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Changements et dynamiques récentes des pratiques habitatives dans les métropoles de l'Europe du Sud

Changements et dynamiques récentes des pratiques habitatives dans les métropoles de l'Europe du Sud

The building where I live: a social mapping of the city

Le bâtiment où je vis : une cartographie sociale de la ville

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Résumés

English Français

This article describes the last 70 years of a building located in the centre of Naples. It draws on interviews as well as the author's memories. A number of typical characteristics of this specific context have emerged from the analysis that will be presented here: the various sizes and quality of the apartments, which therefore host families from very different economic backgrounds (i.e. well-off, middle-class, socially unprotected and poor families living in the same building) – a variety that also characterises lower-than-average rented houses in Naples; the large-scale prevalence of property that has been divided up; the role of certain organisations that protect vulnerable groups in the market system by managing a small number of dwellings; the tendency of families to put down roots in the apartments; the absence of developers investing in historical dwellings; the role played by immigrants. These structural factors allow for the identification of dynamics of slow yet active transformations in a city that is essentially open to plurality and capable of exceptional adaptability, as in the case of the building under examination. These transformations cannot be understood through categories used elsewhere, such as gentrification, polarisation or segregation, which neglect the cities of the south.

Cet article décrit les 70 dernières années d'un immeuble situé dans le centre de Naples. Il s'appuie sur des entretiens ainsi que sur les souvenirs de l'auteur. Un certain nombre de caractéristiques typiques de ce contexte spécifique sont ressorties de l'analyse qui sera présentée ici : les tailles et qualités variées des appartements, qui accueillent donc des familles de milieux économiques très différents (c'est-à-dire des familles aisées, de la classe moyenne, socialement non protégées et pauvres vivant dans le même immeuble) – une variété qui caractérise également les maisons louées à des prix inférieurs à la moyenne à Naples ; la prévalence à grande échelle de la propriété divisée ; le rôle de certaines organisations qui protègent les groupes vulnérables dans le système



du marché en gérant un petit nombre de logements ; la tendance des familles à s'enraciner dans les appartements ; l'absence de promoteurs investissant dans les habitations historiques ; le rôle joué par les immigrés. Ces facteurs structurels permettent d'identifier des dynamiques de transformations lentes mais actives dans une ville essentiellement ouverte à la pluralité et capable d'une adaptabilité exceptionnelle, comme dans le cas de l'immeuble examiné. Ces transformations ne peuvent être comprises à travers des catégories utilisées ailleurs, telles que la gentrification, la polarisation ou la ségrégation, qui négligent les villes du sud.

Texte intégral

Research question and background information

What are the characteristics of Naples in terms of how the dwellings are composed and used?

- 1 A city is not just a physical place: it is also the product of all the conversations (e.g. novels, research, movies, news reports, etc.) about it. Naples has been the object of a large number of discussions regarding various topics. When studying this city, it is difficult to avoid the many conversations about it that, conversely, are carried out implicitly. Even those who have lived in and studied the city for a long time ask themselves, from time to time, what its principal and defining characteristics nowadays are.
- 2 Making a simplification, I will primarily refer to the municipality of Naples and not to the city at large, which extends far beyond its actual limits. It is a compact city – dense and surrounded by hills descending to the sea, while two large amphitheatres look out on a large gulf. It also has extraordinary scenic beauty; it is an ancient city with a large old town area and predominantly historic dwellings, with mixed populations living together. Only a few areas are not integrated and Naples has a less Cartesian layout than other European cities. It is a city with structural unemployment, exceeding 30 to 40 per cent in some territories and sections of the population, and a large number of families live in poverty.¹ It is undisciplined, “porous” and adaptable, with a large number of informal jobs as well as illegal and criminal activities. It is a hypermodern and kaleidoscopic city, where the remnants of pre-capitalism and signs of late modernity meet. Naples is also inhabited by the rich and well-established – perhaps vaguely dynamic – elite, who possess and/or inhabit hundreds of guesthouses with panoramic views scattered across the Posillipo hill or in other prestigious areas. These include socio-geographical enclaves such as Chiaia, San Ferdinando, Vomero and San Giuseppe, as well as the historical centre and the hill, with a concentration of hospitals. Among the 350,000 families who inhabit the city, at least ten per cent live in particularly affluent conditions thanks to their wealth, residential settings, profession, status and stability.
- 3 To understand the city’s multidimensional and mixed landscape, which presents a unique combination of memories, scoriae, traces of hypermodernity and reinvented archaic elements present in the post-metropolis, it is necessary to place it in its Mediterranean context.
- 4 Apart from the well-established rhetoric about Naples’ landscape and way of life, the metaphor of the city’s cosmic uniqueness is reflected in the intermittent nature of local politics. A diverse range of sectors and problems are delegated to some special commissioner endowed with the power to grant dispensations, which are often extended over a long period of time. The best-known examples include the 1980 earthquake and the waste management crisis at the end of the last century, regarding the failed waste collection in the city.²

5 By exploring the dynamics of use and the composition of the residents of one particular building in the city centre, I aim to specify the dynamics of the social division of space and the socio-economic make-up of the city. This will not be a traditional investigation but rather an auto-ethnographic one,³ which has some precedents in studies carried out in Paris and Lyon.⁴

A first methodological, contextual element: the pervasiveness of the cycle of coexistence, turnover and replacement

6 Gentrification is the most common representation of the dynamics of transformation regarding the use of space and urban heritage in many Italian cities. Such representation requires an analytical scheme that is quite popular among scholars and activists who wish to pinpoint the features of this phenomenon.⁵ It describes a cycle that primarily focuses on three phases of the social division of space: coexistence, turnover and replacement – or displacement.⁶ According to the most common analysis, the cycle begins with a progressive depletion and destruction of property, the neighbourhood and people's living conditions. Hence, over time, the presence of unattractive businesses and/or people living in poverty or with an alleged bad reputation lowers the visible living standard and status of the neighbourhood. Less vulnerable groups who no longer tolerate the decrease in living conditions and seek to improve their lives as soon as they have the means begin to leave the neighbourhood voluntarily. Consequently, once the spiral of progressive degeneration has been initiated, housing values and, subsequently, prices gradually drop. This occurs right before or after the arrival of new social players (or businesses), who thus take on the role of forerunners of social replacement, especially because the shift in the renewal of the environment works in the favour of these immigrants, artists, young intellectuals and so on. The place becomes popular at least among those willing to set a trend and attract inhabitants. At this point, still according to the ideal type model, real estate developers may expel long-standing tenants or more vulnerable and problematic residents. Shortly after the temporary emptying and the launch of a redevelopment of parts of the property, the housing is made available to people with a higher social profile, purchasing power and status. This happens also with businesses. In fact, businesses and/or residents are replaced following the – more or less progressive or quick – exodus of poorer people to less expensive areas. Next, a more stable and wealthy class of people arrive in the area, and this all occurs in only a few years.

7 Thus, the developers and real estate operators trigger a kind of poverty trap and subsequent land development, with the aim of profiteering by purchasing real estate at a low price and making very lucrative investments that result in expulsions, which are both social and spatial.⁷

8 The representation type of this cycle applies to contexts that for various reasons have historical, environmental and cultural value. Owing to those characteristics, a property is chosen by people (or businesses) endowed with certain resources (e.g. artists, researchers or young trendsetters) and/or earning capacity. To put it in simple terms, the framework and analysis of the cases of gentrification adopt this interpretative scheme of the dynamics of built heritage use.

9 However, several questions arise when observing the dynamics of use within the neighbourhoods of Naples. Is it certain that every turnover, or replacement, of residents (people and businesses) follows this cycle? Does it do so anywhere? Can certain components of this cycle be found in histories that are substantially different, interpreted as components of other dynamics that may be cyclical yet significantly diverse? It is necessary to conduct other studies of buildings within the centres of Naples and other cities of the south (in Italy but also in Greece, Spain and Portugal). This would allow us to identify the shared traits within the social division of space and

the city's living culture, which are not captured by the explicit framework of this cycle (and of gentrification): a distinct dynamic that is useful to determine.

A second methodological, contextual element: the constant reinterpretation of area studies

10 There is another significant methodological and contextual element that I can mention only briefly in this article. The studies by C. Booth (1889), who in reality used both indirect and direct data, those by the Chicago school and more recent investigations⁸ have managed to analyse the dynamics of the citywide social division of space thanks to statistical surveys and studies that have always used a wide-angle representation of the territory; as a result, these dynamics have revealed a substantial homogeneity of qualities among the buildings and their population.⁹ A radical reduction of complexity thus occurs. By studying the degree of dispersion or the concentration range of several variables on the city map (i.e. the buildings or inhabitants with certain characteristics), scholars obtained a social, demographic and electoral layout as well as property values. Many studies have noted the unique articulations regarding vertical stratification, even within the same unit of analysis (i.e. the lot, the minimum census unit).

11 Before lifts became commonplace, even in large cities such as Paris, attic spaces were conceived and designated for service workers or the poor, while the main floors were occupied by wealthy people and the ground floor spaces were designed for businesses or keeping animals and, occasionally, servants. Until the large-scale distribution of lifts, this was relatively true also for many Neapolitan buildings. However, in the 1980s, the situation significantly changed. The top-floor apartments, often created by progressively adding attics and covering terraces, became more and more attractive to high- and middle-income families.

Naples: a city of diversity and coexistence

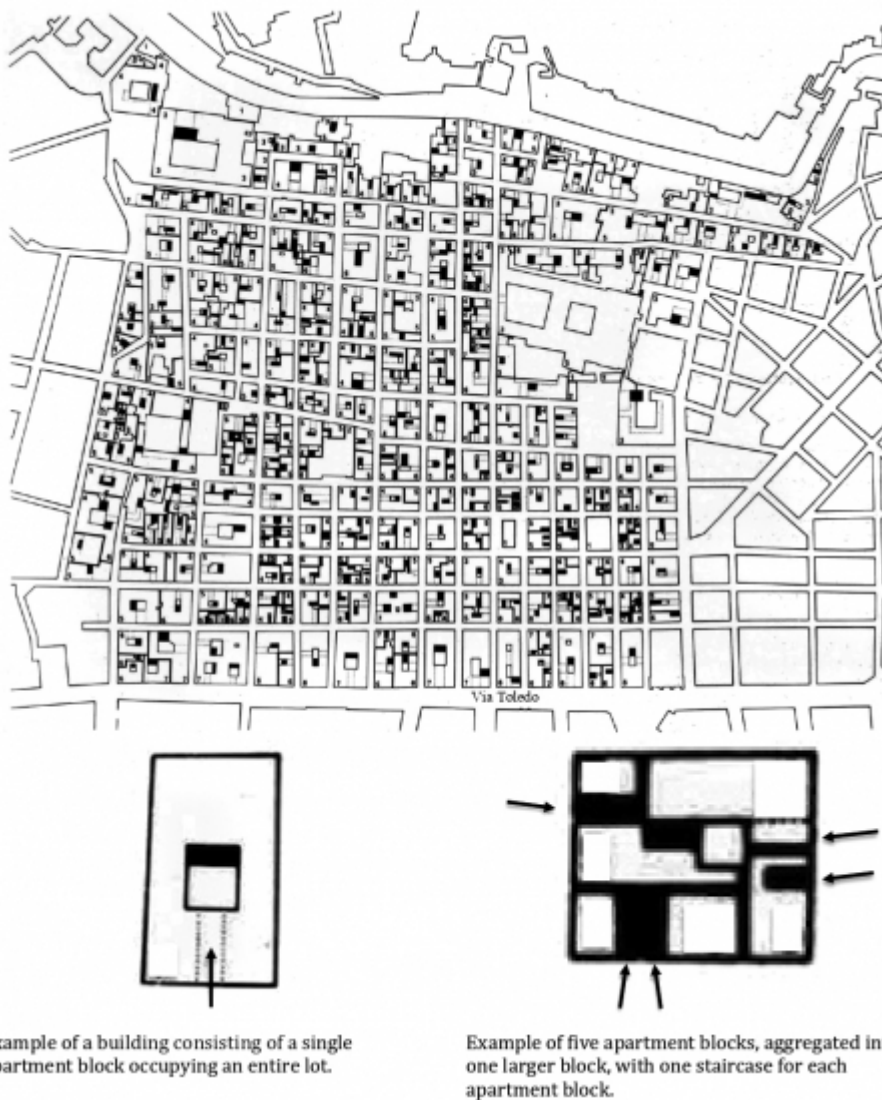
12 This article draws on my in-depth knowledge of the Quartieri Spagnoli (Spanish Quarter), where I have been working, living and studying since the beginning of the 1980s.¹⁰ My research on this area consists of observant participation,¹¹ the coordination of projects for an NGO dedicated to combatting educational poverty,¹² and the continuous analysis of the characteristics of dwellings and, especially, the local community and the dynamics of social reproduction and transition.

13 The dynamics of construction and use of the dwellings in Naples convey trajectories that are markedly different from those indicated in the phases of coexistence, turnover and replacement/displacement. Permeable dwellings have allowed diverse classes – including the working class – to put down roots, greatly reducing the expulsion dynamics of the poorer classes. These dynamics cannot be understood unless the interpretative filter derived from other cities is qualified. The neighbourhoods in the city centre of Naples are neither segregated nor gentrified.¹³ The dynamics of use of the buildings imply a more articulated, diverse and slow evolution. This hasn't prevented large numbers of people from moving from the centre to the outskirts, but these dynamics have taken place over time. Changes occurred over several decades, starting with the regeneration of the disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the last 30 years of the nineteenth century up until the mass relocation of a large part of the population to public housing as part of the government's emergency programme after the earthquake of 1980. Other phenomena with different, much slower and longer cycles have coexisted alongside the relatively quicker, smaller changes.

14 For example, the buildings of the Quartieri Spagnoli (**fig. 1**), where the space is divided into various apartment buildings (joint ownership), each separated by a stairwell (the small black rectangles in the illustration), offer an important piece of

information. The individual lot, which is often of the same size, has been subdivided – even from the moment of its initial construction – into a variable number of apartment buildings. The bourgeois building, usually found on the main road of Toledo and in the grid ascending towards the hill, takes up the entire lot. However, the same – or a relatively similar – lot has been divided into two or even six buildings (**fig. 1**). Thus, buildings with small apartments (i.e. two or somewhat more rooms with minimal space for bathroom facilities) are adjacent to apartment buildings with varying apartment sizes. The qualitative variety of the apartments as a whole is also determined by their floor level, specific conditions and maintenance, and setting: it is more difficult to get to the top floors without a lift, for example, but there is more light and sometimes a good view. The amount of maintenance is also relevant. However, it is important to note that, following the earthquake of 1980 that severely damaged almost all the neighbourhood's blocks, nearly ninety per cent of the dwellings were affected by emergency maintenance work.

Fig. 1. Map of the apartment blocks and building units, including the number of floors, of the central area of the Spanish Quarter.



Example of a building consisting of a single apartment block occupying an entire lot.

Example of five apartment blocks, aggregated into one larger block, with one staircase for each apartment block.

Source: Basic map from Capobianco, 1987, p. 125, additional information by the author.

- 15 The fundamental element of the social division of space featuring many kinds of apartments also depends on a historical division of property ownership, as in the case of the apartments scattered among the various floors of the buildings; over the years, these buildings have all added another level. The Quartieri Spagnoli originated as a mixed neighbourhood, inhabited by wealthy families but also by artisans and workers connected to the activities and economy of the nearby royal palace or the not-so-distant port. It was essentially open to common people and the urban underclass, who lived alongside middle-class people and well-off families.¹⁴

16 We could hypothesise that the typological diversity of the landscape was also conditioned by building methods and repeated construction types used as early as the seventeenth century by a certain type of building professionals. Perhaps derived from Spanish professional culture, their work actually determined the spatial matrices of large parts of the dwellings, except for the few buildings that were destroyed in the Second World War and reconstructed in the post-war period.

The analysis

Micro-history of a building where women live on their own

17 The research presented here consists of an inquiry directed at the inhabitants of a luxury building in Naples' city centre where I have been living since 1968, with a 20-year interruption (from 1981 to March 2001), when I resided in an apartment in another neighbourhood in the city centre.¹⁵

18 As part of my ethnographic inquiry, I conducted five in-depth interviews with people who have lived in the building for decades, while also using my own and my relatives' perspectives. For every apartment in the building, I developed profiles where I catalogued the most relevant information regarding the residents who had come and gone over the years: forms of tenure, household composition and the family's basic social characteristics. I mapped the uses of all 27 apartments (**table 1**), 24 of which were used as homes as of June 2021 (20 apartments and four bassi, one of which was used only during the day).¹⁶

Table 1. Table of the apartments and other used spaces in the investigated building between 2016 and 2021.

Apartment #	Floor	Size	Estimate of house value	Permanent residents				Occasional residents				N. of years of stay	Notes of 2016	Notes of 2021: 15 apartments from the 1960s to 2021 were subdivided into 22 apartments	
				Owners		Tenants		Students		City users					
				2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021				
18	5 [*]	Medium	Very high							4	4	10	Short-term rental apartment	Not used because of the COVID crisis. Resumed weekly letting	
17		Small	High	1								21	Professor	Permanent	
16		Large	High	2	4								35	Widowed office worker with daughter	Widow with daughter, her partner and their daughter
15	4 [*]	Large	Very high	1	1								32	Doctor	Permanent
14		Large	Very high	2	2								30	Teacher with daughter	Permanent
13		Large	Very high	1	2								73	Pensioner	Single elderly woman with carer
13b		Medium	Media			3	2						40	Widowed nurse	Elderly woman (mother living on the second floor) with carer
12	3 [*]	Large	High	2	2								84	Pensioner	Carer replacing the brother
11		Large	High					4	3				30	Students	Empty during lockdowns, then returned
11b		Small	Media			2	2						5	Apartment in the back	Couple of young people
10	2 [*]	Medium	High	4	3								30	Dental technician	Son, now independent
9		Medium	High	2	2								50	Widowed shopkeeper	Permanent situation
8		Medium	Media				3						5	Renovated apartment	Renovated and change of occupants
7	1 [*]	Large	Media					3	3	2			2	Short-term rental apartment 1	Empty short-term rental rooms
7b		Small	Media			3	3						2	Couples letting the apartment	Permanent situation
6		Large	Media		2	0	0						2	Ex-short-term rental 2 lifts	Renovated for the owner's daughter
6b		Medium	Media			0	2						2	Ex-short-term rental 2 lifts	Renovated, couple letting the apartment
6c		Medium	Low			0	2						1	Ex-short-term rental 2 lifts	Chinese family or household
5a	Mezzanine	Small	Low			0	3	2					1	New tenants	Renovated
5b		Small	Low			0	2	2					1		Renovated for young couple
1	Ground floor	Small Basso	Low Low	1			1						2	Ex-tailor, city employee	Tailor deceased, now tobacconist's storeroom
3		Mezzanine	Low	3			1						0	Apartment being renovated	Widow deceased, taken over by relatives
4		Small	Low	4			1						40	Garage of Number 14	Permanent
				15	18	11	19	11	3	7	6		44		46

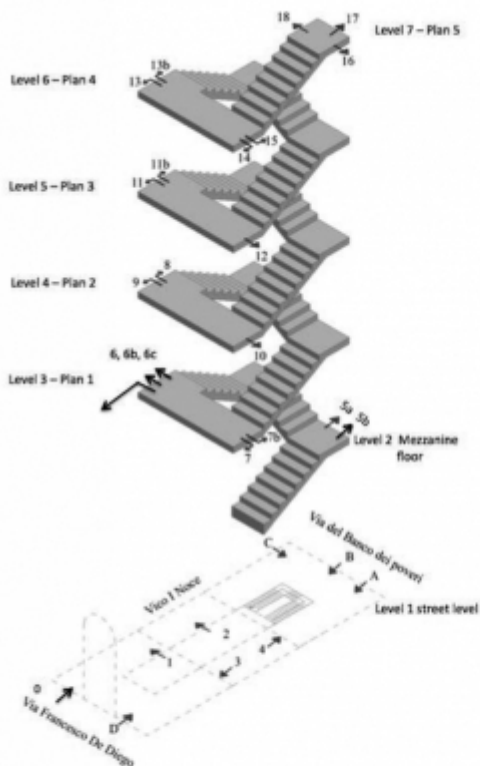
I bassi

2	Inside Basso	G inside	Very Low			5	5						1	Inhabited by immigrants in 2022 new Neapolitan tenants, entrance from the courtyard.
0	Ground floor	G outside	Very Low			0	0						60	Tobacco shop expanded in 2022. New management for about 30 years
D	Basso	G outside	Very Low			0	0						20	Used as an additional living room by the widow who lives with her son in flat no. 9
A	Basso	G outside	Very Low			3	3						10	Marginalised proletariat present for many years
B	Basso	G outside	Very Low			4	4						15	Marginalised proletariat present for many years
C	Basso	G outside	Very Low			4	4						15	Marginalised proletariat present for many years
						16	16						16	

19 Covering three sides of the building, the 27 apartments are distributed over seven above-ground floors. On the ground floor, just beyond the large entrance door, there are two apartments on the façade, a basso on the side of the long alley and two bassi on the side of the short alley at the back of the building (fig. 2). As a result of multiple divisions of larger apartments, a total of 24 dwellings – including four bassi – have been created from the five bassi, up to the three fifth-floor panoramic apartments with access to the street. The ground floor also hosts a tobacconist, a store room for the tobacconist and a garage that can be accessed via the courtyard.

20 This micro-description reveals specific characteristics that can be found also among large sections of the dwellings in the city centre at large. The micro-history of this building has been conducted to identify and verify the presence of certain distinctions within the building fabric and social dynamics in Naples. In my opinion, these aspects contain features that are notably different from those of northern cities and other areas.

Fig. 2. The layout of the building on the seven floors through a perspective view of the stairwell.



The building faces streets on three sides: the main entrance looks out onto an eighteenth-century street (Via De Diego); the other two onto backstreets. Since the seventeenth century, the fourth side of the rectangle has been situated on a second part of the property, which has always been used as a school. Without doing an in-depth study into the scope and other important traits of the building to determine the quality of the accommodations, we could say that there are 22 apartments in addition to the spaces used for different purposes, that is, a *basso* used only during the day (D), an apartment let to three students (9) and another used as a short-term rental apartment (18). These 22 apartments include four overcrowded *bassi* (A, B, C and 2) with lofts located on the ground floor, five small apartments that have recently been renovated (5a, 5b, 6, 6b, 6c), nine medium-sized apartments (7, 7b, 8, 9, 10, 11b, 13b, 16, 17) of different value also because of their positioning on the various floors, and four spacious apartments with few residents, a single person or two. These last four apartments host two elderly women with carers, a couple with a daughter, and two single mothers (each with one child).

On the ground floor, there is a tobacco shop on the street (0). The tobacconist in 2021 rented also the adjacent place, which gives inside the building (1). The latter, which is owned by the same landlord of the tobacconist (i.e. Capitolo Metropolitano), was vacated after the death of the son of the last caretaker who used the space as a tailor's workshop in the 1960s. There is also a garage (4) used by a woman who lives on the fourth floor (14), while apartment 3 was converted into a recently renovated, small apartment located on the mezzanine floor and inhabited by the granddaughter of the elderly woman who lived there previously with her father and then with her husband, both taxi drivers.

The variety of housing sizes and social types that characterise many buildings in the city centre

21 I believe two features are most common in the centre of Naples. First, the variety of housing sizes (scale and expositive value) and the maintenance conditions of the dwellings result in the broad stratification of real estate properties in the same buildings, in many lots or neighbourhoods. Certain property characteristics are also significant. In the first instance, the property is visibly subdivided, not only horizontally but also among the various floors of the buildings. Owing to the large-scale emigration of many Neapolitans, who improved their social position by moving to central and northern cities, the passage from generation to generation has meant that the real estate property was entrusted to someone – usually an administrator – who would distribute the rent (often not very high) among the various descendants living in other cities.

Table 2. Summary of tenures and occupant profiles in the apartments of the investigated building (2016 and 2021).

	Permanent residents				Students and city users				Permanent	Students and non-resident occupants		
	Ownership		House rental		Students		City user					
2016	15	25.0	27	45.0	11	18.3	7	11.7	42	18	60	100
2021	18	29.0	35	56.5	3	4.8	6	9.7	53	9	62	100
	Permanent residents + inhabitants of the <i>bassi</i>				Students and city users							
2016	42		70.0		18	30.0			60	Tot. 2016		
2021	53		85.5		9	14.5			62	Tot. 2020		

- 22 From 2016 to June 2021, students and city users disappeared as a result of the COVID emergency, which prompted the owner of the largest property to reconvert the spacious first-floor houses to long-term lease properties. The apartment remains empty until June 2021. More regular inhabitants arrive, the elderly get older and a few babies grow up. About a tenth of the estate is unused. At least four large houses are inhabited by one or two people. Variety and “sponginess”, a category echoing Benjamin and Lacis’s concept of porosity,¹⁷ persist.
- 23 This situation resulted in great neglect of the property and reticence to sell it because this appeared complicated and not very profitable. The specific function of some apartments in the building stands out, as in the case of the Capitolo Metropolitan.¹⁸ This institution owns two spaces with access to the main street and two apartments in the building, one of which is very small; it was first used by three generations of caretakers and later as a tailor’s workshop, by the son of the last caretaker who passed away in 2019. The other small apartment, which could be accessed through the entrance, was inhabited by two generations of taxi drivers from the same family for over a hundred years. The last, elderly tenant (daughter and widow of the taxi drivers) died in the summer of 2020, after which young relatives of hers moved in without changing the letting agreement. It can be argued that the Capitolo Metropolitan, which has about a hundred properties for let, has objectively played a role in safeguarding the apartments used by low- to middle-income families. With regard to its ownership of a large amount of property, there are no known cases of end-of-contract or delinquent payment evictions, nor has it imposed letting fees that exceed the market average.¹⁹ The widespread presence and rootedness of the middle and working classes in the historical centre have been reinforced by the presence of certain players who, refraining from the practice of selling properties to the highest bidders, have taken on an objective calming role in the competition for the social division of housing.

Families putting down roots in the apartments

- 24 A second common feature that I have identified is the fact that certain working – and middle-class families put down roots in the building in the decades under examination (**box 1**). Most members of these families and/or their descendants achieved an income level and upward mobility that allowed them to move to other bourgeois neighbourhoods. Following different social mobility trajectories, another part moved to outlying areas or towns in the metropolitan area. Seven apartments are now occupied by people – or their descendants – who have lived in the building for at least 40 years. These families (although they can nowadays not be called this) – or some of their descendants – have had more financial opportunities and have therefore chosen, and been able, to remain in or return to the building.
- 25 The study has revealed that some residents belong to families that started living in the building over fifty years ago, while others have lived there for several decades. Only a fourth of the dwellings are used by those who arrived in the last ten years or short-term occupants.
- 26 As we can see in box 4, even in 2021, despite the deaths of two residents who have lived in the building for years, at least six other residents occupy (i.e. own) as many apartments (usually middle- or large-sized and in good condition compared to the other apartments in the building). For various decades, these residents have objectively expressed a distinctive desire to put down roots in the apartments occupied by the same family or their descendants. Depending on life expectancy, it is likely that some of the elderly people will at some point leave the apartments vacant, and it remains to be seen whether their descendants will put the apartment on the market (e.g. for sale, let or short-term letting) or if some descendant will prefer to live in the apartment that was handed down to them.²⁰
- 27 Empirical research and the working hypothesis presented here suggest that this situation is the outcome of traits and methods of use that are recurrent in the city’s large

historical centre. The diffusion and rootedness of these social profiles have most likely co-determined a relatively slow transformation, without specific traumas being caused by social turnover, in the use of dwellings in Naples. This is a city that often fails to value the unique, historically rooted and extended presence of the poor and lower-middle-class populations in large neighbourhoods in the city centre – a long-standing characteristic that will probably not disappear in the next 30 years.

Box 1. The longest-residing families in the building.

Since 1929, the Russo-Riccio family has been letting apartment number 3, located on the mezzanine floor. In 2020, the widow died and the let was passed on to a grandchild.
 One of the sons of the Gatto family used their former home (the caretaker's house, apartment 1) as a tailor's workshop from 1964 until 2019, when he passed away. The space was then converted to a storage room for the tobacconist located on the street. Both spaces are owned by the Capitolo Metropolitano.
 Since 1965, the Lezzi family has been living in the *basso* (currently still occupied during the day) that faces the street (D). In 1970, it moved to number 9 on the second floor, in a middle-sized home with a partial loft where the elderly mother and her widower son still live.
 The Conte family has lived in number 12, a large apartment located on the third floor, since 1936. Since a few years, the elderly woman has an Eastern European carer living with her.
 Mrs Zueli has lived in her apartment – number 13 on the fourth floor – since 1949. Following the death of her elderly mother several years ago, she married a friend but became a widow. Since a few years, an Eastern European carer has been living with her.
 Mrs Piazza, who is separated and lives with an adopted daughter on the fourth floor, is the granddaughter of Mrs Maione, who came to live in the building in 1962.
 Mrs Lollo, a widow who was married to Mrs Maione's eldest son, first lived with her daughter and since 2021 with her grandson and her daughter's partner.
 My own family, composed of a total of six people, came to the building in 1966. In 2021, I returned to live in a smaller apartment on the sixth floor where my two brothers and sister had lived periodically and on a short-term basis.

28 This overall rootedness is demonstrated by strategies that result in the “taking over” of apartments in the same building. For example, in **box 2**, I have indicated the takeover and prolonged use by various members of the Maione family. For about three decades, this family has had their first large family home on the first floor. Next, through family strategies, Mrs Maione's children – despite being married and living in other apartments in the city centre – took the opportunity to purchase the apartments for their daughters. In fact, even today, two beautiful and large apartments on the upper floors are inhabited by two of Mrs Maione's granddaughters. This story demonstrates that this progressive rootedness in the building has facilitated a kind of surveillance by these families, regarding the affairs of the other tenants. In this way, when the apartments were vacated they could implement a strategy of property acquisition, as they already had a presence in the building.

Box 2. The occupation of the Maione family (widow with six children) of four apartments over a period of 50 years.

Apartment number 7, 1st floor: large space with six rooms and amenities.	Apartment number 14, 4th floor: large space with six rooms and amenities.	Apartment number 16, 5th floor: large space with five rooms, amenities and a very nice view.	Apartment number 17, 5th floor: two rooms, amenities and a very nice view.
The Maione family purchased this apartment in 1962. The widow has lived there with her six children since the 1980s.	The eldest daughter bought the apartment, where her daughter has been living since 1991.	The youngest son started letting this apartment in 1986 and then bought it in 1990, with his partner. When their daughter was born, the couple separated and he left. His ex now lives there with their daughter. In 2020, her grandson was born and the family size increased to five members.	The fourth daughter bought the apartment for her daughter, who lived there from 1992 to 2001. She sold the apartment to go and live in a larger one. Laino's partner purchased the apartment.

29 My family, instead, arrived in 1966, letting one of the apartments on the last floor. Previously an attic, it was converted into a large terrace in the 1940s or 1950s (**box 3**). Lacking a lift, these kinds of dwellings – in Naples as in other cities – were relatively affordable for a family with at least one fixed income. The poorer families started living in these buildings in the *bassi*, which were in slightly better conditions than the top-floor apartments. The wealthier people held on tightly to the model ground-floor

apartments, avoiding having to climb too many stairs. Thanks to relative social mobility and, especially, a direct connection with the families in the same building, my family moved to a larger home on the fourth floor where I continued to live with my parents until the earthquake of 1980, when the apartment was condemned.

30 For this family, as many other residents in the building and the neighbourhood, the earthquake marked a moment of rupture and significant life changes. The transitions of the family unit and the four siblings first to the two larger apartments and then to the smaller one, where – slightly by chance – I returned to live in 2001, are summarised in **box 3**.

Box 3. The occupation of three apartments by the Laino family (father and mother, respectively born in 1912 and 1921, with four children).

Apartment number 18, 5th floor: three rooms and a large terrace.	Apartment number 15, 4th floor: large space with five rooms and a nice view.	Apartment number 17, 5th floor: two rooms, amenities and a nice view.
The family began letting apartment number 18 in 1966.	The family changed apartments in 1970 and let apartment number 15, which was condemned in November 1980. They moved out completely at the end of their lease, in 1990.	The apartment was first let in 1972, by the daughter. From 1973 to 1976, the son and his wife lived in the apartment; from 1976 until 1980, the apartment was occupied by the daughter and her husband, who left because of the earthquake.
	From 1985 to 1989, the apartment was occupied by one of the sons separated from his wife	The apartment was inhabited from 1982 to 1984 by the brother, who separated from his wife.
		In 2001, the apartment was purchased by LD, the partner of G Laino who is still living there today.

31 As of 2016, one of the four siblings lives on the outskirts of the city, two in towns located in the greater Naples area, and the last sibling – who achieved the most social mobility – is living in apartment number 17.

Box 4. Data on occupancy type and number of residents (2016 and 2021).

Types of inhabitants	living in <i>bassi</i> *	students and temporary residents	living in middle and high-quality apartments*	The detailed analysis of the resident occupancy in the building, carried out in 2016 and updated in 2021, revealed a small increase from 60 to 62 residents. In reality, though, the changes were more significant than that. The strategies of the owner of the large apartments on the first floor (those that seem to have been divided the most, having been turned into five lodgings), the establishment of new families on the second and third floors, and family expansion on the sixth floor have changed the building's overall social profile. Currently, temporary residents reduced to six and resident students reduced to three people. Only tourists use the apartment on the last floor that is again in business, after the long COVID emergency. These things have led to an increase in more stable middle-class residents in moderately sized, good-condition apartments in the building. Those who have lived there for a longer time continue to own large apartments with substantial underuse of space. The representation of the building seems to reflect the national conflict between elderly people who hold on to a greater share of the property and young people who struggle to find a place to live.
Regarding 60 residents in 2016				
N. residents	16	18	26	
% residents	26.7	30.0	43.3	
% space	10.0	35.0	55.0	
% quality	10	20.0	70	
Regarding 62 residents in 2021				
N. residents	16	3+ 6	37	
% residents	25.8	14.5	59.7	
% space ²¹	10.0	15.0	75.0	
% quality ²²	8.0	15.0	77.0	

* Students and temporary residents are not included to those living in *bassi* or in middle and high-quality apartments.

The impact of the COVID emergency on the social division of space

32 The overall analysis and differences identified among the residents of June 2021 and those living in the building in 2016 (**box 4**) enable us to infer a kind of social division of space and recent dynamics that have also been strongly conditioned by the COVID public health crisis, which partially altered the landscape. In essence, the analysis seems to confirm a change in nature over the last ten years in Naples. Without going too far back, the city has been struck by sweeping crises that it has navigated with distinctive resilience, from the cholera outbreak of 1973 via the 1980 earthquake to the fallout from the crisis of 2018 and, more recently, the pandemic. Having always been part of networks even on the international level, Naples has constantly been affected by new

problems. However, it appears to have a unique capacity to embrace and digest nearly anything, adjusting to non-ordinary phenomena and pioneering this specific kind of adaptability. Although this does not mean that nothing ever changes, the whole of the territory – the socio-economic formation and the local community that is structured but with deep-seated features and personalities, even in its physical composition – digests nearly everything. Even if it is conditioned, in one way or another, it always manages to reach a compromise between modernisation dynamics and certain traits that have taken root over time.

33 The characteristics of the entire built heritage evidently carry a special weight in this dynamic adaptation. The city has never made much room for new constructions, and even less for modern architecture and the demolition of built heritage if not over the course of a (very) long period. For various reasons, the dense construction of new buildings has been experienced as a trauma, as with the land speculation that affected the hills of Posillipo or Vomero, the construction of new public housing areas on the outskirts of the city through the emergency support programme of the 1980s, or the Centro Direzionale office district.

34 Important transformations, which have been extensive in the building sector and infrastructure, have almost always been looked upon with scepticism throughout the city's social history, and for good reason. At times, these transformations have modernised the city, but they have always been interpreted – often rightfully so – in terms of interference, as in the movie *Le mani sulla città (Hands over the city)*.²¹ Furthermore, the building and the local micro-culture have absorbed the impact of the COVID pandemic, which has co-determined the changes and adaptations. Once again, though, it does not seem to have upset the residents' course of life.

35 In nearly fifty years, the number of residents dropped from 70 to 62: 37 permanent residents, 16 living in the *bassi* and currently only five students and non-residents, whose numbers have gone down compared to the situation in 2016 as a result of the COVID pandemic. A large amount of property continues to be scarcely populated, especially from the third floor upwards: four large apartments are inhabited by only one or two people. The connection between property values (especially the size but also other characteristics that distinguish these apartments from others), crowdedness, social standing and the elderly population living in the building is clear.

36 Regarding the proportion between rented and owned housing, there is a difference between the image that emerges from the analysis of the building and the trends in the Italian housing regime.²² In recent decades, owner-occupied housing has grown considerably in Italy. When comparing the percentage of rented homes in the building in the 1970s and that of 2021, it is evident that the number of rented houses – although it has decreased – remains substantial. This fact results from the presence of both housing rented to students or for temporary use and housing offered for rent by owners.²³ I argue that this situation is very common in the city's urban centre. In fact, according to the ISTAT data of 2011, 72 per cent of Italian households lived in an owned property and 18 per cent in rented houses; in the large cities as a whole, the numbers were 65.5 per cent and 25.8 per cent, respectively – in Naples, though, they were 53 per cent (owned) and 37.7 per cent (rented).

37 In 2021, the COVID emergency convinced the owner of the entire first floor (and of several other properties in the same area) to turn two larger short-term rental apartments into five small to medium-sized apartments, which were let to households who had recently arrived in the building. Four large apartments remained on the third and fourth floors, inhabited by seven people in households composed of one or two people (including foreign caregivers), all of whom have been living in the building for years. In the apartments where four to ten people lived until the earthquake of 1980, there are currently single people or couples.

38 By contrast, from the beginning of the 2000s onwards, the number of temporary residents, tourists and immigrants living in Naples has increased. As a result of COVID, since 2021, owner strategies have changed and the number of families letting apartments has increased. Only the owner of the attic lets their vacant property as a

short-term rental apartment for brief periods of time. Among the permanent residents, the already low number of young people has progressively diminished, despite the arrival of a few babies and small children.

- 39 Of the more or less young, single, separated or widowed women, five are heads of households (three one-person households with a carer, two two-person households and one four-person household; living with daughter, son-in-law and child). Three men, who live alone off and on, occupy the other apartments. Some other households lived in the building for only a few months.

Conclusion

- 40 Like other properties in Naples, the building examined in this article had a much higher population density 40 years ago. Today, single people or couples have replaced former households composed of four to ten people. From the beginning of the 2000s until the COVID emergency, the number of temporary residents, tourists and immigrant inhabitants of the building living in Naples increased. This is in line with the rise in substantial immigration from at least ten countries and, more recently, tourism. In the building more than in the city as a whole, the post-COVID situation seems to have partially brought down the short-term letting of apartments primarily by tourists, while there has been a growth in younger, medium-sized households living in renovated apartments taken over from the former, elderly residents or in the apartments created from divisions of larger apartments.

Fig. 3. Changes in the social division of space between 2016 and 2021.

The situation in 2016

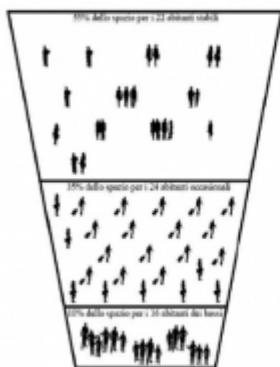
A clear and polarised social division of space.

Most of the space is taken up by a small number of households – often elderly people – that have all rooted themselves in the building.

Various non-resident occupants, especially tourists staying for short periods, and non-resident students. Until March 2020, the non-resident students and non-resident occupants amounted to eighteen people to some twenty-four people. As a result of the COVID emergency, these kinds of inhabitants have considerably gone down in number (only the holiday apartment on the sixth floor and an apartment on the third floor for students remain).

The large apartments on the first floor, which were used as homes until the COVID crisis, have been converted into smaller apartments let to five households, among whom the owner's daughter and her partner, and a Chinese household.

Three Neapolitan households and one Filipino household live in four *bassi* that can be accessed from the courtyard. One *basso* is used only during the day, by a widow who at night stays with her son on the second floor.

*The situation in 2021*

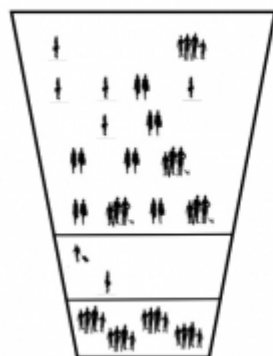
The middle-class – or wealthy – resident owners and elderly people with Eastern European carers have all stayed.

Three or four young couples have moved in (mezzanine floor and second and third floors).

After the death of an aunt, a young couple moved into an apartment that can be accessed from the ground floor.

The large apartments on the first floor, which were used as residences until the COVID crisis, have been converted into smaller apartments let to five households, among whom owner's daughter and her partner, and a Chinese household.

The three Neapolitan households and one Filipino household still live in the *bassi* that can be accessed from the courtyard.



i.e. after the COVID emergency.

41 Naples has been traversed by the trajectories of late modernity, which have affected its ways of living and social morphologies. Since we all live in a time that requires us to live with (growing) diversity and plurality, I believe that Naples is a hypermodern city. All this multiplicity exists within spaces, buildings, places, beliefs, social networks and social dynamics where traces of the past and heritage still run deep.

42 As with other buildings of varying size, quality and property value, from the beginning, this building has welcomed many social classes. The quality and commercial value of the apartments depend on accessibility, and it was not until the building of the lift in 1997 that the value of the apartments located on the last two floors increased. Previously, the property value was determined by the property's floor in the building, in Naples but also in other cities.²⁴ The building under examination here, the Quartieri Spagnoli and several other areas of Naples have always been intrinsically capable of living in a pluralist society.²⁵

43 Up until the 1990s, the ground-floor apartments, those on the mezzanine floors and the apartments located on the fourth and fifth floors gave lower-income families access to these buildings. Precarious working-class people live in the three *bassi* that can be accessed via one of the alleyways around the building. These are young families who are in difficult circumstances not only because of their low income but also for their low level of education and employment. Even at the start of the summer, one of those families sells homemade slushies outside their *basso* in order to make ends meet – this is obviously very informal work.

44 Between the end of the 1960s and the mid-1970s, the building seems to have welcomed the greatest number of low-income families capable of letting a house in a favourable market situation once they had obtained a more stable or regular income. Thus, the labourers or lower-level employees who were less well-off than the white-collar workers living on the first three floors could move to the upper floors of the building. The last few years have seen a new wave of middle-class households taking the place of the more temporary residents.

45 The “porosity” of the dwellings in many areas of Naples is due to variety.²⁶ I believe that this is the result of more long-term causes that may help to explain the characteristics of the social division of space (between stability and fluctuations) and which have greatly slowed down the transformation and movement of families, essentially avoiding the process of gentrification in Naples as opposed to many other cities. This asset is indeed substantially different from the typical layout and social division of space in cities that appear to have been built and transformed following more Cartesian criteria: extensive zoning, a more visible functional and social division of space, the significant restructuring of the urban centre through the widespread construction of boulevards, the more frequent replacement of old buildings and not much mixité. This reflects a great difference that, in Naples, is also embodied in the extensive use of informally occupied public space for private purposes (e.g. car and motorcycle parking lots, street and artisan stalls, and additional constructions in front of the entrance to the *bassi*).

46 In my view, one of Naples’ most evident and unique characteristics is underestimated in comparison to most other European cities: the presence of working-class residents – from the multifaceted precarious workers to various strata of the lower middle class – that have been rooted in the city centre for hundreds of years. This situation is the result of the reproductive processes that characterise the not-so-valuable civil engineering buildings of the large and ancient, Hippodamian city centre. This presence has continuously merged with a broad variety of factors and social classes that, thanks also to the weather, established the city’s unique street life already in the seventeenth century. The economy was first connected to jobs pertaining to court buildings and then to the organisation of the hegemonic capital city of the region, where the public economy and the diffusion of artisan and trade professions created many jobs and income-earning opportunities. By observing the fluctuations in the building’s population, another element is confirmed: among those who lived in the building until a few years ago, public administration jobs were prevalent.

47 Through this research, which started in 2015, I have tried to analyse some peculiarities of Naples, trying to capture and understand the dynamics of the social division of space, its deeper causes and the agency of the actors, which I argue cannot be understood by adopting analytical categories taken from other contexts. There is still much to be explored, including the history of other buildings and the territorialisation of immigrants over the last 20 years, as I am doing at present. I believe that the confrontation with other scholars who have been doing research on Athens, Barcelona, Marseilles and Palermo for years is and will be very fertile. Furthermore, this research will also make an innovative contribution to studies driven by a deep critique of spatial injustice, avoiding shortcuts and ideological stances.

48 In sum, as this research started in 2016 and was updated at the end of 2021, I have tried to develop a persuasive hypothesis. The in-depth analysis of the use of apartments in many buildings in the urban centre reveals some characteristics of the dynamics of the social division of space, and hence of the landscape of Naples’ city centre. These long-term factors have been determined by the characteristics of the building’s dwellings, which are varied in terms of the spaciousness and quality of the apartments and ground-floor rooms and which reveal a constant, strong and citywide spatial proximity between different classes and, therefore, strong interactions. Proximity and interaction fostered a certain cultural contamination without, however, eliminating class divisions. This complex interplay of centuries-old factors still makes the centre of Naples a very vital area, massively inhabited even by economically weak classes that

reflect a deeply rooted and still very lively popular culture. This is a city in which the resistance of heritage (the built one and that of social relations) merges with the ability to open up to the new: to stimulate mediations and create hybrid spaces that eventually slow down dynamics that are typical of globalisation. On the other hand, in other cities, these dynamics have brought about a sudden change in the social division of urban space and landscape.

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Notes

1 In 2022, the city of Naples had just below one million residents, while the entire province counted three million residents. In 2021 Naples has recorded the highest numbers in Italy as for the reddito di cittadinanza (citizen's income), with 170.643 recipients distributed among 53.469 families. The data reported above comes from the Research Office of INPS, Italy's National Social Security Institute, which was responsible for managing the policy. See CHECCHI, DACHILLE, DE PAOLA 2021). For unemployment data, see the Svimez Report 2021. Regarding population density, according to data from the Istat census 2011, the Italian average number of inhabitants per room is 0.55: this number amounts to 0.54 for large cities and 0.64 for Naples. See ESPOSITO, CHIODELLI 2020.

2 Over the past decades, numerous special commissioners have been appointed in Naples to replace mayors in municipalities dissolved because of Camorra infiltrations, manage special events, renew the Bagnoli area and the city's water services, and control the city's debts.

3 DECK 1990; REED-DANAHAY 1997.

4 LEPOUTRE 2010; PINOL 1991.

5 For a critical reading of gentrification, see DAMARIS 1984; MALOUTAS 2004.

6 HAMNETT 2003.

7 SMITH 1996; FREEMAN 2005; SASSEN, 2014. Far more has been written on the dynamics of the social division of space as a result of competition, replacement and expulsion. Other than David Harvey's works, see TOPALOV 1997; LEES, BANG SHIN, LOPEZ-MORALES 2015.

8 OBERTI, PRETECEILLE 2016; HERNANDEZ RODRÍGUEZ ALONSO, RODRÍGUEZ SUAREZ 2018.

9 LAINO 1984.

10 LAINO 1984; LAINO 2012; LAINO 2018.

11 As I have explained elsewhere (LAINO 2012, p. 103), I use the expression "observant participation" instead of the usual "participant observation" to indicate an approach and a way of doing research that is much more involved in the process of documentation.

12 The *Associazione Quartieri Spagnoli* has been conducting projects that support children in the fight against poverty ever since the 1990s (LAINO 2018).

13 BARBAGLI, PISATI 2012; SEMI 2015, MALOUTAS 2018.

14 The studies by FERRARO 2004 and other researchers report that this kind of dwelling is widespread in large areas of the city centre.

15 I have already presented the inquiry in a different, more comprehensive article written in Italian (LAINO 2016), which was updated in 2021. The present article uses data gathered in June 2021.

16 A *basso* is a very small home with only a ground floor. It may be composed of one, two or three rooms, often with loft spaces and small areas for amenities. The housing quality is standard and the spaces are often overcrowded but almost always well-kept. The very likely estimate of at least 15,000 inhabited *bassi* is one of the characteristics of Naples.

17 BENJAMIN 2021.

18 The Capitolo Metropolitano is a church-like entity that manages properties left by people who have put a lien on the use of annuities to pay for masses celebrated in honour of the donors' souls, with a ban on selling the properties; these include about a hundred houses in the city and some fifty other spaces used as shops or warehouses. Other church-like entities own another thousand dwellings. Regarding the properties of religious bodies in Naples, there is no unified and well-structured information system. The entities include the Curia, the Capitolo Metropolitano, the Istituto Sostentamento del Clero, the archconfraternities and various religious families that own a few assets, which have never been examined and estimated as a whole.

19 This information has been confirmed by interviews conducted with administration authorities of some of these institutions, such as lawyers who specialise in wrongful eviction.

20 In 2022, the resident owner of a property told the author that they intended to move, leaving their big house on the fourth floor to their grandson.

21 This is a reference to the famous movie by Francesco Rosi, *Le mani sulla città* (1963).

22 ALLEN *et al* 2004.






23 ESPOSITO, PUNZIANO 2020.




24 LÉPOUTRE 2010; MALOUTAS 2004.

25 From a recent survey on the approximately six and a half thousand foreigners registered – and mapped – by the Chamber of Commerce as traders, either on fixed premises or working as pedlars, one may conclude that a kind of molecular insertion into the housing stock marks the working-class neighbourhoods of the urban centre (LAINO 2022a; LAINO 2022b). This reflects a medium – to long-term transformation that mixes ancient preconditions with the crafting of a new population and new activities.

26 This characteristic was observed by Walter Benjamin and is well-known in the Neapolitan context.

Table des illustrations

	Titre	Fig. 1. Map of the apartment blocks and building units, including the number of floors, of the central area of the Spanish Quarter.
	Crédits	Source: Basic map from Capobianco, 1987, p. 125, additional information by the author.
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/bchmc/docannexe/image/1149/img-1.jpg
	Fichier	image/jpeg, 562k
	Titre	Table 1. Table of the apartments and other used spaces in the investigated building between 2016 and 2021.
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/bchmc/docannexe/image/1149/img-2.jpg
	Fichier	image/jpeg, 575k
	Titre	Fig. 2. The layout of the building on the seven floors through a perspective view of the stairwell.
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	Fichier	image/jpeg, 480k
	Titre	Box 2. The occupation of the Maione family (widow with six children) of four apartments over a period of 50 years.
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	Fichier	image/jpeg, 443k
	Titre	Box 3. The occupation of three apartments by the Laino family (father and mother, respectively born in 1912 and 1921, with four children).
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/bchmc/docannexe/image/1149/img-5.jpg

	Fichier	image/jpeg, 497k
	Titre	Box 4. Data on occupancy type and number of residents (2016 and 2021).
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/bchmc/docannexe/image/1149/img-6.jpg
	Fichier	image/jpeg, 562k
	Titre	Fig. 3. Changes in the social division of space between 2016 and 2021.
	Crédits	i.e. after the COVID emergency.
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/bchmc/docannexe/image/1149/img-7.jpg
	Fichier	image/jpeg, 411k

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