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**Occupy Climate  
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FORMAS



## Creating awareness with retake

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### Where is this grassroots initiative implemented?

Retake is a spontaneous citizen's movement that began in the Trieste neighborhood, now Rome's second municipality, in Italy.

### Who are the promoters?

The experience is originated with Rebecca Jean Spitzmiller, who, tired of the ugliness in her neighborhood, decided to roll up her sleeves since the agencies she had asked for help had not moved to accommodate her requests.

First on her own, then with friends, she decided to create a small association. Now it has settled throughout Italy and is registered with the third sector.

In Rome there are 86 groups, one in each neighborhood, and each group has one or more administrators.

### Who are the beneficiaries?

The beneficiaries of Retake actions are citizens who, not only can experience environments visibly more livable but also can breathe cleaner air.



*Square dedicated to the martyrs of freedom slaughtered by the Nazi-fascist oppressor, cleaned up by Centocelle volunteers (December 2023) image by the author.*

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

These citizen groups engage by trying to bring about a change in perspective, by raising awareness of climate change issues, they mitigate the harm that dangerous behaviors of other citizens bring to the environment.

"It may seem that these actions impact little on climate change by dealing with specific areas," says the activist who told me about the project.

What characterizes them is the intention to make people understand the impact they have on the environment around them and beyond.

By upgrading areas or creating specific teaching events for youth and children in schools, they raise social-ecological awareness.

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

The main objective and value is really to raise awareness, as well as to adopt good practices for the environment, so that a virtuous circle is created in which citizens and institutions work together. With this, they try to get to have the cleanest and most livable cities by trying to share good practices for sustainability.



*Volunteers in action cleaning the ground and putting in new plants (December 2023). Image by the author.*

### **What is the timeline?**

This initiative was started in 2009 by a small core group of people. The goal of the association is to no longer exist; it will last as long as it is needed.

However, thanks to other parallel projects already in action, such as recycling books, recycling shoe soles, or collecting caps, the end of this project is not yet visible.

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

There are people of all types and age groups, with all different lives behind them.



So many professionals who are already in the social work field, such as social workers, teachers, nurses, engineers, accountants and lawyers.

"Me being a teacher is the one who raises awareness. Then there is Silvia, who is a seamstress, has golden hands, and is also very knowledgeable about botany. There is Bruno, who comes from engineering studies, and so he helps in the practical side. Luigi, who is a lawyer, helps us write emails to institutions. In short, everyone introduces their expertise."

In addition, says Sonia, administrator of the Centocelle Retake group, for the past few months there has been a group of Chinese volunteers who are doing a path of integration thanks to the church they belong to. With certificates of participation that Retake can issue them, these volunteers can spend them to the legal authorities to get citizenship.

They also work with groups of young people who have committed misdemeanors and do probation with Retake, using up their community service hours instead of being under house arrest or, worse, in jail, also understanding how to weave deep relationships.

Groups in the neighborhoods of San Paolo, Colle Oppio, and San Lorenzo conduct activities with refugees from some centers. They learn gardening, Italian and how to relate to people in the area where they live.

Many, in doing so, also find jobs.



*Square cleaning and bench beautification (December 2023). Image by the author*

**What 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 limitation is low willpower in some neighborhoods, lack of volunteers and resignation.

They have constant contact with the city hall, with the green councillor, but since Rome is a very large territory and there are so many problems, no matter how much cooperation there is, they can't always address them all.

An example reported by the volunteer I interviewed is syringes left by area drug addicts. Here the limits are resignation and difficulty in management. Without help from city hall, it is difficult to get citizens to approach such sensitive situations.

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

The association already engages in parallel projects while also building links with other voluntary associations. They work on promoting virtuous practices that open avenues to sustainability in various settings.

One important parallel project that can serve as an example is "Reuse and Recycle Used Sneakers" to show how an object can have a second life.

If in good condition, the shoes will be donated, otherwise the soles will be used as a "second raw material" to build shockproof grounds for playgrounds or athletic tracks.

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

With the goal of disappearing, they have entered into covenants of cooperation with the municipality of Rome, in which the association undertakes to find particularly critical areas and redevelop them, expanding to the whole city and then to the whole of Italy. In fact, from a small group of volunteers in a Roman neighborhood, they have grown to create extensive groups throughout Italy.

They try to make synergy with all the actors there are in a city, the municipality, the various subsidiaries such as Ama Roma S.p.A., Atac, and the underground. So far, they have been able to collaborate.

The association starts and the municipality is committed to continue.

"Since 2009 Retake has initiated an ongoing relationship of confrontation and collaboration with all administrations, in the belief that active citizenship and institutions must be mutually supportive in achieving common goals."

In promoting the values, they have also concretely involved international communities in the area, from the European Commission to the embassies of the United States, Japan, Estonia, Canada, Australia, the Philippines and Romania.

### **References :**

Interview with a volunteer

*Retake Roma - Attiva nella cura dei beni comuni! - Sito Ufficiale.* (2025, March 10). Retake Roma. <https://retake.org/roma/>