

*Research article***Existential risks of an excluded community: *Le mani sulle città* by****Franco Rosi****Flavia Schiavo***

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Abstract: The essay focuses on the film *Le mani sulla città* (*Hands on the city*, 1963) by Francesco Rosi. The film, set in Naples, explores some significant aspects of the Italian “Reconstruction” after the end of the Second World War and offers interesting insights. That period was characterized by a number of active, social and economic, recovery policies which produced job and development opportunities and triggered the development of the real estate market and urban speculation. Reconstruction meant consumption of resources (urban land and landscape), creation of new neighborhoods with proposed housing models unrelated to the population who moved to some new peripheral suburbs. This generated a social and physical structure of opposite features to what we call “sustainable”. Specifically, the article relates to Naples, one of the Italian cities where the INA-Casa projects were realized. The construction of public housing, financed by the State was a chance for corrupted administration and politicians for profit. Characters such as Achille Lauro and the Gava family, facilitated and supported the urban speculation, created by entrepreneurs and property developers. Rosi’s film recounts this cross-section that impressed a never healing “wound” to the city, the territory and the landscape.

Keywords: public housing; urban speculation; economic policies; participation; urban democracy; urban management

1. The risks of the project

The story told by Rosi in *Le mani sulla città* (Figure 1), a 1963 black and white film set in Naples, must be explored considering the complex Italian period, during the post-war phase by the “National Reconstruction”. The recovery and economic relaunch and employment policies focused heavily on the construction industry, given the desire to overcome the experience of the war and the deep sense of defeat and “loss” inherent in that phase.



Figure 1. The opening scene of the movie.

The INA-Casa Plan was one of the various interventions that aimed to resolve the structural crisis. The first legislative regulations dates back to February 28, 1949 (*Measures to increase workers' employment, facilitating the construction of houses for workers*)¹ and to the law no. 43 which launched a seven-year program, later extended for another seven years (known as Piano Fanfani, the Fanfani Plan) aimed at creating jobs and building housing for low-income families².

Although numerous and important architects were involved, such as Diotallevi, Ridolfi, Gabetti, Aymonino, Gardella, Figini & Pollini, Insolera or Sottsass who carried out research in architecture with a refined and international perspective, a large number of professionals, surveyors and engineers participated in the construction of several popular neighborhoods, proposing a precise model and standardized building, with a dominating style re-elaborating rationalist tendencies. In an attempt to overcome homogeneity, some interesting examples were produced (mainly individual architectural projects), including the Tiburtino in Rome (architects: Ridolfi and Quaroni), the Spine Bianche in Matera (architects: Aymonino, Chiarini, Girelli, Lenci, Ottolenghi), QT8 in Milan, by Bottoni [1–5].

¹ In June 1948, Amintore Fanfani illustrated his analyzes on the phenomenon of the unemployment at the Council of Ministers: on 6 July the draft law on workers' employment was approved: the solution for the revival of the Italian economy, after World War II was concentrated on the construction industry that, at the same time, provided stable work and houses for low-income Italians workers.

² The initiative was linked to plans and programs aimed at establishing forms of Welfare. The emblematic reference is the Beveridge Plan (from the author's name) delivered to Churchill on 20 November 1942, the Plan provided for childcare, extended health and rehabilitation services, maintenance of jobs, by politically reforming society.

On the whole, the operation generated several “cities in the city”, which often arose in remote areas disconnected to the center, missing services and public spaces, which generated satellite activities (such as capital investments in the construction sector; changes in the intended use of large portions of agricultural land which were made building areas). This caused severe imbalances in the landscape as the new neighborhoods were “hooked” on portions of the existing city, therefore the inhabitants who moved in found unfamiliar areas and were forced to adopt a different way of living [6–9].

As far as the general coordination of the interventions is concerned, many intellectuals expressed doubts on the integration of the new neighborhoods with the urban pre-existences. Among them Giovanni Astengo who, in an article in 1951 [10], expressed the absence of an organic coordination Plan, and Bruno Zevi, who was the Secretary General of the INU (Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica, Italian National Institute of Urban Planning), pointed out how much “adding one or two houses to a village entails the risk of making the work ‘out of tune’, because one or two houses are too few to create a new unit but they are too many to respect the old one. Thus a neighborhood, if its location is not promoted by a well-developed master plan, will remain as an episode not assimilated in the economic and artistic organism of the city” [11].

During the first seven years of the INA-Casa Plan, approximately 334 billion lire were invested and approximately 147 thousand housing units were built. By the end of the fourteen years period, about 355 thousand houses were built, for a total of 936 billion lire.

Amintore Fanfani³, the promoter of the Plan, was concerned with the housing issue since the beginning as early as 1942. In *Colloquio sui poveri (Talk on the Poor)* [12] one of his works of those years, he argued on poverty and pointed out how much the housing condition, if disadvantaged, was pivotal in the inhabitants’ quality of life. In that volume, Fanfani proposed a view based on Keynesian theories integrated by Christian solidarity [13]. The funding to the INA-Casa Plan was implemented thanks to the state participation and the payments of taxpayers who were requested modest taxes (the advertisement of the period said: “at the cost of a cigarette a day”) to help the most destitute workers.

The Plan was realized through the creation of a centralized “Body”, whose interventions were coordinated by the INA-Casa Management (decisive in the economic management of the projects), directed by Arnaldo Foschini, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture of Rome and member of the Roman School of Architecture.

The interventions and the numerous construction sites opened during the “Reconstruction” phase, had a strong impact on the perception of the national condition by the population who could see on the news—in the desolation of the rubble (lavish also in Naples)—the renovated “Democratic Italy” which reacted to the war disasters and was looking towards the horizon of the economic boom.

In April 1949, a few days after the law no. 43 was issued, Giuseppe Samonà published on *Metron*, an Italian magazine, a laudatory article [14] which testified how much part of the Italian “intelligentsia” in the sector approved the ongoing initiatives. It was in this spirit that in July 1949 a first construction site was inaugurated in Colleferro (a settlement near Rome, today in the metropolitan area of the Italian capital), giving impetus to that feverish activity that made the construction industry perhaps the first economic sector of the Country.

³ Amintore Fanfani (1908–1999), was an Italian politician, president of the Senate, President of the Council of Ministers between 1954 and 1987, he was also Secretary of the Christian Democrats Party.

2. Political risks: authoritarianism and lack of polis

While improving the living conditions of some workers, the neighborhoods were conceived in authoritative terms by those political and economic actors who led the Nation, during a time when the Italian urban planning was characterized by an undisputed will to control the transformations, with the illusion that planning and plans could solve the numerous national problems, but with the total exclusion of the population from the decision-making process. This represented a critical point, not considered in that phase (for the existing paradigms): also intellectuals, such as Adriano Olivetti (President of the Italian National Institute of Urban Planning), theorists and pragmatists of “participation”, endorsed the Fanfani Plan [15].

In addition to this enthusiasm, it should be pointed out that other members of the disciplinary culture (Planning and Architecture) made various criticisms, as they noticed that the general Plan did not coordinate the interventions on the national territory. Although there was a group of opposing scholars, the prevailing idea was that the INA-Casa Plan would have been one of the means to implement the economic recovery. The proposed models were, however, burdened by the weight of theoretical objectives and implementation practices established by politicians, designers and administrators. The aim was to build pharaonic neighborhoods, “cities in the city”, often built in agricultural areas close to the main city, basically self-sufficient, under the illusion that this would match with the formation of communities: as if the top-down project of the neighborhoods could generate community interactions and *polis*.

The operation if on the one hand, triggered a temporary and fictitious economic resurgence and involved a number of architects and engineers, by producing a revival of employment, on the other hand it generated speculative drifts, a huge consumption of land, the modification of the structure of entire cities and did not create “community”, except in rare cases. It is arguable, in fact, that a community is formed by creating spaces from whose projects the community is excluded, and it is equally difficult to think that architects or engineers could completely replace the “design imagination” and the “urban representation” of the inhabitants.

If the designers and administrators experienced a season of post-war euphoria and self-assertion, and if speculators took advantage of the ongoing process (as Rosi clearly tells in his film), the inhabitants, on their side, although in some cases benefited of new housing, they experienced exclusion from the decision-making process. This had disastrous effects on the community life: feeling as active part of the reconstruction of their living spaces, being aware of their rights and duties. In short, inhabitants were excluded from the management and the democratic process not only of the urban government, but they were literally deprived of their “daily life” [16].

This model of urban transformation not only abolished any form of participation in the planned process, but greatly reduced the level of urban consciousness: being citizens, in fact, involves not only being bearers of rights and duties (conceived as an active part of an interacting system), but it means being “actors” of the change in terms of having a “design planning” and perception of any risks and effects of transformations on people and inhabited space.

This condition turned out to be very serious, as the city being the elective place where people experience “practices” and explore democracy and learn to be citizens, first on the street of their neighborhood, then in the civic and community sphere.

Therefore, on the one hand, the main idea of “popular islands” (houses and equipment) and “manuals” (guide books for the planning of neighborhoods)⁴; on the other, the illusion that the idea and the manuals themselves would have guaranteed the formation of a new physical-social space (the new neighborhoods), where large sections of the population could be moved into.

The complexity of “Reconstruction” was based on the existing patterns, such as: top-down projects on a national scale; authoritative political choices; urban planning and architecture at the service of the political view imposed by authority, an idea translated into an alienating everyday routine for the inhabitants.

In addition to the disregarded designed directions (for example, incomplete public services and equipment), the originally present contradictions must be underlined: neighborhoods’ lacking integration, both urban in the city, and human, of the population in the places; land consumption and changing of its numerous uses, which above all focused on the transformation of agricultural land into building areas or designed in the new PRG (Piano Regolatore Generale, General Urban Development Plan) as building areas. Besides the lack of “real” green and public spaces replaced by “simulacra” of the same; the pursuit of an urban marked shape with a Catholic and paternalistic “do good” nature moralism, in which politicians replaced inhabitants in the decision-making and planning process, certain that they would establish a new lifestyle. A set of unsustainable choices, neither from an environmental, social or cultural point of view.

What protection then? What risks?

Not only for the territory, meant as a physical support, but also for the people and the residential place, as well as the “ordinary” existing landscape modified and disorganized by the interventions.

The architectural experimentation, in some cases valuable (from a formal point of view), was understood as residential architecture, but “without” residents, whereas other times the political, administrative and technical intention gave rise to, and even favored, heavy speculative drifts. The deteriorating processes, therefore, did not only concern the territory but also the “living” as a condition of belonging to the places and as a “practice” of the everyday life lived in the city.

A harmful practice associated with the “Reconstruction” culture, which also lived on celebratory rituals (mercilessly shown in Rosi’s work, not only at the end of the film). On September 8, 1949, for example, during the opening of a construction site in the Aretino area (in Toscana), Fanfani held an open-air rally, together with political and ecclesiastical authorities, speaking to the locals (in the final scene of the film *Le mani sulla città*, Rosi offers us a similar circumstance).

3. The transformation of a capital

The urban changes, during the fascist twenty years in Naples, were concentrated mainly on the central or intermediate areas, such as the Duca D’Aosta, Miraglia, Sannazzaro, San Pasquale a Chiaia districts, providing for the completion of the Santa Lucia on which the homonymous district was built and the partial demolition of the San Giuseppe and Carità districts for the construction of a public part

⁴ Guides, to coordinate the planning, rich in indications, schedules, typical examples, the manuals also tried to avoid excessive homologation, inducing the designers to look at the local contexts, not only at the building level, but with regard to the landscapes and historic centers, to the climate, to building systems, excluding prefabrication.

of the city, as well as the strengthening of the port area, the fish market, and the Mostra D'Oltremare. The dominant reasoning, on the one hand triggered and favoring urban speculation, on the other generating the “periphery” meant in the most injurious sense, breaking among other things with the more classic and monumental Umbertine urban planning [17]. In summary, the fascist project, with little or no attention to the most disadvantaged classes, aimed to grow the economy by considering Naples as the “port of the Empire” due to its privileged position, compared to the colonial domains.

In the post-war period, the city had to deal with the numerous damages caused by the war, not only related to the building sector, many infrastructural works, in fact, were destroyed during the world war. If the 1939 Master Plan (drafted largely by Luigi Piccinato), can be considered the basis of the post-war urban development, despite the many changes and variations made, it was the project design of the PRG (Piano Regolatore Generale, General Urban Development Plan) in 1946, adopted by the City Council, which faced the city destroyed by the war. The arrangements of this urban tool partially took up the contents of the 1939 Plan, which were invalidated in 1952 when Achille Lauro⁵ became the Mayor of Naples [18].

The 1946 PRG, however, did not address the overall and unitary “design” of the city, by limiting itself to proposing a strategy already present in the 1939 Plan: a decongesting process, implemented through a set of “satellite centers” built around the historic center, within the agricultural areas and hillsides; the promotion the construction industry with an expansion program neglecting landscape and territory protection. Subsequently, in 1958, the administration produced another plan which was rejected by the Ministry of Public Works in 1962. This urban planning tool ignored the most significant directions of the 1939 Plan, it promoted a number of regulation norms to this Plan, by activating links between initiatives of public and private nature of purely speculative kind: the city was a bargaining chip and it was “for sale”. In the absence of control over speculative “abuses” and with the colluded Institutions including The Autonomous Institute of Council Homes, the INCIS—Istituto Nazionale per le case degli impiegati statali (The National Institute for State Employee Homes), the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), the INA—Casa and a good number of private investors foreshadowed the Neapolitan “Sacco edilizio” (the building sack). Between 1957 and 1961, the North-Western suburb known as “urban area 3B”, an area characterized by old farmhouses, was “disfigured” by blocks of flats up to six floors high (this is shown in the opening of Rosi’s film), built on the basis of an construction index of 10 cubic meters for each indoor ground meter occupied.

Various economic and popular building complexes arose, “ghetto neighborhoods” where numerous inhabitants, belonging to the most fragile social classes, were “deported” into. Loggetta and Secondigliano new neighborhoods (3800 and 7000 rooms) were among these.

Such interventions also concerned settlements of the “urban belt”, such as Pozzuoli or some areas West to Naples, such as the district of Barra and San Giorgio a Cremano. The metropolitan area therefore assumed the shape of an extensive, highly unbalanced conurbation, where the periphery showed its unsolved problems, while unevolutionary dynamics were triggered, such as those related

⁵ Lauro was the Mayor of Naples from 1952 to 1957, he was a ship owner, a publisher and a politician. The period of his leadership was defined as “laurism” and was characterized by a network of economic and entrepreneurial interests as well as a populist approval. In 1933 Lauro, who was born in 1887, joined the National Fascist Party first and then the Monarchist Movement after the Liberation.

to the Tangenziale⁶ (a freeway) which had significant speculative side effects, or to the construction of the Viaduct Capodichino.

The figure of Achille Lauro had, therefore, a decisive impact for a decade, from 1952 until 1962, when the Gava family took power with a center-left Council.

During the period known as “laurism”, despite changing the overall structure of the city, numerous public spaces were built, the construction of which gave stable work to numerous construction workers. The Town Hall in the last phase, managed by the monarchists (the only case in post-war democratic Italy), was placed under investigation (by the Ministry of the Interior) revealing “clientelism”, offering contracts without calls, and the lack of coordination between the different administrative offices.

All “knots” of the context are clearly expressed and illustrated in Francesco Rosi’s work, *Le mani sulla città*. The film, already in 1963, had highlighted the role of the administration of Achille Lauro, in producing significant speculative actions, also favoured not only by the housing policies but also by the enactment of the national law in 1947 on the Reconstruction. This granted the owners 80% of funding; in order to pay off the remaining economic share, the owners themselves began to sell the reconstruction rights to speculators and businessmen. Also for this reason, the development model shown by Rosi was consolidated, which consumed a huge amount of agricultural land, entire portions of territory on the hills (e.g. at the Vomero), reduced public green areas and social space (such as the squares) to a minimum. The destruction of the San Giuseppe district, and the construction of the skyscraper of the Società Assicurazioni Cattolica (today Jolly Hotel) were emblematic examples.

For these reasons, the new urban organization was consolidated: the periphery was part of it [19]. The outskirts sub value went beyond their localization. The new neighborhoods were defined as periphery not only because they were allocated in marginal areas, but also because “marginalized” individuals lived there. These people were undergoing the urbanistic and political choices that distributed the benefits only to the privileged categories.

Organizing residential buildings and services according to the functional and aesthetic criteria was not enough, nor was meeting the standards. It was certainly not the quantities (public green; parking lots; school construction; etc.) that determined the places where the community could have lived: in order to give value and overturn the low quality of the suburban neighborhoods the inhabitants should have been involved in the decision-making process, rather than proposing housing models so distant from the historical ones.

The feeling of belonging to places occurs, in fact, through a slow and steady process, or it takes place when and if, during the design, the inhabitants are themselves designers of their own spaces.

On the contrary, the new settlements followed a pre-ordered idea, they measured themselves with the urgencies of the Reconstruction, unemployment and economic recovery, establishing both great violence and endogenous weakness and offering speculators opportunities to act illegally on the entire national territory.

⁶ The project began in January 1968, thanks to an agreement between ANAS, Infrastud, IRI-Italstat group (among the major investors: 70%), with the participation of Banco di Napoli (Bank of Naples), the cost was estimated at around 46 billion lire. The first section was inaugurated in 1972.

Pasolini, in *La forma della città* (*The shape of the city*) a documentary in 1974 [20], reflects on this topic, highlighting how some building actions aimed at the construction of public housing, operated both on the physical form and on the “sense of living”.

What was the “space capital” generated by the new neighborhoods of the 1950s like? It was dissipative and authoritative in its nature: it neglecting the human existential level. It was the result of a political intention, of a specialized technical knowledge, applied by designers, administrators and companies who “redesigned” the space according to a model, which created contradictions and providing comforting, but alienating solutions to the local residents. Individuals were expropriating of the right to “space”, and the right to the “city”.

4. The cultural risk: manipulation and potential reaction

Media control and cultural manipulation, both in cinema and literature were further aspects of Lauro’s exercise of power over the Neapolitan context.

Lauro’s love affair with Eliana Merolla (the actress he married in 1970, after a relationship that began in 1957) anticipated his new cinema project, that was realized: cinema was used to show an image of the city, reflecting the model that Lauro himself was promoting. His cinema project hindered those cultural products that criticized his “view” (*Le mani sulla città*, was among them).

As Goffredo Fofi states in the introduction of an interesting volume by Fusco [21]: “The reconstruction of Achille Lauro’s temptations and cinema undertakings made by Gaetano Fusco digs in unpublished materials, and appropriately chooses to widen the view: not only the two films produced by Lauro, but Lauro’s relations with cinema, and those with the Neapolitan and non-Neapolitan culture that deals with Naples”.

In 1955 Lauro had created an American Film Festival, which was later quashed by the opposition of the Italian national government which promoted only the Venice Film Festival.

In addition, since in 1942 Lauro initially obtained 50% of the ownership (then fully acquired in 1949) of a newspaper based in Naples, “Rome”, the oldest of the post unitary era (founded in 1862), the ship owner began a disparaging campaign against books such as *La pelle* (by Curzio Malaparte) or films such as *Catene* (*Chains*, 1949), *Processo sulla città* (*City process*, 1952, of which Rosi had been assistant director), *Luna Rossa* (*Red Moon*, 1951) [22–25], which showed the harshest aspects of Naples, with strong links to everyday reality. Lauro’s policy, therefore, acted through important cultural vehicles (Newspapers), quashing a certain literature and a specific (Figure 2) cinema capable not only of telling stories trivially, but of revealing some obscure mechanisms of power.

Following an unsuccessful project (*Una medicina chiamata Napoli, A medicine called Neaples*, a film by the Lauro-film Production), Lauro asked Eduardo De Filippo to direct a film on the city. After Eduardo’s clear refusal, Lauro undertook a series of vindictive actions which made it difficult for some of De Filippo’s works to be performed, among them *Questi fantasmi*⁷ (*Ghosts*).

⁷ A three-act comedy from 1945. The first was performed at the Elysée in Rome in 1946. A film was made from the opera with Renato Rascel and Franca Valeri; in 1967, under the direction of Renato Castellani, a remake was produced with Vittorio Gassman and Sophia Loren.



Figure 2. One of the closing scenes: “the facts and characters here reported are imaginary, whereas the social and environmental reality generates them is genuine”.

5. *Le mani sulla città* and the existential risk

The 1960s in Italy were characterized by an important “battle” waged in urban planning. Not only with regard to the “house” but with respect to the Urban Reform, promoted by some Italian urban planners, such as Giovanni Astengo, and by other politicians. Among them, Fiorentino Sullo, who in April 1968 was not reconfirmed as Minister of Public Works, in a phase that decreed the end of the Reformation project (the “Sullo Reformation”), then definitively disavowed by the Christian Democrats Party.

The Reformation project would have been a crossroad not only for urban planning, but for the national economic history. F. Sullo, a D. C. Minister (Christian Democrats Party) of Public Works (during the IV Fanfani Government, 1962–1963) and in the subsequent Leone Government, proposed a Reform that reorganized the “land regime”, by changing the relationship between public government and private property⁸.

Even if the story had not yet ended, in 1963 when Rosi’s film was released, the failure of Fiorentino Sullo’s Decree Law took place. *Le mani sulla città* in fact, took a clear position on that failed reform and showed the general public the mechanisms of income and the connivance between owners, property developers and corrupted administrators (Figure 3). Even today, the film, with a journalistic style, has an ideological depth and involves the viewers by placing them in a dialogical relationship with history.

⁸ The Reformation, in fact, should have provided for, through the systematic public appropriation of the land rent, the separation between the owners of the areas and the right to build on those areas.



Figure 3. The scene of the movie illustrating the corrupted administrators.

If in 1963 the film offered the chance to report on urban resilience, today, in addition to being a classic, denouncing illegal relationships between entrepreneurs and politics (Figure 4), it represents a historical source which explains the irreversible fracture of the crucial 60s.



Figure 4. The scene showing Edoardo Nottola.

The “path” traced by the ensemble of honest and idealist urban planners and politicians was replaced by another unscrupulous and profiteering group. The great ideals (carried out by Giovanni Astengo or by the INU, the Italian National Urban Planning Institute), the attention to the relationship between urban planning, architecture and ways of living [26], and to the planned Reconstruction, were refuted by a widespread practice based on illegality.

Francesco Rosi himself defined the film as a “theorem” that represents the dark complexity of the reconstruction in Naples. This allowed Rosi to tell about a general phenomenon and draw conclusions from the given and observable conditions.

As a matter the fact, the film begins with a statement: given a square meter of agricultural land, how much will the value increase if that territory becomes buildable? And at the expense of the community with urbanization works (electricity, water and gas)? (Figure 5).

The city project, besides concerning the link between administration and urban planning, it was influenced by the academic “culture”. In fact, the University had a fundamental role, by hosting numerous conflicts within the intellectual community. A number of diverging groups and opinions, debated both when Lauro was the Mayor, and in the following period: Luigi Tronchetti, for example, who was Dean of the faculty of Engineering and guarantor of the “gavismo” (linked to the Gava family), excluding those who opposed to speculative policies, among them intellectuals such as Roberto Pane [27], Luigi Cosenza and Domenico Andriello⁹, as Belli [28] and previously Allum [29] reported.



Figure 5. One of the scenes where administrators are taking decisions on the city.

It is in this context that Naples is illustrated, as if it were the model of the urban and territorial disaster, similar to other cities, such as Palermo [30,31].

If in those years numerous authors dealt with building speculation, Italo Calvino was one of them, and contributed with his book written in 1957 (*La speculazione edilizia*, *The urban speculation*). Rosi addressed the matter in a different way, he diverged from the narrative, poetic, intimate styles which were too distant from political issues. He applied another approach, given the cities representation was in crisis due to the different urban organization. It had changed since the mid-1900s when also the residents perceived the territory as profoundly changed in its form and content.

⁹ Prominent figures in Naples: Roberto Pane, a qualified art historian, professor of Stylistic and constructive features of monuments, coordinator of research groups and author of several master plans, worked on the difficult relationship between new and historical settlements; Luigi Cosenza graduated in engineering was active as an urban planner and was a “critical voice” against urban speculation, he drew up plans and projects and published contributions during the reconstruction phase (e.g. detailed plans for Fuorigrotta and Bagnoli; projects for INA- Casa and for the IACP); Domenico Andriello was, in addition, a member of the Governing Council of the Italian National Institute of Urban Planning and was an active opponent to the urban speculation. He also wrote about it in several Urban Planning magazines [27].

The cinematic and literary references preferred by Rosi returned a social and human landscape without winking at the reassuring stereotypes, and were distant from that “light” cinema that in the post-war years intended to divert spectators from the rubble of the war.

At times Rosi’s film detects the drama of local authors, such as Anna Maria Ortese who, in one of her works [32] in 1953 wrote: “Naples is known to be a pouring of pus and dollars”.

Alike Anna Maria Ortese or Curzio Malaparte, Rosi, by “filming” the city in the immediate and contradictory post-war period, lifted the veil of the picturesque and revealed how Naples, which had the germ of innovation in itself, also lived on opacity, sinking in underground dynamics. In this sense, the subsoil¹⁰ is one of the recurring “figures” of the Rosi’s film, which is strongly linked to the “belly” of Naples previously described by Matilde Serao [33].

Although the film makes us spectators of a merciless chronicle, Rosi’s sharp and refined script offers a symbolic and metaphorical key. The subsoil, in fact, refers not only to the hollow and porous belly of the city, to the unstable submerged part of the porosity (*porosité*) [34] already portrayed since 1925 by Walter Benjamin and Asija Lacis during their stay in Naples.

The urban speculation occurred in the city during a phase of national hope and euphoria, while the Italian landscape was being deeply transformed. A process of fragmentation of the territory was being realized (also for the Plans that acted according to standards and rigid zoning). Besides, a specific category of socio-economic actors exploited and consumed the urban land and environmental resources. This drift also witnessed the failure of an illusion that had fertilized the Italian urban planning between the 1950s and 1960s: the Plan was considered as a legal tool for controlling and anticipating transformations and as a guarantor of legality.

Rosi, who had already had cinematic experience (as assistant director of Visconti and Zampa and as author of other works)¹¹ [35–37], in his film he mixes the genres, as fiction and documentary, news and short stories and dips into a *corpus* of works by Italian documentary authors such as Gregoretti and De Seta. The narrative key of *Le mani sulla città*, while making use of the neorealist school—of which *Roma città aperta* (*Rome as an open city*, 1945), by Roberto Rossellini, can be considered the manifesto—represents however a “super structural condition” (the city of the film is certainly Naples, but it could be any other post-war major city). The final product is also achieved by Raffaele La

¹⁰ The subsoil had been subject of study since the mid-1960s. A landslide ruined a seven-story building (at Mirella Park) which overlooked an abyss due to heavy downpours; on that occasion a group of experts asked that building permits were no longer issued in critical areas, such as “Vomero alto”.

¹¹ Among them: The challenge, *La sfida* (1958); *The knitters, I magliari* (1959); *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962). Rosi began working with Visconti and Zeffirelli in 1947, e.g. as assistant director of *La terra trema* (by Visconti), then for Visconti’s in *Senso* (1953) and as a screenwriter for Visconti’s in *Bellissima*, 1951 film with the subject by Cesare Zavattini. In 1952 Rosi wrote the subject of *City process* with Ettore Giannini, directed by Luigi Zampa and directed *Camicie rosse*, (*Red Shirts*). In a succession of experiences as a screenwriter and director, Rosi soon landed in “his” cinema in which he faced the evolution of crime and the Camorra in his Naples (with *The Challenge*) and in which he developed a method, between historical analysis and investigation, which will allow him to show the nuances of non-explicit truths: *Le mani sulla città*, which was awarded in Venice with the Golden Lion (XXIV Film Festival), represents a very high point of this horizon, both formally and for the contents expressed.

Capria's "writing", who signed the subject (together with Rosi) and the screenplay written by Enzo Forcella and Enzo Provenza.

The important Neapolitan writer (La Capria) accompanied Rosi in long walks through the streets of Naples before starting the film. They both shared personal experiences as well as political ideas which emphasized their cultural matrices of the city where they were born (Naples): they were not only inhabitants, but "citizens" [38].

The narrative key of the film results as "critical realism" rather than neorealism. As neorealism was the cinema of everyday life, in which the story obeys to narrative rules linked to reality: Rosi's film (like theorems) offers conclusions given *a priori* and then demonstrates the initial assumption, through a precise presentation of the current political reality.

Some authors of the nineteenth Century, an emblematic example is E. Zola, had used this narrative style [39] to refer to some urban plans of the second half of the that Century: in the Haussmannian Paris, the city as "commodity" is the contested space, the space to conquer and exploit in terms of economic profit. The social classes (the bourgeois), politicians and administrators aimed, with the collusion of the Plan and the implementation mechanisms (expropriation), to grab a better social position, the most representative places as well as large amounts of money. The urban capitalism recounted by Zola in *La Curée* (1871) [39], has significant connections with Naples shown in *Le mani sulla città* by Rosi.

Even the eclipse of democracy in Rosi's Naples, in fact, emerges from the strong contrast between the social categories and the symbolic sense connected to them: the "we" (us), the community made by the most fragile people vs "them", the politicians (Figure 6).



Figure 6. The scene showing the historic center in Naples.

The absent "we"—also made silent by the political choices, by the corruption, by the collusion among the different levels of power, including the clerical one—has no voice, except for the one heard in a tragic moment of the film. Although the voice results disorganized, we perceive it when the inhabitants desperately raise and agitate their hands while looking towards a balcony in the ruined neighborhood where they live following the collapse of the building in the historic center (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The scene representing the collapse.

This shows one of the key moments of the film with strong symbolic references, narrated with pathos and representing a fracture of the narration, central to the development of the story. The ruins, which remind us of some catastrophes in the neorealist cinema (e.g. *La terra trema*, *The earth trembles*) [40] send back to World War II, that had just ended, and represent the absence of the community as a decision-making subject in Naples.

The collapse was inspired by a real experience lived by Rosi during his exploration in the historic center, before the shooting of the film. He saw a devastated building near some newly built buildings and chose to represent the intensity of that collapse and the ruins of the entire city in the hands of speculators. Technically, the collapse was achieved thanks to the collaboration of Massimo Rosi, an architect, brother of the film director. It was made by filming the reactions of the real inhabitants of the neighborhood, according to the neo-realist style.

Another key scene is represented by Edoardo Nottola's (the speculator)¹² statement "power is will", which shows how a PRG (General Urban Development Plan), that would not allow speculation, could be changed (Figure 8).

¹² Some of the actors and characters of the film: Rod Steiger: Edoardo Nottola; Salvo Randone: De Angelis; Guido Alberti: Maglione; Carlo Fermariello: De Vita; Angelo D'Alessandro: Balsamo.



Figure 8. The scene shows Edoardo Nottola and his project.

Another powerful fragment of the film clearly shows the contradiction of the Plan and Urban Planning studies, which did not have the collective good in mind, but favored entrepreneurs neglecting democratic confrontation and those INU reformist ideals that some Italian urban planners and politicians, such as Fiorentino Sullo, author of the Reformation never realized.

The value of the land could be increased out for personal purposes thanks to technical knowledge. This way the Plan legitimized urban speculation and favored the illegal pact between entrepreneurs and the political class. The Plan, thus became the device of illicit agreements and the tool for manipulating the transformations that produced economic benefits for economically strong individuals.

Nottola's super power was also represented by a map which he kept behind his table; the model representing Naples and the new urban expansion, showing the entrepreneur's ideal city and his ability to control and dominate both space and inhabitants (Figure 9)¹³.



Figure 9. The scene represents Edoardo Nottola while he is working.

¹³ All the photographs (screen shots) are taken from the movie; the full movie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvTaqTn7jAA>.

The narrated drama was also highlighted by Piero Piccioni's music, which was not traditional Neapolitan music, and therefore underlined the upheaval of the mortally wounded urban landscape, marked by scars and cuts, disfigured by tall condominiums on pillars (seen in one of the opening scenes of the film).

In order to emphasize the decline, including the uncooperative split between struggling powers, and unresolved tragic conflict, Rosi in his film aimed to target politicians and the speculator (Nottola), leaving the community in the background. He basically tells about the drama of those who were deprived of the chance of action and reaction, of the perception of their precarious condition and basic rights¹⁴.

Why did Rosi define the film a theorem?

By recalling a general question and developing a particular story, he decided to recount the dynamics underway in the city with a "parliamentary investigation" (in Rosi's words) carried out in the City Council of Naples. The investigation shows the illegal circuit between the process of transformation of the city and the political and administrative power.

In fact, Nottola, the speculator, becomes Councilor for Public Works, debasing the relationship between political choices and urban planning actions. A dramatic though widespread condition, which only the "resilient" individual opposes: De Vita. He is the city Councilor inspired by Luigi Cosenza, played by a non-professional actor: Carlo Fermariello. Fermariello was a trade unionist of the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano) and later became the Mayor of Vico Equense. He was chosen according to the neorealist tradition and also for his resemblance with Raf Vallone, an Italian actor who often played positive characters on the screen (see *Riso Amaro, Painful Rice*) [41].

Francesco Rosi, with militant energy, presents the facts in a strong way, apparently not taking a position and not providing solutions, but openly denouncing what really happened during the phase in which Achille Lauro was the Mayor of Naples and in the following phase.

It is in this sense that Rosi launched a genre (between fiction and report) at the time not widespread in Italy, except for specific circuits and by documentary authors. In the contemporary era, only Ken Loach is able to narrate in a similar way the dystopian reality of workers harassed by capitalism, and the possible strategies they put into place to react, sometimes totally unsuccessful.

Rosi's film, has a supreme value, as it shows what the risks within a false or unfinished democracy were, by illustrating the corrupted power that feeds itself, and by overturning one of the cornerstones of democratic governments: the decentralization of the administrative offices and cooperation among different powers for the "common good", that here are totally canceled.

Moreover, during the phase when Lauro was the Mayor of Naples, for the first time in Italy, in the contemporary era, there was a strong conflict of interest between the administration and businesses. In fact, in the film, we can see the effects of the unrestricted conduct of power, when power itself was exercised in a personalist way by individuals who held a political role and who favored themselves and their business.

¹⁴ It may be useful to remember how other contemporary authors had proposed a different modality in both theoretical and empirical terms, among them Danilo Dolci who gave voice to the weak and excluded, faithfully transcribing the voices of many of them, collecting interviews in volumes and acting on the field in severely disadvantaged areas.

This recurring theme, present both in literature and in cinema is shown in a satirical episode in the film, *Signore e signori, buonanotte* (*Goodnight Ladies and Gentlemen*), directed by Age, Benvenuti, Comencini, De Bernardi, Loy, Maccari, Magni, Monicelli, Pirro, Scarpelli and Scola (gathered in the “Cooperative 15 May”) in 1976 [42]. In *Da malata a convalescente* (the title of the episode; *From illness to recovering*), which features Marcello Mastroianni in the role of Paolo T. Fiume, a speaker who was conducting a round table, is the witness of a surreal event: four inelegant and vulgar politicians, former administrators of the city of Naples, all with the same surname (Lo Bove), are called to say what they had done for the city. The four receive insults from the audience and are accused of being liars. At the end of the episode, they close the round table by speaking in Neapolitan dialect and by literally devouring the city of Naples which had been rebuilt in a plastic nougat¹⁵. This is a macabre rite: a sort of “cannibalism” addressed apparently towards the city (but in reality it was directed towards the inhabitants).

Rosi, with no satire and far from being didactic, in *Le mani sulla città*, tells how the “building block” which had put together builders, owners of agricultural areas, lots and houses and other individuals. The real estate investors close to Lauro, had strong interests in the transformation process of the territory, which coincided with the speculative valorization of the areas.

The consensus that the “laurism” obtained in the initial phase, especially from the economic individuals who would have benefited from the transformation of Naples, also had populist aspects because it was based on the cult of the “Captain” (as the ship owner was called) who acted as a defender of the Neapolitan tradition against the injustices addressed to the city by the nation State.

In 1957 Lauro’s power began to decline due to some irregularities found in his work. Thus, the City Council was dissolved, and the Gava family began its rise. Antonio Gava, for example, was the president of the Province of Naples from 1960 to 1969. His leadership was marked by efficient, logical and rational strategies, as well as the collusion with the Camorra. Gava moved away from the work carried out by Lauro, who had previously launched urban speculation (attracting large real estate companies that aimed to build luxury apartments). Gava on the one hand, maintained an apparent official behavior as the economic sphere required, promoting public projects; on the other, he applied an illegal patronage and personalist model.

6. Conclusion

Urban transformation projects, both speculative and national that aimed to improve people’s quality of life, were based on planning and implementing control. They obstructed any chance of imagination and coordination of the inhabitants in Naples, similarly to others big cities in the 1960s. It was difficult for ordinary people to participate, due to the decisions made from above, and even more to gain urban awareness and ability to assess potential risks. In this arrangement, it was impossible for the inhabitants to activate a “cognitive process” able to lead them toward a social and material project of space making it their own.

In such a *milieu* that impeded the appropriation of urban space, what were the reactions?

¹⁵ *Da malata a convalescente*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Y25bbC4pA4>.

The condition experienced by the inhabitants determined a range of “feelings”: from adherence to the proposed model, to accepting or refusing it, and to the alienation of those who felt disorientation from both domestic and open spaces.

The system of public spaces in a historic city, as well as the organization of the residences, has a primary structure. It should not be looked at simply as an aesthetic or immutable configuration, but as a physical, social, symbolic, historicized, human conformation closely interconnected with economic, political and civic aspects. The design method, along with the shape of the space, as well as the residences and public spaces, induce social behaviors, cooperation, conflict, meetings [43] that are experienced day by day. The community is set up and operates within and also thanks to the urban space. This process influences the participation, cooperation and the rising of urban conflicts. When the conflicts generate debate, they represent one of the focus of urban democracy.

Therefore, there was and there is a feedback between civic and political behaviors and the inhabited space, and it is in this sense that the planned space *was* (or *was not*) *polis*.

It needs to be said, that in addition to the illegal and damaging forms of urban speculation, the general organization of the Italian urban planning¹⁶ and the authoritative forms of the project also produced many risks regarding the inhabitants’ participation and political life, in the neighborhoods and in the whole city.

The excerpts written by Giovanni Astengo in 1976, in the editorial (*La svolta. The turning point*) of *Urbanistica* (issue n. 65 entirely dedicated to Naples; *Urbanistica* was and still is the most important magazine in the sector in Italy) [44], indicate how much the transformations in Naples were considered devastating.

Astengo affirms that “Thirty years of deterioration in our country could produce only dreadful built up areas. Naples is among the many examples, where the emphasis of the “urban decay”, is visible both in the physical aspect, so clearly visible to the eye, and in the socio-economic profile, likewise dramatically measurable in terms of schools, employment, housing or public finance which created an extreme situation, where the negative values of the different components were not compensated by any clues with opposite signs, reached exceptional levels and, largely in synergy, enhanced their operational perverse effects”. “The civil ‘revolt’ of Naples that took place on June 15 1975, and June 20 1976”, continues Astengo, “is the sign, an affirmative and positive evidence, that the level of administrative failure in this very noble city has really hit the bottom, and that a substantial turnaround with replacement is urgent”. “In this perspective, a careful analysis is essential. This is the assumption of the report discussed of the thirty-year Neapolitan urban misgovernment, reconstructed also on partly unpublished documents, by Vezio Emilio De Lucia and Antonio Jannello, which *Urbanistica* has required for this file, and to hopefully establish the end of a time period. The complex fraud of the Neapolitan urban events is pursued here in two different, albeit inseparable, moments related to planning and management, in their interdependencies and conflicts with surprising results, which confirm partly known theses, but never carried out in such a broad and methodologically correct way. It turns out that the real crisis of Naples”, continues Astengo, “does not emerge from unfertile deep analyzes or from poor project ideas which, indeed, the plans from time to time develop into coherent

¹⁶ The no. 65 of *Urbanistica*, edited by Vezio Emilio De Lucia and Antonio Jannello, it deals with the history of urban transformation and speculation starting from the 1939 Plan.

and fascinating proposals, that even formally are defined, but it consists in a resilient disruptive action of the planning choices that stimulates a management practice in constant contradiction with the public objectives of the plan and in strong violation of the rules. The crisis in Naples is in fact all here: it is the managerial power that has defeated the plans designed and approved in the public interest; it is the daily, yearly, decades-long administration that has manipulated the development and humiliated this large city. First of all, the reconstruction of a correct management process is required in order to solve the crisis, widespread and democratically controlled, capable of linking the general choices with the operational and specific ones and to extract, from the magnified reality and from the amount of problems pushing up the priority operations which need to be linked to the same basic choices” [44].

The dynamics in the urban and territorial area generate conflicts, urbanistic choices establish priorities, determine scenarios, and organize concurrent rules, expressed not only through logical-formal modalities. In fact, conflicts can be investigated and interpreted, by exploring the underlying practices and their “narration”. In this sense, the most marginal individuals, as well as the system of social connections and practices (at territorial and neighborhood level) performed by them, may suggest an overturning of the top-down perspective, which was common and prevailing in that period.

In Italy the post-war period welcomed the beginning of an increasing trend, related to land and agricultural areas consumption. In that time, a number of major historic centers were progressively abandoned and deteriorated, except for rare cases of urban historic areas that had been specifically planned (e.g. the Plan for Bologna by Pierluigi Cervellati, elaborated during the XXs, verificare data).

The industrialization process had stimulated the construction of many factories and the South-North mobility of the many migrants who, especially in the South of Italy, left the underdeveloped inner countries.

Thus, the increase of the residential construction, the immigration flux and the population growth were strictly connected and linked to the growth of various sectors of the industry.

In other words, the transformation of landscapes and cities combined several factors. If the process had been explored through a systemic view, the interrelationships among the ecological, economic and social levels, would have been discovered.

The national economy, founded on the paradigm of industrial growth and development, focused more on the industrial sectors than on the maintenance of agriculture, which would have been much more sustainable, in terms of the environment and the landscape, which was the real sick one, as Settis defines it [45].

The Italian landscape was irreversibly damaged with permanent “scars” done by speculators and with the complicity of the State, which, since the post-war era, delivered laws and measures that increased the overbuilding of the territory [45].

There was also a deep gap between the theoretical level of protection of the landscape (laws for the protection of “natural beauties”; the theoretical studies by Francesco Saverio Nitti and Benedetto Croce; the “Franceschini Commission”, etc.) and the empirical level. An additional gap was present between the urban and the landscape planning.

The qualitative and quantitative contraction of the agricultural areas began in the mid-50s of the 20th Century. From 1956 to 2001 [45] the urbanized area in Italy increased by 500%. The construction of the INA-Casa neighborhoods represented an additional burden to the territories. They had

contributed to the transformation of the environmental and ecological continuity, in a Nation, that before the last war, was structured by large, medium and small cities, surrounded by the agricultural productive landscapes. These urban settlements, which at the time were limited by borders, began to expand over the territory with high-ways, factories, industrial areas, and residential low-density neighbourhoods. At this stage, the first Italian urban sprawl appeared. In specific geographic and economic contexts, in the following years, it was consolidated, by taking a distinct identity (e.g. in the region called Veneto, North-East of Italy, the “città diffusa”) [46].

Urbanistic choices, in theory, should recognize, integrate and mitigate conflicts, by operating on their nature and intensity, by transforming the destructive drive into a community project, the subversive drive into ideas shared collectively, by interpreting the individual drive on the civic level. Urban policies are never neutral and, while relating to theories, they should not develop ideal models, but should be considered “practices in progress” and in relation to urban evolution and people’s daily activities [47].

The idea of everyday life, however, especially in post-war Italy, was guided by a unilateral political view that guided the technical choices and identified a set of decision-makers (politicians and economic actors) in a superordinate position detached from the community. The conflicts, in that phase were not focused only on the occupation of space, but also on the elaboration of choices, on the locations, on the benefits, on where to build, and on the methods of occupation of the same space, on who and on how to make predictions.

The perpetual conflict was repeated, at a different level, on the allocation of the social categories in the space, on the economic and social inequality, on the intended use, on the choices made (which and by whom) as occurred during the Industrial Revolution in Europe and in America. This knot, in post-war Italy was not faced. The community, in fact, did not have any chance to participate nor express disagreement. The city of Reconstruction represented also the result of all this.

Conflict of interest

Author declares no conflicts of interest in this paper.

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