



# Ethnicized marginality and governance discontinuity: The contentious embeddedness of Roma settlements in Naples

Tommaso Vitale<sup>a,\*</sup>, Fabiola Midulla<sup>b</sup>, Carlo Stasolla<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Sciences Po, CEE & Urban School. Sciences Po, Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics, 27, rue Saint Guillaume, Cedex 07, 75337, Paris, France

<sup>b</sup> Associazione 21 luglio, Italy

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Roma  
Urban governance  
Segregation  
Embeddedness  
Territorial stigma  
Naples  
Urban sociology  
Housing

## ABSTRACT

Urban marginality is increasingly shaped by the intersection of infrastructural exclusion, governance fragmentation, and ethnicized stigmatization. This article investigates these processes through an in-depth analysis of Roma settlements in the Metropolitan region of Naples, where patterns of extreme marginalization emerge from the convergence of infrastructural deficits, governance discontinuities, and normative conflicts. Drawing on 62 semi-structured interviews, extensive participant observation, and documentary analysis, the study develops the concept of governance discontinuity to capture the multi-scalar and relational character of exclusionary dynamics. Empirically, the findings reveal how the daily lives of Roma residents are structured by persistent infrastructural decay, the absence of coordinated institutional interventions, and the production of territorial stigma, which collectively reinforce durable forms of spatial injustice. Theoretically, the article advances urban sociology by illustrating how micro-level solidarities, meso-level mediation mechanisms, and macro-level governance gaps interact within fragmented metropolitan settings. Particular attention is given to how infrastructural materialities and symbolic stigmatizations co-produce processes of urban exclusion, revealing the need for relational and conflictual approaches to understand advanced urban marginality. By situating Roma settlements within broader debates on segregation, housing precarity, and governance discontinuity, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to theorize the embeddedness of urban inequalities in the socio-political and material fabric of contemporary cities.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, Italian housing and inclusion policies have undergone a gradual yet significant reorientation away from the segregating logic of the *campo nomadi* system and toward integrated housing and welfare approaches based on individualized pathways to autonomy. This national shift, promoted through the *National Strategy for Roma Inclusion* (2012–2020, extended to 2030) and a series of regional action plans, has encouraged local administrations to dismantle large mono-ethnic camps and redirect resources toward inclusive urban interventions. Within this evolving policy landscape, the metropolitan region of Naples represents a particularly revealing case. Here, enduring patterns of infrastructural neglect and governance discontinuity coexist with recent attempts at inclusion, offering a critical lens through which to examine how national commitments to desegregation are translated—and often distorted—at the metropolitan and neighborhood

scales (see [Table 3](#)).

This article examines these interlocking processes through the case of Roma settlements in the metropolitan region of Naples, where extreme marginality is not only endured but also produced through the systematic disconnection between policy frameworks, institutional practices, and everyday survival strategies. Far from representing the spontaneous outcomes of impersonal urbanization processes or market-driven dynamics, the marginalization observed in Roma settlements is deeply embedded within locally specific social and economic relations, and sustained by political choices and infrastructural inertia. It reflects the cumulative effects of special public policies organized along ethnic categorical lines rather than integrated within universal frameworks of common citizenship rights, thus reinforcing segmented trajectories of exclusion within ostensibly inclusive urban systems. By foregrounding the concepts of ethnicized marginality and governance discontinuity ([Le Galès and Vitale, 2015](#)), the analysis captures how historical trajectories

\* Corresponding author. Sciences Po, CEE & Urban School. Sciences Po, Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics, 27, rue Saint Guillaume, Cedex 07, 75337 Paris, France.

E-mail addresses: [tommaso.vitale@sciencespo.fr](mailto:tommaso.vitale@sciencespo.fr) (T. Vitale), [fabiolamidulla@gmail.com](mailto:fabiolamidulla@gmail.com) (F. Midulla), [c.stasolla@21luglio.org](mailto:c.stasolla@21luglio.org) (C. Stasolla).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2026.103714>

Received 30 April 2025; Received in revised form 8 January 2026; Accepted 9 January 2026

Available online 26 January 2026

0197-3975/© 2026 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

of exclusion are reinforced and reproduced in metropolitan regions, generating patterns of deep spatial injustice and fractured social integration. This article introduces the concept of contentious embeddedness to capture the dynamic and conflictual processes through which marginalized populations navigate, resist, and endure exclusionary urban environments.

Urban margins in Southern Europe today reveal profound tensions between democratic ideals of inclusion and persistent patterns of extreme social marginalization. Roma communities in the last 30 years have often embodied this contradiction, living in conditions that combine physical segregation, infrastructural abandonment, and discrimination (Ando et al., 2024; Matache, 2025; McGarry, 2017).

Although territorial stigmatization and infrastructural exclusion have historically characterized the treatment of Roma communities through the segregated system of under-standard camps, recent dynamics in Italy reveal a significant transformation. In contrast to the brutal evictions without alternative housing solutions that marked previous decades, most local administrations are now actively pursuing structured camp decommissioning strategies, offering personalized pathways towards residential autonomy. Simultaneously, a growing desire among younger generations to exit conditions of extreme marginality—combined with the progressive abandonment and physical degradation of the largest settlements—is fueling processes of voluntary housing diversification (Maestri & Mantovan, 2025; Manzoni, 2017, Pasta and Vitale, 2018). According to the most reliable monitoring system, updated monthly by *Associazione 21 Luglio* (2025), as of April 28, 2025, approximately 11,100 Roma and Sinti individuals live in mono-ethnic settlements, a dramatic 53 % decrease since 2016. This population represents merely 0.02 % of Italy's total population, and, even when adopting the Council of Europe's higher estimate of 180,000 Roma and Sinti residents nationwide, only 6 % now live in emergency conditions within ethnicized slums. The largest authorized encampments remain concentrated in the metropolitan regions of Naples and Rome, with Naples hosting both the densest concentration of Roma in emergency housing and one of the country's two Roma-specific reception centers.<sup>1</sup> Crucially, recognizing the systemic failure of the “camp system”—a costly model of segregation masquerading as temporary shelter—many municipalities and regions are now reallocating resources toward inclusive policies aimed at dismantling ethnicized housing solutions and fostering full urban integration.

The fieldwork conducted in metropolitan region of Naples between 2023 and 2024 offers a stark illustration: settlements such as the Villaggio della Solidarietà in Secondigliano or the informal barracks in Giugliano display dramatic failures of urban welfare infrastructures, with families inhabiting contaminated lands, lacking access to potable water, and facing recurrent threats of eviction. The testimonies gathered reveal a profound sense of abandonment. As one resident of Cupa Perillo articulated, «*We are citizens only when the police come to control us. For the rest, we are invisible.*» Observations confirm that the infrastructures provided (where they exist) are systematically deteriorated, reflecting a pattern of infrastructural neglect often observed in unauthorized Roma settlements across Europe. At the same time, governance responses oscillate between emergency interventions, evictions, and bureaucratic inertia, exposing a fragmented mode of public action.

Governance practices around Roma settlements often reflect contradictory imperatives: the political will to desegregate is counteracted by administrative incapacity and by localized vetoes that block integration policies. As an NGO operator noted during a focus group, «*Every project we propose risks failing because no neighborhood wants them nearby.*

<sup>1</sup> It is a former school converted into emergency housing around a decade ago, it currently accommodates around 110 residents in very poor living conditions. Although located centrally and close to urban services, it requires significant infrastructural renovation (see also Laino, 2016). The other one is in Latina, in the metropolitan region of Rome.

*Fear wins.*» These findings resonate with broader scholarship indicating that urban marginality is not simply the product of economic deprivation but of systemic failures in the relational governance of space, welfare, and recognition.

To capture the relational and conflictual processes shaping the life trajectories of Roma communities in Naples, this article develops the concept of *contentious embeddedness*. Building upon Polanyi's insight that economic relations are embedded in broader social structures (Polanyi, 1944) and, extending Mingione's recognition of the social foundations of marginality (Mingione, 1991, 2020), contentious embeddedness emphasizes that marginal groups are not only integrated through solidarities but also through enduring conflict, negotiation, and contestation.

In the settlements studied, solidarity networks within and across families—manifested in practices of mutual aid, informal labor exchanges, and collective childcare—enable survival under conditions of infrastructural neglect. Yet these solidarities are not isolated from broader institutional fields: they continuously interact with, resist, or adapt to governance mechanisms that often impose exclusionary norms or erratic interventions. This dual process—embedding through both solidarity and conflict—is what contentious embeddedness captures. An illustrative interview in Cantariello settlement underscores this point: «*If we had waited for the city to fix things, we would not have survived. We fixed the pipes, we built the roads.*» Yet, this informal resilience also exposes communities to criminalization and stigmatization, deepening the very marginalization it seeks to overcome. Contentious embeddedness thus frames urban marginality not as a residual phenomenon but as a dynamic process shaped by ongoing struggles over space, recognition, and resources.

The principal objective of this research is to understand how Roma communities in Naples negotiate survival, belonging, and rights within a contentious embeddedness framework. In particular, the study aim is threefold: (1) to identify the micro-level relational infrastructures (solidarities, kinship ties, mutual aid) that sustain life under conditions of infrastructural neglect; (2) examine the meso-level organizational and inter-organizational dynamics that structure mediation, resource allocation, and contestation over Roma inclusion; (3) analyze the macro-level governance gaps, policy contradictions, and normative conflicts that produce and sustain extreme marginality. Thus, the guiding research questions are.

1. How do relational networks within Roma settlements function as mechanisms of both resilience and reproduction of marginality?
2. How do governance actors (local authorities, NGOs, third-sector organizations) engage, mediate, or exacerbate conflicts around Roma settlements?
3. How do normative conflicts—between values of inclusion, public order, and spatial control—shape the possibilities and limits of Roma integration in metropolitan Naples?

The empirical foundation of this research rests on an extensive and rigorously structured qualitative design tailored to the complexities of hidden and marginalized populations. Following principles inspired by Heckathorn (1997)'s respondent-driven sampling strategies, the study combined purposive chain-referral sampling, trust-building with local NGOs, and multiple waves of participant observation. Over 50 interviews were conducted across five settlements, complemented by a focus group with third-sector organizations and structured engagements with local authorities. Ethical protocols were carefully adapted for low-literacy and highly stigmatized contexts, and data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentary sources ensured empirical depth and robustness.

The persistent entrenchment of ethnicized marginality in Roma settlements across Naples exemplifies how governance discontinuities, infrastructural deficits, and normative conflicts converge to produce durable forms of urban exclusion. The central sociological problematic emerging from our research is the persistent intersection of ethnic

stigmatization, territorial marginality, and exclusionary governance practices in shaping the living conditions and integration trajectories of Roma populations in metropolitan Naples. The research vividly illustrates how Roma communities are caught within a governance paradox: formally recognized by institutional frameworks that rhetorically promote inclusion, yet systematically subjected to institutional abandonment, infrastructural deprivation, and entrenched socio-spatial segregation. At the core of this problematic is the interplay between organizational inertia, discriminatory political discourses, and the infrastructural marginalization that cumulatively produce and reproduce an extreme form of spatial and social exclusion.

The complexity of this problematic lies in its multidimensionality. On the one hand, Roma settlements represent urban spaces physically and symbolically segregated from broader urban dynamics, becoming sites of environmental degradation, stigmatization, and precariousness. On the other hand, governance practices—including frequent forced evictions, lack of meaningful housing alternatives, and the absence of coherent integration policies—reinforce marginalization rather than mitigating it (Turner, 2016a, pp. 19–41). As a result, the Roma become subjected to continuous institutional invisibilization, exacerbating their vulnerability and hindering socio-economic mobility and stable community integration.

To investigate these dynamics, the article proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides the theoretical framework we use for data collection, analysis and causality logic. Section 3 offers a detailed contextualization of the Roma settlements in Naples, situating them within the broader socio-demographic transformations and urban restructuring processes shaping the metropolitan area. Section 4 describes the research design echoing the theoretical framework methodological strategy adopted, including sampling approaches, ethical considerations, and data triangulation methods essential for engaging hidden and highly stigmatized populations. Section 5 is devoted to a configurational analysis across settlements, presenting the main empirical results, highlighting how distinct micro-, meso-, and macro-level mechanisms interact in reproducing marginality. Section 6 discusses the broader theoretical and empirical implications for sociology and urban studies elaborating on the normative and allocative nature of contentious embeddedness, while the last section offers concluding reflections on the contribution of this perspective to the understanding of contemporary urban inequalities.

## 2. Sociological theory for understanding the linkages among infrastructural, inter-organizational, and environmental mechanisms

Urban marginality cannot be understood simply as a spatial phenomenon; it is a structural process of exclusion, stigmatization, and containment within fragmented urban landscapes. Building on Wacquant's theorization of advanced marginality, understood as the joint effect of labor-market opportunities, welfare redistribution and territorial stigmatization that erode class solidarity (Wacquant, 2016), this article situates Roma settlements within a wider framework of urban relegation and institutional disconnection. Advanced marginality compels residents to adopt coping strategies centered on mutual distancing, lateral denigration, withdrawal into the private sphere, and flight from the neighborhood, all of which converge to erode trust, weaken identification with the local community, unravel proximate social ties, and ultimately undermine the capacity for social support and collective efficacy at the neighborhood level. In this trend, the so-called Roma 'camps' (or shantytowns) illustrate a condition where exclusion is not only material but symbolic too, embedded in the degradation of public services, the criminalization of everyday survival strategies, and the spatial fixation of stigma. Looking at the rich literature on Roma 'camps' in Italy, there is a large convergence on some basic features (Armillei, 2018; Daniele et al., 2018; Maestri, 2019; Maestri and Vitale, 2017; Manca and Vergnano, 2019; Marinaro and Daniele, 2014; Sigona, 2015): the settlements are both urban and extra-urban in the metropolitan

areas, frequently ill connected to the city and symbolically and administratively excluded from its promises of citizenship and welfare.

Furthermore, the condition of the inhabitants of the 'Roma camps' can be understood within a larger tendency towards borderscapes, where inclusion and exclusion are continuously negotiated at multiple scales (Miele, 2015). The extreme marginality of the inhabitants in Roma camps is maintained through governance practices that selectively deploy inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms depending on political pressures, territorial stigmas, and resource constraints (Daniele, 2020; Pasta, 2019; Vitale and Boschetti, 2011). Projects are open and closed, some children benefit of some support, a large majority are not even considered for schooling (Associazione 21 luglio, 2020; Bravi and Vitale, 2017; Cousin et al., 2021; Legros et al., 2024; Pasta and Vitale, 2018). This fragmented governance landscape is not a temporary malfunction but a structural feature of how marginalized groups are managed in contemporary cities, requiring analytical frameworks that account for normative conflicts and the institutionalization of ambiguity. This fragmentation of governance responses to Roma settlements highlights the salience of normative pluralism in understanding urban marginality. Following Boltanski and Thévenot, (2021) sociology of justification, actors involved in governing or contesting Roma inclusion mobilize different, often conflicting, orders of worth: efficiency (managing public order), solidarity (ensuring human rights), domesticity (protecting community traditions, as well as familiarity and conviviality see Blokland & Noordhoff, 2008), reputation (and the sense of honour and trustworthiness in inspiring others in the circle of recognition- or civic ideals (guaranteeing equal treatment). But normative variety highlights the complexity of social policies, it does not explain why such a strong ethnic-based segregation and infrastructural deprivation.

Against this background, this article introduces the concept of *contentious embeddedness* to theorize how marginalized communities are integrated into urban systems not solely through solidarities or exclusions, but through ongoing, conflictual, relational processes. The concept of *embeddedness* first articulated by Karl Polanyi (1944) refers to the idea that economic life is not autonomous but is situated within social relations, cultural norms, and political structures. For Polanyi, the disembedding of markets from social control during the industrial revolution generated profound societal disruptions, calling attention to the interdependence of economic and social orders. Building on this foundational insight, Enzo Mingione (1991) extended the notion of embeddedness into the realm of urban marginality and informal economies. Mingione (1993) emphasized that precarious livelihoods in contemporary cities are deeply intertwined with familial and community networks, through which individuals mitigate insecurity and navigate exclusionary labor and welfare systems (Mingione, 2020). His contribution stressed that embeddedness operates as a relational infrastructure sustaining survival under conditions of economic and institutional fragmentation (Amin, 2014).

We further refine and extend the concept by introducing the notion of *contentious embeddedness*. Embeddedness under conditions of marginality is not simply about relational survival mechanisms in a local context of social, infrastructural and economic opportunities but is inherently conflictual, negotiated, and contested across multiple normative orders. In fragmented metropolitan governance contexts, marginalized groups are embedded within fields structured by overlapping and often antagonistic regimes of worth—such as relational solidarity, civic universalism, and industrial efficiency logics. *Contentious embeddedness* thus captures a condition where the relational infrastructures sustaining survival (e.g., kinship-based mutual aid, collective risk-sharing) come into tension with institutional logics that valorize standardization, formality, and individualized pathways of integration. These tensions are not merely abstract but are lived and negotiated daily by actors who must navigate contradictory expectations, scarce resources, and infrastructural neglect. Also, contentious embeddedness is multi-scalar, operating simultaneously at micro (interpersonal solidarities), meso (organizational mediation), and macro

(governance and normative conflict) levels.<sup>2</sup> It is characterized by relational creativity, tactical agency, and embedded forms of resistance, but also by vulnerability to stigmatization, displacement, and selective repression.

Ultimately, contentious embeddedness foregrounds the necessity of recognizing conflict, ambivalence, and relational infrastructures as central to understanding contemporary advanced marginality, moving beyond functionalist or victim-centered perspectives to illuminate the structural and normative complexities of life and interactions at the urban margins. It resonates and help empirical research on the heavy side of structured and segmented integration and the ethnicization of marginality. As Favell (2022; see also Chihaya et al., 2022) argues, migrants and minority groups often integrate into different sectors or spaces of the city according to existing structures of inequality, leading to partial ‘parallel lives’ rather than full social incorporation: a partial separation that do not exclude moderate forms of social exchange and porosity in ties and social support (Vacca et al., 2022). But this modest porosity, and strong segmentation, especially when spatially based in forms of relegation is vulnerable to local authorities and political entrepreneurs strong ethnic categorization (Turner, 2010, 2016b, pp. 123–148), even in a binary forms of radical ethnic othering with the consequences in terms of durable inequality that Chuck (Tilly, 1998) has magisterially described. Bounded ethnic categories result in durable inequality when relations across the boundary produce exploitation between categories or hoarding of resources within the dominant category (Heller and Evans, 2010), as well as making adaptation and emulation processes parallels and without mutual exchange (Vitale, 2019). This form of categorical inequality embedded in territorial stigmatization and infrastructural deprivation (in terms of environmental safety, access to public transportation, education and local welfare, even water and sewage, not to talk about heating, electricity and health) carries embodied and symbolic marks that persist across generations, irrespective of individual socioeconomic mobility efforts (Alunni, 2021; Ioannoni et al., 2020; Monasta, 2010).

In Naples metropolitan region, Roma settlements are mostly at urban edges or in isolated pockets and suffer compounded exclusion – physical isolation, infrastructural abandonment, and ethnic stigma all at once (Sigona, 2003). We identify Roma camps as a critical lens through which to examine how *general urban marginality dynamics* (infrastructural neglect, fragmented governance) become intensified when ethnic discrimination and territorial stigma are also present. To comprehensively explain the complex marginalization dynamics facing Roma settlers living in camps and shantytowns in Naples and its metropolitan region, we propose an integrated sociological theory that systematically accounts for the combined impacts of infrastructural deficits, inter-organizational dynamics, political governance mechanisms, and environmental factors. At its core, this theory conceptualizes extreme segregation as the product of overlapping structural inequalities mediated by governance practices that institutionalize marginality (Ciniero, 2021; Le Galès, 2024).

Firstly, at the infrastructural level, Roma settlements are typically characterized by extreme material deficiencies, including lack of sanitation, precarious housing, limited access to public utilities, and environmental degradation. These conditions do not arise merely from poverty or informality; rather, they reflect institutional decisions to maintain or neglect basic urban infrastructure, effectively converting spatial segregation into a durable form of urban control. Infrastructure deficits, therefore, serve as mechanisms of symbolic and material marginalization, reinforcing territorial stigma by physically manifesting neglect and degradation.

Secondly, inter-organizational mechanisms critically shape governance outcomes through fragmented, discontinuous, and often

conflicting administrative practices. Multiple institutions (municipalities, regional governments, NGOs, social services) frequently operate in isolation, reflecting diverging logics, inconsistent objectives, and competing interests (Cremaschi & Vitale, 2025). Such organizational fragmentation produces ambiguous zones of responsibility, reducing accountability and enabling bureaucratic evasion (Bonetti et al., 2011). Roma communities thus fall through the cracks of institutional frameworks, caught in a cycle of ineffective assistance and forced displacement, perpetuating rather than alleviating exclusion. Political governance mechanisms profoundly influence the treatment of Roma populations through practices of exclusion legitimized by political discourse. Anti-Roma rhetoric—often framed as security or urban order issues—translates into policies prioritizing eviction and containment rather than integration or resource allocation. The political construction of Roma as a ‘problematic’ community enables local governments to justify discriminatory practices, reinforcing public hostility and stigma (Maestri, 2019). Governance becomes a politics of invisibility and containment, where Roma settlements are managed as spaces of exception rather than as neighborhoods requiring inclusive urban policies.

Thirdly, environmental mechanisms contribute significantly to marginalization, as Roma settlements are frequently located in peripheral, polluted, or otherwise degraded areas. These environmental factors exacerbate health vulnerabilities and deepen socio-economic exclusion. The placement of Roma communities in environmentally hazardous spaces exemplifies structural environmental racism, intensifying territorial stigma and further alienating these communities from the broader urban fabric (Vitale, 2008). The structural localization and management of a Roma camp continue to exacerbate conditions of extreme deprivation, reproducing poverty traps and fostering environments conducive to social deviance, rather than supporting processes of integration (Laino, 2016).

Integrating these dimensions, the theory argues that Roma marginalization in Naples emerges from the interaction between material conditions, inter-organizational failures, political discourses and blaming (Sigona, 2005), and environmental injustices. Together, these processes produce entrenched marginalization, shaping patterns of segregation and severely restricting social mobility and urban inclusion for Roma populations.

Building upon the previously articulated sociological problematic, we formulated the following research question: *How do infrastructural deficits, inter-organizational governance practices, and political mechanisms jointly shape patterns of extreme ethnic segregation and territorial stigmatization of Roma communities within the metropolitan governance context of Naples?*

The analytical vocabulary mobilized in this study draws on both established theoretical traditions and original conceptual elaboration. The notions of *advanced marginality*, *territorial stigmatization*, and *normative pluralism* are inherited from Wacquant (2008, 2016) and Boltanski and Thévenot (1991, 2021), respectively, while *embeddedness* derives from Polanyi, (1944) and Mingione (1991, 2020). Building on these foundations, the article develops two authorial operational concepts: *governance discontinuity* (Borraz & Le Galès, 2010), here used as a relational pattern of fragmented institutional coordination; and *contentious embeddedness*, proposed as a new mid-range theoretical construct describing how cooperation and conflict intertwine across micro, meso, and macro levels. This conceptual toolkit informs both the analytical structure and the interpretation of the empirical material that follows.

### 3. Case context: roma settlements in Naples and its metropolitan region

This section situates the empirical study by providing a detailed overview of the socio-demographic, spatial, and institutional characteristics of Roma settlements in the metropolitan region of Naples. It outlines the historical patterns of migration, settlement formation, and

<sup>2</sup> On these three different levels of reality, and their relevance for theorizing, see (Turner, 2015, 2016b, pp. 123–148, 2021).

policy responses that have shaped the current landscape of exclusion and resilience.

The metropolis of Naples offers a particularly fertile context for investigating the dynamics of marginalization, integration, and governance concerning Roma communities. The Metropolitan City of Naples, with a population of roughly 3 million inhabitants, exemplifies a Southern European urban model characterized by high density, informality, and complex social stratification. Although the inner city retains areas of historical prestige and touristic appeal, significant parts of the urban and suburban fabric experience persistent economic hardship, infrastructural decay, and fragmented governance. In Naples, territorial inequalities are deeply institutionalized, structured through decades of selective neglect and informal spatial governance (Laino, 2022), as well as through symbolic and institutional delegitimation over time (Laino, 2025). Within this metropolitan configuration, Scampia and Secondigliano are districts located inside the administrative boundaries of the City of Naples, while Giugliano and Afragola are autonomous municipalities situated in the northern periphery of the metropolitan area. This spatial and administrative distinction is crucial because the latter towns operate under separate municipal authorities, fiscal regimes, and social-service departments, generating differentiated capacities and responsibilities in the governance of Roma settlements. Such municipal autonomy amplifies governance discontinuities, as coordination across administrative borders becomes contingent on informal negotiations rather than institutionalized metropolitan mechanisms. The northern and eastern peripheries of Naples—where many Roma camps are located—concentrate structural disadvantage, infrastructural neglect, and fragmented institutional presence, yet remain internally differentiated and politically under-addressed (De Leo and Mattiucci, 2025). Peripheral municipalities like Giugliano and Casoria exemplify how spatial injustice in Naples is rooted in a disarticulated governance structure and unequal access to basic rights (Cartone et al., 2025).

Unlike many Northern European cities marked by strong residential segregation at the neighborhood scale, in the Mediterranean model we observe an “attenuated segregation”, where social and economic disparities manifest more subtly through micro-segregation patterns within the same urban spaces (Leontidou, 1990; but see also Pfirsch, 2023). The historic coexistence of wealth and poverty within close physical proximity has fostered a unique urban morphology, characterized by vertical and horizontal forms of social stratification embedded into the very architecture of the city (for a very different interpretation, see Esposito, 2023). In Naples, elites have not physically distanced themselves from working-class residents but instead pursue symbolic and spatial strategies—such as residential gating and public space regulation—to assert control over shared urban proximity (Pfirsch, 2016)<sup>3</sup>: indeed, elite residents have historically tolerated the proximity of the poor, as long as it remained spatially segregated and socially controlled (Pfirsch, 2023).

As highlighted by Federico Benassi et al., 2023, Naples exemplifies the distinctive socio-urban dynamics of Southern Europe, where compactness, a housing system dominated by owner-occupation and familial provision (Arbaci, 2019), and a historically limited foreign presence have produced highly heterogeneous urban fabrics (Barbieri et al., 2018). In Naples' historic core, noble palaces and dilapidated buildings coexist side by side, embodying the spatial juxtaposition of wealth and decay. Building on earlier insights by Malheiros (2002), Benassi et al. (2020) stress how poor average living conditions, informal

<sup>3</sup> To better understand the particularities of Naples, it is helpful to recall the mechanisms identified by Pfirsch (2023). In Naples' city center, the elite do not physically avoid disadvantaged groups, as is the case in ‘gated communities’ elsewhere. Instead, they are kept in localized enclaves, such as the vicoli (alleys) and bassi (low-rise buildings). This spatial proximity enables forms of social control, such as patronage, domesticity, and the differentiated use of public space. However, proximity is only tolerated if it is socially and symbolically hierarchical, i.e. if it does not challenge the position of the elites.

housing markets, and the chaotic post-war urban expansion combined to generate low levels of residential segregation alongside complex suburbanization dynamics, with vulnerable populations often integrated into the urban fabric in fragmented ways (Benassi et al., 2025). Far from producing orderly socio-spatial divisions, these processes embedded diversity and fragmentation into the very material and social infrastructures of Naples.<sup>4</sup>

The human geography of Naples reflects a vibrant touristic and agrifood sector industries, huge attractivity, a lively cultural scene but also deep-rooted vulnerabilities: the city continues to grapple with high rates of unemployment, particularly among youth, significant informal economic activity, and an acute lack of affordable and social housing options (Esposito and Chiodelli, 2023). Public investments in welfare infrastructure have increased a lot in the last years, with many innovations (Chiodo, 2021; De Vidovich, 2022), but remain limited in the field of social housing, exacerbating vulnerabilities among populations in unhealthy and deprived housing condition (Esposito, 2022; Galeota Lanza and De Martino, 2022). In this context, the Roma communities—already subject to entrenched ethnic stigmatization—find themselves at the intersection of multiple forms of disadvantage: economic exclusion, spatial precariousness, and political invisibility.

As Enrica Morlicchio, 2018) emphasizes, Naples does not exhibit severe forms of institutional racial discrimination nor extreme spatial concentrations of poverty exceeding the 40 % threshold identified by Wacquant (2016). In Naples, spatial concentration across housing, schooling, and low-wage employment can crystallize into layered marginality without producing classic urban ghettoization (Laino, 2015). Rather, the city's socio-spatial structure is distinguished by a kaleidoscopic pattern of mixed formations, far removed from the polarized configuration of uniformly affluent and impoverished districts typical of many European cities. This interpretation must be nuanced by the fact that many peripheral housing zones exhibit measurable segregation and clustering of low-income populations, the result of fragmented welfare and housing policies (Cerreta et al., 2020). As well, recent GIS-based analysis confirms that socio-economic vulnerability in Naples is spatially layered and gendered, with entire peripheral belts showing overlapping deficits in education and employment among women (Arena, 2025). Moreover, Naples urban fringes, as well in many other Southern Italian metropolitan areas, are marked by spatial heterogeneity and deep inequality, with rural marginality acting as a silent vector of segregation (Cartone et al., 2025). For these peripheral neighbourhoods, what was once celebrated as a “porous” urban fabric has effectively become a laboratory of contemporary urban fragmentation and marginality (Pfirsch, 2016).<sup>5</sup>

However, the complex articulation of urban space fosters dense, informal fields of interaction—markets, piazzas, workshops—where daily encounters based on friendship, kinship, shared living and working spaces, or mere chance are spontaneously woven into the social fabric. But low segregation index masks deep horizontal inequalities: marginalized groups live side-by-side with more privileged ones, but with unequal access to urban resources and opportunities, a “proximity without

<sup>4</sup> With many similarities to other the Southern European city (Arbaci, 2008; Eckardt and Ruiz Sánchez, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> This concerns the specific neighborhoods and municipalities we have studied. It is important to reaffirm that, despite deep social and economic inequalities, Naples presents only weak patterns of residential segregation when compared to other Italian cities. Rather than being sorted into distinct homogeneous enclaves, vulnerable populations—including migrants and low-income Italians—tend to be spatially dispersed across the urban fabric. This fragmented settlement pattern results in what Benassi et al. (2025) call a “diffuse marginality”, where exclusion is embedded within broader, heterogeneous neighborhoods rather than concentrated in clearly delineated zones. However, this apparent spatial mixing does not equate to social integration. Areas with higher proportions of foreign residents often coincide with poor infrastructure, limited public services, and low-quality housing.

parity” that deeply characterizes Southern Italian urbanism (Benassi et al., 2025).

Yet, the resulting fragile under-equilibrium of marginality remains saturated with ambivalences and increasingly exposed to destabilization. Marginalized groups, including the Roma, are often confined to marginal and unhealthy spaces such as disused industrial areas, contaminated lands, or precarious unauthorized settlements beyond the formal regulatory gaze. In this context, Roma communities face compounded vulnerabilities. While the majority of Roma living in the metropolitan region of Naples are Italian citizens or long-term residents, they continue to experience extreme marginalization, both symbolically and materially. Their settlements are often located in environmentally hazardous zones, disconnected from basic services, and subject to administrative neglect punctuated by sporadic interventions. The socio-demographic profiles of these communities reflect broader patterns of urban exclusion: high rates of child poverty, precarious employment, low educational attainment, and systemic barriers to accessing health-care and public services.

The history of Roma presence in the Naples metropolitan region is marked by phases of forced relocation, emergency policies, and the establishment of “Villaggi attrezzati” (equipped villages) ostensibly designed to promote integration but often resulting in spatial and social segregation (Laino, 2014). Settlements such as the Villaggio della Solidarietà in Secondigliano and the informal barracks in Via Carrافيello trace their origins to the late 1990s and early 2000s, when municipal authorities, responding to rising visibility of unauthorized camps, attempted to regularize Roma housing through targeted projects. However, these interventions frequently lacked sustained financial and social investment. In the Villaggio della Solidarietà, initial installations such as prefabricated housing units have deteriorated into unsafe, unsanitary conditions, as field observations and interviews confirm. «We were moved here to have a better life, but no one maintained anything,» reported a long-term resident. Similar dynamics were observed in Cupa Perillo, where Roma families constructed self-organized extensions to accommodate population growth in the absence of formal housing alternatives.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, local authorities responded to the visibility of unauthorized Roma settlements by formalizing a ‘camp system’, constructing designated “authorized villages” such as Cupa Perillo (Scampia) and Via del Riposo (Poggioreale). Importantly, spatial marginalization is compounded by symbolic stigmatization. Roma settlements are routinely portrayed in political and media discourses as sources of urban disorder, public health risks, and criminality, thus legitimizing practices of surveillance, eviction, and dislocation without sustainable integration strategies (Laino and Vitale, 2015). By 2024, the Roma settlements in Naples include a complex mix of authorized camps, informal encampments (such as Zona ASI and Cantariello), and scattered housing units with precarious tenancy conditions. They are predominantly located in degraded urban peripheries characterized by high unemployment, limited public services, and environmental hazards — conditions that amplify residents’ vulnerabilities and entrench intergenerational poverty.

Spatially, Roma settlements in Naples exist in a paradoxical position: they are embedded within the urban fabric yet treated as external, exceptional spaces. Their geographical location near industrial zones, highways, and marginal lands underscores their functional and symbolic exclusion from the city’s developmental imaginaries. This positioning aligns with broader patterns observed in European cities, where marginalized populations are often relegated to “leftover spaces” at the edges of urban growth (Brambilla, 2015). But the settlements are not homogeneous. Fieldwork reveals significant differences in size, internal organization, and degrees of formality across sites. Some, like Villaggio ASI in Giugliano, represent institutional attempts at semi-formal accommodation, whereas others, such as Cantariello in Casoria, remain precarious informal aggregations subjected to periodic eviction threats. The physical characteristics of these settlements profoundly shape the

everyday lives of residents, mediating access to education, health services, and labor markets.

The typology and demographic overview presented in Table 1 highlights the fragmented and precarious nature of Roma settlement patterns in the metropolitan region of Naples. The distribution across authorized and unauthorized settlement, and reception center structures reveals not only a multiplicity of housing arrangements but also profound governance discontinuities and normative ambiguities surrounding residency status. The predominance of residents originating from former Yugoslavia in authorized settlement and from Romania in unauthorized ones suggests differentiated migration trajectories and patterns of settlement, with significant implications for social integration and institutional engagement. Furthermore, the scattered presence of multiple small, unrecognized camps reflects an urban landscape marked by spatial marginality, infrastructural neglect, and deep-rooted processes of ethnicized exclusion (Ciniero, 2018; Stasolla, 2021) (see Table 2).

**Table 1**  
Typology and demographic profile of roma settlements in the metropolitan area of Naples (Data as of April 28, 2025).<sup>a,b</sup>

Settlement Type	Municipality	Name or Location	Number of Residents	Origin of Residents
Authorized settlement (8)	Naples	Secondigliano	300	Former Yugoslavia
	Naples	Via del Riposo	123	Romania
	Naples	Cupa Perillo	200	Former Yugoslavia
	Afragola	Salicelle	29	Former Yugoslavia
	Casoria	Cantariello	90	Former Yugoslavia
	Caivano	Via delle Cinque Vie	53	Former Yugoslavia
	Giugliano in Campania	Zona ASI	150	Former Yugoslavia
	Giugliano in Campania	Carrافيello	385	Former Yugoslavia
Unauthorized settlement (12)	Naples	Via del Macello	700	Romania
	Naples	Via Galileo Ferraris		Romania
	Naples	Via Costantino Grimaldi		Romania
	Naples	Barra 1	140	Romania
	Naples	Barra 2		Romania
	Naples	Barra 3		Romania
	Naples	Barra 4		Romania
	Naples	Barra 5		Romania
	Naples	Pianura 1	60	Romania
	Naples	Pianura 2		Romania
Reception Center (1)	Giugliano in Campania	Circumvallazione Giugliano	51	Former Yugoslavia
	Naples	Grazia Deledda	111	Romania
Other Sites	Naples	Various locations	210	Mixed origins

<sup>a</sup> Updated data are available online, based on the ongoing monitoring work coordinated by Associazione 21 luglio (2025) The mapping covers groups identified as Roma and Sinti living in areas—both open and enclosed—characterized by socio-sanitary conditions comparable either to unauthorized settlements or to large, historically recognized areas often institutionally organized on an ethnic basis. The interactive map, regularly updated and organized by specific sections, tracks settlements currently being dismantled as well as those closed since 2018.

<sup>b</sup> The term ‘authorized settlement’ refers not only to those directly established by public authorities, but also to unauthorized settlements that, over time, have undergone processes of institutional recognition. This is exemplified by the cases of Cupa Perillo, Cantariello, and Via Carrافيello.

**Table 2**  
Spatial relationship of each settlement to the urban fabric.

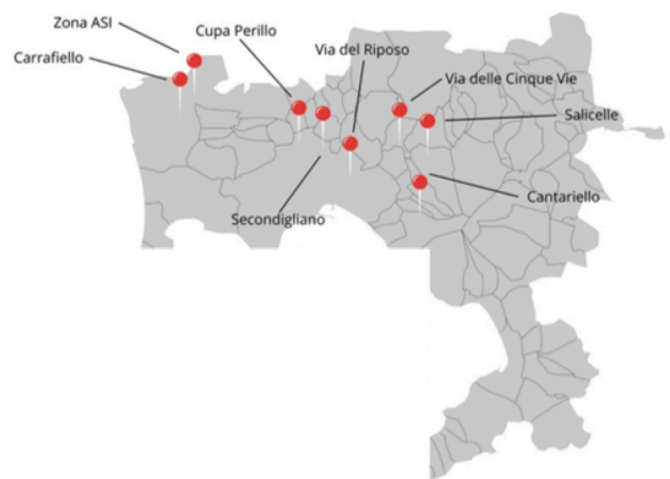
Settlement	Location	Why was it chosen as a settlement location?	Spatial relation to urban fabric
<i>Villaggio della Solidarietà</i>	Naples, neighbour of Secondigliano	Institutional Decision	Extremely isolated position; distance from walking distance essential services is considerable.
<i>Cupa Perillo</i>	Naples, neighbour of Scampia	Chosen by the first settled communities	Well-connected position; easily accessible walking distance services
<i>Cantariello</i>	Casoria	Chosen by the first settled communities	Conveniently situated position; near several essential and walking distance services
<i>Via Carrafiello</i>	Giugliano in Campania	Chosen by the communities after numerous evictions in the area	Relatively isolated position; limited access to many essential services on foot or by public transport
<i>Villaggio ASI</i>	Giugliano in Campania	Institutional Decision	Relatively isolated position; limited access to many essential services on foot or by public transport

**Table 3**  
Roma Settlements included in the research.

Settlement	Population Size	Type of Settlement	Ownership of the Area	State of Infrastructure and Services	Relations with Local Institutions	Planned Interventions
<i>Villaggio della Solidarietà, Naples, Secondigliano</i>	About 300 people	Authorized equipped village (public project)	Municipal property	Dilapidated infrastructure, very poor maintenance, serious health risks	Limited institutional presence; occasional NGO interventions	No structural projects; occasional maintenance interventions
<i>Cupa Perillo, Naples, Scampia</i>	About 200 people	Authorized settlement	Private property (multiple owners)	Precarious structures; self-constructed housing; lack of sanitation	Sporadic contacts with institutions, mediated by NGOs	Ongoing legal and bureaucratic disputes; no concrete intervention plan
<i>Cantariello, Casoria</i>	About 90 people	Authorized settlement	Area in administrative limbo between municipalities	Extremely precarious structures; severe environmental contamination	Minimal institutional presence; mainly police interventions	Eviction orders pending; no relocation alternatives defined
<i>Via Carrafiello, Giugliano, Campania</i>	About 380 people	Authorized settlement	Private property	Precarious and unauthorized dwellings; exposed to serious environmental hazards	Institutional neglect; occasional emergency interventions (civil protection)	Emergency responses only; no medium-long term projects for many years. A concrete intervention plan has started in Nov 2025
<i>Villaggio ASI, Giugliano, Campania</i>	About 150 people	Semi-authorized equipped village	Public ownership (industrial area authority)	Poor maintenance; partial infrastructure degradation	Regular institutional relations, occasional NGO interventions	No concrete intervention plan

The *authorized* or *unauthorized* status of each settlement has concrete implications for residents’ daily access to services, schooling, and healthcare. In authorized sites, municipal registration allows limited eligibility for social housing lists, school enrollment, and health-care mediation, though services remain precarious and often depend on NGO facilitation. In contrast, unauthorized settlements—especially those on private or contaminated land—remain outside formal service grids, leaving residents without stable electricity, water, or legal residence status, and thus unable to access welfare programs. These distinctions are not only administrative; they structure patterns of recognition and neglect that are central to the dynamics of governance discontinuity analyzed in Section 5. The comparative matrix presented there makes explicit how differences in settlement status correspond to variations in institutional engagement, policy intervention, and everyday forms of contentious embeddedness.

The settlements analyzed in this study—Villaggio della Solidarietà (Secondigliano), Cupa Perillo (Scampia), Zona ASI (in the municipality of Giugliano, in the metropolitan region of Naples, Campania Region), Cantariello (Casoria/Afragola), and Via Carrafiello (Giugliano)—exemplify diverse forms of territorialization of Roma marginality. They are in peripheral zones shaped by sedimented inequalities and unstable governance arrangements, where deprivation overlaps with infrastructural neglect and fragmented welfare provision (De Leo and Mattiucci, 2025). They concentrate multiple vulnerabilities, with female unemployment and education gaps reinforcing territorial exclusion (Arena, 2025). As well, they are also politically weak territories, where strategic urban planning has long failed to produce inclusionary trajectories (Cerreta et al., 2020).



*Secondigliano*: Situated inside the municipality of Naples, in the neighbour of Secondigliano, officially recognized as a ‘solidarity village’, it consists of approximately 90 housing modules. It is located between Via della Circumvallazione Esterna, and the Secondigliano penitentiary. Inaugurated in the year 2000, it represents the first example of an authorized settlement specifically designed for the accommodation of Roma communities within the Municipality of Naples. It houses about 300 people of predominantly Serbian origin. The area suffers from chronic neglect and high levels of waste and has been classified as ‘illegal’ since 2021. It hosts 311 persons migrated from former emigration.

*Cupa Perillo*: Situated inside the municipality of Naples, in the neighbourhood of Scampia, it emerged in the early 1990s following the displacement of Roma families from unauthorized sites in central Naples. The neighborhood is known for its association with issues of urban decay and criminality, particularly following the publication of Roberto Saviano's book *Gomorra*. It is an authorized camp, initially promoted as a temporary emergency measure, which over time has become a permanent and highly segregated settlement, severely underserved and stigmatized. It hosts primarily Macedonian-Muslims and Serbian-Orthodox communities divided into four family-based sub-areas. It includes around fifty housing units constructed from scrap material and caravans, with an estimated population of approximately 200 residents, including around 60 minors attending nearby schools. The area is relatively accessible, close to urban centers, facilitating greater integration. Still, and despite municipal recognition, living conditions remain precarious, with inadequate infrastructure, limited access to education, and heightened surveillance.

*Zona ASI*, located in the post-industrial periphery of the city of Giugliano in Campania, an autonomous peripheral town within the metropolitan area of Naples; it represents a large authorized settlement formed around disused warehouses and industrial ruins.: Initiated as an institutional settlement in 2011, it originally featured 24 housing modules for temporary accommodation. Currently, it accommodates about 150 residents and suffers from deteriorating conditions and inadequate facilities. Here, Roma families—mainly Romanian citizens—live in conditions of extreme infrastructural deprivation, often exposed to environmental hazards and lacking basic utilities such as water and electricity. The settlement is invisible in official planning and remains systematically neglected. Before arriving, the families have been displaced over a dozen times within a few years.

*Via Carrafiello*, in Giugliano in Campania, has undergone a partial transformation from an unauthorized settlement to a site of experimental integration initiatives, although these have been partial and contested. Recent interventions by NGOs and local authorities have aimed at dismantling the segregated camp structure and promoting housing inclusion strategies, albeit with limited resources and amidst strong local resistance. Occupied by Roma from Bosnia-Herzegovina since May 2009, it houses nearly 400 residents, at least half of them minors. It features severe deprivation, only one drinking fountain, and significant environmental hazards from surrounding waste. It stands out as one of the most acute sites of deprivation within the Naples metropolitan area, concentrating some of the harshest living conditions experienced by Roma communities in emergency housing. The housing units are built from wood, metal sheets, and other salvaged materials. The settlement has been without electricity since February 2024, following a tragic accident that claimed the life of Michelle, a six-year-old child. The area is characterized by large accumulations of waste, creating an environment where rats and snakes proliferate, and prolonged exposure to toxic substances and hazardous waste is a constant risk for the residents. Among the cases analyzed, it emerges as the most severely affected, marked by extreme sanitary deficiencies, the

pervasive presence of waste accumulations adjacent to dwellings, persistent barriers to accessing essential services, and chronic issues related to civil registration and documentation regularization.<sup>6</sup>

*Cantariello*, straddling the municipalities of Casoria and Afragola, autonomous peripheral towns within the metropolitan area of Naples is an unauthorized settlement occupying residual urban spaces near highway intersections and industrial corridors. A historically recognized settlement originating around 40 years ago, this area hosts approximately 90 people, half of whom are minors. It includes essential services like drinking fountains but faces critical housing and documentation issues. It is marked by both spatial precariousness and constant threats of eviction, reflecting a dynamic of “permanent temporariness” (Sigona, 2005).

These detailed socio-demographic insights highlight severe infrastructural deficits, institutional neglect, and persistent socio-economic vulnerabilities affecting the Roma communities in Naples. Understanding the fragmented, heterogeneous, and institutionally ambiguous landscape of Roma settlements in the metropolitan region of Naples provides the essential foundation for the empirical investigation developed in this study and inform the methodological strategies adopted to explore these dynamics in depth. In the following section, we outline the research design, data collection techniques, sampling rationale, and analytical approach that guided our examination of contentious embeddedness across these urban contexts.

#### 4. Methodology

This section explains the research design, including the sampling strategies, ethical considerations, and data triangulation methods employed to access, observe, and understand marginalized Roma populations in precarious urban environments.

The methodology employed in this research was carefully tailored to the challenges of accessing hidden, stigmatized, and socioeconomically marginalized populations, in line with the methodological reflections of Heckathorn (2002) on chain-referral sampling strategies. Although not adopting a strict respondent-driven sampling (RDS) design, the research incorporated principles of trust-based entry, snowballing, and incremental network expansion to ensure broader coverage within settlements without over-representation of specific subgroups.

Rather than aiming for representativeness or generalizability, the study pursues analytical depth and relational mapping, aligning with approaches advocated in contemporary urban sociology and ethnographic fieldwork traditions (da Silva et al., 2024; Martínez, 2026).

Fieldwork was conducted between November 2023 and June 2024 and combined semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis. The research privileged a “following the actors” strategy (Boltanski et al., 2007), tracing relational interactions between Roma families, NGOs, municipal officials, and other stakeholders involved in the governance of marginality and urban welfare.

Initial contact points were secured through collaboration with local NGOs operating in each settlement, who provided initial referrals to

<sup>6</sup> End of November 2024, part of the settlement of Via Carrafiello was cleared, resulting in the relocation of a few families just a few meters away. The operation was conducted under an emergency-driven logic rather than through a structured housing inclusion policy. However, since April 20, 2025, the Municipality of Giugliano, leveraging targeted national funding aimed at supporting Roma children's well-being and educational integration, has initiated a collaboration with Associazione 21 luglio to conduct a pro bono exploratory project within the Via Carrafiello settlement. This initiative encompasses a systematic mapping of living conditions and the surrounding urban context, a listening campaign to identify the needs of families and local stakeholders, the production of a comprehensive diagnostic report, and the drafting of a preparatory document for the potential establishment of a Local Action Group tasked with coordinating an accompanied pathway for the settlement's gradual dismantlement and social integration.

participants willing to be interviewed. The NGO field itself was heterogeneous. Two main profiles could be identified: *service-collaborative organizations*, which work closely with municipal administrations to deliver social mediation and welfare services; and *advocacy-confrontational organizations*, which position themselves in opposition to local authorities, focusing on rights-based claims and public denunciation (Citroni, 2025). Between these poles, several hybrid groups alternate collaboration and critique depending on project cycles and funding pressures (Armillei, 2018; Maestri, 2019).

Subsequent interviewees were selected using a purposive chain-referral approach, favoring diversity of age, gender, family roles, and migration histories. This method allowed overcoming initial access barriers and reaching segments of the community less visible or connected to formal mediation structures.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select the five primary settlements under study: Secondigliano, Cupa Perillo, Zona ASI, Cantariello, and Via Carrafiello. The choice was based on their different statuses (authorized camp, unauthorized settlement, industrial occupation), geographical distribution within the metropolitan area, varying degrees of institutional visibility, and contrasting levels of NGO engagement.

Within these settlements, participants were selected to maximize variation across age, gender, family role, and migratory trajectory, while focusing primarily on long-term residents. NGO representatives, municipal social workers, local police officers, and regional policymakers were also interviewed to capture the meso- and macro-level dynamics.

In total, 62 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted: 50 with Roma residents<sup>7</sup>, 6 with NGO staff and volunteers, and 6 with civil servants, plus one focus group. In addition, informal conversations and field notes enriched the data corpus, ensuring a multi-voiced and nuanced portrayal of the contentious processes at play. Interviews with Roma residents were conducted in situ within the settlements or in nearby safe spaces provided by collaborating NGOs. Interviews lasted between 45 min and 2 h, and were structured around key themes such as daily survival strategies, experiences with institutions, perceptions of stigma, and aspirations for the future.

Participant observation took place during public events, NGO-organized workshops, community meetings, school enrollment sessions, and informal daily activities within the settlements. Observational data were systematically recorded through detailed fieldnotes, capturing not only verbal interactions but also spatial arrangements, material conditions, and non-verbal expressions of conflict, solidarity, and marginalization.

Furthermore, an extensive review of policy documents, municipal plans, eviction reports, and NGO publications was conducted to triangulate findings and embed micro-level observations within broader institutional contexts.

Data analysis followed an abductive approach, iteratively moving between empirical material and theoretical frameworks (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using thematic analysis techniques, with particular attention to emergent patterns of relational solidarity, governance failures, normative conflicts, and symbolic struggles. A long public report and a policy brief were published online (Associazione, 2024a; Associazione, 2024b). Many results were also discussed later with the inhabitants of the five settlements and a couple of public events with authorities were organized.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research

process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with special protocols implemented for vulnerable individuals. Anonymity and confidentiality were rigorously protected, and particular care was taken to avoid any form of reification or exoticization of marginalized experiences. The positionality of the researchers was also critically reflected upon, acknowledging the inherent asymmetries of power and privilege involved in studying marginalized communities and striving to engage participants as active interlocutors rather than passive objects of inquiry.

Participant observation complemented interviews, offering direct insights into relational dynamics, living conditions, and everyday practices that structured community life. Multiple site visits per settlement over a three-month period enabled repeated contacts and reduced the risk of capturing episodic situations, while acknowledging that the number of visits per site did not exceed two in some cases. The purpose was analytical rather than statistical generalization, focusing on relational mechanisms rather than representativeness.

Ethically, particular care was taken to avoid extractive dynamics, ensuring informed consent procedures adapted to low-literacy populations, respecting confidentiality, and emphasizing participants' right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Given the vulnerability of the target population, interviews were conducted with sensitivity to trauma, stigma, and mistrust, and particular attention was paid to constructing safe spaces for testimony. The research was undertaken as a self-funded initiative by Associazione 21 luglio. Its objective was to shed light on a specific reality in order to support and contribute to the analysis and contextualization efforts of local stakeholders. Prior collaborations with local NGOs and public administrations in the Campania region facilitated trust-building and ethical compliance but also required constant reflexivity regarding positional power and knowledge asymmetries. Following the guidance of scholars such as Kovats (2013), Legros et al. (2024), and Vacca et al. (2022), who emphasize participatory and ethically sensitive approaches to Roma research, the fieldwork was designed to minimize extractive dynamics and to value participants as situated interpreters of their own experience (Martínez, 2026). Regular feedback sessions and joint validation of findings with NGO staff and Roma residents were integral to the process; a specific report has been realized for local actors, and Roma were invited to express their voice at the presentation, as well as in the Italian 'Senato della Repubblica'.

Data triangulation was achieved by integrating testimonies from residents, NGO operators, and institutional actors, and by systematically collecting documentary materials such as municipal communications, NGO internal reports, and eviction notices. This triangulation enhanced the validity of findings and allowed mitigating biases introduced by selective perceptions or gatekeeper influence.

Limitations include potential sample biases due to the relational pathways activated by NGOs, as well as the inherent difficulties of establishing representative sampling frames for informal and often transient populations. In one case, access to the Zona ASI settlement was particularly restricted due to residents' distrust and repeated displacements. To mitigate this constraint, the research team relied on triangulation with NGO mediators active in the area, conducted call-backs with residents previously interviewed, and cross-checked observational data with internal NGO and municipal reports. Indeed, the methodological strategy adopted maximized internal diversity within settlements and provided robust empirical foundations for theorizing contentious embeddedness in extreme urban marginality.

## 5. Main results

This section presents the empirical findings through the lens of contentious embeddedness, analyzing how micro-level solidarities, meso-level organizational dynamics, and macro-level governance discontinuities interact to shape the lived experiences of Roma living in 'camps.'

<sup>7</sup> In each settlement under study, more than ten testimonies and interviews were conducted, ensuring a diversified and in-depth qualitative base. An exception was the 'Villaggio Attrezzato' in the ASI Zone of Giugliano in Campania, where significant difficulties in engaging residents limited the data collection to only three interviews.

Each concept introduced in the theoretical framework is operationalized empirically through the thematic organization of the results tables and the selected quotations, which exemplify how embeddedness, governance discontinuity, and normative pluralism manifest in the lived experience of the settlements.

The analysis that follows traces three sets of attributes corresponding to the analytical levels established in the theoretical framework. At the *micro level*, we examine patterns of relational solidarity, reciprocity, and everyday survival. At the *meso level*, we focus on forms of mediation, coordination, and organizational contention among NGOs and public institutions. At the *macro level*, we analyze governance discontinuities, normative conflicts, and resource allocation failures. These attributes are summarized in the comparative matrix presented later in this section, allowing a systematic view of how they co-vary across settlements.

Each of the following subsections concludes with a short integrative bridge that explicitly connects the mechanisms observed at one analytical level to those unfolding at the others, in order to make visible the multi-scalar logic through which contentious embeddedness operates.

### 5.1. Micro-level mechanisms: solidarity and relational reciprocity

At the micro-sociological level, the Roma communities inhabiting authorized and unauthorized settlements in metropolitan Naples embody intricate forms of relational reciprocity and collective solidarity, deeply embedded in kinship networks and moral economies of mutual aid. These solidaristic practices emerge not as residual traditionalism, but as adaptive responses to structural marginalization and chronic infrastructural deprivation, aligning with the theoretical lens of domestic orders of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2021). Within these settlements, economic survival strategies are predominantly organized at the extended family level, where pluriactivity is the norm and resources are systematically pooled and redistributed across kinship networks (see also Cousin et al., 2023). This embedded economic rationality reflects a form of relational resilience, in which income generation, risk mitigation, and basic needs provision are collectively managed to compensate for chronic exclusion from formal labor markets and welfare infrastructures. Survival, in these contexts, is predicated upon relational proximity, embodied trust, and reciprocal obligation, rather than upon access to formal labour markets or institutional welfare provision.

Empirical observations across the settlements of Cupa Perillo, Secondigliano, Cantariello, and Via Carrafiello reveal how basic needs — food, childcare, healthcare access, and informal credit — are routinely met through networks of familial reciprocity. As one woman living in Cupa Perillo explained during an interview on November 24, 2023: «If you get sick, the neighbour brings you the medicine. If you have no food, you don't go hungry. Someone will help. Here, alone, nobody survives.» This statement crystallizes the embeddedness of survival within the moral economy of the settlement. Another inhabitant of Cupa Perillo declared: «If we are far from each other, we don't survive. Here, when something happens, someone always helps you. Even when there is no money, we share.» Moreover, the fieldwork at Cantariello demonstrated that even in contexts of extreme deprivation, social ties are densely woven. A grandmother explained: «When a new family arrives, we help them build a shack. We give them old mattresses. It's what we do.»

This type of support encompasses basic needs such as food, childcare, and informal lending practices, but it also extends to collective defence against external threats like eviction operations or racialized violence. Relational solidarity thus compensates for the chronic inadequacies of formal welfare structures.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, informal work practices, such as recycling metals, selling market goods, or seasonal agricultural labour, are organized along lines of extended kinship, with responsibilities shifting dynamically taking advantage of small opportunities (such as collection of scrap materials, seasonal agricultural labour, petty trade), and rotating roles depending on the availability of employment and legal status. As stressed by an interviewee from the Cantariello camp: «When my brother works, we all eat. When I find something, I help him back. We don't have contracts, we only have each other.» Another interviewee from the Cantariello settlement, on January 10, 2024, recounted: «When my uncle found work on the construction site, he paid for the electricity. When he lost the job, my cousin stepped in. We are many, but together we manage.» Such rotational solidarity challenges individualistic notions of economic agency, foregrounding instead a relational economy where obligations are negotiated, embodied, and continuously adjusted. The relevance of poliactivity compensates the partial 'disembedding' of skills and credentials from social regulations and collective agreements (Pratschke and Morlicchio, 2012) with effects impoverishment and of intensification in labour market inequalities.

At the micro level, the Roma have also to face together environmental degradation and health risks. In settlements like Via Carrafiello, residents face not only infrastructural neglect but also serious environmental hazards, including soil contamination by hydrocarbons and heavy metals. «My son coughs all the time. The doctors say it's from the ground,» a mother reported. The risk of both intentional and accidental fires represents a recurring hazard within the settlement, frequently contributing to tensions among residents. As one woman living in Cupa Perillo states: «Some people here keep burning things—it's dangerous. I already struggle to breathe on my own; I'm already ill.» These environmental vulnerabilities intensify contentious embeddedness, embedding health risks directly into the materiality of marginalization. While we highlight infrastructural neglect, we highlight how environmental risks compound the marginality and stigmatization mechanisms.

Roma residents embody and defend a relational logic centered on kinship reciprocity and community autonomy, while municipal actors are constrained by industrial and civic norms of bureaucratic standardization. A Roma woman in Zona ASI articulated this dissonance vividly: «They want to put us in apartments far away from each other. But our strength is that we are together. If they separate us, they destroy us.»

These instances of reciprocity and solidarity do not negate the persistent presence of intra-group conflicts and power asymmetries within Roma communities living in the same settlement. These include domestic and gender-based violence, as well as tensions stemming from the criminal activities of specific individuals or small groups, which often exacerbate cohabitation struggles. As a Roma man in Cupa Perillo states: «Here they start burning things and doing bad stuff — if they start a fire, where are we supposed to go? They need to realize what they're doing. If one person does these things, everyone ends up paying the price.»

The relational solidarity observable in these settlements thus resists simplistic categorizations of dependency or marginality. It constitutes a proactive, collective strategy of resilience against systemic exclusion. This relational logic, however, comes into tension when confronted by institutional interventions predicated upon standardization, individualization, and welfare rationalities: meso- and macro-levels dynamics set the stage for contentious encounters between Roma and non-Roma.

Yet solidarity within these settlements is not a frictionless or harmonious process. Field observations and interviews reveal recurrent tensions over gendered responsibilities, generational authority, and access to scarce resources. Mothers often bear the heaviest burden of care, while younger men express frustration at limited opportunities and

<sup>8</sup> There are significant convergences with empirical research on working-class groups in Naples, but pointing at the central role of associations in fostering social ties (Del Pizzo, F. et al., 2021; Pratschke and De Falco, 2024).

internal hierarchies.<sup>9</sup> Occasional disputes over informal earnings or the use of shared spaces show that reciprocity is constantly negotiated and sometimes strained. These ambivalences do not contradict the existence of solidarity; rather, they constitute its everyday condition. Ambivalent solidarity thus exemplifies contentious embeddedness as a mechanism through which cooperation and conflict coexist, shaping the moral and practical economy of survival without implying moral judgment on community cohesion.

These observations confirm that micro-level solidarities cannot be understood in isolation. The same relations of reciprocity that sustain daily life also provide the social infrastructure upon which mediating actors later build their interventions, and they generate expectations that frame conflict with institutions. This dynamic connection from interpersonal survival to organizational mediation constitutes the first movement of contentious embeddedness in practice.

## 5.2. Meso-level mechanisms: mediation, NGO interventions, and inter-organizational conflicts

At the meso-level, the complex field of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civic associations, and intermediary institutions plays a critical but contested role in the governance of Roma marginality. As outlined in the methodological section, these actors embody distinct institutional logics. Service-collaborative NGOs tend to pursue incremental accommodation within administrative frameworks, whereas advocacy-confrontational groups prioritize visibility and contestation. This divergence is visible in field interactions.

Empirical data from the fieldwork highlight that NGOs such as Dedalus, Chi rom e ... Chi no, N:EA, and others function as vital mediators, operating at the interstice between Roma communities and fragmented public administrations. Interventions at this level oscillate between emergency humanitarian responses and long-term integration initiatives, often constrained by precarious funding, limited political support, and bureaucratic hostility. A social worker from Dedalus stated: «*Our work is a constant negotiation, between what the families need and what the municipality is willing to give. Sometimes we feel we are translators between two worlds that don't understand each other.*» This articulation captures the quintessential role of associations and NGOs as relational translators, attempting to bridge conflicting normative orders (Carré et al., 2024).

Interviews also shed light on how stigma operates through institutional routines. A Roma woman recounted: «*When I go to the municipal office, they look at my address and they already treat me like a criminal.*» This corroborates research on mid-level actors' role in perpetuating territorial stigmatization (Kudla and Courey, 2019).

The fieldwork highlights substantial differences between authorized settlements, where minimal infrastructure and administrative recognition exist, and unauthorized settlements, which remain outside official plans and are subject to more violent policing and precarization. Contentious embeddedness manifests differently across these settings, with authorized settlements fostering more visible conflicts over maintenance, while unauthorized ones concentrate survival struggles in invisibilized spaces. As one NGO worker operating in Secondigliano explained: «*We do what we can, but we are alone. Without political support, our actions are temporary patches.*» This situation generates forms of organizational fatigue and frustration, especially given the absence of coordinated, long-term public strategies for desegregation and

<sup>9</sup> Berki et al. (2025) examine the aspirations versus reality for Hungarian Roma mothers living in dire urban poverty, who place high aspirations on improving their children's lives, those aspirations center on securing basic needs rather than a complete escape from their class or community. In fact, despite valuing education, many mothers prioritize immediate necessities like safe water, sanitation, and family survival over abstract upward mobility. As in our cases, their options are bounded by structural constraints.

integration.

Field interviews illustrate these tensions vividly. A municipal officer, discussing eviction procedures, justified actions by invoking «*public hygiene and safety*», while a third-sector operator countered: «*Safety is ensuring housing, not dismantling homes.*» The case of Cupa Perillo in Scampia illustrates the deeply discontinuous and contradictory nature of camp governance in Naples. As Laino shows, initial municipal plans to rebuild the settlement were abandoned after participatory workshops with Roma associations led to a shift toward integrating housing within a revised land-use plan. Despite efforts such as community profiling and social accompaniment initiatives launched in 2015, governance remains fragmented and opaque, with sporadic interventions—such as the periodic severing of informal electricity connections—revealing the absence of any coherent, sustained strategy.

Moreover, conflictual dynamics between NGOs themselves and between NGOs and local governments are evident. Some NGOs prioritize pragmatic engagement with institutions, seeking to secure incremental improvements (e.g., enrollment of Roma children in local schools, access to health services), while others adopt a more radical rights-based advocacy, denouncing systemic discrimination and contesting the legitimacy of segregated camp policies. Moreover, some are characterized by a strong Catholic identity that shapes not only their activities but also their methods of securing financial resources. These divergent orientations often result in a lack of unified action, weakening the capacity to pressure institutions towards systemic change. This diversification and fragmentation has a detrimental effect on the lobbying effectiveness of the NGOs. For instance, some organizations respond to emergencies and address immediate needs without a clear political stance on systemic discrimination (Comitato campano con i rom: «*I would say that we run after emergencies. It is hard to carry out any real planning of the various activities. Essentially, we are constantly running after urgencies and emergencies.*») Conversely, others consistently base their actions on a context of political and community engagement, as opposed to mere volunteerism.

The focus group held on April 16, 2024 captured these tensions vividly, with some associations emphasizing urgent humanitarian action while others stressed the necessity to dismantle the symbolic and material architecture of ethnic separation. During the focus group the representatives from two different NGOs clashed openly over whether participating in municipal “Roma tables” (so to say: working group to discuss policies and services towards Roma) constituted collaboration with exclusionary practices or pragmatic necessity. For instance, while one representative expressed support for the active involvement of Roma communities in the discussion with the administration regarding anagraphic residency, another found the discussion to be lacking in its consideration of other marginalized groups facing similar residency-related challenges.

Furthermore, NGOs themselves are entangled in competitive funding logics, with scarce resources allocated through calls favoring measurable outputs (number of children vaccinated, number of families relocated) rather than sustainable transformations.<sup>10</sup> This dynamic fosters a fragmentation of efforts and hampers the emergence of a coherent, collective political agenda capable of challenging the structural determinants of Roma marginality.

These contrasting orientations illustrate how organizational pluralism, far from ensuring balance, often fragments the field of mediation and reproduces the very governance discontinuities it seeks to repair. Thus, while NGOs are indispensable for mitigating immediate vulnerabilities, their interventions are also marked by tension, partiality, and vulnerability to broader governance dysfunctions.

The contradictions emerging within and between organizations reverberate in residents' everyday experience. Informal expectations of

<sup>10</sup> This point echoes a general trend well discussed by the literature in Italy as well as in other countries (Lichterman and Eliasoph, 2014).

reciprocity collide with bureaucratic temporality, while professional fatigue within NGOs mirrors the exhaustion of residents who depend on them. These frictions transmit upward, shaping how municipal and regional authorities perceive both Roma communities and their intermediaries, thereby linking meso-level mediation to macro-level governance discontinuities.

### 5.3. Macro-level mechanisms: governance gaps, resource allocation, and normative pluralism

At the macro-level, the one of institutional domains and stratification systems (Turner, 2010), the treatment of Roma settlements in Naples reflects profound governance gaps, inconsistent resource allocation, and unresolved normative pluralism. Interviews with high-level municipal and regional officials, including the Councillor for Social Policies, Municipality of Naples and the Councillor for Security, of the Campania Region, reveal an acute awareness of the inadequacy of the “camp system” yet a persistent inability to dismantle it effectively. A municipal official candidly admitted during an interview, «*The camps are a problem we manage in emergencies. There is no long-term plan.*»

Despite Italy's adoption of a National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2012–2020, extended to 2030), local implementation remains weak, underfunded, and politically contested (Alietti & Riniolo, 2021). Municipal and metropolitan authorities face severe budgetary constraints, limiting their capacity to implement structural solutions such as desegregated housing programs. At the same time, political pressures from resident populations, often framed in terms of security and public hygiene concerns, constrain the political will to promote inclusive initiatives. As interviews with municipal officials reveal, interventions are often reactive rather than proactive: «*We act when the problem explodes. There are no long-term plans because there are no resources or consensus.*»

NGOs and third-sector organizations play a crucial mediating role, providing essential services (e.g., schooling support, health mediation) and advocating for Roma rights. However, their actions are also fragmented, dependent on precarious funding, and sometimes caught in competitive dynamics that mirror the broader disarticulation of urban governance. As a social worker commented, «*We are always putting out fires, but we can't build anything lasting.*» Policy approaches oscillate between paternalistic integration schemes and coercive eviction measures, without addressing the structural determinants of Roma marginality. Observations across settlements document how ‘integration projects’ often consist of temporary subsidies for relocation into inadequate private rentals, followed by inevitable returns to unauthorized settlements once resources are exhausted.

In Naples, governance discontinuity manifests not only in formal policy vacuums but in everyday practices: sporadic interventions followed by long periods of neglect, formal relocation programs without corresponding infrastructural support, or eviction threats unaccompanied by viable alternatives.<sup>11</sup> As interviews in Secondigliano revealed, residents perceive the state not as absent but as arbitrarily present: «*They come, they leave, they promise, they forget.*» The Giugliano Eco-village project—initially conceived as an innovative desegregation initiative—collapsed under political pressures, administrative delays, and local opposition, illustrating how even moderately ambitious integration projects are vulnerable to the volatility of local political economies. Similarly, the progressive abandonment of participatory approaches in Cupa Perillo, in favor of top-down security interventions, signals the reassertion of logics prioritizing urban order and risk containment (see also Laino, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> The role of governance discontinuities emerges also in the research by Avar et al. (2024) on Urla (İzmir), where planning for counterurbanization neglected an already marginalized Roma community: as middle-class families move into Urla's countryside and drive up land values, Roma residents face heightened exclusion from formal housing markets.

Resource constraints exacerbate these failures. The financial allocations for Roma inclusion remain minuscule compared to broader urban development budgets, and the dependence on fragmented EU funding cycles introduces chronic discontinuity. As a municipal official admitted, «*Even when children go to school, we don't have a system that supports continuity.*»

Furthermore, the legal and administrative frameworks governing Roma policies are characterized by a sort of what we can label ‘policy invisibilization’: the absence of binding targets, the lack of enforcement mechanisms, and the reliance on discretionary, often paternalistic, municipal initiatives. And, as an elderly Roma woman in Giugliano poignantly remarked, «*You can build a wall to hide us, but we are still part of your city.*» Such testimonies reveal the affective dimension of contentious embeddedness, where spatial exclusion and symbolic erasure intertwine, yet resilience and claims to belonging persist in everyday practices of survival and dignity.

Interviews and document analysis reveal that so-called “temporary relocations” after evictions often become de facto permanent, creating entrenched zones of infrastructural neglect and symbolic exclusion. As a Roma resident of Secondigliano noted, «*They said it was for six months. It's been more than fifteen years.*» These chronic temporarities reinforce contentious embeddedness by institutionalizing instability as a mode of urban management. Access to social mobility and spatial incorporation are deeply segmented by ethnicity, class, and legal status. Roma communities in Naples and its metropolitan region are not merely segregated spatially but are symbolically relegated to an urban underworld characterized by stigma, dispossession, and juridical ambiguity. As a Roma elder living in Cupa Perillo noted: «*Here, we have no address, no documents, no future. We live outside their maps.*» Governance of Roma settlements operates through discontinuous, non-linear (Le Galès, 2021), and often contentious mechanisms, revealing broader patterns of governance discontinuity that increasingly characterize metropolitan contexts across Europe.

An additional layer of marginalization emerges from widespread issues of statelessness among Roma residents, many of whom, despite being born in Italy, lack formal citizenship documentation. This legal liminality obstructs access to education, healthcare, and labor markets, reinforcing patterns of exclusion and confirming how contentious embeddedness operates not only spatially but also with relented care for stateless people.

Crucially, the macro-level is also where normative pluralism manifests most starkly. Municipal institutions articulate a logic of civic and industrial worth, emphasizing standardization, hygiene, and decorum, while Roma communities operate within a domestic logic privileging relational embeddedness and proximity, and putting reputation at the heart of trust-making social exchange. The absence of structured mediation between these logics generates systemic policy failure and recurrent cycles of misunderstanding, distrust, bias generation without sustainable compromise pathways.

International organizations such as the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and UN agencies have repeatedly sanctioned Italy for the systemic violation of Roma rights, particularly regarding access to housing, healthcare, and education (Alietti & Riniolo, 2021; Armillei, 2018; Matache, 2025). These international critiques expose how the governance of Roma settlements operates within broader fields of normative conflict that transcend municipal action, illustrating how contentious embeddedness is reinforced by multi-scalar failures of compliance and rights enforcement. These international normative frameworks are part of the macro-level governance discontinuities that impact local practices.

The macro-level discontinuities observed here close the analytical loop. Institutional volatility and fragmented accountability feed back into settlement life, undermining trust and forcing residents to intensify micro-level solidarities that, in turn, re-enter the cycle of contention. In this recursive movement between levels lies the empirical substance of contentious embeddedness (see Table 4).

To resume the configurational framework developed in this study and substantiate the relational and conflictual analysis of Roma camps marginality, Table 5 systematically maps the five Roma settlements investigated across the three levels of reality: micro-level solidarities, meso-level mediation patterns, macro-level governance gaps.

5.4. Interaction across levels: contentious embeddedness in practice

The empirical material reveals that contentious embeddedness—the concept capturing the dynamic co-constitution of social solidarity and institutional conflict—operates across micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, interlinking them in a dense web of mutual conditioning: struggles over basic needs, dissonant recognition (Burini & Vitale, 2024),<sup>12</sup> and space are simultaneously interpersonal, organizational, and systemic.

At the micro-level, relational solidarities are both survival

**Table 4**  
Data collection.<sup>a</sup>

Settlement	Timing of Observations	Documents Collected	Notes on Data Collection
Villaggio della Solidarietà - Secondigliano (Napoli)	April–May 2024 (2 site visits)	Field notes, administrative records, NGO reports	Standard interviews conducted; extensive participant observation
Cupa Perillo - Scampia (Napoli)	April–May 2024 (2 site visits)	Field notes, municipal project documents	Structured and informal interviews, direct observation in living spaces
Campo di Cantariello - Casoria	April–May 2024 (2 site visits)	Field notes, civil protection alerts, eviction orders	Interviews impacted by tension over imminent eviction; sensitive engagement required
Baraccopoli di Via Carrafiello - Giugliano in Campania	May–June 2024 (2 site visits)	Field notes, NGO memoranda, environmental reports	Very precarious conditions; strong emotional interviews and many conversations held informally
Villaggio attrezzato zona ASI - Giugliano in Campania	June 2024 (1 site visit)	Field notes, minimal official documentation	Difficult access; distrust among residents limited the number of testimonies
Third Sector Organizations (various settlements)	April 16, 2024 (focus group) + May 2024 (individual interviews)	Minutes of focus group, NGO internal reports	Gathered structured perspectives from frontline workers; triangulated with inhabitant interviews
Local Authorities	May–June 2024	Institutional correspondence, strategy documents	High-level policy insight; some reluctance

<sup>a</sup> Access constraints were mitigated through triangulation with NGO staff working on site, repeated follow-up calls to residents, and systematic comparison with documentary material to validate observations.

<sup>12</sup> Barbera (2023) calls dissonant recognition a form of social validation emerging from interactions with heterogeneous publics, marked by plural and conflicting norms. As defined by Burini and Vitale (2025), “dissonant recognition refers to a condition in which social actors receive conflicting forms of legitimacy or acknowledgement from different audiences—such as institutions, peers, or the public—creating tension between how they are valued, supported, or understood across normative frameworks”.

mechanisms and acts of everyday resistance, embedding Roma families in networks of trust and reciprocity that contest institutional marginalization. At the meso-level, NGOs attempt—with partial success—to mediate between domestic, reputational, civic and industrial logics but are constrained by funding imperatives and political ambivalence. At the macro level, the governance architecture remains trapped in normative conflicts and resource scarcity, oscillating between paternalistic integrationist discourses and exclusionary security-driven practices.

These levels are not merely additive but interact recursively. Forced evictions and governance failures at the macro level reinforce distrust and relational closure at the micro-level, undermining meso-level efforts at mediation. As an inhabitant of Via Carrafiello put it: *«Every year they come, they promise, they go away. We stay here, and we help each other because nobody else will.»*

Conversely, resilient solidarity practices at the micro level offer limited but tangible platforms upon which meso-level actors can build bridges, contest marginalization, and negotiate alternative futures. A poignant testimony from a mother living in the Zona ASI settlement (the settlement where we had more problem to be accepted for interviews and observations)<sup>13</sup> encapsulates this contentious embeddedness: *«They move us, they promise houses, but when everything falls apart, it is my sister, my cousin, my neighbour who keeps me standing. Not them. Not the comune.»* Empirical material confirms this: Roma families in Giugliano self-organized to establish electricity networks and basic health monitoring, negotiating informally with NGOs and local intermediaries. Yet these efforts often clashed with municipal projects that criminalized self-organization as ‘illegal occupation’. Contentious embeddedness thus captures the duality: relational resilience against infrastructural abandonment, and simultaneous exposure to renewed forms of control, stigmatization, and conflict.

Interviews also shed light on how stigma operates through institutional routines. A Roma woman recounted: *«When I go to the municipal office, they look at my address and they already treat me like a criminal.»* This corroborates research on mid-level actors' role in perpetuating territorial stigmatization (Le Galès, 2021). This is the effect of territorial stigmatization. In Secondigliano's Villaggio della Solidarietà, fieldnotes captured conversations with parents who enroll their children in local schools, only to encounter persistent exclusion. A Roma father shared: *«My son goes to school, but he sits alone. No friends, no parties, no nothing. They see him as different.»* The teacher-student ratios, access to extra-curricular activities, and dropout rates indicate that formal access does not translate into genuine integration.

Looking at the relation between institutional domains, organizational behaviour, and interactions, the empirical realities documented in Naples exposes the deep cracks formed by governance discontinuities, housing crises, and ethnicized spatial inequalities. The governance of Roma settlements in Naples and its metropolitan region epitomizes the frictions, gaps, and failures associated with fragmented metropolitan

<sup>13</sup> The differentiated ease of access to the settlements under study constitutes, in itself, a significant ethnographic indicator. As extensively noted in the literature on urban marginality and hidden populations (King et al., 2017; Vitale and Cousin, 2003; Wacquant, 2014), patterns of accessibility are not merely logistical challenges but reflect the relational architectures, degrees of institutional trust, and levels of societal stigmatization shaping everyday life. In the Neapolitan context, our findings suggest that difficulties in accessing certain settlements—such as the Villaggio Attrezzato Zona ASI in Giugliano—cannot be attributed solely to the reticence of Roma inhabitants. Rather, they also reveal the fragmentation and ambivalence of local civil society actors and associative networks, which, as documented elsewhere (Vitale and Zucca, 2024), often oscillate between moments of advocacy and abandonment. Thus, patterns of researcher accessibility must be interpreted as relational diagnostics: they illuminate the uneven textures of marginalization, the ruptures of social mediation, and the fragile or absent brokerage structures that mediate between communities (not only advanced marginalized) and the broader urban polity.

**Table 5**  
Configurational analysis of contentious embeddedness across Roma settlements in the metropolitan region of Naples.

Levels of Analysis	Main Attributes	Villaggio della Solidarietà (Secondigliano)	Cupa Perillo (Scampia)	Cantariello (Casoria)	Via Carrafiello (Giugliano)	Villaggio ASI (Giugliano)
<i>Micro-level</i>	Relational solidarities/ reciprocity/survival	Strong kinship ties; collective survival strategies	Fragmented solidarity; emerging intra-group tensions	Kinship networks dominate but stressed by extreme hardship	Dense mutual aid practices; informal leadership structures	Partial kinship-based solidarity; weakened by institutional mediation
<i>Meso-level</i>	Mediation/ coordination/ contention	Sporadic NGO involvement; absence of sustained mediation	NGOs mediate relations with local authorities; contested by residents	Minimal mediation; relations mostly confrontational	Occasional NGO support, primarily health-related	Sporadic NGO presence; collaboration with institutional actors
<i>Macro-level Governance Gaps</i>	Discontinuities/ normative conflicts/ resource allocation	Formal recognition but infrastructural abandonment; no relocation policies	Legal disputes over land ownership paralyze interventions	Administrative limbo exacerbates neglect and policing focus	Total governance void; reliance on emergency responses only	Partial institutional integration; potential relocation plans under discussion

governance. Throughout the fieldwork, NGO workers and municipal officials alike expressed frustrations about their lack of mandate, funding, and coordination. One municipal welfare officer confessed: «We have good intentions, but no real tools. Every year, the plans change. The budget shrinks. We are left improvising.» This discontinuous governance reflects not only bureaucratic inefficiency but lack of trust with Roma citizens and between Roma and non-Roma neighbors.

Furthermore, as participant observation revealed during visits to the Cupa Perillo settlement, even within the administrative machinery, contradictions proliferate. A social worker remarked, «Sometimes I break the rules to help them. If I followed the protocol, they would get nothing.» These acts of micro-resistance within institutions point to the broader sociology of marginality and urban inequality by illustrating that extreme exclusion is not simply a byproduct of historical prejudice but an ongoing co-production of institutional practices, relational dynamics, and precise policy instruments and service, with always discrepancies (Halpern and Le Galès, 2012), contention, room for change.

Table 6 maps the empirical configurations characterizing each settlement along three principal analytical dimensions: normative tensions between residents and institutions, symbolic stigmatizations, and environmental conditions. It highlights the differentiated but structurally interconnected processes through which relational practices, governance discontinuities, and normative conflicts shape patterns of urban marginality and resilience among Roma communities.

Thus, contentious embeddedness is not simply a condition of Roma marginality: it is a dynamic, historically sedimented, and structurally produced process, wherein solidarity and exclusion, agency and constraint, hope and resignation are entangled. Understanding this configuration demands a theoretical framework attuned to normative pluralism, governance discontinuities, and the relational fabric of urban inequality.

**6. Conclusion: revisiting the dynamics of contentious embeddedness**

The analysis of Roma settlements in Naples, anchored in the framework of contentious embeddedness, reveals a complex and dynamic social reality where survival, marginalization, and governance failures are mutually entangled across micro, meso, and macro levels. We introduced the concept of “contentious embeddedness” to describe how Roma settlements are simultaneously embedded in urban networks and in constant contention with institutions and neighbors. Roma residents in Naples are not socially isolated “outsiders” but are embedded in the city’s economy and society through informal labor and networks – yet this very integration is conflict-laden, as their settlements exist in a liminal legal space, often contested by local politics. Rather than framing the Roma communities as passive victims or isolated deviants, the evidence highlights their relational agency, moral economies, and collective strategies for survival amid persistent exclusion. At the same time, it exposes the structural incapacity of fragmented governance arrangements to accommodate normative pluralism and relational needs, resulting in recurrent cycles of displacement, broken promises, and re-segregation. Contentious embeddedness is not a residual condition but rather an active and relational configuration at the margins of urban society. Roma residents exhibit significant agency, mobilizing kinship networks, navigating governance gaps, and creatively adapting to structural constraints. Yet, their strategies unfold within a tightly structured field marked by infrastructural decay, institutional neglect, and normative dissonance (Stasolla, 2021).

Participant observation documented the self-organization of child-care, informal maintenance work, and collective savings systems. In Zona ASI, a mother described how «families pool money not just to buy food, but to pay for taxi rides to the hospital when children get sick”. However, these practices of relational resilience are bounded by the realities of extreme material deprivation and stigmatization (Ciniro, 2024). Residents at Carrafiello consistently expressed that their mutual solidarities were acts of necessity rather than political projects. One Roma

**Table 6**  
Configurational analysis of main sources of contention in-between levels.

Analytical Dimensions	Villaggio della Solidarietà (Secondigliano)	Cupa Perillo (Scampia)	Cantariello (Casoria)	Via Carrafiello (Giugliano)	Villaggio ASI (Giugliano)
<i>Normative Tensions</i>	Conflict between residents' relational logics and municipal standards of urban decorum	Residents' survival strategies clash with formal urban planning norms	No shared normative framework between residents and authorities	Health and environmental risks reframed as public security threats	Gradual emergence of a compromise between relational and institutional logics
<i>Symbolic Stigmatization</i>	Persistent territorial stigma reinforced by infrastructural decay	High media visibility generates double stigmatization (ethnic and territorial)	Residents heavily stigmatized by surrounding municipalities	Intense stigmatization linking environmental degradation and Roma identity	Partial destigmatization through NGO-driven narrative reframing
<i>Environmental Conditions</i>	Severe degradation; contaminated infrastructures	Poor sanitation; frequent flooding and hazardous waste	Toxic soil contamination; lack of basic utilities	High exposure to toxic waste and illegal landfills	Moderate exposure; some infrastructural support available

man poignantly stated, «*We stay together because the world outside treats us all the same — as garbage.*»

Thus, contentious embeddedness emerges here not as a romanticized form of resistance but as a necessary negotiation within asymmetrical power relations. Structural neglect, spatial segregation, and weak institutional responsiveness constrain agency while simultaneously making relational solidarities indispensable for survival.

The findings challenge prevailing linear models of urban ethnic integration based on individual socioeconomic mobility and formal sector employment. The Roma settlements in Naples display that even where families attempt to engage with educational and welfare systems, spatial and symbolic segregation persists. This resonates with findings in other contexts: even when aspirations for a better life are present, they are often channeled into immediate needs due to the constraints of poverty (Berki et al., 2025).

Despite structural barriers, the fieldwork documents instances of positive micro-dynamics, such as the participatory relocation projects piloted in Giugliano, where Roma families, local NGOs, and municipal actors collaborated to craft sustainable housing solutions. These glimmers of negotiated inclusion illustrate that contentious embeddedness also contains latent possibilities for constructive, albeit fragile, reconstructions of urban belonging.

The sociological theory advanced here situates Roma resistance not simply within classical frameworks of recognition (Honneth, 2004), but rather within a dynamic of contentious embeddedness: data prove how these marginalized communities resist external interventions perceived as threats establishing moral networks, relational codes, and normative expectations—especially when such interventions (even if well-intentioned) are delivered primarily through police or impersonal bureaucratic means, lacking embodied mediation. Such resistance underscores the risk of disarticulating established social and moral economies, potentially leading to increased commodification of relational resources and support networks. It explicitly underscores the crucial role of external mediation—embodied, interpersonal interventions provided by social mediators and third-sector organizations capable of translating and harmonizing these conflicting normative orientations. In doing so, it aligns with contemporary calls for a “relational urban sociology” (Blokland, 2012) that foregrounds the micro-meso-macro entanglements shaping urban inequalities, and with recent critiques of governance models that neglect the moral economies underpinning survival in contexts of extreme exclusion.

These findings imply that integration efforts must not only provide housing and employment but also recognize and build upon the pre-existing moral economies and networks that structure life in marginalized settlements. Endogenous solidarities constitute an invisible infrastructure of survival, often ignored by integration policies focused solely on formal relocation or employment metrics. Ignoring these forms of social capital risks undermining the very resilience that sustains these communities against multiple axes of exclusion.

Normative pluralism—the coexistence of incompatible value systems—was a recurrent theme across sites. For Roma residents, the logic of close-knit relational living, characterized by shared childcare, extended family economies, and collective risk-pooling, frequently clashed with institutional expectations based on individual nuclear households, formal labor market participation, and hygiene-based urban planning standards. As a young Roma mother from Zona ASI articulated, «*They ask us to live like Italians do, but they don't see how we live together to survive.*»

The interaction between micro, meso, and macro levels creates a field of contentious embeddedness in which solidarities, conflicts, and exclusions are continuously reproduced and negotiated. Notably, the same relational structures that foster survival also generate patterns of external suspicion and stigmatization, fueling a cycle where policy failures reinforce social isolation, and vice versa.

Furthermore, symbolic struggles play a crucial role in the everyday governance of marginality. Observations revealed that public discourses

framing Roma settlements as ‘risks’ for urban order—articulated by local media and echoed by municipal actors—legitimize repressive interventions and selective neglect. These discourses often obscure the infrastructural violence and environmental hazards documented within settlements, such as the toxic waste exposure noted in Zona ASI.

Importantly, the empirical evidence challenges simplistic victimization narratives. Roma residents frequently display agency, tactical engagement with institutions, and strategic use of available resources. Yet their agency is profoundly conditioned by structural inequalities and normative mismatches that render conventional integration pathways largely inaccessible or undesirable. This study advances the understanding of Roma marginalization by revealing the multi-layered, relational, and conflictual nature of embeddedness at urban margins. Rather than interpreting exclusion as the failure of isolated individuals or ‘cultural’ deficiencies (Bravi and Vitale, 2017), the findings point to a systemic dynamic where agency, solidarity, governance, and stigma are intertwined in a contested and continuously evolving social fabric.

In light of these findings, this research calls for a renewed sociological attention to the relational infrastructures that sustain marginalized urban populations under conditions of governance discontinuity and strong stigmatization. Our analysis affirms that when institutional responsibilities are fragmented and policies are inconsistent – hallmarks of governance discontinuity – marginalized settlements fall through the cracks. In Naples this was evident in the oscillation between emergency evacuations and bureaucratic inertia, which left Roma camps in a permanent state of uncertainty. By framing these outcomes in terms of contentious embeddedness, we emphasize that affected communities are not passive victims: they respond and adapt through both conflict (protest, negotiation) and cooperation (alliances with NGOs, internal support). The concept of contentious embeddedness demonstrates that marginality is not a passive state but a dynamic, conflictual, and multi-scalar process in which solidarity, resistance, and exclusion continuously interact. This perspective challenges linear narratives of integration and demands a more nuanced, relational, and historically situated approach to understanding urban marginality.

This study challenges the prevailing assumption in segregation and marginality debates that spatial exclusion can be fully understood through the dual lens of territorial stigma and advanced marginality. By foregrounding contentious embeddedness, it shows that exclusion and resilience emerge not from isolated structural forces but from recursive interactions among solidarity, mediation, and governance. The findings yield three transferable propositions for empirical and policy testing: at the *micro level*, relational solidarities persist only when conflict and reciprocity are institutionally recognized rather than suppressed; at the *meso level*, coordination failures are not technical accidents but normative struggles over worth and legitimacy; and at the *macro level*, governance discontinuities become durable when political responsibility is systematically displaced across overlapping jurisdictions. Together these propositions demonstrate the explanatory power and policy relevance of contentious embeddedness as a multi-scalar sociological theory.

The deprivations documented in the Roma settlements partly overlap with those affecting other vulnerable urban populations in Naples—such as precarious migrant workers, low-income households in public housing, or residents of environmentally degraded peripheries—who likewise experience infrastructural decay, administrative opacity, and intermittent welfare access. Yet the Roma case remains distinct in the depth of its *ethnicization of marginality*, where spatial exclusion and governance discontinuity are reinforced by long-term stigmatization and categorical othering. Recognizing this overlap and divergence is crucial for theorizing contentious embeddedness beyond ethnicity: it shows that the same relational mechanisms linking solidarity, mediation, and governance recur across vulnerable groups, but that ethnicized stigma (Wacquant, 2024) adds an additional layer of conflict and visibility shaping both policy response and collective adaptation. The framework thus speaks not only to Roma inclusion but to the broader

sociology of urban inequalities in contexts of institutional fragmentation.

As European cities navigate mounting pressures from migration, economic restructuring, and political polarization, grappling with the realities of contentious embeddedness becomes essential not only for addressing the needs of marginalized groups but for reimagining the democratic capacities of urban governance itself. Genuine pathways out of ethnicized and territorialized marginality require not merely policy reforms, but a transformation in how social relations, conflicts, and solidarities are recognized and engaged within governance frameworks. Conflict is not an anomaly to be suppressed; it is the ground upon which new forms of negotiated inclusion can be built.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Tommaso Vitale:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Fabiola Midulla:** Methodology, Investigation. **Carlo Stasolla:** Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: Tommaso Vitale reports financial support was provided by Fondazione Nando ed Elsa Peretti. Tommaso Vitale reports financial and administrative support were provided by Associazione 21 Luglio. Tommaso Vitale reports a relationship with Associazione 21 luglio that includes: board membership and non-financial support. Associazione 21 luglio is a non-profit organization committed to advancing the human rights of Roma children and the empowerment of Roma women. Its activities encompass human rights advocacy, support for strategic litigation, and the promotion of applied research on Roma housing rights and social inclusion. Further information is available at: <https://www.21luglio.org>. Tommaso Vitale, who serves as the vice-president of Associazione 21 luglio, volunteers his expertise in support of the association's mission, without receiving any financial compensation. He is Full Professor of Sociology at Sciences Po, Paris, where he is also the Dean of the Urban School and researcher at the Center for European Studies and Comparative Politics. All the other co-authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### References

- Alietti, A., & Riniolo, V. (2021). The national strategy for Roma inclusion in Italy: Between contradictions and loss of responsibilities. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 29(1), 9–19.
- Alunni, L. (2021). Pathogenic camps, therapeutic city? Roma, healthcare, and the negotiation of citizenship rights in Rome. *Social Science & Medicine*, 289, Article 114421.
- Ando, Y., Mayer, N., Tiberj, V., & Vitale, T. (2024). Comprendre le racisme au prisme de l'antisigianisme. In CNCDH, *La lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie*. In , 2023. *Année* (pp. 289–305). Paris: La documentation française.
- Arbaci, S. (2008). (Re)Viewing ethnic residential segregation in Southern European cities: Housing and urban regimes as mechanisms of marginalisation. *Housing Studies*, 23(4), 589–613.
- Arbaci, S. (2019). *Paradoxes of segregation: Housing systems, welfare regimes and ethnic residential change in Southern European cities*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Arena, A. (2025). Mappare disuguaglianze socioeconomiche nella città di Napoli: una lettura spaziale attraverso la dimensione di genere. *Territorio della Ricerca su Insediamenti e Ambiente. Rivista internazionale di cultura urbanistica*, 18(35), 57–72.
- Armillei, R. (2018). *The 'camps system' in Italy: Corruption, inefficiencies and practices of resistance*. Springer.
- Associazione 21 luglio. (2020). "Asy(s)Lum. Dalle 'istituzioni totali' di Goffman ai 'campi rom' della città di Roma. Rome: Associazione 21 luglio.
- Associazione 21 luglio, ETS. (2024a). *Figli dell'abbandono. I "campi rom" nella città metropolitana di Napoli: spazi dimenticati*. Rapporto di ricerca. Online: [www.21luglio.org](http://www.21luglio.org).
- Associazione 21 luglio. (2024b). *Rapporto sulle condizioni di vita delle famiglie rom negli insediamenti informali e formali della Città Metropolitana di Napoli*. Policy Report. Online: [www.21luglio.org](http://www.21luglio.org).
- Avar, A. A., Doğan, F., Cive, Y.Ö., & Akış, T. (2024). Contextualising the housing problem of the Roma community in relation to counterurbanisation in Urla, İzmir. *Habitat International*, 143, Article 102972.
- Barbera, F. (2023). *Le piazze vuote: Ritrovare gli spazi della politica*. Laterza.
- Barbieri, G. A., Benassi, F., Mantuano, M., & Prisco, M. R. (2018). In search of spatial justice. Towards a conceptual and operative framework for the analysis of inter- and intra-urban inequalities using a geo-demographic approach. The case of Italy. *Regional Science Policy & Practice*, 11(1), 109–121.
- Benassi, F., Bitonti, F., Mazza, A., & Strozza, S. (2023). Sri Lankans' residential segregation and spatial inequalities in Southern Italy: An empirical analysis using fine-scale data on regular lattice geographies. *Quality and Quantity*, 57(2), 1629–1648.
- Benassi, F., Carella, M., García-Pereiro, T., Paterno, A., & Strozza, S. (2025). In search of divided spaces: Socio-economic vulnerability and foreign citizens' settlement patterns in some major cities of northern and southern Italy. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 0(0).
- Benassi, F., Iglesias-Pascual, R., & Salvati, L. (2020). Residential segregation and social diversification: Exploring spatial settlement patterns of foreign population in Southern European cities. *Habitat International*, 101, Article 102200.
- Berki, B., Málóvics, G., & Creţan, R. (2025). Aspirations versus reality: Factors influencing the vertical social mobility of urban Roma mothers living in extreme poverty. *Habitat International*, 158, Article 103334.
- Blokland, T. (2012). Blaming neither the undeserving poor nor the revanchist middle classes: A relational approach to marginalization. *Urban Geography*, 33(4), 488–507.
- Blokland, T., & Noordhoff, F. (2008). The weakness of weak ties: Social capital to get ahead among the urban poor in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. In *Networked urbanism*. Routledge.
- Boltanski, L., Chiapello, È., & Vitale, T. (2007). La sociologia contro il fatalismo. *Itinerari d'impresa*, 11, 231–237.
- Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2021). *On justification: Economies of worth*. In Princeton University Press.
- Bonetti, P., Simoni, A., & Vitale, T. (2011). Norme per la tutela e le pari opportunità della minoranza dei Rom e dei Sintì. In P. Bonetti, A. Simoni, & T. Vitale (Eds.), *La condizione giuridica di Rom e Sintì in Italia* (pp. 1281–1362). Milan: Giuffrè.
- Borraz, O., & Le Galès, P. (2010). Urban Governance in Europe: The Government of What? *Pôle Sud*, 32(1), 137–151.
- Brambilla, C. (2015). Exploring the critical potential of the borderscapes concept. *Geopolitics*, 20(1), 14–34.
- Bravi, L., & Vitale, T. (2017). Editorial. "In-dependence". Control and emancipation paths of cultural minorities in European social history of education. *Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione*, 4(1), 5–12.
- Associazione 21 Luglio. (2025). Il Paese Dei Campi - Mappa. Available at: <https://www.ilpaesedeicampi.it/mappa/>. (Accessed 5 January 2026).
- Carré, B., Oosterlynck, S., Raeymaeckers, P., & Verschuere. (2024). A quantitative analysis of Policy and sociocultural advocacy within a neo-corporatist context. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 35(4), 633–648.
- Burini, C., & Vitale, T. (2024). Decommodifying public space in Italian cities. The temporal embeddedness of modest collective action. In *Fifth ISA Forum of Sociology*. ISA.
- Cartone, A., D'Isidoro, A., Panzera, D., & Postiglione, P. (2025). Spatial segregation, socioeconomic disparities and spatial (in) justice in a Region of the Mediterranean. *Population, Space and Place*, 31(4), Article e70042.
- Cerreta, M., Poli, G., & Reitano, M. (2020). Evaluating socio-spatial exclusion: Local spatial indices of segregation and isolation in Naples (Italy). In O. Gervasi, et al. (Eds.), 12253. *Computational Science and its Applications – ICCSA 2020. ICCSA 2020. Lecture Notes in Computer Science*. Cham: Springer.
- Chihaya, G. K., Marcińczak, S., Strömgen, M., Lindgren, U., & Tammaru, T. (2022). Trajectories of spatial assimilation or place stratification? A typology of residence and workplace histories of newly arrived migrants in Sweden. *International migration review*, 56(2), 433–462.
- Chiodo, E. (2021). Community work practices against children poverty in Southern Italy. Exploring experiences and perspectives in local welfare. *International Journal of Sociology & Social Policy*, 42(9/10), 877–889. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Ciniero, A. (2018). Una questione sociale, non etnica. Processi di interazione ed esclusione di tre gruppi rom nel tempo: il caso del Salento. *Mondi Migranti*, (2), 69–189.
- Ciniero, A. (2021). Modelli politici e processi di istituzionalizzazione come vettori di esclusione e marginalità sociale: il caso dei campi rom e dei ghetti agricoli. *Sociologia Urbana e Rurale*, 125, 40–61.
- Ciniero, A. (2024). *Le Politiche Dell'esclusione: Centri Di Accoglienza, Ghetti Agricoli e Campi Rom in Italia*. Mimesis.
- Citroni, S. (2025). *The everyday life of civil Society*. Springer Nature.
- Cousin, G., Bianchi, F., & Vitale, T. (2021). From Roma autochthonous homophily to socialisation and community building in the Parisian metropolitan region shantytowns. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(13), 2938–2960.
- Cousin, G., Ciniero, A., Florin, B., Le Marchand, A., Manzoni, C., Naintré, B., & Vitale, T. (2023). Savoir "faire de l'argent" : combiner les boulots, les monnaies et les compétences. In O. Legros, C. Bergeon, M. Lièvre, & T. Vitale (Eds.), *Savoir "faire de l'argent" : combiner les boulots, les monnaies et les compétences* (pp. 129–162). Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes.
- Cremschi, M., & Vitale, T. (2025). The policy of refugees reception and the policing of public space in Paris. In *City Makers and the Politics of Urban Diversity Governance* (pp. 41–63). Cham: Springer Nature.

- da Silva, A. A., Kormann da Silva, I. F., & Westerholt, R. (2024). Mapping the margins: A systematic scoping review of the impact of digital mapping on public participation in informal settlements. *Habitat International*, 147, Article 103040.
- Daniele, U. (2020). Informality and the governance of Roma housing through the lens of an NGO. *Cities*, 96, Article 102426.
- De Leo, D., & Mattiucci, C. (2025). Ricerche e sperimentazioni metodologiche per lo studio e le policies utili al trattamento delle disuguaglianze, a partire da Napoli. *Territorio della Ricerca su Insediamenti e Ambiente. Rivista internazionale di cultura urbanistica*, 18(35), 1–14.
- De Vidovich, L. (2022). Different forms of welfare provision for diverse suburban fabrics: Three examples from Italy. *Urban Planning*, 7(3), 86–97.
- Del Pizzo, F., Leone, S., & Morelli, N. (2021). Giovani, solidarietà e reti sociali in zone vulnerabili del Sud in tempo di Covid. In *La Condizione Giovanile In Italia. Rapporto Giovani 2021* (pp. 209–234). Bologna: il Mulino.
- Eckardt, F., & Ruiz Sánchez, J. (2015). *City of crisis. The multiple contestation of Southern European cities*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Esposito, E. (2022). Deprivation-based squatting as a choice from necessity: The housing pathways of low-income squatters in public housing in Naples, Italy. *Cities*, 124, Article 103623.
- Esposito, A. (2023). Tourism-driven displacement in Naples, Italy. *Land Use Policy*, 134, Article 106919.
- Esposito, E., & Chiodelli, F. (2023). Beyond proper political squatting: Exploring individualistic need-based occupations in a public housing neighbourhood in Naples. *Housing Studies*, 38(8), 1436–1458.
- Favell, A. (2022). Immigration, integration and citizenship: Elements of a new political demography. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 0(0), 1–30.
- Galeota Lanza, G., & De Martino, M. (2022). Urban housing inequity: Housing deprivation and social response in the City of Naples. *Sustainability*, 14(3), 3. Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute: 1047.
- Halpern, C., & Le Galès, P. (2012). No autonomous public policy without ad hoc instruments. *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 61(1), 43–67.
- Heckathorn, D. D. (1997). Respondent-Driven sampling: A new approach to the Study of hidden populations. *Social Problems*, 44(2), 174–199.
- Heckathorn, D. D. (2002). Respondent-Driven sampling II: Deriving valid population estimates from chain-referral samples of hidden populations. *Social Problems*, 49(1), 11–34.
- Heller, P., & Evans, P. (2010). Taking Tilly south: Durable inequalities, democratic contestation, and citizenship in the Southern Metropolis. *Theory and Society*, 39(3/4), 433–450.
- Honneth, A. (2004). Recognition and justice: Outline of a plural theory of justice: Outline of a plural theory of justice. *Acta Sociologica*, 47(4), 351–364.
- Ioannoni, V., Vitale, T., Costa, C., & Elliott, I. (2020). Depicting communities of Romani studies: On the who, when and where of Roma related scientific publications. *Scientometrics*, 122(3), 1473–1490.
- King, D., Le Galès, P., & Vitale, T. (2017). Assimilation, security, and borders in the member States. In D. King, & P. L. Galès (Eds.), *Reconfiguring European States in crisis* (pp. 428–450). Oxford University Press.
- Kudla, R., & Courey, M. (2019). Managing territorial stigmatization from the 'middle': The revitalization of a post-industrial Business Improvement Area. *Environment and Planning A*, 51(2), 351–373.
- Laino, G. (2014). I campi rom e l'agenda urbana italiana: lezioni dal caso di Napoli. In *Città Tra Sviluppo e Declino* (pp. 243–268). Donzelli.
- Laino, G. (2015). Immigrazione fra concentrazione e segregazione occupazionale, scolastica e abitativa a Napoli. *Archivio di Studi Urbani e Regionali*, 114(3), 119–140.
- Laino, G. (2016). Superare i campi rom: cosa e come fare. *Autonomie Locali e Servizi Sociali*, 39(1), 45–64.
- Laino, G. (2022). Immigrazione straniera e attività commerciali a Napoli. *Territorio*, 100, 104–129.
- Laino, G. (2025). Napoli città che riproduce e limita disuguaglianze. *Territorio della Ricerca su Insediamenti e Ambiente. Rivista internazionale di cultura urbanistica*, 18(35), 15–56.
- Laino, G., & Vitale, T. (2015). Abitare le contraddizioni, vincolare l'incrementalismo. Città e campi rom nell'Italia della crisi. *Crios. Critica degli ordinamenti spaziali*, (10), 23–32.
- Le Galès, P. (2021). The rise of local politics: A global review. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24(1), 345–363.
- Le Galès, P. (2024). The rise and fall of the sociology of the global City. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 50, 647–669.
- Le Galès, P., & Vitale, T. (2015). Disuguaglianze e discontinuità nel governo delle grandi metropoli. Un'agenda di ricerca. *Territorio*, (74), 7–17.
- Legros, O., Bergeon, C., Lièvre, M., & Vitale, T. (2024). *L'Etat et la pauvreté étrangère en Europe occidentale*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes.
- Leontidou, L. (1990). *The mediterranean City in transition: Social change and urban development*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lichterman, P., & Eliasoph, N. (2014). Civic action. *American Journal of Sociology*, 120(3), 798–863.
- Maestri, G. (2019). The nomad, the squatter and the State: Roma racialization and spatial politics in Italy. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 43(5), 930–946.
- Maestri, G., & Mantovan, C. (2025). Roma housing deprivation and segregation in Italy: An intersectional analysis of social navigation strategies of Romanian Roma migrant women and men. *Ethnicities*, 25(6), 884–908.
- Malheiros, J. (2002). Ethni-cities: Residential patterns in the Northern European and Mediterranean metropolises?—implications for policy design. *International Journal of Population Geography*, 8(2), 107–134.
- Manzoni, C. (2017). Should I stay or should I go? Why Roma migrants leave or remain in nomad camps. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(10), 1605–1622.
- Martínez, M. (2026). Counter-measures. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.70055>
- Matache, M. (2025). *The permanence of anti-Roma racism: (Un)uttered sentences*. Taylor & Francis.
- McGarry, A. (2017). *Romaphobia. The last acceptable form of racism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Miele, C. (2015). Living through the camp: Roma segregation and border-crossing in the City of Naples. In *Borderscapes: Imaginations and practices of border making*. Routledge.
- Mingione, E. (1991). *Fragmented Societies: A sociology of Economic Life beyond the Market Paradigm*. London: Basil Blackwell.
- Mingione, E. (1993). The new urban poverty and the underclass: Introduction. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 17(3), 324–326.
- Mingione, E. (2020). Societies and markets: The challenge of unsustainable development. In *A modern guide to economic sociology* (pp. 219–240). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Monasta, L. (2010). La condizione di salute delle persone rom e sinti nei campi nomadi. In P. Bonetti, A. Simoni, & T. Vitale (Eds.), *La condizione giuridica dei Rom e dei Sinti in Italia*. Milan: Giuffrè.
- Morlicchio, E. (2018). Urban poverty and social cohesion: Lessons from Naples. In *Western capitalism in transition* (pp. 274–288). Manchester University Press.
- Pasta, S. (2019). I rom di via Rubattino a Milano: una storia interculturale di educazione alla cittadinanza. *Palaver*, 8(1), 157–204, 1.
- Pasta, S., & Vitale, T. (2018). 'Mi guardano male, ma io non guardo'. Come i rom e i sinti in Italia reagiscono allo stigma. In A. Alietti (Ed.), *Razzismi, Discriminazioni e Disuguaglianze. Analisi e Ricerche Sull'Italia Contemporanea* (pp. 217–241). Milan: Mimesis.
- Pfirsich, T. (2016). La città frammentata. Geografia sociale di una metropoli in crisi. In *Lo stato della città. Napoli e la sua area metropolitana* (pp. 263–269). Monitor Edizioni.
- Pfirsich, T. (2023). Controlling the proximity of the poor: Patterns of micro-segregation in Naples' upper-class areas. *Land*, 12(11).
- Polanyi, K. (1944). *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Pratschke, J., & De Falco, A. (2024). Il volontariato nelle associazioni sociali di quattro città italiane: una prospettiva spaziale. In C. Caltabiano, T. Vitale, & G. Zucca (Eds.), *La Prospettiva Civica. L'Italia Vista Da Chi Si Mette Assieme per Cambiarla* (pp. 169–186). Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.
- Pratschke, J., & Morlicchio, E. (2012). Social polarisation, the labour market and economic restructuring in Europe: An urban perspective. *Urban Studies*, 49(9), 1891–1907.
- Sigona, N. (2003). How can a Nomad be a Refugee? Kosovo Roma and Labelling Policy in Italy. *Sociology*, 37(1), 69–79.
- Sigona, N. (2005). Locating 'The Gypsy Problem'. The Roma in Italy: Stereotyping, Labelling and 'Nomad Camps'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31(4), 741–756.
- Stasolla, C. (2021). *La Razza Zingara. Dai campi nomadi ai villaggi attrezzati: Lo «scarto umano» in venticinque anni di storia*. Rome: Tau.
- Tilly, C. (1998). *Durable Inequality*. University of California Press.
- Turner, J. H. (2010). *Theoretical Principles of Sociology - Vol 1 macrosociology*. New York: Springer.
- Turner, J. H. (2015). *Theorizing in sociology. The Advocacy of George C. Homans*. In *George C. Homans* (pp. 255–279). London: Routledge.
- Turner, J. H. (2016a). *Integrating and disintegrating dynamics in human societies. Handbook of contemporary sociological theory* (pp. 19–41). Springer.
- Turner, J. H. (2016b). *The macro and meso basis of the micro social order. Handbook of contemporary sociological theory* (pp. 123–148). Springer.
- Turner, J. (2021). Randall Collins on micro-meso-macro theorizing. *Theoretical sociology: The future of a disciplinary foundation*(144–149). London: Routledge.
- Vacca, R., Canarte, D., & Vitale, T. (2022). Beyond ethnic solidarity: The diversity and specialisation of social ties in a stigmatised migrant minority. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(13), 3113–3141.
- Vitale, T. (2008). Etnografia degli sgomberati di un insediamento rom a Milano: l'ipotesi di una politica locale eugenetica. *Mondi migranti. Rivista di studi e ricerche sulle migrazioni internazionali*, 1, 59–74.
- Vitale, T. (2019). Conflicts on Roma settlements in Italian cities: Normative polarisation and pragmatic mediation. *Palaver*, 8(1), 29–74.
- Vitale, T., & Boschetti, L. (2011). Les Roms ? Ils ne sont pas encore prêts à se représenter eux-mêmes. In *Du civil au politique. Ethnographies du vivre-ensemble*. Bruxelles: Peter Lang.
- Vitale, T., & Cousin, B. (2003). Droghe, territorio e ricerca sociologica: perché un approccio ravvicinato e pragmatico ai mondi delle droghe? *Sociologia urbana e rurale. Fascicolo 9, 2003*, 1000–1012.
- Vitale, T., & Zucca, G. (2024). Un'indagine sugli attivisti e i loro mondi associativi a Milano, Firenze, Roma e Napoli. In C. Caltabiano, T. Vitale, & G. Zucca (Eds.), *La prospettiva civica. L'Italia vista da chi si mette insieme per cambiarla* (pp. 111–120). Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.
- Wacquant, L. (2008). *Urban outcasts: A comparative sociology of advanced marginality*. London: Polity.
- Wacquant, L. (2014). Marginality, ethnicity and penalty in the neo-liberal city: An analytic cartography. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37(10), 1687–1711.
- Wacquant, L. (2016). Revisiting territories of relegation: Class, ethnicity and state in the making of advanced marginality. *Urban Studies*, 53(6), 1077–1088.
- Wacquant, L. (2024). *Racial domination*. London: John Wiley & Sons.