

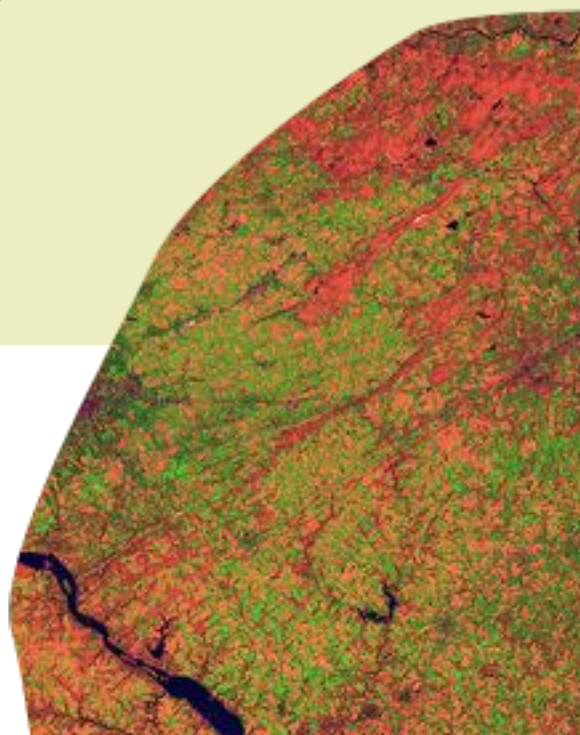
Title:

Author:

**Occupy Climate
Change (OCC!)**
*Grassroots initiatives
entry*



FORMAS



Terranostra Occupata

Ludovica Battista



Terranostra Occupata – Verde liberato autogestito, scene from the last meeting that took place in the area between the actors involved (February 2023), photo by the author

Where is this grassroots initiative implemented?

It is located in Via Boccaccio, Casoria, in the northern fringe of Naples, Italy. More precisely, the place is 200 meters from Casoria-Afragola train station. The place was chosen as it was regularly used as an illegal site for waste discharges, and as it looked to the activists particularly exposed to building speculation (Terranostra, 2015).

Who are the promoters? Who are the actors involved? What are their backgrounds?

In the Facebook page, this grassroots initiative is called *Terranostra Occupata*, which the author translates as “Occupied Ourland”. It is promoted by a group of active citizens, coming from local collectives and associations, and from diverse knowledges and backgrounds. The author recalls having heard during a meeting that the number of activists has been decreasing during the last years, as the place has been closed by the police due to lack of alignment with the municipality. In fact, the closing has led to a change in activities for the collective, now prevented from living the space and therefore active mainly externally in a struggle that lacks of a fixed operational base (as one can read on the Facebook page, the members of the group, and whoever is interested in helping their efforts

towards reclaiming the area as a common good, meet now occasionally in different venues around Casoria). The present situation has limited the possibility to engage with a larger public as it occurred when the occupation was still in place.

Who are the beneficiaries?

The inhabitants of Casoria, especially those who live in the outskirts of the town, whose urban structure, according to the site surveys by the author, lacks common open space and green space. Potentially, being situated near the train station, it could be also used by people from towns nearby.

How does this initiative engage with climate?

It is located in a conurbation whose lands have been covered in cement and waste throughout the years. Casoria is located in an area that has been defined as *Terra dei Fuochi* (“Land of Fires”). The activists want to counter-act the loss of collective agricultural infrastructures and the lack of livable green space. It also provides a refuge from summer heat to many neighbors: during the pandemic it has been one of the few if not the only place where people could find some free open space to inhabit together. This was an argument often repeated during a public assembly in winter 2023, which was convoked by the municipality to share with the activists and university professors the plan for an incoming “Boccaccio Park”. The site of *Terranostra* has in fact become the object of a design process for an “institutionalized” urban park, which is leading to an intense yet very difficult process of mediation between activists and the municipality. The area was previously a military fuel depot that had stayed closed for decades and deemed as contaminated. Despite the activists’ attempts to reclaim the soil, for instance through Phyto depurating and manually picking old waste, the levels of pollution of the site are eventually one of the reasons why the municipality has decided to close it during the design process.

Does it tackle mitigation, adaptation, both or other dimensions of climate change?

This initiative tries to integrate strategies to improve the quality of life for the citizens in the changing climate of the area, but its promoters also want to raise awareness on ecological multispecies relationships, soil and subsoil care, and biodiversity. The aim is to foster a change in lifestyles that can contribute to transform Casoria’s urban setting. It is worth mentioning that in this initiative the environmental justice and ecological conscience discourse are never separated from the dimension of the “commons”, central to *Terranostra*’s initiative.

What are the main objectives? What are the main values?

One can read on the external wall of *Terranostra occupata* in Casoria the writing “VERDE

LIBERATO AUTOGESTITO” (which can be translated as “self-governed liberated green”). Its main objective is building a space for socialising, defending and enhancing recovery processes for the few green areas of that territory.

Terranostra is contextualized in a broader Neapolitan network of grassroots organizations campaigning for commons for civic and collective use fighting to re-appropriate the collective heritage. *Terranostra*'s activists say they “would like a park with an agricultural traction, where people can cultivate and eat healthy food together, living in nature and spending convivial moments in the countryside,” even though they “are in the most built- up area in Europe.” Agriculture and zero-kilometer food are basic ingredient of their objectives, they are instrumental to the change they wish for. At the present, the activists and the Municipality are discussing the construction and management of the park. The activists ask to be included as participant observers and to be consulted before any unscheduled intervention on the present vegetation. They also demand the right to directly manage the place through the assembly of the users. The conflict is between the *Dichiarazione d'uso civico e collettivo* (Declaration of Urban Civic and Collective Use), proposed by the activists, and the municipality's *Patto di collaborazione* (Collaboration Pact), which sees the park as a property of the municipality to be entrusted to an individual, or a fixed group of individuals, i.e. an association). This conflict reflects an ongoing fight for a wider recognition of grassroots initiatives without paying the price of losing their original values. The aim is to find a management solution that building upon the heterogeneous and informal composition of activists' community could offer better and more flexible ways to care for the planned park.



View of the fruit orchard planted by the activists (February 2023),

photo by the author

What is the timeline?

The group of active citizens started caring for these five abandoned hectares in the summer of 2015. After years of struggles with the Municipality, in 2021 they were forced out, and now they are at the center of a delicate process of dialogue with the Municipality, as an institutional regeneration project is intended for this area.

Are there already visible effects?

As a person who has been there and talked to them and to their neighbors, the author can say that the activists of *Terranostra* made the five hectares (38,000 square meters) a true participatory laboratory for Casoria's people to know, contact, and care for their land. By giving life to a social garden and organizing many activities, they imagined a productive and biodiverse urban park. Many local people have started to spend a lot of time there, and care for this green area.

Which limits does it encounter?

The relationship between the activists and the Municipality has been problematic especially since their political background is clearly far from institutional politics. This happens in spite of being next to Naples, home to *Osservatorio e Rete dei Beni Comuni* – observatory and network on “Emerging Common Goods” (De Tullio, 2018), an observatory and network that has succeeded in establishing fruitful institutional synergies during the last ten years. . As previously mentioned, the site of *Terranostra* is presently the object of a design process for an “institutional” urban park, and therefore closed and inaccessible to the community. This forces *Terranostra* activists to try to steer the project from afar, in a situation that presents many uncertainties, hoping to be soon entrusted as the caring community of the new park.



Closed access to the area (February 2023), photo by the author

Are any shortcomings or critical points visible? What other problematic issues can arise from its implementation?

The impossibility to access the area is a significant limitation since the community is deeply connected to that place and the possibility to use it. The risk is that the activists' community might dissolve during the time needed for the construction of the park. In case the area is transformed into an urban park, it loses the agricultural drive that is crucial for the activists' political project. More in general, the institutionalization of the park will imply the imposition of rules, laws, and management that can drastically change the nature of the experience.

How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?

It could be replicated in other parts of the town and its hinterland,, which has a huge amount of abandoned lands, often used as illegal dumps, as this one was, and a huge lack of green space for its inhabitants. The history of *Terranostra* demonstrates that occupations of similar open spaces, can avoid that they become target for urban development and illegal dumping, Those areas can instead be transformed into centers for community sharing of knowledges and for fostering new multispecies relationships, they can become tools to challenge the present condition of urban spaces in a political and ecological perspective.

Is this initiative conducive to broader changes?

Yes, it is. Activists and engaged researchers -- including the author of this entry -- are negotiating with the municipality to introduce a set of regulations that will make possible for this community and for others to be recognized as a community of care for common lands. The result might be that more experiences like Terranostra can be generated producing better socioecological conditions, especially in low-income or hyper densely built contexts.

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