



# QUADERNI

# #14

## Planning for all generations

Per una pianificazione multigenerazionale

Edited by GU | Generazione Urbana

settembre\_dicembre 2017  
numero quattordici  
anno cinque

**URBANISTICA**   
giornale on-line di  
urbanistica  
ISSN:  
2531-7091

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ISSN 2531-7091



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Progetto grafico / Nicola Vazzoler

Impaginazione / Giulio Cucurullo

Data di pubblicazione: Roma, gennaio 2018

*In copertina:*

Roma, Parco degli Acquadotti.

Foto di Serena Muccitelli

edito da



con il supporto di



per informazioni



# #14

settembre\_dicembre 2017  
numero quattordici  
anno cinque

september\_december 2017  
issue fourteen  
year five



in questo numero  
in this issue

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# Planning for all generations

Per una pianificazione multigenerazionale



# Exercising the 'Right to Tufello' by Local Institutional Actors

Esercitare il "Diritto al Tufello"

@ Tishya Rao |  
@ Ehab Ebeid |  
@ Graham Murphy |  
@ Edna Samron |

# Right to the city |  
# Local institutions |  
# "Cross-boundary"  
collaboration |

# Diritto alla città |  
# Istituzioni locali |  
# Collaborazione  
"cross-boundary" |

*This paper explores the role of local institutions and grassroots efforts in practicing the 'Right to the City' in the low-income, public housing neighborhood of Tufello, Rome. Four local institutions and their work are explored - Ennio Flaiano Library, Defrag, Tufello Market and Palestra Popolare Valerio Verbano- using interviews with their enthusiastic employees and volunteers. It tries to understand their strategy of achieving the 'right to Tufello' and in creating a stronger and more inclusive community for its residents, particularly children and the elderly. It is argued that these grassroots efforts would not be as successful without the legal recognition of these institutions and the assistance by city authorities in combating socio-economic issues like poverty, drugs and crime. Therefore, these urban spaces are defined as "invited spaces" instead of "invented spaces" because of its successful establishment through "cross-boundary" collaboration.*

## Introduction

The 'Right to the City' is a concept frequently invoked and championed in policy circles today. It describes the collective right of city dwellers to influence urban processes and reshape their city and was first conceived by Henri Lefebvre, who is thought to be the progenitor of the idea (Purcell, 2014). Purcell outlines varying *versions* of the idea of the 'right to the city' across academic, policy and activist circles. Several values are shared by virtually all those versions: the right to the city is derived from the everyday experience of being an urban dweller, as opposed to their legal citizenship. Therefore, the goal is often to encourage urban policies that promote justice and inclu-



**Fig.1** Neighbors often organize in informal associations to improve and maintain their courtyard spaces. In this court space, residents added a children's play area. Credits Ehab Ebeid, Edna Samron, Graham Murphy, Tishya Rao.

tion at the city and the neighborhood level by identifying and emphasizing the importance of the use value of urban spaces over and above their exchange value (Purcell, 2014). This idea is particularly important for the effective inclusion of disadvantaged or disenfranchised groups, including low income families as well as children and the elderly.

Claiming the right to the city is usually perceived as a bottom-up endeavor, which can take the form of citizen practices that transcend established civil and legal frameworks, with the goal of increasing access to public resources and achieving socio-economic equality (Miraftab, 2004). This implies a pre-existing divide between the visions of city leaders and the needs of the community. Urban policy and design not aligning with the needs of the community often leads to fragmentation, discrimination and poor quality of life. Thus, community members and institutions find it necessary to take action — claiming their right and attempting to reshape the city often without legal ground.

It is important to question whether the right to the city can be achieved without overstepping political authorities, and instead initiate a 'cross boundary dialogue' between the two actors (Frug 2001). Tufello, a peripheral neighborhood in Rome is a model example of achieving a collaborative relationship between municipal governmental bodies and community actors. Top-down planning and grassroots initiatives work together to enhance residents' quality of life in a low-income public housing neighborhood, in hopes of building a stronger community and overcoming threats of socio-economic issues, including a history of drug use. In Tufello, the built environment provides for spaces for interaction and designates service centers, while local institutions strive to provide an array of services and cultural activities that are multigenerational and inclusive. Thus, the two categories appear to intersect through conscious and coordinated efforts to meet the demands of



seniors and of families with children, without creating competition for resources between generations (Warner and Choi 2015).

This article first provides a contextual background of Tufello and the social, economic and demographic threats that it faces. It then explores the role of some local institutions in building a stronger community on top of its physical planning, and the extent to which cross boundary dialogue between authorities and the public has made it possible to do so. We argue that bottom-up efforts by local institutions complement physical design, and would not be as successful if they were not recognized and supported by city authorities through political acceptance and infrastructural provision.

### Methodology

The research incorporated different types of methodologies to create a holistic representation of “The Right to the City” and the child and age friendliness of Tufello. City maps and photographs were used to identify existing institutions and spaces in the neighborhood. And verbal interviews were conducted with various community stakeholders, including the director of a local municipal library, a volunteer at an NGO and elderly residents, with questions revolving around public space use, community initiatives and public housing.

### Semi-Public Space in a Public Housing Neighborhood

Tufello is a peripheral neighborhood located at the edge of Rome’s 16th quartiere -- Montesacro -- in Municipio III. Built as one of the twelve officially designated borgate during the fascist regime, the neighborhood saw successive stages of public housing development between the late 1930s and the 1970s, accompanied by the development of nearby service and institutional buildings, as well as public spaces and public housing communal court spaces. The neighborhood has retained its public housing character

**Fig.2\_** Caption: Biblioteca Ennio Flaiano strives for multigenerational programming through partnering with schools and other organizations. Credits Ehab Ebeid, Edna Samron, Graham Murphy, Tishya Rao.





**Fig.3\_** Caption: Defrag's services include workshops, counseling, concerts and a recording studio. Credits Ehab Ebeid, Edna Samron, Graham Murphy, Tishya Rao.

with low ownership rates. It has developed a notable leftist and anti-fascist identity, as seen in the political orientation of local institutions, and legible in the neighborhood's streets and building walls.

Today, Tufello comprises of a large elderly population, as a large portion of the current residents are among the original occupants of public housing complexes when the neighborhood was first settled in the 1940s. In 2011, approximately 26% of Tufello's residents were over 65 years old (ISTAT, census 2011) and aging faster than the rest of Rome. Tufello also has many children and teenagers who commute there because of the high concentration of schools in the area. Therefore, as a large population of children and the elderly live or visit the neighborhood, services catering to their needs, such as child care, sports centers and social centers are necessary.

While Tufello's neighborhood design is dominated by socially-inclusive public housing complexes, the rise and integration of cultural, commercial and institutional functions has created a mixed-use neighborhood. These include a market, shops, a soccer field, a gym, and cultural centers. However, with only one poorly maintained park, Tufello lacks safe public open spaces. The housing complexes solve this issue as they enclose or are adjacent to characteristic green courtyards. These spaces are semi-public because they form a transition between the private realm of the home and the public realm that is the street. They provide an important space for communal interaction, which we argue has contributed to the neighborhood's strong sense of identity. Besides varying in their design, they are also maintained to different degrees. We have found that the most well-maintained among them are maintained through individual and collective efforts from residents, either in hiring gardeners and maintenance staff with their own funds, or in maintaining the spaces themselves.



**Fig.4\_** Caption: The Tufello market acts as an important social space for the neighborhood's elderly. Credits Ehab Ebeid, Edna Samron, Graham Murphy, Tishya Rao.

### Active Institutions

Local institutions in Tufello are diverse and include many formal ones such as a local public library and market, senior centers, and social and cultural centers. Less formal institutions exist too, like residential community groups working towards maintaining public housing complexes and courtyards. Through our research we have found that formal or otherwise, institutions play an essential role in improving the quality of life of Tufello residents and ensuring their “right to Tufello”. In fact, we were met with high enthusiasm to collaborate by the local public library, which gave us the chance to learn about the impactful work of the various local institutions. Much of the active local participation by institutions stems from the neighborhood’s strong political identity, as well as their vision of overcoming socio-economic issues such as poverty, drug use and unemployment through their services and activities.

It is important to note that the successful history of grassroots efforts in Tufello is not solely based on active local participation. It is also because local authorities have recognized and/or supported these local efforts by politically accepting them and providing them with spaces and infrastructure, despite being formed outside legal frameworks. Most of these institutions were formed out of a municipal-local partnership, where both actors have recognized the need of residents and demonstrated a dialogue across sector boundaries. Therefore, Tufello’s institutions comprise and occupy invited spaces -- as opposed to invented ones -- therefore creating urban spaces that are “occupied by grassroots [efforts] and their allied non-governmental organizations that are legitimized by donors and government interventions” (Miraftab, 2004).

Four active institutions in Tufello played a key role in the success of the collaborative process, operating as invited spaces: a) Ennio Flaiano Library, b)



**Fig.5\_** Caption: The Palestra Popolare Valerio Verbano takes the 1968 Olympics Black Power salute as their emblem. Credits Ehab Ebeid, Edna Samron, Graham Murphy, Tishya Rao.

Defrag, c) Tufello Market and d) Palestra Popolare Valerio Verbano. These entities provided safe and productive spaces for people to meet and feel a part of the community. Here we look at how they have been successful in claiming ‘rights to Tufello’ to build a stronger and more inclusive community for children and the elderly through their unique services and passion for change.

#### **Ennio Flaiano Library**

The library in Tufello strives to engage people of all ages. This is particularly true for children and elderly populations. Through a partnership with local schools, the library leads classes where students conduct fieldwork in the area in and around Tufello, and lead educational workshops for younger students in the library. Additionally, it hosts career orientation workshops for high schoolers, through “Alternanza scuola-lavoro”, a national educational career orientation program. By providing a space for newspaper reading, for example, the library attempts to draw the area’s elderly population to a safe, social and integrated space.

The amount of engagement and enrichment that the library provides should not be entirely surprising. Libraries are often leaders in building multigenerational programs and cross-agency partnerships (Warner and Choi, 2015) in the United States. In fact, Ennio Flaiano Library’s programs are notable all over the city for their work in the low-income neighborhood of Tufello. The library supports its low-income constituency by supplementing some of Tufello’s shortcomings. Apart from the regular books and videotapes offered at the library, study rooms and desktop computers are provided to the public. Moreover, the library caters to people of special needs by offering a collection of tactile books.



**Fig.6\_** Caption: Design, infrastructure and housing provision are not sufficient to creating a strong community, and should be complemented by the work of local associations and institutions. Credits Ehab Ebeid, Edna Samron, Graham Murphy, Tishya Rao.

### **Defrag**

Associazione Defrag, short for defragmentation in English, is a nonprofit institution that was established by concerned community members to combat many social ills in a Tufello then plagued by drug problems, by creating a safe, productive space for teenagers living and visiting the neighborhood.

Defrag can be considered a model of a successful grassroots organization in Tufello. There are primarily two reasons for this. Firstly, the organization is a perfect example of an invited space, initially founded by claiming the under-utilized basement of a local high school in Tufello, which was then legitimized by donors and government support (MirafTAB, 2004). Secondly, Defrag has broken the socio-economic divide between Tufello and its surrounding neighborhood by conducting concerts, exhibits, educational workshops and psychological counseling to families who could not get access to such services otherwise. Therefore, Defrag and Tufello has now become a well-known destination, because of its strong support for children and their families.

### **Market**

Tufello's covered market was completed in 1958. Over the years it has been forced to evolve due to pressure from grocery stores and supermarkets opening in surrounding areas. To compete, the Tufello Market remains open seven days a week. This is uncharacteristic of traditional covered markets in Rome. The market may have been prone to losing customers due to its proximity to the Porta di Roma Mall (the largest in Italy) as well as the recent opening of Jonio Metro station nearby, which acts as a services nod, but the market has remained a vibrant commercial center in Tufello despite the competition.

The Tufello Market has preserved its customer base thanks to Tufello's large elderly population, who are responsible for taking care of the household, including shopping for groceries. The central location of the market and its fresh produce has made it possible for the elderly to visit regularly, and

meet other elderly citizens of the neighborhood. Thus, the market has also become an important social space for building relationships and creating a stronger, inclusive community for Tufello's senior citizens. The market also hosts the office of the Municipio III civil registry, as well as other services including beauty parlors and kitchen supply stores. Therefore, Tufello's market also increases accessibility for the elderly to other services by providing them all under one roof.

### **Palestra Popolare Valerio Verbano**

*Palestra Popolare Valerio Verbano* was established by the occupation of a former abandoned boiler building to keep teenagers off the streets and away from drugs by instilling discipline through contact sports like karate, kickboxing and gymnastics. The location is rather symbolic of a new lifestyle as, during its abandonment, the boiler building was used as a drug den. Though the *palestra's* legal position in its occupation of the boiler building is not clear, the process of negotiating their status with ATER, the public housing agency which owns the building, is an example of "cross- boundary dialogue" between city authority and Tufello residents (Frug, 2001).

The name of the gym is also symbolic and has ties to the neighborhood's rich political character. The gym's name honors the young anti-fascist activist Valerio Verbano who was killed at the age of 19 in nearby Montesacro. Also unconventional for a gym, the *palestra* articulates a theoretical framework through which its work is conducted: it seeks to establish sports as a human right, and to ensure that people have access to exercise, health and well-being without being "subjected to the cruel logic of the free market". A combination of political struggle and improving quality of life led the gym to create a sense of ownership through community-initiated activities and an inclusive community, especially for the children of Tufello.

### **Achieving the 'Right to Tufello' through Cross-Boundary Collaboration**

Tufello's built form provides ample space for communal interaction and sets the possibilities for the neighborhood's mixed-use public housing complexes. Tufello has faced many challenges, however, which it cannot successfully address while relying solely on its built form. These include an ageing demographic, a low homeownership rate, a relatively high unemployment rate, a history with drug issues, and pressure on local services from infrastructure projects in the form of the Galleria Porta di Roma Mall and the Jonio Metro Station.

The neighborhood shows to be able to respond to these challenges, through its institutions, which complete the puzzle through local efforts and cater to the needs of the community's most vulnerable. They are conscious of these challenges, and aware of their individual and collective goals in addressing them. The four institutions in Tufello – *Ennio Flaiano* Library, Defrag, Tufello Market and *Palestra Popolare* – are ideal examples of this.

Besides their consciousness of their roles, the four institutions exhibit an uncommon collaborative relationship across institutional boundaries and with municipal government bodies. The Tufello Market and the Ennio Flaiano Library are examples of city initiated urban spaces that are thriving because of continuous public engagement. Defrag and *Palestra Popolare* on the other hand, showcase institutions that were once established outside of the legal framework, but are now highly successful with the recognition and support

of political authorities. In this they show that governmental bodies' relationship with grassroots efforts need not be combative. But instead, through this collaboration, a new form of lifestyle can be formed where the promotion of justice and inclusion (Purcell, 2014), particularly of disadvantaged groups such as children and the elderly, is recognized and the 'Right to Tufello' is achieved.

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# UB

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settembre - dicembre 2017  
numero quattordici  
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**URBANISTICA** tre  
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