

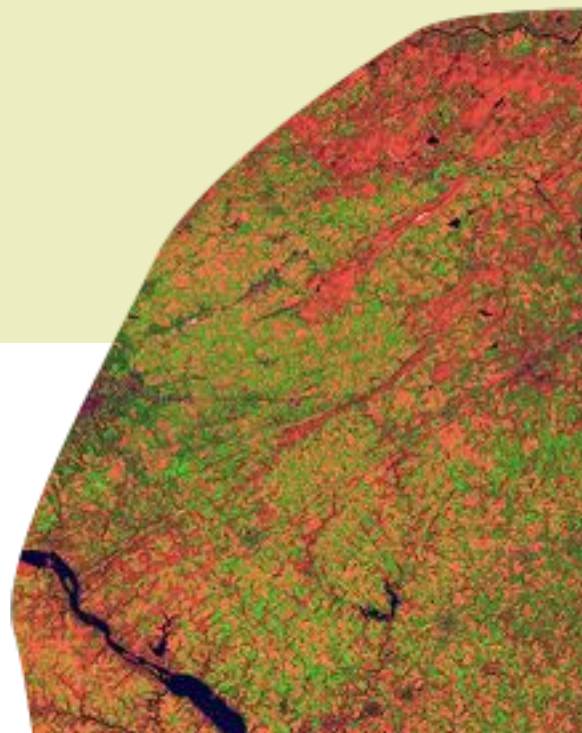
**Title:** The CER.TOSA project: An interview with Paola Tartabani

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FORMAS



# The CER.TOSA Project: An interview with Paola Tartabani

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Paola Tartabani is one of the promoters of the CER.TOSA project, a grassroots initiative that's trying to change the lives of many families and activities situated in the Torpignattara neighbourhood in Rome, the capital of Italy, by cutting the cost of the energy bills while reducing the emissions needed to provide the energy. The CER.TOSA is the third energy community in Rome and was born in 2023 on the 14th of September, so it's still much in the making, but the premises are very promising, and the popular enthusiasm is off the charts.

## **Title:**

The CER.TOSA (Renewable Energy Community) project.

## **Where is this grassroots initiative implemented?**

The CER.TOSA (Renewable Energy Community) project started in the small neighborhood of Villa Certosa, adjacent to Torpignattara and Mandrione, in Rome's 5th Municipality (<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Via+di+Villa+Certosa,+00176+Roma+RM/@41.8805581,12.5336662,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m6!3m5!1s0x132f6219278a9fa3:0xc16c1e9bca9afee9!8m2!3d41.8805541!4d12.5362411!16s%2Fg%2F1vntxt5w?hl=it&entry=ttu> )



*Torpignattara, highlighted in red on the map of Rome.*

*"Rome Zona 6A Torpignattara locator map" by Sannita is licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/),*

### **Who are the promoters?**

CER.TOSA was born thanks to the joint work of the Certosa Neighborhood Committee and the environmental association A Sud.

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

The direct beneficiaries will be the residents of the neighborhood and in general, the members of the association that has been set up. In detail, 42 families, a school (the Carlo Pisacane plexus of the Istituto Comprensivo Simonetta Salacone), a commercial activity, the historic bakery of the Marrocchini brothers, and the CDCA - Centro Documentazione Conflitti Ambientali (Environmental Conflict Documentation Centre) - have set up the CER.TOSA as founding members.

### **How does this initiative engage with climate?**

Energy communities are local organizations made up of citizens, businesses and institutions that work together to participate directly in the energy market, not only as consumers, but also as producers. These communities are based on principles of active participation, democratic involvement and solidarity, with the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting the use of renewable energy at local level. Through civic participation, the sharing of renewable resources and the promotion of environmental sustainability, these communities offer a viable and concrete solution to address the challenges of climate change by fostering a just energy transition.

In addition to the energy issue, those who contributed to the creation of the CER.TOSA had also previously dealt with doing a thermal characterization of the Villa Certosa district and hypothesizing possible climate mitigation measures for the district during the summer months, in particular for Via. G. Alessi, Via di Villa Certosa and Via dei Savorgnan, which are directly affected by the neighborhood's hot spots (Mandrione District warehouses and the former Casilina station area). These are interventions that should be carried out by the institutions, as they have to do with public health, but since they are often absent, the hope is that the CER.TOSA can be a tool to make them happen... somehow!



*Photos of buildings in Villa Certosa (images by Cecilia Cicchetti)*

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

CER.TOSA was formed around the political theme of energy sovereignty and the democratization of energy. Its objectives respond to environmental, social and economic challenges.

**Environmental:** energy communities promote the use of renewable sources, thereby reducing the use of fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions. They thus contribute to climate change mitigation and environmental protection by accelerating our country's decarbonization process.

**Social:** the development of energy self-production policies, together with energy efficiency policies, represent the best welfare policies for households, able not only to contribute to the reduction of energy expenditure but also to improve the social life of members, thus also mitigating the growing issue of energy poverty.

**Economic:** energy communities can generate economic benefits for both members and the local area. Members can reduce energy costs through the sharing of resources and access to 20-year incentives on shared energy. In addition, energy communities can foster local employment in the installation and maintenance of facilities.

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

Our CER had a fairly rapid development: the idea was born during a public initiative in the neighborhood on 4 November 2022 organized by A Sud and the Certosa Neighborhood Committee, entitled 'Climate: global problems, local answers' (Facebook event here <https://fb.me/e/74lsD9DZL>). Then, accepting the challenge of participating in a regional call for proposals, we started with stakeholder engagement activities in February 2023.

In May, we were among the grant recipients and had to develop the project very quickly according to the timeline of the call. Thus, on 14 September 2023, the founding members officially signed the by-laws and the memorandum of association of CER.TOSA. Since then we have convened a members' meeting and organized a public meeting where we invited both Edoardo Zanchini, director of the climate office of the Municipality of Rome, and the local administrators of the fifth municipality to speak. At the meeting it emerged that the fifth municipality is willing to support our CER.TOSA with the installation of photovoltaic panels on the roof of a school. A commitment of which we still have no confirmation to date.

On 23 January 2024, after more than two years of waiting, the implementing decree was published to stimulate the emergence and development of Renewable Energy Communities and to regulate the modalities and timing for the recognition of incentives by the GSE (Gestore dei Servizi Energetici). The next steps will be to convene another meeting with members both to present the decree and to decide together whether and how to initiate popular shareholder activities to purchase the first ERC panels.



*Two of the beneficiaries of the CER.TOSA project: the “Carlo Pisacane” elementary school and the Marocchini Brother’s bakery (images by Cecilia Cicchetti)*

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

To date, the stakeholders involved, as mentioned above, are the residents of the neighborhood and the other adjacent neighborhoods within the same primary cabin, some private entities, some businesses and a comprehensive school. But there are many solicitations from future supporters who would like to join CER.TOSA. At this stage we are collecting memberships.

Interviewer: the Torpignattara neighborhood is inhabited by almost 50,000 people, 10% of whom are unemployed and 23% have a migration background. The state apparatuses care neither for the employment of the population nor for its integration, which is instead done at

the grassroots level through the work of the neighborhood committees and especially thanks to the initiatives of the Pisacane school.

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

The strength of the initiative was the strong involvement of local actors, thanks to the peculiar urban conformation of the neighborhood, which resembles a small village. As explained above, it only took a few meetings to attract the curiosity and conviction of the members. This was possible thanks to a community already sensitized by the presence of the neighborhood committee, to both environmental and social issues.

The weak point is the economic issue: not being able to burden the members, it will be necessary to find both financing (crowdfunding, private foundations, some regional calls) and support from the institutions (economic and bureaucratic, for example if one wants to use the roofs of a school or in any case a public roof to install solar panels). In order to keep the attention and enthusiasm that has arisen around this project, there is an urgent need to activate the ERC members in concrete actions as soon as possible; as a participatory project, it could fall apart and be seen as a mere theoretical experiment.

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

Many organizations are asking us about how to replicate this virtuous community process. The easy replicability is guaranteed by a model that is now widespread, practiced and shared. It is full of guides on how to set up-start an energy community so there is no lack of theoretical support. What is generally difficult to 'find on the market' is the passion of volunteers who are activated by putting their time and skills on the line to coordinate and involve grassroots realities in the area by explaining the project and motivating the group around the potential changes and benefits to be obtained. The rest is all technical work by professionals from the feasibility study to a consultant for drafting the statute.

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

The changes that our project will hopefully bring to the area could be (I use the conditional because we are only at the beginning of a journey that is as long as it is challenging):

1. To stop the phenomenon of neighborhood gentrification, which unfortunately is already happening. If a family is in energy poverty because it has a dilapidated, poorly insulated and very energy-consuming house, then it prefers to move to a more peripheral area of the city, choosing a newer and perhaps more energy-efficient house.
2. ERCs, being bottom-up initiatives, foster a participation of citizens who become active, network, nurture the community by pooling interests and responding together to the needs of the community.



*The headquarters of the Villa Certosa Neighbourhood Committee and one of the initiatives that already take place thanks to their social and democratic work (images by Cecilia Cicchetti)*

**References:**

Tartabani, P. (2024). *Interview* (C. Cicchetti, interviewer) [personal communication].