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The Quest for Citizenship:
Exploring Social Capital and Active Participation in Contemporary Roman Urban Landscapes

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Fall 2019
Abstract

This research was conducted to illustrate the relationship between active participation in neighborhoods and its effectiveness in fixing social issues and improving neighborhood wellbeing. Two neighborhoods in Rome with different demographics and urban phenomena were analyzed. San Lorenzo is a neighborhood which is currently facing a demographical turnover due to studentification. This is a peculiar form of gentrification that involves students in higher education, and a network of citizens that is opposing this change. Conversely, Aurelio-Boccea is a predominantly middle-class neighborhood that has witnessed an increase of Filipino families living in the area. Residents formed a neighborhood committee to improve the quality of the neighborhood and resolve mismanagement of public spaces by local authorities. Through qualitative and quantitative data obtained during a year-long of field research and supported by theoretical literature concerning social capital, gentrification and neighborhood activism, the research found that neighborhood networks were lacking capacity to translate their intentions into actions. As a result, none of the issues in the neighborhoods were fixed, and none of the initiatives proposed came into effect except from the obtainment of fairer housing costs for Sapienza University students through a student movement in partnership with housing unions.
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LRSL Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo
TSH The Student Hotel
"Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever."

(Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*)
1. Introduction

My first ever encounter with social capital was in my first political science introductory course as a university freshman, where I stumbled upon Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work* at the age of 18. My mind started making connections. Putnam studied Italian regional communities and their overall participatory rates on public life and how those influenced democracy in the country. Then I started investigating my own community, that of Roman surfers and skateboarders of which I have been part for almost a decade now. Was it possible that the success we had in keeping our spots clean and usable be a consequence of the high trust we held on each other and the reciprocity of our actions? And if so, why were we successful while other community groups and social centers in Rome seemed unable to translate their ideals and willingness to participate into effective collective action? I saw the changes that the city of Rome underwent in the last 20 years. Maybe the look of the city remained the same, but Romans, or any other social group who has lived here, definitely changed and so did the cultural habits of citizens.

I consider urban studies not as a field of study, but the application of several ones within the context of urban areas. Studying the city means to research all aspects from the political, in order to understand the participatory and regulatory processes that govern a city, the economics, and therefore how capital and growth are generated, to the social; how people are affected and influence the development of the city. Here, Rome is an interesting city to analyze. Politically speaking, Rome is the capital of Italy, and the management of the city has often been associated with corruption and scandals. Economically, although it is the largest city of Italy and represents
the capital of the country, it has never been able to produce as much growth, wealth and employment as its other Western counterparts. However, this pattern seems to have changed as the latest local governments have tried to push for a neo-liberalization of the market in order to establish Rome as a competitive city and attract investments. Still, whether these investments are beneficial to all or to only certain targeted social classes has yet to be assessed fully. For instance, a recent urban phenomenon, gentrification, has in the last decades entered the Roman landscape due to targeted investments in specific neighborhoods of the city. Finally, socially speaking, Rome is a diverse city, which is not the city of Romans, if it has ever been. Constant flows of immigration as well as conflictual demographics in neighborhoods have raised cultural barriers among neighbors and social classes. Although the study of urban phenomena in Rome is certainly vast, the researcher struggled to find a compelling argument that fully incorporated social capital, urban neo-liberalism, immigration and demographic phenomena all into one piece in order to discuss whether active participation could be a helpful tool in the hands of citizens to reinvigorate neighborhoods.

The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to fill this void in urban studies focusing on Rome, in as much as an undergraduate thesis is able to. Two case studies are proposed in order to evaluate how active participation by citizens can be a tool for improving the wellbeing of neighborhoods. All the main Roman neighborhoods were scrutinized before choosing San Lorenzo and Aurelio-Boccea as the two case studies of the thesis. San Lorenzo was selected because is a neighborhood that is now dealing with neo-liberalization policies in the housing market, which have led to its current gentrified state. Original inhabitants have now left the neighborhood under the burden of unaffordable rents, and new families are shying away from establishing themselves there according to official demographic analyses from the City of Rome. At the same time,
university students are increasingly filling those empty houses because of the neighborhood proximity to Sapienza University. This has led to a new cultural market in the neighborhood, that of youth nightlife, which has been named by the literature as the phenomena of “studentification”. Some of the original residents gathered under the flag of the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo (Free Republic of San Lorenzo) network in the hopes of resisting the socioeconomic changes in the neighborhood. Their main tool is open political activism.

The second case, Aurelio-Boccea, is a middle-class neighborhood, just outside Rome’s city center. It was predominantly a family neighborhood with some wealth, which recently witnessed great flows of foreign immigration, especially from the Philippines. Alongside with that, neighbors felt disenchanted and abandoned by the local politicians and have counteracted on their own by forming a spontaneous neighborhood committee, Comitato di Quartiere, that aims to resolve the main critical issues of the neighborhood such as safety and mismanagement of public areas through collective action and participation. Both case studies are analyzed through primarily qualitative as well as quantitative data gathered by the researcher throughout the entirety of 2019 in order to solidifying the findings of the thesis.

In order to assess if these two neighborhoods have been able respond to the issues that have been afflicting their respective areas, the thesis will first provide a theoretical background. The literature will include a theory chapter on social capital theory, including theorist such as R. Putnam’s study on civic traditions in modern Italy as well as J. Coleman conceptualization of social capital at the interpersonal level. In addition, a section of the chapter will be also dedicated to the institutional facets of social capital through a commentary of the works of Diamond and Wilcock & Narayan on this matter. Last, Granovetter and Nicholls’ network theory will be included to ascertain how a network functions through a socio-organizational lens. Furthermore,
all aspects of gentrification will be covered through various scholars such as Annunziata’s definition of popolare, Smith’s study on studentification and Dent’s theory on the ideology of gentrification. Moreover, gentrification as an urban phenomenon will be described also economically by discussing the neoliberal policies which have directly promoted gentrification in recent years. Moreover, because housing is of particular relevance for the neighborhoods in question, an evaluation of the current literature on housing studies from a participative, legislative and economic perspective will be assessed. It will include Italian laws on renting properties and studies on homeownership and participation. Subsequently, a chapter will be dedicated to the methodology used in the thesis. Finally, a short chapter will state how gentrification theories, housing, social capital, network theories and neighborhood activism relate.

In her *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt (1998) established that human being acting in cooperation formed a political space. However, the space of appearance of politics was as fragile as the actions and speeches performed by these people, ultimately resulting in a disappearance of the space itself if actions were too weak. In other words, politics is not perennial; it is fragile. It exists in so far as people gather together and make actions. People acting in concert is political, and it generates power. This is a human creation out of collective actions, and it is limited to the space of appearance in which it is generated. It is the lack of action and speech, and therefore power, that kills political communities.

It is here argued that democratic active participation is a powerful tool in the hands of communities in order to express their will and actualize relevant changes to improve lives in a more impactful way than casting votes. It is through cooperation and action that a vigorous community is built.
2. Social Capital

2.1 Introduction

Defining social capital is a complex task. The term may indicate a variety of subjects such as politics, sociology, anthropology and economics. Hence, a neat definition that fits all cases is almost impossible. As a result, the chapter will provide different conceptions of social capital in order to then elaborate a versatile definition which will provide the background for the case studies of this thesis. This chapter aims at covering a broad significance of the term starting from the extensive work of Robert Putnam, Diamond’s definition and function of social capital in his *Toward Democratic Consolidation*, James Coleman and social capital in relation to the community and to other forms of capital such as human capital, and Woolcock and Narayan’s institutional view. Moreover, the chapter will also provide an extensive description of how social networks functions. Last, it will show the different kinds of civic participation enunciated by the literature.

2.2 The Backbone of Social Capital Studies

2.2.1 Robert Putnam

Among all the scholars who studied the subject, Putnam (1993a) is the one who majorly covered social capital in his works. He introduces social capital in relation to civic engagement, namely the active participation of citizens in public affairs. That does not necessarily mean that citizens carry out an altruistic behaviour, rather that they pursue their own self-interest
contextualized in the broader realm of society. Consequently, self-interest is “enlightened” as it embodies broader public needs. To satisfy the needs of the self, individuals are required to collectively pursue the needs of society. In doing so, Putnam (1993a, p. 98) found in his studies on modern Italy that, “the more civic a region, the more effective its government.” Here lies the potential of social capital. Indeed, it is a form a capital that, through its application and growth by the citizens, can, in turn, improve living conditions and increasing the rates of democracy and political participation in any given country.

In civically engaged communities, Putnam (1993a) states, three key effects are on display. First, actors usually enjoy equality; second, social capital develops trust, solidarity and tolerance among participants. Last, social capital also matures complex forms of networks of cooperation and of associationism. To begin with, in most of the instances in which social capital is in full force, actors enjoy a relatively stable equality. This is not to say that there are no conflicts within the community, but these conflicts are resolved peacefully and in an environment in which active participation is allowed to all members. Moreover, social capital, by virtue of its nature, also erases any form of opportunism; namely, the prioritization of isolated self-interest, which in turn neglects any sort of success for the community as a whole. Putnam (1993a) highlighted how in the most civic regions of Italy leaders were keener to compromise and open to partisanship compared to those of non-civic regions. Meaning that social capital per se would help democratic debate and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Once equality is established among all members of the community, rates of trust among those who participate will rise. In fact, voluntary cooperation to achieve the public good requires high levels of trust. For instance, in rotating credit association, a form of social capital analysed by Putnam (1993a) in Italy, a group of people is asked to make regular contributions to a capital which rotates
among all the members of the community on a regular basis. Such a system requires high rates of trust. Specifically, once one of the actors receives the amount of money to be kept, others trust the holder that the money will be preserved, and a theft will not occur.

The kind of network described in the rotating credit association is of the horizontal type. A horizontal network gives members equal opportunities, powers and obligations. This type of network usually flourishes inside civically engaged neighbourhoods thanks to neighbourhood associations, religious groups, cooperatives, and clubs of any type. The sum all these different types of civic associationism would be the rate of social capital in that given place. Hence, the denser the ties in the neighbourhood, the higher the level of trust and reciprocity, meaning the interconnections among members inside the community. Finally, denser communities are those in which cooperation for mutual gains is the most successful (Putnam, 1993a). To sum up, networks in civically engaged communities limit opportunism and conversely increase reciprocity.

Furthermore, reciprocity improves trust among participants which then increases chances of future cooperation and social interactions (Putnam, 1993a). Therefore, social capital resembles a cyclical scheme that, if fostered, can improve conditions for the community as a whole in the long run while facilitating short term interest for each individual of the community. In fact, social capital is “self-reinforcing and cumulative” (Putnam, 1993b, p. 4). It is a stock capital that increases through its consumption Therefore, social capital grows over time. Conversely, it can also decrease if not used, unlike other forms of capital (Putnam, 1993b). The lack of usage will make the community less trusting and less keen to cooperate when community-related issues are at stake.
Additional studies by Putnam also revealed that the main issue facing Black and Latino communities in major U.S. metropolises is the lack of bonds and connections of members of the community beyond their relatives. Youths avoid dealing with crimes and drugs only when they have at their disposal social resources not only from their families but also from their ethnic social group (Putnam, 1993b). For instance, the Black Church has historically been a powerful resource in the U.S. for political and social mobilization, especially during the civil rights movement. That shows how social capital can be an effective tool for democratization through a context that would not be considered part of the political arena per se. Religious affiliations like catholic churches are a major source of social capital. Some of them can provide financial aid and connections to jobs for people that would otherwise be excluded from usual networks of labor and credit (Putnam, 1993b). Indeed, networks of social capital can provide people the right bonds and bridges that may help them find employment. This is through advice, letters of recommendation and job leads (Putnam, 2000). Weak ties, meaning friends and other connections outside of the family, represent the best way to find employment. Differently from strong ties such as family and relatives, weak ties lead to unexpected connections and opportunities because of their variegated nature. To conclude, social capital is a great resource that can help actors obtain jobs and financial security. Networks of connections, even those which do not necessarily relate to the employment sector, play a role in improving the living conditions of members.

On the community level, social capital becomes a key component in determining the rates of democracy of any given community, from the neighbourhood to the State. It seems that social capital can improve levels of democracy overall. Broadly speaking, civic engagement contributes to the democratization of a community in two distinct ways. Internally speaking, civic
engagement, which we now know makes its participant more cooperative and trustworthy, will also provide a barrier from outside threats such as extremist groups who work against the actors involved in the community. In fact, studies of political psychology have demonstrated how those who fall into the circles of non-democratic groups are usually people who were not previously part of their neighbourhood communities (Putnam, 2000). Thus, isolationism disfavour democracy whereas active engagement and social capital provide the fertile soil for democracy to flourish in a community, and more extensively in a State. Moreover, Putnam (2000) defines participating in the community as a way to learn democratic virtues. Participation requires civility when discussing at meetings, running campaigns and events, and talking at public fares. In relation to the outside of the community, social capital and active participation becomes an asset in order to advance demands to the government and fight abuses of power (Putnam, 2000). In other words, social capital is a mean in order to make one’s voice heard.

2.2.2 Larry Diamond

Moving away from Robert Putnam’s theorization of social capital, Larry Diamond (1994, p. 5) describes it as “the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules,” a broader conceptualization that needs further discussion. First, his definition differentiates social capital from society as a whole defined as “citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests.” Civil society is thus an intermediary body between society intended as above and the State. Such a body can have many forms and shapes ranging from economic, cultural and informational associationism to being interest-based, issue-oriented, developmental or simply civic in a non-partisan fashion (Diamond, 1994). Moreover, other formal characteristics include being interested in the public sphere of life, having relations with the state
(e.g. seeking concessions, policy changes, accountability, and benefits) but without aiming at either acquiring nor subverting the current state of powers. (1994) Thus, social capital must be independent from the party system and the political society.

Diamond goes further explaining the ways in which social capital and civil society can be helpful in the democratic arena. First and foremost, a well-developed and rooted civil society functions as an external check and balance for the government, limiting abuses and acting as a force for accountability. Second, social capital stimulates political participation and promotes democratic debate as well as a sense of civic duty toward state affairs. Third, social capital also furthers the promotion of tolerance, mediation, compromise and respect for opposing views. Fourth, and most importantly, civil society can help emerging people in need who do not have the means to make their voice heard, as Putnam stated as well. For instance, at the local level, marginalized and the oppressed groups can emerge, and they can make a change through policy thanks to the strengthening of their links and activist groups. In addition, civil society also aims at spreading correct news. Disseminating information is the first step in order to make people aware and then transform them into civically engaged citizens (Diamond, 1994). To conclude, for Diamond (1994) civil society is an intermediary between the state and society. It is characterized by its independence yet connectedness with the state. It can be of many forms such as interest or issue-driven or of an economic, cultural or informational nature. Further, it promulgates accountability, participation, values and information.

2.2.3 James Coleman

Compared to the previous two definitions of social capital and civil society, that of sociologist James S. Coleman departs from a purely political lens to provide a more sociological stance on the matter. Social capital is described here in accordance with the functions it aims to
achieve. Social capital is not an entity, yet a variety of ones characterized by distinct social structures and actors. What emerges is that social capital is relative, specific to a certain issue or activity. Consequently, “a given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful to others” (Coleman, 1988, p. 98), which is what we will later see during the analysis of the neighbourhoods of contemporary Rome. Indeed, if social capital is not fixed but it is shaped differently depending on its actors, that would potentially result in a conflict among different actors. For instance, in Aurelio, one of the neighbourhoods analysed in the thesis, the Filipino community, which has its own share of social capital, was often contested by the Comitato di Quartiere, that represented long time Italian families who reside in the neighbourhood. As a result, social capital can also be harmful considering that it may put face-to-face two communities struggling for legitimacy and power. Consequently, social capital may change patterns of interaction among actors.

In Coleman’s (1988) studies, what characterizes social capital from other forms of capital such as economic capital and human capital is its non-tangible nature. In perspective, the latter two forms of capital are either fully physical, as economic capital includes money and means of production or vaguely tangible as in human capital, namely the skills and knowledge a person has acquired through time, study and experience. Instead, social capital is completely non-tangible because it is the behaviour types of two or more interacting actors. Moreover, we can affirm that, by changing the kind of actors or their pattern of interactions, we may obtain a different outcome, so a different form of social capital. Social capital, thus, is not fixed but an imaginary asset, a network of people, which changes in relation to the actors that form it (Coleman, 1988).
The key advantage that resides in social capital that cannot be found in other forms of capital is the number of people who benefit from it. In investment capital, all the benefits of investments reside in the investor himself. Similarly, in human capital, the only one who gains benefits from it is the person who has spent time and money on building up knowledge for his or her own career and knowledge. Instead, social capital does not limit the profits to the main investors. Everybody in the network will gain from the production and expansion of the capital itself even though individually they may have not contributed to the creation of social capital in the first place. For instance, in Parent Teacher Associations, if one of the parents decides to leave the association due to moving the family elsewhere because of a better salary, the family may have a bigger economic gain compared to the loss of abandoning the network. However, from the point of view of the network as a whole and of all of the members involved in it, the departure of an actor would result in the shrinking of the “sets of powers” which that specific social capital network possesses. These sets of powers are the contacts, links, ways and means the network possesses in order to achieve its purposes (Coleman, 1988). Finally, because social capital benefits all members of a network, it can be considered a public good. By benefitting all members of a community, social capital leaves the realm of the private sphere to enter that of society.

2.4 The Institutional View of Social Capital

Contrary to all previous views, which characterized social capital as being external to the political arena, the institutional view of Woolcock and Narayan (2000) emphasizes the institutional framework of social capital. In their work the effectiveness of social capital is tied to the institutional performance of the government of that specific place. Further, social capital is
considered a dependent variable. The bonds and powers of a group depend on the quality of the government under which it resides. Here, a good government is needed in order to make civil society function properly and head towards the right direction. Consequently, the state ought to favour social capital rather than avail it (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Economic growth does not only come out of policies *per se*, but from how those policies affect the daily life of the community they aim to improve. Therefore, policies are effective only if they can also promote the revitalization of the community through improving social capital. Even the best policy would not work if it is implemented in a context with poor rates of connectedness or no sort of social capital whatsoever. In fact, their study showed that growth rates were higher where trust, rule of law, civil liberties and bureaucracy were effective. On the other hand, when corruption, ethnic tensions, bureaucratic inefficiency occur, social capital is at its lowest rate as well as growth. Thus, social capital and growth are complementary; one needs the other in order to be actually successful in improving quality of life (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

In recent times, however, scholars have tried to blend the institutional view and the classical literature that views social capital as completely independent from the government. Consequently, the synergy view describes social capital as a set of alliances and partnerships between the government and a broad range of community actors. This definition relies on the *complementarity* and *embeddedness* of actors. Complementarity describes, “mutually supportive relations between the public and private actors” (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000, p. 13). Without a link between the state and local communities, social capital cannot succeed. The latter, instead, refers to the type of ties between the actors. Societies with a good linkage between the state and the various communities are more apt to grow economically and be stable in the long run. Conversely, when there are not enough talks between the state and the civic community, and
social groups are disconnected from one another, usually the power is in the hands of the few who govern, and exclusionist policies are in place (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

As a result, a community needs the cooperation and mediation between the government and the civil society in order to develop. Also, social capital is the result of such interaction between the parts. This makes investing in social capital a much-needed feature for any developing locality. Finally, the synergy view emphasises three key aspects. First, it puts under the microscope any kind of relations between the public and private actors. Second, it requires institutional strategies that make cooperation possible. Last, it needs ways and means in order to make such encounter successful (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Thus, the challenge is to make this union possible. However, in the neighbourhood analysed it seems that the civil groups were often in conflict with each other and with the local government and the municipalities, making institutional social capital much difficult to actualize.

2.5 The Anatomy of a Network

Although the networks of social capital are never the same, all of them share some intrinsically similar features. By looking at the anatomy of any given network, we find either one of the two possible options: an open or a close network of interactions. A network of people is understood as any group of actors and the relationship they have with one another (Griggs, 2019). The networks of people analysed in the thesis represent neighbours who share similar interests in lifestyle and sometimes political affiliation as well. Often, some of these networks gather under a common flag, namely a neighbourhood committee or a social group. While a close network describes a group of people with very strong ties among the group, making its boundaries well-defined and often even fixed, an open network is plastic and characterized by
both strong and weak ties. Weak ties play a major role in shaping the relationships the network has with its surrounding. Weak ties are, for example, the colleagues, neighbours and acquaintances of the members of the network in question. The most striking feature of weak ties is that they are able to “bridge” between different people and organization even though they do not seem to share a common goal or identity. Indeed, in sociometry, a bridge is, “a line in a network which provides the only path between two points,” and particularly, “all bridges are weak ties” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1364). In other words, weak ties are crucial in the success of a social group because they can increase the scope of influence of a group, linking it to newer and bigger networks and expand the network itself as it would be then easily reachable by outsiders. In addition, the more people within the network who possess weak ties outside of that particular network, often referred in the literature as “liaison persons”, the more the network is likely to expand through bridges (Granovetter, 1973). Vice versa, a community with lots of strong ties and few weak ones will remain an isolated clique with presumably little or no external success due to the lack of bridges. In a community characterized by geographical immobility, i.e. a neighbourhood, if weak ties and bridges were non-existent, Granovetter (1973) wrote, then the community would be fragmented. On the other hand, a community rich in weak ties, implying different ways in which people may come together, would witness a flourishing of bridges. Finally, the more bridges in a community and the greater their intensity, the more the community is cohesive and able to act jointly and unanimously (Granovetter, 1973). In conclusion, weak ties are indispensable for a community in order to grow and prosper as they give to the network a chance to relate with other realities. For the scope of this thesis, analysing the ties of a particular neighbourhood committee will help evaluate its success rate in improving the quality of life in the neighbourhood through its means of civic participation and cohesiveness (social capital).
Nicholls (2008) suggests that the most favourable network contains both strong and weak ties. They work in reciprocity as weak ties give people access to resources that they would not have otherwise have access to while strong ties contain higher rates of trust and assistance because of the connectedness among participants. Consequently, people would mobilize across a broader set of issues and cooperate with others of different networks. Therefore, participants would start mobilizing on a bigger scale, discovering how issues that seemed non-related at a first glance, could actually intertwine in the geographical context of a neighbourhood, as we will later discover in the case study of San Lorenzo and Aurelio-Boccea.

2.5.1 The Leader Figure

Notwithstanding the kind of network, Purdue (2001) analysed the figure of the leader of a network as a variable who could shift the success rate of the network itself. Purdue describes the leader as a social entrepreneur who is simultaneously able to gain trust and legitimacy inside his own network of communal social capital, and also outside by partnering with distant or elite networks, such as stakeholders, local authorities and funding bodies. The figure of the leader is, thus, that of a social entrepreneur who fosters ties and social capital for community development. However, it must be also said that the leader is as human as everybody else, and as it will be discussed later in the case studies, the interests of leaders not always corresponded fully to those of the community they represent.

2.6 Civic Participation and Voluntarism

When we look at the main activities that foster neighbourhood social capital, civic activism and voluntarism are among the most dominant. According to Campbell (2004), civic
participation is the voluntary and nonremunerative collective action of people whose end is not to change public policies. Hence, the goal must be somewhat different. Civic activism aims at bettering living conditions and fostering the wellbeing of the community without subverting existing power structures. Nevertheless, not all civic actions are the same, and some are more efficient than others in having a positive effect on a community. Moreover, activist groups often focus on one particular issue, one social class and one geography such as a neighbourhood.

Likewise Granovetter’s discourse on weak and strong ties in a network, and how they impact the overall success of the network itself, the type of actions undertaken by the group can be relevant as well. Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005) described two types of civic participation. Bonding activities are characterized by being inward-looking, meaning reinforcing pre-existing patterns of power and identities in a homogeneous group of people. On the other hand, bridging activities, just like the bridges among weak ties among different networks are outward looking, grouping people from different social backgrounds under a common intention. Bridging activities are considered by the literature (McLaren & Baird, 2006) to be more functional to the scopes of civic activism. Contrary, people in homogeneous groups do not boost their overall trust and cooperation with others, but only with their peers inside the bonding community, which in turns, would diminish participatory rates resulting in a worsening of the community wellbeing.

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion this chapter provided a conceptualization on the main theories regarding social capital, networks and civic participation. Scholars agreed that trust and embeddedness are crucial in the formation of a network of mutual cooperation. However, there is dividedness among scholar between those like Putnam and Coleman who suggested that networks were a
spontaneous formation, and Diamond, and Woolcock and Narayan who hinted that social capital should be either a bridge between the people and institutions or a sub-body of the institutions themselves. Furthermore, the formation and functioning of a network has been covered as well. It will be crucial in revealing what type of networks exist in the case studies. Lastly, participation in a network can be of two types. First, they are inward looking as they reinforce pre-existing structures in the group. On the other hand, bridging interactions tend to connect the network with other relevant networks.
3.  Gentrification and Studentification

3.1 Introduction

Although gentrification has become common jargon only in recent years, it has been part of urban studies for more than half a century now. This chapter will provide a theoretical overview of the topic before exploring, in a separate chapter, how gentrification has been affecting the neighborhood of San Lorenzo in Rome in recent times. Alongside gentrification, another term has been coined to describe specifically a type of gentrification featuring high education students and universities, *studentification*. The chapter will cover all the major facets of gentrification. It will first provide a description of the phenomenon alongside an historical perspective of the subject. Then it will cover the socio-economic aspect of gentrification such as the neo-liberalization policies and urbanization practices that lead to gentrification, and the major ideological consequences that gentrification implies on the perception of housing and culture in the post-modern era. Successively, the chapter will enunciate the major differences between gentrification and studentification. The latter is a sub-category of gentrification which occurs in close proximity to university campuses, and high education students are along the main players in reshaping the look of the neighborhood. Last, the chapter will cover the literature on homeownership and communal life.
3.2 Describing Gentrification

The word gentrification first appeared in a study of London’s working-class neighborhoods and how they became the new homes of the British bourgeoise after the end World War II (Dent, 1989). From that point on, gentrification stopped having a neutral connotation. Today, gentrification is contextualized within the framework of “reverse filtering theory” (Dent, 1989). The theory presupposes the purchase of housing units in low income neighborhoods from the middle and upper classes. Thereafter, a renovation and a change in demography takes place in correspondence to the moving out of the original local population and the moving in of the new buyers. This demographical pattern contradicts the usual notion of people moving up to better neighborhood as their income rise. Instead, those groups move downwards to poorer and underserviced areas as old as the late eighteen-hundred century, modifying the look of the city. This is due to a new post-modern ideology which perceives restyled poorer housing blocks in a fashionable way.

Depending on how we view the matter, gentrification can be either a negative or positive process. In the latter, the term is synonym of urban renewal. In fact, from the point of view of the gentrifiers, the new bourgeoise resettling in the neighborhood, many benefits are at stake. Those who invest in the neighborhood look for a financial return as they rebuild the neighborhood hoping that it will eventually increase in property value by creating a unique place to live in. Indeed, by usually being in proximity to the historical city center, service employment sector districts and leisure activities, the gentrified neighborhoods increase their commerciality on the housing market. Gentrification is an investment in the value of a place. For the investors, it is a capital investment whereas, as we will later see, for the new buyers it is also an investment in the ideology and cultural capital of the neighborhood. On the other hand, for the original residents,
gentrification takes a negative connotation characterized by eviction and poverty (Dent, 1989). Broadly speaking, the original residents are often a renting population. Therefore, they have no control or power over the decision making over the houses in which they live. When their houses are purchased by big investors or the bourgeoisie, speculation occurs; the prices of rents skyrocket, and eventually they are forced out of the neighborhood (Dent, 1989). Finally, it is also worth taking a look at gentrification from the point of view of city governments. Even though the city capitol openly welcomes gentrification, often by promoting neo-liberal approaches to the housing market, as it sees gentrification as added tax revenue, it then becomes a pressing need for city officials to cope with the relocation of those who have been evicted. However, public housing, specifically in Rome, has never been efficient in providing a stable, long-term solution for lower classes. Further, now the gentrifiers themselves look to municipalities for improving and renewing the area just gentrified, such as social services and upgraded infrastructures for the neighborhood (Dent, 1989). Hence, it is very difficult to assess who gains from gentrification on the longer run.

### 3.3 The Evolution of Gentrification

Historically speaking, gentrification started to take place during the early seventies in the western hemisphere, specifically in north eastern cities in the United States and capitals of Western Europe like London. Gentrification was characterized by public funding and urban renewal in its earlier stages. The result was a class driven urban rejuvenation which favored the middle class though accelerating the decline of labor class families (Hackworth and Smith, 2000).
Right after the end of the oil crisis, the housing market witnessed a second wave of gentrification. This time around, gentrification was not state-driven. In fact, *laissez-faire* policies dominated the market, leaving room for private investors to buy and sell properties as they wished, resulting in an aggressive speculative approach to the housing market. New neighborhoods previously untouched now became the frontier of gentrification (Hackworth and Smith, 2000). Neighborhoods like SoHo and Tribeca in New York became the artsy and fashionable neighborhoods that are well-known today. Furthermore, this is the time when gentrification started to be challenged by social groups such as homeless people, low class residents and squatter communities. However, they were not able to prevail as gentrification fiercely advanced (Hackworth and Smith, 2000).

The third wave of gentrification hit during and after the 1987 stock market crash. As a result, many such as Bourne (1993) predicted a retreat of gentrification associated to the decline of incomes and the end of the baby boom phenomenon. However, this was not the case as, after a short pause, gentrification again slowly regained steam in the downtown areas of many U.S. cities as well as Western Europe. This is when gentrification became a global phenomenon with particular characteristics. First, it started to expand beyond the boundaries of downtowns and city centers. Moreover, the plan now became to gentrify whole neighborhoods instead of just core pieces of it. Because of such a sudden expansion, resistance weakened as many lower income families were forced to relocate as they felt the financial pressure from rising rents. Finally, the state reentered the frame as it has now become a main player in driving gentrification in new neighborhoods through state financed support to enterprises and investors (Hackworth and Smith, 2000). In addition, because each municipality has its own set of needs and means, and neighborhoods always differ from one another, gentrification becomes a more articulated and
case-by-case matter. The way gentrification developed in New York City or London is different from what is happening today in San Lorenzo. To sum up, the kind of gentrification present in the West today resulted from the end of the Keynesian economy in the 1980s. Neo-liberalism and *laissez-faire* policies took over as many private investors such as real-estate companies gained large profits by “revitalizing” inner cities. These new entrepreneurs, alongside state assistance, have now become the main player in reshaping the look of neighborhoods, most of the time at the expenses of previous residents.

3.4 Gentrification and the Neo-liberal Economy

Therefore, when looking at the gentrification process, it is impossible to ignore the economic implications of such phenomenon. Indeed, gentrification is the effect of a particular economic system, that of urban neo-liberalism, which in the past resulted in a revolution of the housing market, leading to our current housing state characterized by higher renting and buying costs. Neo-liberalism rests on the idea that a free and competitive market is able to self-regulate and create more opportunities for growth and profit than the old Keynesian system in which the welfare state dictated the economic model (Peck et al., 2009). As a result, the adoption of neo-liberal policies implies the shrinking of social welfare policies and state-led initiatives aimed at improving conditions in impoverished neighborhoods. In turn, it leaves room for investors to intervene freely and without being accountable to local regulations as *laissez-policies* had few bonds against speculative investments. In fact, after the market crash of a decade ago, cities have been forced into a new period of austerity in which state-led investment flows have become scarce and situational, serving as a stopgap for specific instances. That left a huge void which was subsequently filled by private investors, who took the material properties of cities and
converted them into a source of profit. Lastly, rather than being a policy with a starting and expiration date, urban neo-liberalism seems more of an endless process. The backbone system through which new post-modern societies develop.

3.4.1 How Neoliberalism Has Reshaped the Contemporary City

Peck et al. (2009) described the five phases of the neoliberal urbanization process. First, the privatization of the local public sector occurs, leading to the semi-spontaneous creation of new urban markets, outsourcing of services and new infrastructure. Simultaneously, the housing market is restructured to fit the new economic model. Consequently, the territorial development takes new paths as the new investors and stakeholders have decision-making power over what to do with the new properties in the urban panorama. Third, the new speculative redevelopment leads to a new urban environment characterized by the demolition of the working-class areas in order to make space for the new investments alongside the end of many community-led initiatives. Here is when gentrification starts its snowballing effect all over the neighborhood, creating spaces for high-social class-driven consumption as well as large projects which would likely increase the socio-spatial polarization of the area. Now that the modernization process has taken place, municipalities start looking at solutions for social problems raised by the new system. However, as we already said, more often than not policies are just fallible short-term solutions unable to actually fix any issue. Last, Peck et al. (2009, p. 62, Table1) highlighted how the new urbanization leads to a “reregulation of urban civil society,” namely the entrance of new social classes (investors, stakeholders and entrepreneurs) into the unstable urban regime of the city, and with that new struggles for power and spaces arise.
3.5 The Gentrification Ideology

Alongside the socioeconomic factors, ideology also comes to serve a role in the gentrification process. The meaning of housing has changed through times as gentrification has taken place. For instance, it used to be common knowledge that San Lorenzo was a neighborhood of artisans, left-wing workers and Italian immigrants. People from the same regions usually clustered in the same block, forming a regional community within the neighborhood. For them and their successors, the house was meant as a safe shelter from the outside threats and the elements, a technomic artifact (Dent, 1989). However, housing takes on a new cultural ideology as the gentrification process starts. Indeed, gentrification manipulates the perception of housing turning it into an ideotechnic artifacts (Dent, 1989). In other words, gentrification attaches to each specific neighborhood a new ad hoc cultural ideology. The neighborhood is a material representation of the ideology of the new residents. The old nineteenth century houses, now renovated, represent the ideal type neighborhood of gentrifiers. Although different gentrification processes involve different ideologies, a characteristic is common to all gentrified areas. “Through gentrification we create an artifact that ideologically represents, among other things, a more pure and simple time and thus helps us to rationalize the contradictions of what we perceive to be the present chaos that surrounds us” (Dent, 1989, p. 77). In other words, the new residents aim at giving the neighborhood a vintage look, making it resemble the gone but not forgotten past of the quartiere popolare (Annuanziata, 2008b). The narrative is that of the peaceful and open community. These are the symbols of a post-industrial ideology in which the marketability of a neighborhood is dictated by the esthetics it recalls and the lifestyle it suggests rather than actual physical features that would make it a more valuable place to live in, such as good building conditions, services and green spaces. In fact, by looking
at the strict meaning of *popolare* in San Lorenzo and elsewhere, it does not mean public housing intended for lower Italian strata of society as it generally stands for in the Italian urban literature, yet it reflects on the *popular* as something by the people for the people.

Today, close-knit and isolated neighborhoods in Italian metropolis like Rome and Milan do not exist anymore due to a shift in demographics and the interconnectedness of contemporary cities. In order, since the late 1980s, the rising middle class has been occupying those areas forcing the lower classes to drift towards the peripheries (Annunziata, 2008). Moreover, in order to achieve the ideal neighborhood, gentrification attempts to requalify the neighborhood itself. That includes the protection of a supposedly historical identity of the neighborhood and a formal acknowledgment of it by the local authorities (Dent, 1989). Their ideology is fictitious (artificial) and constructed over time and not a spontaneous formation as they claim it to be (Dent, 1989). The ideology of neighborhood is a product of the cultural practices and ideas of the new settlers.

The ideology of the *quartiere popolare* that Annunziata (2008b) refers to is as far as it could possibly be from a real neighborhood of past years. Consequently, it is pure cultural manipulation. Furthermore, scholars (Dent, 1989; Smith, 1987) have shown that such process would inevitably result in a rise of housing prices, limiting the demography of people who can afford to live there. Essentially, such practices make the neighborhood even more of an elitist place in the city landscape, increasing inequalities and differences between social classes in contemporary western societies.
3.6 The Gentrification of University Students: Studentification

A peculiar form of gentrification which has been taking place inside the neighborhood of San Lorenzo is studentification. The phenomenon has been widely covered in the context of higher education and housing in the U.K. (Hubbard, 2009), while there is almost no literature regarding the Italian facets of the phenomenon. Smith (2005) defines studentification as the ghettoization of a specific area. By ghetto we mean an enclave of university students in an area surrounding a university. At the housing level, studentification features the conversion of single family houses to room-rented houses by owners and investors (Smith, 2005). In correspondence with that, an increase of renting prices occurs in the area, leading to an inflation of the value of a building depending on its proximity to a university (Ogur, 1973).

For Smith (2005), studentification is four-dimensional, involving economic, social, cultural and physical facets. In terms of the economy, as we already mentioned, studentification, likewise gentrification, revalorizes and inflates properties, and it shifts the housing market of the area from being own-oriented to rent-oriented, which however is the inverse of gentrification. Gentrification presupposes new buyers whereas studentification relates to short term renting by students. It is also social as studentification is characterized by the change of demography of a given neighborhood with the local residents being displaced in favor of university students settling in. Therefore, studentification adds new patterns of socialization within the neighborhood which are often in clash with previous forms of interactions (Sage et al., 2012; Chatterton, 2010). The social leads directly to the cultural aspects of studentification. To facilitate those interactions, new lifestyles and consumption models are brought in the neighborhood. Finally, the conversion into room-rented houses often involves an upgrading of
properties in order to fit the needs of students, as well as a new environment made of leisure activities and shops for the new settlers (Smith, 2005 and Chatterton and Hollands, 2003).

### 3.6.2 Studentification and Italian legislations

The current state of studentification in Italy and San Lorenzo is definitely to be addressed as the result of the neo-liberal policies towards the housing market. For instance, in the Italian law, the *contratto di locazione per studenti* is a short-term renting contract between the owner and the student renting the room/house. It was specifically established for university students. It is a legal housing contract ratified by the following Italian laws: Legge 9 dicembre 1998, n. 431, Decreto Ministeriale 30 dicembre 2002, Art. 5, and Decreto Interministeriale 30 dicembre 2002. It can be applied only to houses located in the same cities of Italian universities, and its length ranges from 6 months (a semester) to 36 months (the length of an Italian equivalent of a Bachelor’s Degree, *laurea breve triennale*) (D. I. 30/12/2002). Moreover, the renter must prove the enrollment to the local university. The renting price is not fixed by law, but the parts can agree the amount to be paid. However, it is also stated that the asking price cannot exceed the cap set by Regions or *accordi territoriali*¹ (D. I. 30/12/2002). Finally, students enjoy housing rights as their landlords cannot terminate the he rent prior to the agreed expiring date of the contract. Therefore, evictions are not possible under the contract. Further, students can opt out of the contract for “serious reasons”² (D. I. 30/12/2002) with at least three months in advance.

Moreover, the *contratto di locazione per studenti* favors students over other type of renters as landlords would enjoy less burdensome housing taxes compared to non-student-purpose rents. This was made by the Italian law in order to give offsite students a facilitated way

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¹ Local territorial agreement on the matter of housing rents.
² English translation of “per gravi motivi.”
to find rents by making them a more desirable category to rent a house to. Of course, this has the negative impact of saturating the housing market for students as well as leaving other renter categories without affordable housing. Moreover, because the house demand is so high as well as a very generous regional rent cap, prices would eventually rise, as it will be shown later.

3.6.3 Studentification in Practice

Differently from gentrification, studentification attracts short term settlers, meaning students who rent the property for the length of their period of study, whereas gentrifiers aim at a mid to long-term stay in the neighborhood. Furthermore, students generally do not invest monetary capital in the neighborhood during their stay. For this reason, the actual gentrifiers, meaning those who pave the way for gentrification and studentification to occur in the neighborhood, are the investors and the landlords themselves who rent houses to students. Meanwhile, students, similarly to the later waves of gentrifiers, are the actual consumers of the gentrification process (Smith, 2005). Demographically speaking, students are often considered as young adults without a stable employment and therefore without an income, so they rely on external economic sources such as families. Often, they have little if no attachment to the neighborhood in which they rent their rooms because they are moving in for the reason only of being in proximity to the university they attend. Finally, their social practices are often different to those of the original living community. For example, the recreational activities of students are different from those of the elderly and families. Other findings by Smith (2005) also suggest that students often have a limited knowledge of the housing market. As a result, they are unable to spot excessive housing prices and speculation.

As well as gentrification, studentification offers its own set of ideas and cultural practices. Students are the consumer of studentification, and among the things they consume
there is not only housing, but also cultural consumption hubs such as bars, clubs, fast foods, minimarkets, and a whole lifestyle often characterized by excessive drinking and drug use (Chatternton and Hollands, 2003). A major consequence of studentification, which will be evaluated in the case studies, is the lack of engagement from the students in the civic life of the neighborhood, which in turns depletes it of social capital.

3.7 Housing Status and Participation. Is there a Correlation?

Scholars (Rotolo et al, 2010; Rohe and Stewart, 1996) have long demonstrated that there is a clear correlation between the housing status of a person and the willingness to participate in volunteer work for the neighborhood. The “stake” theory affirms that when one person has its own life at stake then such person will be more encouraged to participate in communal life to better living conditions. Rotolo et al. (2010) identified homeownership as the variable at stake in deciding whether or not participating in the communal life of a neighborhood. Renters have nothing at stake at all as they do not own the property in which they live. Meanwhile, people are actually more inclined to participate in communal life if they are owners rather than renters. Homeowners have their finances at stake as they care about the property value of their houses. Therefore, they will participate and do whatever they can in order to maintain, or even increase, their financial status through improving their neighborhood. This is because owners generally understand the neighborhood and the community to be a relevant part of the value of their houses. Moreover, the higher the property value, the higher the stakes people have, so the more they are willing to actively participate in the community. Conversely, students, who rent their room only for the timespan of their university stay, will not dedicate much of their time to the community in which they live, or they would consider only the university community as the place where to be civically active.
3.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the chapter aimed at providing a background on the literature related to gentrification studies. It appears that gentrification is a vast urban phenomenon which includes many fields of studies, and consequently a big variety of aspects of the life of a person. Indeed, it has been shown how gentrification deals with housing markets and urban economic policies such as neo-liberalism. Moreover, relatable to the housing market is the issue of demographics and displacement of the original settlers in favors of the gentrification community. For the latter, housing represents more than a shelter, but it is a matter of cultural belonging and ideology. However, it has been debated whether such attachment is genuine or a product of the post-modern ideology. Last, a peculiar form of gentrification is the studentification phenomenon. Here, those who settle in are university students, who usually perform a variety of activities which drastically differ from the previous inhabitants. Last, renters and homeowners seem to have two different approaches to associationism, with homeowners being more willing to join communal life as they understand that the value of their neighborhood is intrinsically related to the value of their own properties. Last, the aforementioned literature will serve as a verifying tool in order to assess the consequences of gentrification and studentification in the case study of San Lorenzo.
4. **Contextualizing Social Capital and Gentrification**

Although social capital and gentrification have rarely been seen together in the urban literature (Butler and Robson, 2001), they can be juxtaposed to give a peculiar perspective of urban studies. Social capital defined as a set of values and behaviors while gentrification being an urban phenomenon, together they amount for how people interact and in which environment they do so, respectively. Therefore, it is the aim of this chapter to present a more conclusive merge between the two fields in order to obtain a single conceptualization which will later be applied to the case studies.

In order to contextualize social capital at the neighborhood level, we must first see how the literature can be reinterpreted with that of gentrification. First, gentrification presupposes a change in demography of a given place. Hence, Putnam’s (1993a) considerations on trust, solidarity and tolerance among neighbors have to be reinterpreted in the context of a shifting of demography. How will the newcomers relate with the gentrified locals? Furthermore, Dent (1989) defined the interactions between the new and older residents mainly as conflictual. This would then assume that, because the population is divided, in the case studies there would be hypothetically at least two sets of social capital, one of the gentrifiers and one of the gentrified. As a result, the hypothesis is that the neighborhood would not look cohesive. This is in line with what Coleman (1988) enunciated. Because of its very issue-driven and relative nature, social capital is not fixed, but its value depends on the actor it is related with. In a neighborhood with two or more communities like we saw in gentrified neighborhoods, promoting social capital by one side may result in disadvantages for the other side. As Peck et al. (2009) have mentioned, gentrification always implies territorial renovation and new actors taking center stage, increasing
the socio-spatial segregations of groups. Consequently, Putnam’s (1993a) rates of trust, cooperation and embeddedness would decrease as the neighborhood becomes increasingly fragmented.

Moreover, the literature on participation (Rotolo et al, 2010, Rohe and Stewart, 1996) stated that there is a correlation between the housing status of a person and the willingness to participate. Smith’s (2005) studentification defined as the ghettoization of neighborhoods by renting students would implicate a lower willingness to be civically active compared to homeowners. In addition, one could go as far as stating that, because students usually transfer in the neighborhood for the length of their stay and then leave, they do not have any long-term interest in improving the quality of the neighborhood in which they live through civic participation.

So far, we have seen how Putnam and Coleman’s theories may be applied in the context of gentrification. However, they focus on the interpersonal aspect of social capital. Instead, Diamond (1994) and Woolcock and Narayan (2000) either conceptualized social capital as an intermediary between the state and the civil society or an “institution” promoted by the authorities. Here, gentrification understood as a neoliberal economic process (Peck et al. 2009) becomes central in the development of social capital itself. In other words, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) described the institutional view of social capital and their complementarity and embeddedness of actors’ theory as a state-driven initiative in pair with private investors. Therefore, neoliberalism of private investors, alongside the state, are those who actually try to implement a precise type of social capital aligned to a specific vision of the city’s landscape characterized by gentrification.
Because gentrification and studentification necessitates newcomers in the neighborhood, in order to assess efficacy levels, patterns and types of their participation, network structure is reviewed. The types of networks in place such as neighborhood committee and social centers as well as their functioning and actors can determine whether they are made of either weak or strong ties (Granovetter, 1973) or a mixture of both (Nicholls, 2008), and what leaders there are in place (Purdue, 2001). In addition, the way activities are organized would affect the outcome. If bonding activism is inward looking which means that activities aim at reinforcing the network itself, outward looking activism attempts to bridge different people and necessities (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005). In a gentrified scenario, the latter would imply cooperation between different strata of the population. On the other hand, the first would describe a behavior not apt towards cooperation, yet the different people of the neighborhood actually live in conflict with each other, reinforcing Coleman’s (1988) theoretical framework.
5. Methodology

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology implemented in the thesis. Because the objective of the thesis is to discover and assess rates of social capital and their effects on neighbourhoods, both quantitative and qualitative methods of research were applied. Through surveys (quantitative) and interviews and field work (qualitative), it was possible to obtain two different sets of results that were compared but also juxtaposed, whenever possible. The chapter will start off by explaining the approach to the research question, research design, sample size, and the advantages as well as the disadvantages of qualitative data. Then it will also cover quantitative analysis in the same way.

5.2 Qualitative Analysis

A qualitative approach was particularly useful in this type of research. As well as collecting pre-existing data, qualitative analysis provided important insights that could not be obtained through surveys. Two types of qualitative approaches are discussed here: interview and direct observation. Through 2 focus groups and 10 one-on-one interviews, the research aimed at exploring people’s perspective on the subject matter and evaluated whether these views matched with the literature in the thesis.
5.2.1 Interviews

The typology of people interviewed varied. Three main criteria were applied. First of all, respondents all differed in demography (age, gender, social status, origin and residence); this was to limit any void in the answers. In San Lorenzo, older residents, students and professors from Sapienza University, and shopkeepers were targeted as they were considered the main actors in the neighbourhood for the purpose of the thesis. Differently, in Aurelio, the focus was on long term families of the neighbourhood, active members of the local neighbourhood committee, and migrant communities. Targeting specific demographics was helpful in order to obtain deeper and more concrete evidence about participation and social capital in neighbourhoods from the social groups who intertwine the most and are considered to have a major impact in shaping social capital rates and participatory democracy in the neighbourhoods in question.

Interviews were organized and scheduled differently depending on the interviewee. Students in San Lorenzo were interviewed both individually and in focus groups. Focus groups were of maximum five people. Individual interviews were either scheduled ahead or done on the spot if people agree to do so. During the three neighbourhood committee sessions attended in Aurelio- Boccea participants were gently asked to release an interview during the days of the meetings themselves.

Interviews had a semi-structured format. Interviewees spoke openly and without interruptions for most of the time, leaving room for diversion. The purpose was to achieve a complete overview of the theme by the respondents. Standardized questions were asked to everybody in order to prevent biases and diversions in the answers. Questions related to social issues of contemporary Roman neighbourhoods covered in the chapters of each urban area. Further, questions regarded also the local politics and democracy in neighbourhoods. Finally,
interviews were all confidential and anonymous; full names will not be provided in the thesis. Interviewees all signed a privacy treatment form.

The methodological process explained above is defined as an interpretative method, which aims at “understanding phenomenon in a comprehensive, holistic way. Interpretive methods focus on analytically disclosing the meaning-making practices of human subjects [the why, how, or by what means people do what they do], while showing how those practices arrange so that it can be used to generate observable outcomes” (Labaree 2018). Finally, the interpretative method allows the researcher to make connections about the phenomena under investigation while also linking causes and outcomes from the analysis of the interviews.

Indeed, in analysing the answers of the interviewees, the main objective was to understand the different opinions regarding social capital and local active participation in Rome and their variables like gentrification, social status and participation. These opinions were transformed into data. Thus, data collected from the different interviews were compared in order to have an overall understanding of people’s view on the subject of the thesis. Also, answers by the interviewees were compared to the theories mentioned in the literature chapter. Last, interviews provided an interesting comparison with the observation made directly in the field by the researcher. By comparing the two, it was possible to evince different understandings of the same event. For example, in asking to different types of residents about nightlife and degrade in San Lorenzo, answers differed. Students had a different understanding of nightlife in the neighbourhood, considering that they were involved in it in first person, compared to older residents.
5.2.2 On-Field Observation

Direct observation is the second qualitative method used in the research. Inspecting interactions among those who animate the neighbourhoods was essential in order to understand the social and political dynamics behind social capital in Rome. During the observations, three key elements received major attention: social interactions, daytime and night time life in the neighbourhood, and community meetings. Further, the types of interactions observed among different social groups were a predominant factor in assessing the participatory levels in neighbourhoods. As it was previously discussed in the theory chapter, Putnam bases his own theory of social capital on trust and cooperation, a divided neighbourhood would hypothetically suggest low levels of social capital among different layers of the population. For instance, in San Lorenzo, interactions between students with families and senior residents were watched closely. In addition, observation was necessary to ascertain if in a given neighbourhood gentrification has been taking place. If so, then the research looked at the causes of the phenomenon, again through observation as well as studying data from the housing market, if these were in any way a consequence or a cause of the rates of social capital and democracy in the area.

Furthermore, observation took place during the entirety of the year 2019, and major emphasis was given to daytime vs. nigh-time in neighbourhoods. In this way, different social patterns could be observed. For both San Lorenzo and Aurelio- Boccea, different people animated the neighbourhoods in different hours of the day. Therefore, a systematic observation was made in different days and in different times. It was noticed, and also agreed by some of the interviewees in San Lorenzo, that the demography of the neighbourhood changed drastically depending on the time of the day. This is way each observation session took place in different hours of the day, ranging from early morning to midnight. Youth participation, for instance, was
mostly observable during the afternoon and the evening. Finally, elders usually animated the
neighbourhood before lunchtime in both neighbourhoods, and indeed that was the time when
most of the interactions between the researcher and that demographics took place. This is to say
that observation took into account the variable of time in order to assess activities of different
social groups that might result in raising or lowering social capital levels. Perhaps, participation
flashes at specific hours of the day and the night depending on the actors (students, families,
elders).

In regard to Aurelio, direct observation took place in community events and *Comitato di
Quartiere* meetings. Observation, there, was useful in order to understand the main dynamics of
participation. Moreover, by observing and then reporting the actions of the neighbourhood
committees in fixing issues and promoting the wellbeing in the neighbourhood, the research was
able to discern whether these groups were actually accomplishing the tasks of promoting
democracy and development in the area, or their actions resulted to be unproductive. This would
serve the main goal of the hypothesis, which is assessing whether or not participation, among
other variables, can contribute to social capital and democracy in a neighbourhood.

The literature (Gold, 1958) distinguishes over four different roles the observer can opt to
take in order to accomplish any observatory task. The division regards the modes of
participation, namely Complete Participant, Participant as Observer, Observer as Participant, and
Complete Observer. Any given situation may require a different approach as the role may be
dictated by the openness of the people involved in each field observation. In the case of
Complete Participant, “He interacts with them as naturally as possible in whatever areas of their
living interest him and are accessible to him” (Gold 1958). Hence, it requires full participation of
the observer, meaning first person engagement in the events taking place. Complete Participant
gives the author the possibility to access different realms of people’s own life, so a broader frame of the research is available. However, it also poses the question over acceptance. Indeed, if biases towards the researcher are shown, or hidden as well, the data might be compromised. Complete Participant requires full trust between the researcher and the actors observed.

Similar to the Complete Participant, the Participant as Observer takes part in field actions. Although a relationship with the participants is developed, the researcher does not actively participate in the events in question. Thus, a relationship with the actors is developed over time, but observation rather than participation remains the focal point of the field work (Gold 1958). For instance, attending meetings such as those of the Comitato di Quartiere will produce a sense of trust between the people and the field worker over time. Without, however, making the latter a direct participant of such meetings.

In the thesis, actions took form of both Complete Participant and Participant as Observer. In Aurelio the Complete Participant was possible due to the openness of the members of the neighbourhood committee, who welcomed the researcher during their meetings. Differently, in all events observed in San Lorenzo, whether it was student groups or neighbourhood events, it was impossible to fully participate because of the nature itself of these groups, which will be later discussed in the case study chapter of San Lorenzo.

5.2.3 Ethical Approach to Qualitative Data

In qualitative data, limitations have to be accounted. First, observation must be as neutral as possible in order to avoid any personal bias regarding events, actors and phenomena observed. Therefore, everything will be dealt through the lens of the literature in order to compare what has been written on the topic and the actual real-life events. For instance, while observing for daytime and night time situations, what would look as a clear sign of participatory dynamic for
someone, for others that same event would be understood in a different way. This is due to the different understandings on the same subject people may have because of different backgrounds and personal history. In turn, this would alter significantly the findings of the thesis.

Similarly, the researcher can commit errors during interviews and surveys by posing the wrong questions. Those question could contain favouritisms for a certain party, or make the interviewees respond in the way the researcher wants to because of pressure and fear. Further, the answers could be rushed or incomplete. Hence, a particular emphasis will be given to neutrality and peaceful context in order to not stress and make the people interviewed feel uncomfortable also not to leave room for personal biases. The thoughts of the interviewees are the focus of the interviews, not the opinion of the researcher.

5.3 Quantitative Data

In addition to interviews and field observation, quantitative data were gathered as well. Quantitative data were gathered through surveys carried out in both neighbourhoods analysed in the thesis. Participants were chosen randomly in the neighbourhoods. However, an equal number of participants based on gender and age applied. This was to have no predominance from a particular demographical group in the survey. All questionnaires were filled all in the presence of the researcher. The survey was composed of three sections. The first section of the survey regarded age, gender, social status, provenience and residency of the participant. The second set of questions dealt with living in the neighbourhoods. These questions were all the same for each neighbourhood under scrutiny. Answers had multiple formats depending on the questions such as rating on a scale of 1 to 5, Yes/No type of answers, and crossing the most fitting answer of the one proposed (A, B, C). This was to have the best fit for each question. Questions featured a non-
compulsory blank space were respondents could have left additional comments regarding the subject of the questions. Finally, the last part of the questionnaire dealt with questions related to each specific neighbourhood. Therefore, the two neighbourhoods had also their own set of questions. In San Lorenzo, for instance, this tranche of questions dealt with gentrification, participation, security and the University La Sapienza. On the contrary, thematic questions for the Aurelio-Boccea neighbourhood related to the issue of safety, immigration and mismanagement of public spaces. The surveys did not take place in the same day, but they were collected over the span of the 2019 year.

The sample size was of approximately 70 people total subdivided as follows; approximately 35 people per gender categorized in 3 different age groups (18- 30 yrs. old, 31- 55 yrs. old, and 56- 75 yrs. old). This was to obtain the most neutral results possible. No group dominated in number of participants over the others. Written in a clear and simple Italian, the researcher took care of translating it to English and Spanish when foreign Erasmus students and immigrants were interviewed. The survey was as much straightforward as possible in order to be comprehensible for everybody. The surveys were all anonymous.

5.3.2 Analysis of the Data

In terms of analysing the data collected in the survey, all answers for each question were added to a total which ultimately resulted in percentages. In other words, two percentages were made out of “Yes/No” answers to question as well as a percentage for each grade given by the interviewees for “1 to 5” scale type of questions Results will be kept separate between neighbourhoods because the main aim of the thesis is not an overall analysis of participatory rates in Rome, but an inquiry on the different neighbourhoods examined separately, and a
comparison of the two different “types” of neighbourhood. Hence, data will be analysed within the spectrum of the neighbourhood itself, and then a comparative analysis will be made.

5.3.3 Ethical Approach to Quantitative Data

Finally, several issues were related with taking surveys. Some surveys were not filled properly by the surveyed, making the results unusable. Also, before handing the surveys, they must be carefully reviewed in order to avoid sophisticated terminology, or people would find the surveys difficult to understand. Further, assumptions and bias must be avoided in the questions. Last, the sample size does not represent the entire population, and the sample size of this thesis does not represent the entirety of a geographical area as vast as a neighbourhood. However, paired with the interviews and on-field observations, results were adequate for the scope of the thesis.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the researcher took a mixed path by deciding to approach the research question both through qualitative and quantitative type of data. Questionnaires and interviews were carried out as well as participating to public meetings and events. Surveys had different types of close questions, whereas interviews had a semi-structured format. For both, the samples included people from any kind of background and age. The researcher took both the role of the Complete Participant and of the Participant as Observer during the time of the field work depending on the occasions in order to have the best role fitting for each occasion.
6. Case Study: San Lorenzo

6.1 Introduction

Perhaps one of the most iconic and known neighborhoods among Romans; throughout the years, San Lorenzo has been part of some of the most important social and political phenomena of Italy since Garibaldi’s unification. In order, the massive migratory process of Southern Italians to Rome of the early 20th century and the subsequent rise of the local working class; the antifascist struggle during World War II; finally, the base of some of the most prominent non-parliamentary Roman left-wing groups and occupations. Today, San Lorenzo is home of most of the Sapienza University offsite university students, the so-called fuori sede; the centerpiece of the urban nightlife of the city; a representative neighborhood of Rome’s rental housing market; an acclaimed non-aligned left-wing fortress; and the remains of a working class now retired. Therefore, it is because of the intertwining of all of these reasons that San Lorenzo is the first major case study of this thesis.

The first section will cover the history of the area, then the current political and social arena of the neighborhood will be analyzed and commented by means of the literature mentioned in prior chapters. Finally, the case study will discuss some of the evidence which emerged through field observations, surveys and interviews in order to back up the hypothesis that although the neighborhood would at a first glance look more active than ever, actual participatory and social capital rates do not appear as strong as in the past. The few instances of local activism and civic participation, moreover, do not produce effective collective actions and fails to regenerate the neighborhood and solving its issues.
6.2 The Past and Present of San Lorenzo

Historically, San Lorenzo’s backbone population since the late 1880s was that of Italian immigrants and Romans evicted from the city center. Indeed, after Rome was named capital of Italy, the city center became the place of the new ministries of the Italian state (Spinetti, n.d.). Moreover, it is easy to determine the origin of early immigrants by just reading the names of today’s streets in San Lorenzo like Via dei Lucani, people from Apulia, and Via dei Sardi, meaning the people of Sardinia. Their main source of income was gardening and artisanship at the nearby cemetery of Verano. Alternatively, many also found employment at Termini station freight terminal, today Scalo San Lorenzo, or in one of the small-scale industries of the neighborhood, such as the Pastificio Cerere in the nearby via Tiburtina (Spinetti, n.d.). Socially speaking, the physical geography of San Lorenzo made it difficult to inhabitants to connect outwards to other areas of the city. Indeed, as Spinetti (n.d) recalls, the Termini station on the West side, the Umberto I hospital on the northern side, the cemetery at the East, and, finally, the freight terminal on the southern borders made it physically impossible for the people to actually find a free, open space that would link the place with the adjacent neighborhoods.
The difficulty of moving outwards resulted in an inward aggregation. As a result, the *sanlorenzini* became a close-knit community. The strong unity that characterized the area mixed with left and anarchist tendencies of the working class made the neighborhood the core of the Roman anti-fascist movement during the fascist *ventennio* (Spinetti, n.d.; Sanfilippo, 2003). This culminated with the historical bombing of 19th of July, 1943 by the Allies. It remains to be ascertained however, if that sound political belief is still part of the political tradition of the neighborhood, or else it has disappeared because of the new social phenomena of our contemporary society.
6.2.1 The Current Demographics

Today, San Lorenzo is a variegated area in which many different social classes coexist. According to a recent study by the Urban Studies Department of the City of Rome, the total number of residents in the neighborhood ranges around 9000 people as of 2014. Of them, 8,000 are of Italian citizenship whereas around 1,000 are foreigners (Roma Capitale, 2015, p. 6). In addition, compared to the rest of the city of Rome, San Lorenzo has a residence density of 15.309 Km² compared to the much smaller one of 2.230 people per Km² of the rest of Rome altogether³ (Roma Capitale, 2015, 7). This indicates how San Lorenzo is a neighborhood of closed and small-scale spaces characterized by few overcrowded areas. Moreover, data also indicates that the number of people aged 0-19, renamed in the report as the youngsters, have diminished by 10.5% in the period 2006 to 2014 (Roma Capitale, 2015, 11). Consequently, it is safe to assume that San Lorenzo is not considered a place where family would like to establish themselves anymore. Finally, the age category of students (20-29 yrs. old) constitutes 9,87% of the whole population or 911 people out of the total residents.⁴ Of them, 734 people are Italian, while 177 residents are foreigners (Roma Capitale, 2015, 11). Nevertheless, data do not differentiate between the settled foreigners and Erasmus, study abroad students, which is subject to fluctuation every semester. However, Annunziata (2008b, p. 116) provided higher percentages of students living in the neighborhood. She claimed that the number in the whole Municipality of San Lorenzo was as high as 4.800 people out of 10.000 people, amounting for 35% of the whole population. Further, people who lived in the neighborhood for more than 15 years, the sanlorenzini, were half of the total population. Therefore, it appears that the neighborhood is

³ Note that the actual size of San Lorenzo is approximately 0,60 Km². Therefore, the data is a forecast of the actual number of inhabitants if the area measured 1Km² exactly.

⁴ My own calculation of data provided in Roma Capitale (2015) and Annunziata (2008b).
split into two distinct categories: the seniors and the students. Two very different age groups with no linkages in the middle as families seems to be a minority. Finally, Sapienza University students living inside the neighborhood account from 10% to 35% of the population, depending on the estimates. Annunziata (2008b) calculated that the number of people actually residing in the neighborhood would reach 13,600 people if non-regularly rented houses were counted.

6.3 The Different Looks of Gentrification in San Lorenzo

Alongside the demographic impact, the process of studentization is also a matter of urban development and geography of spaces. Sapienza University bought some of the older buildings of the neighborhood and renovated them in order to adapt them to university departments, such as the former Wurer factory, now the Department of Psychology on Via dei Marsi (Annunziata, 2008b). A few blocks away from the university buildings, we see another attempt of gentrification. The former custom buildings, Ex Dogana and Scalo San Lorenzo, became a known nightlife spot in recent years, and it is now being converted into a residence for university students. The contemporary socio-geographical evolution of San Lorenzo recalls that of middle size cities in Britain reported by scholars (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). It is characterized by a drastic demographical turnover, urban renovation and economic opportunism by public and private groups, all of which has led to a popular discontent among long-tenure residents.

As a result, the way gentrification is to be interpreted in San Lorenzo is multi-dimensional. The Sapienza University hub and the student life are associated with the imaginary of San Lorenzo as the neighborhood of Roman nightlife. In addition, San Lorenzo still attempts

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5 The number is a guess which comprehends also students whose houses are rented through the black market; therefore, not accounted by the official estimates by the City of Rome.
to keep its subversive spirit alive through the anti-fascist Libera Repubblica San Lorenzo, Cummunia, and the Palestra Popolare San Lorenzo, all of which are part of the bigger picture of the left-wing social centers of the neighborhood. Finally, the Centro Anziani San Lorenzo, La GRU (Germogli di Rinascita Urbana), and the newly opened Unione Inquilini San Lorenzo (Y.S., 2018), are attempting to establish a new network of support for the elderly, families and residents in need inside the neighborhood.

However, all of these social classes struggle to coexist. The narrative on the supposed state of urban degradation of the neighborhood is vast and well known in the Italian media (Filippi, 2019; Gainsforth, 2018). The Mayor of Rome, Virginia Raggi, has been attempting to requalify the neighborhood through a series of urban requalification proposals started in August 2019 (Il Messaggero, 2019). This came after the rape and death of a young girl in Via dei Lucani. The incident brought new media attention to the neighborhood and even the former Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini came and delivered a speech on the same streets in which Desirèe died while left-wing groups opposed to his presence in the neighborhood (Il Messaggiero, 2018).

Annunziata (2008a) explained how the state of things in contemporary San Lorenzo is essentially the result of years of gentrification, studentification and housing speculation in the neighborhood. In San Lorenzo, the rising housing prices, demographic substitution of the population, and new forms of cultural consumption all account for the gentrification process of the neighborhood (Annunziata, 2008a). For example, a renowned bar in the area, “Bar dei Brutti” is known to have changed clientele from its loyal customers to students in recent times (Spinetti, n.d.). It now offers cheap alcohol from the afternoon till 2 a.m., when bars must close due to a new decree issued after the death of Desirèe (Monaco, 2019). Around 150 new bars and pubs
have emerged in recent periods in the areas (Annunziata, 2008a). However, the most felt issue is that of housing. Under studentification, housing prices are in constant fluctuation, with prices averaging between 450 to 520€ per room (Uniaffitti.it, n.d.). Despite the high costs, many students still prefer living inside the neighborhood. In fact, students now occupy around 1,100 of the 6,549 houses of the neighborhood, or 16% of the total houses available (Annunziata, 2008a). Later in the chapter it will be explained how neo-liberal regulation have favored the current scenario in San Lorenz.

6.4 The Ex Dogana Project and the Roman Neo-Liberal Agenda

Many urban projects have modified the skyline of the neighborhood, such as the Fonderie Bastianelli in Via dei Sabelli, which are now becoming a new set of private houses, and the requalification of Via dei Lucani, where the City Capitol is struggling to find a compromise with local networks on the future of the building. In this thesis another building is of major interest, though. The upcoming construction of the Student Hotel, a luxury residence purposefully built for students, which will rise in what was previously known as the Ex Dogana. The building has a complex history. The 23km² area was first intended as the State Mint, and during World War II many Jews were sent to camps from here (Pagliaro, 2018). In recent times, Cassa Depositi e Prestiti, a semi-public financial network under the lead of the Minister of Economics, played a huge role in reshaping the look of chunks of the city center and its boundary neighborhoods by selling and renting state and municipal owned buildings to private investors, like the case of the Ex Dogana in San Lorenz. This is part of the bigger picture of Modello Roma, a strategic process of urban renewal in Rome initiated by left-wing mayors from 1993 to 2008, where the promotion of the city center and adjacent neighborhoods for touristic revenue purposes,
“increased commercial desirability of many originally working-class neighborhoods” which consequently led to massive private speculation (Annunziata & Violante, 2011, p. 6). The plan for the Ex-Dogana was first to demolish it in order to make space for a shopping mall back in 2004. However, citizens of the neighborhood revolted, and the plan was abandoned. Consequently, Ex Dogana, under the management of Cassa Depositi e Prestiti, went on sale. The new tenant made of the place an emerging figure of Rome’s nightlife scene, hosting concerts, DJ sessions and art shows. Consequently, residents identified the venue with nightlife degradation, alcohol consumption, drug abuse and acoustic pollution, which led many citizens, especially families and the elders, to protest or even leave the neighborhood. Currently, Ex Dogana has stopped being a youth culture aggregator as the Cassa Depositi e Prestiti struck a 90 million € deal with The Student Hotel in order to dismantle the complex and make space for the upcoming hotel. The company already started similar projects in Florence and Bologna in Italy as well as Paris, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Berlin and Barcelona in the rest of Europe. In San Lorenzo, the hotel is expected to have a swimming pool, gyms and comfort areas. Rooms prices will depend on the luxury of the accommodation (Frontera, 2017). Pricewise, TSH is expected to cost more than a current student-rented room in San Lorenzo. According to a recent interview with Cecilia Sandroni, spokesperson of TSH, renting a room for a whole semester averages 737€ per month in one of TSH’s buildings, almost 200€ higher than the average monthly cost per room in the neighborhood (Cianferoni, 2019). Predictably, this is a sign of Dent’s (1989) and Annunziata (2008) account of the gentrification and studentification process. As gentrification and new players enter the market, prices will rise as well as the marketability of the neighborhood. Furthermore, The Student Hotel’s website states of the new construction on San Lorenzo, “The vital energy of the neighborhood San Lorenzo is yet another face of the Capital: its streets (San
Lorenzo) alters buildings covered with graffiti and vintage shops, creating a modern urban area surrounded by history⁶ (The Student Hotel, 2019). Dent’s *ideotechnic artifacts* (1989) are on display here: vintage shops and graffiti attempt to recall a peculiar cultural ideology characterized by a uniqueness in Rome’s panorama. Moreover, the fascination for history too serves to amplify the idea of *popolare* that Annunziata (2008b) mentioned as a driving force for the social and cultural sides of gentrification. Moreover, the higher than average prices of the apartments show the economic realm of gentrification. This will slowly change the already altered outlook of the housing market in the area. Neo-liberal practices have saturated the housing market with a broad selection of offers from local private owners to big foreign investors. However, universities themselves have also joined the race as they are now partnering with student housing agencies. For example, Sapienza university, as well as many other public and private Italian universities have reached an agreement with Sturent, a renting online platform, in order to provide houses for Erasmus students mainly. The agency covers cities such as Rome, Milan, Palermo and Florence. It is not of public domain, however, the type of agreement between Sapienza University and Sturent. It is not known whether accommodations will be cheaper compared to regular rooms on the market, and if students will enjoy privileges and more rights than their peers living in regularly rented rooms.

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⁶ My translation. Original text: “L’energia vitale del quartiere universitario di San Lorenzo è un'altra faccia della Capitale: nelle sue strade si alternano edifici con muri ricoperti di graffiti a negozi vintage, creando un'area urbana moderna ma circondata di storia.”
6.5 Active Participation in the Neighborhood

However, gentrification, rising housing prices and changes in lifestyles have been contested in the political arena by many social centers in San Lorenzo. Mudu (2014, p. 256) counted as many as 32 different social centers in San Lorenzo as he commented that, “the San Lorenzo district [has] so far managed to resist the pressures from the neoliberal policies now prevailing in the city.” Mudu (2014) also described social centers as converted and self-managed abandoned buildings, usually belonging to the leftist side of the political spectrum. Those networks usually regard three different levels of participation. Individuals participate only in one single social center. Then participants may also join clusters of social centers or a whole movement. Finally, they can ultimately build a network of social centers tied with political actors (Mudu, 2014). This account reflects Granovetter (1973) and Nicholls (2008) account of how networks function. A mix of weak and strong ties are in display as people can either join a single movement or build connections through weak ties between different social movements.

6.5.1 The Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo Network

Among all the social centers of San Lorenzo, direct observation showed, the one that has been the most active in terms of collective citizenship, campaigns and thus social capital is the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo (Free Republic of San Lorenzo). Located in the abandoned Nuovo Cinema Palazzo on Piazza dei Sanniti, the LRSL is an attempt of self-government in the neighborhood (Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo, 2017). The Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo is the leader of a bigger network of social centers and activist groups in San Lorenzo, which includes the social center Communia and the Palestra Popolare San Lorenzo on Vai dei Volsci, just around Piazza dei Sanniti. The Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo is a space of engagement
in the neighborhood aimed at promoting solidarity, mutualism and civic engagement while resisting private and public speculation in the neighborhood. Within that, the group often opposed the Ex Dogana project in both of its forms, as a nightlife playground and as The Student Hotel project. The LRSL claims to meet almost weekly in a round table in open-to-the-public meetings where people can raise suggestions and doubts over neighborhood related issues. The social center offers activities during special occasions, such as fairs and sports games during the 2019 WWII bombing anniversary as well as rallies in the neighborhood. Moreover, the LSRL has also participated in the Progetto Urbano “San Lorenzo” promoted by the City of Rome and seems to have ties with local formations of Italian left wing parties and the II° Municipio.

6.5.2 Student Activism in Sapienza University

Although the literature has shown how more and more students are now part of the gentrification process, the research for this thesis has also discovered that there is a resistance movement among La Sapienza University students. These students acknowledge how gentrification can be detrimental for their interests as renters. Of course, they are the ones who feel greater economic pressure as the cost per room rises in the neighborhood. On the May 2019 issue of “Universitario”, a free newspaper written and published by university students, an article by Claudio Panebianco (2019) described the struggle of students in finding housing for a convenient price. According to the article however, Link Sapienza, a political group of university students, was able to reach a deal alongside other housing unions with the City Capitol in order to grant fairer rent prices for renters whose deal is of the canone concordato type. While in a canone libero type of contract, renters and owners can arrange the renting price privately, the
previous contract imposes a price depending on the area and the \( \text{mq}^2 \) of the house in rent. Moreover, it also grants more rights such as impossibility to be evicted, prevents increase in monthly payment rates for renters, and a more flexible and less burdensome housing tax for owners. Specifically, the new deal limits the price per \( \text{mq}^2 \) of a house in San Lorenzo to 13,50€. Therefore, an 80\( \text{mq}^2 \) house containing four bedrooms will cost around 300€ per person per month (Panebianco, 2019) which is 100€ lower than the average price for a room in the current housing market. Therefore, political activism from student unions like Link Sapienza demonstrates how students can be either promoters or opposers of the gentrificatory process in the area.

6.6 Data Review

During two focus groups interviews carried out inside Sapienza university, one with students originally from Rome, and one with fuorisede, students who moved to Rome to attend college, Roman students not surprisingly were the ones aware of the housing speculation and of the activist groups in the neighborhood. They were informed regarding the death of Desireè, and how risky the neighborhood can be during the night. Although they were aware of the negative effects of nightlife and how that can impact the life of other demographic groups, they never expressed their own guilts during the interviews as they admittedly are the ones that “consume” nightlife. However, that nightlife is a very felt problem among older residents is clear. Many bans and street signs advocate against unregulated drinking. For instance, a sign on Via dei Volsci reads, “We want to sleep, sleeping is our right!”

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7 \( \text{Mq}^2 \) (square meter) is the equivalent of 10.76 square feet. Therefore, 80\( \text{Mq}^2 \) correspond to 861.11 square feet.
8 My translation from Italian: “Vogliamo dormire, dormire è un nostro diritto.”
one female student living in a student accommodation in Via Cesare De Lollis said, “Last year was very scary to come home at night, but after she (referring to Desireè) died the police came. Now I feel a little bit more secure, but drug dealers approaching me on the streets are still a problem.”

Results from the 37 surveys carried out in the neighborhood showed that 84% of the respondents consider that there is an actual problem between students and the older residents of the neighborhood. Further, of those who responded affirmatively, 35% specified that the issue among groups is due to nightlife, drug and alcohol consumption and student life in general. In addition, a young female respondent who lived for more than 15 years in the neighborhood stated that the different use which students and families make of Piazza dell’Immacolata9 is a clear sign of the degrade of the neighborhood. “You never see them together”, she said, “when one group is here the other seems to disappear from San Lorenzo.” What is particularly striking is that of the 35% of respondents who agreed regarding nightlife as being an unresolved issue for the neighborhood, all except one were students of Sapienza University. This shows how students, although aware of the issue, are not able to fix the situation on their own by providing a different set of opportunities for themselves and cooperating with older residents. In addition, in light of Coleman’s (1988) theory on social capital and the dividedness that it could bring, San Lorenzo seems to be a clear example of it. People are divided in age groups and are either unwilling or unable to cooperate for the better wellbeing of everybody. To make the matter worse, 51% of the people surveyed either do not believe or do not know whether there is a network of communal help among residents. Furthermore, 62% of respondents never offered or received help by their neighbors in the last three months. The lack of mutual help among citizens disfavors trust, consequently leading to a split neighborhood. According to Putnam, trust and cohesiveness are key components for the

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9 Piazza dell’Immacolata is a central square in San Lorenzo who gathers families and pensioners during the holy days of mass while also being a meeting point for youngsters during the night due to the many bars nearby.
development of social capital. Further, 62% of the people interviewed have never participated in the activities promoted by any of the community groups of the neighborhood, and 30% participate seldomly. Finally, only 8% participate regularly in the activities offered. Regarding the biggest of the networks inside San Lorenzo, the *Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo*, 89% percent of the respondents never participated. Meanwhile, of the 11% of the people who participate at their meetings and initiatives, none where university students aged 18-25 and enrolled at Sapienza University. There is a clear-cut line between students, who seems to gather only around university hotspots and the rest of the population, who is keener to participate in the initiatives promoted by local community groups.

Table 1: Life and Participation in San Lorenzo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is there an issue among residents in the neighborhood</th>
<th>The issue regards student habits (Out of 84% of Yes)</th>
<th>Existance of a netwrok of help in the neighborhood</th>
<th>Received help from neighbors</th>
<th>Pariticipate in communal life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No %</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes %</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relevant to the degradation debate in San Lorenzo is the case of Ex Dogana, which used to be the core of the urban nightlife in the neighborhood for the past years. Slightly more than half of the respondents considered Ex Dogana a meeting point for students, while the other half...
considered the place a source of urban degradation. The following question in the questionnaire dealt with the future of Ex Dogana as The Student Hotel. The response was evenly divided, and two people refrained from answering. 29% of respondents said that neither Ex Dogana nor the Students Hotel were positive solutions for the neighborhood. 32% stated that the Student Hotel would worsen the living conditions of the neighborhood, and it would be better to keep the Ex Dogana in place. Finally, another 32% believed the Ex Dogana to be positive for the neighborhood and should have been kept in place. Of these 32%, 12 out of the 37 people questioned, 9 were Sapienza students of which 8 were non-Roman students. This is in line with the evidence found out during the focus groups. Fourisede or even students from the Erasmus program where less aware of the possible downsides that Ex Dogana may bring to the neighborhood. However, they are supposedly the gentrifiers, and findings reflects Annunziata (2008a) and Dent’s (1989) theories on gentrification. Because they are those who come and change the look of the neighborhood, for them the leisure place that is Ex Dogana brings no stress, so they are more apt towards welcoming activities of this kind. Moreover, during an interview with a former Ex Dogana female worker, she stated that the management of the venue was inadequate. Nevertheless, she preferred the place being a nightlife area able to produce economic growth for the neighborhood rather than being converted into The Student Hotel which she considered would have a worse impact for the neighborhood overall.

Finally, the gentrification literature discussed in the previous paragraphs broadly considered this urban phenomenon the cause of the excessive housing prices in the gentrified neighborhoods. This applies for San Lorenzo as well, where 54% percent of respondents admitted that housing prices are higher than what should be a fair asking price for a house or room in the area. Of those who responded yes, 35% expressly cited the student housing market as being the
major cause for such high prices. Moreover, one female respondent, a former student from Sapienza university, told the researcher that gentrification was the reason behind such inflated rent rates. Conversely, 30% believed that the asking price is just, and 16% of the people surveyed left the answer blank as they felt their knowledge of the subject insufficient in order to respond fully. Hence, half of the surveyed understood that there are some concerns regarding the housing market. However, their lack of participation as shown earlier translates to an incapability to mobilize for the cause. For Rotolo et al. (2010) homeownership is a key component determining the chances of people’s willingness to participate in the communal life of the neighborhood. Answers were equally split between owners and renters, 15 and 16 respectively. However, 5 surveyed preferred not to answer. In lights of those results, Rotolo et al.’s theory holds true. Indeed, data reveal that homeowners are also those who participate more often in the communal life of the neighborhood and have helped their neighbors in the last three months.

6.7 Observation Review

Observations in different occasions throughout the year have shown that the main actor striving for active citizenship and social capital is the aforementioned Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo. On several occasions, the researcher attended their meetings. The first ever recorded, dated April 2019, made clear what type of network the activist group is. Following Granovetter’s (1973) theory, it seems that the LRSL is a close network made mainly of strong ties. The group operates in the bigger network of neighborhood associations and social centers, yet they did not seem to be able to bridge their operations with other people and groups with either similar or different backgrounds and ideals. The first meeting attended was an open talk with book authors and citizens of San Lorenzo regarding the evolution of the Roman periphery. Although the event
aimed at informing and spreading awareness on the current state of many borgate, neither the organizer nor the guest speakers were willing to be interviewed regarding the urban changes of San Lorenzo, and very few filled the survey, showing signs of closure. The demography was characterized by a heterogeneous group gender wise, while the most dominant age was 35 to 50 years old with no university students attending. Moreover, the event was dedicated to the memory of “Bobo”, an historic resident of San Lorenzo who recently passed away. He was remembered with phrases such as, “He belonged to San Lorenzo more than these walls”\textsuperscript{10}, perhaps referring to the Mura Aureliane which surround a side of the neighborhood. The feeling of attachment to neighborhood was quite strong as some of the people who participated were born and raised in San Lorenzo.

The next meeting attended on the 7\textsuperscript{th} of July, 2019 was a public meeting in Piazza dei Sanniti regarding Scalo Lucani’s regeneration project led by the Rome City Council and open to proposals from interest groups. Even though expressly public, the meeting saw few participants counting around 15 people attending, like in other focus groups held by the LRSL. Almost all participants were representative of the different smaller networks inside the neighborhood like the social center Communia, the self-managed gym on Via dei Volsci, and the library in which the previously mentioned event was held. This shows a hierarchical structure within the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo and other minor players in re-directing power and attention to specific issues. Further evidence has demonstrated the closeness and the clique that this group is. A phrase by one of the managers of the LRSL said to pay attention when spreading information regarding Scalo Lucani’s requalification project proposed by them due to the fear of infiltrators within the community, who could have stolen ideas and reported to the II Municipio. The LRSL

\textsuperscript{10} My translation from Italian: “Lui era di San Lorenzo più di questi muri.”
remains mainly an isolated network in which strangers are seen with suspiciousness. Moreover, *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti* was often mentioned, which apparently does not only own the Ex Dogana area, but also parts of Scalo Lucani area. For this reason, *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti* seem to be the main “enemy” against the project proposed by the LRSL. In fact, the project that the *Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo* is trying to implement in Scalo Lucani is a public recreational and study area for adolescents aged 14 to 18 years old.

In the political arena of San Lorenzo’s urban renewal, the *Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo* is notably the weakest player as it faces pressure from entities such as the Regione Lazio, the City Capitol, the II Municipality of which San Lorenzo is part of, and finally many private and public investment funds, *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti* and the Student Hotel among many others, that lean towards a gentrification and neo liberalization of the area.

It is also worth taking notice that the project proposed by the network would leave a huge chunk of the actual population of San Lorenzo, namely university students, away from the project. The group indeed, perceives students as a threat for local residents. During all the field work inside the *Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo*, university students never participated to the meetings, and student activist groups such as Link Sapienza and others do not appear to be part of the network. In fact, during an interview with a Link Sapienza student member, she stated that the group was never able to reach to other networks such as the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo in order to cooperate and spread awareness on housing-related issues.

Furthermore, prior to the recreational project, the LPSL advanced the creation of a women resource center against abuse and sexual harassment. However, the project never took off due to the existence of a public owned center of the same kind in the area. This unknown other group never wanted another player in their area of work. Consequently, different groups from
different backgrounds seldomly cooperate for a greater good as they fight for power, spaces and legitimacy against each other. Of course, this is not in line with the social capital literature (Putnam, 1994; Coleman, 1988; Diamond, 1999) who unanimously mention cooperation as a key component to the success and promotion of social capital and wellbeing.

6.7.1 The Anatomy of Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo

Thus, the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo shows a hierarchical structure, while also being supported by external figures such as local Democratic Party actors and politically aligned journalists, who work as liaison persons, to use Granovetter’s (1973) terminology. The LSRL does not welcome other realities as those are perceived as a threat for the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo’s power asset. Furthermore, the group does not cooperate with the local Municipio or external associations like Retake Roma because they diverge in their political views and ideas. The Municipio was unwilling to sponsor a friendly all-female football match in memory of the bombings of San Lorenzo during WWII. Although the reasons for such denial were never discussed in the public meetings, the researcher assumes that behind such decisions remains the constant struggle of power and legitimacy between the Municipio and the LRSL, and on who can majorly shape the look of the neighborhood. This also contrasts the institutional view by Woolcock and Narayan (2000), who consider the dialogue between the public sector and interest groups a key component for the production of policies aimed at raising social capital rates. For the latter, Retake Roma is believed to do more harm than good in the neighborhood as they have divergent visions on the type of requalification practices the neighborhood needs. For instance, Retake Roma reportedly comes to the neighborhood to wash graffities from buildings. On the other hand, the LRSL prefers to leave graffities in place as they are considered to be part of the cultural heritage of the neighborhood. This again recalls Annunziata (2008a) considerations on
the *popolare*. The *Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo* themselves try to promulgate a particular vision of the neighborhood as a communal place where graffities supposedly represents a sense of freedom from authorities such as the Municipio II°. Nonetheless, this may even reinforce the desirability of the neighborhood as a vintage washed place for youngers, and in turn work against their same ideals of requalification while pushing for the studentification phenomenon.

Table 2: The hierarchical structure observed of the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo and its internal strong ties all located within San Lorenzo in order of relevance (left), and its external supporters with whom they do not constitute any bridges (right). On the top-right the supposed threats to LRSL power status quo.
6.8 Conclusion

San Lorenzo has often been regarded as one of the most politically active neighborhoods in Rome. Unfortunately, this definition does not persist in contemporary days. Of course, there are different actors such as university groups fighting for fair housing prices, neighborhood associations and major players like the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo that act as a container of ideas inside the neighborhood. However, except few instances such as university groups obtaining greater housing rights and fair prices for students, improvements related to the wellbeing of the neighborhood obtained through active citizenship, participation and thus social capital were mainly unsuccessful. To make the matter worse, players are not able to create a network of cooperation among different people in the area under scrutiny as animosities persist on different levels. Nightlife is an acknowledged issue by all demographics, but neither local groups or student activists could fix the problem. Further, these same groups have also seemed unable to prevent private and public speculators taking over chunks of the neighborhood, and transforming them into pubs, nightlife attractions and remunerative housing opportunities. During interviews, some offsite students lacked even a primitive knowledge of gentrification and of the urban transformation that occurred in San Lorenzo in the last decade. For many fuorisede, the actual urban atmosphere of the neighborhood as being a youth leisure container remains an unquestioned positive reality, ignoring that it could be intrusive to families and seniors who live in the neighborhood. In addition, the main player, the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo appears to be a close network with few bonds with external political parties only, but no actual “bridges” to other networks that would promote communion within the different strata of the population contrary to what Nicholls (2008) suggested. Instead, the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo appears more interested in few renewal projects, legitimacy and power dynamics over other local
political realities such as the Municipio IIº while also establishing itself as the main non-governmental actor as it does not welcome new networks like Link Sapienza and Retake Roma into the neighborhood.

San Lorenzo is far from being critically in danger; however, the state of things does not suggest any improvement. The impact of gentrification, nightlife and student purpose-built housing is expected to grow in the next years leaving less and less breathing room for residents as well as a foreseeable rise in housing prices. Families and elders have tried to prevent the gentrification phenomenon, but unsuccessfully as many have considered leaving the neighborhood the best option; data from the City of Rome have hinted. Direct observations suggest that activist groups like the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo have lost attachment to their local roots. While they aim at higher causes, they have shifted the attention away from more felt issues within the area. Their website reads partecipata in their front page, meaning open to the people. Yet, during meetings relatively few people attended, and there were never new faces joining the group. The pyramidal structure of the network makes it actually quite difficult for unknown local citizens to make their needs heard and presence felt as they would have to climb up the structure in order to change the current state of things, which is what social capital ultimately aims for.

To conclude, San Lorenzo has been torn apart by the housing market, gentrification and studentification, and the differences in lifestyle of the populations living inside the neighborhood. If public participation and social capital are the way to follow in order to re-equilibrate the current status quo, a different stance must be taken starting from a more collaborative position by all the people in the neighborhood, Sapienza university, the LRSL and local authorities included, and higher awareness of the real problems that have been afflicting the
neighborhood. After the 1943 WWII bombings, people unified to rebuild the neighborhood, perhaps it is time to do it again.
7. Case Study: Aurelio-Boccea

7.1 Introduction

Named after one of the main roads built during the Roman Empire, the Aurelio-Boccea neighborhood has been long considered one of the main residential neighborhoods outside of the city center and in close proximity to the Vatican City. Others consider Aurelio-Boccea the first peripheral neighborhood of Rome. Overall, the first urban settlements started during the 1920s and 1930s; before it was mainly an agrarian area. Nonetheless, since the 1970s the new Roman middle class established in the hood. Today, the area is quite different. Residents who have lived here for almost 30 years have now to co-live with the numerous flows of migrant families that started to settle in the neighborhood in the last decade. This, as well as other phenomena such as the particular nightlife of the youth living in the neighborhood contested by adults, the lack of intervention by the local municipality on public issues, and the degradation of the Cornelia underground station and the bus terminal have fomented a sense of abandonment and mortification among residents. The chapter will first briefly describe the contemporary geography of the neighborhood; second, it will provide a short background on the neighborhood committee or Comitato di Quartiere. It will then move on to the major concerns that have been afflicting the neighborhood in recent times such as the management of public goods, security and immigration. Finally, based on the literature mentioned in the previous chapters, an analysis on the current state of social capital and participation will be assessed by also commenting on the data obtained through interviews, participation at three neighborhood events and surveys so to study the efficacy of neighborhood participation in solving local issues.
7.2 The Aurelio-Boccea Neighborhood

The Aurelio neighborhood is a vaster area compared to that of San Lorenzo and with no physical barriers whatsoever. As a result, the geographical boundaries are that of the XIII Municipality of the City of Rome. Broadly speaking the area of inquiry is limited by the Pineta Sacchetti natural reserve, Via di Boccea, Piazza Irnerio and the underground station of Baldo Degli Ubaldi. Within this area three points of interest are crucial as they represent the core of the communal life of the neighborhood. First, the underground metro station of Cornelia, alongside the terminal hub for buses, is largely utilized by the inhabitants of the neighborhood in order to commute to the city center for work, education or leisure purposes. Second, the Pineta Sacchetti which is a vast green area and the adjacent Piazza Pio XI. Finally, the church Santa Maria Immacolata di Lourdes on Via Santa Bernadette that has been for more than two decades the fulcrum of the social life in the neighborhood. As a result, the neighborhood committee Comitato di Quartiere N.S.L–Albergotti meets exclusively there.

According to a 2016 study, the Municipio hosts 134,147 residents with a very low natality rate (Roma Capitale, 2017b, pp. 8, 16). Of these residents, 13.7% is of foreign origin, the fifth higher percentage for all of the 15 official municipalities of Rome. The three highest nationalities are, in order, Romanian, Filipinos and Bangladeshi (Roma Capitale, 2017a, pp. 9, 11). The theme of immigration will be discussed later in the chapter as it seems to be a major concern for Italian residents. In addition, other issues perceived by residents regard safety, and the urban requalification of the green area of Pineta Sacchetti.
7.3 The Neighborhood and Neighborhood Committee

Marrone (2013) refers to the neighborhood as a material place, an area easy to identify geographically in which bonds and ties among residents are created. Furthermore, a neighborhood is an area in which people can express a sense of security and attachment. In fact, the neighborhood is a place of communion where sense of belonging and social cohesion might lead to customary norms of collectivity, safety and mutual help. In turn, this results in what is referred to as “collective efficacy” (Sampson and Graif, 2011, p. 1581), the collective willingness to participate for the well-being of the neighborhood. Collective action is usually understood as being issue-oriented such as civic engagement in maintaining public order. The efficacy is measured through institutional presence and active participation of the residents involved. Similarly to Rotolo et al.’s (2010) account of participation and homeownership, Sampson and Graif (2011) considered homeownership a variable that would positively influence collective efficacy.

7.3.2 The Formal Establishment of the Neighborhood Committee

The formation of a Comitato di Quartiere usually follows three phases (Marrone, 2013). First, it is a normative act. Although it is a spontaneous aggregation of neighbors, the issuing of a formal contract is always necessary. The committee is, formally, a local political institution which may also be non-politically aligned, but it still retains political action as one of its forms of action. Moreover, it will contain a statute or a constitution describing the actors, provisions, internal regulations and customary norms of the committee. Third, there is a historic evolution of the committee. In other words, the evolution regards all of the critical issues and events that have made the Comitato di Quartiere start and evolve throughout time, leading to its current state.
While the first two acts are similar to all neighborhood committees, the historical evolution is “contingent” (Marrone, 2013, p. 138) to each of them, meaning that each neighborhood committee will evolve in a different way depending on the circumstances. Last, consequentiality (Marrone, 2013) defines the operational ways of the committee and the consensus from citizens. This would in turn affect future decisions and functions of the Comitato di Quartiere itself.

7.4 Pressing Issues in Aurelio

During the interviews which took place during neighborhood committee meetings, it emerged that the major concerns for the Aurelio citizens were the current abandoned status of the local Greenwood and of the adjacent auditorium, the pollution of the underground hub, safety and immigrant communities living in the area. In order, the Pineta Sacchetti, is a vast area of almost 240 hectares which was considered by many of the residents interviewed as a polmone verde, meaning a vast green area where people could go to catch a break from the city, and where many used to bring their kids to play. Next to it, the Auditorium on Via Albergotti, a cultural venue built by the City of Rome in 2003 costed around 600,000€, that was however never inaugurated. In 2005, it became known in the local news for the aggression of a 17yrs old girl by her peers. Lastly, in 2016, the Auditorium went on fire, and as of 2019 it is still in an abandoned state (Savelli, 2016).

The second issue that has been widely agreed to be a major issue for the neighborhood is the Cornelia metro station and the bus terminal. The terminal is located in Circonvallazione Cornelia, a huge square surrounded by four-to-six storey building. Residents have lamented for a long time against the noise and high level of pollution that the buses produce from the early
morning to midnight. Indeed, residents considered the quality to life in the neighborhood insufficient, and public transportation was among their main concerns.

Then the issue of safety is strongly felt by the families and the elders of Aurelio. The main fear is the lack of police patrolling, and the lack of safety felt when coming home at night. In addition, many seniors lamented young adults’ nightlife to be associated with the lack of safety in the neighborhood. Moreover, there has been a wide discontent with the Roma people living in the neighborhood as well as concern with the integration of new immigrant families now residing in the neighborhood, mainly from the Filipino community.

7.5 The Filipino Community

The Filipino community is among the biggest and most numerous in Rome. According to an official demographical study carried out by the City of Rome in 2016, the Filipino community is estimated to be the second largest following the Romanian one. The Filipino people account for slightly more than 11% of the total foreign population in Rome, or 41,000 people (Roma Capitale, 2016, p. 9). For the Municipio XIII, that of Aurelio-Boccea, Filipinos are the second most numerous foreign community with just under 3,000 people residing in the neighborhood (Roma Capitale, 2016, p. 11).

Nguyen Long (2011) followed the Filipino community in Rome and found that the Filipino network enjoys great levels of social participation. However, this does not translate to high rates of participation in Rome’s political arena. The reason for the lack of participation in the formal political arena of Rome is to be found in Filipinos’ lack of interaction with Italian nationals in a politically informative environment although a vast majority of Filipinos are still employed as domestic helpers of Italians according to Nguyen Long (2011). Therefore, Nguyen
Long described the Filipinos as people “placed silently and invisibly in the homes of their employers” (2011, p. 16).

She described the type of network that the Filipinos have put in place as *bayanihan*, a Filipino term meant for assistance of neighbors through a system of cooperation and inclusive activities (Nguyen Long, 2011, 16). The isolation of the Filipino network proves Coleman’s (1988) social capital theory. A type of social capital that works internally as a promoter for jobs and contacts, but that is also unable to perform at the bigger scale, lacking the capacity to communicate with networks completely different from that of origin. The outwards inefficacy to build relationships, does not translate internally, where the network is made up of smaller cluster networks based on geographical proximity, which helps coordinating the community. Their struggles to move outwards and create bridges between them and other networks made them strengthen and embed their internal network even further. Indeed, the network shows high levels of reciprocity and interpersonal exchanges, supposedly bulging upward mobility and communication (Nguyen Long, 2011). Their level of connectedness and mobility reaches as far as the Filipino embassy in Rome. Moreover, the accessibility to the network by newcomers is eased by the Filipino Newspaper *Ako ay Pilipino and Kabayan*. It provides translations and suggestions regarding Italian policies from Italian to the Tagalog language, the most spoken language by Filipinos, in order to favor integration and understanding of the Italian bureaucratic system (Nguyen Long, 2011).

Nevertheless, despite their great internal cohesion, the Filipino community has yet to be able to reach other social networks of Italians. It is perhaps due to this lack of mutual cooperation between the Filipino and the Italian parts that the Aurelio-Boccea neighborhood committee regarded them as a source of supposed devaluation of the neighborhood.
7.6 Data Review

Results from the random surveys carried out in the neighborhood demonstrate very low rates of participation and activism among residents in the communal life of the neighborhood. In fact, 37% of the surveyed stated that they have never participated in at least one event during their residence in Aurelio. 31% have joined very seldomly. While only 10.5% of the respondents said to have participated often to neighborhood activities. Furthermore, there is a pattern of answers as those that have stated to have never participated also stated that the Comitato di Quartiere does a poor job in promoting and actively trying to engage people in their initiatives, underlining the incapability to enlarge the network of participants. Overall, the Comitato di Quartiere was judged poorly by the residents interviewed when asked how the committee helped improving the quality of life of the neighborhood, too. On a scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent), data reveal that 42% gave the neighborhood committee a grade of 1, and 31% gave it a 2 out of 5. Grades of 3 and 4 were given by 10.5% of the surveyed. The best grade, 5, was given by only 5% of the respondents.

Furthermore, 58% of the people surveyed believed that there was a network of communal help and trust among residents. All of the people who responded “No” were aged 18-25 years old in the survey. Thus, data indicates that collective trust and mutual cooperation are present only in older demographics in the neighborhood. Besides that, 68% of the interviewed either felt pride or emotional attachment to the neighborhood of Aurelio-Boccea. Instead, of the 32% of the respondents who did not feel attached to the neighborhood, the demographic shows that they are either people of a young age (18-25 years old), or they were originally from a different region of Italy and moved to the neighborhood just recently. Social capital develops through relations over
time, and data confirm this statement. It takes time in order to build a network of effective relationships and sense of belonging.

The issue regarding Pineta Sacchetti and the local Auditorium was the most felt among most of the respondents. Although 63% positively acknowledged the efforts made by the neighborhood committee in requalifying the greenwood through past summer initiatives such as anniversary parties and fire watching in the greenwood, 68% of the respondents judged negatively the attempts made by the network in order to fix the issues related to the Auditorium nearby. However, it must be taken into account that the Auditorium is an issue that needs more work and governmental and administrative know-how as it is a city-owned building. The neighborhood committee must be able to dialogue with higher political authorities such as the City Capitol and the XIII Municipio in order to be effective and relevant on the issue. Indeed, 79% of the respondents judged poorly the job done by the Comitato di Quartiere so far in mediating between the needs and requests of the population and the City Capitol. To sum up, the neighborhood committee seems effective in doing small-scale local requalification for the neighborhood and servicing people, according to the questionnaires. Nevertheless, it fails to reach to bigger political players in Rome when addressing issues of higher institutional relevance. Moreover, they fail to enlarge their network as data reveal that many very seldomly join the committee.

When respondents were asked about security and immigration respond were mixed. 74% of the interviewed considered immigration and nightlife a serious danger for themselves. In addition, of those who responded yes, 42% specifically cited the Roma people living near the greenwood and the metro station Cornelia as the major source of threat and insecurity in the
neighborhood. Nobody mentioned the Filipino community as a possible menace to their lifestyle, which is in contrast with what emerged during the meetings held by the *Comitato di Quartiere*.

Security-wise, 52% surveyed believed that more police patrolling was needed in the neighborhood. What is particularly striking is that the majority of the people who felt unsafe in the neighborhood were people aged 18-25 years old (around 70% of the yes respondents), contrary to the popular belief that families and elders are the ones more concerned with their personal security, and who feel more threatened by external forces such as immigration and nightlife as previously reported in San Lorenzo. Indeed, in San Lorenzo mainly elders and families were the ones who felt more unsafe. Moreover, the threat came from youth nightlife. Instead, in Aurelio-Boccea findings show that youngsters are the ones who feel more threatened. However, the source of such fears was never mentioned in the questionnaires.

**7.7 Observation Review**

Three separate meetings were attended over the course of a year to assess participation rates and effectiveness of the *Comitato di Quartiere*. The three meetings focused on three different topics. The first was a debate over Pineta Sacchetti and the Auditorium, the second dealt with the supposed state of abandonment of the neighborhood, and finally the last one dated October 2019 was a public gathering meant as a neighborhood party.

Broadly speaking, all the meetings were characterized by the same type demographics (35 to 70 years old) and an attendance between 40 to 70 people. Notably, youngsters never attended any of these meetings. Moreover, ties-wise, the frontrunners of these meetings were always the same three families, all of which live in the neighborhood for two decades now. These figures are very well known among the residents of the neighborhood, and they were
called by nicknames during the events. Thus, the network structure resembles that of
Granovetter’s (1973) close-knit communities with no liaison persons, but rather a relationship in
which these actors were considered of higher status compared to the rest of the neighborhood
committee. For instance, during the panels on the Auditorium, Jimmy, one of these principal
members, who has also a past as a member of local political parties, made several speeches in
which he explained the current situation of the building and the management by the XIII
Municipio and the City Capitol. Afterwards, people asked what were the renewal plans that he
and the rest of the heads Comitato di Quartiere had planned in order to start the requalification
of the area. Therefore, the decisional power rests in the hands of the most prominent members,
who perhaps are also the founders. He is very trusted among participants, but levels of
reciprocity are low. The Comitato di Quartiere looks more like a vertical rather than the
horizontal networks described by Putnam (1994). Decisional powers rests in the hands of the few
on top as people entrust them on decisions over local issues.

Although Jimmy seems to enjoy high legitimacy within the committee, he expressed
several times how he was not able to reach either the City Capitol or the Municipio to request the
accesso agli atti, meaning the legal papers concerning the Auditorium. The plan of the
committee was to reevaluate the purpose of the space near the Pineta Sacchetti and the
Auditorium. Their efficacy is confined to a neighborhood level as they are unable to find bridges
to reach bigger political arenas, namely the City Council and the Municipio, and propose to them
their initiatives. Apparently, the Comitato di Quartiere initiated a series of surveys made in late
2018 in order to understand people’s feels regarding the future of the venue. However, no
evidence of such surveys was ever found. Moreover, the main idea was to transform the
asphalted area into an “ecological island” for seniors and kids, but it was never implemented.
Seniors were indeed the most active demographics during meetings. Interestingly enough, the most common question regarding the Auditorium project by participants was “Quanto è costato?”. A psychological fear rested throughout the whole meeting. People were interested to know how much of the money they paid in taxes were spent on to the failed Auditorium. That made clear how for them the failure of the Auditorium was not only a missed chance of improving the wellbeing of the neighborhood, but also a monetary loss out of their own pockets.

Finally, during the first meeting a short section was dedicated to the Filipino community living inside the neighborhood. People lamented the immigrant community because of their apparent usage of the greenwood. In fact, Filipinos often organize community events, festival and barbecues inside Pineta Sacchetti, and the committee highlighted this as a source of dirtiness and environmental pollution due to the trash amounting from these events. Nonetheless, it must also be noticed that the Comitato di Quartiere never organized a festival of their own in the greenwood during the whole year of field research.

The second meeting, dated June 2019, was held in the local church just like the prior meeting. Religious associationism indeed still resists as a strong component for the Comitato di Quartiere of Aurelio-Boccea, as Putnam mentioned in his Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (1994). In the past, residents funded the maintenance of the soccer field of the parish on their own when they were made aware that the church was not able to cover all the expenses.

The meeting was heated due to the delicateness of the matter. Likewise San Lorenzo, environmental degradation, immigration and nightlife remain the most pressing issues in the neighborhood. Residents shouted and were very vocal against the municipal police and local

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11 Translation of “How much did the Auditorium cost?”
authorities for their lack of patrolling in the neighborhood. People lamented drug abuse, minimarkets and alcohol vendors and bars, accused of serving drinks to young adults and to the children of the participant themselves. Moreover, in order to fix the issue a neighborhood watch was proposed, which however never took place to this date. Further, due to the presence of Roma groups living in campers nearby the local metro station and accused of stealing copper, shopkeepers requested the use of cameras, while others asked repeatedly to “take back our neighborhood,” and, referring to the local street vendors, “That guy does not sell a thing! He’s a drug dealer!” It remains to be seen how accurate these concerns are as no major incidents comparable to Desireè’s death occurred in the neighborhood. Yet, an increase of patrolling was noticed over the summertime in the area.

Many also made the neighborhood committee accountable for the lack of civic culture in Aurelio. This is in line with the surveys, where 63% of the respondents believed that the Comitato di Quartiere did not promote civic activism whatsoever. Neighbors understand the many possibilities that building a civic community can give to them, and how a bonded and trusted neighborhood can improve quality of life. However, neither them nor the neighborhood committee seemed able to find a solution during the second public meeting. No bonding events were proposed, nor were requalification initiatives undertaken afterwards.

Finally, in October when the Comitato di Quartiere organized a public party in Piazza Pio IX, a square near Pineta Sacchetti. It was not a political occasion as none of the above issues were ever mentioned throughout the whole event. It was rather a communal event where people brought sweets and dishes. It was also the first time that families brought kids to the committee’s events, and a few adolescents were present. Differently from the event in June, people were more

12 My own translation of the Italian “Riprendiamoci il territorio” and “Quello non vende niente! Quello spaccia!”
cohesive and talkative with each other; perhaps underling that a more familiar and joyful environment may settle some of the animosities between residents on the aforementioned issues. However, no Filipino families participated to this and to the other two meetings. Only during the last minutes of the public meeting one of the organizers decided to discuss the issue on nighttime safety, which was positively acclaimed by neighbors. The Comitato di Quartiere seemed willingly to improve safety, but no new ideas or initiatives were presented. To conclude, the last meeting looked more like a neighborhood block party to gain more visibility and build legitimacy among residents rather than a formal discussion on what ought to be done in the neighborhood.

7.8 Conclusion

To conclude, the neighborhood Aurelio-Boccea and its committee seems two sided. On the one hand, the people on top seems to receive high praises by the residents. On the other hand, we see a vertical and hierarchical structure of the Comitato di Quartiere with few leaders and just beneath them the rest of the population, with no intermediaries. Furthermore, it does not have the same power that the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzno enjoys in terms of external resources and outreach. Aurelio-Boccea’s committee remains confined within the geographical boundaries of the neighborhood. It is indeed unbale to link to external players. The actors who are well established inside the area become instantly powerless when they confront other political realities, showing no institutional bargaining power. Consequently, in the year of observation, the biggest of achievements was a lone neighborhood party event, and no political or social initiatives actually took place. In addition, although a lack of civic culture and initiatives were acknowledged, showing signs of interest for the overall neighborhood wellbeing,
people looked more concerned their own personal security and money expenses when dealing with delicate matters such as immigration and the Auditorium.

The animosities towards the Filipino community seem inexplicable to the researcher as there have never been reported issues between the two communities. It appears to be more an issue related to losing ground in a race on who the neighborhood belongs to that a real political and socioeconomic threat. The hypothesis is that neighbors in Aurelio-Boccea are having difficulties in adapting to the new environment of the neighborhood. The close-knit community of the Comitato di Quartiere is the results of years of internal aggregation and no external links. However, now that a new population with its own network is establishing itself in the neighborhood, long-time residents are unable to open their community to these new people. In addition, due to the inward nature of the Filipino community, we now see two communities that struggle to find a communal ground through which the establishment of a prosperous relationship is possible.

Coleman (1988) noticed how one’s social capital can be detrimental to others and this seems to be the case. Moreover, Diamond (1999) described social capital as an intermediary figure between society and authorities. Nevertheless, in Aurelio-Boccea the efficacy rate is so low that no intermediation is ever possible. Finally, almost two thirds of the people interviewed were owners of the apartments in which they lived. Even though interests are at stake, and Rotolo et al.’s (2010) argument that homeowners are more inclined to participate is valid here, the efficacy of such participation is questioned. In Aurelio attendance was generally higher than the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo’s meetings, but that did not translate to a more successful neighborhood in terms of social capital. The lack of activities shows that no matter people’s
interest in participating, it is their overall ability to perform initiatives that outlines the efficacy of the neighborhood committee.
8. Conclusion

This research aimed to identify how active participation and social capital can help improve conditions in two neighborhoods in Rome, San Lorenzo and Aurelio-Boccea. Based on an analysis of primary quantitative and qualitative data, it was concluded that although participatory forms were present, these were too weak and disorganized to produce effective improvements for the community of residents. In San Lorenzo, results indicate that the main network of participation, the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo, is a vertical network which is more interested in establishing itself as a relevant political player in the local debate against other formal actors like the Municipality and private investors such as the Cassa Depositi e Prestiti instead of implementing a horizontal network of cooperation and mutual help in the area. Surveys indicated that nightlife and housing were two pressing concerns in San Lorenzo. However, the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo did not sponsor any activity to answer residents’ needs during the year of research. Moreover, the network features mainly close relationships and few bridges to sister organizations in the neighborhood. Indeed, it does not welcome other players inside its structure. For instance, they have never partnered with Link Sapienza, a student organization. The latter group produced some interesting results by decreasing housing prices for students by partnering with housing unions, contrasting the gentrification process. Yet, the LRSL never opened up to them; the network perceives students living inside the neighborhood as a threat to their stability. Both networks understand neoliberalism and gentrification for being detrimental for San Lorenzo; however, they remain distant although they are contesting the same actors, the Cassa Depositi e Prestiti and The Student Hotel.
By observing Aurelio-Boccea residents and their neighborhood committee it was found that the network is made up of few important members and then the rest of the community, leaving a huge space in the middle. These few orchestrate the activities of the community without linking back to neighbors. Furthermore, they do not enjoy political bargaining power against the Municipality when dealing with issues specific to the neighborhood, like the local greenwood and Auditorium. Moreover, during community meetings people seemed very averse to the Filipino community, but the reasons for such divergence seem more psychological rather than a concrete threat to the overall security of the neighborhood. Indeed, residents were more worried of their personal interests being at stake instead of those of the community as a whole. For them, the burning of the Auditorium was more a matter of taxpayers’ money than a lost opportunity for improving the overall quality of life of the neighborhood. Similarly, the sense of perceived urban degradation related to foreign communities living in the area resides on a lost sense of belonging, if not of owning the neighborhood. Newcomers and their practices do not appear to have been accepted by long-tenure residents.

To conclude, there is a gap in knowledge between social capital and gentrification studies, especially related to the question of the city of Rome. There are certainly valid scholarly materials on the matter, but these are too few to provide a round understanding of social capital in relation to neighborhood activism and gentrification. Social capital scholars mentioned in the thesis all refer to active citizenship as a great provider of communitarian wellbeing and growth. However, they failed to acknowledge that participation will rarely make any changes per se. Not all types of participatory actions will provide the same set of changes and improvements.

The quality of participation is the key component to determine the success or failure of any neighborhood committee. Vitale (2007) acknowledged that the formations of neighborhood
committees to discuss local urban themes does not grant success, but it is one of the steps needed to make public local issues. It must be also noted that, representation does rarely include all group of citizens. Indeed, neighborhood networks claim to speak for the people living in the neighborhoods, but in neither the neighborhoods there has been a political decision or vote which entrusted the networks as the political speaker of the entire neighborhood (Vitale, 2007). It ultimately results in a matter of legitimacy.

A definition of quality of participation can be ascertained through the evidence collected in this thesis. Quality of participation stands for a network’s ability to gather resources and people in order to effectively shift the current social structure so to improve communal wellbeing. First, formal consensus is needed, or representation fails to be such as mentioned by Vitale (2007). Then quality is persistence of actions over time, meaning the more activities are held over the longest possible period of time, the higher the chances to influence the system. The study reportedly showed that networks failed to be constant in their operations, leading to isolated peaks of social capital. Social capital must be fed and managed over time. In addition, neighborhood networks work within a structured political arena made of bigger players such as the state, policies, local municipalities and stakeholders. Here, in order to be relevant, a neighborhood committee must be able to “enter and navigate” the urban regime (D’Albergo and Moini, 2015), meaning the thick strata of political relationships that effect the planning and decision-making concerning the development of cities. Once committees are acknowledged by bigger parties then they can start to have an impact over the system. Again, acknowledgement comes from presence in the system. The more actions are undertaken, the more visibility is gained. In addition, quality is also determined by the bridges a network possesses. Close networks, both the literature (Granovetter, 1973) and the case study of Aurelio-Boccea have
shown, usually fail to exercise change. Through bridges, support and legitimacy are built. Finally, political legitimacy is the tool to obtain acknowledgement and bargaining power over bigger networks within the system, authorities and stakeholders. In the cases analyzed, networks failed because unable to reach formal authorities and bargain with them over neighborhood related issues.

Both Aurelio-Boccea’s committee and the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo did not seem to have a clear plan of action in order to publicize their operate. Moreover, people inside Aurelio-Boccea’s Comitato di Quartiere are very disjointed as membership is divided between few main actors and a majority of passive citizens, leaving the network without external bridges. In the Libera Repubblica di San Lorenzo no citizens are involved in the decision making but only representatives from other smaller networks, resulting in a clique. In Aurelio-Boccea, the network failed to reach the local municipality in order to propose changes. Hence the network was alienated from the system. For San Lorenzo, the network examined, although it possesses formal ties with local parties’ actors, it is still unable to have bargaining power against the City Capitol or Sapienza University over the urban planning of the neighborhood. Consequently, both networks were only able to accomplish few initiatives over an entire year. In addition, all were parties and not issue-oriented initiatives regarding any of the problems concerning the respective neighborhoods. The quality of their actions analyzed under the definition above proposed results very poor, leading to an ineffective type of participation. Further studies on the concept of quality of participation are needed to provide a better answer to many cases of active citizenship in Rome as well as the rest of the Global North.
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