



Cinema in Piazza: a cultural grassroots initiative as an opportunity for urban resilience.

A qualitative study of the open-air movie screening phenomenon in Rome.

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Abstract

Urban resilience is fundamental for cities to adapt and overcome future challenges. Social cohesion has been found to be an important pillar of urban resilience. Both grassroots initiatives and public spaces can enhance social cohesion, therefore a combination of the two could offer an opportunity for increasing urban resilience. The neighborhood of Trastevere, in Rome, has lived through the multiple cinema closures through the past years, along with gentrification and damaging nightlife. Cinema in Piazza is a grass-root initiative born in 2014 to fight these changes in Trastevere. This research investigates whether this initiative is enhancing social cohesion, how, and if this could be an opportunity for urban resilience. Five interviews were conducted, which were shaped around four identified manifestations of social cohesion: social interactions, sense of belonging, willingness to help, and trust. The limited results demonstrate that Cinema in Piazza could be an opportunity for resilience. The key contribution in the paper is that it is the tie between public space and a grassroots initiative that seems to be linked to manifested social cohesion. Future research should investigate the role of design of public spaces to facilitate, or not, cohesive behaviors through grassroots initiative.

1. Introduction

Resilient cities are more likely to adapt in positive and healthy ways to changes or challenges in natural, economic, or social circumstances (Ludin et al., 2019). Resilience is what allows cities to face expected and unexpected 21st century challenges. Social cohesion is an important correlate of urban resilience (Townshend et al., 2015). This thesis investigates whether Cinema in Piazza, a public space-based grassroots initiative in the shape of a summer open air movie festival in Rome, has the power to enhance social cohesion, and consequently to be an opportunity for resilience.

Rome has been subject to a phenomenon that has impacted Italy, and the world, on a large scale: cinema closures. Rome, Italy's historical capital of cinema, currently has 96 closed cinemas, of which 43 are abandoned and 56 are renewed into casinos, supermarkets, banks or clubs (Dire Fare Cambiare, 2022). Many Roman cinemas used to hold not only a mere value of providing entertainment, but had communal value, artistic value, and political value (due to the kinds of films that screened; Bowen, 2015). These are the cinemas that were more impacted by closures: small businesses with a valuable societal role.

The counter phenomenon is raising urban activism, by organizations, residents, filmmakers, actors, who have been very vocal, through protests, occupations, or petitions, about the topic. A group of activists started, in 2014, to project movies in a public square, Piazza San Cosimato, a square in Trastevere. This initiative took the name of "Cinema in Piazza", Cinema in the Square. Since then, the square has been a symbol of Roman's youth resistance and resilience to the increasing phenomenon of cinema closures and has "tapped into the residual symbolic value of cinemas as associated with community" (Bowen, 2015).

While there has been some research about grassroots initiatives and their relation to social cohesion (Heuser, 2005; Lockwood, 1999, Moulaert, 2009), this kind of research has not been translated into the practice of public cinema screenings. Bowen (2015) has investigated - specifically in Rome - the grassroots movements born as a counter-attack to cinema closures and touched upon the Cinema in Piazza public screenings. Interviewees mention these screenings very positively, and hint at their power of social cohesion. However, this study was conducted in 2014/2015, when Cinema in Piazza had only one edition. Conducting this research on a similar topic, but with more editions behind it, could be valuable in terms of investigating not

only cohesion, but also resilience. The more years the initiative goes on, the more likely it is to be resilient itself.

This research raises the question of whether the grassroots initiative of Cinema in Piazza is an opportunity for urban resilience through its power of enhancing behaviors linked to social cohesion. Firstly, social cohesion is questioned through the social aspect of Cinema in Piazza (SQ1), then the spatial element is added through SQ2, given that Cinema in Piazza takes place on public ground. Social cohesion is investigated through a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews, in terms of sense of belonging, willingness to help and participate, trust, and social interactions amongst the initiative participants. These themes are all identified as factors defining social cohesion in the literature. The following research question and subquestions are formulated:

RQ – To what extent is Cinema in Piazza an opportunity for urban resilience?

SQ1 – How has the social element of Cinema in Piazza contributed to social cohesion in the context of Rome?

SQ2 – How has the public space element of Cinema in Piazza contributed to social cohesion in the context of Rome?

The second chapter summarizes the key literature used to formulate this research's theoretical arguments, which are visualized in the same chapter through a conceptual model. The third chapter summarizes the case study of Cinema in Piazza. The fourth chapter provides an in-depth description of the methodology used in the research. The fifth chapter summarizes the results, later discussed in the sixth chapter along with this study's limitations. Conclusions are drawn in the seventh and last chapter.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Defining social cohesion

Defining social cohesion presents a challenge owing to its concurrent definitions. (Friedkin, 2004). Lockwood (1999) describes social cohesion as a strong primary network (such as kinship and local voluntary organizations) among the community, while Larsen (2013) defines social cohesion as the presence of a moral community - a group of people sharing common moral

values - that enables its members to trust each other. Chan et al. (2006) reviewed existing definitions of social cohesion, depending on academic or policy usage, and created a more holistic definition that forms the basis for this paper:

Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioral manifestations. (Chan et al., 2006, p. 290)

Key elements in this definition must also be defined, though. Vertical interactions are between state and citizens, while horizontal interactions are amongst members of society in the same group (eg. amongst residents of a neighborhood). Interactions are characterized by trust (citizens find assurance in other citizens), sense of belonging (citizens positively evaluate the existence of their role within their group and find ease in their condition of belonging to said group) and willingness to participate and help (citizens are participating in and helping in the organization of events within their community).

Beckley (1994) integrates the spatial aspect to the definition, and defines social cohesion as the extent to which a geographical place achieves 'community', being shared values, cooperation, and interaction. The element of interaction is also discussed in Peters et al. (2010), who operationalized social cohesion in terms of social interactions and place-attachment and conducted a study in urban green parks in the Netherlands. It argues that both social interactions and place-attachment could enhance social cohesion among communities. They also suggest that public spaces should "learn" from urban green parks in terms of providing a space for informal social interactions among strangers. For example, openness and accessibility are important in encouraging social cohesion in parks. This would be achievable also in non-green urban spaces, along with the suggestion of Peters et. al (2010) of organizing informal activities that would encourage people to interact, similarly to temporary outdoor spontaneous group activities that are organized from time to time in urban parks.

2.2 Grassroot initiatives in public spaces

Prior literature on social cohesion touched upon how geography can be a factor in enabling certain aspects of social cohesion, namely in relation to public spaces and social interactions (Beckley, 1994; Peters et al., 2010).

Sociality is an intrinsic element to the public space: urban public spaces are crucial in daily life due to their ability to serve as a platform for collective power exercising over urbanization processes (Navarro et al., 2018). Public space is therefore seen differently by government officials and lay people (Saleh et al., 2020). The state can view it as a space subject to state regulations, while non-specialist citizens view it as fostering a sense of recognition and civic participation (Springer, 2011). The latter presents public spaces as fostering active participation and use (Bayat, 2013)- these spaces must be not just open to, but shaped and controlled by, the public (Mitchell, 2003).

Grassroot initiatives occurring on public urban ground can, therefore, represent a living window on community-specific needs manifested and addressed through the initiatives themselves. Such initiatives foster high local community empowerment and more locally-oriented public spaces (Nikkhah & Redzuan, 2009), and can be vital to generate socially cohesive conditions (Heuser, 2005; Lockwood, 1999; Moulaert, 2009). All organizations, especially voluntary organizations, exert great influence over the implementation of codes and norms, greatly impacting societal levels of social cohesion.

The literature suggests that: i) social cohesion exists when behaviors of trust, sense of belonging, and willingness to help are manifested (Chan et. al, 2006), ii) public spaces are a great laboratory to foster social interactions and consequently social cohesion (Peters et al., 2010), and that iii) grassroot initiatives encourage societal effects that can be linked to social cohesion (Nikkhah & Redzuan, 2009; Heuser, 2005; Lockwood, 1999; Moulaert, 2009).

2.3 The tie with urban resilience

UN Habitat (n.a) defines urban resilience as “the measurable ability of any urban system, with its inhabitants, to maintain continuity through all shocks and stresses, while positively adapting and transforming toward sustainability.” Social cohesion can therefore strengthen the overall fabric of the city – its urban resilience – as it “allows communities to bounce back faster and rebuild more efficiently after experiencing major shocks and stresses” (100 Resilient Cities, n.a, pg. 24). In literature, social cohesion has already been found to be an important correlate of urban resilience, as cohesive communities are more likely to be resilient (Townshend et al., 2015; Patel & Gleason, 2018). Communities fostering social interactions and manifesting

behaviors of i) trust, ii) sense of belonging, and iii) willingness to help and participate, are more cohesive. Both public spaces and grassroots initiatives encourage this condition (Peters et al., 2010; Nikkhah & Redzuan, 2009; Heuser, 2005; Lockwood, 1999; Moulaert, 2009). Therefore, resilient communities could be a product of societies where the public space constitutes the playground of socially cohesive behaviors and encourages positive and needed bottom-up changes, through grassroots initiatives.

2.4 Conceptual model

Figure 1, the conceptual model, visualizes the literature review. Grassroots initiatives could enhance social cohesion (Heuser, 2005; Lockwood, 1999, Moulaert, 2009) through the spatiality of the public space they take place in (Bayat, 2013, Peters et al., 2010). This is understandable by allowing for behaviors defined as pillars of social cohesion: social interactions, sense of belonging, trust, and willingness to help and participate (Chan et al., 2006; Beckley, 1994; Peters et al., 2010).

It is assumed that social cohesion increases the chances of urban resilience (Townshend et al., 2015; Patel & Gleason, 2018).

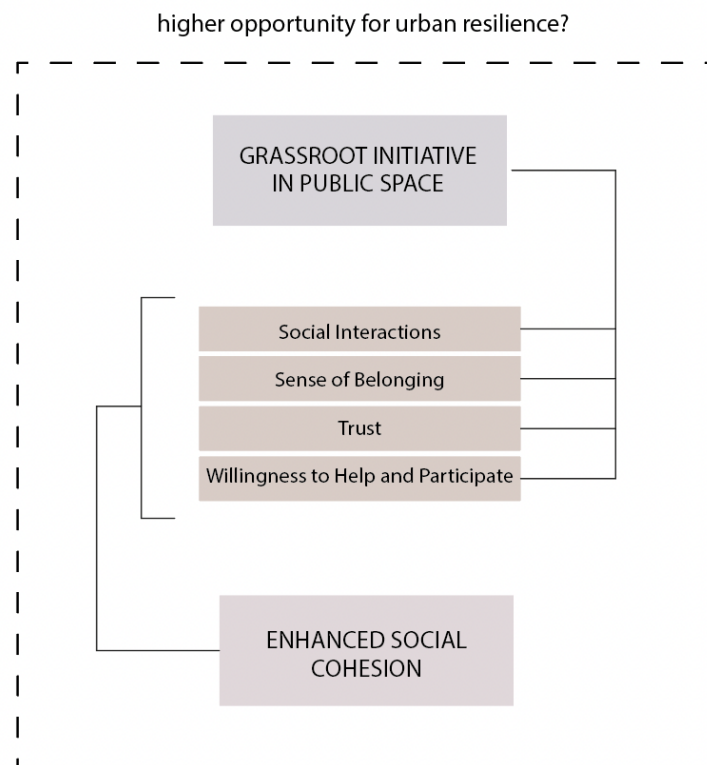


Figure 1 - Conceptual Model. Made by author.

3. Introduction to Case Study

Trastevere is a neighborhood in Rome on the Western side of the Tiber River (Figure 2 and 3). It is a well-known neighborhood in Rome with lively nightlife and a mix of local and tourist activities. It is known for historical bars, public squares and, lately, tourist accommodation, contributing to touristification.

In the last decade, Trastevere has been exposed to organized crime, fights, drug abuse, and the negative externalities associated with nightlife (Peronaci, 2020). Neighborhood groups vocally resent this, and anticipate Municipality-driven policy changes, such as increased policing, to mitigate these drawbacks (Peronaci, 2020). Trastevere also faces gentrification with 'AirBNBification' and local leisure and cultural space closures, replaced by supermarkets or apartment buildings (Polvoledo, 2017).



Figure 2 - Location of Trastevere within Rome.



Figure 3 - Typical scene of Trastevere, tourists walking around the characteristic streets and cobble-stone pavement

Cinema in Piazza was started in 2014 by a group of Rome students as an alternative to Trastevere's partying scene. The initiative entails the daily public screening of movies over June and July. It started in Piazza San Cosimato, a square in Trastevere, but recently expanded to Parco della Cervelletta (Colli Aniene) and Monte Ciocchi (Balduina; Figure 4). The group became a non-profit organization under the name "I Ragazzi del Cinema America". The name derives from the Cinema America, occupied in 2014, to protest gentrification in the neighborhood. Screenings in San Cosimato began as a counter-movement to the closure of 96 historical movie theaters in Trastevere and Rome more broadly (Dire Fare Cambiare, 2022). In

their own words, “*Cinema in Piazza represents a journey of resistance against gentrification, but also demonstrates that the answer to fights, criminality, and drug-dealing is not an anti-alcohol policy or an anti-homeless policy, but the opening and sharing of common social and cultural spaces that are not tied to profit and that are in the hands of the same people who benefit from the cultural offer*” (I Ragazzi del Cinema America, 2022). Bowen (2015) describes this square as a “symbol of Roman’s youth resistance and resilience to the increasing phenomenon of cinema closures” that has “tapped into the residual symbolic value of cinemas as associated with community”. This contrasts with screenings in peripheral suburbs, which fulfill a lack of public and free cultural destinations (I Ragazzi del Cinema America, 2022).

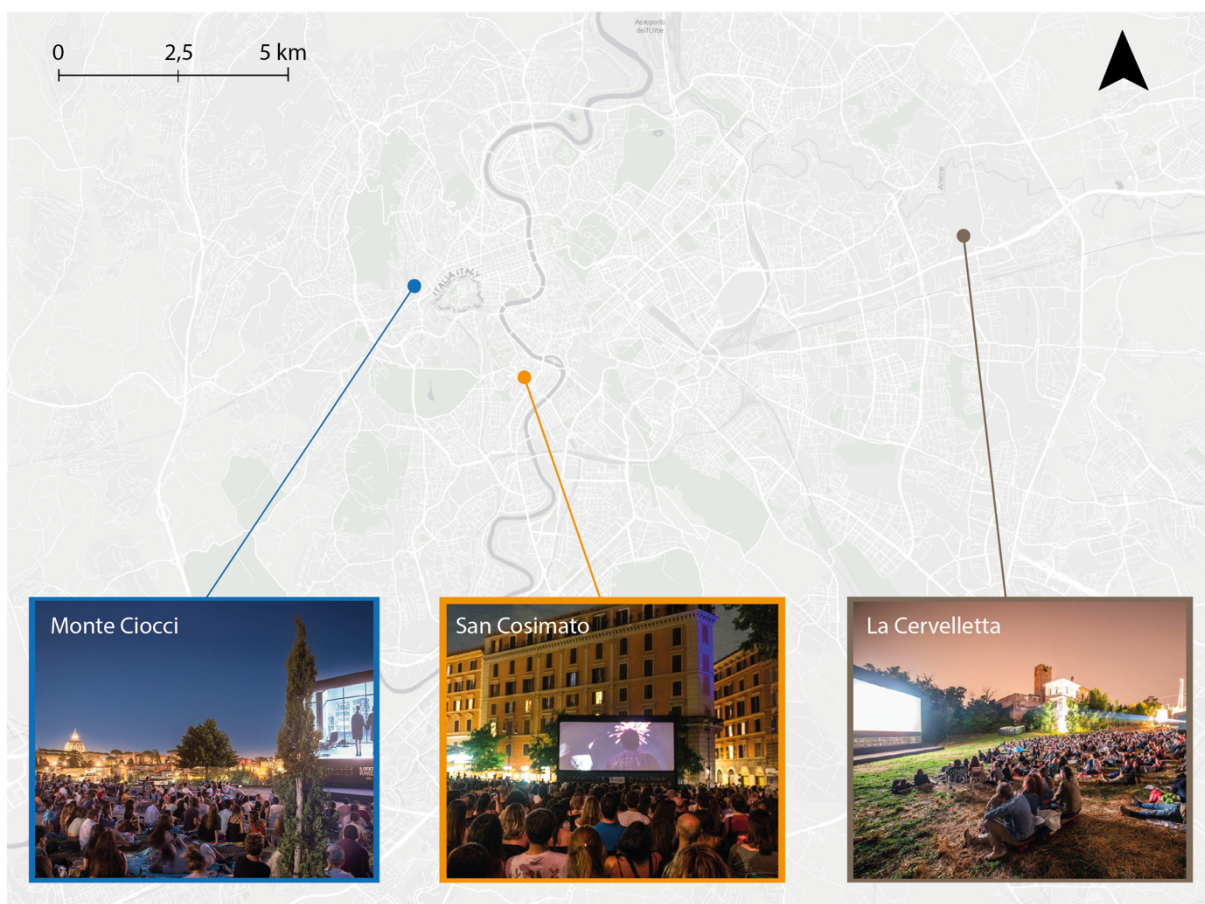


Figure 4 - Location of the three main Cinema in Piazza initiatives within the city's boundaries. Pictures by Corriere della Sera (2022).

4. Methods

4.1 Research strategy

Field data collection was informed by a thorough literature review, through an iterative process. The resulting flexible structure and framework provides replicability. These results can therefore be compared to prior research.

A case study analysis approach is used here, which makes all data context-dependent. However, it also provides a mechanism to understand how global phenomena impact local communities. The research question(s) and the methods are strictly related to the aforementioned Cinema in Piazza initiative.

4.2 Research area

The case study is related to the Cinema in Piazza initiative in Piazza San Cosimato, Rome (Figure 6). Participants were recruited on the whole of the Trastevere neighborhood (Figure 6). This is because people who are in the neighborhood throughout the year, regardless of their residency, are more likely to have participated in the screenings and are effectively part of the social context of the neighborhood where the initiative takes place. Cinema in Piazza is not meant to be a neighborhood activity but connects people from the entirety of the city, so participants are not necessarily residents. Initially, this research aimed at studying mainly the San Cosimato Piazza. This research does not touch upon the two other locations of Cinema in Piazza, as will be discussed in the limitations section in chapter 6.2.



Figure 6 - Research area and frequently mentioned spaces.

Cinema Troisi, a newly opened cinema in the hands of the same community organization in charge of Cinema in Piazza, will also be mentioned throughout the paper (Figure 6).

4.3 Data collection

The data was collected through 5 one-to-one interviews. The original aim was to conduct between 5 and 10 interviews, but geographical and time constraints allowed for only 5 interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, and the interview guide is shown in Appendix A. This method of data collection was chosen because it allows for a degree of uncertainty in what questions exactly are relevant, and empowers participants to lead the discussion to themes that were not identified beforehand. Depending on the answers, the discussion can take onto different leads than the original plan.

Table 1 displays relevant information, along with a pseudonym chosen by the author. Two participants were recruited in Cinema Troisi, a newly opened cinema-based community center in the neighborhood, two in Piazza San Cosimato itself, and the last one, 'Marco', was previously contacted to organize the interview.

The sample does not represent the population of participants or organizers of the initiative. In the discussion section, I discuss the limitations of the data that were identified when examining the quality of the gathered data.

Table 1 - Participants' characteristics.

| Pseudonym | Age | Connection to initiative | Residence |
|------------------|------------|--|--|
| Lucia | 22 | Regular participant | 30 min from San Cosimato, near Cervelletta |
| Luca | 32 | Goes to the square yearlong to play football and has participated a couple times in the screenings | Milan, used to live in Rome. |
| Marta | 23 | Regular participant, movie fanatic | 40 min from San Cosimato, near Cervelletta |
| Marco | n/a | Part of I Ragazzi del Cinema America | Trastevere, 5 minutes from San Cosimato |
| Roberta | 22 | Regular participant | 30 minutes from San Cosimato |

Cinema Troisi was chosen as a legitimate location to gather participants, as it is in the hands of the same grassroots association that organizes Cinema in Piazza (I Ragazzi del Cinema America). Gathering participants in such a space could increase the chances of finding individuals that are involved with, or participate in, the summer initiative.

The interviewees answered between 10 and 20 questions (Appendices A), divided into 3 categories: 1) personal, 2) individual experience with Cinema in Piazza and 3) determinants for cohesion. In the third part of the interview, prompts to ask participants about the pillars of social cohesion as identified by the literature, were used.

All interviews were conducted in Italian, and recorded on a phone. Along with the recording, notes were taken to highlight important passages and have a back-up plan in case the recording failed or got lost. In the case of Luca’s interview, the recording device was connected via Bluetooth to a pair of headphones and the audio is not audible. In this case, only written down quotes were included.

4.4 Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed in their entirety in the original language, which was Italian. The software Amberscript was used to assist in transcriptions, for which additional informed consent is required. Interviews were coded in Italian using Atlas.ti and the coding tree illustrated in Figure 7, which was translated into English for better comprehension.

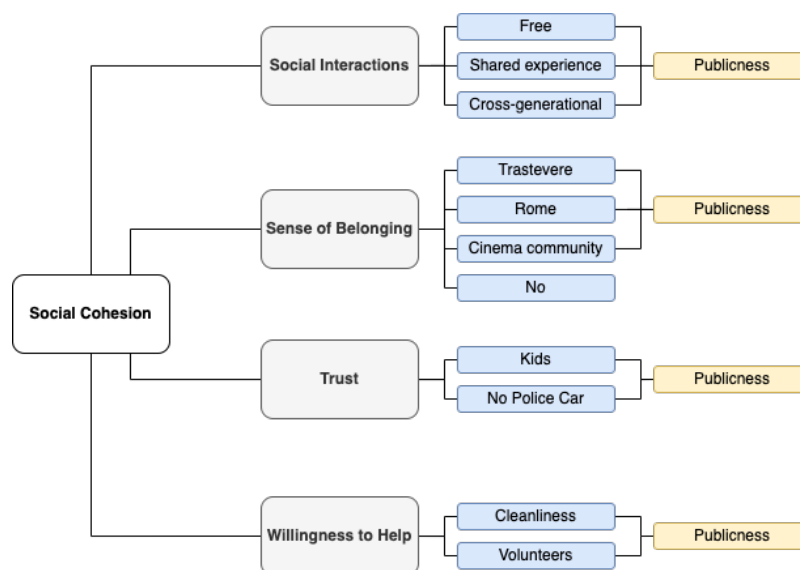


Figure 7 - Coding tree

Codes were initially based on the conceptual model and the author's expectations, but were adapted in response to themes emerged through the interviews. After the coding process, relevant quotes and concepts were translated into English to be used in the study.

The result will be of a discussion illustrating how Cinema in Piazza is experienced by respondents and how their experiences relate to pillars of social cohesion as identified in the literature review.

4.5 Data storage, privacy and ethical considerations

The data collected was stored on a private password protected drive to protect the information provided by the participants. After recording, the interviews were moved onto the drive and removed from the recording device. All transcripts created for the research were pseudonymised to avoid sharing of personal information. Data will be deleted on March 1st, 2023.

All interviews were adherent to the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Interviewees were provided with an information sheet and a consent form, which were signed by both the participant and researcher prior to the start of the interview. Participants were given time pre and post interview to ask questions, and will be able to withdraw from the study if they wish so.

5. Results

5.1 Cinema in Piazza & Social Interactions

For what concerns Cinema in Piazza as a social experience, all participants were keen to immediately describe its role in allowing for multiple kinds of horizontal social interactions.

In the quote below, Lucia describes how this kind of initiative was a healthy alternative to interact socially instead of staying at home:

“For me Cinema in Piazza was a blessing. I got to a point where I really didn't wanna do anything at night. Like the usual... going out, drinking. It was cool! I found a way to use my

time in a constructive way, which wasn't staying at home and watching movies alone... I would go with my boyfriend and my friends, people who wouldn't usually go out together”.

Social interactions can be discussed also in terms of age. All participants mentioned how Cinema in Piazza attracts people of all ages. Marco, an organizer, says:

“Our agenda always tries to... say... build more bridges than walls. We try to vary it as much as possible to attract anyone”

And continues mentioning the Disney screenings (Figure 8), popular among children and adults. Marta also mentions the kids' screenings and adds onto the discussion:

“I see literally anyone... for example: the Ghibli Studios nights. There were kids, adults, grandpas ... All ages. Because yes, it's like Disney: you gather all people. [...] This kind of thing ties more people together.”



Figure 8 - Screening of "The beauty and the beast" in 2019. Source: Roma Today

Marco and Marta also both talked about older women who live in the neighborhood and bring their chairs down to the square to watch the movies.

As illustrated by Lucia in the following quote, Cinema in Piazza also brings people from different neighborhoods together, and encourages Romans themselves to visit parts of the city where they usually do not go, allowing for social interactions that would not happen otherwise.

“It’s also interesting how people really move far to go to these things. I live near La Cervelletta. Nobody used to go there if they were not already from the neighborhood. Now I see people that from the city center travel all the way here. They get to experience different parts of the city. Same for me, I travel to Trastevere on purpose.”

The element of public space was key to the discussion. Similarly, to what suggested by Peters et al. (2010) - for urban spaces to allow for informal social interactions among strangers - participants seem to recognize this kind of power in Cinema in Piazza. Marta, Luca, and Lucia all respectively highlighted how just being sitting around people, in a public space, is a valuable social interaction:

“I felt connected from an emotional perspective. Because you’re all on the floor, sitting together, maybe you say something to your neighbor, or someone asks you if they can sit on your towel... you laugh together. Not like maybe at the closed theater or at the movies [...] Just friendly remarks, you know, but they make you happy.” – Lucia

Finally, the fact that the event is public both in spatial and monetary terms, was positively described in terms of (passive) social interactions, specifically amongst strangers, which is marked as fundamental for social cohesion by Peters et al. (2010).

Publicness in monetary terms (i.e. the event being free) was mentioned by all 5 participants. Lucia made the following remark comparing it to other cultural activities in Rome:

“Maybe one sometimes wants to go to these [cultural] things but then you see the prices of a museum, like now there is Van Gogh, and it’s 20€. If it’s free and in a public space, you’re really interested in sitting among a bunch of strangers that are all there for the same reason.”

Cinema in Piazza seems to be able to enhance social interactions, index of social cohesion (Berkley, 1994; Peters et. al, 2010). The element of public, both in spatial and monetary terms,

seems to be key to the existence of these interactions, as the square itself was described by multiple participants to have this kind of “bringing together” power.

5.2 Cinema in Piazza & Sense of Belonging

“As a ‘Trasteverino’ [person from Trastevere] filling the square with people makes me proud”.

This is how Marco unpromptedly initiated a conversation regarding his neighborhood and how the initiative that he himself organizes adds onto his feelings towards the place he grew up in. Pride is here associated with a sense of belonging, manifestation of social cohesion (Chan et al, 2006). According to him, the motive behind the initiative was to “save” from gentrification the neighborhood and the culture of cinemas, both linked to sense of belonging, to the neighborhood and to the cultural community of cinema go-ers:

“It all started with the idea of fighting a showcase neighborhood [...] We found ourselves squatting in a cinema in a situation in which every year the lists of cinemas being closed to make supermarkets, or bingos, or apartment blocks, was increasing. And keep in mind that Trastevere has so many vacant apartments.”

Similarly, Roberta, who is not from Trastevere, also used the word “proud”, this time for what concerns the pride of showing the “real” side of Rome to the outsiders:

“This is stuff that makes me proud of being from Rome. When tourists come to our city, and to this neighborhood that probably is on every “10 things to do in Rome” list, I think it’s so much better that they see people sitting on the ground in a square watching an old movie instead of some new bingo house, millions of AirBnBs, or tourist traps.”

Public space here is key both strictly in terms of how the square represents the battle that the neighborhood is fighting against urban processes, such as gentrification, but also in terms of what outsiders and tourists see. In both cases, participants have pointed at how their “belonging” to such places is influenced by the grass-root initiative, which provides a citizen space to ownership of the city (Mitchell, 2003).

Luca, who has been to the initiative a couple of times, instead did not recognize any effect on him in terms of being part of a community:

“No... that doesn't do it for me. I also don't need that. I don't go to the movies to feel like I belong. That's not what I do. When I went to the Cinema in Piazza it was always nice, but I didn't go there to belong.”

5.3 Cinema in Piazza and Willingness to Participate and Help

Being a grassroots initiative, Cinema in Piazza has many “helpers”. This comes in financial form, from actors, directors, etc... but also in labor-force form, thanks to the organization itself and many summer volunteers who offer to help. Marco, in this regard, said the following, which demonstrates a large interest in helping the cause:

“Our group [in summer] becomes a much bigger group. Many people aren't part of the association but work with us in the summer and then we've a group of volunteers. Because then there are so many people asking to help. People who enjoy the event and want to do more. They are all welcome of course, without commitment.”

Lucia made a direct link between the perceived willingness to help and the fact that it is a voluntary initiative:

“People really seem very keen to help in my opinion. Maybe on one hand because it's free and then cause it like voluntarily organized. I see a lot of good and inspirational spirits. Maybe yes cause it's free. Also, everyone is very kind.”

Another point was especially made on cleanliness. Such initiative could leave spaces in terrible conditions, but here is how Roberta commented on the matter:

“Then they always leave everything super clean. Like, if you go by two hours later, you find them still cleaning. And people all take care of their individual trash. Maybe this more in La Cervelletta than Trastevere, but it still happens”.

Marco, at the beginning of his interview, said the following when asked about the spirit of Cinema in Piazza:

“One of our mantras always has been: leave the place better than you found it. We clean a square that if you walk on right now [in winter] is gross. We screened the final of the World Cup last year and they complimented us. We stayed there until 2AM and it actually seemed like there was nothing happening there.”

Both previous quotes demonstrate how, by cleaning up, the grassroots initiative encourages people who volunteer or even participate to take care of the public space, which is a manifestation of social cohesion. Figure 9 illustrates an example of how the square can be found in winter days, when the initiative is not taking place.



Figure 9 - Piazza San Cosimato on a week day during the winter. Photo taken by author.

Marco made this remark connecting the publicness element to the quality enhancement one, highlighting that participation is key to the process. He continued describing how they were always welcomed to stay, even after many frictions with government and some neighborhood committees because of people wanting to live spaces together (willingness to participate, as recognized in the literature; Chan et. al, 2006).

“We had frictions with all of them [the mayors]. But at the end, speaking to them, they always allowed us to stay. Because you cannot be indifferent to what we do. Not because we’re cool but because it works. Something old like watching a movie on a big screen, it works. We saw it this summer, after the pandemic, there’s the will to be together, and be outside. Simply the will of wanting to live spaces together.”

5.4 Cinema in Piazza & Trust

“Before us there was an assigned police car on this square. When we started they took the car away. We really became the defense unit of the square, with no weapons. It was a way of saying: this square isn’t dangerous, it’s dangerous if you don’t use it and don’t maintain it.”

This is how Marco wanted to highlight the role of the initiative also as a way of using space in a way that adds onto the quality of safety, and subsequently the overall trust, in the area. He then continues:

“It offers a cultural opportunity to the neighborhood inhabitants but also it means that a parent can trust their 10-year-old child to go downstairs, walk to the square, and watch cartoons outside. Instead of going somewhere else.”

Lucia did not have much to say in terms of this, besides that she found people to be kind and trustworthy. Marta answered:

“I feel fairly... reassured. Obviously it’s not like I am there with my purse just open, but I am much more chill than in other places like the metro.”

Even though not many themes emerged in terms of trust, these results are relevant when looking at overall trust put into the event and into the people who attend the event. The police car being

removed and children attending screenings without supervision are both indirect indicators of trust that citizens, participants and even city government reserve for the initiative.

6. Discussion

6.1 Discussion of the results

All interviews make clear Cinema in Piazza's role in manifesting key societal behaviors of social cohesion as identified by the literature (Chan et al., 2006; Peters et al., 2010). The themes richness of social interactions, sense of belonging, trust, and willingness to help and participate, were mentioned by the respondents.

The strength of Cinema in Piazza is that it offers a free public space for social interactions to take place. These can go from sharing a blanket to sit on, to acknowledging and enjoying each other's presence while watching the same movie. Cinema in Piazza was described as a place where people "*who usually don't go together*" can connect. Mentioned in multiple instances, the power of this grassroots initiative lies in encouraging horizontal social interactions among different age groups and neighborhoods within the city, aligning with the findings by Peters et al. (2010). Public space, "la piazza", is the means through which this is achieved. This notion is promising, as social interactions are necessary to create a cohesive environment. However, little to nothing was said regarding other factors such as class, ethnicity, political ideals, etc.

Only people that felt very tied to the initiative recognized traces of "belonging". However, this was the case on 2 different scales and always in terms of "pride". The only interviewee from Trastevere described the full San Cosimato square as something that makes him proud to be a "Trasteverino", while one interviewee connected the event to feeling roman and wanting to showcase Rome as a place where such initiatives can happen. In one case, the square represents the battle that the neighborhood is fighting against urban processes, such as gentrification. The square gains the role described by Navarro et al. (2018) and Mitchell (2003): a platform for collective power exercising over urbanization processes. In the other, it represents something cultural and typically Roman to tourists, giving Rome an urban personality. In both cases it is the grassroots initiative that unlocks the public spaces' property to give ownership of the city to its citizens, in terms of what battles they want to fight and what they are proud to be showing to outsiders. It can be argued that what Mitchell (2003) describes as a "must" – public space being a space crafted by the citizens for the citizens – is possible solely through the initiative:

a moment in which citizens take the lead in deciding what happens to the space, creating a cohesive social environment.

Cinema in Piazza started as a grass-root initiative from the motivation of young students who were protesting the closure of cinemas. Cinema closures were the face of the gentrification that had been taking place in Trastevere. Despite everyone's interest in cinema, the power of such places was recognized by various groups, from different areas of the city. They did not want to give up places of social connection to apartment buildings, supermarkets or bingos. Through the years, more people became involved, with the goal of bringing people together. Fostering active participation was done in a public space (Springer, 2011; Bayat, 2013), encouraged by Cinema in Piazza as a grassroots initiative. A large part of the work is thus done thanks to volunteers, or participants that are respectful in how they leave the area when the movie ends. Because of the tensions with different political parties, or neighborhood committees, the spirit of cleaning, helping, and leaving the place in the best conditions runs amongst most participants and organizers. This can be a manifestation of social cohesion, measured by willingness to help and participate (Chan et al., 2006).

The square is perceived safe during the event, which correlates to trust - another behavior defined within social cohesion by Chan et al. (2006) and Larsen (2013). Safety within the square has increased since the start of the event, given that the city does not place a police car in the surroundings anymore. Kids freely go to the screenings, even unsupervised, which is not a usual behavior in Rome. This points to parents' reassurance found in the presence of other adults on the square. In both cases the grassroots initiative is the relevant event that changed the common order of things: before the initiative, the square was deemed as dangerous and in need of constant surveillance. Similarly, adults only send their children to viewings unsupervised because of the initiative.

The aforementioned elements are tied by one common theme: the presence of a grassroots initiative on public space. Some participants connected the perceived kind, social interactions, good spirit, and perceived trust to the event being free and accessible in a public space. Peters et al. (2010) suggests public areas should 'learn' from parks, by encouraging healthy social interactions among strangers. Through the interviews, this is demonstrated to be the case for San Cosimato. Not only was Cinema in Piazza believed to be fostering social interactions more than cinemas, but the motive behind this initiative also connected people through a common

cause confirming the findings of Bowen (2015). The large number of volunteers, and general willingness to help portrayed by volunteers and participants demonstrates this further. This public space was made safer, as demonstrated by the disappearance of the 24/7 police car. This increases trust among visitors and residents in the surroundings, and therefore increases social cohesion (Chan et al., 2006; Larsen, 2013). All of the above are manifestations of a cohesive environment (Chan et al., 2006; Peters et al., 2010). Both grassroots initiatives (Nikkhah & Redzuan, 2009) and public space (Navarro et al., 2018) have *per se* properties of enhancing social cohesion, but in this case study it is the combination that unlocks the manifestation of behaviors characteristic of a socially cohesive environment and creates opportunity for urban resilience.

6.2 Reflections and Limitations

Even though this study brought to light some interesting results, it has some significant limitations.

Firstly, the data gathered was not representative of the sample of people involved with Cinema in Piazza. People of all ages attend the screenings, but I was only able to interview people in a similar age group as mine. The participant recruitment method, retrospectively, should have allowed for 1) more participants to be gathered, and 2) more variety. Because everyone that was interviewed found Cinema in Piazza of great value, data amongst people who do not like the initiative was not retrieved. When speaking of social cohesion, it is important to search whether people are affected negatively by initiatives that are argued to enhance social cohesion. The small sample and its being non-representative of the actual population of people involved with Cinema in Piazza, are an obstacle to making claims about the power of this initiative in this study.

Secondly, Cinema in Piazza takes place in two more public squares in Rome that are not in the city center. During interviews, these were mentioned significantly but this study does not touch upon the differences between these spaces and whether social cohesion is affected by some more than others. The reason behind the lack of in-depth investigation among on the ladder was mainly of time constraint.

7. Conclusion

This study has found that Cinema in Piazza has potential to become a spatial alternative for social resilience, given the manifested behaviors of social cohesion that were found in this research. Given the limitations of this research, it is not possible to draw hard conclusions, but it can be said that elements of enhanced social interactions, sense of belonging willingness to help and trust – manifestations of social cohesion according to Chan et al. (2006), Peters et al. (2010) and Larsen (2013) – were found when speaking to people about their experience with Cinema in Piazza.

Overall, positive social interactions, sense of belonging, trust, and willingness to help and participate are the societal behaviors that demonstrate that Cinema in Piazza has enhanced social cohesion (SQ1). Public space plays a role as the factor that allows for the grassroots initiative to take place publicly, strengthening the cohesive characteristics even more (SQ2). The combination of a grassroots initiative, Cinema in Piazza, and the use of public space is what participants indirectly linked to those manifestations of social cohesion, and also what answers the main research question (RQ).

In Rome, Cinema in Piazza provides an alternative to top-down decision making by city governments and developers. It empowers the local community in taking ownership and shape the institutional design of their space to better meet their needs. The piazza became a space responsive to local needs and culture, while giving people a voice in the development of the cultural scene of their city.

Policy makers should continue to allow for grassroots initiatives to take place in public spaces, as it encourages resilience and seems to be of great value to different generations of people living in Rome. In general, accessible cultural initiatives in public spaces should be encouraged as they allow for most people to take part and create alternatives to the dominant order of cultural activities that take place indoor and require the purchase of a ticket.

Future research should investigate the role of grassroots initiatives in urban spaces that were hit by natural or societal shocks. This research presents opportunities for potential enhancements of social cohesion, an important pillar of social resilience. Locally, I invite researchers to study Cinema in Piazza as a three-locations phenomenon and understand how the different location

in the same city can have different social impacts, which would contribute greatly to the body of research studying how different design of public spaces impact people's experiences.

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Appendix A

| Umbrella topic | Questions | Subquestions, if any | | | |
|-----------------|---|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Personal | What is your age? | | | | |
| | Where do you live? How long have you lived there? | | | | |
| | What do you use this square for, usually? | | | (If not mentioned) does this change during Cinema in Piazza? | |
| | What does this square mean to you? | | | | |
| | What does Cinema in Piazza mean to you? | | | | |
| Cohesion | What comes to mind when you think of a community? | | | | |
| | What about your (neighborhood) community? | | | | |
| Pillars | What role does Cinema in Piazza play within your community? | | | | |
| | What are some challenges this community had to face? | How were they addressed? | (Has Cinema in Piazza played a role in addressing these?) | | |
| | Do you trust people in the square? | What about during the event? | | | |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|-----------------------------|
| | Do you have social interactions with people you know on the square during the event? | Do you have social interactions with people you know on the square during the event? | Can you make some examples? |
| | Does this event make you feel more connected to Rome? To citizens? To the neighborhood? | How? | If yes, what? If no, why? |
| | Do you think people help out during the event? | Why? | |