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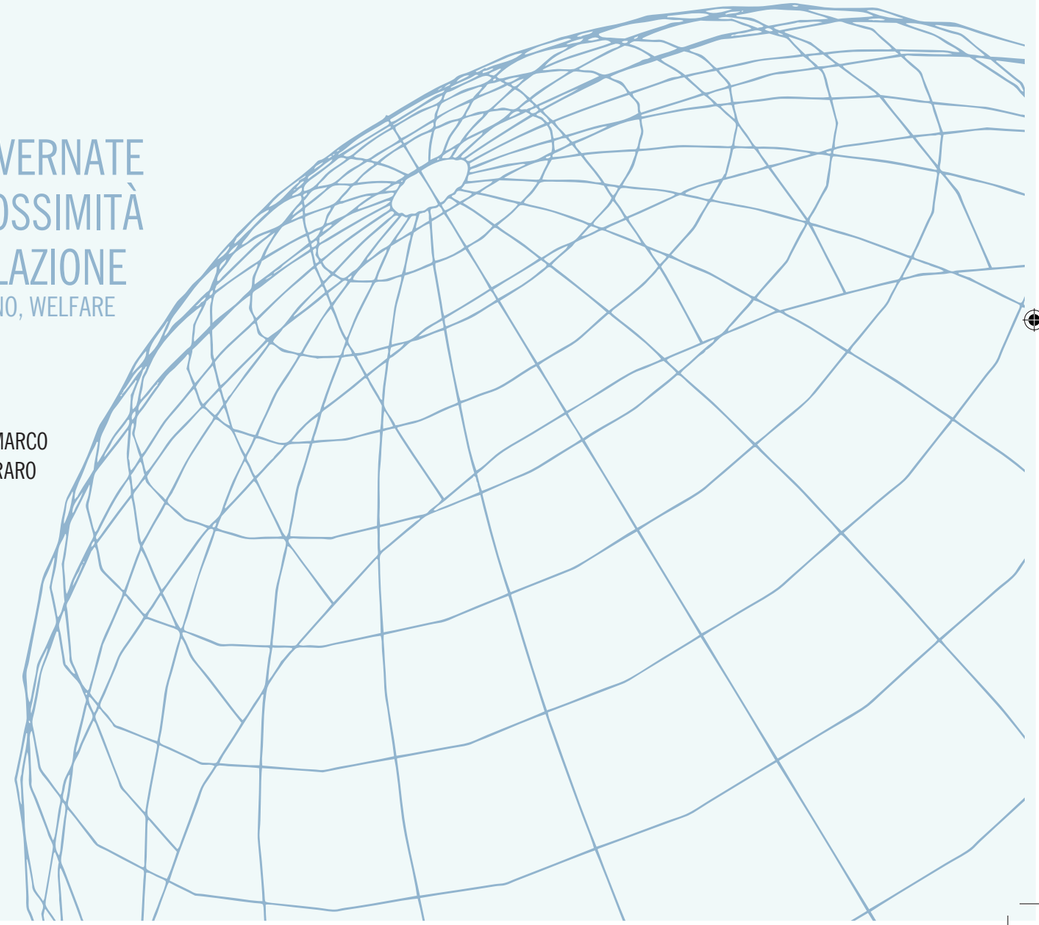
VITE GOVERNATE TRA PROSSIMITÀ E REGOLAZIONE

SPAZIO URBANO, WELFARE STATE E DATI

A CURA DI
GIANCARLO DE MARCO
E STEFANIA FERRARO



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Spazio urbano, welfare state e dati

A cura di
Giancarlo De Marco e Stefania Ferraro

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MAPPE

Roberta Basile, Stefania Ferraro*

BEYOND EMERGENCY: CAIVANO AND THE GEOMETRIES OF POWER AMID A CRISIS-RIDDEN WELFARE STATE AND THE RISE OF PENAL GOVERNANCE

Abstract:

Starting from a theoretical framework that brings together the contributions of Wacquant, Bourdieu, Foucault, and Castel, this article examines how urban space is shaped by logics of exclusion, control, and disaffiliation. From this vantage point, the city emerges as a laboratory of emergency governance, where welfare provision recedes and the penal state advances, turning peripheral areas into repositories for the management of social distress. The case study of Caivano – and of the Parco Verde district in particular – constitutes a paradigmatic node of these dynamics. Marked by a long history of state-appointed Commissioners, recurrent media-covered incidents, and structural fragility, Parco Verde becomes a critical lens through which to interrogate the geometries of power that traverse urban margins. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that marginality is a traversable space in which forms of proximity, alliance, and collective project-making emerge, capable of challenging stigmatising imaginaries. The first section of the paper reconstructs the theoretical framework of urban marginality; the second examines the socio-institutional history of Caivano; the third brings local voices to the fore, highlighting everyday practices of resistance. In conclusion, the article advances a critical reflection on the need to rethink the social contract from the margins.

Keywords:

Urban Marginality; Emergency Governance; Welfare State; Third Sector Organisations; Caivano.

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* The general structure of the paper is the result of cooperation between the two authors. However, paragraphs 3 and 4 were written by Roberta Basile; paragraphs 1 and 2 were written by Stefania Ferraro.
For a more in-depth discussion of the Caivano case, see *Social Topographies: A Reportage from Caivano* (*infra*), which presents maps, visual materials, selected excerpts from institutional document, and from an interview.

1. *Urban Marginality and the Transformation of Welfare: Public Policies, Governance, and Social Inequality*

> The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls (Calvino 1974, p. 11).

In this poetic and unsettling image, Calvino conveys an urban truth: cities are architectures of memory, stratifications of power, and dispositifs of exclusion and resistance. The modern city, far from being a neutral space, operates as a filter that does not distribute resources, opportunities, and visibility evenly; rather, it selects, fragments, and excludes, producing deeply entrenched inequalities. Within this landscape of inequality, urban peripheries emerge as zones of relegation (Wacquant 2006), where social distress is concentrated.

The concept of urban marginality[1] refers to a relational representation of contemporary societies, in which centre and periphery are not merely geo-

1 The sociological literature on marginality is broad and heterogeneous reflecting the conceptual complexity and multidimensional nature of the concept itself. Marginality has been theorised as a structural position, a relational condition, and a dynamic process shaped by historical, institutional, and spatial configurations. Given this complexity, the existing scholarship spans multiple theoretical traditions and empirical domains. Rather than engaging exhaustively with this vast body of work, we refer here to a selective set of key theoretical frameworks that are particularly relevant to our analytical focus.
Our primary point of reference is the strand of literature that conceptualises marginality at the intersection of urban space and the welfare state. Foundational insights into the spatial and relational dimensions of marginality can be traced to Simmel's (1971) analysis of the "stranger", which highlights the ambivalent position of actors who are simultaneously included in and excluded from social relations. These insights were further developed within the Chicago School, notably through Park's (1950) and Stonequist's (1961) formulations of the marginal man, which framed marginality as a product of urban differentiation, migration, and incomplete institutional incorporation.
Later interactionist contributions, particularly Goffman's (1990) analysis of stigma, shifted attention to the symbolic and relational processes through which marginal positions are produced and maintained. From this perspective, marginality emerges through mechanisms of social definition, labelling, and the management of discredited identities, often unfolding within specific urban and institutional contexts.
From the late twentieth century onwards, the concept of marginality has been increasingly linked to the restructuring of welfare states and labour markets. In the French tradition, Castel's (1999) notion of disaffiliation conceptualises marginality as a zone between integration and exclusion, generated by employment

graphical categories, but symbolic and functional poles that are continuously redefined through historical, economic, and cultural processes. In this sense, urban space is never neutral: it is an active dimension, shaped by power relations, exclusions, and invisible symbolic orders. Places are not mere geographical containers, but social environments that both reflect and reinforce inequalities. In a hierarchically structured society, space itself is also hierarchical (Bourdieu 2015); the social position of individuals becomes inscribed in space, turning dwelling into a symbolic marker of distinction, inclusion, or exclusion.

Urban peripheries exemplify this dynamic: they are not merely physical margins, but structured positions within social space, produced through power relations, in which unequal endowments of economic, cultural, and social capital are converted into durable forms of social marginality. This condition is not contingent, but the outcome of state-mediated classificatory practices that territorialise disadvantage and impose symbolic boundaries, thereby defining what is included and what is relegated outside (Petrillo 2013; 2021).

With the concept of biopower, Foucault (2004a; 2004b) elaborated an analytics of government in which life itself, at the level of populations, becomes an object of regulation. From this perspective, urban peripheries are governed not primarily through juridical exclusion or disciplinary constraint, but as urban milieus to be managed. Power operates through dispositifs of security that rely on probabilistic calculations, thresholds of acceptability, and forms of *laissez-faire* that structure the circulation of people, goods, and risks within and across urban spaces. These dispositifs do not eliminate marginality, but normalise it, allowing certain processes to unfold while allowing their effects. In this sense, biopower contributes to the territorialisation of disadvantage and to the reproduction of durable forms of marginality, by silently shaping life

instability and the weakening of social protections. Similarly, Paugam's (2013) analysis of social disqualification emphasises how welfare institutions and social policies actively contribute to shaping marginal trajectories and statuses.

More recent urban sociology has explicitly theorised marginality as a territorialised and state-mediated phenomenon. Wacquant's (2008) concept of advanced marginality links the spatial concentration and stigmatisation of disadvantaged urban areas to welfare state retrenchment, institutional abandonment, and the expansion of penal and disciplinary forms of state intervention.

Taken together, these approaches conceptualise marginality as a dynamic, relational, and spatially embedded process, produced through the interplay between urban space, welfare arrangements, and state action. The references mobilised here thus represent a non-exhaustive but theoretically grounded selection of contributions that inform the analysis of marginality at the nexus of the city and the welfare state. For a genealogy of the concept of urban marginality, see, among others, Paone, Petrillo 2016.

trajectories and organising the unequal distribution of resources, exposure, and visibility among populations. Within the context of European welfare state transformations, territorial marginality has become a central expression of the new "social question" (Castel 1999 2003). The destabilisation of wage labour and the dismantling of systems of *sécurité sociale* (social security) have eroded the foundations of *propriété sociale* (social property), namely, the set of collective rights and protections historically attached to stable employment. As these supports erode, the zone of vulnerability expands, increasingly blurring the boundary between integration and exclusion, while processes of disaffiliation become spatially concentrated and territorially inscribed. Vulnerability thus emerges as a generalised condition, extending well beyond the economic margins to encompass broad segments of the population. Neoliberal reforms – grounded in the individualisation of risk and responsibility and in the retrenchment of state intervention – have contributed not only to the privatisation of services but also to the erosion of collective guarantees against social insecurity. In this context, cities are no longer primarily spaces of social integration, but sites in which marginality is governed and regulated through dispositifs of control, rather than addressed as a structural issue. The resulting transformation entails a progressive reduction of citizenship to an economic function, measured by the individual capacity to remain employable and productive even in the absence of minimal conditions of social equity.

Urban marginality is therefore neither a natural nor an inevitable condition: it is the outcome of political choices, economic models, and institutional arrangements. Over the past decades, public policies have undergone a profound transformation under the influence of the New Public Management paradigm, which has aimed to replace the presumed inefficiency of public bureaucracies with the presumed superiority of market-based mechanisms. This condition has developed in a particularly pronounced way in the Italian context (Pellegrino, Rodeschini 2024; Bifulco *et al.* 2022a; 2022b).

In the domain of urban welfare, this shift has reconfigured local governance through outsourcing, competitive tendering, and performance-based management, thereby progressively subordinating social intervention to logics of efficiency, measurability, and cost containment. These managerial reforms have reshaped local welfare provision at the local level, generating unintended consequences that have intensified territorial inequalities and contributed to the uneven governance of marginality across urban space (Miller, Rose 2008; Rosanvallon 1995). The standardisation of services, asymmetric decentralisation, and inter-territorial competition have produced a fragmented urban landscape in which public intervention is weakest precisely in the most vulnerable areas. In this context, urban marginality is increasingly governed

through exceptional, short-term, and emergency-oriented measures, aimed less at structural transformation and more at the visible management of disorder. Intervention thus targets symptoms rather than causes. In parallel with the retrenchment of the welfare state, the penal state expands: the "left hand" of social protection is progressively eclipsed by the "right hand" of punishment. Through policies of zero tolerance and intensified surveillance, marginal populations are subjected to processes of relegation and inserted into a carceral continuum that extends from stigmatised urban spaces to the institutions of penal control (Wacquant 2000).

Security, understood in this way, does not stem from social justice but from fear (Dal Lago 1999; Pitch 2014), thereby reinforcing a spiral of exclusion and surveillance. Marginality is thus not eliminated, but governed and maintained in a state of unstable equilibrium. Urban peripheries consequently take shape as a *locus terribilis* (Petrillo 2013, p. 50), zones of friction between the materiality of life and the artificiality of governing, where vulnerabilities accumulate and urban inequalities crystallize. Social disaffiliation is thereby translated into territorial segregation and generalized insecurity.

By contrast, addressing marginality would require a paradigm shift: investing in structural policies, education, welfare provision, and participation, as well as building systems of protection capable of generating genuine and durable security.

As Castel (2003) reminds us, insecurity is not simply the absence of protection, but rather its reverse: it emerges when public responses fail to correspond to social needs. From this perspective, welfare can no longer be conceived merely as an assistance-based instrument, but rather as a generative social infrastructure capable of fostering autonomy and participation. Reclaiming a central place for welfare within urban policy entails moving beyond the confines of welfarism and recognising the fight against poverty as a matter of local development, urban planning, access to services, and rights of citizenship (Chiodini, Milano 2010). The right to housing (Madden, Marcuse 2016; Kemeny 1995), for example, cannot be reduced to the mere provision of shelter, but must be understood as a core social right[2], realised through dignified,

2 In relation to the Italian context, Gargiulo's (2024) analysis, among others, offers a relevant contribution as he examines the governance of housing poverty through the lens of public policies and emergency-oriented interventions. Drawing on empirical research conducted in recent years, his work highlights how, despite the formal right to residence, individuals experiencing homelessness or itinerant living conditions are frequently denied access to municipal registration. Such exclusion is produced by discriminatory practices at the local level, compounded by an occasionally ambiguous legal framework. Gargiulo conceptualises the exclusion

accessible, and inclusive urban environments[3]. The right to housing materialises through social housing policies aligned with territorial needs and through forms of urban regeneration that integrate public spaces, essential services, and community networks. For these rights not to remain abstract or merely declaratory, it is necessary to critically reflect on the limits of multi-level governance, which – while formally intended to coordinate the responsibilities and actions of the state, regions, municipalities, and social actors – often produces fragmentation, uneven implementation, and gaps in the effective realisation of social citizenship rights[4].

The principle of subsidiarity, enshrined in Article 118 of the Italian Constitution, acknowledges the active role of communities and Third Sector organizations in pursuing the general interest. Instruments such as co-programming and co-design enable the development of shared policies capable of identifying social vulnerabilities and mobilising local resources. Within this analytical framework, the Third Sector plays a strategic role, particularly in peripheral ar-

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of homeless people from the population registry not as an episodic anomaly, but as a structural phenomenon rooted in historical trajectories of welfare governance, with far-reaching theoretical and political implications for access to social rights, public services, and citizenship.

3 The right to housing is intrinsically linked to Henri Lefebvre's (1996) concept of the right to the city, which frames urban space as a socially produced arena structured by relations of power and capital accumulation. While the right to housing is often reduced to the provision of shelter, Lefebvre's perspective situates housing within broader struggles over the city's use value against its treatment as a commodity. From this standpoint, access to adequate housing cannot be separated from residents' collective rights to appropriate urban space, to participate in its production, and to contest forms of exclusion generated by market-driven urban development. The right to the city thus offers a critical framework for understanding the right to housing as a political and social right to housing can be understood as a political and social right, embedded in conflicts over urban inequality, dispossession, and democratic control over urban life.

4 For a critical analysis of the territorialisation of welfare and, in particular, of social policies in Europe, see, among others, Kazepov and Barberis (2017). In Italy, as in other European countries, policies aimed at social cohesion, employment, and the support of vulnerable populations have given rise to new forms of social citizenship, grounded in networks between public and private actors, the personalisation and integration of interventions, and citizen participation. Bifulco (2015) analyses these developments through a framework that spans financial capitalism and the European social model, with the aim of assessing the achievements, shortcomings, and potential trajectories of local welfare. From this perspective, she also examines the instruments of territorial planning, integrated neighbourhood-based interventions, school-to-work transitions for young people, and public-private mixes, ultimately discussing both the strengths and the limitations of community-based welfare.

eas – not merely as an implementing agent, but as a key actor in the definition of social and territorial responses. Rebuilding trust, fostering participation, and generating alliances thus become ways of restoring centrality to marginalised territories, where the contradictions of the dominant urban model are most acutely expressed. It is precisely there that the possibility emerges of transforming insecurity – as conceptualised by Castel (2003) – from a symptom of insufficient protections into an opportunity to rethink the social pact.

Such a rethinking is crucial for addressing contemporary challenges, as in these territories – where marginality accumulates and becomes visible – it is urgent to interrogate the geometries of power, the forms of resistance, and the possibilities for transformation.

Within this context, Caivano[5] – a municipality located in the northern of the Naples Metropolitan Area – represents one of these emblematic sites. Marked by a long history of state-appointed administrations, by high-profile events that have shaken public opinion, and by a structural fragility intertwined with social disaffiliation and institutional mistrust, the dynamics described above are paradigmatically condensed in the Parco Verde public housing complex[6]. The research conducted in Caivano did not stem from an external standpoint,

5 Caivano constitutes one of the case studies within the PRIN 2022 research project, *The Commissioners of Politics: How Extraordinary Administration Transforms Democracy* (Principal Investigators: Antonio Costabile and Vittorio Mete), as it is paradigmatic of a phenomenon of a dual system of extraordinary administration. For a two-year period, from October 2023 to October 2025, two extraordinary forms of administration coexisted: an Extraordinary Commission replacing the municipal council dissolved due to mafia infiltration (pursuant to Article 143 of Legislative Decree No. 267/2000, the Consolidated Law on Local Authorities - TUEL), and an Extraordinary Commissioner for infrastructure, appointed by the national government and still in office at the time of writing this article.

6 Although Caivano cannot be reduced solely to the Parco Verde area, it is important to note that this is the most densely populated zone, characterised by a high concentration of social and economic hardship, which has also given rise to dramatic and unacceptable situations. On 25 August 2023, another episode that shook public opinion, namely the report of the sexual assault of two young girls perpetrated by a group of adolescents. According to investigative findings, the abuses reportedly continued for several months, between June and July 2023, and took place in an abandoned sports centre located in Parco Verde known locally as *Delphinia*. Deprived of both function and oversight, this site can be understood as a "residual space" where power withdraws, leaving room for deviant practices. In Foucauldian terms, it constitutes a dispositif that, despite no longer exercising a disciplinary function, continues to produce effects on social behaviour (Foucault 2004a). Parco Verde is also adjacent to another public housing area known as *Bronx*. For a spatial localisation of Caivano and its marginal areas, see *Social Topographies: A Reportage from Caivano* (*infra*).

but from a deliberate choice of proximity: a posture that privileges dialogue, the density of voices, and the tension between the visible and the invisible. The adopted position was that of reflexive and dialogical research, conscious of its own partiality and of the relational nature of the knowledge produced.

In line with Clifford Geertz's (1973) ethnographic perspective, fieldwork was conceived as a form of "thick description", namely, an attempt to interpret the meanings that social actors attribute to their practices by situating them within the symbolic and relational contexts in which they are produced. The qualitative approach was therefore adopted not merely as a set of techniques, but as an interpretive stance. Following Corbetta (2003), qualitative research does not aim at generalisation, but at an in-depth understanding of situated social meanings. In this sense, the voices of the actors were not treated as "data", but as meaning-generating practices, capable of questioning sociological categories and opening up spaces for critical reflection.

The choice of Caivano as a research site was motivated by its symbolic and political significance: a territory marked by structural marginality, intense media exposure, and institutional interventions that often take the form of dispositifs of control rather than instruments of emancipation. At the core of the investigation lies a situated analytical question: how do the social networks active in Caivano articulate relationships, forms of resistance, and practices of negotiation, and what does mapping them reveal about the tensions between public governance and the generative capacities of local communities?

An initial phase of the research involved direct observation of the field, with particular attention to the spatial, relational, and symbolic dynamics that traverse it. This work was accompanied by a re-examination of available statistical data concerning the socio-demographic, economic, and housing indicators of the municipality of Caivano. The combination of field observation and quantitative data made it possible to construct a contextual framework to guide the subsequent phases of the study, offering a stratified reading of the territory, bringing together lived experience and social structure.

The field was not defined through rigid boundaries, but was progressively constructed through a relational mapping of associations and Third Sector actors active in the municipality, guided by criteria of territorial presence and fields of intervention. Consistent with the reflexive and dialogical stance adopted in this study, access to the field was mediated through informal contacts, proximity networks, as well as sustained moments of listening, with the aim of establishing a research presence attentive to power asymmetries, expectations, and forms of mutual positioning. In a context such as the Parco Verde public housing complex – widely exposed in public discourse due to episodes of sexual violence and known as a major drug-dealing area – the positional-

ity of the researcher was continuously negotiated and interpreted, oscillating between trust, suspicion, and role attribution. Relationships with local actors proved heterogeneous: while some associations and Third Sector organisations engaged with the research with openness and interest, others expressed hesitation or resistance, particularly in relation to an inquiry perceived as potentially critical of prevailing intervention logics or of existing relationships with public institutions. Acknowledging these dynamics was integral to the analytical process, as they shaped both access to the field and the meanings produced within the research encounter. In some cases, requests for contact went unanswered, indicating a form of prior closure or disconnection from the circuits of dialogue activated by the research. Sampling followed purposive and theoretically informed criteria, oriented toward capturing the plurality of positions present in the territory. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of associations, social cooperatives, and local practitioners, prioritising diversity in terms of approaches, organisational trajectories, and relationships with public institutions. The interview guide functioned as a dialogical instrument, adaptable to the specificities of interlocutors and conducive to the emergence of situated narratives. The questions explored perceptions regarding the extraordinary administrations, intervention practices, relationships between organisations and institutions, and the tensions between local embeddedness and externally driven project-based logics. Some interlocutors articulated a strong tension between aspirations for community rootedness and the need to comply with external funding and project requirements; others highlighted the risk of symbolic dependence on institutions, thereby potentially undermining the autonomy and agency of local actors.

To complement the fieldwork, a systematic monitoring of media sources related to the Caivano case was conducted, with particular attention to the period following the Commissioners' administrations and the implementation of the policy framework known as the "Caivano model". The media corpus revealed a strong narrative polarisation: on the one hand, triumphalist and security-oriented discourses; on the other, critical voices questioning its effectiveness, legitimacy, and impact on local communities. Particular attention was paid to discursive conflicts between institutional figures and public intellectuals, to the reactions of territorial organisations excluded from decision-making processes, as well as to the tensions that emerged in other urban areas targeted by similar interventions[7].

7 The so-called "Caivano model" refers to a set of extraordinary measures introduced by the Italian government following the 2023 events in Caivano, institutionalised through Decree-Law of 15 September 2023, No. 123, better known in the news as the Caivano Decree, and subsequently expanded through Decree-Law No. 208 of

This analysis made it possible to place external representations in tension with the local practices observed in the field, bringing to light fractures, silences, and forms of resistance. In line with Vitale (2007), the media dispositif was approached not as a neutral informational frame, but as a technology of power/knowledge and a site of symbolic production, through which regimes of visibility are established, actors are differentially legitimised, and forms of consensus are actively produced[8].

The triangulation of interviews, participant observation, and media monitoring made it possible to construct a stratified reading of the field, bringing lived experiences into dialogue with public representations, while interrogating the forms of symbolic exclusion that permeate the "Caivano model".

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31 December 2024, commonly referred to as the "Caivano-bis Decree". Officially framed as an integrated strategy to address urban marginality, youth deviance, and territorial insecurity, these measures combine intensified policing, exceptional administrative powers, and targeted infrastructural interventions. While presented by authorities as a model of swift state action and territorial regeneration, critical analyses have identified several problematic aspects. First, the model's reliance on securitarian and emergency-driven logics prioritises control and repression over structural social policies. Second, it centralises decision-making power at the national level, marginalising local administrations, civil society organisations, and community actors, thereby weakening mechanisms of participatory governance. Third, by framing social fragility primarily as a question of public order, the Caivano model risks stigmatising whole territories and populations, thereby reinforcing processes of territorial labelling rather than addressing the structural determinants of marginality.

The Caivano-bis Decree identifies the following areas of intervention: Rozzano (Milan), Quartiere Alessandrino-Quarticciolo (Rome), Scampia-Secondigliano (Naples), Orta Nova (Foggia), Rosarno-San Ferdinando (Reggio Calabria), San Cristoforo (Catania), and Borgo Nuovo (Palermo). In the contexts of Naples, Rome, Milan, and Palermo these areas are affected by issues connected to rapid housing expansion following urban regeneration policies in the respective metropolitan centres, which have entailed excessive and forced development of public housing to remove socially and economically vulnerable populations from the "central districts". The Calabrian and Foggian areas have long been characterised by the so-called "migrant emergency" and associated informal settlements. In the case of San Cristoforo, its inclusion in the Decree cannot be disentangled from ongoing policies of urban renewal and touristification led by a mayor affiliated with the Fratelli d'Italia party – the same party that currently provides the President of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic, Giorgia Meloni. For a sociological in-depth analysis of the effects of these decrees on local territories, see D'Ascenzio, Ferraro 2025.

8 For an analysis of how media discourses shape public opinion and contribute to agenda-setting processes, see Entman 1989; Marini 2006. On the relationship between urban decay, fear, and agenda setting, see Bellinvia 2009.

2. *Topographies of Fracture: Urban History and Emergency Governance in Caivano*

Caivano's urban history is intertwined with the broader dynamics of Southern Italian modernisation, which, as Fantozzi (2010) argues, incorporated, from its very origins, a discrepancy between normative frameworks and lived realities. The transition to capitalism did not produce a rupture in relations of production, but rather preserved forms of subordination and dependency that have sedimented within the social fabric. In this sense, Caivano does not represent an exception, but is part of a historical trajectory in which modernisation has taken on distinctive features: a weak bourgeoisie, the persistence of vertical social relations, and a structural separation between legality and legitimacy.

Caivano offers a portrait of a peripheral area that embodies the contradictions of Southern Italy, as it is rich in productive potential yet marked by deep social fractures. These fractures are not merely perceived, but empirically measurable. Caivano ranks among the highest-ranking municipalities at the regional level in terms of social and material vulnerability, with an index value of 106.9 – higher than both the Campania regional average (99.3) and the national average[9].

The share of young people not in employment, education, or training reaches 28.7%, more than double the national average (12.3%), while 16% of households experience potential economic hardship, compared to a national figure of 7.2%[10]. Housing overcrowding, the presence of inadequate dwellings, and the prevalence of large households further intensify pressure on everyday resources, outlining a condition of structural marginality. Paradoxically, indicators of unmet care needs appear lower than the national average; however, this figure may reflect an underestimation of actual need or difficulties in accessing services. These data are not merely numerical indicators: they provide a concrete representation of a territory experiencing structural marginality, where multiple forms of vulnerability overlap and mutually reinforce one another. In this context, the vulnerability index should not be regarded as an endpoint, but rather as a starting point for rethinking the role of institutions, the value of civic participation, and the concrete possibilities for social recovery within a community that, despite persistent adversity, continues to resist.

A further critical issue that profoundly affects quality of life in Caivano concerns waste management. This is not merely a local problem, but one embedded

9 Data derived from Osservatorio delle Povertà e delle Risorse Diocesi di Aversa, *In-mensa-mente. Esperienze di cura delle povertà nel territorio diocesano*, Dossier 2024, p. 23, *passim*.

10 Data derived from Spena 2023, p. 11, *passim.*

in a broader regional context shaped by Campania's first major "waste emergency", officially declared on 11 February 1994. On that occasion, the national government – under the leadership of Prime Minister Carlo Azeglio Ciampi – granted extraordinary commissarial powers to the Prefect of Naples, inaugurating a phase of exceptional interventions that would redefine the relationship between territory and institutions[11]. Caivano lies fully within the area notoriously known as the *Terra dei Fuochi*[12] and ranks as the second most polluted municipality in the Region. This position is not merely symbolic: the municipal territory hosts a waste treatment facility, the waste collection centre, tasked with producing so-called "eco-bales", which are destined for the Acerra waste-to-energy plant located in close proximity. In this context, Caivano represents not only an emblematic case of environmental degradation, but also a paradigm of emergency-based governance that, over time, has displaced ordinary planning in favour of extraordinary measures, often disconnected from the actual needs of the local population.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the *Terra dei Fuochi* can be conceptualised as a biopolitical space governed through regimes of security in which power operates less through care and protection than through selective abandonment (Foucault 2004b). Here, risk is managed rather than eliminated, exposure is normalised, and territorial sacrifice becomes not only a material condition, but a political and symbolic dispositif embedded in techniques of government. Waste management thus operates as a technology of governmentality, structuring circulations, tolerating harm, and regulating populations unevenly across space. Far from being a merely technical matter, it provides a critical lens through which to observe processes of marginalisation, institutional fragility, and the need for a profound rethinking of territorial policy.

Within this scenario of structural peripheralisation and emergency-based governance, the Parco Verde public housing complex represents the densest and most symbolically charged site of Caivano's urban crisis dynamics:

> From the Asse Mediano – the major arterial road crossing the northern of the Naples metropolitan area – it immediately comes into view. Before the eyes of those arriving, a patch of turquoise green opens up: these are the buildings of Lot C, widely known as the area where heroin dealing takes place. The complex is composed of three lots. Together with Lot C, the circle is completed by Lot B, characterised by brown and pink buildings, and Lot A, with yellow and red blocks marked by peeling façades and deteriorating plaster (Spena 2023, p. 11; Translation by the authors).

11 For a critical sociological analysis of the Campania waste emergency, see Di Costanzo, Ferraro 2013.

12 For an in-depth analysis, see *Social Topographies: A Reportage from Caivano* (*infra*).

Despite its name evoking nature and tranquillity, Parco Verde is in fact a vast concrete housing agglomeration located on the edge of Caivano's town centre[13].

Parco Verde was built using funds allocated in the aftermath of the devastating 1980 earthquake, which caused nearly 3,000 fatalities in Campania. Law No. 219 of 1981 earmarked 1,500 billion lire to provide housing for more than 300,000 displaced people. However, what was intended as a temporary solution gradually became a permanent settlement, characterised by anonymous high-rise blocks, a lack of services, and dilapidated apartments often passed down through inheritance or occupied unlawfully. Originally, the area now known as Parco Verde was referred to as *Rione 219*, in reference to the aforementioned law. As emerges from the interviews, however, it was the first residents themselves who renamed the area with a new and more evocative designation. This choice was not accidental: the internal streets were lined with oleanders, and it was precisely this floral presence that gave rise to the name Parco Verde.

For those who moved there after months spent in containers in post-earthquake displacement camps, the site initially represented the hope of renewal – the beginning of a dignified life in a home rather than in caravans or containers – even though it was conceived as temporary accommodation, pending a return to their places of origin destroyed by the earthquake. Over time, however, this aspiration turned into profound disillusionment, a broken promise of renewal. The absence of a coherent urban and social project transformed Parco Verde into a place where emergency became a permanent condition and the return to the original territories never materialised. Ghettoisation, in this sense, is not only physical, but also symbolic and relational.

Parco Verde came to national media attention following the report of the sexual assault of two young girls in August 2023. The severity of the case prompted Don Maurizio Patriciello, the parish priest of the Church of Saint Paul the Apostle, to address the Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, directly, inviting her to visit Parco Verde. The Prime Minister accepted the invitation and visited the area just eight days later, on 31 August 2023, accompanied by three ministers and the Chief of Police. During the visit, Meloni stated: «If we are here almost ten years after the tragic story of Fortuna, it means that a failure has taken place»[14]. The reference concerns a sequence of violent deaths that

13 For selected images of Parco Verde, see *Social Topographies: A Reportage from Caivano* (*infra*).

14 Translation by the authors, in Marco Iasevoli, *Meloni a Caivano:* «*Lo Stato ha fallito. Ora legalità, servizi e scuola*», in «Avvenire», 31 August 2023, https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/meloni-a-caivano-lo-stato-ha-fallito-ora-legalita-servizi-e-scuola_69240

have profoundly marked the Parco Verde area and contributed to its public stigmatisation. In 2014, Fortuna Loffredo, a six-year-old girl, was killed by her mother's partner, who was later sentenced to life imprisonment. One year earlier, in 2013, Antonio Giglio, aged three, died after falling from the seventh floor of the same building. More recently, on 4 October 2021, Antonio Natale, a 22-year-old man, disappeared and was found dead two weeks later in a Roma camp near Caivano; investigative authorities framed the killing as a drug-related settling of accounts[15].

Taken as a whole, these events outline a context of profound social fragility, in which violence intertwines with institutional abandonment and educational poverty. Within this framework, what Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) conceptualise as "social reproduction" becomes clearly visible: the material and symbolic conditions of Parco Verde not only generate social hardship, but actively perpetuate it, consolidating a structure of inequality that is transmitted across generations, not least through failures within the educational system. Unequally distributed cultural capital and an *habitus*[16] shaped in environments marked by precarity contribute to structuring behaviours, aspirations, and life trajectories, often oriented toward forms of deviance or marginality. Territorial stigmatisation, fuelled by media coverage and public discourse, operates as a form of "symbolic power"[17], reinforcing the distance between centre and periphery and legitimising emergency-based interventions rather than transformative ones.

The governance of Caivano's territory has historically been shaped by a logic centred on the regulation and containment of bodies and behaviours deemed deviant, dating back to the early 1970s, when the decision was made to construct the large public housing area known as the Bronx. The designation of this area for economically vulnerable populations displaced from Naples – subjected to various processes commonly described as gentrification[18] – has produced a context marked by a prolonged sequence of dramatic events and

15 See: Redazione, *Morte di Antonio Natale, la storia del 22enne ucciso a Caivano*, in «Fanpage», 19 October 2021, https://www.fanpage.it/napoli/morte-antonio-natale-vicenda/

16 Here, the concept of *habitus* is understood in accordance with Bourdieu's (1980) analysis, as a system of durable and transposable dispositions shaped by social conditions, which orient perceptions, practices, and aspirations without being fully conscious or mechanically determined.

17 Bourdieu (1991) argues that language should be viewed not only as a means of communication but also as a medium of power through which individuals pursue their own interests and display their practical competence.

18 For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between real estate speculation and urban regeneration policies in the city of Naples, and their effects on peripheral areas of the metropolitan province – including Caivano – see D'Ascenzio, Ferraro 2025.

by entrenched institutional fragility. In response, state intervention has been repeatedly articulated through emergency-based governance, relying on exceptional powers, temporary measures, and *ad hoc* interventions, rather than on long-term, structural policies capable of addressing the underlying social and territorial inequalities. Here, the state of exception is not new. The Caivano case is embedded in a long genealogy of commissionerships that have punctuated the local administrative history, repeatedly suspending democratic representation in the name of order and legality. From the end of the Second World War to today, the municipality has experienced an almost uninterrupted succession of Mayors and appointed Commissioners, marked by short mandates and unstable governments, culminating a dual system of extraordinary administration in 2023. From a sociological perspective, Caivano's administrative instability reflects a broader fragility of the local social and political fabric. The frequent alternation between elected Mayors and extraordinary Commissioners has contributed to a widespread perception of institutional powerlessness, in which decisions appear imposed from above and lacking territorial embeddedness. This has fostered a sense of civic alienation, whereby citizens come to perceive themselves as passive spectators of opaque and weakly accountable political processes (Mete 2009; 2016).

In this context, Foucault (1978) provides a crucial interpretive lens: commissionership can be understood as a form of emergency governmentality, in which power is exercised less through representation than through dispositifs of control and surveillance. The Commissioner is not a representative of the population, but rather a functionary who embodies state power in its most impersonal and disciplinary form. The persistent political instability of Caivano has hindered the construction of a shared vision of development, fostering social fragmentation and polarisation between professional elites and underrepresented populations. In this scenario, extraordinary administration is not merely a technical measure, but a sign of a crisis of democratic legitimacy because it suspends political contestation and imposes an impersonal and distant mode of governance. While ensuring order, the figure of the Commissioner fails to engage with the everyday lived needs of the population, thereby contributing to processes of civic disaffiliation. Following Castel's (1999) interpretation, Caivano can thus be conceptualised as a "grey zone" between inclusion and marginality, where administrative power does not heal social fractures but risks exacerbating them, reinforcing mistrust and a pervasive sense of abandonment.

In the wake of the tragic events of the sexual assaults and the appointment of the Extraordinary Commission replacing the municipal executive, issues of governmentality reached a critical point with the adoption of the so-called "Caivano Decree" by the national government. The Decree allocates €30 mil-

lion for infrastructural interventions and urban regeneration. Yet a crucial question remains: does this measure genuinely address the social wounds of the territory, or does it reproduce a logic of control that marginalises participation and forecloses transformative change?

The Decree is articulated around two main axes: territorial regeneration and the prevention of juvenile deviance. Specifically, Article 1 establishes an Extraordinary Commissioner tasked with preparing and implementing an extraordinary plan of infrastructural and functional regeneration interventions for the territory of the Municipality of Caivano. The measures envisaged include the remediation and recovery of degraded urban areas; the renovation of public buildings to be allocated to social and cultural activities; the strengthening of urban security and the liveability of public spaces; and the simplification of procedures for transferring public real estate to Third Sector organisations. Among the stated priorities is the redevelopment of the former Delphinia sports centre – the site of the assaults – intended to be transformed into a symbol of possible urban and social redemption. The municipality was also authorised to recruit additional personnel to reinforce both the local police force and social services.

On the educational front, Article 2 provides for agreements between the Ministry of Universities and Campanian universities to promote university orientation pathways, with the aim of supporting students from Caivano and neighbouring municipalities. Nonetheless, a critical question persists: can orientation initiatives meaningfully influence life trajectories if they are not accompanied by structural policies addressing the right to education, access to employment, and income security?

The Decree also introduces harsher penal measures for minors. These changes have rapidly produced tangible effects: according to a report by Antigone[19], as of 15 January 2024 – just a few months after the adoption of the Caivano Decree – admissions to juvenile detention facilities increased by 37.4%, with a marked rise in pre-trial detention and a high incidence of property-related offences and violations of drug legislation. As the report notes, the most represented age group is that of 16-17 year-olds, and the possibility of transfer-

19 VII Rapporto di Antigone, *Ragazzi Dentro. Giustizia minorile e Istituti penali per minorenni*, https://www.ragazzidentro.it/
Antigone is an Italian non-governmental organization that promotes the protection of human rights within the criminal justice system, with a particular focus on prison conditions, detention practices, and penal policies. It conducts research, monitoring, and advocacy aimed at ensuring legality, dignity, and constitutional rights for people deprived of liberty.

ring young adults from juvenile penal institutions to adult prisons is causing severe harm to the future prospects of these youths.

As it has been implemented, the Caivano model appears as a form of "social restyling", alternating construction sites with media-driven visibility and presence. Yet the most controversial and dramatic marker of state intervention has been the eviction of unlawfully occupied housing units in the Parco Verde public housing complex, carried out on 28 November 2024. The operation involved the deployment of 1,200 law enforcement officers and multiple helicopters to "clear out" 36 housing units inhabited by 132 people. The evictions were justified on the grounds of non-remediable irregularities, either due to household incomes exceeding eligibility thresholds or because one family member had final criminal convictions involving sentences exceeding seven years.

This episode has been interpreted as punitive not so much with regard to the legal grounds of the evictions themselves, but rather in relation to the spectacularisation of the intervention. On this occasion, social tension had already surfaced at a symbolic level in February 2024, when the evictions were announced in continuity with the Caivano Decree but were subsequently suspended following strong protests by residents, who blocked the main road and access to the parish church of Don Patriciello. During these demonstrations, protesters articulated a powerful *j'accuse*: «You used our children for your own interests and then took away their homes»[20].

This statement brings to light a structural contradiction within the emergency-based policies adopted in Caivano, most visibly crystallised in the enactment of the Caivano Decree. Children are mobilised in public discourse as lives to be protected and as the moral foundation of state intervention, while the governmental practices implemented – most notably evictions – act upon populations through security dispositifs that produce discontinuity and precarisation. Childhood thus becomes a privileged object of biopolitical enunciation, the condition through which power legitimises its hold over the territory, whereas at the material level families are subjected to regulatory techniques that interrupt the minimum conditions of social reproduction.

It is within this gap between the register of protection and that of intervention that a mode of governing populations emerges that does not aim to eliminate risk, but rather to distribute it unevenly across urban space, normalising

20 See: Rosaria Rocco, *Caivano, Parco Verde in protesta: "Avete usato i nostri bambini e poi gli avete tolto la casa"*, in «il Mattino», 24 February 2024, www.ilmattino.it/napoli/area_metropolitana/caivano_parco_verde_protesta_avete_usato_nostri_bambini_poi_avete_tolto_la_casa-7955538.html
The content of the banner was translated by the authors.

exposure for specific social groups and territories. The protection of childhood is thereby inscribed within a regime of security that privileges control and the public visibility of action over care, transforming fundamental social rights – such as the right to housing and educational continuity – into variables subordinated to the emergency management. In this sense, power does not "make live" through stable forms of protection, but governs by leaving exposed the very lives it claims to safeguard, reproducing a governmental rationality grounded in exception rather than in structural transformation.

3. *Caivano Voices and Identities: The Third Sector's Central Role in Caivano*

The Third Sector represents one of the few stable and credible presences in the area. In a territory marked by educational poverty, organised crime, and institutional abandonment, associations, volunteers, and social workers do not merely "do something": they are there every day, actively creating possibilities. This is not only a matter of providing services, but of rebuilding trust and serving as a constant point of reference in a context where the State is often perceived as distant or even hostile.

The president of an association working with children and adolescents strongly criticises this situation: «With the appointment of a government Commissioner, our perception was one of rupture with the territory, but also with the associational sector»[21]. He adds: «Today we are able to sustain this structure and this organisation only because we committed ourselves to developing cultural activities proposals that already existed but were not renewed under the commissarial administration»[22].

Each initiative is designed to create safe spaces in which children and adolescents can experience healthy relationships and alternative role models. «I have always said this: we not only need the *Carabinieri*[23] or law enforcement agencies, but also youth workers, street educators, psychologists, and sociologists, because the issue of children and young people must be addressed in a truly comprehensive way» – the president insists, adding: «The issue of children must be tackled… And certainly not through the incarceration»[24].

21 Interview B2, 8 November 2024, Caivano; translation by the authors.
22 *Ibidem.*
23 For an explanation of the armed forces known as the *Carabinieri* in Italy, see *Social Topographies: A Reportage from Caivano* (*infra*).
24 Interview B2, 8 November 2024, Caivano; translation by the authors.

The transformative role of the Third Sector is also evident in its capacity to reshape the narrative surrounding Parco Verde: no longer merely a place associated with decay and crime, but a space of beauty, social relations, and resistance. As a pedagogue observes, «volunteering promotes a culture of life – that is, living with dignity and coexisting through reciprocity» (Spena 2023, p. 7; translation by the authors).

However, associations cannot act alone. What is required is an integrated network involving schools, public institutions, and social services. This network functions as a social dispositif capable of producing subjectivities and alternative ways of life in contrast to those imposed by organised crime.

During the research, another president of an association dedicated to the protection of children's rights offers a clear-sighted account of the municipality's prolonged administrative instability[25].

This condition of institutional precarity, which recurs cyclically, has generated a profound sense of distrust and has made it difficult for associations to build stable relationships with the local administration. The account provided by this second president also reveals a divided social geography, in which Parco Verde is perceived as an "other territory", separated from the rest of Caivano: «We have always been left on our own, as if we were already ghettoised by this very situation»[26]. Urban segregation is also reflected in educational institutions: «Even today, in 2024, in Parco Verde schools we still find only children from Parco Verde»[27]. These words evoke the concept of a "stigmatised space", in which marginality is inscribed within the urban structure and institutional practices. Rather than functioning as a space of protection, the school becomes a site of exclusion:

> We told the State that we needed training, but they have not listened to us for over a year. They have held twenty meetings in Caivano with various Commissioners and Prefects, always involving the parish priest. The Third Sector has never been heard… The community has never been taken into consideration, nor have its needs. So, if you do not listen to the people and believe that you can impose solutions from above… such as installing a skateboarding facility that we do not need… Why install it at all? Moreover, they did not provide skateboards, or a skateboarding instructor. What use is it to us? Eighty thousand euros wasted… […]

25 Interview B1, 8 November 2024, Parco Verde, Caivano; translation by the authors; for further details on this interview, see *Social Topographies: A Reportage from Caivano* (*infra*).

26 *Ibidem.*

27 *Ibidem.*

> We, as a community, had asked the Commissioners and the President of CONI[28] for a public meeting here in Parco Verde […]. We did not ask for the Pope, nor for Mattarella[29]; we asked for the President of Sport, because for us sport here […] is fundamental for mutual respect and for all those rules that make coexistence possible. Instead, they decided from above to remove the two bocce courts that were there and that we had asked to have refurbished. They said no: we will remove them and place this plastic structure in the middle instead. What use is that to us? So if they do not listen, if they do not understand, and if they do not engage with the life of the local community[30].

Through his testimony, this president highlights how schooling, sport, and training are not merely services but fundamental components of citizenship, and how their progressive weakening generates exclusion, deviance, and a loss of meaning. His voice powerfully calls for an approach that begins with the community itself, recognising its competencies, wounds, and aspirations.

He does not limit his critique to material interventions, but addresses the very logic of public action, which disregards forms of situated knowledge and the networks of proximity embodied by the Third Sector. What emerges is the failure of a mode of governance that does not engage in dialogue, that does not allow itself to be permeated by the voices of the territory, and that fails to recognise the value of grassroots-generated social capital. This results in a redefinition of the institutional field that marginalises local actors, reducing both their capacity to influence decision-making and their recognition as legitimate interlocutors (Gori 2022).

The president of an association working with children and adolescents, cited earlier, further confirms the distance between institutional governance and civil society: «In one year, we managed to obtain only a single meeting with the government Commissioner»[31]. He also denounces: «They came with the aim of identifying this territory as a place of wrongdoing… there was prejudice»[32].

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28 CONI (Italian National Olympic Committee) is the public body responsible for the organisation, regulation, and promotion of sport in Italy, operating under the supervision of the Italian government and in coordination with national and local sporting institutions.

29 Sergio Mattarella is the President of the Italian Republic, serving as the head of state and a guarantor of the Constitution, with a primarily representative role and responsibilities that include safeguarding institutional balance and democratic principles.

30 Interview B1, 8 November 2024, Parco Verde, Caivano; translation by the authors; for further details on this interview, see *Social Topographies: A Reportage from Caivano* (*infra*).

31 Interview B2, 8 November 2024, Caivano; translation by the authors.

32 *Ibidem.*

His voice grows bitter: «The State did not intervene to resolve the problems, but only to place a sort of lid over a situation of distress»[33].

By contrast, a third president of another association in Caivano adopts a more dialogical tone: «Structural interventions and urban regeneration are welcome… also because these are things that did not exist before»[34]. He acknowledges concrete improvements: «Buses running, separate waste collection, the sports centre that is actually functioning»[35]. He also values the institutional presence: «The most beautiful thing was being able to see representatives of the State working with open doors… You can go there, knock», saying: «Commissioner, there's a ditch there, there's this, there's that»[36].

He nevertheless insists on the need for civic assistance:

> What has been lacking in Caivano over the past thirty years has not been welfare assistance – because that is another matter altogether – but rather the kind of support that, in my view, a municipality in general […] should provide to its citizens through everyday, ordinary practices. The fact that you can rely on the municipal police […] or on a social worker who is meant to help you in certain situations, and who at the same time allows you not to be afraid of them because social workers are often seen as those who "take children away" […].
>
> Their numbers have increased [referring to the rise in the number of municipal police officers and social workers]. I have met a couple of them myself. And, to tell the truth, [the Commissioners] are trying, because it is not easy[37].

According to him, the issue is not a lack of welfare provision in the strict sense – often conflated with the passive distribution of benefits – but rather the absence of genuine civic assistance, expressed through everyday, small-scale practices: the presence of the municipal police, the support of social workers, and the possibility of relying on trusted figures who do not inspire fear but foster trust.

Close to this position, the voice of an activist from a local association also comes to the fore. Engaged in the protection of children's rights and supporting individuals affected by illnesses linked to environmental pollution, she adopts a more disenchanted stance, in which change is assessed less in terms of formal project design and more through the lived experience of the environment and micro-level social relations:

33 *Ibidem.*
34 Interview B13, 15 November 2024, Caivano; translation by the authors.
35 *Ibidem.*
36 *Ibidem.*
37 *Ibidem.*

> We meet them regularly [referring to the Commissioners], because they often attend Mass, frequently collaborate with us, and engage directly in dialogue with local residents. They maintain close interaction with people, especially those from Parco Verde, explaining what they are doing. I hope that in January I will also be able to initiate a form of collaboration in the area, particularly at the level of information-sharing. I want to speak again with the population and help them truly understand what is happening in this territory, because media reporting is misleading – whether it talks about illegal housing or about what has taken place in Caivano in terms of waste management and criminality.
>
> I think they do not realise that if Don Maurizio were to leave, or if something were to happen to him, this territory would begin to decline again – perhaps even more than before. […] It is not as if the centre is inaccessible; it is open to everyone. The fact is that the Pino Daniele [formerly called Delphinia] centre was an abandoned place where many terrible things happened, including violence against young girls, and so people would break in. The very fact that it is now monitored by law enforcement, that there is attention, cleanliness, and a possibility of use, already makes a difference. And who is to say that one day it might not be possible to establish an agreement with the municipality and expand opportunities? But this will take time.
>
> For now, together with the government authorities, we have tried to clean up the area. Of course, Don Maurizio was also criticised over his relationship with the Meloni government, but over the years he has engaged with every government. Don Maurizio is neither right-wing, nor left-wing, nor centrist – this is something people really need to understand. If he has responded to the needs of the territory by pragmatically engaging with whoever was in power, whether for political strategy or not, including Giorgia Meloni, it was because he had to take what was available in order to give something back to the citizens. Certainly, Don Maurizio was not closing the Delphinia centre and taking it home with him; he has sought to return it to a community where he cannot possibly aspire to become a cardinal or the Pope.
>
> […]
>
> For me, things remain largely the same, although there is obviously more control and a bit more attention when entering Parco Verde. You feel more protected, but the work carried out before is not fundamentally different from the work carried out today[38].

Her recognition of the Commissioners' administration as a reassuring presence is not accompanied by a reflection on the democratic implications of an extraordinary form of governance that, as she herself acknowledges, has not altered the work carried out by associations – «the work done before and the work done now has not changed»[39]. The trust she expresses towards the Com-

38 Interview B21, 10 December November 2024, Parco Verde, Caivano; translation by the authors.

39 *Ibidem.*

missioners – «they often come to collaborate with us, to engage directly with the population» – stands in contrast to the accounts of exclusion and lack of meaningful interlocution reported by other associations.

The activist appears to describe a privileged relationship, mediated by the figure of Don Maurizio Patriciello, which is neither generalisable nor structural. The risk, in this case, lies in conflating individual availability with genuine institutional openness, thereby legitimising a mode of governance that remains opaque and non-participatory. Even more problematic is the centrality attributed to Don Maurizio, portrayed as an irreplaceable figure; the careful defence of the priest turns into an indirect political legitimation that fails to interrogate the ways in which his figure has been strategically mobilised by the Giorgia Meloni government to construct a "Caivano model" aligned with an institutional narrative.

The voices collected depict an associative field that is far from homogeneous: between those who denounce systemic exclusion and those who acknowledge limited forms of institutional openness, a geography of positions emerges that reflects the complexity of the relationship between governance and territory. The institutional presence of the Commissioners, while perceived by some as reassuring, risks turning into an instrument of political legitimation, in which charismatic figures such as Don Maurizio Patriciello become symbolic mediators of a form of governance that remains opaque.

Within this framework, the Commissioners' administration does not appear merely as an emergency response, but rather as a mode of government that redistributes legitimacy, rewrites local hierarchies, and redefines who is entitled to speak and to act. This scenario invites a deeper problematisation: is the so-called "Caivano model" a genuine response to marginality, or rather a strategy of containment that neutralises dissent?

4. *Concluding Reflections on the Caivano Case: From Exception to institutionalised normality?*

The analysis of the interviews conducted in Caivano reveals a complex and stratified picture, in which divergent perspectives intertwine in relation to the role of the Third Sector, the quality of institutional interventions, and the possibility of constructing transformative practices rooted in the local context. Several recurring themes emerge forcefully, not as abstract categories but as living traces of everyday life shaped by tensions, aspirations, and forms of resistance.

One of the most salient themes concerns the tension between the Commissioners' intervention and responsiveness to the population. Many

practitioners denounce a form of project planning imposed from above, grounded in logics of urgency and visibility, which rarely engages with informal competencies and local networks of proximity. Institutional intervention is perceived as intrusive, oriented more towards control than toward co-construction. The distance between decision-makers and those who live in the area translates into the marginalisation of local subjectivities, reduced to passive recipients of extraordinary measures.

In this context, the legitimacy of local associations emerges as a laborious and continuously negotiated process. The Commissioners' administration has redefined power hierarchies, concentrating visibility on institutional and religious figures, while many grassroots organisations struggle to obtain recognition. The risk is that of a silent delegitimisation, which marginalises the most deeply rooted experiences and diminishes the capacity of proximity-based practices to exert influence.

Alongside these critical dynamics, narratives of everyday resistance also emerge: stories of care, presence, and relationships that escape institutional metrics yet embody vital forms of active citizenship. Paradoxically, a significant portion of the Third Sector takes shape as a counter-systemic field, capable of offering young people identities grounded in dignity, responsibility, and relationality. These practices do not merely respond to emergency conditions, but seek to transform the very circumstances that produce them, generating situated knowledge and transformative relationships.

The media representation of the territory contributes to a form of symbolic dispossession, whereby Caivano becomes an object of narrative rather than a subject endowed with a voice. Local actors call for recognition, not salvation; they demand space, not spectacularisation. «We want to live through beauty, we want to live through legality… but put us in a position to be able to do so», the president of an association pleads once again[40], expressing a desire for transformation that is also cultural and symbolic.

Within this framework, the epistemological question becomes central: who has the right to speak? Who can define what counts as "regeneration" and what counts as "control"? The divergence among voices reflects social positions, biographical experiences, and power relations.

It is precisely in difference – and not in synthesis – that the stakes of social transformation are played out. This tension is also reflected in the assessment of the social impact of the so-called "Caivano model", introduced through Decree-Law No. 123/2023 and subsequently extended to other vulnerable con-

40 Interview B1, 8 November 2024, Parco Verde, Caivano; translation by the authors; see *Social Topographies: A Reportage from Caivano* (*infra*).

texts. The evaluation frameworks adopted by institutions tend to privilege visible and quantifiable indicators – such as the speed of construction works or the number of surveillance cameras installed – while overlooking the relational, cultural, and symbolic transformations that permeate the territory.

As Robert Castel (2003) suggests, security is not a given objective, but a social relationship that depends on the protections provided in relation to specific needs. In response to this perspective, the research presented here advances a qualitative approach capable of capturing both the material and symbolic conditions of vulnerability: employment, housing, mobility, and access to services. Social impact cannot be assessed solely in terms of tangible outputs, but must also encompass processes of recognition, participation, and agency.

In this sense, the "Caivano model" appears profoundly ambivalent because for some actors it represents, at least in part, an opportunity for visibility and regeneration, while for others it functions as a dispositif of containment that neutralises dissent. The logic of exception, once institutionalised, tends to reproduce itself through standardised schemes, disregarding local specificities and the relational histories that traverse territories.

The construction of an exportable paradigm – based on Commissioners' administrations and extraordinary measures – risks transforming exception into norm, consolidating a governmental rationality that privileges control over care, media visibility over listening, and simplification over complexity. Against this logic, generative welfare may indeed take shape as a counter-dispositif: a relational practice that resists standardisation, values the plurality of subjects, and constructs responses that are not transferable but deeply rooted. It is a form of welfare that does not impose itself, but is built through dialogue; that does not contain, but accompanies; that does not redeem, but recognises.

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