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The silenced paradoxes of urban renewal: morality, welfare reconfiguration and precarious labour in Collective Food Procurement in Turin

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Chapter I. Co-producing urban renewal?

I arrived at the Parco Piemonte in January 2019, after a first encounter with Matteo, one of the founding members of the Orti Generali project. A few days before, I had contacted him via email then we had talked on the phone and agreed to meet during his lunch break. I had joined him at his office, at the community centre of Mirafiori Sud, which hosted the offices of several local non-profit organisations as well as recreational spaces and a social canteen. During that first meeting he introduced me to the various and complex phases of the Orti Generali project design as well as invited me to pass by the park to see things directly. The actual construction phase of the project was just starting. Matteo worked as part of the cultural association *Coefficiente Clorofilla*, which had developed the idea of Orti Generali over the last years. In the Italian context a cultural association is defined as a non-profit private organisation constituted by a group of subjects pursuing a common goal of public interest and using its financial resources for cultural or educational purposes. Based on its statute, Coefficiente Clorofilla aimed at "encouraging sociality, participation and contributing to the cultural, environmental and civic growth of the entire community, by realizing activities related to cultural, environmental, social, educational and recreative projects" (statute 2013, translation is my own). In 2014, this association had officially won a 15-years land concession and funding to reorganize and manage part of the park and developing their urban gardening project. The development of Orti Generali was funded through the call "smart cities and communities and social innovation" allocated by the Ministry of Instruction, University and Research. The project also received funding by the bank foundation *Compagnia di San Paolo*, the European Union Horizon 2020 project *proGireg* and through other smaller collaborations. Due to delays in the arrival of the funds, the land rehabilitation and construction works at the park could only start between 2018 and 2019 through the anticipation of some payments by the association and the mobilization of volunteer work.

January 2019 was a busy time: the whole area that would soon host Orti Generali's gardening activities was being cleaning up. I accepted Matteo's invitation to join the group of workers and volunteers at the park, to meet them in person and see what such land rehabilitation

operations actually meant. I arrived at the park with the tram 4. I remember walking toward the empty agricultural field, thinking that I really was at the very end of the city. I was leaving behind me this peculiar mix of buildings that characterize the margins of the former industrial neighbourhood Mirafiori Sud, namely a set of working-class housing compounds dating back to various waves of urban construction between the 1950s and 1990s. The landscape was whitened because of the frost. I passed next to an old peri-urban farmhouse (*cascina*): it was difficult to say if it was semi-occupied or entirely abandoned. As I learned later, this was called the *Cascina Cassotti Balbo* and was historically related to the nearby agricultural field. I entered the dirt road on the side of the field: no signs revealed that I was entering a public park, nobody around, just an open iron gate. I continued walking and saw, fastened to a pole, an information leaflet about Orti Generali. It was wet and partly damaged but still readable: "by March 2019 at the Parco Piemonte 150 new urban gardens will be born. Water, automatic irrigation, light, organic waste disposal and many other services for agriculture. For information, costs and procedures call this number or you can find us here at the park on Mondays between 10h and 13h or by making an appointment at the *Casa nel Parco* [neighbourhood community centre]".

[Image 1: Orti Generali information leaflet. 21/01/2019. Photo by the author.]

I continued walking, following the dirt road, which started descending towards what seemed more like an actual park: trees, plants and then again, more fields – which would later be dedicated to collective gardening and educational activities. I also caught sight of what seemed like vegetable gardens, hidden behind high plants and improvised fences made of plastic ropes and rusty bed nets. They seemed frozen in time, left alone in their winter sleep, with different materials and farming tools piled in their corners. On the other side of the path, I found a small concrete house. I saw Matteo with some workers and volunteers. He was preparing coffee for everybody on a portable gas cooker while the others were getting ready to start.

When I first started doing fieldwork at the Parco Piemonte my idea was to study the project Orti Generali as an example of urban gardening initiative in Turin. I was interested to understand the actors involved, their way of working and skills in relation to food production. At the time, I had little knowledge about the park where the project stood: its context, origins, former users and linkages to the industrial past of the city. As I took part to the land rehabilitation and construction works, I understood that partaking to the development of the project would allow me to understand much more than what I expected. This process spoke to the meaning given not only to urban food production but to urban renewal more generally: the redesign of urban margins and the making of new framings for and by its citizens. While cleaning up the park from the industrial material which companies and former users had abandoned there over the past decades, the project was redefining the function of public ground in an area where the local administrators had for long closed their eyes. This process also redefined the meaning of the public sector, putting non-profit workers and local inhabitants at the centre of urban renewal and staging non-profit organisations a new (moral) authority.

In this first section, I present the actors involved in this process, expanding on the extent to which this initiative redefined the urban planner – user divide as discussed by Newman (2015). In his analysis, the author looked at how urban design and the production of space can occur through the everyday practices of city inhabitants beyond urban planners and their logic. In the case analysed by Newman, at the *Jardins d'Éole* in Paris, different everyday (political) practices blurred

the distinction between "planners" and "users" and called for attention to the ways in which:

> People envision and analyse infrastructure, parks, streets, city blocks, and neighbourhoods in terms of movements and flows that may or may not correspond to the understandings of planning authorities; they also attempt to redirect, fix, shift, or even maintain the movements within and across these spaces by reimagining these sites and even materially reshaping and reworking places and infrastructure. (Newman 2015, xvi)

Following a similar approach, namely inquiring on who designed and transformed this urban space, I first contextualise the case of Orti Generali as part of the changing frames of urban gardening in Turin. I discuss the case of community gardens in relation to the emergence of non-profit organisations as new urban planners and users. I then analyse how these processes take shape at the park: how the workers of the association *Coefficiente Clorofilla* positioned themselves as figures in between city planners and local inhabitants and involved the latter in the transformation of the park? I shed light onto the ways in which this is part of a broader seemingly participatory approach to urban regeneration in the area, to be understood however as a feature of welfare state retrenchment.

(Re)defining urban gardens

Typology of urban gardens

Turin is characterised by different types of gardening arrangements[8]. There are regulated individual allotments also called district gardens (*orti della circoscrizione*). These are managed and assigned by the local administration based on criteria among which the age and socio-economic situation of the applicants (Bianco 2012). Moreover, school gardens are also part of municipal development plans for urban gardens. Such officially recognised and regulated activities have always co-existed with what are called illegal or spontaneous gardens (*orti abusivi, orti spontanei*). The way of naming these spaces varied according to the position and sensibility of my interlocutors. The gardeners would often just call them "gardens" and specify that these were "illegal" just when asked more specific questions. The name "illegal gardens" is more common – and resonates, in Italian, with the widespread issue of unauthorised construction. The adjective "spontaneous" was probably initiated in the realm of NGOs. Using the term spontaneous can serve multiple purposes, and sometimes the one of going beyond their immediate criminalisation and observing these as complex social phenomena. I will refer to them as "spontaneous gardens" to remark that these are the result of local inhabitants' direct land appropriation, but also to go beyond the legal/illegal and formal/informal dichotomy. As argued by Herzfeld (2020) going beyond such juxtaposition is important to be able to analyse the power relations and social assumptions that characterise decision making processes around urban spaces.

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[8] For a more general historical account of the development of urban gardens in Italy see Crespi (1982). While the historical overview of urban gardening in the Italian context goes beyond the scope of this section, it is important to recall that urban gardening became common practice during the wars to face the challenge of food provisioning. The fascist regime particularly emphasised the importance of these "war gardens" (*orti di guerra*) and converted a number of urban spaces into cultivated areas, as summarised in the slogan "cultivate park and squares" (*coltivare parchi e piazza*) (Albinati 1997; Fratin and Pozzati 2015). For a more recent overview of urban gardening in Italy see Marino and Cavallo (2016).

Spontaneous gardens were often developed at the margins of the city, in peripheral neighbourhoods, alongside water streams, railways or around abandoned farmhouses. This phenomenon particularly grew in the 1970s, in parallel to the increase of urban population linked to the development of the industry and the country's internal migration (Tecco *et al*. 2016). At the time, the new city inhabitants were workers coming from rural southern Italy, who developed urban gardens for both subsistence and recreation purposes (Baldo 2012; Crespi 1982).

From the mid 1990s, the municipality of Turin worked more actively on the conversion of these green areas in the name of legality and of what they named as a more "appropriate" and "shared" use of spaces – these terms, were still recurrently used by administrators and non-profit workers in the field to define the desired future of these green areas. An example in this sense were the efforts of municipal urban planners to create more public green areas obtaining peri-urban agricultural land (such as the fields around the old peri-urban farmhouses) from their private owners with the zoning plan of 1995:

> How could the city administration of Turin give parks to its inhabitants? It had to find a trick to obtain green areas and at the same time not to displease the landowners. Then the municipal technicians and the creator of the zoning plan thought of giving a sort of compensation: the owners would confer the agricultural area to the city administration of Turin, which in turn recognised them some land rights in other parts of the city.[9]

In 2010 (which corresponds to the years in which the city was hardly hit by the economic crisis), the municipality also started working on developing new regulations (2012, 2013) specifically for the development of urban gardens. As part of these plans, urban gardening was seen as a strategy to "valorise impoverished areas, support sociality, […], incentivise educational and therapeutic activities" (Tecco *et al*. 2016, translation is my own). The project TOCC (Turin a City to Cultivate) (*Torino Città da Coltivare*), for example, was

[9] Luigi Canfora, municipal employee at the department of urban green area management, interview, 06/11/2019.

developed in 2012 to promote the development of agricultural practices in the urban context such as short food chains, social agriculture, gardening and urban reforestation. With TOCC, the municipality aimed at developing an analysis that would reveal the state of the art: mapping existing agricultural areas, land concessions and understanding what the different options were to foster the development of urban agriculture in these spaces (Comune di Torino 2012).

Urban gardens, city renewal and the third sector: entanglements

I frame such interests for urban gardens as part of the local administration's attempts to renew the city's identity. Namely to transform its image from the one of an industrial to a sustainable and creative city, attract external resources and position itself in global networks – elements discussed by Vanolo (2008) and Finocchiaro (1999), among others. I build on similar arguments that have been made about other post-industrial cities such as Detroit, where urban agriculture was promoted to counter post-industrial decline and give a new function to vacant land. In their article on marginality and urban agriculture in Detroit, Draus *et al*. (2013) remark however that people living and working in heavily depopulated areas of Detroit actually foresee little opportunities for urban agriculture to alter their living conditions and marginalisation. Building on Wacquant (1999)'s notion of advanced marginality, the authors highlight the importance of contextualising these projects, looking at how, at the same time, these inhabitants are subject to "absence of an effective public sector, the withdrawal of services, and the reliance on non-profit and volunteer efforts for maintaining day-to day survival in the neighbourhood (Draus *et al*. 2013, 2535-2536). More generally, literature about Detroit reveals that the many attempts to "reinvent the Motor City" and its image are to be analysed as part of the narrowing down of the range of public interventions and the normalisation of city governance by "extra-democratic entities" (Smith and Kirkpatrick 2015). As I will exemplify all along the dissertation, the case of Turin analysed from the perspective of collective food procurement adds to this line of arguments and is particularly relevant to explain how welfare (its meaning, practice and agents) is reconfigured (and scoped down) in such post-industrial contexts.

In Turin, processes often defined in terms of public green renewal (*rigenerazione del verde pubblico*) occurred through the remaking of entire green areas (which included the dismantlement of spontaneous gardens) as well as through collaborations between city planners, local non-profit organisations and citizens. While the municipal planners worked on the identification of potential areas for urban gardening, the definition and management of the urban gardening projects were not always compatible with the limited resources and "times of institutional politics and the local administration" (*il tempo della politica*) - as pointed out by several non-profit workers engaged in urban agriculture. This meant that, aside from the municipal gardens managed by the districts' administrations, other public green renewal projects were rarely seen as a public policy priority because of the high costs and long-term of such operations. Among other places, this was the situation at Strada del Drosso (close to the Parco Piemonte), which is an area left completely unmanaged by the city administration and hosting more than 300 spontaneous gardens. The municipality increasingly developed land concessions and collaboration with local non-profit-organisations or group of citizens in charge of renewing and directly managing some of these public areas. While telling me about the limited economic and human resources of the city administration (an important theme, recurring in most of my interviews), Vittorio Bianco, one of my research participants and a researcher and practitioner in the field of urban agriculture, explained:

> It is an engine in trouble [referring to the municipality and its budget]. From the point of view of its human resources too, with regards both to the management of the space and to the policies that should be put in place. Therefore, inevitably, the principle of subsidiarity has been implemented, de facto giving

> to private social organisations also the duty to find their resources[10].

The remark of Vittorio points to yet another element of such public green areas' concessions and shared management, namely the need for external resources. As confirmed throughout my ethnography, local non-profit organisations most often had to search for private funding (and voluntary work) to be able to sustain their activities. While I do not have the space to expand on this here (but will come back to it in part III of the dissertation), the dependency on external funding further complexifies the figure of the urban planner: who are the city planners in a context in which the municipality, non-profit organisations and private founders have a say and different margins of intervention (bringing in agendas and power relations) in the redefinition of the urban space?

Orti Generali should therefore be contextualised as part of the emergence of non-profit organisations workers as co-planners of urban green areas and the development of what could be regarded as a third way between public management (municipal gardens) and direct appropriation (spontaneous gardens) [11]. It is also to be linked to a general increase in interest in urban agriculture from the bottom-up across European cities and to the proliferation of concepts and international models such as North American community gardens and *jardins partagés*. According to Vittorio Bianco, the emergence of similar experiences in Turin represented a renewed citizens' interest

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[10] Vittorio Bianco, urban ecology and sustainable development consultant, interview, 06/06/2020. Original quote: "È una macchina in difficoltà anche dal punto delle risorse umane, rispetto al presidio del territorio e a tutte le politiche che dovrebbero esserci; e quindi giocoforza il principio di sussidiarietà è stato implementato un po' a forza e di fatto lasciando al privato sociale anche l'onere di recuperare risorse." All along the dissertation, I sometimes report the original quotes in Italian like I did here - when I felt that the words and turn of phrase were particularly telling.

[11] While I do not have the space to discuss this here, it is important to add to the picture also the growing number of urban gardens sponsored by private companies. For example, I visited an urban garden on the rooftop of a supermarket (managed by the non-profit organisation *Rete O.n.g.*) as well as gardens managed by the multinational *Le Roy Merlin*.

for urban green spaces that were envisaged as "opportunities for socialisation, passing from an individual management of the garden to a **collective vision**, more or less formalised, more or less open" (Bianco 2012, 1, translation and emphasis are my own).

At the time of the fieldwork, many of Turin collective urban gardens were gathered under the umbrella of the network Metropolitan Gardens of Turin (*Or.Me. Torinesi*). This network was developed in 2016 to allow garden organisers (most often workers of non-profit organisations, social cooperatives and informal groups of citizens) to discuss about their experiences, get common trainings on the themes of agriculture and education and collaborate in the search for funding[12]. The Or.Me network developed as a consequence of the changing requirements of private foundations, which incentivised the creation of networks as means to channel their funding. Highlighting this perspective is interesting to think of the meaning of contemporary networks of non-profit organisations: as I discuss in Vasile (2023), I argue that these are not necessarily created based on a shared vision per se, but the shared vision is constructed as a tool to access funding and develop a homogenised narrative around different initiatives. As a matter of fact, it was only in 2019 that Or.Me members started to work more actively on a presentation document stressing their shared visions and needs. They also aimed at creating a more unified image of their work. As illustrated by the image reported below (retrieved from a presentation given by Or.Me as part of a webinar[13] organised by the municipality of Paris on the theme of Italian urban gardening experiences) by 2021 the network managed to develop such shared narrative and homogeneous aesthetic. It recalls international models

[12] Matteo Baldo, founder of Orti Generali, interview, 25/05/2020.

[13] "*Retour d'expériences des jardins urbains italiens à Turin, à Rome et en Toscane"*. Webinar organised on 09/06/2021 by the *Pôle Ressource Jardinage Urbain de la Direction des Espaces Verts et de l'Environnement de la Ville de Paris*.

such as community gardens in Rotterdam[14]. The network also developed shared yet broad objectives such as the promotion of local development, increasing urban food access, strengthening or creating community ties and improving urban microclimate.

[Image 2: the different gardens that compose the network *Or.Me*. Courtesy of *Or.Me*.]

By taking a closer look at these urban gardens, it was possible to note that, more than a linear third way, these initiatives incarnated a wide variety of actors and different forms of collaborations, modes of organising and thinking about collective gardens. Such variety was also pointed out in the context of community gardens in New York city and Amsterdam by Eizenberg (2012) and Bródy and de Wilde (2020), respectively. These authors look at the effects that different models of NGO management of community gardens can have on community participation, people's sense of ownership and control over space (Eizenberg 2012). Bródy and de Wilde (2020) delve into their social inclusion and food provision and distribution potentials. While

[14] I give the example of Rotterdam here as my research is informed by the comparative framework of the *Food Citizens?* project. The case of community gardens in Rotterdam was analysed by Vincent Walstra who looked at *Rotterdamse Munt*, among other cases.

attending one of Or.Me's meeting I was able to discern the variety of approaches of the gardens' organisers, who talked about their scopes, activities and challenges. Such meetings gathered groups and non-profit organisations such as Orti Generali and Rete ONG.

I have introduced general trends in the transformations of urban gardens in Turin, which illustrate the relation between welfare state retrenchment and the development of new models of green renewal in line with international trends and examples. I discussed the emergence of new figures at the frontier between planners and users, namely non-profit organisations workers and volunteers engaged in the development of collective urban gardening projects. In what follows, I present the case of Orti Generali in more details: how the engagement of non-profit workers occurred in practice? What was their role in and visions of urban renewal in Mirafiori Sud? I also question the extent to which the remodulation of the planners-users divide occurred in practice. I build on participant observation to uncover the actual shape that concepts such as collective and social inclusion took in practice.

"Giving back"

Land configuration, organisation and access at Orti Generali

The area concerned by the project Orti Generali comprises two very different parts of the Parco Piemonte. An agricultural field (called A on the map below), flat and closer to the street, which was converted into allotments rented to individuals or families. The other area (B), closer to the Sangone river, wilder and more isolated, and previously partly occupied by spontaneous gardens was transformed into a space for collective gardening and educational activities.

As per 2021, the area A was transformed into 160 allotments of varied sizes: 50, 75 or 100 square meters, costing respectively 25, 35 and 45 euros per month. Gardeners at Orti Generali included inhabitants of the neighbourhood Mirafiori Sud, a working-class area of the city historically inhabited by workers of the car industry (e.g. Vasile and Pisano 2021). More recently, the area become characterised by an ageing population which increased by 14.5% between 1991 and 2011. Mirafiori Sud also attracted new immigrants, representing 9.94% of

the local population - which is less, however, than the city average (data from 2015)[15]. As I will explain further, gardening is, since a long time, part of the habits of the local population – for recreational and subsistence purposes – also considering that in the area the average yearly income amounted in 2009 to just under 14,000 euros. It is important to underline that Orti Generali also attracted dwellers from other areas of the city such as young families, people interested in sustainable agricultural practices and environmental activists.

To try to ensure a wider accessibility, the association reserved 25 of their allotments at a reduced price to people under 35, and 15 allotments to people facing economic difficulties. The latter, also called "solidarity gardeners" (*ortolani solidali*) were asked 5 euros per month, in addition to 10 hours of voluntary work to support the association in the management of the shared areas of the gardens. Such system of "solidarity" must be problematised in terms of unremunerated labour, as I will further elaborate throughout the dissertation in relation to similar free labour arrangements and the widespread culture of volunteerism. While "solidarity gardeners" agreed with such arrangement, this corresponded to free labour for the organisation. Moreover, it represented a form of engagement in the management of the area (e.g., cleaning, maintenance, small construction works) that did not correspond to shared decision making but rather to the implementation of tasks decided and organised top-down by the project directors. Finally, it is important to highlight that a waiting list to access such type of contract and garden soon developed, reflecting a broader need and desire for more accessible plots that remained unsolved.

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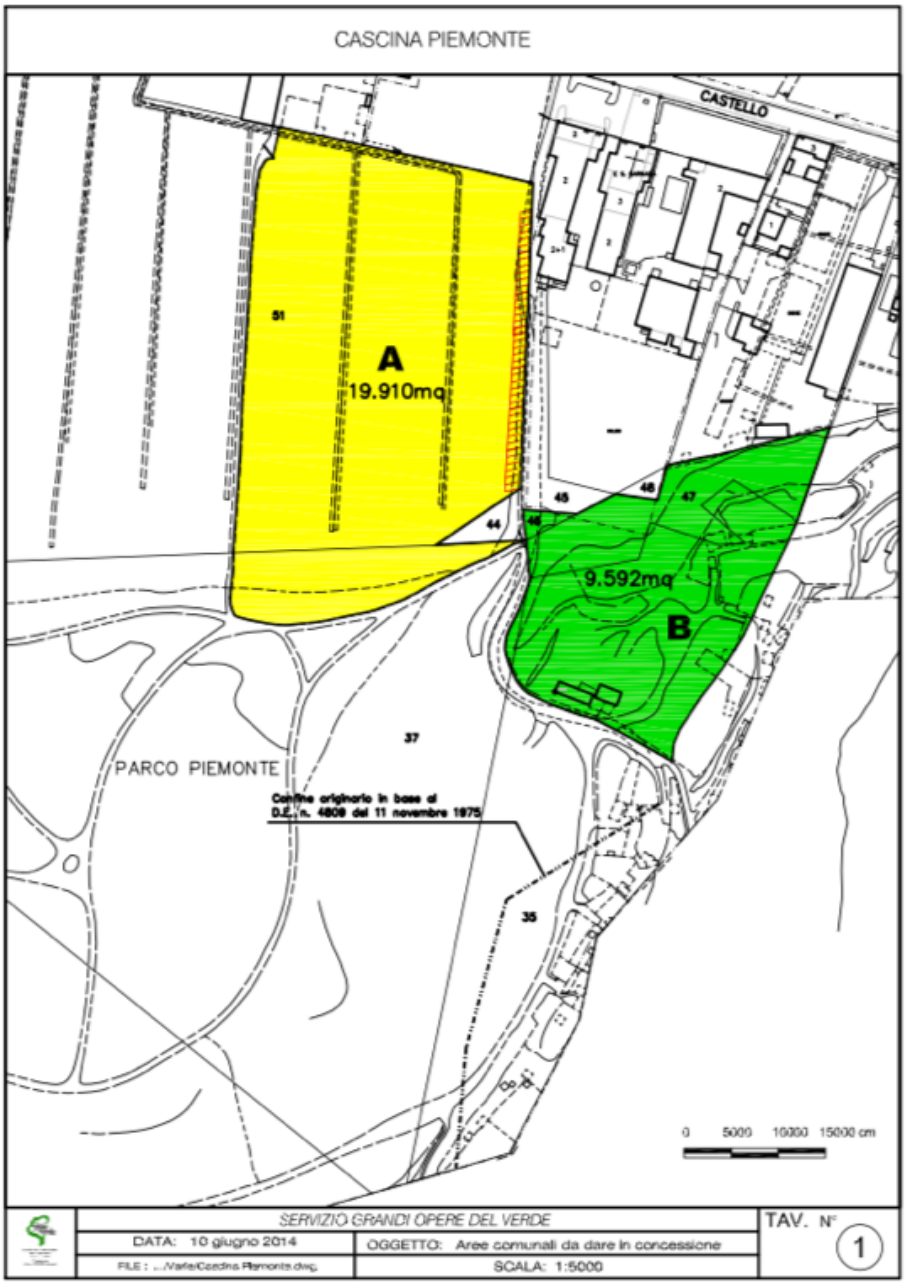
[15] Data retrieved from the infographics of the exhibition "*Mirafiori Dopo il Mito*" visited in October 2019. The infographics were mostly based on the Rota reports on Turin.



[Image 3: The two areas of intervention. Image from the municipal department *Servizio Grandi Opere del Verde*. 2014. Courtesy of *Associazione Coefficiente Clorofilla*.]

All allotments benefitted from a technological irrigation system connected to a groundwater pomp and in situ weather station. These were regarded as essential elements of the innovative model of Orti Generali and contributed to attract both people that had a garden for the first time as well as long-term gardeners from the area. For example, this was the case of Alessandro, a former railway worker now retiree, which rented a plot at Orti Generali because of such services as well as the active management and monitoring of Davide, Matteo and Stefano, the garden organisers[16]. When learning about the project, he had decided to opt out of municipal gardens, which he said were left unmanaged by the district administration. Over the years, Alessandro noted, the administration had dedicated less and less time and resources to the gardens. In recent years, he argued, claims made to the local administration about broken fences, frozen water pipes and theft always remained unanswered and, as the space lacked general maintenance and supervision, the overbearing behaviours of some of the long-term gardeners had also grown stronger. Frustrated by such challenges, he had decided to take part to the new project, finding what he described as a place with "civil, constructive and collaborative people". Alessandro's transition from one type of garden to the other is illustrative of the progressive decline of public investment in urban gardening, the emergence of new planning actors and the consequent redefinition of gardens' organisation and attributes. This line of argument was often used by the organisers of Orti Generali, who pointed to limited action of the public administration and the need for a different model of gardens' management.

The other space concerned by the project, the area B, was transformed into a community garden including areas for educational activities, collective gardening and a café. As per 2021, the organisation also developed a stable (mainly hosting chicken, a dog and few sheep during the summer), an area for bee keeping, one for university experimentation projects and two large greenhouses for hosting courses and events. The land rehabilitation and construction work in this lower area - once called by Matteo "the legacy we had to

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[16] Alessandro – a pseudonym, gardener, interview, 25/05/2021.

undergo"[17] - was an enormous endeavour achieved thanks to the work of volunteers involved for several months in the cleaning up and significant reshaping of the space. In the past, the area had been the site of accumulation of industrial material by spin off industrial firms, that would use parts of the city river banks as an informal landfill[18]. Later, as spontaneous gardeners had started to use the area, they also brought in all kinds of materials for their activities such as metal, construction material that, in the process of renewal, were deemed inappropriate, polluting and out of place. As I will elaborate next, these transformations not only dramatically changed the aesthetic of the area but also its occupants and local ways of understanding gardening. New rules and standards were brought in by the project organisers and, to a lesser extent, the volunteers and new gardeners.

At the basis of Orti Generali: visions, narratives and the moral approach

At the time of my fieldwork (2019-2020), the project organisers were Davide – a young inhabitant of Mirafiori Sud, who joined the team after a first period of participation as volunteer -, Matteo and Stefano[19]. Before winning such concession and ideating the project Orti Generali, the founding members of the non-profit organisation *Associazione Coefficiente Clorofilla*, Matteo Baldo - social worker - and Stefano Olivari - landscape architect -, had previous long-term experiences around urban gardening and project

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[17] Matteo Baldo, field recording, 17/10/2019. Original quote: "*l'eredità che dovevamo subire*".

[18] Luigi Canfora, interview, 06/11/2019.

[19] As I finalised this chapter (August 2022), the staff of Orti Generali increased - including, for example, new people responsible for the educational activities and food preparation. On the other hand, some of the people encountered during my fieldwork left the project such as Davide who quitted in October 2021. Most importantly, in January 2022, Orti Generali's status was transformed from a non-profit organisation into a for-profit social business. While these elements are important to shed light onto the evolution of the project, I do not discuss them in this dissertation, which focuses on my fieldwork period.

management in the area. In 2010, they started a research participatory planning project called *Miraorti*. It aimed at understanding together with local inhabitants how to reconfigure more than 300 spontaneous allotments (situated in the area of Strada del Drosso, near to Parco Piemonte). The idea at the basis of their research was to propose a new model of allotments reconfiguration based on the active engagement of the spontaneous occupants encouraged to open their gardens to a wider public and new activities. After several years of research and experimentation in Strada del Drosso, their official proposal for the transformation of the area was not taken ahead by the local administration and "the project ended up in a drawer"[20]. Their approach was in fact not deemed appropriate by the public employees in charge of green renewal in Mirafiori at the time who preferred to follow a different management model[21]. In 2014, as new funding possibilities arose, they decided to present a proposal for the partial reconfiguration of the Parco Piemonte, another piece of the peripheral green belt that the administration planned to transform. As they designed the new project, their work transformed from one of research and experimentation to one of actual implementation and transformation.

As narrated by Stefano during a presentation meeting with the volunteers and gardeners that took part to the transformation of the area:

> When we arrived here, this area was the target of different types of speculations. For example, at the beginning there was the idea of a supermarket which then vanished because of urbanistic limitations. Then the idea of making a camping, but quite a heavy one. At that time, us and the group Borgata Mirafiori did some questionnaires, participatory planning, to

[20] Matteo Baldo, interview, 25/05/2020.

[21] As per September 2020, the project *Miraorti* was back on the agenda of the association due to a renewed interest by the local administration – also to be linked to a change in the employees working in the greening department. The association attempted to mobilise funds to restart the research process in Strada del Drosso through a crowdfunding campaign sponsored via the project *Bottom Up* (Bottom up Torino n.d.).

> understand what the neighbourhood wanted and we fought a bit so that the area could remain an agricultural land, as now these are very few in the urban fabric […]. The agriculture that mostly made sense in the city was not the one of the tractors, on a large scale, but a type of agriculture which involves as much as possible citizens so small-scale agriculture. A form of horticulture as part of which all the people kind of become small-scale farmers, they have their gardens and in fact it also becomes a practice with an educational and social value, where you can bring schools and then involve the neighbourhood in the transformation.[22]

Stefano underlined the importance of urban agriculture and explained how the association operated to guarantee the continuity of agricultural activities within the Parco Piemonte. The reference made to inadequate private investments risking transforming the very nature of the land was juxtaposed to the association's efforts to develop a participatory, social and educative project for the area. In other parts of his talk, Stefano also referred to the local administration as an ensemble of pre-constituted visions and agendas that were difficult to influence or, using his terms, were not always ready to respond to new proposals and new ways of doing.

The positioning emerging from the words of Stefano is to be linked to the work of non-profit organisations and in particular to their growing role in the delivery of social services in Italy (e.g. Caselli 2015). As explained in the introduction, such shift to a third way characterised the last decades of welfare reconfiguration in the peninsula and was accompanied by an important moral reconfiguration of shared understanding of welfare and the role of citizens – discussed by Muehlebach (2012), among others, and all along this dissertation. Claims like the ones of Stefano about the role played by the Third Sector can be found, among other, in Alexander (2009) and Koch (2021), both discussing welfare reconfiguration in the context of neoliberal reform of British public policy and welfare. Building on Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*, Alexander (2009) explained how welfare has been redefined through claims on the importance of the

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[22] Stefano Olivari, field recording, 17/11/2019.

retrenchment of the public sector "in favour of an autonomous market and civil society" (222). In such context, the third sector is viewed as means to "foster social cohesion, providing the trust in a community of strangers that the state no longer credibly supports" (222) and works to recast the relation between public administration and society. The analysis of Koch (2021) helps reflecting on the moral economy brought in by such figures, which she called "frontline workers" (244), many of which are part of non-profit organisations (to which the government outsourced the delivery of public services). Koch (2021) shows how these figures (feel that they) are guided by ethics while navigating between people's need and structural constraints.

The morality imbued in Stefano's vision emerged through recurrent terminology such as "sharing spaces and practices" (*condivisione di spazi e pratiche*) and "giving back to the neighbourhood" (*restituire al quartiere*). Connecting this terminology to the broader question on the urban planner/ user divide allows for new questions and contradictions to be unfolded: who "gives back" the land? Is it the non-profit organisation which is in charge of representing the interests of local inhabitants and preserve public green areas from the neglect of the local administration and market speculations? Are then local inhabitants involved on the same level of planning and management as these non-profit workers? Are there tensions and diverse levels and forms of engagement to be considered? Answering these questions necessitates looking at the everyday practices of the making of the urban gardens. But before doing so it is important to contextualise such terminology and related moral approach to urban renewal as part of the history of Mirafiori Sud and the participation of local non-profit organisations and citizens in its regeneration plans.

Urban renewal through citizens engagement at Mirafiori Sud: a critical analysis

The neighbourhood Mirafiori Sud, situated in the southern part of Turin, was an agricultural production area until the 1930s. Then the FIAT industry established there one of its plants and since then the area underwent enormous transformations both in terms of construction and population, as it started to host migrant workers from southern Italy. This neighbourhood became the heart of Turin's

industrial production and, at the same time, some of its areas (such as Via Artom and Via Millelire) were sites of profound social hardship and marginalisation (Basile 2014). The industrial crisis, the progressive closure of most of the city industrial plants and growing unemployment severely affected the local economy and the working class's living conditions. In Mirafiori's most vulnerable areas it entailed an increase in micro criminality and drug use (e.g. Segre 1976). Since the end of the 1990s, policy interventions such as urban renewal and socio-cultural programs aimed to ameliorate living conditions in the area. Among these, the ensemble of measures (*Programma di Recupero Urbano*) was put in place to redevelop part of the neighbourhood, as part of which the famous urbanistic housing interventions of Via Artom (1998-2006)[23]. Such physical transformations were accompanied by a series of social measures (*Piano di Accompagnamento Sociale*) aimed to tackle social problems and give a new identity to Mirafiori's most critical areas, which were considered for many years the "ghetto of the Fordist Turin" (Scarafia 2003).

Over time, third sector organisations including social cooperatives, non-profit organisations such as cultural associations, the voluntary sector and civil society groups proliferated, coming to play a key role in the idea of the neighbourhood's renewal and overall, in social care in marginal areas. The development of the Mirafiori Community Foundation (*Fondazione di Comunità di Mirafiori*) in 2008 was a significant step in this sense. Its objective was to give continuity to the above-mentioned transformations and "valorise the interventions made by the municipality of Turin, the foundation *Compagnia di San Paolo* and local actors to create strong partnerships between the public administration, the third sector, bank foundations, private companies and citizens" (Fondazione della Comunità di Mirafiori Onlus 2020, translation is my own). The community foundation also aimed at sponsoring new forms of civic engagement (such as building networks

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[23] For a collection of research material on Mirafiori Sud and its transformations refer to the online archive "*Atelier Mirafiori - Mirafiori Dopo il Mito*". In particular, Scarafia (2003) discusses the reconfiguration of Via Artom (including the renewal of social housing) by presenting the perspective of local inhabitants, social workers and administrators.

of volunteers) as a way to give a new life to the area, both for the benefit of current inhabitants as well as to attract new inhabitants and to "work on the non-residents' imaginary of *Mirafiori*"[24].

[Image 4: detail of the leaflet of MiraMap, a collaborative platform connecting citizens, the public administration and the third sector in *Mirafiori Sud*.]

The image above is a detail of a leaflet sponsoring a new digital platform facilitating collaborations among local organisations via the setting up of a rooster of volunteers. Images such as this one – which depict the different steps that non-profit organisations should follow to

[24] Elena Carli, president of Mirafiori Community Foundation, interview, 03/10/2019.

work with volunteers and incentivise their active participation - should not be red in a vacuum but as part of contemporary city agendas where urban renewal and civic engagement are viewed as a vector for city branding, repopulation, boosting the local economy, and actually, only rarely, simply ameliorating current inhabitants' living conditions. Wanting to attract new residents, while making the current ones participate to urban renewal, does not come without the diffusion of a morality that justifies and legitimates their active participation.

I find that the leaflet above is illustrative of the moral apparatus which reframes local inhabitants as volunteers and aims at normalising volunteerism while attempting to make it more efficient. In the top left corner, the handing of a medal visually represents the scoring system which was built in this platform and that attributes a good score to the more active citizens. This is part of a broader system that praise volunteerism, for example, through its official legitimisation and "recognition by the city administration" - as written on the leaflet itself and exemplified by many public discourses presented in this dissertation. As represented in the bottom right corner, the platform also aims at facilitating all the paperwork revolving around the setting up of volunteering activities, easing organisational procedures around volunteer work. As similarly pointed out by Bolzoni (2019) in the context of another neighbourhood of Turin named San Salvario, the work of local NGOs (and, I add, their employment of volunteer work) is being increasingly facilitated and entangled with other city agendas which results in several ambivalences. Among other, not all the stances, voices and point of views find space in these processes – an element which I will come back to –, the rhetoric of participation may actually decrease public engagement, fostering neoliberal logics and jeopardise more radical initiatives (Bolzoni 2019).

Overall, the transformation of Parco Piemonte can be contextualised as part of two main trends: first, "urban green renewal" and second the "participatory approach" as part of which citizens were invited to co-manage new spaces and communities. Both of these trends speak of changing relations and blurring boundaries between the local administration and the third sector. In particular, they are characterised by the emergence of non-profit organisations as entities in between urban planners and users, positioned at the forefront of the

transformation of urban peripheral areas in terms of the redefinition of both their welfare and space (see also Bolzoni 2019 and Eizenberg 2012a). More general trends about the growing role of the third sector have been highlighted in international literature. The work of Alexander (2009), among others, pointed to the ways in which the state has externalised the functions of care to the third sector and how that reshapes citizenship (as the Third Sector becomes an intermediary between the state and citizens).

The case of Turin and the analytical angle of the evolution of urban gardening in peripheral areas confirm such evolutions while displaying some peculiarities. The narrative around the development of Orti Generali reflects a growing morality around the new role of citizens who shall directly contribute to urban transformation and to the improvement of liveability of their environment – also discussed in terms of a narrative and morality of active citizenship inherent to contexts of welfare state retrenchment (e.g. Muehlebach 2012; Pusceddu 2020). However, this approach can be intertwined with different city agendas, visions and scopes of urban renewal and the modus operandi of the non-profit organisations can vary significantly. Narratives of urban renewal such as "giving back" reveal some tensions as per the role of non-profit workers and how citizens can be framed as recipients in a narrative of participation. In the next section, I focus on the involvement of volunteers at Orti Generali, going beyond the narratives of civic engagement and entering into its practices. I show how this case complexifies the idea of the moving boundaries between city planners and users by exposing the ways in which users' contribution is confined to particular forms of civic engagement.