

ERC-COG-2016-724692



HETEROPOLITICS

Refiguring the Common and the Political

D3.4

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ERC COG 2016 (implementation 2017-2020)

July 2020

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REPORT 4

CASE STUDIES IN ITALY



Common goods network national Assembly, February 2019 (Theatre, Ex Asilo Filangieri).

Introduction

The case studies in Italy have been selected taking into account the main experiences of commoning and self-government in recent years. The latter, with a few exceptions, are concentrated in urban contexts and have to do with the recovery of large, publicly owned buildings by communities of activists who have at heart the future of public property and the forms in which it is managed. At the same time, in all these cases, occupying a public building was a political act that allowed certain communities to experiment with new forms of politics from below.

In several Italian urban areas, in recent years, heterogeneous communities of activists have mobilized in the name of ‘common goods’ (*beni comuni*), in order to propose new alternative forms of politics. The latter appear to be discontinuous both with the purely institutional vision of the management of public goods and with the mobilization practices that had characterized social movements in recent decades. This

is a real paradigm shift in the conception of politics from below. New movements have created new forms of political participation. The communities that have given rise to this new political process are heterogeneous and involve actors from different social and political spheres. The resulting experiences reveal many elements of interest for those who want to study the changes that the theory and politics of commons has introduced in the more general panorama of grassroots movements.

The case studies in Italy were mainly conducted in two major cities, Naples and Turin. In both contexts, the dialogue between the new commons movements and local institutions was deepened, along with the different conceptions of the commons that have been built in these two contexts. They are two urban fieldworks that instantiate the different realization of the commons in political and social contexts that have very different histories. At the same time, they evince some elements of continuity. In both cities, the emergence of a grassroots mobilization for the commons took place at a time of profound changes in local political and institutional structures. These changes represented a possibility –a real breakthrough– for communities of activists who wanted to propose forms of politics in dialogue with local governments. This report therefore focuses on two major Italian cities and the main commoning experiences that have been initiated in them. The analysis of the political action of these movements was conducted in parallel with the analysis of the local political and institutional contexts.

I did not adopt a properly comparative approach, although each of the two case studies allowed me to illuminate aspects of the other case. Especially when the communities and representatives of the institutions I met in the field came into contact with each other, as was often the case. As we will see, in fact, precisely during the research for the *Heteropolitics* project, these two experiences have maintained a constant dialogue, not only between the community of activists I studied, but also between officials and local administrators.

Studying the experiences of Naples and Turin allows us to describe two different configurations of the discourse on commons in Italy, showing how the latter has influenced the concept of ‘common goods’ and commoning practices at local level. The case studies have been analysed therefore in the light of the more general diffusion of this theme throughout the country, taking also into account other experiences spread in the national context (cf. *Report 1. The Political* and *Report 2. The Common*).

Commons in Italy

In Italy, in the last decade, there has been a fierce public debate on the commons and the management and use of occupied spaces. In 2011, the referendum on public water and the occupation of ‘Teatro Valle’ in Rome drew attention to a political and social issue that had already emerged in the academic debate several decades before, starting from the well-known works by Garrett Hardin (1968) and Elinor Ostrom (1990). The

bottom-up movement that has arisen in the past decade goes far beyond these two single occurrences. It was quickly connected to the international debate on the commons and it intersected with other social and political demands (environmental movements, movements for the right to housing, etc.). The heterogeneous movements for the commons thus fit into ‘the broader debate on forms and models of sustainable and alternative development over the dominant patterns’ (Gargiulo & Cirulli 2016: 90).¹ The attention to common goods has not remained confined to the theoretical level but has affected the sphere of the practices and languages of both institutional and non-institutional politics, generating some ambiguity and conceptual confusion (Coccoli 2014: 3).

The political and social mobilization for commons in Italy was supported and promoted publicly by a prominent institutional figure, that of the jurist Stefano Rodotà. On June 14, 2007, the Italian Minister of Justice appointed by decree a commission charged with drafting a bill for the reform of the Civil Code rules on public goods (never modified since 1942). In 2008, the Commission, chaired by Rodotà, submitted a highly innovative proposal to the Ministry. Few years later, a book written by the jurist Ugo Mattei (2011) became a real manifesto of the mobilization for common goods in Italy, since it theorized, in a clear and accessible form, the relationship between the concrete management of public spaces and the new possible forms of democracy.

Most scientific contributions devoted to the concept of the *commons* start by mentioning the generic, elusive, and sometimes contradictory nature of this term. Moreover, scholars frequently emphasize the overuse of the expression, which refers not only to different concepts but also to phenomena regulated by different legal systems (see, for instance, Sanlorenzo 2017). This problem had been already identified by Rodotà after the referendum to repeal the privatization of Italy’s national water services. Nevertheless, despite possible trivializations, Rodotà highlighted the importance of fighting for common goods as an essential prerequisite ‘for the exercise of fundamental rights and the free development of individuals’ (Rodotà 2011: 237).

When analyzing the nature of the notion of common goods in Italy, some authors have adopted the concept of ‘floating signifier’ theorized by Claude Levi Strauss (1967), who used it in relation to words that represent an undetermined signification, in itself devoid of meaning and thus apt to receive any meaning. As reframed by Ernesto Laclau, this category is connected to the considerable potential of concepts when used in politics. The empty signifier stands for a series of differences as a whole, and it refers to the ‘absent fullness’ of community, i.e. to what is lacking to the various parties that press particular demands. In this fashion, a particularity can assume the function of a universality, turning into a force that acts and speaks for a broader

¹ Where no other translator is mentioned, the translation from Italian texts is made by the author of this report, Dr. A. Vesco.

collectivity of interests (Laclau 2000: 207-212; 1996: 43, 54-57; see *Report 2. The Common*, sections 2.5.6, 2.5.12). This is indeed the case for common goods in Italy, as well as elsewhere: ‘the extreme semantic volatility characterizing...the phrase “common goods” may then represent, rather than the symptom of evident theoretical deficiencies, the secret of its political fertility and its ability to catalyze social energies and forces’ (Coccoli 2014; see also Ciervo & Coccoli 2010, Spanò 2013).

Although the theoretical debate around the nature of the commons first developed in the 1970s, the political deployment of normative tools aimed at promoting practices for the commons is fairly recent, and has gained ground especially in the last decade, which has been, from various points of view, a rather peculiar historical and political period in Italy. Above all, the last few years have been characterized by a deep crisis of the national political system, i.e. the traditional parties that had governed the country, as well as most local councils, during the so-called ‘Second Republic.’ Thus, in order to better understand the broader political and institutional context in which the discourse about the commons has asserted itself at the level of municipal councils, it is also necessary to take national politics into account. For instance, it is vital to consider the crisis of Italy’s center-right parties, led by Silvio Berlusconi. According to a widely established historical interpretation, the success of Berlusconi’s political system

started to come apart when a growing portion of the country was forced to discard its unfounded and irresponsible optimism. When the crisis made it ever more evident that the absence of rules is not an opportunity but the precondition for a common decline. When the ‘paternalistic protection’ that had held until then was shattered to pieces...This is how that pact was irremediably torn apart, turning wide strata of society into ‘orphans,’ now exposed to disillusionment and even rancour and to further entrenchment into individual and class egotism (Crainz 2016: 360).

In a bewildered country, where the middle classes struggle to promote ‘processes of civilisation’ (Donolo 2011), and both employees and precarious workers are being increasingly impoverished by the protracted economic crisis and the choices made by previous governments (Revelli 2011), the main center-left party -the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico-PD)- enjoyed a brief period of success and gained a majority during the early years of Matteo Renzi’s leadership. Meanwhile, the left-wing parties that had been active during the Second Republic went into a phase of unstoppable decline.

In this context, the political discourse concerning the commons partially developed within the political and social circles historically linked to the left. Yet, a greater stimulus was provided especially by the new approach of the Five Star Movement (M5S), a political party founded in October 2009. The proposals of M5S represent an effective response to the political events of the Second Republic. As is well known, in the space of a few years, M5S achieved growing electoral success across the entire

country and came to power in several local councils until, in spring 2018, it secured the leadership of the national government. The main characteristics of M5S are its lean organizational structure, the use of some forms of digital democracy, and a strong emphasis on direct (bottom-up) citizen participation in political initiatives (see Biancalana 2017: 328). Along with its anti-establishment political propaganda and antagonism towards the institutions, the distinguishing features of M5S's politics make it a privileged interlocutor for self-organized movements with practices and objectives regarding the commons. In other words, the political evolution of M5S -and the broader political context in which it occurred- represents a key element to interpret the processes of convergence between movements promoting the commons and local institutions.

As will be explained in detail later, the two main case studies in Italy -conducted in Turin and Naples- concern either a local council managed by M5S (that of Mayor Chiara Appendino in Turin) or an approach to the local government that is far removed from that of traditional parties and closer to forms of political communication that the center-left would call 'populist' (mayor Luigi De Magistris' administration of Naples).² According to some scholars, the main demands of a party like M5S are rooted in the anti-politics phase that has marked the entire history of Italy after its establishment as a republic (see, among others, Biorcio & Natale 2013). Political theorists like Alfio Mastropaolo (2000) and historians like Salvatore Lupo (2013) exhaustively described the process leading from the strong legitimacy crisis experienced in the first twenty years of Italy's democracy to the increasingly widespread support for traditional political parties, and then also for non-conventional and *protest* parties (Mastropaolo 2000: 41-42).

Such a broad and complex topic would require an extensive investigation, but here it might be enough to mention the long duration of the political, social, and cultural processes that paved the way for the success of a political party such as the Five Star Movement. One of the elements that the case studies in Italy aim to highlight is the existence, within the participatory management of the commons, of such a party on the Italian political scene. The season in which the M5S dominated the Italian political scene is therefore relevant to the case studies in Italy because many members of the party have been interlocutors of the Italian movements for the commons.

As we shall see in the case studies, in parallel with the institutional political context,

² The debate about the concept of populism now occupies center stage in Italy, particularly after M5S gained electoral success and came to power together with another party which is commonly associated in Italy's public debate with the notion of populism, i.e. Lega Nord led by Matteo Salvini. An exhaustive account of these events cannot be provided here, but it may suffice to mention the thorough analysis by Ernesto Laclau (2005) of the processes and logic of collective identities, in which the Argentinean philosopher launches into 'a long digression about the paradoxes and ambiguities of the concept of populism and about its origins, which can be traced back to the positivist crowd psychology, fearing total loss of self-control and self-discipline of the masses' (Urbano 2017: 34).

the transformations of grassroots politics are equally relevant in order to understand the success of the commons in Italy. Such success is partly the consequence of a long period of repression against the so-called CSOAs (Occupied and Self-managed Social Centers), belonging to the networks of anti-globalisation movements that arose in the early 1990s (cf. Dines 2000). The network of urban movements for the commons has become a fundamental component in the landscape of political and cultural movements, replacing and integrating earlier forms of activism (for instance, many militants from CSOAs are now fighting for the cause of the ‘commons’). Against this background, antagonism and conflict with the institutions have given way to dialogue around the management of public goods.

The considerable changes in institutional politics, on the one hand, and politics from below, on the other, have therefore given rise to a real paradigm shift. In other words, antagonism and conflict with institutions has given way to dialogue for the management of public goods. This is a rather common trait of the movements that have joined Italy’s national commons network.

Ultimately, both at the central and local level, the crisis and the collapse of the traditional parties have represented a gap for the creation of a dialogue between movements and institutions. This opportunity is the result of two main factors. On the one hand, the transformations that have affected the Italian social movements, on the other hand, the presence of new local administrations eager to enter into a dialogue with the new movements. This convergence has made it possible for commons activist groups to imagine previously unexplored forms of dialogue.

In this context, various communities from all over the country have established a real network of movements for the commons. These heterogeneous groups of activists are held together by the need to build a platform for discussion, within which it is possible to rethink activism in forms that distinguish themselves from the previous forms of political militancy.

Legal constructs for the practice of the commons in Italy

One of the key aspects regarding the diffusion of commons processes in Italy -and a key topic for the *Heteropolitics* project- concerns the relationships established between the communities of citizens/activists and the local institutions to implement processes of self-production, self-management and self-government related to the discourse on ‘common goods.’ This convergence between institutions and social movements is mainly ascribable to legal issues, i.e. concepts elaborated mostly through the theorizations of jurists. As mentioned in the *Report 2. The Common*: 21, the Italian urban commons are characterized by a strong tie between city politics, movements and the law. ‘Law is enlisted here as a means of counter-hegemonic politics that could give to commoners purchase on established institutions without absorbing them directly in city administration in the manner of the new Spanish municipalism.’

A turning point for the establishment of institutionalized commons practices was the legal elaboration of the concept of ‘commons’ at the level of Italian local councils, which took place in 2001, when Article 118 of the Italian Constitution was amended. From then on, as stated in the last section of Article 118: ‘The State, Regions, Metropolitan Cities, Provinces and Municipalities shall promote the autonomous initiatives of citizens, both as individuals and as members of associations, relating to activities of general interest, on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity.’ This ushered in the diffusion of participatory experiences at the level of local councils and, despite the lack of national laws on the matter, a group of jurists -especially scholars and activists working around the group called Labsus³- believes that it may be possible to take advantage of this constitutional amendment to promote active participation initiatives in urban contexts. The first set of urban regulations concerning common goods was approved in Bologna at the beginning of 2014 and was called ‘Regulation on the collaboration between citizens and the local council for the care and regeneration of urban common goods.’

Bologna was soon followed by other cities and towns and, so far (July 2020), around 230 municipalities have approved similar regulations and many others are expected to do the same. As explored in greater detail in each case study on Italy, many of these cities and towns have not yet had the opportunity to implement their regulations, while in other cases the commons movements, as well as local administrators sensitive to the matter, deem the regulations to be completely insufficient and inadequate to carry out self-supported projects.

Thus, as seen later, the Italian organizations and movements that aim to realize self-organized initiatives for the protection of the commons mostly refer to the legal meaning of this concept. The reasons for this are chiefly of a practical nature and have to do with the *actual* applicability of a legal discourse based on the consistency between concrete political action and current regulations.

At the same time, the tendency of Italian social movements to adopt a legal interpretation of the concept of commons has a significant impact on ways of conceiving political participation for commons. Indeed, the normative approach, with its careful application and enhancement of existing Regulations, has non-negligible effects on the daily actions of politicians and activists. As explained specifically in the case study in Turin, movements that pursue commons practices constantly try to strike an effective balance between compliance with existing rules (the Regulation on common goods and the urban legislation on the use of public spaces) and the possibility of introducing new ones. But the way in which they conceive ‘public

³ As reported on its website, Labsus (Laboratory for Subsidiarity -Laboratorio per la sussidiarietà) is ‘a true Laboratory for the implementation of the subsidiarity principle, where we elaborate ideas, collect experiences and materials of all kinds, and list initiatives. And we do all this as volunteers or, even better, as active citizens, offering our time and energies without any material reward but with great satisfaction in terms of personal fulfilment’ (Labsus 2017).

goods' as 'common goods' is inevitably influenced by the strong legal narrative characterizing this concept within the Italian debate.

In the case of the management of the Cavallerizza Reale area in Turin, a convergence between commons movements and institutions was achieved by social groups whose demands rested on legal rather than social foundations. The entire process that led to the occupation of the Cavallerizza buildings took shape through a discussion (at times rather heated) between individuals who perceived themselves as occupants and individuals who acknowledged that the complex was publicly owned and subject to all the constraints of a UNESCO World Heritage site (cf. Turin report). The latter made explicit reference to one of the key principles of the legal construct around common goods, using both rhetoric and practical approaches that conceive the 'common' as an object that is neither public nor private, in terms of both ownership of the good -in this case, a large, historic building- and its management. As pointed out by one of the jurists who have explored these issues most extensively:

Insisting on the common rather than the public management of resources thus means claiming that society enjoys a certain degree of autonomy from state control, acknowledging its ability to govern and regulate itself, that will be exercised through the instruments of direct democracy and political participation (Coccoli 2013).

The views expressed by Lorenzo Coccoli have characterized the Italian legal debate, which, far from concerning itself with regulations alone, addresses crucial political questions. The aim is to challenge the neoliberal approach, going beyond the distinction between public and private and pursuing some rather heterogeneous goals: 1) establishing a link between the discourse on the commons and the diffusion of the so-called collaborative economy (which deals with goods that are shared within communities), in order to establish a theory of goods that is finally free from 'the subject' and to shape new approaches to community belonging (Quarta 2017); 2) conceiving the urban space in its entirety as commons (Marella 2017); 3) reasserting a concept of the *common* that challenges the extractive and economist view of the public cultural heritage, which has been dominant in Italy's recent political choices (Montanari 2017); 4) questioning the property rights of some types of goods through a historical and legal reconstruction of the concept of 'public use' (Albanese 2017). These matters, discussed in a recent special issue of the journal *Questione Giustizia* (2017, no. 2), are openly broached as strongly political questions.

Nonetheless, as the discussion around the commons is reaching its peak, a heated debate is taking place also within the tightly knit community of Italian jurists working on this topic. According to Ermanno Vitale, for instance, this debate displays a short circuit between the legal dimension of research around the commons and practical political proposals pertaining to them (Vitale 2013). The jurist Luigi Ferrajoli (2017) points out that the commons should not be sought out in some kind of mythical

beyond -that is, beyond the distinction between public and private- but they should be reclaimed through their more rigorous constitutionalization.

The legal debate briefly described here is not mirrored by an equally well-developed debate in the social sciences and humanities. However, there have been some attempts at carefully elaborating on the more strictly social dimension of inquiries into the commons. In April 2017, the conference ‘Beni comuni, tra diritto, ethos e pratiche sociali,’ organized in Trieste, saw the participation of several Italian sociologists, who began to draw connections between the more purely legal concepts linked to the idea of the commons and studies of fundamental economics, fair economy, and the development of local areas (University of Trieste 2018). In subsequent years, further conferences including social scientists took place. Moreover, some ethnographic research on the practice of commons is underway, especially in urban contexts.

This short and non-exhaustive overview of legal contributions on the topic of ‘common goods’ has the sole purpose of showing that, despite emerging from a context that relies heavily on the production of rules and regulations, the demands put forward in Italy are not entirely alien to the political-economic field. For example, the triggering factor that led a large number of citizens to occupy public buildings in many Italian cities in the last decade has to do with one of the main features of the struggle for the commons for the commons at the international level, i.e. the need to remove common goods from the sphere of influence of capitalist markets and from the logic of commercial gain dominating them (see Marella 2012: 21; see also Coccoli 2013).

As Andrea Muehlebach (2018: 244) noticed in her writings on Italian movements for public water, it is important to pay attention to political and legal processes from above in order to grasp the incremental use of the law ‘as a mechanism for [the legitimation of] plunder “and as a means to perform acts of” predation, fraud, and thievery’ (see also Mattei & Nader 2008). Since the mass mobilization on the occasion of the referendum for public water (2011), the whole movement for common goods in Italy is based on the awareness of a predatory use of law by the institutions and political parties. It is this awareness that drives the communities of commoners to whom the case studies in Italy are dedicated. The occupation of the Cavallerizza Reale in Turin by a heterogeneous collective of artists, activists and simple citizens took place precisely in response to the sale of public property by the local administration (cf. Turin report). Similarly, the network of social centers to which the Municipality of Naples assigned the management of many occupied public spaces is made up of movements that pose extremely relevant political questions concerning the life of communities in today’s urban contexts (including cultural and artistic self-production, political activism, and social support to the weaker portions of society), as a response to the increasing privatization of public property in this city, too.

The main theories that have inspired the Italian legal debate on the commons dwell, therefore, on the importance of the commons as an essential tool for anti-capitalist

movements to deal with economic and social inequalities, given that states and markets have clearly failed in redistributing resources equally (Mattei 2011; De Angelis & Harvie 2013). The interweaving of law and political economy issues is thus one of the central nodes of the Italian jurists' theories on commons.

This strictly legal-political stance is a distinguishing feature of the Italian debate around the commons. It has obviously a major impact on the narrations produced by social movements concerned with these issues, in terms of both the political forms adopted and the internal organization of the various spaces (see next section).

In this brief overview of the legal concepts that have influenced the Italian public and scientific debate on the commons, I cannot fail to mention the so-called 'civic use.' It is a legal instrument for the recognition of social subjects that use (urban) public spaces. The device of 'civic use' lies at the basis of the demands and the activities of both main communities studied in our research (cf. Naples and Turin reports). The civic and collective use in urban contexts has been considered by some jurists to be a tool that allows us to use the rules in a 'creative' way and to create new institutions from the bottom (Micciarelli 2017: 136; also, Micciarelli 2014). The 'declaration of civic and collective urban use' was first recognized by the Municipality of Naples with a series of resolutions issued between 2011 and 2016. The Naples route was followed by other cities. The two main case studies in Italy will explore in depth this topic, underlining the discontinuity between the two investigated contexts -while in Naples it has been applied for all intents and purposes, the administration of Turin has long tried without success to follow the Naples line.

The juridical reflections we have considered in this section have influenced the conception of the commons in Italy, affecting the modes of implementing the common policies. These theorizations have been concretely applied in two main processes. First of all, in the Co-city platform, which was launched in Bologna as a research-action project aimed at testing, adapting and developing strategies to govern the common goods, and becoming a model also for other urban contexts. In Turin, for example, the Co-city project aims at promoting new forms of shared governance between local administration and citizenship, collecting citizens' proposals through a public call (cf. Turin report).

Ultimately, the Italian counter-hegemonic strategy is strongly linked to the use of law as an instrument for the advancement of urban commons. The Italian commons movements are the result of the dialectical relationship between institutions and communities that foster commons from below. In some cases, the law has been a tool for the emancipation of grassroots movements from local institutions. In other cases, it has been a tool provided to local governments, which have used legal mechanisms to pursue top-down processes of commons governance. The main legal visions of the commons adopted in the Italian context have been well summarized by Alexandros Kioupiolis in the report dedicated to the Commons.

Three legal paths and regulatory frameworks can be discerned: a perspective which pivots around constituent power and private law (U. Mattei and partners), a public law method which designs facilitating municipal regulations and institutional mechanisms (the ‘Bologna regulation,’ the Labsus and Labgov lawyers), and a more autonomous, bottom-up process of ‘civic use’ initiated by social movements and collectives in the city of Naples (Ex Asilo Filangieri, G. Micciarelli et al.).

What marks out the the Italian ‘laboratory’ of urban commons in recent years is the involvement of pro-commons lawyers and professors of law and their coalescence with activists, movements and grassroots collectives. Deploying a variety of legal tools for the cause of the commons and against neoliberal privatizations, Italian lawyers have helped collectives and movements in Italian cities to gain legal recognition and to claim protection for diverse commoning practices, including initially illegal occupations.

The first legal path, blazed by Mattei and his collaborators, tracks an ecological, politicized and activist employment of law as an instrument for institutional change, which is kickstarted from the grassroots and is mediated by lawyers and jurists. This tactic allows for an autonomous constitution of commons by civil society while it also wrangles with dominant institutions and strives to inflect them in commons-friendly directions. But it does not suffice to trigger the tectonic shift it envisions unless it answers to the essentials of counter-hegemonic politics, beginning with the beginning: the formation of a broad-based, allied force of commoners which is out for hegemony.

The second, public law framework, which draws up city regulations for the commons, provides citizens with access to urban spaces and authorizes the use of city’s resources by groups of citizens. It also contrives supportive institutional mechanisms which supply financial, technical and administrative aid. Citizens are summoned to collaborate with institutions and private associations in the city, in a consensual pursuit of the common good. The Bologna or ‘co-city’ route is institutionally solid, enabling and legally secure. But it borders on paternalism and it directs commoning from the top, colliding thus with the fundamental disposition of collective self-organization and self-government which drives the commons. It also fails to tackle issues which stand at the top of a counter-hegemonic agenda, such as the building of a collective agency for far-reaching commons. Furthermore, it tends to gloss over the steep inequalities of power and wealth that should be contested and reduced on the way to a commons-centered society. On the other hand, the case of the ‘rebellious’ L’Abas social center, which has benefited from the Bologna regulation, indicates that institutional grids and policies for the commons can yield a battleground in which even more critical and aspiring commons can claim their space.

Finally, the third, ‘Neapolitan way’ has been the singular offshoot of a confluence between independent social actors and the persona of the

independent Naples mayor, Luigi de Magistris. In this convergence, movements and citizens' groups have retained a higher degree of autonomy, leading the process of the formal recognition by the city government and framing their own regulations for the civic use of urban assets. The open and fluid community of artists, lawyers and other people who inhabit the Ex Asilo Filangieri, a former convent in the center of the city, has been at the forefront of this experimentation with public-commons partnerships. The counter-hegemonic politics of 'l'asilo,' which is horizontalist, anti-racist and anti-sexist, open, plural, creative and collaborative, breeds new subjectivities, relations and assembly-based self-rule. It aspires to lead by example and to 'prototype' municipal regulations authored by commoners themselves. It also liaises with convergent collective initiatives in the city of Naples and across urban and national borders (*Report 2. The Common: 21-22*).

Urban movements and local institutions

In order to understand the political subjectivity of the communities engaging in the 'battle' for the commons in Italy, it is useful to study the dialogue between social movements and the state (see e.g. della Porta 2006). My research focused thus on the space in which social movements and institutions meet. The aim was to explore the practices and the political rhetoric of the commons diffused within social movements, as well as the institutional dynamics connected to the widespread rhetoric of the commons in Italy. Both sides have been investigated on two different levels/scales. The research on social movements was carried out keeping a micro-scale in mind, and it focused mainly on the urban context, with particular reference to some social centers/occupied spaces and their relationship with other movements. On the other hand, research on the relations between movements and institutions has focused on both the local and the national scale.

As far as the role of the institutions is concerned, I adopted a critical perspective, which takes into account the risks associated with an institutional use of rhetoric the commons and with their application. In particular, it was essential to both investigate the negotiations between activists and local administrators for the use of public spaces and the rhetoric and discussion on the commons carried out on both sides. Cultural anthropology can contribute to the study of the commons by providing theoretical tools to interpret the construction of new moral contexts that have become a reference point for activists and militants who reject the political participation expressed by *traditional* movements.

Social movements have been an emerging research field in political anthropology, 'which generally revolves around the relations between the ability to act of social actors (*agency*) and socio-political structures' (Koensler 2012: 47). This way of conceiving social movements proves to be particularly useful from the perspective adopted in our case studies in Italy, since it allows us to regard them not as empirical

phenomena to be observed per se during fieldwork but as a social and cultural phenomenon which describes specific processes (Koenler 2012: 48; see also Touraine 2003). Analyzing how Italian social movements have changed over time makes it possible to better understand how non-institutional approaches to political activities have been transformed, dealing thus with some of the key questions raised by our project. What is the 'politics' of the commons? What is political about/in the commons? What do we mean when we say that the commons enact 'alternative ways of doing politics'?

In order to answer these questions, it is once again useful to resort to the reflections of anthropologists, who have analyzed broad (and transnational) processes such as the transformations of social movements in different countries, giving particular importance (obviously) to local contexts. From this point of view, the model of analysis proposed by the French-Canadian feminist and anthropologist Elisa Beaulieu (2001) appears very useful, as it was taken up by Koenler (2012: 54):

Elisa Beaulieu takes up the concept of 'flow,' which is evidently linked to that of movement. She distinguishes different directions that the flows of the ethnographic analysis of movements can take. This is how theoretical dimensions can enrich ethnography. According to her, it would be possible: (1) to follow the circulation and flows of meanings within the networks of collective action and, in so doing, the reinterpretations of discourses, ideas and practices; (2) to follow the flow of power relations between the different groups, social forces and individuals involved in collective action; (3) to follow the flow of resources and material capital in the dynamics between agents of movements and institutions and, finally; (4) to follow the circulation of the negotiation of power relations between the subjects of collective action.

These four dimensions encapsulate the sensibility with which the case studies in Italy were undertaken. The different mobilizations for the commons that took place in Turin and Naples were in fact observed by noting the flow of the relations between the different collective subjects that I met during the fieldwork. First of all, I analyzed the relations between the new communities that refer to the commons and the anti-capitalist movements that preceded them. Secondly, I was able to delve into the relations between these new political communities and their institutions of reference. Starting from these two dimensions, it was possible to lay out the relevant changes in the relationship between grassroots movements and institutions in urban contexts, i.e. how the power relations between the different subjects of collective action have changed.

From an anthropological perspective, all these aspects have been discussed by attending to what we can consider the key element of the analysis of the Italian case studies. The latter is well summarized by the first point proposed by Beaulieu, i.e. the flows of meanings that nourish the new counter-hegemonic practices of the subjects.

In other words, the power relations between movements and institutions, and within movements themselves, are based on the way subjects reinterpret political discourses, ideas and practices. The concept of the 'common good' has burst onto the scene of movements from the bottom of Italian cities, contributing to a complete rethinking of the forms of political participation and the forms of interaction with official power.

It is at this point that anthropological research comes to our aid, to allow us to grasp the specificities of different narratives about commons that are always particular and situated, as well as their effect on the collective action of the subjects. In Italy, the term 'common goods' has its own idiosyncrasies, which are connected to the process of signification of the concept of commons. Social movements have elaborated it starting from the political and institutional circumstances in which they operate. At the same time, the same phrase has been available to institutions, whose actors have used it in different forms, sometimes to introduce new official practices of politics and governance of public goods, and sometimes to give a patina of 'collectivity' to political action inspired by old models and top-down forms of governance of urban heritage.

Urban commons and Italian urban contexts

The cities chosen for the study of commons in Italy carry mechanisms and processes that speak to some of the main basic questions of the *Heteropolitics* project. In particular, those concerning the particular weight of urban contexts for the study of commons. It may be useful to remember them here.

- Why are cities a privileged terrain for studying, performing and expanding the commons?
- How does the struggle for the commons manifest itself in the urban context?
- How do cities redefine the context in which we think and practice the commons?
- Why do power structures and hegemonic processes of the state and the market rise to prominence in the urban context?
- How can the different experiments in urban commons, especially those connected with city government, help us to explore and assess the different perspectives and strategies of the commons?
- How does the proximity of local government to the citizens enable social movements to take social change from the streets to state institutions?
- How can we 'common' city politics by empowering ordinary citizens to get involved in urban politics and governance in ways which strike a balance between openness, horizontality and effectiveness?

The communities and movements for commons which we have focused on are all active in urban contexts. Their political action is therefore conditioned by the

peculiarities of the urban landscape.

The challenge of the urban commons is that any such commoning effort is subjected to the urban condition, albeit in different ways and to different degrees. On the one hand, urban commons have to deal with the challenge of devising strategic scales and boundaries for collective action. On the other hand, the ongoing urbanization of society, with its mobilities, ephemerality, and diversity of subjectivities, constantly undermines and challenges boundaries. The question is: what kinds of institutions are needed in such a context of diversity and (at least partial) anonymity? And how should we think of the process of collaboration between these diverse urban actors? (Dellenbaugh et al. 2015: 17-18).

Ultimately, the characteristics of urban commons can be summarized as follows. Their large scale, which can involve hundreds of thousands of citizens, entails that the commons lack salience for individuals who often do not think of the water or electric supply as a 'common.' Moreover, several types of social differentiation and division along class, race, gender and professional lines give rise to different relations to the commons and, hence, to their contentious character. For instance, a space may become the location of a community garden for some, or of leisure and communication for others. Ultimately, complexity, diversity and multiple scales call for cross-sectoral collaboration between citizens, governmental authorities, non-profits and others in the governance of urban commons, as e.g. in the network of energy supplies (cf. *Report 2, The common*, section 2.5.8).

The case studies in Italy dwelled, therefore, on the networks of social movements operating in the urban contexts which have been covered by this research, while also inquiring into the relationships between movements of different kinds. The movements that today refer to the rhetoric of 'common goods' -trying to put into practice forms of self-government- use broad theoretical references that are in line with those adopted by the autonomous movements which have operated in Italy in recent decades. However, the difference between these two 'traditions' in urban contexts is evident not only because of the deep rifts and explicit splits between these two modalities of activism (see, especially, the case study in Turin), but also because of other profound dissimilarities, including: their different degree of interest in explicitly addressing political issues; the different organizational forms adopted; the decision-making processes and internal structure of the movements; the public rhetoric that they use; the self-perception of militants/activists; their political positioning with respect to some sensitive issues in the post-Marxist debate.

The two main case studies are particularly helpful in illuminating the transformations and relationships between these two forms of activism. Turin and Naples have a long history of antagonistic social movements and, in both cities, it is possible to grasp, from an ethnographic perspective, the concrete transformations of these political

subjects and the changes that have characterized the self-perception of militants.

To understand the novelty of recent commons experiences in Italy, they should be studied in relation to the broader context of other social movements who have a long history of activism and militancy in urban space. Across Italy, in the last two decades, the evolution of Urban Social Movements -USMs, as theorized by Castells (1983)- has been marked by the occupation of various types of spaces, from *squats* for housing purposes to the so-called Occupied and Self-managed Social Centers (Centri Sociali Occupati e Autogestiti -CSOAs), with a strong countercultural and antagonist stance. The history of CSOAs and the spread of conflicts within the urban domain are particularly relevant to understand the origins and the nature of the main movements fighting for common goods. Indeed, most of them have emerged from practical experiences of occupation, as well as from ideas of self-management of spaces, which derive from the socio-cultural model of social centers and the antagonistic political practices that had developed in urban contexts (see Dines 2000).

In some cases, e.g. in Naples, the relationship between the CSOA social movements and the commons movements appears to be very strong. Following the mobilization for the commons initiated in 2011,

several social centers [in Naples] took up the cause of the commons and drew up a strategy for the use of public spaces and to advocate the right to use the land. From this point of view, the CSOs have at times used the *commons* as an umbrella concept under which to bring together rather different and heterogeneous demands and fights (Gargiulo & Cirulli 2016: 90).

In the other case investigated in this research, that of Turin, the main community which is inspired by the commons' theory was very heterogeneous. It went through phases of strong conflict among different groups, including members of cultural associations, activists from political parties, activists from housing movements, artists who had already initiated shared self-production projects, and representatives of some of the city's CSOAs. The relationship between the latter and the other groups within the community that occupied the Cavallerizza Reale proved to be rather stormy and forced the representatives of the CSOAs to quit. As explained in the case study of Turin, one of the keys to interpret the situation lies in analyzing the concept of the *political* and the forms of organisation of both the *old* antagonist social movements and the newer movements for the promotion of the commons.

In the case of both Turin and Naples, it has been useful to use research on forms of living in urban contexts (see Pitzalis, Pozzi & Rimoldi 2017), as well as on activists of urban social movements who aspire to create a sense of community that conveys a 'bottom-up' reaction to institutional abandonment (see Turolla 2017). Paying attention to these aspects allows us to grasp the actions of these movements beyond the legal construction that dominates the Italian debate and to address the issue of their place in the broader social context.

The two main case studies in Italy (Naples and Turin) allow us to answer some of the main research questions of the Heteropolitics project. How does the struggle for the commons manifest itself in the urban context? How do the various commons relate to the state in different circumstances? How could we reconstruct hegemonic politics so as to accommodate and nurture the alternative political logic of the commons, particularly in the institutions of political representation? How does the proximity of local governments to the citizens enable social movements to take social change from the streets to state institutions? Ultimately, these two case studies shed light on the fragmentation of the various social movements that make up the heterogeneous totality of spaces adhering to the practices and the rhetoric of the commons. The latter is a label which in recent years has brought together profoundly different experiences, political goals, and values.

The social movements that took part in the recovery of urban spaces in these two cities present some common traits that deserve to be explored from a comparative perspective. We are faced with heterogeneous organizations, composed of subjects with very different political imaginaries and objectives. They are held together not only by the strong rhetoric about the commons that has spread to different areas of the country, but also by the rejection of some modes of participation that have characterized Italian autonomous or anarchist movements, as well as by their propensity to consider dialogue with the local institutions as a plausible path, even within spontaneous experiences developed outside the institutional context (and often in open contrast to the institutional management of cultural activities in urban spaces).

In both cases -Turin and Naples- we are therefore dealing with *bunches* of people who are profoundly different from the antagonistic social movements that have occupied the urban political scene from the 1960s onwards. In both cities, experiences of self-organization, self-management of spaces, and artistic and cultural self-production have started to emerge in the last few years. At the beginning, these experiences refused the institutional political management of the places in which they were based, while today they establish relations with the institutions themselves. In the perspective adopted in this research, the study of these movements (and their organisational forms) must be carried out in parallel with that of local political and institutional contexts. Consequently, the theoretical reference framework summarized in these pages must be expanded, considering also the large amount of research on local political cultures and institutions in Italy, as well as on the construction of political identities among activists after the crisis of Italy's left parties (a recent analysis of these issues can be found in Dei & Vesco 2017). Research that focuses on the dialogue between social movements and local administrations raises analytical and cognitive questions that bear also on the institutional political sphere, the management of political consensus in urban contexts, urban development strategies, and urban planning with commercial objectives (see, for instance, Semi 2015).

The case studies in Italy will be framed also in light of the construction of a strong

institutional rhetoric of the commons. The use of this rhetoric in the institutional sphere seems to be a peculiar aspect of the Italian context and is part of the wider transformations of society and the political sphere taking place in the country. In summary, to identify the field of study with which we are dealing, it is necessary to place the movements involved in commons practices within a broader political scenario, including the crisis of the left-wing parties (especially with regard to their local social and political action), on the one hand, and the transformations that have affected the complex sphere of antagonistic movements in Italy, on the other.

Naples and Turin: two case studies in dialogue

Before addressing the reports on each case study, it may be useful to provide a brief description of the two main urban contexts in which the fieldwork in Italy focused, i.e. their political-institutional universe and the reasons that make them relevant to respond to the research questions of the *Heteropolitics* project.

As I said, the two main case studies on the Italian context are dedicated to two urban contexts, Naples and Turin. In particular, the participant observation of commons practices in these two cities dwells on the problematic convergence between local administrations and social movements that manage public spaces. This convergence gives rise to shared conceptions of the commons and of political participation from the bottom. On the one hand, the rhetoric of the commons is appropriated by institutional political actors, who take advantage of the dialogue with social movements to manage some public buildings in innovative and less expensive forms; on the other hand, social movements arising in self-organized forms seek institutional legitimacy to make their activities effective (and economically and socially sustainable).

Turin and Naples have something in common, concerning their political-institutional structures and their political history. Both cities have been administered for several decades by center-left parties. However, in both cities, the Democratic Party (the main heir of the Italian Communist Party) faced a serious crisis of legitimacy that led it to lose the last local electoral contests, giving way to other political parties. The crisis of the Italian left to which I refer in the first section of this Introduction is exemplified, albeit in different forms, in the political situation of these two big Italian cities.

In both reports I therefore decided to engage in an account of the recent political history of the two cities, since it is essential to grasp the forms that the narratives (and practice) on the commons assume in these contexts. The current administrations of these two cities are today interlocutors of social movements, proposing solutions for the (self-)management and the (self-)government of public buildings. Although the interaction between local institutions and social movements is not always harmonious and has also given rise to forms of conflict, in general, both urban governments and the groups that manage the main occupied spaces devoted to commons practices try explicitly to find a way to collaborate with each other, with a view to protecting and enhancing commons practices. The convergence between the political-institutional

level, on the one hand, and the political-social level, on the other, becomes thus one of the central themes of the research work conducted in Italy.

There are, of course, significant differences between the two contexts, first of all, as regards the action of the new local governments that followed the center-left hegemony, and the nature of the social movements involved in these processes.

In Turin, the Municipality is governed by Chiara Appendino, the new mayor of the 5 Star Movement. Here, the group of citizens who mediate with the local administration and articulate a discourse on the commons is essentially linked to a single space, the Cavallerizza Reale. This is a building registered among the UNESCO heritage since 1997 and occupied in May 2014 by a group of people named ‘Assemblea Cavallerizza 14:45,’ which reopened this wide space to citizens. The Municipality of Naples, on the other hand, has been governed since 2011 by mayor Luigi De Magistris, a former magistrate who founded an independent party electorally supported also by sections of the population that generally support the 5 Star Movement, although the DeMa list (from the name of its leader) has no connection with the latter.

A substantial difference, from this point of view, lies in the divergent approach of the two new administrations towards movements from below which have promoted commoning and self-government practices within their communities of reference. While in Turin the dialogue between movements and institutions had to get through a lot of hardship and never fully realized, in Naples it is strong and consolidated, to the point that the theme of commons has become one of the main propaganda topics of the De Magistris administration.

Despite some discontinuity, both cities have gone through an unprecedented political phase, in which the new local governments have used the rhetoric of common goods to promote a dialogue between local institutions and citizenship for the management of public buildings that the Municipalities cannot manage, given the serious economic crisis affecting the Italian local administrations. In both contexts, the discourse on common goods has represented a strong element of legitimization for the governing parties. In both contexts, the discourse on grassroots movements and participation from the bottom has become the political argument of the administrators.

The two contexts deserve to be studied in parallel also for another reason. The path to the recognition of the ‘civic use’ of public spaces launched in Naples was also followed by the community that manages the Cavallerizza Reale in Turin. As we will see in detail in both case studies, the movements for the commons that are active in the two cities and the representatives of the institutions have organized many joint public meetings, with the aim of consolidating the link between both the administrators and the communities that managed the ‘common good’ spaces. The main objective of these meetings was to join forces to pursue a common path, allowing the institutions and movements in Turin to follow the Neapolitan route.



Flyer of a meeting between Naples and Turin (mayor De Magistris at Cavallerizza).

The difficult management of the commons and the role played by rules

The main source of conflict within the Italian communities of commoners that I observed on the field lies in the different conception of the rules governing the life of the communities themselves and their interactions with institutional environments. From this point of view, we can roughly identify two main attitudes.⁴

The first concerns those activists who favour forms of self-organization that hold the dialogue with local institutions in high regard. This attitude strongly influences the political nature of their actions and the stance that they take towards the concept of the ‘common,’ giving rise to some types of recurrent behaviour, such as: constant emphasis on compliance with the shared rules of the community; frequently reaffirming the leading role of the decision-making body (the ‘assembly’); devoting most of their time as activists to the meta-implementation of commoning practices, i.e., the definition of the principles regulating community life, the decision-making methods adopted, the sanctions to be applied in case of non-compliance, etc.

This stance is very much in line with the demands put forward by the local institutions when a dialogue is opened with the social movements (for example, when a process for the recognition of the civic use of spaces is underway, like in the case of Turin, where the Municipality has asked the Cavallerizza Reale community to lay down a set of regulations for the civic use of the spaces occupied). This approach is more easily controlled by the institutions and has many elements in common with the legal sensibility towards the commons described in the previous sections of this introduction. It is no coincidence that the groups which show a greater respect for the rules and a stronger will to establish clear and well-defined decision-making procedures are, as seen below, those that are better acquainted with the legal literature on the commons and the processes for civic use recognition. Lastly, another significant aspect is the fact that this approach is very much in line with the notion of political-institutional

⁴ This bipartite division often corresponds to the (self-)representation offered by the activists during case study interviews.

activism that is prevalent in this specific phase of Italy's politics.⁵

The second attitude to which I refer is usually adopted by many activists in response to what they perceive as an 'excess of rules,' especially in the Turin context. Those who come from a background of political antagonism (just like those who focus mostly on the cultural and/or artistic dimension of their contribution to the community) oppose over-regulation and a vision of common goods mostly revolving around legal definitions. The latter are perceived by the former as too dependent on the relationship with institutions and, thus, subordinate to them.

These aspects, which will be discussed in greater detail in the case studies, are outlined here in order to account for the main rift which generates conflicts within the communities under investigation. Yet, the bipartite division described above is highly schematic. As we shall see, the internal life of the communities appears less schematic and more complex.

The success, or failure, of a certain strategy often depends on the ability of individuals or groups within a large community of activists to deal with the contradictions between rules and political action and with the gap between the intention of subverting the accepted social norms and the actions that instead blatantly reaffirm the latter.

Attempts to found a national 'network of common goods'

The recent diffusion of local laws affirming the importance of 'common goods' has been accompanied by the emergence of numerous local commons movements. The latter are very different from one area to another, but they all identify themselves in a common platform, or have tried to build it on several occasions. The platform does not make extensive use of social networks. Although each of the movements involved uses the main social networks to promote their work, the network bases its collaboration mainly on face-to-face meetings, that is, on assemblies in which meeting people is fundamental to building lasting relationships.

During the fieldwork I had the opportunity to participate in various meetings held in different contexts –in particular in Turin, Naples and Bologna. These events were attended by many activists and helped to create a platform of heterogeneous but converging experiences around the issue of common goods.

To recall the theoretical and conceptual frame that underlies these moments of sharing one's own activism, it may be useful to list some recurring questions, which arose during all the meetings that took place from autumn 2017 to summer 2019:

-which concept of the 'common good' do individuals and groups refer to?

⁵ An example of this type of activism can be found in the success of the Five Star Movement (M5S). It is no chance that, in Turin, many of the activists I met on the field (and who adopt this stance) used to vote for M5S or regularly participated in their activities.

- which organizational forms does each movement choose?
- which decision-making processes are adopted?
- which model should they follow in order to regulate relations with local institutions?
- what is the self-perception of each group of activists with respect to the wider universe of social movements?
- the different conceptions of what is 'political' in what they do;
- the opportunity (or not) to maintain links with institutional political structures (parties, associations, trade unions, etc.);
- the relationship with the concrete spaces they use or inhabit;

We are dealing with issues and problems that cover most of the questions posed by the *Heteropolitics* project. To go into more detail about the topics addressed on these occasions, it may be useful to say something more about each meeting.

The first of the three meetings was called 'Anomalie' and was held in September 2017 in Turin, precisely in the Cavallerizza Reale, the place to which the case study in Turin is dedicated. The meeting, which lasted three days, focused mainly on presenting the groups involved, trying to place them within the same conceptual framework. The common thread of these different experiences was the attempt to follow the model applied in the city of Naples, which provides a point of convergence between social movements and local institutions for the recognition of the civic use of occupied spaces. The informal conversations with the people who took part in Anomalie have been useful since they allowed me to grasp some first elements of discontinuity between the various groups.

More specifically, different conceptions of what is 'political' have emerged, deriving from the different activities carried out within the different spaces and from the different histories of each movement. Some of these were formed within wider circuits already active before, others have come to life by putting together very different subjects. This is the case, for example, of the Cavallerizza Reale, characterized by a strong presence of artists, whose assembly also hosts members of cultural and environmental associations, as well as subjects who have carried out in the past political activities in the strict sense (within political parties or other movements), individual citizens interested in safeguarding cultural heritage, etc. This heterogeneity became evident in the organization of the meeting by the collective that manages the activities conducted in Cavallerizza.

However, given the prevalence of artists within the assembly, the Anomalie event revolved primarily around the role of art in commons processes and the political role of artistic activity. Such an approach did not satisfy most of the activists who came

from other cities, since many of them were there representing movements devoted mostly to social and political activities in the strict sense. During the three days, their interventions in the assembly were in fact aimed at affirming the primacy of political activity and the importance of cultivating a critical vision of the urban political context also in the self-management of spaces which were dedicated mainly to forms of artistic and cultural self-production. Anomalie, therefore, brought to light the considerable difficulty of establishing a dialogue between these two different conceptions of the ‘common’ and the ‘political.’



‘Anomalie’ meeting, Turin, September 2017.

These aspects became evident also during the meeting held in November 2018 in various occupied buildings of Naples, and in particular at the Ex Asilo Filangieri and the Scugnizzo Liberato. Unlike Turin, where the Cavallerizza is almost the only space of the city which declares itself close to the cause of the commons, in Naples many movements have received the recognition of civic use of ‘their’ space by the City government. The Neapolitan network for the commons has therefore set itself up as an ideal guide for the various national experiences interested in starting a process of convergence with the local administrations for the recognition of civic and collective use of the building they manage. The meeting in Naples was attended by very different subjects. In addition to the movements already present in Turin in September, there were members of associations and representatives of the local administration. The mayor Luigi De Magistris took part in the meeting, with an intervention in which he

emphasized his openness towards the movements for the commons and self-organization practices.



‘Commons and cities,’ November 2018 (Theatre, Ex Asilo Filangieri, Naples).

Another meeting I will mention here by way of example was held in December 2017 at the University of Bologna. It was joined by various representatives of occupied spaces and commons movements from different Italian cities. The transversal themes that characterized the interventions bore on the subjectivity (even the political one) of the communities participating in meetings of this kind and on their self-perception, or on their *political nature*. Once again, the representatives of these social movements pose extremely interesting questions for *Heteropolitics*. As we will see in detail in each case study, the direct observation of these public debates and the participant observation of the practices and rhetoric of each community allows us to analyse different issues relevant to the project: a) the democratic potential of these experiences; b) the degree of closure or, conversely, of opening of these communities to the outside; c) the forms of freedom practiced, both individually and collectively; d) ultimately, the way in which the commons are put into practice in the daily life of each community of activists; e) what is their transformative impact on the wider social life.

Many of the speakers at the Bologna meeting also explicitly talked about the continuous changes in the subjectivity of groups dedicated to self-organization and self-production practices, stressing that this aspect is one of the main issues discussed

among activists within their community. This aspect raises another theme that is particularly relevant for the entire research project, that of rhetoric (and ideology) of commons, or the way in which the *main characters* of these processes talk about their own experience. We are indeed faced with moments of self-reflection on the rhetoric, which nourish the discourse on the commons even within the social movements.

The network of movements involved in these meetings met on several occasions in the following months. The link between them was consolidated in early 2019, in response to the proposal of some intellectuals, including professors Ugo Mattei and Alberto Lucarelli, who had called for the collection of signatures for a national citizens' initiative law on common goods. The promoters of this venture were blamed for having acted in a top-down way, without involving the realities that actually represented commoning practices on the ground. Their choice to promote a citizens' initiative law using methods that were anything but horizontal was considered completely paradoxical. In February 2019, before concluding my ethnography, I took part in a last meeting at the Ex Asilo Filangieri, in Naples, attended by many movements from all over Italy. It was not by chance that it was organized precisely by l'asilo (the community to which my fieldwork in Naples was dedicated), as its activists had been trying for several months to promote a coordination between the different movements of the network. The network of movements that took part in this great assembly was made even more cohesive by the sharing of a common goal and the common opposition to the methods adopted by other commons' promoters in the country. It was a moment of a substantial formalization of the national network, which is still today solid and well established.

The ethnographer and the morality of the commons: theoretical and methodological reflections

In line with the methodology of the *Heteropolitics* project, the case studies in Italy were conducted mainly through participant observation. To apprehend the practices and the rhetoric of social movements –and their ways of seeking consensus and of resignifying the concept of the 'common' in specific social situations–, it is necessary to identify the connections between the political objectives of the movements and the cultural elements that characterize the action of these groups. That is to say, we should analyze not only their conscious strategies, professed ideologies or doctrines, and their material interests, but also the networks of meanings and the moral contexts in which the various social actors act, which are crucial elements in order to identify their interests and motivations. To access this unexpressed background, it is not enough to refer to the self-representations that the activists and their interlocutors offer about themselves. Instead, what is needed is an ethnographic exploration capable of grasping the subtler level of everyday practices, the *unsaid* that underlies the social construction of commoning practices (Dei & Vesco 2017: 24-25).

In addition to the participant observation of the movements' activities, in my case

studies I also conducted interviews with activists and militants. Moreover, interviews with local politicians, public officials, journalists, and other actors in the urban context were required in order to capture and to flesh out the representations of the new forms of commoning and the political issues that mark the conflicts and the negotiations between social movements and local governments. Also (and especially) during interviews, the *unsaid* plays a central role. Each interview is, after all, characterized by a certain degree of negotiation, which brings into play the role of the researcher, in particular when he or she is, at the same time, an activist involved in commoning practices with the communities s/he is observing.

Studying social movements from an ethnographic and anthropological point of view enables us to look into the intimate aspects of the political action of the subjects involved, i.e., their affects, grudges, rifts and conflicts, friendships, and so on. In order to do so, it was vital to reconstruct the political biographies of some of the activists and groups that I observed. In both Naples and Turin, different practices and discourses emerge regarding the ways in which the relationships among the subjects are managed. Such discourses and practices are constructed in the local context according to the different ways in which the ‘political’ is understood in a given territory. This perspective helps to identify not only the formally established social movements, but also the processes of establishing informal groups in the world of urban movements. Indeed, this aspect can be dealt with through the reconstruction of the activists’ political biographies. Piecing together personal and political events in the lives of individual subjects allows us to recognize the profound heterogeneity of the political paths existing within the container of the ‘commons.’

As any activist ethnographer, I tried to be as self-reflexive as possible in order to be consistent with the conclusions prompted by my theoretical background (cf. Clifford and Marcus 1986), namely that activist, engaged or militant ethnography cannot be seen separately from the historical and political contexts to which both the ethnographer and the informants belong. After all, as Cunningham (1999: 5) claims, ‘while anthropologists are in the process of discerning globalisation as an analytical phenomenon, they may also be located in -and therefore subject to- the processes of it.’ Their existence in the field is liminal as they are neither outside the arena of inquiry nor completely inside (Casas-Cortés et al. 2013).

In her dissertation on ‘Engaging a knowledge turn’ in ethnography and, more specifically, in her research on social movements, Casas-Cortés (2009) advocates a ‘necessary epistemological shift where the traditional object of study starts to be symmetrically treated as a subject, as a knowledge producer of complex and worthwhile interpretations of the world’ (Casas-Cortés 2009: 42-43). In this shift, both the subject-object studied and the notion of knowledge are questioned and redefined. Shifting from the notion of ‘objects’ of study to the study *of and with subjects* implies engaging with active, transforming and complex entities who live in a world. Hence, they can be neither studied as objects (as inert, defined and bounded) nor understood

in separation from their world. Casas-Cortes sketches out thus the ‘cultural turn’ in social movement research that critically engages the relation between state and movements.

Rather than seeing the movements as strategic actors in relation to the state, a more recent conception broaches them as sites for the elaboration of collective identities, innovative meanings, social relations and cultural practices, all of which become important sources for counter-hegemonic formations (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Mouffe 2013, Alvarez & Escobar 1992). This re-conceptualization has been called the ‘cultural turn’ in social movement research, and anthropology has been one of the main contributors to this move towards ‘culture’ in the analysis of collective action.

For Casas-Cortes, however, it is important to follow up on this with a broader epistemic shift that can address knowledge production from within the movements themselves, rather than merely taking the viewpoint of ‘participants’ into account. Such an epistemic shift contests the notion that militants and researchers must necessarily be separated, while also leveraging the forms of knowledge production and research developing within social movements.

Ultimately, it is urgent to raise a question related to the moral positioning of the anthropologist within a field of study, such as that of the commons, which is strongly informed by moral-political issues. As Didier Fassin has pointed out, the recent interest in moral issues expressed by anthropologists is to be questioned in itself:

Two or three decades ago, anthropologists did not work on violence and suffering, trauma and mourning, prisons and camps, victims of wars and disasters, humanitarianism and human rights. These realities existed but received little attention from the discipline (Fassin 2012: 5).

We could add that, back then, anthropologists did not deal either with social movements, politics from below in Western contexts, or the efforts to build counter-hegemonic politics in the field of the commons. Today, they have decided to focus on ‘more urgent’ issues, partially denying the un-political posture of previous streams of the discipline and adopting forms of research that have a more direct public impact and may involve them as activists, too. All this must mean something in terms of their moral positioning towards the subjects to whom they turn their attention.

Such a remarkable evolution raises the question of why we were unaware of or indifferent to the tragic of the world before and, symmetrically, why we became so passionately involved in it in recent years. It also elicits an interrogation about what was gained, and what was lost, in this evolution, or, to say it differently, about how our apprehension of the human condition was reconfigured (Fassin 2012: 5).

My view of the commons and of the political processes related to their pursuit is partly influenced by the sensitivity with which Fassin and other anthropologists have

critically addressed the concept of morality in the anthropological field. The events observed in the Italian case studies can be interpreted through the lens of critical moral anthropology insofar as they bear on the relationship between the subjects encountered and moral norms, whose configurations and role in the political processes I observed.

In his review of the ways in which cultural anthropology has looked at social norms, Fassin refers to two main schools, one following Durkheim, the other Foucault. These traditions of thought are based respectively on the two main paradigms that make up moral philosophy: deontological ethics, of Durkheimian and Kantian origin, which rely on pre-existing norms that describe the horizon of action of individuals, and the ethics of virtue, of Foucauldian and Aristotelian derivation. To these, the French anthropologist adds consequentialist ethics, according to which the actors do not assess their conduct on the basis of their conformity to pre-existing norms or the specific disposition of the agent, but according to the consequences, immediate or remote, that may derive from them.

Fassin's reflection inevitably crosses moral philosophy and social sciences and leads to Max Weber, who may help us to grasp the political dimension inherent in moral actions. The following passage by Fassin is once again worth quoting verbatim:

To account for these proximities between the moral and the political, one can have recourse to another lexicon, more familiar to social scientists. The confrontation of different positions in a process of decision may be interpreted in Weber's terms as the conflict between an ethics of conviction -exemplified by the attitude of the Christian who 'does the right thing and leaves the outcome in the hands of God'- and an ethics of responsibility -corresponding to the affirmation that 'one must answer for the foreseeable consequences of one's action' (2008 [1919]: 198). The former, which is grounded on principles or dispositions, is therefore related to deontological or virtue ethics. The latter, which acknowledges the complications necessarily involved in the exercise of power, clearly adopts a consequentialist approach. It is noteworthy, though, that the recent blossoming of anthropological works on morality and ethics has apparently overlooked this third philosophical thread, thus neglecting the articulation of the moral and the political. Yet, the question 'Should one do the right thing or act in function of the foreseeable consequences?' is crucial to the practice of politics, whether it concerns remote societies or closer horizons (Fassin 2012: 9).

It is precisely this aspect that closely concerns the commons movements and their political practice. As we shall see, the two main case studies conducted in Italy describe two rather different scenarios. In the first one, deontological ethics prevails, precluding any possibility of carrying out a political process, since the agent is denied any form of autonomy from the pre-existing rules that bind him/her. This is the case of Turin and of the mechanisms that plagued the group pursuing the Cavallerizza project,

as it attempted to overcome the difficulties and conflicts affecting its community. The other scenario is the one observed in Naples, where the subjectivation of individuals has enabled the development of self-reflective political practices that are always subject to change.

Of course, as explained later, the above framework does not account for the internal nuances of the various communities, nor is it capable of describing all the different steps in the complex processes they go through. On many occasions, the actions of the activists from the two communities were guided by real ‘practical norms,’ to use an expression coined by Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan. These norms are not necessarily expressed as such by social actors: they are ‘more often than not automatic and routine, existing in a vein more latent than explicit’ (Olivier de Sardan 2009: 29). This is where anthropology (i.e. the cultural dimension of the political practices of the subjects encountered in fieldwork) comes into play. As discussed in the case of Naples, practical norms have often supplanted the value of the formal norms or official norms that should regulate the interactions between communities for the commons and local institutions, giving rise to unforeseen scenarios and creating openings for the realization of alternative forms of politics, with the approval also of official politics. These practical norms do not lack a cultural component at all. Their characteristic is that they are produced from time to time by activists in specific situations, taking into account the political context in which they act and the official interlocutors to which they relate.

From an anthropological point of view, it is precisely in relation to the value attributed (or not) to official norms and formal norms that the differences among the Italian case studies of the *Heteropolitics* project emerge. These differences also depend on the ability (or lack thereof) to renounce both and to resort instead to practical norms, which are agreed upon from time to time and whose strength primarily lies in their being provisional. By creatively manipulating relations within communities and between them and their officials and political representatives, the movements for the commons have managed to introduce new, alternative forms of politics and have paved the way for micro-experiments in counter-hegemony that have, in some cases, left a trace in the urban and social fabric of the cities examined for this project.

In Turin, the conflicts and malaise within the community of Cavallerizza prevented its members from taking a step beyond the difficulties encountered and from breaking free of the control that the rules exerted over them. In Naples, the awareness of their complex situation allowed several communities, and in particular the community that I studied (l’asilo), to constantly rethink the rules, without ever mentioning them, and to introduce new alternative forms of politics based on a process of continuous rethinking one’s political commitment.

In all these cases, as I have already said, the law plays a central role. Thus, any reflection on the rules must be complemented by considering the relationship between

these rules and the law. In particular, when analyzing the Italian movements for the commons, the use of rules and regulations must be connected with law as a primary source of both theoretical elaboration and practical implementation of the commons.

4. Case Studies in Italy

4.1. Naples



View of Naples from Ex Asilo Filangieri.

4.1.1. Ironic Naples. An introduction

It was November 2017 when I first set foot in Naples after the beginning of the *Heteropolitics* project. I went there to take part in a public assembly called ‘Commons and cities.’ It had been organized by the community of artists and activists of l’asilo, who invited other entities devoted to common goods in other parts of Italy (as well as some from other countries). My fieldwork concerning Italy had started two months earlier in a very similar situation, during the assembly and meetings called ‘Anomalie,’ organized by the activists of Cavallerizza in Turin. It was therefore impossible not to become immediately aware of key differences between the two experiences. Firstly, from the very beginning, the people I met in l’asilo appeared to be much more ‘political.’ What does that mean?

They moved with greater ease through the spaces of an event of that kind. They seemed used to managing situations such as a conference, involving also members of the institutions. They talked to politicians with a certain degree of confidence, often mirroring the attitude of their interlocutors. At l’asilo I found none of the awkwardness and struggle -the seemingly sullen embarrassment- that I had observed in the relations between those living at Cavallerizza and anyone else who did not clearly belong to their reference community. I began reflecting on the reasons behind these differences, and I told myself that they were mostly due to the social and cultural make-up of the two groups. Yet, the differences also had to do with some ‘context’ features, i.e., the relationships established by these groups with other social movements active in their

cities, with representatives of the institutions, and with their social context at large. In that phase, I still had few clues to help me understand how the commons were realized in the two cities. However, I knew that behind these aspects lay the way in which these two communities conceived *the political*, as well as their different understanding of their own political role within the urban context.

Naples has been called the ‘tuff city’ (Dines 2012). A ‘porous’ city, where ‘nothing moves forward along clear lines’ (Cacciari 1992, in Amaturio 2019: 11).⁶ A scholar who narrated the long 1900s in Naples explained the two prevailing and opposing representations of the city. Naples is perceived as deeply fractured by its social divisions and, at the same time, as a *jumble*, because here, much more so than elsewhere, people live on top of each other, beyond all social differences (Gribaudo 1999). It is that ‘social confusion’ that the writer Raffaele La Capria -one of the greatest observers of the processes of building a Neapolitan identity- described as ‘this kind of wonderful confusion: wonderful yes, but confusion -even psychic, even creative, even interpretative; this is perhaps the Neapolitanity’ (in De Matteis 2012: 30). All research exploring the Neapolitan context has relied on interpretative approaches linked to the concepts of *contradiction*, *contrast*, *paradox*, and *oxymoron*, in other words, the constant opposition of antithetical concepts and representations, requiring complex analyses, more complex than elsewhere. Thus, researchers and social scientists have also contributed their own stark depictions, adding to the plethora of representations that nourish the identity of the city and its people.

All of the above affects the way in which individuals and groups conceive and interpret opportunities for change, political and social interventions, and how to act within a context that never ceases to represent itself, through cinema, theatre, music, and literature (see De Matteis 2012, Pezzella 2019), as well as in private conversations, which make up and define the so-called ‘public culture’ (Breckenridge-Appadurai 1988).

So, how do the activists and politicians I met in Naples deal with this social background and the constant re-elaboration of the city’s identity? Needless to say, they have to reckon with these issues on a daily basis. They relate to their own image and to the way their community is represented from the outside, and their main concern is to propose and propagate a model of political and social action. As we will see, they believe that the city’s ‘faults,’ which they constantly tackle both in practice and in their political reflection, are seen as such only if one fails to read them by going beyond clichés and to grasp their subversive potential. How can we study the ‘social jumble’ that Gribaudo (1999) refers to and the political life across Naples’ various neighborhoods without taking *paradox* and *irony* into account?

⁶ A comparative analysis of the Italian case studies in the *Heteropolitics* project immediately reveals that the situation in Naples is very different from that in Turin, where the rifts among the different components of society are narrated and manifest themselves in much sharper ways.

Some anthropologists investigated the ‘practical consequences’ of irony and ‘its place in the effective action in the world.’ They define irony as ‘a weapon of the weak, providing space for subordinated persons to voice resistance, imagine alternatives, build community and mobilize for better times’ (Fernandez & Huber 2001).⁷ This aspect makes the Naples case a peculiar and particularly relevant one, because thanks to the ironic attitude shown by social movements towards institutions, it is possible to put into circulation alternative and emergent modes of collective self-organization, self-management and mobilization. Nevertheless, we must take care not to give in to the temptation to assume a vague and indefinite concept of irony, theoretically valid for every place and every time. No need to say that irony is not the same everywhere, it does not mean the same thing in every context. We must therefore understand what it means, in the specific Neapolitan context, to act politically in alternative ways thanks to irony. The present report will also deal with these aspects, in an attempt to ethnographically and theoretically frame the elements that emerged from the fieldwork.

Another issue characterizes the ‘Naples case’ and makes it relevant for the purposes of the *Heteropolitics* project. In Naples, more than elsewhere, it is inevitable that political issues connect with moral and ethical ones. Another prevailing representation of the Neapolitan political and social context concerns in fact its alleged patronage *vocation* and the propensity of its popular social classes to crime. The main studies on politics in the Neapolitan context have concerned precisely these aspects, adopting a prescriptive and orientaling perspective⁸ that has designed an image of the city with which we must grapple today if we want to start any discussion on it. Parallel to these reflections, recent social research on Naples has also focused on grassroots mobilizations and alternative forms of politics that have developed in the last two decades (i.a., Andretta 2005, Dines 2000; 2012, Gargiulo & Cirulli 2016; 2017). Many of these works reveal an absolutely different picture of the political vitality of the city of Naples, highlighting the transformative potential of the social movements of the city. In some of the most recent contributions, Neapolitan urban movements for the commons are celebrated as an avant-garde of political reflection and as points of reference in the national panorama and beyond. Inevitably, the potential of commons as the new frontier of social and political action in Naples has been highlighted above all by militants and scholars who are part of the most active experiences in the city—many of them they are part of the asilo community (see Capone 2013, Cozzolino 2017, De Tullio 2018, Micciarelli 2014; 2017).

⁷ James Scott (1990), in his now classic work on resistances, explains also how the subordinate groups create a secret discourse that represents a critique of power spoken behind the backs of the dominant.

⁸ By using the concept of *orientalism*, I obviously refer to the hegemonic mechanisms of construction of the *other* highlighted by Said (1978). In the following pages, I will refer to other authors who have used—more or less explicitly— the concept of *orientalism* referring specifically to the Italian context and to the social construction of Southern Italy (see Gribaudi 1996, Schneider 1998, Zinn 2001).

So, on the one hand, the quintessence of patronage and corrupt politics, and, on the other, one of the most advanced realities as regards social movements for commons and the affirmation of alternative forms of politics. How can we keep these two opposite *interpretations* together in a research into the transformative potential of such movements and their interlocutions with the institutional world?

Inevitably, the narrative on the patronage tendencies of the Neapolitan political and social context has exerted a strong influence on the city dwellers themselves, i.e. on how they perceive their own 'politics' and their own public conduct in general. It is a representation of Neapolitan politics and institutions that guides the action of the subjects who engage with the institutions. Every action or organization that departs from this inferior representation of political action, does it consciously and, often, in opposition to it. But, as we will see, some groups (such as those I observed during my fieldwork in l'asilo and other 'common goods' in the city) have developed a high degree of awareness of the processes of orientalization towards their city. So, they act taking this aspect into account and consciously reworking it as a mix of representations from the outside, on the one hand, and actual and daily practices with which to deal with, on the other.

All this calls into question elements that have to do with the morals and the ethics that guide the political action of the militants and activists I met on the field. Following the reflections of Didier Fassin (2009; 2012) we can interpret the potential and transformative effects of the political action of these subjects by connecting ethics, morality and daily political action, and by questioning these three dimensions in light of my position in the field, i.e. the role that I, as a researcher, played in that context in the months I spent in close contact with the l'asilo community.

Ultimately, the Naples case allows us to reflect on a broad and general theme: the relationship between social movements and the local institutional sphere. One of the main subjects of interest in this case study lies in the mutual definition of the two parties. We can therefore detect both the rhetoric about the commons employed by local institutions and the political and social activity of the main social movements in the city, which are very different from one another, but share the use of a still vague and indefinite concept of commons.

At the same time, this is a very specific case that mobilizes a particular rhetoric. Naples is the main city in Southern Italy, and one of the places where local communities experience many forms of self-organization from the bottom up. These experiences often arise, and self-represent themselves, as an answer to the patronage practices that have historically characterized local governments. The urban policies of the current municipal Council question and disrupt the usual representation of the urban context, opening up possibilities for new forms of urban space management. However, the dialogue between the occupied spaces and local institutions is not linear, and it is indeed affected by conflicts and continuous bargaining. Studying the main

social movements which are active in the Naples districts is therefore useful in order to explore the possibility of imagining new forms of political organization by local communities in a conflictual political context such as Naples. As we will see, the ability to deal with conflict and keep it at bay in creative forms makes Neapolitan movements particularly capable of continually introducing new forms of political participation. The latter enter the internal reflections of the movements themselves, producing new discourses and new political practices that are almost unique in the national panorama and in the European context.

Just like in the case of Turin, in Naples, too, I could say that my research is not about the experience of a single space. As I stated in my general Introduction to case studies in Italy, these are not only case studies on the commons practices of circumscribed communities. In Naples, the aim was to observe the transformations of movements politics and their relationship with the City's political institutions from a privileged point of view, that of l'asilo, the first community in Italy that obtained a resolution for the civic use of a public space by its Municipality (2011). I observed the practices and the rhetoric of self-government and of practicing the commons within the community. At the same time, I took into account the political and social transformations of a big Italian city through the prism of one of its most active political and cultural collectives. This may allow us to make a more general argument about the political nature of this experience, capturing also the attempts to institutionalize these processes and the dialogue between movements and institutions.

My work therefore addresses two main issues: 1) the relationship between social movements for commons and institutions; 2) the social, political and cultural elements that turn this relationship in one direction rather than another, driving the experiences of Neapolitan commons towards the affirmation of alternative forms of conceiving the *political* and *sharing*, especially in the cultural and artistic fields. Like the global movements theorized by Hardt and Negri (2017), Kioupkiolis (2019) and other scholars in recent years, the movements and political projects that arose and developed in Naples have had nothing spontaneous or impromptu, but are rather the example of a subsequent political maturity.

4.1.2. This report

The report on Naples consists of two parts. The first is dedicated to Naples' social and political context, that is, to the scene in which the projects and political actions of the subjects to whom my ethnography is dedicated are situated. The second part goes into the political activity and the representations of politics that characterizes the asilo community, through which we can observe the transformations that have affected political militancy and the concept of the 'common' in Naples in the last decade.

In short, by giving an account of the events that took place in this community of activists, artists and entertainment workers, it will be possible to provide a broader picture of the so-called Naples model, or of a specific declination of the policies for

commons and commoning practices in the Italian context. The report will first provide an overview of the recent history of institutions and local politics, as well as of the transformations that have affected the forms of political struggle and participation in social movements in the last decades. This is a mandatory exercise if we want to grasp the social, political and cultural context in which the network of movements for commons takes shape.

As we will see, in an anthropological perspective, the specificities of these experiences can be traced back to the processes of building the political identities of the activists. These processes are connected to forms of opposition (and re-appropriation) of the main stigmas that weigh on Neapolitan society and on the alleged forms of political action widespread in it.

Gradually, I will broach the events concerning l'asilo, through which it will be possible to glimpse even the broader context of the Neapolitan commons. The second part of the report will therefore examine the internal organization of a self-governing community; its relations with the outside world, both with institutions and with other urban movements for commons; the social and political composition of the community; the role of law as a creative tool for building counter-hegemonic forms of politics; the positioning of l'asilo activists within the political and cultural process they carry out and the ability to constantly question their own position.

Finally, I will try to draw some conclusions regarding the success of l'asilo experience and the 'Naples model,' which are linked to a widespread practice of 'listening in dissent.' This practice is possible only thanks to the ability of subjects to approach ironically their daily political practice, appropriating 'traditional' codes and forms of political action. The moral imagination of the asilo community and the network of Neapolitan common goods is in fact based on the use of irony as a 'tool of the weak,' thanks to which it is possible to keep at bay the official political power and the attempts made by institutional actors to dominate the political process underway, as well as the alleged 'political culture' of Naples conditioned by exoticism and orientalism.

4.1.3. A new local government in dialogue with social movements

For a long time, major research into politics in Naples has focused on patronage practices adopted by the parties of the so-called First Republic (1946-1992). In particular, Naples is one of the Italian cities that have been studied most often by political and social scientists due to its political bargaining dynamics and the strong hegemony of the Christian Democracy party (see e.g. Allum 1973; 2003, Geremicca 1997, Gribaudo & Musella 1998).⁹ When portraying the city's political and social

⁹ Naples has been often depicted as clientelist, corrupted, and at the mercy of ruling classes that maintain special relations with Camorra and organized crime at large. An example of this tendency can be found in a study on the 1990s. Here, Gribaudo & Musella (1998) observe that Neapolitan public prosecutors tended to prosecute (and, thus, to narrate publicly) the crimes of the 'Tangentopoli' period

context, these aspects cannot be overlooked for two reasons. First, this is the political history that has shaped the institutions with which the commons movements have to deal in Naples, Second, over time, strong stereotypes and narrations have developed around Naples, just like around other parts of Southern Italy, regarding a certain type of local political culture and ways of ‘playing politics’ that are allegedly widespread in and around the city. Literary *topoi* and archetypes have been widely used by political observers and representatives in their depictions (see Gribaudo 1996, Moe 2004). Moreover, the literary field and the political field have long been influencing each other. An interplay started to develop between these concepts and the interpretations offered by social scientists themselves, concerning the socio-cultural analysis of local government traditions and political participation practices. Without going into detail about these studies,¹⁰ the key point here is that decades of investigation and research have contributed to introducing rigid categories of analysis of local political phenomena, which have heavily influenced the public debate and have even affected how the people who live in the South of Italy have come to regard their own ways of conducting politics. Anyone who wishes to do institutional work in Naples or to establish a relationship with the institutions, in order to promote new ways of managing public life, must grapple with this narration of their own context.

The *Heteropolitics* project aims to capture, describe, and analyze alternative democratic practices in response to the contemporary crises in Southern Europe, and beyond. Within this framework, Naples represents a relevant case for a number of reasons. The practical application of the commons and the promotion of alternative forms of politics have obviously taken on a specific shape in the city, which also depends on how it talks about itself, or, in other words, on how the representatives of the local institutions and the militants of urban social movements interpret this narration and face up to it. As we will see, when confronted with the usual labels applied to them (and to their ways of managing ‘public affairs’) by various scholars and observers, the politicians of Naples to which these narratives refer, react like the Native Americans described by the US Native American writer Vine Deloria Jr., i.e., with ‘all the variations on the irony continuum -parody, scorn, satire, ridicule’ (see Fernandez & Huber 2001: 20).

In recent decades, Naples’ political and social context has been considerably transformed. After the Tangentopoli phase and the collapse of the Christian Democracy,

from the perspective of clientelism and organized crime. During the famous ‘Mani Pulite’ phase, while in other Italian regions public prosecutors focused on the exchange of bribes between corrupters and corrupted, those working on key cases of corruption in Naples decided to provide evidence of such corruption dynamics by describing the surrounding context of clientelism, seen as pervasive in its harsh depictions. Therefore, they used the crime of ‘vote bargaining’ to frame the participation of politicians in Camorra activities.

¹⁰ It might suffice to mention the strong influence of works such as Banfield (1958) on the alleged amoral familism of the Italian South, and Putnam (1973) on the alleged lack of ‘civic culture’ in the same areas.

from 1993 to 2011 Naples was governed by parties belonging to the center-left coalition, whose political experience ended on account of scandals involving its main leaders and politicians (Rea 1995, Sales 2012). The figure around whom the Neapolitan politics of this season revolved was Antonio Bassolino, the mayor of Naples from 1993 to 2000 and the president of the Campania region from 2000 to 2010, whose ‘rise and fall’ has been read as paradigmatic of the crises that have affected center-left politics in Italy (Brancaccio 2013). The Bassolino administration was a contradictory experience, because the mayor and his collaborators were able to bring to the foreground demands for change that had been denied until then. They became agents who embodied the dreams of a generation. However, following some investigations, the figure of Bassolino quickly passed into ignominy, paradoxically becoming the symbol of bad governance.

In response to the collapse of the Neapolitan urban regime represented by the center-left parties, 2011 saw the election of mayor Luigi De Magistris, a former magistrate who stayed until then far from party politics. His election gave rise to criticisms and heated debates among the main actors of the local and national political context, who considered the new local government to be the result of the collapse of the party system. In the public debate, the current mayor is often described as a populist politician (in the pejorative meaning that this term takes in the media debate). The ‘Bassolino era’ (as it is often defined in Naples and beyond) had begun in the name of change and discontinuity with the politics of the so-called Italian First Republic,¹¹ but ended by confirming the historical-political judgment that had identified the city in the previous decades. I will not discuss here the significant and obvious differences between the two political phases and the two systems of local government. What is interesting to underline is that even the long hegemony of the center-left bequeathed to the Neapolitan institutions a cumbersome label: that of being essentially a place where patronage and corruption dominate.

The current phase of local government has developed precisely in contrast to the power system that preceded it. The ‘orange revolution’ of mayor Luigi De Magistris and of the DeMA local candidates list (from the first letters of the mayor’s surname)¹² presents itself as a reaction to the previous administration of the city. Undoubtedly, its electoral and social success has been bolstered by the crisis of party clientelism and by the inability of the local notables and veteran politicians to once again provide their voters with material resources (Brancaccio 2018).

The inauguration of the new administration was not welcome by the intellectual class, which (despite having been disappointed and embittered by the Bassolino experience) had trusted the center-left to advance its own vision of the city. Accusations have

¹¹ The First Republic ended with the scandals and cases of party and administrative corruption in the early 1990s.

¹² This non-party list supported him in the 2011 and 2016 municipal elections.

mostly been coming from intellectuals and professional politicians close to the parties that had failed to 1) represent the most socially underprivileged areas of the city and 2) maintain a dialogue with its urban social movements.

After his election in 2011, the first impression was that the gap existing between the center-left parties and the city's working/lower classes had suddenly been bridged by De Magistris. Hence, the label -often coinciding with a political accusation- of populism was regularly attached to the new mayor's political propaganda. In the last few years, greater attention has been paid in Italy to socio-economic factors as determining variables in voting choices, focusing in particular on the consequences of the economic downturn and the perception of its seriousness by voters (Brancaccio & Fruncillo 2020). Indeed, it has been observed that, in the underprivileged areas of the city (the suburbs and the deprived areas of the historic center), De Magistris' movement has more than once received the same share of votes in municipal elections as the 5-Star Movement in national elections (Brancaccio & Fruncillo 2020). It is common knowledge that the 5-Star Movement is a political party that has built its success around the populist construal of its political issues (see e.g. Biorcio & Sampugnaro 2019).

Obviously, the accusations of populism directed at De Magistris have nothing to do with the theorisation of this concept put forth by Ernesto Laclau (2005). De Magistris is essentially criticized for having opened a communication channel with the lower classes, seen as groups of people willing to accept 'simplified' messages about the problems affecting their lives. In this perspective, the concept of populism is associated with a whole series of other negative characterizations, such as familism, dirigisme and a certain autocratic tendency. An example of this judgment on the mayor's politics and policies is offered by the media coverage of the mayor's political action, in particular by the press close to the center-left parties, on whose pages the 5-Star Movement and the De Magistris project have often been compared to the point of stating that the mayor's 'populism...is even more deleterious than that of the *grillini* [5-Star politicians], as Naples is painfully experiencing' (La Bruna 2020).¹³

The mayor has also attracted constant criticism because of how he has used the support gained among social movements, allegedly cashing in on his close relationship with the city's occupied spaces in terms of votes at the elections. Within these dynamics, the representatives of the social movements have been often described as politically naive subjects, at the mercy of the new mayor's electoral strategies. The

¹³ Headlines from newspapers and magazines of the same editorial group highlight the negative connotations they attribute to his populist politics and policies: see, for example, C. Formenti (2017) *De Magistris, il populista di sinistra tra luci e ombre*, Ragone (2017) *De Magistris-De Luca, il duello dei populistici familisti*.

activists of the ‘commons’ spaces are actually aware of this depiction, as explained to me by one of l’asilo ‘inhabitants’:¹⁴

No one wants to marry him [De Magistris], no way! When he was a rising politician, everyone said ‘careful! He’s about to steal your thunder! He’ll steal your thunder!’ But I think we’ve actually stolen his. It’s only right that all this effort is expended, at a political level too... no, no, honestly... in that regard, our relationship really seems fair to me (Oscar 2018).

I also raised this problem to Augusto, a researcher and political scientist, one of l’asilo’s inhabitants with whom I have had many discussions during my fieldwork. I did it even in a provocative way, to understand to what extent this narrative is firmly rejected. I told him that it is normal for a new administration to need to listen to the world of social movements as well, because this also strengthens it from an electoral point of view. Augusto first gave me a straight answer: ‘The electoral force was produced only by Luigi de Magistris, with his person, his speech, his rhetoric. We certainly didn’t give it to him.’ When I pointed out to him that in any case the rhetoric he talks about has evidently taken hold also among social movements, he replied:

But this is always a danger, politics is also this. De Magistris can wake up tomorrow and say: ‘common goods were made exclusively thanks to us [the administration].’ And take possession of this experience. It wouldn’t surprise me. He is waging his political battle. We are not naive, we know there is always this risk, but who cares (Augusto 2018).

Hence, in Naples, the season of the commons has coincided with a phase in which institutional politics has been called ‘populist.’ This assessment is chiefly based on the interpretation of electoral data from recent years, which are mostly in line with both national figures and prevailing trends in other areas of Italy. They reveal the parallel success of two parties: the DeMa local candidates list of mayor De Magistris, and the 5 Star Movement. Within a few years, the latter saw an increase in votes from 24.5% (Chamber of Deputies 2013) to 26.5% (European Parliament 2014), 52.4% (Chamber of Deputies 2018), and then 39.9% (European Parliament 2018; see Brancaccio & Fruncillo 2020: 131). The electoral trend of the M5S has been studied in relation to the success of De Magistris and his movement. Indeed, after illustrating the M5S results reported above, Brancaccio and Fruncillo point out that:

In light of these results, it seems rather surprising that the M5S did not manage to take part in the municipality election race for the mayoral office. This was the case not so much in 2011, when the Movement had not yet expressed its potential, but rather in 2016. In fact, while until 2011 the M5S had participated, albeit rather unsuccessfully, only in the 2010 regional elections, in 2016 it had

¹⁴ This is the name given to the people who look after the space, although none of them physically lives at l’asilo.

already achieved encouraging results in Naples in the national, European, and even local elections, with around one fourth of valid votes. Nevertheless, in the municipal elections both the M5S mayoral candidate and the M5S list for the city council failed to reach double digits, remaining under the 10% threshold of votes (Brancaccio & Fruncillo 2020: 132).

The main reasons behind the M5S' lack of success in the local elections have been ascribed to two main factors: '1) a local political system characterized by well-established networks of particularistic bargaining at the decentralized level; 2) the presence of a strong competitor, such as De Magistris' list' (Brancaccio & Fruncillo 2020: 132).

The above data show how successful the DeMa list actually was, since in the local elections it managed to rival the Italian political entity that had received most votes in previous years. Of course, its electoral similarities to the 5 Star-Movement strengthened the perception that the mayor's list was indeed a party that had a populist leaning.

Despite its electoral success, the De Magistris' administration could not rely from the start on solid roots in the local institutions. Local administrations need time to take roots, as relationships with civil servants, officials, and managers in the local institutions must be built up over time. In cases like De Magistris', it is necessary to overcome the mistrust of people who have always worked within other political networks and have followed structured ways to relate to a political class entrenched in the institutions. This is why the new administration has tried to legitimize its presence within the institutions and its actions by recruiting fresh councillors and managers. Among these, the administration's main new recruits are those in charge of the 'Common Goods,' because from the very beginning this has been the key topic around which the propaganda of the Orange Movement and the DeMa candidates list has revolved. One of them is Fabio Pascapè, who has held the position of manager for the 'Common Goods' in the City Council of Naples for many years. In an interview, Pascapè described to me his role as follows:

Naples was recovering from a defeat, the end of the Bassolino season. After 18 years -I was there- that had started so enthusiastically, leaving behind financial difficulties, bringing together the best from all sectors (the best in city planning, business, culture...), there was an unstoppable downward spiral, despite mayor Iervolino's attempts to pull back from that situation. Towards the end, it was the chronicle of a death foretold. Then came a mayor who is one of the few Italian public prosecutors that have dealt with crimes against the public administration. So, he comes extremely well prepared to face all the mechanisms of blockage and distorted, misguided management of the public administration. He understands what it's all about. He came in and dismantled the support machine... He *unblocked*, that's what happened. Along the way, he has made

some brave choices too....The first councillorship for the commons in Italy was set up by the Municipality of Naples! The first statute to be amended to include common goods was ours! These things leave a mark. The experience of the Observatory on the Common Goods is important as well... (Pascapè 2019).

As we have seen, in Italy as elsewhere, the commons are cast as a unifying theme and a rallying point -an 'empty signifier' in Ernesto Laclau's theory of hegemony (Laclau 1996; 2005) which can help to re-describe diverse experiences, experiments, activities and people in a common language (*Report 1. The Political*, 2.5.2). In Laclau and Mouffe's lexicon, the commons are in fact an empty signifier, that is, a general idea which can be signified variously by different people, but it acts as a 'meeting point' that establishes a 'chain of equivalence.' The empty signifier renders different social groups, practices and relations equivalent vis-à-vis a common opponent and it places them under the same umbrella, which can, and should, also assume a positive meaning (the alternative to which we aspire; see Laclau & Mouffe 1985).

This mechanism is evident in the Italian case, as noted with respect to Naples specifically:

The label of 'common goods' seems to represent an *empty signifier* able to catalyze and aggregate different social needs into a single demand. For these movements, which assert their independence in the use of urban spaces, the *commons* represent a notion able to absorb other needs, forged into a strategy of conflict that addresses local and national institutions by proposing a city development model that is alternative, sustainable and guided by notions of justice and equality (Gargiulo & Cirulli 2017; emphasis in the original).

The De Magistris era began in the name of the commons and with a view to overturning the 'classic' representation relations within a context that, until then, had been characterized by poor management, bad governance and misrule. It is precisely because of this discontinuity with the past that it has been welcome by those social movements and networks that had begun engaging with Naples's urban spaces, as stated, for instance, by Oscar, one of the founders of l'asilo:

The administration, here, all in all, as far as being clean, you know... I mean, it's pretty clean. But many prigs criticize it... De Magistris is very unpopular with a portion of our civil society because he is a nonconformist, while Naples' civil society is based, for the most part, on very conformist dynamics (Oscar 2018).

The election of De Magistris created an opening for a possible alternative. In those circumstances -deriving from a clear crisis in democratic representation- the urban social movements of Naples seized an opportunity, a chance to establish an alternative model of doing politics at the urban level.

Since its election, the current municipal administration has followed a path of dialogue with some of the major occupied spaces. In recent years, Naples has been considered a

place where social and political experimentation takes place: spaces and gardens run by spontaneous groups of citizens, squats, after-school and public clinics, social laboratories and new cultural associations, territorial committees, etc.

In 2011, the administration amended the Municipal Statute. The City of Naples introduced the legal category of ‘bene comune’ (common good). The common good was intended as ‘accessible, usable, shared, available to the representation and the realization of the instances, projections, and recognizable desires of established communities’ (Piscopo 2017). In 2012, the City Council enacted the ‘Rules for the Management of Common Goods,’ and, in 2013, the municipal administration established an Observatory on the Common Goods in order to identify public and private assets which could be transformed into public goods for collective use and wealth.¹⁵ Other institutional acts have been carried out with the aim of symbolically communicating the (still generic and indefinite) commitment of the City of Naples to promoting the public use (and self-government) of public spaces. In 2014, the City of Naples adopted two resolutions to *return* some (both public and private) abandoned goods to the citizens. The most interesting aspects of Naples’ administrative pathway in recent years have been: 1) the importance attached to these measures in the public debate; 2) the tendency of the administration to (formally and publicly) recognize the political activity of existing groups and social movements, organized according to the logic of self-government and experimenting with the direct management of public spaces.

4.1.4. Mayor De Magistris and the practical management of the commons

One of the deepest and most pervasive changes occurred in Europe in the last two decades is a constant increase in the ‘strategic supremacy’ of cities -in particular of big cities...cities are no longer regarded as places where economic development manifests itself but rather as places where economic development is generated -with the aid of local development policies as well.

This is stated by Antonio Calafati (2016: 225-226) in his observations about the economic development of the city of Naples. In terms, also, of local government and the promotion of urban development, Naples is a stage on which paradoxical rhetoric and representations manifest themselves. On the one hand, the city is affected by a sort of ‘analytical prejudice,’ according to which its urban system is ‘too complex, its political-administrative fragmentation too high, its imbalances too atypical and deep to be able to interpret its dynamics and formulate a development strategy’ (Calafati 2016: 223). On the other hand, over the last decade, this very prejudice has provided the basis for the rhetoric and political action of the ‘new’ city council and has acted as a driver to encourage the activism of local administrators.

¹⁵ The Observatory’s activities were suspended for a certain period and restarted in 2019.

This rhetoric of Naples' peculiarity is indeed the key element around which the political and public communication of the current administration, led by Luigi De Magistris, revolves. For what concerns the cultural and artistic field (and, in some cases, also the social services), we can conclude that the experience of the 'Neapolitan common goods' has been made possible only thanks to the stalemate that has characterized the city's urban planning in recent decades. Faced with the practical impossibility of devising top-down development strategies, the Neapolitan administration has partially relied on direct citizen participation. The emphasis on *participation* has been the leitmotiv of the new city council: 'besides being considered a practice that has political value in and of itself, therefore intrinsically being a "common good," the participatory management of policies and decision-making processes is seen as a tool to bring about economic and social transformations in the city' (Cirulli & Gargiulo 2016).

As for the planning and management of major events in the city, especially artistic and cultural events, the local administration has been able to count on the proactive relationship established with the so-called 'liberated spaces' or 'common goods.' The practical, daily role played by these communities of commoners has also a strong symbolic value, since the merits and successes of the communities and social movements that inhabit and manage them have long been at the core of the political propaganda of the mayor and his council.

During my fieldwork in Italy, I met mayor De Magistris on several occasions, and not only in the offices of Naples City Hall, which testifies to his actually being present at many events organized around the commons in Naples and beyond. While I was carrying out my ethnographic research in Turin, I also saw him at a public meeting held in Cavallerizza, to which he had been invited together with Turin's mayor, Chiara Appendino. Here, he had the opportunity to showcase his oratorical prowess vis-à-vis his colleague's much more hesitant approach, as well as the tangible results achieved by his administration in relation to the commons vis-à-vis the immobility of the Turin council in this regard.

He brought to bear his knowledge of the legal details of the resolutions for assigning public spaces to Naples's commons movements -which I will further explore in a later section of this report. He also spoke frankly and directly about the political importance of these experiences, which, according to him, are in opposition to the neo-liberal system, 'because if everyone becomes an agent for change, then the human capital becomes stronger than the financial capital.' He certainly was not as precise and specific as other individuals who had personally followed the civic use process in Naples. However, on that occasion at least, what he said was enough to present him in a good light and to reinforce the admiration that most of the Cavallerizza community already had for him. As my Turin interlocutors explained, the respect that they felt for De Magistris stemmed above all from his ability to combine high-profile political knowledge and experience with political actions able to yield 'extremely practical'

results. Certainly, this opinion, which was widespread among the Turin activists of Cavallerizza, was influenced by the content of De Magistris' skilful speeches, as most of the information circulating in Cavallerizza about the political situation and social movements in Naples had come from the mayor himself or from Neapolitan organizations and networks for the promotion of the commons.

De Magistris also took part in the assembly 'Commons and cities,' held in Naples in November 2017, which I mentioned in the introduction to this report. Then, he once again underlined his closeness to and political affinity with the social movements, but he did not omit to highlight his own political and institutional work, mentioning that he had just returned to Naples after meeting the President of the Republic. In addition, addressing the audience, which was made up of activists from all over Italy, he talked at length about the 'Naples case' and the virtues of following a path of political convergence between institutions and social movements. He even claimed that, during his time in office, 'we've almost completely recovered from the economic and social depression that had been plaguing our city.' The other topics which he touched upon in that speech deserve a brief mention, because they are typical leitmotifs of the rhetoric around the commons in Naples, as well as recurring themes in the political rhetoric of the movements themselves and of communities like the one of l'asilo. I will try to list them.

Firstly, De Magistris mentioned the 'human relations' that had developed along the way, referring to the concept of 'proximity' between elected representatives and voters -a concept that is as evocative as it is undefined since it is more connoted than denoted (Le Bart & Lefebvre 2014: 13-14). This emphasis on the rhetoric of proximity clearly emerged also in the descriptions offered by the mayor's supporters whom I met during my visits to Naples City Hall:

De Magistris is a mayor who simply walks down the street, and I think he's one of the few who, at this stage, can enter any city neighborhood. He walks around with his two bodyguards (he *must* have bodyguards by law), but I know him, and I bet he'd happily do without. He acknowledges dissent, elaborates it, and confronts it...He might just take the notion and start queuing up for a slushy at a street kiosk or right in front of a pizzeria...Luigi [De Magistris]'s wife, Teresa, takes the underground, she goes shopping...They never use official cars either...You get the impression he's someone who could be sitting right here with us (Santo 2019).

The issue of proximity, of 'human relations,' dominates the public discourse in 'Western democracies,' and it is understood in positive terms as a virtuous *return* to non-hierarchical and non-intermediated ties between elected representatives and voters. Nevertheless, once again there is a paradox in all of this. When applied to southern Italian societies, the concept of proximity evokes old stigmas that have regularly featured in the public discourse. And when applied to areas like Naples and its

surroundings, it inevitably conjures up the spectre of clientelism and of personalized political relations. The *proximity* characterizing the personalized political relations among elected representatives, activists, and voters within the Neapolitan context seems rather similar, in its premises, to the virtues associated with the concept of proximity so frequently invoked by politicians and by key normative perspectives on the function of Western democracies. At the same time, such proximity is perceived as a *fault*, an *original sin*, that prevents the proper functioning of healthy democratic mechanisms. In either case –whether it evokes virtuous ties between representatives and voters or is interpreted as degeneration of local political systems– this reference to proximity seems to remain quite undetermined, potentially leading to contrasting interpretations of a region’s social circumstances.

As was stated by Kioukiolis (*Report 1. The Political*: 121), in the communities themselves, the tight entanglement with the state bred also clientelist relationships and a growing dependence on the state and the leader, which undercut the growth of self-reliance and self-rule (see also Stavrakakis et al. 2016). From this point of view, too, the Naples case complicates the picture. The entire debate around the commons in Naples has developed from this underlying paradox, from the ambiguity between healthy human relations and much more reproachable forms of clientelism. De Magistris’ political opponents -i.e., his predecessors, accused by many of having managed public affairs in the city in a clientelistic manner- have relied on this ambiguity. I came across a good example of how voters and intellectuals close to the center-left view the mayor while talking to a colleague, a social scientist from Naples, with whom I had the opportunity to discuss the above topics during my fieldwork. According to her, the main problem with the relationship -constantly flaunted and used for propaganda- between the mayor and the city’s social movements lies in the discretionary way in which the new administration has allocated spaces to them: ‘Why did they assign a space to a group of people rather than another? What are the criteria behind the decision? Such a model is inevitably going to be criticized. It’s a highly questionable method.’

Evidence of this hostility by intellectuals can be found in the local edition of *La Repubblica*, the main Italian newspaper with social-democratic leanings, whose pages have been regularly hosting extremely critical editorials and comments about the new City government, written by scholars and observers of Naples’s political life. Naturally, the information presented by these media outlets is carefully selected and more emphasis is given to news that *do not help* the work of the De Magistris’ administration.

The institutional rhetoric around the commons has therefore proven to be a double-edged sword for the mayor and his council, because it has equipped his political opponents with a strong argument against them. Indeed, they use the topic of his relations with social movements to underline his discretionary assignment of public spaces and the alleged lack of ‘political substance’ of the De Magistris’ administration,

considered to be at the mercy of the city's social movements. This view is partially due to judicial investigations by the Naples Public Prosecutor's Office into the methods adopted by the Municipality to assign public spaces to the city's social movements, which involved the use of resolutions 'for civic use' (see the following sections). Since it is difficult for the judiciary to frame forms of collaboration that do not conform to a consolidated legal and regulatory framework, magistrates have conceived the latter as forms of corruptive exchange between administrators and activists who use public buildings. As we shall see, in fact, the legal instrument of civic use in the urban context gives rise to practices and relations (between administrators and activists) that are not formalized at all and that are built day after day in completely new forms.

As Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2009) noted with reference to the management of local institutions in some West African countries, 'although not following official norms, most public officials' practices do not follow traditional norms. The informal norms that regulate them escape this dichotomy between official norms and traditional norms. So, we have to investigate them.' They are therefore informal norms (however paradoxical the definition seems) which Olivier de Sardan defines as 'practical norms.' The employees of the Municipality have given life to real practical norms and must interact with the social movements of spaces such as l'asilo and the other urban 'Common Goods' of Naples. They did not have precise official indications, that is, a formal municipal regulation on the matter. They must interpret resolutions approved by the Council which were then questioned by the investigations of the judiciary on the alleged discretionary allocation of spaces and buildings. They therefore move in an almost virgin field. For some of them -those who draw visibility and official recognition from this path, then the councillors, the most prominent officials, the mayor- this is a reason for pride: 'we have contributed to building a new paradigm.' For others, it is a problem and a limit to serenely do their job.

Of course, the relations between the movements for the commons and the administration of Naples -like all relations between subjects and groups- also go beyond the alleged strategies of the actors in the field or the material interests that they are ready to negotiate between them. Field research allows us to grasp what at first glance may seem like justifications for social actors to mask their interests.¹⁶ In this context, memberships and collective political identities are at stake, which have little to do with the strategies and the material or symbolic interests of the subjects.

In order to fully grasp this point, let us take again Oscar's and Augusto's opinions. Their view of the relations with the administration is significant, because non-strategic aspects emerge from their stories, which are useful for capturing the political dimension that is hidden behind the cultural and social explanations of the subjects. When we talked about this point, Oscar described to me as follows the moment in

¹⁶ On the limits of rational action theories see Somers (1997) and Pizzorno (1993; 2006).

which the former councillor for the Common Goods of Naples, Alberto Lucarelli, was replaced by the new one, Carmine Piscopo:

Lucarelli was unable to manage this thing. For example, Piscopo is different... oh well, he is a university professor, too, he is a professor of architecture, but we still have a slightly more honest discussion with him, that is, I feel that Piscopo has made this journey together with us [even following us], and we did it hand in hand. I will tell you this to help you understand: within the administration many have made a journey...For example, the heritage director: 3 years ago she did not open her mouth, today she believes that it can be done in a different way. And the employees! The municipal keepers! We had two caretakers who were employed in the various municipalities to do nothing; when they came to l'asilo at some point they became passionate! (Oscar 2018).

As we will see in the next section, this paradigm shift within the administration has been possible also thanks to the support of an intellectual class quite far from social movements, to which Lucarelli himself belongs.

4.1.5. The Italian Institute for Philosophical Studies: élites and institutions

The Neapolitan intellectual classes are obviously not homogeneous. Those who supported, not without criticism, the previous center-left administrations have always emphasized the 'new' mayor's contradictions and missteps, whereas the intellectuals who had not been acknowledged by the previous administrations have found in De Magistris an attentive interlocutor and have built up a relationship with him, which has led some of them to take on key institutional roles. For these networks of intellectuals, just like for the city's social movements, the new political situation means that they now had an opportunity, a chance to present to the city their own view of the world (as well as to take up posts in the new administration).

From this point of view, my fieldwork in Naples strengthened some insights which seem to me particularly important to interpret the case studies in Italy, i.e. Turin and Naples. While in Bologna -the first City that enacted a regulation on the 'common goods'- the implementation of urban commons is driven by strong institutions and by subjects (public and private) who have governed and oriented the development of the city in recent decades, in both Naples and Turin the local administrations were influenced by local intellectual elites to begin a common path on topics that politicians and public officials did not know in depth (regulations on commons, civic use, etc.). It is normal, and even desirable, that a local government makes room for figures who have the skills and the knowledge to offer visions of politics and the city. What is most relevant is that, in both cities, 'new' administrations are governing, which do not have a tradition of local government behind them. So, in both cases, the political sphere tends to rely also on subjects that are not part of the local bureaucracy, in order to uphold a margin of autonomy in relation to those circuits of public officials and public managers who adhere to previous logics (and to old administrators).

It is useful to highlight that new administrations need subjects and groups of intellectuals who nurture their administrative action with new issues. Moreover, both cities come from a tradition of center-left government, which constituted a real power bloc and that was challenged in a precise political moment, the current one, in which social movements seek interlocutors from other political groups -De Magistris' Dema in Naples and the Movimento 5 Stelle in Turin. These dimensions set the context in which certain ideas of politics from below mature. We cannot ignore them, if we want to grasp the political and commons practices from below that are pursued in this historical phase in Italy.

The interviews I have done have led me to think about the importance of the mediation by scholars and activists belonging to the commons movements, but also of people belonging to true intellectual elites. Without their support, mayor De Magistris would not have developed any dialogue with social movements. What is interesting is that the dialogue was produced thanks to the intermediation of lawyers and intellectuals that the mayor trusted. These subjects have placed themselves at the center of De Magistris' urban policies, at least in the first phase of his term as mayor.

Many of the intellectuals who accompanied De Magistris' political adventure are linked to a place in Naples that has played an important role in the political and philosophical debate in the city and that was a formative influence for many people. It is the Italian Institute for Philosophical Studies, which is located in Palazzo Serra, in an area of Naples located on the border between the historic center -where the main aristocratic palaces are located- and the Spanish Quarters (Quartieri Spagnoli) -a popular area of the city that is undergoing a complex gentrification process. The Institute was founded in 1975 by a group of intellectuals linked to the figure of Benedetto Croce and close to historical and philosophical events such as the Neapolitan revolution of 1799, the Italian Risorgimento and the Southern Question. It was headed by the lawyer Gerardo Marotta until his death in 2017.

Sandro is one of my informants in Naples. He is professor of law at the University of Naples Federico II and he is familiar with the circuits of intellectuals who have collaborated with the new administration. According to him, some figures of intellectuals close to De Magistris come from the Institute for Philosophical Studies and represent 'the Neapolitan intellectual upper class. In other words, thanks to the new administration, they had the opportunity to act as urban elite.' By virtue of their links with political power, they can now rely on their 'means of orientation' (Elias 1978). Some of them ran for the 2011 elections with the DeMa list, to support De Magistris' candidacy. One of them, Alberto Lucarelli, was elected and was then appointed councillor. When, in 2013, Lucarelli ran for the national parliament, De Magistris asked him to resign. It is not clear what happened at that moment, given that Lucarelli, who was not elected to the parliament, will never return to collaborate with the administration.

His figure is relevant for two reasons. First of all, he represents the institutional face of the process of dialogue which social movements initiated with local institutions in Naples. In 2012, as councillor of the Municipality of Naples, he was the signatory of the resolution that sanctioned the civic use of the Ex Asilo Filangieri, which committed the Administration to

guarantee a democratic form of management of the monumental common good ...in line with a constitutionally oriented reading of art. 43 of the Italian Constitution in order to facilitate a constituent practice of 'civic use' of the common good, by the reference community of intangible workers (Micciarelli 2017: 150).

Secondly, after leaving the Neapolitan council, he was the protagonist -together with the jurist Ugo Mattei- of the conflict that took place at the national level between the network of commons to which l'asilo belongs and the group of intellectuals who proposed the popular legislative initiative for a new national law on commons (see here above, the Introduction to the Italian case studies).

According to Sandro, subjects like Lucarelli have found the opportunity -'a favourable political conjuncture'- to put their theories on commons and political action into practice at an institutional level. Most of the people who live the daily life of the Neapolitan movements and who have contributed to the political path of l'asilo do not agree with this argument. According to them, the theoretical work of Lucarelli, the only one who had actually dealt with commons in his writings, has nothing to do with the declination assumed by the discourse, the practices and the institutional political choices regarding the commons in the last few years in Naples. According to them, the theoretical elaboration is always connected to political action and is primarily due to the concrete urban movements, whose theoretical and political proposal has been accepted by an institution available to take into consideration those who do politics from below. Every time we have faced the issue of negotiating with the administration, many l'asilo activists have argued that the autonomous initiative of these institutional actors has a very relative effect, and that it is the bottom-up movements that contaminate the institutions.

Then I'll give you an example that makes things clear. Lucarelli was the first councillor for common goods in the De Magistris administration, 7-8 years ago. Lucarelli launched the 'Laboratorio Napoli' as a place to encourage the birth or in any case the implementation of common goods. The lab failed more or less after 1-2 months. In my opinion, this is quite significant. Because the real push-both in terms of elaborating what we mean by common goods and civic use and in terms of implementation (both from the legal point of view and from the point of view of concrete practice)- necessarily comes from below. And this is something that I feel I can say with great force. For example, in the case of l'asilo, a series of favourable conjunctures have been found. First: the space is

occupied, there is a ferment, etc. Second: the encounter with people, with organic intellectuals in the Gramscian sense, who studied the issue within the l'asilo community. This elaboration was then also transmitted to those who did not deal directly with legal and political issues. So, the l'asilo case is a fortunate one, because you had the material push, from below -occupation, possibility of experimentation, because a space had literally been opened- and at the same time this space was filled by the elaboration of those who had the tools to do it . Now, honestly...I am from Naples, I know people...If I can really say it...The city intelligentsia was really all for nothing!...Actually the real elaboration, and its diffusion also outside Naples, came from the experience from below. Also, on this point, I feel quite convinced that, in this specific case, there has been a decisive push, so to speak, from below, rather than a top-down control by the administration (Augusto 2018).

Some of the inhabitants of l'asilo, scholars who worked on the commons, focused on these issues, underlining how the path for the administrative recognition of l'asilo as a common good 'walked on two legs: on the one hand, writing a declaration of use-authored by the community in self-government, through public roundtables and comparisons- and, on the other, a resolution -written together with the representatives of the administration- that could accept it as a corpus of rules for the use of this space' (Micciarelli 2017: 149).

In addition to its history, the Institute deserves to be mentioned also because it has been a place of intellectual and political formation for certain inhabitants of l'asilo. For some, it was a site of important philosophical and political formation, for others, it was even a starting point for shooting a documentary about the figure of its founder.¹⁷

One of my first informants, researcher and activist of l'asilo, told me that she came into contact with l'asilo through the Institute of Philosophical Studies:

It is a free academy but is essentially private: it is a foundation financed mostly by the lawyer Marotta and now by his heirs, who decided to create this independent academy of philosophy. It is very interdisciplinary, you can also meet people who are physicists by profession but who have a slightly more open sensitivity, you can meet people of all origins: art historians, etc. Before the university, in high school, I found there a very interesting cultural environment, because they conceive the seminars in a very open way, in which research is really discussed. There is a theme and there is a speaker, who however only gives a starting point for the discussion, he is not there to display his ego. There is a very lively cultural environment. Many people from l'asilo have already attended the Institute's meetings (Anna Maria 2018).

¹⁷ I talk about the film by Marcello Sannino, who has always contributed to the activities of the Cinema work table at l'asilo. His documentary 'La seconda natura' is about Gerardo Marotta and his important cultural role in Naples, and it was presented at the Torino Film Festival in 2012.

The Institute for Philosophical Studies is a space recognized by both independent researchers and institutions: a very prestigious place but, at the same time, a space perceived as very open. According to my informants, it is a reality that is always economically at risk, despite its high cultural value.

In this environment, I met a number of people who were already active in the political and cultural experimentation of l'asilo, who had occupied l'asilo...who had *freed* l'asilo, and through them I began to know what it was...and then I also happened to attend shows and events at l'asilo and then I entered it as a user (Anna Maria 2018).

Amedeo was also trained at the Institute. He is one of l'asilo's inhabitants I met during my research. During an interview, he presented Marotta as follows:

Marotta was a reference intellectual for Europe. For example, Jacques Derrida, Gadamer, Imre Toth wrote about him. Pablo Neruda was a guest in his home. Renato Caccioppoli, a great mathematician, was in direct contact with him... Within the Italian Communist Party, immediately after the Second World War, he was the founder of the Gramsci Group, one of the most lively and appreciated intellectual groups within the party, which was then boycotted and eliminated because it was dissident in relation to the official current. But the most important thing about Marotta is his attention to civil philosophy, which is the tendency to always connect thought and science with reality (Amedeo 2019).

When I pointed out to Amedeo that the Institute expressed figures like him but also very different figures from a social point of view, which represent an urban elite, he replied:

Yes, yes. Because the lawyer Marotta was a great enemy of his class, of the bourgeoisie. He has collected many loose dogs like me, boys from the suburbs with nothing...I am the son of a worker and a housewife, five male brothers... For me, money means a constant debt for a lifetime because this is what I have always lived at home...The fact that the lawyer Marotta, as an intellectual who came from the great tradition of the PCI, has formed a series of scholars who were not at the university, had no political affiliations, who had only a great anger and desire for transformation...this highlights the contradiction: at the Institute there are people like Lucarelli but there are also people like me (Amedeo 2019).

I quoted these long excerpts of interviews because they allow us to perceive the complexity of the network around which the discourse on common goods unfolded in Naples. Accordingly, any analysis of the commons in such urban contexts should focus on the encounter between local administrations, social movements and the simultaneously top-down and bottom-up construction of rhetoric and commons practices. It is a central theme for this research. These groups are never completely

distinct from each other, but they are often different products of the same social and political experiences of the city, such as the Institute for Philosophical Studies.

The Philosophical Institute had the opportunity to live the process of l'asilo... spontaneously. The lawyer [Marotta], however, before dying, came to l'asilo a couple of times, and spoke with us, because he was passionate about these enlightened citizens anyway. There was Amedeo, whom he knew well, then he remembered me because he knew my parents...for him, my father was an example of an enlightened bourgeoisie, serving the city, and he saw this in me. There was Marcello Sannino, who made the film about the lawyer, who is another person who has given a lot to l'asilo. It is a bit as if the Institute was naturally part of the asilo path. Even Massimiliano, Marotta's son, has a high esteem for all of us, he trusts us a lot.

The last conference held by Stefano Rodotà in Naples ('The unexpected rebirth of collective uses') was held at the Philosophical Institute with many l'asilo activists, with the mayor...and, therefore, this means that the administration must feel that it participates in this production of practices and contents. It has its merits, it takes courage to understand this thing, this must be said, however they take responsibility by keeping the building open (Oscar 2018).

I decided thus to approach these case studies by considering not only the bottom-up movements for the commons, but also other social actors belonging to the upper classes. This seems to me a good way of trying to answer the question why the discourse on the common goods in Italy has found so many supporters in the world of institutions (at least in some cities).

If the current political challenge for these movements is to rethink and remodel the politics of counter-hegemony in order to bring it more in line with our times and the political spirit of the commons, then it is important to understand the complexity of the intertwinement between top-down and bottom-up commons practices.

...a politics of counter-hegemony for the commons navigates its uncertain and arduous course amid complexity, hybridity and fluidity. It utters words which can speak to society at large, in manners that can tap into ambiguity and indeterminacy so as to tweak habitual ways of thinking and seeing things. When the political identities of popular majorities are not already set in an anticapitalist direction, a partisan anticapitalism denouncing all those who do not espouse its full dogma could not be political. It could not talk to the polis beyond the narrow circles of its adepts (*Report 2. The Common: 187*).

Such an anticapitalist stance would be rather a personal, existential posture of self-affirmation or self-promotion.

As we will see from the detailed report of the activities of l'asilo (which takes up the core of the second part of this report) and from the short references to the other

Neapolitan spaces (which will be shortly discussed in the next section), the importance of the Neapolitan case lies precisely in the ability of the subjects to build their own political action through an ironic and conflictual dialogue with urban elites and ruling classes, that is, with those subjects who control specific resources, through which they acquire political power and material advantages and hold the tools to govern (Pina-Cabral-Lima 2000). Through classical texts (Cohen 1981, Marcus 1983), the anthropology of the elites has taught us that the ideas of these subjects and their interests are substantially hegemonic in the social space in which they move and act (cf. Shore 2002: 2). The objective of the Neapolitan movements for the common goods is not to offer a sterile and short-sighted opposition, which would serve only to distinguish them from other movements and other political experiences. On the contrary, the effectiveness of the Neapolitan model (we can speak of a real model) consists precisely in the ability to dialogue and to build a new social and political imaginary through the political use of irony and sarcasm, rendering the moral norms that guide their action political and accessible.



Meeting at Cavallerizza between the two mayors of Naples and Turin and the communities of Cavallerizza and l'asilo.

4.1.6. The Neapolitan commons network

I have so far described institutional politics in Naples and how the city's intellectual elites, local politicians, and voters themselves have related to it. I have done so

because such a world -and narratives- is the context that must be addressed by those who decide to engage in alternative forms of politics within this setting, using the concept of the commons to influence or transform urban policies. In fact, the well-known network of the Neapolitan common goods, which has been much talked about in Italy (for a period, also in mainstream media), cannot do without its institutional component and, consequently, without the reputation that the local institutions have gained in recent years, characterized by deep political changes in the city.

This institutional and political background is the setting in which the Neapolitan project for common goods has unfolded. It might therefore be useful to narrate what has happened to the Neapolitan movements over the last few years. Many have done so, and this is why I will not dwell extensively on their history. I will, however, try to illuminate a juncture that is particularly relevant to the focus of this work, that is, the shift from autonomy and antagonism, typical of the city's 'Centri Sociali Occupati e Autogestiti' (Occupied and Self-managed Social Centers, from now on CSOAs), to the network of the so-called Neapolitan 'beni comuni.'

When I arrived at Naples, I did not yet know which spaces I would explore in detail. I knew that I was certainly going to focus on the Ex Asilo Filangieri, since I was aware of its significance in order to understand the relational dynamics between the network of the city's common goods and the municipal administration. Lastly, I knew that a large portion of the legal elaboration work shaping the evolution of the Neapolitan common goods, with the support of the local administration, had been carried out by people who frequented l'asilo and contributed to the life of its community. Hence, I ended up devoting most of my fieldwork to this space, an ideal case study to reflect on a few theoretical and ethnographic issues that I have always regarded as crucial, that is: the attempt to make creative use of the right of a community to self-government; the distance of the attitude of the people making up the asilo community from the previous period of the city's social movements. It is on these two aspects that I will focus in this section of the report.

Nonetheless, my investigation did not neglect the network existing around l'asilo. This is because the Neapolitan case owes its significance also to the abundance and the heterogeneity of the subjects involved in this new stage of the common goods. Indeed, over the last few years, a crucial topic has been the diversity characterizing the various entities that have opened a dialogue with the Municipality to gain institutional recognition of their space as a place to be managed through self-government processes. These are the 'emerging common goods,' as they are called both by the movements managing them and by the Neapolitan administration. After the first resolution for civic use regarding the Ex Asilo Filangieri itself (2015), the drafting of self-government regulations has taken place in several other spaces, and their numbers are constantly growing (so far, more than ten spaces in total have been recognized as common goods, whereas almost another five are currently undergoing the same process).

This mechanism has obviously posed some problems regarding the role played by the local institutions (in particular, the mayor, the councillor for the common goods, and the officers who deal with these matters) in the political processes occurring in such spaces. When I raised this question during an assembly involving people from various Neapolitan spaces, those present told me that an imbalance might have existed during the early stages. Nevertheless, over the years, the movements have multiplied and have become so tightly knit that they are now able to relate to the Municipality ‘on equal terms.’ ‘We are now in a different phase,’ stressed Carla Maria during another assembly around these issues at l’asilo, after I had presented the *Heteropolitics* project to the community with which I would spend the following months. But let us return to the central issue discussed in this section, i.e., the shift from CSOAs to the discourse and practices linked to the concept of commons.

As briefly mentioned above, research on Naples’ social movements has often underscored that ‘in structuring the relationship of cooperation between the municipal administration and the CSOAs, a key role is played by the concept of common goods and, in particular, by the tendency to subsume under this category the abandoned public buildings regenerated through the collective action of Urban Social Movements, including the buildings occupied by Social Centers’ (Gargiulo & Cirulli 2017). It is true that many occupied social centers have initiated a dialogue with the new administration, to the point that activists from long-established CSOAs, such as ‘Insurgencia,’ have taken on formal roles within it, and some of them have been appointed councillors in the new city government. Nevertheless, the multifaceted galaxy of subjects and activists that have contributed to creating the current political situation -informed by a thorny but solid dialogue between institutional politics and social movements- cannot be exclusively associated with Occupied Social Centers.¹⁸

According to the scholar and urban planner Giovanni Laino (2018: 101),

a significant role was played by social centers, but above all the frustration and disillusionment that many (individuals and groups) who were interested in cultural activities experienced due to the conduct of local administrations, especially during the two councils led by Rosa Russo Jervolino (2001-2011), until the obvious failure of the Forum of Cultures, which had been considered a great opportunity for the revitalization of the city.¹⁹

¹⁸ When I speak about a CSOA, I refer to the social movements that identify with the main international anti-globalisation networks established from 2000 onwards.

¹⁹ The author of this article is an urban planner and professor at the Federico II University of Naples, who has started work with associations in some popular neighborhoods of the city (the well-known Spanish Quarters). His opinion on the previous administrations is therefore the judgment of those who try to carry out cultural activities in the city, clashing with administrative problems. This passage suggests once again that the social movements, the people engaged in artistic and cultural work and the new administration were ready to converge towards a common project to imagine a city different from the one imagined by the old administrators.

For instance, numerous ‘common goods’ spaces in Naples are animated and managed by communities of individuals with a long history of participation in the antagonist movements that came before those established in the last twenty years. Places like ‘Ex Convitto Monachelle’ and ‘Santa Fede Liberata’ -located in two very different parts of the city, i.e. the suburbs along the coast and the historic center, respectively- have some ties with the city’s CSOAs, but they are inhabited and looked after by people from older generations, who did not take part in that phase of activism. More generally, the social and political make-up of the movements that have established a dialogue with Naples’ municipal administration is heterogeneous and includes also many networks of artists with a history of fighting for the rights of entertainment industry workers. The latter are linked to various experiences of mobilization which took place over the last decade, such as the occupation of Teatro Valle in Rome. A key example of this heterogeneity is, indeed, l’asilo. As we will see in the second part of this report, many of its ‘inhabitants’ -who have long been the main interlocutors of the mayor and of the city councillors for the Common Goods- do not come from an activist background within the CSOAs.

Some believe l’asilo to be a rather peculiar case. In an interview for this research, the ex municipal manager for the Common Goods, Fabio Pascapè, underlined that, while the asilo community mostly comprises individuals with limited experience in antagonism, ‘in other spaces there is a greater presence of people who come from the movements, antagonism, and the political debate of the previous decades.’ Yet, my work has given me the opportunity to ascertain that l’asilo is not an isolated case among Naples’s liberated spaces. According to the viewpoint proposed in this report, l’asilo actually represents a paradigmatic case of a major shift in how political activism within the social movements is understood. Several activists of l’asilo and of other ‘common goods’ in the city have told me that they decided to become involved in the life of these spaces exactly because they are ‘not really social centers’ (Veronica 2018). Many of them do not see their identity as activists as based on belonging to the ‘traditional’ antagonistic social movements. On the contrary, several of those I interviewed explained that they would never take part in the activities of a CSOA.

This paradigm shift does not apply exclusively to the Neapolitan context but, as mentioned in my Introduction, it is a rather common trait of other movements that have joined Italy’s national commons network. The most noteworthy aspect here is that the ‘common goods’ spaces of Naples comprise also many people who had never felt attuned to the antagonistic movements of the previous decade, but had actually experienced a distance from their ways of practicing politics. These activists decided to commit themselves to a project of political participation because they regarded the new ‘empty signifier’ as an opportunity to bring together subjects not entirely linked to those militancy environments that they considered ‘closed and self-referential.’ For instance, Laura (2018), a l’asilo ‘inhabitant’ from Milan, told me about her relationship with l’asilo and with the city of Naples at this particular historical-

political moment: ‘There is always a lot of diffidence among the various movements in Milan. You were either on one side or on the other. Instead, at l’asilo I can happily be, at the same time, far from that world that I thought didn’t belong to me and a part of it.’ Here, Laura obviously refers to the forms of activism that had characterized the antagonistic social movements, from which she had always distanced herself and which today she views as ‘exclusionary.’

In fact, this applies also to the Neapolitan context itself. When Augusto, one of the first occupants of l’asilo, told me the reasons why he decided to engage himself more and more in this new political project, he underscored the fact that at l’asilo he found the opportunity to cultivate free relationships and to put into question hegemonic mechanisms, such as those which he had lived in other movements: ‘after having occupied l’asilo I left the collective where I was before. That collective was very top-down, it was founded on an almost mechanical idea of activism, very sterile, with the cynicism that often accompanies this type of experience.’

We are therefore at a different phase from that of the non-global movements of the early 2000s. And this transition has been experienced as a change in people’s approach to politics:

compared to Genoa²⁰ I have this feeling: all that beauty of the days of Genoa has been destroyed and scattered. After 10 years we can say that we were more than right! We had always been represented as non-global, antagonists...Well, the word ‘antagonist’ annoys me a lot, because I believe that instead they are protagonist movements, they must be protagonists. The antagonist theatre is beautiful, but it is also beautiful as a protagonist. And perhaps the time has come, as they did in Spain, to assault these government buildings. So, this new movement in my opinion is also born on these bases (Oscar 2019).

When speaking of the Neapolitan common goods, one cannot overlook an experience that, starting from 2015, has brought together the main activities and spaces devoted to the city’s common goods. It is called Massa Critica (Critical Mass) and it is a platform assembling entities that are very different from one another. They include traditional associations, occupied spaces, ‘liberated’ spaces -meaning that inhabitants and/or activists participated in drafting the regulations for the self-government of their spaces and were granted civic use of the buildings through a Council resolution-, and the so-called ‘emerging common goods’ -spaces whose communities have begun drafting self-government regulations in order to be granted their civic use.²¹

²⁰ He talks about the 2001 World Social Forum, held in Genoa.

²¹ Later on, I will explain in greater detail the mechanisms concerning the civic use of spaces and the political processes related to self-government regulations. L’asilo is indeed an ideal vantage point to observe these developments, since most of the theoretical elaboration behind these participation practices stems from the work and contribution of the l’asilo community.

We could say that Massa Critica was born in l'asilo, the space that more than any other has worked -and still works today- as a neutral place that can host meetings between political experiences that are also very different from each other and sometimes even in open conflict with each other.

How was Massa Critica born? Massa Critica is an experimental passage, which started from a micro group that attended l'asilo. One of the small realities that naturally entered l'asilo is Attac Napoli, of which I and some others were part, so we began to imagine how to invite movements and other realities to build an agora and a space for concrete participation. So, we made a first attempt about five years ago. It was a test to understand what world was out there, what kind of situation there was... So, we made a call to the city... We imagined it as a space for political confrontation and collective practice, regardless of one's belonging. And it went well, there was a good level of elaboration, a good starting participation. Let's say, however, the practices we were experimenting with were still a little immature... we were not self-sufficient (Ottaviano 2018).

At that stage, the promoters of Massa Critica considered it a priority to create a space of participation for social movements and, above all, to create a network where until then there had been quarrels, conflicts, misunderstandings. But above all, as we will see, for this group of people it was a priority to construct conditions that would bring out the contradictions of each space and to draw from the discussion and comparison on these contradictions new forms of encounter and political action: 'because at that moment, save some micro-areas, real participation did not exist. Neo-municipalism is obviously possible where there is a different political situation from ours, in some areas of Kurdistan, Mexico, Greece, Spain...but also in Italy there are real experiences that go into this direction (Ottaviano 2018).

The Massa Critica network set itself the explicit task of establishing 'a new political process, breaking away from all the experiences developed in the past' (Massa Critica 2019b), and over the last few years it has initiated extensive public discussions and debates of great importance. A key example dates back to March 2019, when they organized a three-day meeting with 'Fearless Cities,' a network of municipalist experiences from all over the world, whose first convention had taken place in Barcelona two years earlier.

The promoters of this great 'agora' have invited the citizens of Naples to critically reflect on the government of their territory, explicitly identifying some specific areas of action: *culture, training, and research; environment, territory, and right to the city; employment, services, and public finances; democracy and self-government.*

For some years, Massa Critica gathered around itself all the Neapolitan entities which had policies for the commons as their main point of reference. This work was soon developed through a series of meetings -which, in certain periods, took place regularly- among the representatives of the city's various 'common goods' spaces.

These meetings were mostly organized in ‘liberated’ buildings but, on several occasions, they were also held inside the City Hall. In both cases, and especially when they occurred in institutional settings, they were attended by key representatives of the municipal administration, including the current councillor for the Common Goods (Carminè Piscopo) and mayor De Magistris himself, who have always publicly supported the network. Because of its ability to bring together highly diverse experiences, its strong institutional legitimization, and its significance within the city’s social movements circuits, until recently Massa Critica was considered ‘an important change in the city’s socio-political context, both in general and with respect to the historical evolution of its urban movements’ (Gargiulo & Cirulli 2016).

Indeed, one of the most interesting features of this platform has to do with the fact that it is a symbol of the changes that the activist experience has undergone in Naples. As mentioned above, this transformation did not consist only in a shift from activism within Occupied and Self-managed Social Centers to the new Common Goods formula -closer to the world of the institutions. It was also a mutation that is somehow even more significant, involving new subjects (both individuals and collectives) that have accessed the political field ‘from the bottom up,’ as well as new contributions to alternative forms of politics that seek to contaminate -sometimes through strong conflict, other times through dialogue- the local institutions. Many activists from the Neapolitan common goods sphere speak about ‘hacking the institutions and law.’

Other realities that I had the opportunity to observe during the fieldwork and that have constant relationships with l’asilo community are part of the Massa Critica network: ex Opg ‘Je so’ pazzo’ (ex Monastero S. Eframio Nuovo), a space with a Marxist-Leninist orientation deeply integrated in the popular neighborhood of Materdei, where there is a football pitch for boys, study rooms for students, social and cultural activities accessible to all (workshops, shows, exhibitions, tournaments, concerts, an outpatient clinic, etc.); Giardino Liberato di Materdei (ex Convento delle Teresiane), the least restored space among those recognized as a common good by the administration, animated by a community which consists of many immigrants and elderly activists close to anarchist movements; ex Conservatorio di Santa Fede Liberata, an experience of self-management in the heart of the historic center of Naples and a space dedicated to sociality and animated also by the inhabitants of the neighborhood, in a very touristy area of the city; Scugnizzo Liberato, a place occupied in 2015 by a community of young people, mostly students and activists of the student movements, torn from neglect and speculation and returned to the inhabitants and the city.

The common goods recognized by the administration of Naples are a total of eight (to those already mentioned we must add C.s.o.a. Zero81, Lido Pola, Scuola ex Schipa). Other spaces are being recognized and have been designated by the network of urban movements for the commons as ‘emerging common goods.’ Collaboration among different urban commons is also expedient in order to amass sufficient social power so as to confront the expansive process of commodification in cities and to avoid co-

optation or subordination to the state (Kip 2015: 45-46, 55). Despite their ongoing dialogue with the Municipality and the local institutions, the people that make up the Massa Critica network have always distanced themselves from an institutional approach to politics, expressing their ambition to actually affect those very same institutions:

Massa Critica wants to launch an ambitious project: to shape the political agenda of the city from the bottom up, in an autonomous and independent way, going from neighborhood to neighborhood, so as to be able to impose this agenda on whoever will be elected in the coming months, and ensure that is respected, day by day, in the coming years.²²

This approach is embodied in an attitude of strong opposition to the city's administration when the latter makes choices concerning the urban heritage that seem to favor the neo-liberal austerity policies that butcher cities and local bodies.

Unfortunately, even the experience of Massa Critica is questioned today, at least its function and its essence, as one of the first occupants of l'asilo explained to me during one of our long chats. Immacolata has followed the project of this network from the beginning and now she does not have much confidence in this path.

You will certainly have been informed about Massa Critica, about how it was born and about the fact that now it is practically worthless, which obviously means something. The esteem between the movements is almost more personal than at the level of what each collective, each community does...(Immacolata 2019).

Here, an element that will accompany us throughout the following pages appears for the first time, namely personal trust. The intertwining of personal and political relationships lies at the heart of every political dynamic. More than ever in this political era, in Naples, the survival of a political project is highly dependent on the solidity of personal ties between people, on their ability to imagine and cultivate personal bonds well beyond ideological divergences. Within a network of subjects who have renounced solid ideological fences -where the new experiences of participation are based precisely on the refusal of strong dogmas and on the heterogeneity of their members- personal relationships constitute a central element for the operations of the 'political.' And, on a personal level, the differences and potential conflicts must be resolved with irony and through the ability to discuss without breaking the bonds.

After a few years of good results and participation, which have been appreciated also outside the Neapolitan context, those bonds are now questioned by those who had

²² See <https://www.identitainsorgenti.com/dopo-la-due-giorni-massa-critica-decide-la-citta-i-prossimi-appuntamenti-di-napoli/>, accessed 3/5/2018.

worked to create them. However, something has now changed, the network has established some virtuous mechanisms that it is now difficult to completely lose.

On some levels, Massa Critica has not realized its potential, but has also carried out an excellent confrontation in the city, for example on the ‘debt’ and on some financial mechanisms, thanks to a dialogue between very different skills and approaches. It was also the starting point for experimenting with common goods, which was a very spontaneous experimentation. Certainly, it is not just about l’asilo, but thanks to the input given by Massa Critica, a city space has been imagined in which one can practice politics outside one’s own territory (Ottaviano 2018).

The Massa Critica experience has also been fundamental for the creation of some institutional bodies that involve also representatives of the various liberated spaces and of other organisations belonging to the network. An example of this is the *Observatory on the Common Goods*, which was first convened on 1st April 2019. This is a mixed entity that comprises also scholars and representatives from the institutions, among which both the mayor and the current councillor for the Common Goods.

Together with the P.I. of the *Heteropolitics* project, Alexandros Kioupkiolis, I took part in the first formal session of the Observatory, to which we had been invited by some members of its scientific committee representing l’asilo. The session was held in the city council hall and it was attended by representatives of various ‘liberated spaces,’ as well as by the mayor and the councillor for common goods.

The first element that seemed relevant to me was the need, on the part of the mayor and other members of the committee, to clarify immediately the importance of law for such a process. As the mayor said, ‘Law is fundamental if you choose to sit at this table.’ And he added, ironically: ‘Then the anarchist solution also has its charm, but if we decide to take an institutional path, we cannot ignore the law.’ After the mayor’s intervention, the committee members spoke in turn, explaining why they considered the Observatory useful and what objectives should be set. Sharing a path which is based on law easily leads to a certain complicity between the subjects who are part of the Observatory. In a venue like this, strong complicities are generated among people, and therefore strong alliances. One can be very critical of the institutions, as the representatives of the common goods have often done, but the pride of having shared a project and a process that has become a model even outside the Neapolitan context, as well as the formalization of this path through institutions such as the Observatory, will always be elements that feed the interaction between social movements and institutions.

Despite the informal attitude flaunted by the mayor and the evident ‘intimacy’ in the relations between the latter and the people representing the movements, the discussion was conducted at a mostly formal and official level. The councillor spoke thus of the

need to involve an informal network of researchers in support of this project (the academy always plays a legitimizing role, in such cases).

In this context, the discussion on common goods took place within a rather formal framework, recalling commons experiences in other countries, themes and topics that could legitimize that moment. Hence, the concept of neo-municipalism was recalled, with explicit references to the Spanish experiences, in particular to the case of Barcelona, which serves to legitimize the Neapolitan experience by presenting it as a case in line with the Spanish one.

Nonetheless, even after the establishment of the Observatory, which marked the start of a formal collaboration, there have been cases of sharp conflict between the two parties. For example, when in April 2019 the municipal accounts were made public and showed that the city administration had ordered the sale of 479 public buildings to put its finances back on track, the Massa Critica network decided to publicly and fiercely attack the administration, also because the properties on sale included some spaces that were part of its network. The following statement was released on the 7th of April 2019 (Massa Critica 2019a):

It is no news that the Municipality of Naples, strangled by debt and fiscal ‘harmonization,’ has put on sale several hundred buildings that it owns, in order to pay off its debts and to follow the imposition of neo-liberal austerity regulations on Local Bodies.

We have addressed these issues on several occasions: from our battles for the Common Goods with the resolution for the Civic Use of Ex Asilo Filangieri and other spaces across the city (among which Lido Pola and Scugnizzo Liberato, which are now on the list of the 479 buildings on sale), to the proposal of a People’s Debt Auditing Committee (still inactive) and, above all, the Observatory of the Common Goods (convening for the first time).

The attack continues by addressing the role of the Observatory of the Common Goods, and by subtly accusing the administration of having established a purely formal entity, through which it can publicly support the popular cause of the Common Goods, without, however, committing itself in practice to working side by side with the movements for the commons.

It should be emphasized that on 1st April the Observatory on the Common Goods convened for the first time and, on that occasion, those participating in the meeting were not officially informed by anyone about the intention to sell an additional 479 properties belonging to the Municipality of Naples, among which some Common Goods.

Therefore, the first question which arises is: which role does the administration intend to assign in practice to this new institution?

Incidents such as the one above exemplify the kind of relationship that exists between the Neapolitan movements for the Common Goods and the city administration. According to some observers, the administration has established a strong and *peaceful* rapport with these organisations, which can provide the mayor with tangible electoral support. However, it is evident that the relations between the two parties are much more complex. Many of the people I interviewed believe that ‘hacking’ the institutions is possible only through the constant renewal of conflict. None of the entities that have been the beneficiaries of resolutions for the civic use of their spaces feels ever entirely safe. None of them intends to subordinate itself to the administration. As I will show referring to l’asilo community and its role in this process, this is a delicate balancing act, which relies on continuous negotiations.

While I was observing the relations among the people active in the city’s ‘common goods’ spaces, I clearly discerned their ability to listen to each other and to exchange views, also in cases of clear disagreement. As explained before, my fieldwork in Naples began after I had spent several months observing the evolution of the movements for the common goods in Turin, during a phase that was dominated by conflicts and tension in spaces like Cavallerizza (see the report in Turin here below). This jolt, this abrupt shift, underscored even more the ease, which has often seemed to me a sign of grater ‘political maturity,’ with which situations of potential conflict were managed in Naples.

Obviously, the relaxed approach to managing the relations among spaces that are potentially in competition or conflict with one another has not always been a permanent feature of the Neapolitan movements. As I heard in interviews and conversations with members of various movements that are now active in the city, until a few years ago Naples witnessed repeated and often violent clashes among individuals belonging to different political groups (see, for instance, Dines 2000; 2012).

These circumstances were brought up by many of the individuals I met during my fieldwork. From this point of view, the words of Oscar are significant, even if he took no active part in the mobilization of the Neapolitan social movements that formed in the early 2000s:

Well... When, in 2011, we [l’asilo, author’s note] became protagonists of the Neapolitan movements, there were enormous rifts around here, truly enormous. There was the collective that then became Ex Opg, they were a real monad [isolated, withdrawn into itself, author’s note]; there was Insurgenzia (‘disobbedienti’ area),²³ which had decided to run in the elections, so the rift was at its strongest; there was Zero81, which had broken away from...they allegedly attacked each other with glass bottles. L’asilo’s miracle was that, over the first

²³ An Italian social movement born in 2001 following the G8 summit in Genoa. The movement takes its name from the practice of social disobedience.

ten nights of occupation, there were people sleeping inside that building who, until a very short time before, had attacked each other with broken bottles. So, compared to 7 years ago, it's a whole different story. There is a great deal of collaboration among the liberated spaces... It's also because the resolution [the one acknowledging the civic use of l'asilo, author's note] has then been adapted to other spaces, to Ex Opg, Scugnizzo Liberato, Santa Fede Liberata, etcetera... At Santa Fede you have Raffaele Paura, who has a political history of armed struggle, we are talking about people who would have never mixed with other movements, but now they can... From this point of view, we are very close – then of course, someone might always talk behind your back, but we know we are all part of the same thing. Even Ex Opg, those who founded the political party [Potere al Popolo, author's note], the revolutionary vanguard...I think Potere al Popolo played it well because, when you decide to take the plunge into that world, you have to create contact, you have to establish a rapport with the other movements. I feel part of the whole, I feel connected to everybody (Oscar 2018).

When I recorded this conversation with Oscar, I had been in Naples for a couple of months. His words confirmed an impression I had had immediately after the first city assemblies and meetings involving the different communities of commoners, in which the legal experts of l'asilo helped some people from other spaces to write their own 'common goods regulations' (an aspect which I will discuss in detail later). Given that the 'common goods' currently represent the main experience of activism in Naples, at this specific juncture the most important social movements of the city 'work as a network' in a virtuous and certainly sustainable way. This is not a purely instrumental vocation, nor is this trend the sign of a shared strategy of action. When he says that he is 'ecumenical,' Oscar refers to a common attitude that is not linked to the individual space each activist personally frequents and supports, but that can rather be imputed to the surrounding context, i.e. the conditions enabling each space to feel part of a network and a wider movement.

This change has to do with transformations in how militancy is experienced, with a more general paradigm shift from the 'antagonism' of autonomous and anarchist movements to the present phase, characterized by the prevalence of the discourse around the commons and commoning practices. As the case study in Turin clearly testifies, the model of the common goods is not in itself a guarantee of hegemony within the social movements network. But this is certainly the case in Naples, where the context set out so far -the role of the institutions, how militancy has transformed, the need to build a common front to make the most of a peculiar and favourable political scenario- allows the significant emptiness of 'commons' to bring together extremely diverse political demands. It seems to me that this ability to 'listen in dissent' is what lies at the very core of the Neapolitan common goods experience. I

will analyze it further in the last part of the report on Naples, in which I will offer some detailed comments on the reasons behind this *virtuous* trend.

The Massa Critica network has also provided the space for institutional political experiments, although these are characterized by a conflictual and problematic relation with the institutions. An example of this is Potere al Popolo (Power to the people), mentioned earlier by Oscar. This is a political party founded by a group of activists from the Ex Opg Je so' pazzo. Since it was founded, during the 2018 National Political elections, the party has been substantially supported by the entire common goods network of the city. Some activists from l'asilo also contributed to the election campaign activities. However, the decision to institutionalize the path of one of the spaces that belongs to this network generated also many fractures. On several public occasions in which I participated -such as the event in which the former Minister Matteo Salvini of the Northern League was challenged or a national assembly of the 'Non Una di Meno' network- the militants of the ex Opg participated with the flags of the party, and this has given rise to numerous criticisms from people close to l'asilo or other spaces. The main reproach was that they exploited moments of collective struggle to promote the image of a single political entity. In particular, the inhabitants of l'asilo explained to me that the decision to work for one's party, transforming the collective public moments into electoral campaign, conflicts with the idea of the common good and with the depersonalization of the political struggle.

Today, the opposition between this post-Marxist political party and the party of the current mayor De Magistris is clear-cut. This is not the only moment of rupture between the movements for common goods and city institutions. However, it is an emblematic instance of the complexity that marks the relationships between movements recognized as common goods and local political power. To give an idea about the attitude of the Ex Opg (and Potere al popolo) towards the administration, I quote an excerpt from a recent article published on the Ex OPG website, in which the municipal administration is explicitly and severely criticized:

De Magistris' experience is failing from an administrative point of view. The problems of Naples are many and ancestral, of course, they also depend on the Region, the State, the Camorra and a voracious entrepreneurship. But precisely for this reason they should be approached with competence and above all with popular participation. On the other hand, in the last year De Magistris' second mandate has been characterized by a continuous power struggle within the majority, by rewarding some subjects because they are faithful and not because they are capable; as well as by the tendency to lock themselves in the corridors of power, far away from citizens. In recent months we have witnessed an incomprehensible change of councillors, end-of-empire scenarios, even morally embarrassing (Ex Opg 2019).

The criticisms addressed to the administration by *Potere al popolo* are very similar to those addressed on other occasions by *l'asilo* or by the SET network (of which I speak in section 4.1.12), as well as by the *Mass Critica* network itself, which has recently taken up the problem of the sale of public goods by the municipality, as they had already done in the past.

Here we go again, the spectre of financial distress is summoned again to invoke the commissariat of the Municipality of Naples and to justify thus the sale of the city.

After the deficit inherited in 2011, after fifteen years of center-left administration ..., the crisis in 2016/2017, after the sanction of the Court of Auditors imposed in 2018 for having breached the stability pact in 2015, we are once again on the brink of the abyss because two national laws (Renzi Government 2015 and Gentiloni Government 2017) regarding the use of liquidity for Local Authorities, have been considered unconstitutional.

In the footsteps of other democratic social movements in recent years, such as the *Indignados* and *Occupy*, the network for the commons in Naples contests the rule of both private and public property, pointing to the possibility of gaining free access to resources that are held in common and are managed collectively, in the context of a sustainable and equitable economy (Hardt & Negri 2012: 5-7, 39-40, 63-64). As interlocutors of the new democratic regimes, these movements could realize thus a collective governance of the 'common.' In the second part of this report I will try to show more closely, in the ethnographic narrative of the micro-politics of a Neapolitan urban movement, what it means to engage in a dialogue with institutions in order to establish counter-hegemonic practices in a specific context such as Naples.

4.1.7. History of an occupation. From Teatro Valle to Ex Asilo Filangieri

L'asilo immediately appeared to me as a place that has established a fair relationship with the institutions. In some ways, such a relationship has had an instrumental value for the community. Art, culture and entertainment are deeply linked to the public sector, and their sustenance depends on public bodies. The founders of *l'asilo* are very clear on this point: one of the main, immediate objectives of the entertainment workers who had occupied the building and started that experience, was to create a relaxed and fruitful relationship with public bodies.

We claim an absolute autonomy of culture with respect to politics, but then inevitably we are talking about having to create a new public institution, otherwise how do you do it? What if you don't care about the relations with the administration? But why do you do it? Because, as workers of art, culture and entertainment we relate to the public, I don't mean that we depend on the public, but the public contribution is fundamental, and therefore, in short, we have to consider this aspect (Oscar 2018).

On March 2, 2012, a group of people working mainly in the art and entertainment sector occupied the Ex Asilo Filangieri, which is located in the historic center of Naples. This building was part of the wider project of an ancient convent (San Gregorio Armeno), which began in 1572. In modern times, it hosted workshops for the training of young people in arts and crafts, and after the First World War it became a male boarding school, which welcomed and trained young Neapolitan orphans. Its historical function as a place that welcomes people in need has been recovered by the occupants, and today this function is often recalled in order to underline the historical vocation of this place. For this reason, the name ‘asilo’ has been kept by the occupants. It invokes the concept of the ‘asylum,’ whose main meaning is connected with the concept of the refuge, the right of asylum, etc. After a long period of neglect, it was definitively restored in 2005 and it became the seat of the Universal Forum of Cultures, an international event promoted by UNESCO, whose 2013 edition was awarded to the Municipality of Naples. It was managed by a Foundation set up by the previous administration, which was led by mayor Rosa Russo Jervolino. According to many observers, the Forum had failed in its ambitious attempt to revive art and culture in town. The occupation took place immediately after the restoration works. This is why l’asilo community manages now a building which is in an excellent condition (e.g. Laino 2018).

On the page of the website where they present l’asilo, the occupants refer to the logics that had characterized the governance and the management of art and culture in the city. They point to employment as a primary way to counteract these logics and they propose a practice of shared and participatory management for public spaces dedicated to culture.

From the beginning, the multitude of artists, culture and entertainment professionals, researchers, students and inhabitants of the city who occupied and revived (with shows, concerts, book presentations, assemblies and seminars) a place that was previously a huge empty space without identity (seat of the umpteenth Foundation subject to the exclusive arbitrariness of political power), felt the need to oppose institutional immobilism with a constituent process of self-determination, generating a new possible form of *institutional art*, founded on cooperation, autonomy and independence of culture (l’asilo 2019; emphasis added).

The first relevant aspect of this process emerges already from this quote: the idea that the artistic and cultural process initiated by an occupation could become an institutional path (‘generating a new form of institutional art’). This is a new way of creating institutions or of influencing the existing ones, which shares the same objective with new Spanish municipalism, although the Neapolitan movements are not so much focused on contesting power per se (see *Report 6. Case Studies in Spain*). It is no coincidence that this occupation was not confined to the simple self-management of the occupied space but is based on a juridical-political instrument that allows

occupants to put into practice a particular form of institutionalization. I refer to the ‘civic use:’ ‘a different use of a public good, no longer based on the assignment to a specific private entity, but open to all those who work in the field of art, culture and entertainment who, in a participatory and transparent way, through a public assembly, share the projects and cohabit the spaces’ (l’asilo 2019).

The occupants of the building had already formed a collective made up mostly of artists and actors and named ‘La Balena’ (The Whale). This group had started a reflection together with other collectives of the city which had arisen in those years. The commitment to dialogue between the various political groups and movements was a new element after years of strong conflict between the Neapolitan movements (Augusto 2018). So, this ability to network was the result of a precise historical moment and will mark the Neapolitan experience of common goods, and in particular the experience of l’asilo, which has woven strong networks both at local level (see section 3) and at the national and international level (see the Introduction to the Italian case studies).

As we will see, the case of l’asilo is paradigmatic of the new conceptions of political activism at a time of profound transformations for social movements. At that juncture, there was a fusion between different experiences scattered throughout Italy and beyond: the campaign for public water, the students’ movement ‘l’Onda’ (The Wave), etc. As a result of this convergence, new forms of conceiving the ‘political’ and new forms of activism surged forth. Precisely like l’asilo: ‘not a rigidly identity movement, but a movement capable of expanding to different subjects’ (Augusto 2018).

The first thing to keep in mind when talking about l’asilo in Naples is that its genesis is strongly linked up with a specific type of activists, that is, workers of art and entertainment:

We were born in the wake of the movement ‘0.3,’ which was a movement of workers in the entertainment sector that in that period, 2013-2014, began to question the material conditions of their work, which in Italy have always been very difficult and critical...So in the wake of a reflection that started years earlier in France, from French intermittent employees, we also took over the legal issues bearing on workers’ contracts, and we opened a debate on the fact that in Italy there was little funding for culture and show, live show in particular, and that the working conditions were very difficult (Eliana 2019).

To understand the path of l’asilo, we must go back to the experience of the Teatro Valle in Rome. To describe the emergence of their project, the historical *inhabitants* of l’asilo, those who participated in the occupation, have always referred to the Valle, considering it ‘an important detonator for l’asilo’ (Ottaviano 2018).

The experience of the Teatro Valle was followed by a group of people from Naples connected with theatrical work. Back in Naples, for some time they gathered at CSOA

Ska, an occupied social center in the historic center of Naples, where they began to discuss the idea of occupying a space, which at that time could have been the Ex Asilo Filangieri or the Teatro Trianon, located in the popular district of Forcella.

So, l'asilo fits into all this, we have a very strong link with the Teatro Valle. So, after the referendum on public water [in 2011], we decided that the time had come for Naples to take a strong action that puts the issue of 'common goods' at the center. Supported a lot also by Ugo Mattei, who at that moment was at the front line with the Teatro Valle, it was clear to us that any theory or discourse on commons should start from a practice. And this was a bit the defining characteristic of all the experiences of commons present at that time on the national territory (see the Valle and others). Actions and reflections had to start from the localities, from the proximity, from the practical management of a building, and from there they had to create communities. And so, we also had this idea of occupying a space. We mapped the various buildings and opted for the Ex Asilo Filangieri. At the beginning it had to be a symbolic act: three well organized days with thematic assemblies...On Sunday evening, at the end of the three days, when we were organizing to leave the space, Roberto Ciccarelli, who came from Rome to help us, said: 'In my opinion this space is perfect for doing all the things we are talking about...the Fifth State²⁴...So, in my opinion you should not leave.' We thought about it for a while, we had a meeting and decided not to leave l'asilo anymore (Eliana 2019).

There is a deep gap between the memory of the events of the first occupants and the memory of those who arrived later. Among the latter, many have approached this space individually, attracted by specific activities, and in some cases they do not know the stories Eliana told me. Yet, in her story, l'asilo is basically the result of a process through which these workers became aware of their condition:

The nice thing that was happening in those years (I talk about the next few years after the referendum on public water), is that in Italy these occupations were spreading like wildfire, and they had as their protagonists -and this in my opinion is the most disruptive- not the classic workers, let's say of an industrial sector, nor the students, but a sector of workers hitherto invisible...We have had the ability to not close ourselves in vertical issues addressed to the category of entertainment workers and in my opinion [we had the ability] to turn towards the issues of law, that is, to take the issue of the commons a step ahead, from a theoretical and legal point of view (Oscar 2018).

²⁴ The reference to the Fifth State concerns precarious, self-employed and freelance workers, especially in the world of culture, art and entertainment. A book co-authored by Ciccarelli himself has circulated a lot in Italy and has influenced various political practices (and, in turn, it was the result of these concrete experiences carried out in the territories). Its authors articulate a political discourse around self-protection, cooperation between independent workers and citizens, the economy of sharing (see Allegri & Ciccarelli 2013).

According to Oscar (and other l'asilo inhabitants), only this type of workers, together with researchers and jurists, could realize this small revolution:

because culture suffers a whole series of issues related to the management of the public good, because it is produced in public spaces, because it is very much linked to the management of public funds...we have put culture at the center, and from culture, as Chinese boxes, we have moved on to common goods understood also as the management of the public good. Then we hooked up to the territorial struggles, and therefore another strand of struggles was grafted, which also concern the commons (Oscar 2018).

According to the story of the first occupants (i.e. those who were the first to define the political path of this community), l'asilo was conceived as a reality that is profoundly different from previous social movements. According to many of my interlocutors at l'asilo, in fact, it was only later that a convergence occurred between the struggles of artists and entertainment workers who had occupied the space and other political groups which already had a strong connection with social movements having a different political orientation. Despite the strong bonds with the movement that had occupied the Teatro Valle, l'asilo was conceived immediately as a new place capable of starting a new phase for the city of Naples: 'The name "asilo" also comes from "Ex Asilo Filangieri," but we named it "l'asilo" because of its meaning, because we wanted to start from scratch. The main cultural practice that we can donate to the city is that of an encounter. A space for new encounters' (Andrea 2018).

L'asilo, unlike other common goods of the city, is the result of these encounters and a convergence of different factors, the main ones of which are the following: 1) the needs of a specific sector of the population (workers in the entertainment sector and activists/users of art and culture), 2) the development and affirmation of the discourse of the commons at a national level, 3) the establishment of a new administration with which they could negotiate the difficult steps of this project.

The numerous and heterogeneous components of the community shared a common need, that is, to overcome the ways in which institutional politics had conceived the political aspects of artistic and cultural production. At the same time, the occupants intended to go beyond the approach to these issues adopted by occupied social centers and their kind of activism. This confluence concerned very different subjects, which until then had not found a shared space in which to interact and give life to new forms of participation: artists, intellectuals, scholars, organizers and users of art and culture, politicians, activists of social movements, officials, administrators, people engaged in the world of social services, who conceive art and cultural creation as a tool for social transformation.

However, this heterogeneity of roles contrasts with a substantial social homogeneity of the community. Most of the people who organize and join activities in this space come from the so-called middle classes and have advanced education. Among the

inhabitants, most have at least a university degree and many have obtained a PhD. This aspect is still often debated within the space, since it is an element that identifies l'asilo from the outside, a sort of stigma that weighs on its community. The people who gravitate around the Neapolitan social movements often identify l'asilo starting from this distinctive trait. As one of these people ironically told me, 'l'asilo is a radical chic common good. Only people who have a certain background go there.' Of course, this is a generic and mostly negative label. It does not exhaust the variety of personal stories and paths of the inhabitants and frequent visitors of l'asilo, but it is important because it constitutes a representation with which many of them have to constantly contend. In addition, as we will see, it identifies some distinctive traits of the community, or at least of the people most representative of it, or those who have relationships with the outside (other movements, other spaces, institutions, etc.).

In recounting the first phase of existence of l'asilo I have highlighted until now the strong artistic and cultural vocation of this space, because that's what still markedly characterizes this space today. Of course, the artistic and cultural production of l'asilo is relevant for this research project because it is integral to a political framework. But here politics is not exclusively a dimension that emerges from their way of conceiving art and culture. It is also very present as a daily activity, that is, as a real practice. In the latter sense, it assumes the features of a political-juridical discourse and practice.

As we have seen, this political activity and discourse have been placed at the center of the political process of this space from the very beginning. And it is an aspect that catches the eye when one visits this place. In the assembly and in the daily activities of the place, the presence of people linked to a tradition and to a legal and philosophical-political formation is strongly felt. It suffices to go to l'asilo during the assembly on Monday, enter the Cinema Hall (where the assemblies are held), sit and listen. Inhabitants, guests or users who take the floor often have a very specific priority: that of facing contingent and organizational problems without ever ceasing to question and rethink the legal and political process that they are practicing within the space. A process that is never considered concluded. It is always work in progress. Many of them do not carry out artistic or cultural activities. They engage exclusively in political practice in the strict sense, that is, in those activities that serve to provide the community with the technical and legal tools which are required to continue on the political journey that has been started. I will discuss these elements in detail in the sections dedicated to self-government processes and the role of law in the path of l'asilo -and in the lives of people who pass through this space.

4.1.8. A common different from the others but in dialogue with everyone

The experiment of l'asilo has attracted the attention of researchers, journalists, filmmakers and artists in general.²⁵ It has also been the subject of numerous graduate and

²⁵ Many of these writings are authored by l'asilo activists and inhabitants: see, for example, Capone (2013), Cozzolino (2017), De Tullio (2018), Micciarelli (2014; 2017).

doctoral theses written both by activists close to l'asilo -and the Neapolitan movements for the commons- and by students from other cities who are interested in this experience, which is now well known in Italy. While conducting my fieldwork in Naples, I met at least a dozen people who were doing research on the commons in Naples and who had interacted with the inhabitants of this space to talk about their research.

These representations of l'asilo are very different from each other in terms of their nature -some are real artistic products, other scientific reports- and in terms of their approach. Researchers working in very different disciplinary traditions have set foot in l'asilo: from political economy to anthropology, from urban architecture to urban sociology, etc. Inevitably, therefore, in each of these works, several different dimensions have been highlighted, from its internal organization to the process of self-government, from its role in the artistic and cultural sphere to the internal relations in the community. But in all perspectives, l'asilo has been always represented primarily as a *model*. A virtuous idea of the 'common good,' created in a context that strongly nourishes the imagination of anyone who wants to imagine alternative forms of politics. Of course, there has been no lack of criticism over time, which has come mainly from other Neapolitan movements. The strong narrative that was built around l'asilo is now one of its characteristic features, and it deeply conditions the perception that its inhabitants and its community have of 'their' space and 'their' artistic and political experience. As we will see, this is not a secondary dimension. The self-narration of the most assiduous inhabitants and frequenters of this space is closely tied to the narratives, both positive and negative, that have been constructed over time by the most diverse observers.

My first report to the colleagues of the *Heteropolitics* project about the fieldwork conducted in Naples conveys a vivid impression of the atmosphere I found when I first set foot in l'asilo. The following is an excerpt from the long email with which I updated my colleagues after the first few days spent in Naples, where I had arrived after my fieldwork in Turin:

First of all, the fieldwork is much 'easier' than in Turin. Access to the field is facilitated by the situation (all in all) relaxed in l'asilo. The spaces I visited in Naples live a much more 'virtuous' everyday life than that of Cavallerizza.

Beyond the interviews, I have participated in the activities of l'asilo (mainly Tavolo Cinema and Tavolo Auto-governo). I was lucky to be in Naples during some plenary assemblies of l'asilo, since for long they had not held plenary assemblies in which the political assumptions underlying the self-government path that is being carried out are discussed.

During these assemblies the members of the space had decided to discuss once again the political nature of their project (forms of self-government, 'accessibility' of the space, their political/cultural/artistic role in the urban space,

etc.). Participating (even intervening) in these discussions was also an important moment to enter the dynamics of the city and its movements for commons. Furthermore, I was greeted in a wonderful way by the community.

The asilo community is singular among the Neapolitan ‘common goods.’ Or, rather, it is perceived and perceives itself as singular, as a place which is different from those historically characterized as CSOA (Occupied and Self-managed Social Center). This perception relies on the explicit choice to not practice politics as it is experienced by the autonomous social movements, and on the considerable prestige of this space, on the elements that constitute it as a place in dialogue but, at the same time, in competition with other spaces that are more close to the political practice of antagonistic movements -there are some of such movements among the so-called Neapolitan ‘common goods.’ L’asilo is certainly not the only space in Naples with these characteristics. In other places, such as the Scugnizzo Liberato, Il Giardino di Materdei and Santa Fede Liberata, I have noticed a similar attitude. However, as I was able to see day after day during my fieldwork, the community of l’asilo has a certain reputation (corresponding to its a brand, we could say). Both from the outside and from its inhabitants’ perspective, it is identified as a place which builds its identity through its difference from the ‘classic’ forms of militancy in the CSOAs.

These characteristics ensure that l’asilo remains mostly outside the dialectic relations (less and less conflictual, as we have seen) between the different political collectives of the city. As we have seen, its inhabitants do not come as a whole from the social movements of the city. The movement of art, culture and entertainment workers is a new movement, it is a ‘naïve’ movement, to use Oscar’s words, ‘that is, it does not have a past, but is formed in the process, it is born in the process. So, it was a movement that created a prairie to bring together all those other slightly more dogmatic, slightly more structured movements, which battled each other’ (Oscar 2018). When l’asilo was born, an unprecedented place of encounter was created, a safe space. From that moment on, many assemblies and political meetings involving different social movements were held at l’asilo, because it was one of the few spaces in which everyone could participate without hesitation. ‘Why?’, I asked Oscar: ‘Because it was seen as a neutral space, but it was anything but neutral, it was radically open, radically open to contradictions.’

In the rooms of this place which is perceived as ‘neutral,’ organizing activities of any kind is a delicate process, since one must always take into account the relationship between the different collectives. Furthermore, most of the meetings between the representatives of different ‘common good’ spaces were held at l’asilo, as well as the meetings with the representatives of Massa Critica and the meetings and public conferences of the SET network (see the present report, section 4.1.6). At the end of 2019, some activists of Potere al popolo (Power to the people), the political party founded by the collective of the Ex Opg Je so pazzo, asked the asilo assembly to organize its political meeting in the Cinema Hall. The asilo community decided to

reject this request because there was no consensus on whether they should host a structured political party at the time of an election campaign. This is a point that has been much discussed within the community in recent years: whether or not to explicitly support that institutional political experience. Many of the inhabitants come from anarchist milieus and they are far from party politics, so they are not comfortable with this type of political activity.

In general, during my fieldwork at l'asilo, I was able to attend many moments of encounter between activists belonging to different collectives of the city. Many of them are very familiar with l'asilo, with its rooms, with the people who frequent it and take care of the space. This emerged paradigmatically at one of the first times that I set foot in the building. Once I arrived on the third floor, where the library is located, I found about twenty representatives of the so-called emerging common goods (who had yet to obtain recognition of civic use of their buildings) gathered around a small table to write their own regulation proposal for their spaces together with the jurists of the asilo community. As one of the first occupants of l'asilo told me in those days:

L'asilo still represents [as at the beginning] the 'safe' space, where everyone can meet. At Mensa Occupata you can't, at Zero81 you can't. And this [being a safe space] certainly has its positive aspects because there is no fucking space to dominate anything here. So, when *Non una di meno* was born they decided to meet at l'asilo. Then they also decided not to interact with the asilo community at all, which is a very serious thing... In any case, it is a great wealth that *Non una di meno* people meet here, because if they leave l'asilo, it will surely end up badly, because they would end up entering heavy hegemonic dynamics (Immacolata 2019).

The same familiarity is also felt by many of the 'inhabitants' of l'asilo when they frequent other spaces of the network of Neapolitan commons (such as Lo Scugnizzo, Santa Fede and Materdei). The frequency with which you visit other spaces and spend time together with other communities of activists is a clear indication of the tendency to network and share many steps of a path (the problems, but also the moments of celebration) that is really perceived as a *common* one.

4.1.9. How l'asilo works

Inhabitants, guests, users

But how exactly does l'asilo work today? First of all, the people who frequent it are distinguished explicitly from each other -and formally, also, in the statute and the regulation- according to the degree of proximity to the process and the activities of the space. As stated in the declaration of civic use of the building, the 'inhabitants' are those who 'participate in the life, care and management of l'asilo and therefore enjoy full rights of participation in the decision-making processes provided for by this declaration.' The latter then establishes formal steps to 'become inhabitants,' but the practice is much more informal and depends on the effective participation in the Work

Tables (Tavoli di lavoro) and the willingness to take care of the space, which are recognized implicitly and are not explicitly organized steps in the daily life of the community. I myself have been designated by other inhabitants of l'asilo as an inhabitant in turn, after a certain period of research with them, precisely because of my proximity to the political and cultural process carried out there, but also by virtue of my proximity to many of the people who look after the space. The 'guests' are instead 'those who propose an activity that is scheduled by the assembly or those who, for artistic or cultural purposes, request a space for extemporaneous use.' Finally, the declaration identifies the figure of the 'user,' who participates in the activities proposed to the public by the 'inhabitants' or by the 'guests.'

The inhabitants of l'asilo all agree that the division into roles as explained in the declaration is excessively rigid. They constantly emphasize the actual informality of the process, saying that those roles have exclusively legal-formal purposes. In this regard, it may be useful to report Laura's example. She was born in Milan and she ended up in l'asilo almost by accident. She is not an activist, and she does not perceive herself as such. She had never taken part in the activities of the social centers of her city. She knows Macao, an occupied space that today is part of the national common goods network of which l'asilo is a promoter, but did not frequent it, if not sporadically. Laura is one of the first people I met in l'asilo, and I immediately realized that she was not part of the 'founding group.' She sat in the assembly in the front rows, but never took the floor. After the assembly she was always available to attend the dinner of those who manage to get to the end of the assembly, and therefore she accompanied the main 'inhabitants,' but her behavior as an activist did not correspond to that of those who feel entitled to participate in the actual decision-making processes.

Are you a l'asilo inhabitant or not?

Laura: Well...I don't participate so much. In the assembly, I like to be there and listen. Maybe I don't focus on a particular...That is, I don't live it in terms of: I have this idea and if we don't do this way I leave...

And do you think the other inhabitants perceive you as an inhabitant?

Laura: Well, maybe not, because I don't participate actively in the assembly. Since I live nearby, maybe I can help on certain issues, for example if we have to open the guesthouse for new guests who are in town, then I make myself available, but...

What is the difference between you and the inhabitants, then?

Laura: In my opinion the difference lies precisely in how much one speaks in the assembly, that is, how much he/she expresses an opinion about the projects carried out in l'asilo.

If I continued to better clarify this last thought of Laura I would say: the ease with which one feels entitled to intervene in discussions and decisions.

In fact, the roles are at odds with a political practice of self-government which, as I will say in the next sections, is based on two key concepts (with some problematic facets): accessibility and traversability. The latter, at least on a theoretical level, would exclude the possibility of creating differences in proximity to an alleged power center of the community. From this point of view, the ‘inhabitants’ do not define themselves as such -distinguishing themselves from guests and users- because they want to establish hierarchies and highlight their role as guides of this project. The definition of this category, which refers to inhabiting (living, dwelling), emphasizes that a part of the community takes care of the building and the political path of this space, with a considerable openness towards possible external contributions. This intention is not always respected and, inevitably, hegemony mechanisms arise within the space, on which I will dwell in the next sections. However, a lot of attention is given to this aspect, which constitutes one of the central political nodes of the whole process: ‘l’asilo has always professed non-hegemony, l’asilo is holistic, we are all part of everything,’ as Oscar (2018) once told me.



Posters of events organized and hosted by l’asilo.

The internal geography of the space and the articulation of activities

There are many spaces in l'asilo which are set up and arranged to host events and moments of encounter: a theater, a cinema room, a library, some study rooms, a laboratory of visual arts, an exhibition gallery, a tailor's room, a refectory for the dance and the performing arts, an urban garden. There is also a place to experiment with forms of digital commons, where an archive (called Cubotto) was created in order to store the artistic and cultural contents produced within l'asilo.

The main components of l'asilo are two: the assembly and the tables. In the declaration of civic use of the building, the latter are defined as 'thematic programming tables,' with a legal language that has little to do with their actual functioning. The discrepancy between norm and action and, above all, between written norm and the daily life of the community is an important component of the way in which l'asilo actually functions, as it brings out a first layer of irony in the management and conception of law by this community. When the civic use regulation was written, many participated and wrote it in a form that was both creative and authoritative. Yet today no one ever refers to that regulation. It is common ground that it is only a 'piece of paper,' a formal passage to attain a form of self-government which, in order to function, needs instead to be subject to constant maintenance, to be continually re-interrogated. Each legally elaborated element describes only an infinitesimal part of the real activities that take place within the community. And the community knows very well how politically important it is to take the rules ironically: 'On the civic use declaration of l'asilo, we reached this sensational, sweaty consensus: that when the phrase 'in the regulation it was written that...' was used during an assembly, then this meant that the regulation had to be questioned immediately!' (Ottaviano 2018).

Let's take, for example, the case of 'thematic programming tables.' In the statute, they are described in article 11 as groups that 'meet publicly and regularly...to discuss and elaborate the proposals received during the Management Assembly or directly during the Tables meetings.' The Tables undertake to realize, even materially, the proposals that are scheduled. They also have the task of 'discussing the proposals, evaluating their feasibility, helping the proposer to formulate their own project so that it is in tune with the practices of l'asilo.' Naturally, the daily life of the Tables has made them meeting places that have little to do with their formal function. The daily and concrete functions of these 'institutes' are highlighted and formalized through other channels, such as the website, where it is said immediately that the tables 'are not limited to scheduling events but tend to favour the encounter and exchange between artists.'

In January 2019, I decided to organize an activity in l'asilo. And I decided to start right from the table that I had attended from the beginning, that is, the Cinema table. This is the activity to which I feel closest among those that take place inside the space, and I liked the idea of participating in programming film cycles in such a beautiful room with the technical collaboration of experienced and passionate people. The film review

I proposed was in the form of a workshop. We called it ‘Imagined criminalities. Naples, the cinema, the Camorra,’ and consisted of a series of film screenings on Naples through which we could have dealt with the issue of the power and violence of the Camorra. All this took place in a district of Naples where important Camorra clans have historically been present, but within a ‘bubble’ (the Ex Asilo Filangieri), which, however, seems light years away from that world of violence. I had thought of approaching one of the tables and proposing an activity because I imagined that it would allow me to closely test some internal organizational schemes.

This certainly happened, but that experience served me mainly to discover something that I had already partially understood (and perhaps it is precisely because of that intuition that I decided to propose the workshop). By engaging with a theme like that of the Camorra, I had the opportunity to test the substantial social and cultural separation between l’asilo and the surrounding social context.

Of course, almost none of the neighborhood residents were present at the screenings. In addition, many of the inhabitants of l’asilo also did not take part, probably considering the issue as ‘all too debated.’ The event, however, was a vivid representation of the social role of that space, or at least it gave me some first elements to interpret this role. L’asilo is a place where politically and socially important issues can be discussed using the most varied means of expression, but the languages and forms of discussion remain confined to a circle of subjects who have an ‘advanced’ political and cultural background.

That experience allowed me to confirm some impressions which I already felt strongly after the first months spent into the space. Being located in a popular neighborhood plagued by significant social problems did not lead the community to seek a real dialogue with the world outside. This is not a limit, nor obviously a fault, but a precise political choice that is constantly discussed and called into question by the asilo inhabitants. However, as I will say in the following sections, a group of inhabitants carries out a project aimed precisely at the teenagers in the neighborhood, adopting methods that have nothing to do with simple welfare or the provision of services.

The tables are therefore a microcosm that lives in its own dimension but is deeply connected to events and plenary assemblies. They constitute the true input channel to community life, the place where it is possible to enter into direct communication with a limited group of people and to create forms of intimacy linked to the sharing of a specific artistic language and a precise political, artistic and cultural priority. Through the tables it is possible to learn intimately dynamics related to the political attitude of this space, both the internal dynamics regarding relationships between the different inhabitants and dynamics that concern the political gaze of the community towards the outside.

4.1.10. Assembly and conviviality

At l'asilo, as in other Italian spaces that pertain to commoning practices, the first assemblies were also attended by the many existing political collectives of the city. According to the inhabitants who were present at those assemblies, some of the representatives of those collectives

tried to dominate the assembly in a very classic way. But after a while the collectives withdrew and there remained a community of people who wanted to experiment. The first two months of occupation were very exciting. This ferment was felt but there was still the will to *hegemonize*, to direct the community towards a certain idea rather than another. Afterwards, the collectives withdrew and this strong tendency towards experimentation, innovation, etc. was born (Augusto 2018).

The same dynamic characterized the first assemblies of Cavallerizza in Turin (see the Turin case, here below section 4.2.4). In that context, also, the representatives of other collectives (mostly autonomous) were enjoined, not always peacefully, to abandon the space to allow a form of experimentation different from the hierarchical dynamics that characterized the self-management of some CSOAs. This aspect is relevant for two reasons. It attests to and confirms the tendency of some groups -described by several scholars (Kadir 2015)- to introduce hegemonic and hierarchical dynamics within social movements. It also confirms that the period in which the first experiments on commons practices in Italy took hold was a transition phase for social movements, in which experiences that were discontinuous with those of the CSOAs arose. Inevitably, as I have already said, the commons communities inherited political and cultural practices from the various movements that had preceded them. However, the first assemblies of these new experiences manifested clearly a break with the past, displaying the contrast with some of the assembly's management methods.

The assembly is, of course, a central political moment in the process carried out at l'asilo and other Neapolitan 'common goods.' The assembly form is used to deliberate, discuss and elaborate the activities that take place within the space. It is divided into two forms that are typical of the assembly organization of the CSOA: the Management Assembly and the Address Assembly. As we read in the Statute, the Management Assembly 'discusses the ordinary management of the activities carried out by l'asilo:'

it discusses and determines the planning of the activities; each project, regardless of the duration and the artistic and cultural sector to which it belongs, is discussed and decided collectively on the basis of a direct proposal; it coordinates the use of available spaces, taking into account, first of all, the activities proposed by the thematic Programming Tables; it publicly discusses and approves spending commitments related to self-government, management and planning.

Each session of the Management Assembly concludes by updating the schedule of activities that will be sent to the Municipal Administration; the latter, in compliance with the principles of inclusiveness, impartiality, usability, accessibility and self-government, may be presented during the Address Assembly through its own representatives to attest to the decisions taken, the accessibility and usability of the Assembly itself [my translation].

The Address Assembly discusses the general guidelines for the activities realized by the community:

It decides on: [the] definition of cultural and artistic areas; relationships with other social and institutional realities; tools to ensure a wide dissemination of scheduled activities; [the] creation of the thematic programming tables; [the] area of the building to be used for a specific artistic or cultural activity; proposals to equip the space with the means of production necessary for carrying out the activities; [the] promotion of fundraising and crowdfunding initiatives to support activities and projects; [the] necessary measures to resolve any disputes on the application of the declaration; the suspension of inhabitants or guests from ongoing activities in case they violate the declaration; reviewing the implementation of the declaration and the resolution of critical issues by periodically monitoring the effectiveness of the practices [my translation].

So far, nothing new. According to the description that we find in the Statute of l'asilo, the assemblies of this community are organized in a form that has now become almost 'canonical,' a modality that characterized the assemblies of many CSOAs in different countries. However, there is a first element of novelty in this experience. L'asilo, as well as the other Neapolitan 'common goods,' has institutionalized this method of managing assemblies and has put it pen to paper in the official regulation of civic use that it shares with the municipal administration. In addition, of course, the assembly is much more than its formal description. The political significance of this moment cannot be grasped by simply reading its formal functions. If we want to get hold of the elements of innovation and radicalism expressed by this community, we must then delve into the political meanings attributed to the assembly by its community in the daily life of l'asilo. In other words, the assembly is the vantage point that allows us to understand the organizational form of this community (and similar ones present in Naples and the rest of Italy). As Hardt and Negri (2017) observed, positioning our gaze within these experiences allows us to understand how it is possible that a movement can last over time and bring about a lasting social transformation.

L'asilo assembly is held in the Cinema Hall, located right at the entrance of the building. The assembly is also a 'meta-place' where we generally talk about how important the assembly is and how the assembly should be experienced and attended by the inhabitants. During the assemblies it is often said that some inhabitants do not participate in the assembly, but from my observation it has become instead evident that

the assemblies are always well attended. Apart from some moments in which an actual fatigue and/or tension sets in between the inhabitants, the assemblies are always very alive and operational. 'Here we often tell ourselves that we don't participate in the assemblies enough, but this seems to me more a feeling than a reality,' Dora (2019) once said, answering yet another complaint from the other inhabitants. This aspect is interesting because it shifts attention from an alleged problem (poor participation) to its perception within the community. The meta-discursive dimension is very present during the assemblies, and it does not only concern the question of participating in the assembly. It allows inhabitants to constantly question the political value of the process in progress, to the point of exhaustion, precisely by grasping the potential and political contradictions of the choices that bear on the artistic and cultural processes and events debated in the assembly.

It is a trend that the most self-reflective inhabitants can perceive, to the point that some of them, when I noted the obsession with this constant questioning of the process, jokingly (more or less) told me that in after all, theirs is a deeply Zapatista practice, taking as reference the best known, but also the most radical, model. As I will try to say in the following sections, this ability and stubbornness to continually question the process, subjecting it to a permanent and self-critical close examination is the profound meaning of the political project of l'asilo.

Returning to the assembly in the strict sense, one can trace out two main feelings among the inhabitants who frequent it, which we can summarize as 'duty' and 'pride.' On the one hand, in fact, it is experienced as a constraint, a tiring and difficult moment to manage, in which one must participate for the collective good of the community and the project. On the other, the inhabitants of l'asilo are very proud of the efforts they make to continuously reform the assembly according to the needs that arise. This feeling prevails in the inhabitants who join the assembly after a long time. They have the will and the desire to look at the beauty that has been built and that still resists. On the contrary, after a long period of participation in the assemblies without pauses, the inhabitants naturally tend to get tired because of the emotional and organizational fatigue that the assembly entails.

As for the guests (i.e. those who go to the assembly exclusively to propose a specific activity), they are divided into two main categories: those who consider the assembly a strongly welcoming and virtuous place, and those who feel rejected by the ways in which inhabitants manage the assembly. These two ideal categories, which obviously do not exclude more nuanced positions on the part of more or less habitual participants in the assembly, identify two different ways of relating to this space, but also two ideal moments in the functioning of the community. The first is the ability to welcome those who are not part of the community. The second is the tendency to create among the inhabitants an intimate atmosphere and a sense of familiarity, which, in the case of particularly critical guests, is identified as a closure and an ill-concealed hegemony.

I will narrate an episode that helps us to better understand this aspect. On a spring Monday, in 2019, a middle-aged man whom I will call Alvaro came to present his theatrical project during the assembly. It was a project involving many children, of which Alvaro is evidently very proud. His attitude was immediately perceived as haughty by some inhabitants, who reacted to his presentation of the proposal sometimes with coldness and sometimes with annoyance. Alvaro's reaction was to further exaggerate the haughty tone with which he spoke of his project, accusing frequently several inhabitants of the assembly that they are closed to themselves and they manage l'asilo as if it were their own home. Of course, these accusations made the discussion degenerate, provoking the reactions of several inhabitants and, finally, the departure of Alvaro, who in a blatant way got up and left the assembly saying that the place had 'become the opposite of a common good.' Episodes like this are not so frequent, but they happen, and it is useful to report them because they disclose the core of the concept of the common among the inhabitants. On the one hand, they strengthen their internal unity against those from outside who are unable to grasp the efforts they make to render the place truly crossable and accessible for anyone, provided it is in line with the principles of sharing and does not allow for racist, sexist or fascist proposals. On the other hand, these episodes solicit doubts and sorrows about the difficulties entailed by a political path, leading the inhabitants to further question themselves about their way of conceiving the self-government of a space.

After Alvaro's departure, the assembly resumed, but the mood was obviously already ruined. After the assembly, I found myself discussing with some inhabitants about how to handle those cases, but more generally also about how to receive external subjects in that space. Together with other inhabitants, I argued that every time a person (however grumpy, confrontational and difficult) leaves the assembly in that way, this is a defeat for l'asilo. I added that, beyond who was wrong or right, those episodes were useful in highlighting some assembly management dynamics that take place in practice. I also talked about this with the inhabitant who discussed most with Alvaro, to whom I was now bound by a relationship of friendship, and I shared a political path, albeit with differences due to my position as both an activist and an ethnographer who observes and reports what he sees. Immacolata did not receive well my thoughts. At first, she actually closed upon herself further and reiterated that people of that type cannot be useful in any way for a path like this, that 'it is better to lose them than to find them.' But despite the initial closure, she revealed an awareness that even in those cases it is necessary to adopt a listening disposition and that it would be better to avoid situations of that type.

All this has an ethnographic value because it allows us to notice the fragility of the inhabitants of l'asilo and, more generally, of their political disposition, i. e. the predisposition to listening that characterizes this project, the need to leave the doors of this space open to anyone, the constant care for the relationships within and outside the community. These are all elements that expose the community to the risk of

friction and conflicts, in the face of which l'asilo's inhabitants appear fragile, because their task is precisely to look after these dynamics and not to take a clear position that must prevail in the end. They do not fight in order to assert their own line against those who do not understand, but they must take into account the lines brought also by subjects who are apparently distant from the idea of the 'common' that holds that community together. This does not mean that they do not share some basic principles (even on a practical and daily level) which, in their opinion, regulate the operation of the space in a 'correct' way, but that those principles are never completely fixed. Needless to say, this weakness constitutes at the same time the strength of the political process of l'asilo. The assembly is, therefore, the place where the main political problems of space clearly emerge. It is inevitable that this will be the case, since it is at the same time the place formally assigned to self-government and the place where most of the informal meetings are held between inhabitants, guests and people who happen to be spending some time in Naples and they decided to visit l'asilo.



Monday Assembly (Cinema, l'asilo).

4.1.11. Conviviality, politics, and the political

L'asilo captivates its inhabitants. After spending a lot of time inside the space with the people who frequent it, leaving the space is very difficult. Once in those relationships, it is difficult for some to even have dinner alone, giving up the company of the others. For example, the assembly is always followed by a dinner among those who withstood

and attended until the end. Normally it is ten, at most twenty people. They are all inhabitants, with the addition of people like me who spend a more or less long period in space (generally considered inhabitants in turn), as well as some external guests who are in that period in Naples and who use the guesthouse of l'asilo to sleep as they have obtained an artistic residence here. In general, in short, dinner is a moment attended by people who are close, in one way or another, to the community of l'asilo inhabitants. And it is an important moment of conviviality, like all moments of conviviality for this community, which does not forget that being together, eating and drinking, are basically the main reasons why it is worth doing politics.

Dinner time is important because it brings out two important facets of the community's convivial moments: the relationship with the managers and the waiters of the neighborhood restaurants, and care for those who cannot afford to pay to participate in dinners and in general at moments of celebration and sharing.

The first aspect allows us to delve into some issues that I will take up in more detail in the next section, namely the relations between the inhabitants of l'asilo and the society that is immediately around the walls of the building. There are mainly two restaurants with which the community has created a customary relationship, and both are located at the heart of the area which has now become highly touristic in the historic center: a pizzeria and a trattoria. In both places, people who work there are very far from the lifestyle and political activity of those who attend l'asilo. Many of them have never set foot in l'asilo, except in some cases to bring take-away lunches or dinners ordered by the community during meetings or conferences, or during long meetings of the Self-government Table, on Sunday. For the rest, they lead very different lives from that of a community of artists who organize the cultural program of a commons space. They have very different material and cultural styles of consumption, they talk about different things and they use the dialect with greater spontaneity than my friends from l'asilo. Simplifying, they can be described as subjects belonging to popular or petty bourgeois classes which are (almost) never reached by the cultural and artistic production of l'asilo.

The relationships between the inhabitants of l'asilo and these people show the social stratification of the historic center of Naples and the heterogeneity of the social milieus that coexist within a quite small area, like the narrow alleys of this sector of the city (Gribaudo 1999). Despite the social distance between these groups of individuals, the relationships between them are still close and based on continuous interactions. The established bonds are strong, in all respects (Granovetter 1998). From this point of view, the geographical position of l'asilo allows us to explore once again the clear separation between the plebs and the Neapolitan bourgeoisie that has been narrated in the Neapolitan literature, from Anna Maria Ortese to Raffaele La Capria, from Elena Ferrante to the Gomorrah phenomenon (see De Matteis 2012, Pezzella 2019). Despite its stratification and the constant mix of different social environments, the city comes to terms with this clear differentiation between a cultured and a popular society.

Some inhabitants of l'asilo (Ottaviano, Floriana, Salvo, Attilio) take great care to maintain a relaxed relationship with the managers of the main restaurants of the area. They are respectful of their work, and are very grateful to them for the availability they have always shown. They often remind other inhabitants that requests for catering or home deliveries from l'asilo community should never be overly complicated. They show a remarkable esteem towards these subjects, with whom they want to maintain relationships of mutual respect. They rarely talk to them about politics or the social problems of a complex area of Naples such as the one in which they live or work; they do not engage in discussions on social issues or on their ideas about politics and society. The differences between these two worlds are certainly many, and probably very different ideas would emerge regarding these topics. It is as if a sort of non-aggression pact between the two 'groups' was in force in these respects. And in this case, too, what guarantees their pact is above all the ability to conceive of the 'other' in an ironic way, to develop one's relationship with him or her by resorting to ironic and very serious conceptions of the 'people,' on the part of artists and intellectuals from l'asilo, and 'intellectuals' who manage a space such as l'asilo, on the part of workers in the restaurants and bars in the neighborhood.

Some of these young workers were part of the Camorra clans that are active in the neighborhood. They were in prison and, in general, they led more daring and harsh young lives than those of my friends of l'asilo. Perhaps it is the latter aspect that arouses respect and solicits a certain sense of guilt for having lived more 'comfortably' the problems of a city like Naples. However, there is never on their part an exoticizing attitude towards individuals that obviously belong to what a politically committed collective recognizes as 'the people'. The stratification I mentioned above gives rise to complex forms of mutual 'understanding.'

The conviviality of the inhabitants of l'asilo is realized sometimes also in a very famous pizzeria that generates mixed feelings among the Neapolitans. Gino Sorbillo is a well-known pizza chef in Naples and now also in the rest of the world (Seymour 2018). His first and most important pizzeria is located less than 100 meters away from l'asilo. Sorbillo's entrepreneurial history and social profile have been much debated in recent times, and they have also been discussed outside the Italian context (Mucci 2015). Many of the inhabitants of l'asilo are critical towards Sorbillo, due to the ambiguity of the founder and owner of this large pizza chain. He is an entrepreneur who has always declared his hostility to the city's mafia clans. This behavior makes him remarkably popular among the population, which, needless to say, suffers daily from the presence of the Camorra clans and needs entrepreneurial projects like this, which declare themselves openly anti-mafia.

Sorbillo's popularity is also due to his ability to exploit this reputation, as it happened in 2019, when a bomb exploded in front of the pizzeria. This episode had a wide media echo. The managers released interviews stating that they stand up in the face of mafia threats. Shortly afterwards it was discovered that the threats were not addressed

to Sorbillo but to another trader who lives on the upper floor, in the same building of the pizzeria (the Neapolitan social and housing stratification also favours these forms of ambiguity). Above all, it was discovered that Sorbillo knew that the intimidation was not directed at him, but he made public statements anyway, pretending that the target was himself. This ambiguity has been the subject of discussions within the asilo community. However, some of them continue to impute a great significance to the ability to make a good pizza and spread it around the world. They believe that an entrepreneurial project like this is still useful to give Naples a reputation that counterbalances, in some way, the negative narrative.

Why do I dwell so much on this topic? Because by grasping in greater depth the conceptions of the inhabitants about the community around them we can understand how these people make sense of the ‘political.’ The latter inevitably depends on the positioning of each of the inhabitants with respect to the particularities of their city and its representations. In the next section I will focus precisely on the relationship between l’asilo and the society of the historic center of Naples.



Palestinian director, Mohammed Bakri at l’asilo (Cinema).

4.1.12. Around l’asilo: the neighborhood

L’asilo can be reached by foot, zigzagging through the crowds that abound in the historic center of Naples. Increasingly visited by tourists, these narrow alleyways are

also crammed with the residents of the area, who spend a lot of time on the streets and in the many shops that have been opened in the last few years.

More specifically, l'asilo is located in an area called 'Naples Decumani,' consisting of three main roads built during the Greek period (6th century B.C.), which are considered the heart of the city's historic center. Its tall buildings were partly destroyed or damaged by the 1980 earthquake but, for the most part, they are still intact, and they date back to the time of their construction. Once the location of important noble palaces (and, for this reason, called 'Napoli Nobilissima'), this area has been progressively abandoned and run-down. Over time, numerous transformation plans have been pursued, described from time to time as 'recovery,' 'rehabilitation,' 'requalification,' and, as early as the late 1980s, urban planners and architects started talking about a process of 'gentrification' (see Lepore 1989).

Walking to l'asilo immediately gives you an idea of its spatial location. The streets are very narrow and hardly ever in direct sunlight, and the crowds take up all the available space. As Valeria -one of l'asilo's inhabitants- told me, for the children living in the area 'there is really no physical space to be together. Every day they are forced to look for small corners to play football at the edges of squares.' In fact, in recent years the very few, tiny squares available have been constantly crowded with tourists from morning till night. As a result, finding some breathing space is not easy for children who want to meet and spend a few hours out of their often small and overcrowded homes. The local businesses have increasingly turned into tourist shops selling souvenirs, and groceries. Needless to say, prices have gone up significantly. The result is a hybrid shop, halfway between the standard style of modern shops and the sober, popular style of small food retailers of the past. Here the 'touristification' process has followed a peculiar trajectory, since shopkeepers naturally cannot forgo presenting the image of a popular and 'traditional' city, just as tourists expect, but, at the same time, their increased wealth has led some of them to renovate their shops in a more modern style.

During the first two months I spent in Naples, I lived in the Porta Capuana area, a working-class neighborhood located between the Central train station and the historic center. Later, I moved to via Toledo, the main thoroughfare in the center of Naples -a shopping street that is also the location of institutional buildings-, where I shared a home with two friends who had been l'asilo inhabitants since its occupation and use to spend a lot of time working there. To get to l'asilo, I would thus follow two different routes through two very different 'cities:' to reach it from Porta Capuana, I had to cross the troublesome area of the station and the Forcella district,²⁶ while from via Toledo to l'asilo I went through the city center, which is increasingly touristy and 'touristified.' The building that houses l'asilo is located right in the middle, between

²⁶ Forcella is a neighborhood inhabited mostly by sub-proletarian sections of the population, an area heavily controlled by the local Camorra clans.

these two ‘cities.’ In both cases, for most of the route you have to walk through dense crowds of people.

Naples’s historic center was the subject of reflection by the SET network (Southern Europe against Touristification), an instrument for criticizing the current tourism model. The network was formally created in April 2018 and involved the following cities: Venice, Valencia, Seville, Palma, Pamplona, Lisbon, Malta, Malaga, Madrid, Girona, Donostia/San Sebastian, Canaries, Camp de Terragona, and Barcelona. The founding manifesto of SET identifies the main problems and challenges around which the collectives making up the network pledge to reflect and intervene:

- the increased precariousness of the right to housing, largely caused by the massive purchase of properties by investment funds and real estate funds in order to allocate them largely to the tourism market.
- the increased prices and the transformation of local commercial activities into tourist activities unrelated to the needs of local populations.
- the overcrowding of streets and squares which makes the daily life of residents difficult both in terms of noise and access to public space itself.
- the high dependence of the local economy on the tourism sector
- the precariousness of the working conditions of the population, given that the main tourism sectors (hotel, catering, commerce) are often based on the worst working conditions (low wages, undeclared work, outsourcing...)²⁷

Within a few weeks, the network expanded considerably in Italy, gathering members from associations, social movements and research departments. Along with individual activists, researchers and concerned citizens, they have mobilized in many cities ‘to demonstrate the urgency of raising the question of tourism even in places where the process has not yet reached the devastating effects of overtourism’ (l’asilo 2019).

Its relations with the SET network are emblematic of the ways in which the asilo community deals with the surrounding urban context. Although direct relationships with the inhabitants of the neighborhood are weak and only sporadic attempts at dialogue with it have been made, the community explicitly addresses the political and social problems facing the city. This is demonstrated by the fact that SET members have often held both formal and informal meetings inside l’asilo and its inhabitants have actively participated in the network’s activities.

Other Italian cities, including Naples, were later added to the list of municipalities supporting SET, and -precisely in Naples and, more precisely, at l’asilo- one of the network’s national assemblies was held in October 2018. The intertwining between

²⁷ The founding manifesto is available at <https://www.dinamopress.it/news/nasce-set-rete-citta-lattuale-modello-turistico/>, accessed 5/1/2020.

the networks for the common goods and the activities carried out by SET becomes clear when one looks at the guests who took part in the assembly, i.e., a group of intellectuals who had for some time been involved in the debate around common goods in Italy (e.g. Salvatore Settis and Tomaso Montanari).

The Neapolitan ‘common goods’ spaces deal with this aspect in different ways. Some focus strongly on developing direct relationships with the inhabitants of the urban areas in which they are located. Places such as the Ex Opg, Santa Fede Liberata and the Giardino Liberato in Materdei base a large part of their activities on this issue, directly addressing those who live or spend time in proximity to their buildings, and making their relationship with the neighborhood one of their distinctive features. The types of activities that take place in these spaces are markedly characterized in these terms, as most of them have social value and they are a form of service to the neighborhood. The three examples cited above are very different from one another regarding the political orientation, the social composition and the age of the people who animate them, as well as their practical and political priorities. Yet, they are united by a basic idea. All these collectives firmly refuse to be regarded as mere service centers similar to those that are (or should) be promoted by the municipal administration and are aimed at specific or weaker sections of the population. This refusal is motivated by the need to distinguish their actions from those of entities that operate in an un-political or pre-political way and provide specific services in a purely ‘welfare’ way, interpreting the urban welfare state as an idea removed from political discourse and practices.

The refusal to carry out mere welfare activities is naturally shared by l’asilo. Indeed, here this refusal is even clearer. As previously mentioned, l’asilo’s projects and practices are mainly artistic and cultural, and they are addressed at an educated public of different ages that hardly ever comes from the surrounding neighborhood, where most resident families belong to the city’s popular classes. Still, at l’asilo the issue of its neighborhood is deeply felt, and it often becomes the object of arguments and tensions. In conversations with l’asilo inhabitants I have repeatedly addressed this point, asking them -in an almost provocative way- what they think of the fact that the activities taking place there are not directly accessible to the average inhabitants of the neighborhood. In fact, most of the events are based on content which is targeted at intellectual minorities. This is what I discussed with Augusto, an inhabitant about whom I have already spoken, who is a Marxist researcher and political scientist: ‘Do you think that, politically speaking, this is a problem? I mean: what do we do about the people?’

I care a lot about this whole ‘neighborhood.’...Often it is faced with great arrogance, that is, it is your business. That is, if you are a woman who has to go to work and I put the music on high volume until 5 in the morning, it is you who do not understand that we are making culture...This is intolerable. But this is another thing that unites us at l’asilo: the idea that we are in a neighborhood

where there are people who work, have their own rhythms and we have absolutely no right to interfere negatively with the lives of these people. We must respect them, obviously trying to do the things that distinguish a social space. So, the idea is always to find common sense compromises, then talk, understand what the needs are...It doesn't always happen, it's not easy...but this is an important element (Augusto 2018).

Based on this awareness, the events that take place at l'asilo are selected taking into account both the need to respect the people of the neighborhood and the need to stage concerts, art exhibitions, films and theatre shows that are difficult to find elsewhere. This synthesis is perhaps the signature feature of l'asilo, its very essence. On the one hand, its inhabitants do not forget that they are part of a social context and have assumed a political mission which is concerned with those who do not generally have access to art and culture. On the other hand, they are very proud to be a true avant-garde in various fields of art and culture. L'asilo inhabitants with whom I spoke about this aspect have always highlighted errors or contradictions, since their commitment to cultivating doubt and rigorously questioning their processes is strong:

We have had extremely complex concerts, to the point that even I, who am an average user of music, have sometimes found them almost incomprehensible. Now there is a cycle on Herzog, before there was one on Bergman...[Laughing] Then Žižek....So, in a certain sense, what you say is true. However, we turn to a target of 'educated' people, of people who already have a certain background, who have studied...(Augusto 2018).

Outside l'asilo, the tension that animates its community, swinging between two opposite poles of cultural and artistic production, which we may simply call 'mass' and 'avant-garde,' goes almost unnoticed. Especially in Naples, in the world of social movements, l'asilo is perceived as a rather 'niche' space. Hence, in this case too, we are faced with an ambivalent representation. On the one hand, several people from Naples who have rarely attended l'asilo events describe it as a place 'for the radical chic.' On the other hand, all those who know this place are well aware that it is not a place with a minority vocation, because they have heard the long discussions and they have seen the efforts to combine avant-garde artistic discourse with the wider outreach of the activities proposed. The tension between the two poles of l'asilo's social and cultural commitment is clearly summarized, once again, by Augusto:

Personally, I would also continue to do the most abstruse things, if this is a form of experimentation, if they are 'important things.' But, in the past, we have also proposed film reviews open to the neighborhood, or the theatre for children on Sundays, all kinds of collateral activities. It is only right that we continue to offer things that otherwise would not be done by anyone, because a minority of people who seek complexity are still a minority to be protected, therefore it is right in some way to encourage the circulation of a certain knowledge. But next to this

you have to offer, in my view, some more popular languages and forms of artistic creation. By popular I don't mean sloppy, the Christmas films etcetera. I mean to identify, also on a case by case basis, quality artistic artefacts that are popular because they manage to reach people (Augusto 2018).

The conception of the common good as interpreted and reformulated by the current movement for the commons may rule out any occasion of a true and fruitful dialogue with the working classes. In the neighborhood, there are groups of population that are excluded a priori from this process. The concept of commons espoused by l'asilo -and, more generally, by the network for common goods- is the result of selection, enhancement and aestheticization operations carried out by intellectuals.²⁸

In fact, l'asilo plays host to a series of artistic and cultural events and content that otherwise would not find room in the city. Of course, the two poles that I have identified should not be interpreted in an excessively dichotomous way. L'asilo does not offer content that is either entirely geared to the masses or exclusively aimed at limited, cultured elites. On the contrary, most of its production and cultural offer is halfway between these two poles, blurring any clear-cut differences and reaching rather heterogeneous audiences. In addition, the community is open to any proposals put forth in management assemblies -and many of them do actually come 'from the outside'- and welcomes a host of diverse suggestions.

I dwell on the relationship between l'asilo and its immediate surroundings because this allows us to deal with a more general question concerning the political vocation of this space. I refer to the concept of 'the political' that circulates within its community, the political construction processes occurring within it, the ambiguities, daily misunderstandings and ceaseless efforts of a group of people who truly intend to build a process of counter-hegemony in the Neapolitan context.

The specific social fabric of l'asilo's neighborhood, its daily business and crafts, its houses and courtyards, are very far from the experience of most of the people who frequent l'asilo. The latter give a great importance to this gap, questioning their relationship with this diversity. The sense of guilt which arises from their inability to establish direct relationships with popular social groups turns into anger and tensions fomented by the violent attitudes of some young people in the neighborhood. The success of a counter-hegemonic process inevitably depends on how its promoters intend to relate to sectors of the urban population that are very different from them. What does 'people' mean for the l'asilo community? And, more generally, what does this concept mean within the discourse of common goods in Naples and beyond? This point can be grasped through 'the issue of the kids,' as my informants call it, since this marks the daily life of the community, revealing its relations with the outside world.

²⁸ For a reading of Gramsci that moves in this direction, see Dei (2019).

The ‘kids’ are a group of teenagers who live in the surroundings of l’asilo and go there on a daily basis to play with friends, a practice that very often consists in disturbing or provoking those who are carrying out activities inside the building, so as to draw attention and create conflicts that are, all in all, a form of encounter. The ‘kids’ come from troubled families with difficult lives, marked by unemployment and parents or close relatives in prison or under house arrest, serving time for petty crimes at best. During the assemblies, the participants often raise the question of how to relate to their neighbors, and in particular to *these* difficult neighbors. When planning events of any kind, the community organizes everything taking account of this boundary, which is experienced as a true limitation. Misunderstandings, tensions and fights often arise precisely because of the difficulties in communicating and coming to an understanding about the main rules for mutually respecting a common space.

The ‘issue of the kids’ was addressed by a group of local residents, together with other l’asilo inhabitants, in 2018. They implemented a project called ‘Prato Verde,’ designed to create an ideal meeting place for the people close to l’asilo and the teenagers who had been hanging around in the space for a few years. The activities began in November 2018 and featured workshops with children, carnival parties, after-school initiatives but, above all, they provided a chance for the kids to spend time with adults who, until then, had been perceived as ‘alien.’

Since the relationship between the community and this group of kids has never been easy and their way of drawing attention and seeking help has often taken on violent forms, not all l’asilo inhabitants were in favour of developing a direct relationship with them. For some of the ‘old’ inhabitants, having relations with the local people is not necessarily a good practice and can often become a feel-good and welfare-like form of playing a social role in the neighborhood. Moreover, early contacts with the older brothers of these children and teenagers had been very tense, and they are part of the ‘epic’ memory that was built up within the community around the time when l’asilo was first occupied and established.

Indeed, in the days of the symbolic occupation of the building, way back in 2012, the adolescent inhabitants of the surrounding buildings came to one of l’asilo’s first assemblies to observe ‘the settlement’ of a community of ‘aliens,’ completely different from the average resident of the neighborhood, both from a purely ‘aesthetic’ point of view and in terms of their methods of interaction and the activities they pursued. In short, the social and cultural distance between these two macro-groups -the occupants and the residents of the neighborhood- was obviously considerable. Ottaviano, one of the first people that I interviewed at l’asilo, told me about that situation, recounting how the ‘leaders’ of the group of boys had been shocked that the ‘males’ attending the assembly had allowed some ‘women’ to respond to their provocations. Since then, many things have changed, and many of these kids have accepted that tough discussions have no gender boundaries, at least inside the walls of l’asilo.

Speaking of Ottaviano, the first interview with him (2018) took place at La Campagnola, the restaurant of choice of the asilo inhabitants, and getting there from l'asilo proved far from easy. It was a beautiful autumn day and, in the one hundred meters or so that separate the two places, Ottaviano stopped to greet many people: 'comrades from other spaces,' 'neighborhood children who always ask for spare change' (that's why Ottaviano gave them some coins), and 'friends of friends of friends who live or work in the area.' So, he described those encounters with his usual irony. I did not know him well then, but I understood that I was with one of the people who would allow me to better understand not only what happens inside l'asilo but also, and above all, the role that l'asilo plays within the city context, as it relates to the other movements for the commons, to antagonistic politics in the city, etc.

Ottaviano is often said to be 'a node of networks,' capable of connecting worlds that are so very different from one another. Still using the metaphor of the social network, Carla Maria once told me that 'Ottaviano is more than a node, he is a hub!', because he is capable of being in contact with countless different realities in terms of artistic vocation, cultural/political orientation, social composition, and so on. He is certainly a central figure at l'asilo because of his ability to always get involved in the processes currently underway. For example, he is among those who supported and developed the Prato Verde project. Moreover, he represents, maybe more than anyone else, the ironic attitude and the paradoxical 'listening in dissent' attitude that I mentioned in the previous pages. It was with him that I discussed this topic for the first time.

The relationship with the neighborhood is strengthened at times of emergency. An exemplary case was the clearing of the building that is located in front of l'asilo, in the autumn of 2019. In those days there was a police raid to capture dozens of affiliates to important Camorra clans in the center of Naples and some peripheral neighborhoods. One of the clans is that of the Contini. That occasion was used to evict about 15 families who had occupied the building and lived there because they had no income or had very low incomes. The link between the anti-Camorra operation and the eviction was the fact that two of these families had distant kinship ties with the Contini family.

Concerned with the possibility that these people would lose the house in which they had lived for many years in a condition of peaceful and tolerated occupation, many comrades of l'asilo immediately mobilized in support of the families. At that time, I was still registered with the Telegram chat of the 'inhabitants,' so I was able to closely follow the different positions that were taken with respect to this event. Everyone agreed that something had to be done to help those families. Many proposed to attempt a mediation (more or less formal) with the Municipality, which is the owner of the building under eviction. It was also obvious to all that the asilo guesthouse, generally used only for artistic residences (that is, for guests visiting Naples to conduct activities inside the space), could be offered for some time to those families, to secure a roof for them until they have found a more stable solution. On the night of the eviction and the following morning, some went to the front of the building to better understand what

was happening. After a few days of negotiations, the eviction was averted, and most families were able to return to the houses in which they lived.

Each episode like this brings out the profound complexity of the stratified Neapolitan context, especially in its historic center. In this case we are faced with an anti-Camorra operation against the city's historic clans, which are well known for their violent power and for having exercised strong social control for a long time in the neighborhoods where they were hegemonic. For the inhabitants of l'asilo, the police raid was good news, but at the same time it was a wake-up call, because the anti-Camorra repression would have put in trouble even people who have never exercised violence in the neighborhood. It is the age-old theme of the criminalization of the so-called 'dangerous classes,' described very aptly by the historian Francesco Benigno (2013). The inhabitants of l'asilo are well aware of this tendency of repressive institutions to identify violent subjects within the most disadvantaged social classes in popular areas, such as the historic center. They know that reality is terribly complex, and they know that it is not by repressing even those who have sporadic ties to the Camorra clans that the anti-mafia struggle will bear fruit. Many of them live in Naples, most were born there and grew up there, and they are well aware of the contradictions besetting the relationship between repressive state institutions and popular classes. Furthermore, during their political journey, they have developed a critical gaze towards this kind of repression. It is therefore inevitable that they will face critically an eviction action that places on the same footing violent Camorra bosses and people who are in difficult conditions. Their symbolic and political support for families evicted under the mantle of anti-Camorra repression has never developed, however, into a real relationship with these people.

I will not delve into the controversial and contradictory concept of the 'people' widespread in the political and intellectual circuits of the Neapolitan and Italian left. However, the episode of the eviction illustrates a complicated and ambivalent relationship established (or not) on a daily basis by the community of a cultural and artistic space, such as l'asilo, with the social context of a 'popular' area of a city like Naples. The context I have briefly described here confirms the reflections on urban commons advanced so far by other ethnographers in Europe, which diverge from the model proposed by Ostrom. Several types of social differentiation and division along class, race, gender and professional lines give rise to different relations to the commons and, hence, to their contentious character. L'asilo is a space inhabited and governed by a quite homogeneous community. Nevertheless, the stratification of the social context that surrounds this place requires a constant dialogue between heterogeneous sectors of the population, which constantly conditions and questions the political positions of the activists.

Ultimately, the attempt to establish a lasting bond with the families of the area is also mediated by the children and adolescents of the neighborhood. The Prato Verde experience continues today. It involves only a part of the community, but it is

supported almost unconditionally by the assembly. Even when the encounter is difficult and tense, there is no place for Ostrom's clear boundaries inside a commons community: 'Urban commoners thus should be thought of as engaging in constant boundary negotiation' (Dellenbaugh 2015: 19). This is a topic that rises to prominence when we talk about urban commons. The main characteristic of the communities we deal with in Naples (as in the case of Cavallerizza in Turin) is their heterogeneity. It is at the same time a weak point and a strength of these experiences, because it allows us to imagine forms of politics that go beyond social and class membership.

4.1.13. Positioning oneself as an 'inhabitant:' the constant questioning of the process

I have already noted that the identity of this community is built 'by difference' with respect to the practices that are widespread among other movements. The community of the inhabitants and main guests of l'asilo has a precise idea of the elements that make it distinct and distinguish it from the rest of the common goods of the city. I am referring not only to a personal attachment to one's experience and a natural propensity to highlight its peculiarities and virtues, but also to the tendency to frequently verbalize this presumed singularity.

L'asilo is not a closed collective and does not perceive itself as a political collective in the strict sense, because its inhabitants believe in its profound internal heterogeneity, which they promote and constantly defend:

There are some realities that by their nature do not seek to question the social structure, but they already have precise parameters and solutions. The Marxist-Leninists, for example, but also the whole disobedient area [the social movements born in the early 2000s in Naples and then spread to other areas]. I am not talking in negative terms about ideologization, quite the opposite! However, these realities believe they have already found the solution, so, they don't think it's necessary to call their structures or methods into question (Ottaviano 2018).

L'asilo has built its identity not only with respect to the other urban commons of Naples, but also with respect to the experiences of other cities and countries. This specificity is experienced and discussed in the daily conversations among its inhabitants, and a strong narrative has developed around it within the community, of which everyone is very proud although it is mostly expressed in an ironic key. They constantly deal with this need for differentiation, which leads them to claim, and often take on, a central role in the processes in which they participate, as it happened within the national network for common goods (see the general introduction to Italian case studies). Oscar, like many others, often hinted at this 'peculiarity' in our conversations. When, during a recorded interview, I asked him what makes l'asilo a peculiar place, he replied:

Very often, the other movements, the other spaces perhaps think that l'asilo is not very politically engaged. I associate this with the fact that, very often, there is a strong reactionary logic also among the comrades. Why do I tell you this? [Within social movements] one often has the feeling that those who produce culture, those who make art, especially in a certain way, are a little radical chic, a little out of this world. In reality, the peculiarity of the movements belonging to the cultural and artistic world, implied that this peculiarity was produced...it is not that we are not political or that we are neutral, but we are based on a radical openness, therefore we are open to contradictions. Opening up to infinite worlds is peculiar to artists (Oscar 2018).

It is a real peculiarity, which I was able to clearly discern during my fieldwork. However, this tendency to stand out clashes both with the aspiration to become a 'model' and lead other experiences, and with the need to create a space that is both accessible and contaminating. When I asked Laura, a l'asilo inhabitant who joined the community only a few months before my arrival, why its inhabitants were so proud of l'asilo, she answered:

in my opinion because they feel the responsibility of being a point of reference for other common goods. I don't mean leading the way but showing how far we can go. So, they throw this stone very far because there is someone else who could follow this path. I felt it when I was in Palermo in Montevergini.²⁹ When I said that I am part of l'asilo, they gave me a warm welcome! (Laura 2019).

The asilo community hardly ever asks for 'help.' Except during the occupation phase-when the occupying group asked for the support of the Teatro Valle community, with which many had strong ties- this has probably never happened. In external relations, they are used to taking on the role of those who *help*, who *guide*, who earn praise for their commitment and their qualities. Many other collectives and social spaces -such as Mondeggi (Florence), Poveglia (Venice) or Cavalerizza (Turin)- have often turned to l'asilo to overcome difficult moments or to manage their relations with local institutions. Yet, not all its inhabitants think that l'asilo is -or should be- a guide. In my conversations with them, we have often discussed their doubts about the more or less explicit ambition to become a good example for other communities. They are frightened by the idea of being a role model, as well as by the haughty use of the word 'we.' As one of them once told me, 'belonging to a community is valid only to the extent that it is in the making and gives life to a project that is not eternal, which can produce a seed for future experiences, different from this and also completely ephemeral' (Diego 2019).

²⁹ As with other spaces in other parts of Italy, the collective that had occupied the former Montevergini Theatre in Palermo asked the l'asilo community for help when applying to the municipal administration for recognition. In fact, they wanted to ratify a set of self-governing space regulations together with the Municipality of Palermo.

The tendency to stand out has nothing to do with a haughty attitude and is not an attempt to boast about one's singularity, which may sometimes transpire, but it is part of the normal competition between social movements and different experiences. It is the result of a real awareness, on the part of the l'asilo inhabitants, of their theoretical resources and daily practices. Let me explain in detail. The fact that within the community there is often talk of heterogeneity and openness to contradictions and multiplicity (as Oscar said earlier) has an effect on the practices of the community itself, making it truly more open. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy that is based on strong identity elements: *we are artists and cultural workers, therefore we are by our very nature opposed to the indoctrination and closure that characterizes political collectives*. Let us dwell for a moment on Eliana's words, a l'asilo inhabitant who talked to me about the early days of the occupation and the relationship with the Teatro Valle, which she had witnessed first-hand from the very beginning:

L'asilo has always tried to keep heterogeneity as its founding principle. I don't even want to say non-identity, as is often said, because identity for me is something that you build yourself despite yourself...Heterogeneity is also an identity figure: I am heterogeneous. *L'asilo* has always been configured as 'the space of the possible.' I don't want to mention Deleuze here...but it is so. It is a place where you can truly make meetings possible that could not have happened in the city before. Ours was a breach action. Well, we started a conversation with mayor de Magistris but, at the same time, we strongly believe in the possibility to start other conversations. The most significant projects (Stop Biocide, Massa Critica, Non Una di Meno and many others...) were born in l'asilo not because l'asilo offers the space -that is necessary but it is also secondary- but because at l'asilo you can meet your enemy starting from exactly the same position. The ex OPG was born shortly after l'asilo and immediately they gave more importance to their positioning, that is, they set themselves a political, programmatic objective. Which for me it is absolutely not something to condemn, indeed sometimes I feel sorry that we are not like the ex OPG, because sometimes I'd like to have a clear objective and to work for that...(Eliana 2019).

As I mentioned above, it is clear that, while not pursuing any strong political identity, l'asilo inhabitants obviously cannot give up on some form of community identity. It is precisely the non-identity of which Eliana speaks that constitutes the precondition for the construction of an identity 'by difference.' This is also shared by those who are not artists and have a much more 'canonical' political background, i.e. linked to collectives with a strong political identity. This is the case, for instance, of Augusto, whose story I have already narrated:

At l'asilo, I immediately felt the possibility of living very free political and human relations, this is the essential point. So, beyond some even unpleasant conflicts that have occurred in these seven years, I have never lived outside this experience. And it has been like this since the beginning: that is, there has never

been a group that wanted to dominate the assembly...I have a very Schmittian vision of politics: that is, friend/enemy, strategic, tactical...Because unfortunately it works like this. In l'asilo somehow this dimension has been deactivated. That is, there is no friend/enemy, there is no 'my collective against yours, my practice against your practice.' The idea was: we can be together in a different way. I don't know if we did it or not...But this is the dimension that I experienced (Augusto 2018).

Thus, at l'asilo, political activity and care for diverse relationships are strongly connected with the practice of constantly questioning one's own role and position in ongoing activities. Of course, this does not always happen, and it is not always a virtuous process, but it is certainly an overall trend that characterizes the 'politicity' of this space. Especially for what concerns internal community relations and the creation of a common goods network at the national and supra-national level, political assemblies (called 'self-government assemblies'), chat messages and daily conversations among community members are marked by the constant search for an appropriate attitude. The latter is in dialogue with the position adopted by the anthropologist, who observes those lives and participates in their processes, in an attempt to narrate them.

We are therefore dealing with an apparent paradox. The daily discourse on heterogeneity and non-identity creates a strong internal cohesion and contributes to building the identity of the community. The latter is based precisely on sharing its 'peculiarity.' This is why the asilo inhabitants, like those of any other collective, do not completely renounce the dynamics of belonging. They perceive the successes of other inhabitants as their own and they extol them publicly, on social networks or in private conversations with individuals outside the community. Likewise, they protect one another in all circumstances which are difficult or potentially threatening for any of the members. After all, belonging has always played a very important role in social movements.

In sum, the positioning of individual inhabitants has significant effects on the constant questioning of the ongoing political process. Continually asking who you are and what you are doing in that space is a vital step in expressing your idea of the political process that is taking place. These two operations are strongly connected with each other. But the opposite is also true. Explicitly questioning the process and its political sense -as it often happens during assemblies, meetings and workshops- always leads to rethinking yourself.

The reflections of the community around these aspects clearly emerge in the following interview excerpts:

In the first year, to help you understand the approach a little, there were about twenty terms -we had made a list- that we preferred not to use, because every time we used them, we wasted three hours of assembly. Ok, it was not a waste of

time, however...So, for example, we didn't use 'bottom-up:' when it happened, there was the intervention of someone who remembered it and said 'wait a minute guys! When we say "bottom-up" we mean [something else].' Since it is an abused term...Other terms we used them on purpose to introduce them into the political discourse: the discourse about common goods, for example. It was a term that we used a lot, because it was important to give it a precise meaning and to defend it from the exploitation that was already occurring at the time and its use in various areas (Ottaviano 2018).

At the beginning we worried a lot, we said to ourselves: 'how can we do it? How can we act for workers in our sector? What tools can we use? Maybe the national contract? Look, every project proposal from outside, during the assembly, made our knees hurt [because of too many discussions]. Every time we tried to do the workers' assemblies it was a torture...really bad, everyone came there to complain, thinking only about their own interests...I realized, after seven years, that the peculiarity of l'asilo is that it is not a space for disputes, there are no disputes. The main dispute is that of continuing a permanent process. Permanent! We are used to quote that slogan: 'if you want to run a mile, run a mile. If you want to live another life, run a marathon.' Only a permanent process can change things, over time only (Oscar 2018).

L'asilo's relationships with the institutions -mostly local administrations- are also the subject of constant attention and scrutiny. However, the relationship with everything that is institutionalized triggers an ambivalent stance among the community members. All the realities that are not in line with ideas of commons, of alternative politics, of rethinking society starting from the political practice of subverting the existing order, are viewed with suspicion. In this regard, there is nothing different between the attitude of this community and that of 'traditional' political collectives.

The 'novelty' consists in the fact that at l'asilo the exchange of ideas with these entities (associations, movements, political parties, magazines, cultural groups, etc.) is not rejected but rather sought after, for two main reasons. One is eminently political, that is, linked to the political orientation of the space, and concerns its openness towards the institutions. The dialogue with the institutional world forms the basis for the social and political hacking that the community pursues, vis-à-vis both norms and laws, and political power in general. The second reason is linked to the first. Since l'asilo does not set out from a firm refusal of any interaction with institutional subjects, despite maintaining a critical position, its inhabitants see recognition from that world as good news. And such recognition becomes real flattery if it comes from a widely circulating newspaper or magazine, a prestigious public body or figure (e.g. official theatre networks, universities, famous music bands, a famous film director, etc.), or individuals who hold prominent public offices of any kind.

When establishing a channel of communication, they always try, at least within their internal debate, to adopt an almost snobbish posture of distrust. This is their attitude by default; it is there in the background, ready to emerge on the first occasion. So, when *Robinson*, a cultural magazine published by one of Italy's main newspapers, decided to dedicate a special insert to *l'asilo* and the common goods experience in Naples, the internal chat conversations were filled with ironic jibes at the 'worst newspaper ever,' stigmatizing it and immediately creating a distinction between 'us' and 'them.' Yet, there was also a feeling of being flattered and intrigued by all the attention and the will to be present when the journalists would visit *l'asilo* for their reportage. The visibility gained thus does not serve only instrumental political purposes, that is, the objective is not to publicize the work done among those who do not normally have access to alternative channels of knowledge and information production. Rather, it has to do with being keen for recognition from official entities. The *l'asilo* inhabitants are aware that this recognition must be taken with a grain of salt -they are always careful not to be assimilated and co-opted into the institutions- but, at the same time, they are fascinated by these forms of recognition, albeit critically, i.e. with a great degree of awareness.

Such situations strengthen the community's sharing of a moral horizon. These episodes provide an opportunity to reaffirm a common political goal and a common moral orientation. A good example is the exchange of emails in which they discussed about the interview that some *l'asilo* community members had with the journalist from the *Robinson* magazine. Those who did not participate in the interview immediately asked for news by writing in chat, betraying their strong interest in the whole story. First of all, the obvious question: 'how did it go?'. Secondly, they wondered about something that has to do with this sharing of a moral horizon, namely 'did they behave?'. Ironically, they wanted to know if those 'bad guys' from the mainstream newspaper were nice and treated the community well. All this was affirmed with irony, unlike what would have happened in other political collectives with a precise political orientation and little room to deviate, which state their positions in much clearer and more resolute terms. Here, the hallmark of the moral economy of a space such as *l'asilo* is this distance from other alternative forms of politics -a gap generated by irony itself.

A final distinguishing aspect that sets *l'asilo* and its inhabitants apart from the 'traditional' social movements linked to the CSOAs is their attitude towards the space occupied by the community. I refer in particular to the sense of responsibility towards the building that hosts *l'asilo*. In the case of squats occupied by social movements, the 'reclaiming' moment, when a space is 'taken,' often prevails, which leads in many cases to a diminished sense of responsibility for what is done inside the space. Conversely, as we have seen, at *l'asilo* a strong sense of responsibility prevails and much care is devoted to the building, which are regarded as precious. During my fieldwork, I repeatedly hypothesized that this sense of responsibility may be a

consequence of the social background of most of l'asilo's inhabitants. So, the social composition of the community carries an 'original sin' with it, i.e. the fact of having had the opportunity to study and make art. This privilege is now combined with yet another one, that of having access to a very beautiful building in which they can carry out various activities. It is a sentiment that I can understand because I share it, and this is probably why I brought it up in conversations with my friends and informants. Indeed, some of them opened up completely and embraced my reflection. In the moral mutuality that is established during an ethnographic encounter, guilt often develops for being unable to empathize with one's informants (Gable 2014). In my case, the opposite happened: having to deal with informants whose background was very similar to mine, I realized that empathy arose between us precisely because of our shared guilt.

Yet, this guilt turns into a politically productive sense of responsibility. Of course, the social composition of the community is not completely uniform, but there is a prevalence of individuals with high-level qualifications. Emanating from a 'Catholic' sentiment, guilt is politicized through the knowledge one gains along one's political trajectory and it turns into responsibility. In other words, one realizes, more or less explicitly, that guilt is politically characterized, because it concerns one's origins, one's position in society, and the opportunities that one has had and continues to have by being able to access the building. This assumption of responsibility is demonstrated by taking care of the building itself as well as of the people who frequent it, welcoming them kindly when there are events and listening with interest and openness to the proposals from outside that are made during the regular Monday evening meetings.

We are a heterogeneous group of people who take care of a common space. We have always felt unconsciously almost obligated to the city. This feeling, if you observe the dynamics, emerges often. Because the space we manage is a large space, renovated with around 10 million euros...So, it is a large space, recently renovated, which lies at the heart of the historic center, which was the object, before us, of plans and conflicts between the various administrations...So, all of a sudden, we had to self-manage a worthy place. Its material, historical, cultural and artistic value is...There is a whole archaeological part behind it! So, we never felt like owners of the space with that attitude: 'here we do what we want.' On the contrary, we entered here with a purely political act, but we are responsible. And this idea of responsibility is fundamental. I think that the whole life of l'asilo can be explained setting it from this sense of responsibility towards the value of this space, and this is exactly why we have always felt obliged -as well as pleased- to be open, to welcome. There has never been any artistic direction, no form of exclusion -except towards racist or sexist contents. So: sense of responsibility for something that is common and of which we want to take great care of. Even if they evict us tomorrow, we think we have given so

much to this city. Not only because we have provided a civic use regulation or because we have organized many events. But precisely because of a sense of profound responsibility towards a common ‘thing,’ in a city where public space often falls prey to disrespect, in some way (Augusto 2018).

This attitude resurfaces continuously in the daily life of the community. The inhabitants perceive themselves precisely as custodians of a public good on behalf of the Municipality, but also as custodians of a place to which they have become attached and which they want to protect from any damage. ‘Care for the place’ is the emic term with which they refer to their commitment to the building, and it is an interesting element through which to discuss conceptions of commons, starting from specific places and care for them.

Respect and care for the place was also a key reason behind the inhabitants’ choice to keep some prerogatives and decisions for themselves. The Regulations for the use of the space (whose participatory drafting lasted about two and a half years) explicitly detail the ways in which the various areas must be used, clarifying also the decision-making processes within the space:

so, who’s got the decision-making power at l’asilo, if l’asilo is an open community where you come and even from the first day you can make a decision together with us at the assembly?...In my opinion, we have had the intelligence above all to establish rules in order to respect the place (Immacolata 2019).

Over time, things have been built inside Ex Asilo Filangieri -means of production-, which have human and economic costs. Some of these items have been stolen or broken and later bought again or repaired. Like in any building, this too needs care and management. Therefore, unlike guests and users, the inhabitants are, both according to the Regulation and on account of facts on the ground, the only ones who have decision-making power in the assembly: ‘Simply because an inhabitant is someone who, for a certain period of time -we formally wrote three months but then it is clear that this can change depending on the situation-, has lived and actively participated in the care and the management of the spaces’ (Immacolata 2019).

However, this care for the place also reveals another dimension, namely the relationship with the institutions and the sense of responsibility that the inhabitants demonstrate towards the agreements made with the municipal administration. Beyond any differences and misunderstandings, beyond the ironic comments about the choices and attitudes of the administration, the inhabitants have always done all they can to respect the agreements made with the Municipality. The community sees itself as the custodian of the space it occupies because it is ‘common’ by definition and, as such, it is ‘for everyone.’ At the same time, it is also true that, in daily experience, the protection and care for what is common is also intertwined with care for the relationships between the movements and the institutions.

On many occasions, during my fieldwork, we joked about some changes that were made to the l'asilo building by its inhabitants. We spoke of this also before events that the Mayor, the commissioner or the officials in charge of common goods were due to attend, and my interlocutors were worried about what the latter would say if they noticed that gates had been installed in a certain area, modifying the original design of the building: 'If they notice the modification, they will chase us away.' Somehow, albeit ironically, they cared about the politicians' possible reaction. Hence, respecting the place, being its custodians, and taking care of it is a political commitment in a broad sense, but it is also the result of simple human respect for the people with whom a pact has been made.³⁰

The political dimension is therefore inevitably intertwined with the personal one. These two elements are always held together thanks to the weapon of irony. Irony is capable of combining these two aspects. It advances l'asilo's political project by respecting its main promoters: the activists of a community that has realized commoning practices and the institutions that have supported it from the beginning.

4.1.14. L'asilo as an incubator: a space for processing legal knowledge

Bottom-up mobilization, juridical perspectives, and the State

Doing research on social movements, whatever their genesis and political orientation, means dealing with self-reflective subjects. Needless to say, this reflection made by the communities on their role and their political stance is not always in harmony with the researcher's ideas, nor is it always a virtuous and useful process for the communities themselves. But it is certainly a constant, and it significantly conditions the work of those who observe (participating) the political practices within these experiences. Engaging with commons and social movements means doing research with militant subjects and positioning oneself by also taking into account one's own ideological (and often militant) background (Boni & Ciavolella 2015). But it also means doing research with subjects who study, who elaborate ideas, thoughts, analyses, strategies of political action, etc. The comparison with these subjects is peculiar, and as such it must be addressed. The ethnographer of social movements is just one participant in a system of knowledge production, and his/her participation in this system generates new collective knowledge and forms the basis of political action (Casas-Cortés et al. 2013). Even though I did not act entirely as an activist ethnographer, I felt deeply engaged with the people I observed. Thanks to this research, I was able to better understand how important the role of law is in these processes, especially in the Italian case. However, like any ethnographer, I was unable to strip myself of my identity as a subject that questions the influence of the law on creative and political processes such as the ones I was observing.

³⁰ The members of the l'asilo community deal personally with technical and bureaucratic issues regarding the management of the spaces (for example, replacing lights in the rooms, ordinary waste disposal, etc.), while they seek the Municipality's support when it comes to structural problems.

On the one side, I was familiar with the ‘others’ that I met on the field. On the other side I had to negotiate constantly, challenging my doubts about the creative use of law that many of my interlocutors proposed. What I have described so far is inevitably conditioned by this aspect. As it always happens in the ethnographic moment, my gaze was built on (and with) that of my interlocutors. In this case, their ideas are based on advanced academic knowledge and a specific approach to activism and concrete politics. Therefore, the convergences and the divergences, the sympathy and the misunderstandings arise sometimes from conflicting feelings and more or less explicit alliances, as well as from common or divergent political orientations.

As an ethnographer, I first came into contact with the people who were involved with commons within the community in a more academic perspective. The mutual interest in our research and our work has greatly influenced the first phase of my research. At first, I was not particularly interested in the legal dimension of this process, but after the first interviews with jurists and researchers, I became more and more convinced that taking these legal actors into account was crucial. And I intended to ethnographically capture the positions of these subjects within the commons field, in Naples and beyond. I began to wonder why institutions gave these subjects so much credit. I immediately understood -it was quite obvious- that they were the agents closest to officials and administrators and the most useful for the latter, because they were able to theoretically elaborate and concretely put in practice models that could have been translated into local government policies by an administration that, on this as on other issues, displayed courage but also a lot of improvisation.

In the months I spent in Naples, every interaction, every discussion was also a mutual positioning between me and my interlocutors. My presence in the community was viewed with sympathy and, at the same time, with suspicion by the most libertarian artists who perceived me as a potential ‘ally’ of the ‘academics’ (mostly political scientists and jurists) who support and promote dialogue with institutions -the so-called ‘jurists’ of the community. But I was also perceived in the same way by the latter who, as an anthropologist, saw me as a potential detractor of their formalistic perspective.³¹ We therefore touch on a highly debated dichotomy within l’asilo (and beyond), which allows us to look at a more general dimension that characterizes the Italian way to the commons: the role of law and its ‘holders’ in the construction of potential internal hegemonies within the movement for commons, but also in introducing new formalized commons practices.

I have already mentioned several times Ottaviano, who is part of what he himself called ‘the libertarian wing of l’asilo.’ Indeed, he is often considered by the community to be the archetype of the ‘libertarian,’ i.e. the representative par

³¹ As I have already mentioned, but it is appropriate to remember it, these jurists have always promoted a ‘creative use of the law’ and have always wanted to distance themselves from approaches to law that can somehow harness the ongoing political process.

excellence of this trend, who is not interested in interacting with the institutions, while he also acknowledges that he is part of a process which is also the result of that interaction:

L'asilo is not a political collective, therefore it has a series of tensions within it. Our forms of interaction with the outside world are, quite rightly, very varied. So those who participate in the process naturally build a series of interactions also with the institutions, which are contradictory realities. I don't say it in a moralistic sense, I say it to help you understand the type of dynamics we carry out: the contradiction is not to be avoided, quite the contrary. So, for example we interact with the Municipality for a path in the legal field, and this is one of the most obvious examples. A path like that of civic use, which has a particular genesis within a more complex process, because it stems from the encounter of 1) jurists who had participated in the experience of the referendum on water, 2) artists and 3) comrades. That goal must be pursued, it is interesting, but I am more interested in it from an anthropological point of view. I am interested in the practice of confrontation that arose from the idea of putting on paper a mode of collective use of a public good, of a common good, which was a moment of confrontation that lasted two years and passes wonderfully. It was very powerful! (Ottaviano 2018).

In this quote Ottaviano describes my own anthropological curiosity for the process and for the encounter between activists, law theorists and institutional subjects. While not sharing the assumptions of this choice, he too observes this network of practices and interactions. As a libertarian, moreover, he supports internal conflict, he promotes divergences, he encourages the tendency to 'put one another in trouble,' in both word and deed. In this interview, as in many everyday conversations within the space, he always spoke out against any form of institutionalization of the process. He has always said that it is not at all easy to act in a place within which there are 'positions ranging from anarcho-individualism to almost statist socialism,' as he once said to me. 'I believe the only positive world is a stateless world, but not tomorrow morning. So, I don't mind about the interaction with institutions if it is done consciously, if it is done paying also the consequences. And it's not easy' (Ottaviano 2018).

As privileged interlocutors of the Municipality of Naples, the jurists of l'asilo have held a long dialogue with the councillors and officials in charge of the common goods issue. From them comes the idea and the proposal to formulate an urban version of the ancient statute of civic uses. The latter are 'perpetual rights of members of a community...over assets belonging to state property, or to a municipality, or to a private individual' (Treccani Encyclopedia 2020). They are institutions of very ancient origin and they are related to the archaic institution of collective property on earth.³²

³² In some regions of Italy, civic uses date back to pre-Roman times and have been never abolished. The content of these rights is very varied: grazing, mountain pasture, wood (*ius incidendi* and

Among the inhabitants of l'asilo, some played an important role in this process of theoretical and legal elaboration which resulted in a regulation for the use of the space. Starting from this ancient institution, this group of jurists guided the 'Neapolitan way' to the commons. Here, the application of the institution of civic use replaced the regulations that had been approved in several other Italian cities. The case of the Ex Asilo Filangieri became a textbook case, as I said. In fact, a resolution of the city council was approved, establishing the right of the community to use the building on the basis of civic use, after which other experiments were possible in other spaces. Here is how one of the protagonists of that experience discusses this process in an article:

The goal was to set up an 'interdependent cultural production center,' which was not entrusted to subjects nominated by political institutions or to an association or foundation with public/private participation, since these practices in recent history have all too often proved permeable to favouritism circuits and the squandering of public funds, and have been hostile to the promotion of experimental works produced outside the mainstream circuits. A drive emerged that was typical of the practices around common goods: a form of direct management by workers in the sector that was not designed only for the participants in the project, as in the more traditional cooperative models. This aspiration was welded with another common element of the movement: *the creative use of law* (so to speak), which in Naples, through an original path of study and collective research, closely connected to the practice of other contiguous social experiences, led to the development of a new legal institution (Micciarelli 2017: 147; emphasis added).

As for the relations between social movements and institutions, the centerpiece of this experience is that it is not based on the concession of a space by the Municipality to an association or a specific body, but provides for the self-government of the space by an open community of people. The occupation of the kindergarten was decided precisely in order to counteract the clientelistic dynamics that governed the allocation of resources for culture in Naples. However, between the direct management of the public administration and the non-profit assignment to associations there is therefore 'a third hypothesis, that is that communities require the government and the direct management of the common goods...promoting their collective enjoyment.'

This claim is reflected in the references to 'self-government,' absent in the Bolognese model and central, instead, in the other two cases to be examined. For the art. 20 of the regulation of the Municipality of Chieri, proposed by the then vice mayor Ugo Mattei, regulatory autonomy is expressed in the fact that 'the regulations of the reference communities must guarantee self-government,

capulandi), gathering fronds (frondaticum) or grass (herbaticum), gleaning (spigaticum), even sowing (ius serendi) (Treccani Encyclopedia 2020).

accessibility and impartiality in the use of common goods and production tools made available by the Municipality, through shared decision-making practices that ensure inclusive management inspired by the free expression of individual talent in the care and governance of common goods.’ To coherently translate this assumption, Chapter 5 (entitled ‘on the management of common goods’) includes a series of articles borrowed from the model which, in the meantime, was being experimented with in Naples, anticipating thus its formal recognition. In this way, self-government is connected to a basic decision-making system which...puts at the center of the process not a single subject as an exclusive concessionaire, but an open number of individuals, associations and collectives that can benefit from the common good, which is the subject of the sharing agreement (Micciarelli 2017: 145-146).

As Micciarelli points out in the same article, the researchers who worked on the elaboration of the concept of urban civic uses (including himself) claim that this tool allows a ‘creative use of regulations, which reveals an ability to create from below new institutions’ (Micciarelli 2017: 136).

The topics set out in this article have often been the subject of conversation between me and the l’asilo inhabitants who deal with this aspect. As it emerges from those conversations -but also from the quoted text- the theoretical elaboration of the group of Neapolitan jurists and the political practices that derive from it are an element of distinction from other national experiences. In particular, the competition around legal choices involves precisely two groups of scholars, which we observed during the *Heteropolitics* project and that are based in Bologna and Turin.³³ The differences with the approach adopted in these contexts emerge from the words of Carla Maria:

In Bologna it is a very top down process...The only subjects who can take these spaces are subjects who have already a sustainable economic idea, orienting the activities in this direction. Of course, the administration will select people who are responsible for the space, they could be an association or not, but they have to be responsible. Here, we didn’t want to create an association or a committee. We wanted to create something that was really self-governed, and they invented this mechanism with the public support, which is very important in terms of substantial equality (Carla Maria 2018).

Of course, even those who set up the Bologna commons process have their own view of the Naples model. During the fieldwork we were exposed to these different views. The promoters of such an institutionalized model cannot look favourably at the Naples model. Furthermore, in talking about it, opinions transpire that once again adopt the orientalist gaze towards the main city of Southern Italy: ‘oh, those people are crazy, almost anarchist! Here there is something completely different!’, as one of them told to

³³ The jurist Ugo Mattei worked on the Regulation on common goods of the municipality of Chieri, in the province of Turin, when he was the vice mayor.

me and the P.I. during an interview (Pasquale 2018). Moreover, outside Naples, the institutional figures who work in this field affirm that the Neapolitan process is closely linked to the person of De Magistris. For this reason, the same administrator in the Municipality of Bologna highlighted during our interview that ‘our system maybe is not the best one, but it is integrated in the bureaucracy of the City, so, even if the mayor changes, the bureaucratic machine goes on anyway.’

To these accusations and these judgments, the ‘Neapolitans’ respond by affirming the specificity of their approach:

A model is better for some situations and other models are better for others. When they call us to explain them the civic use or to help them with the juridical path, we never go there to say ‘you have to do the civic use!’ We always try to understand what their needs are (Carla Maria 2018).

The use of law -and therefore of legal instruments such as that of civic use- has also an instrumental value:

the reason why we called it civic use is to make comprehensible what we are talking about from an administrative point of view, but it’s not exactly the same with the civic use in the countryside. According to the State, civic use is still something about lands, shepherds, etcetera. We tried to build somehow an analogy with this traditional institution, but to be honest, we do not really agree with each other on how the urban civic use should be related to the traditional civic use. We have all different opinions. There is a debate, also a strong one! (Carla Maria 2018).

Some of the philosophers and jurists who are also activists of l’asilo have studied the Neapolitan commons and the experience of the common goods in Naples, among other issues. A couple of them have started their intellectual formation within the Institute for Philosophical Studies (see section 4). They believe that it is an important place for the spread of the ‘revolutionary culture’ in Naples. Moreover, like many other l’asilo inhabitants, they argue that the role of figures such as the ex-councillor Lucarelli in producing a discourse on common goods in Naples has been overestimated. Those elites, for the inhabitants of l’asilo, would have played no role without the push that came from below, from the places of theoretical elaboration and concrete commoning practices, among which l’asilo is certainly one of the main in Naples.

The role of these figures of jurists and legal philosophers is the subject of discussion within the community. They are perceived as bulky, but at the same time as useful figures. They are mostly tolerated by some, wholeheartedly supported and defended by others. For some -both inside l’asilo and outside- they are responsible for an excessive institutionalization of the process, while, for others, they are the only ones who have been able to give substance to a political journey which otherwise would be so heterogeneous and vague as to risk failure.

Sometimes, these jurists do not even agree with each other. Some differences between them on fundamental aspects have given rise to different factions within the community. The reasons for supporting one or the other position are naturally conditioned by the concrete action of each of them within the space, by the relationships established by each one with the other inhabitants, by the affects that they have been able to nurture, that is, by motivations only apparently futile and politically irrelevant. They are all figures who follow the debate on commons even outside l'asilo, and they often represent the community in theoretical debates (more or less academic conferences, informal meetings, etc.). They enjoy no priority over other inhabitants when it comes to representing l'asilo in meetings with other movements in Italy or abroad, but they are among those who participate most in this type of meetings.

As I said, many inhabitants of l'asilo are in general very critical of the constraints of the law, but this has not prevented the community from establishing a privileged relationship with the Neapolitan institutions. A relationship based precisely on their legal expertise, or on the bargaining power that these competences confer on them in the dialogue with an institution. This relationship is the object of criticism, but also of admiration outside l'asilo. It has led the community of long-standing inhabitants to maintain informal relationships with the mayor, the councillors, officials, employees working on the political process of Neapolitan common goods. The great events organized by l'asilo (such as the national assemblies of common goods) are often also attended by these institutional figures, who are also the target of ironic criticism and jokes.

During my stay in Naples, I have heard many of the stories about the mayor and his collaborators precisely at l'asilo, by people who could distance themselves from established power in this way. This coexistence between a political and moral distance and an effective collaboration could be interpreted as inconsistent political behaviour, but it constitutes the essence of the 'power of the weak' (Fernandez & Huber 2001). It is true that the use of irony may also serve to maintain and perpetuate a fundamental inequity. Michael Herzfeld showed us very well with his research on the Greek context that the irony of gossip 'iconically reproduces the dilemma of exceptionalism, a view of the world in which [people] generally acknowledge a common humanity from which they can tactically exclude themselves' (2001: 77). Herzfeld reads also through these lenses the relationship between patrons and clients, where the irony of the weak 'provides both the means of retaining a measure of self-respect...and the greatest impediment to escaping the unequal relationship' (Herzfeld 2001: 77). However, the expansion of popular self-government can be primarily an effect of autonomous grassroots processes rather than of top-down initiatives, which typically result in popular indifference or clientelist relations (Stavrakakis et al. 2016). It is here that the Neapolitan paradox is produced. The encounter between activists and professional politicians gives rise to relationships that at first glance can be seen as privileged and,

at the same time, deeply asymmetrical. Yet it is precisely in this asymmetry that the political substance capable of introducing new counter-hegemonies is generated.

During one of the national assemblies on common goods held in l'asilo, I was in a room with some Cavallerizza activists from Turin and some inhabitants of l'asilo. While we were conversing in a room in the library where meetings are generally held, mayor De Magistris entered and stayed with us for a few minutes. In front of that confidence and informality, the Cavallerizza activists remained speechless. They were faced with a modality of relations with a political-institutional figure which was much more informal than the one they were used to in Turin. They witnessed a relaxed relationship which was hard for them to fully understand, even if they could guess its potential. As Lorenzo, an activist from Cavallerizza, said to me on that occasion, 'we should only learn from the Neapolitans, from their ability to smile and act.' And in saying so, Lorenzo certainly had a cliché in mind, he was once again proposing the stereotype of the Neapolitans who *sing and dance* even in formal and serious situations (a stereotype that outside the Italian context is applied to all of Italy, due to the effect of a sort of synecdochal sliding). In doing so, he also grasped an important aspect, namely the ability to make irony a decisive political instrument in the hands of the people he met at l'asilo.

By virtue of the mutual trust between the municipal administrators and the community and thanks to the work of the jurists, the administration has been able to secure an important practical support to the community that manages l'asilo. Talking about the inhabitants who occupied the space and started the dialogue with the Municipality, Carla Maria told me:

they had this idea of devising new legal forms. Then they wrote in a public assembly this declaration of public and civic use, which is like a constitution of the space, how the space is governed, with principles of openness and non-exclusion, etcetera etcetera...which are the governing bodies of the space, like the assembly, the working tables...(Carla Maria 2018).

According to the declaration of civic use of the space, the economic responsibilities are shared between the community and the City.

This is very important in terms of equality, because the City is actually giving an active support to this experiment, because, in particular, in the declaration the City guarantees the accessibility of the space and they pay bills (electricity, gas etc.). If you think about a community of precarious workers...they are not like foundations, they have no money to run it by themselves, so this is a device of equality to allow people who cannot afford...who have not the resources to run it by themselves...to self-government, otherwise they couldn't do it because of economic reasons (Carla Maria 2018).

The trustful relationship between the asilo community and the municipal government is evident if we take into consideration the declaration of civic use of the building. The latter is strongly linked to the decisions taken by individual politicians who at that time held important positions. It was in fact approved by the City Government and not by the City Council. This makes it more fragile, because a City Government resolution is easier to change than a Council resolution -that would need an assembly majority. So, the new City Government could change it very easily.

As I have already mentioned, the declarations of civic use have been the subject of some investigations by the Neapolitan judiciary, which examined the crime of voting exchanges between the mayor's party and the movements that benefit from the spaces assigned by the administration in a discretionary manner. 'There are many inquiries of the magistrates...the basic idea of these inquiries is that someone was given spaces for electoral reasons. A hidden exclusive concession and assignment of the space to a de facto association of the mayor's friends. Like: I give you the building and you vote for me' (Carla Maria). These are investigations that have been initiated but have not made progress.

The force of law, the Neapolitan legal avant-garde and the North-South issue

The guiding role assumed by the asilo community in regard to other experiences of Italian commons is mainly based on the knowledge and the legal skills of some of its members, thanks to which they are able to concretely assist other communities. For many of these experiences, l'asilo is a point of reference, especially as regards the use of law in commoning processes. A good example concerns the relationship between l'asilo and Cavallerizza (Turin). For the latter, l'asilo represented a beacon, a model to follow, as it emerges from the gregarious and imitative attitude -borderline veneration- of the Turin activists. An unbalanced, unequal, increasingly asymmetrical relationship has developed over time between these two communities. The Neapolitan friends became those to whom they turn to solve the problems and conflicts that tormented the community of Cavallerizza, which split before completing the process for the recognition of the civic use of the space with the Municipality of Turin (see the Turin case study). So, both the two main sub-communities of Cavallerizza -the 'artists' on the one hand, and the group that carried forward the bureaucratic process for the recognition of civic use on the other- have turned countless times to the comrades of l'asilo, and more often to the so-called 'jurists,' who in addition to helping them on the technical-juridical level had also to mediate between the two factions, in order to reach a solution that could bring the community back on a common path.

It was in Turin, during my fieldwork in Cavallerizza, that I met the comrades from l'asilo for the first time. But it is useful to tell the story of the last time I met them in Turin. One of them had been invited by the Turin City Council to explain the 'Neapolitan model,' that is, the application of urban civic use. In the past, Francesco had also had contacts with some Turin councillors, especially with those who had

followed the Cavallerizza case more closely and who had tried, not always with conviction, to help the community obtain the civic use of the space, or else they had obstructed it for reasons related to their position in the City Council at that particular moment. In any case, some of them, together with an assessor, had invited Francesco for a public speech.

When they arrived in Turin, Francesco and Carla Maria, who accompanied him, called me to join them at the Town Hall. Once I arrived, I immediately noticed something that confirmed the impression I had already had during my two fieldwork experiences (Turin and Naples). Francesco and Carla Maria were much more comfortable in an institutional venue than their Turin friends from Cavallerizza. They are familiar with institutional environments and have a great respect for them, despite their highly critical vision and their choice to work to contaminate them without being subsumed by them. That situation galvanized them at least as much as an assembly with other Italian experiences of commons, because in both cases it was a question of taking their networking project a step forward, and it was done in more formal ways than in their everyday activism.

It was one of 'their' moments, and exactly in these moments they feel they can make their own contribution at best. And in these moments their individual identity is at stake, as well as their political role. Their story is not important in itself, but insofar as it shows a widespread attitude within the experiences of commons in Italy. That is, the inclination towards a productive dialogue with a world -the institutional one- which is not rejected in full, but which they have decided to approach critically as an interlocutor. This aspect also highlights the social background of those who are entitled to produce a discourse around common goods in Italy. They come from social circles similar to those of their 'opponents' and former 'interlocutors' (the Neapolitan intellectuals I mentioned in the first sections of this report, but also figures such as Ugo Mattei and other promoters of the commons in Italy). Also, the jurists and activists of l'asilo must be careful not to promote forms of hegemony within the broad commons movement, by means of their knowledge and their academic paths.

The asymmetrical relationships between them and the other Turin comrades emerged clearly in that circumstance. Before entering the courtroom where the audition would take place, Leila and Freddy (two Cavallerizza activists) approached them to ask how things were and how they planned to set up the audition, with the reverence that in general is reserved for those with more tools and resources (political, social, cultural, technical). These asymmetries turn mainly on the specific character of the Italian commons experiences that are mostly based on the juridical elaboration of the dialogue between movements for commons and institutions. The social heterogeneity within these communities results into a *de facto* imbalance between the ones who have the tools to manage this dimension and the ones who cannot. Not everyone has the same voice. Some are endowed with more specific cultural resources that allow them

to propose and affirm particular modes of managing the commons and theoretical models for their political elaboration.

This mechanism also takes place within the asilo community itself. Here, as I have already said, some oppose (respectfully) the legal drift of the ongoing political process, while others recognize it as a primary resource:

In the last few years, we have seen that our politics is entering the institutions. We have the feeling of really contaminating and also that perhaps it is not a blasphemy, on the contrary! And yet many of us also have the feeling of not having the [juridical] tools to do it. Therefore, we totally welcome those few who have them. And in Naples these people are mainly activists of l'asilo! (Immacolata 2019).

Going back to Francesco's hearing, he was introduced by an assessor, who immediately underscored the importance of the alliance between Naples and Turin, confirming that Neapolitan experiences have now become a model for other commons in the national context. Concerning Francesco's speech, two main elements deserve attention: 1) his explicit comparative references to the relations between Naples and Turin and to the different social and cultural contexts in which the experiences of commons take place; 2) his evident willingness to support the ongoing process in Cavallerizza. I will try to consider both of these issues.

The first point is important because it tells us something about the tendency to read with irony and ease, while speaking also in public, certain socio-cultural dimensions of the experiences of the commons in the two cities. During the hearing, Francesco criticized the widespread 'toxic narrative' according to which in Naples certain results were possible only because in that context there is a 'labile relationship between legality and illegality and the Neapolitans would be crazy people.' It was an attempt to oppose the orientalist representation of Naples and its inhabitants, a construction of the South from the North. What is interesting, however, is that Francesco (as well as others), in criticizing this vision, doesn't refuse it at all. On the contrary, he ends up appropriating it and, on many occasions, he uses it and legitimizes it himself, because it is an intimate aspect that defines, on ethnic grounds, the identity of a group (Herzfeld 1997). It is important to stress that the construction of Naples from the outside is added to the long process of building a strong 'Neapolitan identity' from the inside, starting from the literature in the 1950s which focuses on the peculiarities of the city, accentuating and highlighting them (De Matteis 2012: 26)

People from l'asilo know very well how to position themselves on the border between their virtuous commoning practices and the stereotypical representations of Neapolitan commons, which are in tune with the more general stereotypical representations of everything related to politics and society in Naples. The identity of the community is built precisely upon this paradox, based on two opposite lines of representation, and no one within it intends to give up on the 'negative' part of this story, that is, the

alleged shared vices, since it is these vices that generate a cohesion within an ethnically characterized community (Herzfeld 1997). Appropriating it ironically, with an attitude that oscillates between criticism and acceptance of the ‘stigma,’ allows the inhabitants of l’asilo to re-propose this paradox in public, simultaneously obtaining two effects: strengthening the cohesion within their group and showing off a certain self-confidence and awareness of their own role.

The Neapolitan activists employ, through this appropriation, the counter-hegemonic essentialization mechanisms put in place by the social movements which, in recent decades, have also fought for the ethnic emancipation of their groups and minorities:

[This attitude] is particularly prevalent among new cohorts of activists in the early stages of mobilization, as they use what some consider to be essentializing language to unite distinct groups and common elements of group consciousness. These constructed elements of identity enable them to counter negative stereotypes used to denigrate the excluded groups as they seek dignity and respect in the world from which they feel excluded (Nash 2005: 11).

This emotional-cultural mechanism emerged clearly in numerous conversations about the perception of l’asilo from the outside. And it is also reflected within the community and in its mechanisms. Just comparing Naples to Turin, Immacolata described to me her early days at l’asilo, when some of the activists who were already part of the community welcomed her very informally, taking care of her:

In Turin that informality, that direct and ironic way, that margin that here allowed me to find space would be...perhaps not impossible but less possible. We are talking about a paradox, perhaps it is obvious, but it must be remembered every now and then: here things work thanks to that margin. They don’t work because the assembly works, they work especially when the assembly doesn’t work, because thanks to this imperfection a margin is created (Immacolata 2019).

The mechanism I have just described is widespread in different contexts, and the interpretative keys proposed by M. Herzfeld risk becoming a *passe-partout* applicable to very different social situations. However, deploying them in this context is useful, because the interaction I am talking about takes place specifically with subjects -the Turin City councilors and the Cavallerizza community- who, in the face of the ironic self-representation of the Neapolitans, are mostly baffled, surprised, since they are accustomed to conceiving as *good* and functioning mainly the processes that follow a linear path.

I do not know if the Neapolitan movements can be considered real ‘indigenous movements’ (Nash 2005). What is certain is that many western anthropologists have regarded, and still regard, the Neapolitan context as sufficiently ‘other’ to also apply this category to its more or less organized political collectives. As I mentioned above, in the Italian context there is a widespread tendency to insist on the otherness and the

presumed contradictions of a complex city like Naples. Once again, looking at Naples from the other territories studied for this project helps us to concretely grasp this aspect. As we have seen, both in Turin and Bologna I have had the opportunity to listen to narrations about Naples that are in line with this type of social construction of the Other.

Returning to the relation between Naples and Turin, if the Turin institutions -like the Bolognese ones- are quite afraid of the 'creative' approach to the commons pursued by the Neapolitan government, by contrast the Cavallerizza community welcome this approach with enthusiasm. There is a sort of positive discrimination in this attitude. And on the part of the Neapolitans there is an awareness of being orientalized and a strong ability to appropriate the stigma. In general, in the collaboration and the dialogue between Naples and Turin it is therefore possible to grasp the hinge point for an anthropological interpretation of the Italian case. The central theme of these reports is precisely this: the processes for the mutual construction of the commons between different areas of the country. The reciprocal representations give shape to specific forms of enacting the commons and, ultimately, to different commoning concepts and practices.

As for the hearing at the Turin City Council and its practical implications, Francesco's effort to explicitly support Cavallerizza on that public and institutional occasion served to give strength to the political project of l'asilo and to affirm the 'asilo model' also in the city where the most direct political rivals of l'asilo live and operate, that is the circuit of jurists and activists who were a point of reference for the Cavallerizza (see the Introduction to Italian case studies). As I write in the report on Turin, there is a real struggle to gain influence on a significant experience and on a large community such as Cavallerizza.



Work group on 'The creative use of law,' Common goods network national Assembly, February 2019 (Refettorio, l'asilo).

4.1.15. The work of the commons: looking for the 'political' beyond the law

Consensus and the ethics of the self

For a long time, the asilo community was faced with a dilemma regarding its identity and priorities: to be a collective that engages in battles and disputes over the question of work and -above all- the condition of workers of art and entertainment; or to become a self-governed heterogeneous community maintaining the political goal of carrying out transformative processes with respect to politics, the common and the forms of self-managing artistic and cultural self-production. As is now evident, this second model prevailed.

This choice had an immediate reflection on the assemblies. Because the first model only provides for an internal assembly, that is, the assembly of the collective. When the second model prevailed, however, the assembly split, so to speak, into two: an internal assembly to discuss more political, internal issues linked to the life of space; and an assembly that welcomes external proposals (Augusto 2018).

Following this decision, l'asilo was taking a clear direction and the community began to speak more explicitly about self-government. 'Then, a short time later, the jurists, Francesco, Assunta and Amedeo, came and asked us to discuss this thing about civic

use. I remember the moment when they entered the assembly. I already knew them from the Institute for Philosophical Studies days' (Piero 2019).

It is evident that at a certain point, with the entry of the so-called 'jurists,' the discourse and the practices of self-government are linked and welded with a legal discourse around civic use and the formalization of modes of self-government. For many inhabitants, civic use is nothing more than the form that served the community to affirm a political model that was already the result of a profound elaboration. Many of them told me about it as a pure technical 'ornamentation,' useful also for establishing a formal dialogue with the administration and in order to be understandable, reliable and credible in the eyes of the mayor and officials who dealt with common goods.

The legal debate also affects the internal life of the community and the political elaboration that takes place in l'asilo. A large part of the inhabitants tolerate with impatience the centrality assigned to law in this process. I have often talked about it with Diego, who enjoys the esteem and affection of the community, and is one of the main promoters of the activities of the Cinema table as well as an avid supporter of the libertarian and artistic soul of this political project. He always invited me not to forget 'all the other things that happen in l'asilo and that have nothing to do with the legal reflection on the commons.' As I said before, for Diego this process has to be defective, faulty, imperfect. However creative it may be, the constant use of law as a legitimizing weapon of the process worries him deeply.

Be that as it may, the legal discourse remains one of the central themes for the debate over (and the practice of) the commons in this context. As we can see, it also engages those who do not fully believe in its political function, who are 'forced' to talk about it and reflect on this aspect, even if just to question it. Although they do not seek to produce a hegemonic discourse within the community, the so-called 'jurists' strongly condition the political discourse that goes beyond l'asilo and that represents this community elsewhere. Whether it likes it or not, the community must deal with a speech articulated in legal and institutional terms, which defines it as a political space and determines an important part of its external collaborations.

Political issues, and their legal elaboration, are mostly discussed in formalized moments, called 'Self-government tables,' which some inhabitants bear with impatience even if they never stop attending them. Even these roundtables, as well as the assemblies and discussions in the two Telegram chats in which most of the inhabitants participate ('Autogoverno' [Self-government] and 'asilo'), are often monopolized by a 'legal' discussion. To be honest, from the very first day my participant observation was pervaded and overwhelmed by law. This is an inevitable consequence of the choices made in the first years of this project's existence. Law is at the basis of the declaration of civic use of space and those who deal with it have since then enjoyed unconditional esteem by a large part of the community.

With regard to everyday commoning work and concrete self-government practices, law plays a central role in decision-making processes, which in this context are equivalent to how consensus is reached. The connection between the rules about consensus and access to space, on the one hand, and their concrete application, on the other, is a concern of the jurists themselves. So, Francesco (2019) complains about the gap between these two moments during a Self-government table: ‘When the declaration of civic use was made, the forms of self-government were decided, but the concrete part was missing, namely the practical organization of accessibility, which is instead very important.’

L’asilo is a public space that is self-governed as a common good by a constantly evolving community. Like many other movements for commons, l’asilo also reaches its decisions by consensus. Since it is contingent upon the circumstances and the relations between the subjects who use it, the consensus method is in itself difficult to define. Some scholars of social movements have tried to capture this by construing consensus as a ‘multidimensional concept’ (della Porta 2008: 5):

it stipulates that in the course of discussion the degree of agreement of the group’s various members on a specific question, which must be presented clearly and explicitly, must be assessed. Confrontation is continued, working on the possibility of reconciling differing opinions, based on an incremental model, whereby a decision can always be brought back into discussion so as to satisfy the widest possible number of people. The consensus method invites everyone to communicate the reasons for any disagreement, clarifying whether they will be prepared to uphold the decision eventually taken without exiting the group. The consensus method thus builds ‘agreement within disagreement,’ since any particular disagreement is always set within a framework of more general agreement, based on respect and reciprocal trust (della Porta, Andretta, Mosca & Reiter 2006: 53-54; see also della Porta 2008).

As stated in the declaration of the civic and collective urban use of l’asilo ‘in order to promote an effective practice of civic awareness and self-organization, the decisions taken by the bodies envisaged by this declaration are established on the basis of consensus’ (l’asilo 2019). Of course, we can interpret consensus there in various ways. In many contexts it is used in a ‘loose’ way, as a tool to test the degree of agreement of a given community around a proposal or problem. In l’asilo, ‘consensus does not mean unanimity’ (Eliana 2019). On the contrary, it leads to tortuous and not always happy decision-making processes. It is, as for many political collectives, a method that protects individuals who do not accept certain principles decided by majority in the community (Attilio 2019). When someone disagrees on a point, this must be always discussed. Attending the assemblies and the meetings has allowed me to note that there is a real and very concrete commitment to getting to the bottom of the issues in the discussion, without bypassing dissent, but engaging with it.

The consensus method slows down decision-making processes and challenges many efficiency criteria which are generally associated with the democratic method, such as the majority vote. During the Self-government tables, we often talked about the difficulty of actually realizing the many proposals that are discussed in the assembly. Alberto, one of the inhabitants who is most attentive to the process of self-government, once said during one of these meetings:

if we wanted to be efficient, we would have chosen a majoritarian method. The crowded assemblies may not be very efficient, but allow us to share our concerns before deciding. We will probably still refuse some proposal, but it is better for someone to come to the assembly and be disappointed than...I mean, it is important that it is clear what we do here.

The importance given to the consensus method was summarized by another inhabitant during a session of the Self-government table: ‘the method is our political strength’ (Attilio 2018).

The consensus method affects -and is combined with- other basic principles of the community life: that of hospitality and that of accessibility. These practices are almost always subject to discussion, question and care by the community. This usually happens during the Self-government tables, but also during the ‘plenaries,’ that is, the meetings of the inhabitants that are held in some particularly difficult periods for the community (a two-day total immersion in the space, usually during a weekend, to talk in a circle about the problems that have arisen). During the plenaries, the inhabitants re-discuss the basic principles of being together and self-governing the community.

In the internal rhetoric of the community, these fundamental principles are grounded in a basic feeling of ‘trust,’ which is constantly evoked. This sensitivity translates into constant care for those who use the space in incorrect ways or who disrespect the community. The general disposition, accepted more or less willingly by all the inhabitants, is to cultivate and maintain an openness towards those who ‘make mistakes,’ being flexible and taking the time required to communicate with these people. All this attention to the basic principles finds an expression both in the more or less formal statement of principle (i.e. the declaration of civic use and the internal discussions of the inhabitants’ community) and in the concrete practices conducted in the daily life of the community.

In this case, too, it may be useful to recall Didier Fassin’s reflections on the political implications of the moral choices of the subjects. In discussing the endeavor to rethink politics in connection with ethics, the French anthropologist takes up the concept of ‘ethics of the self’ from ‘The hermeneutics of the subject,’ that is, the well-known thesis by Michel Foucault that to govern others one must first resolve the problem of governing oneself. The construction of an ethics of the self is ‘an urgent, fundamental, politically indispensable task, if it is true that, after all, there is no other point, original and final, of resistance to political power, which is not in the relationship of self with

itself' (Foucault 2000: 282). It is, as Foucault concludes, a work of ourselves on ourselves as free beings -and this is perhaps the most meaningful formulation of what we should understand by 'ethics of the self' and 'politics of ourselves.'

Some of the inhabitants, especially those who have a philosophical background or a strong propensity for political self-reflection on their actions, are sometimes even self-conscious subjects of this Foucauldian ethics. Their action is informed by a deep and constant attachment to their being in the space and in the process. These people perceive their action as politics precisely to the extent that it is based on a constant political exercise that, in a Foucauldian vocabulary, we can define as 'ethics of the self.' However, as Fassin points out,

both the autonomization of morality and the neglect of consequentialism contribute to a form of depoliticization. Actually, Foucault himself became aware that the argument according to which one should govern oneself in order to govern others, and therefore the thesis that politics could merely derive from ethics, were not entirely satisfactory. This is how one can interpret his last two series of lectures on 'The government of the self and the government of others' and 'The courage of truth:' as a way to reconcile ethics and politics, in particular through the exercise of parrhesia, which consists in speaking the truth at whatever cost (Fassin 2014: 433).

Parrhesia is linked to the discourse of trust that I mentioned earlier, and therefore to care for relationships. The latter receive foremost attention within the community, since they represent the moment of articulation between the personal and the political plane, that is, between the relationships with the comrades characterized by affections and intimacy and the wider relationships which allow those affections and intimacies to be transformed into projects. During the interviews, during the assemblies and also in the daily conversations inside the space, the discourse of care for relationships emerges constantly. The inhabitants are permanently looking for a balance and a synthesis between two apparently very distinct moments: on the one hand, the intimate and daily relationship between two or three people, on the other, a huge circle of strangers in some assemblies or the meetings of the enlarged networks of movements for commons.

These practices of truth, trust and care for relationships keep at bay the intrusive role of law within the community and in the wider process of building commons in Naples and beyond. In fact, it is precisely in the concept of the 'government of the self,' as it was ideally developed in Ancient Greece, that Foucault finds a form of freedom that escapes its modern definition in terms of right (Fassin 2014: 432).

Art, culture, and politics

'We do not have any political direction! The Ex Opg has one, we don't! Let's take care of culture and forget the troubles of this city, because we can't do it!.' With this

consideration, in the spring of 2019, Sandra closed her speech during a rather turbulent assembly. Sandra knows very well that these two aspects cannot be separated and that l'asilo experience is based exactly on the strong connection between culture and politics.

One aspect is now clear: l'asilo is not exactly a social space. No 'social' activities are carried out within it, and its community is not directly dedicated to supporting those in need. This does not mean, of course, that its inhabitants do not have these issues at heart. Almost all of them pursue their own paths of social activism, within associations or other political collectives. And the whole community often collaborates with other experiences and supports them in their activities. It is therefore a community attentive to civic, social and political activism (on l'asilo's social pages, political positions are constantly expressed on urgent and relevant issues). However, l'asilo is mainly a space for craftsmen and artists who perform manual work, musicians, actors and performers, intellectuals and film directors, in general for people who engage in the so-called 'cultural work.'

In Italy, this expression is linked to Luciano Bianciardi (1964) and his book *Il lavoro culturale*, which has been one of the cornerstones of the literary reflection on the cultural work in the country, and on its political implications. It is no coincidence that I use it with reference to the cultural activities carried out in l'asilo. Although none of the inhabitants of the space has ever spoken to me about Bianciardi, their cultural commitment and the difficulties with which it is fulfilled remind me of the work of the Italian writer: 'the impatience, always ostentatious, towards intellectual circles,' the awareness of being condemned to an eternal 'intellectual proletariat,' the feeling 'of being a simple gear of the cultural industry,' 'the sense of the failure of the intellectual project' (Reccia 2012). The experiment, which is now a consolidated reality, of l'asilo is precisely a response to this political and existential unease. Self-government and care for a place and a community in dialogue with a difficult city like Naples are their weapon to fight the sense of helplessness. At the beginning of this report I referred to the reflections on the Fifth State and the condition of cultural and entertainment workers (Allegrì & Ciccarelli 2013). It is no coincidence that l'asilo project was born precisely within that intellectual framework and developed by preserving such an orientation. This vocation becomes evident in the 'about us' section on its website:

The spontaneous practice that has started in recent months has highlighted the need to create an interdependent production center that revolves around a self-managed community of reference. Workers of art, culture and entertainment, artists, scholars, as well as the audience that benefits from it, equipped with the means of production that are necessary to produce art and culture (spaces equipped for theatre, libraries, editing rooms, cinema rooms, etc.). We believe that artistic and cultural research must remain out of the logic of the market and from discretionary co-opting practices by political power and that it requires investments by the whole community, which are only apparently 'unprofitable,'

since they affect the whole society and they contribute to collective well-being. The community that takes care of l'asilo is replacing those [in the world of institutions] who are supposed to take charge of the artistic and cultural research (l'asilo 2019a).

Here the political vocation of the cultural project of l'asilo comes out clearly, along with its purported role in the context of the city.

This report focused mainly on the more explicitly political actors, or on those who represent the public interface of l'asilo, because they intervene more frequently in the assembly, they maintain relations with other movements for the commons, they participate more in public debates, etc. Ultimately, they expose themselves more. These are also the people who welcome a researcher that comes into contact with the community, whose knowledge is therefore strongly conditioned by the group of the inhabitants with whom s/he has conversed. There is also a component that is less noticeable, but which is equally important for the life of the space. There are those who work in the spaces where craft activities take place (the so-called Armeria), but also many who work on dance, theater, cinema projects, and who give priority to their concrete activity within the space at the expense of an explicit political elaboration of their work. The latter participate in a less active way in the discussions and in the political elaboration of the project, but they maintain relations of esteem also with the component which is most attentive to political issues. As Augusto (2018) suggested to me about the social composition of the community, 'we should also start from the biographies, because if we go to...For example, if you go to the Armeria it's exactly the opposite: craftsmen, working class, people who have that social and class background. In the theater or in the dance group you may find some examples of different class, at the Cinema table still different... .'

Therefore, the importance of the different worlds that take shape within l'asilo and are not directly connected to the legal and political discourse of common goods cannot be underestimated. It should also be emphasized that, as in the case of Cavallerizza in Turin, most of those who work on the legal construction of the process -helping other spaces and obtaining civic use, promoting this legal institution even outside the Neapolitan context, making use of it in the chats and assemblies to shape their political participation- almost do not participate in the artistic and cultural activities that take place inside l'asilo. They enjoy them indirectly, almost never participating in film screenings, theatrical or dance performances, concerts, etc. More than in the daily life of the space, the connection between art, culture and politics must be sought in personal relationships, in sharing moments of life, and in the theoretical elaboration that is upstream of the process. In the daily work of the commons, it is clear that for some people -the most prominent ones, which are in some way the public interface of l'asilo- the importance of cultural and artistic practices depends on their political theorization.

4.1.16. Commons in ironic Naples. A conclusion

L'asilo is only a vantage point from which to observe a broader political dynamic, that is, the more general mobilization for the commons in Naples and beyond, starting from the counter-hegemonic process that was initiated during the referendum on public water in 2011. The Neapolitan experiences for commons must be situated in that more general frame. As Andrea Muehlebach (2018: 244) noted in her writings on Italian movements for public water, it is important to pay attention to political and legal processes from above in order to grasp the 'incremental use of the law as a mechanism for [the legitimation of] plunder and as a means to perform acts of predation, fraud, and thievery' (see also Mattei & Nader 2008). Since the mass mobilization on the occasion of the referendum for water (2011), the whole movement for common goods in Italy is based in fact on the awareness of a predatory use of law and right by institutions and political parties. Both yesterday and today, the latter looked with suspicion at the rise of movements from below in favour of a new politics of the 'commons.' At the time, they completely ignored the result of the popular referendum won by the supporters of public water, and today they are trying to stem and control every form of organization from below in the name of the commons.

However, each local network for the commons has its specificities and it is articulated in a determined territory, intertwined with the history of local institutions and movements. The Naples case is no exception. Although, as we have seen in the case of l'asilo, it is the result of the links with the experience of Teatro Valle and the movement for public water, it is also the outcome of a particular political situation and an idea of politics from below that derives from several factors, which we can summarize here: 1) the evolution of the forms of activism among the Neapolitan social movements after the exhaustion and the phase of conflict that beset them in the early 2010s; 2) the collapse of the party system that had ruled the territory for several decades, and the rethinking of the forms of interaction with the public sector; 3) the choice to take advantage of the gaps and the opportunities that arose after the election of mayor De Magistris; 4) the ability to exploit even those features which are 'considered a source of external embarrassment but nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality' (Herzfeld 1997: 3), or the ironic appropriation of stigmas and intrusive identity stories; 5) the ability to transform the latter into effective forms of political action, which I have described using the concepts of irony and moral imagination and the formula of 'listening in dissent.'

As I said, if we look at the interactions within the Neapolitan network for the commons, we can see that dissent is almost never translated into forms of rupture. Generally, one listens to the other independently of the position he/she expresses and the opinion one has of the other activists/movements/spaces. It is what I have called 'listening in dissent.' It is not only my impression, it is an element that I also found in

the analyses of other subjects who look at the city ‘from the outside,’ as we can see in the following interview with the managers of a small bookshop in the historic center of Naples, who arrived in town a few years ago and collaborate now with many common good spaces:

Naples is a city where many people are engaged in intense cultural work, made of music, magazines, graffiti, political debates and much more. Compared to other cities, we can say that there are good connections among these groups... it’s rare to see attitudes of open hostility or mutual boycotting that would make no sense (Che Fare 2019).

The irony that pervades the conversations I have had with the Neapolitan militants is the same irony with which they face the difficulties, the misunderstandings, the disagreements and oppositions. There is no room, in this context, for the anger and the closure that I have been able to observe elsewhere. As we will see in the Turin report, the fragmentation between the different experiences, between the different groups and between the different social movements that I had observed in Turin gave rise to profound ruptures that are simply impossible in Naples, because here none of the subjects who do politics from below in the world of common goods would allow dissent to turn into an irremediable break. In Naples, social movements display peculiar political characteristics. The anger and the tensions that pervade many social movements (Kadir 2016) are reworked and transformed through irony and self-awareness. It is this awareness that allows us today to speak of the Naples case as a virtuous and ‘successful’ one.

It is an ability to not take one’s position too seriously, while keeping firmly in mind one’s own ideas. This sarcastic flexibility and this ability to listen has allowed l’asilo and the other common good areas of Naples to establish a fruitful and relaxed relationship with the institutions. When I first met the asilo community, during the ‘Commons and cities’ assembly in November 2017, I immediately understood that its members were capable, if necessary, of behaving like ‘professional politicians.’ It seemed to me an interesting paradox, but I soon realized that, like all paradoxes, it was not so paradoxical. As we have seen, what seemed to be cordial relations with Neapolitan politicians and administrators, were not so cordial. In any case -this is the most important point- these were not purely instrumental relationships. The ease with which l’asilo militants built relationships with politicians and officials was the result of common (socially shared) ways of conceiving political interactions, despite the fact that their world views were very different. On both sides, we find individuals who were aware of having contributed to major changes in the way politics from below was conceived in the city. The complicity between the two sides is based therefore on a common goal, but also by what had now become a common past. For better or for worse, beyond the differences and disagreements, the ‘Naples model’ had been built together.

With reference to the Turin case, I will try to show how the spasmodic concern for the rules revealed a passion for morality that left little room for virtue and the freedom to propose a radically alternative political path (see the report on Turin). In Naples, the picture appears more complicated and the results are in some ways opposite. In this context, for communities promoting commons, rules have a completely different meaning and application than in other contexts. If, in Turin, they serve to protect individuals or groups, in Naples they are nothing more than the formalization of a way of doing politics that constantly challenges those same rules. In other words, they are useful ‘by difference,’ because they serve to ‘put on paper’ the ability of a community to ignore the rules themselves. This is the meaning and the essence of the ‘creative use of the law’ constantly affirmed even by those who are closest to the law itself. The intrusiveness of the legal discourse, in the final analysis, does not have the effect of harnessing the political process. On the contrary, it confirms the open and creative disposition of the communities that use the law. It is for this reason that the two main approaches to commons that I have reported in this text -let’s call them juridical and libertarian- can intertwine and converge in a common project.

In conclusion, another element deserves to be mentioned once again: the ability to conduct a meta-reflection on the part of subjects who know the political-theoretical implications of being able to exploit the ‘margins’ and to do politics on the border between life and norms: ‘We are talking about a paradox, which must be remembered from time to time: here things work thanks to that margin. They do not work because the assembly works, they work especially when the assembly does not work, because in non-operation a margin is given’ (Immacolata 2019).

So, how is the ‘political’ rethought within these milieux of activists? The Neapolitan network of social movements for commons seems to follow Hardt & Negri’s line of reasoning, when they say that the different movements that arose after 2011 should build alliances in which autonomous singularities interact with each other, transfigure themselves through their exchanges, draw inspiration from one another and recognize themselves as ‘part of a common project’ (Hardt & Negri 2012: 107). This means that the logic of difference should be supplemented with a ‘logic of equivalence,’ which forms a community of passion and understanding, in Gramsci’s sense of a (counter-) hegemonic bloc (Gramsci 1971: 333, 418). From this point of view, what is the role played by l’asilo in this network and -especially- in the city of Naples?

We have said that irony is a key concept to interpret the political imagination of l’asilo community. Let’s be more precise. I already mentioned the work by Fernandez & Huber (2001), in which they ask themselves to what extent irony can be a local resource. In saying that ‘all is potentially ironic,’ the authors clarify that ‘the task of the anthropologists is to explore the circumstances in which that potential is mobilized, recognized, moralized or politicized...Irony arises in practice and excites the moral imagination by its identification of a gap, contradiction, inconsistency or incongruity’ (Fernandez & Huber 2001: 262-263). It is true, as they warn, that irony can be an

evasion of reasoning around moral issues and an alternative to action, or a true form of inaction (Herzfeld 2001). Well, this is not the case in Naples, as we have seen.

Of course, the experiences I have narrated evince also limits and face difficulties. The transformative potential of a space such as l'asilo is hampered by several factors that have surfaced during this report. The main one, which is explicitly worth mentioning here, is that of the sustainability and the potential duration of similar experiences. It is a problem that has been highlighted by several of my interlocutors:

[I have in mind] above all the everyday life and the relationship with time for each person who has dedicated time to this experience...Everyone has had to deal with their own existence as a precarious worker. This problem -we are talking about a real problem- is what then made the experience of l'asilo increasingly weaker, at least in terms of theoretical production. In recent years, we have not questioned what was one of our starting points when we worked with the Teatro Valle, that is, how to make sustainable these experiences that require a lot of time from the people who animate them. This is one of the reasons why these experiences are bound to run out of steam in a very short time (Eliana 2019).

However, beyond the pessimism of these considerations, Eliana and the other inhabitants of l'asilo are aware of the results achieved and of those that are always in the making:

I strongly believe in the potential of these experiences, which are political and also human, and have a transformative impact on reality but also on existence. So, I, together with many other people who start from stories that are very different from mine, have given a lot and we have received a lot from this experience (Eliana 2019).

Beyond l'asilo

Resting upon these changing and evolving but solid foundations, l'asilo's community has assumed a leading role in the Neapolitan context and beyond. They have worked out a unique approach to the commons, because the framework of social norms and the ethical and moral horizons in which the political action of these subjects is situated, has singular features. When I speak of 'morality' I refer first of all to the second meaning that E. P. Thompson (1976) gave to this concept in the study that greatly influenced anthropological and social studies on forms of political action from below (but also and on the commons in the strict sense; see Muehlebach 2018). As Edelman (2012: 55) noted, 'The second meaning of "moral" [in Thompson] relates to a principled stance vis-à-vis society, the world, and especially the common good, with the latter defined both in terms of customary rights and utopian aspirations.' The anthropology of morality (or moral anthropology) has been renewed in the last

decades by some authors who have started to conceive ethics as virtue and freedom (e.g. Laidlow 2014, Faubion 2011).

Both in the case study of Turin and in this one, we can rely on this sensibility to interpret the articulation between ethics, morality and political action in the commons movements. A reflection on the use of these categories to interpret action was put forward more recently by Didier Fassin, who recalled that the concepts of ethics and morality

are co-constructions of the observer and the observed, of the anthropologists and their informants. It is a major difference between the work of philosophers or psychologists, who can artificially isolate moral judgments or ethical dilemmas for the purpose of their conceptual experiments, such as in the famous example of the trolley, and social scientists, who know that in their fieldwork moral and ethical acts or thoughts are never 'pure,' so to speak (Fassin 2014: 432).

The role of l'asilo in managing relations with the De Magistris administration was important, especially in the first phase of this process. As we have seen, the first municipal resolution for the civic use of an occupied building was issued precisely for the Ex Asilo Filangieri. It was signed by the then Councillor for Common Goods, a constitutional law scholar and professor at the University of Naples Federico II, Alberto Lucarelli. However, it was developed through a legal path pursued by the asilo community, within which there are subjects who had the legal skills to do it, and others who had the imagination and the political vision to think about this legal institution in relation to everyday politics. This point is central to understanding their experience and its singularities. And l'asilo experience is paradigmatic to understand some more general dynamics informing the dialogue between social movements for commons and local institutions.

In my opinion, this was also a test of maturity. L'asilo gave a strong push. The basic idea is: dialogue with institutions is possible if the conditions for doing so exist. That is, if this dialogue implies a real possibility of making some demands real, recognizable and above all -and this is the fundamental thing- reproducible. The idea is that if l'asilo, through dialogue, conflict, institutional negotiation, obtained the civic use of a space, this means that other spaces can also reproduce that experience and create new institutions. And this is exactly what happened (Augusto 2018).

As I wrote, l'asilo has also become the guide of a network of commoning movements spread all over Italy. It is perhaps the Italian community that has most connections with other commons experiences in Italy and abroad. The success and affirmation of this model of political action is traced back to many factors, which, I hope, have emerged during this report. This widespread success may seem rather singular if we think that l'asilo represents a very peculiar mode of self-management and self-government of a common. It is an expression of a very specific context. This may

seem like a paradox, but it is not. In some ways, this success is precisely the fruit of the Neapolitan singularity (see section 3), that is, of the exotic labelling processes through which Naples is often described. If, for the dominant models of development, Naples represents a case of constant failure (see Calafati 2016, Punziano 2016), for the social movements that pursue alternative forms of politics, the Naples case and the asilo model constitute a possibility of transforming the main development pattern. Social movements that fight to establish alternative forms of politics seek alternatives, first of all, in subordinate worlds that function in completely different ways from those prevalent in the neoliberal context. For a long time, North African and Latin American indigenous movements have enjoyed an excellent reputation in western countries precisely because of their otherness -and Naples seems to follow precisely the same pattern. The ‘theory from the South’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012) always has a strong hold on non-southerners looking for alternatives to the asphyxiating political-economic system.

L’asilo, ex OPG Je so’ pazzo, Scugnizzo, Santa Fede, Giardino Liberato in Materdei and other ‘liberated spaces’ in Naples have become points of reference for those seeking alternative models to the dominant vision of urban development. Ultimately, l’asilo and the broader Neapolitan movement for the commons have succeeded in introducing alternative forms of politics that overcome the obstacles besetting the militancy of the social movements that were active in previous decades. In order to find alternative ways of conceiving the political it is not necessary to be on the lookout for miraculous acts and revolutionary events. We must recognize the unexpected revolts and the willingness of the local contexts to welcome the hidden countercultures that have not found enough space in the mainstream so far. Only in this way will it be possible to identify and analyze pre-existing resistances and micro-processes of ongoing structural renewal. The new and the extraordinary are resituated in a world of immanent gaps, contradictions, oppositions, germinations and emergent possibilities. This picture of things can help to overcome the ‘impossibility’ of enacting the impossible by directing our attention towards available resources of transformation along with diverse pragmatic experiments which are undertaken here and now (see *Report 1. The political*).

The impact of l’asilo experience on the real is evident. It occurs at many levels: in the well-balanced relationship with the administration (the so-called ‘hacking’ of local institutions), in the introduction of new ways of conceiving political participation after a difficult season for social movements, in the constant contamination with other movements, in Naples and beyond. As we have seen, l’asilo pulled off a rare feat, which was praised also outside the Italian context. The community knows this well. This awareness sometimes risks becoming a pronounced distinctive element, hindering the process of constant transformation that constitutes the revolutionary element of this project. Identity, especially when it becomes particularly strong, has the character

of permanence, blocking the flow. However, being solid and self-aware is also an excellent resource for continuing to question the process, always from below.

The gist of the alter-politics embodied by l'asilo can be summed up in three main elements, or, it would be better to say, in three main paradoxes. First, it lies in the ability of its activists to break with traditional politics while maintaining an ironic willingness to adopt traditional political languages, as well, which allow the community to establish a fruitful (and not subordinate) dialogue with local institutions. Secondly, this project can count on the ability of its activists to listen and take their interlocutors seriously even (or especially) when they disagree completely with them. Finally, l'asilo is a project pursued by people who have a high opinion of their own work and their political potential precisely because they constantly face its limits. These ironic paradoxes do not concern only l'asilo, but the entire Neapolitan network of commons movements and the forms of politics from below that have *invaded* the city in recent years.

4.2. Turin



Cavallerizza Reale (courtyard).

4.2.1. Commons in Turin: an introduction

My fieldwork in Turin took place mainly in Cavallerizza, a large occupied building located in the city center, whose community started a dialogue with local institutions for the use of this space. In talking about Cavallerizza I will use the past tense, since this occupied space was evicted, after several attempts, in November 2019.

Ethnographic methods are properly equipped to grasp social processes through which active subjects re-imagine and refashion social relations and structures in new and alternative ways. The ethnographer brings out the tacit logics which underlie specific social practices by interacting closely with the social actors themselves, by observing them directly and by conversing systematically with them in order to lay bare their beliefs, objectives, methods and doubts (Haiven & Khasnabish 2014: 50-55, Escobar 2008). Ethnography therefore aims to go beyond the ‘said’ to reveal the unsaid. All this proves particularly challenging when dealing with subjects who constantly question the processes and relationships in which they are immersed. Researching social movements always means, for the ethnographer, constantly negotiating his/her knowledge with the subjects s/he meets, since they have their own ideas and have developed a normative look at what they are doing.

Ethnography in a community that is experiencing a strong sense of pain and failure -as in the case described in this report- makes everything even more complicated, forcing the researcher to dwell particularly on this aspect, since it becomes a central element in the daily speeches and actions within the community. In the past two-three years, the Cavallerizza community has experienced the difficulties and troubles that grip all social movements when something goes wrong and contradictions, hierarchy, and leadership issues become a central and unavoidable political knot (see Kadir 2016). As the gap between publicly professed values and effective internal relations deepened, the community increasingly lost the ability to look after its inhabitants, who were not prepared to face the consequences of this drift. However, beyond these obstacles and difficulties, their obstinacy has made something happen in Cavallerizza in the past few years. This report is primarily an ethnography of their attempt to make sense of the gap and the drift, and to attain a ‘common good,’ even if many of them were not so clear about what this meant.

My position in the field in Turin was peculiar for at least two reasons. First of all, I have been living in Turin for several years, and over time I had developed a certain idea of Cavallerizza. This idea was also the result of the rumors I had (more or less voluntarily) gathered in the field about this experience. These stories came from different areas of the city, and in particular from friends and acquaintances who had crossed that occupied space as *users* or by carrying out activities within it. Only in a few cases, before the fieldwork, had I relations with Cavallerizza that were not those of a simple user.

The concept of *user* clashes with a movement-experience that intends to break with capitalist economic-commercial concepts. However, I will continue employing this term, since this is how many people who are not part of the Cavallerizza community were perceived and defined by the community. ‘Users’ attend artistic and cultural events organized within Cavallerizza. To break with the logic of demand/supply takes a long time, as well as a community capable of facing the challenge to overturn the hegemonic economic and political paradigms.

My personal vision of Cavallerizza led me soon to perceive this experience as a potentially creative process, but at the same time to doubt about the genuineness of the process itself, as well as about its chances of success. The rumors around the tense and conflicted atmosphere within the space were ongoing and widespread. During some informal chats, the occupants made no secret of their concerns about the project. As a researcher interested in also grasping the problems that the movements of Italian common goods are facing in their path, this conflict interested me as much as the potential of that project.

So, we come to the second aspect that marks my position on the field. As a political anthropologist who has mainly studied political parties and institutions, I attended particularly to the role played by institutional actors in the dialogue between the latter

and the movements for commons. From this point of view, the difficulties, the peculiarities and the complexity of the Cavallerizza project seemed to me even more relevant, especially if read in the light of the relationship between Cavallerizza and the municipal administration of Turin, whose political action and orientation I had known for many years as an inhabitant of this city.

Thus, I focused on the processes of consensus building and on the subjects that take part in it, giving life to power relations that vary according to the economic, social, cultural and political contexts in which they act. The questions from which I started to analyze the Turin case were therefore constructed by crossing the theoretical and cognitive priorities of the *Heteropolitics* project and some of my research priorities; the latter constitute an inevitable filter through which I delved into the dynamics between movements and institutions in Turin.

From an anthropological perspective, the first questions I had to answer can be summarized as follows. Can politics -both in its institutional version and in that proposed by alternative movements- be read through the cultural meaning of the concept of consensus? Which theoretical and cognitive tools do we need to apprehend this consensus? And which spheres (social, cultural, moral, ethical, etc.) of people's lives do they involve? These are decisive nuances, to which I will return to in more detail. The Turin case will be interpreted in the light of an anthropology of ethics and morals, as this has been revisited by Didier Fassin (2009; 2012) and, before him, by James Faubion (2011) and James Laidlow (2014). The moral contexts (in the Gramscian sense) in which the political action of the subjects I met in the field are set, are conditioned by several factors: the role of the institutions and the consensus-building processes adopted by their representatives; the role of law as an instrument for affirming a politics for commons, as well as forms of mediation between institutional and extra-institutional subjects; the relationship between these two poles of political action, i.e. the institutional one and the alternative forms of politics expressed by grassroots movements.

On the basis of this sensibility I investigated the processes of political participation from below, the forms of self-organization, self-government and self-production of cultural and (above all) artistic contents in a self-managed and occupied space, which was trying to converge with the institutions in a shared process for the management of the space itself. Turin (like Naples) was the vantage point from which I looked into a reality that I perceived as problematic. The public question of common goods in Italy is inevitably beset with problems and contradictions with which any study on this subject in this area should engage. The main ones can be summarized in this short list: the crucial and dominant role played by legal actors in the process of the public definition of common goods; the risks associated with the use of the category of the 'common good' as a unifying theme and a rallying point -an empty signifier (see Laclau 1996, *Report 2. The common*: 162); the tendency of local administrations to

appropriate the rhetoric³⁴ of the commons and to show their proximity to the communities they administer; the extraordinary spread of this phrase/locution (common good), which has become a key word used by institutional policy to refer to very varied instances. All this problematic turns out to be particularly interesting in Turin, allowing us to capture the relationships between governments and citizens, as well as the cultural constructions of both forms of political participation from below and top-down electoral support management.

The case study of Turin enables us to grasp the relationships between those who govern and those who support (or oppose) their government. In a word, it discloses the puzzling process of consensus-building around a political and public instance such as that of a ‘common good.’ I decided to focus on the experience of Cavallerizza because it involved a very large number of people and because it was the only one in Turin that explicitly referred to the theme of commons. The subjects involved were very different from each other. We can schematically split them in three main sub-categories. Some of them had a past in associations and they had already several connections with local institutions. Others were part of autonomous and antagonistic social movements and they carried out mostly artistic work into the space. A third category includes very young people who had no political experience behind them, so they were facing the challenges of an occupation and negotiations with institutions for the first time. All these *categories* established a dialogue on the commons and the self-management of a public space with local politicians who were governing the city for the first time.

The curiosity with which I observed the occupation of Cavallerizza in 2014 was mitigated by some worries concerning the historical fragmentation of the different movements of the city, i.e. the difficulty in engaging in a compact way in potentially common struggles, and the isolation of each political collective of the city. Such a fragmentation is clear both from the isolation and the anger that grip some anarchist collectives all over the world (see Apoifis 2017) and from the suffocating leadership and strict indoctrination that characterizes the so-called ‘autonomous movements’ (see Kadir 2016). Although it is an element that we find elsewhere, too, the Turin case seems to offer a telling representation of this fragmentation.

The occupation of the Cavallerizza Reale intended in some way to address all these issues, going beyond the historical rifts within social movements. Nevertheless, from the very first moment, the thousands of square meters of this fascinating and functional space located in the city center had been a ‘land of conquest’ for the already existing movements, whose activists have immediately put forward the first hypotheses to use the space, producing the first frictions and fights within the assembly.

In sum, in the light of the field research, this report brings to the fore three main

³⁴ The concept of rhetoric is used here in the sense Michael Herzfeld (1982) gave to it, or rather as the ability to create things with words.

elements, interconnected with each other, through which we can frame the potential and the problems of an alternative politics for the commons in a large city of Northern Italy, such as Turin.

1) The effects of the relations between the local institutional sphere and the heterogeneous community that occupied and managed Cavallerizza. Through their dialogue, sharing practices and rhetoric but also many splits emerged, raising the question of power relations within the Cavallerizza community and between the latter and official power.

2) The relationship between the composite and heterogeneous community of Cavallerizza and the other urban movements and, therefore, the construction of the identity of a community in relation to the broader dynamics that govern the world of social movements in Turin. This construction takes place ‘by difference,’ producing significant splits and rifts, and it helps us to grasp the narratives about the meaning of the commons and political action in the city.

3) The same rhetoric of the commons appears as a discourse that belongs to specific categories of citizens. Most of the movements that did not join the Cavallerizza community see in the rhetoric of common goods (very widespread in Italy at the institutional level, too) a process of normalization and ‘anaesthetization’ of political conflict. For many of them, the case of Cavallerizza is paradigmatic of the tendency to repress conflict in the name of the need for institutional recognition.

Keeping these three issues in mind, the Turin case is all the more interesting if analyzed in comparison to the other in-depth case study on the Italian context, i.e. the Naples case.

4.2.2. The occupation and the management of a public space in Turin

What is Cavallerizza?

Cavallerizza means ‘riding school.’ The Cavallerizza Reale is part of the Royal Pole of Turin, an architectural complex that was the main residence of the Savoys (later to become the Italian Royal Family) in Turin’s old town. Together with the other buildings of the Royal Pole, this large building was declared World Heritage by UNESCO. It was built as a place for court exercises and shows. This aspect was frequently brought up by some activists of Cavallerizza in order to emphasize the continuity of cultural activities and artistic events which take place within it, so as to give this experience a strong historical foothold of legitimacy.

The building occupied and then managed by the Cavallerizza community is 41 368 square meters large and it is located in a commercial and institutional area, where today there are mostly shops, offices, museums, cinemas, theatres. It is not an only building, but actually a large space consisting of several buildings. Over the years, it was put to very different uses. A part was managed by the Teatro Stabile of Turin until

a few years ago, other floors were houses rented to public employees with subsidized rent, other buildings were assigned to associations, cultural institutions, municipal offices, etc.

According to some architects who have studied this large architectural complex, Cavallerizza should not be thought of as ‘a palace,’ but as ‘a piece of the city in the form of buildings linked according to an orthogonal scheme’ (Brino & Lupo 2018). Cavallerizza’s story has to do with the budgetary problems of a municipality in financial distress. It is the story of an attempt to sell off some public properties to private entities. The art historian Tomaso Montanari sums up the anomaly of this story well, explaining the reasons that led a varied and large community of citizens to occupy the building to prevent its definitive privatization. In his view, since Cavallerizza is ‘a piece of Turin designed and built -between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century- by architects such as Amedeo di Castellammonte, Filippo Juvarra, Benedetto Alfieri, it should be treated just like a piece of the city’ (Montanari 2019).



Cavallerizza Reale (facade of the main building).

I will summarize some events concerning the last few years, so as to provide a brief chronology that will be useful for framing the nature of the occupation by a very heterogeneous community of people. The description is based on the memory and the dynamics that I observed over time, as a resident of Turin attentive to the facts that happened in spaces such as Cavallerizza, as well as on the punctual chronology of

events provided on the Cavallerizza website (Cavallerizza Reale 2019a). In addition to being a useful tool to reconstruct the different steps that have characterized the occupation, in an anthropological perspective the website is also a point from which we can observe the self-representation of the Cavallerizza community. Indeed, it has been produced and shared by the inhabitants, artists and activists, and it allows us to notice which moments this community considers salient in the Cavallerizza self-management path.³⁵

The occupation of the Cavallerizza matured in a precise political-economic context: the growing crisis of local authorities and the choice of many municipalities (Turin is no exception) to remedy the financial collapse by selling some elements of the public patrimony (see Gori & Fissi 2012). This crisis is intertwined with the crisis in the urban real estate market. In this context, in 2009, the municipality of Turin decided to sell some parts of the Cavallerizza Reale complex to a securitization company, of which the municipality itself is the sole shareholder.

At the end of 2013, the Teatro Stabile, a theatrical institution that managed a large area of the Cavallerizza Reale, decided to leave the structure because it was no longer able to pay the rent to the municipality. In May 2014, as we can read on the Cavallerizza website, ‘a group of citizens later called “Assemblea Cavallerizza 14:45” (from the time marked by the clock which had stopped on the façade of the building before it was occupied) reopen[ed] the Cavallerizza Reale, a place now almost unknown to the Turin citizens, so that the citizens [could] know it and enjoy it’ (Cavallerizza Reale 2019a).

This text contains an element which often recurs in the public communication of the Cavallerizza community, as well as in the language used by many activists during public assemblies. It is the tendency to employ the term (and the concept) of ‘citizens’ and ‘citizenship,’ disclosing a legalistic disposition, which relates to the institutional communication of the commons. At a time when citizenship is a status acquired only for some of the people who live in European cities, this language obviously means that this aspect has not been sufficiently discussed by the community.

During the first months, after the space was occupied and reopened, crowded assemblies were held. These meetings were attended by people already active in

³⁵ As we will see, the Cavallerizza community has always been quite heterogeneous and divided into several components. The website is the mirror of this internal division. Hence, some pages have been managed by those who have assumed the task of communicating and disseminating the process of self-government. Other pages were created and managed by the artists of the community to promote the events and the projects that concerned them. If, in some periods, all the choices regarding the website were shared with the whole community during assemblies and meetings, in the most difficult and conflicting phases the assembly ceased to be the place for sharing and decision-making, and many decisions (including those relating to communicate with the outside world) were assumed almost autonomously by sub-groups within the community. Taking this aspect into account allows us to better frame the processes of memory-building by the heterogeneous Cavallerizza community.

associations and in other experiences of self-management in the city. Among these, we can identify some relevant groups: a) those coming from autonomous occupied social centers (CSOAs), b) those belonging to the world of associations, c) those devoted to recovering and safeguarding Cavallerizza as an architectural asset, d) representatives of local institutions (municipal councillors, district councillors, etc.).

The first public assembly was held on 1 July 2014 in the Cavallerizza courtyard. It focused on the need to prevent a future of degradation for this large public space. Right from the start, the management of the place was in the hands of groups of people who had nothing to do with the municipality of Turin. The former local administrators (belonging to center-left administration) remained external to the process and they always judged Cavallerizza's experience as an illegal occupation, but also as a process that challenged some useful projects of the City government that would make profit from that space.

'Theatre, music, artistic installations, performances, visual art' are the activities quickly listed on the Cavallerizza website, in the section where the first phase of occupation is narrated. From that moment on, festivals and artistic and cultural initiatives of various kinds will follow. Some of these events had a great public success: a series of installations by artists known also at an international level, a Forum of cultural practices from below, etc. In May 2016, the Cavallerizza project will be officially born, as officially as an initiative in an occupied space can be. The website describes this event as 'a moment of active participation modelled on the horizontal organization of Cavallerizza.' It is precisely at this stage that the first edition of 'Here,' a contemporary art exhibition, was held. It was then repeated every year, till the fourth edition (2019). 'Here,' as well as other initiatives of this kind, reached a very wide audience and, in some editions, they hosted over 10.000 visitors.

Over time, the various and heterogeneous communities that have managed Cavallerizza have worked to make certain parts of the space accessible. The most important works concerned the floors in which the various rooms are located, which hosted workshops, meetings and studios led by artists who requested 'artistic residences' by addressing the Cavallerizza assembly.

The institutional building of a common good

In terms of institutions, over the years there have been a series of events concerning the status of ownership in some areas of the Cavallerizza complex and the intended use of the space by the municipality. In February 2015, the administration proposed that Cavallerizza become a Hostel - 'Hostel de Charme' - whose management would be contracted out to large hotel chains, and that 'the residual spaces (one third of the total, which would represent more than 5.000 square meters) host commercial establishments' (Cavallerizza Reale 2019b). However, Cavallerizza was not removed from the securitization program, and its sale was not suspended. The association founded by some occupants, 'Assemblea Cavallerizza 14:45,' decided to report to

UNESCO ‘the danger of possible speculative use of Cavallerizza, asking at the same time for the annulment of the provision authorizing, for this place, hotels, university residences, shopping centers and parking lots’ (Cavallerizza Reale 2019b). UNESCO asked for clarifications in this regard, addressing the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism and the municipality of Turin. The last letter sent by the UNESCO to the municipality clearly explains that the plan presented by the Turin administration seems to be focused on profit rather than the enhancement of public heritage.

It seems, therefore, that there is a significant divergence between what the public administration claims to want to achieve through the Master Plan, in terms of public access and involvement, and what is established in the Master Plan, which seems to suggest that access will be strongly constrained, and that the Plan is mainly oriented towards the financial enhancement of the property through a privatization of the spaces rather than a valorization aimed at understanding its meaning and its (social and cultural) value for the city (see Brini & Lupo 2018; my translation).

In March 2016, some people of the Cavallerizza 14:45 Assembly founded the ‘Salviamo Cavallerizza’ Association, which will be supported only by a part of the Cavallerizza community. A month later, one day after the works were closed, the municipal administration presented a ‘master plan’ which included an investment of 100 000 000 euros and would be completed in 25 years.

During the first two years of the occupation there was a clear contrast between the various communities staying in Cavallerizza and the center-left municipal administration. At that time, in fact, the projects for Cavallerizza that had been proposed by the municipality did not converge with the demands of the movement that was taking shape inside the space, which was inspired -in varied and not always clear forms- by the commons and principles of self-government.

Located in the center of the city, Cavallerizza has two large entrances from two different streets. It is therefore also a transient place, from whose large internal courtyard many people pass while strolling in the city center. Its large gardens, too, are often visited by tourists and people who frequent that area of the city. The occupation of the space has allowed the inhabitants of the city to visit and use this large building.

The community built its own rhetoric of hospitality on the basis of this opening. This theme emerged in several interviews, in which members of the community talked about the Cavallerizza as a way station, explicitly pointing to its two entrances and exits as a good metaphor for the social reality within this space. According to Veronica, for example, ‘Cavallerizza is a place in constant flux, in which priorities and rules (albeit unofficial) are constantly changing.’ At the same time, the interviewees described Cavallerizza as ‘a very closed space, from which you can’t get out easily. You get caught up in it.’ So many people, after having spent a lot of time there, can no longer imagine themselves outside that space. According to many interviewees,

Cavallerizza was ‘a good shelter’:

you stay there because it is a place where you can live even without working, because you always find food, after all; you don't have to pay rent rent...In this sense, getting out of Cavallerizza becomes difficult especially for individuals who have these needs (Veronica 2018).

Not all the areas of the Cavallerizza were used by the community. At the time of the occupation, only the buildings owned by the municipality were made accessible and were used. The community had at its disposal a large number of spaces that allowed it to carry out a series of activities. The huge former stables were used for large assemblies, for theatre and dance performances. Another small theatre with audiences and a stage were also used for shows. Part of the building was used for film screenings. The large outdoor courtyards and a large indoor area were used for music and dancing evenings. Two entire floors of hundreds of square meters were divided into rooms, which have become studios for artists and exhibition spaces for the major events that I will discuss in the course of this report. Finally, two wings of the building served residential purposes. In one of them some artists lived, while in the other lived a series of people who ‘just’ needed a place to live. This subdivision, to which I will return later, ideally represents certain fault lines within the community.



Cavallerizza Wednesday assembly.

4.2.3. From the center-left hegemony to the 5 Star Movement

The political and economic context

The political and institutional history of Turin in recent decades has been characterized by the center-left parties' hegemony. Having governed the city since 1993, the center-left coalition affirmed its political and social hegemony even at the turn of the millennium (Belligni, Ravazzi, Salerno 2008). Before the current legislature, the Democratic Party (PD) had obtained a majority in the municipal council for three consecutive terms. The two mayors elected by PD for these three mandates were both leading figures. Sergio Chiamparino served as mayor for two terms, and he then became president of the Compagnia di San Paolo (the main Italian banking foundation, based in Turin) and President of the Piedmont region. Piero Fassino, who succeeded Chiamparino, has been for decades one of the most influential members of the national secretariat of the PD, since the days of the Communist Party.

Turin is located in a territory which is marked by a strong liberation struggle against Nazism-fascism and is deeply attached to its anti-fascist memory in general. It has also been one of the major industrial cities of Italy since the economic boom of the 1960s. Given these historical conditions, in the Republican period (from 1946 onwards), the electoral majority has always been linked to the workers' struggle and demands, relying also on strong unions, especially the leftist ones, and on migrant workers' associations from Southern Italy, which were politically active and able to connect the experience of migration with factory labour (Spriano 1972). On this basis, even the post-Fordist period of the city was hegemonized mainly by a political subculture linked to the values of the left,³⁶ through the long experience of Diego Novelli's local government, the mayor of the 'red' City council supported by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) between the 1970s and the 1980s (Ruggiero 2018).

After the Tangentopoli³⁷ season and the transition from the PCI to the PDS (Democratic Left Party),³⁸ the center-left has become the point of reference for the

³⁶ The concept of 'political subculture' is used here in line with its theoretical elaboration by Bagnasco & Trigilia (1984) in the field of Italian sociology. In an anthropological perspective, such subcultures are *de facto* social, political and economic configurations, that is, real political hegemonies on a given territory. Therefore, they must be interpreted in light of their construction by the dominant political classes, that is, the discourses and narratives that supported the policies carried out by the center-left parties in Turin, as well as elsewhere (see Solinas 1998, Dei & Vesco 2017).

³⁷ 'Tangentopoli' (from 'tangente,' i.e. 'kickback') is a term coined by the Italian media in the 1990s to designate a series of judicial investigations that revealed a corrupt system involving Italian politics and business. Since the main governing parties were implicated in the scandal, this marked the end of the so-called first Republic.

³⁸ This is the well-known 'Bolognina turn,' announced by the then secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Achille Occhetto, in a section of the PCI in the Bolognina district of Bologna.

local elites, or rather for the economic interests of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie of the city (of FIAT, above all). Since 1993, the alliance between the center-left and local business sectors has become institutionalized. The mayor Valentino Castellani will be the guarantor of this alliance, after the long period of local government led by his predecessor Novelli (Ruggiero 2018, Belligni, Ravazzi, Salerno 2008). From that moment on, a local power system took shape. It has been laid out in detail by journalists and activists who wrote investigations into this urban power system. 'Sistema Torino' is a book by journalist Maurizio Pagliassotti (2014) and also the title of a quite successful theatrical performance. The protagonists of this system of power are those political and economic groups that control specific resources through which they acquire political power and material advantages, equipping themselves with material and social resources to govern (Pina-Cabral 2000). This interpretation of the power system of the local center-left emerged during an interview with Guido Montanari, urban architect and professor at the Polytechnic University of Turin, who has been appointed vice-mayor of Turin by the current mayor of the 5 Star Movement, Chiara Appendino. According to Montanari,

Once again, as a national laboratory, Turin has experimented with an extremely neoliberal policy, carried out by the so-called left: this is the starting point. This theme has never been studied in depth, because the continuity of this dynamic is so dense, so thick that, in my opinion, it has involved all sectors of society, from university to work, from trade unions to anything. The 'earthquake' of a year and a half ago [the election of a mayor of the 5 Star Movement] was an earthquake whose scope has not been grasped even by us, who are inside. The incredible transformation of the Communist Party was deep and broad: from a party that, for better or for worse, was connected with the interests of workers, to a party that has become the party of banks, large industry and the leaders of the third sector (Montanari 2018).

Of course, we must take into account the fact that the vice-mayor speaks from his own perspective about a political reality to which his party (the 5 Star Movement) is clearly opposed, but this is a ruling class that he knows for a long time also as an inhabitant of the city and a politically active Marxist intellectual. Classical anthropological texts (Cohen 1981, Marcus 1983) have explained that the subjects of which Montanari speaks are those who hold the 'means of orientation' (Elias 1978). They are actors whose ideas and interests are substantially hegemonic in the social space in which they move and act (Shore 2002: 4). In the case of Turin, it is a small number of people, an 'urban coalition' that has oriented the new public narrative of the city (Belligni-Ravazzi 2012). The conversion from an industrial city to a cultural city was in fact accompanied by a strong public communication campaign, aimed at changing the image of Turin -the significant increase of the presence of tourists in the city is an indicator of the effectiveness of this narrative.

The political cycle that has come to an end is based on a series of continuities: urban,

social and cultural. Between 1993 and 2016,

the twentieth-century factory town was overturned through a very important series of interventions that brought the old city center ‘to the center’ of government action. Transforming Turin into a tertiary and tourist, student and cosmopolitan city meant substantially reversing the rhythms and the uses of the spaces made up until the 1980s (Capello & Semi 2018: 19; cf. also Semi 2015).

However, as the authors themselves notice, the shift from a Fordist and industrial economy (and society) to a post-industrial one -which had already begun in the 1980s and the 1990s following the crisis of the large industry (see Bagnasco 1986; 1990)- has not been fully accomplished yet. It is to this liminal condition of the economy that politics has tried to respond in recent decades, seeking to turn the loss of the industry into an opportunity for renewal (Capello 2018, Belligni & Ravazzi 2012).

Besides, the point is that the liminal condition of Turin, with its ethos of uncertainty, is not properly an expression of the expectation of a possible passage, it is the structural condition of post-Fordist neoliberalism (Spyridakis 2013).

Since a change, albeit slow, has actually taken place, Turin has become something else. Not on a strictly productive level, because the post-industrial transition is still ongoing, but on a political-economic level, because neoliberalism is now predominant (Capello 2018: 48).

Until 2016, while the governments of the center-left were in charge, the new political choices in the management of the local economy were backed up with powerful narratives -supported by the local ruling classes themselves- which presented this transformation of the city as if it had already occurred, emphasizing the creative use of spaces and the virtuous conversion of the city into a ‘cultural center of excellence.’

The political and economic dynamics informing Turin are inscribed in the more general trend towards the privatization of urban areas through processes of gentrification. It may be useful, in this regard, to recall once again my conversation with Guido Montanari (2018):

So, the current city, through its urban transformations and its new urban layout, returns as a faithful mirror the political transformation that has taken place. We saw it in Thatcher’s London, in Reagan’s Detroit, and we’ll see it again in other places. So, this mathematical and symmetrical correspondence between political and urban transformation in Turin was extraordinary. I no longer work as a historian of architecture, but I would like very much to approach these issues and to see how the city has been a mirror of the political transformation underway, at the head of the private sector.

Here I don’t want to be perceived as the usual extremist Marxist, because in fact

there were also understandable reasons. Turin, at the end of the 1980s lived the end of Fiat, and this is not a joke, we are talking about 120 000 workers who no longer existed. Now there are 20 000, but then there were 150 000, in a city of 1 million inhabitants... a family out of three! This is crazy!

The power system that governed the city is not the main focus of this report. However, it was useful to sum up its features because it is precisely in contrast with these tendencies and this system of power that -at least in its public propaganda- the new administration has built its own profile. The dialogue between the new local rulers and the experience of Cavallerizza is based precisely on their convergence in opposing the previous system of power and management of public spaces. But there is more: the same movements that are inspired by the rhetoric of the common goods in Turin and that promote commoning practices can be considered a response to the local power system that preceded the current phase of city government. We could say that the process of reconverting Turin from an industrial city to a cultural and smart one (Vanolo 2014) is the background and the counterpoint of commoning experiences.

As I will try to show in the sections devoted to the political identities of the subjects active in Cavallerizza, the moral contexts in which they act have been also constructed in opposition to a dominant narrative and in connection with an idea of progress deeply anchored in the capitalist model of development. It is relatively anomalous that this idea has developed within a center-left political culture. In fact, public propaganda and recent policies (local and national) of the Democratic Party go in this direction in other areas of the country, as well.

The last Turin administrative elections (2016) marked a change, or perhaps a momentary interruption. They were won by the 5 Star Movement (M5S) and by the mayor Chiara Appendino. The new coalition swayed above all in the outskirts of the city (see Cepernich & Vignati 2016), while the city center and the districts of the Turin bourgeoisie have confirmed their unconditional support to the previous administration -and to the system of power that underpinned it.

Chiara Appendino's victory was unexpected. The center-left coalition was considered difficult to beat by the major observers of Turin's politics. This success came after the expansion of the 5 Star Movement nationwide. It was a result in line with the general trend of this party, which has achieved excellent results also in local elections. Although in recent years it has managed to obtain electoral successes even at the national and the European level, the party has in fact retained local roots, supported by the image of the party that was born on the street at the initiative of ordinary citizens (see Biorcio & Sampurnaro 2019).

As noted by Berta (2016), perhaps a part of the city (which, like other Italian cities, has been heavily hit by the economic crisis and has a high rate of youth unemployment) failed to identify with this narrative of change, and so decided to vote for the promise of political renewal. Indeed, the two main election

contenders, Fassino and Appendino, symbolized perfectly continuity and change, respectively. While Fassino relied on his experience as a public administrator and politician, Appendino pledged a radical discontinuity with respect to the previous administrations and more generally with respect to the Sistema Torino, understood to constitute a consolidated network of power and interests. Moreover, Appendino focused on the inequalities that affected the city, and in particular on the existence of ‘two cities:’ the center (the main locus of the narrative of change and the setting for the cultural events that symbolized it) and the disadvantaged suburbs, characterized by poverty and negligence. Her slogan, ‘L’alternativa è Chiara,’³⁹ summarized well her promises (Biancalana 2019: 69).

Before addressing in greater detail the relationship between the new administration and the community of commoners that managed Cavallerizza, a clarification is in order. The 5 Star Movement is a rather young political party and quite diverse internally. It was officially founded in 2009 and obtained the first electoral successes at the national level starting in 2012. Without getting into the details of its history and its different local variations, it is sufficient here to point out that, although even in Turin the party is very heterogeneous and cannot be traced back to the classic distinctions between left and right, many Turinese actors are considered part of the left wing of the party and are linked to struggles and political issues close to radical social movements -one such movement, among all, was the protest against the construction of the TAV, the high-speed train in Val di Susa, a project championed by the Democratic Party.

The new administration and the commons

The new political turn was in apparent discontinuity with the development policy carried out by the center-left. The new administration seemed to provide a breath of fresh air for the movements that had hitherto opposed the policy of the center-left. It is in this context that the struggle for the affirmation of the commons in Turin is situated. The new administration was elected precisely at the same time as the City Council ratified the Regulation on Urban Commons (Co-City 2017). Turin is therefore one of the almost two hundred cities that have endorsed such a regulation (see the Introduction to case studies in Italy). As in many other cities, the Regulation has not been effectively applied. However, within this new formal and institutional framework that recognizes the commons, some projects have developed, very different from that of Cavallerizza. For example, the Co-City project and the experience of the so-called Michelotti Park. The first is a substantially institutional project, with a strong focus also on the legal dimension. It is an EU initiative about sustainable urban development for which Turin (together with Milan, Bologna and Pozzuoli) was granted funding to implement a project, ‘creating thus a replicable model in other urban areas.’ As described in the website of the project, it

is intended to break the self-reinforcing circle of poverty, social segregation in

³⁹ ‘The Alternative is Clear.’ The slogan uses the mayor’s proper name, Chiara, which means ‘clear.’

deprived neighborhoods and lack of participation. It achieves this by supporting the development of an innovative, polycentric ‘commons-based urban welfare’ composed of generative communities centered on urban commons, low-cost service co-production, social mixing, and care of public spaces. Co-City is innovative in its legal, managerial and technological aspects, providing:

- an unconventional legal framework to enable citizens to take care of urban commons;

- an innovative ICT infrastructure for local social market and networking;

- management tutoring towards economic sustainability.

The authoritative approach is replaced by a collaborative one that considers citizens as potential changemakers, agents of virtuous circular processes of commoners’ welfare. Meanwhile, the public sector evolves from being a service provider to being an enabler and a partner (Co-City 2017).

Regarding the participatory management process of the Michelotti Park, it was born in forms quite similar to the experience of Cavallerizza. This is an area where a large Municipal Zoo was located. The latter has been neglected for several decades, and for a long time the area has been abandoned due to the failure of the formula of direct concession to associations that was followed by past municipal administrations. As in Cavallerizza in 2014, in this case, too, in 2018, a citizens’ committee was set up to recover this area and to start its participatory management, preventing thus the sale to private companies. In this case, the collaboration between the committee and the municipal administration was less problematic than in the case of Cavallerizza. It may be useful to report the words of the municipal councillor of the M5S who coordinated the project so as to highlight the rhetoric of common goods adopted by the municipal administration:

The return to the city of the Michelotti park is the result of a neither short, nor easy, yet exciting path, which has allowed all citizens interested in the fate of the ex-zoo to participate in decisions and to contribute ideas, suggestions, as well as to actively participate in the redevelopment work. I am satisfied with the results obtained so far and I am relaunching it, sharing the enthusiasm of all those who have done their part: let’s continue together on this road to complete the recovery of Michelotti Park. This path will be an example for the future and will represent a participatory model of virtuous intervention to be applied in similar contexts (Press Office Turin Municipal Administration 2019).

The mobilization for the Michelotti Park was also joined by some Cavallerizza activists, in particular by those whom I call ‘politicians’ (see the next sections), since this process -and this method of interaction with the administration- closely resembles what a part of the Cavalerizza community would have liked to undertake for the latter.

Neither of the two projects I mentioned has given rise to an active community oriented towards a common goal, as it happened in the case of Cavallerizza. The Co-City project has a strong institutional connotation. Therefore, the participation of citizens conforms to the choices made in the institutional setting. The Michelotti Park Committee had a single objective, it did not have a seat and did not propose to pursue a wider process beyond safeguarding and protecting this urban area. These are two cases in which some citizens took part, but they have not generated real forms of self-management and self-government, or at least attempts in this direction, as in the case Cavallerizza. In these contexts, the concept of the commons has been understood in more institutional forms, that is, as a project entirely guided by institutions, with the support of a community of stakeholders (associations, businesses, individual citizens).

Cavallerizza's experience is part of this framework, but it also appears to be a very different case. The heterogeneous movement that managed Cavallerizza saw in the new political course a possible ally to replicate models that had proved successful elsewhere. The winning election campaign for the new mayor had been cleverly based on her image, as she embodied this shift (Biancalana 2019: 68). Her figure was a point of reference for the Cavallerizza movement. In the same way, Cavallerizza was for the new administration one of the symbols of proximity to movements, art, precariousness. It stood for the new government's willingness to protect public assets from sale to private capital, as the old administration was doing. Both mayor Appendino and vice-mayor Montanari, as well as other members of the new council, have established a very personal relationship with the community of Cavallerizza, closely following the different phases of the occupation. At least until 2018, when internal conflicts in the community made it increasingly difficult to imagine a concrete realization of civic use and, therefore, the endorsement of an urban regulation for common goods. However, these conflicts are also the result of the attitude displayed by the administration in recent years towards Cavallerizza and its fate. Many militants, during our interviews, showed that they did not trust much the promises made by the administration. Alliances with councillors were fragile and agreements seemed to change constantly. During the fieldwork I was able to see this constant change, to the point that I was struggling like my Cavallerizza informants to identify who, among the new administrators, could be considered a true ally of that path and of the political process underway.

It is, therefore, in this political context that the experience of Cavallerizza came into play. The journey they were making could never coexist with the previous administration. Like the activists of the Neapolitan social movements, the Cavallerizza community tried to exploit the gap opened by the election of a new municipal administration. The social movements of Naples had likewise seized the opportunity offered by the new mayor, Luigi De Magistris. And in Naples, as well, this opportunity came after decades of center-left hegemony, when a dialogue between social movements and institutions was not possible at all. Nevertheless, these two

experiences are also the outcome of a more general process: the crisis of social movements born in the late 1990s, the intensification of institutional repression and capitalistic hegemony and the need to seek a dialogue with institutions in open ways. 'This is not the time to push for immediate results through our political action,' an activist from Naples once told me, 'now we must be open to all proposals that allow us to go forward and rethink militancy' (Augusto 2018).

Following the occupation, the Cavallerizza experience entered a second phase by initiating an interaction with the new administration. The deployment of the political-theoretical frame of the commons would not have been possible for this community, if there had not been an administration available to support, at least formally, this rhetoric.

The local institutional policy for the commons is not important because of its concrete effects and for the results obtained over time -as we will see, the process of transforming Cavallerizza into a commons has been interrupted and we actually do not know if it will be completed. The political acts of the local government are important because they reveal the rhetoric and the moral connotations of the concept of the common good in the Turin context, as well as its potential and its effectiveness in public debate. The rhetoric of the new administration can be interpreted in the light of Didier Fassin's (2009; 2012) attempt to set forth a critical moral anthropology. As stated in the introduction to his main work on these topics:

The presence of a moral vocabulary in political discourses is definitely not new and one could even argue that politics, especially in democracies, has always included moral arguments about good government and public good, fairness and trust, as well as moral condemnations of all sorts of evils...The study of the production, circulation, and appropriation of norms and values, sensibilities, and emotions in contemporary societies -what one can designate as their moral economies (Fassin 2009)- is all the more important for a moral anthropology since it concerns what we most easily take for granted, sometimes even viewing it in terms of moral progress (Fassin 2012: 10).

The discourse around the commons promoted by the new local government can be read, thus, in the light of the moral vocabulary of institutions and its performative effects. Such a rhetoric, articulated in different forms, concerns many of the Italian commoning experiences that surged forth in recent years.

As in the case of Naples, the new municipal administration of Turin represented a crossing, which made it possible for social movements of the commons to imagine different forms of dialogue with local institutions. However, I dwelled so much on the government of the 5 Star Movement also because on some key issues it evinces elements of continuity with the Cavallerizza community. As I will try to show in the next sections, this continuity concerns the conception of norms and rules, as well as the way they are enacted in the management and the governance of political processes.

4.2.4. From CSOAs to commons: social movements and institutions in Turin

From the very first moment, the occupation of Cavallerizza appeared different from the other occupations in Turin, due to several factors: the heterogeneous groups of people who launched the occupation, the proclaimed intentions, and the conceptions of political struggle that animated this new community. However, the main differences between the political and the artistic path of Cavallerizza and other movements of the city bear precisely on the forms of interaction with local institutions, as well as the rhetoric mobilized both at the institutional level and by the heterogeneous community that occupied the space.

In the introduction to the Italian case studies I mentioned the role played in the last decades by the Occupied and Self-managed Social centers (CSOAs) in Italy (see Dines 2000, Koensler & Rossi 2012). In addition to being points of reference for the aggregation and socialization of different generations of militants, the Turin CSOAs are places where cultural and political experimentation takes place: ‘a space for incubating new languages and new forms of communication’ (Berzano & Gallini 2000: 35). As stated in the final motion of a conference organized at the CSOA Askatasuna of Turin in April 2000, the purpose of the CSOAs is not to try to obtain recognition from the local or national authorities, but to ‘build roots in the territories and social strata with which it is possible to develop opposition and antagonism: immigrants, students, young people, temporary workers, workers’ (Berzano & Gallini 2000). This is an attempt to build a counter-hegemony by involving portions of the surrounding society.

Two researchers who have studied the Turin CSOAs for a long time described their nature as follows:

The radicalism and the antagonism that marks the CSOAs in Turin, and the conflict that they arouse, are indicative of their political dimension...The different realities we have observed are generally divided into two areas - libertarian and anarchist, on the one hand; neo-communist and autonomous, on the other- in relation to the cultural references that characterize the identity of a social center or occupied building. This division is purely descriptive, aimed at simplifying a reality which is more complex and nuanced than it appears at first sight. In fact, within each of these options there are differences that are reflected in the way in which they position themselves towards politics and society and in the way of communicating and expressing their dissent and their cultural, social and political criticism. The differences between the groups can be traced back to the ideologies and the cultural traditions of communism and anarchy which, after the period of protests in the Sixties and Seventies, subsequently permeated in various ways, in the Eighties and Nineties, the styles of youth subcultures. Underground culture, music and, ultimately, information technology today contribute to giving a form and an external appearance to a practice that is often more political than aesthetic and cultural. In Turin, in particular, the CSOA

component has been formed and develops setting out from its contamination with Punk culture and from the encounter with anarchist culture (Berzano & Gallini 2000: 21).

The Turin CSOAs have been made up of communities that have chosen to establish and maintain, albeit with some difficulty, a relationship with the neighborhoods in which they are located. Not all of them fully succeed in doing so. The collectives that have succeeded have been longer-lived and durable, less exposed to evictions and repression by the institutions and the police, since their role was recognized and shared with the population living in their areas.

An important feature of the Turin social movement scene concerns its fragmentation. The dialogue between them is difficult and often conflicting. From this point of view, the Turin case clearly differs from the Naples case, where a network of the city's social movements was set up in the last decade (see the Naples report in the foregoing). In the case of Naples, I talked about the widespread tendency to listening to other collective instances even when there was no agreement, and the ability demonstrated by almost all Neapolitan collectives to never completely stop communicating with other movements of the city. In Turin we are faced with a completely different reality. Here, strong forms of belonging prevent the militants of the various movements from opening up to a conversation with the outside world. This dimension was disclosed by many of the respondents during the interviews I carried out in the fieldwork. Take, for example, the words of Geremia (2018), an activist of Cavallerizza whose profile I will present in more detail later in this report:

when I go around and visit the political spaces of Turin, which are very exclusive realities...I mean...there are many social groups that are very closed, they always hang out with the same people for all their life...there is no interaction, except to do urban guerrilla warfare. Many have become accustomed to belonging to a group and they remain stuck there, and also defend it senselessly from possible foreign attacks. So, absurdly, if I go to a social center, I am seen as a plainclothes cop; if I go to the cops, I am the one from the social centers; if I go to the communist association, I am a fascist...because I am not part of that group, then automatically it triggers that mechanism of suspicion...

This brief account of the Turin CSOAs tells us nothing new about the characteristics of the occupied social centers in other European cities. However, I wanted to briefly describe their relationship with institutions and society because a project like Cavallerizza -as well as other experiences that refer to common goods- was conceived, at least at the beginning, in opposition to this model. Many of the people who live or work in Cavallerizza do not have any experience of militancy in CSOAs behind them. They look suspiciously at the old forms of militancy that marks the CSOAs, and before getting involved in the Cavallerizza project they wanted to make sure that it was something different. Quoting one of them (Leila 2017), we could say that

Cavallerizza interested them ‘precisely because it was not a classic social center.’

Hence, many of the Cavallerizza activists do not perceive themselves as ‘militants’ in the strict sense, because they associate this term with other forms of political participation: ‘closed contexts, in which there is an indoctrination and very precise hierarchies’ (Gaspere 2018). An interesting case is, for example, that of Marzia, whom I interviewed for this research. Marzia is a restorer who found much inspiration for her work in an old abandoned building like Cavallerizza. At the time of the interview she had been attending Cavallerizza for about a year. Her look, elegant and refined, is very far from those that we generally associate with the militants of a social center. In addition, she arrives every day at Cavallerizza from her home in an affluent neighborhood of the city, which is inhabited by the middle class, aboard her brand new red Fiat 500.

Marzia: Here I see a great potential, a potential that goes beyond the building...I mean, I really see a potential for the city, for the redevelopment of individuals who...I don’t know, I feel a strong empathy towards the people around me, so for me it is a satisfaction to meet people who open up and if I had met them on the street I would never have stopped to exchange a few words...

Antonio: Is Cavallerizza different from other occupied spaces in Turin? You already told me that here they are different from a political point of view, that there is less indoctrination...

M: Less indoctrination, yes! It is not that they request from you the CV of your experience as a good militant, you are not even indoctrinated...You know, elsewhere if you don’t read those three sacred books you can’t be a part of the community!

A: Have you ever been part of some occupied spaces? Were you used to participating in their activities?

M: It was something I had never considered, even though I knew that inside there is an interesting cultural life, but I’ve never felt close to such realities. Here I found a very strong community of artists, and it convinced me to try, but without asking me questions about my militancy, about occupations...(Marzia 2018).

Lorenzo’s case is different from that of Marzia. Lorenzo is much older, he is a musician, he has played in many places in Turin during the last decades and he knows better the dynamics of social centers. He has visited them many times in the past and now he gives us an idyllic representation, comparing ideal places that he locates in an idealized past with the current social centers, which would have lost the ability to welcome:

in the past there were places well rooted in the neighborhoods where anyone

(anyone!) who came in was welcomed, as long as he was poor and had nothing to sustain himself and was welcomed and was not asked ‘are you part of this or that social center.’ Now, in some movements...for example, if you are from the Aska [Askatasuna, a social center in Turin] you can’t be something else....‘you are either with us or against us: you cannot work both with us and with the others, because we don’t want to have anything to do with them.’ Good politics must create better models than previous ones. Here is the challenge. Cavallerizza is a huge social laboratory that, precisely because it is not harnessed by dynamics of pure ideological nature, can express all the contradictions of the human being. This generates a great difficulty in governing it, but many here have the presumption that they know how to govern it...and I had this objective myself when I entered. Instead, now, after 8 months in here, I realized that you can’t govern it, you can’t somehow decide how this path should develop... (Lorenzo 2018).

Cavallerizza’s project, like many other Italian movements for commons, began also with an occupation of a public space, contrasting thus with the legal and institutional approach. Among the various communities that animate this space, one in particular has been close to the new administration. These people have been very critical of the choices made by the new mayor and municipal councillors who have closely followed the Cavallerizza affair. However, they have appeared completely in line with the institutions’ point of view on several occasions, affirming their role as subjects that solicit urban political power, affecting institutions from within.

However, contrast and conflict are not the central elements of these experiences. In many cases, and Turin is no exception, such gestures usher ultimately in a non-conflictual dialogue with local administrations. This is the case in different Italian cities and in very different spaces: Naples, Milan, Rome, Bologna, etc. The Turin case is peculiar because of the political context that I laid out in the previous section, and also because many of the people active in Cavallerizza were quite close -albeit critically and mainly just as voters- to the new 5 Star Movement administration.

So, what is a ‘common good’ for those who have worked and lived in Cavallerizza? Geremia (2018) explained to me the difficulty, recalled also by others, of applying the principles of commoning to Cavallerizza:

I have always thought that it was difficult to turn Cavallerizza into a ‘common good,’ because I was terrified at finding myself for the umpteenth time with such human and anthropological dynamics, which I had seen in other places...

The role of those who already had a long experience in the field of common goods in Turin proved to be important, since these subjects were mediators between the Cavallerizza community and the municipal administration. An institutional figure such as the jurist Ugo Mattei -professor of constitutional law at the University of Turin, former vice-mayor of the Municipality of Chieri, where a regulation for common

goods had been endorsed, former director of the Acquedotto Bene Comune in Naples, etc.- kept these two poles together, ensuring thus the success of the process. He was the privileged interlocutor of the institutions, by virtue of his knowledge on this topic, but also thanks to his status and his authoritative profile. As we will see, in Turin, too, the role of law and jurists has greatly influenced the formation of common goods, driving the process of drafting the Civic Use Regulation.

4.2.5. People of Cavallerizza

Two, three, n sub-communities

The social composition of the community that *crosses* Cavallerizza is rather heterogeneous. The use of the verb ‘to cross’ is not accidental: it is an emic term, through which different movements for common goods in Italy highlight their political approach to the use of the space. The community takes care of the space -the expression ‘taking care of the place’ also returns in the case study of Naples and l’asilo- and makes it crossable. The community takes thus responsibility for the condition of this public building.

By renouncing a clear distinction between the ‘managers’ and the ‘users’ of a space, they underscore their own non-proprietary attitude through language, as well. For this reason, they are very careful to value the work undertaken to make the place accessible and open. This is why the old banner that was placed inside the courtyard – ‘Cavallerizza è di tutti’ (Cavallerizza belongs to everyone)- was then replaced by another one: ‘Cavallerizza è per tutti’ (Cavallerizza is for everyone).

Cavallerizza Reale (one of the two entrances)



‘Crossing’ is also a term that conveys the fluidity of the situation in Cavallerizza. It is true that some people and some groups have continuously participated in all the phases of the self-management and the self-government of this space, but most of those who cross it have changed over time. This has occurred not only because of the strong conflict that took place within Cavallerizza, but also because of the political nature of this place. Only some people perceived it as a place to take care of, while for many the adhesion to the project is bland and weak, also because of the location of the space: an area of the city center that does not allow forms of identification with the urban district in which the space is located.

The social composition of the large community that managed Cavallerizza is quite heterogeneous. An only specific social group or class cannot be identified within it. We could say that urban society is represented within this building on a reduced scale. A part of the community was made up of subjects who have found in Cavallerizza also a place where to sleep and live, since they did not have an income, or they work in odd jobs. Others were public workers, while another group were students or worked precariously in the field of art and culture. In addition, the community consisted of activists of all ages, belonging to different generations. At the same time, it cannot be said that within the community of Cavallerizza a specific category of militants was predominant.

Literature and philosophy scholars, graphic designers, communicators, visual artists, musicians, restorers, video-makers, theatrical and cinematographic authors and actors, jugglers and performers of various kinds, architects, lawyers, researchers from different disciplines, former bricklayers and craftsmen: these are just some of the professional and artistic profiles that I have noticed in my notebook during the months spent in the field. These profiles are (schematically) summed up by the different groups established by the assembly to manage the specific types of activities that took place within the space: Musical Arts, Literary Pole, Communication, Visual Arts, Psychophysical Arts, Giocolerizza, Performing Arts, Popular cuisine, Makers, Agora. As we can see from this list, the political moment was represented in only one of these groups -Agora- and it concerned the whole community (at least on paper).

In some phases, communication between these groups was very effective. The coordinators of each of them reported to the general assembly not only on their own activities and projects, but also on the problems within the group. The practice of self-government is also based on sharing these aspects. In other phases, communication lost its effectiveness, especially when the assembly lost its centrality for the community (see the following section). In general, the existence of these groups is precarious, and their composition and management are subject to continuous changes. As we will see, the split between the two main components of the community that took care of the space has diminished the importance of these groups and the effectiveness of the internal coordination between the different activities carried out in Cavallerizza.

The heterogeneity of the community is also reflected in the subdivision of the interior spaces, especially those in which the people who lived in Cavallerizza used to sleep. Only a few people (between 20 and 30) lived and slept in Cavallerizza. Shifts between these are fairly constant, and over the years they have often changed, although some have remained within the space even for very long periods -up to one or two years. Although the assembly had established some criteria for people who resided in Cavallerizza, these were not always respected. Such criteria concerned the number of months to live in the building and the grounds on which the assembly could assent to an 'artist residency' for the people who would live there.

The residential area of the building was in fact a litmus test, which brought out the main schematic subdivision within the Cavallerizza community: the one between the artists coming mostly from the middle class and people who have instead found in Cavallerizza a refuge and a support in exchange for their work of cleaning and maintaining the space. It is, in fact, a schematic distinction, but these two *nuclei* of people were quite explicitly separated. First of all, they were perceived as two distinct components from the outside. Secondly, the difference between these two ways of living in this place was part of the daily discourse of the people who lived in Cavallerizza.

Since the community was very heterogeneous from a social point of view, social subdivisions often arose, sometimes implicit and sometimes sharp and lacerating. The division between those who lived and slept in Cavallerizza mirrored the class divisions within the community. There were two housing areas in Cavallerizza: one had been partly renovated, while the other was in a worse condition. Basically, those who had a strained past slept in the first one, while the better renovated area was inhabited by those who were accustomed to more comfortable lives. This internal division was so explicit that many of my friends within the space have told me that it reflected an ancient division of the same building when it was used by the royal family. Court servants lived in the area now inhabited by the *poor*, while court officials lived in the other area. Unfortunately, the situation underlying my description is hopelessly schematic. The first one who talked to me about it was Linda, a woman who works in the theatre, with whom I often conversed about this topic:

The society that lives in Cavallerizza perfectly reflects the social divisions that characterized this building in the past. When Cavallerizza was used by the royal family, court officers and servants were here. Coincidentally, the court officers lived in the wing of the building where the wealthy artists now live. Instead, in the other wing (the one that belonged to the servants), the poor people live today, those who have found refuge here and who have nothing else in the world (Linda 2018).

This interpretative key has been proposed to me by several other members of the community. In speaking to me about the heterogeneity of the community, Matteo

(2018) once took up the court metaphor, too: ‘a place like this shows a stratification of personal experiences and geographies. Who knows what court dynamics there were inside! There were certainly conflicts back then too! Because it’s very difficult to be together!’

With regard to the use of some parts of Cavallerizza for accommodation, interviews with many militants of other Italian common spaces, in particular in Naples and Bologna, have brought to light their critical attitudes to the choice made by the assembly of Cavallerizza to set up a purely residential space. The judgment on Cavallerizza by people who look on it from the outside and who have carried out commoning projects elsewhere was well summarized by Fabio (from Bologna), who has visited Cavallerizza many times, during an interview for this project:

Cavallerizza is a very problematic political project, in which it is difficult to maintain a relaxed climate. Housing is a choice that attracts people who are already feeling unwell (poverty, migration, problems of various kinds). And the discomfort engenders further discomfort. The Cavallerizza community is not strong enough to sustain this discomfort, at least at this stage. And the result is that those who live in Cavallerizza are not well, in many cases (Fabio 2017).

This malaise has deep roots, which must be sought in the social composition of the community. Today, in the field of commons, ‘the politics of collective action [often] consists in economic experimentation that ... embraces an ethic of care for the other, institutes different class relations of surplus distribution and betters the well-being of all’ (*Report 2. The Common*: 184).

At the time of the occupation, the community of Cavallerizza decided to use the huge building also for housing purposes, so that some homeless occupants could have a place to live. According to many activists from other Italian commons communities, this choice is one of the main reasons for the conflicts and difficulties of this space. Activists from both Bologna and Naples told me that their choice not to create a housing space is due to the fact that it would absorb the energies of their communities, preventing them from concentrating on artistic and cultural production, and *healthy* political processes. Here, for example, are the words of Fabio, an activist from Lâbas in Bologna, whom I interviewed in September 2017 during the ‘Anomalie’ meeting held in Cavallerizza:

The problem with Cavallerizza is that the community has to deal with all the problems involved in maintaining a housing space. Although it hurts me to say it, housing is often a source of problems. You can’t take care of other things well if you have to devote all your energy to managing a difficult cohabitation between very different people (Fabio 2018).

In fact, the Cavallerizza project had to deal, from the very beginning, with the problems stemming from the cohabitation of very different people from many points

of view: social background, the idea of activism, priorities with respect to the use of the building; ultimately, different conceptions of the world and life, to use a famous Gramscian expression which helps us to highlight the cultural problems associated with class division. This was one of the main reasons for the malaise within it and the sense of failure that pervaded its inhabitants. Other communities for commons in Italy have achieved more 'virtuous' results (e.g. l'asilo in Naples), but their initial social composition was more homogeneous. The main political problem in the life of this community resides in the difficulty of combining personal conditions and aspirations with a common project.

From this point of view, Cavallerizza was precisely the failure of the attempt to build a conscious and lasting counter-hegemony. As we will see, in addition to failing to deal with the different social conditions of its inhabitants, the community has failed to manage gender relations, to think forms of horizontal leadership, and even to imagine a shared concept of the 'common' and the 'political.' The term 'failure' is an emic term too, and it has been suggested to me on various occasions, not only by external observers, but even by members of this community. 'Cavallerizza is the story of a failure,' one of them once told me.

Artists and politicians

Now we come to the internal composition of this place. Many Cavallerizza activists, during our interviews, tended to distinguish two main communities: on the one hand, a community of artists who use this large building for their own activities; on the other hand, a smaller group of people that many call 'the politicians,' who come from associations and experiences of political militancy and focus mainly on the possibility of making Cavallerizza a model of urban common good. If the former ones are mainly dedicated to making art through extremely varied expressive forms, the latter have committed themselves mostly to maintaining relations with the Municipality, in an attempt to attain the civic use of this space following the Neapolitan model (see the case study on Naples).

Many of Cavallerizza's artists do not explicitly elaborate on the political meaning of their art. When I asked them what is political about what they do, many replied that 'art is political in itself.' I often objected that this was a naive phrase. 'Well, politics must be done with your own hands, not with your head,' Giorgio once replied to me. Actually, his answer left me unsatisfied, but, basically, he was repeating to me that if there is one thing that the artists of this place have in common, it is the ability to imagine. It is a dimension that my other interlocutors from other spaces have also grasped. One day, I talked about the political attitude of the artistic community of Cavallerizza with Carla Maria, a jurist from l'asilo in Naples (see Naples report). She explained to me that, while the political press releases written by l'asilo have a strong political character and are based on a thorough theoretical elaboration, 'Cavallerizza has always stood out for the ability to write imaginative press releases, very powerful,

difficult to place in the scope of the debate on commons and politics in general.’

When I interviewed some of the artists and artisans who work in the rooms of Cavallerizza, I asked each of them what the common good is for them and how this can be achieved within a place and a community like Cavallerizza. Furthermore, I asked them how the occupation and the self-governing experience of Cavallerizza can contribute politically to other places in the city. Finally, I asked them what they think of the widespread discourse on commons more generally, and how this can be connected with what they were doing in Cavallerizza. Their answers, in many cases, coincide. For many of them, the concept of the ‘commons’ and ‘common goods’ is ‘instrumental,’ useful for creating a framework of meaning that pushes those who participate to impute a strong meaning to this experience. A concept that acts as a driving force for political action, we could say. None of them had ever attached much importance to the rhetoric of the commons. Everyone, or almost, showed a high level of self-reflection in this respect and a certain scepticism with respect to this rhetoric.

At the same time, they almost always refer –more or less explicitly– to this concept when they promote their work. Logos and keywords of the great artistic events that have been organized inside the Cavallerizza have always had some relationship with this concept. And, so, the great artistic exhibition ‘Here’ (2016-2019) was explicitly presented as ‘a space for socio-cultural experimentation in Civic Use, a pole for contemporary arts and cultures.’ It is also connected with the process of ‘self-government’ and with the ‘participatory modalities’ through which it was organized (Cavallerizza Irreale 2020a). Another event is called ‘Communitas’ (2017), from the Latin *cum munus* (i.e. with-gift), and it is associated with the concept of the ‘gift to citizens, in which the creative community opens up to citizens, in which the community becomes a refuge, where the artistic ferment is intertwined with the common good, where the border between public and private dissolves’ (Cavallerizza Irreale 2020a). Or, again, the ‘Spore’ festival (2017) is defined as ‘an artistic contamination through co-habitation’ which fosters ‘coexistence as a fundamental production tool’ (Cavallerizza Irreale 2020b).

On the other hand, the so called ‘politicians’ have always mainly dedicated themselves to managing the legal and formal process that was supposed to lead the community to the civic use of the building they had occupied. This was a small number of people (from ten to twenty), who made up the Communication Group. During my fieldwork, the meetings of this group followed one another, week after week. The main function of this group was to look after the relations with the institutions, i.e. to establish concrete strategies that would attain the civic use process as quickly as possible. At the same time, the group meetings were also an opportunity to talk about the dissatisfaction of many of the ‘politicians’ with internal relations in space, especially with regard to their relationship with the artists’ community.

As I also said in relation to the case of l’asilo in Naples, even in Cavallerizza those

who deal with legal and formal issues for the attainment of civic use are generally not directly involved in the organization of artistic and cultural events. Much of the time that they spent in Cavallerizza was dedicated to bureaucratic and political issues. Except for rare exceptions, they managed to participate in artistic events especially as users.

Apart from the first phase of the occupation, the relationships between these two components have always been rather conflictual, due to the different visions of the political project in which they are involved. It may be interesting to report a few lines drawn from my field notes to illustrate the atmosphere in Cavallerizza during the months I spent in the field, between autumn 2017 and summer 2018.

My fieldwork in Cavallerizza was very intense in this first phase. The community that participates in space activities is going through a complicated phase, in which a complete rethinking of the common good model is taking place. The subjects who have been in the space for the longest time are divided into two main blocks that can no longer communicate with each other. The split concerns above all the attitude to be taken towards local institutions (i.e. the municipality of Turin). The assemblies and the moments of sharing are very tense, with mutual accusations between the members of the two ‘factions.’ Unfortunately, we are also witnessing strategies of de-legitimization which are by no means new to social movements in the phases of rupture and conflict. The accusations often take place on a personal level and involve the private life of the subjects: the private sphere takes on a very important role for the positioning of each within the field of the community. This is a conflict that does not remain confined within Cavallerizza, it is also perceived outside, since the accusations are often made public, through social networks and sometimes even in local newspapers.

The events that I describe in this short note took place in a very delicate passage: the collective writing of the regulation for the recognition of the civic use of the spaces of Cavallerizza by the Municipality of Turin -to which I will return (in section 4.2.8). This is the reason why many tensions that had accumulated over the years since the occupation of Cavallerizza were now breaking out in an irrepressible way.

At that time, I perceived an extremely conflictual community, in which these two components tended to accuse each other due to profound differences over several issues and problems of space management. The politicians reproached the artists for engaging mainly or exclusively in artistic and cultural activities, mostly pursuing their ‘individual interests’ as people who use a space to enhance their artistic work. The artists were also asked to participate more in the assemblies, the collective decisions and the meetings, in which in general some coordinators per work group participate. Beyond the individual misunderstandings, this conflict can be traced back to moral, ethical and political motivations, or rather to different conceptions of one’s

commitment to achieving a common goal. My analysis focuses precisely on these three dimensions, reflecting on the forms of politics and on the relationship between the personal and the political plan. The internal rift within the community was in fact managed through the use of rules and the reference to the need to regulate the behaviour of the members of this community. Rules were used to distinguish good behaviours from bad ones. This method has greatly undermined the ongoing political process, the trust and sharing among members of the same community.

From now on, I will schematically define these two communities as ‘politicians’ and ‘artists.’ This distinction has also been somewhat formalized in the everyday life of the community. The politicians, as I said, were part of the ‘Communication Group,’ which managed all the legal and formal practices for the recognition of the civic use of Cavallerizza. The artists, for their part, when the internal rupture of the community emerged clearly, created a collective of their own, calling it ‘Creative Community,’ whose function was precisely to start an alternative project beyond the political and juridical one.

The social background and the interests of these two sub-communities were so far from each other as to create a communicative short circuit that made interaction and synthesis between the two perspectives almost impossible. The libertarian *manifesto* and the artistic communiqués written and distributed by the Creative Community were countered by the bureaucratic language that characterizes the documents of *politicians*. All this becomes evident if we look, for example, at the two main activities carried out by the two groups in recent years, or at the most representative of the objectives and the political disposition of the two groups: on the one side, the contemporary art exhibition called ‘Here,’ on the other, the path for the recognition of the civic use of Cavallerizza Reale by the Municipality of Turin (see section 4.2.8).

The dissemination and organization of ‘Here’ by the Creative Community relies on language and communication techniques that are typical of contexts related to contemporary art and alternative forms of production of artistic knowledge. On the contrary, the reports of public assemblies produced by the Communication group are much closer to the legal and bureaucratic-administrative language, not only because they deal with legal and bureaucratic issues, but also because its members present themselves -and perceive themselves- as subjects entitled to maintain a relationship with the city administration.



Creative Community assembly.

It goes without saying that the positions of some of the participants in the Cavallerizza project were not clear-cut and that not all of them fully recognize themselves in one or the other sub-community. However, this division into two large homogeneous blocks was an explicit narrative within the space. I draw it from the self-representations I observed during my fieldwork. The problem of the adhesion (or not) to one of the two components arose for everyone.

If, for many members of the Creative Community, the relationship with institutions was mostly tolerated (many of them did not like to delve deeper into these aspects of the Cavallerizza process in conversations and interviews), for the members of the Communication group the relationship with the institutions lay, instead, at the center of the daily discourses and constituted one of the main objectives of the political path in which they participated, if not the main one. At the same time, for many of the artists, the occupation of the Cavallerizza was still an important symbolic gesture, which defined their identity as militants. On the contrary, many members of the Communication group recollected the occupation as a moment in which they intervened in defence of an artistic project. They stood as guardians of the public heritage. They interfered with the policymaking of the administration in order to avoid the privatization of the building:

I lived the first days of the occupation in May 2014...I had immediately the

feeling that there were already specific positions, aimed at directing the political and cultural debate. I went back exactly ten months later because I realized that the essential aspect of that place was not so much the occupation itself, but the battle to prevent its privatization. To avert the privatization of a place protected by UNESCO, which had its own history, whose safeguard had to be our absolute priority (Lele 2018).

This position is indicative of a way of conceiving activism for the common goods which is rather widespread within the wider Italian movement for commons, that is, a vision of the common good whose main priority is the protection of public property.

So, the *guardians* and *custodians* of the public good, on the one hand, and the young artists who need to express their art and to achieve institutional recognition for it, on the other, are united by the need to conduct a dialogue with the institutions in order to affirm their own approach. Their opposition feeds on forms of mutual delegitimization, which always concern the alleged opportunism with which the opposing faction manages its relationship with the public sector. This is what emerges from these statements by Lele himself regarding the Creative Community.

The danger is that Cavallerizza also becomes also a camouflaged gentrification process within an architectural complex where only art is made, but contemporary art and artistic creativity are varied and inconsistent. In my opinion, this is the risk: Cavallerizza as a brand to be displayed outwards and to profit from. In my opinion, this cannot be accepted in any way. In my opinion, this is the risk we have been running since this Creative Community was formed in Cavallerizza. I don't want to accuse anyone...But the Creative Community is the result of an intrusion of external elites who monopolized a part of the community (Lele 2018).

The polarization between the two communities has gone through moments of dialogue and of very strong conflict. This conflict has also taken place in social networks and it concerned some cases of violence that occurred within Cavallerizza. Another interviewee, who is also one of the 'politicians,' refers to the artists working on the upper floors of the building, and complains about their choice (which had not been shared with the assembly) to change the structure of some rooms:

They have carried out restoration work inside the property units that do not meet the essential requirement of taking care of the place: I mean, you cannot adapt those spaces to your needs, tout court. It has been done, in some cases. I'm talking about chipped walls, eh! This is very serious [repeated 4 times]. Sooner or later, I think that they will wash their hands of it, because they will say: 'we have been tolerated.' But I would like to address with you more explicitly one point around which we have turned so far: what broke the balance, and broke a spirit of open sharing (even within conflict dynamics, but you know, the conflict is overcome through responsibility)...The initiation of the civic use process for

Cavallerizza coincided with a deleterious phenomenon, pursued by a part of the community, which is the creation of the enemy. The creation of the enemy figure within Cavallerizza, within the movement, within the Cavallerizza Assembly (Sandro 2018).

He was talking about the attacks against whoever engaged with political and technical issues (civic use, communication, the organization of public assemblies for drawing up the rules of space management). The accusations, on one side and the other, often resemble each other. The other camp was accused of having established an exclusive relationship, without notifying the others, with the municipal councillors and with the councillors who manage the process of the civic use of Cavallerizza. Many times, opponents have been accused of attempting a 'coup' against those who disagree.

Needless to say, within the two communities that I have schematically identified, there are nuanced positions and the very subjects who belong to these two groups would not fully recognize themselves in this simplified description. However, the way in which Cavallerizza members represent differences within the community is also simplified. In other words, the net distinctions to which they refer, reflect the clear polarization that has governed the debate between the members of the two communities. As we have seen from the few interview passages reported, the emic representations that I have gathered in the field reproduce very clear binary distinctions.

So, beyond these two main components, the people who took care of Cavallerizza and who lived there differ greatly from one another, for various reasons. The community was composed of subjects who come with different backgrounds, who had built different relationships with this place and who had described it to me in very different ways. In short, they had very different interpretations of the process of which they were part. In these early years, when they shared this space, they did not produce a truly hegemonic narrative about it, although (as we shall see) in all their stories there are some recurring elements, introduced mostly by subjects who carried a significant weight within the community because of their strong political and legal role, and therefore their de facto leadership within Cavallerizza, at least for some periods.

The personal stories of the people who lived and worked in Cavallerizza are very different from each other, but -with few exceptions- there is a common thread between almost all their stories: political disengagement, the lack of the habit to act as political activists. Their activities and their commitment to Cavallerizza are obviously not in tune with the view of the institutions, but they do not subscribe to antagonistic and anti-system logics.

Many of the artists who worked in Cavallerizza believed that their art is the most political thing that can happen in that space. Their discourse never contained an explicit political reasoning. Rather, they tried to stay away from political debate in the strict sense. A significant episode displaying this attitude took place in the spring of 2018, when a conference was organized in the Aula Magna of the University of Turin

inside the Cavallerizza, to support the well-known major project called TAV in Val di Susa, near Torino. The fight against the construction of the high-speed train in this valley had been one of the main symbolic struggles of the Italian social movements in the last decades, and it brought together very different political spaces (see, for example, Aime 2018). That day I passed by the Cavallerizza because some friends had told me that outside the building there were a lot of police officers who controlled the access to the space in order to protect the conference. When I arrived, outside the building I found many activists of other spaces who were intent on protesting against this act of institutional legitimization of a major infrastructure project, which they considered harmful. Beyond the gate, inside the building, many inhabitants of Cavallerizza welcomed me and told the police to let me in. When I asked them what was going on, some of them talked to me absent-mindedly about the conference, telling me that they were happy that the police had let them in precisely because they were from Cavallerizza.

I was very impressed by their attitude. When I arrived at the university, I talked about it with other people who are part of other movements. They already knew about the situation and advised me to look at the Facebook page of Cavallerizza, where some had commented on the attitude of the occupants towards this symbolically important situation. The comments were very angry and offensive, claiming that the Cavallerizza community was unworthy of being considered a community in political struggle, because they had been completely indifferent to the conference that took place ‘just inside the walls of their building.’ An ironic and paradigmatic comment came from a girl, hinting that she did not expect anything better from them: ‘If you really didn’t want to waste time, you could at least have exhibited a NO TAV flag. You are unworthy.’ This episode anticipates some of the reflections I will make later on the perception of the Cavallerizza community by the other movements of the city.

Of course, in Cavallerizza, some people used to feel very uncomfortable about this situation, and would have preferred to be in a more politicized context. Some of them, during our interviews and conversations, expressed their disappointment but they still tried to represent Cavallerizza as a positive model of political action. Some of them recalled the mythical reconstruction of a political past that they did not experience first-hand and they evoked it today in a paradigmatic way, because they were dissatisfied with a context that failed to be as political as they would like:

when I first entered here, the first thing I did, after the first HERE exposition, when I understood more precisely why I was talking about that energy, about that magic, about that very powerful energy flow, I said to myself: ‘I have to make my contribution, somehow, to this process that is happening in Cavallerizza, because it is very interesting, because I see here something that I saw when I was a child, towards the end of the 70s. Towards the end of the 70s, I was a small child and my father took me to these assemblies, which were meetings in the streets, but where there were real communities, which were

similar, in some ways, to what I have seen here. But it was the distant memory of an epic time, where people gathered in a square, created a form of Agora and shared things together and created empathy. I had never seen this stuff again and I thought it was gone...(Lorenzo 2018).

This excerpt reveals, in fact, the disengagement of many Cavallerizza activists before joining the community. From the '70s to the present, other 'agoras' have been created. The problem is that they had not taken part in them and they had privately dealt with the memory of the politics that had marked the working-class Turin of the '70s and the punk or underground scene of the following decades. These periods are mythologized by subjects who were not at ease with everything that came later, with other militant experiences spread in the city (including the CSOAs, of which I have already spoken).

In summary, the community had two main souls within it. On the one hand, there were those who adhered –albeit critically– to the point of view of the local institutions. On the other hand, there were those who performed artistic activities of various kinds within the space and whose vision about how the space should be managed was very far from the institutional one.

4.2.6. The 'political' in a community without trust: rules as a defensive weapon

The theoretical discourse on commons is sprinkled with references to the rules and the need to establish principles and structures of self-governance, trust and norms of reciprocity. Local communities may fail to self-organize due to internal conflicts and lack of trust or leadership, or they may fail to manage efficiently the complexity of the design task (Ostrom & Andersson 2008: 73-75, Ostrom 2005: 220). As we read in the *Report 2. The Common: 7, 23-24*), in socio-political terms the commons consist fundamentally in a diversity of social structures and processes through which *commoners* manufacture and use resources and goods by collectively deciding the rules of such production and use, improvising and reformulating these rules on an ongoing basis in ways responsive to particular socio-ecological situation. As a result, there is 'an incredible range of commoning across time, geography, resource domains and cultural tradition' (Bollier & Helfrich 2015: 7), which defy any simple formulas and fixed taxonomies. In her institutional analysis, Ostrom (2005) explains that the rules of the commons acknowledge and bolster the capacity of individuals to collectively self-organize, to self-govern themselves and to fashion new institutions for self-government. 'Learning to craft rules that attract and encourage individuals who share norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness, or who learn them over time, is a fundamental skill needed in all democratic societies' (Ostrom 2005: 133).

This normative approach comes in handy here, since it describes the horizon in which militants and movements for commons recognize themselves and act. The process by which these rules are decided obviously depends on the specific context and the communities that engage in this work, the moral and ethical choices that become dominant within them.

In other contexts, such as l'asilo in Naples, the political process appears constantly in progress and it is constantly questioned in the practices of self-government of the community (see the Naples report). Well, the case of Cavallerizza in Turin appears completely different and, in some ways, opposite. To describe it, it can be useful to recall the continuity between the dynamics of political participation in the Cavallerizza project and the forms of political activism within the 5 Star Movement.

As we have seen (section 3), relations between Cavallerizza and the 5 Star Movement are frequent and consolidated. Many Cavallerizza activists are close to the Movement and some have supported it even with direct political activity, that is, beyond the simple vote in the municipal elections. The whole community of Cavallerizza is perceived from the outside as a space close to the Movement. The other political collectives of the city fault Cavallerizza for having forged strong bonds with the local power, that is, with the party that governs the city. Geremia, one of the members of the Communication group and one of the main promoters and supporters of the process of civic use, explains it well. He is closely connected with the 5 Star Movement, to the point of applying in the primaries for nomination by the party in the parliamentary elections, and he feels uncomfortable in the face of those who criticize his membership in this party.

The other collectives use to say that we are 'friends of the 5 stars,' 'friends of the mayor,' an experience that belongs to the 5 stars and is supported by the 5 stars.

And this, for example, is not appreciated by militants of the Askatasuna. Then when those of Askatasuna shout at Elisa (a jurist and Cavallerizza activist, see here below, section 4.2.8), I intervene to mediate and I am recognized as the strange one, who is not part of the collectives and therefore does not understand what dynamics are going on between the groups, so I am excluded from the quarrel, because I do not have a background in social centers.

Well, Askatasuna says that we are friends of the 5 Stars, but also Elisa, when she wants to accuse me, says: 'You and your grillini⁴⁰ friends.' It's all relative, it's a game of belonging (Geremia 2018).

Askatasuna is a CSOA well established in a district of Turin for several decades, and it is often taken as a benchmark for describing the modalities of political action typical of the Turin social centers. Whenever Cavallerizza activists try to describe their political activity, they refer to this or to other social centers to highlight the distance between their experience and the latter. It is no coincidence that these two realities -a populist political party and a heterogeneous community of subjects who reject antagonism as a political method- found themselves conversing and converging at a precise historical moment, the one in which the party governed the city and affirmed

⁴⁰ 'Grillini' is the name with which the activists of the 5 Star Movement are identified. It comes from the name of the party founder, Beppe Grillo.

its own ways of conceiving the ‘political.’

Not all members of the Cavallerizza community have supported the new mayor of the 5 Star Movement, nor all the activists of this space recognized themselves in the politics pursued by this party, or would be ready to declare themselves in favour of the new urban government. What is important, however, is that the conceptions of politics informing these two spheres converge. Let us see how.

The political participation from below in the political process of the 5 Star Movement was read in the light of Ernesto Laclau’s (2005) reflections on populism, in particular the concept of the ‘democratic demand.’ As Urbano (2017) noted, political participation in this party is a response to anger and discontent with democratic politics as it is routinely practiced. A counter-hegemonic coalition cannot rest only upon the shared antagonism of different groups with the same enemy (*Report 1. The Political*: 157-158). For the local cells of the 5 Star Movement,

Overcoming ‘anger’ means channelling it towards the definition of a practice that can also be creative, that helps the group to reply to the accusations of acting exclusively destructively and ensures that it is perceived (and perceives itself) as a legitimate actor within the local political sphere. But it also means bringing individual activists to go beyond their individual demands, becoming thus fully part of the antagonistic and resistant narrative of their party (Urbano 2017: 41).

However, a ‘chain of equivalence’ (Laclau 2005) is not always established between the demands of the various activists, and individual dissatisfaction does not always manage to become shared and collective. What is not achieved in Cavallerizza is precisely this ‘chain of equivalence.’ In this context, the rules become a weapon against other activists, a tool to defend themselves from the demands of others.

Among the so-called ‘politicians’ of Cavallerizza, many are close to the 5 Star Movement. In this context of distrust, rules became an instrument of defence for individuals, a form of protection from the community. This is an evident degeneration of the processes of commons and the main explanation for the difficulties of the community and the conflicts that troubled it. The rules were a leitmotif of the long phase of internal conflicts in the community; they were evoked during assemblies and meetings, in private conversations and in quarrels.

Ultimately, the local political situation and the victory of the 5 Star Movement in the municipal elections generated fertile ground for the emergence of this political attitude, which we can define, using an oxymoron, as ‘participatory mistrust.’ The obsession with rules was regarded by a Turin interviewee, who knows the context of Cavallerizza, as the main reason for the ‘evanescent politicity of this space’ (Fabiana 2018).

This diffidence permeated also the relationships and the different attitudes within the

Creative Community. The result is that, in Cavallerizza, the concept of ‘commons’ is often employed, but there are no premises to make it effective. The different moral inclinations surge forth in the different approach adopted by the two main sub-communities of this space to the same objective and concept, that of the ‘common.’ On the one hand, art is seen as something already political in itself, through which the artists of the community legitimize their presence within the space and refuse an explicit conversation about the collective government of the process of artistic self-production, as well as the political meaning of their artistic work. On the other hand, the ‘common’ implies the need to control conflict and fights by making a repressive use of the rules -what we have called ‘participatory mistrust.’

The different positions and the various conceptions of the common good that emerged during interviews are intertwined with the faults and responsibilities attributed to the opponents. Everyone agreed that the idyllic depiction of this space was completely misleading. Everyone considered Cavallerizza as a space composed of many subjectivities that do not listen to what others have to say. Everyone contributed to their own sub-group, but they do not really converse with everyone else.

To better understand these mechanisms, it may be useful to briefly describe the concrete life of the community. During my interview with Geremia, the notion of rules was evoked countless times. He had an ambivalent attitude towards the problem of rules. He was happy that Cavallerizza was distinguished from places where more restrictive and indoctrinating forms of socialization exist. He was happy to be part of a space that had given up on forms of militancy linked to strong leadership and an oppressive doctrine. At the same time, he regretted that he could not establish a system of rules that works. His position was in some ways paradoxical, since he would like a community capable of subjecting itself to the norm without being forced to do so. To explain his point of view, he compared the case of Cavallerizza to other political collectives in the city, by referring once again to Askatasuna, the self-managed ‘autonomous’ social center already mentioned.

A series of very strict rules have been imposed on the Askatasuna, here in Cavallerizza we have tried to give internal rules...Since this community is not as rigid as that of Askatasuna, then the rules are often violated, then as soon as it happens something, the chickens coming home to roost (Geremia 2018).

I quote once again his words because they are representative of a part of the community and because I believe they illuminate the deployment of the rules as ‘defensive weapons,’ to which I referred. According to Geremia (2018), as with several other activists, the rules appear as the main tool to secure a collective process: ‘Why can everyone pass through a park freely? Because there are rules that regulate the way you can cross it. And the same should be in a place like Cavallerizza.’

In theorizing city spaces as common, Stavrides (2016: 2-3) has described the quintessentially political process of forming a community by drawing boundaries,

setting rules and deciding thereby who is included and who is excluded (see *Report 2. The common*, section 2.5.9.). He underscores from the outset that common space is a set of spatial relations produced by commoning practices, and it can be organized in two distinct ways.

They may either be organized as a closed system which explicitly defines shared space within a definite perimeter and which corresponds to a specific community of commoners, or they may take the form of an open network of passages through which emerging and always-open communities of commoners communicate and exchange goods and ideas (Stavrides 2016: 3).

When Cavallerizza was faced with this ethico-political dilemma, given the difficulties and internal conflicts, many members of the community opted for the simplest, but also the most im-political solution, configuring thus a ‘collectively private’ space which many people from the outside decided not to enter.



Cavallerizza Reale, Courtyard during the ‘Here’ exhibition (May 2019).

4.2.7. Relationships: what kind of care?

‘Care for relationships’ is one of the main objectives among those mentioned in the documents and in the statutes of the various Italian spaces that make use today of the discourse on common goods. Cavallerizza is no exception. On an official level -at least as an intention- the community dealt with relationships in line with a Foucauldian

understanding of ethics, and in particular of what Foucault (2000: 282) defines as ‘ethics of the self,’ a particular way of relating to oneself ‘by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself.’ As recalled in the *Report 1. The political*: 32-33,

Foucault argued, thus, that an active labour on the self or an ‘aesthetics of existence’ is required today so as to attain the maximum individual freedom within social relationships, which are by definition power relationships in which certain agents influence the action of others.... Foucault derived the idea of a practice of the self, which is also a practice of freedom, from the ethics of ‘care of the self’ in the Greco-Roman world. This care consisted in knowing oneself but also in mastering the appetites that threaten to sway the self by consciously observing certain rules of acceptable and respectable behaviour. Preoccupation with the self motivates an extensive work of the self on the self, on the individual’s body and soul, to attain a desirable state of being and to make one’s life good, beautiful or exemplary. And it implies a way of caring for others and an ability to conduct oneself properly in relation to others (Foucault 2000a: 284-287).

However, this reflection concerns only some of Cavallerizza’s activists and turns out to be exactly the opposite of the turn that ethics has taken within this community. The theme of the relationships within the community that managed Cavallerizza was one of the most debated topics in the daily conversations between activists, and also one of the most often cited topics during my interviews with them. Many of them used to talk about it a lot precisely because they feel distant from the realization of a virtuous process of caring for the community through self-care. No person who had liaised with Cavallerizza for long enough to establish (more or less strong) relationships with other people who live and pass through it, would ever have defined Cavallerizza as a place in which relaxed relationships are nurtured. One of the main issues that the members of the community complained about when they talked to each other (and with external subjects) regards the tensions that have troubled the space since its occupation. This perception belongs to both the members of the community and to the people who are not part of it but who have come into contact with it. As one of the people who lived in the building explained to me,

Cavallerizza is a system of alliances, of brotherhood...If you are very close to a person, it can happen that it becomes a symbiosis. For example, Matteo and I live in symbiosis because we are very close, and therefore sometimes in Cavallerizza they treat us like one person, which is quite absurd (Alice 2018).

This person was one of my first and main informants during the fieldwork. She was shooting a documentary film on Cavallerizza in which she talks precisely about internal relationships, because she believes that this was one of the most problematic but at the same time most interesting traits of this community.

Several times, the problems between people have turned into open conflicts and

sometimes into real fights. The issue of violence in personal relationships has been discussed for long within the assembly, since it was recognized by many as one of the main problems. In November 2017, for example, Veronica, one of the members of the Performing Arts group, recounted to me an episode that happened in those days, while one of the artists, Matteo, was organizing an event called Habitat with other members of the Visual Arts group. It consisted in placing a large brazier in the external courtyard of the building. Its function was to warm the environment, but also to symbolically recall the dimension of sharing around a fire. Late in the evening, when there were few people in Cavallerizza, Emiliano, one of the inhabitants of Cavallerizza close to the group of ‘politicians,’ told Matteo to remove the brazier from the porch, because the smoke disturbed them and made the air unbreathable. Matteo probably answered in an unkind way, but the fact is that Emiliano gave him two punches. Some of the people who watched the episode claim that Emiliano was quite drunk.

The following day Emiliano wrote to the mailing list of the representatives of the various working groups of Cavallerizza saying that he ‘only gave two punches’ to Matteo, asking people not to exaggerate about what had happened. Matteo, instead, announced that if the assembly had not expressed itself clearly on what happened, he would have considered the possibility of leaving Cavallerizza. This was not the only episode of explicit physical violence, but it is interesting because, in the following days, some activists gathered in small groups to talk about this episode and other incidents of violence that occurred in that period. Having participated in some of those conversations, I could see that many of them attributed the constant tensions and fights to the presence, within the community, of people who are not well, on the grounds of drug use or complicated personal affairs. So, it was difficult to manage relationships (Veronica 2018). For some, these subjects should be expelled because they were harmful. For many others, the community should have taken charge of their malaise. However, they all agreed on one thing: Cavallerizza’s difficulties derived from the choice to not establish once and for all clear and defined rules for a ‘civil coexistence.’

From this point of view, the more structured realities (for better or for worse), for example the classic social centers, in which there are strong leaders and a clearer regulation of the use of space, have fewer problems and manage better the coexistence between people. They tend to punish episodes of this kind more clearly and, more generally, situations of conflict and ‘unease’ (Veronica 2018).

Once again, the community was faced with the consequences of their choices in terms of management and leadership, that is, the way they conceived these functions and the participatory ways in which these issues were discussed and rethought from time to time. When the situation became more serious and difficult to manage, more stringent rules were often requested.

Another element that generated strong tensions within the community concerned the drug dealing in the main courtyard of the building. As I said, Cavallerizza was an open

place, a 'way station.' For the community that sought to manage it through self-government, it was very difficult to control the influx of people within it. Many of the spaces were frequented by people who did not attend the assembly and who were in contact only with some of the community's members. For a long time, the court was attended by a group of young people who never took part in Cavallerizza's activities and who were caught selling drugs. The 'drug dealing problem' became thus one of the thorniest issues in the last years of the community's life. This situation gave naturally rise to a series of rumors. In a very large community, in which relationships are often rarefied and characterized by weak bonds (Granovetter 1973), the rumors spread uncontrollably and are often difficult to verify. For a time, for example, it was suspected that the young pushers used the cash desk of the bar, which is in fact the main source of livelihood for Cavallerizza. The cash was probably used to buy the drugs outside and then sell them inside. Of course, this hypothesis implied the involvement of some members of the community and created further suspicions and further ruptures within it.

Some of the people I interviewed also raised the issue of the potential negative spill-overs from the presence, in that place, of people who use drugs (even hard ones). According to them, the public image of the place was severely impaired by the widespread rumor that heroin was also used in Cavallerizza. It is a gossip that I have been able to verify in person and which became particularly problematic at a time when the community pursued a concrete dialogue with the institutions.

Socializing distress: assembly and social media as incubators of sick relationships

The community faced many times the challenge of how to manage the problems that afflicted it, from violence to drug dealing and the care of relationships itself. In the most difficult times, I got to talk about it with many of its members. According to many, the Cavallerizza was not a social center. For them, it was primarily 'a place of culture.' When the other occupied spaces (for example Askatasuna) requested that the last floor of the building be used to house migrants and refugees for whom there was no more space in other buildings, the inhabitants and activists of Cavallerizza replied that they were not interested in this kind of activity. They stated their solidarity with the movements that engage with these issues and said they were available to support them within the space by organizing and hosting evenings of funding and raising awareness about these issues, but in their opinion the main mission of that place was - and had to remain- the production of culture in forms alternative to the mainstream.

In short, the production of culture represented the main objective that was invoked by all those who inhabited the space, both in their negotiations with the Municipality for the recognition of civic use, and in internal discussions, in the assembly. It was an opinion shared by both politicians and artists, especially when it was necessary to defend Cavallerizza's path against the criticisms of other movements, which considered it as a space dedicated mainly to art, not very politicized, with a poor

political subjectivity and a low level of political debate.

The conflicts between the various communities of Cavallerizza were not confined to the daily interactions within the space, but were also known outside this space, at least in the militant circles and among the different political collectives of the city. Cavallerizza's reputation was that of a fragmented, conflictual community, unable to express a clear political line. During a conversation, a militant from another social space told me the following:

The problem is not that they did not choose a precise political line...because from the point of view of a politics of the commons, heterogeneity could also be a strength of that project. The problem is that no real politics has emerged. Conflicts are the result of the use of the space in a selfish way, using it for their work, using their rooms because this is convenient for many, who in this way do not have to pay a rent elsewhere. Many of them are not interested in politics, but in making art using the Cavallerizza 'Bene Comune' logo [the reference is in particular to the so-called 'artists'].

Furthermore, internal conflicts broke out also on social networks. During my fieldwork, many cases of violence occurred within the space, as we have noted. Beyond fights, there were also incidents of gender-based violence. The attention of the various communities of Cavallerizza has focused on the latter to the point of becoming for a few months the main topic of conversation in the assembly, in meetings and in private conversations. Some of these cases have been made public on social networks, reaching many people in the city. For the sake of synthesis, I will not report what was said in those conversations on social networks, but it is useful to underline that even in those virtual conversations a very severe judgment emerged towards the heterogeneous community that managed the space.

Social media were employed in an instrumental way by some inhabitants and activists of Cavallerizza to delegitimize the rival groups or the people with whom they were in conflict. The city councillors were also involved in this delegitimization process in their personal Facebook profiles. From this point of view, too, there is a continuity between the militancy style of a political party like the M5S and the militancy of the activists of Cavallerizza. Like many other recent movements -including, for example, Podemos- the 5 Star Movement operates in fact almost exclusively online, without any headquarters and non-digital types of communication (until recently, candidates were forbidden to give interviews on TV or to the press). The web is therefore an integral part of the party's life and of its history (Musso 2019). In Turin as elsewhere, this way of doing politics online is nothing more than the result of the more general way of conceiving political activity in a context in which, as we have seen, it is difficult to nurture relationships of trust within political communities. The participatory diffidence of which I spoke above was also manifested in the online positions of many members of Cavallerizza, who also used the institutional channels and pages linked to the 5 Star

Movement to disseminate their opinions on the events that occurred in the building.

As in all communities of this type, most of the conflicts broke out in the assembly or were eventually discussed in the assembly. In the early years, the Cavallerizza community held its assembly every Wednesday evening, until internal conflicts have reduced the significance of the assembly as a place where community self-government was formalized. When the community of artists founded the so-called Creative Community, all (or almost all) members of the latter stopped attending the assembly, establishing their own assembly every Monday evening. The latter added to the many meetings that already took place. As a result, for many of the inhabitants and activists, this new situation was unsustainable:

Because there are a lot of assemblies...One can't take it anymore...That's another problem, if you want, we can talk about it, but it's very simple, that is, there are too many and they are not so effective, and one after a while becomes exhausted ...(Lorenzo 2018).

This is how Lorenzo condenses a difficult moment of the Cavallerizza community and the attempt by a group within the community to create a relaxed atmosphere and effective collaboration by organizing assemblies. The assembly is a symbol, as well as a place to elaborate ideas and to share politically a process of self-government. The assembly is, as Hardt & Negri (2017) have explained well, what allows us to hone the ability to rethink democracy and to realize the 'common,' but at the same time it is the metaphorical representation of the community.

During the Cavallerizza assemblies, all the issues addressed in this report were brought to the fore: the split between the two communities, the power dynamics within the community, the controversial rise of the leaders, the question of rules, the tendency to use the rooms in an exclusive way, etc. For a long time, the assembly was a vantage point from which to grasp the troubles afflicting the community. It had to come to terms with all the problems facing communities where no consensus has been reached on the political principles that hold a community together.

Many times, attempts were made to address the problems of the assembly by inviting external facilitators, organizing real training courses for community members on how to conduct an assembly. However, as it has transpired from the fieldwork, the problems affecting the community were not the result of an improper assembly management. On the contrary, the assembly was a mirror of the problems that beset the community and that prevented it from converging towards a common political goal.

4.2.8. Turin and the hegemony of legal knowledge

The civic use process: writing the Regulation

The inauguration of a new local administration was a fundamental stepstone in the evolution of the relations between the occupants and the municipal government. In

December 2016, negotiations with the new City Council⁴¹ led to the organization of a public meeting about Civic Uses and Common Goods, involving representatives from l'asilo (Naples), some technicians working in the municipal administration and the new political representatives of the Municipality.⁴² The new Vice Mayor of Turin decided to launch a participatory process to discuss the future of Cavallerizza Reale with the actors interested in taking care of the building, including 'Assemblea Cavallerizza 14:45' (in February 2017).

Apparently, the new City Council elected in 2016 embraced the idea of such a participatory process in order to involve citizens in a commoning experiment at Cavallerizza. A municipal council motion of July 2017 invited the association 'Assemblea Cavallerizza 14:45' to initiate the process of drafting the Regulation for the Civic Use of Cavallerizza Reale. This Regulation had to be ratified by the Administration and could be immediately applied to some parts of the building, i.e. the ones that been bought back by the Municipality in the meantime. The writing process, completed in March 2018, consisted of a series of public assemblies (ten in total, which were almost always held on Sunday afternoons), during which some important elements appeared on stage which might help us to assess the political character of this process and the concept of the 'common' shared by its participants. Indeed, during these assemblies, the occupants belonging to the wider Cavallerizza community came face-to-face with other people who visited Cavallerizza to attend events and meetings as guests and perceived it as a potentially interesting place for political action, but who had never personally participated in the self-government of the space.

My fieldwork took place in this writing phase, which gave me the opportunity to follow it closely and to collaborate with the group in charge of the public assemblies, during which the points that would be included in the Regulation were discussed and agreed upon according to the so-called consensus method (della Porta, Andretta, Mosca & Reiter 2006, della Porta 2008). The end of this process led to a new phase of discussion with jurists from the University of Turin (including Professor Ugo Mattei), who undertook to rewrite some parts of the Regulation so as to translate it into legally appropriate language and to ensure its legal validity and effectiveness.

The attitude of the Municipality towards the civic use process was not consistent over time. In addition, rumors began circulating about the attitude of local politicians. In February 2015,

⁴¹ As explained in detail later in this report and in the report about the Naples case study, civic use is a legal instrument which was first introduced by social movements in the city of Naples (at the initiative of l'asilo).

⁴² Contacts were established particularly with some councillors, including Vice Mayor Guido Montanari, who played an important role in the subsequent events involving the administration and its relations with the Cavallerizza community. Interviewed for this research, Montanari expressed some positions that are very useful for analyzing the mode of interaction between the local institutions and the common goods movements in a city like Turin.

The Administration, within the Culture Commission of the Municipality and Region, decided about the intended use of Cavallerizza during the hearing of Councillor Passoni (Budget, Municipality of Turin) and Councillor Paris (Culture, Piedmont Region). It was proposed that Cavallerizza become a hostel - 'Hostel de Charme' - and its management be contracted out to large hotel chains, while the residual spaces (one third of the total, amounting to more than 5000 m²) would host commercial establishments. Cavallerizza, however, was not (or could not be) removed from the securitization plan and its sale was, therefore, not suspended. The protocol included a confidentiality clause that did not allow any citizen to access the documents (Cavallerizza 2019a).

As for Cavallerizza, the fragmentation within its community and the discord among its various components resulted from different attitudes towards the civic use process. Some followed the juridical path and held that reaching an agreement with the city administration is an important step, others looked at it with indifference, preferring to continue their own artistic activities and essentially ignoring the legal work needed to achieve the recognition of the civic use of the building. For a long time, the members of the Creative Community of Cavallerizza did not attend the public assemblies held to draw up the regulation, relying instead on the contribution of the 'politicians.' They only became actively involved in the civic use process after breaking off altogether with the politicians, as they felt the need to closely follow the developments that would decide their fate.

During the first of the ten assemblies, it was surprising to see that many of those present were interested in legal matters. Like the following ones, this assembly had a considerable turnout, since it was attended by nearly one hundred people. However, many of them were tackling the issue of the commons and the civic use process for the first time, while the Regulation had already been drafted by a small set of individuals, the members of the Communication Group. As the discussion went on, the links with the Neapolitan experience became immediately apparent. It was publicly stated, in fact, that some parts of the Cavallerizza Regulation that would be discussed in the upcoming assemblies had been copied and pasted directly from l'asilo's Civic Use Regulation. They turned to the comrades in l'asilo in order to solve the problems and conflicts that tormented the Cavallerizza community. As I said in the case study of Naples, there is a great asymmetry between the two communities. For the Cavallerizza members, the 'comrades from Naples' became a point of reference, since they had a superior theoretical and technical competence and a stronger ability to pursue the process of self-government.

The spatial arrangement of the conflicting groups during the public assemblies interestingly mirrored their position within the community. Most of the artists, for example, stood near the front door, with one foot inside and one outside that formal situation, and they often went out to smoke. They looked perplexed and wary. It was their way of communicating their critical position towards the process taking place, as

it had been managed by the Communication Group in a way that, in their view, had been wholly undemocratic.

As mentioned in the case study of Naples, ‘urban civic use’ is the urban version of the ancient statute of civic uses. The latter are the ‘perpetual rights of the members of a community...over assets belonging to the state, or to a municipality, or to a private individual’ (Treccani Encyclopedia 2020). They are of very ancient origin and ‘connected to the remote institution of collective property on earth’ (Treccani Encyclopedia 2020).⁴³ Starting from this ancient institution, the group of jurists from l’asilo steered the ‘Neapolitan way’ to common goods. The application of the civic use institution took the place of the regulations that had been endorsed in several other Italian cities (Bologna above all, but also Chieri, where the commitment of jurist Ugo Mattei is well known), and developments at the Ex Asilo Filangieri became a textbook case. After many assemblies with ‘comrades from l’asilo,’ the Cavallerizza community decided to follow the Neapolitan example. However, the Neapolitans repeatedly warned the Cavallerizza residents that civic uses are not a fully replicable model. They always highlighted the problem of adapting this legal instrument, as well as all the other legal instruments, to the context in which it is implemented.

The choice to take the civic use path affected the relationship between the community and the institutions. The central tenet of this formula is that it is not based on the concession of a space by the Municipality to an association or a specific body, but it provides for the self-government of the space by an open community of people. To grasp the singularity this model, compared to other formulas employed in Italy, it may be useful to report a text by one of the jurists from l’asilo. In addition to the direct management of a space by the public administration and to its concession to non-profit associations, there actually is ‘a third hypothesis,’ that of the communities themselves claiming the government and the ‘direct management of the common goods, promoting their collective enjoyment.’

A claim that is reflected in the references to ‘self-government,’ absent in the Bolognese model and central, instead, in the other two cases to be examined. For the art. 20 of the regulation of the municipality of Chieri, proposed by the then vice mayor Ugo Mattei...[following] the model experimented with in Naples...self-government is connected to a basic decision-making system which puts at the center of the process not a single subject as an exclusive concessionaire, but an open number of individuals, associations and collectives that can benefit from the common good which is the subject of the sharing agreement (Micciarelli 2017: 145-146).

⁴³ In some regions of Italy, civic uses date back to pre-Roman times and have never expired. The content of these rights is very varied: grazing, mountain pasture, wood making (*ius incidendi* and *capulandi*), gathering fronds (*frondaticum*) or grass (*herbaticum*), gleaning (*spigaticum*), and sowing (*ius serendi*) (see Treccani Encyclopedia 2020).

The choices made by the Cavallerizza assembly were, therefore, framed by the more general Italian legal debate on the commons, leaning towards the solution proposed by the 'Neapolitan school.' This decision evidently affected the relations between the community and the various schools of jurists, who had different opinions regarding the formulas to be adopted. As we shall see, the Cavallerizza case would turn into a bone of contention among legal actors holding different views as to the concept and the practice of the commons.

The first public assembly highlighted a number of useful elements that allow us to grasp the attitude of the Cavallerizza community towards the civic use process. It was 'the mother of all constituent assemblies,' as one of the participants said. In other words, it was a question of 'thinking of a method together and then proposing a method to decide the next steps together.'

The assembly focused on the management of that first phase so as to avoid becoming an easy target: 'Because now, with this resolution, this assembly has been given institutional investiture, that is, it is a town assembly also in a formal sense,' according to another participant. These remarks mirrored the decision to offer an image of oneself that could be credible for the local institutions, with which a process of collaboration had been initiated. The people who were closest to the Communication Group and to the contingent of the politicians were impatient, asking for more steps forward to advance the civic use process. They complained about the absence from the assemblies of all those who did artistic activities in Cavallerizza. To get people more involved, Geremia (Communication Group) suggested setting up a register for the participants to sign, so as to have everyone's contacts and be able to call them each week to send them the agenda of the next assembly.

The discussion around rules frequently posed by the Communication Group was often challenged by other people: 'the rules are useful if they manage to communicate to the outside what self-discipline is. They should not be taken excessively seriously or used to impose punishments.' Also, regarding the regulation to be drafted, some people questioned the excessive attention paid to its 'legislative' and regulatory dimension. Another participant stated that 'the regulation we write is serious but also flexible and dynamic at the same time. Once approved, it can be changed from the following day onwards.' This interpretation is borrowed from the Neapolitan friends of 'Asilo Filangieri,' who had lent their support to the Turin community in drawing up their regulation and in managing the most difficult phases in the life of their project. In this case, too, 'the comrades from l'asilo' were explicitly mentioned during the assemblies.

In essence, those participating in the public assemblies espoused a straightforward principle expressed by one of them: 'the civic use regulation means that we translate into an institutional form what Cavallerizza already is.'

Of course, the civic use process also exacerbated the clashes between the two main factions within the Cavallerizza community. During an interview recorded after a

public assembly for the civic use, Geremia clearly summed up the main elements that defined the relationship between the so-called ‘artists’ and the so-called ‘politicians.’ The latter accuse the former of using Cavallerizza in an instrumental way, as a cosy space where they can create art. For their part, the artists reject the formalism and the burden that stringent rules entailed. Geremia’s opinion appears to be in line with what I have described so far:

This is what they are telling us, that rules cage art, that we must go beyond the assembly dimension, what does it mean? They say: ‘how can we experiment with all these rules?’...But coincidentally this desire for experimentation came out when an institutionalized path becomes more concrete, when it becomes a written act in the city statute, which will be made official with a resolution, so they are terrified...Before they were excited about their stay in Cavallerizza: ‘it is a beautiful, charismatic place, where you can do fantastic things. I, as an artist, work there, because it is convenient for me, because I can stay there, because nobody breaks my balls, because I don’t have a manager, a curator, a gallery owner who hosts me and here I can instead do appealing things.’ Santino [one of the leaders of the artists] last Sunday, during the public assembly, said one important thing: he, as an artist, needs a place to stay, where to work and where to create. But I would ask Santino a fundamental question: we distinguish the objectives to be achieved, they speak of a community of artists that has been created and must be preserved, absolutely yes, I agree, it is a crazy experience what they are doing as a community of artists and surely it is something to promote, help and preserve. But that’s one thing, civic use in Cavallerizza is another. Without civic use in Cavallerizza, the artists’ community must move elsewhere, while a ratified civic use of the space also allows us to preserve what the artist community is doing (Geremia 2018).

Law, power relations and leadership issues

The role played by the legal actors in the decisions of the Cavallerizza assembly is a hinge point of this report. More generally, it is a relevant point in the whole report dedicated to the Italian case studies (see my general introduction). In fact, the ‘politicity’ of the self-government processes that I observed -in Turin, Naples and Bologna- was conditioned to a large extent by the important role taken on by legal actors (activists or simple consultants close to local institutions and/or to the movements for the commons), i.e. by the influence that they exerted on the ethical choices and the moral attitudes of the activists operating in the spaces to which my ethnographic research is devoted.

In October 2017, before the public assemblies began, the people involved in the management of Cavallerizza were invited to participate in a meeting. It was an opportunity for everyone to sort out any misunderstandings and to express their position concerning the civic use process so as to launch it in a relaxed and less

confrontational atmosphere. The main representative of the ‘politicians’ group (and therefore of the Communications Group, responsible for managing the civic use process) suggested that all those present should focus on the ideas through which each of the topics would be considered, on ‘the political vision with which you want to help Cavallerizza.’ She argued that people should not offer allegiance based on friendships, but that ‘they should think about the common good when they act in this space.’ This reference to the ‘higher’ and more formal value of the ‘common good,’ which goes beyond friendships and relationships, was very common in discussions between the two blocs in the community. Since they were in disagreement about fundamental aspects of the political path that they were sharing, the politicians would frequently resort to political-moral issues to call the ‘unreliable’ artists to order. It was a paternalistic call, whose strong moral connotation infuriated the artists.

These contrasts reveal another important facet of the Cavallerizza dynamics, namely the role of emotions in its internal power struggles. Feelings of affection and friendship were at times described as a fundamental ingredient for the survival and the success of the project, while on other occasions they were stigmatized as a harmful complication that got in the way of realizing ‘the common good.’ In both cases, these were simply tools for achieving certain forms of hegemony within the community. It was not just an instrumental attitude. On the contrary, it manifested the conceptions of the ‘political’ and the ‘common’ informing the community. As we shall see in the next section, these mechanisms raise important questions bearing on leadership and the more or less instrumental use of the law. Since the law is not accessible to everyone, those who know how to handle it can fix the meaning of the ‘common good’ - a formalized, codified and regulated common good.

Therefore, two different ways of understanding and conceiving the commons within the community rose to the surface. On the one hand, the commons are intended as a process of sharing based on the ‘power of love,’ following Hardt and Negri (2009: 192-199), for whom love and the common are primary forces. In this perspective, the social life of commoning at its best breeds another affectivity and re-imagines the terms of modern civilization beyond the homo oeconomicus, engendering another kind of politics, which is more social, relational, democratic, ecologically responsible (Bollier & Helfrich 2019: 108-109). On the other hand, a specific way of conceiving rules and the law draws attention to political action as a rational activity, which pursues certain purposes and for which the common good is nothing but the realization of a well-regulated society that is respectful of rules. As we have seen, the law is not in itself a harbinger of such a rational conception of the commons. Indeed, the Naples case shows what it means to make ‘creative’ use of it. In Cavallerizza, too, the law was regarded as a simple tool serving a political process. Nevertheless, when conflict and dissent are strong, a part of the community may decide to use the law as a weapon to control the ongoing process. One of the artists told me about the discomfort that he felt when faced with a stringent and oppressive conception of the ‘common good,’

construed in regulatory terms rather than experienced as a shared practice:

When we say ‘let’s take matters into our own hands,’ we impose ourselves (on it) and we create a doctrine, which is enforced for the sake of some alleged ‘collective good.’ And who carries the banner of the ‘collective good’? I believe that the whole conflict in this community is based on waving this flag. Who has the right to say what is good for everyone? Who has the right to say what we all think? And it’s one of my greatest sorrows...I can’t stand it when someone speaks for me and I think differently (Matteo 2018).

The apparent tensions suggest that the dynamics at play here are linked to the concept of affect rather than to different political views. Or, perhaps, it is better to say that the general political views of the people belonging to this community are driven by affects much more than we are willing to admit. From this perspective, an anthropologically founded conception of the political is configured, that is, a conception built around the relationships and different meanings that the political itself takes in relation to its reference community.

As I said, the role of jurists was very important in the phase of writing the regulation, whose drafting was carried out by Elisa, a member of the community and the de facto leader of this process, and by a group of academics close to Ugo Mattei. They represented figures capable of steering participatory processes from below but, at the same time, they had links with the institutions.

Their presence was considered fundamental at every stage of the more or less formal discussion with the councillors and officials of the Municipality. On these occasions, the Cavallerizza group always featured some jurists. For example, the meetings with Vice Mayor Monatanari were attended by Ugo Mattei, whose role was precisely that of a guarantor for the community. Similarly, the Neapolitan jurists of l’asilo took part in some institutional events, such as a long meeting with Giuseppe Micciarelli at the Turin City Council (see the report on Naples).

What is relevant in this case is the function that these groups of legal ‘experts’ had in the relationship between the municipal administration and the community that managed Cavallerizza. In fact, they had a practical function, because the Cavallerizza residents would not have the tools to draw up a regulation for the civic use of the space. In addition to providing technical support and helping the community to solve its problems, they were also the guarantors of the whole process, of which they tended to conceal any difficulties when the institutions were present. As for the local administrators, they regarded these two groups of experts as a guarantee of the legitimacy of the whole process. Hence, in the Turin case, the law represented a formal instrument for legitimizing a political process. In contrast to the Neapolitan case, there was no room for its creative use here, since it had a specific legitimizing function. Councillors and municipal officials only conversed with the community insofar as it was supported by subjects who vouched for it.

As we read in the report of P.I. Alexandros Kioupkiolis, ‘common hegemony’ should be ‘a hegemonic battle conducted in ways which place decisive power in the hands of the many on terms of equality, plurality, freedom and openness’ (*Report 1. The political*: 10). In this perspective, a fully realized democracy of the commons ‘unsettles standing divisions between rulers and ruled, and it affords to anyone who so wishes the opportunity to take part in political deliberation, lawmaking, administration and law enforcement over collective affairs’ (*Report 1. The political*: 10). The role of individuals equipped with juridical knowledge and skills, as well as the difference in cultural capital between them and the communities that animate a space, contributes to centralizing power within a small group of subjects. In some cases, such as at l’asilo in Naples, they are an integral part of the community and they share with fellow members not only their knowledge but also their reflection and their political practice behind and beyond the use of the law. In Turin, conversely, the community dynamics did not engender virtuous decision-making processes, preventing the formation of a truly collective approach.

Given the importance of these figures and the growing tensions between the two groups of jurists (the Turin group and the Neapolitan group; see the introduction to the Italian case studies), the community no longer knew how to manage its relationships with them. Thus, when the civic use process was nearing its end, in the spring of 2019, internal conflicts inside Cavallerizza were intertwined with the open conflict between these two groups. Many activists would turn to both groups at the same time, causing ever greater tensions between them. The two Cavallerizza blocs addressed one or the other reference group according to internal splits in the space. In some phases, the artists were close to Ugo Mattei, while the politicians were more in line with the Neapolitan group. At other junctures, exactly the opposite occurred. Allegiances were in constant flux. For me, who observed these dynamics while doing fieldwork in both contexts, it was very difficult to keep up with the ever-changing alliances, and my informants were in turn disoriented by this situation as well as worried about the fact that the process was clearly failing.

Introducing the question of leadership in social movements, Morris and Staggenborg (2004: 191) affirm:

Human initiatives and choices guide social movements. Social movement agency is rooted in these initiatives and choices. Social movement leaders are the actors whose hands and brains rest disproportionately on the throttles of social movements. What they do matters and it is the job of social movement analysts to elucidate the dynamics and processes that constrain and enable the work of social movement leaders.

As in any other type of movement, even in the movements for commons in Italy, the question of leadership is crucial. But who are the leaders in this peculiar universe of political action? How are they created, what is their background and what are their

prerogatives? Among the many questions that the two authors ask about the topic of leadership, one appears particularly pertinent here: ‘How do movement leaders become elite challengers and how do their connections to leaders in government and other sectors affect movement goals, strategies, and outcomes?’ (Morris & Staggenborg 2004: 191).

As we can see in Turin, and elsewhere in Italy, leadership and legal knowledge generally go hand in hand. The introduction to the report on the Italian case studies contains a section (‘Legal constructs for the practice of the commons in Italy’) dedicated to the role of legal actors in commoning processes across the Italian territory. Similarly, questions relating to the centrality of the law also appear in the report on the Naples case study. These actors often have a hybrid profile. They practise their profession in the legal field (they are mostly researchers, university professors and/or lawyers) and, at the same time, they actively participate in the practices of some self-governed spaces. They are intellectuals who perform the combined role of professionals and activists. The relevance acquired in Italy by the juridical subjects mentioned in this section means that their knowledge inevitably casts them as charismatic figures. It is, first of all, a matter of status, deriving from the fact that they have authored important contributions on key topics and concepts in this field of study.⁴⁴ But their success also depends on a more pragmatic foundation since, thanks to their technical skills, they can actually help commoning experiences to develop and survive, even in a hostile context, boosting their bargaining power vis-à-vis institutional actors. This state of affairs grants these subjects access to key leadership positions, giving rise to forms of hegemony.

The correlation between legal knowledge and leadership clearly arose in the Turin context. For a long time (about two years), only one person in Cavallerizza possessed the technical and legal knowledge to appropriately engage with the civic use process. She is a lawyer, and her name is Elisa. Her position was crucial at every difficult turn and had a more or less positive effect on the community’s internal problems and breakdowns. For a long time, Elisa was close to the Communication Group, with whom she drafted the first version of the Civic Use Regulation. However, she also entertained friendly and affectionate relations with many of the members of the artists group. She had previously shared political experiences with some of them and she had always felt emotionally close to them. Her position made her feel uncomfortable on several occasions, leading her to manage her relationships with the two communities in an ambiguous and often conflicting way.

Beyond Elisa’s personal feelings and needs, here it is important to underline the importance of her role within Cavallerizza, in order to grasp the power relations within the community and the processes through which internal hegemonies are structured. In theorizing the power of the multitude, Hardt & Negri (2017), starting from the notion

⁴⁴ As regards the Turin context, see, for example, Mattei (2015), Mattei & Quarta (2015; 2018).

of hegemony in Gramsci, provided important elements to rethink leadership. The latter should be relegated to a *tactical* deployment for specific purposes and on special occasions, e.g. when there is a need for swift action or special expertise, and it should be bound by limited mandates. The multitude should hone its capacity to be the main strategist, seeing far in the future and across the social field, weighing the balance of forces, scrutinizing the structures of domination in all their guises, amassing counterpowers, planning for the future and re-organizing social bonds (see Hardt & Negri 2017: 18-19, 279-280).

Elisa's case clearly shows that possessing technical tools and the charisma needed to dominate the community endangers the self-government potential of the multitude even within a rather small group of people.

Until her violent and permanent breakoff with her old friends from the Creative Community, Elisa had held the role of a charismatic leader, necessary for many of the artists, who dared not argue with her because she was the only one who could guarantee that their relationship with the city administration would be on equal (or, rather, less unequal) footing. In the meantime, the conflicts became stronger and stronger, until they got out of hand and poured out on social networks, as we saw in the previous sections. After many ups and downs, estrangements and returns, Elisa left the community for good, but continued to speak publicly about its fate and defects, without ever really giving up her role.

Other forms of strong leadership structured the daily life of Cavallerizza. An example of this is Santino, an artist who participated in the occupation of the building and never relinquished his hegemonic position until he was permanently evicted. If Elisa's leadership was based on her legal knowledge and political skills, Santino's was mainly based on his determination to hold a central role and on his constant monitoring of what happened inside the space. Santino was granted various exemptions so that he could continue to live in the building, even after the time that the assembly had established that his artistic residence expired. His stubbornness and his constant insistence on having a central role were performative and led the rest of the community to allow him what he was asking for.

Elisa and Santino had known each other for a long time and had a rather major impact on the whole process at Cavallerizza. The relationship between the two and their quarrels deeply informed the community's internal splits.

Other figures played crucial roles, too, but here I only and briefly describe the two main ones, because they are representative of the vicious mechanisms that vitiated the Cavallerizza experience, preventing it from pursuing a virtuous participatory process. These two individuals did not gain their salience and power by virtue of the wide recognition of their role. They were the expression of the mechanisms created within the space, as well as of the degeneration of human relationships that ensued when the community became unable to look after such relationships.

4.2.9. The disintegration of a community and the disposal of a common good

At this point it is imperative to make a clarification that once again concerns my position in the field during my research in Cavallerizza. The point of view from which I observe the events is inevitably conditioned by my refusal to enter into a symbiotic relationship with the community. Of course, I established good relationships with individual members with whom I was in tune -with some, even a real friendship- but I have always maintained a certain detachment from the community life. In many cases, assemblies, meetings and events were not a pleasant moment for me because of the ongoing conflicts. Following them closely was painful, but also embarrassing.

Some ethnographers have articulated how a tendentially democratic or radical researcher feels when s/he studies closely the so-called ‘ugly movements.’ They recounted the difficulty of positioning themselves in relation to xenophobic, nationalist or fundamentalist political movements and parties, whose basic elements they do not share and which express political positions and social behaviours that are often repulsive for the researcher (Esseveld & Eyerman 1992; some Italian cases are described by Avanza 2007; 2018). In this case, I was not in contact with a reality completely alien to my worldview. Still, the community I was engaged with expressed political positions often distant from mine. This heterogeneity was difficult to deal with it, while certain inter-individual behaviours were equally repugnant.

All the mechanisms that I have laid out so far therefore inevitably suffer from my positioning, the result of a long and constant observation, but also from my defensive attitude. The latter is also the result of my habit of frequenting other occupied spaces and other more or less organized collectives in the city, through which I had acquired an alternative view from which to observe what I could see directly in the daily life of my fieldwork. Hence, I was able to see how Cavallerizza was perceived by other social movements. More precisely, I could distinguish two main external perspectives on this community: that of the non-Turin people who belong to the national network of common goods, and that of the other Turin activists who have chosen to distance themselves from this project, talking about it with distrust and sometimes even with prejudice.

As far as the first ones are concerned, I started to collect testimonies on this experience since the two days organized in Cavallerizza in September 2017 and called ‘Anomalie.’ Since we still did not know each other, some activists from Palermo and those from Bologna had tentatively expressed some of their perplexities. Over time, national assembly after national assembly, the discourse about Cavallerizza’s problems had now become a *topos*, an inevitable reference in any chat between militants from different cities. The prevailing assessment, in this context, was the low political strength of this community and the fear that internal conflicts could not be resolved due to the difficulty of rethinking the ongoing political process, which seemed to many destined for failure.

As for the other political collectives of Turin, many of these attended the space because its location -the very city center- and its characteristics -a historic building to which almost all the Turin residents feel naturally connected- make it an open space, potentially accessible to all, a place in which everyone believed that they could carry out activities. This was no longer possible since the community that occupied it began to break their relationships with other groups, driving many people away -sometimes following very strong conflicts. Others left of their own free will, because they did not recognize themselves in the way the prevailing community managed Cavallerizza.

In general, as I said, it is very difficult to draw clear boundaries between those who felt part of Cavallerizza and those who did not, precisely because it was a space in which, at first, many other movements would have liked to conduct their activities. The community that inhabited and frequented it in the last years was the one that had prevailed after a long conflict.

I also had many informal conversations with subjects who did not participate in Cavallerizza, but who were part of other urban movements (autonomous, anarchists, etc.). On the part of all the other movements in Turin, they were very critical of the community. The dialogue with the other movements was completely interrupted. This represents another knot that I also explored in the interviews I held with some activists of Cavallerizza.

What was the ground of the sceptical representations of the political and social experience of Cavallerizza from the outside? And what were the opinions of the same subjects who participated -in various ways- in the path of Cavallerizza? The difficulties in the internal communication between the different micro-communities that had been shaped within the space were often connected to the more general mode of interaction between the social movements of the city. Many activists who have participated in the activities of social movements in Turin -CSOAs (self-managed social centers), associations, political parties of the radical left that are close to social centers- noted to me the general difficulty of networking between the different collectives that propose alternative forms of politics in Turin. This theme has surfaced both in formalized interviews and in informal chats with people who live in Turin and know in depth the scene of the city's social movements. As a resident of the city, I also know that it is an 'ancient' topic, which voices the discontent of those who aspired to a greater interaction between the different actors that pursue alternative forms of politics.

This reflection does not circulate only on an informal level. It has got down on paper on several occasions, in documents and blog articles and local newspapers, which express the hope that the different Turin movements will become more capable of networking. Consider, for example, this recent reflection that appeared on the blog of a well-known Turin association:

Today, the associations succeed in many cases in carrying out a positive action on the territory...but what is striking is the almost total shattering of these

experiences. Every reality is very closed, there is no exchange of ideas, nor any attempt to build links between these experiences (Lovisolò 2019).

From this point of view, the Turin case can be interpreted in the light of the Naples case. As I wrote above in the Naples report, the Massa Critica network was put together precisely in order to generate forms of interaction, collaboration and discussion between different political and social realities. These are very different from each other; however, they recognize themselves within the same political horizon. As I argue in the case study of Naples, Massa Critica includes movements and experiences that were conflicting with each other a few years ago -and some of these conflicts took violent forms. Many interviewees talked to me about Massa Critica as an absolute novelty, stressing that until 2011 many violent fights between people belonging to 'rival' social centers had taken place. In this historical phase, within the Neapolitan common goods network it is possible to discern various modes of listening despite the basic dissent over the political assumptions of a given initiative. In many cases, despite disagreeing with the initiatives organized by other spaces, they participate in them, deciding to express their disagreement explicitly but not entirely in conflict. The dialogue I witnessed between spaces such as l'asilo, the ex Opg and the Scugnizzo (see above, the report on Naples) would not be possible in a social reality like that of the Turin movements. Why? Beyond culturalist explanations, which take into consideration the irony with which the conflict in the city of Naples is played out, we can still notice some core elements that mark out the approach to politics in Turin.

Some artists who used to work in the building considered Cavallerizza a wonderful place. The rhetoric produced by those who lived within this place was anchored in a mythical narrative of the activities carried out within it from the moment it was occupied. Throughout this report I tried to bring out the self-critical visions (and there are many) that I collected during my field research. As I said, many people within the community knew that Cavallerizza was a strongly conflictual place, in which the political ideal linked to the commons often gave way to intense and harsh clashes between the different components of the community. For some of them, this awareness was decisive, driving them to leave Cavallerizza and to give up on the effort to change the tense and conflict-ridden atmosphere with their contribution. For others, those who did not leave the community, this account of Cavallerizza as a conflictual place, incapable of expressing its political strength, has been assimilated, internalized and reworked, up to the point of overturning the stigma and of appropriating it in positive forms.

This appropriation was often explicit and was used by some to explain pain and conflict. I mentioned the tendency of the inhabitants to hide in Cavallerizza, which was a good refuge for them. When I spoke to Matteo about his difficulty in getting out of the building, his propensity to get trapped in it, he explained to me that the community itself is the trap. The more it malfunctioned and generated pain, the more he and others felt the need to find a shelter in it. This process gave rise to various

forms of dependence, but also of identification with the vicious dynamics that characterized the community.

This place has very high pain and joy peaks. But it is also the nature of this city, which lives this dichotomy between peaks of different colours. There is a whiter and a blacker energy and both act...not as good and bad, but as two rivers, and this place is a little in the middle of the current between the two rivers...

Sometimes there is a sort of atavistic solidarity between us that becomes sacrifice, and when it becomes sacrifice and destabilizes the well-being of each of us, it risks becoming a negative contamination, because if you are not well and you want to help others, then you do some damage (Matteo 2018).

In this perspective, the decision to stay in Cavallerizza is linked to the need to resolve internal conflicts precisely by experiencing the conflict:

It is an attempt to resolve and evolve through conflict with others. This also binds us unconsciously, because we do not want to betray a part of ourselves, and therefore we try to accept some elements of this experience, even if they are perhaps the parts of ourselves that we most refuse, and that we project on the people with whom we have a conflict. I realized that we live in a large gym, where everyone is looking for himself/herself. In this search, we clash with the whole range of society, because it is a very diverse community, and therefore a sort of fractal of the world, with the potential and all the difficulties of a society that reflects life (Matteo 2018).

This vision rested on a rather widespread representation of Cavallerizza among the artists, and particularly in a circle of people. Matteo was in fact part of a group of people who were shooting a documentary on this space, in order to represent it and to find a key to reading it through images. Even the documentary project, like many other Cavallerizza projects, was troubled and suffered many slowdowns due to the precariousness of the work of its promoters, but also because of the conflicts between them. One of them, Alice, allowed me to access her precious materials and the interviews she had already held for the documentary. When she talked to me about Cavallerizza, she defined it verbatim as a 'society in captivity,' proposing an interpretation that had already been advanced by others, namely Cavallerizza as a metaphor for society. In this context, the relationships and the conflicts between people belonging to the community were described by Alice as 'meta-relationships:'

I realized that when I'm in Cavallerizza, I'm not only Alice, but I'm the one I represent. All the people in Cavallerizza also have a strong social and public role. The private sector also becomes public and there is no longer a division between public and private (Alice 2018).

In this vision, the members of the community were identified by the others according to their social affiliation, that is, as individuals who already had a role outside

Cavallerizza, which was reflected in their relations with the community. Of course, all these gave rise to prejudices and misunderstandings between people and relegated them to a fixed role, which was difficult to deny.

Even within a very close relationship such as that of housing, a mechanism is created, which is that of recognition. For example, during the first three months that I was there, Adriano did not want me to eat the food he cooked because he said that what I was doing was not useful, because the results of my daily work were not visible, because obviously it was an intangible job, and therefore I did not deserve to stay there and I didn't deserve to eat. This was absurd: once I invited a friend of mine to lunch and they didn't serve us food. And then I started having problems because I had to make my work visible, to have a social recognition. And it is absurd because I have my social recognition outside that nobody questions...my skills...While in the micro-society of Cavallerizza you are continually questioned (Alice 2018).

The class issue already described in the account of the different sub-communities of this space recurs once again. The intellectual work of Alice, filmmaker and anthropologist, is diminished and it is not recognized by those who performed much more practical and 'concrete' functions. For example, Adriano, to whom Alice refers, is a former convict who lived in Cavallerizza and took care of the building by carrying out manual tasks, washing, repairing and helping all the other inhabitants. Needless to say, he lived on the wing of the building that was once destined for servants.

Alice and other inhabitants of Cavallerizza continuously joked about this awareness, to the point that they created a role-playing game, in which many of the inhabitants represented a character of the dark drama par excellence, Alice in Wonderland. The Queen of Hearts, the Cheshire Cat, the White Rabbit, the Mad Hatter, and so on. The metaphor is handy and it circulated in the conversations, gossip and meta-talk between the inhabitants, influencing in turn the internal meta-relationships. This metaphor has helped to share the discomfort among some members of the community, who now had a captivating narrative to identify with, in order to exorcize negative narratives about their community.

As Michael Herzfeld (1997) explained in a very popular theoretical reflection, in a community, shared embarrassments engender an internal cohesion rather than shared virtues. They strengthen identity and give life to 'social poetics,' understood as a 'rhetoric of action' (Herzfeld 1982). The last phase of the occupation of Cavallerizza was marked by other conflicts and new difficulties. The Municipality had not yet recognized the civic use of the space, the community still did not exist as a single cohesive body, but it was always divided into sub-communities that spoke less and less with each other. And yet, those who had always believed in this political experiment (or, as in many cases, they always maintained it because they believed that the space was useful to their work as artists), elaborated a narrative that we can trace back to the

concept of cultural intimacy elaborated by Herzfeld.

4.2.10. Commons in Turin: a conclusion

Certain Cavallerizza activists and inhabitants -including Alice and Matteo with their documentary- have attempted to explicate pain and conflict, to shape them through art. Year after year, every time I visited the 'Here' exhibition, this aspect seemed increasingly clear to me. 'Here' was located on the upper floors of the building and used the numerous rooms to display hundreds of works by the selected artists. A very long corridor, very crowded, in which it was difficult to orient oneself because of the huge amount of works exhibited in the different rooms that overlooked the corridor. This exhibition was a unique opportunity to witness closely, among other things, the pain produced by that community. Room after room, artwork after artwork, that event composed the picture of misunderstandings, abuses and violence that I had grasped ethnographically. A semiologist could have paused for years in an attempt to connect the signifiers he encountered in the exhibition and the events that had happened in that place during its five intense years of life.

There is a work that helps us to understand what we are talking about more than others, the great work that Antonio created for 'Here' in 2018, when he had already decided that he would leave that space. He is a young artist, and a couple of years earlier, when he arrived in Turin to attend the academy of fine arts, he had already heard of Cavallerizza. He was very curious to see that space for himself, that is, what was happening inside, to start experimenting and to propose an artistic residence. Over time, his enthusiasm had diminished. For a long time, he had been very hard on the community, he suffered a lot from the prevaricating behaviour and the continuous conflicts, but he still continued to frequent the space, carving his own niche in which he could produce his own works without running into problems with other artists.

Antonio built his artwork into one of the rooms on the top floor and he spent many months inside it. He wanted to go away and to bequeath to the community a work that represented his unease and fatigue.

This work has a double meaning. On the one hand, an aesthetic one, on the other, it is a gift of love that I am trying to leave in this place, because I think that after 'Here' I will leave here. I'm not going to live and share with people I have nothing to do with, and this wonderful place is not enough to justify this...it's beautiful, and it would be beautiful if it were as I imagined it from the first moment I entered, but it will never be so (Antonio 2018).

Our long interview took place right in the room of his artwork, which consisted of a huge papier-mâché structure attached to the walls and the ceiling of the room, which was difficult to remove. Antonio described it as an attempt to connect his artistic work with Cavallerizza's political vocation.

I think that Art, if you do it in a certain way, can legitimize this path, and

therefore I try to legitimize this path through Art. The sense of this work [he refers to the work we have in front of us] is that I am creating something that will be difficult to remove afterwards. This wants to be a pebble in the shoe to anyone who will then want to clear this place and remove everything. I am thinking about it in relation to the *carabiniere* who enters here and the poor guy who will have to cut everything. And it must also be beautiful enough to make him say: maybe I don't. This is my idea.

And this should be the sense of this place. In fact, here we try to create the museum of living art [he speaks of a project called Living Museum, started by a group of artists in the Cavallerizza Royal Gardens], so what I'm doing is precisely living art, because it grows, it evolves day after day, and it will always be new because there will always be people who come in and enjoy. This is my idea of art, but...in this place there are no people who truly have a common vision and want to carry it out for the collective good...because here...if we continue to think about ourselves, where do we go? We must always think about who is out of here, but nobody here understands this.

The pain, the difficulties and the fragmentation experienced by a huge and heterogeneous community have been addressed by means of two main instruments. On the one hand, the use of rules to defend the community against destructive attitudes. Hence, many inhabitants of Cavallerizza -and particularly the so-called politicians- have tried to stem the difficulty of building a virtuous community by relying on rules. On the other, art as a response to pain and an attempt to rework it. In this perspective, 'the political' is conceived in such an implicit way that it borders on non-political issues. Nevertheless, in both cases the problem comes up again and again, since an individual disposition prevails. In the first case, the disposition to protect oneself from the potential abuse of others; in the second case, the disposition to affirm oneself as an artist but without any connection with a common political process. These two dispositions, opposed to each other, have made the community weak and have lent themselves to exploitation by the institutions and by individuals who have attended Cavallerizza with short-term projects. The transformative potential of this project was therefore endangered by the weakness of the community. This fragility, as we have seen, is reflected in the weakness of the local institutions linked to the 5 Star Movements, whose policy for the commons has never found a concrete application.

The failure roughly concerns all aspects that make a political project a common one. Let's take the description of the 'commons counter-hegemony' that was set out in the theoretical reports of the Heteropolitics project.

'Common hegemony' is, indeed, a hegemonic politics which rallies together broad-based political fronts, uniting social forces around a common political project and identity, with a view to altering the balance of power in society and to configuring new social relations. Common hegemony ties in with Gramsci's

and Laclau's strategizing. It aspires to an empowered democracy which will be really governed by the will of popular majorities on a footing of equality, collective decision-making, plurality, openness, sharing, solidarity, and care for earth. Common hegemony, however, is distinctly a political endeavour directed by 'common people' in egalitarian and horizontalist, anti-hierarchical ways. It dismisses top-down leadership, homogenizing unity and 'representation' by leaders, politicians or activists who take decisions for the people in their place. This 'other hegemony' commons political initiative by making political decision and government a collective affair of ordinary citizens on equal terms (*Report 2. The common: 9-10*).

Needless to say, the objectives and political projects of a movement for commons, as described in this short quote, have not been realized in Cavallerizza. Nevertheless, the concept of failure has a strong normative connotation, which is alien to the sensitivity with which my ethnographic research was conducted. It is clear that, over five years, the Cavallerizza project has pursued forms of political participation and of rethinking self-government and artistic self-production which had not taken place in any other space in Turin. It is also evident that pain and conflict are unavoidable elements in any human attempt to undertake a tortuous journey that reverses traditional forms of politics and the usual dynamics of power within a community. From an emic point of view, the concept of failure proves to be very limited, since it does not identify the sentiment of many members of this community, who began this process with quite indefinite expectations from a theoretical and political point of view.

However, we cannot fail to take into account the strong moral and ethical implications of the militancy for the commons in the Turin context. These activists have largely renounced the values of antagonism and the total rejection of institutions, and they built a moral horizon of action that distinguished them from other social movements. To function linearly, such a project needs a set of internal agreements and consensus around some basic notions that govern the idea of living and acting in common. In the way it was conceived and applied in Cavallerizza, the 'common' is an elitist project, or at least difficult to access for those who did not possess the notion of the 'commons' and who were not willing to rely on those who commanded it. The results of this attempt to domesticate an entire community and to bend it to the power of an elitist notion are evident in this case study. One part of the community had no choice but to resort to the rules -and their sanctioning function- to defend themselves against dissent. Another part of it decided, instead, to disregard the principles that regulated life in Cavallerizza in order to defend themselves against rules that harnessed their artistic tension, and, therefore, in turn, to defend themselves against dissent from their idea of art as commons. Two sides of the same coin.

What undermined well-being within the Cavallerizza project was precisely the attempt to establish, once again, a form of internal hegemony around some key concepts that a part of the community handled better than another part of it. The much criticized

‘indoctrination’ that characterizes other political projects took shape here, as well, around the notion of the ‘common good’ and the aura that its many supporters have given it, even within political and economic institutions and through the legitimizing power of the law. This was perhaps the main contradiction of Cavallerizza’s project and the context in which it unfolded.

The morality of the commons in Turin

A moral conception of rules and the institution of norms to protect itself from conflicts informed the community of Cavallerizza. This obviously represents a short-term solution that allowed it to take care of relationships on the basis of complex mechanisms. We can grasp this attitude by connecting ethics, morality and the daily political action of the subjects. Analyzing the practices of these subjects in the light of modern critical moral anthropology (Fassin 2012; 2014) allows us to interpret the constant recourse to the words ‘rules’ and ‘norms’ within Cavallerizza. The distinction between the two communities to which I referred is produced precisely on this point. Faced with a part of the community that attributed a great weight to rules, the members of the Creative Community rejected this very logic. As for the cross between institutional ethics, moral from below and political action of the subjects, it is necessary to quote what one of my interlocutors told me during my research, referring not only to the Turin case but to the approach to the commons of the entire national network for common goods:

The approach of the movements for common goods suffers from a basic misunderstanding: they tend to re-propose a Kantian idea of ethics as moral, instead of an Aristotelian reading (and practice) that conceives of ethics as virtue. For this reason, their conception of politics and the ‘political’ is often evanescent (Attilio 2018).

Attilio’s words could not fail to bring me back to the so-called ethical turn of contemporary anthropology and to the usefulness that those reflections had had throughout the first phase of my research in Turin. Returning again to the reflections of Didier Fassin (2012; 2014), we can distinguish two currents within modern social sciences that have grappled with an ethical-moral analysis of social action. A Durkheimian one, which refers to morality as theorized by Kant, and a Foucauldian one, which refers to the concept of ethics as virtue that dates back to Aristotle.

According to the former, an action is judged in relation to the respect of rules or principles to which the agent can refer. According to the latter, an action is assessed in function of the virtuous disposition that underlies the appropriate psychology of the agent. Anthropologists inscribed in the first paradigm view morality as the set of values and norms that determine what agents are supposed to do and not to do. Ethnographers adopting the second paradigm regard ethics as the subjective work produced by agents to conduct themselves in accordance with their inquiry about what a good life is. The former tend to see morality as

exterior to individuals and imposed on them as a social superego: it is a given. The latter are inclined to analyse ethics as an inner state nourished by virtue and nourishing action: it is a process. Hence the differentiated empirical approaches, in search of moral codes analysed in general terms, or of ethical debates apprehended through particular situations (Fassin 2012: 7-8).

In summarizing these two theoretical and methodological attitudes, Fassin refers to two large families of anthropologists and social scientists in general, and their consequent posture towards the subjects they meet and study. However, my friend Filippo, a Palermitan activist, is right to attribute one of these two postures to the movements for the commons, since it is a network of subjects who ask theoretical questions of this tenor before putting the commons into practice in their communities. Not all of them, as we have seen, command the theoretical notions to pose the problem in these terms, but for all the problem arises in terms of rules, and the latter have a precise status in their daily lives. Furthermore, we are unable to say whether all the Italian movements for the commons display the limits mentioned by Filippo, but we can say with certainty that his description corresponds perfectly to the case of Cavallerizza. Such a moral posture goes against the transformative potential of this process. It is no coincidence that many of the Cavallerizza activists see the 5 Star Movement as a lifeline.

To close and encapsulate the sense of failure and the anger, I will use again Antonio's words.

I have never taken this thing seriously [Cavallerizza as a common good]. Also because these are only words, the common good must be proved with actions, if you are inclusive, if you are open, if you are accessible.

I expected to find a higher level of comparison, a greater stature...spiritual, artistic, intellectual...I thought I would learn something here. Instead, I didn't grow up *thanks* to people but *because* of people. That's what is frustrating. Again, this place is wonderful, but the walls are dumb, they don't say anything, they don't give you anything...Here people speak a lot [i.e. people want to show that they are capable], and if when people speak, they say just bullshit, then it doesn't make a damn sense. Also because people who say bullshit are the same people who have always built barriers, because they don't want to speak to the others, because their little island is happy like this, or because they are so addicted to this attrition that they cannot do without it. I'm not addicted to it, it bothers me, I'm leaving and I don't even regret this experience (Antonio 2018).

Cavallerizza was evicted in November 2019, following a fire that destroyed part of the building. As always in these cases, the occupants were initially charged with the incident. However, investigations showed almost immediately that responsibility was to be found elsewhere. A person who had nothing to do with Cavallerizza was arrested for the fire. This episode, however, was the detonator of a series of measures that were

already in the air, as a consequence of several factors: the difficulty of completing the process of civic use; the economic difficulties of the Municipality of Turin, which has never abandoned the idea of profiting from the sale of this huge building. But the main factor consists in the substantial inability of local institutions to imagine a common project with the Cavallerizza activist community. Some members of the administration were committed to building a process of participation in which they truly believed; another part of it was unable to dare, remaining anchored in their role as controller rather than in a political activity of imagining new forms of politics and participation in the management of public goods.

Even during the Covid-19 epidemic in the spring of 2020, Cavallerizza's artists and activists continued meeting (albeit virtually) and imagining ways to take their project forward. The issues faced by the community are mainly political ones, i.e. the possible ways out of an unbalanced relationship with an administration that has not kept its promises. Cavallerizza's social networks are still active and some have not lost the hope of returning to the building, aspiring to a solution similar to the Bologna model, i.e. an administration that does not give up its central role and grants a certain community a public building, establishing upstream how it should be used. However, as we have seen, one of the main reasons why this community has not been able to complete the path it had started is precisely the unpreparedness and the ambiguity of the institutional interlocutors. The weakness of the new administration certainly stems from the difficulty of governing an urban context in which power structures linked to the political networks of the previous governments were still in place. Winning elections is not enough in order to manage economic processes such as the one underlying the precious Cavallerizza complex, which is still an economic target for foundations and privatization projects launched by previous local governments. At the same time, the new urban government has shown all the limitations of a party (the 5 Star Movement) whose political projects could not take the pressures of effective government, and whose policies about the commons were penalized by the internal division of the party, within which many have no interest in this topic.

Be that as it may, if the new administration puts forward a solution similar to that of Bologna, with a strong institutional leadership, for many of the artists it would be a desirable solution, which would allow them to return to that space, to whose reputation as a place of art they have contributed in recent years, for better or for worse. We know for sure that if the project succeeds, they will call it 'bene comune' ('common good').

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