

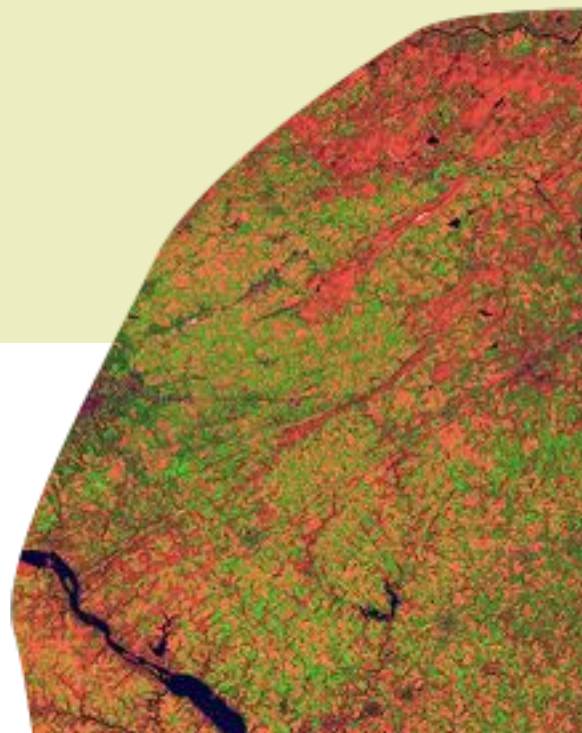
**Title:** Forty years of effort to safeguard  
the Caffarella Park

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



FORMAS



## Forty years of effort to safeguard the Caffarella Park

*by Marta Alimelli*

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The Caffarella Park is a piece of the Roman countryside that has remained unchanged over the centuries and is itself part of the largest park in Rome, the Appia Antica Regional Park. It covers approximately 300 hectares within the perimeter of the Italian capital and contains archaeological monuments of particular historical and cultural significance. Since 1984, the Comitato per il Parco della Caffarella, a voluntary association founded in the same year, has been carrying out intensive work to safeguard the park's natural, environmental and historical heritage through the contribution of the neighbourhood community and interlocutions with the institutions.



*Part of the Caffarella Valley and the Alban Hills in the background, by Marta Alimelli*



*Private orchards in the Caffarella area, by Marta Alimelli*

**Where this grassroots initiative is implemented? Who are the promoters?**

The regional park of the Appia Antica is located within the current IX municipality of Rome, in the south of the capital; in particular, the Caffarella area is located in the Appio-Latino district, reachable by walking from the Furio Camillo and Colli Albani stops of Rome's Metro A. The Comitato per il Parco della Caffarella (Committee for the Caffarella Park) was founded in 1984 by some youth from the neighbourhood who lived in the area facing the park, tired of witnessing the degradation in which the area had been deteriorating since the 1960s, at that time used as a garbage dump. Since 1995, the Committee has been registered in the Lazio Region's register of voluntary organisations, 'culture' and 'environment and nature' sections. Among the Committee's founding volunteers is the name of Mario Leigheb, after whom one of the widest avenues through the park is named. At the end of the 1990s, some members of the Committee created the cultural association 'Humus Onlus', which still operates in the area today, with the aim of taking over the direct management of the Caffarella valley and assuming the role of an active collaborator of the Appia Antica Regional Park and the Municipality of Rome, through cultural events, educational activities, and cleaning and securing the archaeological areas.



*Commemorative Plaque, by Marta Alimmeli*



*Sign announcing that “the committee has adopted this green aeria in order to redevelop it” by Marta Alimelli*

### **Who are the beneficiaries?**

Those who benefit the most from the Committee's activities are certainly the neighbourhood community and all the people who live in or frequent the area; but also those who visit Rome from another country, passing through the Valley, have the opportunity to experience the dedication that the Committee puts into safeguarding and preserving the area. Concrete examples of this are the many benches placed in the park's most frequented spots (especially those adjacent to roads), the dog areas, the play areas and the area equipped for outdoor training. Furthermore, a point of reference for the entire neighbourhood is ‘La Casa del Parco/Casale Vigna Cardinali’, the information and service point run by the Humus association, which, in addition to bicycle hire, cycle repair shop and guided tours, offers a refreshment area and space for organising events and presentations. This makes it very popular within the community because it is free and open to all and sundry; among other things, it is a very pleasant place to study. But in addition to human beings, non-humans can also enjoy the results of the Committee's efforts, because in the preserved unspoilt nature of the Caffarella they have the opportunity to live and build their own dimension: animals and plants coexist and collaborate in the creation of new relationships, including farms, educational gardens, undisturbed pastures and areas dedicated to the conservation of certain bird species.





*Access to the Casa del Parco/Casale Vigna Cardinali, by Marta Alimelli*



*Ship grazing in the Caffarella and one of the children's play areas in the park, by Marta Alimelli*

**How does this initiative engage with climate? Does it tackle mitigation, adaptation, both or other dimensions of climate change?**

The initiative strongly resonates with the fight against climate change accelerated by human activities, because since its conception, the Committee for the Park has fought and continues to fight against the pollution of land and water in the Caffarella Valley caused by human activities, giving Rome a green lung in which to find relief from the heat during the summer and to be able to breathe fresh air all year round. For example, it was in the 2010s that the Committee began its work, which is still ongoing, for the purification of the Almone river through petitions addressed to the Mayor of Rome and the President of the Lazio Region. The river, sacred to the ancient Romans, who every 27 March performed the 'Lavatio Matris Deum', a purification rite related to the cult of Cybele, was submerged by waste in the second half of the last century. From the moment the Committee for the Park began its work to recover the river, it was discovered that two neighbourhoods of Rome were discharging their sewage into the Almone. After about seven years of battles, including complaints, petitions

and solicitations to the Municipality of Rome, the Region, and the Public Prosecutor's Office, a new sewerage collector was started to stop this water pollution. In the meantime, work to clean the river of solid pollutants began in 2015. These interventions, financed thanks to citizens' donations, are repeated every few years because, unfortunately, there are people who keep throwing all kinds of waste into the water, which gradually accumulates on the banks of the river. Another action taken against environmental pollution was urging the Municipality of Rome in 2015 to move the car wreckers that were illegally operating within the perimeter of the Appia Antica Regional Park. After a few months, the same were seized by the Judiciary for environmental damage and in 2018 remanded for trial for soil pollution of the Caffarella and the Almone river.



*Portions of the Almone river, by Marta Alimelli*

### **What are the main objectives? What are the main values?**

The section of the committee's website dedicated to the history and values of the association states that the association was started with the aim of eliminating degradation, expropriating the area, creating a public park within the larger complex of the Appia Antica Park, and promoting the valuable historical-artistic-naturalistic heritage of the IX Municipality. Today, as for the past twenty years, they continue to pursue these goals of caring for the park, above all thanks to donations from citizens who enable the committee to purchase agricultural equipment, and not only that, for the maintenance of the fields and pathways, to collect and eliminate rubbish, and to make the green and play areas enjoyable. In addition, urging the institutions to monitor the pollution levels of the Almone river and to secure and restore unguarded archaeological areas remains fundamental.

### **What is the timeline? Are there already visible effects?**



As already mentioned, the Committee has been working since 1984 and the effects of its activities are clearly visible, because otherwise today the park would be overrun with waste and scraps produced by illegal activities, just as it was in the 1960s. From the second half of the 1980s until the end of the 1990s, the association was engaged not only in collecting signatures and petitions, but also in an intense activity of publications concerning the crucial natural and historical aspects of Caffarella. An example is the book 'La Valle della Caffarella - spiccioli di natura', the first monograph dedicated to the naturalistic and geological aspects of the park, published in collaboration with the WWF and issued in a second revised edition in 1997. Or the text on the historical-archaeological aspects of the Caffarella Valley and the Via Latina, entitled 'La Valle della Caffarella - la storia ci racconta', the publication of which was financed through the self-taxation of 50,000 Lire (= 25 euros) each by 249 citizens of the Appio-Latino district. Although the book did not receive any contribution from the institutions, the information it contained was made available to the City of Rome for the drafting of the Caffarella Utilisation Plan by the Environmental Protection Office. On 9 April 2000, the 'Parco Aperto' party was organised, with the contribution of the IX Municipality, for the inauguration of the opening to the public of the Caffarella Park, of which 70 hectares had then been cleaned up and made usable. During the first decade of the 2000s, the Committee continued its activities to disseminate the natural archaeological heritage of the Valley, through the publications and the organisation of events. At the same time, the creation of rest areas near the park entrances was carried out, with the placement of numerous benches and the planting of several trees. In addition, the insistent solicitations to the Municipality of Rome that led to the expropriation and consequent acquisition of an additional 40 hectares of land and a number of farmhouses, the most important of which is the Renaissance farmhouse of Vaccareccia, have been fundamental. As already mentioned, in 2010 actions began for the purification of the Almone river, which continue into the present, and those for moving the car wrecks outside the boundaries of the Appia Antica Regional Park. In the ten years that followed, and which are still ongoing, the activities of pressing the institutions and those of maintaining the valley, carried out thanks to the donations of citizens, have continued unabated: dirt roads have been re-surfaced, boundary walls re-established, access gates and buildings restored, and many green areas cleared and tidied up. In short, if it wasn't for the Caffarella Park Committee, Rome would not have this imposing and solemn piece of unperturbed nature within the city.



*Renaissance farmhouse Vaccarenccia, by Marta Alimelli*

**Who are the actors involved? What is their background?**

As will be understood, the actors involved in the Committee's activities are, first of all, the neighbourhood community, which, thanks to donations and voluntary work, does not fail to give strong support to the association. On the other hand, on an institutional level, the Municipality of Rome and the Lazio Region play a predominant role, to which all the Committee's requests flow.

**Which limits (institutional, physical, social, etc.) does it encounter? Are any shortcomings or critical points visible? What other problematic issues can arise from its implementation?**

The Committee mainly faces the limits related to the inactivity on the part of the municipality and cutbacks by the region. Over the years, the Committee has always used its grassroots power to move, often successfully, decisions on the part of the aforementioned institutions. Examples of this are the citizens' initiative question to the Mayor of Rome in 2011 for the construction of the sewerage collector mentioned above - a project approved by the Mayor only after being urged to do so by the Prefect of Rome, to whom the Committee had sent a complaint for not having received any response from the Mayor to the above-mentioned question - ; the denunciation presented, in 2016, by the Committee and the neighbourhood community to the Prosecutor's Office of Rome against the degradation of the Almone river; or again, in 2019, the mass sending of e-mails to the Mayor for the resolution of the problems related to the areas expropriated ten years earlier and for the restoration of municipal funds for the maintenance of the Park. It could therefore be said that the greatest criticality concerning the Committee's activity is its dependence on the behaviour of the institutions, since, despite the strong and heartfelt presence of the community, the management of the Caffarella cannot be carried out independently and without the action of the institutions, which should provide the primary sustenance for the safeguarding of the Park system.



### **How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?**

The power of this bottom-up initiative is, in addition to the restoration and preservation of the Park's environment, the creation of relationships within the neighbourhood and the awareness of citizens to safeguard their Park, also through the very bonds that are established between humans and non-humans. Whoever crosses the Caffarella feels part of something extremely unusual for a city, as if as soon as they set foot in the Valley they feel welcomed by the genuine energies of the non-human. And this would not be the case if forty years ago a group of young people had not mobilised to reclaim a piece of Rome's history and nature. So yes, the initiative would be potentially replicable in other settings, since its birth is due to the desire of young citizens to recover and defend a space, of a certain natural and cultural importance, that polluting and moreover illicit human activities were destroying. It would also be replicable because the Committee, despite being made up of a small number of people, has the support of an entire neighbourhood of Rome and this guarantees the initiative strong popular roots.

### **Is this initiative conducive to broader changes? If yes, which?**

The fact that the initiative has led to changes at the community level is unquestionable at this point, both in terms of raising awareness of the preservation of the park's heritage and in terms of political and economic commitment. But, given the incessant interlocutions with the institutions, the Committee's actions have also led to changes on an institutional and legislative level: an example of this is the Regional Resolution of March 2019, which establishes the management and preservation of specific portions of the Almone River by the Public Maintenance Service, and no longer the sole responsibility of the Committee.

### **References :**

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