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Urban Informality in Italy: understanding the discourse and perceptions of unauthorised housing in the Italian context

Name: Rosaria Battista - 630079

Supervisor: Anitra Baliga

Specialisation: Strategic Urban Planning and Policy

Country: Italy

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Summary:

The topic of urban informality has been widely discussed in academic literature relating to Global South Theory. Discourse on urban informality however has been mostly skewed toward the Global South due to a myth that informality only occurs in developing countries. To debunk this myth and look at more nuanced definitions of urban informality that are based on academic publications by Anyana Roy, this study looks at the phenomenon of informal building practices in Italy (known in Italian as *abusivismo edilizio*), which are dominated by the construction of unauthorised houses which bypass formal building regulations. The objective of this study has been first to use an empirical discourse analysis of a variety of documents to identify how urban informality is perceived by the socio-political environment in the country to understand what are the factors that have facilitated the normalisation and rationalisation of the practice of *abusivismo* within Italy. The second objective of the study has been to understand what is the State action on unauthorised housing, how are unauthorised homes flagged and condemned, but also how and how often they are regularised. The main findings of the study have shown that there is an overall negative and criminalised perception of informal building practices expressed in Italy in the socio-public discourse, but these critical perceptions are not directed towards a logic of 'building out of a need for shelter' but rather, out of the individual's exploitation of deregulations in the system to build second and more luxurious homes in a more financially convenient manner. Secondly, unauthorised building practices have been facilitated thanks to poor administrative governance on behalf of the state, and a cyclical pattern of 'washing away' responsibilities through the extensive use of building amnesties which have caused a major loss in credibility in the State. Other factors that have contributed to the facilitation of unauthorised building practices have been the influence of mafia-type organisations, particularly in the Southern regions of Italy. The analysis has shown that the logic that drives the rationalisation of unauthorised building practices is that it is more convenient for the individual to take the risk of cutting financial costs by building informally because it lacks the credibility that the State will inherently do something to sanction it. Informal building practices in Italy were not synonymous with poverty, nor were they driven by a lack of regulations. Instead, it was a condition of deregulation and poor administrative governance that led to the widespread normalisation and rationalisation of Italian *abusivismo edilizio*.

Keywords: Urban informality, Unauthorised housing practices, Mafia, Urban Planning, Italian urban planning

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There are various reasons why people in the urban sphere turn to informal practices. Often, urban informality is associated with the urban poor, however, the scope goes beyond solely the concept of poverty. Squatting and insurgency are ways in which informality is expressed as a means to ‘the right to the city (Roy, 2009). This is a concept first introduced by Henri Lefebvre and is expressed as a moral right, indicating that no group participating in society shall be excluded from urban life and its qualities (Lefebvre, 1968). Each group has a right to inhabit space in a holistic way that benefits all (Purcell, 2013) (Marcuse, 2014). Informality stemming from a place of needs is thus often caused by a government’s failure to provide essential resources, or by general inaccessibility to such resources due to a person’s socioeconomic status. Informality as a means to the city in the form of squatting and insurgency is often stigmatised by those in power and “blackened” (criminalised, demolished), while the perceptions of elite informality (participation of privileged people in the practice of informality in the urban space) are more often “whitened” (legitimised) using the terms coined by Yiftachel’s *stratification process of informality* (Roy, 2007) (De Leo, 2015).

However, informality may also be conceptualised beyond the scope of needs caused by a failure of state policies and interventions to provide people with important resources. Ananya Roy describes “informality as a mode of production of space defined by the territorial logic of *de-regulation*” (rather than un-regulation) (Roy, 2007), meaning that informality goes beyond the lack of rules and regulations (Banks, Lombard & Mitlin, 2019).

While most literature on urban informality has originated from studies within the context of the Global South, Roy’s conceptualisation of informality can also be seen within urban practices of some countries belonging to the Global North, such as in the case of Italy. Little attention has been paid to urban informality in the global North because of a “tendency of scholarship to reproduce the myth of Northern formality: the widely held belief that informality occurs only in corrupt and clientelist ‘developing countries’” (Jaffe, Koster, 2019). However, in the context of Italy, modern forms of informality have been significantly expressed through the widespread construction of unauthorised housing outside of formal regulatory permissions. Defined in Italian as *abusivismo edilizio*, it is a phenomenon that is present throughout the whole peninsula, but most especially in the regions of the South.

Linking back to Roy’s definition of informality, the widespread presence of *abusivismo edilizio* is not caused by un-regulation, it is not that there are no rules and regulations in place, but rather, a process of de-regulation, explored in the analysis of this study. Furthermore in the chapter, *The Areas of Organised Informality*, urbanist Daniela de Leo talks about how the widespread construction of unauthorised housing phenomena in Italy has become a form of normalised informality, following both a process of the aforementioned Yiftachel’s ‘whitened’ informal *stratification (process)* and the Italian mafia’s role in the way it was able to exploit the de-regulated character of the Italian legal housing system (Roy, 2007) (De Leo, 2015).

More on the actual definition of *abusivismo edilizio* and what is classified as “*abusivo*” (unauthorised, informal) will be covered in the literature review, and the reason such a phenomenon has been normalised to such an extent will be explored within the research of this study.

1.1. Background Information and Problem Statement

Informality in Italy is expressed extensively in terms of unauthorised housing, known in Italian as *abusivismo edilizio*. According to the urban planning law n.1150 of 1942 parallel to the new reform of the country’s master plan at the time, the term *abusivismo edilizio* defines any construction or private intervention that does not comply with the provisions of the plans (Pluchino, 2017).

Unauthorised housing in Italy is currently undergoing a ‘second phase’, one that is disconnected from the primary needs and livelihoods of people turning to informal means (*abusivismo di necessità* in Italian). In the 1970s and 80s, Italy experienced a period of economic prosperity which improved many Italian families’ economic conditions. As a consequence, many middle-class families began to build second homes or extensions to their primary homes by tapping into illegal markets as they were “decidedly more **convenient** than the formal and regular ones” (Pluchino, 2017) (Chiodelli, 2018). Such unauthorised methods constitute, for instance, the bypassing of building regulations. An example would be that people may first buy agricultural land intended for agricultural use as the price per plot is often cheaper than “formally developable land”, and then rely on informal networks to find ways to bypass building regulations to construct on this agricultural land (Chiodelli, 2019). Those who are violating building regulations are often middle to high-income citizens and “even real estate developers” (Chiodelli, 2018). This type of *abusivismo* in Italian is known as *abusivismo speculativo* (Pluchino, 2017).

Abusivismo edilizio is a phenomenon that is widely normalised and rationalised in the Italian context. Rationalisation goes beyond normalisation but differs from justification, such as informality justified through Lefebvre’s right to the city. A rationalisation is a “belief-like attitude towards some proposition” (Schwitzgebel, 2016), and is a common way to account for “intended actions” or “past decisions” (Jefferson, 2020).

Is the normalisation and rationalisation of extensive *abusivismo edilizio*, enforced by a response to Italian society’s common acceptance and tolerance of it? If so, how is Italian society so tolerant of these informal practices? To understand this, it is important to analyse the Italian attitudes, perceptions and discourse around *abusivismo edilizio* and perceptions of the State’s response to it.

The State has mainly dealt with the matter through the issuance of the *permessi di sanatoria* and the *condoni edilizi* (substantial and formal building amnesties) (Chiodelli, 2018). A formal building amnesty (*Permesso di Sanatoria*) may be requested after the construction of a home has begun *without* prior authorisation (i.e: a building permit). If the construction does

not conflict with any condition in which a permit would not be approved, then amnesty is granted (Studio Legale Metta, 2021). A substantial building amnesty (*Condono Edilizio or Condono*) is a special building law passed by the government that would grant the authorisation of homes constructed without formal permits (even if a formal amnesty could not be granted) (Studio Legale Metta, 2021).

While building amnesties may only formally be accepted if the unauthorised building meets the normative requirements for it to become legal, what is done formally and what is done in practice differs. A total of 15.4 million applications for the *condono edilizio* have been submitted, but around 5.4 million remain unsettled, with 3.5 million of them still dating “back to the first” 1985 amnesty (Chiodelli, 2018) (Sogeea, 2016). These numbers show that the Italian government’s exercise of sanctioning unauthorised building regulations has not been very efficient. The governmental response to abusivismo will be further explored in the analysis of this study.

Not enforcing current laws does mean that Italian building regulations are unchangeable, but if there are strong attitudes that continue to support the widespread construction of unauthorised housing, then evoking any kind of change in legislation to deal with the situation may become increasingly difficult.

1.2: Relevance of the Research Topic

This second phase of *abusivismo* is the aspect of informality that is often less stigmatised in the greater global context. Much of academic discourse on the topic of informality itself is skewed towards the global South and the lack of attention on behalf of scholars for informal practices in the global North is often caused by a common myth that informality only occurs in corruption-developing countries” (Jaffe, Koster, 2019). This is not the case as urban informal practices in the Italian context have been so widespread through its *abusivismo edilizio*.

This study will aim to build on the existing literature’s idea that the definition of informality is in reality more nuanced than a hard dichotomy between a formal and informal classification. In particular, it will build on Roy’s definition of informality seeing how a state of deregularisation (in the Italian housing sector) has created opportunities for “informalisation” (e.g through *abusivismo edilizio*), a process that is “not bounded” to an “unregulated” sector (i.e enterprise, work, settlement) and that is not “synonymous with poverty” (Roy, 2015). In addition, since societal discourse shapes the normalisation of certain practices within a society, studying the discourse, attitudes, and perceptions of *abusivismo edilizio* in Italy will give insights as to how this process of ‘informalisation’ has become so normalised and rationalised within the country.

In summary, this study will contribute further to the literature on urban informality by showing how examples of informal practices in the context of the Global North can be defined using existing literature based on Southern theory, disproving the myth that

informality only occurs in the countries of the global South. It will seek to contribute further to literature that has applied also Southern theory in a Northern context, blurring the lines of harsh dichotomic depictions of informality between the Global North/South. Lastly, Italy's proximity to many global South countries, its relations with migrants and globalisation (due to its presence of global cities such as Milan), make it an interesting case for discussing Global North/South power dynamics.

1.3: Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to dive deeper into how exactly this normalised construction of unauthorised housing is perceived by Italian society and the conditions that foster its rationalisation and normalisation. The main objective of the research is to identify how urban informality, through the bypassing of building regulations, is perceived, rationalised, or condemned in the context of Italy, and to explain how this contributes to the greater debate on urban informality. This study will thus:

- Use empirical discourse analysis of a variety of documents to identify how urban informality is perceived by the socio-political environment in the country
- Understand what is the State action on unauthorised housing, how are unauthorised homes flagged and condemned, but also how and how often are they regularised?

Using both discourse analysis and the mapping of state action on informal practices in Italy will help understand Italian perceptions and attitudes towards them. This will be useful for building on existing academic discourse regarding urban informality that has been mostly skewed towards the global South. Using Italy as an example for studying informal practices in the context of the global North will be useful to also disprove the myth that informality only occurs in the countries of the global South.

1.4: Main research question and research sub-questions

Main research question: *How is the discourse behind unauthorised housing perceived and rationalised in Italy, and how does it contribute to the overall debate on urban informality?*

Research Sub-questions:

- *What are the factors that play a role in shaping the environment that facilitates unauthorised housing construction in Italy?*
- *Is the state response to Italian urban informality parallel to its perceptions by Italian society? Does the response show a cyclical pattern?*

Chapter 2: Theory Review

2.1: Literature Review

2.1.1: The Concept of Informality

Informality in the urban sphere is a topic that has been debated by various scholars. Its depiction in both the contexts of the global North and South are often wrongly linked to poverty and illegality. However, informality does not necessarily mean either of these

concepts. The notion of informality goes beyond this limited scope and is more nuanced. Southern Theory scholars such as Ananya Roy have greatly contributed to the debate on informality in various ways.

What defines the concept of informality? There are various notions of the term that have been discussed throughout academic literature. Initially built on Hart's notion of the "informal economy" (1973), the term informality essentially refers to practices that are not taken within "officially sanctioned institutions", or are ways of doing things that "precede formalisation" (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster, van Meijl 2022). The concept of informality originates from Global Southern theory and urban studies conducted within that global sphere. However, with time, the concept has also begun to be applied in urban studies of the Global North, showing thus an instance of Ananya Roy's (2009) "worlding of concepts" (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster, van Meijl 2022) (Roy, 2009)

One may argue that one of the reasons why people turn to informal means or practices for acquiring their livelihoods is a consequence of a need that in some way is not being met. For example, a practice that is heavily associated with informality is the construction of informal housing. This is caused by either the state's incapacity to provide sufficient/adequate housing for its people, or high rents and housing unaffordability for those of a lower socio-economic background. In the Global South, informality in housing can be seen with the growth of informal settlements whereas in the Global North it is often portrayed through the occupation of buildings by people who cannot afford to own or rent a property. Through this logic of the state's incapacity to provide for a person's needs, informality is often justified as evoking people's right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968). The right to the city is justified as a "moral right", which refers to both the accessibility of people to what 'exists' in their living environment, and people's right to create desired (and needed) socio-physical changes to that environment (Marcuse, 2014) (Harvey, 2003).

However, there is also a "thematic bias" that is often accompanied by the notion of informality (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster, van Meijl 2022). Oftentimes, informality is wrongly depicted as a practice that is exclusive to those living in poverty, or that it occurs only in corrupt and clientelist "developing countries" (Jaffe, Koster, 2019) (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster, van Meijl 2022). Subsequently, informality expressed by the logic of 'the right to the city', or in the form of insurgency as a means to protest against state incapacities, is primarily stigmatised and criminalised by those in power ('blackened' using Yiftachel's term in the study *stratification process of informality*). On the other hand, informal practices that are undertaken and endorsed by privileged people with power (also known as elite informality) are more often legitimised (whitened) or not officially recognised as 'informal' although they technically fall outside "officially sanctioned institutions" (Roy, 2007) (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster, van Meijl 2022).

The notion of informality that shows a more nuanced perspective and how it goes beyond the thematic bias depicted above is well conceptualised in Ananya Roy's article *Urban*

Informality, Toward an Epistemology of Planning and Urban Informality: The Production and Regulation of Space. Roy's definition is cited and built upon by many scholars and academic articles regarding the topic of informality. In both of Roy's articles, the author describes how policy responses to informality in the Global South (particularly in India) have been paradoxical and that "planning modalities can produce informality as a 'state of exception' (referring to the Amagembanien model) from the formal order of urbanisation. Roy first presents two definitions (Hall, Pfeiffer and De Soto) of informality. Still, Roy argues against them as their "dichotomy" does not recognise "how informality might be a different process embodying varying degrees of power and exclusion" (Roy, 2007).

Roy argues instead, that "informality is a mode of production of space defined by the territorial logic of *de-regulation*" (rather than un-regulation) (Roy, 2007, 2015). This phenomenon is explored in India as Roy argues that urban planning must be understood "through dynamic processes of informality", where the "purpose of land cannot be fixed and mapped according to" the law (Roy, 2007, 2015). A state of de-regulation shows informality through "purposive action and planning", thus informality can be defined as a "mode of regulation (stemming from the word *modus* in Latin)" which is different from simply failures in planning or "the absence of the state", meaning that it occurs for reasons that go beyond simply a lack of rules and regulations (Roy, 2007, 2015) (Banks, Lombard & Mitlin, 2019). Additionally, a state of de-regulation creates opportunities for "informalisation", a process that is "not bounded" to an "unregulated" sector (i.e enterprise, work, settlement) and that is also not "synonymous with poverty" (Roy, 2015)

"If the formal sphere follows a set of rules defined by the state, then the informal sphere can be seen as a different set of rules negotiated and enforced by diverse actors who frequently include, but go beyond, city-based or national elites" – (Banks, Lombard & Mitlin, 2019).

Informality according to Roy is conceptualised as a "system that runs parallel to the formal and the legal" making the existence of informality at the "very heart of the state, integral" to "the territorial practices of the state" (Roy, 2009). Thus, informality "runs parallel to the evolution" of society's wealth and needs (Pluchino, 2017).

2.1.2: Informality in a Global Northern Context

As aforementioned, conceptions of informality are often accompanied by a "thematic bias" focusing only on "immigrants" or those affected by poverty (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster, van Meijl 2022). Much of the academic literature that challenges this bias has been mostly rooted in Southern theory that has been applied in studies in a Southern context (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster, van Meijl 2022) (de Leo, 2015) (Chioldelli, 2018). There has been, however, an increasing amount of academic literature that has addressed this gap by applying Southern Critical Theory in a Global Northern context to challenge the thematic bias, but also to challenge the notion that informality in the Global North is a practice that has been "imported through immigration from the South" (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster, van Meijl 2022) to offer a different but important contextual perspective of informality. For instance, articles such as

The Political Potential of Urban Informality in the Global North: A Rancièrian Perspective by van de Pas, de Kort, Koster, van Meijl (2022), and *Writing Southern theory from the Global North: Notes on informality and regulation* by Mario Cremaschi and Laura Lieto (2020) attempt to build on Roy's theory but explicitly applying it in a Global Northern context. They build on Ananya Roy's proposal for a "worlding" of concepts: a worlding in which we build theories on local urban experiences, yet leave open the option of whether they tell us something about "all cities" (Roy, 2009) (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster, van Meijl, 2022).

"As Devlin (2018b, p. 530) notes, such a project demands not only that we enrich the literature with the urban experiences of hitherto excluded cities in the Global South, but also that we reconsider what we know, or thought we knew, about cities in the Global North. To do so, Roy (2009) proposes a "worlding" of concepts" ...

...In this way, then, we can hope to arrive at a flow of concepts that, rather than merely travel southward, interconnect all cities around the world." (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster, van Meijl, 2022)

In the article written by van de Pas, de Kort, Koster and van Meijl's (2022), the authors state that informal practices are often analysed under the dichotomy of being either "political" (resistance to "exclusionary planning) or "apolitical" (informality as a means to meet people's needs)(van de Pas, de Kort, Koster and van Meijl's, 2022). Some practices are also "selectively legitimised" whilst others are "criminalised and controlled"(van de Pas, de Kort, Koster and van Meijl's, 2022). This dichotomy also reflects Yiftachel's dichotomy of urban informal practices being either 'blackened' (criminalised) or 'whitened' (legitimised) (Roy, 2007). To go beyond the harsh dichotomy of informal practices being either political or apolitical, the authors offer to reconceptualise the notion of urban informality offering a Rancièrian perspective on urban informality, which in a way bridges the hard dichotomy together.

*"Many urban informal practices to which political sentiments are attributed, turn out to be a (re)confirmation of the dominate **police** order, since they have been either formalized, integrated into policy agendas or designated as a "policy problem."* – (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster and van Meijl's, 2022).

The term police, however, does not refer to "the forces of law and order," but to "the polis of the city or civilization (Rancière, 1999)"(van de Pas, de Kort, Koster and van Meijl's, 2022). Spatial policies and formal urban planning practices are thus "both a reflection and an agent of the" *polis* which can "determine" the purpose of different spaces and by whom these spaces can be used (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster and van Meijl's, 2022). However, there are certain groups of people that cannot challenge the polis through formal means (such as voting) as they lack a political voice. Therefore, to challenge their struggles of not having their demands seen or taken into consideration by the '*polis*' they resort to informal practices

to meet their needs, needs of survival, needs that in essence are not apolitical as often depicted by the harsh dichotomy (van de Pas, de Kort, Koster and van Meijl's, 2022)

Mario Cremaschi and Laura Lieto on the other hands offer a perspective of urban informality of Southern Europe by studying two case studies in Italy. They suggest that

“Southern Europe has been sometimes explored as a suspended theoretical entity between North and South...”

And that,

“...urban theories neglect the views of urban scholars from the Mediterranean countries and the Global South equally.”

As,

“...scholarly research on Mediterranean cities increasingly deals with informality and acknowledges the structural role it plays in the processes of economic and urban development” – (Cremaschi, Lieto, 2020).

In their studies of informal housing in Rome and Naples, the authors have concluded that there is no strict and sharp formal/informal divide, but that in reality, at least in the context of Southern Italy, there exists *“a new political geography of «grey spaces» in which informalities rise and coexist with new forms of domination and oppressive relations largely exceeding state powers”* (Cremaschi, Lieto, 2020). These relations are most especially depicted by the Italian mafia, which is involved in various informal and illegal practices, especially that of the construction and cement industries. Although the relationship between informal practices and the Italian mafia is “rarely direct”, through their involvement in the construction and cement industries there has often been a connection in these contexts between “informal urbanisation to the mafia” (Cremaschi, Lieto, 2020). This is particularly caused by instances of de-regulation in society, which favours the condition of dysregulation in the Italian “abstract legal system” (Cremaschi, Lieto, 2020). This condition of dysregulation then becomes a “hypertrophic characteristic of legal systems that crime organizations exploit to strengthen their power as intermediaries” and channel these powers “into alternative projects, out of policy and regulatory frameworks provided by formal institutions” (Cremaschi, Lieto, 2020).

Other examples of literature that depict Roy's ‘worlding of concepts’ in an Italian context, specifically tied to mafia-type organisations are shown by Italian Urbanist Daniela de Leo in the book *Mafie & Urbanistica* (2015), and Italian urban studies professor Francesco Chiodelli in various articles depicting the widespread practice of unauthorised housing in Italy. Both de Leo and Chiodelli argue that the more nuanced perspectives on informality from Southern theory, especially that of Roy's, have been useful in bridging the gap between the thematic

biases in North/South informal theory as described by Jaffe and Koster (2019) (de Leo, 2015) (Chiodelli, 2018). De Leo states that many planning theories have failed to explicitly address informal practices in areas where the reproduction of de-regulation is caused by weak forms of institutions (especially corrupt institutions), and not just due to a lack of socio-political structures or caused by “absolute poverty” as Roy also argues (de Leo, 2015).

Additionally, both De Leo and Chiodelli reference Roy’s Amagembadien model of “the state of exception” (*lo stato di eccezione*) to describe informal processes of de-regulation in Italy. In the chapter *The Areas of Organised Informality*, by building on Roy’s theory, de Leo depicts a “Mediterranean context” (much like Cremaschi and Lieto’s grey spaces) to address how weak institutional conditions created processes of de-regulation which were exploited by the Italian Mafia, especially in the field of construction and unauthorised housing (de Leo, 2015). De Leo explored in her study of ‘borderline neighbourhoods’ (neither completely safe nor unsafe as described by De Leo) of Italy, specifically within Naples (as also studied by Cremaschi and Lieto (2020)). A prominent characteristic of these states of exceptions in their spatiality is that they are defined by the presence of criminal powers and their complex interdependence to the space. According to de Leo, this complex interdependence is expressed between a territorial nexus of “unauthorised housing and the diffusion of criminal phenomena”, expressed in both an **indirect** and **direct** manner (De Leo, 2015). It is expressed “**indirectly**, through conditions of **weak legality**¹ (*legalità debole*), within which criminal organisations proliferate, favouring the spread of unauthorised constructions, corruption, and lack of administrative controls” (De Leo, 2015). According to LUISS University professor of sociology, Antonio La Spina, in his book *Mafia, legalità debole e sviluppo del Mezzogiorno* (Mafia, weak legality and development of the South), weak legality is a concerning factor of Southern Italy because,

“...many public institutions are not very credible as producers and applicators of rules of conduct such as to constitute reliable premises for the convenience calculations of economic operator, thus favoring criminal organisations” and disincentivising “productive activities” – (La Spina, 2005)

On the other hand, the nexus is “**directly** expressed where organised crime is an active part of the building cycle and a real ‘planner’ and ‘financial promoter’² of the development of entire squatter neighborhoods in specific urban areas over which they have control”, most prominently in the four Southern regions of Campania, Puglia, Calabria and Sicily (De Leo, 2015). This complex interdependence shows the same as the “oppressive relations” described by Cremaschi and Lieto above (Cremaschi, Lieto, 2020). De Leo’s grey spaces are characterised by a concentration of illicit activities and urban degradation, often ‘tolerated’

¹ In Italian law, the principle of weak legality is satisfied when a precept is issued by an authority that by law is entitled to exercise this power. Therefore, if the law merely indicates that the “person holding the power is sufficient” in defining the “contents, limits and methods of exercising the precept”, the authority is allowed to issue the precept (Tutor Magistralis, 2022).

² Italian Mafia-type organisations dominate in the production and servicing of the cement industry. They are often the suppliers of manpower and building supplies in the construction industry (de Leo, 2015) (Legambiente, 2021).

by the society living within them, due to the influential presence of criminal mafia-type organisations. Francesco Chiodelli also addresses the issue of how weak institutional conditions have fostered the opportunity for mafia-type organisations to play a role in informal practices in Italy (Chiodelli, 2018, 2021).

To summarise, Italian urban informality demonstrates a logic which differs from the biased belief that it is synonymous with poverty. Urban informality in the context of Italy is widely depicted by unauthorised housing, known as *abusivismo edilizio* and the reason why the practice has been so widespread will be better understood after the analysis of this study.

2.1.3: ‘L’Abusivismo Edilizio’

According to the urban planning law n.1150 of 1942 parallel to the new reform of the country’s master plan at the time, the term *abusivismo edilizio* (unauthorised housing) defines any construction or private intervention that does not comply with the provisions of the plans (Pluchino, 2017).

“According to Italian law, there are no more areas of the country not subject to planning constraints where it is possible to build freely and any private intervention that does not comply with the provisions of the plans will be “abusive”. ” --(Pluchino, 2017).

What exactly constitutes as *abusivo* however is nuanced. There are two phases of ‘*abusivismo*’ that have characterised Italian society. The first is ‘*abusivismo di necessità*’ (unauthorised housing to fulfil the primary need for shelter), this phase in Italy became extensive after the end of WWII, it can be seen in other historical contexts of the Global North and current contexts of the Global South as well (Pluchino, 2017) (Chiodelli, 2013). This first phase is often justified by the means of Lefebvre’s right to the city.

“If, after the second world war, the main factor driving most self-building in Italy was an immediate need for housing (Cremaschi, 1990), as the urgency dwindled over the years other forms of illegal building began to take hold. Illegal building was no longer linked to basic needs but instead driven by, for example, the desire for a larger self-contained property within its own garden (a widespread occurrence on the outskirts of Rome; Clementi and Perego, 1983) or a second home at the seaside (Zanfi et al.,2015)” — (Chiodelli, 2018)

The second phase (*abusivismo speculativo*), on the other hand, becomes increasingly more disconnected from primary needs. In this phase, the growing number of unauthorised constructions of homes was a consequence of “an improvement in the economic conditions of” Italian “families”, especially after the period of economic prosperity in the 70s and 80s, as families wished to build with unauthorised methods “to satisfy other types of needs distinct from primary ones, thus tapping into the convenience of illegal markets (Pluchino, 2017) (Chiodelli, 2018).

2.1.4: Understanding How Socio-public Discourse Shapes the Processes of Normalisation

Why has this second phase of *abusivismo* become so widespread? Was it caused by the normalisation by Italian society that has made it become a more tolerable practice? How does Italian society perceive *l'abusivismo edilizio*? Is the practice rationalised or received with positive acceptance? These are important questions that will be answered in the research of this study as they will play an important role in understanding how the practice has become so widespread.

Social discourse plays an important role in shaping the processes of normalisation of an ideology, concept or phenomena. Michał Krzyżanowski's article, *Normalization and the discursive construction of "new" norms and "new" normality: discourse in the paradoxes of populism and neoliberalism* (2020), explores how current "state of the art of contemporary public discourse" is a "process of its gradual," "context-dependent change, which reflects" and "nests the dynamics of introduction and perpetuation, as well as the gradual normalisation, of key radicalised norms of describing the social, political and economic reality" (Krzyżanowski, 2020). According to Krzyżanowski, this process of gradual transformation of public discourse refers to the process of **normalisation**.

"...normalization, i.e. a set of simultaneous or subsequent discursive strategies which gradually introduce and/or perpetuate in public discourse some new – and in most cases often uncivil or untrue – patterns of representing social actors, processes and issues."-- (Krzyżanowski, 2020)

While in the past, it was "customary and codified norms" that regulated socio-public discourse, contemporary (neoliberal) society no longer has "recognisable limits" to what can be said, how it is said and if "it can be said", especially in the "public domain", the media or in politics (Krzyżanowski, 2020). There are various aspects of contemporary social discourse that used to be recognised as "deviant" or "outside widely accepted/recognised norms of public expression" which are now seen as a normal and standard component to public discourse (Krzyżanowski, 2020). Applied to the Italian context, if there are no limits to what socio-public discourse can express, then even formally "criminalised" practices of unauthorised housing construction can be publicly shrugged off as simply 'part of Italian culture' and 'how things work around here'. Then, to go beyond normalisation, public discourse about *abusivismo edilizio* may even **rationalised** by those who want to continue the fostering of the practice. This is why studying socio-public discourse on *abusivismo edilizio* in Italy would help understand why this practice is so widespread within that particular context, and especially whether the rationalisation of the practice plays an important role in making it so extensive.

2.2: Conceptual Framework

2.2.1: Understanding the Differences Between the Concepts of Normalisation, Rationalisation and Justification

There is an important conceptual distinction to make, and that is the distinction between the concept of normalisation, justification and rationalisation. This is because to answer the

research question posed in the previous section, there has to also be an understanding as to if and how Italian informal practices are differently rationalised from the ones justified by Lefebvre's 'right to the city'.

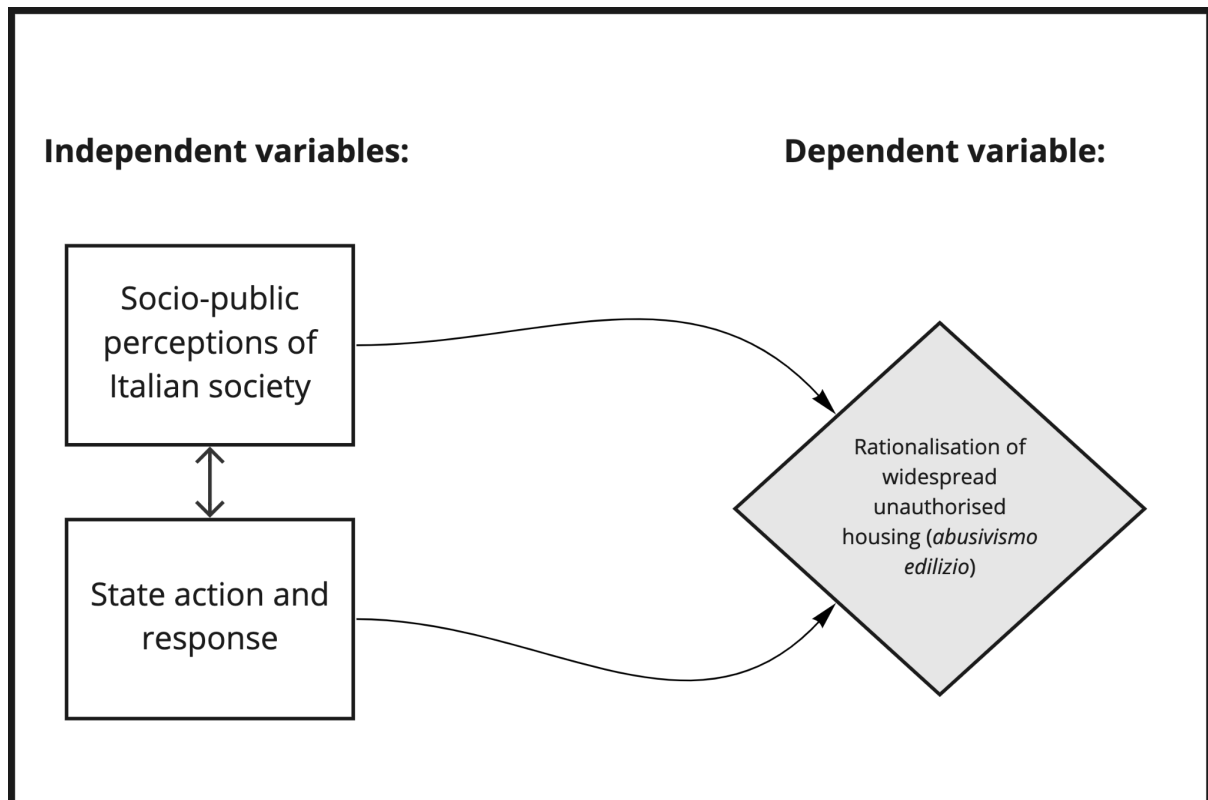
Normalisation, building on its conceptualisation in section 2.1.4, is a process of accepting something as normal, conforming it to the standard. Justification and rationalisation go beyond normalisation, as they attempt to explain the 'why' a process is normalised. Oxford learner's dictionary defines the term justification, as "the action of showing something to be right or reasonable" (Oxford Languages, 2022). This is often seen in informal practices that are seen as justifiable under Lefebvre's 'right to the city'. There is a morally right component to these informal practices (such as the right to shelter).

On the other hand, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines rationalisation as the act of attempting to explain or justify behaviour, or an attitude with logical reasons, even if these are not" deemed as "appropriate." (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Rationalisation thus goes beyond normalisation but differs from justification because it lacks the moral component. This can be seen in the statements made by Schiwwtzgebel (2016) and Jefferson (2020). According to these academics, rationalisation is conceptualised as a "belief-like attitude towards some proposition" (Schwitzgebel, 2016) that **goes beyond explaining "a moral judgement"** (Jefferson, 2020). It is also "a common way" to account for "intended actions" or "past decisions" (Jefferson, 2020).

The second phase of Italian unauthorised housing is less seen in terms of it being a morally "justifiable" practice, thus whether Italian society has come to rationalise the practice as reflected in the contextual socio-public discourse will be a focus of research within this study.

2.2.2: Conceptual Framework Diagram and Research Focus

Figure 1: Conceptual framework diagram



As demonstrated by the diagram above, there are two independent variables to be measured. One is the **state action and response** to urban informality in Italy (*abusivismo edilizio*). The other is the **perceptions** (based on socio-public discourse) of the phenomenon. The perceptions to be measured do not only reflect the phenomenon of *abusivismo* on its own. The analysis also measures how socio-public discourse perceives the State's actions to tackle it. The extensiveness and rationalisation of *abusivismo edilizio* in Italy, therefore, depends on both of the independent variables and how they relate to one another.

Chapter 3: Research Design & Methodology

3.1 Description of the Research Design and Methods

3.1.1 Methodology:

The scope of this research study is to describe the perceptions and attitudes towards unauthorised housing in the context of Italy to understand how the practice has become normalised and rationalised. Therefore, the methodology chosen in order to understand the socio-public discourse on *abusivismo edilizio* in the Italian context is through using empirical discourse analysis.

There are **three** main ‘state actions’ which can be identified as methods that the state has taken to address *abusivismo* in Italy. Each of these actions has created different types of discourse within the Italian media.

1. The three main *condoni edilizi* (*substantial building amnesties*) (law n.47/1985, law n.724/1995, and law n.326/2004).
2. The *permessi di sanatorie*, formal amnesties that grants people to formalise an unauthorised practice, **after** the practice has already been done, **as long as** the practice meets certain requirements for authorisation.
 - a. In the field of housing, these building amnesties are known as *sanatoria edilizia* which grant people to render constructed unauthorised homes into becoming legal, as long as they meet the normal building requirements.
3. Law n. 120/2020 – Simplification Decree to pass executive power to the regional Prefects to enact demolitions of unauthorised homes (for homes that do not officially meet any permit or amnesty requirements) in the case that local municipalities fail to execute/enforce demolition ordinances.

The sampling of the documents needed for analysis is purposive. This is because, to gain a more in-depth and holistic idea of the perceptions and attitudes within socio-public discourse regarding unauthorised housing, a wide variety of documents are to be analysed. The following is a table of the type of documents and from where these documents have been sourced to use for the analysis.

Table 1: Italian Media Agencies and Government Actions

Newspaper/journal agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ANSA, ● Corriere Della Sera, Corriere del Mezzogiorno ● edilTecnico, ilBoLive, ● Il Fatto Quotidiano, ● La Stampa, ● La Repubblica, ● L'ESPRESSO ● LINKIESTA
Broadcasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rai <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>La Vita in Diretta in Estate, Sapiens,</i>) ○ <i>La Repubblica TV (GEDI Visual)</i> ● LA7
Building laws and regulations, proposed bills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Condoni Edilizi (Substantial Building Amnesties of 1983, 1995, and 2004)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law n. 120/2020 regarding simplifications to enact demolitions
Press release (Appeal to Parliament)	Legambiente, (2021, 2018)

Newspaper reports will come from different agencies, some are big and popular agencies such as *ANSA* and *Il Corriere Della Sera*, whilst others are smaller and/or more independent such as *il Fatto Quotidiano* and *ilBoLIVE*. This spectrum was chosen purposely as each newspaper agency may skew more towards one perception than the other, thus looking at a different range may balance the discourse. The same goes for looking at different news reports and broadcasts, especially from more independent opinion writers and presenters. In addition, official reports/press releases by organisations that are concerned with the phenomenon of *abusivismo* such as Legambiente will also be analysed to diversify the typology of media studied.

The building amnesties (*condoni edilizi*) and law n.120/2020 on demolitions have been chosen to be analysed as the state’s response (or lack of response depending on one’s position) to tackle the phenomenon of *abusivismo edilizio*. Each of these laws and decrees have extensively influenced the general discourse regarding *abusivismo edilizio*. Law n.120/2020 has especially sparked the debate as to how mafia-type organisations have been able to exploit a reform on this deregulation declared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The empirical discourse analysis will be done manually, by studying each “sample of written” and “oral” text, media and data individually (Hodges et. Al, 2008). The analysis will be divided into two sections. Part A will look at the perceptions of the phenomenon of *abusivismo* on its own. Part B will take a look at the State Actions used to deal with *abusivismo* in Italy (*condoni, sanatorie and demolitions*), the effects of the State Actions and the perceptions regarding the State Actions. The documents will be analysed by finding recurring themes and patterns within them, to get an understanding of **how** the language regarding *abusivismo edilizio* in the socio-public discourse is being used. As aforementioned, socio-public discourse plays an important role in shaping the processes of normalisation of an ideology, concept or phenomena (as stated in the literature review in relation to Krzyzanowski’s article). Therefore, doing an empirical discourse analysis on the socio-public discourse of *abusivismo edilizio* in Italy would help understand why this practice is so widespread, and whether its normalisation is also reflected through patterns of rationalised perceptions (or not).

Lastly, to gain a better understanding of the concrete numbers regarding unauthorised housing in Italy, the results of the empirical discourse analysis will be studied in accordance with reports and statistics regarding the phenomenon, particularly taken from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), as it is the main statistical collector and analyst of Italy for the country’s population, economic activities, environment and more.

3.2: Operationalization: Variables and Indicators

3.2.1: Operationalisation Table:

Table 2: Operationalisation Table:

Concept	Variables	Indicators	Measurement
Urban informality in italy [unauthorised housing (<i>abusivismo edilizio</i>)]	Attitudes and perceptions demonstrated by the media, citizens and politicians	Recurring patterns and themes of how language is used within the socio-public discourse on <i>abusivismo edilizio</i>	Qualitative empirical discourse analysis
Urban informality in italy [unauthorised housing (<i>abusivismo edilizio</i>)]	State response to unauthorised housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking at the how different laws and decrees have affected the phenomenon (<i>Condoni edilizi</i> of 1983, 1995, 2004, The use of <i>permessi di sanatorie</i> and the ‘Simplification Decree’ of law n. 120/2020) Recurring patterns and themes within the discourse in media as a response to the State’s actions 	Qualitative empirical discourse analysis

3.2.2: Expected challenges and limitations to data

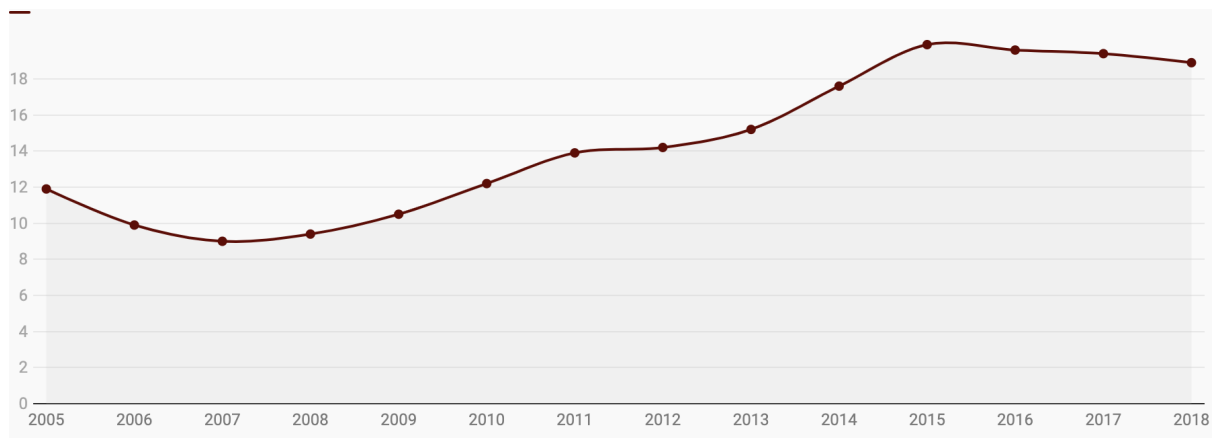
There are a few limitations to this study that must be addressed. Firstly, perceptions regarding *abusivismo edilizio* may shift within the country as be skewed towards different ‘sides’ in different regions. This may be the case, especially between the regions which are more or less affected by the phenomenon (larger or lower percentage of *abusivismo edilizio*). Additionally, while an empirical discourse analysis is a helpful methodology for understanding socio-public discourse regarding the issue of *abusivismo edilizio*, it may still have instances of bias depending on how the media and political party decides to present the information. It may also not give a complete picture of how the public views the issue in ways which surveys or interviews could do. Nevertheless, since media is consumed daily by Italian citizens and still makes up an important cultural resource, thus an empirical discourse analysis will nonetheless reveal some important answers to the research questions of the study.

Chapter 4: Results, Analysis and Discussion

4.1: L’*Abusivismo Edilizio* in Numbers

The presence of *abusivismo* is very widespread in the country of Italy, especially in the regions of the South. In order to further understand just how widespread the phenomenon is and its effects on Italian society, the Italian government made the percentage of unauthorised housing one of the indicators for the Fair and Sustainable Wellness index (known in Italian as the *Benessere Equo e Sostenibile* or *BES*). This initiative is led by the ISTAT (The Italian National Institute of Statistics) and CNEL (The National Council for Economics and Labour) and was launched to measure Italy’s fair and sustainable well-being and its socio-economic progress according to public policies and individual choices (Massariolo, 2020) (Tommaso, 2018). The indicator for *abusivismo* shows a high percentage, especially in the more Southern regions with the regions of Campania, Basilicata, and Calabria scoring the highest (over 50%).

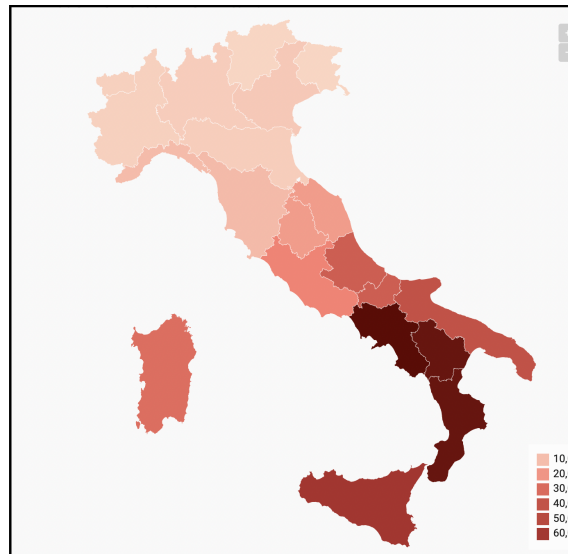
Figure 2: Number of Italian homes classified as unauthorised per 100 homes per year



Source: Antonio Massariolo, ISTAT (2020)

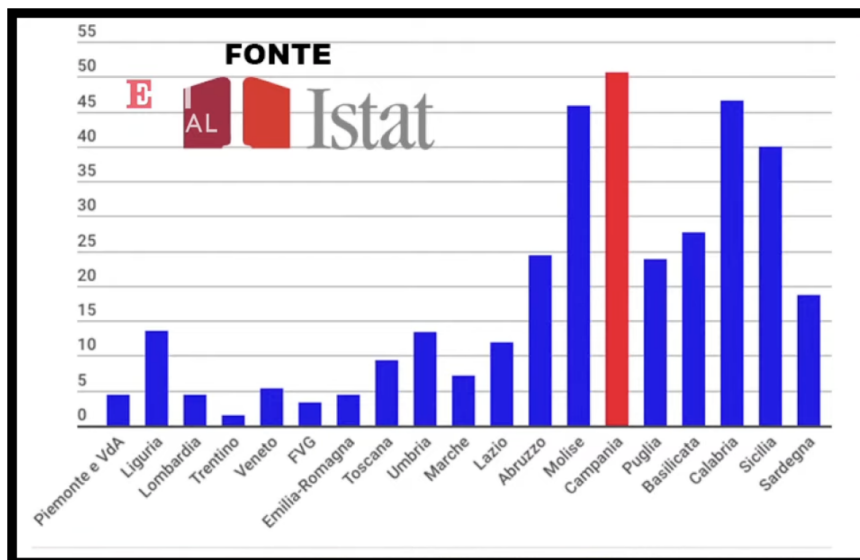
Nationwide, the presence reached a peak in 2015, where for every 100 homes, 18.9 are classified as unauthorised, proportionately to the total number of homes within each region of Italy (Massariolo, 2020). In addition, according to studies by the CRESME (Centre for Sociological and economic research for the housing construction market), approximately 400,000 unauthorised homes have been constructed since the issuance of the last building amnesty in 2004, equating to approximately a growth of 20,000 unauthorised homes per year (Montini, 2021)

Figure 3: Percentage of unauthorised housing in Italy per region (mapped)



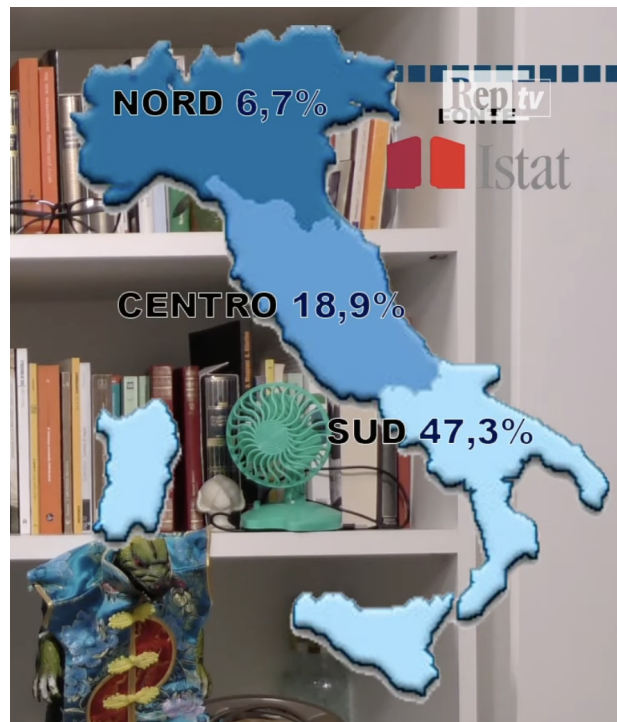
Source: Antonio Massariolo, BES, (2020)

Figure 4: Percentage of unauthorised housing in Italy per region



Source: ISTAT, screenshot taken from La RepubblicaTV's broadcast on August 14, 2019

Figure 5: Percentage of ‘abusivismo edilizio’ in Italy by macroregions



Source: ISTAT, screenshot taken from La RepubblicaTV’s broadcast on August 14, 2019

It is evident that *abusivismo* is more prevalent in the regions of the South. A newspaper article by *Il Fatto Quotidiano* shows that in 2013, the Campania region for instance had about 129 thousand unauthorised homes, growing approximately 6 thousand in numbers each year (Fierro, 2013). In addition, as of 2018, only 3% out of the 16,596 ordinances for demolitions in Campania were issued, equating to only 489 demolished homes.

There are a variety of factors which contribute to the prevalence of *abusivismo* in the South, mainly its interconnection to mafia-type organisations and corruption, which are further analysed in part 4.4.3 of the chapter, looking at the perceptions of *abusivismo* and of State action.

How do these statistics reflect in the discussion on urban informality in Italy?

4.2: Discourse Analysis

PART A: Perceptions of the individual practising ‘abusivismo speculativo’

4.2.1: ‘L’Abusivismo Edilizio’ as a Threat to Environmental Safety and a Detriment to the Italian Landscape

Various technocrats believe that *l’abusivismo edilizio* poses an environmental safety threat in terms of hydrology and seismology. A reportage by docuseries *Sapiens*, broadcasted by the RAI channel in Italy states the extensive *abusivismo* phenomenon poses numerous safety risks regarding landslides and floods, as in Italy, these risks are no longer concerned with rivers, but with increased consumption of soil by cement (Sapiens, 2021) (Mercalli, 2018). This same risk is expressed by climatologist Luca Mercalli during an interview broadcast by the LA7 television channel. He states that there is a “huge problem of overbuilding of which a large portion is unauthorised as

demonstrated by the alarming statistics provided by ISTAT” (Mercalli, 2018). The large area (around 25 thousand km) of “consumed, covered and waterproofed” land creates a “double effect” (Mercalli, 2018). Firstly, it reduces the resources available for both “agriculture” and the “absorption of rainwater during floods, CO2 and other free” ecosystemic services” that are important in the battle against climate change (Mercalli, 2018). Secondly, it increases the risk and vulnerability to floods risking the safety of residents whilst also threatening the local economy (Mercalli, 2018). This type of risk has also been signalled by Vicepresident of WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) Italia in an interview with *EdilTecnico*, Dante Caserta, which states that *abusivismo* not only “squanders the natural and landscape capital of” Italy, but it also amplifies the “hydrological instability” of the soil, putting the safety of citizens at risk” (Sacchetti, 2018). According to Mercalli, it is thus indispensable that the issue of *abusivismo* be tackled as a priority by the State, something that it is essentially “failing to do so”, especially with creating any reforms to the overall “laws” regarding the consumption of territory and soil (Mercalli, 2018).

As for seismic risks, according to a lawyer of the Italian Legislative Office *NOSTRA ONLUS* Emanuele Montini, in an interview with *L’Espresso* magazine, it is alarming how in private housing (including the percentage of unauthorised homes), “all of” safety “controls, including **anti-seismic** ones, have been substituted by self-certifications” authorised by a “trusted professional” of which the private individual hires to do so (Biondani, 2016). There has been a condition of deregulation in public safety controls, of which each region follows separate rules. For instance, in the Lazio region only five percent of constructions are verified by public technicians and (Biondani, 2016),

“«the units to be controlled are randomly drawn» Montini replies with a *desperate* tone. All we needed was the *earthquake lottery*.” – (Biondani, 2016).

Montini’s “desperate tone” highlights how alarming the situation of *abusivismo* is in Italy is perceived by technocrats and by the media.

Another concern expressed in the media is how *abusivismo* aesthetically affects the Italian landscape. The reportage by *Sapiens* demonstrates an unfinished cement pillar belonging to an unfinished home, describing how extensively these have described “the Italian skyline”, and satirically calling them an “*italic non-finito*”³ (Sapiens, 2021). The satirical comparison (visual example below) to a historically Italian sculpting technique demonstrates just how engrained the phenomenon of *abusivismo* is in Italian culture.

³Italic meaning ‘relating to Italy’.

Non-finito, in English means ‘unfinished’ and is used to describe a sculpting technique that leaves a part of the artwork unfinished. It was often used by the Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo.

Figure 6: The ‘italic non-finito’ vs Michelangelo’s ‘non-finito’



Left: Screenshot taken from Sapiens report, showing the unfinished building pillar (Sapiens, 2021)

Right: Historic Italian sculpture Michelangelo and his ‘Young slave’, created using a ‘non-finito’ technique (Unna, 2011)

These unfinished constructions are often negatively described by the media, such as the ones present in Pizzo Sella, Palermo, Sicily, nicknamed “the hill of **dishonour**” by the people of Palermo according to a report broadcasted on the ‘*La Vita in Diretta in Estate*’ show by RAI (RAI, 2018). Pizzo Sella is covered by approximately “a million square-metres of cement”, almost all of which is classified as ‘abusivo’ after being confiscated by the State following a corruption scandal involving a series of ‘illegitimate’ concessions given by the local municipality for the construction of these homes which did not, in practice, follow building regulations (RAI, 2018).

Figure 7: Pizzo Sella, “The Hill of Dishonour”, Palermo, Sicily 2018



Source: Screenshot taken from ‘La Vita in Diretta in Estate’ by RAI (RAI, 2018)

Another article by L'Espresso magazine describes the negative effects of *abusivismo* on the landscape in the following manner,

“The coasts of southern Italy, mainly of Campania, Calabria and Sicily, and the suburbs of large and small cities remain forever disfigured.” – (De Lucia, 2016)

“abusivismo is *“un male* for Italian landscape” – (Montini, 2021)

Where the substantive noun *“un male”* (meaning ‘bad’) in Italian is used to indicate an irreparable **detriment** in behavioural or moral terms.

One of the organisations concerned most with *abusivismo* in Italy is *Legambiente*, an Italian association that deals with environmental concerns, especially regarding ‘Ecomafias’⁴. For example, *Legambiente* president of the Campania region, Mariateresa Imparato, declares in an interview for an ANSA newspaper article, that the region of Campania is “at risk”, as it is “**battered** by unauthorised building, covered with concrete with a consumption of land that increases year after year”. *Legambiente* firmly “denounces” the “phenomenon” of *abusivismo*, declaring in a 2021 appeal to the Italian Parliament, that “every year, aiming for impunity, thousands of illegal properties are built, which **disfigure the landscape** and **fuel a criminal economy.**” (Ciafani, 2021). Further analysis of this press release will be analysed in section 4.4.3, as it is an appeal of law n.120/2020’s ineffectiveness to deal with intentions of simplifying and speeding up demolition interventions.

Figure 8: Abandoned and unfinished unauthorised villa in front of beach



Source: Calabrese, 2018

⁴ Ecomafia: a “neologism coined for the first time by Legambiente, an environmental association. Ecomafia definition refers to all illegal activities of mafia-type criminal organizations that cause damage to the environment” (Il Giornale dell’Ambiente, 2022)

While this negative perception of *abusivismo* as a detriment is prevalent in various media sources, it is also recognised as something that has been so ingrained within Italian society, especially within certain regions. For example, Italian architect and urban planner, Italo Insolera, describes that “*abusivismo* is not only a perverse phenomenon that has conditioned the life of Rome, but it is **a way of being** in Rome”, indicating how normalised and embedded the practice has become in the urban fabric and culture of the Italian capital city (De Lucia, 2016). Another example that identifies the cultural normalisation of the phenomenon is expressed in a satirical broadcast by *GEDI VISUAL Repubblica TV* (2019), hosted by public figure Alessio Giannone (known as Pinuccio). Pinuccio raises alarm of the “scanda of *abusivismo edilizio*” situation of Italy whilst poking fun at it in a satirical manner (Giannone, 2019). Each ‘alarming’ statistic that he presents is followed by a sarcastic response from an invisible co-host. For example, as he speaks in the excerpt below, Pinuccio removes his glasses, and begins to gesticulate (in a typical Italian manner) as a sign of annoyance (see below).

Figure 9: Pinuccio’s perception of the ‘abusivismo situation’ in Italy



Source: Screenshots taken from ‘Pinuccio and the Scandal of Abusivismo Edilizio’ (*GEDI VISUAL Repubblica TV*, 2019)

Excerpt A:

Pinuccio: “The BES (see section 4.1) declares that in 2015, approximately 19.7% of Italian homes are abusive”

Invisible co-host: “*addirittura!?*” (Seriously!?)

Pinuccio: “*eh...!*” (he sighs)

Excerpt B:

Pinuccio: The CRESME (2014) declares that *abusivismo* in the Puglia region makes up 15% of the national total

Invisible co-host: “*Siamo forti!*”

Both excerpts demonstrate a sign of frustration in the extensiveness of the *abusivismo* situation present in Italy. In excerpt two especially, the figurative exclamation “*siamo forti!*” can be translated to “we’re the best!”. This is again, used to make fun of the extensiveness of the issue, especially for *abusivismo* present in Puglia as Pinuccio is native to the region (Giannone, 2019). Overall, the satirical perception of the Italian

state of *abusivismo* indicates how deep-rooted and normalised *abusivismo* is within Italian society.

In summary, addressing the research questions of this study, unauthorised housing is negatively perceived as a detriment to Italian society, but it is important to highlight that this criticism is directed towards the '*abusivismo speculativo*' that has been growing in the 'second phase' of *abusivismo* as described in section 1.2. There has been a "context-dependent change" of the type of unauthorised housing depicted in the media, from '*abusivismo di necessità*' to the '*speculativo*' type, and the discourse regarding *abusivismo* as well has been increasingly directed this type, thus depicting Krzyżanowski's process of **normalisation** (Krzyżanowski, 2020). While the discourse of this section does not attempt to explain **why** the practice has been so normalised it definitely recognises that the phenomenon is widespread within Italian culture.

4.2.2: The Logic Behind 'L'Abusivismo Edilizio' as a Convenience to the Private Individual

This section will explore how socio-public discourse perceives the logic behind *abusivismo edilizio* as one of convenience. For example, there are various sources of media that criticise those who are able to 'get away' (thanks to the government) with such building practices that do not follow regulations to build themselves a 'second home', one that is not out of necessity for shelter. This is for instance, clearly depicted by an article of *Linkiesta* (an online-independent news agency) titled '*Abusivismo, the unspoken truths: unauthorised homes cost half (and they are all second homes)*' (Patti, 2017). The article begins with a bold statement,

*"Let's **not waste time** bringing up the **slowness of the bureaucracy**, the delays in the municipalities in the regulatory plans or the '*abusivismo di necessità*'⁵. There is a little unspoken truth about '*abusivismo*': that constructing a house outside building regulations costs **much much less**. How much? About half, often **less than half** of a regular home"* – (Patti, 2017).

This statement depicts the current logic of *abusivismo* as one of financial convenience, as it costs much less to build in this manner (Patti, 2017). The article also interviews *Legambiente*'s national vicepresident, architect and urbanist Edoardo Zanchini to gain a better understanding of how *abusivismo* is convenient to private individuals who practice it. Both the article and Zanchini also criticise the use of '*abusivismo di necessità*' to rationalise the practice in modern times. While it may have been true, up until the 80s and 90s (as also demonstrated in the criticism of *abusivismo* perceived in section 4.2) this is no longer the driving force of *abusivismo* (Patti, 2017).

⁵ See introduction for definitions of *abusivismo di necessità*

*A third consideration concerns the "unauthorized necessity". According to Zanchini, this phenomenon can be talked about until the 1980s and early 1990s, when there was a "hunger for home", that is, there was more demand for houses than supply. "In cities like Rome and Naples, entire squatter neighborhoods have sprung up, they are the image of bad governance," he comments. In 2017, however, it is incorrect to recall that term. «Today to speak of necessity means to **excuse very different behaviors**. Unauthorised houses in Italy are largely second homes, beautiful or ugly, in more or less pleasant areas, in substantially agricultural areas. – (Patti, 2017)*

This perception demonstrates that informal building practices in Italy are no longer dominated by a logic driven by poverty and necessity, thus reflecting Roy's statement that "informality is not synonymous" with slum-like depictions and "poverty" (Roy, 2015). However the reason of financial convenience is no staggering discovery. The reduction of costs is not uncommon when people recur to informal markets. However, if there is no crucial necessity for building informally (such as for a means to shelter), why do people **prefer** to cut costs by risking to build informally, especially if the State, by law, declares that it will sanction those who do so?

The logic behind this is that there has been an incredible loss of State credibility in tackling *abusivismo* from Italian society. This is demonstrated by perceptions in socio-public discourse of the State actions itself. In addition, as analysed in the next sections of the chapter, these perceptions also explain why the particular actions taken by the State are perceived as convenient, not only for the private individual partaking in *abusivismo edilizio*, but also for the State itself. The next sections will cover in particular how the extensive use of the *condoni* and *sanatorie edilizie* have caused a loss of credibility in the State, also allowing it to avoid political complexities that come with dealing with *abusivismo edilizio*. It will also briefly cover how mafia-type organisations have been able to influence the logic of *abusivismo*, especially in certain regions of the country. Perceptions surrounding the discourse are critical of not only *abusivismo* itself, but of the State's actions as well, showing that the two are not parallel.

PART B: State Actions and Perceptions of State Actions

4.3: The Consequences of the Three 'Condoni Edilizi'. – State Actions

Firstly, as aforementioned, the *condoni edilizi* are special substantial building amnesties passed by the government to grant the authorisation of homes (within certain deadlines) built outside official building norms, especially for those that do not meet requirements for the *permessi di sanatorie* (formal amnesties). The law also determines the applicable terms to authorise the home (Studio Legale Metta, 2021).

The first condono edilizio is law n. 47 of the year 1985, the two others (n.724/1995, and n.326/2004) that follow are merely extensions of the provisions provided in the first one.

The official **objectives** of the *condoni* can be traced from the first of 1983. There were two main objectives, firstly, it intended to provide “additional regulatory instruments” as a means to prevent further cases of *abusivismo* by providing tougher sanctions and penalties for “the most serious cases of *abusivismo*”, an increase in powers conferred to local mayors for the demolition of unauthorised homes, and to nullify any sales of homes which were constructed without authorisation (Pluchino, 2017). The second objective of the law decree was to pardon “the criminal offence” of constructing without authorisation with the payment of a fine that is proportional to the “crime committed” to legalise the unauthorised construction, thus completely pardoning the act of building without authorisation (Pluchino, 2017). Applications for this type of pardoning were to be applied to buildings whose construction did not exceed October 1st, 1983. The concessions and pardoning also obligated the state to provide utilities for the homes constructed within the deadline prescribed by the decree, in order to fully formalise their legal status (Biondani, 2016).

It is interesting to note that the word *condono* stems from the Italian verb ‘*condonare*’, which means ‘to pardon’ or ‘to exempt of one’s obligations, and of which the English equivalent is ‘to condone’. This condoning act is in essence, a type of **deregulation** as the government is removing (for the period defined within the decree) the restrictions which exempted homes built outside formal building regulations from becoming formally authorised. The *condoni edilizi* can thus be seen as an act of pardoning on behalf of the State, to begin dealing with the matter with ‘a clean slate’ as it exempts those who have built before 1983 from certain legal consequences. However, at the same time, it expresses that it will impose tougher sanctions on those who from the deadline onwards (1983), will no longer follow the rules. In short, the state says,

“*we forgive you, but from today on we will be serious!*”. – Pluchino, 2017.

While the intentions defined by the first *condono edilizio* decree seemed promising, in reality, the effects which came afterwards went far off from those official intentions. The main issue lay with a series of long and inefficient parliamentary processes that caused the law to become enacted only on June 30, 1987, four years after the formal amnesty application deadline. The substantial enactment of the deadline for the amnesty application was thus postponed to four years after the initial announcement of the law, creating a grey area characterised as a period of **deregulation** in the laws for building practices, and incentivising opportunities for increased **informalisation**. This increased informalisation can be identified with the “*generalised mobilisation to unauthorised construction*” which sprouted an additional 400,000 units of unauthorised homes (within those four years) (Pluchino, 2017). The delay of the amnesty enactment, in combination with the significant number of new homes to be dealt with, also led people to believe that more amnesties were likely to be enacted in the future. These beliefs became true as two additional *condoni edilizi* were later enacted under the Berlusconi government (1995 and 2004). Lastly, despite the ‘strict’ sanctions that the *condoni* officially aimed to impose, as of 2018, only 19.6% (71,450) demolitions were executed since the enactment of last *condono edilizio* in 2004 (Chioldelli, 2018) (Legambiente, 2018).

Subsequently, all of these effects described above also led to a major **loss in the credibility** of the Italian State's ability to deal with *abusivismo*, a consequence that was also analysed in Francesco Chiodelli's study of *abusivismo* in Italy,

*“One of the consequences of this reiteration of amnesty laws has therefore been an **encouragement of further unauthorised building**: people have built without permits knowing that sooner or later another amnesty would be declared, allowing them to legalise anything built without authorisation (Zoppi, 2000).”* – (Chiodelli, 2018)

As of 2020, there remains a total of 4,263,897 cases of unresolved building amnesty applications since the first *condono edilizio* of 1983 (Massariolo, 2020).

How do the effects of the Italian State's act of issuing *condoni edilizi* relate to the greater discourse on urban informality? The growth of informalisation in the field of housing in Italy after the issuance of the *condoni edilizi* were not the results of an unregulated system as Anyana Roy argues with her conception of informality. It was not a lack of rules and regulations which dictated the process of increased *abusivismo edilizio*. On the other hand, the government tried to impose a system that was characterised by a type of deregulation, and that, along with other flaws which emerged in the governance and the administration of the system, incentivised people even further to construct homes without prior authorisation. This also goes back to the logic of convenience as discussed in section 4.2.2. The lack of credibility in the government's ability to harshly sanction *abusivismo* incentivised people to take the risk of cutting building costs by building informally rather than following the standard regulatory procedures. Thus, the combination of financial convenience and this lack of governmental credibility drove a logic behind the increase in *abusivismo* in Italy.

Furthermore, following Yiftachel's stratification of processes of informality, *abusivismo* is clearly 'blackened' (criminalised) by the general discourse as demonstrated in the examples of section 4.2 (Roy, 2007). However what is depicted by the discourse **differs** from the State's actions in dealing with the phenomenon, which has on the other hand followed a more 'whitening' (legitimising) perception of *abusivismo* in Italy. It can be deduced from this section that the State's response to Italian urban informality is **not** parallel to its perceptions by Italian society. Therefore, to deepen the analysis and understand the **factors** that play a role in shaping the environment that facilitates unauthorised housing construction in Italy, the next sections will analyse the **perceptions** from socio-public discourse specifically towards the State's actions, especially in how it has created a loss of credibility from its people. This logic is demonstrated largely by the perceptions demonstrated in the socio-public discourse which will be more deeply analysed in section 4.4. However, before diving deep into these perceptions there is one more factor that is important to consider when looking at the loss of State credibility, and that is the influence of mafia-type organisations in the spread of *abusivismo edilizio*.

“Therefore, an almost generalized attitude of loosening the regulatory and control pressure on the part of all the organs of the State is adopted, from the contradictory regulations emanating from the central State to the very poor prevention of local administrations, which determine, in fact, the failure of the initial intent of radical change and absolute change of

pace in the matter of unauthorized law that the Galasso law aimed to bring.” – (Pluchino, 2017).

4.3.1: ‘Condono Edilizio’ vs. ‘Sanatoria Edilizia’

The *condoni edilizi* are not to be confused with the issuances of the *sanatorie edilizie*. The *condoni* decrees were issued as an ad-hoc law, unauthorised homes could be formalised even if they did not comply with building standards as long as they were built (formally) within the deadline outlined in the provision. The *sanatorie edilizie* on the other hand, are formal amnesties that grant people to formalise an unauthorised practice, after the practice has already been done, **as long as** the practice meets certain requirements for authorisation. This means that for the *sanatoria* to be granted, the constructed building “*must comply with the planning instruments in force at the time the provision was issued and those in force at the time of its implementation*” (Massariolo, 2020).

However, it can be argued that the use of *sanatorie* as a process of deregulation in building regulations (it removes the restriction of needing to first receive a permit approval), along with a perception of loss in State credibility (more analysis of this in the next section), caused an incentive for people to build much more through informal means. People thus began to follow a different set of informal rules which became a type of social norm (Banks, Lombard & Mitlin, 2019). This would be that it became more convenient to build without permits as the issue of ‘legitimising’ came later, whether through a *sanatoria* (if applicable) or a new future *condono* (which would exempt them from any criminal punishment as long as they paid a fine). In addition, the State has failed to properly sanction those who have not followed building regulations to a great extent as the statistics in section 4.1 demonstrates how widespread the issue of *abusivismo* continues to be.

4.4: The Perceptions of the Italian State’s Actions - A Loss in the State’s Credibility

4.4.1: Loss of State Credibility due to State’s extensive use of the ‘Condoni Edilizi’ and ‘Permessi di Sanatorie’

As aforementioned in the section above, the effects of the State’s use of *condoni* and *sanatorie* has created a loss of credibility in the State by the Italian people. This perception is also demonstrated by the criticism presented by the socio-public discourse analysed in this section. For example, the uses of the *condoni* and *sanatorie* are often described as a ‘*colpo di spugna*’ (swipe of a sponge), a figurative form of Italian speech used to describe the “washing away” (removal) of responsibilities, the taking away accountability of certain actions, and the act of forgiving one’s offences. This perception is, for instance, demonstrated in an article by a local independent news company of the University of Padova, *IlBO Live*, which criticises the use of the *condoni* as a “*colpo di spugna*” because while the State promised to deal with the matter, it did so in an extremely inefficient manner, which only led to more *condoni* as a way to quick-fix the issue in the future (Massariolo, 2020). The aforementioned

high number of unanswered applications since the first 1983 *condono* remains, which shows that the decree was essentially useless in doing what it intended to do, producing contradictory effects instead (Massariolo, 2020). The title of the newspaper article itself is, “*Abusivismo* in Italy: una *zavorra* per for the future of the country” (Massariolo, 2020), where the Italian word *zavorra*, is another figurative word used to describe something that is extensively (in quantity) **useless** and **worthless**. The article depicts *abusivismo edilizio* as a concern that is not being “prioritised” by the state (Massariolo, 2020).

“The amnesties have already been made and the results are there for all to see. – (Massariolo, 2020)

Interestingly, the media criticises the action of the Italian government’s issuance of countless amnesties as going even beyond the scope of housing. An article by L’Espresso magazine written by Paolo Biondani is satirically titled “*L’Italia è una Repubblica fondata sul condono*”, which in English translates to “Italy is a Democratic Republic founded on **amnesties**” (Biondani, 2016). This title is used as a play on words for Art.1 of the Italian Constitution replacing the word for “labour⁶” with “amnesties” (Biondani, 2016).

The article criticises the extensive use of amnesties in Italian Governance as a band-aid solution to countless aggravating and complex problems in various fields, not just in housing. With relation to housing, however, it paints a rather condemning picture of *abusivismo* and how the Italian state deals with it. It blames the Italian State for not properly sanctioning those who fail to comply with rules and regulations, even if formally, the State ‘threatens’ to do so. It sees those who do not comply with rules and regulations as “sly” outlaws because of their awareness of the State’s incapacity to sanction them when it should formally be doing so (Biondani, 2016). This perception is demonstrated in the following paragraph,

*“in Italy, **impunity** wins. Those who violate the law risk little or nothing. So there always comes a next little legend that forgives the **dishonest**. In all countries, even the most civilized, there are cases of illegal building, illegal work ... but in Italy illegality moves enormous figures and is part of the country system. While **the State** threatens very severe sanctions, on paper, but **then always sides on the side of the sly ones.**” –* (Biondani, 2016)

In addition, the article again describes the decrees using the figurative form of speech, “*a colpo di spugna*” (Biondani, 2016). It attacks the use of decrees as a method of condoning those who fail to respect rules and regulations in the country. It also blames the usage of amnesties of playing an role in rationalising the presence of “mass illegality” (in different fields) in Italy (Biondani, 2016).

*“A **colpo di spugna**”... issued approximately.. “every two years, that legalises millions of outlawed buildings: houses and buildings built, by definition, without*

⁶ Article 1.1 of the Italian Constitution: “Italy is a democratic Republic founded on labour”

respecting any rules... Amnesties are the other side of mass illegality” – (Biondani, 2016)

These perceptions and figurative use of speech to describe the *condoni* criticise the State, and show how the socio-public discourse also perceives the loss of credibility in State actions. Again, the extensive use of the *condoni* have only been a method for the state to quick-fix the issue, to incentivise and “reward” those who build ‘*abusivamente*’. The pattern in the use of the figurative term a ‘*colpo di spugna*’ to describe a band-aid solution to the core issue, also demonstrates how the use of the issuance of **multiple** *condoni* has been a more convenient action **for the state** to pursue and deal with the mass number of unauthorised housing cases that had emerged.

4.4.2: Criticism of Politicians who Support the ‘Condoni’ and ‘Sanatorie’

An article by *L'Espresso* magazine criticises the State and the politicians who support the use of the *condoni* and *sanatorie*. The author of the article describes the “*condoni*” as a an “**insult**” and “**wound that forever devastates** the (Italian) territory” of “which **politicians** have **always favoured** and defended” (De Lucia, 2016). Another article by *il Fatto Quotidiano* (2013) criticises the politicians of the PDL party (*Popolo della Libertà*, The People of Freedom) (led by Silvio Berlusconi at the time) that have proposed possible reforms to make the *sanatorie edilizie* less rigid as a political tactic to gather votes for the 2013 general Italian Elections, especially in the regions where *abusivismo* is most prominent, such as in the ‘*Mezzogiorno*’ (The Southern macroregion of Italy) as demonstrated by the statistics in section 4.1. Using the *condoni* as a political tactic in the Southern regions is also again criticised in Biondani’s article for *L'Espresso* magazine.

“Today Campania leads the platoon of regions that are planning a new building amnesty: the governor of the Democratic Party Vincenzo De Luca promised an amnesty of "about 70,000 unauthorised lodgings" during the election campaign, arguing against "idiotic environmentalism". Forza Italia openly supports him, speaking of "abusivismo di necessità". Senator Carlo Sarro estimates "270 thousand constructions" outlawed in Campania alone and quantifies those "already affected by final demolition sentences" at 67 thousand. After the 2004 amnesty, the favors for the smart people of the brick changed their name: now they are called simplifications.” – (Biondani, 2016)

Biondani criticises De Luca’s statement that the perceptions concerned with the environmental safety risks that *abusivismo* may cause (as stated in section 4.2.1) are mere examples of “idiotic environmentalism” (Biondani, 2016). Both De Luca and Berlusconi (Former leader of PDL, current leader of Forza Italia) (along with members of their parties) have been perceived as power-hungry politicians that strategically support the use of *condoni* in regions where *abusivismo* is most prevalent as a tactic to gain political votes, rationalising these cases as ‘*abusivismo di necessità*’.

However, the reality of the logic behind *abusivismo* in the Southern regions is more nuanced, even more than the perceptions of financial convenience or a loss of state credibility as analysed in previous sections. Media outlets are often critical of the Southern regions' (especially Campania) municipal support in condoning unauthorised building practices because they attribute it as **an indirect support** that finances and increases the **influence of mafia-type organisations** within those regions. This will be further explored in the next section of the chapter.

4.4.3: Demolitions and The Darker Shades of 'Abusivismo' in the Southern Regions of Italy – The Influence of Mafia-type Organisations

According to a report published by Legambiente Campania, in the region alone, only “3% of demolitions” of the signalled “16.596 ordinances” of unauthorised homes have been carried out”, while on the other hand there has been a “boom of amnesty requests” (Legambiente Campania, 2018). Not only does the State refrain from demolishing, but the signalled homes have not been “acquired as public assets as the law declares” either (Legambiente Campania, 2018). Only “2%” have been meaning that the owners of these homes are able to “enjoy” them “without any title and without burdens, in the most total indifference” (Legambiente Campania, 2018).

“A consolidated practice” of non-enforcement of laws “unfortunately, which however clashes with the application of the law.” – (Legambiente Campania, 2018).

This is not the only time Legambiente has criticised State actions regarding *abusivismo* demolitions. In 2021, the organisation issued an appeal to the Italian Parliament as aforementioned in section 4.2.1. Within this appeal, National President of Legambiente Stefano Ciafani denounces an interpretative action by Minister of Internal Affairs, Luciana Lamorgese, that “eliminates the effectiveness of the Simplification Decree inserted in law n.120/2020 (Geremicca, 2021). This decree assigns substitute power to the Prefects to execute demolitions for unauthorised building abuses, in the cases of “inertia” when local Municipalities “issue the demolition ordinances but do not execute them” (Ciafani, 2021).

“Only 19.6% of the demolition orders issued by municipalities” across Italy “according to a survey carried out by Legambiente, were carried out. We ask all the political forces present in Parliament that have promoted and approved the law against unpunished ‘abusivismo’ to take action to restore the meaning of a law approved as soon as possible to erase decades of guilty delays and reaffirm the central role of the state in the affirmation of legality ”. ” – (Ciafani, 2021).

The excerpt above shows how Legambiente is demanding the Italian State to reaffirm the law decree n. 120/2020. The Simplification Decree is very important, because it is an instrument that allows the State to fight the regions' conditions of **weak legality** that mafia-type organisations are able to exploit to indirectly influence conditions of *abusivismo* as expresses by professor La Spina and De Leo in section 2.2.1.

Conditions of **weak legality** favour “the spread of unauthorised constructions, corruption, and lack of administrative controls” (De Leo, 2015). Local municipalities with the interpretive act would supposedly be able to apply a “strategic non-enforcement of laws” which would only encourage further unauthorised building practices (Banks, Lombard & Mitlin, 2019).

The interpretative act issued for the decree by the Ministry of Internal affairs is a deregulatory measure which can risk dysregulations in the application of norms, which crime organisations are able to exploit (Cremaschi, Lieto, 2020). Mafia-type organisations have been able to proliferate in the business of *abusivismo edilizio* in the South because of their extensive power and influence in the cement industry (De Leo, 2015) (Geremicca, 2021).

“*Abusivismo edilizio in our region rhymes with Gomorrah*”⁷ – (Legambiente Campania, 2018).

According to the Legambiente Campania 2018 report, the organisation conducted an investigation into Ecomafia cases relating to *abusivismo* and concluded that approximately 111 local municipal governments in the region since 1991 have been dissolved for Mafia infiltrations. Also, around 80% of reported *abusivismo* cases from these dissolved municipalities were connected to the illegal, Mafia-run circle of the cement business, speculation of unauthorised homes and non-execution of demolition practices (Geremicca, 2021). As De Leo also stated in her study *Mafia & Urbanistica* (2015) (see section 2.2.1), the mafia has been able to directly influence *abusivismo* practices within these regions as a financial provider of informal building services such as manpower for quarries, the production of cement and even the speculation of real estate subdivisions with “rigged contracts” (Geremicca, 2021) (De Leo, 2015). Through the services, the Mafia has been able to provide more convenient markets for the private individual, albeit illicit (Chiodelli, 2018).

⁷ Gomorrah: An Italian nonfiction novel written by Roberto Saviano which discusses Saviano’s personal experiences infiltrating the powerful Neapolitan mafia-type criminal organisation ‘*la Camorra*’.

Figure 10: Bulldozing an unauthorised construction in Torre di Gaffe, Licata, Sicily



Source: BlogSicilia, 2016

But why are some political parties and politicians promoting more reforms, *condoni edilizi* and *sanatorie* for electoral support from the citizens within these regions? It can be sensibly deduced that people would most certainly be unhappy if the State was to come and bulldoze their units. This thus poses a complex and rather wicked issue to parties running for governmental elections regarding the question, to condone or to demolish?

It is again, not uncommon for parties to promote the “stop of demolitions” to units classified as *abusivismo di necessità* during election campaigns (Geremicca, 2021). However, in the fewcases that these unauthorised homes are in fact a necessity to people, State nevertheless also fails to properly distinguish homes constructed for financial convenience out of actual necessity or mere luxury (Geremicca, 2021) (Chiodelli, 2018).

Additionally, not every resident of Campania is in favour of *abusivismo* practices. This is demonstrated for instance, in a reportage by Peppe Pace of Fanpage interviewing citizens of Terzigno, one of the many municipalities in the Metropolitan city of Naples (Campania) affected by *abusivismo* and Mafia (Pace, 2019).

Man, local resident, approximately in his 60s: “*We have an ‘obbrobrio’ (adjective directed at works that are aesthetically disgraceful) here in the middle of the street, here, this building here, but what is it for? – (indicating at an unfinished construction classified as ‘abusivo’). Along this house there are two, three buildings to prevent so, what are they for? Empty, ugly, unsafe, don’t we throw them on the ground?*” – (Pace, 2019).

A lack of demolitions and authority over the sanctioning of unauthorised practices only increases a lack of State credibility, as analysed in previous sections. People do not believe in the laws because, the State fails to execute them accordingly, and while demolitions are unpopular amongst regions with high cases of *abusivismo*, they are nonetheless considered to be “the best deterrent to avert the emergence of new unauthorised building constructions” (Ciafani, 2021).

“The (120/2020) law was approved precisely to address the knot of the old ‘abusivismo’ that has resisted the bulldozers for decades, with a thousand motivations from many mayors, from the lack of resources to the risk of losing electoral approval. For this, we launch an appeal to Minister Lamorgese to revise the interpretative action of her ministry.” – (Ciafani, 2021).

Chapter 5: Conclusions

In conclusion, the results presented from this study have demonstrated how definitions of informality are in reality more nuanced, and that most especially, they are not necessarily related to the biased ‘slum-like’ and poverty-ridden descriptions that Anyana Roy argues against. The discourse analysis has identified and analysed a variety of texts depicting both State actions and perceptions of *abusivismo* in the socio-public discourse.

With reference to the main research question,

How is the discourse behind unauthorised housing perceived and rationalised in Italy, and how does it contribute to the overall debate on urban informality?

The analysis identified in sections 4.1 and 4.2 demonstrated that *abusivismo* is negatively depicted by the discourse studied. Aside from aesthetic concerns, it is most critical of the environmental safety risks that such buildings pose when built without adhering to certain regulations, especially risks regarding hydrology and seismology connected to the increased consumption of soil by cement. It is important to note that these critiques are mostly directed toward a belief that unauthorised housing is **no longer** justifiable under the notion of ‘*abusivismo di necessità*’, a logic justifying informality that stems from a place of needs when the government fails to provide essential resources, or by general inaccessibility to such resources due to a person’s socioeconomic status. These perceptions toward the individual resorting to informal building practices criticising the rationalisation of financial convenience to fulfil more material and luxurious desires such as a second home, a beachside or a beach-view villa.

However, criticism of *abusivismo* is not only directed toward the individual realising informal building practices without prior authorisations. Sections 4.3 and 4.4 of the discourse analysis demonstrate both how the effects of the identified State actions (the *condoni*, *sanatorie* and *demolition* decrees) have affected the normalisation of *abusivismo*, and how these actions have influenced the socio-public discourse of *abusivismo* itself. The results of this analysis demonstrate that, similar to Roy’s conceptualisation of urban informality, the logic behind

abusivismo in Italy is not driven by a state of unregulation (Roy, 2007). On the other hand, a condition of deregulation in the Italian building regulations (with the *condoni* and *sanatorie*) propelled a major loss in the credibility of the Italian State in its ability to sanction people who built without following those regulations. People consequently no longer believed in the law and preferred to cut costs and risk building informally even if the State declared that it would harshly sanction those who do so.

With reference to the two research sub-questions,

1. *What are the factors that play a role in shaping the environment that facilitates unauthorised housing construction in Italy?*
2. *Is the State response to Italian urban informality parallel to its perceptions by Italian society? Does the response show a cyclical pattern?*

The results of the analysis have demonstrated that an important factor that shaped the environment that facilitates unauthorised housing construction in Italy was how the State's extensive use of *condoni* and *sanatorie edilizie* was a means of convenience to 'washing away' (remove) responsibilities and accountability for the massive growth in unauthorised building practices that began during the economic boom of the 1980s. This was expressed through a pattern of figurative discourse present in multiple sources that described the use of *condoni* and *sanatorie* as a 'colpo di spugna' (swipe of a sponge) as explained in section 4.4.1. The failure of the *condoni* was propelled from the first one in 1983 because of firstly, the three year delay of its enactment, which incentivised people to exploit the 'grey' area of the decree that surfaced to build in a financially convenient manner 400,000 more units of unauthorised homes (between 1983 and 1987). Secondly, there was a failure in the administrative procedures during the period of announcement and enactment of the first amnesty to properly check whether the applications were respecting the regulations defined by the decree. After the enactment of the first *condono*, it became unrealistic for the State and municipalities to deal with the 400,000 increase in amnesty applications, leading people to believe that more amnesties were likely to be enacted in the future. This was the case when the Berlusconi government decided to extend the *condoni* further in 1995 and 2004.

This **cyclical pattern** of 'washing away' responsibilities in combination with the poor governance that Italian administrations had exercised powered the perpetual perception of a lack in the Italian State's credibility in its methods of dealing with *abusivismo edilizio*. **The rationalisation and logic behind *abusivismo*, therefore, is that it is more convenient for the individual to take the risk of cutting financial costs by building informally because it lacks the credibility that the State will inherently do something to sanction it.**

Have State actions and perceptions in the socio-public discourse been parallel? The answer is no. This can be deduced using Yiftachel's *stratification process of informality* (Roy, 2007) (De Leo, 2015). While the perceptions in the socio-public discourse perceive *abusivismo* in a 'blackening' (criminalising) manner, the State actions through the issuance of the *condoni*, *sanatorie* and non-enforcement of demolitions have been more 'whitening' (legitimising) (Roy, 2007) (De Leo, 2015).

Another factor that contributed to the environment that facilitates unauthorised housing construction in Italy is the influence of mafia-type organisations most prevalent in the Italian ‘*Mezzogiorno*’ (Southern macroregion). As demonstrated by investigations of the Legambiente organisation, 111 municipal governments in the Campania region alone have been dissolved due to corruption from Mafia infiltrations. Further deregulations in building norms, such as the interpretative act declared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the Simplification decree n.120/2020 has allowed local administrative governments in mafia-influenced territories to apply a “strategic non-enforcement” of laws under the false logic of “*abusivismo di necessità*” (Banks, Lombard & Mitlin, 2019). Furthermore, due to the perception of poor credibility in local administrations and public institutions as previously discussed, has also allowed Italian mafia-type organisations with its large influence on the cement industry to provide more convenient (albeit illicit) services to promote the construction of unauthorised building practices (La Spina, 2005) (De Leo, 2015)(Chiodelli, 2018).

Abusivismo Edilizio is a complex issue that is deep-rooted in Italian culture. The complexities that arise in the way local administrations govern and the influence of Mafia-type organisations dates all the way back, even prior to the Republic’s unification in 1861. The issue is also not being seen as a priority by the current governments, despite alarming declarations presented by the socio-public discourse studied in the analysis.

However, the phenomenon of informal building practices in Italy offers an interesting case to study, as the vast extensiveness of the issue and the logic that continues to drive it completely debunks the myth that informality is only present in poor, conflict-ridden developing global Southern countries. As the study has demonstrated, the majority of modern *abusivismo* cases in Italy are neither shown to be nor perceived as slum-like villages that lack sanitation and public services, a myth that is often perceived when thinking of urban informality.

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