

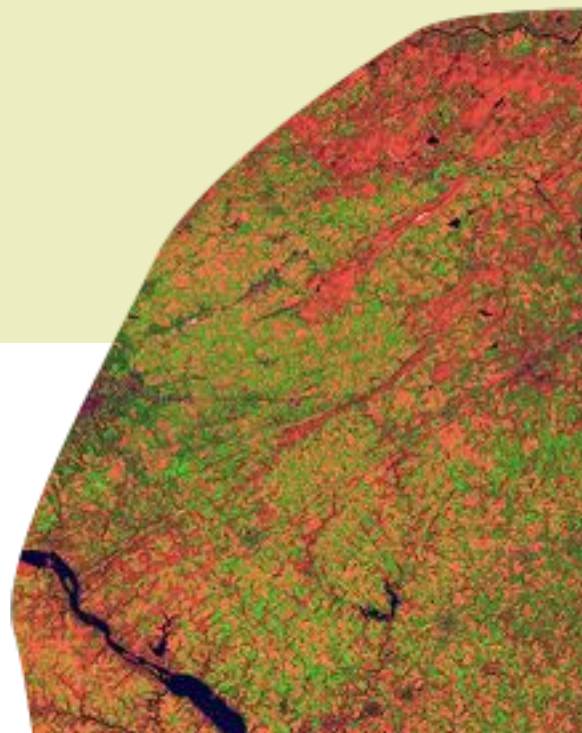
Title: Grassroots initiatives in Naples. The case of Masseria Antonio Esposito Farraioli: from confiscated asset to a place of care for community

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Grassroots initiatives in Naples
The Case of Masseria Antonio Esposito Ferraioli:
from confiscated asset to a place of care for community

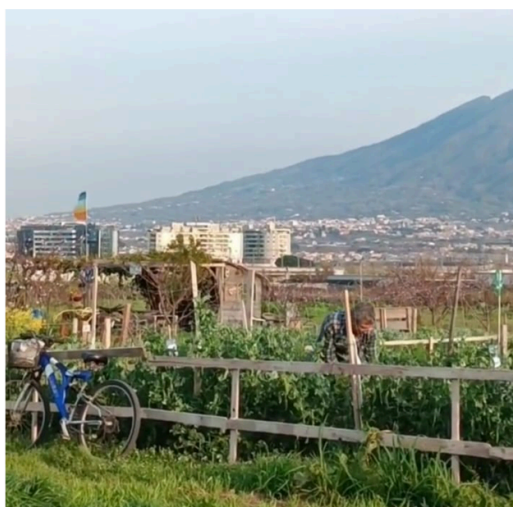
Giorgia Arillotta

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Where is this grassroots initiative implemented?

In the district of Afragola (Naples), stands the Masseria Antonio Esposito Ferraioli, an asset that was confiscated from the local organized criminals. Since 2017, it has been managed by a network of associations and cooperatives in partnership with local authorities and schools. Spanning 12 hectares, the Masseria is one of the largest confiscated assets in the area. Its grounds feature urban vegetable gardens, educational gardens, a biodiversity museum, beekeeping areas, and a 1,000-square-meter farmer house currently under renovation.

The Masseria is relatively easy to reach: it's about a 15-minute drive from the center of Afragola and only 8 minutes from the Casoria-Afragola railway station. It can also be reached on foot, though caution is advised as there are no pedestrian crossings along the route. The Masseria offers a green oasis, providing a peaceful refuge in a busy urban setting, with two bustling shopping centers and a major highway nearby.



1- Cultivated vegetable plots on the Masseria (march 2023). Photo by Giorgia Arillotta

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

In 2017, the Masseria Antonio Esposito Ferraioli was assigned, through a public tender, to the Associazione Temporanea di Scopo (ATS) for a period of 10 years. The ATS is led by the Consorzio Terzo Settore with CGIL Napoli, Radio Siani, the Associazione Sott'e'ncoppa, and the social cooperative L'Uomo e il Legno. The ATS that manages the Masseria brings together a network of actors who, through specific initiatives, promote legality and are committed to defending rights while building pathways toward inclusion and sustainability. The Associazione Sott'e'ncoppa promotes critical consumption and fair trade, raising

awareness on social and environmental issues. The Giancarlo Siani Social Cooperative, founded in 2012 in Ercolano, manages lands confiscated from organized crime, cultivating typical Vesuvian products, and working to promote legality and fight against the Camorra. The L'Uomo e il Legno Social Cooperative, active since 1995 in Scampia, operates a woodworking workshop focused on the social reintegration of individuals with substance abuse issues, as well as offering employment opportunities for former inmates. The "Terzo Settore" Consortium of Social Cooperatives, founded in 2002, focuses on social innovation, providing support for women, minors, and people with disabilities. The CGIL Naples is a trade union organization dedicated to defending the rights of workers and retirees. Since 2017, the Masseria has been part of Libera – Associazioni, nomi e numeri contro le mafie. Libera is an Italian network of 1,600 organizations committed to fighting organized crime and corruption. One of its first initiatives was a signature campaign in 1995, which collected over one million signatures in support of a proposed law enabling the social reuse of assets confiscated from the mafia. Thanks to this mobilization, the proposal became Law 109/1996, which governs the social reuse of assets confiscated from organized crime in Italy. Over the years, the Masseria's network has expanded to include other organizations involved in its projects and activities, including local associations, communities, universities, businesses, and schools.

Who are the beneficiaries?

The main beneficiaries of this initiative are the residents of Afragola, particularly young people, as the author noted. By participating in a workshop at a local school, it became clear for the author that many students identify the Masseria as a main space for gatherings. Providing opportunities for young people to meet and socialize, through cultural, musical, and artistic events. In 2023 there was 'Festival of the Suburbs,' a free music event dedicated to bands under 35 with workshop activities. Residents of other municipalities in the Naples metropolitan area also benefit from the initiative. For instance, external gardeners have rented plots to cultivate in the masseria, accepting the given guidelines to manage these. The author learned that a 50-square-meter plot of land, carefully tended, can provide enough food for a family of four to be self-sufficient and maintain a healthy, zero-mile diet.

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

The Masseria Antonio Esposito Ferraioli promotes impactful actions focused on both climate change mitigation and adaptation. As a matter of fact, 328 urban gardens, each 50 square meters in size, have been created, through an agricultural requalification of the confiscated land. With 308 of these rented from residents across the Naples metropolitan area. The idea behind these gardens emerged from a participatory design process that actively engaged local citizens. The gardens contribute both to soil regeneration and local biodiversity. More than 2,700 native trees were planted over time supporting biodiversity preservation. These activities enhance the environmental quality of the heavily urbanized area while also creating employment opportunities. The Masseria launched a project for prisoners called "Coltivazioni Motivanti" ("Motivating Cultivations"), providing them with training in agricultural techniques and practical skills for cultivating the gardens.

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

Based on in-person exchanges with the actors and past field observation, it is possible to affirm this project aims to promote a collective change by creating solidarity networks between local schools, associations, and citizens. Its main objectives include educating and raising community awareness on the social reuse of confiscated assets and how these assets can become valuable resources for the common wellbeing. The project also aims to tackle climate change by promoting sustainable practices and a circular economy that encourages environmentally responsible behavior. Another key element is to promote civic engagement and collaboration, encouraging citizens to take an active role in the management of shared resources, thus contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society. Through these objectives, the initiative aims to create sustainable social change in which everyone feels part of the change process.



2- Ortholan informs other farmers about what is growing in his garden (July 2024). Photo by Giorgia Arillotta

What is the timeline? Are there already visible effects?

Masseria Antonio Esposito Ferraioli, originally known as Masseria Magliulo, was confiscated from the Camorra Magliulo clan in 1998. Much of the area had been out of control for more than 25 years. The area had been occupied, partly abandoned or set on fire (Martone, 2022). Only in 2017 was it assigned to the ATS network and re-named after a local mafia victim. In Italy, assets confiscated from organised crime face long and complex legal and bureaucratic processes before they can be used for social purposes. In the case studied, part of the property remained in the hands of the former owners until 26 April 2023, when it was finally handed over entirely to the ATS. Today, a large part of the green area has been redeveloped and returned to the community as a gathering space, transforming a symbol of illegality into a

concrete example of social redemption. Ongoing projects include the renovation of the farmer house, financed with PON Legality funds, to create a support centre for women victims of violence, with family support services and work reintegration programmes. However, work is proceeding slowly, with those in charge denouncing on social media an ‘endless construction site’ that should have started as early as June 2018. On 8 November 2024, the construction site was completed and, after the inauguration, the author visited the farmhouse. During the visit, the Masseria managers pointed out that the interior spaces of the farmhouse are incomplete and need further work before they can be fully operational. Once completed, the ground floor will be transformed into a culinary workshop and agritourism, designed to enhance local gastronomic traditions. The area will include a foyer, a fully equipped kitchen and a dining room where visitors will be able to taste the products grown in the masseria's gardens. The upper floor, on the other hand, will be used as a shelter for women victims of violence, providing them with a safe and secure environment.

Which limits does it encounter? Are any shortcomings or critical points visible? What other problematic issues can arise from its implementation?

An important challenge is vandalism and intimidation by unknown persons, hindering the management of the confiscated property, and contributing to prejudices and stigma towards this reality. In July 2023, some as yet unknown people entered the farm and destroyed some areas intended for displaying produce. In a well-known newspaper, the author read that “all the plants were destroyed. Trampled, cut down and broken” (Di Caterino, 2023). This act of vandalism represents the fifth in a series of similar episodes that have occurred in the past, which the Masseria operators believe to be acts of intimidation by criminal organizations against the activities that take place there. Furthermore, the author points to difficulties in dialogue with institutions, which many Masseria operators see as obstacles in the long and arduous process of renovating the farmer's house. For example, delays in starting the work have risked the European funding of 1.5 million euros obtained for the project. This funding is intended to transform the house into a shelter for women and children who are victims of violence. The project also includes the construction of training classrooms and a bouvette, spaces designed to encourage the employment of fragile people. Had the funding been lost, all of these initiatives would have been compromised. There are currently ongoing tensions between the Masseria's operators and the Afragola municipal administration, related to a project to build a roundabout that threatens to damage the Masseria's gardens. This project further complicates relations and puts future initiatives of the Masseria gardens in serious difficulty. Among the visible critical issues related to the spaces, some people report concerns about the safety of the crosswalks necessary to reach Masseria from downtown Afragola without using a car. It is essential to find alternative solutions that ensure a safe connection between the surrounding area and the Masseria.



3-The educational garden of the Masseria (march, 2023). Photo by Giorgia Arillotta

How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?

The experience of the Masseria Antonio Esposito Ferraioli can be considered a significant case study of social reuse and a model that can be replicated in other areas of the city, particularly on confiscated assets in Afragola or Naples with similar characteristics. The regeneration of this confiscated asset shows how it is possible to transform sites symbolic of illegality into places of social inclusion, education, and sustainable development. The story of Masseria Antonio Esposito Ferraioli highlights the importance of well-coordinated collective action, involving the local community, institutions and associations, in order to give back to the community resources that have been stolen illegally. This type of project not only strengthens the sense of social justice, but also contributes to building a fairer and more sustainable future by promoting activities that enhance the territory. In particular, the ecological initiatives launched at the masseria, aimed at protecting biodiversity and raising awareness of environmental issues, are a fundamental pillar in ensuring sustainable development. Through the use of sustainable practices and the creation of spaces that encourage the active participation of citizens, the Masseria becomes a concrete example of how the regeneration of confiscated assets can become a strategic resource for the territory and an engine of positive change for the entire community.

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

Yes, this initiative contributes to broader changes. By transforming a property confiscated from organised crime into a place of social reuse, the Masseria contributes to raising public awareness on the management of assets confiscated from organised crime, while providing a reference point for other associations wishing to activate practices of social reuse of confiscated assets. Moreover, through sustainable agriculture projects, biodiversity protection

and actions to tackle climate change, the Masseria promotes environmental sustainability that improves the quality of the surrounding area. The case of Masseria Antonio Esposito Ferraioli emphasises that the success of social reuse depends on the ability of the actors involved to build collaborative networks and activate projects in relation to the context, enhancing existing resources and social networks (Berruti, 2021). Through shared care practices, these assets are transformed into symbols of liberation and change, contributing to the regeneration of the territory.

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