

Francesco Careri  
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October 2025

# Porto Fluviale RecHouse in Rome: a replicable case of insurgent urban regeneration

*The paper is part of the project titled  
“Affordable Housing: Best Practices  
from around Europe.”*



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# Porto Fluviale RecHouse in Rome: a replicable case of insurgent urban regeneration

In the heart of Rome, in the Ostiense district, lies Porto Fluviale: an historic former military building, listed by the Superintendency, squatted since 2003 by families fighting for housing rights which, through ten years of collective and shared practices, has become an intercultural social laboratory and a symbol of urban resistance. Faced with a deep housing crisis in Rome – with tens of thousands of families in fragile situations and a large amount of empty property – citizens, movements, universities and the administration have initiated unprecedented negotiations. The project, funded through the PINQuA call for proposals with PNRR funds, formalises the occupation in terms of regeneration: philological restoration of the building, creation of public housing to be allocated to eligible occupants, and socio-cultural spaces open to the neighbourhood.

Community participation, the mediating role of the Department of Architecture of Roma Tre University, and the transformation of informal activities into associations are at the heart of the experiment, designed as an antidote to gentrification. However, the process has encountered internal and political resistance, revealing the difficulties of translating conflict practices into institutional governance. Despite this, with the construction site in its final stages and the gradual return of families, Porto Fluviale is emerging as an insurgent and potentially replicable model: it shows how collective actions, even those that arise informally, can generate sustainable, inclusive housing solutions and urban regeneration for European cities in crisis.



*The interior of the Porto Fluviale, one of the small housing spaces derived through the use of wooden divisions.*

## Abstract

The contribution gives an overview of the Porto Fluviale project in Rome, an example of building and social rehabilitation through which a former military construction, occupied by 54 families belonging to the housing struggle movement, is transformed through a collaborative process with the squatters, universities, public institutions and local actors. The project, financed by the PINQuA (Innovative National Housing Quality Programme) call for proposals, and on which work is currently underway, consolidates and formalises the occupation, acting as a model for housing policies and as an anti-gentrification tool. The contribution highlights a replicable model of urban regeneration and social inclusion, capable of valorising abandoned heritage and strengthening the cohesion of combative communities against the gentrification process. Finally, the article emphasises the crucial role of universities as mediating and co-constructing subjects of new urban governance practices, highlighting the challenges and potential of a participatory approach in the field of alternative housing policies.

## 1. Introduction

Housing hardship in Rome represents a well-established and structural situation that affects large segments of the population, with important social and political repercussions. The national picture already highlights a gap between Italy and Europe. Just over 72% of Italians live in a house they own, 20% rent, and the rest, 8%, live in free or usufruct housing. However, it is estimated that 1.5 million households (just under 6%) are experiencing housing difficulties, and one in three Italian families incur housing expenses that are too heavy in relation to their income. Despite this, in 2021, Italy spent €11.50 per capita on public or social housing, compared with a European average of €104.5 per capita with peaks of €199 in Germany and €210 in France<sup>1</sup>.

Relative to the capital city, the recent report of the City of Rome, entitled “Housing Deprivation in Rome”<sup>2</sup>, returns a disarming picture. To date, 114,000 households (8.3% of all Roman families) are in a condition of housing fragility; among them, about 81%, or 92,000 families, run a high risk of severe housing fragility, while 19%, 22,000 families, are already in a severe housing condition. This second, decidedly more fragile group, consists of about 30,000 people of whom 75% are homeless or homeless, while the remaining 25% live in equipped camps, tolerated settlements or other types of inappropriate housing. Other data make the scenario even more severe: 2,142 households live in overcrowded conditions, i.e., a situation in which the housing inhabitants are at least twice the number of available rooms. Half of these overcrowded households pay rent for such housing and about the same amount have minor dependent children.

The causes of this situation reflect a general national condition that is exacerbated in the Capital.

*First, there is a widespread economic condition of great disparity between people's income levels and housing costs.*

Wages, in fact, are not growing to the extent that property values and rental costs are growing instead, affecting, in this case, those with the lowest incomes. Compared to 1996 base levels, average wages in Italy have never grown more than 10% (an increase that occurred in 2010), while today they stand at an increase of less than 5%. In contrast, rents and property values, again compared to 1996, have increased by about 40%. In the rest of the Eurozone coun-

tries, on average, this gap is very small, with rents up 37% and average wages up to about 30%. This gap between costs and incomes has led over time to an increase in evictions from about 2,200 in 1983 to 4,500 evictions in 2022, with peaks of 7,500 evictions per year in 2014 and with 70% of the measures occurring due to morosity without fault. This scenario is accompanied by the almost total absence of structured housing welfare; on the contrary, there has been disinvestment in that direction. In Rome, the last major infrastructural interventions in Public Residential Housing (ERP) date back to the 1970s, and the Social Housing model has found much more limited applications than in cities such as Milan. Nationwide there are at least 600,000 applications from households on the waiting list for public housing of which about 3% (18,000 households) are in the city of Rome. Consider also that, according to some professional associations, for every household that applies for public housing, there is at least another one that is in the same economic and social conditions but does not apply due to lack of information or distrust of the administrative and management machine.

Despite the pressing needs, Rome shows a huge unused residential stock consisting of about 250,000 apartments (about 14.7% of the total residential stock) and a difficult-to-count number of disused public, nonresidential buildings. On this disused heritage that has been inserted over the years a bottom-up, self-organized and self-managed subsidiary welfare mechanism, carried out by Rome's housing struggle movements, which are mainly divided into three groups: the Blocchi Precari Metropolitani (BPM), the Coordinamento Cittadino di Lotta per la Casa and, finally, Action. These three organized groups, over the years, have given rise to various occupations of abandoned property, providing housing, services and social infrastructure to numerous people unable to provide for the payment of market rents and, experimenting with new ways of inhabiting and experiencing urban space, in alternative ways and in open conflict with liberalist and capitalist model.

Individuals, households, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and other forms of precarious citizenship have found, thanks to the work of the movements, a housing space and a community of reference within which to claim their own ways of living. Despite some intimidating and repressive legislative interventions toward this practice<sup>3</sup>, an estimated 13,500 people currently live in Rome, in 70 properties occupied by the movements. Among these, some experiences have represented real paradigmatic cases while remaining, at the same time, examples of good practices and experiences of struggle, such as to let outline paths of formalization and allocation of houses and social spaces to occupants, in a process of value creation and public space and houses. These include Metropoliz, Spin Time, Quarticciolo and Porto Fluviale. The latter will be the subject of the

<sup>1</sup> Data reported from the article by Natili M. and Jessoula M. (2024). Housing policies in Italy increase inequality. International Observatory for Cohesion and Social Inclusion.

<sup>2</sup> Report developed in 2025 by the Department of Heritage Enhancement and Housing Policies of Roma Capitale and the Department of Methods and Models for Economics the Territory and Finance of Sapienza University of Rome.

<sup>3</sup> The main reference is to the Lupi Decree, L.D. No. 47/2014, which prohibits the occupants of a property from applying for residency and, consequently, connection to public services such as water, electricity, and gas.

in-depth study that follows and on which a complex operation is currently being experimented involving Roma Capitale, the Coordinamento Cittadino Lotta per la Casa (the occupiers), the Department of Architecture of the University of Roma Tre, and other important public and institutional actors.

## 2. The Porto Fluviale Project

Porto Fluviale RecHouse is an urban regeneration project of an occupied former military building<sup>4</sup>, which involves both the philological recovery of the building and the social recovery of the multicultural community that inhabits it, with the development of new ERP housing for current residents who meet the requirements for public housing, and integrated sociocultural spaces for the neighbourhood.

*In July 2021, the project was funded with 13,000,000 euros from the PNRR, through the Bando PINQuA<sup>5</sup>, a call for proposals that finances more than 280 innovative projects on housing quality throughout Italy.*

The project was presented by the City of Rome along with two other cases, Tor Bella Monaca and Cardinal Capranica, all of which were drafted with the scientific and technical support of Rome's universities, Sapienza Università di Roma, Roma Tre and Luiss. In fact, the Porto Fluviale project is the result of an intense mediation process initiated by the Urban Planning Department of the City of Rome with the Air Force leadership who were the owners of the area, with the superintendents of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage who had placed an architectural constraint on the building, with the Coordinamento Cittadino Lotta per la Casa that had been occupying it since 2003, with the Department of Architecture of Roma Tre that had consolidated a good relationship with the inhabitants for years, and with the Municipio VIII that, having always followed the events, was interested in the sustainable development of the neighbourhood and also involved various associations and local actors. Porto Fluviale is considered a monument by both the housing struggle movements and the superintendency. For the movements, which have been fighting for the right to housing for years, it assumes importance

because it is one of the most central housing occupations in the city, and it has become a recognizable icon because of the mural paintings by street artist Blu<sup>6</sup>. The artwork, in fact, is not only reported in the most important international street art publications but has also become a kind of living work and visual landmark for the entire neighborhood.

The superintendence, on the other hand, has bound the building, as an asset of historical and artistic interest, as it has features common to many buildings of industrial archaeology in the Ostiense district. In consultation with Blu, the author of the large mural painting, the inhabitants and the Superintendence, it was decided to remove the pictorial work, favouring the restoration of the deteriorated parts and the restoration of the original facade. When the work is finished, the necessary operations will be evaluated for the implementation of a new mural painting that will cover the interior, such as the stairs, distribution corridors. But according to Blu, "all this will happen when all the families have had a new home in the building."

### 2.1 A shared process between squatters, the City of Rome and the University

As stated in the official project report, Porto Fluviale RecHouse is a "participatory recovery of the artistic and social heritage," whose objectives are to "recover a restricted good, refunctionalizing a disused property, without land consumption and with a view to sustainability and densification; increase the social housing stock; reduce housing hardship with a process of social integration of a housing occupancy; provide the neighbourhood with a new public space; use innovative ways of management; activate a participatory process; increase social mixité, intended as an antidote to the gentrification processes taking place in the neighbourhood and to enhance social proximity between heterogeneous groups. " In fact, at the Porto Fluviale lives a community that for more than twenty years has developed within it unprecedented and innovative forms of intercultural coexistence and has opened to the neighbourhood various social spaces by organizing political and cultural events, performances, intercultural festivals and to be told through scientific articles and documentary films<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> On the history of the building in the contest of the Ostiense industrial zone, see: Arnaldo Coggiati, *Vincenzo Taburet*, in "Strenna dei Romanisti", MMDCCVIII, 21 aprile 1955, pp. 310-315; Paola Brunori, Francesca Carboni, *Ai margini di Roma Capitale – Appunti sull'architettura del quartiere Ostiense*, in Manlio Vendittelli, *Roma capitale. Roma comune. La storia della città dall'unità ad oggi*, Gangemi, Roma 1985, pp. 553-554; Giorgio Muratore (Ed.), *Cantieri romani del Novecento*, Archivio Guido IZZI 1995; Valentina Pini e Agnese Pizzuti, *i Magazzini dell'Aeronautica Militare al Porto Fluviale*, Dissertation, Supervisor Prof. Alfredo Passeri (2004); Alfredo Passeri, *I magazzini dell'aeronautica militare al Porto fluviale*, in Roma memorie della Città industriale, Enrica Torelli Landini (Ed.), Roma, 2007, pp. 161-163. Rita D'Errico, *Ostiense. Assetti proprietari e trasformazioni economico-sociali di un settore dell'Agro romano (secoli XVIII-XX)* (2007).

<sup>5</sup> National Innovative Program for Housing Quality of the Ministry of Infrastructure (MIT), I.D. 395 of 09/16/2020.

<sup>6</sup> See: Alberto Piccinini, *Un tuffo nel Blu*, "il Manifesto" 16.03.2013; Francesco Careri, *Tano, Blu e il Porto Fluviale*, in Giorgio de Finis, Fabio Benincasa, Andrea Facchi, "EXPLOIT. Come rovesciare il mondo dell'arte. D-Istruzioni per l'uso", Bordeaux Edizioni, Roma 2015; Fabiola Naldi, *Tracce di Blu*, Postmedia Books, Bologna 2020.

<sup>7</sup> On the history of the occupation see: Margherita Pisano, *Creare relazioni da abitare. Voci, narrazioni in uno scheletro urbano riabitato*. Doctoral Thesis in Urban Planning Technology. Ciclo XXV. Tutor prof. Carlo Cellamare. University of Rome "La Sapienza", Department of Construction and Environmental Engineering. 2011; Gaetano Crivaro e Margherita Pisano, *Good Buy Roma*, 2011 documentary film, available at <https://lambulante.org/gbr/>; Solange, *Il Fronte del Porto: la città non è in vendita*, CORE, 14.12.2011. See also; Margherita Grazioli & Carlotta Caciagli, *The right to (stay put in) the city: il caso di Porto Fluviale a Roma*, QU3 Quaderni di Urbanistica3 n°13/2017, p. 79; Irene Di Noto and Giorgio De Finis, *R/home. Diritto all'abitare dovere capitale*, Bordeaux Edizioni, Roma 2018; Tano D'Amico, Cristiano Armati, *Guerra ai poveri. La resistenza del movimento per il Diritto all'Abitare. Roma 2009–2019*, RedstarPress, Roma 2019.

*The social inclusion and housing path proposed by the project is thus aimed at consolidating and maintaining the community of current inhabitants in the building, accompanying them in their transition from squatters to public housing assignees.*

The process included the transfer of ownership of the former barracks from the Air Force to the City of Rome through the Cultural Federalism procedure, ending a long-standing conflict<sup>8</sup>. Subsequently, the community compiled an initial informal self-census of households which showed that 56 households from thirteen different nationalities lived in the occupation, mostly from Latin America, Maghreb countries and Eastern Europe. On this basis, an official census was drawn up, which enabled the Heritage Department to open a Special Call for Proposals that, after verification of the possession of the requirements for access to ERP housing, guaranteed the allocation of housing in the building.

During the work phases, the inhabitants were temporarily relocated to other publicly owned housing. The project proposal initially envisaged that the work would take place with the inhabitants (or a part of them) being present through a system of shifting by phases. This would have allowed the residents not to move away from the property during the entire duration of the construction. Following the inclusion of the project in the NRP timeline, this was only possible for the socio-cultural activities and the assembly hall, which continued to be active as a garrison during all phases of work.

As far as socio-cultural activities are concerned, it was the PINQuA Call for Proposals itself that was very sensitive to the issue by reporting among its objectives that of “coordinating and aggregating subjects and self-consolidated realities in an associated form and in the spirit of legality.” The project was immediately directed at enhancing and implementing the informal activities already present, promoting and facilitating the incorporation in legal form of the different actors who were running them. During the drafting of the project, all the informal activities were transformed into associative forms: the artisan workshops for goldsmithing, tailoring and leather goods; the circus-workshop for circus training and dance; the tea room with related recreational and cultural activities; and finally the cycle-workshop, which over time has constituted an important center of sustainable mobility connected to the bicycle path being built with the project. The inner courtyard,

a reserved space that has always been the beating heart of the community, will continue to offer itself as a place to celebrate the various festivities and holidays of the many world cultures that inhabit it. At the same time, however, the proposal is to transform it into a public square with a weekly oKm market, a low-threshold counter for women victims of violence and other activities related to the cultural life of the area. The building, which for years has appeared closed to the outside, will become permeable both visually and usefully with the opening of new glazed entrances. Previously, in fact, the courtyard was accessible by a single doorway that opened to the city only during events; the Tea Room was the only filter space between the city and the building.

*It was precisely the observation of this space that created the basis for the flow regulation project, which envisions that all social activities on the ground floor will act as a filter for access to the courtyard during the evening hours when the gate will be closed.*

## **2.2 The Department of Architecture and the Porto Fluviale community: building mutual trust**

The Civic Arts Laboratory (LAC) of the University of Roma Tre since 2009 had started a path of observation and collaboration with the occupation of the Porto Fluviale, and it was on this basis that it was possible to build the trust that allowed the realization of the whole process. In 2012 the international workshop “Rome: Occupation City” was organized together with the Developing Planning Unit (DPU), during which foreign students were hosted to live temporarily within the occupation. On this occasion, the courtyard had been transformed by eliminating the parking lot and creating a square of flying boats to reproduce a surreal harbor scene<sup>9</sup>. In 2013, for the ten-year anniversary of the occupation, the installation *Odyssey for Home* was set up to narrate the Porto Fluviale as a landing place for migratory trajectories. The installation simulated a large wave entering from the city and pushing the boat suspended over the entrance, inside of which were a map of the Roman occupations, a planisphere recounting the origin of the inhabitants from three different continents, and, hanging from the ceiling, a sail with the first verses of the *Odyssey* translated into all the languages spoken in the occupation written on it.

<sup>8</sup> In 2010, the building had been included in the plan for alienation and redevelopment of military areas, and the Ministry of Défense had given it to Roma Capitale for one year. After the year stipulated in the agreement had passed without action, the asset returned to the Ministry of Défense. The Air Force will then make the asset available to “ensure the transformation of the current squatter settlement into a place for the experimentation of integration policies, offering a proactive perspective for the management of an emergency through a virtuous path led by the public hand.”

<sup>9</sup> See: Giorgio Talocci, *Occupying and the new monuments*, DPU 2012; Camillo Bono, *DPU Summerlab as a way to defend architecture*, DPU 201; Azzurra Muzzonigro, *Porto Fluviale. Narrative of a urban adventure and a new idea of Piazza*, DPU 2013.

In 2017, the LAC research group had started the CIRCO Lab, an acronym for Irreplaceable Housing for Civic Recreation and Hospitality, to rethink a public housing policy proposal for the city of Rome based on hospitality<sup>10</sup>. The Lab recognized in occupations a model of social inclusion capable of reusing abandoned housing stock and formulating housing policy where institutions are lacking, but also the possibility of triggering benefits and opportunities through mechanisms linked to alternative economies to market economies, based on cooperation and sharing<sup>11</sup>. In this context, through a dissertation and subsequent educational and participatory activities, shared ideas for employment transformation were developed. In 2020, prior to the PINQuA call, Porto Fluviale invited Roma Tre's Laboratory of Architectural and Urban Design to work directly on their case<sup>12</sup>.

*During the pandemic, Italian and foreign students started a process of getting to know the occupants, first at a distance and then in presence, surveying the apartments and developing real projects, shared at all stages with the squatters, which facilitated the emergence of common ideas and visions about the future of the occupation forming the basis of the shared design path.*

Students were stimulated by the fact that they were working on a real issue, with families and people they knew directly, on a process that had possibilities that could be realized: finally on reality and not on an anonymous abstract simulation. Even the exams were held in situ and not in the university classroom to exchange opinions and views with the inhabitants at all creative and design stages. After the exams were over, many students spontaneously decided to collaborate in the drafting of the project for the PINQuA Call for Projects, which considered the best ideas that emerged from the course projects.

The publication of the PINQuA call for proposals was followed by numerous co-design activities: meetings with residents and institutions, site visits, focus groups, until the Tea Room was transformed into a shared Architectural Design Laboratory.

*Here, students, faculty and squatters worked side by side, editing and improving the project together until its final draft.*

### **2.3 The Missed Laboratory: perspectives and critical issues of an experimental and contested public housing policy process**

After PINQuA funding, the research team continued to support the project as scientific advisor, mediating between the Citizen's Coordination Struggle for Housing and the institutions in a formalization process that was unprecedented for Rome and required experimenting with new design and administrative tools.

In 2022, the Department of Architecture proposed a University Third Mission project<sup>13</sup> developing a CIRCO Laboratory at the Porto Fluviale, a research and action group initially supported by the Charlemagne Foundation and later to be funded through an agreement with the City of Rome. The path provided for the activation, for the duration of the construction site, of a permanent and recognizable location from outside the building, which would inform the inhabitants about the work, accompany the transition from occupants to assignees; a communication and documentation device capable of raising awareness of the project's potential; a participatory context where comparisons of ideas, debates and proposals could be developed. The Laboratory was envisioned as a mixed working group, between researchers, occupants and other actors inside and outside the community, who would undertake together a training course aimed at building the group that would later participate in the co-design and experimentation of an innovative model of living and laboratory management on the ground floor.

A mixed group of researchers, inhabitants and external actors was planned, with shared training and co-design of a housing management model. Discussions were initiated with inhabitants already involved in the PINQuA call and with the CoMù association to manage the sensitive issue of regularization. However, the political and irregular nature of the occupation has generated political criticism and resistance, provoked controversy from political opponents of both the city council that submitted the project to the PINQuA call and the one that is implementing it. In this sense, the University's presence helped incentivize the administration to undertake the process and protected the continuity of the process at the change of political colour of the administration and from attacks on the process in the public and media spheres.

<sup>10</sup> Laboratorio CIRCO is a research group of the Department of Architecture of Roma Tre, directed by Professors Francesco Careri and Fabrizio Finucci and participated by Chiara Luchetti, Alberto Marzo, Sara Monaco, Serena Olcuire, Enrico Perini and Maria Rocco. <https://laboratoriocirco.wordpress.com/>

<sup>11</sup> See: Laboratorio CIRCO, 2021, CIRCO. *Un immaginario di città ospitale*. Roma: Bordeaux Edizioni.

<sup>12</sup> The Architectural and Urban Design Laboratory of the Master's Degree in Urban Design was taught by Professors Francesco Careri, Fabrizio Finucci with the teaching collaboration of Arch. Enrico Perini.

<sup>13</sup> The third university mission concerns the activities of universities to transfer knowledge in order to innovate and contribute the social and economic development of the territory.

Over time, however, strong internal contrasts emerged: the broadening of the confrontation to a larger group of residents and the movement's leadership brought out conflicts and distrust toward universities and institutions, and in addition, the funding of a private foundation and collaboration with an outside association were viewed with suspicion. There was a realization that information exchanged between universities and the small group with which the project had been carried out had never actually leaked into subsequent circles, and that the levels of internal conflict were much higher than the research group had realized.

*The proposal to open a physical Lab space within the occupation was seen as a threat and as a foreign body no longer useful and tied to external logics that were not shared.*

The fear encountered, was that the ongoing process could be told in a language other than that of conflict and struggle, without recognizing that it was precisely its translation into a narrative more acceptable and understandable by institutions that had been among the winning factors of the call. The issue of the involvement of the neighbourhood, and the city more generally, in the transformation process was also found problematic, partly because, in the view of the research team, the movement failed to realize the kind of consensus that already existed outside it and the need to continue to nurture it for the future quality of life of the inhabitants themselves. The City Coordination of Housing Struggle therefore imposed restrictive conditions on collaboration, limiting the Laboratory's role to technical advice, excluding it from direct dialogue with the inhabitants and denying it a physical space within 'the building. Having failed to act as a mediator in a space of exchange and trust, the research team chose to withdraw, noting the loss of the principles of reciprocity and legitimacy fundamental to the work of the CIRCO Lab<sup>14</sup>.

### 3. Conclusions

As we write, the Porto Fluviale construction site is at an advanced stage and work is expected to be finished in December 2025. Families have been temporarily relocated to other public housing, maintaining a garrison consisting of the craft workshops and assembly hall on the ground floor. Despite the lack of activation of the Workshop, it is interesting to dwell on some aspects.

Porto Fluviale offers a model of "insurgent" urban regeneration that can also be replicated in contexts where there is

not an established and structural housing fragility, but also, simply, where there is a conflicted community that wants to safeguard its own alternative model of living in conflict with the ongoing transformations.

*The challenge of transforming informal housing occupancy into public or social housing, with shared and community spaces, can become a model for the rehabilitation of the huge brownfield stock in large European cities.*

The innovative aspect that the process can propose to replicate is the inclusive model that, in addition to preserving a derelict building, allows it to hold together a cohesive community that has grown together, characterized by strong political ties and neighborhood relations, without being dismembered by gentrification processes. The university, in this, has emerged as a privileged stakeholder, ideal as a guarantor of the vision to be co-constructed, largely already put into practice by the occupants and capable of fulfilling many of the city's open questions, and of trusting relationships between the parties and with the community. This has enabled the involvement of a multicultural, insurgent and conflicted community, translating into reality that social mixité always invoked in theoretical form but often thwarted by market mechanisms, but which is the only real antidote to the gentrification processes underway in many European cities. Porto Fluviale shows the existence of the transformative potential of collective actions, even from illegal or informal practices, in effective housing policies. Occupants become 'lawbreakers' who, starting from an illegal act, call institutions to an intervention inspired by principles of researching new practices, aimed at social urban reuse and a more structured and participatory housing welfare. Stimulating the search for alternative solutions, starting precisely from the subjects who pose problems and conflicts in cities, can lead to creative and normogenerative processes, unimaginable within the narrow meshes of formality and institutional framework alone.

The actions that can result from solutions identified in this way can lead to broadly shareable effects, as they appeal to the pragmatism and political-administrative efficiency to which each group aspires, providing additional tools for situations of housing fragility. In this specific case, they can reduce the abandonment of spaces and their physical decay, with phenomena that impoverish the quality of life in neighbourhoods, by returning them to collective use; they succeed in proposing accessible spaces and public housing that can lower rents and service costs, producing places of sociability and aggregation as alternatives to consumer spaces. Solutions, then, that are both economically efficient, in terms of net social benefit, and environmentally and socially sustainable, as they combine housing policies, densification and non-land consumption.

<sup>14</sup> See: Reardon K., 2006, «Promoting reciprocity within community/university development partnerships: Lessons from the field». *Planning Practice & Research*, 21(1): 95-107; Aernouts N., Cognetti F., Maranghi E., 2023, *Urban Living Lab for Local Regeneration: Beyond Participation in Large-scale Social Housing Estates*. Berlino: Springer Nature.

The resulting project, in fact, was financed with PNRR funds, which corroborates its conformity with nationally and European recognized and shared development and recovery agendas.

The inclusive approach to urban governance, where communities are actors and not recipients of decisions, fosters and stimulates community empowerment. In fact, the moment of elaboration of the projects submitted to the PIN-QuA call had begun to take shape as a context of institutional learning and social innovation in the framework of public policies for housing, fostering the negotiation carried out by the Movement for the Right to Housing with policy makers, which led to the inclusion of the rehabilitation of abandoned heritage for the creation of new ERP in the recently approved Housing Plan of Roma Capitale<sup>15</sup>.

The interrupted process raises important questions and critical issues that remain unresolved. For instance, there is a need to formalize housing occupation as an exemplary and replicable approach. Additionally, we must consider how to sustain the vitality of this experience during the institutionalization process. Another challenge lies in adapting these solutions to a formalization process, which necessitates new regulations for reuse in contrast to new construction.

The construction of the Port Fluviale proposal is the result of many years of work, of mutual understanding and building a relationship of trust between an initially closed community, a strong struggle movement and an institution with its own rules and cultural modes of intervention. What has happened highlights how, despite the growing fortunes of bottom-up planning experiences, institutional processes are still strongly manned by 'strong' knowledge of technical-theoretical derivation and, even more interestingly, this separation seems to suit the self-organized counterpart as well, at times when distrust and fear prevails toward institutions that, for years, have failed to guarantee a fundamental right, such as that of housing, and with which we still struggle to collaborate without suspicion. The exclusion of the university from the implementation phase of the program was experienced as one less complication by both the movement and the decision-makers, who preferred to leave the critical issues of implementation to a 'closed-door' negotiation between top management; the road to a real co-evolution of knowledge, to those forms of mutual learning between institutions and practices already mentioned, still appears to be a long way to go.

<sup>15</sup> The Strategic Plan for the Right to Housing 2023-2026, approved in 2023 by the City of Rome aims to strengthen housing policies to ensure the right to housing for all citizens. The Plan includes investments and initiatives aimed at addressing the housing emergency by recovering public assets and acquiring idle private properties, with the goal of meeting the needs of about 3,000 households in the ranking list by 2026.


## About the Authors



**Francesco Careri** is an architect, co-founder of the Stalker urban art laboratory and Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture, University of Roma Tre, where he is co-director of the Master Environmental Humanities and head the itinerant course Civic Arts grounded in walking explorations of neglected suburban areas. Among his main publications: *Constant. New Babylon, una città nomade*, Torino 2001; *Walkscapes. El andar como pràctica estètica / Walking as an aesthetic practice*, Barcellona 2002;; *Pasear, detenerse*, Barcelona 2016, *Stalker/Campus Rom*, Matera 2017; *Hospedar-se*, Barcelona 2023. (<http://artiviciche.blogspot.com>)



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## Porto Fluviale RecHouse in Rome: a replicable case of insurgent urban regeneration



The Porto Fluviale project in Rome demonstrates how civic activism and institutional cooperation can transform an occupation into an innovative model of urban regeneration. What began in 2003 as the self-managed occupation of a disused military building by 54 families evolved into a formally recognized project integrating social housing, cultural production, and community participation. Through years of dialogue between residents, architects, activists, and the municipality, Porto Fluviale became part of the national PINQuA programme funded by the PNRR, linking social inclusion with architectural preservation and sustainability.



Collaboration between the City of Rome, Roma Tre University, and the resident community turned the occupation into a laboratory for co-design and collective governance. The process institutionalized informal practices of solidarity and mutual aid, creating a precedent for cooperative housing models within the Italian welfare and urban policy framework. It also redefined the role of universities as mediators between citizens and institutions, building trust and shared responsibility in urban transformation.



Porto Fluviale shows that grassroots action can generate viable, equitable, and durable housing solutions when met with political openness and technical support. By combining bottom-up initiative with public investment, the project offers a blueprint for inclusive urban regeneration, balancing the right to housing with heritage protection and social innovation in the face of market-driven urban change.

Further information on this topic can be found here:

➤ [www.fes.de/publikationen](http://www.fes.de/publikationen)