

smmp

SOCIETÀ MUTAMENTO POLITICA
RIVISTA ITALIANA DI SOCIOLOGIA

Precarious dwelling. Everyday
practices, caring relations,
and meaning-making
processes

VOL. 17, N° 33 • 2026
ISSN 2038-3150


FIRENZE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

SOCIETÀ MUTAMENTO POLITICA
RIVISTA ITALIANA DI SOCIOLOGIA

**Precarious dwelling.
Everyday practices, caring relations,
and meaning-making processes**



DIRETTORE

Lorenzo Viviani (Università di Pisa)

REDAZIONE

Lorenzo Grifone Baglioni (Università di Firenze)

Pierluca Birindelli (University of Helsinki)

Silvia Cervia (Università di Pisa)

Carlo Colloca (Università di Catania)

Marco Damiani (Università di Perugia)

Simona Gozzo (Università di Catania)

Aurora Maria Lai (Università di Pisa)

Stella Milani (Università di Firenze)

Maria Alessandra Molè (Università Roma Tre)

Andrea Pirni (Università di Genova)

Ilaria Pitti (Università di Bologna)

Stefano Poli (Università di Genova)

Luca Raffini (Università di Genova)

Andrea Valzania (Università di Siena)

COMITATO SCIENTIFICO

Antonio Alaminos, Universidad de Alicante

Luigi Bonanate, Università di Torino

Marco Bontempi, Università di Firenze

Fermín Bouza, Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Enzo Campelli, Università di Roma "La Sapienza"

Enrico Caniglia, Università di Perugia

Luciano Cavalli, Università di Firenze

Vincenzo Cicchelli, Università di Parigi "La Sorbona"

Antonio Costabile, Università della Calabria

Vittorio Cotesta, Università di Roma III

Gerard Delanty, University of Sussex

Antonio de Lillo †, Università di Milano-Bicocca

Klaus Eder, Humboldt Universität, Berlin

Livia Garcia Faroldi, Universidad de Malaga

Roland Inglehart, University of Michigan

Laura Leonardi, Università di Firenze

Mauro Magatti, Università Cattolica di Milano

Stefano Monti Bragadin, Università di Genova

Luigi Muzzetto, Università di Pisa

Massimo Pendenza, Università di Salerno

Ettore Recchi, Sciences Po, Paris

M'hammed Sabour, University of Eastern Finland, Finlandia

Jorge Arzate Salgado, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, Messico

Ambrogio Santambrogio, Università di Perugia

Riccardo Scartezzini, Università di Trento

Roberto Segatori, Università di Perugia

Sandro Segre, Università di Genova

Sylvie Strudel, Université Panthéon-Assas Paris-II

José Félix Tezanos, Universidad Uned Madrid

Anna Triandafyllidou, European University Institute,

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

Paolo Turi, Università di Firenze

Claudius Wagemann, Goethe University, Frankfurt



© 2026 Author(s)

Content license: except where otherwise noted, the present work is released under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>). This license allows you to share any part of the work by any means and format, modify it for any purpose, including commercial, as long as appropriate credit is given to the author, any changes made to the work are indicated and a URL link is provided to the license.

Metadata license: all the metadata are released under the Public Domain Dedication license (CC0 1.0 Universal: <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/legalcode>).

Published by Firenze University Press

Firenze University Press

Università degli Studi di Firenze

via Cittadella, 7, 50144 Firenze, Italy

www.fupress.com

Precarious dwelling. Everyday practices, caring relations, and meaning-making processes

Anna Maria Paola Toti, Maria Alessandra Molè (Eds.)

Indice

- | | | | |
|----|--|-----|---|
| 5 | Introduction
<i>Anna Maria Paola Toti, Maria Alessandra Molè</i> | 117 | Populist Attitudes, Ideology, and Climate Change Beliefs: A Comparative Analysis of Six European Countries*
<i>Moreno Mancosu, Cecilia Biancalana, Riccardo Ladini, Arturo Bertero</i> |
| 13 | Misery of Position and the Crisis of Possibility. New Forms of Poverty in Contemporary Democracies
<i>Anna Maria Paola Toti</i> | 131 | An Obstacle to the Sustainability Transformation? How Conspiracy Beliefs Shape Climate (In)action
<i>Kevin Winter</i> |
| 23 | Dwelling as a Wicked Problem: Housing, Inequality and Precarious Life Trajectories
<i>Maria Alessandra Molè</i> | 145 | «I Don't Need Climate Change to Be an Ecologist». Far-right Ecological Activism, or When Climate (Almost) Doesn't Matter
<i>Lise Benoist</i> |
| 35 | From Ferrarotti's <i>baraccati</i> to Roma camps. The long wave of housing marginality
<i>Vincenzo Romania, Tommaso Bertazzo</i> | 157 | Victims of the Green Transition: Harm Narratives in AfD's Climate Skepticism*
<i>Till Hilmar</i> |
| 47 | Collaborative Housing Strategies: The Case of "Widespread Reception" by Caritas Diocesana in Rome
<i>Carmelo Bruni, Matteo Finco</i> | 169 | Far-right Climate Skepticism Across Europe: The Transnationalization of Narratives?*
<i>Manuela Caiani, Nicolò Pennucci</i> |
| 59 | Dwelling Among the Ruins
<i>Paolo Do</i> | 183 | Ecofascism's Dual Legacy: Local Revolts and Imperial Dreams in Italy
<i>Nicola Guerra</i> |
| 71 | The Right to a Home: Housing Strategies and Social Inclusion of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors and Youth Foreigners
<i>Giuseppina Tumminelli</i> | 201 | Drill, Baby, Drill. How Misogynist and Far-right Narratives Are Connected to Issues of Environmentalism*
<i>Linda Coufal</i> |
| 81 | «Two Heads Are Better Than One but They Must Be Good Ones»: Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Social Work With «people Living on the Street»
<i>Andrea Gollini</i> | | |
| 95 | Legal Aid at the Margins: realizing Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness in Italy
<i>Maria Chiara Pedroni</i> | | |

Special Issue

Climate Change and Far-Right Politics: Between Adoption and Adaptation
Manuela Caiani, Nicolò Pennucci

- 107 Climate Change and Far-Right Politics: Between Adoption and Adaptation
Manuela Caiani, Nicolò Pennucci

Passim

- 215 Ageism in Healthcare and Social Care Settings in Europe: A Scoping Review
Stefano Poli, Paola Giannoni, Giada Moretti¹
- 227 L'artificazione nelle mode. Una lettura sociologica
Lorenzo G. Baglioni
- 235 Appendice bio-bibliografica su autori e autrici

* Supplementary methodological appendix available in the online version only.



Citation: Toti, A. M. P. & Molè, M. A. (2026). Introduction. *Società Mutamento-Politica* 17(33): 5-12. doi: 10.36253/smp-17643

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Introduction¹

ANNA MARIA PAOLA TOTI^{1*}, MARIA ALESSANDRA MOLE²

¹ Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

² Roma Tre University Italy

E-mail: ampaola.toti@uniroma1.it; mariaalessandra.mole@uniroma3.it

*Corresponding author

1. PROLEGOMENA FOR A SOCIOLOGY OF PRECARIOUS DWELLING. EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSTURE AND EMPIRICAL CONSTELLATIONS

The monographic issue, entitled *Precarious Dwelling. Everyday Practices, Caring Relations, and Meaning-Making Processes*, constitutes the outcome and the deepening of an articulated international research path launched within the framework of the Grande Progetto di Ateneo (Major University Project) of Sapienza University of Rome². This investigation was specifically oriented toward the theoretical problematization and empirical observation of contemporary morphologies of housing marginality, with the aim of analyzing the intrinsic co-implication between the configurations of urban space, trajectories of poverty, and the dynamics of subjectivation processes.

The theme of precarious dwelling has been investigated through three fundamental analytical nodes: housing and the connected demand for a home, socio-settlement morphologies, and the qualitative and symbolic dimension of dwelling. The various essays making up this volume offer a critical reading of these transformations within the context of contemporary cities, which are dramatically marked by processes of social polarization, the financialization of the real estate market, and the neoliberal redefinition of urban policies. In this perspective, housing precarity is not interpreted exclusively as a condition of material deprivation linked to the possession of or access to adequate housing. On the contrary, it configures itself as a multidimensional and processual phenomenon that simultaneously invests the economic, relational, symbolic, and affective spheres of existence.

¹ The introduction is to be specifically attributed as follows: paragraph 1 is the work of Anna Maria Paola Toti, the 2nd paragraph is to be ascribed to Maria Alessandra Molè.

² Specific reference is made to the research project *Theorizing Urban Space through Crossing Bodies: Homelessness in Rome (in Comparison with São Paulo)*, funded by Sapienza University of Rome under the “Grandi Progetti di Ateneo” (Major University Projects) 2023 grant scheme, and coordinated by Anna Maria Paola Toti as Principal Investigator. For an initial systematization of the research results, focused on the intersection between spatial stigma and vulnerability, see: P. Do, L. G. Fassari, G. Pompili, A. M. P. Toti, *Crossing Stigmatizing Spaces of Homelessness and Mental Distress*. in *Sicurezza e Scienze Sociali*, XII(3), 2024, pp. 43–59.

The focus of the research centers on the intersections between social inequality, structural urban violence, everyday relations, and spatial marginality. In doing so, the volume carefully avoids a purely victimizing reading of marginality, instead valorizing the dimensions of agency – the capacity for action – and the subjectivation pathways of social actors. The objective is to understand how subjects in conditions of vulnerability negotiate their daily presence in the city, build formal and informal support networks, and develop strategies of adaptation, resistance, and reappropriation. Urban space, indeed, does not constitute a mere neutral background for social action, but rather a conflictual, asymmetrical field of continuous negotiation where different forms of power, devices of visibility/invisibility, recognition, and stigma confront one another. The spatial configurations of the city reflect and, at the same time, contribute to reproducing social hierarchies and regimes of accessibility.

As a consequence, precarious dwelling becomes a privileged lens through which to observe not only the devices of exclusion and subjection, but also the practices of infra-political resistance and the forms of mutual care that emerge at the margins. The theoretical goal is to understand how intersectional inequalities, situated biographies, and “struggles for subjectivity” (McDonald 1999) contribute not only to inscribing themselves within urban space, but also to actively producing it, continuously redefining its boundaries, uses, and meanings. In this framework, the city is understood as a dynamic field of forces in which Foucaultian-style devices of surveillance and spatial regulation co-determine – and are in turn challenged by – the daily forms of resistance and tactics of reappropriation theorized by De Certeau (1980). In this light, precarious dwellings cease to be mere zones of social erasure and are reconfigured as heterotopias of resistance-spaces where the marginalized paradoxically leverage their exclusion to enact alternative modes of urban cohabitation. By analyzing these dynamics, the volume unpacks how the subaltern body operates simultaneously as the target of biopolitical containment and as the primary site of an insurgent spatial reclamation, thereby transforming survival into a collective political statement.

The volume places itself within a broad interdisciplinary debate spanning urban sociology, critical geography, poverty studies, and housing research, proposing a reflection on contemporary transformations in the relationships between space, power, and subjectivity. The text intends to map and problematize these mutations, deconstructing the links of interdependence that bind spatial and material dimensions to macro-political logics and to the symbolic structures of urban experience

(Soja, 1996; Harvey, 2006). Adopting an innovative epistemological posture, the research brings macro-political economy into dialogue with the micro-sociology of practices, taking care relations, everyday life, and meaning-making processes as dense observatories (thick descriptions). This integrated approach allows for overcoming the sterile dichotomy that has long divided sociological research on housing between the grand macro-analyses of political economy and radical micro-sociological and ethnographic drifts. It thus demonstrates how the macro-dynamics of global financialization and urban extractivism translate directly into the bodies and rooms of inhabitants, and how the latter’s daily responses are not mere passivity, but forms of insurgent citizenship capable of counter-acting upon structures.

To empirically anchor this theoretical framework, the volume articulates a constellation of situated case studies. The different investigation contexts gathered here do not operate as simple local illustrations of global dynamics; on the contrary, they bring to light significant analytical convergences and morphological constants in the interaction between collective action, biographical lived experience, and institutional responses, revealing the intrinsically biocapitalist nature of the contemporary city, where life itself is put to value and, simultaneously, resists. And it is precisely within this analytical perimeter that the opening essay of the issue is situated, entitled *Misery of Position and the Crisis of Possibility. New Forms of Poverty in Contemporary Democracies*. This contribution provides the theoretical-critical framework of the volume, proposing a radical reconceptualization of social vulnerability by applying Bourdieu’s (1993) categories of “misery of position” and “crisis of possibility”.

These concepts make it possible to highlight how contemporary inequalities are expressed not only through the unequal distribution of economic resources, but also through processes of progressive erosion of opportunities for social participation, access to rights, and the construction of meaningful biographical projects. The notion of “misery of position” describes a form of relational social suffering experienced by individuals who, while not living in conditions of extreme poverty, suffer the frustrations and tensions deriving from their asymmetrical or marginal placement within specific social contexts and fields. It is a distress generated by the mismatch between the subjective habitus and the objective structures of the field, which translates into a daily loss of control over one’s life trajectories, while simultaneously operating a radical deconstruction of the tendency to psychologize or privatize social malaise. What common sense perceives as personal failures, identity crises, or emotional vulnerabilities is reinterpreted

through Bourdieu's lens as an expression of structural violence. This reframing reveals the inherently political character of such lived experiences and demonstrates how seemingly personal experiences of dignity and self-worth are constituted by broader structural dynamics, systemic power relations, and institutional forms of domination.

This framework exposes the structural violence of late-capitalist urbanization, where housing is violently decoupled from its use-value as a place of shelter and care, to be aggressively subsumed as a financialized asset. The "crisis of possibility" is therefore not merely a psychological condition of hopelessness, but a systemic foreclosure of the future: an existential dispossession driven by real estate extractivism that strips vulnerable subjects of their right to stability, predictability, and ontological security.

The epistemological foundation of the Bourdieusian project lies in reconstructing the "space of points of view" through a rigorous relational perspective. The study brings together the narratives of social actors who, despite occupying the same physical spaces, are separated by significant social distances. In doing so, it reveals how spatial proximity may coexist with profound social divisions, generating tensions and misunderstandings rooted in unequal volumes and compositions of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital, as well as in structurally divergent life trajectories. Ultimately, perception and understanding of the social world are fundamentally conditioned by one's position within it. Moving from a genealogical examination of the new morphologies of poverty traversing advanced democracies, the Author demonstrates how existential precarization has transcended the traditional boundaries of extreme material deprivation to become a pervasive device. It progressively invests social segments that are formally integrated within the socio-economic structure but subjected to processes of downgrading and a systematic compression of the capacity to plan for the future.

This approach engages productively, on the one hand, with Saskia Sassen's (2014) analysis of processes of expulsion from economic and social systems, which redefine the very geography of inequality in global cities; on the other hand, it evokes Foucault's (2004) mechanisms of biopolitical governmentality, revealing how housing precarity becomes a technology of governance and a means of disciplining bodies and lives. This biographical fragmentation finds a fundamental anchor in Zygmunt Bauman's reflections on liquid modernity (2000; 2003), where the dissolution of social bonds and the institutionalization of uncertainty transform housing vulnerability into a tangible symptom of the condi-

tion of "waste" produced by late modernity. Within Bauman's framework, the excluded individual loses not only the home as a physical dwelling, but also the ontological grounding of legitimate citizenship itself, becoming confined to a suspended temporality devoid of guarantees, and to a deregulated space in which systemic risk is entirely privatized.

These dynamics of territorial and relational uprooting take the form of what Loïc Wacquant defines as "advanced marginality", a radically new regime of socio-spatial exclusion characterized by the retrenchment of the welfare state and the parallel expansion of the penal state. Within this framework, territories marked by housing precarity are subjected to processes of territorial stigmatization. According to Wacquant, segregation and the spatial confinement of urban outcasts no longer generate historical forms of collective solidarity, such as those associated with the Fordist ghetto; instead, they produce fragmented and isolated social spaces in which the stigma attached to place of residence becomes an insurmountable structural barrier, constraining and ultimately suffocating individuals' biographical trajectories.

This existential and segregative dimension joins historically and analytically with Gino Germani's (1976) sociological lesson on the processes of modernization and marginality: contemporary housing precarity can be re-read as an updated form of "asymmetrical integration" or "social deactivation", in which the urban transition does not translate into emancipation, but rather into a structural fracture between the objective assimilation to consumption or urban logics and the actual institutional and normative isolation of the marginalized subject, reproducing forms of alienation that undermine the very foundations of democratic cohesion. Faced with these excluding and expulsive drifts, the planning and analysis of space necessitate an epistemological paradigm shift that Leonie Sandercock (1997) has masterfully outlined in her theory of the cities of cosmopolitan destiny, postulating the transition toward inclusive and heteroglossic urban planning models capable of giving voice and dignity to those communities traditionally relegated to invisibility or considered "insurgent"; Sandercock's call to listen to ordinary stories and to valorize the memory and identity of the margins offers the indispensable theoretical legitimization to connect planning to spatial justice.

The experiences of housing precarity thus appear closely intertwined with broader forms of social, employment, and relational insecurity that invest the very capacity of individuals to imagine their future. The heuristic and original core of the volume resides, therefore, in the deconstruction of the daily dimension of pre-

carious dwelling, taken as the cornerstone for interpreting contemporary forms of marginality and resistance through the conceptual triad that gives the monographic issue its title.

The first axis, focused on “everyday practices”, highlights how, when faced with a hostile urban environment and institutional policies that oscillate between welfare abandonment and the criminalization of poverty, individuals must develop an intense activity of negotiation and micro-resistance, including the informal occupation of empty spaces, the functional adaptation of dilapidated or overcrowded housing, and the invention of survival tactics; these micro-actions configure a true politics of the everyday that constantly calls into question the legitimacy of the geometries of institutional power.

The second analytical pillar is constituted by “caring relations”, understood in the sense of affective social infrastructures and informal solidarity networks (family, neighborhood, or community bonds) which, operating as bottom-up social shock absorbers, attenuate the destructive effects of isolation and fragmentation imposed by urban neoliberalism, revealing the intrinsically relational character of vulnerability and transforming dependence into a collective resource.

Finally, the third axis explores “meaning-making processes”, namely the symbolic and cognitive dimension through which subjects interpret, justify, and subvert their condition of precarity, allowing social actors to deconstruct public stigma, build a sense of “home” and refuge within instability, and convert spaces of exclusion into places dense with biographical value, claim, and dignity.

In conclusion, the volume does not configure itself simply as an anthology of studies on housing distress, but as a true scientific manifesto for a critical sociology of urban space. Through the lens of precarious dwelling, the crucial nodes of contemporary political change are laid bare: the crisis of liberal democracy and its welfare inclusion systems, the subsumption of daily life by the logics of capital, and the pervasiveness of spatial control devices. However, the emphasis placed on ordinary practices, on care relations, and on meaning-making processes allows for tracing the existence of a widespread infrastructure of resistance, capable of producing disruptive material and symbolic effects within the folds of urban change. It is in these daily struggles that the boundaries of citizenship are redefined and alternative forms of sociality and management of the common goods are experimented with, launching a crucial theoretical and methodological challenge to contemporary sociology.

The various contributions making up the issue invite us, indeed, to overcome the historical fracture

between macro and micro-analysis in order to equip ourselves with a gaze capable of descending into the minutest folds of daily life without ever losing the compass of structural critique. The deep objective of this approach is not only to understand the biopolitical mechanisms and economic devices through which today’s metropolises actively produce exclusion, segregation, and marginality, but also to radically overturn the classical perspective. Marginality, in fact, ceases to be described as a mere place of passivity or victimhood to configure itself as a frontier space of radical possibility, from which it becomes possible to imagine and build different cities. In this view, the act of listening to “voices from the margins” and valorizing the subjective dimension of lived experience is not a simple methodological choice, but the prerequisite for tracing new spaces of opposition, awareness, and resistance.

It is precisely within these spaces that the expression “dwelling from below” becomes charged with a profound political meaning: to dwell no longer means merely to physically occupy a place or to find shelter, but to claim the right to the city through the re-signification of space. Re-signifying urban space means removing it from the logics of the commodity-city and real estate speculation to restore to it a use-value based on sociality, solidarity, and the community reappropriation of the commons. Through self-management, informal practices, and associationism, the places of exclusion are rewritten by the inhabitants themselves, transforming the urban void or the segregated neighborhood into a laboratory of active citizenship. This metamorphosis of places and their meanings paves the way for a true paradigm shift in the Kuhnian sense (Kuhn 1962). Faced with the structural failures of neoliberal urban models, there emerges the need for an unprecedented alliance between theoretical research and action on the ground, capable of radically redefining the key concepts of coexistence: a social justice founded on spatial equity, a substantial citizenship based on concrete practices of belonging, and an open, inclusive community oriented toward the care of the shared interest.

In the final analysis, the transition toward the “cosmopolis” of rights and dignity outlined by Sandercock (1997) demands a sociology that is no longer merely descriptive or reportorial, but rather a sociology of emergencies. Dwelling from below means recognizing that vulnerable subjects are not the passive recipients of theoretical categories dropped from above, but the producers of a living critical theory. The scientific manifesto outlined here thus configures itself as an act of epistemological justice: restoring voice, conceptual depth, and political dignity to those practices which, in the very moment

they struggle for a shelter, challenge the existing urban order and radically interrogate the coordinates of the democracy to come.

2. PRECARIOUS DWELLING AS A SOCIAL CONDITION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

Over the last two decades, housing has progressively moved to the centre of public debate and sociological inquiry. Rising housing costs, the retrenchment of welfare systems, labour market flexibilisation, the financialisation of urban space, and the increasing instability of life trajectories have transformed access to housing into one of the most critical dimensions through which contemporary inequalities are produced, experienced and reproduced (Clapham 2005; Aalbers 2016; Madden and Marcuse 2016; Rolnik 2019; Moos 2019). Yet the housing question can no longer be reduced to the problem of providing shelter or ensuring access to a dwelling. Rather, it has become a privileged lens through which to observe broader transformations affecting social citizenship, urban governance, welfare regimes and everyday life.

The notion of *precarious dwelling* proposed in this Special Issue emerges precisely from the need to move beyond narrow understandings of housing deprivation. While homelessness, housing exclusion and residential insecurity remain crucial dimensions of contemporary marginality (FEANTSA 2005), precarious dwelling refers to a wider and more complex condition. It designates the growing uncertainty that characterises the relationship between individuals and the spaces they inhabit, the fragility of the social ties that make dwelling possible, and the instability of the symbolic frameworks through which people construct meanings of home, belonging and security (Somerville 1992; Padgett, Henwood and Tsemberis 2015).

From this perspective, dwelling cannot be understood as a static condition. Following a long sociological tradition, dwelling appears instead as a process: a situated and relational practice through which individuals negotiate their position within society, organise everyday life, establish social relationships and construct biographical continuity (Somerville 1992; Clapham 2005; Palvarini 2010). To dwell means not simply to occupy a physical space, but to transform a space into a meaningful place through routines, attachments, memories, expectations and social interactions. Consequently, housing insecurity extends well beyond the absence of a roof or legal tenure; it concerns the erosion of those material, relational and symbolic conditions that allow

individuals to inhabit the world with a minimum degree of stability and predictability.

This special issue starts from the assumption that precarious dwelling constitutes one of the most revealing manifestations of contemporary processes of social transformation. Economic restructuring, labour precarisation, welfare retrenchment, demographic changes and intensified mobility have progressively weakened the institutional arrangements that traditionally provided individuals with relatively stable life trajectories (Dovis and Saraceno 2011). The transition from industrial to post-industrial societies has generated new forms of uncertainty that increasingly affect housing pathways, transforming residential stability from a relatively widespread condition into an unevenly distributed resource (Clapham 2002).

The global financial crisis of 2008 represented a turning point in this process. In many countries, housing markets became central mechanisms through which inequalities were produced and accumulated. Housing increasingly ceased to function primarily as a social good and became a financial asset, subject to speculative logics and market volatility. Simultaneously, urban transformations associated with tourism, gentrification and real-estate investment have contributed to the displacement of vulnerable populations and the emergence of new forms of residential exclusion (Smith 1996; Harvey 2008; Cocola-Gant 2016). More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic further exposed the centrality of housing inequalities. During lockdowns and restrictions, domestic space became simultaneously a place of work, education, care and isolation, revealing the unequal distribution of housing resources and the differentiated capacities to cope with crisis.

These transformations have stimulated an extensive body of literature on housing precarity, homelessness, residential insecurity and housing pathways (Clapham 2005; Bramley and Fitzpatrick 2018; Pleace and Hermans 2020). Nevertheless, much of this scholarship remains fragmented across disciplinary fields and often focuses either on structural dynamics or on individual experiences. One of the ambitions of this Special Issue is precisely to reconnect these dimensions by analysing precarious dwelling as a phenomenon located at the intersection between macro-social transformations, meso-level institutional arrangements and micro-level everyday practices.

The concept of precarious dwelling adopted in this issue embraces a broad analytical scope. It includes conditions traditionally associated with housing deprivation, such as homelessness, housing exclusion and severe marginality, but also forms of insecurity experienced by

individuals who formally possess a dwelling while lacking stable access to the social and economic resources necessary to sustain it (DeLuca and Rosen 2022). In this sense, precarious dwelling should not be understood as a residual condition affecting a limited segment of the population. Rather, it increasingly represents a continuum of vulnerability traversing contemporary societies.

Such a perspective resonates with wider sociological debates on precarity. Since the late twentieth century, scholars have described how uncertainty has progressively become institutionalised within labour markets, welfare arrangements and life courses (Castel 2003; Dovis and Saraceno 2011). Precarity has ceased to be an exceptional condition and has instead become a structural feature of contemporary capitalism. Housing trajectories are deeply embedded within these broader dynamics. Residential instability, insecure tenures, unaffordable rents, overcrowding and forced mobility increasingly affect individuals whose biographies are marked by fragmented employment careers, unstable family arrangements and weakened social protections (Clapham 2005; Arundel 2017).

The contributions collected in this Special Issue show how individuals develop everyday strategies, relational networks and symbolic resources that enable them to navigate precarious housing conditions (Meo 2008; Appadurai 2004; Krumer-Nevo 2008). Dwelling therefore emerges not only as a site of vulnerability but also as a terrain of agency, negotiation and meaning-making.

The articles collected in this Special Issue explore these dimensions from different empirical and theoretical perspectives, offering a multifaceted understanding of precarious dwelling and its implications for contemporary societies.

Following the opening essay, *Misery of Position and the Crisis of Possibility. New Forms of Poverty in Contemporary Democracies* by Anna Maria Paola Toti, this reflection is further developed by Maria Alessandra Molè in *Dwelling as a Wicked Problem: Housing, Inequality and Precarious Life Trajectories*. Drawing upon housing studies, urban sociology and qualitative research conducted in Rome, the article conceptualises dwelling as a wicked problem characterised by multidimensional interdependencies that escape linear policy solutions (Rittel and Webber 1973; Gallent 2019). Housing emerges as a crucial social infrastructure whose growing commodification generates new forms of vulnerability and inequality (Madden and Marcuse 2016; Rolnik 2019).

The historical roots of these processes are explored by Vincenzo Romania and Tommaso Bertazzo in *From Ferrarotti's Baraccati to Roma Camps. The Long Wave of*

Housing Marginality, the authors reveal how residential segregation and marginality are historically produced and institutionally reproduced through long-term mechanisms of exclusion, drawing in particular on Ferrarotti's studies of Roman shanty towns and on debates on Roma camps, segregation and institutional marginality (Ferrarotti 1970; 1974; Picker 2017; Sigona 2015).

The following contributions shift attention towards housing interventions and inclusion strategies. In *Collaborative Housing Strategies: The Case of "Widespread Reception" by Caritas Diocesana in Rome*, Carmelo Bruni and Matteo Finco analyse innovative forms of collaborative accommodation that seek to counter housing exclusion through community-based practices and relational support networks. Their contribution is situated within debates on homelessness, welfare mix and territorial responses to housing exclusion (FEANTSA 2005; Saraceno *et al.* 2020).

The focus then moves to the everyday experience of precarious dwelling. In *Dwelling Among the Ruins*, Paolo Do examines how people experiencing homelessness transform archaeological ruins into provisional yet relatively durable spaces of habitation. Through an original ethnographic perspective, the article shows how continuity and stability are actively produced through situated spatial and temporal practices, even under conditions of extreme uncertainty. The contribution dialogues with urban ethnography and the sociology of space, while drawing attention to the temporal organisation of survival and the situated production of dwelling (Ferrarotti 1970; DeSilvey 2017; Duneier 2016).

Similarly, Giuseppina Tumminelli's *The Right to a Home: Housing Strategies and Social Inclusion of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors and Youth Foreigners* highlights the central role of housing in the transition to adulthood among migrant youth. Drawing on the literature on unaccompanied foreign minors and the "triple transition" to adulthood, migration and trauma, the article shows how access to stable accommodation represents a crucial condition for autonomy, citizenship and social integration (UNICEF and Médecins du Monde 2018).

Questions of intervention, care and professional responsibility are addressed by Andrea Gollini in *«Two Heads Are Better Than One but They Must Be Good Ones»: Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Social Work With «people Living on the Street»*. The article explores the dilemmas faced by social workers operating in contexts of severe marginality, highlighting the tensions between care, autonomy and social justice. Interpreted through Relational Social Work and the Poverty-Aware Paradigm, the contribution shows how helping practices must negotiate the boundaries between support

and control, protection and freedom, accompaniment and substitution (Folgheraiter 1998; 2011; Krumer-Nevo 2016).

Finally, Maria Chiara Pedroni's *Legal Aid at the Margins: Realising Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness in Italy* concludes the collection by focusing on access to justice and the practical realisation of rights. The article demonstrates how citizenship and housing rights are not simply formal entitlements but social processes that depend upon everyday practices of mediation, advocacy and institutional recognition. In doing so, it contributes to debates on access to justice, non-take-up, administrative barriers and the role of intermediary actors in fragmented welfare systems (Halvorsen Rønning and Hammerslev 2018).

Taken together, these contributions show that precarious dwelling cannot be reduced to a housing problem alone. Rather, it constitutes a privileged lens through which to observe broader transformations affecting inequality, citizenship, care, social exclusion and everyday life. By connecting structural processes with lived experiences, historical trajectories with contemporary challenges, and vulnerability with agency, the Special Issue highlights the centrality of dwelling for understanding the contradictions and possibilities of contemporary societies.

REFERENCES

- Aalbers M. B. (2016), *The financialization of housing: A political economy approach*, Routledge, London.
- Appadurai A. (2004), «The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition», in V. Rao and M. Walton (eds.), in *Culture and public action*. Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, California, pp. 59-84.
- Arundel R. (2017), «Equity inequalities: Housing wealth inequality, inter and intra-generational divergences, and the rise of private landlordism», in *Housing, Theory and Society*, 34(2): 176-200.
- Bauman Z. (2000), *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bauman Z. (2003), *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu P. (1993), *La misère du monde*, Seuil, Paris.
- Bourdieu P. (1997), *Méditations pascaliennes*, Seuil, Paris.
- Bramley G. and Fitzpatrick S. (2018), «Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?», in *Housing Studies*, 33(3): 96-116.
- Castel R. (2003), *L'insécurité sociale*, Seuil, Paris.
- Clapham D. (2002), «Housing pathways: a post modern analytical framework», in *Housing, Theory and Society*, 19: 57-68.
- Clapham D. (2005), *The meaning of housing: A pathways approach*, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Cocola-Gant A. (2016), «Holiday rentals: The New Gentrification Battlefront», in *Sociological Research Online*, 21(3):10
- De Certeau M. (1980), *L'invention du quotidien. Vol. 1: Arts de faire*, Editions Gallimard, Paris.
- DeLuca S. and Rosen E. (2022), «Housing insecurity among the poor today», in *Annual Review of Sociology*, 48: 343-371.
- DeSilvey C. (2017), *Curated decay. Heritage beyond saving*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London.
- Do P., Fassari L.G., Pompili G. and Toti A. M. P. (2024), «Crossing Stigmatizing Spaces of Homelessness and Mental Distress» in *Sicurezza e Scienze Sociali*, 3: 43-59.
- Dovis P. and Saraceno C. (2011), *I nuovi poveri. Politiche per le disuguaglianze*, Codice edizioni, Torino.
- Duneier M. (2016), *Ghetto: The invention of a place, the History od an Idea*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.
- FEANTSA (2005), *Ethos: European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion*, Brussels.
- Ferrarotti F. (1970), *Roma da capitale a periferia*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- Ferrarotti F. (1974), *Vita di baraccati. Contributo alla sociologia della marginalità*, Liguori, Napoli.
- Folgheraiter F. (1998), *Teoria e metodologia del servizio sociale. La prospettiva di rete*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Folgheraiter F. (2011), *Fondamenti di metodologia relazionale. La logica sociale dell'aiuto*, Erickson, Trento.
- Foucault M. (2004), *Sécurité, territoire, population: Cours au Collège de France (1977-1978)*, Gallimard/Seuil, Paris.
- Gallent N. (2019), *Whose Housing Crisis? Assets and Homes in a Changing Economy*, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Germani G. (1976), *Aspetti teorici e radici storiche del concetto di marginalità con particolare riguardo all'America Latina*, in G. Turnaturi (a cura di) *Marginalità e classi sociali*, Savelli, Roma, pp. 29-67.
- Halvorsen Rønning O. and Hammerslev O. (2018), *Outsourcing legal aid in the nordic welfare states*, Basingstoke, Springer Nature.
- Harvey D. (2008), «The Right to the City», in *New Left Review*, 53: 23-40.
- Krumer-Nevo M. (2008), «From noise to voice: How social work can benefit from service users' knowledge», in *European Journal of Social Work*, 11(3): 295-309, DOI: 10.1080/13691450802187478.
- Krumer-Nevo M. (2016), «Poverty-aware social work: A paradigm for social work practice with people

- in poverty», in *The British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6): 1793-1808.
- Kuhn T. S. (1962), *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Madden D. and Marcuse P. (2016), *In Defense of Housing: The Politics of Crisis*, Verso, London/New York.
- McDonald K. (1999), *Struggles for Subjectivity: Identity, Action and Youth Experience*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Meo A. (2008), «Vite in strada: ricostruire “home” in assenza di “house”», in *Meridiana. Rivista di Storia e Scienze Sociali*, 62: 115-133.
- Moos M. (2019), *A Research Agenda for Housing*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Herndon.
- Padgett D. K., Henwood B. F. and Tsemberis S. J. (2015), *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Pickier G. (2017), *Racial cities: governance and the segregation of Romani people in Urban Europe*, Routledge, New York.
- Pleace N. and Hermans K. (2020), «Counting All Homelessness in Europe: The Case for Ending Separate Enumeration of ‘Hidden Homelessness’», in *European Journal of Homelessness*, 14(3): 35-62.
- Rolnik R. (2019), *Urban Warfare: Housing under the Empire of Finance*, Verso Books, London.
- Sandercock L. (1997), *Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities*, John Wiley, London.
- Saraceno C., Benassi D. and Morlicchio E. (2020), *Poverty in Italy: Features and Drivers in a European Perspective*, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Sassen S. (1991), *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Soja E. W. (1996), *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Blackwell, Cambridge.
- Sigona N. (2015), «Campzenship: reimagining the camp as a social and political space», in *Citizenship Studies*, 19(1): 1-15.
- Smith N. (1996), *The New Urban Frontier. Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, Routledge, London.
- Somerville P. (1992), «Homelessness and the Meaning of Home: Rooflessness or Rootlessness?», in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 16: 529-539.
- UNICEF, Médecins du Monde (2018), *Enea. Manuale operativo per la presa in carico psicosociale dei minori stranieri non accompagnati*, https://issuu.com/medecinsdumonde/docs/enea-manuale_operativo.
- Wacquant L. (2008), *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality*, Polity Press, Cambridge.



Citation: Toti, A.M.P. (2026). Misery of Position and the Crisis of Possibility. New Forms of Poverty in Contemporary Democracies. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 13-22. doi: 10.36253/smp-17125

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Misery of Position and the Crisis of Possibility. New Forms of Poverty in Contemporary Democracies

ANNA MARIA PAOLA TOTI

Sapienza University of Rome, Italy
E-mail: ampaola.toti@uniroma1.it

Abstract. Marginality emerges as a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be reduced solely to deprivations linked to the redistributive sphere, but is instead intertwined with a dense network of social issues, including processes of social disintegration, vulnerability, relational exclusion, and the erosion of solidarity. It is within this context that the concept of new urban poverty takes shape. The weakening of collective protection dispositifs, the restructuring of labour markets, and the growing individualization of risk have contributed to the formation of an intermediate social space, situated between inclusion and exclusion, in which heterogeneous forms of economic, social, and relational fragility accumulate. These configurations constitute the structural outcome of transformations induced by neoliberal capitalism. This contribution is situated within an operational theoretical framework that integrates the analysis of positional and relational poverty with the study of institutional processes involved in the production of marginality. Its aim is to analyze the expansion and complexity of new forms of poverty through a critical and conceptual re-reading of selected categories and models useful for interpreting these dynamics.

Keywords: democratic crisis, right to the city, urban marginality, positional poverty, grey zones of poverty.

Les espérances tendent universellement à s'accorder à peu près aux chances objectives (Bourdieu 1997: 253)

1. COORDINATES, ARTICULATIONS, AND MICRO- TEXTURES. A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

The economic, geopolitical, migratory, pandemic, cultural, and social transformations that traverse contemporary democracies have profoundly redefined the modalities of social participation and inclusion, producing unprecedented configurations of precarity and insecurity. The weakening of collective protection mechanisms, the restructuring of labour markets, and the growing individualization of risk have contributed to the formation of an

intermediate social space, positioned between inclusion and exclusion, in which heterogeneous forms of economic, social, and relational fragility accumulate. This context is thus marked by increasing social disparities and by the continuous transformation of social conditions.

The marginality¹ takes shape as an intrinsically multidimensional phenomenon, which cannot be reduced exclusively to deprivations linked to the redistributive sphere, but must be understood as the outcome of the interaction between processes of social disintegration, the weakening of social relations (Mela 1993), and the erosion of solidarity. It is within this scenario that the concept of urban poverty, or new urban poverty (Pieretti 1992; Silver 1993), takes form, understood not as a mere quantitative extension of traditional, pre-industrial poverty, but as a qualitative transformation of its configurations in the post-industrial context. The so-called grey poverties, or grey zones of diffuse hardship (Dovis and Saraceno 2011; Iori and Rampazi 2008), refer to situations of latent, intermittent, or apparently reversible impoverishment, affecting individuals and social groups previously located in positions of relative security. The phenomenon of new poverty displays elements of novelty that can be traced, at least in part, to the factors responsible for the emergence and diffusion of so-called social vulnerability, understood as an existential condition in which individuals' autonomy and capacity for self-determination are constantly exposed to risk, due to unstable

integration into the main systems of social inclusion and resource allocation (Ranci 2002).

Poverty thus tends to lose its character as a traumatic event and to assume the form of a possibility structurally inscribed within the ordinary transitions of life courses – occupational, familial, and housing-related – thereby revealing the systemic nature of inequalities and the growing instability of living conditions in advanced societies. During the Covid-19 pandemic, these conditions became particularly evident. The sudden suspension of economic activities, the restriction of mobility, and the disruption of informal support networks caused fragile and temporary equilibria to collapse – equilibria that, under ordinary circumstances, had allowed individuals located in the grey zones to maintain an apparent stability, making previously invisible latent vulnerabilities visible. The pandemic emergency brought to light once again the complexity of the human world, the interdependence among economic, health, and social dimensions, and the profound fractures within the process of secularization of our seemingly unstoppable model of civilization: «the emergency is experienced in a dramatic way also because it is global. [...]. The virus is a threat to people's lives, but also to the stability of institutions, the soundness of finance, interpersonal relations, democracy, the maintenance of jobs, international links and many other things» (Esposito 2020: 5).

This event represents the emblem of a globalized society which, in its global spread, forcefully brings inequalities back to the fore: the virus can affect anyone, but it has a preferential and disproportionate impact on the poor and on the most vulnerable. The health crisis further intensified the spatial and housing-related dimension of vulnerability, transforming the domestic space into a total site of work, care, and isolation, while at the same time highlighting how intermittent and structurally unstable poverty was not an exceptional phenomenon, but rather a systemic condition that the pandemic suddenly rendered visible, laying bare the fragility of social protection mechanisms and the structurally uncertain character of life transitions in advanced urban societies.

In large metropolises, conditions of social hardship generate spaces of precarity, invisibility, ghettoization, fragmentation, and inequality. For this very reason, the city – as a research laboratory – once again becomes a “lens” through which to observe ongoing metamorphoses and their corresponding spatial reconfigurations.

The various crises or shocks that may occur over the life course – such as job loss, the onset of illness, marital separation, stigma associated with certain personal experiences, or conditions of housing precarity – can produce fractures in individual trajectories, giving rise to

¹ The concept of marginality constitutes one of the most effective analytical tools for understanding the processes of modernization in societies characterized by late and uneven development. Within Gino Germani's sociological reflection, the definition of marginality as “exclusion from rights” still retains its full heuristic value today. The originality of Germani's contribution lies in his ability to overcome individualistic or culturalist interpretations of social exclusion by situating marginality within a historical and structural perspective. Moreover, already in the 1950s, he was able to grasp the radical transformations of society and of the market. Marginality is not a residual condition of the past destined to disappear, but rather an intrinsic product of the dynamics of social transformation. Marginal groups are deprived not only of economic resources, but also of recognized cultural and social capital, and they encounter difficulties in accessing legitimate languages, institutional codes, and the competencies required by modern society. They participate intermittently in the labour market, often in informal or precarious forms, and remain weakly integrated into systems of welfare, education, and political representation. Marginality thus takes shape as a structural condition of partial integration, rather than as a deviation or a social pathology. From this perspective, the phenomenon can be interpreted as a structurally disadvantaged position within social space, in which material exclusion intertwines with processes of stigmatization and symbolic delegitimation. This reading makes it possible to bring the Germanian paradigm closer to Bourdieusian analyses of the reproduction of inequalities, while maintaining a strong focus on the historical and macrosocial dimension of exclusionary processes: «sono gli “anelli” più deboli dei Paesi industrializzati quelli che si trovano in maggior pericolo [...], e che possono mettere a dura prova non solo la propria democrazia ma anche l'equilibrio mondiale» (1985: 26).

forms of marginalization, loneliness, social isolation, and fragility. Understanding these processes requires a sociological approach that takes into account both economic-political structures and the cultural and spatial dimensions of exclusion.

Pierre Bourdieu analyzes these dynamics within *La misère du monde* (1993), conducted together with his collaborators² and focused on the analysis of the forms of so-called small positional misery. The work conveys the image of a misery of position that is essentially relational and comparative, a condition undergoing rapid expansion that poses a radical challenge to contemporary democracies and brings into particularly sharp focus the very difficulty of existing – or, more precisely, of resisting – within current social structures.

La misère du monde designates the set of social effects arising from the tension between the universalistic promises of liberal democracies – in terms of equality, mobility, and recognition – and the concrete mechanisms through which social institutions operate, mechanisms that tend to re-produce and legitimize persistent inequalities. Within the Bourdieusian theoretical framework, the production of social suffering is inseparable from the processes through which power structures are reproduced and from the unequal distribution of capital. The central institutions of modern society, particularly the educational system and the labour market, function as privileged sites for the exercise of symbolic violence, contributing to the transformation of structural inequalities into differences perceived as natural or meritocratic. *La misère du monde* cannot be interpreted as a residual or pathological condition, but rather as an ordinary effect of a social order that systematically produces exclusion and frustration while maintaining a rhetoric of formal inclusion. The suffering that results from this tends to be internalized by individuals, who incorporate schemes of perception and evaluation that lead them to interpret their social position as the outcome of individual failure.

A distinctive element of the approach developed within the work is its attention to the lived dimension of suffering, understood as an everyday and often invisible experience. Through the use of qualitative methods, such as interviews, Bourdieu and his collaborators show how symbolic violence manifests itself in the micro-processes of social interaction, producing feelings of inadequacy, disorientation, and loss of meaning. Misery thus assumes a properly existential dimension, one that affects the very possibility of constructing a coherent *narratum* of one's biographical trajectory. From this per-

spective, the difficulty of existing within contemporary social structures can be read as the outcome of a growing misalignment between socially produced expectations and the resources actually available to individuals.

Within the context of the socio-economic transformations of recent decades, these dynamics appear further intensified. Processes of labour precarization, career flexibilization, and the individualization of social risks have contributed to redefining the conditions of social integration, rendering them increasingly unstable and reversible. Within this framework, social existence can no longer be understood as a relatively guaranteed condition, but rather as a position constantly exposed to processes of devaluation. It is in this sense that the category of resistance acquires analytical relevance: it refers to practices, often fragmented and non-institutionalized, through which individuals seek to maintain a minimal form of identity continuity and social recognition. However, such practices remain largely individualized and depoliticized, thereby limiting their capacity to translate into forms of collective action. *La misère du monde* thus raises an eminently political question by interrogating the conditions of possibility of democracy in contemporary societies. The systematic production of social suffering and subjective powerlessness calls into question the very idea of active citizenship and of effective participation in social and political life. The growing distance between institutions and subjects, together with the weakening of mechanisms of representation and mediation, contributes to a crisis of legitimacy affecting advanced democratic orders. In this sense, misery does not constitute merely a social problem to be managed, but rather a critical indicator of the internal contradictions of contemporary democratic regimes. In light of these considerations, *la misère du monde* can be taken as a fundamental analytical category for a critical sociology of the present. It makes it possible to articulate the analysis of objective structures with that of processes of subjectivation, restoring sociological intelligibility to forms of suffering that tend to be depoliticized and privatized.

In *Méditations pascaliennes* (1997), Bourdieu undertakes – from a strictly theoretical standpoint – an in-depth analysis of subjective hopes and expectations and of objectively available opportunities: «on est toujours surpris de voir à quel point les volontés s'ajustent aux possibilités, les désirs au pouvoir de les satisfaire, et de découvrir que, à l'encontre de toutes les idées reçues, la pleonexia, le désir d'avoir toujours plus [...] est l'exception» (253-254). The author emphasizes that the gap between hopes and opportunities becomes increasingly frequent, insofar as social agents possess powers – defined by the volume and structure of their capital –

² Among his collaborators were: Abdelmalek Sayad, Rosine Christin, Michel Pialoux, Patrick Champagne, Gabrielle Balazs, Philippe Bourgois, Loïc Wacquant.

that are profoundly unequal. Their hopes and aspirations themselves are likewise unevenly distributed. Indeed, far from conceiving desire as an autonomous and unlimited force, Bourdieu shows that individuals' aspirations tend to be structurally adjusted to the real possibilities of their realization. It is therefore not surprising that the scholar observes with a certain degree of surprise how frequently wills are shaped by conditions of possibility and desires by the effective power to satisfy them. From this perspective, *pleonexia* – namely, the impulse to always want more, often regarded as a universal trait of human action – appears not as the rule, but rather as an exception to the ordinary functioning of social practices.

Such an adjustment between hopes and opportunities is not, however, the result of a conscious choice or a rational calculation, but rather the outcome of a process through which social structures are incorporated. When the gap between what one hopes for and what is objectively accessible tends to widen, it is not distributed uniformly; on the contrary, it becomes all the more frequent and pronounced the more unequal the powers of social agents are. These powers, determined by the volume and composition of the capital possessed – economic, cultural, social, and symbolic – define not only the horizon of concrete possibilities, but also the field of what is thinkable and desirable.

Consequently, hopes and aspirations cannot be regarded as purely subjective or individual dimensions: they are themselves socially structured and unevenly distributed. Agents tend to desire what it is “reasonable” for them to desire, that is, what appears compatible with their position within the social field. In this sense, the experience of time – understood as the relationship between present and future, between expectations and possibilities – becomes a powerful indicator of social inequalities, revealing that the future is not equally open to all, either at the objective level or at that of subjective dispositions.

Bourdieu's theoretical legacy thus proves particularly fruitful for interrogating the social conditions of existence and resistance, and for reopening a space for critical reflection on the ways in which democratic societies produce, govern, and legitimize inequalities.

2. URBAN HETEROTOPIAS, DISAFFILIATION, AND SOCIAL CONTROL

To analyze the city means to interrogate the ways in which power is inscribed in space, distributing the taxonomies of visibility/invisibility, proximity/distance, and legitimacy/stigmatization. Within the framework of the

overcoming of the modernist paradigm of urban planning, the critique of its presumed neutrality assumes particular relevance when read in relation to processes of marginality production. Planning cannot be understood as an apolitical practice, insofar as it actively contributes to defining which subjects, spaces, and needs are recognized as legitimate within the urban order and which, instead, are relegated to the margins (Sandercock 1998). From a Foucauldian perspective, planning can be interpreted as a power/knowledge dispositif (Foucault 1980) operating through specific discursive regimes. Such discourses – grounded in technical, statistical, and normative categories – do not merely describe the city, but rather produce a particular intelligibility of urban space, establishing boundaries between normality and deviance, inclusion and exclusion. In this sense, marginality is not a pre-existing condition that planning simply manages, but rather an effect of governmental practices that select, classify, and hierarchize populations and territories.

Modernist planning, as a technology of government that can be inscribed within the rationality of governmentality³ (Foucault 2004), informal neighborhoods, precarious populations, or non-conforming spatial practices are thus represented as anomalies with respect to a normative urban model, thereby justifying interventions of normalization, disciplining, or removal. The claim to the neutrality of planning contributes to obscuring the political dimension of such interventions, presenting them instead as necessary and rational solutions.

The overcoming of the modernist paradigm therefore entails, in line with Leonie Sandercock (1997), a reconceptualization of planning as a field of conflict and as a situated discursive practice – a way of knowing and constructing the city beyond dominant mental frameworks. The scholar dismantles the pillars of modernist urban planning and, in their place, advances a new post-modern planning, one that is attentive to community, the environment, and cultural diversity.

From a Foucauldian perspective, this requires attention to the processes through which marginality is produced and governed, as well as recognition of counter-discourses and forms of subaltern knowledge that challenge dominant regimes of truth. Planning thus becomes a potentially transformative space, in which marginality is not merely an object of intervention, but a site of resistance and of the renegotiation of power.

Within this perspective, the theoretical contribution of Michel Foucault (1972) offers a fundamental interpretive key for understanding the dialectical relationship

³ According to Michel Foucault, we live in the era of governmentality. By this concept, he refers to the ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses, and tactical reflections that make the exercise of power possible.

between space and marginality. Poverty and madness are progressively removed from a moral or charitable reading and reconfigured within spatial dispositifs of confinement that enable their control. The founding decree of the Hôpital général in Paris in 1656 – at the behest of Louis XIV – represents a decisive moment in this transformation: while presenting itself as an assistential institution intended to receive, feed, and house the poor, it simultaneously operates as a mechanism of disciplining, surveillance, and normalization. Within this space, cure is structurally intertwined with control, and assistance becomes an instrument for isolating, rendering visible, and correcting behaviors deemed deviant or dangerous to the urban order. The creation of order consists in continually drawing new boundary lines. The confinement of the poor, beggars, and the mad – often within the same institutions – does not merely produce a physical separation from the rest of the city, but establishes a symbolic boundary between what is considered normal, rational, and productive and what must be governed as excess. Foucault interprets such practices as expressions of a biopolitical rationality, a “disciplining of life,” through which modern power takes charge of the life of the population as a whole, transforming poverty into an object of government rather than simply of assistance (Foucault 1975; 2004).

The Foucauldian contribution makes it possible to read these dynamics as the outcome of specific rationalities of government, in which poverty is not so much eliminated as administered. Contemporary welfare state dispositifs, increasingly oriented toward logics of activation, conditionality, and individual responsabilization, produce vulnerable subjects who are called upon to constantly demonstrate their deservingness. Precarity is normalized as an ordinary condition of existence, while the risk of impoverishment is internalized as the result of individual choices rather than as the product of structural constraints. The grey zone of hardship thus takes shape as a governable space, in which uncertainty is regulated, monitored, and rendered compatible with the existing social order.

The concept of heterotopia elaborated by Michel Foucault (1984) makes it possible to read social space not as a neutral or merely physical dimension, but as a historical and political product, traversed by power relations and practices of exclusion. Heterotopias are “other spaces,” real and locatable, situated at the margins of the dominant order while at once reflecting and overturning its logics. They function as sites of separation, accumulation, or confinement of that which appears deviant, excessive, or difficult to integrate into the ordinary circuits of social life.

In the context of the contemporary city, such spaces emerge with increasing visibility as the outcome of processes of advanced modernization, economic restructuring, and the rationalization of urban policies. The fragmentation of urban space is not only the result of material transformations, but reflects a deeper social disarticulation, producing territorial inequalities and a growing polarization of life experiences. Within this scenario, heterotopias take shape as residual spaces – marginal neighborhoods, degraded areas, spaces of reception or confinement – in which socially vulnerable populations are concentrated.

Such spaces can be read as containers of “wasted lives” (Bauman 2003), that is, of those individuals whom the mechanisms of liquid modernity tend to expel or treat as superfluous.

Within the Baumanian perspective, the production of waste does not concern objects, spaces, or symbolic categories alone, but directly affects the human and political dimension of modernity. The residues generated by processes of classification and ordering increasingly take the form of individuals and social groups that come to be considered as excess in relation to the requirements of the system.

The spaces of marginality – degraded urban peripheries, refugee camps, administrative detention centers, zones of informal confinement – can be interpreted as spatial dispositifs for managing these surplus lives (Douglas 1966). They function as containers of the ambivalence produced by modernity, places in which what cannot be fully included is temporarily segregated and neutralized. In this sense, marginality does not represent an anomaly of the modern system, but rather one of its structural components: the production of wasted lives is the necessary correlate of the construction of order.

It is precisely in relation to these surplus figures that recourse to security policies intensifies. Whereas classical modernity aspired to eliminate ambivalence through forced integration or assimilation, liquid modernity instead seeks to manage it through practices of control, containment, and surveillance. Wasted lives, insofar as they are not fully classifiable and not immediately functional, are progressively reinterpreted through a securitarian lens: not so much as subjects to be included, but as risks to be prevented or threats to be neutralized.

Security no longer operates as a collective guarantee of protection, but as a technique for governing uncertainty. Securitarian policies increasingly focus less on the structural causes of exclusion and more on the management of its visible consequences. Fear of ambivalence – embodied in figures such as the foreigner, the migrant, the urban poor, or the deviant – is translated into nor-

mative, administrative, and spatial dispositifs aimed at making such subjects predictable, controllable, or physically separated from the “legitimate” social body (Bauman 2000).

Wasted lives thus become the privileged targets of a selective and asymmetrical security, one that is not applied uniformly to the population but concentrates on those who embody the insecurity produced by liquid modernity itself. In this sense, security policies do not merely address social insecurity; they actively contribute to reproducing it, reinforcing the distinction between lives worthy of protection and lives deemed disposable. Security therefore asserts itself as a technology of exclusion, functional to the preservation of order and cleanliness, rather than as an instrument of emancipation. Order signifies regularity; it implies a distribution of the probability of events that is not random, but hierarchical and calculable.

The link between wasted lives and security policies ultimately reveals a profound transformation of the modern project. If solid modernity pursued order through the elimination of ambivalence, liquid modernity acknowledges the impossibility of this aim and instead comes to rely on the permanent management of excess. As Bauman argues, postmodernity does not mark the end of modernity, but rather its reflexive adaptation to a structural failure: the renunciation of the illusion of total order gives way to a regime of security that does not resolve ambivalence, but administers it, confining it within the lives and spaces of waste.

Spatial exclusion thus becomes a concrete modality through which power relations materialize: not only by separating, but by rendering conditions of marginality invisible and normalizing them. Urban heterotopias therefore assume an ambivalent function: on the one hand, they protect the dominant social order by isolating its contradictions; on the other, they make visible the structural fractures produced by the economic, political, and symbolic processes that govern the city. From this perspective, heterotopia does not only represent a spatial “elsewhere,” but a dispositif through which society manages its own waste, organizing marginality within defined boundaries and thereby contributing to the reproduction of social inequalities.

These dynamics generate profound asynchronies across different urban domains, intensifying fractures within the city’s social and spatial structure.

The concept of vulnerability can be understood as an intermediate condition of instability, referable to a social space marked by uncertainty:

La zone de vulnérabilité, en particulier, occupe une position stratégique. C’est un espace social d’instabilité, de tur-

bulences, peuplé d’individus précaires dans leur rapport au travail et fragiles dans leur insertion relationnelle. D’où le risque de basculement dans la dernière zone, qui apparaît ainsi comme une fin de parcours. C’est la vulnérabilité qui alimente la grande marginalité, ou la désaffiliation (Castel 1994).

Vulnerability highlights how the risk of falling into poverty does not derive solely from situations of social exclusion – that is, from circumstances that formally or de facto hinder access to fundamental rights and resources– but may also emerge within so-called normal conditions. From this perspective, alongside the poverty of the excluded, which can be traced back to exceptional or marginal situations, there also exists a poverty that concerns the included, those who formally belong to the social system yet nevertheless find themselves in conditions of vulnerability (Negri 2002).

Forms of urban marginality are not the result of exceptional, accidental, or contingent dynamics, nor do they constitute a “deviation” from the norm of urban life. On the contrary, they represent the systemic and structural outcome of dispositifs governing space and bodies that operate within the social stratification of the contemporary city. The analysis of these phenomena makes it possible to decipher the ways in which certain individuals are seen and perceived as others/outsideers while being fully internal to the urban body: despite physical proximity, life trajectories appear increasingly heterogeneous and divergent (Magatti 2007). The systemic transformations of the new world of production further accentuate existing divisions and disproportionately penalize lower social strata and minorities.

In particular, the new forms of territorial and social inequality that have emerged from processes of globalization produce an expansion of the margins and a new geography of centrality and marginality (Sassen 1991). According to Sassen, the complexity of contemporary societies gives rise to new forms of brutality that manifest themselves through dynamics of expulsion. Capacities and instruments originally intended to strengthen social cohesion, expand collective well-being, and preserve the equilibria of the biosphere are in fact reconverted into mechanisms that generate extreme inequalities and dismember the social structure. In this process, the promises of stability and social mobility advanced by liberal democracy toward the middle class are progressively hollowed out, while entire populations are expelled from their territories, from work, and from housing; in parallel, portions of the biosphere are likewise subjected to processes of expulsion, losing the minimal conditions necessary for the reproduction of their vital space (Sassen 2014).

The contemporary global capitalist economy is grounded in mechanisms of integration and in their selective counterpart, expulsion. Sassen argues that the present configuration represents a form of primitive accumulation, based on the logistics of “outsourcing” and on financial algorithms. The accelerations of the past three decades mark a new phase that threatens both individuals and the biosphere, while bringing to the surface renewed forms of poverty and brutalization. The scholar seeks to conceptualize and make visible the space of the expelled, which should not be understood as a “black hole” or an absence, but rather as a “tangible presence.” Sassen defines the systemic margin as the site in which the dynamics of expulsion from different systems – ranging from the economic to the social – are concretized.

These are conceptually submerged domains that need to be brought to the surface, insofar as they represent potential sites of action capable of generating new forms of global economy, alternative narratives, and novel modes of belonging. The fractures between West and East, North and South now manifest themselves within the same city, in a condition of topographical contiguity that intensifies the violence of the conflict between those who possess economic capital – and thus the means and instruments to access technologies – and those who are excluded from them. In this way, the dichotomies urban/rural, Global North/Global South, East/West are reproduced.

In light of these theoretical perspectives, territorial stigma cannot be reduced to a merely individual or psychological label – as in the classical perspective developed by Erving Goffman (1963) – but must instead be understood as a spatial, material, and political dispositif that segments the city into zones characterized by differing degrees of existential legitimacy. Following the interpretation developed by Loïc Wacquant in *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (2008), stigma operates as a mechanism of symbolic and physical confinement that marks the territories of exclusion, transforming urban spaces into veritable territories of relegation or “domains of non-citizenship”:

the elements of a sociological sketch of advanced marginality, i.e., the novel regime of sociospatial relegation and exclusionary closure (in Max Weber's sense) that has crystallized in the post-Fordist city as a result of the uneven development of the capitalist economies and the recoiling of welfare states, according to modalities that vary with the ways in which these two forces bear upon the segments of the working class and the ethnoracial categories dwelling in the nether regions of social and physical space (2-3).

By mobilizing Goffman's concept of stigma and Bourdieu's theory of groups (1982/1991), Wacquant emphasizes: «it stresses the distinctive weight and effects of territorial stigmatization as well as the insuperable political dilemmas posed by the material dispersion and symbolic splintering of the new urban poor» (7).

The construction of distance between a “we” – integrated and visible – and a “they” perceived as dysfunctional, dangerous, or out of place does not therefore occur in an abstract or ideological manner, but becomes embodied in practices of spatial governance, in urban planning, in the selective distribution of services, and in everyday surveillance and repression. Territory thus becomes an active vector of stigmatization, and urban space takes shape as a field of forces in which relations of power, inclusion, and exclusion are played out:

urban marginality is not everywhere woven of the same cloth, and, all things considered, there is nothing surprising in that. The generic mechanisms that produce it, like the specific forms it assumes, become fully intelligible once one takes caution to embed them in the historical matrix of class, state and space characteristic of each society at a given epoch. It follows that we must work to develop more complex and more differentiated pictures of the 'wretched of the city' if we wish accurately to capture their social predicament and elucidate their collective fate in different national contexts (1-2).

It is within this context that marginality not only reproduces itself, but becomes normalized, taking the form of an invisible yet deeply regulated presence. Interrogating territorial stigma from this perspective therefore means recognizing that the contemporary city is not a neutral space, but an active dispositif of selection, separation, and hierarchization of urban life. The universe of this social misery is expanding at an accelerated pace, fostered by the precarization of life and the disintegration of traditional bonds of solidarity. Within this context, marginality is not merely tolerated, but produced and reproduced as an integral part of the contemporary urban organization.

In continuity with Robert Castel's analysis, these processes can be read as expressions of a profound restructuring of social insecurity, which no longer manifests itself predominantly through radical exclusion, but rather through a progressive erosion of the material and symbolic foundations of integration. The precarization of work, the intermittency of income, and the weakening of social ties place a growing number of individuals in a condition of permanent vulnerability, close to disaffiliation yet not entirely external to the circuits of social citizenship. In this sense, vulnerability does not represent a

residual or transitory condition, but a structural dimension of contemporary biographical trajectories, inscribed within ordinary life courses and no longer reducible to exceptional or deviant events (Ranci 2002).

Saskia Sassen's reflections on new forms of expulsion make it possible to further radicalize this analysis by shifting the focus from the margins to the processes operating within formally inclusive societies. According to the author, the dynamics of advanced global capitalism generate expulsions that do not necessarily take the visible form of total exclusion, but instead manifest themselves through a progressive loss of rights, resources, and possibilities. These slow and cumulative expulsions affect individuals and groups who remain formally included within political and legal systems, yet are substantively deprived of the material and symbolic conditions that make full social participation possible. From this perspective, new forms of poverty can be read as the outcome of such processes of expulsion from within, which traverse the social body without immediately producing recognizable figures of marginality.

The difficulty of existing that characterizes these conditions does not concern the economic dimension alone, but permeates the entire subjective experience, affecting the possibility of constructing biographical continuities and horizons of meaning. Permanent uncertainty, the instability of social ties, and the fragility of resources erode the capacity to plan for the future and to exercise control over one's life trajectories, producing diffuse forms of social suffering that often remain invisible or lack social legitimation. In this sense, new forms of poverty constitute a privileged observatory for understanding the transformations of contemporary democracies, revealing the tensions between formal inclusion and substantive exclusion, between proclaimed rights and effective possibilities of life.

Intertwined with these dimensions are the concepts of structural misery and poverty of possibilities. Structural misery does not necessarily manifest itself through absolute deprivation, but rather as a lasting compression of possibilities of choice and projectuality, produced and reproduced by economic, political, and institutional arrangements that restrict access to meaningful life opportunities. Poverty of possibilities concerns the temporal and existential dimension of vulnerability: not only what individuals possess in the present, but what they can reasonably expect from the future. Permanent uncertainty and the narrowing of horizons of choice erode the capacity to project oneself into the long term, limiting both the construction of biographical continuities and the ability to exercise agency over one's life trajectories.

Urban regeneration policies, the financialization of space, and processes of gentrification generate new expulsions and redefine the boundaries of urban belonging, rendering marginality a condition that is structurally functional to the logics of economic valorization. Within this scenario, *le droit à la ville* – one of the key concepts developed by Henri Lefebvre, which also gives its title to his seminal essay – is progressively expropriated, while urban space is transformed into a commodity and dwelling into a function subordinated to the market. Lefebvre reflects on the right to the city by problematizing the segregative dynamics produced by the urban consequences of Fordist capitalism, and arrives at an emancipatory theory articulated in *Le droit à la ville* (1968), which encompasses those social subjects who inhabit the proliferation of precarious ways of living and dwelling at the margins of the market and consumption.

Taken together, these theoretical contributions make it possible to read the city as a field of forces in which dispositifs of confinement, processes of space production, the governance of life, and capitalist accumulation intersect. From this perspective, urban marginality does not appear as an anomaly, but rather as a structural outcome of the political and economic rationalities that shape the contemporary urban condition. The right to the city thus takes the form of a claim, a social and political demand that, in the absence of a radical critique of the capitalist system, cannot find concrete realization. Its transformative potential comes into conflict with the predatory logic of the economic and political dynamics of capitalism.

3. HORIZONS AND OPENINGS

The future challenge of reducing inequalities in access to resources, services, and knowledge is inseparable from the challenge of complexity.

Reflection on miseries of position and crises of possibility in contemporary democracies offers a crucial analytical lens for understanding the new forms of poverty emerging in today's social, economic, and political contexts. These phenomena do not only represent material deprivation, but rather take shape as a complex and multi-dimensional condition rooted in the erosion of collective structures of protection and in the transformation of the social contract.

Misery of position is no longer simply a matter of immediate economic deprivation, but rather of occupying a position of vulnerability in relation to social change and the structure of the labour market. In an increasingly globalized and polarized world, limited

access to stable and dignified employment opportunities, economic uncertainty, and labour precarization push large segments of the population toward conditions of social exclusion nourished by structural inequalities and insecurity. The issue is no longer only who has less, but who lacks access even to a future capable of ensuring meaningful social mobility.

At the same time, the crisis of possibility represents the inability, for broad segments of the population, to see those fundamental aspirations once associated with democratic and active participation in society as realizable. Economic crises, growing inequalities, and the dismantling of the welfare state have pushed millions of individuals toward the margins – those systemic margins identified by Sassen – not so much because of absolute poverty, but because of the denial of opportunities that make active and fulfilling inclusion in a democratic society possible. The “crisis of possibility” is therefore a condition deeper than material poverty: it is a crisis of hope, a loss of trust in institutions and in the capacity to mobilize for the improvement of one’s living conditions.

In this scenario, new forms of poverty are increasingly linked to conditions of relational and social fragility. Poverty is no longer solely a matter of lacking goods or resources, but is configured as the inability to participate fully in social, economic, and political life, with a growing fracture between those who are inside and those who are outside systems of protection and opportunity. The growth of inequalities, uncertainty about the future, and the progressive erosion of possibilities for personal and collective realization generate a spiral of exclusion that impoverishes not only materially, but above all humanly.

The interconnection and overlap of global crises – economic, health-related, climatic, and political – further intensify and multiply the effects of this “polycrisis” (Morin and Kern 1993), creating fertile ground for the diffusion of new forms of poverty that no longer appear as isolated events, but as structurally interrelated dynamics. Social fragility spreads across multiple dimensions, from labour precariousness to cultural marginalization and psychosocial vulnerability, pushing individuals to live within a context of growing disillusionment.

Within this framework, responses to new forms of poverty can no longer be limited to material intervention alone. A paradigm shift is required – one capable of recognizing the challenges of complexity and placing at the center of public policies not only material well-being, but also the promotion of real possibilities for participation and inclusion. Only by rethinking forms of collective protection and *promoting* authentic and sustainable inclusion will it be possible to address new forms of pov-

erty effectively, restoring to individuals not only a right to work and income, but also a horizon of hope and possibility. According to Sassen, the expelled claim recognition – the right to be, to exist. From this starting point, sociological theory can critically and constructively orient our understanding of social life, confronting the major challenges of social complexity through a radical paradigm shift and a rethinking of conceptual frameworks.

As Pierre Bourdieu famously argued, sociology is “a combat sport”:⁴ a tool of struggle capable of exposing mechanisms of domination and making visible the power structures that traverse social reality.

REFERENCES

- Bauman Z. (2000), *Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpień*, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warsaw.
- Bauman Z. (2001), *The individualized society*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Bauman Z. (2003), *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Bourdieu P. (1993), *La Misère du monde*, Édition du Seuil, Paris.
- Bourdieu P. (1997), *Méditations pascaliennes*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.
- Castel R. (1994), «La dynamique des processus de marginalisation: de la vulnérabilité à la dé-saffiliation», in *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, (22), 11-27, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1002206ar>.
- Douglas M. (1966), *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, United Kingdom.
- Dovis P. and Saraceno, C. (2011), *I nuovi poveri: politiche per le disuguaglianze*, Codice, Torino.
- Esposito E. (2020), «Systemic Integration and the Need for De-Integration in Pandemic Times. Sociologica», 14(1): 3-20, <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/10853>.
- Foucault M. (1964), *Le Langage de l'espace*. in *Dits et écrits*, I (1954-1975), Édition Gallimard, Paris.
- Foucault M. (1964), *L'ordre du discours*, Édition Gallimard, Paris.

⁴ The expression is drawn from the documentary film *La sociologie est un sport de combat* (France, 2001), directed by Pierre Carles and focused on the life and work of Pierre Bourdieu. The film conveys an understanding of sociology as a critical practice and an intervention within social conflict, portraying Bourdieu as engaged not only in theoretical research, but also in the public sphere, the media, and collective mobilizations against forms of symbolic domination and the inequalities produced by neoliberalism.

- Foucault M. (1972), *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Édition Gallimard, Paris.
- Foucault M. (1975), *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Édition Gallimard, Paris.
- Foucault M. (1980), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings (1972-1977)*, Pantheon Books, New York.
- Foucault M. (1984), «Des espaces autres», (Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales 14 mars 1967), in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, 5: 46-49.
- Foucault M. (2004), *Sécurité, territoire, population: Cours au Collège de France (1977-1978)*, Gallimard/Seuil, Paris.
- Germani G. (1976), *Aspetti teorici e radici storiche del concetto di marginalità con particolare riguardo all'America Latina*, in G. Turnaturi (a cura di) *Marginalità e classi sociali*, Savelli, Roma, pp. 29-67.
- Germani G. (1985), *Autoritarismo e democrazia nella società moderna*, in R. Scartezzini, L. Germani, R. Gritti (a cura di), *I limiti della democrazia*, Liguori, Napoli.
- Goffman E. (1963), *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ Prentice-Hall.
- Iori V. & Rampazi M. (2008), *Nuove fragilità e bisogni di cura*, Unicopli, Milano.
- Lefebvre H. (1967), «Le droit à la ville», in *L'Homme et la société*, 6: 29-35, <https://doi.org/10.3406/homso.1967.1063>.
- Magatti M. (a cura di) (2007), *La città abbandonata*, il Mulino, Bologna.
- Mela A. (1993), *Dualismo urbano, carriere morali e reti interattive*, in P. Guidicini e G. Pieretti (a cura di), *La residualità come valore. Povertà urbane e dignità umana*, Franco Angeli, Milano, pp. 53-65.
- Morin E. and Kern A.-B. (1993), *Terre-Patrie*, Édition du Seuil, Paris.
- Negri N. (a cura di) (2002), *Percorsi e ostacoli. Lo spazio della vulnerabilità sociale*, Trauben, Torino.
- Pieretti G. (1992), *Per una teoria di medio raggio sulle povertà moderne*, in P. Guidicini e G. Pieretti (a cura di), *Le radici dell'impoverimento. Tessuto sociale, famiglia e povertà a Bologna negli anni '90*, Franco Angeli, Milano, pp. 37-62.
- Ranci C. (2002), *La società della vulnerabilità: Politiche sociali e nuove povertà*, il Mulino, Bologna.
- Sandercock L. (1997), *Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities*, John Wiley, London.
- Sandercock L. (1998), *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*, University of California Press, California.
- Sassen S. (1991), *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Sassen S. (2014), *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Silver H. (1993), «National Conceptions of the New Urban Poverty: Social Structural Change in Britain, France and the United States», in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 17(3):336-354, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.1993.tb00225.x>.
- Wacquant L. (2008), *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.



Citation: Molè, M.A. (2026). Dwelling as a Wicked Problem: Housing, Inequality and Precarious Life Trajectories. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33):23-33. doi: 10.36253/smp-17135

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Dwelling as a Wicked Problem: Housing, Inequality and Precarious Life Trajectories

MARIA ALESSANDRA MOLÈ

Roma Tre University, Italy

E-mail: mariaalessandra.mole@uniroma3.it

Abstract. Over recent decades, dwelling has become one of the major social issues in Western societies, assuming a central role in both public and academic debate. Access to housing can no longer be understood solely in terms of the availability of dwellings, but rather as a multidimensional phenomenon intersecting transformations in the labour market, changes in family structures, and the widening of socio-economic inequalities. This contribution analyses dwelling as a social process, focusing on the tension between people's rights and privileges which characterises contemporary societies. Through a theoretical framework drawing on the concept of *wicked problems*, this paper discusses the structural criticalities of housing, paying particular attention to its effects of the commodification. The theoretical reflection is then brought into dialogue with the findings of a qualitative study conducted in the city of Rome. It, therefore, aimed at exploring the symbolic, relational and identity-related meanings of dwelling for people who have experienced, and in many cases continue to experience, conditions of severe housing precariousness.

Keywords: dwelling, wicked problems, precariousness, inequalities.

1. DWELLING AS AN EMERGING SOCIAL ISSUE

Dwelling represents a fundamental dimension of human and social experience. As Palvarini emphasises (2010), it cannot be reduced to a merely material function or to a static possession, but must instead be understood as a relational and situated process which unfolds over time through adaptive everyday practices and processes of spatialisation. While the home has traditionally been associated with the provision of shelter and the satisfaction of basic needs, sociological research has progressively shown how dwelling also constitutes a space for the identity's construction, the stabilisation of social relations and participation in collective life (Clapham 2005). From this perspective, housing functions as a social infrastructure, as it enables the exercise of rights, the construction of belonging and the possibility of planning relatively stable life trajectories (Saunders 1989; Somerville 1992; Padgett, Henwood and Tsemberis 2015).

Due to the fact that it operates as an infrastructure, the housing issue intersects multiple domains of social life, such as health conditions (Saegert and Evans 2003; Baker and Lester 2017), welfare and care arrangements (O'Malley and Croucher 2005; Bowlby and Jupp 2021), as well as other forms of social and economic inequality (Arundel 2017). Regarding this concept, dwelling can be adopted as an analytical lens through which to observe broader transformations. As Moos (2019) argues, housing is positioned “on the front line” of the processes of change which have shaped urban societies over the last two decades. Figure 1 summarises the main structural trends contributing to the redefinition of access to housing and forms of housing inequality.

Economic, demographic, climatic and political changes tend to manifest themselves with particular intensity in the housing sphere, through rising housing costs, socio-spatial segregation, residential instability and the emergence of new forms of exclusion. Therefore, dwelling actively contributes to shaping inequalities, reinforcing or reorganising them spatially and affecting individuals' life trajectories. Over recent decades, access to housing has indeed become increasingly problematic. Transformations in developed economies, labour market precarisation, the pluralisation of family structures and the intensification of mobility have altered housing demand, placing pressure on welfare systems which are often ill-equipped to respond to differentiated and inter-

mittent needs. Within this framework, dwelling lies at the centre of a growing tension between right and privilege: while formally recognised as a fundamental right, in practice it increasingly takes the form of a selective and unequally accessible resource.

The aim of this contribution is to analyse dwelling as a complex social phenomenon, highlighting its material, relational and symbolic dimensions. This article particularly seeks to show how the housing issue can be interpreted as a *wicked problem* (Gallent 2019: 26), that is, a domain characterised by uncertain boundaries, sectoral interdependencies and the absence of unequivocal solutions (Rittel and Webber 1973). Thus, this phenomenon requires integrated policies capable of combining market regulation, social protection and the promotion of inclusion.

2. DWELLING BETWEEN USE VALUE AND EXCHANGE VALUE

One of the most robust interpretative keys for understanding contemporary transformations in dwelling lies in the distinction between the *use value* and the *exchange value* of housing. Drawing from Marxian reflections on the commodity form, Lefebvre (2014 [1968]) shows how space – and housing in particular – is not a simple material container destined for biological and practical functions (shelter, rest, consumption), but rather a social product traversed by power relations and logics of appropriation.

From this perspective, housing tends to be transformed from a social good into a financial asset (Madden and Marcuse 2016), giving rise to what may be defined as a “housing question” which concerns not only the availability of dwellings, but also the structural mechanisms producing precariousness, displacement and inequality.

This shift cannot be interpreted as a process reducible to purely economic dynamics; but rather, it should be understood as a structural transformation of the social functions of dwelling. The growing centrality of exchange value alters the very way in which housing is conceived, regulated and lived: from a space oriented towards social reproduction, stability and the construction of social ties, housing increasingly comes to be treated as a patrimonial and financial asset. In this transition, the “rationality” governing housing is no longer primarily defined by residents' housing needs, but by criteria such as economic return, investment liquidity and expectations of long-term appreciation. Hence, the housing question becomes a privileged lens through which to

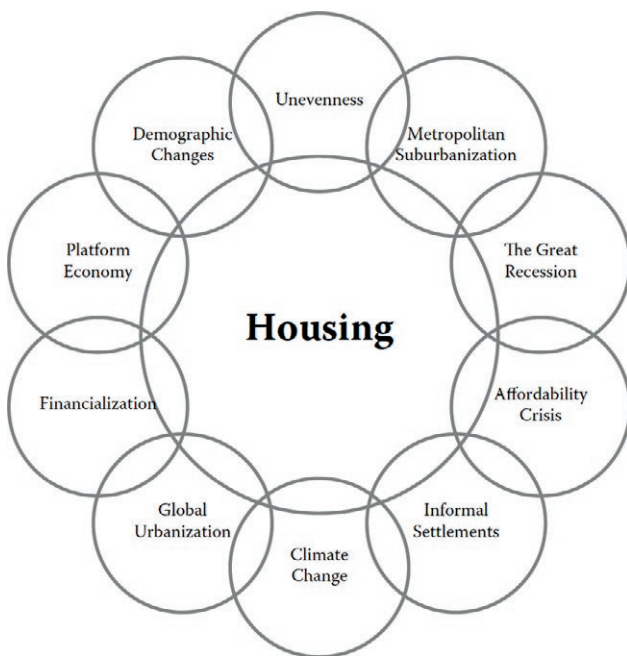


Figure 1. Societal trends shaping housing since the turn of the millennium. Source: Moos (2019: 4).

observe the evolution of contemporary urban capitalism: not only because real estate rent assumes a central role, but also because processes of social and territorial selection are intensified, redefining who can inhabit a certain housing space, where, under what conditions and with what degree of stability.

Over the last two decades, academic researches have described this process through concepts emphasising the growing integration between housing and financial markets. The *financialisation of housing* refers to the expansion of financial logics within the real estate sector, through the diffusion of mortgage credit, the transformation of dwellings into investment instruments, the centrality of large operators and the increasing disciplinary power of debt over life trajectories (Aalbers 2016; Fernández and Aalbers 2016). Even where housing formally remains “owner-occupied”, access and permanence are mediated by the ability to sustain its costs. This shift has fuelled new forms of housing vulnerability, often invisible in traditional homelessness indicators (Clapham 2002).

Alongside financialisation, *gentrification* and intensified urban competition have operated as territorial devices of social restructuring. Harvey (2008) links these phenomena to the neoliberal production of the city as a space of investment, while Smith (1996) explains gentrification as the outcome of a rent-gap logic which incentivises neighbourhood reconversion and valorisation, often at the cost of displacing working-class residents.

A further accelerator of these dynamics is represented by the growth of *urban tourism and short-term rentals*, which has rendered the boundaries between the city as a place to live and the city as a platform for an increasingly porous consumption. In environments where housing stock is captured by higher returns in the tourist market, dwellings lose their function of social stabilisation and become part of an economic chain oriented towards rotation and profit maximisation (Cocola-Gant 2016). This transformation, in addition to compressing supply for residents, contributes to rising rents and increasing contractual instability, with particularly severe effects on young people, migrants and low-income households.

Within this scenario, Rolnik (2019) explicitly speaks of a “war of places” to describe the growing conflict traversing housing space: dwelling becomes a terrain of struggle between social rights and extractive rent-seeking logics. Thus, the tension between use value and exchange value does not merely represent an analytical dichotomy, but a concrete social conflict, observable in difficulties of access to housing, displacement from central neighbourhoods, the growing weight of housing

expenditure on household budgets and the production of new forms of urban marginality.

Within this framework, the growing prevalence of exchange value over the social use of housing has contributed to the emergence of an increasingly widespread condition of *residential insecurity*, which does not necessarily coincide with the absence of a dwelling, but rather with the instability, vulnerability and uncertainty characterising the housing trajectories of broad segments of the population. Recent researches have indeed challenged the equivalence between the housing issue and homelessness, highlighting how contemporary forms of housing exclusion are often less visible but not less pervasive (Clapham 2002).

The concept of *precarious housing* is located precisely within this intermediate analytical space, indicating unstable housing conditions marked by temporary contracts, unaffordable rents, overcrowding, threats of eviction or dependence on informal solutions (McKee 2012). In such contexts, housing ceases to function as an infrastructure of social security and instead becomes a source of stress, anxiety and vulnerability, with effects extending far beyond the housing sphere in the narrow sense.

Through the *housing pathways* approach, Clapham (2005) has shown how the experience of dwelling should be read as a dynamic process intertwined with individual biographies, life-course transitions and structural transformations of housing markets and welfare regimes. From this perspective, residential insecurity does not represent an exceptional or temporary condition, but an increasingly normalised dimension of housing trajectories, particularly for young people, single-parent households, migrants and workers in precarious employment.

Numerous studies have highlighted how housing precariousness is closely connected to labour market precarisation and welfare retrenchment, particularly in contexts characterised by a strong emphasis on private homeownership as a pillar of social security (Kemeny 1995; Ronald 2008; Arundel and Doling 2017). In such regimes, access to housing is increasingly mediated by the market and by debt, while public forms of protection are insufficient to compensate for the risks associated with income volatility and rising housing costs. Housing, far from being a stabilising factor, thus becomes a vector of risk exposure.

Academic researches on *residential insecurity* further emphasise the cumulative and intersectional effects of housing instability, disproportionately affecting individuals already exposed to other forms of inequality. Waldron (2022), for example, shows how the threat of eviction and contractual instability produce direct effects on mental health and long-term planning capac-

ity, while Desmond (2016) demonstrates how evictions are not merely a consequence of poverty, but an active mechanism in its production and reproduction. Therefore, housing precariousness acts as a structuring factor of inequality.

Similarly, Coulter, van Ham and Findlay (2016) show how residential insecurity limits individuals' ability to invest in social relationships, educational pathways and labour opportunities, reinforcing dynamics of social and territorial immobility. When housing is unstable, opportunities to exercise agency and to construct coherent life projects are significantly reduced.

In light of these contributions, the tension between use value and exchange value of housing acquires further relevance: it is not merely a theoretical contradiction, but a *structural mechanism* which produces residential insecurity as an ordinary condition.

In situations which exchange value prevail, housing is primarily assessed in terms of its capacity to generate rent rather than its role as a space of life and social reproduction. This configuration produces a form of housing contingency in which permanence in domestic space is exposed to risks, negotiations and interruptions: sudden rent increases, contract termination, property sale, conversion to more profitable uses or income loss may trigger exit from housing even in the absence of exceptional biographical events. Hence, the researches on *precarious housing* broaden the analysis of housing inequality, shifting attention from extreme situations alone to a more articulated understanding of ordinary forms of vulnerability.

Housing, thus, tends to shift from a space of protection to a *space of uncertainty*, paradigmatically revealing the contradictions of urban capitalism and contemporary housing policies. These structural transformations find concrete expression in the life trajectories of individuals experiencing housing precariousness, as will become evident in the empirical findings presented below.

3. DWELLING AS A WICKED PROBLEM OF PUBLIC POLICY

Contemporary transformations of dwelling can be interpreted through the category of *wicked problems*, introduced by Rittel and Webber (1973) to describe public problems characterised by high causal complexity, sectoral interdependence, a plurality of actors holding conflicting values and the absence of definitive solutions. More recent literature has clarified that wickedness is not solely a technical property of problems, but

also emerges from processes of framing, contestation and governance: wicked problems tend to generate persistent controversies over problem definition, responsibility, legitimate policy instruments and evaluation criteria (Head 2008; Termeer and Dewulf 2019; Head 2022). From this follows a crucial paradox: while defining housing as a wicked problem is analytically useful, there is also a risk that complexity may be invoked as an alibi for postponing structural interventions, producing forms of decision-making paralysis (Termeer and Dewulf 2019).

The housing issue exemplifies the characteristics of wicked problems for at least four reasons. First, dwelling is intrinsically multidimensional: it simultaneously concerns the availability and quality of housing supply, regulation of real estate markets, access to credit and rental housing, social and health policies, mobility and urban infrastructure, as well as demographic and migratory dynamics. It is therefore a "nested" problem in which sectoral interventions systematically generate externalities in other domains, making it difficult to isolate causes and effects and complicating any attempt at integrated governance (Adams 2011; Head 2022).

Secondly, housing governance is typically multi-level and polycentric. Responsibilities are fragmented across local, national and supranational levels and distributed among public authorities, real estate market actors, financial institutions and third-sector organisations. This configuration increases the risk of incoherence between objectives – such as urban attractiveness, property valorisation and tenant protection – and produces difficult trade-offs, particularly in the absence of binding coordination instruments (Thomann, Trein and Maggetti 2019). Third, housing is highly exposed to external shocks – economic crises, pandemics, energy inflation, rising interest rates which amplify instability and reduce the predictability of policy outcomes. Fourth, distributive conflicts are structural: depending on social and asset positions, the same intervention may be perceived either as the protection of a fundamental right or as a threat to property value and rent, making it difficult to build stable coalitions in support of long-term reforms (Head 2008).

This configuration helps explain why, in practice, housing policies tend to oscillate between emergency measures and partial interventions, often characterised by incremental adjustments that fail to address the root causes of inequality and sometimes merely displace problems across territories or social groups. The literature on the governance of wicked problems highlights that in such contexts there are no "solutions" in a strong sense, but rather strategies of management and

mitigation requiring cross-sectoral coordination, iterative learning and adaptation over time (Head 2022). In particular, Termeer and Dewulf highlight the so-called *evaluation paradox*: when problems are complex and dynamic, it becomes difficult to determine “what has worked”, making approaches based on small wins and measurable intermediate objectives necessary, without abandoning a long-term transformative vision (Termeer and Dewulf 2019).

Applied to housing, this literature helps interpret the difficulty of combining supply-side policies, redistributive measures, market regulation and socio-health interventions without one domain neutralising or contradicting another.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The empirical research is based on a qualitative approach aimed at exploring the meanings attributed to dwelling by individuals living in conditions of urban marginality in the city of Rome. A total of 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted between April 2025 and July 2025 at two service centers: (1) Don Calabria Institute of Rome, a low-threshold service providing reception, meals and, in some cases, overnight accommodation; (2) the service “Assistance to the Person” promoted by Caritas Diocesana, oriented towards case management for situations of severe marginality and individualised support.

The sample consists of 22 individuals aged between 42 and 84 years old, with life histories marked by labour precariousness, housing loss, health problems, breakdown of family ties and, in some cases, addiction or experiences of detention. Five of the participants are women and seventeen are men. Among the women, two are foreigners and three are Italians, while among the men, six are foreigners and eleven are Italians. Interviews addressed common thematic areas – daily life, work, health, social networks, relations with services, dwelling and future aspirations – while leaving ample space for biographical narratives (Kvale 1996).

Access to the field was mediated by social workers employed in the services, whose presence played a crucial role in relational mediation and trust-building. For individuals who often experience ambivalent or conflictual relationships with institutions, such mediation proved decisive in facilitating authentic narratives of lived experience.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed through theoretically informed thematic coding, in dialogue with the literature on dwelling, housing precariousness and

processes of social exclusion. The analysis does not aim at statistical representativeness, but rather at an in-depth understanding of vulnerability trajectories and practices of agency. This research design made it possible to explore dwelling not only as a material condition, but also as a lived and narrated experience, providing the empirical basis for the analysis of results that follows.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This empirical evidence confirms and further articulates the theoretical reflections developed in the previous sections. It, therefore, shows how dwelling is configured, in the experiences of the interviewees, as a fundamental social infrastructure whose presence or absence cumulatively affects security, social relations, identity and capacity for action. Individuals attempt to “domesticate” urban space, rendering it experientially accessible as a place in which it is possible to feel at home. Dwelling can, in fact, be interpreted as a form of existential rootedness constitutive of human experience (Heidegger 1998 [1962]). The spaces where people seek to render familiar are not mere physical containers, but environments which are traversed, lived and continuously endowed with meaning, in which the world is experienced through repetitive and familiar actions, the use of objects, bodily postures and routines which enable symbolic appropriation. Practices such as habitually sleeping in the same place or regularly frequenting specific spaces contribute to the construction of a relatively stable everyday life. This routine is similar to what Giddens (1984) defines as “ontological security”, making the inhabited environment more predictable and therefore less threatening. However, this process of domestication is never fully accomplished nor guaranteed: it is fragile, reversible and constantly exposed to external disruptions, highlighting the structural tension between the need for rootedness and the precariousness of the material and social conditions of dwelling.

5.1 Dwelling on the street: between insecurity and symbolically valued objects

One of the most salient findings emerging from the interviews concerns the link between housing precariousness and everyday insecurity. Individuals living on the street, in cars or in informal arrangements describe their situation as one of permanent exposure to risk, in which the lack of a protected space amplifies their vulnerability. One interviewee recounts:

Now I'm on the street and I struggle even with the smallest things. For example, I had an umbrella –this morning I woke up and it was gone because it was stolen during the night. Then they stole my phone, my ID card. It's mostly poor people who get targeted, the ones who have nothing (Male, Interviewee 1).

This account highlights how dwelling, understood as the construction of routines, repeated use of objects and stabilisation of everyday life, is continually interrupted and rendered precarious by external conditions. The absence of housing is presented as a radical rupture of a set of practices that enable existential rootedness. The loss of objects such as an umbrella, a mobile phone or an identity card directly contributes to the erosion of ontological security, making the environment not only unpredictable but constantly threatening (Giddens 1984). The episode of night-time theft illustrates how urban space, although lived and traversed daily, remains uncontrollable and radically unstable.

Other accounts further illustrate this condition:

Here, I charge my phone, have breakfast, take a shower, have lunch, and then I go around Rome until 8 p.m. I usually go to Via del Corso, Piazza di Spagna, because I sleep near the Ara Pacis. I stay there because there's a lot of police. Rome has become dangerous; the more time goes by, the uglier things get to me. I was also robbed: I was looking at my phone and a kid grabbed it from behind and ran away (Male, Interviewee 2).

One day a friend told me he was sleeping outside under the canopy of an apartment building and invited me to stay with him for almost the whole summer. In October I stayed in a shelter near Piazza Venezia for eight months. Now I sleep in a friend's car. During the day I move around to eat, fortunately food can be found all over Rome. I can have two lunches, three breakfasts, but places to sleep are hard to find. (Male, Interviewee 3).

These excerpts show how, in the absence of housing, everyday life is organised through a spatial ordering of the city, within which interviewees structure their time and movements. The typical day is marked by a relatively stable sequence of places and functions: the Don Calabria day centre represents a crucial anchoring space, where essential activities such as personal hygiene, food, phone charging and an initial form of social interaction are concentrated. This place takes on an almost domestic function during the first part of the day, enabling the construction of a routine which introduces a degree of predictability into everyday life.

Interviews reveal how respondents when occupying spaces select and render them functional. Central areas of Rome – Via del Corso and Piazza di Spagna – are not

chosen randomly, but based on perceived safety, visibility and control. The explicit reference to police presence near the Ara Pacis, where the first interviewee sleeps, shows how security is sought through strategic use of public space. Thus, the city becomes both a resource to be tactically governed and a potentially hostile environment from which one must protect oneself.

These practices confirm that public spaces, temporary shelters and even a car can be transformed into spaces of everyday life. A condominium canopy, a dormitory or a friend's car are not merely shelters, but become – albeit temporarily – inhabited places, that is, spaces marked by presence and repetition of actions. In line with Lefebvre's reflections (1991), urban space appears in this situation its dual dimension: it is both the domain of action and the product of action itself. Interviewees shape urban space according to their needs, exercising a capacity to use it for their own purposes, rendering it familiar and, as far as possible, "homey".

5.2 Dwelling and relational poverty

The analysis shows how dwelling is deeply intertwined with the relational dimension (Berti, Valzania and Molè 2025). The absence of stable housing not only fragments pre-existing family and friendship ties, but also makes it difficult to build sociality and sharing, fostering isolation and social withdrawal¹. Some interviewees describe loneliness as a feeling of disconnection from the social world, accompanied by a perception of irrelevance: "Nobody looks at you here. You're old, poor and useless. You disappear, it's as if you don't exist" (Female, Interviewee 4).

Conversely, reception services produce forms of proximity-based sociality which perform an important function of emotional and symbolic support. One woman describes the service as a place of everyday community:

In the morning I come here and stay with my friends. We're together, we talk, we confide in each other. Everyone has their own problems, but among us we're united. Those three hours pass in harmony, in community (Female, Interviewee 5).

Such ties perform a function of *emotional containment* and mutual recognition, particularly significant in trajectories marked by isolation, loss of social roles and

¹ While this analysis addresses relational poverty and the consequences of marginality and housing precariousness without explicitly adopting a gender perspective, a more in-depth examination of similarities and differences between men and women will be the focus of future researches.

relational fragility. The possibility of sharing time and words contributes to reconstructing a minimal sense of belonging and restoring dignity to everyday experience.

However, these ties are often narrated as ambivalent:

They care about me here, but they're not real friends. They're almost forced friendships, because we're all in the same situation. Here it's everyone for themselves, God for us all (Male, Interviewee 10).

In "our world" it's hard to find someone who can really be a friend, there's always some interest underneath (Male, Interviewee 7).

While such relationships provide immediate support and mitigate loneliness, they tend to be fragile, temporary and weakly convertible into resources useful for broader social inclusion.

Analytically, these are predominantly forms of *bonding social capital* (Putnam 2000), which strengthen internal cohesion and produce a sense of belonging and mutual support. However, they do not facilitate access to more heterogeneous networks with greater mediating capacity vis-à-vis the labour market, institutions and urban opportunities. As Portes (1998) observes, social capital is not intrinsically "positive": in contexts marked by poverty and instability, it may generate ambivalent effects, contributing to group closure, mutual dependence and, in some cases, the reproduction of the very conditions of exclusion it seeks to mitigate.

The absence or weakness of *bridging social capital* significantly limits the possibility of transforming relationships into resources deployable beyond assistance circuits. In this perspective, Granovetter's contribution (1973) on the role of *weak ties* is particularly relevant: it is precisely weak ties, rather than strongly cohesive ones, which enable access to information, opportunities and resources external to one's immediate group. However, in contexts of housing precariousness, such connections are structurally reduced, both due to the spatial and symbolic segregation of services and to the instability of individuals' life trajectories.

Dwelling, therefore, does not constitute a simple background to social relations, but a structuring condition of their quality, horizon and "social convertibility". When housing experience is unstable or confined within circuits of marginality, relational networks also tend to remain closed and self-referential, offering short-term protection and support but rarely functioning as bridges towards autonomy and inclusion. As Woolcock emphasises (2001), the capacity of social capital to generate inclusive outcomes largely depends on the presence of connections between informal networks and formal

institutions; in their absence, social relations risk unintentionally crystallising positions of disadvantage. From a more structural perspective, Bourdieu (1986) reminds us that the value of social networks is never neutral, but depends on their position within social space and their capacity to be converted into other forms of capital, highlighting how not all relationships offer the same opportunities for mobility and recognition.

5.3 Housing and agency: dwelling as a precondition for action

A central axis of the analysis concerns the relationship between dwelling and capacity for action. The absence of housing is associated with a reduction in autonomy, future planning and the ability to exercise agency. This condition is powerfully synthesised by one interviewee:

Without a home you're mutilated. It's a strong word, but it's true. You can't fully act, you're limited. I lived in many houses; before I had a normal life, then I was on the street for quite some time, and this is the first home after that street life (Male, Interviewee 12).

The lack of stable space prevents the structuring of everyday time, self-care, sustained job searching and access to social rights. Conversely, access to housing – even temporary – produces an enabling effect. Another interviewee recounts:

When I entered this house, the feeling was that I suddenly came from nothing to having everything. The staff here tell us: this is your space which has value to you. So you have to be responsible and manage it (Male, Interviewee 6).

The possibility of having a space recognised as one's own contributes to reconstructing a sense of responsibility, biographical continuity and social legitimacy – central elements for the exercise of agency. From this perspective, housing does not represent the final reward of an already accomplished pathway of inclusion, but rather a preliminary condition that makes the activation of individuals possible in the first place.

5.4 Residence and rights

A recurring thematic axis in the collected narratives concerns *official residence registration (residenza anagrafica)* as a crucial node for the effective exercise of social citizenship. The absence of residence emerges as a genuine form of *institutional invisibility*, placing individuals

“outside the world” of rights, despite recognised needs and, in some cases, partial access to basic services. In this context, so-called “*fictitious residence*” (as in the case of Via Modesta Valenti in Rome) plays a central role as a minimal inclusion device, indispensable for avoiding total exclusion from welfare and legal protection circuits. This instrument is not perceived by interviewees as a definitive solution, but rather as an access threshold that allows one to “exist” for public administration. As one interviewee explains:

Yes, I have the fictitious one at Via Modesta Valenti... the people from Sant'Egidio helped me... sometimes people ask me where I got it... maybe I can help someone else (Male, Interviewee 14).

This excerpt highlights at least two relevant dimensions. On the one hand, the fundamental role of third-sector organisations as *institutional mediators*, capable of filling informational and procedural gaps within the public system. On the other, a “horizontal” dimension of knowledge emerges: obtaining residence transforms beneficiaries into informal resources for others, activating micro-practices of solidarity and information circulation that compensate for the opacity of official procedures.

Residence is also represented as a *symbolic boundary* between inclusion and exclusion. Even when primary needs are partially met (food, healthcare, shelter), the absence of residence continues to produce a condition of legal and social suspension:

I have everything: I eat, I get medical care, I sleep. But as long as I don't have residence, I'm outside the world. The moment I get residence, everything will change (Male, Interviewee 16).

Here, residence is not merely a bureaucratic requirement, but assumes the meaning of an *enabling device*, capable of reactivating a future perspective and repositioning the individual within the social and normative order. Its absence produces a *vicious circle of irregularity* involving residence permits, access to rights and the very possibility of interacting with institutions:

I have to renew my residence permit, because I lost it. I lost my residence and now I'm doing everything with lawyers to get it back. [...] I find it difficult because I'm not helped by the State. [...] But it's a right—we're not protected, because you're outside the world. But when I get residence, everything will change; what I'm missing is the bureaucratic and legal aspect (Male, Interviewee 9)

The analysis thus shows how official residence registration is not a mere administrative formality, but a *key*

device of inclusion/exclusion, rendering individuals institutionally “visible” and entitled to rights.

5.5 Health and precariousness

Several narratives show how physical and mental health conditions are deeply intertwined with housing precariousness trajectories, configuring not as separate dimensions but as mutually constitutive elements of cumulative vulnerability. Many interviewees report chronic conditions—including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, recognised disabilities and past physical trauma – which directly affect work capacity and the possibility of maintaining employment continuity. Health, for these specific group of people, is frequently described not as an episodic event, but as a permanent condition limiting opportunities for “starting over”, especially in the absence of stable housing capable of guaranteeing rest, regularity and access to services.

Most interviewees report inadequately monitored health problems due to interrupted care pathways, service fragmentation and logistical or financial difficulties related to purchasing medication or accessing specialist visits. As a 73-year-old man when renouncing treatment recounts: “I take the pills when I can afford them. Otherwise, I stay in bed and wait for it to pass” (Male, Interviewee 17).

Alongside physical conditions, psychological distress pervades narratives in a diffuse manner, often remaining in the background and rarely explicitly defined. In some cases, mental suffering is narrated through difficulties in maintaining stable relationships or being recognised in one's complexity. One woman states:

I've always told people that I'm bipolar, but it always caused problems [...]. It wasn't an advantage to say it, because they took advantage of it. It's something I have, it's not who I am (Female, Interviewee 18).

This narrative highlights the weight of stigma associated with mental health and the risk that disclosure becomes an additional source of vulnerability, especially in relational and housing contexts marked by power asymmetries.

Other accounts emphasise how psychological distress often results from a stratification of critical events – bereavement, social isolation, difficult biographical transitions – rather than being a direct and immediate consequence of economic poverty. One man states: “It's not even about money, it's a deep crisis inside you”, (Male, Interviewee 8) underscoring how mental suffering is

experienced as an intimate and totalising condition, difficult to translate into terms of assistential need.

5.6 Fragile social networks, shame and concealment strategies

Alongside material needs, interviewees' narratives reveal a profound *poverty of recognition*, in which individuals struggle to be perceived – and to perceive themselves – as legitimate subjects within their affective and social networks.

Fear of being “seen” in their own vulnerability generates concealment strategies which manifest, first and foremost, in the construction of alternative narratives addressed to family members. As one interviewee recounts:

I'm ashamed to be seen like this, so I make up that I'm in Milan, Turin, Naples for work, that I'm travelling. Maybe they have doubts. I have a brother, but it's as if I didn't. I'm the one who keeps them at a distance. I also keep friends at a distance (Male, Interviewee 11).

In this situation, shame emerges as a central emotion, and lying is not aimed at deceiving others, but at protecting their own identity and preserving a symbolic distance which avoids judgement, pity or stigma.

When you live on the street and want to wash yourself, you can't go to your friend's house. I've never asked for it. I'd rather die than ask. (Female, Interviewee 13).

This statement shows how street homelessness produces a *rupture of implicit norms of reciprocity* regulating social relations. Asking for hospitality – or even access to basic hygiene facilities – is experienced as an unbearable violation of dignity, to the point that suffering becomes preferable to requesting help. In this sense, isolation appears not merely as a consequence of poverty, but as an *active self-defensive mechanism* against loss of status and recognition.

The construction of “protective lies” represents a further device for managing vulnerability, especially towards close family members:

I even lied to my brother; I didn't tell him I'm on the street. I told him I'm in a shelter; it's a white lie. Who knows what he would think, imagining me sleeping on the street (Male, Interviewee 15).

The lie is, therefore, as presented above, explicitly defined as “white”, underscoring its ethical and relational function: not deception, but *damage limitation* for

both self and others. Fear of being imagined “sleeping on the street” refers to a socially stigmatised representation of marginality, from which the interviewee seeks to distance himself.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This analysis shows how dwelling is configured as a dynamic, relational and symbolic process, deeply intertwined with public policies, support networks and individuals' biographical trajectories. The findings highlight how dwelling on the street or in informal arrangements produces a condition of permanent exposure to risk, in which insecurity is not episodic but structural. The recurrent loss of personal belongings, the need to select spaces based on criteria of protection and visibility, and the inability to control the surrounding environment progressively erode the possibility of constructing stable routines and “feeling at home” in urban space. Observed practices of spatial zoning reveal significant adaptive capacity on the part of these interviewees, but at the same time expose the limits of a domestication of space constantly threatened by external and unpredictable factors.

Secondly, this analysis presents how housing precariousness is deeply intertwined with forms of relational poverty. Moreover, proximity-based networks developing within services and reception contexts perform a fundamental function of emotional support and mutual recognition, but often remain fragile, temporary and weakly convertible into resources for broader inclusion processes.

A further contribution concerns the relationship between dwelling and agency. Collected narratives show how the absence of housing is experienced as a genuine mutilation of the capacity to act: without a stable space, it becomes difficult to organise time, care for oneself, plan for the future and claim rights. The administrative and legal dimension also emerges forcefully through the role of official residence registration. The absence of residence constitutes a form of institutional invisibility which suspends full access to social citizenship, even in the presence of recognised needs and partial service use. “Fictitious residence” devices represent minimal thresholds of inclusion, capable of reactivating rights and future perspectives, but also reveal the fragility of a system which delegates to exceptional solutions what should be structurally guaranteed.

Furthermore, difficulties in accessing continuous healthcare, the inability to sustain medication costs and fragmentation of healthcare provision exacerbate existing physical and psychological conditions. Mental distress – often not explicitly named – confirms that health

cannot be addressed separately from the material and relational conditions of dwelling.

In light of the analysis presented above, these findings suggest that policies and interventions targeting individuals in conditions of housing precariousness are unlikely to be effective if confined to emergency or sectoral responses. Dwelling emerges as a transversal dimension, capable of profoundly shaping the quality of social relations, access to rights, health and individuals' capacity to act.

REFERENCES

- Aalbers M. B. (2016), *The Financialization of Housing: A Political Economy Approach*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Adams D. (2011), «The 'wicked problem' of planning for housing development in the UK», in *Housing Studies*, 26(6): 951-960.
- Arundel R. (2017), «Equity Inequity: Housing Wealth Inequality, Inter and Intra-generational Divergences, and the Rise of Private Landlordism», in *Housing, Theory and Society*, 34(2): 176-200.
- Arundel R. and Doling J. (2017), «The end of mass homeownership? Changes in labour markets and housing tenure opportunities across Europe», in *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 32: 649-672.
- Baker E. and Lester L. (2017), «Multiple housing problems: A view through the housing niche lens», in *Cities*, 62: 146-151.
- Berti F., Valzania A. and Molè A. (2025), «Se la povertà è relazionale: una ricerca nelle aree interne della Toscana», in *Rivista Trimestrale di Scienza dell'Amministrazione*, 1: 1-17.
- Bourdieu P. (1986), «The Forms of Capital», in J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Greenwood Press, New York, pp. 241-258.
- Bowlby S. and Jupp E. (2021), «Home, inequalities and care: perspectives from within a pandemic», in *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 21(3): 423-432.
- Clapham D. (2002), «Housing pathways: A postmodern analytical framework», in *Housing, Theory and Society*, 2: 57-68.
- Clapham D. (2005), *The Meaning of Housing: A Pathways Approach*, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Cocola-Gant A. (2016), «Holiday Rentals: The New Gentrification Battlefront», in *Sociological Research Online*, 21: 3.
- Coulter R., van Ham M. and Findlay M. A. (2016), «Re-thinking residential mobility: Linking lives through time and space», in *Progress in Human Geography*, 40(3): 352-374.
- Desmond M. (2016), *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, Crown Publishers/Random House.
- Fernández R. and Aalbers M.B. (2016), «Financialization and housing: Between globalization and varieties of capitalism», in *Competition & change* 20(2): 71-88.
- Gallent N. (2019), *Whose Housing Crisis? Assets and Homes in a Changing Economy*, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Giddens A. (1984), *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Polity Press Cambridge.
- Granovetter M. S. (1973), «The Strength of Weak Ties», in *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6): 1360-1380.
- Harvey D. (2008), «The Right to the City», in *New Left Review*, 53: 23-40.
- Head B. W. (2008), «Wicked Problems in Public Policy», in *Public Policy*, 3 (2): 101-118.
- Head B. W. (2022), *Wicked Problems in Public Policy. Understanding and Responding to Complex Challenges*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Heidegger M. (1998 [1962]), *Tempo ed essere*, Guida, Napoli.
- Kemeny J. (1995), *From Public Housing to the Social Market: Rental Policy Strategies in Comparative Perspective*, Routledge, New York.
- Kvale S. (1996), *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.
- Lefebvre H. (1991), *The Production of Space*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Lefebvre H. (2014 [1968]), *Il diritto alla città*, Ombre Corte, Bologna.
- Madden D. and Marcuse P. (2016), *In Defense of Housing: The Politics of Crisis*, Verso, London/New York.
- McKee K. (2012), «Young People, Homeownership and Future Welfare», in *Housing Studies*, 27(6): 853-862.
- Moos M. (2019), *A Research Agenda for Housing*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Herndon.
- O'Malley L. and Croucher K. (2005), «Housing and dementia care – A scoping review of the literature», in *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 13(6): 570-577.
- Padgett D. K., Henwood B. F. and Tsemberis S. J. (2015), *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Palvarini P. (2010), «Qualità abitativa e vivibilità urbana», in *Quaderni di Sociologia*, 52: 31-51.

- Portes A. (1998), «Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology», in *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24: 1-24.
- Putnam R. D. (2000), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Touchstone Books/Simon & Schuster, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Singapore.
- Rittel H. W. J. and Webber M. M. (1973), «Dilemmas in a general theory of planning», in *Policy Sciences*, 4: 155-169.
- Rolnik R. (2019), *Urban Warfare: Housing under the Empire of Finance*, Verso Books, London.
- Ronald R. (2008), *The Ideology of Home Ownership: Homeowner Societies and the Role of Housing*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Saegert S. and Evans G. W. (2003), «Poverty, Housing Niches, and Health in the United States», in *Journal of Social Issues*, 59(3): 569-589.
- Saunders P. (1989), «The Meaning of “Home” in Contemporary English Culture», in *Housing Studies*, 4(3): 177-192.
- Smith N. (1996), *The New Urban Frontier. Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, Routledge, New York.
- Somerville P. (1992), «Homelessness and the Meaning of Home: Rooflessness or rootlessness?», in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 16(4): 529-539.
- Termeer C. and Dewulf A. (2019), «A small wins framework to overcome the evaluation paradox of governing wicked problems», in *Policy and Society*, 38(2): 298-314.
- Thomann E., Trein, P. and Maggetti M. (2019), «What’s the problem? Multilevel governance and problem-solving», in *European Policy Analysis*, 5(1): 37-57.
- Waldron R. (2022), «Experiencing housing precarity in the private rental sector during the covid-19 pandemic: the case of Ireland», in *Housing Studies*, 38(1): 84-106.
- Woolcock M. (2001), «The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes», in *The Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, 2(1): 11-17.



Citation: Romania, V. & Bertazzo, T. (2026). From Ferrarotti's *baraccati* to Roma camps. The long wave of housing marginality. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 35-45. doi: 10.36253/smp-17102

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

From Ferrarotti's *baraccati* to Roma camps. The long wave of housing marginality

VINCENZO ROMANIA*, TOMMASO BERTAZZO

University of Padua, Italy

E-mail: vincenzo.romania@unipd.it; tommaso.bertazzo@phd.unipd.it

*Corresponding author

Abstract. Italy is sadly notorious in Europe as “campland”, as the nation that has created the largest and most systematic model of territorial segregation of Roma people within institutional camps. Most scholars have interpreted this phenomenon by using exogenous or abstract theoretical conceptualizations. In this article, we offer a different perspective by focusing on the internal factors of continuity between housing marginality and the rise of *campi nomadi*. We will focus on the case of Rome, showing how the intertwined phenomena of *baraccati* [shanty dwellers] and *borgate ufficiali* [institutional suburbs], studied by Franco Ferrarotti, played a major historical and sociological role in determining some of the characteristic aspects of camp governance. This perspective offers new insights for understanding and addressing the current challenges of social and housing inclusion of Roma people in Italy.

Keywords: Housing studies, Romani studies, urban studies, Franco Ferrarotti.

1. INTRODUCTION

Roma people are the largest and long-settled ethnic minority living in Europe (FRA 2020). At the same time, they are one of the most discriminated-against groups across the continent (Eurobarometer, 2019). All over Europe, such discrimination has produced a significant spatial, social, and economic segregation, but what happened in Italy is particularly noteworthy: the country that hosted the largest and most pervasive system of Roma camps – ethnically connoted areas of residential segregation designed by institutions for these minorities. At their peak, Roma camps – institutionally labelled as *campi nomadi* – housed around 40,000 people, while today only 15,800 people live in the camps, out of a total of 150,000-180,000 Roma residing in Italy (Associazione 21 Luglio 2024).

Although only a minority of Italian Roma live in camps, in the common perception camp dwellers represent the entire group. The segregated and often undignified living conditions¹ of those who live in camps therefore fuel

¹ Indeed, there are cases in which Roma camps have been transformed into dignified housing

the processes of stigmatization. For this reason, Italian Roma camps have attracted significant scholarly attention, primarily committed to conceptualizing their existence and nature. We propose to classify this literature into two main strands: exogenous explanations of the phenomenon and theoretically oriented interpretations. Some authors, however, go beyond this classification, offering exogenous explanations through theoretical interpretations; or do not fit neatly into either category. Therefore, the distinction should be understood as purely ideal-typical and functional to the argument of the article, namely the need to delve deeply into the internal historical causes that led to the creation of the camps.

The former strand includes all articles that explain the birth of Italian Roma camps not as a domestic phenomenon, but as a manifestation of a broader process that sees the emergence, throughout Europe, of a large and varied system of camps of different natures. In camp studies, “camp” is an umbrella term used to indicate a variety of heterogeneous socio-spatial formations, developed within Western states and supranational contexts to respond to different and sometimes contradictory functions. The camp has been variously described as: a) a modern technology of humanitarian government (Hyndman 2000); b) a thanatopolitical institution, i.e., an expression of the triumph of power over confined subjects (Agamben 1998); c) a device of colonial expansion (Gilroy 2004); or d) as a space of resistance and political claim (Ramadan 2013).

The most representative study of this strand is Picker’s *Racial Cities* (2017). According to Picker, the genesis of Roma camps can be traced back to the ethos that animated colonial camps, with which they share a dual ambivalent function: on the one hand, the protection of supposed Roma nomadism, essentialized through a precise discursive order; on the other, its progressive neutralization through practices of assimilation and sedentarization. In Picker’s view, such ambivalence would confirm the historical continuity of these spaces with the colonial experience, making Roma camps a contemporary reworking of devices aimed at confining populations considered racially inferior and, at the same time, a threat to the economic, social, and cultural order (Picker 2017: 86).

The second strand of interpretation is theoretically oriented. Although most Romani studies are, in turn, theoretically oriented, some interpretations tend towards greater theoretical abstraction, based on a strong conceptual framework. For reasons of space, we will only

present here the studies that refer to Agamben’s philosophy. These are, after all, among the most widespread in the sociopolitical interpretations of Roma camps. Giorgio Agamben describes camps as the “nomos of our time”. The widespread phenomenon of camps is interpreted as the manifestation of a “geopolitics of exception”. Roma camp therefore represents the materialization of the «state of exception» (1996: 38), a place where ordinary law is suspended and those confined there, stripped of their civil and political rights, are reduced to their “bare life” (Agamben 2003), at the mercy of a power that disposes of them. Authors such as Piasere (2006), Armillei (2018), and Legros and Vitale (2011) made extensive use of Agamben’s conceptualization to show how institutions governed nomad camps through the device of the “state of exception” and how bureaucracies played a significant role in standardizing and simplifying the internal differences of Roma camp dwellers. However, other scholars have highlighted the limitations of Agamben’s conceptualization. Some has shown how this approach ignores the multiplicity of actors and forms of governance in the camps (Maestri 2017). Others have argued how Agamben does not pay enough attention to the agency of camps’ dwellers (Kalyvas 2005), and their daily strategies of “campzenship”, i.e., citizenship-making in the camp (Sigona 2015).

In conclusion, the first strand of studies offers an interesting perspective but one essentially based on exogenous contributing factors, while the second strand focused primarily on regulatory and governmental aspects, paying little attention to the domestic historical factors that led to the emergence of the camps. The aim of this contribution is to integrate these perspectives by showing how Italian Roma camps can also be interpreted as an authentic product of endogenous factors of republican Italy and its tendency to create long-term housing precarity.

To do so, we will focus on the Italian city that has experienced the longest and most extensive phenomena of urban marginalization: Rome. After a brief historical introduction on urban marginalization in the Italian capital from 1871 to the fascist era, we will analyse the studies conducted since the 1960s by Franco Ferrarotti on Roman shanty towns. Ferrarotti devoted a profound sociological reflection to urban marginalization, exploring the living conditions of the so-called *baraccati*, paying attention both to the material difficulties imposed by segregation and to the social relations and survival strategies put in place by the inhabitants. Finally, we will show how, in recent decades (1970s-2010), in the city of Rome, the transformation of suburbs and shanty towns, on the one hand, and the emergence of camps, on the

areas. This is the case, for example, of the Village of Roses, to which we have recently dedicated a journalistic in-depth study (Romania and Bertazzo 2026b).

other, intersect in dynamics of exclusion of the excluded and resistance to such exclusion.

The main goal is to reveal a genetic line connecting Roman shanty towns to Roma camps, highlighting the similarities and continuities between these two socio-spatial formations and recognizing Roma camps as a profoundly Italian phenomenon.

2. BARACCATI AND BORGATE IN ROME: A SHORT HISTORY.

Compared to other Western countries, residential segregation in Italy appears more nuanced (Kazepov 2005), but remains a relevant phenomenon, albeit partly historically underestimated. Historically, the process has declined above all with respect to socio-economic status; more recently, however, both for the Roma camps and for the phenomena of segregation of international immigrants, the ethnic component has become more visible (Balbo 1994). Rome exemplifies this phenomenon better than other Italian cities, in the polarization between gentrified and peripheral areas and in the strong territorial discontinuities generated by this divide (Cellamare 2016). Such discontinuities generate significant inequalities in terms of educational opportunities, employment, and social mobility (Atkinson and Kintrea 2001).

The city of Rome has a long and continuous history of urban marginalization (Insolera 2011). The presence of extensive shanty towns spans from the establishment of Rome as the capital of the Kingdom of Italy in 1871 until at least the 1990s. Nevertheless, the phenomenon remained invisible in the public representation of the city for a long time, except for the period from the end of the Second World War to the early 1970s, when journalists, writers, filmmakers, and sociologists began to focus their attention on the inhabitants of shanty towns, the so-called *baraccati*. In 1956, publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli financed an inquiry into the condition of people living in the Mandrione shanty town². Two years later, intellectual, writer, and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini published a report for *Vie Nuove*, the magazine of the Italian Communist Party, entitled «Viaggio per Roma e dintorni» (Journey through Rome and its surroundings), in which he examined the conditions of deprivation in the capital's shantytowns. Two famous literary works about *baraccati* are *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) by Pasolini and *Racconti romani* by Alberto Moravia (1954). Shortly afterwards, sociologist Franco Ferrarotti and his

research group launched the first sociological surveys on the conditions of shanty dwellers in Rome (Ferrarotti 1970; 1974).

Let us now summarize the main phases of the phenomenon, highlighting for each period the main social and urban factors that favoured precarious dwelling and slum formation. Historically, the rise of shanty towns and suburbs in Rome can be divided into four major phases: the Liberal age (1870-1922), the Fascist age (1922-1945), the post-war expansion phase (1945-1970), and the phase of progressive elimination of shanty towns and birth of Roma camps (1970-2000). Throughout all these phases, Roma people have always been present in the Italian capital, but their visibility and relevance have changed considerably. In this section we will focus on the first two phases, while we will analyse the situation after WWII in the next section, showing how it appeared to the sociological eye of Franco Ferrarotti and his collaborators.

The history of housing marginalization in Rome dates back to 1870s, when the city assumed the role of capital of the newly formed Kingdom of Italy. In the last decades of the 19th century, the population grew rapidly, increasing from 213,000 (1871) to 509,000 inhabitants in 1909 (Comune di Roma 1960). During the same period, the relative weight of the Roman population in relation to the total national population doubled (idem). It was therefore during this period the nation began to undergo progressive urbanization, as happened in most European countries (Antrop 2004).

However, this growth was not adequately regulated in terms of housing policy, either with regard to urban planning or the provision of public housing. This deregulation encouraged both building speculation and illegal construction, i.e. the emergence of «self-built shacks or shacks built in the recesses of the city, which ended up forming separate residential areas, veritable 'cities within the city' with their own forms of social organization» (Salsano 2012: 137). From a territorial point of view, the first shacks were built in areas covered by natural or built elements and/or isolated and therefore less controlled. Typical locations for precarious settlements were Roman aqueducts, such as Acquedotto Felice, Mandrione, Porta Portese and peripheral state-owned lands (*terre demaniali*) near the many railway lines converging in the capital. These areas were also inhabited by Roma populations, coming mostly from the neighbouring region of Abruzzo. Shanty towns such as Acquedotto Felice survived for over a century, demonstrating the pervasiveness of these phenomena and the slowness of politics and bureaucracy in combating them (Portelli 2024). The inhabitants of the Roman

² The inquiry involved the anthropologist Franco Cagnetta and photographer Franco Pinna, but it also found the support of intellectuals such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Elsa Morante and Goffredo Parise.

shanty towns were called *baraccati* in Italian, a term that we will use throughout this text, as well as *borgate* and *borghetti* to emphasize the specific nature of the phenomenon. During the Liberal Age, also the first institutional attempts were made to overcome the slums through emergency housing solutions offered by the Municipality of Rome. Under Mayor Nathan, in 1911, the first temporary public houses made of wood were built (Farina and Villani 2017).

During the following phase, the Fascist era, new conditions of marginalization were added to those already mentioned, both on an urban and national level. From a national point of view, Fascism's policies discouraged internal mobility, thus reducing the chances of settlement for those already living in areas that excluded them from the property market (Treves 1976). The aim, consistent with the ideology of the regime, was to halt the historical trend towards urbanization (Breschi 2007). Fascist «legislation against urbanization» (laws 358/1931 and 1092/1939) restricted the transfer of residence to cities, requiring the possession of a job, for reasons of public order, economics. They were only completely repealed in 1961, at the height of the Roman shanty towns.

At the municipal level, an important factor contributing to urban marginalization was the demolition of large areas of Rome's historic centre and the consequent eviction of many families (Salsano 2010). Rome was clearly a central city in fascist ideology, which strongly proclaimed a return to the classical origins of Italian/Roman civilization. For this reason, significant investments were made in its urban transformation, aimed at increasing the size and grandeur of the central thoroughfares, thereby demolishing the less functional dwellings. This led to the large-scale eviction and displacement of residents from the city centre. Added to this was the migratory pressure of Italians attracted by the economic opportunities of the capital and pushed by the poverty experienced in their regions of origin. However, these opportunities were limited, because Rome had limited industrial development, which inevitably led to a process of housing marginalization.

Institutions responded to this set of phenomena with the introduction of official suburbs named *borgate ufficiali*, i.e. the stabilization of marginalization through the construction of precarious but institutionalized housing. In several areas of Rome (Tor Marancia, San Basilio, Tiburtino, Gordiani, Prenestina, Tufello, Acilia, Trullo), it was decided to build clusters of temporary houses to remedy spontaneous settlements. The construction model was initially based on the use of «very simple housing structures» (*casette di semplicissima struttura*) intended for the «derelict classes», as reported by Francesco

Boncompagni Ludovisi, governor of Rome from 1928 to 1935 (Farina and Villani, 2017). Throughout the Fascist period, the *borgate* were often built on unsuitable land, with significant problems of permeability and sanitation. Moreover, the size and amenities were typically inadequate. The borgate Gordiani and Tor Marancia, built in 1933, for example, although constructed with brick frames, had a single 16-square-metre room per family, with external bathrooms and almost entirely inadequate facilities. As Villani explains, «[l]iving conditions in these housing estates deteriorated rapidly. From the very beginning, it was clear that their success was compromised from the outset by the temporary nature of the projects and the segregationist logic from which they originated» (Villani 2017: 17).

Alongside this, the Municipality of Rome built temporary shelters inside barracks, factories, and disused hotels. These were dilapidated structures with a high concentration of inhabitants, which typically led to further precarious housing conditions and relational and family instability (Farina & Villani 2017). At the same time, the clearance of existing shacks began, with their inhabitants being transferred, at least partially, to public housing. This process was never completed; rather, it was characterized by the continuous transfer and spontaneous re-emergence of new shacks on the outskirts of the *borgate* themselves. Although a substantial process of eliminating the shacks began in 1928, in 1929 there were still 32,683 shack dwellers in 6,032 shacks (ASC UAS 1929). The institution of *borgate* did not make the precarious housing disappear but increased its presence, «generating the first cases of illegal settlements consisting no longer of temporary shacks but of real, durable constructions» (Salsano 2012: 148).

The survival of shacks next to suburbs was linked to mechanisms of tolerance towards everything that was not very visible. In a 1936 document, the governorate of Rome recommended resolving the situation of the various shanty dwellers «either through public assistance [...] or by repatriating families who had no possibility of finding work in the capital, or by tolerating illegal shanty towns, but in well-designed and supervised areas» (Villani 2017: 13). This marked the beginning of a process that pushed the inhabitants of the most precarious housing areas to the outer edges of the city. One episode is particularly significant. In 1930, the shacks located in the Portuense area were cleared so as not to create a visual obstruction to the wedding of Maria José and Umberto di Savoia, with the arrival of the Belgian sovereigns in Rome. The municipality offered the *baraccati* [shacks dwellers] either a cash subsidy or the possibility of accommodation in a former pasta factory.

In conclusion, starting from the Fascist era, the intertwining of spatial and economic segregation affected urban planning in Rome and, more generally, in Italian cities. The official suburbs «functioned as the original nuclei of the outer suburban belt and as cornerstones for the subsequent process of urban expansion» (Ivi: 9).

As regards Roma people, the expansion of the shantytowns also led to differences in migration flows. With the annexation and forced Italianization of Istria, there was an increase in arrivals from the Balkan area, in addition to internal migrations of Roma populations residing in the centre-south of the country. However, Roma people were excluded from both access to official *borgate* and the allocation of public housing. Finally, starting in 1940, Italian Roma were rounded up and imprisoned in concentration camps. Of the 25,000 residents in Italy during the Second World War, 1,000 lost their lives and an unknown number were imprisoned and killed in German camps (Hancock 2018). In short, Roma people living in Rome faced even worse housing conditions than other inhabitants of shanty towns and suburbs. They survived by occupying spaces left vacant by others who were just as desperate, but less discriminated against on ethnic and racial grounds.

Summing up, the Fascist era represents a prodromal phase for the model of institutionalized housing insecurity that would later become a reality in Roma camps. Laws against urbanization never succeeded in limiting the spatial mobility of Italians but created a large grey area in terms of urban planning. The reaction to all this was the creation of suburbs (*borgate*) which, similarly to what would happen later with Roma, helped to control the mobility of marginalized people by limiting their movement and segregating them in spaces of physical and symbolic invisibility.

Furthermore, we witness the ineffectiveness of the suburbs in absorbing *baraccati*'s housing marginality, their tendency to stabilize precariousness and the persistent dialectic between spontaneous settlements and authorized areas. If we look at the recent history of Roma camps, we see how municipal administrations will sometimes proceed by institutionalizing spontaneous illegal settlements, and other times by introducing new authorized areas, near which, however, new spontaneous settlements will inevitably arise. This phenomenon continues today, as we have shown in the cases of Genoa, Turin, and Padua in ethnographic research conducted during the 2022-2025 period (Romania and Bertazzo 2025).

An additional point of contact between fascist *borgate* and *baraccapoli* and Roma camps is territorial stigmatization and invisibilization (Sisson 2021; Wacquant *et al.* 2014). Both Roma camps and Roman shanty towns

and suburbs arose as spontaneous results of poor urban regulation and planning, to which institutions did not respond with well-considered policies, but with a simple process of transferring the social problem elsewhere, to make it as imperceptible as possible to the majority of society. Another point of contact lies in displacement. In many cases, in fact, the suburbs were built at considerable distances from the shantytowns being evacuated, forcing those who were transferred to undergo a painful process of displacement.

Finally, the mechanism of evictions with pocket money is another recurring feature constantly found in the case of Roma people, who are regularly forced to vacate and relocate in exchange for financial compensation (Romania and Bertazzo 2026a).

3. BORGATE AND BORGHETTI IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD: FERRAROTTI'S STUDIES

The first sociological studies on housing marginality in Rome date back to the 1960s. Indeed, Fascism and idealistic philosophy had prevented Italian sociology from developing and becoming institutionalized before the Second World War. The situation changed radically during the 1950s, with the birth of the first research institutes, the introduction of the first sociology faculty positions (1961-1962), and the subsequent establishment of the Higher Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Trento (1966). The newly formed Italian sociology was greatly influenced by the United States and the New Deal, which pushed for rapid modernization and industrialization of the country (Rossi 2023 [1973]).

Italian sociology identified alignment with the positions of the modernizing elites as the best way to finally achieve the status of an academic discipline (Bortolini, 2012). To do so, the new generation of sociologists had to distance themselves from a series of intellectual positions – from Pasolini to Carlo Levi to Rocco Scotellaro – which, although lacking any “scientific qualifications”, had until then intervened to describe the profound transformations experienced by Italy since the immediate post-war period. In relation to the modernizing elites, composed of industrialists, economic operators, public administrators, politicians, and trade unionists, sociologists thus positioned themselves as «bearers of scientific knowledge, objective and directly applicable to the solution of development problems» (Ivi: 355).

This epistemological stance and these normative orientations are also visible in the work of Franco Ferrarotti, one of the most representative figures of early Italian sociology. His studies conducted in the late 1960s

and 1970s on the living conditions of shanty dwellers in Rome led to the publication of two books that were important both for sociological debate and for public opinion: *Roma: da Capitale a Periferia*³ (1970) and *Vita da baraccati*⁴ (1974). These two books can be classified as examples of public sociology, strategically intersecting three different linked ecologies (Abbott 2005) or interconnected fields (Bourdieu 2020): the academic field, the political field, and the media field.

Programmatically, the two studies recall Chicago School's urban studies, but unlike the exponents of the First School (1915-1935), Ferrarotti offers a more structuralist explanation of urban marginality and adopts a critical tone towards both the political and intellectual spheres. He accuses Italian politics of not having done enough to solve *I mali di Roma* (the ills of Rome)⁵, bowing to the interests of property speculators; and he accuses intellectuals such as Pier Paolo Pasolini and Moravia of offering an overly romanticized representation of poverty, which ended up reproducing and justifying it (Ferrarotti 1974: 16).

Roma: da capitale a periferia (Ferrarotti 1970) argues, as its title suggests, a *j'accuse* against the unregulated expansion of the suburbs in the Italian capital and the failure to integrate its inhabitants. In a century, the city's population increased tenfold, from 213,233 inhabitants in 1871 to 2,251,495 inhabitants in 1962 (ISTAT data), leading to an explosion of urban marginalization. At the time Ferrarotti undertook his research, the suburbs presented a very complex picture of precarious dwellings. The author distinguishes three different typologies of precarious dwellings: the official *borgate*, the spontaneous *borgate*, and finally the so-called *borghetti*, i.e., the shanty towns where *baraccati* live.

Official borgate are the only ones subject to public sanctions... Spontaneous settlements are clusters of illegal buildings that have sprung up on the outskirts of the city or in the Roman countryside on land that has been illegally subdivided, i.e. subdivided outside the town plan. Finally, there are the so-called "borghetti", which consist of groups of small brick houses, huts, and shacks built partly of sheet metal and partly of brick (Ferrarotti 1970: 55).

The situation therefore reproduced what happened during the Fascist era: the construction of official settlements for poor people did not prevent the continuous transfer between official and spontaneous suburbs and

slums. Shanty dwellers were considered by politicians either as an "ugly blemish, a reminder of sad times" or, even worse, as "troglodytes". But, Ferrarotti asks, «aren't the shacks and the suburbs of Rome a symptom of deep structural divisions and contradictions?» (Ivi: 12). He returns to this point in *Vita di Baraccati*, oscillating between defending the humanity of the shanty dwellers and an attitude of implicit paternalism:

Baraccati are a separate, segregated humanity, but only from an objective point of view, considering the conditions in which they are forced to live due to 'a series of factors that do not depend, at least not entirely, on them (Ferrarotti 1974: 17).

Those who do not adapt [to today's capitalist exploitation] either deliberately or, as is more often the case, simply because they lack sufficient flexibility, are finished: cut off, isolated, segregated, ghettoised, excluded (Ivi: 21).

However, Ferrarotti grasps here two fundamental points for understanding the reality of Roma camps as well: ghettoisation as a process of social exclusion of those who do not adapt to the rules of capitalism; and the resulting double victimisation and stigmatisation of them. A third, no less important, point: the political invisibility of the excluded: «baraccati have no right to citizenship; they are, by definition, squatters, invisible men and women» (Ivi: 32).

Consistent with post-Marxist critical theory, Ferrarotti defines shacks as «a necessary function, the inevitable and unavoidable product of the capitalist city as it is configured in its forces and real social relations, in its harsh objective demands» (Ivi: 13). Although he does not state so, his conception echoes the post-Marxist book *Le borgate di Roma* (The Suburbs of Rome), written in 1960 by Piero Della Seta⁶ and Giovanni Berlinguer.

The areas of precarious dwelling are spaces inhabited by the so-called «reserve armies of capitalism». Politics does not address this as a structural issue, but adopts an emergency approach, which is expected to be overcome autonomously by events:

Shacks are always thought of as an emergency situation, linked to war, immigration... But the shack dweller is not simply a displaced person. In the city based on the principle of profit maximisation, shacks are the norm: luxury neighbourhoods and ghettos of poverty are necessary to one another (Ibidem).

³ En: Rome: from Capital to Periphery.

⁴ En: Life as shanty dwellers.

⁵ *I mali di Roma* is also the name of a conference held in 1974 which will be fundamental in determining public policies for overcoming slums (see further).

⁶ Piero Della Seta was an important politician in the Roman Communist Party, with extensive knowledge of urban planning and journalism. He was a city councillor from 1956 to 1985 and a tireless protagonist in urban planning battles in the capital.

In an entirely Italian paradox, shanty dwellers are mostly construction workers, engaged in building dwellings they will never be able to enjoy. Thus, a city split in two emerges: on one side, prestigious areas destined for the well-off and, on the other, anonymous and mass-produced peripheries, shacks, and *borgate* «dozens of kilometres away and lacking services».

Similarly to what occurs in illegal settlements that arise following the eviction of Roma camps, the houses of shack dwellers are built using scrap materials «sheet metal from nearby construction sites, planks, mismatched tiles, sections of wire mesh, asbestos sheets, fruit shipping crates», and become veritable bunkers. The combination of social isolation and absolute precariousness leads to barricading oneself behind barbed wire fences. The explanation for this relationship is brilliant and reveals phenomena of resistance to contact with external reality that are also very common among Roma living in camps and shantytowns, as we showed in our book on the segregation of Romani people in Italy (Romania and Bertazzo 2025).

In the barbed wire that defends the entrance from neighbours one can read the desperation of those who stay afloat only through an extreme concentration of the minimal available resources, the insecurity of those who cannot open up and collaborate because they cannot risk a bad encounter (Ferrarotti 1970: 45).

Just as would happen later in Roma camps, the objective conditions of the shacks profoundly limit the life chances of shack dwellers and function as a factor of social disintegration: «Under normal conditions, housing constitutes the nucleus of the primary socialization process; here it functions as a factor of disintegration with respect to any associative need or will» (Ibidem: 47).

Thus, genuine ghettos emerge, separated from the rest of the city by barriers of built and natural environment:

The borgata responds very precisely to the definition of "ghetto" with which its existence has been denounced on several occasions. Along the Aqueduct, on both sides, the shacks are lined up. At the rear, in the direction of the Appia Nuova, lie lands and fields owned by the Torlonia family. On the other side, towards the Tuscolana, there is instead a strip of deserted and uncultivated land of a few hundred metres, an authentic segregation belt, a sort of "no man's land" that separates the borgata from the neighbourhood, the shacks from the "buildings" (Ibidem 148-149).

More specifically, many *borghetti* emerge as construction ghettos, that is, hobo-like structures for precarious workers, to draw a parallel with Nels Anderson's

celebrated research (Anderson, 1923). Ferrarotti explains this well in the final chapter of *Vite di Scarto*, emphatically entitled *Il ghetto edile* (The Construction Ghetto):

Take a peasant from Abruzzo who abandons the land and leaves for Rome. Having got off the train, if he has a point of reference, he heads towards some borgata to visit people from his village. Here the only support they can give him is to let him sleep somewhere and put him in touch with certain "friends" able to offer him immediate work. And immediate work, in Rome, means work in construction. The immigrant is thus enclosed in a ghetto, from which he may never escape. [...]. The construction worker carries the full weight of a ghetto existence: intermittent employment, marginalisation from overall social structures, psychological isolation, the difficulty of aggregation at the level of class consciousness (Ferrarotti 1974: 117).

Urban ghettos are places of waste for wasted lives⁷, to use Bauman's terms (Bauman 2013). As occurs, for example, in Turin, where a Roma camp is situated near an asbestos collection site, or like a thousand other Roma camps that have arisen next to landfills, motorways, or other undesirable places. Pina, a lady who has lived at the Acquedotto Felice for 36 years, explains: «Not only the Municipality of Rome but all municipalities collect the rubbish and burn it, because they say that this rubbish brings many ills, as the doctors have discovered. Here there isn't a refuse collector who is concerned with collecting this rubbish, gathering it and taking it somewhere to burn it, because we are not part of humanity» (Ferrarotti 1974: 40).

In the same interview, she refers to another recurring element also found in Roma camps: fences, walls, security, and control devices used to guarantee absolute separation between the shack dwellers and the rest of society:

They're building a great wall like a concentration camp so that we can no longer pass through to where they are... Don Roberto⁸ actually went to the Municipality to talk about this matter and they told him that gardens must be made here and there's nothing to be done. [...] Don Roberto said: we won't let them build the great wall, because as soon as they build, it we'll tear it down and we've decided to tear it down, because we're not in a concentration camp (Ferrarotti 1974: 72).

Walls in Roman suburbs emerge from recurring conflicts between shack dwellers and local residents, par-

⁷ Similarly, Leonardo Piasere defined Roma people as 'people of the dumps' (Piasere 1991).

⁸ Don Roberto Sardelli, the principal Catholic actor engaged in the political defence of *baraccati*.

ticularly affecting Roma communities. Ferrarotti hastily dismisses shantytowns as spaces of deculturation, whilst public policies view them merely as sites of self-reproducing marginality requiring intervention at the “primary socialisation” stage. However, this paternalistic view overlooks the ambivalent nature of these spaces. Following Wacquant’s approach to ghettos (Wacquant 2008), shantytowns also contain significant solidarity networks, parallel institutionalism, and communal habitus – making them potential spaces of alternative humanity rather than simply areas of social degradation (Romania and Bertazzo 2026a). Ferrarotti’s successors themselves, through their research, would provide a more multifaceted picture of urban ghettos.

In subsequent decades, Ferrarotti would not return to addressing the problems of the peripheries and would therefore not investigate the outcomes of the housing relocations which, albeit not directly, he had helped make possible. This was instead done by Maria Immacolata Macioti, his long-standing collaborator, who in the 1980s returned to interview the inhabitants of the *borghetti* to observe the long-term effects of housing relocation processes. Macioti recognised how the destruction of the *borghetti* and the consequent relocation of their inhabitants to new neighbourhoods of the city had not succeeded in helping them overcome the condition of marginality from which they came. Although housing conditions might appear undeniably improved, Macioti found that many of the problems affecting them, rather than easing, had intensified with the transfer (Macioti 1988). The overcoming of the *borghetti* had coincided with a substantial rupture of a model of social organisation, communal and oriented towards mutual aid, which had until then enabled those groups to confront material conditions of extreme hardship.

Similarly, forty years after Ferrarotti’s studies, Stefano Portelli (2017) studied the people then evicted from Rome’s shantytowns. Consistent with Macioti, he argues that the demolitions of the *borgate* and *borghetti* and the transfer of their inhabitants, far from having resolved the condition of marginality of those groups, produced repercussions which, transcending the individual psychological dimension, «have decisively influenced Rome’s urban and social development» (Portelli 2017: 70). The assumption that providing “proper houses” to inhabitants of self-built neighbourhoods would overcome their marginality and make them full citizens proved largely fallacious. In brief, Ferrarotti failed to grasp the long-term consequences such uprooting would generate for these groups.

In conclusion, many of the issues listed in this section had already emerged critically during the Fascist era.

However, Ferrarotti’s main merit lies in showing the relationship between ghettoisation and the political inability or unwillingness to fight against social exclusion, and in investigating the effects of ghettoisation on shanty town dwellers. Walls, barbed wire, and control of the excluded in institutional areas are therefore not new phenomena introduced with the Roma camps, but variations on a paradigm of exclusion and control already experienced by shanty town dwellers. However, his analyses also have significant pitfalls, as the aforementioned epistemological naivety and a certain normative orientation, in terms of paternalism and uncritical support for modernization.

4. FROM THE CLEARANCE OF SHANTYTOWNS TO THE BIRTH OF ROMA CAMPS IN ROME

Whilst in the 1960s there were 13,684 families living in shacks, primarily in the area between Casilina and Nomentana, this number fell to 3,200 families in 1976, eventually reaching zero in the early 1980s when the last 13 shantytowns, housing 1,513 families, were demolished (Careri *et al.* 2016).

The final phase of this analysis begins in the 1970s with the gradual clearance of shantytowns and the emergence of Roma camps. These two phenomena intersect and are closely linked. Firstly, because numerous violent episodes against Roma occurred within the Roman borgate, leading to the creation of “protected” areas. The intention was to defend Roma from attacks, but as is easily understood, the barriers segregating them served politically, above all, to protect neighbours from the unwelcome presence of Roma themselves. In fact, even back then, there was widespread anti-Gypsyism in Italy, the effects of which have continued to the present day (Piasere 2009). Secondly, because many of the abandoned old shantytowns (Gordiani, Quarticciolo, Casilino 900) were occupied both by long-established Roma and by Roma migrants arriving in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s from Yugoslavia and Romania. With their arrival, the shantytowns were reborn. In 1994, 18 were recorded, some located in the very places where the historic shantytowns demolished in the 1970s and 1980s had stood. The establishment of ten Roma camps that same year was primarily motivated by the closure of these new shantytowns.

But let us proceed step by step. To understand the genesis of the nomad camps, particular attention must be paid to the period from 1970 to 1975. During this time, numerous attacks against Romani populations occurred in the Roman peripheries. In 1972, at San Basilio, «a citizens’ protest provoked yet another expulsion order by the police» (Salsano 2012: 173), lat-

er blocked by school authorities' intervention. In April 1974, a camp of Serbian Roma located in the Settecamini borgata was evicted and then set on fire by *carabinieri* and the local population. Mirella Karpati, pedagogist and long-standing collaborator with the NGO Opera Nomadi, described this as a veritable round-up (Karpati 1975). In December 1974, again at San Basilio, Roma were evicted to "protect them" from attacks by some families from the area. As in other cases, school and church authorities attempted to mediate with the Municipality and police, but without success.

Meanwhile, increasing tensions in the city's shantytowns led to an important conference in 1974, entitled *The Ills of Rome*, which forcefully raised the political necessity of eliminating existing shantytowns. In 1975, Mayor Clelio Darida announced for the first time the project to establish an equipped area for nomads. The measure was set within a legislative context that was beginning, at European level, to recognise the needs of Roma people. A 1973 memorandum from the Council of Europe recommended that member states take initiatives precisely to defend Roma from the discrimination to which they were subjected. It would be approved by the Italian government only in 1985. However, the creation of rest areas was delayed and episodes of intolerance continued. In April 1976, a camp inhabited by Xoraxane Roma at Tiburtino III was stormed by a group of three hundred citizens armed with iron bars and sticks (Lacio Drom, 3/1976). Police intervened to protect the Roma, but only to escort them away. Similar demands for removal from shacks and settlements occurred in 1978 at Casal Bruciato (Lacio Drom, 6/1978) and in 1979 at Borghetto Prenestino (Lacio Drom, 5/1979).

Meanwhile, evictions of the largest existing shantytowns began: Mandrione and Borghetto Prenestino in 1981; the Via Meda camp, occupied by Slovenian Roma, and agricultural land occupied by approximately 400 Xoraxane and Rudari Roma at Quarticciolo in 1983. The new defining feature of this period is the systematic recourse to evictions, first of shantytown dwellers in general and then of Roma in particular. Evictions, establishments, and new evictions would characterise the entire subsequent history of Roma camps in Italy, until the most recent period (2018-2026) when the establishment of new institutional camps ceased, although various slums continue to persist.

On 28 March 1985, upon proposal by the PCI (Italian Communist Party), the regional law "Provisions in Favour of Roma" (Regione Lazio, law n.82/1985) was approved, the first Italian law to establish camps. The Municipality implemented the provisions contained in the regional law in December 1985 and January 1986,

approving the establishment of the first Roma camps. As Salsano explains, however, things did not proceed as planned: «Whilst awaiting the construction of the camps, thanks to the commitment of Councillor Mori, provisional stops equipped with essential services were authorised for ten Xoraxane families in the territory of the 9th District and for eight Rudari families in the 5th District. For the others, due to the determined opposition of residents which clashed with the goodwill of the Municipal Administration, it was not possible to find a place for rest and their removal from Rome was ordered» (Salsano 2012: 192).

Meanwhile, the Roma presence in Rome grew. There were approximately 6,000 in 1990 and around 10,000 a decade later, thanks to arrivals of former Yugoslavs first and then Romanians. The new migrants settled in the very shantytowns that had been cleared in the previous decade: «In 1994, 18 large shantytowns were recorded and a 'reabsorption plan' was presented by Mayor Rutelli, along with regulated municipal spaces through the construction of 10 "nomad camps"» (Careri *et al.* 2016: 18).

5. CONCLUSION

This article has sought to demonstrate the historical and sociological continuity between the experience of Roman slums and shanty towns and the subsequent establishment of ethnically segregated areas, such as Roma camps. Its main limitation lies in the enormous scope of the available data and related fields of study. Even within these limitations, we believe we have demonstrated how certain factors clearly show continuity between the two different phenomena. First, the institutional production of urban marginality. Second, the attempt to control the phenomenon of marginalized housing not through effective social policies, but through the systematic segregation of the poor and excluded. Furthermore, the secondary victimization of those living in ghettos. Finally, as can also be seen in sociological literature inaugurated by Ferrarotti, a certain tendency to consider marginalized housing as a phenomenon to be combated with top-down policies, without involving precarious dwellers.

REFERENCES

- Abbott A. (2005), «Linked ecologies: States and universities as environments for professions», in *Sociological theory*, 23(3): 245-274, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0735-2751.2005.00253.x>

- Agamben G. (1996), *Mezzi senza fini. Note sulla politica*, Boringhieri, Torino.
- Agamben G. (1998), *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA.
- Agamben G. (2003), *Lo stato di eccezione*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino.
- Anderson N. (1923), *The Hobo*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Antrop M. (2004), «Landscape change and the urbanization process in Europe», in *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 67(1-4): 9-26, DOI: 10.1016/S0169-2046(03)00026-4
- Armillei R. (2018), *The 'Camps System' in Italy. Corruption, Inefficiencies & Practices of Resistance*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- [ASC UAS] Archivio Storico Capitolino, Ufficio Assistenza Sociale (1929), *Censimento dei baraccati del 1929*.
- Associazione 21 Luglio (2024), *Vie d'uscita. Comunità rom negli insediamenti formali e informali in Italia*. Rapporto 2023, <https://www.21luglio.org/2018/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Rapporto-intero-con-ISBN.pdf>
- Atkinson R. and Kintrea K. (2001), «Disentangling area effects: Evidence from deprived and non-deprived neighbourhoods», in *Urban Studies*, 38(12): 2277-2298, DOI: 10.1080/00420980120087162.
- Balbo M. (1994), «Urban planning and the fragmented city of developing countries», in *Third World Planning Review*, 15(1): 23-35, <https://doi.org/10.3828/twpr.15.1.r4211671042614mr>
- Bauman Z. (2013), *Wasted lives: Modernity and its outcasts*, Wiley, Hoboken NJ.
- Bortolini M. (2012), «Gli indifferenti. I sociologi, Pier Paolo Pasolini e la modernizzazione dell'Italia», in *Studi culturali*, 9(3): 345-370, DOI: 10.1405/72735.
- Bourdieu P. (2020), *Habitus and Field: General Sociology, Volume 2 Lectures at the Collège de France 1982-1983*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Breschi D. (2007), «Fascismo e antiurbanesimo. Prima fase: ideologia e legge (1926-1929)», in *Le carte e la storia*, 13(2): 171-188.
- Careri F., Cellamare C., Ciniero A., Fiorucci M., Formica M., Macioti M.I., Laino G., Pasta S., Salvatori F., Scandurra E., Sigona N., Vereni P. and Vitale T. (2016), *Roma: Oltre le Baraccopoli*, Associazione 21 Luglio, Roma.
- Cellamare C. (2016), *Città fai-da-te: Tra antagonismo e cittadinanza. Storie di autorganizzazione urbana*, Donzelli, Roma.
- Comune di Roma (1960), *Roma. Popolazione e Territorio dal 1860 al 1960*. Url: https://www.comune.roma.it/web-resources/cms/documents/Roma_Popolazione_e_Territorio_1860-1960.pdf
- Eurobarometer (2019), *Special Eurobarometer 493: Discrimination in the EU (including LGBTI)*, Url: https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2251_91_4_493_eng?locale=en
- [ERRC] European Roma Rights Center (2000), *Camp-land. Racial segregation of Roma in Italy*, Country Report Series, n. 9, October 2000.
- Farina M. and Villani M. (2017), *Borgate Romane. Storia e forma urbana*, Libria, Melfi.
- Ferrarotti F. (1970), *Roma da capitale a periferia*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- Ferrarotti F. (1974), *Vita di baraccati. Contributo alla sociologia della marginalità*, Liguori, Napoli.
- [FRA] Fundamental Rights Agency (2020), *Roma and Travellers in six countries: Roma and Travellers Survey*, Publications Office, Luxembourg.
- Gilroy P. (2004), *Between camps: Nations, cultures and the allure of race*, Routledge, New York-London.
- Hancock I. (2018), «Responses to the Porrajmos: The Romani Holocaust 1», in Id. (a cura di), *Is the Holocaust unique?*, Routledge, New York-London, pp. 75-101.
- Hyndman J. (2000), *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota.
- Insolera I. (2011), *Roma moderna. Un secolo di storia urbanistica 1870-1970*, Einaudi, Torino.
- Kalyvas A. (2005), «The sovereign weaver. Beyond the camp», in A. Norris (eds.), *Politics, metaphysics, and death. Essays on Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer*, Duke University Press, Durham, pp. 107-134.
- Karpati M. (1975), «Rastrellamento a Roma», in *Lacio Drom*, 2: 6-13.
- Kazepov Y. (2005), *Cities of Europe: Changing contexts, local arrangements, and the challenge to urban cohesion*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Legros O. and Vitale T. (2011), «Les migrants roms dans les villes françaises et italiennes: mobilités, régulations et marginalité», in *Géocarrefour*, 86 (1): 3-14, <https://doi.org/10.4000/geocarrefour.8220>
- Maestri G. (2017), «The contentious sovereignties of the camp: Political contention among state and non-state actors in Italian Roma camps», in *Political Geography*, 60: 213-222, DOI: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.08.002.
- Piasere L. (1991), *I popoli delle discariche, Saggi di antropologia zingara*, Cisu, Roma.
- Piasere L. (2006), «Che cos'è un campo nomadi?», in *Achab*, 8: 8-16.
- Piasere L. (2009), *L'antiziganismo*, Quodlibet, Macerata.
- Picker G. (2017), *Racial cities: governance and the segregation of Romani people in Urban Europe*, Routledge, New York.

- Portelli S. (2017), «Dove l'acqua dolce incontra quella salata. Idroscalo, ultimo grande quartiere autocostruito di Roma», in *Antropologia*, 3: 159-178.
- Portelli S. (2024), *Il diritto di restare. Espulsioni e radicamento tra Roma e Ostia*, Carocci, Roma.
- Ramadan A. (2013), «Spatialising the refugee camp», in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38(1): 65-77, DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-5661.2012.00509.x
- Romania V. and Bertazzo T. (2025), *Romani People in Italy: The Different Shades of Segregation*, Routledge, New York-London.
- Romania V. and Bertazzo T. (2026a) « 'From Ghetto to Habitus Factory' Roma Camps in Italy: an Empirical Extension of Loïc Wacquant's Theorization», *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 50(2), 449-465, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.70009>
- Romania V. and Bertazzo T. (2026b) «Il Villaggio modello rom che Milano vuole cancellare», in *il manifesto*, 18/01/2026.
- Rossi P. (2023), «La sociologia in Italia. Strutture universitarie e organizzazione della ricerca [1973]». *Quaderni di Sociologia*, (92-93-LXVII), 159-174, <https://doi.org/10.4000/12ejg>
- Salsano F. (2010), «Edilizia residenziale pubblica, assistenza sociale e controllo della popolazione nella Roma del primo Novecento (1903-1940)», in *Annali del dipartimento di Storia*, Università di Roma Tor Vergata, 4/2008: 95-120.
- Salsano F. (2012), «Gli zingari a Roma tra integrazione e rifiuto. Dal 1870 al XXI secolo», in B. Coccia (eds.), *Zingari. Storia dei nomadi a Roma tra accoglienza e rifiuto*, Apes, Roma, pp. 135-198.
- Sigona N. (2015), «Campzenship: Reimagining the camp as a social and political space», in *Citizenship Studies*, 19(1): 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2014.937643>
- Sisson A. (2021), «Territory and territorial stigmatisation: On the production, consequences and contestation of spatial disrepute», in *Progress in Human Geography*, 45(4): 659-681, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132520936760>
- Treves A. (1976), *Le migrazioni interne nell'età fascista*, Einaudi, Torino.
- Villani L. (2017), «La periferia stratificata. Borgate romane dal fascismo al secondo dopoguerra» in M. Farina e L. Villani (a cura di), *Borgate romane. Storia e forma urbana*, Libria, Foggia, pp. 9-90.
- Wacquant L. (2008), *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Wacquant L., Slater T. and Pereira B.V. (2014), «Territorial stigmatization in action», in *Environment and planning*, 46(6): 1270-1280, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a4606ge>



Citation: Bruni, C. & Finco, M. (2026). Collaborative Housing Strategies: The Case of “Widespread Reception” by Caritas Diocesana in Rome. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 47-57. doi: 10.36253/smp-17126

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Collaborative Housing Strategies: The Case of “Widespread Reception” by Caritas Diocesana in Rome

CARMELO BRUNI*, MATTEO FINCO

Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

E-mail: carmelo.bruni@uniroma1.it; matteo.finco@uniroma1.it

*Corresponding author

Abstract. Homelessness is a long-standing issue, but only recently has it become relevant on the Italian and international political agenda. The latest data show that the phenomenon is growing and that policies to combat it have often proved ineffective. The traditional responses in our country have been limited to the provision and organisation of low-threshold reception services (staircase model). Only recently have some alternative services based on the “Housing First” model been trialled. The literature emphasises that the complexity of the homeless situation requires an integrated approach to the individual, which can create a stable network of multi-professional interventions. At the same time, interventions must promote the recovery or development of people’s skills and abilities when these are limited or compromised. In this context, in 2015, Caritas Rome launched the “Accoglienza diffusa” (Widespread Reception) project. The initiative is based on the principle that the path to inclusion involves building stable social networks that support personal empowerment. This contribution presents the initial results of this initiative. These show that the project is developing Welfare Communities in some areas of Rome, characterised by a stable local network of support and assistance for vulnerable individuals, involving public institutions, social enterprises, families and parishes.

Keywords: welfare communities, inclusion, homelessness.

1. THE HOMELESS

The presence of homeless people¹ in our urban contexts is not a recent phenomenon. In the 1980s, the attention to this issue began to grow, together with the crisis of modern Western welfare systems after the so-called *Trente Glorieuses* (Fourastié 1979). Since then, an extensive body of literature on

¹ In general, but not for everyone, the term “homeless” refers to an individual who does not have a fixed, regular and adequate place to sleep at night. Conversely, “homelessness” refers to the phenomenon of not having stable and permanent accommodation. “Homelessness” will be preferred here, since it is a structural condition and not the result of individual responsibility and (even less) individual choices.

this subject (e.g., Blau 1992; Kozol 1988; Rossi 1989; Shinn and Weitzman 1990; Stern 1984) has demonstrated the worsening presence of homeless people², especially in wealthier urban contexts³.

In Italy, too, the interest for homelessness became significant during those years (Caritas Diocesana Roma 1987; Guidicini and Pieretti 1988; Negri and Saraceno 1996; Sarpellon 1991), although it only emerged as a factor in the political agenda at the beginning of this century. In fact, until 2011, there had never been a systematic survey on homelessness in the country⁴. Data show how it has become a growing problem, accompanied by urbanisation and migration, which have transformed it into a real social emergency.

It is hard to give a clear definition of homelessness, since it can be referred to different kind of people and situations. In literature, many terms are used to describe people without a home, since it is difficult to identify homogeneous characteristics in a wide and diverse range of situations and disadvantages (Lavanco and Santinello 2009: 19-20). In English, the range of terms used includes «tramps, hoboes, bums, idle and disorderly, poor and indigent, rogues and vagabonds, incorrigible rogues, vagrants, idle and dissolute, mendicants, beggars, casuals, dossers, of no fixed abode» (Gerrard 2017).

This explains why there is no shared definition at European level, since different countries use different criteria to describe the phenomenon. However, cross-sectional analyses carried out by international organisations such as FEANTSA (*Fédération Européenne d'Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri*) show that, in general, the category of homelessness includes people *without accommodation*; in *temporary accommodation* (provided by the public services or NGOs), and those in *marginal accommodation* (well below standard) (Maucci and Di Censi 2024: 20).

However, the proliferation of terminology and the difficulty in reaching a shared definition of homelessness is the consequence – and not the cause – of the difficulty to grasp its many facets. Historically, homelessness has been surrounded by prejudices and beliefs that are difficult to eradicate. For example, contrary to popular belief, some of the most recent studies on the relation-

ship between homelessness and mental illness or drug addiction have concluded that it is not true that the latter are prevalent among the majority of homeless people (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2020).

Conversely, homelessness could typically take the form of a long-term, episodic or temporary condition. In fact, a research in the US in the 1990s shows that approximately 80% of shelter users are temporary, with very short stays or even a single one, while a further 10% are episodic users, and the remaining 10% are long-term users, who account for about half of all overnight stays (Kuhn and Culhane 1998). Substantially similar evidence, *ceteris paribus*, has been found in studies on other areas of the global North (Bairéad and Norris, 2022; Taylor and Johnson 2019; Waldron *et al.* 2019).

Furthermore, homeless families are not randomly distributed across the population (Bramley, Fitzpatrick 2018), but belong to a larger set of disadvantaged families (Batterham 2019; OECD 2024), for whom housing insecurity is a pervasive and semi-permanent dimension of existence (DeLuca and Rosen 2022). Therefore, the phenomenon takes different forms and characteristics depending on the territory (e.g., northern or southern Europe) and marital status (single or families). As a consequence, the conceptualisation of what constitutes the “homelessness phenomenon” in much of north-western Europe includes dimensions that elsewhere would not necessarily be defined as such (Busch-Geertsema *et al.* 2014).

In short, homelessness is not a fixed state (Pleace and Hermans 2020). Instead, it varies in terms of its characteristic dimensions, dynamics and outcomes. The extent of homelessness is determined by structural factors that involve the social system as a whole: the level of poverty and social exclusion; accessibility to the housing market; the degree of generosity and extent of welfare systems; the intensity of labour market contraction (Benjaminsen 2023; Bramley and Fitzpatrick 2018; Headly *et al.* 2023). These elements can essentially be traced back to the concept of “poverty regime” (Saraceno *et al.* 2020).

Individuals and families experiencing homelessness are therefore those who find themselves at the intersection of unfavourable structural circumstances at the macro level and personal vulnerabilities at the micro level, i.e. those who are «*both* the wrong kind of person and in the wrong kind of place» (O'Flaherty 2004). The discriminating factor lies in the availability of social, economic and emotional resources for individuals and families (Hastings 2021; 2023). Consequently, the families who are most at risk of losing their homes «are more likely to be impacted by sudden, unexpected events, have one or more personal vulnerabilities, lack adequate social support, or be alumni of an institutional

² A distinction between the various degrees of severe housing exclusion and homelessness is provided by the ETHOS classification developed by FEANTSA.

³ The first official report on homelessness in the United States was published in 1984 under the Reagan administration, authored by Margaret Mary Heckler. The 1980 decennial census was the first official estimate of the extent of homelessness.

⁴ At the time of writing, the III Homeless National Survey was underway. On January 2026, a survey investigated the presence of homeless people in 14 major Italian cities.

setting» (Lee *et al.* 2021: 13). For example, both in Italy and abroad, single-parent families are more exposed to the risk of experiencing one or more episodes of homelessness compared to two-parent families (Morelli *et al.* 2022; Istat 2025; Saraceno *et al.* 2020).

Differently from what we might expect, the phenomenon affects a much larger segment of the population, partly because poverty has fluctuating characteristics (Alcock and Siza 2003). Recently in Doha, during the World Summit for Social Development⁵, it was stated that according to the latest UN-Habitat estimates, 318 million people are homeless, while 2.8 billion people – over a third of the global population – lack access to adequate housing. In 2011, the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) recorded 47,648 homeless people in 158 municipalities, which rose to 50,724 three years later and to over 96,000 in 2021 (last census Istat 2022), although all irregular situations could not be detected.

Only a small number of people remain “trapped” in emergency accommodation services. For them, the evaluations focus on their individual characteristics, on the cumulative effect of prolonged periods of homelessness that reduce the likelihood of leaving, or on contingent factors which refer to “bad luck”. A crucial finding emerging from the research is that «[a]lmost everyone who will be homeless two years from today is housed now, and almost everybody who is homeless today will be housed two years from now» (O’Flaherty 2010: 143).

The multifaceted conditions of homeless people and the difficulties in addressing the phenomenon point to another and more general problem, which cuts across social policies (Ferrera and Jessoula 2025): the fact that the characterisation of fragility is conditioned not only by objective factors, but also by the different perspectives of researchers, on one hand, and (above all) legislators, on the other, as well as by the resulting intervention policies undertaken.

2. POLICY RESPONSES

A central function of welfare systems is to ensure that people in vulnerable situations receive adequate social support. Historically, attitudes towards homelessness have been shaped by persistent ambivalence, determined by the interpretative dilemma linked to its manifestation and persistence: is it an expression of genuine need or an attitude resulting from instrumental manipulation (Camporesi 2003)? This symbolic distinction con-

tinues to be applied in contemporary societies (Paugam 2005), accentuated by the fact that homelessness tends to be concentrated in metropolitan areas, which are more impersonal and depersonalising⁶.

Given that, as mentioned above, homelessness arises from the interaction between structural, systemic, interpersonal and individual risk factors, the ability of welfare systems to fulfil their support function, and the methods of intervention adopted, which vary significantly not only between different national contexts, but also within individual countries (Edgar and Meert, 2005; Fitzpatrick 2005). This depends on the different characteristics of welfare systems (Esping-Andersen 1990), which allow to understand the (sometimes profoundly) different outcomes in terms of preventing and reducing homelessness (Benjaminsen 2023). The structural differences between systems produce a strong heterogeneity in the scope of benefits, the availability of housing, and the quality of support services for vulnerable population groups. In countries where universalistic and de commodified models prevail, homelessness takes on a more homogeneous and residual profile. Conversely, in countries where the services are more commodified and selective, homeless populations tend to be larger and more heterogeneous (Stephens *et al.* 2010; Benjaminsen 2023).

However, the relationship between welfare systems and the extent of homelessness cannot be interpreted in simplistic or linear terms. The structural and systemic factors that influence patterns of homelessness are in fact manifold, interdependent and constantly evolving. Furthermore, welfare systems, in their concrete implementation, often tend to deviate from the ideal-typical characteristics outlined by Esping-Andersen, as they present significant differences even between countries that formally belong to the same regime.

Although recent research indicates – both in the EU and US – an increase in spending on services for homeless people, institutional responses continue to favour emergency-oriented interventions rather than prevention and elimination of the phenomenon (Parsell 2023; Pleace *et al.* 2018). In addition, such interventions are also based on the so-called “staircase model”, according to which people should first resolve any psychosocial issues before accessing stable housing (Pleace *et al.* 2021; Culhane and An 2021). As a result, a significant portion of resources is still allocated to passive and reactive ser-

⁵ The World Social Summit, Doha 4-6 November 2025: <https://social.desa.un.org/world-summit-2025/blog/300million-people-homeless-worldwide>.

⁶ In Italy, Milan and Rome account for 38.9% of homeless people: 23.7% in the former (slightly decreasing from 27.5% in 2011), and 15.2% in the latter. Palermo is the third municipality with the highest number of homeless people (5.7%) (down from 8% in 2011), followed by Florence (3.9%), Turin (3.4%), Naples (3.1%, up from 1.9% in 2011) and Bologna (2%) (Istat 2015: 2-3).

vices – such as emergency shelters, day services or subsistence interventions – which are aimed more at managing the most acute effects of homelessness rather than at its structural resolution.

Researchers have interpreted this approach as the result of a historical trajectory in which services for homeless people have been primarily conceived as emergency responses, focused on providing temporary shelter (Culhane 2008). Moreover, a static and individualising political view of the phenomenon is common: it underestimates its dynamic and transitory nature and favours the expansion of emergency shelters (Culhane and An 2021). At the same time, a significant body of evidence has been accumulated on effective and ineffective interventions in combating homelessness for specific population groups (Munthe-Kaas *et al.* 2018; Cortese and Consoli 2022; Lakshminarayanan *et al.* 2023). However, these interventions are mainly focused on the individual level and rarely address the systemic causes of the phenomenon.

In Italy, too, traditional responses have focused mainly on organising low-threshold reception services, which can offer temporary shelter to large numbers of people but are often fragmented, discontinuous and poorly tailored to individual needs. This trend can be attributed, among other things, to:

- The limited availability of dedicated accommodation facilities;
- Consequently, the tendency to concentrate guests in facilities that offer uniform services in response to diverse needs;
- The lack of municipal housing, which would allow to create more personalised cohousing solutions tailored to the different situations and needs of users;
- The lack of collective awareness of the phenomenon, which leads to portray homeless people as individuals in an irreversible condition. At the same time, this view drastically reduces, or even eliminates, their opportunities for social reintegration.

Only recently, we have been witnessing to greater openness towards alternative approaches based on integrated hospitality models that combine access to accommodation with pathways towards employment and progressive empowerment (Cortese and Consoli 2022). However, the complexity of the living conditions of homeless people requires integrated and holistic approaches that are capable of enhancing individual resources and skills, even when these are limited or compromised. Effective intervention must combine individual strategies with multi-level ones, aimed at reforming public policies, strengthening institutions, and improving the quality of social services (Matei *et al.* 2025).

According to this perspective, restoring a sense of community belonging and fully protecting social rights are essential starting points for any process of empowerment and social reintegration. The starting point for a process of empowerment and promotion of social reintegration is the restoration of a sense of belonging to a community and the protection of rights. In this context, the “Accoglienza diffusa” (“Widespread Reception”) project was launched by Caritas Roma in 2015, involving parishes, religious institutions and families.

The aim of this work is to understand the strengths and challenges, obstacles and benefits encountered in implementing this initiative, in order to assess how it fits within the broader landscape of interventions aimed at supporting the homeless. The central hypothesis of the study is that “Widespread Reception” represents an intermediate level of intervention that fits within the Welfare Community model. It cannot clearly be defined as an *Housing First* example, nor as a cohousing one. The hypothesis is that this initiative represents a community-based intervention aimed at building a local safety net to facilitate the process of reintegration for people who have experienced homelessness.

The project is divided into two areas of intervention:

- Reception of asylum seekers: aimed at individuals or families.
- Secondary reception: aimed at Italian and foreign individuals or families who have already undergone an initial reception phase and have begun a path towards independence.

The following chapter presents the initial results of this initiative based on a survey – largely already underway – which proceeds along two lines:

- The socio-demographic characteristics of the recipients of the intervention, taken from the service’s database;
- The results of three focus groups conducted with participants in the initiative: Caritas workers, parish volunteers, parish priests.

In particular, the focus groups involved:

- 4 parish priests, representing the same parishes that have been involved in the project throughout its 10-year duration;
- All six Caritas staff members involved in the project – graduated in different disciplines: sociology, social work and education – who act as mentors to both service users and the facilities, serving as mediators between guests and the host community;
- 12 volunteers, once again selected on the basis of their length of service. They have been involved in the reception project from the start and have therefore participated in it throughout the years.

The focus groups were led by a moderator, assisted by an observer, with whom the findings were subsequently discussed and analysed. The discussion was recorded with prior consent from the participants.

The results of the focus groups were transcribed in full, since the aim was to thoroughly analyse the content in order to compare the various emerging positions. To this end, only the parts relevant to this study were analysed (Krueger 1988), using the Content Encoding Analysis as the analytical strategy (Acocella and Cataldi 2021).

3. THE “ACCOGLIENZA DIFFUSA” [“WIDESPREAD RECEPTION”] PROJECT

In a world affected by increasingly widespread migration⁷, on 6 September 2015, during the Sunday Angelus, Pope Francis urged parishes and religious institutions around the world to welcome refugee families fleeing war and violence. This message was further elaborated on about a year later (on 21 February 2017) during the International Forum on Migration and Peace, where the Pope explained the principles underlying hospitality, articulated around four actions: welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating.

This marked the start of the “Accoglienza diffusa” (“Widespread Reception”) project, aimed at creating opportunities for homeless who are asylum seekers and refugees to help them find accommodation in parishes, religious institutions and Roman families.

Over the past 10 years, 128 local organisations have been involved in the network. These include the social and registry services of nine municipalities in Rome, which register and provide social support to some families, as well as the enrolment of minors in nurseries and compulsory schools.

The data presented below were elaborated for the purposes of this contribution from the project’s database, made available by Caritas Romana⁸.

There are currently 26 facilities providing accommodation. More than half of them (16) are parishes, 3 are religious institutions, 2 are associations and 2 are families. Their distribution within the municipal area is fairly uniform: two municipalities (*Municipi*) (III and

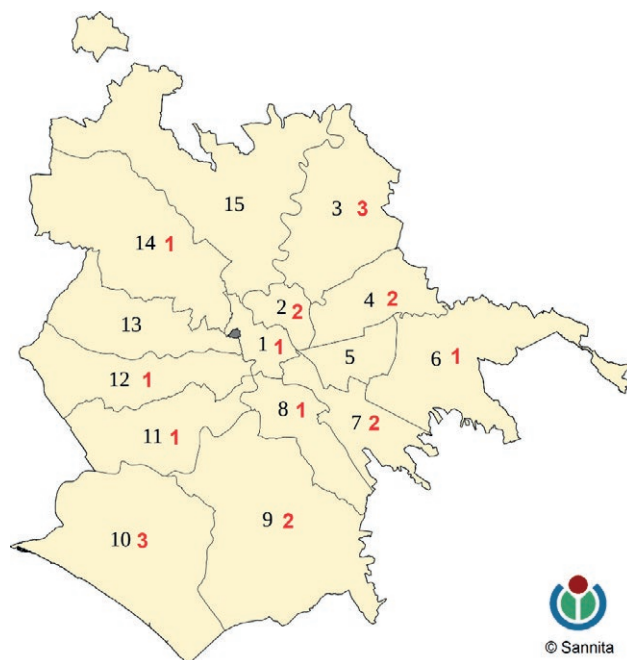


Figure 1. Distribution of facilities providing accommodation among the Municipalities. Source: elaborated and adapted from ©Sannita on Wikimedia.

X) have 3 facilities, three have 2 and six have 1 (Fig. 1). Most of them have provided an accommodation within the facility itself and with a separate entrance, while in 6 cases the living space is outside the facility. The number of beds varies from one to five: two-thirds of the facilities have a capacity of at least three beds. In 6 cases, the facilities have provided users with the registration for residence (*iscrizione anagrafica per residenza*), which is necessary to guarantee the full exercise of civil and political rights and to access numerous social services.

A total of 88 households – all of them foreign – were accommodated in 45 reception facilities, involved in five different projects. The most numerous countries of origin were Nigeria (11), Ivory Coast (10) and Afghanistan (9). Over a quarter of the households (24) consisted of two people, while a third (33) of three. Two-thirds of the facilities (16) accommodated families with minors (half of the households (43) were single-parent families), while the remaining third accommodated single individuals (6 men and 2 women). The average length of stay was 1 year and 4 months (16 months). The facility of Casa S. Giacomo welcomed the majority of guests (8).

A total of 352 individuals were hosted (the vast majority of whom were men): 135 Italians and 209 foreigners. The most common nationalities were Ukrainian (21 people), Afghan (19), Nigerian and Senegalese (18 each). The average length of stay was 8 months.

⁷ The World Migration Report 2024 (by International Organisation for Migration) estimates that in 2020 the number of international migrants was around 281 million (3.6% of the world’s population), of which 28 million were children.

⁸ Here a first analysis of data relating to the “Accoglienza diffusa” project is presented. The data were provided directly by the project managers. Any inaccuracies or inconsistencies is the sole responsibility of the authors of this paper.

The reception facilities involved were 72 (including 4 families). Ten of these had more than 10 guests. The facility that hosted the most people was the parish of Sant'Andrea Corsini (39). The reception took place within two main projects: Emergenza Freddo (Cold Emergency, 233 people) and Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria (CAS) (Extraordinary Reception Centres, 91 people).

"Widespread Reception" was created with the aim of guaranteeing reception in order to re-include excluded individuals. This was achieved through the construction of social networks within stable local communities, by means of a well-defined plan characterised by clear objectives and guiding principles, aimed at ensuring the protection and promotion of individuals – either single persons or families – affected by multidimensional fragility. The ultimate goal is to bring these people to full social inclusion in its various forms (housing, work and social), through the building of relationships that can be maintained over time and represent a point of reference for those involved. From a territorial point of view, this means activating a stable social protection network, based on cooperation between volunteers, nonprofit entities and institutions.

The project can be considered a social intervention that fits perfectly within the *Welfare Community* model (Barnes 1997; Raineri 2013; Di Santo 2022). Such model is based on structured cooperation between public institutions and civil society actors – including private companies, citizens and social economy organisations – aimed at improving the "*civitas*" and enhancing the common good (Rossi and Zamagni 2011). This paradigm is rooted in the so-called "horizontal subsidiarity", which implies a redistribution of welfare responsibilities and presupposes the pooling of material and immaterial resources, as well as the development of innovative forms of governance. In this perspective, collective well-being is no longer considered the exclusive prerogative of the State, but a task that involves the entire community.

In analytical terms, it is possible to identify certain constituent elements of the *welfare community*: a) the development of public-private and private-private partnerships; b) the extensive involvement of local society actors and active citizens, understood in the broadest sense of the term; c) the adoption of a self-activating approach by the local community, which contributes to collective well-being through the mobilisation of its own resources – first of all, time, but also organisational and economic resources (Ponzo 2014).

Each of these elements can be found in the "Widespread Reception" experience. In particular, with regard to the first aspect, this initiative involves a mix of interventions carried out and financed partly through the use

of professional expertise and public funds (Municipal Social Services, Regional Funds, CAS centres, and the Emergenza Freddo project), and partly through reception activities carried out in facilities owned and/or managed by private social organisations (Caritas Romana in this case), which provide support and empowerment interventions involving volunteers, tutors and guests.

As a group of volunteers, we learned how to network with different public and private organisations, such as the local soccer club. We learned to look around and collaborate with schools, institutions, medical centres, local health authorities, and so on. We learned how to create a network with them. We realised that we cannot do it alone, we cannot do everything by ourselves (Parish priest of a parish involved)⁹.

It is something we insist on, again and again: the actors in the project are the guests, the community, and the tutors. They are the three pillars of the project: if one of them is missing, the project does not work. In other words, if the tutor is not present, the project is very fragile. If the guest does not take responsibility, the project is useless, i.e., it is stuck, and the objectives are not achieved. If the community is not present, the project is not effective, and the result is very poor. (Caritas worker).

With regard to the involvement of the various "actors" in the community (in the broadest possible sense), Law 328/00 and the integrated system of social interventions and services have to be mentioned. From this perspective, a functioning welfare system is not possible without a "civic" community capable of building a culture of solidarity that gives rise to widespread social capital (Putnam 1994; 2001). This civic community is socially balanced and includes "high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement and collective well-being" (Putnam 1994: 209).

In my opinion, the parishes themselves – that is, priests and communities – changed their approach. It is not just about giving money. It is about directly and fully committing yourself and your life, your family and the parish spaces in an experience of hospitality that is different from what we have experimented up to this point.

"Widespread Reception" is something that lasts over time: it keeps you very busy and then it is no longer something occasional, even for the community. It becomes like a personal project, a real ongoing commitment (Caritas worker).

Finally, with regard to the "self-activating approach" of the local community, this welcoming experience has

⁹ The testimonies are taken from three separate focus groups, one conducted with the participation of all Caritas operators involved, and the other two with a self-selected sample of volunteers and parish priests.

succeeded in stimulating initiatives and solutions that have led, at the same time, to growth for both the community and its guests.

What this project highlights is your experience as a Christian when faced with the difficulties of others. And then, obviously, it brings out the best in you, so that you can approach the person in a certain way and according to their characteristics, because you cannot behave in the same way with everyone. Everyone has their own identity and plans, and you have to be attentive to that identity and those plans, in order to bring out the best from the person you are helping (Volunteer).

I think it is very important for the community to recognise and reflect the guests’ personal growth. As said earlier, the community recognises their progress. It is like to say: “Look, you’ve done this!”. It gives value to them, recognising that they have value and that they are discovering it, or rather, that the community and the guests are discovering it together (Caritas worker).

The creation of this “integrated system of interventions” is important not only for generating a public-private support network, but also in terms of cost reduction in an era of shrinking welfare funding.

In my opinion, this is important not only for individuals and the community, but also for the State, since this model saves public money and, what’s more, the community covers part of the costs. In fact, in CAS (Extraordinary Reception Centres) projects the State invests much less than usual: now the State only covers the cost of keeping people alive. So, people who are lucky enough to be included in a CAS with us still benefit from a whole range of integration tools that they would not have elsewhere (Caritas worker).

A central dimension of community welfare lies in the ability to enhance social ties and interdependent relationships between the actors involved. The territorial and relational nature of the “Widespread Reception” project, based on the idea of proximity, allows for the construction of social networks within which individuals, through mutual interaction, become part of a shared relational system. In this perspective, the community takes on a dual function: it represents both the ultimate goal of welfare action and the preliminary condition that makes its implementation possible.

“Widespread Reception”, therefore, is a service that closes the gap between the function of large centres (which provide a first and essential response) and a *Housing First* experience. Given the immediate availability of accommodation, people are involved in a process of community integration, since it is the community that takes responsibility for their reception.

I have always said – long before “Widespread Reception” – that for years in our society we have treated these adults as if they were under guardianship, as if they were minors under guardianship. And then suddenly, from one day to the next, it is decided that reception is over and, without knowing how and on the basis of what skills, these people should be able to move independently in the outside world, which they do not know, because no one has really introduced them to it (Caritas worker).

Usually, in the centre there is this logic that you have a single operator who has to take care of a number of people. In this case, we completely reverse this logic, because sometimes you have one or two guests, or a family unit, but around these people, you have an entire community. The guests are at the centre, and around them revolves a whole series of people who have various roles, who then take care of the person. You have the operator, who in this case may be the tutor or the parish priest; you have the volunteers; and then you have the whole local network that you can activate, i.e., the local associations. In the case of families with minors, there are schools and sports associations where the child plays soccer or goes swimming, and then you activate the local social services. You completely change this logic and put the person at the centre of a circle, with different rays which can activate different resources (Caritas worker).

Another strength of this project is the central role played by the implicit alliance between users and operators, which typically characterises guidance and support interventions. In fact, the agreement clearly refers to the “contract” (Fargion 2013) that is established in social services between operator and guest. This agreement calls on tutors, guests and the community to take responsibility, so that the reception is productive for all parties and is not reduced to welfare dependency.

There is also the fact of giving them responsibility right from the start, which can be done when they have their own accommodation, and then they can really begin to understand how to manage their own accommodation. Because families and individuals who have their own mini-apartment – even if it is the community that brings them food – they still have tasks to do in that space, which is their own space (Caritas worker).

There is a tool used by tutors that I think is very useful, which is the “reception agreement”. It is a very effective tool for promoting the guest, because it is a tangible element in which the guest is given responsibility. It is not taken for granted that he or she is in that place and has no role, but rather he/she is given a central role (Caritas worker).

It is precisely this approach that allows to create lasting bonds, which extend over time and space, going beyond the duration of participation in the project.

These relationships demonstrate the success of the individual's path towards autonomy, but also the protective value of the community, beyond the explicit mutual recognition of this bond.

The guests usually do not thank you explicitly, but in my opinion they do it anyway by calling you every now and then or telling you things like... for example, once a guy who left the centre and moved to England called me and said: "My second daughter was born, I'll send you a picture". If someone sends you a picture, you are not just the person who helped them. No, in many cases, you are their anchor. You are a point of reference, you understand? For example, one of these guys called us and said: "Can I come over for lunch?" I mean, he invited himself! [Laughter] He said: "I need to talk to you", because he had to choose between going to live in England, where he had a girlfriend, or staying here, right? So, since he did not have parents or anyone to talk with, he asked us for advice... (Volunteer).

At a first evaluation, the "Widespread Reception" project seems to be positioned precisely between low-threshold forms of reception – still very common in Italy – and the *Housing First* experiences that are beginning to spread in the country (Cortese and Consoli 2022). Therefore, the project seems to provide a further response to the severe marginalisation of individuals and families without secure housing: it is capable of integrating the advantages of *Housing First* with those typical of community experiences lamented by Putnam.

The advantage of the project lies in "reversing" the typical logic of low-threshold structures. In those structures, a small number of operators deal with a large number of people. The need, in this case, is to provide immediate support to those who have experienced extreme marginalisation and homelessness, and therefore need immediate help to reconnect with a life that suffered a more or less sudden collapse (Bonadonna 2001). "Widespread Reception", instead, gives operators the opportunity and time to devote themselves to the guests and their personal growth. It is not a question of determining whether one approach is better than the other, but rather of reaffirming the importance of having diversified interventions, adapted to different stages of life and people's different resources. Some people need immediate help and a facility that is sometimes, but not always, as impersonal as the Ostello ["Hostel"], where they can blend in with others. Before making a fresh start, they need to "find themselves". Others need to set their lives in new directions, therefore finding themselves at the centre of a community that can help them start again becomes a powerful tool for assistance.

However, structures and functions must not be confused.

The Hostel is not only functional for those who need an impersonal structure, it can also help a person's plans if they feel more comfortable in a structure that accommodates many people at the same time. It is not the type of structure itself that defines the efficacy of the service. It is the centrality of the person's needs and characteristics that makes the difference.

Of course, the "Widespread Reception" scheme is affected by weaknesses and problems. First and foremost, the turnover of parish priests determines whether or not the project can be implemented in the community.

That's how it works: it's a cyclical process. From time to time, a parish gets a new priest: when the leadership changes, the dynamics often shift completely, and in many cases we've seen that when a priest moves on, the programme or course comes to an end and things do not continue (Caritas worker).

This highlights the central problem that has characterised the initiative along the years, at least until recently: its still unstructured nature. Only lately, "Widespread Reception" has taken on a more formal organisational structure. In the past, the project used to operate informally, with its own mission, but without a formal definition of objectives, roles and methods, or a clear allocation of budgets and resources. This meant that the initiative, whilst laudable, was all too often at the mercy of events. The turnover of parish priests is just an example.

Another highlighted limitation concerns the lack of training received by participants in the initiative. As a matter of fact, the role of tutors, as well as the potential contribution of volunteers, is most likely affected by the very absence of a formal structure that clarifies the characteristics of these roles.

In summary, as one of the project coordinators likes to say, "Widespread Reception" is many things at once:

It is an opportunity that people can voluntarily seize in terms of community, in terms of people who are on a path towards emancipation. And it is certainly an experience of relationship. I also insist a lot when I talk about "Widespread Reception" and its potential for beauty. What we see and perceive from the testimonies of the people who have taken part in the project and give us feedback is precisely that feeling of having experienced "something beautiful". Finally, another word that comes to mind is development, in the etymological sense of removing anything that may hinder human growth. The project is an opportunity that allows people to grow in many ways – humanly, relationally, spiritually – and has a strong potential to promote humanity itself (Caritas worker).

4. FINAL REMARKS

In conclusion, and despite the limitations just highlighted, “Widespread Reception” represents an innovative approach within the landscape of policy responses to homelessness, which distinguishes it from other housing models. Indeed, differently from the *Housing First* approach, there is not a direct placement in independent flats: “Widespread Reception” follows the *staircase* model, since the guest is initially hosted in other facilities. Instead, in the *Housing First* model, the aim is first and foremost to provide the individual with a stable accommodation (minimising not only the time spent on the streets but also in hostels), while, at the same time, people are initiated to a personalised support pathway (Pleace and Bretherton 2012).

From this perspective, the “Widespread Reception” model seems closer to the *Communal Housing First* (CHF) than to the *Housing First Light Services* (HFL) model. In fact, the former represents a kind of application of HF principles to the *staircase* model, since it provides forms of shared accommodation in former hostels or social housing, but maintains some HF principles (self-determination, contribution to rent, harm reduction). The latter, on the other hand, was developed in countries such as the United Kingdom, where homelessness is addressed through light support services, which do not involve the direct provision of assistance, but only act as an intermediary between the person experiencing housing difficulties and local services.

This initiative also differs from the *Social Housing* model, which is aimed at middle-class families and couples who cannot afford a home at market prices, but whose income is too high to qualify for council housing. In this case, the prerequisite of vulnerability and social exclusion is absent. Furthermore, *Social Housing* is based on the principle of housing sustainability, both in terms of community (shared spaces, green areas) and energy efficiency (construction of buildings according to the principles of bio-architecture).

As already highlighted, the “Widespread Reception” model falls within the Community-Based Welfare paradigm, the fundamental premise of which is to recognise the local community – conceived as a collective of citizens, associations and third-sector organisations – as an active player in promoting social well-being. From this perspective, these actors complement or integrate traditional public intervention, helping to move beyond a purely provision-based conception of welfare in favour of a generative model, geared towards making the most of the resources available in the local area (Fondazione Emanuela Zancan 2015). Within this framework, hous-

ing takes on a meaning that transcends the purely material dimension of accommodation: the home is understood as a relational space and a community context, capable of supporting pathways towards autonomy and integration, including through initiatives such as *Housing First* and cohousing.

As highlighted in the introduction of this paper, social sciences have shown that the experience of homelessness should be conceived as a dynamic process rather than a static condition. In particular, guaranteeing stable access to housing and adequate forms of support requires overcoming structural obstacles, such as the lack of affordable housing, as well as facing organisational challenges, such as the fragmentation of social and health services and the difficulty of integration between different sectors. The systems effectively oriented to overcoming homelessness are called upon to prioritise systemic interventions – by intervening on the set of policies and services facing homelessness – rather than approaches focused on “individual changes”. This approach is based on the empirical evidence that homelessness can be tackled and potentially resolved through the adoption of appropriate policies and practices, as well as through broader cultural and organisational change (Jones *et al.* 2021; Kaakinen 2023) aimed at designing integrated service delivery models, as in the case of “Widespread Reception”. A model of integrated strategic governance makes it possible to overcome fragmented approaches and *ad hoc* interventions, thus promoting coordinated management of responses and more effective mitigation of negative impacts.

However, the implementation of holistic programmes and interventions for homelessness requires broader processes of transformation – which are often complex and difficult to achieve – of welfare systems and organisations at the local level. The inability to complete these transitions helps explain why many innovations remain limited to small-scale experiments and do not have a significant impact on reducing the phenomenon as a whole. In this sense, the reconfiguration of local welfare systems towards integrated and long-term responses, rather than emergency interventions, requires profound and interconnected changes in housing provision, as well as in support mechanisms and welfare services, including health and income support, in which the activation of the wider community plays a crucial role.

As highlighted by the “Widespread Reception” experience, welfare systems characterised by diversified services, the presence of public or privately-provided social housing, and a high level of integration between services specifically geared towards homelessness tend to have a more effective impact on mitigating the phenomenon.

This is due to the existence of multiple overlapping safety nets, each of which responds to different dimensions of human needs (Banjaminsen 2023).

REFERENCES

- Acocella I. and Cataldi S. (2021), *Using Focus Group. Theory, Methodology, Practice*, Sage, London.
- Alcock P. and Siza R. (2003), *La povertà oscillante*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Bairéad C. and Norris M. (2022), «Homelessness Duration and Stability: A Typology of Emergency Accommodation Usage Patterns in Dublin», in *Cities*, 127, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103735>.
- Batterham D. (2019), «Defining “At-risk of Homelessness”. Re-connecting causes, mechanisms and risk», in *Housing, Theory and Society*, 36(1): 1-24.
- Banjaminsen L. (2023), «Homelessness and Welfare Systems», in J. Bretherton and N. Pleace (eds.) *The Routledge International Handbook of Homelessness*, Routledge, London, pp. 60-70.
- Blau J. (1992), *The Visible Poor: Homelessness in the United States*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Bonadonna F. (2001), *Il nome del barbone. Vite di strada e povertà estreme in Italia*, DeriveApprodi, Roma.
- Busch-Geertsema V., Banjaminsen L., Filipovič Hrast M. and Pleace N. (2014), *The Extent and Profile of Homelessness in European Member States: A Statistical Update*, FEANTSA, Brussels.
- Camporesi P. (2003), *Il libro dei vagabondi*, Garzanti, Milano.
- Caritas Diocesana Roma (1987), *Essere barboni a Roma*, Edizioni T.E.R., Roma.
- Culhane D.P. (2008), «The Cost of Homelessness: A Perspective from the United States», in *European Journal of Homelessness* 2(1): 97-114.
- Culhane D.P. and An S. (2021), «Estimated Revenue of the Nonprofit Homeless Shelter Industry in the United States: Implications for a More Comprehensive Approach to Unmet Shelter Demand», in *Housing Policy Debate*, 32(6): 823-836.
- DeLuca S. and Rosen E. (2022), «Housing Insecurity Among the Poor Today», in *Annual Review of Sociology*, 48: 431-471.
- Esping-Andersen G. (1990), *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Polity Press, Oxford.
- Cortese C. and Consoli T. (2022), «Homelessness in Italy», in J. Bretherton and N. Pleace (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Homelessness*, Routledge, London, pp. 344-354.
- Fargion S. (2013), *Il metodo del servizio sociale. Riflessioni, casi e ricerche*, Carocci, Roma.
- Ferrera M. and Jessoula M. (2025), *Le politiche sociali*, il Mulino, Bologna.
- Fondazione Emanuela Zancan (2015), *Welfare generativo. Responsabilizzare, rendere, rigenerare. La lotta alla povertà, Rapporto 2014*, il Mulino, Bologna.
- Fourastié J. (1979), *Les Trente Glorieuses. Ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975*, Fayard, Paris.
- Gerrard J. (2017), «The Interconnected Histories of Labour and Homelessness» in *Labour History*, 112: 155-174.
- Guidicini P. and Pieretti G. (1988), *I volti della povertà urbana*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Hastings C. (2021), «How Do Poor Families in Australia Avoid Homelessness? An fsQCA Analysis», in *Housing, Theory and Society*, 39(3): 275-295, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2021.1936624>.
- Hastings C. (2023), «Why do some Disadvantaged Australian Families become Homeless? Resources, Disadvantage, Housing and Welfare», in *Housing Studies*, 39 (10): 2479-2503, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2023.2194248>.
- Jones S., Albanese F. and Revelli M. (2021), *Achieving a New Systems Perspective to Ending Homelessness Through Housing First*, Housing First Europe Hub, Helsinki.
- Challenges of Housing First in Finland», in *European Journal of Homelessness*, 15(3): 45-48.
- Kaakinen J. (2023), *Home. Report on the Measures Needed to End Homelessness by 2027*, Y Foundation, Helsinki.
- Kozol J. (1988), *Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America*, Crown Pub, New York.
- Krueger R.A. (1988), *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, CA Sage, Thousand Oaks.
- Kuhn R. and Culhane D.P. (1998), «Applying Cluster Analysis to Test a Typology of Homelessness by Pattern of Shelter Utilization: Results from the Analysis of Administrative Data», in *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 26(2): 207-232.
- Istat (2015), *Le Persone senza Dimora in Italia. Anno 2014*, Istat, Roma.
- Istat (2022), *Popolazione residente e dinamica demografica. Anno 2021*, Roma.
- Istat (2025), *La povertà in Italia - Anno 2024*, Roma.
- Lakshminarayanan M., Bhandari R., Mantri S. and Singh S. (2023), *Why Interventions to Improve the Welfare of People Experiencing Homelessness Work or Not: an updated evidence and gap map, 4th Edition*, Centre for Homelessness Impact, London.

- Lavanco G. and Santinello M. (2009), *I senza fissa dimora. Analisi psicologica del fenomeno e ipotesi di intervento*, Paoline editoriale libri, Milano.
- Lee B.A., Shinn M. and Culhane D.P. (2021), Homelessness as a Moving Target, in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 693(1): 8-26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716221997038>.
- Matei A., Ghența M. and Mladen-Macovei L. (2025), «Understanding the Problems of Homeless People: Solutions from the Perspectives of Social Services Providers», in *Journal of Social Service Research*, 1-11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2025.2604053>.
- Mauceri S. and Di Censi L. (a cura di) (2024), *Povert  estreme. Un'analisi sul Sistema dei Servizi per le persone senza Dimora a Roma*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Morelli S., Nolan B., Palomino J.C. and Van Kerm P. (2022), «The Wealth (Disadvantage) of Single Parent Households», in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 702(1): 188-204.
- Munthe-Kaas H., Berg R.C. and N. Blaasv r (2018), *Effectiveness of Interventions to Reduce Homelessness: A Systematic Review*, Campbell Systematic Reviews, Oslo, <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2018.3>.
- Negri N. and Saraceno C. (1996), *Le politiche contro la povert  in Italia*, il Mulino, Bologna.
- OECD (2024), *Indicator HM1.1. Housing stock and construction*, Affordable Housing Database, <https://oe.cd/ahd>.
- O'Flaherty B. (2004), «Wrong Person and Wrong Place: For Homelessness, the Conjunction is What Matters», in *Journal of Housing Economics*, 13(1): 1-15.
- O'Flaherty B. (2010), «Homelessness as Bad Luck: Implications for Research and Policy», in I.G. Ellen and B. O'Flaherty (eds.), *How to House the Homeless*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, pp. 143-182.
- O'Sullivan E., Pleace N., Busch-Geertsema V. and Hrast M.F. (2020), «Distorting Tendencies in Understanding Homelessness in Europe», in *European Journal of Homelessness*, 14(3): 109-135.
- Parsell C. (2023), *Homelessness: A Critical Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Paugam S. (2005), *Les forms  l mentaires de la pauvret *, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris.
- Pleace N. and Bretherton J. (2012), *What do we Mean by Housing First? Categorising and Critically Assessing the Housing First Movement from a European Perspective*, Paper presented to the Conference “Housing: Local Welfare and Local Markets in a Globalised World”, Lillehammer, United Kingdom.
- Pleace N., Baptista I., Benjaminsen L. and Busch-Geertsema V. (2018), *Homelessness Services in Europe Comparative Studies on Homelessness*, No. 8, European Observatory on Homelessness, Brussels.
- Pleace N. and Hermans K. (2020), «Counting All Homelessness in Europe: The Case for Ending Separate Enumeration of ‘Hidden Homelessness’», in *European Journal of Homelessness*, 14(3): 35-62.
- Pleace N., Baptista I., Benjaminsen L., Busch Geertsema V., O'Sullivan E. and Teller N. (2021), *Financing Homelessness Services in Europe - Comparative Studies on Homelessness No. 11*, European Observatory on Homelessness, Brussels.
- Ponzo I. (2014), *Il welfare di comunit  applicato alla cura*, paper presentato alla ESPANET Conference dal titolo “Sfide alla cittadinanza e trasformazione dei corsi di vita: precariet , invecchiamento e migrazioni”, Torino, 18-20 settembre.
- Putnam R. D. (1994), *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ).
- Putnam R. D. (2001), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, New York.
- Rossi P. H. H. (1989), *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Rossi E. and Zamagni S. (2011), *Il terzo settore nell'Italia unita*, il Mulino, Bologna.
- Saraceno C., Benassi D. and Morlicchio E. (2020), *Poverty in Italy: Features and Drivers in a European Perspective*, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Sarpellon G. (1991), *Percorsi di povert  e reti di servizi*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Shinn M. and Weitzman B. C. (1990), «Research on Homelessness: An Introduction», in *Journal of Social Issues*, 46(4): 1-11.
- Stern M. J. (1984), «The Emergence of the Homeless as a Public Problem», in *Social Service Review*, 58(2): 291-301.
- Taylor S. and Johnson G. (2019), *Service Use Patterns at a High-Volume Homelessness Service: A Longitudinal Analysis of Six Years of Administrative Data*, Unison Housing Research Lab, Melbourne
- Waldron R., O'Donoghue-Hynes B and Redmond D. (2019), «Emergency Homeless Shelter Use in the Dublin Region 2012–2016: Utilizing a Cluster Analysis of Administrative Data», in *Cities*, 94: 143-152.



Citation: Do, P. (2026). Dwelling Among the Ruins. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 59-69. doi: 10.36253/smp-17093

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Dwelling Among the Ruins

PAOLO DO

University of Trento, Italy
E-mail: paolo.dox@gmail.com

Abstract. This article examines how people experiencing homelessness in Rome use archaeological ruins to secure a minimal continuity of dwelling under conditions of radical precarity. Ruins, in this reading, are not simply spatial supports or remnants of the past. Rather, they are material devices through which time becomes spatially available and through which space is experienced, inhabited, and reorganized through temporal practices. From this perspective, the article contributes to debates on space and time by shifting the focus from the general theoretical claim that space and time are inseparable to the empirical question of how this inseparability can be observed. Adopting the analytical lens of the situated project – understood as a mundane and incremental organization of urgency across space and time sustained through tactics of duration – this contribution focuses on the micro-practices of people experiencing homelessness. It shows how ruins are reconfigured into provisional forms of dwelling and how these practices redefine boundaries, functions, and tacit norms of use while producing alternative spatial orders and temporal rhythms within the city.

Keywords: homelessness, archaeological ruins, urban ruins, Rome.

1. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH FOCUS

The article examines how people experiencing homelessness in the city of Rome use archaeological ruins to construct relatively durable forms of shelter, arrangements capable of securing a minimal continuity of dwelling under conditions of precarity. This overarching inquiry unfolds into a set of mutually intertwined sub-questions, each addressing a distinct analytical dimension of the phenomenon.

First, at the level of spatial practices, the article asks how ruins are materially appropriated, adapted, and organized to generate forms of dwelling. It observes how people experiencing homelessness move through urban space, as well as the kinds of knowledge they mobilize to render ruins habitable and usable for survival. This spatial dimension is made particularly distinctive by the specific figure of people experiencing homelessness, who transform space into something as ambiguous as it is complex: an “inside of the outside”. Their state of being “outside” social, economic, and cultural centrality simultaneously constitutes a particular form of being “inside” society (Simmel 1985). The simple oppositional logic between an “inside” and an “out-

side” conceived as separate and internally homogeneous domains is thereby weakened. These practices take root in hybrid metropolitan spaces capable of hosting different and often conflicting worlds: public and private spaces, seemingly the same for everyone, yet differentiated by necessity and oriented toward passage, the provisional, and the ephemeral (Rossi 2016).

Second, focusing on temporal organization, the article examines how these dwelling practices produce specific temporalities within precarious conditions. Drawing on descriptive observation of the micro-practices of survival, it shows how the use of ruins highlights a set of constitutive elements in which spatial arrangements are inseparable from a temporal dimension of continuity. From this perspective, duration is not given but rather actively produced through a situated organization of adaptations and gestures that articulate the practical need to stabilize over time a condition that nonetheless remains highly precarious. Survival practices on the street involve sophisticated forms of temporal organization that measure, anticipate, and design survival within a temporal horizon of continuity. This dimension is often neglected by public policies addressing homelessness, which in Rome are largely organized according to an emergency-based logic and activated in response to specific seasonal or climatic thresholds, such as so-called “cold weather emergencies” (Do *et al.* 2025). On the one hand, this approach favours short-term, fragmented, and poorly coordinated interventions. On the other, it contributes to obscuring the spatial and temporal forms of organization through which people experiencing homelessness construct relatively stable modes of dwelling. This article seeks to account for the complexity of these practices by foregrounding the embedded dimensions of duration, situated projectuality, and the production of continuity.

To address these research questions, the study interweaves temporal and spatial coordinates, treating them as interconnected and co-constitutive dimensions that shape the social processes of urban life. The article posits that ruins are analytically important because they make visible a form of dwelling in which space and time are inseparable at the level of practice. They allow us to see how people experiencing homelessness produce continuity within discontinuity, duration within precarity, and habitation within spaces officially defined as residual, monumental, or unusable. The ruin is therefore not only the setting of the analysis but also an operational device: It renders observable the material consistency of the bond between space and time.

Building on this perspective, the article advances the analytical lens of the “situated project”, conceptual-

izing the micro-practices of people experiencing homelessness as a set of pragmatic, locally grounded practices. These practices do not deny urgency; rather, they organize responses to immediate needs through tactics of duration and forms of intermittent stabilization. The notion of the “situated project” treats urgency as something spatially and temporally organized, giving rise to tactics of duration through which a minimal continuity is constructed day by day by way of choices and compromises within a structurally precarious and discontinuous context. In this way, the article explores the tensions that emerge between these informal uses of ruins and the regulatory frameworks governing public space.

The empirical work draws on field observation conducted between June 2025 and January 2026. Although the observation period was not exclusively in winter, it included the cold months and therefore made it possible to grasp a central dimension of the phenomenon, since homelessness is strongly shaped by seasonality (De Rosa *et al.* 2025). The fieldwork was carried out in the east of Rome, within and along the edges of the city’s railway ring – more specifically, in the archaeological area of Ad Duas Lauros between the municipal districts V and VII. This area is not among those with the highest concentration of people experiencing homelessness in Rome. As De Rosa *et al.* (2025) show, the majority of people experiencing homelessness in the city can be found near the main railway station, Termini, and in the area around Vatican City, particularly around St Peter’s Basilica. Precisely for this reason, Ad Duas Lauros offers a significant field of observation, since it allows attention to be shifted away from the most obvious concentrations of homelessness towards more dispersed and less immediately visible forms of dwelling. Ad Duas Lauros is located in a high-density residential area where the concentration of Roman-period archaeological remains is second only to the historic centre. In this part of the city ruins, both visible and invisible traces of historical epochs layered into the duration of the present are dispersed across the urban fabric. In the so-called “Eternal City”, the use of ruins as shelter is embedded in a long history of reuse and cohabitation between material remains and everyday life: What is now framed as “heritage” has also functioned as a spatial, logistical, and relational resource (Ferrarotti 1970; 1974). In this sense, ruins have long operated as a kind of “second city” composed of interstices, niches, arches, level changes, thick walls, and zones of shadow. They constitute a “reserve of space” within a dense and unequal urban environment. At the same time, Rome is the Italian city with the highest number of individuals experiencing homelessness. A recent city-level estimate of visible homelessness counted

2,204 people, including 1,018 unsheltered individuals identified within the railway ring area and 1,186 sheltered individuals accommodated in night shelters and emergency or temporary facilities across the city (Fondation pour le Logement des Défavorisés; FEANTSA 2025).

The present study is based primarily on field observation. This approach aligns with traditions of urban ethnography (Duneier *et al.* 2014; Duneier 2016), understood as the close study of everyday urban life through sustained attention to practices, spaces, and forms of practical competence, here extended with an emphasis on spatiality and materiality. The research favours direct observation of spatial arrangements while placing immediate interaction with people in the background, except when it emerged spontaneously through narratives or informal exchanges.

The fieldwork was conducted by way of repeated visits at different times of day and under varying environmental conditions, allowing for the observation of temporal patterns and strategies of duration. Particular attention was paid to how material elements of ruins such as walls, arches, recesses and zones of shade are employed as operative spatial devices enabling specific forms of use. Observation focused on practices of adaptation, on the materials employed (tarpaulins, ropes, cardboard, nails, protective items, decorations), and on temporalities of use (hours, days, months).

2. THE TEMPORALITIES MATERIALIZED THROUGH THE SPATIAL USE OF RUINS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Ruins have been the object of significant analyses across disciplines. Tim Edensor (2005) has approached them primarily in the shape of industrial and post-industrial ruins, emphasizing their “undomesticated” materiality as spaces in which decay, improvisation and sensorial dimensions unsettle the codes of urban order and enable unforeseen possibilities of use. Caitlin DeSilvey (2017) has shifted attention to the “material life” of deterioration, advancing a perspective that views decay as a process for observing how memory, care, maintenance, and abandonment are negotiated over time. According to Adam Przywara (2025; 2023), ruins should be read not as nostalgic “icons” but as material metabolisms: processes of transformation, selection, and re-use of matter (rubble, fragments, residues) along practical and institutional chains. From this perspective, the ruin becomes a resource and a contingent infrastructure, capable of reorganizing labour, techniques, and the politics of reconstruction and urban management. Finally,

together with Lia Fassari, we have proposed reading ruins as a constitutive part of a hybrid (nature–ruin) that reshapes practices, conflicts, and criteria of public space quality (Do and Fassari 2023).

Yet ruins can be understood not only as spatial infrastructures or physical residues within urban space; beyond their materiality, they can also be viewed as forms of “temporal thickness” that do not simply represent the past but articulate multiple temporalities simultaneously. On the one hand, their existence highlights conditions of continuity; on the other, it makes explicit how this existence is a stratified accumulation of objects and practices that render them proper temporal infrastructures.

This way of comprehending ruins emerges particularly clearly if we consider the Roman context, where ruins appear not as isolated exceptions but as structural elements of the city. In his text on Rome (1898, 2018), Georg Simmel interprets the city as a composition of layers, differences, and times that Rome “holds together”: The ruin becomes an operator of relation, a threshold in which the city displays its history not as a linear narrative but as a coexistence of temporalities. In other words, Rome is a city in which the ruin participates in the everyday configuration of space and its possibilities of use. In another sociological text, however, Georg Simmel offers an especially dense formulation of the ruin. To him, the ruin makes visible in almost didactic manner the relation between an intentional project and the forces exceeding intention and control: The original form does not disappear but is reshaped, diverted, and recomposed through the combined action of nature, history, and use (Simmel 1958). This oscillation between permanence and transformation, between form and deformation means that, according to Simmel, the ruin simultaneously reveals the force that willed the form and the force that surpasses it.

If, as for Martina Löw, space is not a frame or container but living matter (Löw 2008) – a construction shaped by cultural, social, and symbolic interactions – Simmel allows us to see with particular clarity how this production of space passes through the life of forms: their duration, their vulnerability, and their capacity to be reactivated through unforeseen uses. In the stratified city of Rome, ruins become surfaces and volumes that participate in the possibilities of the present. Simmel offers us a language for describing how the city is never only what it was *designed* to be, but also what it *becomes* when different forces, unequal and situated, traverse it and rewrite it.

Taking into account Simmel’s reflections, and focusing on the use of ruins as configurations that hold together the spatial and the temporal dimension of con-

tinuity and duration, this article analyses the micro-practices of people experiencing homelessness in the city of Rome as they build relatively durable forms of shelter. To do so, the research adopts the analytical lens of the situated project, understood as a set of pragmatic and locally grounded practices that do not deny urgency but organize it through tactics of duration and forms of intermittent stabilization. The term ‘project’ refers to the ensemble of procedures, adjustments, and decisions through which people experiencing homelessness coordinate their action with the environment, with objects, and with contingencies (Suchman 1987). From this perspective, precarious dwelling can be read as a social-material practice grounded in specific competences: identifying urban micro-opportunities (shelter, warmth, water, light, controlled visibility), managing the logistics of mobility (assembling and dismantling, transporting, concealing, negotiating), and interpreting the city’s rhythms and signals (checks, pedestrian flows, schedules).

The qualifier ‘situated’ indicates that these practices unfold under determinate material and relational conditions, within horizons of constraints, inequalities, and forms of visibility that cannot be bracketed. In this sense, ‘situated’ does not merely describe an external context that “influences” action; rather, it signals that action is inseparable from the very conditions that both enable and limit it (Haraway 1988). Moreover, ‘situated’ here also means that these practices do not simply occur *within* urban space as if the city were a pre-given container, but that they participate in its everyday production as a social and political configuration (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]; Löw 2008). This orientation helps to avoid an interpretation that opposes “projectuality” (ascribed to non-marginal subjects and institutions) to “reaction” (ascribed to marginal subjects). Even under extreme precarity, one can observe forms of spatial projectuality through which duration becomes possible.

In dialogue with de Certeau’s theory of everyday practices (1984 [1980]) – particularly the distinction between “strategies” and “tactics” – one might argue that precarious dwellings transform urgencies into *tactics of duration* that maximize the continuity of taking shelter in a given place while minimizing the risk of being displaced.

Thus, the notion of the situated project developed here does not primarily aim to differ analytically from what de Certeau, Suchman, and Haraway have defined and proposed. Rather, it seeks to mobilize and interweave these categories in a more specific way in relation to the case of people experiencing homelessness. In this sense, the concept of the situated project makes it possible to focus on how practices of survival are neither merely tactical reactions to constraint nor simply situ-

ated responses to immediate circumstances, but forms of practical organization through which space, time, material supports, and everyday practices are assembled into precarious yet relatively durable modes of dwelling.

From this vantage point, the street is not only a “place” but a field of temporal possibilities: What is accessible in space is always accessible through windows of time, rhythms, and cadences. For those living on the street, a shelter is not simply *where* one can stay, but *when* one can stay: when an arch can be traversed without being moved on; when a recess becomes effectively invisible; when an area is emptied by daily flows; when surveillance loosens; when urban maintenance has not yet installed fencing or restored barriers. Rather than appearing as a continuous surface, urban space offers itself as an assemblage of temporal intervals and thresholds (hours, days, seasons) within which forms of habitability are produced and where niches, ruins, and discarded materials (ropes, tarpaulins, cardboard, supports) become components of a practical “making do”.

Indeed, for those living on the street, the city is not only a geography of places but also a grid of durations: temporal windows in which a site is accessible, tolerated, or effectively invisible – or conversely, exposed; cycles of opening and closure (services, transport, commercial activities); alternations between crowding and emptiness; shifts in control and surveillance; and climatic seasonality that redefines what is practicable. What emerges is a temporality made of thresholds and interruptions, in which dwelling coincides with adjusted movements. In this sense, marginality is inscribed not only in space but in the possibility of “making time” in the city, allowing traces to sediment.

Space and time, however conceived, are the great framework within which we order our experience. As Kevin Lynch observes, “we live in time-places” (1972: 241). Building on this notion, and by exploring Rome’s time-places, this article examines how people experiencing homelessness use archaeological ruins: material diapositives that incorporate duration and render observable, so to speak, the concrete consistency of the bond between space and time that is often difficult to grasp in the city’s more fleeting practices.

Social theory has long recognized the need to think space and time together. David Harvey (1990) insists on “spatiotemporality” as a structural entanglement of the two dimensions; Doreen Massey (2005) speaks of “space-times” to dislodge space from the notion of a static container and show it as dynamic, traversed by social relations and histories that interweave different temporalities; finally, Karen Barad (2007) radicalizes this perspective with the idea of “spacetime mattering”,

emphasizing the inseparability of space, time, and matter in the material-discursive constitution of the world. Yet while theoretically generative, these formulations do not in themselves provide a concrete methodological framework for capturing, investigating and empirically analysing the intertwining of spatial and temporal processes (Baxter *et al.* 2025). It is precisely the difficulty of observing and describing the co-constitution of space and time without reducing it to background around which the article develops its attempt to take space as a central empirical object and treat temporality as a constitutive dimension of the dwelling practices of people experiencing homelessness.

3. THE USE OF URBAN RUINS BY PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN ROME

The empirical work draws on field observation conducted within the archaeological area of Ad Duas Lauros, a high-density residential area whose concentration of Roman-period archaeological remains is second only to the city's historic centre. In this part of the city, ruins are not merely monumental presences. Rather, they form a dispersed constellation of arches, plinths, recesses, walls, and interstices which, depending on conditions of access, visibility, and control, may become supports for the construction of precarious forms of dwelling.

The observational trajectory followed in this research moves from the outer parts of the city toward its interior. It begins at the eastern edge of the Pigneto district, at a point which, on the city map, coincides not so much with an address as with a fold: an interstice between what Rome displays and what it leaves in suspension. From here, the line of the Acqua Felice aqueduct extends as a sequence of arches (Fig. 1).

Following a sinuous trajectory, the aqueduct leads toward the Aurelian Walls, which appear as a dense urban threshold layered with successive temporalities and uses (Fig. 2).

The remains of these walls do not simply mark a line of separation between an “inside” and an “outside”. Rather, they constitute a thick margin made of later adaptations, openings, closures, repairs, and interruptions that register the transformations of the city over time. In this sense, the Aurelian Walls do not function as a clear-cut boundary but as a porous edge: once a military infrastructure, later absorbed into the expanding urban fabric, and now continuously crossed, reworked, and redefined by everyday practices. It is along this trajectory, between aqueduct and walls, that the empirical material analysed in this article was collected.

The following pages focus on two observed configurations of dwelling within Rome's archaeological and infrastructural landscape: the use of arches of the Acqua Felice aqueduct along the Mandrione, and the placement of tents against the Aurelian Walls. In both situations, the ruin works as an urban resource. It offers thickness, protection, enclosure, and support, becoming part of the practical organization of survival.

3.1 How ruins are materially appropriated, adapted and organized to generate forms of dwelling

The first case concerns the remains of the Acqua Felice aqueduct along the Mandrione, at the eastern edge of the Pigneto district. From the street, the sequence of arches seems almost identical: the same curvature, the same masonry, the same monumental repetition. Yet as one approaches, this uniformity breaks down: some recesses are empty; others are obstructed by debris and vegetation; others still bear signs of occupation.

These are not generic traces of use, but in fact organized arrangements that transform architectural cavities into inhabitable interiors. The observed arch presents itself as a sharp opening in the wall: a stone mouth, high enough to allow passage and deep enough to offer protection. Its material form already provides a minimal spatial grammar. The vault shelters; the lateral walls draw a perimeter; the recess creates a distinction between inside and outside. In this case, the ruin is appropriated by entering this space. Its depth is used to produce an interior where no formal dwelling should exist (Fig. 3).

Inside the arch, the environment remains rough: worn plaster, damp stains, layered graffiti. However, the arrangement of objects is not left to chance. A light-



Figure 1. The Acqua Felice aqueduct. *Source:* The images were taken by the author during fieldwork.



Figure 2. The Aurelian Walls. *Source:* The images were taken by the author during fieldwork.

coloured drape with a repeated sun motif is hung at the back, functioning as a soft inner wall. It does not fully close the space, nor does it declare possession in an explicit fashion. Rather, it creates depth, separation, and a second threshold within the cavity. Through this gesture, the public wall of the ruin is partially withdrawn and transformed into an interior surface.

On the ground, a green rug delimits a zone of use. Blankets and bedding are arranged laterally and toward the rear of the arch, leaving a clearer strip near the entrance. This produces a minimal spatial plan: an entry zone and a resting zone. The arrangement is elementary, but recognizable. It shows that dwelling is not only a matter of being sheltered by a structure; it also requires the internal organization of space.

A large multicoloured umbrella placed near the threshold further contributes to this organization. It simultaneously functions as a screen, a barrier against wind, and a device blocking direct visual access from outside. It does not turn the arch into a closed room, but it nevertheless modulates exposure by producing a partial opacity, allowing the space to remain accessible while reducing its visibility. Here, the act of dwelling consists in making a place liveable without making permanence too legible.

The vertical use of the walls confirms this domestic organization. Baseball caps placed high above the drape,



Figure 3. The making of an interior. *Source:* The images were taken by the author during fieldwork.

small objects hung or propped against the walls, containers, a framed item, a rosary, and a calendar transform the ruin into something more than a refuge. They introduce a domestic grammar into a space that remains materially precarious. The wall becomes a support not only for protection but also for ordering, storing, displaying, and composing (Fig. 4).

The second case, observed along the Aurelian Walls, shows a different form of spatial use: here, the dwelling arrangement is not established inside the ruin but against it. A light grey tent is placed on the sidewalk, pressed against the masonry (Fig. 5).

The wall functions as a fourth wall at no cost: it blocks wind, reduces lateral exposure and protects the tent from one side. The tent is not simply pitched, as in camping; it is wedged into space. Its shape appears slightly compressed, as if it had adapted itself to the wall's presence: The shelter emerges from adhesion rather than enclosure.

This difference is important. In the case of the aqueduct, the ruin offers a cavity; in the case of the Aurelian Walls, it offers a backing. In one case, inhabita-



Figure 4. Arched masonry niche reused as a shelter. *Source:* The images were taken by the author during fieldwork.



Figure 5. Tent shelter anchored against an ancient wall. *Source:* The images were taken by the author during fieldwork.

tion depends on entering into the thickness of the ruin. In the other, it depends on aligning the shelter with a monumental surface. The tent's very shape, slightly compressed as though it had relinquished part of its volume, signals adaptation: The point is not only to cover oneself, but to make a shelter and a context cohere, even though that context was never designed to host it. A tent leaned against a ruin does not "inhabit" a monument; it inhabits a threshold – a short circuit between temporalities and functions that the city did not anticipate, but that the practices of people experiencing homelessness render operable.

Yet both practices rely on the same operation: transforming a historical structure into an infrastructure of habitability. These actions do not erase the precariousness of the dwelling; they organize it materially. The arch becomes an interior; the wall becomes a support. Both are activated as partial infrastructures through which exposure is reduced and a minimal domestic order is generated.

3.2 How dwelling practices produce specific temporalities within precarious conditions

The use of ruins also produces specific temporalities. These are not stable or linear temporalities, but fragile forms of duration. In both cases, dwelling involves the attempt to transform uncertainty into a minimally organized sequence.

In the arch of the Acqua Felice aqueduct, this temporal dimension is made visible by the calendar hanging on the wall (Fig. 6). The calendar is not merely decorative. It introduces a grammar of time into a space that officially does not provide for dwelling. A calendar only makes sense if the place is expected to endure, if one expects to return, and if days can be counted from a relatively stable point. It presupposes repetition.

By hanging a calendar inside the ruin, the inhabitant attaches a short and fragile duration to the long historical duration of the aqueduct. The ancient structure carries the time of the city, of infrastructure, of ruin, and of historical stratification. The calendar introduces another temporality: the everyday time of the person



Figure 6. The calendar: a temporality bound to space. *Source:* The images were taken by the author during fieldwork.

who sleeps, returns, arranges, waits, and keeps track. The result is a temporal grafting: The brief and precarious duration of homelessness is attached to the extended duration of the ruin.

The calendar suggests that the site is not only used in the moment but incorporated into a sequence of days. It marks the possibility of “here again” that transforms the arch from a shelter for a single night into a place within a repeated practice of return. In this sense, the calendar materializes a minimal claim to continuity: not simply to be there, but to remain long enough for time to accumulate.

Other objects inside the arch reinforce this temporal structure. Bedding, rugs, hanging items, containers and personal objects indicate a dwelling arrangement that is both settled and ready to be interrupted. The presence of bags and a wheeled frame suggests that mobility remains necessary.

The inhabitant must be able to move, save what is essential, and minimize loss. Yet this mobility does not contradict the domestic order of the space; rather, it belongs to it. Precarious dwelling is organized around the possibility of interruption.

The case of the Aurelian Walls produces temporality differently. Here, the key temporal device is the anchoring point: the nail or insert between the bricks, together with the rope attached to it, turns the tent into an object oriented toward return (Fig. 7).

Anchoring is a spatial gesture, but also a temporal one. It implies that the shelter is not only placed for the present moment; it is prepared to resist, to remain, or to be reassembled.



Figure 7. Close-up of the anchoring point. *Source:* The images were taken by the author during fieldwork.

The rope safeguards against wind, displacement, and possible disturbance. It anticipates what might happen. This anticipation is itself a temporal practice: a force applied in the present in order to avoid rupture in the near future. The doubled or braided rope makes this logic especially clear. It does not promise permanence, but it creates the conditions for repeated, low-intensity stability.

The temporal form produced here is not permanence in the full sense. The tent may need to be dismantled; the site may become unusable; the presence may be interrupted by control, circulation, weather, or removal. Yet the anchoring point enables a form of intermittent permanence: staying when possible, loosening when necessary, returning when conditions allow. The nail makes reassembly faster, return more reliable, and repeated effort less costly.

This is one of the central temporal features shared by the two cases. The use of ruins does not abolish uncertainty, it organizes it. The arch and the wall allow the production of rhythms: returning, arranging, repairing, fastening, storing, withdrawing, and reappearing. Dwelling emerges not as a fixed state but as a repeated practice.

In both cases, the duration of dwelling remains fragile, exposed, and reversible – but it is not insignificant. It is produced through material devices: a drape, a rug, an umbrella, a calendar, a nail, a rope, a tent. Each object participates in the stabilization of time. Together, they make possible a situated project of dwelling: a way of rendering the present more manageable by linking it to a possible repetition.

The temporalities generated by these practices are therefore neither those of formal residence nor those of pure transience. They are intermediate temporalities: precarious but organized, unstable but repeated, exposed but partially protected. The ruin becomes the support through which the time of survival is stretched, sequenced, and made minimally inhabitable.

4. CONCLUSION

In this contribution, the notion of the situated project has been developed both analytically and through empirical field research conducted at the level of micro-practices. Taking into account that the use of ruins constitutes a configuration that holds together both the spatial and the temporal dimension of continuity and duration, this article has analysed the micro-practices of people experiencing homelessness in the city of Rome as they build relatively durable forms of shelter, securing a minimal continuity of dwelling under conditions of extreme precarity.

Rome's ruins can be understood as particularly dense time-places – material formations where different temporalities intersect: the *longue durée* of archaeological remains, the rhythms of the contemporary city, the cycles of surveillance and tolerance, and the everyday routines through which survival is organized. In this sense, ruins are not simply spatial supports or remnants of the past. They are material devices through which time becomes spatially available and through which space is experienced, inhabited, and reorganized through temporal practices.

Building on this perspective, the article contributes to debates on space and time by shifting the focus from the general theoretical claim that space and time are inseparable to the empirical question of how their inseparability can be observed. While Harvey's notion of "spatiotemporality", Massey's "space-times", and Barad's "spacetime mattering" offer conceptual resources for thinking the co-constitution of space, time, and matter, the article shows empirically how this co-constitution becomes visible in urban practices through practices of dwelling. In doing so, people experiencing homelessness

establish a close, material, and unauthorized relation to ruins, engaging with them through practices of touch, movement, anchoring, hanging, and adaptation. In such practices, ruins are made to function in another sense: as shelter – places in which objects can be stored, where one can sleep with a degree of regularity, and where some protection can be secured. This mode of use exists in direct tension with the touristic imaginary of modernity, which tends to stabilize ancient remains as aesthetic objects to be contemplated from a distance as frame, scenery, or monument (Stewart 2020; Schnapp 2020).

The ruin becomes a field of forces in which conservation and use, visibility and invisibility, monumentality and everydayness, long historical duration and the short duration of precarious dwelling coexist and collide. In Rome, a paradigmatically stratified city, this collision is structural: ruins are active components of the urban morphology, and therefore also of its inequalities. Observing Rome through the practices of people experiencing homelessness brings into view a city marked by asymmetries, which tolerates such presences so long as they remain discreet and removes them when they become too visible. What is observed here is not only shelter in time, but the very possibility of making time in public space.

A further development of this research would be to extend the same analytical lens beyond the level of everyday practices, applying it to the study of public policies, territorial planning and urban regulations that structure, constrain or render invisible these practices. In this direction, the concept of the situated project could offer a way to rethink the relation between informal dwelling practices and institutional forms of spatial governance. The point would not be to replace institutional policies with the micro-practices of those who live on the street, nor to romanticize survival tactics as alternatives to institutional intervention. A politics of the situated project would therefore not consist in transforming precarious arrangements into acceptable solutions, but rather in using them as a point of departure for rethinking the city and its inequalities.

Similarly, the notion of the situated project could help to interrogate the plurality of urban knowledges at stake – practical, institutional, technical, social and experiential – and the ways in which this plurality may coexist. Such knowledges are often heterogeneous and asymmetrical; they may also be in tension or conflict. Yet it is precisely from this friction that a different understanding of urban policy might emerge: one oriented toward the recognition of the spatial competences, temporal routines, and material arrangements through which precarious lives are sustained in the city.

This does not mean accepting ruins as appropriate places to live, nor legitimizing the conditions of inequality that make such uses necessary. On the contrary, it means taking seriously the capacity of people experiencing homelessness to generate other spaces (Meert 2006; Mela *et al.* 2024) and multiple temporalities as a concrete mode of urban production.

Through adjustments, reuses, and forms of maintenance, homelessness is not only a condition of lacking, but also a mode of inhabiting and producing urban space. Through these practices, people experiencing homelessness outline original ways of imagining the city and their own lives, challenging interpretations of life on the street as merely passive marginalization or a “parasitic” condition. Rather, they act as inventive actors, bricoleurs capable of actively constructing the reality around them in the course of everyday life (Barnao 2004; Bonadonna 2005; Bergamaschi 2009). In this sense, people experiencing homelessness should be recognized as legitimate social actors who contribute to redefining functions, boundaries and the implicit norms of the metropolitan environment for everyday continuity. They interact continuously with the city, reinventing and re-signifying it; through their daily practices, they contribute to the production of urban space itself. This active dimension composed of micro-practices, adaptation and resistance offers an empirical lens through which to read the city not as a mere backdrop, but as a processual and relational formation in which urban space is both the product and the stake of social practices that produce alternative spatial configurations, multiple temporalities, and uses within the city.

REFERENCES

- Barad K. (2007), *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.
- Barnao C. (2004), *Sopravvivere in strada: Elementi di sociologia della persona senza Dimora*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Baxter J.-S., Heinrich A. J., Marguin S. and Sommer V. (2025), «Introduction: Multiple Spacetimes and How They Matter», in J.-S. Baxter, A. J. Heinrich, S. Marguin and V. Sommer (eds.), *Spacetimes Matter: A Collection of Mapping Methodologies*, Jovis Berlin, Berlin, pp. 7-21.
- Bergamaschi M. (2009), «Between Mobility and Sedentariness: Homeless People in Urban Space», In M. Bergamaschi, M. Colleoni and F. Martinelli (eds.), *La città: bisogni, desideri, diritti. Dimensioni spaziotem-*
- porali dell'esclusione urbana*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, pp. 204-220.
- Bonadonna F. (2005), *Il nome del barbone. Vite di strada e povertà estreme in Italia*, DeriveApprodi, Roma.
- De Rosa E., Di Leo F. and Scambia F. (2025), «Homelessness in Rome 2024: The PIT Count», in *European Journal of Homelessness* 19 (1): 205-223.
- de Certeau M. (1984 [1980]). *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- DeSilvey C. (2017), *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Do P., Fassari L. G. and Pompili G. (2025), *Marginalità ibride. Pratiche di rifigurazione spaziale*, Carocci, Roma.
- Do P. and Fassari L. G. (2023), «The Quality of Public Space Among Hybrid Nature-Ruins: The Case of Bullicante Lake in Rome», in *Quaderni di Sociologia* 91(LXVII): 29-45.
- Duneier M., Kasinitz P. and Murphy A. (2014), *The Urban Ethnography Reader*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Duneier M. (2016), *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.
- Edensor T. (2005), *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality*, Berg, Oxford.
- Ferrarotti F. (1970), *Roma da capitale a periferia*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- Ferrarotti F. (1974), *Vite di baraccati: contributo alla sociologia della marginalità*, Liguori, Napoli.
- Fondation pour le Logement des Défavorisés, FEANTSA (2025), *Tenth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2025*, Report. September 2025.
- Haraway D. J. (1988), «Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective», in *Feminist Studies*, 14 (3): 575-599.
- Harvey D. (1990), *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Blackwell, Cambridge MA and Oxford.
- Lefebvre H. (1991 [1974]), *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Löw M. (2008), «The Constitution of Space: The Structuration of Space through the Perception and Action of Social Actors», in *European Journal of Social Theory* 11 (1): 25-49.
- Lynch K. (1972), *What Time Is This Place?*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA.
- Massey D. (2005), *For Space*, Sage, London.
- Meert H. (2006), *The Changing Profiles of Homeless People: Conflict, Rooflessness and the Use of Public Space*, FEANTSA, Brussels.

- Mela A., Battaglioni, E. and Palazzo L. (2024), *La società e lo spazio*, Carocci, Roma.
- Przywara A. (2023), «Mining for Embodied Coal: Building Material Reuse in the Postwar Reconstruction of Warsaw», in *Ardeth*, 13: 141-159.
- Przywara A. (2025), «Wartime Circularity: Adapting Buildings, Salvaging Materials, and Designing Supply Chains for Ukraine», in *Urban Research & Practice*, 19 (1): 139-156.
- Rossi G. (2016), *Le forme dello spazio nella tarda modernità*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Schnapp A. (2020), *Une histoire universelle des ruines: Des origines aux Lumières*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.
- Simmel G. (1958), «The Ruins», in *The Hudson Review* 11 (3): 371–385.
- Simmel G. (1985), *La moda e altri saggi di cultura filosofica*, a cura e trad. di M. Monaldi, Longanesi, Milano.
- Simmel G. (2018), *The Art of the City: Rome, Florence, Venice*, Pushkin Press, London.
- Stewart S. (2020), *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Suchman L. A. (1987), *Plans and Situated Actions: The Problem of Human–Machine Communication*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.



Citation: Tumminelli, G. (2026). The Right to a Home: Housing Strategies and Social Inclusion of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors and Youth Foreigners. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 71-80. doi: 10.36253/smp-17082

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

The Right to a Home: Housing Strategies and Social Inclusion of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors and Youth Foreigners

GIUSEPPINA TUMMINELLI

University of Palermo, Italy

E-mail: santagiuseppina.tumminelli@unipa.it

Abstract. In the current social landscape, the housing dimension constitutes one of the most decisive variables in defining social hierarchies and stratification processes. Access to stable housing is not merely the satisfaction of a primary need; it represents a crucial node in welfare policies and urban planning. When this dimension intersects with the trajectories of human mobility, it becomes a priority indicator for measuring the effectiveness of integration pathways, revealing the structural barriers that migrant subjects are forced to confront. Although a progressive trend toward settlement can be observed among the foreign population, capable of triggering transformation processes in urban spaces, the housing market remains a domain characterized by profound asymmetries and conflict. Indeed, the availability of accommodation acts directly upon an individual's social status and the quality of interactions with the host community, influencing the dynamics of acceptance and reciprocity. Drawing on the results of an exploratory study conducted in the metropolitan area of Palermo, this contribution aims to offer a reflection on the situation of unaccompanied foreign minors leaving the reception system upon reaching the age of majority, and on the possible housing strategies undertaken (such as transitional apartments, co-housing, and Housing First).

Keywords: unaccompanied foreign minors, young adults, housing, social inclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current social landscape, the housing dimension constitutes one of the most decisive variables in defining social hierarchies and stratification processes. Access to stable housing is not merely the satisfaction of a primary need; it represents a crucial node in welfare policies and urban planning. When this dimension intersects with the trajectories of human mobility, it becomes a priority indicator for measuring the effectiveness of integration pathways, revealing the structural barriers that migrant subjects are forced to confront.

Although a progressive trend toward settlement can be observed among the foreign population, capable of triggering transformation processes in urban spaces, the housing market remains a domain characterized by pro-

found asymmetries and conflict. Indeed, the availability of accommodation acts directly upon an individual's social status and the quality of interactions with the host community, influencing the dynamics of acceptance and reciprocity.

The framework of vulnerability assumes particularly severe traits when the analysis focuses on the demographic segment of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (UAMs) aging out of the Reception and Integration System (SAI)¹ upon reaching eighteen years of age.

Over the last ten years, Italy has recorded a significant increase in unaccompanied foreign minors arriving via the Mediterranean or Balkan routes. Lacking parental figures, they carry a baggage of traumatic experiences: from early separation in the pre-migratory context, to violence and exploitation suffered during transit, through to linguistic, cultural, and social difficulties in the country of arrival.

The most critical issues emerge in correspondence with turning eighteen. In this phase, defined in the literature as a "triple transition" (UNICEF, Médecins du Monde 2018): biological, migratory, and the reworking of trauma, these young adults risk slipping into a condition of social undesirability. The expiration of juvenile legal protections exposes these "migrant adolescents and near-adults" to the concrete risk of irregularity and marginalization, transforming them into subjects perceived as a source of public insecurity.

It is within this context of structural fragility that the necessity to rethink strategies for accompanying these youths toward autonomy, overcoming emergency-driven logics, is situated.

Drawing on the results of an exploratory study conducted in the metropolitan area of Palermo, this contribution aims to offer a reflection on the situation of unaccompanied foreign minors leaving the reception system upon reaching the age of majority, and on the possible housing strategies undertaken (such as transitional apartments, co-housing, and Housing First). The research involved interviews with both young adults and operators from the multidisciplinary teams working within the involved facilities.

2. PROFILE

The surge in migration flows into Italy over the past ten years, along both the Mediterranean and Balkan routes, has led to a substantial increase in unaccompanied foreign minors deprived of parental care. This

demographic shift has triggered the emergence of novel challenges for receiving societies throughout the process from arrival to settlement, with wide-ranging implications for institutional, legislative, and organizational frameworks.

As of June 30, 2025, Ministry of the Interior records indicated 16,497 unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy, 87.5% of whom were male. The age breakdown highlighted a clear majority of seventeen-year-olds (54.6%), individuals nearing adulthood and thus poised to transition out of the care system. They were followed by sixteen-year-olds (21.7%), with the 7-14 age group comprising 15.1%. The age profile for female minors, however, diverged significantly from the general trend. Over half of the female cohort was under 15 (51%), whereas the older bracket (16-17 years) represented just over 37%, a markedly lower proportion compared to the 77% seen in the aggregate data. Regarding countries of origin, Egypt ranked first (24.6%), followed by Ukraine (19.5%), Gambia (9.5%), Tunisia (7.9%), and Guinea (6.2%). Reception was concentrated primarily in Sicilia (22%), Lombardia (14%), Campania (9.4%), and Emilia-Romagna (8.2%).

Given these figures, undoubtedly, administrations, territorial services, the third sector, and educational bodies have been compelled to face the increasing social complexity associated with this demographic.

In this context, the awareness that the best interests of the child cannot be pursued solely by meeting material needs, but rather through the promotion of rights and the construction of pathways leading from reception to the acquisition of autonomy and self-determination, has been fundamental. Furthermore, minor age constitutes an additional factor of substantial fragility, both regarding self-protection and the delicate developmental phase the minor is traversing, one heavily conditioned by cultural determinants. The migratory journey itself, the duration of which varies considerably, can be interpreted as a passage into a new phase of existence where minors are called upon to redefine their identity and their relationship with the "other". This transition involves, on one hand, a forced anticipation of certain developmental stages and, on the other, precocious exposure to experiences of adulthood. Minors undertaking the journey without reference adults are frequently exposed to violence, traumatic events, and re-traumatization during the migration phases. Feelings of failure, existential instability, profound vulnerability, uncertainty about the future, and risks of labour and sexual exploitation amplify their condition of fragility, placing them in a suspended space: between childhood and adulthood, between the country of origin and the country of arrival, and between uncertain legal statuses, poised between

¹ Rete SAI, Sistema Accoglienza e Integrazione <https://www.retesai.it/>.

social inclusion and exclusion. Trauma acts as an element that exacerbates this intermediate condition, hindering the transition toward new identity configurations, complicating integration processes within the reception context, and increasing the risks of marginalization and violation of fundamental rights. Among young migrants, stress, depression, anxiety, unresolved grief, and fear of death negatively impact social integration processes. Added to this is the necessity of navigating complex processes of resocialization within a new national context. The internalization of new normative, cultural, and symbolic codes can generate feelings of disorientation, loneliness, abandonment, and communicative difficulties, making integration pathways particularly arduous and fragile.

Even the lack of institutional recognition of educational qualifications and prior skills acquired in countries of origin contributes to reinforcing a form of symbolic devaluation, which is deeply intertwined with experiences of violence and marginalization. These conditions become more acute for those who are no longer minors. In such situations, the activation of interventions falls within the framework of collective responsibility, inscribed in an articulated process of social inclusion aimed at ensuring the full and effective enforceability of fundamental rights. Access to legal guardianship and protection systems, attention to personal development and autonomy, trauma recovery, and mediation must be central to programmed and implemented interventions.

Alongside this, it is equally relevant to institutionally recognize their condition of social vulnerability, accentuated by the diverse motivations driving mobility choices. These decisions, situated within the broader framework of global economic inequalities, climate change, the fragility of family structures, and limited access to education, characterize migratory processes as “unsafe, irregular, exploitative” (IOM 2020: 231).

3. THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD AND THE ROLE OF HOUSING

Reflection on the protection of minors in adolescence is situated within a structural intersection involving the rights, guarantees, and protection measures provided until the age of majority, as well as the system of resources and opportunities that institutions and welfare mechanisms can activate during a particularly sensitive transition phase. In parallel, entry into adulthood must be understood as a complex, non-linear process involving psychological, biological, and neurocognitive dimensions connected to the progressive acquisition of

reasoning skills, emotional regulation, and the assumption of responsibilities typical of adulthood. The transition to adult life (Bichi and Bonini 2021) cannot be reduced to traditional “rites of passage” (Van Gennepe 1981) such as completing schooling, entering the labour market, or forming a family unit. Instead, it must necessarily include numerous factors affecting social inclusion opportunities and biographical trajectories, such as socioeconomic status, gender, migratory and ethnic background, and religious affiliation. These youths experience a “triple transition” (UNICEF, Médecins du Monde 2018): the universal transition from adolescence to adulthood; the migratory transition linked to separation from the context of origin and adaptation to a new environment; and the transition connected to processing traumatic experiences and painful life events. The intersection of these three dimensions gives rise to growth trajectories that are often discontinuous, non-linear, and significantly divergent from those of their native-born peers.

From a sociological perspective, moving from one cultural context to another introduces an additional layer of complexity. The categories of “childhood,” “adolescence,” and “youth” assume different meanings depending on the cultural reference systems, impacting social expectations, gender roles, economic responsibilities, and the timing of leaving the family nucleus. For many migrant minors, migration itself marks a profound discontinuity between a “before” and an “after,” entailing the premature assumption of responsibility, exposure to high risks, and the necessity to develop self-care strategies in often adverse conditions. Added to this dimension is the weight of responsibility toward the family and community of origin, which frequently invests these young people with high expectations and moral and economic bonds. This reduces the space for individual self-determination and places many foreign minors far from the models of adolescence typical of Western contexts.

Another critical issue concerns identity construction processes within the reception context, where the young person often experiences a condition of “non-belonging”. This assumes specific relevance for minors engaged in defining their own self. In contexts marked by stigmatizing labelling and discriminatory practices, the possibility of developing an autonomous identity is severely compromised, producing psychological suffering and potentially hindering balanced integration into the host society.

Furthermore, the rigid distinction between “minor” and “adult” does not reflect the procedural nature of becoming an adult, nor does it adequately consider the cultural and social differences characterizing growth paths or the specific vulnerabilities of young migrants.

Many have already experienced roles and responsibilities typically associated with adulthood in their countries of origin or during the migratory journey, yet they encounter difficulties both in recognizing themselves and in being recognized as adults in the host society. Consequently, they must confront new cultural and institutional codes while the host country's regulations and legal devices limit their decision-making autonomy.

The analysis of transition processes highlights several pivotal domains: legal status and the legal recognition of the minor or newly-turned adult; access to education and training; labour market integration opportunities; the construction and maintenance of relational networks, both formal (institutional) and informal (family, community, friends); and the achievement of housing autonomy. These domains constitute the primary devices of social inclusion or exclusion, around which the possibility of developing an autonomous life project and constructing a sense of belonging in new contexts revolves.

A primary obstacle within transition pathways is represented by the complexity and sluggishness of bureaucratic procedures required to obtain residence permits and forms of legal protection. For asylum seekers, prolonged waiting periods for convocation by Territorial Commissions² and for decisions regarding international protection generate conditions of persistent uncertainty, fueling mistrust and increasing the risk of withdrawal from institutional reception pathways. Consequently, the moment of peak vulnerability frequently coincides with the departure from reception centres. This phase is characterized by an increased risk of labour exploitation, social invisibility, structural discrimination, and widespread prejudice, all of which can severely limit access to the real estate market, forcing many young people into precarious, temporary, or informal housing solutions (Brandolini *et al.* 2009).

Access to housing constitutes a central strategic lever for mitigating factors that produce vulnerability (Bergamaschi 2022). Although the right to housing is formally recognized as a fundamental right, its effective exercise remains profoundly unequal and stratified. This condition is also applicable to other target groups and scenarios, such as care leavers, individuals exiting institutional reception systems, and those experiencing housing poverty or residential precarity linked to forms of socio-economic vulnerability. Lack of a dwelling falls

within the spectrum of extreme poverty and correlates with other forms of social inequality, economic disparity, low motivation, negative health impacts, precarious social bonds, lack of civic participation, marginalization, and profound discrimination. These scenarios may lead migrants to homelessness (Consoli and Meo 2020; Meo 2009; Barnao 2004). In such cases, prevention through new housing solutions implies complex choices and critical challenges, such as property identification, cohabitation arrangements to contain costs, domestic space management, and relations with landlords and neighbours. Furthermore, the territorial context acts as a determinant factor: educational, training, employment, and housing opportunities available after reaching the age of majority rely heavily on local realities.

Young migrants confront a multiplicity of normative, bureaucratic, economic, and relational obstacles that limit access to both the private rental market and public or social housing circuits. The demand for economic and employment guarantees, the precariousness of legal status, and the diffusion of discriminatory practices render housing one of the most critical domains in autonomy pathways. Vicious cycles are created where housing precariousness intersects with labour and legal instability, generating an accumulation of exclusion. In this sense, housing cannot be reduced to a mere material good; it must be understood as a constitutive dimension of social inclusion and citizenship. While housing denotes a physical site – whether stable or temporary – intended for habitation and governed by technical, regulatory, and economic parameters, the home serves as an affective institution. It provides more than mere physical protection; it projects the individual's identity onto the external world. Whereas housing addresses survival-related issues, the home constitutes the space where autonomy is exercised and citizenship is constructed. The home is a social product, and dwelling implies processes of symbolic appropriation, relationship building, territorial rooting, and identity reconfiguration.

Therefore, housing support must be configured as a central challenge for public policies and the multidisciplinary teams of the Reception and Integration System. These actors are called upon to promote strategies capable of combining protection, empowerment, and active participation, with the awareness that investing in housing autonomy means strengthening social capital, fostering proximity ties, and contributing to contrasting the structural inequalities that traverse the trajectories of young migrants. The fragility of legal status frequently intertwines with socioeconomic vulnerability, amplifying the risk of housing exclusion.

² The Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection, established within the Prefecture - Territorial Office of the Government, is the competent authority for examining applications for international protection, which have been previously formalized at the Border Police Offices or at the Police Headquarters (Questure). <https://prefettura.interno.gov.it/it/prefettura/torino/commissione-territoriale-riconoscimento-protezione-internazionale>.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

The research was conducted using a purely qualitative methodological approach, based on in-depth interviews with unaccompanied foreign minors and young adults residing in second-level reception facilities, followed by an interpretive analysis of the emerging content. The inquiry addressed three fundamental dimensions: the ontological question (reflection on the nature of the studied object); the epistemological question (reflection on scientific knowledge); and the methodological question (reflection on social research methods) (Corbetta 1999: 21-23).

From a methodological standpoint, a non-standard approach and an inductive criterion were adopted to gain deeper insight into the subject of study through specific experiences, utilizing an “analysis by subjects” (ibid.: 23). This chosen approach facilitated the exploration of the social and symbolic meanings that actors attribute to their own practices, prioritizing the understanding of processes over the numerical measurement of phenomena.

Interviews served as the central instrument, allowing for the establishment of a direct, situated relationship with interlocutors. This fostered a climate of trust that enabled the emergence of personal narratives, memories, sensitivities, and subjective interpretations of lived experiences. The conduct of the research adhered strictly to ethical principles, with particular regard to participant protection. This entailed ensuring all participants were fully informed of the study’s objectives and data usage modalities, alongside the strict application of the principle of anonymization.

The qualitative analysis of collected data, conducted through thematic coding and the comparison of diverse viewpoints, ultimately allowed for the identification of shared interpretive models. The study was implemented first through a literature review and subsequently through the analysis of interviews. Data collection took place between May 2025 and December 2025. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 migrants from various countries (all male, aged 17-19) and 15 operators working in structures of the Reception and Integration System within the Palermo metropolitan area. The interviews with migrants were conducted in Italian and, in only a few instances, in English. The decision to focus the interviews on male subjects is informed, as previously noted, by their significantly higher representation, 87.5% according to Ministry of Interior data, compared to their female counterparts. Each interview lasted approximately one hour on average. The interviews were conducted within the facilities

or at the participants’ homes. The operators are specifically tasked with initiating pathways toward housing and employment autonomy.

A semi-structured interview guide was utilized, constructed based on dimensions, or thematic areas (Cardano 2011), associated with stimulus questions deemed relevant to the research aims. Finally, the interviews were analysed using ATLAS/ti to support textual processing. Through this software, texts were managed, categories created, and conceptual frameworks constructed.

4.1 What does it mean to dwell?

The concept of “dwelling” extends far beyond the mere possession of a physical space; it encompasses a set of practices, relationships, and meanings through which locations are lived and acquire symbolic value. For care leavers transitioning out of reception systems, housing autonomy represents a crucial milestone in the transition to adulthood. This process does not exclusively concern access to housing, but involves the development of economic management skills, the construction and maintenance of relational networks, engagement with social norms and expectations, and the capacity to envision future projects. In this perspective, dwelling becomes a space of mediation between past, present, and future, between the abandoned space of origin, often marked by traumatic experiences, and the space of settlement, which remains unstable and fraught with uncertainty (Kabachnik *et al.* 2010). To dwell means to take root, to construct an identity, and to transform a “space” into a “place.”

Consequently, the pathway toward housing autonomy constitutes one of the most complex challenges: it is not merely a matter of finding accommodation, but of acquiring economic management competencies, building social networks, and navigating the discriminations present in both the labour and housing markets. Dwelling, therefore, refers to a social and symbolic process interwoven with the construction of personal autonomy, empowerment, the strengthening of proximity ties, and social cohesion. In this sense, housing autonomy represents a critical stage in the transition to adulthood, in the recomposition of fragmented identities, and in gaining access to broader forms of social participation and independence.

From the analysis of the interviews, three key dimensions emerged: the management of everyday life within secondary reception facilities; the experimentation with innovative models such as transitional apartments or “Housing First” (Molinari and Zenarolla 2018); and the critical impact of structural barriers within the private real estate market.

The experience of living within secondary reception facilities is articulated by interviewees across two distinct yet interconnected temporal and functional levels: dwelling within the facility, understood as a “training ground” for autonomy and the negotiation of rules; and dwelling outside the facility, viewed as the ultimate goal for self-recognition and the initiation of forms of participation in collective life.

The internal space of the facility is not presented as neutral but, following Bourdieu (1993), as a space reflecting power relations and social dynamics. The management of domestic space becomes the primary testing ground for the beneficiaries’ soft skills. Dwelling and cohabiting with other young people of different nationalities is configured as a continuous relational process, shaped by memory, daily practices, and social interactions. These dimensions render the space dynamic and meaningful, enabling the construction of bonds and a sense of belonging. Life within reception facilities follows precise educational logics, often derived from prior experiences with “group apartments”, as highlighted by one of the interviewed practitioners.

Let’s say that we only recently became a community, but our organization used to be an ‘apartment-group’ (shared housing), so we wanted to keep that same setup where the kids start to test themselves out, even with things like meal preparation; they also have to manage the washing machine. They are starting to move towards a certain level of autonomy (02).

The internal organization proposed by the multi-disciplinary teams within the reception facilities aims to replicate familiar or small-community dynamics that foster the acquisition of skills geared toward building autonomy through “daily doing”. These dynamics are designed to foster the acquisition of skills geared toward building autonomy through daily practical activities.

In this context, tasks such as cooking and self-care, for example, facilitated through cleaning, catering, and laundry services, are not merely provided services; rather, they serve as “spaces of agency”. However, forced cohabitation among individuals with diverse backgrounds, originating from various countries such as Gambia, Bangladesh, Somalia, and Maghreb may generate conflict. In such instances, the strategies implemented by practitioners aim to create spaces for collective dialogue and confrontation:

When there is a problem involving everyone, we call a meeting and discuss the issue, attempting to foster accountability. If a problem affects one person today, it could affect everyone tomorrow. We try to make them understand that

this is a home and that it must be lived in with trust and mutual respect (05).

A significant development has been the decision by certain facilities to move beyond the mere provision of reception services toward the development of innovative projects (D’Agostino 2020), such as “transitional apartments”. These initiatives provide a bridge between protected reception environments and full independence, offering critical insights for reimagining “housing welfare” for care leavers.

These interventions are characterized as processes of gradual detachment, specifically designed to empower the individual youth and bridge the gap between their pursuit of rights and autonomy and the host society. In this context, forms of political and community action are initiated, centering on co-design practices and the development of robust public-private partnerships.

For sure, the ‘transitional apartment’ is an apartment that, because it’s small, gives autonomy back to the kids by letting them experience the sense of ‘having’ and ‘being’ home (07).

In the landscape of reception policies, specifically those targeting Unaccompanied Foreign Minors and young adults, the housing question is not merely a logistical necessity, but the pivot around which the entire educational and empowerment project revolves. Housing autonomy thus becomes an evolutionary phase toward independence and responsibility, marking the transition from a state of passivity to one of activism and social networking. This pathway aims to restore the individual’s central role in decision-making, respect their personal timing, re-signify social belonging, and actively counter structural inequalities.

The support pathways toward housing autonomy initiated within the reception facilities are designed to prevent unaccompanied foreign minors from regressing relative to their achieved goals once they leave, due to loneliness or a lack of practical tools for household management.

While the internal pathways within facilities and transitional apartments appear structured and pedagogically oriented, the impact of the external real estate market is described by practitioners and young adults alike with tones of frustration and condemnation. The search for housing represents one of the most critical points of the system.

An alarming picture emerges in which the possession of formal requirements, such as employment contracts, valid documentation, and financial stability, is insufficient to secure a lease. Practitioners define this

phase as the “sore point, a very sore point (07)”. What presents itself is a form of explicit and diversified “housing racism” based on nationality, which forces practitioners into an exhausting and often fruitless role of mediation. Often, the guarantee offered by the organization or the practitioner themselves is the only possibility to overcome the suspicion of landlords, though even this does not always prove successful.

It's such a sore point... you call the numbers on the ads and they tell you: no, they're foreigners, we don't want them. We don't want foreigners, we only want students, we don't want people coming from facilities, we don't want Bangladeshis, we don't want Tunisians, we don't want Nigerians (07).

Housing poverty is inextricably linked to social marginality (Tosi 2017) and manifests through processes of spatial exclusion. Material deprivation compromises individual capacities for autonomy and the ability to be recognized as citizens, thereby increasing the risks of social exclusion and lack of participation.

The transition out of the reception system forces young adults to confront a private real estate market characterized by: a shortage of supply often saturated by short-term tourist rentals; unsustainable demands for economic guarantees; and a widespread distrust from landlords fuelled by stereotypes of insolvency and unreliability. Consequently, available solutions are often of substandard quality, located in peripheral or degraded areas, which amplifies the perception of deprivation.

Furthermore, the relationship with the surrounding residential context is often described as hostile or suspicious. Neighbours are frequently ready to demand “good conduct” from foreign youth to legitimize their presence in the building. In this context, dwelling becomes a continuous performance, as the young person must prove themselves to be a “good neighbour” to deconstruct stigma (Goffman 1963), burdening the simple act of residing with elevated political and social responsibility.

Let's just say we experience this lack of acceptance on a daily basis, especially since not everyone in the building accepts the presence of foreigners. That's why it's important to follow the building rules, be polite, and let people get to know us, doing our best to fight the idea of prejudice (05).

Despite these barriers, analysis of the youths' biographies reveals that they do not operate as passive subjects or mere victims; rather, they demonstrate a capacity for agency manifested through motivation for autonomy, expression of needs, and the claiming of rights.

Where innovative models have been proposed, they have opened spaces for mutual aid, assistance, and dia-

logue, serving as homelessness prevention tools. A primary example is the Housing First (HF) approach, originally theorized by Tsemberis (Tsemberis 2010; Tsemberis, Gulcur and Nakae 2004; Tsemberis and Eisenberg 2000) in the 1990s to combat chronic homelessness with psychiatric comorbidities and subsequently adopted into national guidelines for severe marginalization.

The HF approach (Cortese 2017) has been adapted to support the transition to autonomy for migrant youth. In this perspective, housing is understood as a fundamental starting point in an individual's life, not a reward to be obtained at the end of an integration path, but a necessary precondition to activate social and labour inclusion processes. Housing is no longer the final goal, but the primary action of harm reduction and the first step toward the recovery of relationships, roles, and transversal social competencies (recovery approach).

We cook together; we eat together. There are four of us. One guy is Italian, a student, we do everything together (10).

Consequently, this represents an inescapable precondition for the activation of any socio-occupational inclusion pathway and for the restoration of psycho-physical well-being. The model, as developed within the European context, is structured around eight core principles: housing as a fundamental human right; user self-determination in decision-making processes; the decoupling of housing provision from clinical treatment services; a recovery-oriented approach; harm reduction; active engagement without coercion; person-centered planning; and the provision of flexible support for as long as required (Pleace 2016).

Through the Housing First experience, for young migrants, the concept of dwelling has transcended mere spatial availability. It points instead toward a socio-symbolic process interconnected with self-determination, empowerment, and the strengthening of social cohesion, thereby challenging a victim-centered narrative of these individuals (Tumminelli 2024).

I moved from the facility to a house with a friend of mine... it's nicer, even if you have to think about keeping the place clean and doing the cooking (01).

I didn't feel like staying in the community all the time... it felt too closed off that way (03).

The youth have demonstrated a capacity for resilience and aspiration, utilizing the domestic space as a site for identity renegotiation and the exercise of responsibility (budget management, maintenance of the premises, and compliance with building regulations). They

have translated this agency into the assertion of rights and the formulation of autonomous choices.

In the community, that's how it was, whenever you needed something, you'd ask... one time [the tutor] got annoyed and told me, 'Look, the house is yours, when you want something, just take it'. These little things might seem silly, but honestly, if you're used to living that way, it's really hard (05).

What I've always liked is that sometimes we wait for each other... to wait for the other person, to chat, we buy some things... and we have a good laugh (02).

Furthermore, autonomous living, clearly distinguished from the communal life of reception facilities, has fostered an unprecedented sense of freedom, while simultaneously presenting new managerial challenges and deconstructing prejudices through the routine of neighbourhood interactions.

Around here we say hello when we see each other on the stairs... it's little things like that (09).

Investing in structural housing solutions has proven fundamental for ensuring dignity and substantive citizenship, while also being more economically advantageous compared to the costs of emergency management for marginality.

5. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The persistent shortage of housing and structural discrimination within the private market continue to constrain the effective exercise of rights. Addressing the issue of dwelling, therefore, assumes both individual and collective significance. Constructing one's life in a new country entails the development of autonomy and the strengthening of empowerment. Having access to a home does not merely imply possessing a physical space; it means accessing concrete opportunities for social inclusion. Residential autonomy thus becomes a fundamental phase in the transition toward independence and responsibility, marking the passage from conditions of passivity to processes of activation and the construction of social networks, while contributing to the redefinition of meanings of belonging and the countering of inequalities.

For young migrants, dwelling presents itself as a relational and processual dimension, arising from the intersection between a space of origin, often abandoned and marked, in the case of refugees, by traumatic experiences, a current settlement space characterized by material and symbolic precariousness, and a future space as

an object of aspirations and strategic planning. A structural tension emerges between the migratory experience and dwelling practices, in which the home loses its meaning of static stability to assume that of a process in constant transformation.

The act of inhabiting becomes synonymous with an inclusive pathway aimed at territorial rooting and the acquisition of agency within the host community. Despite this, the home simultaneously represents both a space for experimenting with responsibility and the primary obstacle to the realization of the integration pathway, due to phenomena of systemic racism and mistrust on the part of property owners.

The young people have demonstrated significant capacities for resilience and aspiration, utilizing the domestic sphere as a site for identity renegotiation and the exercise of responsibility, specifically regarding budget management, premises maintenance, and compliance with building regulations. They have translated this agency into the assertion of rights and the formulation of autonomous choices. Furthermore, autonomous living, clearly distinguished from the communal life of reception facilities, has fostered an unprecedented sense of freedom, while simultaneously presenting new managerial challenges and deconstructing prejudices through the routine of neighbourhood interactions.

From the analysis of interviews with reception operators and the young people involved, the complexity of the housing-autonomy nexus for migrants is reconstructed. The reception system has developed refined methodologies to transform dwelling into an educational process capable of generating skills and responsibility. The concept of the "passage" as a supervised transitional phase represents a best practice that responds to the need for gradualism in the process of exiting tutelage. Consequently, operators find themselves managing not only the education of the youth but also the "education" of the local territory and homeowners, acting as guarantors and mediators in a context of increasing social closure.

The analysis highlights as centrally relevant: working with young migrants to acquire cultural, social, and relational resources; working with the community to ensure it assumes a proactive and inclusive role; and working with the context to imagine spaces of encounter, dialogue, and participation. Furthermore, the impact that new housing models exert on the creation of social relations, the acquisition of social roles, participation in territorial life, the reduction of prejudice, and the emergence of forms of reciprocity should not be underestimated.

Housing support, therefore, represents a central challenge not only for the multidisciplinary teams operating within reception and integration systems but for

the institutions themselves, which are called upon to design strategies capable of sustaining this delicate transition. The activation of support networks, investment in social capital, the construction of alliances between public and private actors, and the promotion of spaces for shared relational confrontation are configured as indispensable trajectories for the reduction of the risks of marginalization (fio.PSD 2006).

Finally, the residential autonomy of young migrants cannot be read exclusively as the outcome of an individual integration path (“finding a job”, “behaving well”), but rather as a structural issue requiring public policy interventions in the real estate market, such as social housing, guarantee funds, and ethical mediation, to prevent the “sore point” of dwelling from undermining the entire educational investment of the reception system.

Therefore, investing in housing policies proves to be not only an ethical imperative but also economically advantageous compared to the costs of emergency management. This confirms that stable housing constitutes the essential foundation for transforming the presence of care leavers from a problematic issue into a community resource.

REFERENCES

- Barnao C. (2004), *Sopravvivere in strada. Elementi di sociologia della persona senza dimora*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Bergamaschi M. (ed.) (2022), *The multidimensional housing deprivation. Local dynamics of inequality, policies and challenges for the future*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Bichi R. and Bonini E. (2021), «La transizione all'età adulta dei minori stranieri non accompagnati in Italia», in *Studi di Sociologia*, X: 1-18, https://doi.org/10.26350/000309_000107.
- Bourdieu P. (1993), *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Brandolini A., Saraceno C. and Schizzerotto A. (2009), *Dimensioni della disuguaglianza in Italia: povertà, salute e abitazione*, Il Mulino, Bologna.
- Cardano M. (2011), *La ricerca qualitativa*, Il Mulino, Bologna.
- Consoli T. and Meo A. (2020), *Homelessness in Italia. Biografie, territori, politiche*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Corbetta P. (1999), *Metodologia e tecniche della ricerca sociale*, Il Mulino, Bologna.
- Cortese C. (ed.) (2017), *Scenari e pratiche dell'Housing First. Una nuova via dell'accoglienza per la grave emarginazione adulta in Italia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- D'Agostino M. (2020), «Città responsabili. Pratiche e politiche per accogliere diversamente», in T. Consoli e A. Meo (eds.), *Homelessness in Italia. Biografie, territori, politiche*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, pp. 151-166.
- fio.PSD (2006), *Grave emarginazione e interventi di rete. Strategie e opportunità di cambiamento*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Goffman E. (1963), *Stigma. Notes on the management of spoiled identity*, Simon and Schuster, New York.
- IOM (2020), *World Migration Report 2020*, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020-1.pdf.
- Kabachnik P., Regulska J. and Mitchneck B. (2010), «Where and When is Home? The Double Displacement of Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia», in *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 23(3): 315-336, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feq023>.
- Meo A. (2009), «Vivere in strada: carriere di povertà e pratiche di sopravvivenza. Uno sguardo sociologico sui senza dimora», in R. Gnocchi (eds.), *Homelessness e dialogo interdisciplinare*, Carocci, Roma, pp. 183-214.
- Molinari P. and Zenarolla A. (2018), *Prima la casa. La sperimentazione Housing First in Italia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Pleace N. (2016), «Utilizzare l'Housing First in Europa», in C. Cortese (eds.), *Scenari e pratiche dell'Housing First. Una nuova via dell'accoglienza per la grave emarginazione adulta in Italia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Tosi A. (2017), *Le case dei poveri: è ancora possibile pensare un welfare abitativo?*, Mimesis, Milano.
- Tsemberis S. and Eisenberg R.F. (2000), «Pathways to Housing: Supported Housing for Street-Dwelling Homeless Individuals With Psychiatric Disabilities», in *Psychiatric Services*, 51(4): 487-493, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.51.4.487>.
- Tsemberis S. (2010), *Housing First: The Pathways Model to End Homelessness for People with Mental Illness and Addiction*, Hazelden, Minnesota.
- Tsemberis S., Gulcur L. and Nakae M. (2004), «Housing First, Consumer Choice, and Harm Reduction for Homeless Individuals With a Dual Diagnosis», in *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(4): 651-656, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.94.4.651>.
- Tumminelli G. (2024), «Housing First: A System for Combatting Marginality», in F. Lo Piccolo., G. Patermostro., V. Todaro and A. Mangiaracina (eds.), *In and out: rights of migrants in the European space*, Springer, Cham, pp. 67-77.
- UNICEF, Médecins du Monde (2018), *Enea. Manuale operativo per la presa in carico psicosociale dei minori stranieri non accompagnati*, https://issuu.com/medecinsdumonde/docs/enea-manua-le_operativo.

- Van Gennep A. (1909), *The Rites of Passage*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Vanclay F., Baines J. T. and Taylor C.N. (2013), «Principles for ethical research involving humans: ethical professional practice in impact assessment Part I», in *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 31(4): 243-253, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14615517.2013.850307>.



Citation: Gollini, A. (2026). «Two Heads Are Better Than One but They Must Be Good Ones»: Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Social Work With «people Living on the Street». *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33):81-93. doi: 10.36253/smp-17078

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

«Two Heads Are Better Than One but They Must Be Good Ones»: Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Social Work With «people Living on the Street»

ANDREA GOLLINI

Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Italy
E-mail: andrea.gollini@unicatt.it

Abstract. This paper presents a case study analysis focused on an accompaniment process with a person living on the street, developed in a city in Northern Italy. Through the story of Arnold – a migrant man facing housing, employment, and relational precarity – the article examines key ethical and methodological challenges of social work with people who live on the street: managing relational timeframes, negotiating the boundaries between support and control, holding together protection and freedom, and the effort to sustain without substituting, especially when access to rights remains uncertain. The analysis, based on a case study design and on qualitative materials collected throughout the accompaniment process, is interpreted through Relational Social Work and the Poverty-Aware Paradigm. This highlights a form of networking that does not coincide with mere inter-agency coordination, but actively involves the person being supported as a reflective subject and knowledge-holder, while interrogating power asymmetries, access criteria, and everyday practices that may generate stigma or exclusion. The phrase that gives the article its title “Two heads are better than one but they must be good ones” spoken by Arnold during a focus group, encapsulates helping as a relational practice grounded in dialogue and reflexivity, whose effectiveness depends on reciprocity and on the capacity to integrate care and justice, also through advocacy and policy practice.

Keywords: homelessness, social work, relational social work, caring relations, ethics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Severe adult marginalization and social work with people living on the streets are increasingly present in Italian public debate and policies (Meo and Consoli 2020), yet they remain shrouded in stereotypes. However, *this increase in resources* and strategies has not translated into proportional collective awareness. The risk is that as further interventions are implemented, the meaning and direction of practice will remain uncertain. This contribution questions the ethical and methodological conditions that make aid con-

sistent with inclusion. The article examines social work as a practice that faces dilemmas between protection and freedom, support and control, and accompaniment and substitution, showing these dilemmas as inherent to professional action with people in precarious housing. «*Two heads are better than one, but they must be good ones*»: this phrase, spoken by Arnold, the protagonist of the case study presented here, captures what is at stake in proximity-based social work, where reciprocity and shared reflection are necessary conditions for navigating the uncertainties of helping processes.

Working with people in this condition means confronting a relationship that resists procedural regulation, forcing engagement with power imbalances, individual timeframes, outcome uncertainty, and social injustices (Locatelli 2025). This contribution engages with the sociological debate on precarious housing, viewing “home” as both a material resource and a condition enabling routine, recognition, and social citizenship. Street and temporary solutions represent the absence of housing and rights vulnerability. The analysis explores how living possibilities can be constructed when access to rights is uncertain and the ethical choices that make social work supportive without becoming controlling. This article presents a single qualitative case study - the support process of Arnold, a 44-year-old Nigerian man in precarious housing conditions in northern Italy - as a reflective device for examining the ethical and methodological tensions inherent in proximity-based social work, interpreted through Relational Social Work (Folgheraiter 1998; 2011) and the Poverty-Aware Social work Paradigm (Kramer-Nevo 2016).

2. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

This section offers interpretative lenses for reading the case presented in the paper and is organized around three themes: (1) the definition of the phenomenon; (2) people’s experiences and social representations; and (3) practices and models of intervention, with main open questions for practitioners, services, and territorial governance.

2.1 Understanding homelessness today: definitions, measurement, determinants and policy context

A “classical” framework describes homelessness as a condition of extreme poverty including life “on the streets” and hidden forms, showing seasonality and varying over lifetimes (episodic, recurrent, chronic), given difficulties in quantifying it comparably (Johnson and

Cnaan 1995). In European debate, comparison challenges led to convergence toward shared taxonomies. The Ethos¹ typology by FEANTSA²(2005) shifted focus from not having a home to conditions of housing exclusion, clarifying transitions between situations. Comparative literature shows definitions are not neutral; they influence measurements, service targets, and policy priorities (Busch-Geertsema 2010). In Italy, national surveys made homelessness statistically visible: the ISTAT report on homeless people’s conditions (with surveys in several Italian cities) was key toward policy alignment (ISTAT 2015). The national guidelines formalized the need for an integrated approach (services, care, housing, health, and work) and minimum standards in coping severe adult marginalization (MLPS³ 2015). More recently, the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (2021) and the Italian Essential Levels of Social Services (LEPS) framework have defined specific standards for people experiencing homelessness, including emergency social intervention and civic registration services as gateways to citizenship rights (MLPS 2025).

Recent scholarship warns against reducing homelessness to “housing”: it intertwines with structural inequality, disadvantage, criminalization, and hidden forms of housing exclusion (Awad 2023; Bramley, Fitzpatrick and Sosenko 2020;). Homelessness expresses extreme poverty affecting income, health, work, and social capital, shaped by institutional arrangements and individual trajectories (Bramley *et al.* 2020; McGrath *et al.* 2023). It includes hidden forms of housing exclusion, which escape purely housing-based definitions (Batterham 2018). In Italy, the typical image of the homeless person as someone “outside” society is being challenged; situations include different thresholds of exclusion, residual skills, intermittent ties, and informal work (Antinori, Fontanari and Leonardi 2025; Bianciardi 2019). Literature emphasizes that a universally accepted “contemporary” definition of homelessness remains elusive; this uncertainty affects social policies and practices, including access, criteria, rights, and responsibilities (Decembrotto 2017). Tosi Cambini (2004) proposed «people who live on the street» as terminology that is epistemological and political, avoiding definitions by lack (homeless, roofless) and reducing stigmatization. Regarding causes, reconstructions from the 1990s rejected monocausal models (e.g., only psychopathology or deviance), proposing multifactorial interpretations combining personal vulnerabilities, biographical ruptures, and struc-

¹ European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

² European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless

³ Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali.

tural factors (Johnson and Cnaan 1995). Multiple exclusion homelessness describes the intertwining of exclusions (housing, income, health, addiction, justice, relationships) and avoids reductionism: exclusions reinforce each other in trajectories (Manthorpe *et al.* 2015).

2.2 People's experiences, stigma, and othering

Much recent literature focuses not only on material needs but also on the social processes that lead to distance, stigmatization, and the symbolic dehumanization of people experiencing homelessness (Locatelli 2025). In international research, stigma is described as a mechanism that reduces access to resources, produces mutual distrust, and justifies exclusionary practices; furthermore, it persists even when the social profiles of the people involved change (Belcher and DeForge 2012; Mahangu and Kgadima 2021). In the Italian context, in addition to the reflections of Tosi Cambini (2004), Porcellana (2018) discussed how “becoming homeless” is a process involving stages, institutions, and constraints, and how public representations tend to moralize extreme poverty, producing othering and distance.

This symbolic dimension cannot be separated from the daily experience of life on the streets, which also profoundly restructures the coordinates of time and space. Life on the streets can generate survival routines and precarious geographies that both protect and expose, making it difficult to build continuity and plans for the future (Meo 2008). Additionally, a rift often opens up between “service time” and time spent on the margins, with direct effects on the ability to meet deadlines, appointments, and administrative procedures (Lavanco and Santinello 2009). In this sense, homelessness tends to compress life horizons and narrow the imagined possibilities, as Gui (1995) has indicated in describing the processes of uprooting typical of severe marginalization.

Read in context, this compression also affects the ability to aspire, not as an individual trait, but as a socially distributed competence made (in)accessible by recognition, resources, and opportunities (Appadurai 2004). Therefore, stigma is not only a problem of “image.” Critical social work literature shows that stigma can manifest in everyday micro-exclusions (humiliating procedures, controls, gatekeeping, blaming language) and that the relationship with institutions is often part of the experience of vulnerability, not only the context in which interventions take place (Krumer-Nevo 2008).

Access to services and building alliances depend on how people feel they are seen, named, and treated. Alongside basic needs detailed in Johnson and Cnaan's (1995)

review, contemporary literature emphasizes the need for recognition and “re-narration” of the self, especially when extreme poverty leads to status breakdown and public shame (Krumer-Nevo 2008; Paugam 2013). Italian contributions highlight how homelessness should be understood as the coexistence of material and immaterial poverty, where isolation and loss of ties become integral to deprivation (Bianciardi 2019; Decembrotto 2017).

2.3 Social work practices: from emergency services to rights-based and de-oppression paradigms

A classic review showed prevalence of emergency responses (shelters, soup kitchens, healthcare, income support, addiction, and mental health services), organizing access through “step-by-step” support processes and selective criteria (Johnson and Cnaan 1995). This approach continues, though literature indicates a shift toward integrated models focused on housing stability, interpreted within welfare structures and multilevel governance (Kazepov 2009). In Italy, Housing First makes housing a basic right rather than final reward (MLPS 2015; Molinari and Zenarolla 2018). Housing First is an evidence-based model that provides immediate access to permanent independent housing combined with support services, prioritizing housing stability as a precondition rather than an outcome of recovery (Padgett, Henwood and Tsemberis 2016). International evidence shows high effectiveness in housing stability (Baxter *et al.* 2019), but variable results for health, work, and integration (Keenan *et al.* 2021). In European debates, data comparability remains a significant issue for policy priorities (Busch-Geertsema 2010; Edgar 2009; Tosi 2010). New social work practices are emerging: multiuser centers, social farming, adult foster care, and mechanisms linking needs and bonds (Bianciardi 2019; Meo and Consoli 2020). Participatory design practices show effectiveness depends on building participation and reducing asymmetries (Porcellana 2018).

Recent literature shows that choosing “what to do” is insufficient; how and position must also be chosen: anti-oppressive approaches, criticism of paternalism, and power relations between institutions and homeless people are central. Oppression forms a barrier to health and housing reintegration; hence, tools like counter-narratives, critical reflexivity, and agency are needed (Glumbíková *et al.* 2017).

Another perspective, closer to critical social work, holds that homelessness results from social relations, inequalities, and service governance. This implies that addressing homelessness requires combining micro (relationships, support) and macro (rights, policy, access

to resources) aspects (Busch-Geertsema 2010; Weng and Clark 2018). Locatelli's (2025) contribution shows how services build relationships with homeless people: engagement quality, continuity, accessibility, and ability to support realistic micro-goals become crucial in avoiding "nominal care" and promoting agency. The literature identifies key service system limitations: persistence of "stopgap" responses, fragmentation, focus on control of deviance, and lack of inclusion of people's voices in service design (Johnson and Cnaan 1995; Krumer-Nevo 2008; Porcellana 2018). The ethical dimension can be interpreted as the practical work of negotiating functions and boundaries in complex contexts, where care, control, and responsibility toward third parties overlap (Philippart 2014).

Therefore, territorial governance policies are crucial: integrating welfare, housing, and local services is a condition for effectiveness (MLPS 2015; Prandini and Ganugi 2021).

The literature reviewed here offers rich analytical tools for understanding extreme poverty and homelessness, yet leaves a specific question insufficiently addressed: what happens within the helping relationship when social work tries to be simultaneously close, non-oppressive, and structurally aware? It is precisely this gap, between the conditions described in the literature and the situated, relational experience of support, that the theoretical framework adopted in this article is designed to address.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This contribution follows Relational Social Work (RSW), developed by Folgheraiter (1998, 2011), which considers relationships as the foundation of social intervention. From this perspective, social problems are not individual shortcomings or technical issues but difficulties within complex relational configurations of social life. The task of social work is to activate shared coping processes, where the person is recognized as a reflective and competent subject. A central concept of RSW is a coping network, understood as a space where different actors, professionals, volunteers, and people receiving support think and act together regarding problematic situations (Folgheraiter 1998, 2011; Raineri 2004). The effectiveness of intervention depends on the quality of reflective relationships built and the ability to support agency, even in conditions of great precariousness. The helping relationship is interpreted as a process of mutual learning marked by uncertainty, negotiation, and nonlinearity.

This theoretical framework integrates the Poverty-Aware Social Work Paradigm (PA-P) (Krumer-Nevo 2016), which views poverty as a structural and relational condition marked by inequalities and institutional oppression. The PA-P recognizes that people in poverty possess situated knowledge from daily experience, often invisible in support systems. Social work must question its position, avoiding moralizing views and treating poverty as a public issue. A key feature of PA-P is its focus on power asymmetries in helping relationships: intervention practices can empower people or reproduce control and stigma (Krumer-Nevo 2016). The two frameworks are complementary: RSW provides the relational and methodological lens, while PA-P situates helping relationships within structures of power, poverty, and rights.

This combined framework guided the case analysis and provided the interpretative categories for the emerging themes.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study research design (Bryman 2016; Stake 2005) focusing on the support trajectory of one person as the unit of analysis. In methodological literature, case studies analyze complex phenomena in depth, examining interactions between actors, context, and change dynamics, while favoring analytical over statistical generalization (Gerring 2004; Stake 2005). This method allowed us to question approaches and reasons for the processes observed, revealing decision-making junctures, alternatives, and dilemmas in the practices. As Flyvbjerg (2006) clarified, many criticisms of case studies stem from misunderstandings about their rigor and generalizability, which can be addressed by stating the design, sources, and inferential logic.

In social work, case studies are a methodology aligned with knowledge as situated, relational, and practice-oriented. Gilgun (1994) emphasized that case studies produce "practice-proximal" knowledge, connecting biographical trajectories, institutional contexts, and professional choices. Folgheraiter (2022) noted that in social work research, which focuses on subjectivity, vulnerability, and helping relationships, case studies question support processes and reveal tacit professional knowledge and methodological appropriateness. The case is not a good practice to replicate but a reflective device for problematizing conditions that make interventions socially and ethically meaningful.

This case was reconstructed from empirical materials from the author's doctoral research (Gollini 2025).

Table 1. Overview of participants and citation codes.

Name (pseudonym)	Role	Sex	Code
Ernesto	Social Worker	Male	SW1
Giorgia	Social Worker	Female	SW2
Enrica	Social Worker	Female	SW3
Arturo	Volunteer	Male	V1
Arnold	Service User	Male	SU1

Source: Author's elaboration.

The unit of analysis is the support process, comprising interactions, negotiations, and decisions between the person and actors they interacted with (practitioners, volunteers, services, community contexts) in an urban environment. Table 1 summarises participants' roles and the citation codes used in the paper.

The documentary corpus covers 10 months from formal reception and support; prior information from low-threshold contexts (soup kitchen) exists but was not included in the materials used to reconstruct the process.

Data was collected through participant observation within the intervention, allowing observation of interactions between the accompanied person, practitioners, volunteers, and services (Bryman 2016). Additional data sources are summarised in Table 2, together with the source codes used in the paper.

Analysis followed iterative thematic analysis (Bryman 2016): familiarization with data, initial coding of critical moments, theme aggregation, and stabilization of interpretative categories through source triangulation.

For ethical reasons and confidentiality, the case is presented anonymously. All names are pseudonyms, and identifying details (place names, organizations, and program labels) have been modified or generalized. Quotations are reproduced selectively with minimal context to reduce recognition risk while preserving meaning for analysis.

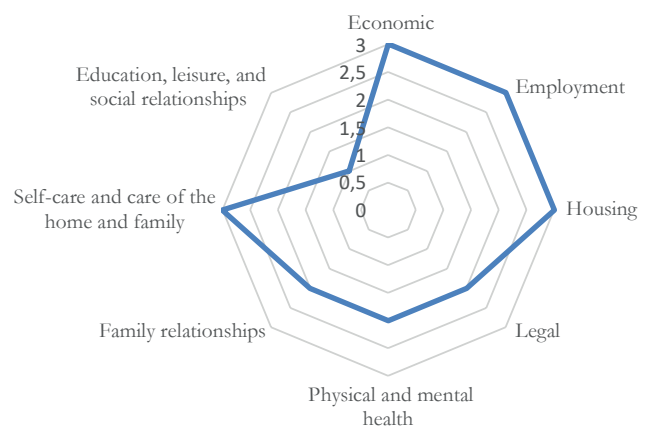
5. CASE STUDY PRESENTATION

Arnold is a 44-year-old Nigerian man encountered at low-barrier services of a faith-based third-sector organization in a mid-sized city in Northern Italy during a period of housing, employment, and documentation precariousness. His situation was marked by unstable finances, fragile social networks, and a migratory trajectory of moves and temporary solutions, which he summarized as biographical loss: «I lost everything... I

Table 2. Summary of empirical materials used in the case study.

No.	Date	Activity	Document type	Code
1	16/06/23	Preparatory meeting	Initial report	IR1
2	17/06/23	Initial assessment	Assessment tool	AT1
3	30/08/23	Network meeting	Facilitator's log	FL1
4	19/10/23	Network meeting	Facilitator's log	FL2
5	18/01/24	Network meetm	Facilitator's 10	FL3
6	13/02/24	Network meeting	Facilitator's log	FL4
7	02/04/24	Network meetin	Facilitator's 10	FL5
8	16/08/23	Supervision session	Transcript	SUP1
9	09/11/23	Supervision session	Transcript	SUP2
10	09/02/24	Supervision session	Transcript	SUP3
11	03/04/24	Evaluation focus group	Transcript	FG1

Source: Author's elaboration.

**Figure 1.** Radar chart showing Arnold's assessment of the situation.

Source: Gollini 2025: 158.

lost my life» (FG1). The initial request focused on immediate needs, housing and work, and was reconstructed by practitioners as a clear objective: «what he asked for from the beginning was to have a place to live» (Ernesto, social worker, IR1). A difficulty emerged in the initial assessment: «Arnold reports having many difficulties with regard to work» (AT1). During the process, his needs broadened and became more specific, revealing additional vulnerabilities and support requirements not initially formulated, as shown in Fig. 1.

5.1 The context: an informal settlement in a former industrial area and a municipal regeneration program

Arnold lived in an informal settlement in a former industrial area housing about one hundred residents. Despite precarious conditions, the settlement developed

internal organization with social spaces including bars, barber shops, and a chapel. The area faced problems of conflict, crime, and informal control, making it complex for residents and institutional actors. Arturo, a volunteer, described Arnold's stay as harsh: «Arnold lived at the settlement, the settlement was not the best place [...] he had negative experiences» (FG1). Ernesto, a social worker (SW1), described an incident: «One of the other residents of the settlement went to his workshop and, armed with an axe, broke down the door, threatened him, and took away some bicycles. Arnold did not want to return to the settlement» (AT1).

This occurred within a municipal regeneration program promoted by local authorities together with civil-society actors to help settlement residents find alternative solutions and reclaim the area for urban development. With the project's launch, the organization was asked to help create support processes out of the settlement for some identified people, including Arnold.

5.2 Initial reception and first problems of cohabitation

After the municipal regeneration program launch, Arnold was placed in shared temporary accommodation by the organization: an apartment with three other people. This arrangement was meant as a transition toward permanent settlement. From the first weeks, it proved a fragile environment prone to conflict. In Arnold's account, relationship difficulties with roommates were seen through a religious lens, helping him interpret misunderstandings and daily tensions. As shown in the focus group, this interpretation was intertwined with the dynamics of belonging and minority status within the apartment:

Arnold: In my first placement, I had problems with Muslims.

Arturo, volunteer (V1): You have to understand that he feels more Biafran than Nigerian, and being Biafran, he is also Catholic, so he has some problems coexisting with Muslims.

Enrica, social worker (SW3): There were indeed two Muslim gentlemen who formed a group of their own. They were very close. Because, obviously, religion, culture, and language unite you [...] Arnold was actually a bit in the minority, so to speak (FG1).

Critical issues emerged regarding the management of cohabitation, implicit rules, and mutual expectations. The tension extended beyond religious aspects to include broader elements of daily life and cohabitation. The project team and volunteers observed deterioration in the domestic atmosphere. During supervision, violations of

house rules were reported, including disturbances and unauthorized entry.

Ernesto SW1: The stories of the others roommates concerned returning home in an altered state and inappropriate behavior, such as urinating on doors and wardrobes or letting unauthorized people into the apartment (SUP1).

5.3 The dilemma of discharge

The fragile balance of the initial reception entered crisis when cohabitation, intended as temporary and "bridging," was fraught with growing tension. As weeks passed, the tension mounted from "over-the-top" incidents to open conflict. The point of no return came with an escalation culminating in Arnold's serious act against his roommate's property. This episode alarmed those in the accommodation and raised questions about protecting other guests and the educational appropriateness of handling the case. In supervision, the assessment was clear: «We gave him the opportunity, but he blew it [...] He is not capable of sticking with a project» (Enrica, SW3, SUP1).

The project team faced a critical decision regarding Arnold's dismissal from the shelter. Dismissal appeared logical given the breakdown of cohabitation and the need to signal consequences to others. However, this risked his return to the settlement or streets while alternatives were being sought within the municipal regeneration program. Discussions among practitioners, including through Arturo, revealed competing concerns: the need to restore safety and address rule violations versus avoiding reducing Arnold to a "cohabitation problem" and preventing expulsion without a plan. This situation highlighted the gap between rigid criteria and case management, as noted by Giorgia, SW2: « [The point we are at now stems] from the decision not to throw Arnold out when it was time to throw him out, if we had used rigid criteria in a service-oriented approach» (SUP3).

The questions that guided the project team were: Could Arnold be dealt with differently? Was there an alternative to cohabitation that would better address the aspirations he was gradually expressing: stability, independence, work, and the chance to "put his life back in order", without interrupting his progress during his greatest vulnerability?

5.4 Experimenting with Housing First as an alternative to cohabitation

The project team began considering a different solution for Arnold that would go beyond rigid rules and reflect his emerging aspirations for independence and

stability. This reflection addressed professional attitudes. A facilitation diary noted the team's difficulty in reorienting the project: « The educational team... was unable to break away from a project that was not sufficiently focused on the people and the issues they faced» (FL1). During discussions, the idea of individual accommodation based on the Housing First approach emerged. This option would ensure continuity and reduce factors that made Arnold's life fragile when living with others. It was perceived not as a shortcut or "reward," but rather as a coherent response to his initial request. In focus groups, Ernesto, SW1, stated: « He was by himself, this is what he is asking for from the beginning to have accommodation and independence... closer to his desire» (FG1). A concrete proposal emerged when an empty rectory from Arturo's parish was identified as potential housing.

Initially, Arnold resisted leaving the city but agreed to visit the house with the practitioners and Arturo. After visiting, he accepted the proposal. The focus group highlighted the role of proximity in facilitating the change:

Initially, Arnold was not enthusiastic about moving out of the city, but then he realized that I was in a nearby town and he began to see things differently. He met the people who live in a nearby town, immediately bonded with the families, and a beautiful relationship was born (Arturo, V1, FG1).

The project team then took steps to facilitate his integration while ensuring his housing choice connected with the broader process. Housing was viewed as a foundation for stability, from which Arnold's financial and relational resources could be reorganized, along with administrative and work issues from previous phases.

5.5 The role of the community

Moving into the rectory marked a change in Arnold. He not only "had a roof" but also entered a recognizable community structure. The availability of the property and Arturo's presence as a bridge figure enabled reception within a relational framework that supported daily life aspects (orientation, connections, commitments) while offering a symbolic context different from the previous refugee settlement. The rectory functioned as a stepping stone toward normality and a space to rebuild stability without exposure to the competition and judgment of forced cohabitation.

Within this framework, the community dimension was particularly important, as Arturo emphasized in the focus group reconstruction: «However, the new relationships with local families within the community changed

his perspective, and Arnold got involved with everyone and opened up to everyone» (FG1). From Arnold's point of view, the quality of the relationship with those who accompanied him was described in terms of trust and perceived authenticity:

They gave me trust [...] it's not easy to find someone who works with their heart in this way... When your heart is sincere, you feel the warmth, so it's easy for me to accept you because I feel that you are sincere (Arnold, SU, FG1).

This community setting created new opportunities for relationships. Arnold, who was Catholic, participated in Christian community events for support and shared language. Arturo clarified their relationship was based on deeper common reference; Arturo, V1: « The bond between him and me is not so much our relationship with the settlement... but has always been our faith» (FG1). Arnold attended parish events, experiencing recognition beyond the "beneficiary" label. He joined initiatives like the parish theater group, offering an informal space to be with others less marked by precariousness. This participation helped multiply his relationships, fostering contacts beyond survival needs and expanding his social network.

5.6 Daily life: steps forward and new obstacles

Moving into the rectory and connecting with the community significantly improved Arnold's quality of life. Stable housing reduced his exposure to the risks of the street and made it possible to reestablish some daily routines, such as rest, more regular meals, more continuous contact with the project team, and participation, albeit sporadic, in some community activities. In this trajectory, the team also recognized signs of change observable in everyday life: « He has grown and improved a lot in this time in terms of autonomy, behavior [...] even with regard to housekeeping: before it was a disaster, really a disaster, today his house is his home» (Giorgia, SW2, FG1).

However, this reception did not coincide with a solution to the case. In the following months, several vulnerabilities remained open and intertwined. Difficulties persisted in managing practical tasks (e.g., appointments, calls, documentation), as did inconsistency in commitments, fluctuation between enthusiasm and withdrawal, and health vulnerabilities that made necessary actions less predictable.

At this stage, the project team sometimes interpreted these difficulties as passivity or lack of responsibility, fear-

ing support might foster dependence rather than autonomy. This perception is recorded in the assessment tool:

The perception is that he takes advantage of these things, pretends not to understand them or to be hearing them for the first time, so he can always be helped and supported by us in everything, when he has the ability to do them himself (AT1).

Consistently, in supervision, difficulties moving forward with certain operational steps, even on simple tasks, were reported:

For about a month now, we have been telling him to correct the things he wants to fix on his resume by hand, to send them to Elena via photo, and he is not doing anything. Arnold tends to always ask me or Arturo for help, even for very trivial things, and we're at a standstill (Giorgia, SW2, SUP2).

Within this interpretative tension, a specific episode caused a shift in their perspectives. In a focus group, Giorgia reconstructed a situation about managing a healthcare task, in which insistence on autonomy clashed with anxiety and blockage:

I always insisted that Arnold be autonomous in health-care matters and asked him for months to book this dentist appointment himself, but he told me he couldn't get through. One day at his house, I suggested making the call; I called, and when the dentist answered, I threw the phone at him and said, "You talk to them." He was shaking and stammering but made an appointment. When he hung up, he said, "See, it was not that difficult after all..." and I realized how much of a hurdle this call had been for him. He was probably afraid they would ask him questions (Giorgia, SW2, FG1).

The episode revealed a gap between the practitioners' perception of the task as straightforward and Arnold's experience of anticipatory anxiety and inadequacy. These difficulties appeared less due to reluctance than practical and emotional barriers which, if unrecognized, risked undermining the support process toward autonomy.

5.7 The issue of work

With his documents in order and cohabitation arrangement over, work became central to Arnold's journey. He reported previous work experience in Switzerland as a carpenter and in the car trade, and while in the city, he secured an internship at a painting company after starting the support project. The internship, preceded by a safety course funded by the organization, turned into a monthly contract through a temporary

employment agency. This improved his economic situation but maintained uncertainty, as the precarious contract hindered his housing access and life plans. Workplace difficulties arose, including colleague issues and renewal concerns, which were discussed with the project team and Arturo, who remained an important reference for daily support.

When Arnold asked about greater stability, the project team organized a network coping meeting with Arnold's employer. The meeting clarified expectations and job aspects but did not change the contract type, as the company used temporary contracts across the sector. In the focus group feedback, Arturo reconstructed this turning point, highlighting recognition and structural constraints:

He started working as a painter at the company [...] in June. He still works for this company, but there are problems because the employer is not complying, but he does this with everyone, as he told us yesterday during the network meeting. Instead of hiring, he uses temporary contracts with monthly renewals. We said we should look for something else for him, as he performs very well at work, which was also confirmed by Mauro, the owner. So, the problem is clear, we know about the job insecurity, but that's okay, we're doing very well, in short (Arturo, V1, FG1).

The link between job stability and housing plans emerged particularly clearly in the operational reflections, in which the contract uncertainty was seen as a concrete barrier to the transition to ordinary housing solutions, as Giorgia, SW2, stated: «We agreed that looking for an apartment with a one-month contract is not feasible» (FL3). Moreover, Arnold explained that job stability was a prerequisite for him to be able to invest in emotional and family ties, summarizing the sense of urgency with an expression that placed work within a broader biographical horizon; Arnold: «At 44... I would like to have a family» (FG1). Moving into the rectory allowed Arnold to leave the settlement and gain work stability. However, his housing relies on an extraordinary solution that isn't replicable, while his fixed-term contract maintains high uncertainty. This limits planning, weakens housing access, and prevents linear progress toward autonomy. The trajectory continues as an unstable balance between progress and vulnerabilities, with precariousness remaining a constant challenge.

6. DISCUSSION

Arnold's case allowed for the examination of methodological and ethical tensions in interventions with

Table 3. Thematic analysis map: ethical and methodological issues emerging from the case.

Category	Methodological themes	Ethical themes
1. Life horizons and accompaniment	Time in helping relationships	Self-determination vs necessary intervention in situations of risk
	Difficulty keeping a future-oriented plan	Non-blaming interpretation of discontinuity
	Service timelines vs lived time	Responsibility toward others/community when safety is at stake
	Continuity/discontinuity of the project	
2. Dwelling dimensions	Space as identity	Protection vs freedom in housing decisions
	Non-chosen cohabitation as a vulnerability factor	Unconditional support vs eligibility/criteria in access to housing
	Precarious accommodation	Support processes and fragility of transitional placements
	Shift to individual housing as an enabling condition for stability	
3. Access to rights	Bureaucratic rigidity and administrative obstacles	Discrimination and unequal access to rights
	Discontinuities and fragmentation across services and pathways	Rights on paper vs rights in practice
	Enabling practical access to rights	Stigma and institutional barriers as forms of oppression
4. Power in the helping relationship	Managing autonomy: supporting without substituting; avoiding dependence	Professional boundaries and trust: closeness without overstepping
	Boundaries in proximity-based practice	Self-determination vs necessary intervention
	Tension between support and control in multi-actor projects	Unconditional help vs access criteria
	Interpretive work on meanings and attributions	Avoiding paternalism and disciplinary responses

Source: Author's elaboration.

people living in poverty and severe precariousness, particularly when support intersects proximity, institutional networks, and community resources. We examined these issues through two lenses: RSW, which focuses on shared meanings, coping networks, and relationship quality as help infrastructure; and the PA-P, which recognizes structural conditions, avoids blame-based interpretations, and combines care, rights, and experiences of oppression. The discussion draws on themes emerging from the thematic analysis of the collected materials, showing how ethical and methodological issues extend beyond technical aspects to relational and political dimensions. Table 3 summarises the thematic map and structures the discussion into four areas: (1) life horizons and accompaniment; (2) dwelling dimensions; (3) access to rights; and (4) power in the helping relationship.

6.1 Life horizons and accompaniment

The material reveals temporal tension affecting continuity in planning. Initial demand focuses on immediate needs (housing and work), with support measured

against instability, displacement, and discontinuous resources: a condition crushing the future onto the present and hindering the transformation of desires into personal plans. What Gui (1995: 29) described as « progressive uprooting » reduces available options and erodes the possibility of “imagining” viable alternatives. Here, the capacity to aspire emerges: when life centers on urgency and contingency, aspiration is not merely individual but a culturally and socially distributed capacity, weakened by prolonged precariousness (Appadurai 2004). Arnold's story is consistent with the literature on the cultural distance between service time and street time; in street time, daily life is organized around urgent actions (e.g., eating, sleeping), and opening one's perspective to medium-term goals is a struggle (Lavanco and Santinello 2009; Locatelli 2025).

Accompaniment reopens the space for the future by helping people name credible goals, articulate steps, and reconnect everyday life to a less fragmented horizon. In line with RSW and PA-P, goal-work is treated as co-constructed and discontinuities are read as effects of structural constraints rather than moral traits, requiring both care and access to rights. Arnold's aspiration, «At 44...

I would like to have a family», shows that “work” also concerns recognition and the possibility of imagining a meaningful adult life.

6.2 *Dwelling dimensions*

The case shows that where one lives is not merely a logistical backdrop but also shapes one’s identity, perceived safety, relationships, and self-determination. The former settlement, although marked by conflict, crime, and informal control, appeared as an inhabited and partially organized space, with structured forms of cohabitation and places for social life and worship: an ambivalent context that both protected and exposed people to risk, a city within the city. The homelessness literature captures this ambivalence: even precarious spaces can become stable reference points, as people equip them and make them recognizable until they begin to resemble a home. Thus, leaving such spaces does not automatically improve living conditions; it may generate disorientation and new burdens (Locatelli 2025; Meo 2008). In the materials analyzed, this dynamic became visible in the shift to non-chosen cohabitation: designed as a bridging solution, it proved vulnerable, as the precariousness and absence of choice increased breakdown risks and created discontinuities.

The subsequent move toward an individual Housing First solution (made possible through the parish house) appeared not as a mere “technical” adjustment but as a change of frame: dwelling became an enabling condition and lever for stabilization. From a PA-P perspective, this shift represents a move toward a more claimable right to housing, one not subordinate to merit-based prerequisites. From an RSW perspective, it foregrounds work on meaning attribution: What does that place represent for Arnold? What fears or expectations does it trigger? What role does the coping network play in sustaining the transition? Because space is not neutral: it is identity-forming, relational, and political.

6.3 *Access to rights*

The materials showed that Arnold’s difficulties primarily concerned navigating citizenship and welfare systems: documentation, registration/domicile, access to health services, regular employment, and housing. Along this trajectory, vulnerability was produced and amplified by formal requirements (e.g., residence permits, procedures, waiting times) that became barriers when employment continuity and housing stability were missing. Contractual insecurity, here, precarious work that

increased income but was renewed “month by month”, showed how transitions toward autonomy remained structurally obstructed, despite significant efforts. Access to rights (e.g., housing, stabilizing one’s life, planning) remained uncertain, raising questions about whether these can truly be called “rights.”

From an RSW perspective, this highlights relational support as a mediation between worlds (e.g., languages, expectations, institutional codes), and the role of the coping networks in making complexity manageable: not by substituting for the person but by enabling conditions through which rights become claimable.

From a PA-P perspective, focusing on rights helps prevent blaming interpretations: “discontinuity” often results from a system demanding high administrative performance from those most exposed to stress, poverty, exclusion, and discrimination, with less economic, relational, and symbolic capital. The case shows how rights become a site of everyday struggle, and how practitioners’ interventions must hold care and justice together without collapsing into mere assistance or bureaucracy.

6.4 *Power in the helping relationship*

The empirical material revealed dilemmas where the core issue was how to redistribute power in an asymmetrical relationship without slipping into control or abandonment disguised as self-determination. The “to discharge or not to discharge” dilemma was emblematic: the team had to balance interests while avoiding mere expulsion from the support system. Ethical issues intersected (self-determination vs. intervention; unconditional help vs. eligibility criteria; professional boundaries and trust) with methodological concerns (the boundary between support and control; fostering autonomy; sustaining relationships when alliance is fragile). The phone call episode uncovered the gap between practitioners’ perceptions and the person’s experience: what seemed simple for practitioners became a barrier, charged with anxiety and fear of inadequacy for Arnold.

This evidence invites reframing “passivity” and shows autonomy is not a prerequisite but a relational outcome supported through trust and accompaniment. From an RSW perspective, this requires attention to meaning-making (What does “being autonomous” mean for Arnold? What does “helping” mean for the team?) and to relationship quality, including volunteers like Arturo and the community, which create spaces beyond need response. From a PA-P perspective, power focus highlights the need to monitor practices that may reproduce oppression: help can become conditional and normalizing, or expand people’s real choices.

This is where the structural point becomes salient: even when life improves, precarious work and systemic constraints can make housing autonomy difficult, due to contextual conditions that practice must name. The case shows that exiting street homelessness extends beyond securing accommodation to reconstructing rights, meaning, and social recognition. Barriers in residence, timelines, service access, and labor-market insecurity reveal how vulnerability is co-produced by institutions and housing markets. In this framework, proximity-based relationships function as infrastructures of access and meaning yet remain affected by power dilemmas requiring reflexivity to avoid disciplinary slippages.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Placement through a Housing First approach, joint work within a coping network, and the consolidation of a broader relational network enabled Arnold to leave the informal settlement and to gain a more stable base, with observable improvements in everyday life and in labor-market inclusion. Nevertheless, the trajectory did not fully stabilize: the desired housing autonomy remained sustained by an exceptional arrangement and, above all, employment stabilization occurred within a framework of contractual insecurity that made future planning difficult, limited access to ordinary housing solutions, and hampered the transformation of incremental progress into a linear transition toward full independence.

From this perspective, we should not interpret fluctuations in support processes as individual faults, but as effects of structural conditions (e.g., precarious work, administrative constraints, housing market, and intermittent access to rights) that shape people's daily lives and possibilities. This requires abandoning the notion that help is solely professionals' task and that people must undergo it passively. Arnold, reflecting on his trajectory, captures this reciprocity: «Two heads are better than one but they must be good ones» (FGV1). What the analysis has shown is precisely what makes those heads «good»: first, that autonomy is not a prerequisite for support but a relational outcome, emerging through trust and the patient work of a coping network that neither substitutes for the person nor abandons them to self-sufficiency; second, that the gap between practitioners' perceptions of a task and the person's lived experience of it, visible in the phone call episode, can only be bridged through sustained relational proximity and shared reflexivity.

A final implication follows. The dilemmas highlighted cannot be treated solely as issues of the dyadic

relationship between practitioner and person supported. They require political action by social workers through advocacy and policy practice: documenting barriers that obstruct rights enforcement, building alliances within institutional forums, and helping shape organizational and policy choices (on employment, housing, access to residence/domicile, and service integration) so individual progress does not depend on exceptional arrangements but becomes a sustainable trajectory for all.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Antinori S., Fontanari E. and Leonardi D. (2025), «Muoversi tra i margini. Intersezioni tra processi migratori e homelessness», in *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 2: 257-285, <https://doi.org/10.1423/113557>.
- Appadurai A. (2004), «The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition», in V. Rao e M. Walton (eds.), *Culture and Public Action*, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, California, pp. 59-84.
- Awad M. (2023), «Everything, all the time: Engaging the social problem of homelessness in entrepreneurship research and practice», in *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, 20: e00400, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbvi.2023.e00400>.
- Batterham D. (2018), «Homelessness as capability deprivation: A conceptual model», in *Housing, Theory and Society*, 35(3): 268-284.
- Baxter A.J., Tweed E.J., Katikireddi S.V. and Thomson H. (2019), «Effects of Housing First approaches on health and well-being of adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness: Systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials», in *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 73: 379-387.
- Belcher J.R. and DeForge B.R. (2012), «Social stigma and homelessness: The limits of social change», in *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 22(8): 929-946.
- Bianciardi C. (2019), «Vecchi miti e nuove evidenze: come stanno cambiando o dovrebbero cambiare le strategie di presa in carico delle persone senza dimora», in *Welfare Oggi*, 3: 37-49.
- Bramley G., Fitzpatrick S. and Sosenko F. (2020), «Mapping the “hard edges” of disadvantage in England: Adults involved in homelessness, substance misuse, and offending», in *The Geographical Journal*, 186(4): 390-402.
- Bryman A. (2016), *Social research methods* (4th ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Busch-Geertsema V. (2010), «Defining and measuring homelessness», in E. O'Sullivan, V. Busch-Geertse-

- ma, D. Quilgars and N. Pleace (eds.), *Homelessness Research in Europe*, FEANTSA, Brussels, pp. 19-40.
- Decembrotto L. (2017), «Homelessness e possibili interventi di contrasto alla povertà estrema», in *LLL*, 30: 42-51.
- Edgar B. (2009), *European review of statistics on homelessness*, European Observatory on Homelessness, FEANTSA, Brussels.
- European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (2021), *Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness*, European Commission, Brussels.
- FEANTSA (2005), *Ethos: European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion*, Brussels.
- Flyvbjerg B. (2006), «Five misunderstandings about case-study research», in *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2): 219-245, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363>.
- Folgheraiter F. (1998), *Teoria e metodologia del servizio sociale. La prospettiva di rete*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Folgheraiter F. (2011), *Fondamenti di metodologia relazionale. La logica sociale dell'aiuto* (Nuova ed.), Erickson, Trento.
- Folgheraiter F. (2022), «La ricerca scientifica di social work. Quale oggettività per lo studio della soggettività profonda?», in *Studi di Sociologia*, 60(2): 1-16, https://doi.org/10.26350/000309_000030.
- Gerring J. (2004), «What is a case study and what is it good for?», in *American Political Science Review*, 98(2): 341-354, DOI: 10.1017/S0003055404001182.
- Gilgun J.F. (1994), «A case for case studies in social work research», in *Social Work*, 39(4): 371-380, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/39.4.371>.
- Glumbíková K., Gojová A. and Vávrová S. (2017), «Use of antioppressive approach in Czech social work with homeless people», in *CBU International Conference Proceedings*, 5: 611-615, <https://doi.org/10.12955/cbup.v5.994>.
- Gollini A. (2025), «Se sei con me mi sento più forte». *Nuove pratiche di contrasto alla povertà nelle Caritas della diocesi di Reggio Emilia-Guastalla*, Tesi di dottorato, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano.
- Gui L. (1995), *L'utente che non c'è. Emarginazione grave, persone senza dimora e servizi sociali*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Johnson A.K. and Cnaan R.A. (1995), «Social work practice with homeless persons: State of the art», in *Research on Social Work Practice*, 5(3): 340-382, <https://doi.org/10.1177/104973159500500306>.
- Kazepov Y. (2009), *Rescaling social policies: Towards multilevel governance in Europe*, Ashgate, Aldershot.
- Keenan C., Miller S., Hanratty J., Pigott T., Hamilton J., Coughlan C., Mackie P., Fitzpatrick S. and Cowman J. (2021), «Accommodation-based interventions for individuals experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness», in *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 17: e1165, <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1165>.
- Krumer-Nevo M. (2008), «From noise to voice: How social work can benefit from service users' knowledge», in *European Journal of Social Work*, 11(3): 295-309, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691450802187478>.
- Krumer-Nevo M. (2016), «Poverty-aware social work: A paradigm for social work practice with people in poverty», in *The British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6): 1793-1808.
- Lavanco G. and Santinello M. (2009), *I senza fissa dimora. Analisi psicologica del fenomeno e ipotesi di intervento*, Paoline, Milano.
- Locatelli M. (2025), *Le relazioni di aiuto nell'Outreach Social Work con persone senza dimora. Una ricerca etnografica per studiare l'esperienza di Caritas Ambrosiana*, Tesi di dottorato, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano.
- Mahlangu T. and Kgadima N.P. (2021), «Social exclusion and marginalisation of homeless people: A clarion social work call for the spirit of ubuntu to reign», in *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 57(4): 443-454, <https://doi.org/10.15270/57-4-970>.
- Manthorpe J., Cornes M., O'Halloran S. and Joly L. (2015), «Multiple exclusion homelessness: The preventive role of social work», in *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(2): 587-599, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bct136>.
- McGrath J., Crossley S., Lhussier M. and Forster N. (2023), «Social capital and women's narratives of homelessness and multiple exclusion in northern England», in *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 22: 41.
- Meo A. (2008), «Vite in strada: ricostruire "home" in assenza di "house"», in *Meridiana. Rivista di Storia e Scienze Sociali*, 62: 115-133.
- Meo A. and Consoli T. (2020), *Homelessness in Italia: biografie, territori, politiche*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (2015), *Linee di indirizzo per il contrasto alla grave emarginazione adulta in Italia*, Roma.
- Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (2025), *Piano nazionale degli interventi e dei servizi sociali 2024-2026*, Decreto interministeriale 2 aprile 2025, Roma.
- Molinari P. and Zenarolla A. (2018), *Prima la casa: La sperimentazione housing first in Italia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Padgett D.K., Henwood B.F. and Tsemberis S.J. (2016), *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transform-*

- ing Systems, and Changing Lives*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Paugam S. (2013), *Le forme elementari della povertà*, il Mulino, Bologna.
- Philippart F. (2014), «Negoziare funzioni e confini», in *L'etica in pratica nel servizio sociale. Casi e commenti in prospettiva internazionale*, Erickson, Trento.
- Porcellana V. (2018), «Diventare “senza dimora”. Politiche e pratiche del welfare alla lente dell'etnografia», in *Antropologia*, 5(1): 113-132.
- Prandini R. and Ganugi G. (2021), *Governance territoriali e politiche di contrasto alla grave emarginazione adulta. Verso un modello strategico integrato*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Raineri M.L. (2004), *Il metodo di rete in pratica. Studi di caso nel servizio sociale*, Erickson, Trento.
- Stake R. (2005), «Qualitative case studies», in N.K. Denzin e Y.S. Lincoln (eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, London, and New Delhi.
- Tosi A. (2010), «Coping with diversity. Reflections on homelessness in research in Europe», in E. O'Sullivan, V. Busch-Geertsema, D. Quilgars and N. Pleace (eds.), *Homelessness Research in Europe*, FEANTSA, Brussels, pp. 221-236.
- Tosi Cambini S. (2004), *Gente di sentimento. Per un'antropologia delle persone che vivono in strada*, CISU, Roma.
- Weng S.S. and Clark P.G. (2018), «Working with homeless populations to increase access to services: A social service providers' perspective through the lens of stereotyping and stigma», in *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 29(1): 81-101, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2018.1394784>.



Citation: Pedroni, M.C. (2026). Legal Aid at the Margins: Realizing Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness in Italy. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 95-106. doi: 10.36253/smp-17084

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Legal Aid at the Margins: Realizing Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness in Italy

MARIA CHIARA PEDRONI

Free University of Bozen, Italy

E-mail: mariachiara.pedroni@unibz.it

Abstract. Legal aid is widely recognised as a key mechanism for enabling access to justice, however its inherent ambivalences and structural limitations have been highlighted in the literature. This paper explores how access to rights is enacted in everyday practice through a qualitative study of a volunteer-based organisation of “street lawyers” operating in Italy, which provides free legal aid to people experiencing homelessness. Drawing on volunteers’ accounts of their everyday practices, role interpretations, and encounters with institutional and structural barriers, the study examines how legal protection is enacted in practice, and how it both reveals and responds to the tensions shaping access to rights at the margins of citizenship. The findings underscore the relevance of approaches oriented towards the strengthening of rights as key levers for countering social exclusion and promoting substantive citizenship. The experiences of SL demonstrate that legal aid plays a significant role not only in relation to judicial outcomes, but also through its functions of recognition, visibility, and the restoration of voice to marginalised individuals.

Keywords: homelessness, access to justice, legal aid, civil registration, citizenship.

1. INTRODUCTION

The effective realisation of rights for vulnerable groups, such as people experiencing homelessness, takes place within a persistent tension between formal legal recognition and substantive access. Existing research consistently highlights a strong correlation between homelessness, social exclusion, and limited access to fundamental rights, shaped by the interaction of legal frameworks, welfare policies, administrative regulations, institutional arrangements, and service practices (Walsh 2006; Walsh and Douglas 2008; Szeintuch 2022). While legal systems formally enshrine principles of equality and provide mechanisms for protection, the practical exercise of rights is often constrained by administrative and organisational practices that generate barriers to access and contribute to processes of exclusion and marginalisation.

Within this framework, access to justice occupies a central position. Recognised internationally as a fundamental human right, it extends beyond the formal availability of legal remedies to encompass the practical capacity to

activate protection mechanisms without encountering economic, bureaucratic, linguistic, or cultural obstacles. For this reason, access to justice is commonly conceptualised as a gateway right, enabling the effective enjoyment of a wide range of civil, social, and political rights, while also functioning as a key mediating mechanism through which individuals navigate welfare institutions and access systems of social protection (Sommerlad 2004; United Nations 2004; Walsh 2006).

In this context, practices of advocacy and legal aid offer an important site to empirically investigate the everyday enactment of rights. Building on this perspective, the article draws on a qualitative study of a volunteer-based organisation of “street lawyers” (SL) operating in Italy in order to explore how access to legal protection is negotiated at the margins of citizenship.

Within the literature on access to justice and legal aid for people experiencing homelessness, the everyday practices through which legal aid is delivered, interpreted, and negotiated by those who provide it have received comparatively limited attention, with existing studies predominantly focusing on structural barriers to access, the outcomes of legal interventions, and the characteristics of service users (Forell and Gray 2009; Jüriloo 2015; Halvorsen Rønning and Hammerslev 2018). This paper contributes to addressing this gap by examining how volunteers in a legal aid organisation make sense of their role, navigate institutional constraints, and enact access to rights in practice, with specific reference to the Italian context, where volunteer-based legal aid operates within a fragmented and highly decentralised welfare system.

2. BACKGROUND

The effective realisation of rights for vulnerable groups represents a particularly complex challenge, as the gap between formal legal recognition and actual access to services is shaped by multiple barriers that reinforce processes of exclusion, a complexity that is further intensified by the interplay of social, legal, and political dimensions involved (Walsh 2006; Forell and Gray 2009; Belcher and DeForge 2012; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2013).

In this context, access to justice assumes a pivotal role, as it is recognised internationally as a fundamental human right (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Arts. 8 and 10; European Convention on Human Rights, Art. 6) and extending beyond the formal guarantee of legal recourse to encompass the effective capacity to activate protection mechanisms in practice.

Accordingly, the literature highlights how legal assistance, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, can

play a crucial role in reducing inequalities and strengthening the overall effectiveness of welfare systems (Halvorsen Rønning and Hammerslev 2018). Legal practitioners thus assume a mediating role between individuals and the resources to which they are entitled, contributing to the implementation of rules and procedures that, although formally established, are often unevenly enforced or difficult to translate into practice (James and Forbess 2011).

Despite the formal recognition of this right, its effective enforceability remains highly unequal and strongly shaped by social status and income, making free and easily accessible legal assistance particularly crucial for people in situations of vulnerability (Jüriloo 2015; Halvorsen Rønning and Hammerslev, 2018). In the specific context of homelessness, the lack of free legal protection services for people experiencing homelessness, the difficulties in accessing state-funded legal aid where available, and the challenges involved in recognising one's needs as rights and translating them into legal claims – hampered by the complexity of the legal system and by the high linguistic, cultural and technical competencies required – constitute major obstacles to the effective realisation of rights (Felstiner *et al.* 1980; Ife 2012; Jüriloo 2015; Halvorsen Rønning and Hammerslev 2018). Given these difficulties, legal aid services targeted at people experiencing homelessness assume a central role, addressing a wide and heterogeneous range of needs, spanning issues related to debt or fines, family law matters, and service navigation, as well as providing support in accessing welfare provisions (Forell and Gray 2009; Halvorsen Rønning and Hammerslev 2018).

Access to fundamental services represents one of the most complex and significant challenges faced by socially vulnerable groups. In particular, people experiencing homelessness are exposed to persistent structural barriers that hinder their ability to access fundamental services. Processes of social exclusion and marginalisation further exacerbate conditions of vulnerability, undermining the effective exercise of citizenship rights and reproducing cumulative dynamics of inequality and exclusion (Walsh 2006; Belcher and DeForge 2012; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2013; Somerville 2013; Caton 2017).

In the Italian context, the provision of services for people experiencing homelessness has historically relied on a welfare mix in which third sector organisations play a central, and at times substitutive, role alongside public institutions (Ascoli *et al.* 2003). Within this framework, legal aid services operate in an interstitial space between formal legal protection and social support, shaping the scope and limits of their intervention. Access to rights in this context is shaped by a fragmented welfare system,

characterised by a high degree of decentralisation and variability at the local level. As a result, access to services and provisions often depends on locally specific arrangements, institutional practices, and the availability of territorial resources. Moreover, access is frequently mediated by complex administrative procedures and conditionalities, which can generate significant barriers for people in situations of extreme vulnerability (Natili *et al.* 2021). Internationally, growing attention has been paid to the role of intermediary actors in welfare systems – including voluntary organisations, social workers, and legal aid providers – who occupy a structurally central position in mediating access to services and rights. Rather than acting as mere service deliverers, these actors function as brokers between individuals and institutions, navigating bureaucratic complexity, facilitating access, and at times compensating for gaps in formal provision (Lipsky and Smith 1989; Evans and Harris 2004, Voivozeanu and Lafleur 2023, Ratzmann 2024).

Although social protection systems are formally designed to ensure support and foster social inclusion, their capacity to achieve these objectives in practice is frequently constrained by the phenomenon of non-take-up (NTU), which highlights the gap between policy design and policy outcomes (van Oorschot 1998; Hernanz *et al.* 2004).

Defined as the failure of entitled individuals to take up benefits or services (van Oorschot 1998), NTU functions as a critical analytical indicator of policy effectiveness, revealing structural limitations in the capacity of public policies to reach their intended beneficiaries and to translate formal entitlements into substantive inclusion.

Van Oorschot (1996) distinguishes between primary NTU, whereby entitled individuals do not claim their rights – due, for instance, to stigma, lack of information, or the complexity of administrative procedures – and secondary NTU, which refers to situations in which individuals apply for a benefit but ultimately do not receive it, as a result of procedural errors or difficulties in interactions with administrative bodies. Alongside these forms, the concept of tertiary NTU (van Mechelen and Janssens 2017) captures situations of exclusion stemming from eligibility criteria themselves. A particularly emblematic example in this regard concerns the requirement of official residence registration, which is often a prerequisite for access to political rights and social benefits.

Within the existing literature, Crepaldi (2019) identifies a set of interrelated barriers that constrain access to social rights for people experiencing homelessness. A first cluster of obstacles concerns informational and procedural dimensions, whereby limited awareness of available resources, services, and care pathways – com-

bined with the complexity of administrative procedures – generates substantial access costs, further intensified by limited personal, cultural, and cognitive resources. A second set of barriers relates to social and relational factors, including stigma, feelings of shame, and distrust towards institutions, often rooted in previous encounters with welfare and administrative systems. Finally, a critical structural constraint derives from the conditionality embedded in contemporary welfare regimes, whereby access to key social provisions, such as minimum income schemes, is increasingly tied to behavioural requirements and activation-oriented criteria.

Further studies point to the presence of material barriers – such as the absence of a bank account and limited access to the internet or to legal assistance – as well as symbolic and relational factors, including stigma, institutional distrust, and perceptions of non-eligibility. These constraints are often compounded by a negative cost-benefit assessment, whereby the practical and symbolic costs associated with accessing services outweigh the expected benefits (Boccardo 2014; Chareyron and Domingues 2018; Szeintuch 2022; Robben *et al.* 2024). In addition, burdensome administrative procedures and demanding documentation requirements further restrict access, alongside restrictive definitions of homelessness that confine eligibility for support measures to individuals living on the street, thereby excluding those experiencing insecure or precarious housing situations (Szeintuch 2022). Among the barriers, the requirement of registration in the population register constitutes one of the most significant obstacles for people experiencing homelessness. In many European contexts, including Italy, the requirement of a permanent address represents a prerequisite for access to a wide range of civil, political, and social rights, from healthcare and minimum income schemes to the exercise of voting rights (Prescott 2015; European Commission 2019). However, this requirement often constitutes an insurmountable barrier, as the lack of stable housing entails the impossibility of registering in the municipal population register or results in deregistration. For this reason, several European countries have developed a range of policy solutions to ensure forms of administrative anchorage for people experiencing homelessness. Examples include the *ProxyAddress* scheme in the United Kingdom, ‘Main residence confirmation’ in Austria, and the postal address in the Netherlands (FEANTSA, 2018; Crepaldi, 2019; Robben *et al.* 2022). In Italy, the regulatory framework allows residence to be recognised through registration at a reference address, including addresses provided by municipalities or local public services, thereby enabling people experiencing homelessness to access the rights associated

with residence, such as primary healthcare, income support measures, and the exercise of voting rights.

However, local authorities often adopt strategies that hinder registration through the introduction of additional requirements or through discretionary and evasive implementation practices, ultimately generating forms of administrative exclusion. In practice, the implementation of such measures remains uneven and is strongly shaped by street-level administrative discretion (Gnocchi 2009; Gargiulo 2017, 2021).

As the literature on street-level bureaucracy has long emphasised, it is precisely in the everyday interactions between frontline workers and citizens that social policies are effectively shaped at the point of implementation (Lipsky 2010). In this sense, street-level bureaucrats exercise significant discretionary power that can both facilitate and obstruct access to rights and services (Brodin 2008). In this context, these dynamics contribute to transforming residence from a right into an interest contingent on local political discretion, generating forms of administrative selection based on deservingness criteria that define who may be recognised as a legitimate member of the local community and who may be excluded, with disproportionate effects on the most vulnerable groups, particularly migrants and people experiencing homelessness (Gargiulo 2017). Street-level bureaucracy research has increasingly expanded beyond frontline interactions in public services to investigate the implementation and mediation practices of actors who shape access to services and, thus, to rights. In this sense, this perspective can also inform this study, which focuses on legal aid volunteering practices.

A further factor hindering access to a reference address concerns the fear of discrimination associated with the immediate identifiability produced by the names assigned to certain administrative or reference addresses. Recent studies (e.g. Robben *et al.* 2022) show that this may lead some individuals to refrain from applying for residence registration altogether. The significance of this dynamic is particularly evident in the Italian context, where the official names assigned to some reference addresses include, for example, “Via dei senza fissa Dimora” (Street of the Homeless), “Strada della fantasia” (Fantasy Street), “Via degli introvabili” (Street of the Untraceable), and “Via lattea” (Milky Way)¹. These designations clearly convey a mark of exclusion that institutionalises stigma, transforming a device originally intended to guarantee rights into a mechanism that renders homelessness immediately visible and, as a result,

further exposes individuals to discrimination and stigmatisation.

Against this background, legal and bureaucratic dimensions – closely intertwined with the difficulties of exercising and claiming fundamental rights and citizenship – constitute a structural component of the condition of homelessness. These considerations underscore the importance of rights-oriented approaches and highlight the central role of access to justice and legal support as key instruments for promoting social inclusion and substantive citizenship. However, a strictly legalistic approach, grounded in the formal application of legal norms and the existence of legally recognisable claims, reveals clear limitations when individuals’ needs do not fit neatly into predefined legal categories or when the formal requirements necessary to activate legal protection are lacking.

The literature shows that the needs addressed by legal aid services for people experiencing homelessness are often heterogeneous and cannot be reduced to strictly legal issues alone. Alongside narrowly defined legal problems, needs related to service navigation, access to welfare provisions, and institutional recognition frequently emerge (Forell and Gray 2009; Halvorsen Rønning and Hammerslev 2018). From this perspective, legal protection risks proving ineffective if it is not embedded within a broader framework capable of integrating the legal and social dimensions of rights.

Against this background, critical legal scholarship has long highlighted the inherent ambivalences and structural limitations of legal aid. Several authors point to a tension between the pursuit of formal justice – grounded in the application of legal norms – and the aspiration to achieve justice in a broader, substantive sense that addresses social inequalities and exclusion (Sommerlad 2004; Walsh 2006). Law operates through specific categories, procedures, and evidentiary requirements, which shape the kinds of claims that can be articulated and recognised. As a result, social problems must be translated into legally intelligible forms to become actionable, leaving unaddressed needs and injustices that do not fit within established legal frameworks (Grande 2017).

From this perspective, the apparent neutrality and impartiality of law may conceal its role in reproducing existing power relations and legitimising structural forms of inequality, particularly when legal protection is detached from the social, institutional, and political conditions under which rights are exercised (Sommerlad 2004). Although access to justice constitutes a necessary precondition for the effective enjoyment of rights and for participation in social and civic life, the formal availability of legal remedies does not, in itself, guarantee substan-

¹ The updated list is available on the FIO.PSD website <https://www.fiopd.org/elenco-vie-fittizie/>

tive justice. This tension points to the limits of a strictly legalistic understanding of rights and anticipates the relevance of broader socio-political interpretations that foreground the relational, institutional, and contextual dimensions shaping how rights are lived, especially in contexts of extreme vulnerability such as homelessness.

This tension between a formalistic approach and a socio-political interpretation of rights (Ife, 2012) represents a central analytical node for understanding the role of legal protection services and advocacy practices. Access to justice can thus contribute to countering exclusion only if it is accompanied by a critical reading of the institutional barriers that constrain its effective enforceability and by a recognition of the complexity of needs shaping the lived experience of homelessness.

3. RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODS

The research context of the current study is the non-profit organisation SL, founded in Bologna in 2001 and currently active in 65 cities across Italy. SL provides free legal assistance to people experiencing homelessness, migrants, and victims of trafficking through a nationwide network of volunteer lawyers. Its activities include legal advice, support in accessing civil, political, and social rights, and, when required, legal representation in court.

Legal assistance is delivered through a network of local offices, operated by over a thousand volunteers, primarily lawyers but also individuals without formal legal training, and located in accessible and familiar settings, often near shelters, soup kitchens, and railway stations.

As part of a broader research project aimed at investigating how the protection of the rights of people experiencing homelessness is implemented in the context of SL, this paper focuses on exploring the needs encountered by legal aid volunteers, with particular attention to barriers related to accessibility and residence registration, as well as the different meanings and representations that volunteers attribute to their practices and to their own role. Against this background, as the study centres on how access to rights is mediated, interpreted, and operationalised within legal aid practice, volunteers are examined as key actors in this process: they translate legal frameworks into actionable support, negotiate with institutions, and bridge the gap between formal entitlements and substantive access.

Within a wider qualitative research design, the study combined participant observations and semi-structured interviews with volunteers from five different cities, however, this paper draws exclusively on interview data, presenting excerpts from interviews with volunteers (Ama-

Table 1. Sample composition.

Legal office	Volunteers	Professional profile	Gender	≤ / ≥ 2 years of experience
A	A1	LV	F	≤
	A2	LV	M	≥
	A3	LV	F	≤
	A4	LV	F	≥
	A5	LV	M	≥
B	B1	LV	F	≥
	B2	LV	F	≥
	B3	LV	M	≤
	B4	LV	F	≥
	B5	LV	M	≥
C	C1	V	F	≤
	C2	V	F	≤
	C3	LV	F	≥
	C4	LV	F	≥
	C5	LV	M	≥
D	D1	V	F	≥
	D2	V	F	≤
	D3	LV	F	≥
	D4	LV	M	≥
	D5	LV	F	≤
E	E1	V	F	≤
	E2	V	F	≥
	E3	V	F	≥
	E4	LV	F	≤
	E5	LV	F	≥

Legend: LV = lawyer volunteers; V = volunteers without legal training. ≤ 2 years of experience; ≥ 2 years of experience.

turo 2012). A total of 25 volunteers were interviewed, and the respondents were recruited using a combination of snowball and purposive sampling methods, with the objective of including individuals with longer-term involvement in the organisation, as well as volunteers from diverse local contexts.

All interviews were recorded, fully transcribed, and subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurrent themes and patterns (Clarke *et al.* 2015).

Some limitations of the contribution are noted. A first concern relates to the sample, as the perspectives of users accessing legal aid services are not directly represented. The experiences of people experiencing homelessness constitute a relevant dimension that this study does not address and represent a significant avenue for further research.

Additionally, the study draws on interviews conducted in five cities, and although territorial diversity was a sampling criterion, the findings do not explicitly capture

variations across Italy's highly differentiated local welfare systems and administrative cultures.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Access to justice and changing forms of vulnerability

SL was established with the aim of making access to justice effective for individuals living in conditions of extreme poverty and vulnerability, in particular homelessness, migrants, and victims of trafficking, through advocacy actions and the provision of free legal assistance services. As articulated by several volunteers, the underlying intention is thus to give concrete expression to the right of defence enshrined in Article 24 of the Italian Constitution, understood as an indispensable instrument for the effective exercise of rights by all, regardless of social or legal status. As one volunteer explained, «From a legal standpoint, everyone has the right to be protected, and I believe that the right to defence is the most important one, aside from freedom, of course» (A5).

Given their aims and organisational configuration, SL activity emerges as a privileged observatory of the role played by access to justice in the effective realisation of a wide range of other rights. From this perspective, analysing the activities of these offices provides valuable insight into the obstacles faced by people experiencing homelessness, showing how the interplay between legal norms, bureaucratic procedures, and welfare arrangements concretely shapes the lives of individuals in situations of marginality. In this sense, the association also acts as a “sentinel” regarding developments occurring within the local context. As one volunteer explained, «Associations are often the first to perceive what is happening in the local context and to identify emerging problems. Although we provide legal advice, people share much more than legal issues during consultations, which allows us to grasp the broader reality» (C5).

Although the SL bylaws identify people experiencing homelessness and victims of trafficking as its primary target groups, the population reached appears more heterogeneous and has evolved over time. As one interviewee noted, «there is no typical user; rather, there is a wide diversity of people in need» (A1).

This heterogeneity is seen as closely linked to broader changes that have reshaped the configuration of poverty in contemporary society. The interviews provide a clear account of how economic, social, and demographic transformations have made the trajectories of people experiencing exclusion or marginality more diverse and often more complex, encompassing population groups

that were previously less affected, such as the working poor, pensioners, and migrants excluded from formal reception systems. Volunteers report that the situations encountered at the office have changed significantly over time, pointing to a broader increase in poverty. As one interviewee noted, «people were not born poor but became poor» (E5) following events such as relationship breakdowns, job loss, professional failure, or pensions insufficient to meet rising living costs. In other cases, the impossibility of renewing an expired residence permit results in the loss of legal status, leaving individuals without documentation or the possibility of returning to their country of origin and ultimately pushing them into homelessness. These accounts point to forms of unexpected poverty, involving individuals who «suddenly find themselves confronted with a condition of marginality they would never have expected» (E5).

These transformations also pose new challenges for volunteers, as the target population defined by the organisation's mandate – formally limited to people experiencing homelessness – inevitably confronts the complexity and unpredictability of the situations encountered in practice, thereby highlighting the implications of adopting a narrow definition of homelessness. As one interviewee explained,

There has been a shift in poverty, and the geography of marginality has changed. There are segments of the population who are not homeless in the strict sense yet are deeply immersed in poverty. [...] They are not our users, because they may have a home – even if they are behind on rent – or other conditions that place them outside our remit; nevertheless, they are people in severe need (E5).

These situations generate forms of ethical tension in everyday practice, in which volunteers, despite recognising the presence of evident needs, are unable to intervene in order to remain faithful to the association's mandate and to safeguard its organisational sustainability. Accordingly, while legal advice is provided exclusively to people experiencing homelessness, other forms of support – such as listening and guidance on available services – are offered to all individuals who approach the offices. As one interviewee explained «It is not easy to turn people away, especially when their legal needs are clear but cannot be addressed. [...] Yet it is often experienced as a denial of access to justice. In this sense, it represents a failure and a boomerang effect for us as well, because people ask, “So you cannot help me? What are you here for?” These are always failures» (C4).

Another volunteer observed, «there are many – an increasing number – of people who come to us seeking legal assistance, but to whom we can only offer gen-

eral guidance, in order to safeguard the survival of the association and remain faithful to its founding principles» (C4).

These accounts highlight a core tension in the work of the offices: the need to adhere to the organisation's mandate and institutional limits, on the one hand, and the awareness that these constraints may contribute to further exclusion among already marginalised individuals, on the other. In some cases, this tension prompts volunteers to reflect on the possibility of revising or expanding the organisation's mandate to include those who, while formally outside the eligibility criteria, are regularly encountered at the offices and constitute a growing share of people in need.

Our statute does not allow us to extend support to this group. Yet the paradox is that the people who come to us and say, "So what are you here for?" are not precisely homeless: they have accommodation and, in some cases, a permanent address. But the only difference between them and the homeless living on the street, or in shelters, lies precisely in this! (C5).

The changing profiles of individuals approaching SL raise a dual challenge for volunteers: how to respond to those who seek support but cannot be assisted in order to remain faithful to the association's mandate, and how to reach potential beneficiaries who fall within SL's target groups but do not access the office. These include women who are victims of trafficking – formally identified in the bylaws but who «do not come to us at all, because they are afraid to exercise their rights and are often unaware of them – as well as detainees» (B4).

4.2 Administrative invisibility and access to rights

Accessibility emerges as a key structural issue in the provision of legal assistance, primarily revolving around access to health and social services and registration in the population register.

Barriers to accessing and navigating services are among the most frequently reported needs in volunteers' accounts and are described as having a decisive impact on the lives of people seeking support from SL.

If we think about fundamental rights such as the right to health or the right to defence – and many others – they are constitutionally guaranteed and therefore universal, applying to everyone, both Italian citizens and non-citizens. Yet, in practice, accessing the services that are meant to protect these rights is far from straightforward. As a result, when people attempt to exercise their rights, they are often effectively denied (A3).

In this regard, a range of barriers can be identified. As one interviewee noted, «When people are somewhat detached from the social context in which they live, they also struggle to understand where to go, whom to turn to, what to do, and where to seek help» (A1).

For this reason, facilitating access to services constitutes a core component of SL's work. In some cases, this involves guiding individuals towards appropriate local services, as «many people come to us simply because they do not know where to go, so it is essential to be familiar with the services available in order to direct people according to their needs» (E2). In other cases, volunteers assess the feasibility of identified options – such as access to a shelter – by verifying their practical viability and, when necessary, initiating contact with relevant services to facilitate access or establish an initial referral.

In situations of particular vulnerability, volunteers may also personally accompany individuals to services or public offices, or assume key supportive roles within assistance pathways, helping to overcome communicative and practical barriers, for instance by providing interpretation when needed. This dimension of volunteers' work lies beyond the association's formal legal mandate yet often proves crucial for securing effective access to rights.

Volunteers' accounts further reveal the presence of exclusionary practices within service provision and the resulting experiences of frustration among individuals who are repeatedly «bounced» between different offices. As illustrated by the following accounts, this dynamic often translates into anger and exhaustion, as people are denied access to services or redirected elsewhere: «They are often angry because they have had enough, they can no longer bear being bounced from one service to another» (E3). This experience is echoed in another volunteer's account: «The man came to us saying, 'They won't let me into the Emergency Department.' Yes, these are also the kinds of things people tell us» (D2).

One of the major barriers affecting accessibility stems from the absence of registration in the population register. People experiencing homelessness are frequently removed from the municipal population register on grounds of untraceability; despite the availability of mechanisms such as registration at a reference address, re-establishing residence status often remains highly complex: «From the outset, SL has placed the administrative 'invisibility' resulting from the absence or loss of registration at the core of its work».

As this volunteer described:

The idea was to provide free legal assistance to the invisible [...] How does one become invisible? In our experience, most commonly through the loss of residence registration.

The intuition, therefore, was to offer those who had become invisible – and thus excluded from essential services – the possibility of becoming visible again, of re-emerging (C4).

The use of the terms «re-emerge» and «invisibility» effectively conveys the central importance of residence registration in people's lives: without residence, one effectively does not exist and becomes invisible. In the absence of registration, individuals are excluded from fundamental rights and services, including «the right to health and access to healthcare, the right to vote, access to employment service registers, and eligibility for public housing waiting lists. These are core principles that our Constitution identifies as foundational to the development of a democratic society» (C3).

The loss of residence registration also constitutes a significant area of volunteers' work, to the extent that in some cities dedicated days are organised exclusively to address requests and disputes in this domain. Although registration in the population register is formally recognised as a subjective right, it is frequently denied in practice, often unlawfully. Consequently, a substantial part of SL's activity consists of actively enforcing compliance with existing rules – by accompanying individuals to public offices or, where necessary, initiating legal proceedings – in order to secure recognition of this right. As this volunteer explained:

Exercising the right to permanent address often means physically accompanying the user to the municipal office and contesting refusals by the population register, including the denial of registration at a reference address. In practice, this involves ensuring that the applicable rules are correctly implemented in the face of obstructive administrative behaviour (C4).

Beyond obstructive practices by administrative offices, the difficulties surrounding residence registration are manifold. Volunteers' accounts offer a glimpse into the procedure for obtaining registration. One interviewee, for instance, vividly illustrates the paradoxes involved in being required to prove residence in each city to apply for registration in the population register.

Anyone applying for residence registration is required to demonstrate a continuous presence in the city. Until a few years ago, a self-declaration was sufficient; now this presence must be documented. People are asked to provide proof – for instance, showing that they regularly eat at soup kitchens through stamped vouchers – to demonstrate continuity over time. Presence must also be prolonged: if someone has been on the street for only a few days, they are told to 'wait until things get worse', often at least two months. Applicants are further required to specify exactly where they

sleep, which may trigger police checks. These checks can occur at any point during the 45-day period, a timeframe that effectively forces individuals to remain on the street in the same location. If they temporarily stay with a friend, they risk being deemed not homeless and therefore denied residence registration (E2).

This account further illustrates how the adoption of rigid and static definition of homelessness generates paradoxical forms of exclusion, rendering intermittent housing precarity and more fluid experiences of marginality difficult to recognise within administrative frameworks. It also reveals how the procedure for obtaining residence registration can itself become paradoxical: to demonstrate stable presence in a context, individuals may be compelled to renounce informal forms of support – such as temporarily staying with friends – in order to perform continuous homelessness.

Within these dynamics, volunteers may be asked by municipal social services to verify and formally attest individuals' homelessness status, thereby being assigned an inappropriately delegated role of gatekeeping and certification. Volunteers expressed strong concern about being informally tasked with certifying homelessness status by municipal authorities. This delegated gatekeeping role was described as ethically problematic, as it shifts responsibility for eligibility decisions onto support organisations and risks arbitrary and discriminatory outcomes: «You cannot ask us to assume the responsibility of deciding who qualifies and who does not. This is deeply troubling!» (D2).

4.3 Interpreting the legal aid role

SL's mission is primarily oriented towards protecting and strengthening the rights of the most vulnerable, understood as fundamental levers for countering processes of social exclusion and promoting substantive citizenship. In everyday practice, however, this objective encounters the complexity of the conditions under which legal action can be pursued, as well as the plurality of ways in which volunteers interpret, negotiate, and enact their role.

Regulatory provisions and bureaucratic criteria create a rigid framework that often constrains intervention, even in cases of severe hardship. As volunteers' accounts indicate, procedural deadlines, lack of documentation, absence of residence registration, and precarious legal status frequently prevent individuals from obtaining protection or redress. In such circumstances, the law appears not only insufficient but, at times, actively exclusionary, leaving individuals already in conditions of acute vulnerability without effective safeguards.

A man who worked at a petrol station was harassed on a daily basis [...]. Every evening, they would get out of their car with a stick and beat him [...]. He brought us video footage, so I saw it with my own eyes. We advised him not to go to the police, but he would have been expelled because he had no legal status. In that case, we truly felt powerless (B4).

Such cases generate a profound sense of frustration and powerlessness among volunteers, at times forcing them to respond with “I cannot”, despite fully recognising the legitimacy and severity of the needs expressed: «Sometimes they do not understand, and they become angry with the lawyers assisting them, believing that the lawyer is doing nothing, when in fact there are limits that no longer depend on us but on the system» (E4).

The findings clearly reveal an internal tension within the work of the legal aid office, linked to volunteers’ differing interpretations of their role. While some volunteers emphasise a more expansive, rights-oriented understanding of legal aid, others adopt a strictly technical conception of their role, confining intervention to clearly delimited legal categories recognised by the legal system, arguing that «the right to health care is enshrined in the Constitution, as is the right to education. Other rights, such as the right to housing, are not explicitly guaranteed. From this perspective, we are technicians. We can provide support only when there is a clearly defined legal basis (A5).

From this perspective, action is grounded in a formalistic reading of rights, which are recognised and protected only insofar as they have an explicit legal basis and are legally actionable. Within this framework, reference to the limits imposed by the law becomes not only an operational constraint but also a constitutive element of role identity, shielding volunteers from the risk of making unfulfillable promises and from forms of involvement perceived as exceeding their professional remit.

Others, by contrast, recognise the ambiguities and shortcomings of the system and adopt a more flexible stance, mobilising discretionary practices, mediation, and forms of institutional advocacy to expand the substantive enforceability of rights: «As long as there is no law obliging the municipality to act, common sense is required. Where no formal obligations exist, it becomes necessary to engage in dialogue with the administration and to seek solutions, even if this is difficult» (C5). This orientation is underpinned by an ethical commitment to translating principles into practice rather than merely invoking them. As another interviewee explained «Principles of solidarity remain merely on paper if no one attempts to put them into practice. It is easy to proclaim them, but far more difficult to implement them: we need

to make proposals to administrations, set up working groups, and bring these issues to their attention» (C4).

Within this interpretative framework, legal aid practice within SL volunteers’ work extends beyond the mere application of legal norms to encompass practices of mediation, institutional dialogue, the development of informal arrangements, and advocacy aimed at enhancing the substantive enforceability of rights. From this perspective, the exercise of discretionary judgement, sustained engagement with public administrations, and mobilisation of institutional pressure emerge as necessary strategies for addressing needs that, while legitimate, lack immediate recognition within the existing legal and regulatory framework.

In such situations, volunteers are required to navigate a persistent tension between what may be ethically and socially warranted and what is legally permissible. This tension frequently generates experiences of frustration and powerlessness, particularly when volunteers are compelled to withhold assistance despite acknowledging the seriousness of the circumstances encountered.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study illuminate a structural tension in the provision of legal aid for people experiencing homelessness, located at the intersection between the formal recognition of rights and their substantive enforceability. By examining volunteers’ everyday practices and role interpretations, the analysis demonstrates that access to justice is actively produced, and frequently constrained, through the interaction of legal frameworks, administrative discretion, and organisational practices (Sommerlad 2004; Walsh 2006; Forell and Gray 2009; Lipsky 2010).

While the research is grounded in the Italian context, the findings resonate with broader international debates on access to justice and street-level practices in welfare systems, particularly in relation to administrative discretion, gatekeeping mechanisms, and the gap between formal rights and their effective implementation. In this sense, the Italian case offers a relevant empirical lens for understanding how these dynamics unfold in decentralised and institutionally fragmented contexts in which access to services and rights can additionally be hampered by territorial variability in provision and the discretionary practices of local actors (Halvorsen Rønning and Hammerslev 2018; Natili *et al.* 2021; Voivozeanu and Lafleur 2023; Ratzmann 2024).

The effective realisation of rights for vulnerable groups unfolds within a persistent tension between for-

mal legal recognition and substantive access. In this light, the findings underscore how rights-oriented approaches can operate as key levers for countering social exclusion and promoting substantive citizenship, insofar as they engage with the institutional and organisational conditions that shape the exercise of rights in practice (Walsh 2006; Forell and Gray 2009; Belcher and DeForge 2012; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2013).

The analysis shows that social exclusion and marginalisation frequently assume legal and administrative forms, limiting individuals' capacity to claim subjective rights and access essential services. Difficulties surrounding registration in the population register are emblematic in this respect: although residence is formally recognised as a subjective right, it operates in practice as a selective device, with access shaped by exclusionary administrative practices and restrictive local interpretations.

The empirical findings further indicate that access to justice cannot be reduced to the mere activation of legal procedures, but requires sustained practices of mediation, accompaniment, and translation between legal norms and lived experience. From this perspective, legal protection emerges as a relational process, situated in an intermediary space between normative prescriptions and individuals' concrete living conditions. Volunteers describe forms of practice that frequently extend beyond a strictly legal mandate, encompassing activities of guidance, support, and facilitation of access to welfare services. This underscores how the legal needs of people experiencing homelessness are deeply intertwined with broader social needs, and how a sectoral or narrowly legalistic interpretation of rights risks proving insufficient.

This gives rise to a field of tensions that permeates SL's intervention, shaped by the gap between the demands articulated by individuals and the scope of available legal aid, by the pervasiveness of legal and bureaucratic constraints that at times render legal protection unworkable, and by the complexity of individuals' life trajectories. Within this context, volunteers also report recurring experiences of frustration and powerlessness, alongside a growing awareness that legal protection alone is insufficient to address the complexity of the situations they encounter.

Within this framework, the interviews point to two distinct operational stances among volunteers: on the one hand, a more flexible and dialogical approach, oriented towards identifying margins for institutional negotiation; on the other, a more technically restrictive stance, which confines intervention to cases in which the conditions for legal action are met.

As some authors highlighted (Evans and Harris 2004), this tension reflects a well-established dilemma

in which discretionary practice is shaped by organisational context and professional identity. Within this framework, volunteers adhering to a strictly formalistic approach prioritise procedural compliance, whereas those adopting a more flexible stance engage in what may be defined as discretionary advocacy – an active, rights-oriented exercise of professional judgement aimed at expanding the substantive enforceability of entitlements beyond what formal rules explicitly allow.

Although law and legal institutions continue to represent primary instruments for the protection of rights (Ife 2012), the findings demonstrate that an exclusive reliance on the legal dimension encounters structural limits, particularly where complex social problems must be translated into formally recognisable legal categories. When situations of need fall outside these classificatory frameworks, legal intervention becomes unfeasible (Grande 2017). Moreover, the administrative definition of homelessness adopted by SL itself contributes to constraining the organisation's capacity to support all individuals experiencing housing precarity, by excluding those who do not fully meet institutional criteria.

In this sense, the apparent neutrality and impartiality of the law do not preclude its role in producing or legitimising inequalities, particularly insofar as legal frameworks tend to individualise problems that have collective and structural roots while neglecting the political and social dimensions that generate them (Sommerlad 2004; Grande 2017). Volunteers' accounts highlight how the realisation of justice hinges on the institutional and social conditions through which rights are enacted, rather than on their formal recognition alone. Thus, while access to justice constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for citizenship and participation in social life (Fraser 2005), substantive justice ultimately depends on the conditions under which rights are made effective in practice.

Against this backdrop, SL's legal aid practice emerges as an interstitial space in which volunteers are continuously required to negotiate their role, oscillating between compliance with institutional constraints and efforts to expand the scope of protection through practices of mediation and advocacy. The experiences of frustration and powerlessness reported in the interviews do not merely reflect individual difficulties but instead point to broader structural issues within the welfare system and the governance of access to rights. In this sense, the case of SL confirms its value as a privileged observatory of contemporary forms of exclusion and of the ways in which concrete citizenship is enacted.

Within this framework, the findings underscore the need to situate legal protection within a broader socio-political perspective (Sommerlad 2004; Ife 2012),

one in which rights are not understood solely as formally enforceable individual claims, but as instruments through which the conditions that generate exclusion can be interrogated and transformed. The case of SL illustrates how access to justice is socially produced at the level of implementation, through the interplay of institutional discretion, administrative gatekeeping, and volunteers' advocacy practices (Lipsky 2010). The experience of SL illustrates how legal aid can play a significant role not only in terms of judicial outcomes, but also through its functions of recognition, visibility, and the restoration of voice to marginalised individuals.

REFERENCES

- Amaturo E. (2012), *Metodologia della ricerca sociale*, UTET, Torino.
- Ascoli U. and Ranci C. (2003), *Il welfare mix in Europa*, Roma, Carocci.
- Belcher J.R. and DeForge B.R. (2012), «Social stigma and homelessness: The limits of social change», in *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 22(8): 929-946.
- Boccadoro N. (2014), *European Minimum Income Network thematic report: Non-take-up of minimum income schemes by the homeless population. Analysis and road map for adequate and accessible minimum income schemes in EU Member States*, European Minimum Income Network.
- Brodin E. Z. (2008), «Accountability in Street-Level Organizations», in *Journal of Public Administration*, 31: 317-336.
- Chareyron S. and Domingues P. (2018), «Take-up of social assistance benefits: The case of the French homeless», in *Review of Income and Wealth*, 64(1): 170-191.
- Clarke V., Braun V. and Hayfield N. (2015), «Thematic analysis», in J.A. Smith (a cura di), *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, SAGE Publications, London, pp. 222-248.
- Crepaldi C. (2019), *Peer Review on "Access to social assistance and rights for homeless people". Thematic discussion paper. Overview of the EU policy framework and implementation across EU countries*, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission.
- European Commission (2019), *Peer Review on "Access to social assistance and rights for homeless people". Synthesis report*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Evans, T. and Harris, J. (2004), «Street-level bureaucracy, social work and the (exaggerated) death of discretion», in *The British Journal of Social Work*, 34(6): 871-895.
- Forell S. and Gray A. (2009), «Outreach legal services to people with complex needs: What works?», in *Justice Issues*, 12: 1-23.
- Fitzpatrick S., Bramley G. and Johnsen S. (2013), «Pathways into multiple exclusion homelessness in seven UK cities», in *Urban Studies*, 50(1): 148-168.
- Fraser N. (2005), «Reframing global justice», in *New Left Review*, 36: 69-88.
- Gargiulo E. (2021), «I poveri di fronte all'anagrafe. Tra diritti, disciplinamento e resistenze al controllo sociale», in L. Coccoli (a cura di), *I poveri possono parlare? Soggetti, problemi, alleanze*, Ediesse, Roma.
- Gnocchi R. (2009), *Persone senza dimora. La dimensione multipla del fenomeno*, Carocci, Roma.
- Grande E. (2017), *Guai ai poveri: la faccia triste dell'America*, Edizioni Gruppo Abele, Torino.
- Halvorsen Rønning O. and Hammerslev O. (2018), *Outsourcing legal aid in the nordic welfare states*, Basingstoke, Springer Nature.
- Hermans K. and Roets G. (2020), «Social work research and human rights: where do we go from here?», in *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(6): 913-919.
- Hernanz V., Malherbet F. and Pellizzari M. (2004), *Take-up of welfare benefits in OECD countries: a review of the evidence*, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, 17, OECD.
- Ife J. (2012), *Human rights and Social Work: towards rights-based practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- James D. and Forbess A. (2011), *Rights, welfare and law: legal aid advocacy in austerity Britain*, The London School of Economics and Political Science, Londra.
- Lipsky M. (2010), *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public service*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York.
- Lipsky M. and Smith S. R. (1989), «Nonprofit organizations, government, and the welfare state», in *Political science quarterly*, 104(4): 625-648.
- OCIS (2021), «Politiche per la casa e per i senza dimora in Italia: sfide e prospettive in prospettiva comparata» in *Social Cohesion Papers – Quaderni della coesione sociale*, n. 1.
- Prescott C. (2015), «What is the value of an address?», in *Journal of Creating Value*, 1(1): 33-44.
- Ratzmann N. (2024), «Insights from the frontline of German welfare policy: the under-recognised role of brokerage in street-level practice», in *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 26(1): 81-96.

- Robben L., Samyn S., Emmanuel N., Hermans K., Roets G. and Wagener M. (2024), *TRAHOME. Homelessness trajectories and non-take-up of social rights from a dynamic perspective*, Final report.
- Robben L., Roets G., Wagener M., Van Lancker W. and Hermans K. (2022), *Including the most excluded? A qualitative analysis of the non-take-up of an address for people experiencing homelessness in Belgium*, SPSW Working Paper.
- Somerville P. (2013), «Understanding homelessness. Housing», in *Theory and Society*, 30(4): 384-415.
- Sommerlad H. (2004), «Some reflections on the relationship between citizenship, access to justice, and the reform of legal aid», in *Journal of Law and Society*, 31(3): 345-368.
- Szeintuch S. (2022), «Homeless without benefits: The non-take-up problem», in *Housing Studies*, 37(5): 673-692.
- Turner B.S. (2016), «We are all denizens now: on the erosion of citizenship», in *Citizenship Studies*, 20(6-7): 679-692.
- van Mechelen N. and Janssens J. (2017), *Who is to blame? An overview of the factors contributing to the non-take-up of social rights*, Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy, University of Antwerp Working Papers, University of Antwerp.
- van Oorschot W. (1996), «Modelling non-take-up: The interactive model of multi-level influences and the dynamic model of benefit receipt», in W. van Oorschot (a cura di), *New perspectives on the non-take-up of social security benefits*, Tilburg University Press, Tilburg, pp. 7-59.
- van Oorschot W. (1998), «Failing selectivity: On the extent and causes of non-take-up of social security benefits», in H.J. Andress (a cura di), *Empirical poverty research in a comparative perspective*, Ashgate, pp. 101-132.
- Voivozeanu A. and Lafleur J. M. (2023), «Welfare brokers and European Union migrants' access to social protection» in *The British journal of sociology*, 74(4):717-732.
- Walsh T. (2006), «A right to inclusion? Homelessness, human rights and social exclusion», in *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 12(1): 185-204.
- Walsh T. and Douglas H. (2008), «Homelessness and legal needs. A South Australia and Western Australia case study», in *Adelaide Law Review*, 29(2): 359-380.
- Weiss-Gal I. and Gal J. (2009), «Realizing rights in social work», in *Social Service Review*, 83(2): 267-291.



Citation: Caiani, M. & Pennucci, N. (2026). Climate Change and Far-Right Politics: Between Adoption and Adaptation. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 107-115. doi: 10.36253/smp-17644

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Climate Change and Far-Right Politics: Between Adoption and Adaptation

MANUELA CAIANI^{1,*}, NICOLÒ PENNUCCI²

¹ Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy

² Université de Namur, Belgium

E-mail: manuela.caiani@sns.it; nicolo.pennucci@unamur.be

*Corresponding author

1. INTRODUCTION

«farmers demonstrate outside the EU headquarters on the occasion of a EU agriculture ministers meeting in Brussels, on March 26, 2024. Farmers across Europe have been protesting for weeks over what they say are excessively restrictive environmental rules, competition from cheap imports from outside the European Union and low incomes» (EU News 2024)

«Between February and March 2024, farmers' protests flared up in several EU countries. Driven by several real reasons, including concerns over Brussels' environmental agricultural policies and economic uncertainty, farmers took to the streets demanding a fair price for their products, more support to be accompanied in the transition, and administrative and bureaucratic streamlining of the CAP. According to EFCSN Newtral, however, "misinformation has permeated the discourse, adding new layers of complexity to the narratives surrounding the protests» (Newtral & Science Feedback 2024)

As the quotation stresses, farmers are protesting against measures to reduce emissions. In recent years, farmers in Western Europe have engaged in increasingly vehement opposition to policies designed to safeguard the environment, which they perceive as imposing undue financial burdens on them. From the Netherlands, where the backlash has been most pronounced, to Belgium, France, Spain, Ireland, Germany, and the United Kingdom, protests have resulted in convoys of tractors congesting roadways and ports, farmer-led occupations of capital cities, and even cows being herded into the offices of government ministers. Politicians from mainstream parties are worried that right wing populists could exploit a "climate backlash". The adverse effects of the climate crisis and globalisation have resulted in marginalisation and vulnerability for farmers in Europe, who are susceptible to the influence of populist politicians, as well as to far-right discourses and mobilisations, according to academics and the media. The growing argument is that in the absence of adequate funding, planning and equity in the transition to a low-carbon

economy, there is a risk of a resurgence of the far right exploiting environmental issues across the continent.

On the one hand, when it comes to climate protection, conventional wisdom describes the far right as skeptical by signaling the substantial non engagement of actors in this ideological family with the matter and political science observed that denialism is the traditional official position of the radical right on climate change. Some parties, such as Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany, even deny the human impact on the climate. Hostility to liberal, cosmopolitan and green elites, as well as a rejection of international commitments, fits well with opposition to climate protection as a supposed elite project (Caiani and Padoan 2021). On the other hand, however, we also know that some right-wing populist parties and far right movements support the protection of the domestic environment as a source of national identity. In this reading, climate change can also be a far-right concern, because it threatens the environment of the nation state. The Berlin branch of AfD's youth organisation, for example, in an open letter from May 2019, urged the party to explicitly reject the denialist position.

Even more remarkably, although at first glance the environmental movements and the far-right movements, including anti-immigrant and white supremacist groups, appear to be situated at opposite ends of the political ideology spectrum, recent scholarship started to investigate overlaps between these two movements (Lubarda 2024).

Against this background, the environment as an issue is then becoming increasingly a contested battlefield where also right wing political actors try to impose their view, by embedding the environmental issue into broader ideologies linked to more traditional far right themes such as nationalism and nativism, as Mancosu and colleagues show in this special issue. Statement such as 'Counteracting climate change is one of today's most important challenges'; 'We are one of the leaders in the "climate championship"'; 'We need to engage better with the environment (. . .) bring the ecological question to the center of politics' may appear as excerpts pulled from a press release of any Green actor, but they are not. In fact, all three were produced by right-wing populists (RWP): the first is by Mateusz Morawiecki, Poland's Prime Minister (Law and Justice, PiS, party); the second by Viktor Orbán, Hungary's Prime Minister (Fidesz, Hungarian Civic Alliance party); and the third is from the 2019 Election manifesto of the Italian Lega per Salvini Premier. How can we explain such an evolving engagement of the far right with the environmental issues? And which impact does this have on the environmental politics of the far right?

If it is now clear that Far Right movements and parties are not simply 'anti-environmentalist' (Gemenis *et al.* 2012), it remains still to be understood what this change of route means in terms of ideological positioning and in the overall development of the far-right politics in contemporary political spectrum. After all, this turn in the making is being developed after years of unfavourable positions by the radical right towards the protection of the natural environment (Tosun and Debus 2022, Vihma *et al.* 2020). Moreover, the different positions of right-wing populist parties on environmental issues may also depend, in part, on their genetic process and the political culture that has permeated their evolution. Ultimately, it is difficult to understand whether the repositioning of the far-right actors towards the environment represents an ideological shift, or it is rather the result of contingent political opportunities to be exploited for electoral gains.

While scholars have so far mostly focused on left wing progressive movements and discourses in their relationship with environmental issues, the Far Right, including both social movements and political parties, has been neglected until recently. Furthermore, the (still comparatively rare) scholarship on far right and environmentalism has followed a strict division of labour, either focusing on far-right social movements and eco-fascism (Lubarda 2023), or focusing on right wing (populist) parties and environmental policies, with very few works crossing and combining the two strains of research. Whilst some attempts have been made to bridge the party politics literature and social movement studies (Tarrow 2021), the two branches of scholarship have only rarely crossed paths in analyses of the radical right (for exceptions, Minkenberg 2018; Caiani and Cisar 2018). In this special issue we offer an empirical contribution to fill this gap.

This special issue empirically investigates the relationship between the far right and environmental issues and particularly climate change. Specifically, it looks at the current Far Right in Europe and its frames, networks, and strategies relate to environmental and climate change issues. In order to look at the widest array of political actors, from political parties to social movements, it will draw on social movement studies and research on political parties, as well as the scholarship on 'movement parties' (della Porta *et al.* 2017) to address these dynamics of an increasing interest on and positioning of the far right on environmental current issues, paying particular attention to the political (and discursive) opportunities provided by the process of European integration and globalization. Against this background, the special issue considers the political, economic, and

cultural crises that have hit Europe in the last two decades and which have offered specific political and discursive opportunities for these political actors to mobilize also on environmental issues.

1.1 *The far right and environmentalism*

The conceptual departure point of this special issue is the role of the far right towards environmental issues. Acknowledging the complexity of the terminological debate, which is beyond the scope of this special issue to address in detail, we use the term far right to refer to those groups that exhibit in their common ideological cores the characteristics of nationalism (ethno-nationalism), xenophobia, antiestablishment critiques and socio-cultural authoritarianism (law and order, family values) (Mudde 2019). This deliberately includes political party and non-party organizations, even subcultural (violent) groups as well as cultural associations and think tanks. Other scholars prefer to use a broad and inclusive meaning of the ‘radical-right’ category, which encompasses other labels commonly used in the literature such as ‘extreme right’ or ‘populist radical right’ (Wondreys and Mudde 2022). Thus, we refer to the far right in this conceptual sense in this special issue. Some contributions will also address the articulation of far-right actors with radical right groups and populism. The central theoretical goal of the special issue is highlighting the evolving nature of the relationship between the far right and environmental issues and to critically assess whether this is the result of an ideological restructuring or rather the strategic positioning towards an opportunity provided by several crises.

This matters because not only are right wing populist leaders publicly adopting ‘pro-environmental’ discourses, but, with an increasing number of these parties currently in power around the world, they also have the potential to impact environmental policies through their position within governing coalitions (Caiani and Meardi 2022). This capacity to exercise power therefore raises a series of questions about what determines the, political, discursive and policy positions that these parties take on the environment, and whether they are the result of an evolving ideology or the outcome of contextual adaptation to contingent ‘political opportunities’. Do far right parties and non-party organizations (still) tend to follow their ideological convictions as ‘anti environmentalists’ or they moderate their positions once becoming mainstream? And, more in general, what are the discourses, frames, action repertoires and relational strategies undertaken by the far right (including parties and movements) when dealing with the environmental issues

understood as ‘novel’ issues of potential mobilisation? While Ideology can indeed be a determinant of environmental (policy) preferences (McCright and Dunlap 2013), in many situations, the context can assume prevalence (Criado and Herrerros 2007).

To delve more into the conceptual definition of the far right used in the special issue, far right is not a monolithic ideology, but it shows instead several variants within this family, which can also be expected, in turn, to influence the (degree and) forms of these actors’ political discourse (on environment), repertoires and relations. Examples of these varieties include ‘national conservatism’ on the one hand and the ‘populist radical right’ on the other (Zulianello 2020). A third subtype is ‘neoliberal populism’. Similar attempts to parse out the spectrum have been made with respect to the far-right communication on climate change in the European Parliament (Forchtner and Lubarda 2023) but reflections on the broader spectrum of far right are still missing.

This gap will be the point of departure of our special issues, that aims to investigate the relationship between the far right and environmental issues, across different types of organizations and countries, as well as political arenas.

Overall, a growing body of academic literature provides evidence of how far-right parties position themselves on environmental issues (Lockwood 2018; Forchtner *et al.* 2018; Schaller and Carius 2019; Lubarda 2020), including the attitudes of their voters (Huber *et al.* 2021; Duijndam and van Beukering 2021; Domorenok and Prontera 2021). Most of the scholarships agree that right wing actors have assumed critical positions against protective, ambitious European and national climate policies (Vicedo Carabea *et al.* 2021; Tosun and Debus 2020; Vihma *et al.* 2020). Some relate this to the right-wing (and populist) ideology as key determinants of their environmental politics and policy (Böhmelet 2021). Right wing populist ideology constructs the environment in several ways: privileging the national against the global domain of international policy making, as is, for example, visible in climate change policy (Farstad 2018); foregrounding nostalgia and “retropias” (Elçi 2022), where nostalgia for the past environments is a motivational frame and a call for policy action restoration (Hanusch and Meisch 2022); or discursively centering ‘the people’ against the elites (i.e. the ‘polluting outsiders’, such as immigrants or elites or the elites making the people bear the costs of climate change. Moreover, right-wing populist discourses on climate change rely heavily on emotional framing processes, through which specific interpretations, grievances, and identities are constructed and communicated, see Caiani and

Di Cocco 2023). Because of their nationalism, as well as opposition to multiculturalism and internationalism, right wing actors frequently support local and national environmental policies that protect the countryside (i.e. rural vs. urban), nature and the homeland (Forchtner 2019), but often express scepticism about global environmental problems like climate change and oppose policies to address them.

Second, ideological interpretations are particularly relevant when it comes to the far-right ideology, as the emphasis on blood and soil of the so-called ‘ecofascism’ (Hughes *et al.* 2022) is generally narrower than far-right ecologism, which also includes conservative and populist sentiments (Lubarda 2020). Populist attitudes play an important role in explaining climate change scepticism and opposition to environmental protection: yet, populism offers an orthogonal dimension to partisanship and left–right self-placement (Gooch and Huber 2020), which broadens the scope of the concept of ideology suggested by Bartha *et al.* (2020). However, these analyses also point to the potential heterogeneity within the right-wing spectrum and discourses: examples of ‘green’ right wing populists, such as environmental populism of anti-extractive or climate justice movements (Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach 2021) and far-right ecologism (Forchtner 2019), are cases in point. However, research on this topic is still scant and centred around the alleged association between the far right and denialism, based on the anti-establishment sentiments of far right against the ‘green lobbies’.

Beyond ideology, there are also other factors that play a role in the right wing positioning and strategies on the environment: the political opportunities provided by the institutional framework of the country within which they operate (Biard *et al.* 2019); the institutionalization process (De Lange and Art 2011); the links of RWP parties and other (non-party) actors (e.g. links with the fossil fuel industry have been seen as determining right wingers positions on environmental and especially climate policies) (Jeffries 2017). Finally, political cultures can also be important: for instance, differences among Eastern and Western Europe have been continuously emphasized, although evidence has been mostly context-specific and not easily generalizable (Leininger and Meijers 2021). In terms of environmental issues, the range of ideas, frames and ultimately, policies that resonate with the public is determined by the contextual and country-specific markers (Cherp *et al.* 2017).

Building on a rich emerging literature and *drawing on social movement perspectives and concepts* (such as collective identity, frames, movement-counter-movement dynamics, networks, and action repertoire), our special

issue intends to contribute to this debate. We then also investigate, from a resource mobilization approach (della Porta and Diani 2006), if the differences among different types of actors can account for explaining the environmental politics of the far right.

This special issue will address different problems from a social movement perspective. In particular, the special issue’s various contributions will address the development of far right ‘environmental politics’ using the following guiding concepts: a) movement relations, networks, and events; b) transnationalization trends and domestic opportunities; c) movement-counter-movement dynamics; d) climate/environmental related protest events and strategies; e) local/transnational practices and sites of environmental-related mobilization; f.) movement identities and frames; g.) ‘critical junctures’ for the development of a far right politics. Methodologically, this SI will draw on a variety of methods: survey in-depth interviews; text and discourse analysis; historical comparative analysis; and qualitative content analysis. In addition, the methods used by contributors to the special issue help overcome existing biases in approaching right-wing movements from an outsider, externalist perspective and answer the calls for analyzing them as movements in their own right (Avanza 2018; Castelli Gattinara 2020).

2. BACKGROUND

The interrelated nature of the challenges currently facing our societies and planet has led to the term ‘poly-crisis’ being used to describe the current era (Henig and Knight 2023). Both the World Economic Forum (WEF 2023) and climate researchers (Homer-Dixon *et al.* 2022) have identified the existence of systemic risks associated with these long-term challenges. The most prominent of these are the crises of liberal democracy and climate and environmental emergencies. This special issue is concerned with the numerous interconnections between these developments and the way right wing populist and far right movements are shaped by and feed on the climate crisis. In Europe, there has been a discernible shift towards authoritarianism, an increase in right-wing populism and the growth of illiberal democracies. Concurrently, there has been an increase in distrust of the political system and public institutions (Dijkstra *et al.* 2019). Many such actors proactively seek to exploit societal discontent to erode the foundations of liberal democracy. They argue that ‘political elites’ are unresponsive to the concerns of citizens, particularly on matters such as migration and economic hardship, or that they are

exceeding their authority in their response, as evidenced by strict measures introduced in response to the pandemic and climate policies. These positions have been articulated by a diverse array of political movements but are now gaining traction in the political programs of (right wing) populist parties and far right movements that have gained power and are leading governments in some European states.

European research on post-war environmental movements is, among others, related to the prominent 'new social movements' theory (Offe 1985), and later to the cognitive (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Cox 2014), as well as opportunity structures, approaches, originally dominant in North American academia (della Porta and Rucht 2002). These approaches are almost exclusively oriented towards the study of progressive social movements on the environmental issue. This wave of environmental movements – re-labelled as 'climate justice movements' (Martiskainen 2020) or, more rarely, 'environmental defenders' (Scheidel *et al.* 2020) – effectively re-use repertoires and organizational forms that emerged earlier but sublimate them into new patterns (Jamison 2010). They stand out, among others, for their internet-assisted network and global arena of actions (Temper *et al.* 2020) as the contribution of Caiani and Pennucci in this special issue will show, as well as their science-based rationale (Massarella *et al.* 2021). These movements often draw support from the youngest and under-aged demographics (Wallis and Loy 2021; Biswas and Mattheis 2022) and employ consistently non-violent repertoires (Scheidel *et al.* 2020). They offer novel ways of political mobilization, such as engaging underage individuals in activism and youth climate panels, experimenting with citizens' assemblies, and engaging art to both mobilize, transgress boundaries and imagine alternate futures, to name a few. They also attempt to transform social and cultural norms, e.g. when they challenge the obsession of capitalist performance principle through specific 'regeneration cultures' or engaging the transgenerational justice concept and exceeding the temporalities to future generations. But what about the reactionary nativist far right? These above mentioned issues are still under-researched for what concern this area of the political contention.

Studies from various research fields, from political science to political sociology have addressed the development of the 'new' interest of right wing actors for environmental issues. As recently pointed out, however, existing research has overwhelmingly focused on the 'denialist' frame adopted by these actors to develop their discourse and policy positions on the matter, with discourse and textual analysis as the primary methods

used to inform empirical social research on the matter. In addition, studies focusing on conspiracies (Caiani *et al.* 2026) and relational elements and repertoires of far right actors and environmental issues are almost absent (Caiani and Pennucci 2026) or research have been focused solely on single case studies rather than comparative studies. Interestingly, building upon the literature on movement framing, scholars have shown how multi-level discursive opportunities can influence movement dynamics and local framing by analyzing local contention in relation to universal and EU-level themes (Ayoub and Chetaille 2020). In this SI we argue that this would be profitable also for the topic far right and environmentalism and climate change.

Overall, as we will demonstrate in this special issue, if we want to understand the growing relevance of the repositioning of the far right towards environmental issues, a social movement approach seems particularly fruitful. This will allow us to account for coalition-building dynamics, cooperation and conflict and to grasp the ideological mosaic of diverging claims and identities (Maciejewska 2024; Zuk *et al.* 2024; Mihai *et al.* 2024; Mannoni 2025; Figulova *et al.* 2024, Celik 2024) in various countries.

3. CONTENT

The articles that compose this special issue consider several aspects of far-right actors relationship with environmental and climate change. They do so by combining contributions exploring empirical manifestations of this phenomenon in several European countries, and beyond. We will also go beyond the classical division between social movements and political parties to capture actors both outside and between these concepts.

More specifically, our special issue aims to appraise the 'degree' and 'varieties' of Far Right and Environmental politics within various political, cultural and economic contexts across all Europe and beyond. This also includes reflections on the momentum for European democracies after the European Elections, which brought about (and revitalized) issues of FR on the one hand and Environment on the other hand.

The special issue hosts seven articles each of them contributing to its goal from different perspectives. The first two articles analyze the articulation of the far right with external political ways of articulating complex ideologies such as populist attitudes (Mancosu *et al.* 2026) and conspiracy theories (Winter 2026). The subsequent four articles look at the far right in its relationship with the environment form a social movement

perspective (Benoist 2026), a social media data driven approach (Hilmar 2026; Caiani and Pennucci 2026) and an ideological perspective (Guerra 2026). The last article looks at the articulation of the far right and misogyny in explaining the emergency of far right environmental issues (Coufal 2026). The contributions of Mancosu *et al.* and Winter investigates the articulation of populism and conspiracy theories respectively with the right-wing ideology in order to understand the determinants of people's attitudes towards the environmental issue.

Specifically, Mancosu, Biancalana, Landini and Bertero unpack the role of ideology in climate related behaviors and beliefs. They pose the research question of whether the relationship between populist attitudes in human induced climate change is dependent on people's political ideology. They tackle this question through an original survey with 15000 respondents in six countries after the 2024 European Elections. While populist attitudes are linked to skepticism towards the human nature of climate change across the political spectrum, right wing ideology remains a strong predictor of climate skepticism with substantial national variations.

Kevin Winter advances the claim that conspiracy beliefs are a stronger predictor than political ideology to climate inaction. Conspiracy beliefs are in his view strong determinants of behavior and attitudes towards the environment. His article calls for a better engagement of the literature on environmentalism and climate change with conspiracy theories.

Benoist, Hilmar, Caiani and Pennucci, and Guerra zoom in the far right by looking at it through several perspectives in order to highlight its evolving relationship with the environmental issue. Benoist looks at extra parliamentary far right movements, Hilmar employs computational methods on X data for the AfD case similarly to Caiani and Pennucci, who employ quantitative text analysis on social media data to uncover the shifting narrative of social movements and political parties on the far right spectrum towards the environment, and Guerra unpacks the concept of eco fascism as a specific way of looking at the far right evolving relationship with the environment.

In particular, Benoist's article looks at the far-right side of the political spectrum by analyzing the relationship between French extra parliamentary far right activists and climate change. She argues that far right relationships with the environment must go beyond the traditional denialist, non-denialist distinction and she focuses on the role of environmentalism in the articulation of the overall political activism of the far right that embeds the discourse on the environment in a broader anthropocentric crisis narrative.

Hilmar employs a computational approach to look at X data produced by the AfD between 2009 and 2023. The computational analysis on X data shows that the AfD employs the framing of environmental issues through the lens of victimhood. Climate policies are framed as harmful for citizens and pro climate activists are seen as morally corrupted. In this way they are shifting their strategy towards the environment by looking at the protection of the middle-class people harmed by the ecological transition that is economically dangerous and morally corrupted.

Against the same lines, Caiani and Pennucci's article focuses on the changing relationship between the far right and the environment, beyond skepticism, by looking at social media data for key political actors in seven European countries, employing computational text analysis by looking at common frames they use to talk about the environment. By looking at common narratives towards the environment, their contribution seeks to look for potential transnational patterns of diffusion of the far right ecologism beyond traditional skepticism.

Building on this debate on the specific use of environmentalism by the far right, Guerra's article makes a vital and innovative contribution by challenging the conceptual rigidities that often constrain current scholarship on far-right ecology. The author forcefully demonstrates the analytical utility of framing "ecofascism" as an autonomous, syncretic ideological formation, distinct from the broader and more diffuse category of Far-Right Ecologism (FRE). By mapping extra-parliamentary movements in Northern Italy and specifically the National Anarchists, ANAI, and NR-NA, this study shatters the conventional academic assumption that aligns neo-fascist environmentalism with hyper-nationalist statism. Instead, Guerra uncovers a sophisticated ideological architecture where anti-statism, Alain de Benoist's ethnopluralism, and direct democracy converge with a radical anti-capitalism rooted in the syndicalist legacy of the Italian Social Republic. All these elements are structurally bound by a foundational, organicist cult of nature that acts as the supreme normative standard for human society. Ultimately, this piece contributes to the literature by illustrating how ecological concern can serve as a catalyst for "Red-Brown" political hybridization, revealing a fluid front of dissent against the liberal-democratic world order.

Still looking at the far right in its relationship with environmentalism, Coufal inserts an innovative viewpoint by analyzing the threefold relationship between far right, environmentalism and misogyny that is severely under looked in the literature on the far right. Coufal's article fills this gap by analyzing Incel blogs, representing a most

likely case study to look at the way of looking at the environment in far right and misogynist online forums.

4. CONCLUSION

Overall, this special issue aims at contributing to the emerging literature on the relationship between the far right and environmental issues. First, it proposes an innovative approach looking at a various array of actors, from social movements to political parties and their relationship, by employing a social movement perspective that builds on the literature on movement parties to look at the widest possible number of political actors. Second, it tries to understand whether the evolving relationship between the far right and the environment beyond the usual frame of denialism is embedded in a broader ideological restructuring of the far right or it is rather the result of a strategic positioning to respond to contingent political opportunities. In terms of methodology, the special issue displays pluralism by hosting qualitative quantitative and computational perspectives spanning from data collected through interviews, survey and social media data.

By looking at the articulation of populism and conspiracy theories with the far-right relationship with the environment, focusing on the evolving relationship of far right actors with the environmental issues, and developing its articulation with misogyny, the various articles in the special issues try to advance our comprehension of these complex issues from different but complementary perspectives. In so doing, this special issue contributes to the advancement of the knowledge of the new positioning of the far right on the environment through a multi method and multidisciplinary approach taking together several actors and different political arenas by providing a solid base for further studies on this innovative and urgent matter in contemporary political and social sciences.

REFERENCES

- Avanza M. (2018), «Plea for an emic approach towards 'ugly movements': Lessons from the divisions within the Italian pro-life movement», in *Politics and Governance*, 6(3): 112-122.
- Ayoub P. M. and Chetaille A. (2020), «Movement/countermovement interaction and instrumental framing in a multi-level world: Rooting Polish lesbian and gay activism», in *Social Movement Studies*, 19(1): 21-37.
- Bartha A., Boda Z. and Szikra D. (2020), «When populist leaders govern: Conceptualising populism in policy making», in *Politics and Governance*, 8(3): 71-81.
- Benoist L. (2026), «'I don't need climate change to be an ecologist'. far right ecological activism or when climate (almost) doesn't matter», in *Società Mutamento Politica*, 17(3): 145-156.
- Biard B., Bernhard L. and Betz H.G. (Eds.) (2019), *Do they make a difference?: The policy influence of radical right populist parties in Western Europe*, ECPR Press.
- Biswas T. and Mattheis N. (2022), «Strikingly educational: A childist perspective on children's civil disobedience for climate justice», in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 54(2): 145-157.
- Böhmelt T. (2021), «Populism and environmental performance», in *Global Environmental Politics*, 21(3): 97-123.
- Buzogány A. and Mohamad-Klotzbach C. (2021), «Populism and nature-the nature of populism: New perspectives on the relationship between populism, climate change, and nature protection», in *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 15: 155-164.
- Caiani M. and Císař O. (Eds.) (2019), *Radical right movement parties in Europe*, Routledge.
- Caiani, M. and Della Porta, D. (2010), «Extreme Right and Populism A Frame Analysis of Extreme Right Wing Discourses in Italy and Germany», in *Reihe Politikwissenschaft Political Science Series*, 121: 1-24.
- Caiani M. and Di Cocco J. (2023), «Populism and emotions: a comparative study using Machine Learning», in *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, 53(3): 351-366.
- Caiani M. and Meardi G. (2022), «Populism in power and its socio-economic policies: An assessment of European evidence», in *Stato e Mercato*, 125: 204-223.
- Caiani M. and Padoan E. (2020), «Populism and the (Italian) crisis: The voters and the context», in *Politics*, 41(3): 334-350.
- Caiani, M. and Pennucci, N. (2026), Far-Right Climate Skepticism Across Europe. In: Caiani, M., Solinas, M. and Trenz, H.J. (eds.), *Conspiracism and political conflict*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 261-287
- Caiani, M. and Pennucci, N. (2026). «Far-right climate skepticism across Europe: The transnationalization of narratives?», in *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 169-182.
- Caiani M., Solinas M. and Trenz H. J. (Eds.) (2026), *Conspiracism and political conflict*, Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/book/9783032139320>

- Cherp A., Vinichenko V., Jewell J., Suzuki M., and Antal M. (2017), «Comparing electricity transitions: A historical analysis of nuclear, wind and solar power in Germany and Japan», in *Energy Policy*, 101: 612-628.
- Coufal L. (2026). «Drill, baby, drill. How misogynist and far right narratives are connected to issues of environmentalism», in *Società Mutamento Politica*, 17(3): 201-214.
- Criado H. and Herreros F. (2007), «Political support: Taking into account the institutional context», in *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(12): 1511-1532.
- de Lange S. L. and Art D. (2011), «Fortuyn versus Wilders: An agency-based approach to radical right party building», in *West European Politics*, 34(6): 1229-1249.
- della Porta D. and Diani M. (2006), *Social movements: An introduction* (2nd ed.), Blackwell.
- della Porta D. and Rucht D. (2002), «The dynamics of environmental campaigns», in *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 7(1): 1-14.
- della Porta D., Fernández J., Kouki H. and Mosca L. (2017), *Movement parties against austerity*, Polity Press.
- Domorenok E. and Prontera A. (2021), «Governing by enabling in multilevel systems: Capacity building and local climate action in the European Union», in *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 59(6): 1475-1494.
- Duijndam S. and van Beukering P. (2021), «Understanding public concern about climate change in Europe, 2008–2017: The influence of economic factors and right-wing populism», in *Climate Policy*, 21(3): 353-367.
- Eberl J. M., Huber R. A. and Greussing E. (2021), «From populism to the “pandemic”: Why populists believe in COVID-19 conspiracies», in *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 31(Supl): 272-284.
- Elçi E. (2022), «Göçmenlere karşı tutumların parti tercihlerine etkisi: Türkiye örneği», in *İstanbul Ticaret Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 21(Özel Sayı): 46-73.
- EU News (2024), <https://www.eunews.it/en/2024/06/03/farmers-protests-exploited-to-spread-fake-news-about-eu-climate-policy-study-nails-european-far-right/>.
- Eyerman R. and Jamison A. (1991), *Social movements: A cognitive approach*, Penn State Press.
- Farstad F. M. (2018), «What explains variation in parties' climate change salience?», in *Party Politics*, 24(6): 698-707.
- Figulová A. and Vicenová R. (2024), «Nativist framing of energy issues in times of crises across the Slovak political spectrum», in *EU Energy and Climate Policy after COVID-19 and the Invasion of Ukraine* (pp. 211-231). Routledge.
- Forchtner B. (2019), «Climate change and the far right», in *WIREs Climate Change*, 10(5): e604.
- Forchtner B. and Lubarda B. (2023), «Scepticisms and beyond? A comprehensive portrait of climate change communication by the far right in the European Parliament», in *Environmental Politics*, 32(1): 43-68.
- Forchtner B., Kroneder A. and Wetzel D. (2018), «Being skeptical? Exploring far-right climate-change communication in Germany», in *Environmental Communication*, 12(5): 589-604.
- Gemenis K., Katsanidou A. and Vasilopoulou S. (2012, April 12-15), *The politics of anti-environmentalism: Positional issue framing by the European radical right* [Paper presentation], Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference 2012, Chicago, IL, United States.
- Gooch A. and Huber G. A. (2020), «How issue positions affect candidate performance: Experiments comparing campaign donors and the mass public», in *Political Behavior*, 42: 531-556.
- Guerra N. (2026), «Ecofascism's dual legacy, local revolts and imperial dreams in Italy», in *Società Mutamento Politica*, 17(33): 183-199.
- Hanusch F. and Meisch S. (2022), «The temporal cleavage: The case of populist retrotopia vs. climate emergency», in *Environmental Politics*, 31(5): 883-903.
- Henig D. and Knight D. M. (2023), «Polycrisis: Prompts for an emerging worldview», in *Anthropology Today*, 39(2): 3-6.
- Hughes B., Jones D. and Amarasingam A. (2022), «Ecofascism: An examination of the far-right/ecology nexus in the online space», in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 34(5): 997-1023.
- Lawrence M., Janzwood S. and Homer-Dixon T. (2022), *What is a global polycrisis?* (Discussion Paper v2), Cascade Institute. <https://cascadeinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/What-is-a-global-polycrisis-v2.pdf>
- Leininger A. and Meijers M. J. (2021), «Do populist parties increase voter turnout? Evidence from over 40 years of electoral history in 31 European democracies», in *Political Studies*, 69(3): 665-685.
- Lockwood, M. (2018). Right-wing populism and the climate change agenda: Exploring the linkages. *Environmental Politics*, 27(4): 712-732. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2018.1458411>
- Lubarda B. (2020), «Beyond ecofascism? Far-right ecology (FRE) as a framework for future inquiries», in *Environmental Values*, 29(6): 713-732.

- Lubarda B. (2023), «The murky world of ideologies: The (un)troubling overlaps in visual communication between Hungarian greens and far-right ecologists», in *Visualising far-right environments*. Manchester University Press.
- Lubarda B. (2024), *Far-right ecologism: Environmental politics and the far right in Hungary and Poland*, Routledge.
- Maciejewska M. (2024), «Fare-free public transport: a gender-neutral or gender-focused policy?», in *Handbook Of Gender And Mobilities*, 400-414.
- Mancosu M., Biancalana C., Ladini R., Bertero A. (2026). «Populist attitudes, ideology and climate change beliefs, a comparative analysis of six european countries», in *SocietàMutamentoPolitica*, 17(3): 117-130.
- Mannoni E. (2025), «Pro-environmental voting: What it is, how to measure it, and its determinants among contemporary European voters», in *Parliamentary Affairs*, 78(1): 77-96.
- Massarella K., Nygren A., Fletcher R., Büscher B., Kiwango W.A., Komi S., Krauss J. E., Mabele M. B., McInturff A., Sandroni L. T., Alagona P. S., Brockington D., Coates R., Duffy R., Ferraz K. M. P. M. B., Koot S., Marchini S. and Percequillo A. R. (2021), «Transformation beyond conservation: How critical social science can contribute to a radical new agenda in biodiversity conservation», in *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 49: 79-87.
- McCright A.M. and Dunlap R.E. (2013), «Bringing ideology in: The conservative white male effect on worry about environmental problems in the USA», in *Journal of Risk Research*, 16(2): 211-226.
- Mierzejewski-Voznyak M. (2018), «The radical right in post-Soviet Ukraine», in J. Rydgren (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the radical right*, Oxford University Press, (pp. 611-629).
- Mudde C. (2019), *The far right today*, Polity Press.
- Newtral & Science Feedback (2024), *A Fertile Ground for Disinformation: From Spreading Climate Change Misinformation to Undermining Climate Action: How the Farmers' Protest Were Used to Influence Audiences* 4.06.2024)
- Offe C. (1985), *Disorganized capitalism: Contemporary transformations of work and politics*, MIT Press.
- Schaller S. and Carius A. (2019), *Convenient truths: Mapping climate agendas of right-wing populist parties in Europe*, adelphi.
- Scheidel A., Del Bene D., Liu J., Navas G., Mingorría S., Demaria F., Avila S., Roy B., Ertör I., Temper L. and Martínez-Alier J. (2020), «Environmental conflicts and defenders: A global overview», in *Global Environmental Change*, 63: 102-104.
- Tarrow S. (2021), *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics* (4th ed.), Cambridge University Press.
- Temper L., Avila S., Del Bene D., Leer J., Beling J., Walter M., Gerber J. F., Alonso-Fradejas C., Boyra, F. and Martínez-Alier J. (2020), «Movements shaping climate futures: A systematic mapping of protests against fossil fuel and low-carbon energy projects», in *Environmental Research Letters*, 15(12): 123004.
- Tosun J. and Debus M. (2022), «Right-wing populist parties and environmental politics: Insights from the Austrian Freedom Party's support for the glyphosate ban», in *Trajectories in Environmental Politics*, Routledge.
- Vicedo-Cabrera A. M., Scovronick N., Sera F. et al. (2021), «The burden of heat-related mortality attributable to recent human-induced climate change», in *Nature Climate Change*, 11: 492-500.
- Wallis H. e Loy L. S. (2021), «What drives pro-environmental activism of young people? A survey study on the Fridays For Future movement», in *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 74: 101581.
- Winter K. (2026), «An obstacle to sustainability transformation? How conspiracy beliefs shape climate (in) action», in *SocietàMutamentoPolitica*, 17(3): 131-144.
- Wondreys J. and Mudde C. (2023), «Victims of the pandemic? European far-right parties and COVID-19», in *Nationalities Papers*, 51(1): 91-109.
- Žuk P. and Žuk P. (2024), «Ecology for the rich? Class aspects of the green transition and the threat of right-wing populism as a reaction to its costs in Poland», in *Science, Practice and Policy* 20(1): 2351231.
- Zulianello M. (2020), «Varieties of populist parties and party systems in Europe: From state-of-the-art to the application of a novel classification scheme to 66 parties in 33 countries», in *Government and Opposition*, 55(2): 327-347.



Citation: Mancosu, M., Biancalana, C., Ladini, R. & Bertero, A. (2026). Populist Attitudes, Ideology, and Climate Change Beliefs: A Comparative Analysis of Six European Countries. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 117-130. doi: 10.36253/smp-16840

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Populist Attitudes, Ideology, and Climate Change Beliefs: A Comparative Analysis of Six European Countries

MORENO MANCOSU^{1*}, CECILIA BIANCALANA¹, RICCARDO LADINI², ARTURO BERTERO³

¹ University of Turin, Italy

² eCampus University, Italy

³ University of Milan, Italy

E-mail: moreno.mancosu@unito.it; cecilia.biancalana@unito.it; riccardo.ladini1@gmail.com; arturo.bertero@unimi.it

*Corresponding author

Abstract. Existing literature highlights ideology as a key factor in shaping public opinion on climate change. Overall, left-wing individuals are more likely to believe in climate change and express concern about it than their right-wing counterparts. Moreover, in recent years, research has increasingly focused on the role of (right-wing) populism and nationalism, showing that individuals with populist and nationalist attitudes are less likely to believe in human-induced climate change and more likely to oppose environmental protection and fossil fuel taxes. However, the interaction between populist attitudes and ideological orientation remains partially underexplored. Does the relationship between populist attitudes and belief in the anthropogenic nature of climate change vary depending on individuals' ideology? This study provides novel and up-to date evidence to the research question, drawing on an original and recent large-N comparative survey (n~15,000) conducted after the 2024 European elections and covering six European countries (Italy, France, Poland, Germany, Sweden, and Spain). Our results confirm that right-wing identification is substantially associated with lower levels of belief in the anthropogenic climate change. Moreover, populist attitudes are associated with lower levels of belief in anthropogenic climate change across the ideological spectrum, and their impact is especially strong among left-wing individuals. These patterns vary cross-nationally, with Germany and Sweden displaying stronger associations, likely due to the greater politicization of climate issues in such contexts.

Keywords: populism, ideology, climate change beliefs, comparative.

1. INTRODUCTION

The XXI century has brought forth significant global challenges, with climate change standing out among the most pressing (IPCC 2023). The scientific community broadly agrees that human activities are the primary drivers of this phenomenon and stresses the urgent need for action by gov-

ernments and policymakers to tackle the escalating environmental crisis posed by global warming (Lynn and Peeva 2021). However, this consensus does not uniformly translate into elite positions and public opinion attitudes, which in Western societies tend to be polarized (Birch 2020). One of the most consistent predictors of public attitudes toward climate change and climate policies in Western advanced capitalist democracies is indeed political orientation: citizens identifying with the left are more likely to report pro-climate views (in terms of belief, perceived seriousness and worry, and support for climate policies) than do their counterparts on the right (Hornsey *et al.* 2016; McCright *et al.* 2016; Lewis *et al.* 2019; Poortinga *et al.* 2019; Fisher *et al.* 2022). Climate change is indeed considered as a positional issue, since it implies the unique combination of altruistic imperative and restructuring of the economy (Farstad 2018).

Together with the rising social consequences of climate change, the XXI century has been characterized by the rising consensus of populist parties in Europe (Mudde 2021). Several studies have analyzed the relationship between populism sentiments, especially in its right-wing version, and climate change beliefs. We know that right-wing populist parties tend to adopt denialist or ambiguous positions on climate change (Lockwood 2018) and express hostility toward policies aimed at reducing emissions (Lockwood and Lockwood 2022). Given that populism is characterized by anti-elitism, and that the effects of climate change are not immediately visible, the issue may be perceived by populists as a concern of a liberal, cosmopolitan elite influenced by powerful global interests – an attitude that often intersects with conspiratorial thinking (Uscinski *et al.* 2017). Moreover, climate change is a complex issue that challenges the populist aspiration to provide simple and direct solutions, which may further contribute to climate change denial.

Additionally, right-wing populist parties use to view the ecological transition as a threat to the economic system, and then to employment. According to Lockwood (2018), these parties tend to attract supporters who have been “left behind” by globalization and who are disproportionately affected by its negative consequences – including climate policies, which may lead to job losses in highly polluting industries. Consequently, it has been demonstrated that, among the public, populist attitudes influence opinions toward climate change (Huber 2020). Individuals who exhibit strong populist attitudes or vote for populist parties (see Crulli and Zulianello 2025) are indeed less likely to believe in human-induced climate change and more likely to oppose environmental protection.

Nonetheless, little is known about whether populist attitudes, *per se*, impact climate change attitudes and, at the same time, have differentiated effects depending on left-right orientation. In this regard, the only empirical contribution comes from Huber (2020), who show that in the UK populist attitudes are associated with lower belief in human-induced climate change and support for environmental protection, net of left-right ideology. Furthermore, the effect of populist attitudes did not substantially vary by left-right orientation.

This study draws on an original and recent large-N comparative survey (approximately 15,000 respondents) conducted after the 2024 European elections, covering six European countries (Italy, France, Poland, Germany, Sweden, and Spain) to explore the extent to which individuals with specific ideological and populist leanings are inclined to endorse views that minimize or deny the significance of climate change. Building on previous research, we hypothesize that individuals holding right-wing ideological beliefs (Hornsey *et al.* 2016) and populist attitudes (Huber 2020) are more likely to downplay or deny the reality and urgency of climate change.

Furthermore, we aim to investigate the interaction between populism and ideology: what happens when an individual is both right-wing and populist? Does the combination of these two traits have a multiplicative effect on climate change uncertainty and denial? Or, conversely, should right-wing ideology and populism be treated as distinct and independent dimensions, each exerting its own influence on climate attitudes?

Finally, the third objective of this study is to examine how this relationship unfolds across different countries. Specifically, we seek to determine whether the interaction pattern between populism, ideology, and attitudes toward climate change remains consistent across national contexts or varies depending on local political and cultural factors.

Our findings reveal that left-right political orientation influences climate attitudes as expected, with individuals on the right being more likely to exhibit lower belief in the anthropogenic climate change. Overall, populist attitudes show a negative relationship with climate change beliefs, with higher populist attitudes associated with lower belief in the anthropogenic climate, though the relationship shows a substantial heterogeneity across contexts – many countries show no significant populist effect (see Kulin and Johansson-Seva 2024). When left-right orientation and populist attitudes are analyzed together and interacted, the results suggest that being on the right does not significantly amplify disbelief for populist individuals, as their disbelief remains high regardless of populism. Conversely, the

interaction reveals that populism has a stronger effect among left-leaning individuals, with notable differences in patterns across nations.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 *Attitudes towards climate change*

Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in scholarly interest in understanding how the public perceives global warming (Steg, 2023; Bogert *et al.*, 2024). Attitudes toward climate change are a multi-dimensional concept, encompassing several dimensions such as belief, threat, salience, responsibility, willingness to act and pay, and support for climate policies (Poortinga *et al.* 2019; Crawley *et al.* 2022; Kenny *et al.* 2024). The Belief Gateway Model (Van der Linden *et al.* 2015) integrates several dimensions of climate change attitudes, by explaining that consensus within the scientific community regarding the existence and origin of climate change reflects in higher perceived scientific consensus among the public which influences concerns, belief in climate change existence and causes. In turn, these factors are associated with support for climate policies.

Regarding climate change beliefs, literature has distinguished between belief in the rising of global temperature (trend), the human activity as its main cause (attribution), and the earth's consequences of global warming (Poortinga *et al.* 2019). However, researchers often refer to climate change beliefs as a single construct by combining belief in the existence of global warming and its anthropogenic origin, with the aim of distinguishing between belief, uncertainty and denial (Lübke 2021; Biancalana and Ladini 2024). While the prevalence of denial is residual across Europe, a large portion of the public remains uncertain about the anthropogenic nature of climate change (according to European Social Survey 11 data, ranging between 32% and 54% in European countries). Since belief in human-induced climate change is consequential to support for adaptation and mitigation policies, this figure becomes particularly significant.

2.2 *The determinants of climate change attitudes: the role of ideology and populism*

Political orientation is one of the most consistent predictors of environmental beliefs, attitudes, and policy preferences in advanced Western capitalist democracies (McCright *et al.* 2016). In these contexts, individuals who identify with the political left are more likely

to express pro-climate views compared to those on the right (Hornsey *et al.* 2016; Poortinga *et al.* 2019). Research suggests that these differences are largely elite-driven, as political leaders, media, and party discourses shape public opinion on climate change (Carmichael and Brulle 2017). Right-wing elites have often politicized climate issues by framing them as threats to economic freedom, national sovereignty, or cultural identity, reinforcing disbelief among their supporters.

This pattern can be explained by the ideological foundations of conservatism. Right-wing ideology tends to resist interventions aimed at addressing social and environmental problems associated with industrial capitalism, including climate change. Conservatives prioritize economic freedom, private property rights, and free markets, which makes them more likely to defend the legitimacy of the existing economic system and oppose actors –such as scientists and environmental movements– that advocate for government intervention to address its negative externalities (McCright 2016). Additionally, conservatives tend to uphold the moral authority of the free market and perceive government regulations, such as taxes and environmental policies, as an unwarranted intrusion (Nilsson and Jost 2016). This ideological stance may contribute to a reduced acknowledgment of environmental problems and lower levels of concern about climate change (Lakoff 2010). In contrast, left-wing elites tend to emphasize the urgency of climate action and the need for government intervention, aligning their constituencies with pro-climate positions. Left-wing political values, which emphasize state intervention and regulatory measures –even at the expense of economic freedoms and property rights– align more naturally with stronger concern for climate change and support for policies aimed at environmental protection.

However, while this ideological divide is well-documented in advanced capitalist democracies, and particularly prominent in the United States and other Anglophone countries, the same pattern does not necessarily hold in other political contexts, particularly in post-communist countries (see Birch 2020; Lewis *et al.* 2019; Caldwell *et al.* 2024). In Eastern Europe, the relationship between political orientation and climate change attitudes appears weaker, likely due to the distinct historical and political trajectories of these countries, shaped by the legacy of communism and the specific dynamics of party competition (Poortinga *et al.* 2019).

While the relationship between left-right ideology and climate change beliefs is more consolidated, both the theoretical and empirical level, the same does not apply when considering populist attitudes as an explanatory factor. Among the three dimensions of populism, namely,

anti-elitism, people-centrism and good versus evil view of politics (Castanho-Silva *et al.* 2017), only the first one is theoretically related with climate change beliefs (Huber 2020). First, it fosters disbelief in climate change, often portraying it as a concern of a liberal, cosmopolitan elite advancing a globalist agenda. Given that climate change is a complex and long-term issue with effects that are not always immediately visible, populists may reject it as a narrative imposed by powerful interests rather than a pressing problem. This perception frequently intersects with conspiratorial attitudes (Castanho Silva *et al.* 2017), reinforcing uncertainty and denial toward climate policies (Uscinski *et al.* 2017). Additionally, populism often fosters distrust of scientific expertise, portraying scientists, environmental activists, and international organizations as part of an elite seeking to impose regulations that threaten people's interests (Lockwood 2018; Eslen-Ziya and Giorgi 2022). Populist positions may also reflect in disapproval of those corporate elites aiming at obtaining economic advantages from the green transition (Sapinski 2015). However, a cross-national study using European Social Survey 2016/2017 data (round 8) shows that anti-elitism is negatively associated with support for climate policies only in some countries, net from other ideological variables, and the same applies for people-centrism (Kulin and Johansson-Seva 2024).

So far, literature has devoted specific attention in studying the relationship between right-wing populism and climate change belief. Right-wing populist parties tend to adopt ambiguous or openly skeptical positions on climate change (Lockwood 2018) and frequently oppose environmental and energy policies aimed at reducing emissions (Lockwood and Lockwood 2022). The relationship between right-wing populism and climate change can be understood through two main explanations: an ideological and structuralist one (Lockwood 2018). The former focuses on the central role of nationalism in right-wing populism, which emphasizes nature, landscape, and territory as part of the national heritage. Rather than engaging with climate change as a global issue requiring coordinated action, right-wing populists often frame environmental concerns through a nativist lens, portraying the environment as a resource to be protected from external influences (Forchtner & Kølvråa 2015; Kulin *et al.* 2021; Kulin and Johansson-Seva 2024). Spoon and Williams (2023) argue that for right-wing populists, environmental protection is embedded within a broader ideology of safeguarding the nation and its native population, a framework they define as "environmental chauvinism".

According to the structuralist explanation, right-wing populists relate climate policies to broader griev-

ances about globalization and economic decline. The ecological transition is often perceived by right-wing populists as a threat to employment, particularly in industrial sectors heavily relying on fossil fuels and heavy manufacturing. Right-wing populist parties frequently attract voters who have been (or perceive themselves as) "left behind" by globalization and who experience climate policies as an additional burden, leading to job losses in polluting sectors (Lockwood 2018). A recent study by Forchtner and Lubarda (2023) further suggests that right-wing populists frame economic well-being as a priority over environmental concerns, arguing that climate policies should not jeopardize national prosperity.

Going beyond right-wing populism, one could argue that populism per se is not inherently tied to climate uncertainty and denial or opposition to environmental policies. Some authors, indeed, argue that left-wing populists play the anti-elitist card differently when compared to right-wing ones (Huber *et al.* 2021; Chazel and Dain 2024). Huber and colleagues (2021) show that left-wing populists parties rely on populist discourses to demand more ambitious climate and energy policy measures. Analyzing the case of La France Insoumise, Chazel and Dain (2024) show that left-wing populists point out that the economic elite contributes to the climate crisis through harmful practices and profit-driven decisions, while also blaming the political elite for failing to act on climate change and for prioritizing corporate interests over environmental protection. As regards science, left-wing populists tend to emphasize the importance of science and take a broad, global view of environmental issues. However, they are also critical of how scientific knowledge is produced and advocate for more inclusive, participatory approaches that incorporate local knowledge alongside scientific expertise (Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach 2022). Overall, while right-wing populists tend to resist climate policies, often framing them as threats to national sovereignty, left-wing populists can incorporate environmental concerns into their broader critique of neoliberalism and economic inequality.

Also, left-wing populists may approach the economic implications of climate policies differently from right-wing ones. Chazel and Dain (2024), indeed, highlight how left-wing populists can incorporate environmental concerns into their broader vision of social justice, positioning themselves as defenders of the people against both economic elites and the environmental consequences of capitalism, identified as responsible for the environmental crisis. Given the differences between right-wing and left-wing populism, it is important to examine how the interaction between ideology and pop-

ulism shapes attitudes toward climate change. While the literature has documented the link between populism and climate belief, very few studies have investigated whether and how populism operates differently depending on ideological positioning. To our knowledge, the only study that explicitly explores this interaction at the public opinion level is Huber (2020), which demonstrates that populism constitutes an independent dimension of political orientation that intersects with, but is not reducible to, left-right ideological positioning. Using data from the 2015 British Election Study, he finds that populist attitudes are negatively associated with climate belief and support to environmental protection, even when controlling for partisanship and self-reported ideological placement. This suggests that populism, through its rejection of elites and expertise, contributes to climate uncertainty and denial independently of traditional ideological divides¹. His findings indicate that while populist individuals, both on the left and the right, are more likely to exhibit climate disbelief, there is no clear interaction effect between populism and political ideology. In other words, populism appears to be a key determinant of climate belief across the ideological spectrum, rather than one that interacts significantly with left-right political orientation.

This study builds on Huber's (2020) work by providing empirical evidence from a comparative perspective, using up-to-date data collected in a period when climate change has become a more salient and polarized issue in the European context (Caldwell *et al.* 2024; Ladini and Biancalana 2025). Expanding the scope of analysis to other European contexts may yield additional insights into the interplay between ideology and populism. Prior research highlights that the impact of right-wing populist attitudes on climate policy preferences varies across countries, with nationalism and nativism playing a stronger role in some contexts than others (Kulin, Johansson Sevå & Dunlap 2021). This underscores the need for a cross-national approach that considers contextual differences in how populism and ideology shape climate belief.

2.3 Hypotheses and research questions

This article adopts a demand-side approach that centers on the ideological determinants of climate change attitudes – with special reference to climate

change belief. In other words, rather than focusing on elite discourses, policy designs, or institutional arrangements, the emphasis here is on how individual-level predispositions – particularly ideological self-placement and populist orientations – shape climate change views. In line with much of the existing literature, we posit that individuals who place themselves on the right of the ideological spectrum will be less likely to believe in the anthropogenic climate change (Hp1). Similarly, considering the strong association between populism and anti-elite and anti-expert positions, we hypothesize that populist attitudes will also be negatively associated with climate change belief (Hp2).

While prior research in this area has yielded robust evidence of these relationships, most of it (especially regarding populist attitudes) has focused on single-country contexts, leaving open the question of whether these patterns are consistent across diverse national settings. Consequently, the first two research questions aim to address these patterns are consistent across diverse national settings. This is particularly relevant when analysing the relationship between populist attitudes and climate change beliefs, as extant research has focused on single-country contexts. Therefore, RQ1 asks whether the relationship between right-wing self-placement and climate change belief (H1) holds across all the countries under consideration. RQ2, by the same token, explores whether the relationship between populism and climate change beliefs (H2) is similarly widespread and robust.

Although studies such as Huber (2020) suggest that the relationship between populist attitudes and climate change beliefs does not substantially vary by left-right orientation, we argue that the interplay between these two dimensions remains underexplored and potentially context-dependent. Understanding this interaction is theoretically relevant because ideological orientations and populist attitudes capture distinct yet potentially overlapping sources of political reasoning. While right-wing ideology is often associated with economic conservatism and opposition to state intervention, populist attitudes reflect anti-elitism and distrust in scientific and political institutions. These mechanisms could reinforce one another, leading to particularly high levels of climate change denial among individuals who are both right-wing and populist. However, given the limited empirical evidence on whether and how such an interaction occurs, we formulate a third research question rather than a formal hypothesis (RQ3): Does the interaction between populist attitudes and left-right ideological self-placement influence climate change beliefs, and does this pattern vary across countries?

Moreover, the relationship between these factors may vary across national contexts, making it crucial to

¹ Huber and colleagues (2022) identify two main mechanisms through which populism influences climate skepticism: distrust in political institutions and skepticism toward science. Populists tend to distrust institutions responsible for climate policy and perceive climate scientists as part of an elite, leading them to reject the scientific consensus.

explore their interaction rather than assuming uniform additive effects. RQ4, therefore, examines whether this hypothesized interactive effect remains stable or differs across countries.

3. DATA AND METHODS

3.1 Data and contexts

This research employs data coming from an extensive opt-in online survey involving approximately 15,000 respondents, with around 2,500 participants drawn from each of six European nations: Spain, France, Italy, Poland, Germany, and Sweden. The samples reproduce socio-demographic distribution of the countries' population². These countries were selected for their demographic significance and their prominent roles within the European Union, collectively representing nearly 70% of the EU's population. Data collection was conducted shortly after the June 2024 European elections in five of the countries, capturing immediate public attitudes and voting behaviors in the post-election period. For France, data were gathered following the legislative elections, held one month after the European elections, to account for the specific national political timeline. This strategic timing ensures that the survey captures the prevailing political climate and reflects voter sentiments closely linked to recent electoral events, providing a nuanced and contemporaneous view of public opinion³.

Moreover, the contexts substantially differ in terms of the salience of the climate change issue among the public. According to Eurobarometer data collected in Spring 2024 (April/May, Standard Eurobarometer 101), "the environment and climate change" is considered one of the two most important issues facing the European Union and the respective countries by 49% and 35% of Swedish respondents, respectively. The issue is considered far less salient in other countries involved in the study. Regarding the issues facing the European Union, "the environment and climate change" ranks among the two most important issues for 19% (12% at the country level) of French respondents, 17% (18%) of Germans,

14% (11%) of Italians, 11% (8%) of Spaniards, and 10% (9%) of Poles.

Such differences could reflect into cross-country differences in the role of populist attitudes and ideological orientations, and their interplay, in explaining climate change belief. Indeed, previous research has argued out that the relationship between political orientation and climate change attitudes is stronger in contexts characterized by higher issue salience (McCright *et al.* 2016; Ladini and Biancalana 2025). In such contexts, indeed, there is higher polarization on the climate change issue at the elite level which, in turn, translates in larger difference in climate change attitudes among people with different political orientations.

3.2 Dependent variable

The dependent variable of the study is climate change belief. The original variable assesses beliefs about the causes of global climate change, with the following answer categories⁴: "The global climate has not changed", "the global climate has changed mainly due to natural processes", "the global climate has changed due to both natural processes and human activity, in equal measure", "the global climate has changed mainly due to human activity"). Considering the low prevalence of denialist positions and our aim to distinguish between those who believe in anthropogenic climate change and those expressing uncertainty or denial, we decided to simplify the analyses, by recoding the original variable into a binary variable (1 = human attribution of climate change; 0 = all other responses)⁵.

3.3 Independent and control variables

The independent variables for this study are left-right ideological self-placement and the Akkerman populist attitudes scale (Akkerman *et al.*, 2014). The left-right scale is a widely used measure of ideological orientation, ranging from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). Respondents who were unable or unwilling to position themselves on this scale were excluded from the analyses. The Akkerman scale (Akkerman *et al.*, 2014) is one of the

² A descriptive overview of the dependent variable and of all covariates used in the analyses, broken down by country (N, minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation), is provided in Supplementary Material - Table A3.

³ The survey was conducted as part of the SUSPECTS project that focuses on the prevalence and impact of conspiracy theories in Europe. The CAWI data were materially collected by the polling firm Dynata. While the project has a broader scope, the data relevant to this study pertain specifically to attitudes toward climate change and political affiliations.

⁴ The wording and answer categories of the original variables are analogous to those used in international survey projects, such as the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP).

⁵ As an additional robustness check, we also included an alternative specification of the models that include, as dependent variable, the original one, modeled by means of a set of ordered logit models. The models presented here and the ordered logit specification produce substantively equivalent results (see Appendix 1 – Table A2 of the Supplemental Material).

most consolidated scales measuring populist attitudes (Castanho-Silva *et al.* 2020). It is a standardized tool designed to measure populist attitudes through six specific items (in the original scale the sixth item does not exist, but other versions of the scale use it, see Hameleers *et al.*, 2017). These items assess the degree to which individuals hold populist views, emphasizing themes such as the primacy of the people, distrust in traditional political institutions, and skepticism toward elites, including politicians and journalists. Given its high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.77$), we computed its sum score (which we further normalized into a 0-10 scale).

The logistic regression control for gender, age, educational attainment (categorized into primary, secondary, and tertiary education), political interest (4-point scale, considered as cardinal variable in the analysis), and country.

The analytical sample ($N = 12,862$) excludes respondents who did not place themselves on the left-right scale, with country-level non-placement rates ranging from approximately 1.9% (Sweden) to 18.2% (Spain). As a robustness check, we re-estimated all four models with left-right recoded as a four-category variable (Left, Center, Right, and a separate category for non-placed respondents), which raises the sample to $N = 13,951$. The substantive results are unchanged, with non-placed respondents consistently fall between Center and Right in terms of climate change acceptance, and the interaction patterns reproduce those reported in the main text (see full results in Appendix 1 – Supplementary Material, especially Figures A2b, A3b, and A4).

3.4 Models

We fit four logistic models to examine the relationships between political affiliations and climate change beliefs, incorporating both main effects and interaction terms (see Appendix 1, Table A1 for the coefficients' table). Model 1 assesses the net effects of populist attitudes and ideological self-placement on climate change attitudes, without including any interaction terms. This model directly tests H1 and H2, focusing on whether populism and left-right ideology independently influence belief in the anthropogenic climate change.

Model 2 introduces two two-way interaction terms: one between country and populism and another between country and left-right ideology. This approach allows us to investigate whether the coefficients of populism and ideology are consistent across all six countries or if there is heterogeneity across contexts. This model addresses RQ1 and RQ2, shedding light on potential country-specific dynamics.

Table 1. Average marginal effects for the control variables (M1).

	Marginal effect	S.E.
Gender (ref. Man)		
Woman	0.03 ***	(0.01)
Age	0.00 ***	(0.00)
Education (ref. primary)		
Secondary	0.02	(0.02)
Tertiary	0.03	(0.02)
Interest in politics	0.02 ***	(0.01)
Country (ref. Italy)		
France	0.01	(0.02)
Germany	-0.08 ***	(0.02)
Spain	-0.04 **	(0.01)
Poland	-0.14 ***	(0.01)
Sweden	-0.03 **	(0.01)

Model 3 examines the interaction between populist attitudes and left-right ideology, adding a layer of complexity to the analysis. By including this interaction term, the model evaluates whether the relationship between ideology and climate change belief is modified by the degree of populist attitudes, thus testing RQ3.

Finally, Model 4 incorporates a three-way interaction term between populism, left-right ideology, and country. This model addresses RQ4, exploring how the interplay of populism and ideology operates within different national contexts and whether this interaction exhibits unique patterns across the six countries.

All models are fitted with listwise deletion and incorporate the above-mentioned controls. To enhance the interpretability of the results, findings will be illustrated using predicted probabilities and average marginal effects⁶.

4. RESULTS

Before testing our hypotheses, we examined the average marginal effects (AME) of control variables, as displayed in Table 1. Gender appears to have a modest but significant effect, with women exhibiting slightly higher (and significant) levels of climate change belief compared to men (about 3 percentage points). Age also plays a role, with older individuals showing slightly higher belief in anthropogenic causes of climate change, although the effect is very small. Political interest demonstrates a similar trend, with more politically engaged respondents

⁶ Coefficients for all the models can be seen in Appendix 1 – Table A1 of the Supplemental Material

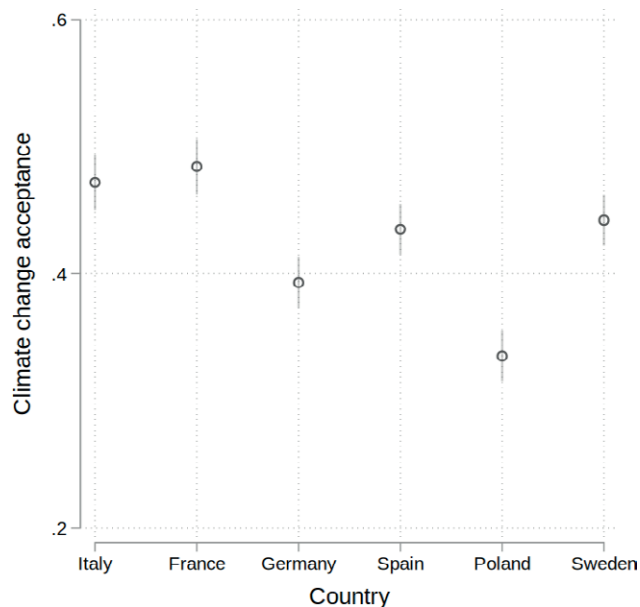


Figure 1. Climate change beliefs per country (M1).

being marginally less uncertain/denialist (2 percentage points at every additional interest level on average).

The observed differences in climate change belief across countries are illustrated in Figure 1, which presents the estimated probabilities of belief for each country. In line with extant empirical studies showing lower belief in anthropogenic climate change in Eastern European countries (Birch 2020; Lewis *et al.* 2019; Caldwell *et al.* 2024), Poland stands out as having the lowest levels, while Italy, France, and Spain show higher levels of belief overall. Sweden occupies an intermediate position, while Germany shows slightly higher prevalence of belief when compared to Poland⁷.

Passing on the hypotheses and research questions that emerged in the previous paragraph, Figure 2 illustrates the effects of populist attitudes and left-right ideological self-placement on climate change belief. Both effects are negative and statistically significant, indicating that higher levels of populism and a stronger right-wing orientation are associated with lower belief in human-induced climate change. Notably, the effect of left-right self-placement is stronger than that of populist attitudes, suggesting that ideological positioning has a more pronounced impact on skepticism compared

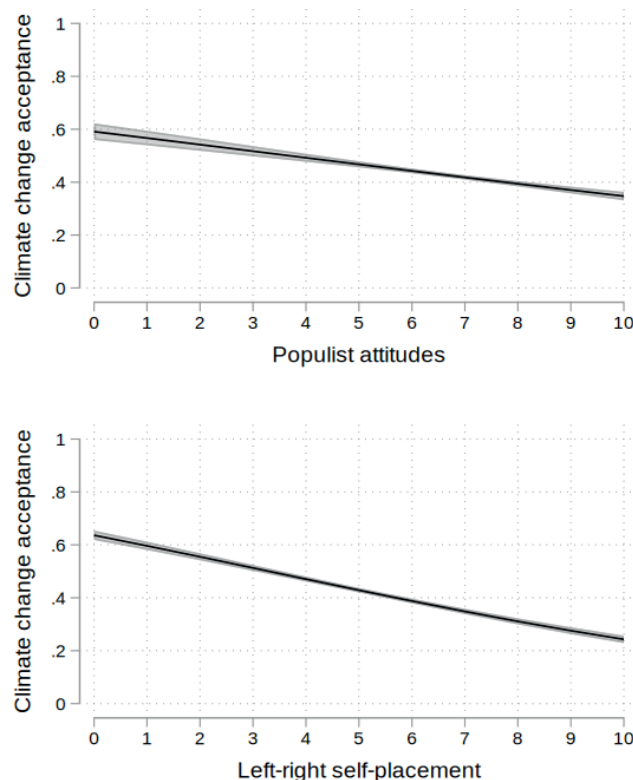


Figure 2. Populist attitudes and left-right self-placement effects on climate change beliefs (M1).

to populist beliefs (the predicted proportion of people believing in the anthropogenic climate change is equal to 60% among left-wingers against about 20% among right-wingers).

Figure 3 presents the average marginal effects (AME) of populist attitudes and left-right ideological self-placement on climate change belief, broken down by country. The results reveal a more nuanced picture when disaggregated by national context.

For left-right self-placement, the effects are largely consistent across the six countries, with a negative and significant association observed everywhere. The only exception is France, where the effect is smaller but statistically significant. This suggests that ideological positioning on the left-right spectrum influences climate change skepticism in a relatively uniform way across most of the countries analyzed.

The effects of populist attitudes (top panel of figure 3), however, are considerably weaker and more variable, as shown in Kulin and Johansson-Seva (2024). Populism appears to have a significant impact only in Germany and Sweden, two countries where environmental issues are more politicized, as we will discuss later. In the other countries - Italy, France, Spain, and Poland - the effects

⁷ Analogously, European Social Survey data collected in 2023/2024 show that the lowest prevalence of climate change belief was found in Poland (35%). The ranking of the other countries is slightly different when compared to the data here employed: Sweden reports the higher percentage of people believing in anthropogenic climate change (63%), followed by France (56%), Italy (53%), Spain (50%) and Germany (49%)

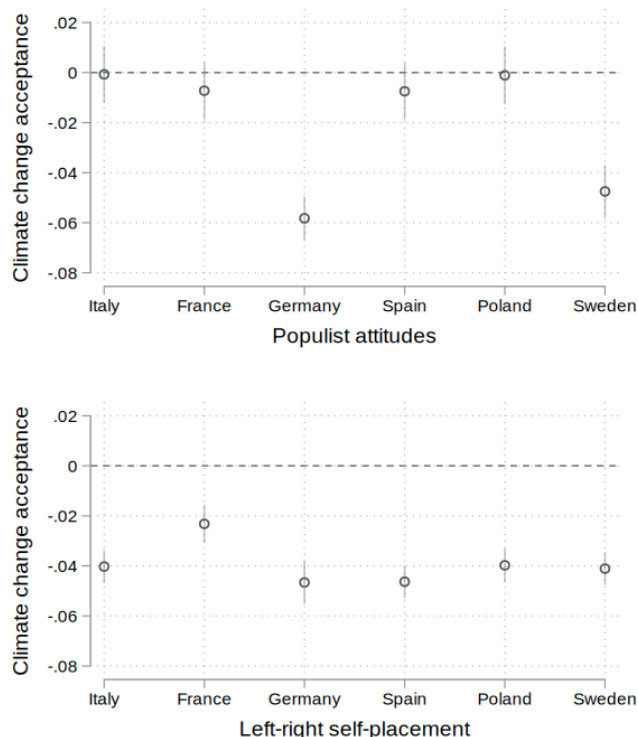


Figure 3. Populist attitudes and left-right self-placement effects on climate change beliefs (by country - M2).

of populist attitudes are not statistically significant once left-right ideology and the other controls are accounted for. This pattern is directly reflected in the coefficients of Model 2 (Table A1 - Supplementary material): the main effect of populism is essentially zero and non-significant, while the country-by-populism interactions are negative and significant only for Germany and Sweden. Populism is therefore associated with lower acceptance of anthropogenic climate change only in these two contexts, and is statistically indistinguishable from zero elsewhere.

Figure 4 focuses on the interaction between populist attitudes and left-right ideology, overall, revealing a more complex dynamic than initially hypothesized. While we expected an overall multiplicative effect, where right-wing individuals with high levels of populist attitudes would exhibit extremely low levels of anthropogenic climate change belief, the results partially disprove RQ3. Instead, the dominant factor appears to be ideology, with a stark divergence between those on the far right and far left.

For far-right individuals, belief in anthropogenic climate change remains consistently low, regardless of their level of populist attitudes. This suggests that, for these individuals, climate change belief is primarily driven by ideological positioning rather than populist beliefs. In

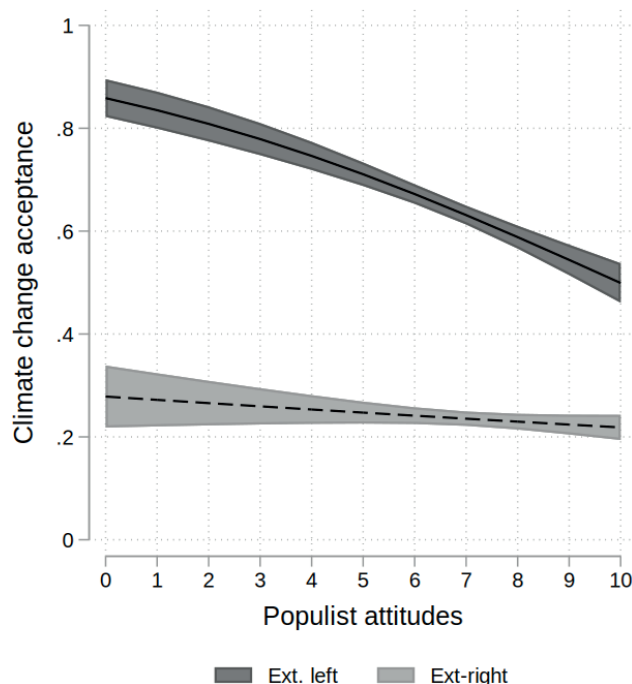


Figure 4. The interaction between populist attitudes and left-right self-placement (M3).

the discussion and conclusions, we will propose possible explanations of this finding. In contrast, among those on the far left, populist attitudes play a more relevant role. Individuals with low levels of populist attitudes exhibit very high levels of belief, but as populist attitudes increase, the percentage of uncertain/denial positions increases. This points to a distinct mechanism at work for the left, where populist attitudes—plausibly mostly driven by anti-elitism—correlates with a greater rejection of the scientific consensus on climate change. In Model 3 (Table A1, Supplementary Material), this corresponds to a positive and significant populism-by-ideology interaction, meaning that the negative association between populist attitudes and acceptance of anthropogenic climate change is strongest among left-leaning respondents and progressively weakens—rather than strengthens—as respondents move toward the right of the ideological spectrum. The multiplicative effect we initially hypothesized between right-wing positioning and populist attitudes is therefore not supported by the data.

These findings highlight two divergent processes: for the far right, climate change belief appears to be largely insulated from other factors due to the issue's deep entrenchment in ideological discourse. For the far left, however, populism interacts with ideological positioning to influence attitudes, suggesting a more conditional relationship between these variables.

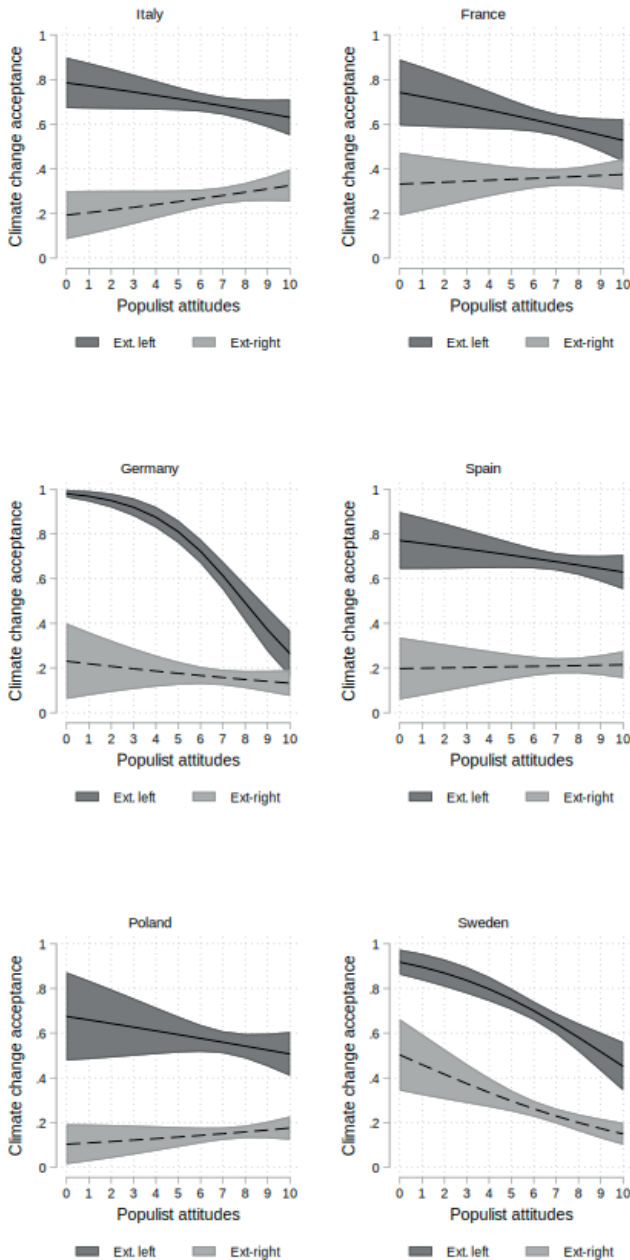


Figure 5. The interaction between populist attitudes and left-right self-placement (per country - M4).

Figure 5 provides result for a three-way interaction between populist attitudes, left-right ideology, and national context, addressing RQ4. The overall pattern observed previously generally holds across countries, with varying degrees of strength. However, notable exceptions emerge, particularly in Germany and Sweden, where the dynamics deviate from the broader trend.

In Germany, the relationship between populism, ideology, and climate belief appears to show a form of

convergence. As populist attitudes increase, the gap in belief between individuals on the far left and far right diminishes, suggesting that populism reduces ideological polarization on this issue.

In Sweden, as well, populism seems to be a strong driver of climate skepticism. While there is still a baseline difference between the far left and far right, populist attitudes significantly amplify skepticism across the ideological spectrum. This suggests that, in the Swedish context, populism attitudes play a crucial role, in shaping attitudes toward climate change, independent conditional from left-right ideology.

These patterns are mirrored in Model 4 (Supplementary Table A1). The overall populism-by-ideology interaction estimated in Model 3 is broadly similar across countries: most three-way terms do not reach statistical significance, indicating that cross-national variation in the interaction itself is limited and partly noisy. The main exception is Germany, where the Germany $\times$ Left-right $\times$ Populism coefficient is significant and points to a slightly steeper attenuation of the populism slope as respondents move rightward - consistent with the very flat far-right curve and the steep far-left curve in Figure 5. Taken together, ideology remains the dominant driver of variation in acceptance of anthropogenic climate change across most contexts, while the deviations from this baseline pattern cluster in the same two countries (Germany and partially Sweden) where populism already mattered most in Model 2.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our results confirm several hypotheses already consolidated in the literature, while also revealing unexpected nuances. First, as expected, we observe that left-right orientation is the strongest and most consistent predictor of climate change belief. Individuals on the right of the political spectrum exhibit a significantly lower likelihood of supporting the scientific consensus on climate change compared to those on the left. This finding aligns with previous studies that emphasize the role of conservative and right-wing values in resisting environmental policies, often framed as threats to economic growth and individual freedoms. Second, populist attitudes are negatively associated with climate change belief, but this relationship is less robust and more context-dependent, in line with previous research (Kulin and Johansson-Seva 2024). Moreover, as regards the interaction between populism, ideology, and climate change belief, our results show that for individuals on the right populist attitudes are less influential. This find-

ing disproves our assumption of a multiplicative effect between populism and right-wing ideology, as belief among right-wing individuals remains consistently low, regardless of their level of populist attitudes. On the contrary, populist attitudes have a stronger negative impact on belief among left-leaning individuals, suggesting a distinct mechanism at work for the left.

This finding may indicate that at least two possible dynamics are at play in the relationship between populism, ideology, and climate beliefs. For individuals on the right, belief in the anthropogenic climate change seems to be primarily driven by ideological positioning rather than populist beliefs. This pattern likely stems from the strong politicization of climate change by right-wing leaders, who have framed the issue as a positional one, making their followers resistant to other influences, including anti-populism. Once climate change has been labeled as a left-wing concern, right-wing individuals tend to reject it outright, reinforcing a rigid and ideologically entrenched form of skepticism. Moreover, in the six countries analyzed in this paper, the most popular radical right parties can be even defined as populist (see PopuList, Rooduijn *et al.* 2023)⁸. In other words, all the political supply at the radical right side of the ideological framework is populist, namely, belongs to right-wing populism. As literature suggests that the formation and dynamics of climate change attitudes is mostly elite-driven (Carmichael and Brulle 2017), right-wing people are supposed to be influenced by the parties locating in such political ideological area. Therefore, we could expect that, among people with far-right orientation, even those people holding low levels of populism tend to follow the positions of those parties representing the available political supply. Accordingly, there is slight variation in climate change beliefs depending on the populist attitudes. In contrast, among those on the left, populist attitudes play a more significant role, suggesting a different mechanism at play: while left-wing individuals are generally more inclined to accept climate change as a serious issue, those with strong populist orientations are more likely to distrust the scientific consensus on climate change. Here, skepticism appears to emerge not from ideological opposition to climate policies but from a broader suspicion toward elites, including scientists and policymakers. Moreover, in the far-left ideological area the political supply is more heterogeneous regarding populism, both within and across countries.

These findings have important implications for understanding the different pathways through which climate skepticism develops and for policymakers seeking to address climate change. On the right, climate change belief appears to be deeply embedded in ideological identity, making it less susceptible to external influences. Efforts to counteract climate uncertainty and denialism in this group may require a reframing of climate policies in ways that align with right-wing values, such as emphasizing national security, energy independence, or economic competitiveness. On the left, skepticism seems to be more contingent on populist attitudes, suggesting that increasing trust in scientific institutions and enhancing transparency in climate policymaking could help mitigate skepticism among left-wing populists.

Also, at the country-level analyses highlight significant variations in the interaction between populism, ideology, and skepticism. While left-right ideology is consistently positively associated with climate change belief across all countries, the effects of populism vary widely. For example, in Germany and Sweden - the two countries in which our data show a significant negative effect of populism on climate change acceptance - the literature documents both a particularly salient and politicized climate change debate and the prominence of right-wing populist actors that have explicitly framed climate policy in anti-elite terms (see Küppers 2024; Hultman *et al.* 2019). While our analyses do not directly measure the diffusion of anti-elitism along the ideological spectrum within each country, this contextual configuration offers a plausible interpretive frame for the stronger populism effect observed in these two cases.

More broadly, our results underscore how individual-level ideological orientations and populist sentiments interact with the broader “supply” of political cues provided by parties and elites – especially in contexts where climate change has become a highly politicized issue. On one hand, the lower belief among right-wing people suggests that conservative parties across Europe effectively mobilize concerns about regulation, economic disruption, and national sovereignty, making climate denial/uncertainty a salient component of their political platforms. Voters who place themselves on the right promptly respond to these signals, reinforcing party cues that frame environmental policies as elitist, costly, or overly intrusive. On the other hand, the more variable effect of populist attitudes might indicate that populist supply may not be uniformly strong across all countries; in some contexts, populist parties aggressively adopt anti-expert and anti-elite rhetoric on climate issues, thereby intensifying denialist beliefs. These dynamics illustrate that even when individuals hold populist attitudes, the

⁸ This is indeed true for Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, Lega and Fratelli d'Italia in Italy, Rassemblement National in France, Vox in Spain, Sverigedemokraterna in Sweden and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość in Poland.

translation of those attitudes into climate denial depends on the particular set of messages championed by political actors.

While this study provides valuable insights, it also highlights several avenues for future research. First, our focus on six European countries, while providing a robust comparative framework, leaves room for broader analyses that include additional contexts with diverse political systems and environmental policy contexts. For example, incorporating countries outside the European Union or with varying presence of populist parties in the political supply could provide a more comprehensive understanding of these dynamics. Second, longitudinal studies tracking changes over time would help assess how shifts in political power and party platforms influence public attitudes toward climate change. This would be particularly relevant in understanding the evolving role of populist movements and their adaptation to mainstream politics. Finally, our study does not analyzed support for climate policies, which is crucial to understand to what extent the public is engaged in enhancing institutional actions for the ecological transition. Nonetheless, without believing that climate change is entirely or mostly caused by the human activity, supporting climate actions –carried out by humans themselves– remains limited.

REFERENCES

- Akkerman, A., Mudde, C., and Zaslove, A. (2014), «How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters», in *Comparative political studies*, 47(9), 1324-1353.
- Biancalana, C., and Ladini, R. (2024), *Emergenza lenta: Il cambiamento climatico in Italia tra politica, media e società*. Milano: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.
- Birch, S. (2020), «Political polarization and environmental attitudes: A cross-national analysis», in *Environmental Politics*, 29(4): 697-718, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2019.1673997>
- Bogert, J. M., Buczny, J., Harvey, J. A., and Ellers, J. (2024), «The effect of trust in science and media use on public belief in anthropogenic climate change: A meta-analysis», in *Environmental Communication*, 18(4): 484-509.
- Buzogány, A., and Mohamad-Klotzbach, C. (2021), «Populism and nature—the nature of populism: New perspectives on the relationship between populism, climate change, and nature protection», in *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 15(2): 155-164.
- Buzogány, A., and Mohamad-Klotzbach, C. (2022), *Environmental populism*. The Palgrave handbook of populism, 321-340.
- Caldwell, D., G. Cohen, and N. Vivyan (2025), «Long-run trends in partisan polarization of climate policy-relevant attitudes across countries», in *Environmental Politics*, Online first: 1-26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2024.2403957>
- Carmichael, J. T., and Brulle, R. J. (2017), «Elite cues, media coverage, and public concern: an integrated path analysis of public opinion on climate change, 2001–2013», in *Environmental Politics*, 26(2): 232-252.
- Castanho Silva, B., Jungkunz, S., Helbling, M., and Littvay, L. (2020), «An empirical comparison of seven populist attitudes scales», in *Political Research Quarterly*, 73(2): 409-424.
- Castanho Silva, B., Vegetti, F., and Littvay, L. (2017), «The elite is up to something: Exploring the relation between populism and belief in conspiracy theories», in *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23(4): 423-443.
- Chazel, L., and Dain, V. (2024), «Left-wing populism and environmental issues: An analysis of la france insoumise's 'popular environmentalism'», in *Political Studies*, 72(3): 1223-1249.
- Crawley S., Coffé, H., and Chapman, R. (2022), «Climate belief and issue salience: comparing two dimensions of public opinion on climate change in the EU», in *Social Indicators Research*, 162: 307-325, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2019.1630463>
- Crulli, M., and Zulianello, M. (2025), «Not really concerned? Populist radical right voters and climate change», in *Environmental Politics*, 35(4): 745-770.
- Eslen-ziya, H., and Giorgi, A. (ed. by) (2022), *Populism and science in Europe*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Farstad, F. M. (2018), «What explains variation in parties' climate change salience?», in *Party Politics*, 24(6): 698-707, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068817693473>
- Fisher, S. D., J. Kenny, W. Poortinga, G. Böhm, and L. Steg, L. (2022), «The politicisation of climate change attitudes in Europe», in *Electoral Studies*, 79: 102499, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2022.102499>
- Forchtner, B., and Kølvrå, C. (2015), «The nature of nationalism: Populist radical right parties on countryside and climate change», in *Nature and Culture*, 10(2): 199-224.
- Forchtner, B., and Lubarda, B. (2022), «Scepticisms and beyond? A comprehensive portrait of climate change communication by the far right in the European Parliament», in *Environmental Politics*, 32(1): 43-68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2022.2048556>

- Hameleers, M., Bos, L., and de Vreese, C. H. (2017), «The appeal of media populism: The media preferences of citizens with populist attitudes», *Mass Communication and Society*, 20(4): 481-504.
- Hornsey, M. J., E. A. Harris, P. G. Bain, and K. S. Fielding. (2016), «Meta-analyses of the determinants and outcomes of belief in climate change», in *Nature Climate Change*, 6(6): 622-626, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2943>
- Huber, R. A. (2020), «The role of populist attitudes in explaining climate change skepticism and support for environmental protection», in *Environmental Politics*, 29(6): 959-982, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2019.1708186>
- Huber, R. A., Greussing, E., and Eberl, J. M. (2022), «From populism to climate scepticism: the role of institutional trust and attitudes towards science», in *Environmental Politics*, 31(7): 1115-1138, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2021.1978200>
- Huber, R. A., Maltby, T., Szulecki, K., and Ćetković, S. (2021), «Is populism a challenge to European energy and climate policy? Empirical evidence across varieties of populism», in *Journal Of European Public Policy*, 28(7): 998-1017.
- Hultman, M., Björk, A., and Viinikka, T. (2019), The far right and climate change denial: denouncing environmental challenges via anti-establishment rhetoric, marketing of doubts, industrial/breadwinner masculinities enactments and ethno-nationalism. In *The far right and the environment* (pp. 121-135). Routledge.
- IPCC, (2023), Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 35-115, <https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647>
- Kenny, J., L. Geese, A. Jordan and I. Lorenzoni. (2025), «A framework for classifying climate change questions used in public opinion surveys», in *Environmental Politics*, Online first: 1-26 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2024.2429264>
- Kulin, J., and Johansson Sevä, I. (2024), «Rightwing populist attitudes and public support for climate policies in Western Europe: widening the scope using the European Social Survey», in *PLOS Climate*, 3(10): e0000443.
- Kulin, J., Johansson Sevä, I., and Dunlap, R. E. (2021), «Nationalist ideology, rightwing populism, and public views about climate change in Europe», in *Environmental Politics*, 30(7): 1111-1134.
- Küppers, A. (2024), «‘Climate-soviets,’ ‘alarmism,’ and ‘eco-dictatorship’: The framing of climate change scepticism by the populist radical right alternative for Germany», in *German Politics*, 33(1): 1-21.
- Ladini, R. and Biancalana, C. (2025), «The role of public issue salience in the relationship between political orientation and climate change concern: Cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence from Europe, 2008-2021», in *Acta Politica*, online first, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-025-00395-5>
- Lakoff, G. (2010), «Why it matters how we frame the environment», in *Environmental Communication*, 4(1): 70-81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524030903529749>
- Lewis, G. B., R. Palm, R., and B. Feng. (2019), «Cross-national variation in determinants of climate change concern», in *Environmental Politics*, 28(5): 793-821, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2018.1512261>
- Lockwood, B., and Lockwood, M. (2022), «How do right-wing populist parties influence climate and renewable energy policies? Evidence from Oecd countries», in *Global Environmental Politics*, 22(3): 12-37.
- Lockwood, M. (2018), «Right-wing populism and the climate change agenda: exploring the linkages», in *Environmental Politics*, 27(4): 712-732.
- Lubarda, B. (2024), *The ‘fake’ virus and the ‘not necessarily fake’ climate change: ambiguities of extreme-right anti-intellectualism*. In: Kinga Allen, I., Ekberg, K., Holgersen, S., and Malm, A. (2024), *Political ecologies of the far right: Fanning the flames*. Manchester University Press.
- Lübke, C. (2022), «Socioeconomic roots of climate change denial and uncertainty among the European population», in *European Sociological Review*, 38(1): 153-168.
- Lynn, J., and Peeva, N. (2021), «Communications in the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report cycle», in *Climatic Change*, 169(1): 18.
- McCright, A. M. (2016), «Anti-reflexivity and climate change skepticism in the US general public», in *Human Ecology Review*, 22(2): 77-107, <https://doi.org/10.4225/13/58213a5387787>
- McCright, A. M., R. E., Dunlap, and S. T. Marquart-Pyatt. (2016b), «Political ideology and views about climate change in the European Union», in *Environmental Politics*, 25(2): 338-358, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2015.1090371>
- Mudde, C. (2021), «Populism in Europe: an illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism (The Government and Opposition/Leonard Schapiro Lecture 2019)», in *Government and Opposition*, 56(4): 577-597.

- Nilsson, A., and J. T. Jost. (2020), «The authoritarian-conservatism nexus», in *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 34: 148-154.
- Poortinga, W., L. Whitmarsh, L. Steg, G. Böhm, and S. Fisher. (2019), «Climate change perceptions and their individual-level determinants: A cross-European analysis», *Global Environmental Change*, 55: 25-35, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.01.007>
- Sapinski, J. P. (2015), «Climate capitalism and the global corporate elite network», in *Environmental Sociology*, 1(4): 268-279.
- Spoon, J. J., and Williams, C. J. (2023), «Environmental chauvinism? Explaining issue expansion among non-mainstream parties», in *Party Politics*, 29(6): 1077-1087.
- Steg, L. (2023), «Psychology of climate change», in *Annual Review of Psychology*, 74(1): 391-421.
- Uscinski, J. E., Douglas, K., and Lewandowsky, S. (2017), «Climate change conspiracy theories», in *Climate Science*, 1-35.
- Van der Linden, S. L., Leiserowitz, A. A., Feinberg, G. D., and Maibach, E. W. (2015), «The scientific consensus on climate change as a gateway belief: Experimental evidence», in *PloS one*, 10(2): e0118489.



Citation: Winter, K. (2026). An Obstacle to the Sustainability Transformation? How Conspiracy Beliefs Shape Climate (In)action. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 131-144. doi: 10.36253/smp-16976

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

ORCID:
KW: 0000-0002-9201-2986

An Obstacle to the Sustainability Transformation? How Conspiracy Beliefs Shape Climate (In)action

KEVIN WINTER

Department of Sustainable Behavior and Management, University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart, Germany

E-mail: kevin.winter@uni-hohenheim.de

Abstract. Conspiracy theories about climate change and climate policies are deliberately spread, mainly by right-wing actors. Such narratives can limit societies' ability to address climate change. But what exactly are the consequences of believing in climate-related conspiracy theories and who is susceptible to believe them? Political ideology is known to shape citizens' views on climate-related topics, yet another worldview might be relevant. Recent empirical work suggests that the so-called conspiracist worldview (i.e., the assumption that societal events are the result of secret plots by malevolent and powerful groups) can be a strong determinant of climate-related conspiracy beliefs and behavior. The current article reviews this work and provides a theoretical framework for studying the link between conspiracy beliefs and climate-related behavior. In many cases, the conspiracist worldview appears to be more influential than political ideology in predicting climate-related beliefs and behavior. At the same time, the current review doubts that conspiracy beliefs per se are an obstacle to sustainability. Disentangling effects of different worldviews and differentiating between types of conspiracy beliefs can provide a more nuanced view. This approach could inform the design of future studies and help address the challenges that misinformation and conspiracy theories pose for communicators and institutions who aim to bring about the sustainability transformation.

Keywords: conspiracist worldview, conspiracy beliefs, climate-friendly behavior, political ideology, misinformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human-made climate change poses a significant threat to human existence on Earth, including negative impacts on physical and mental health, water and food supply as well as damages to infrastructure (IPCC 2023). Despite an overwhelming scientific consensus about human-made climate change (Cook *et al.* 2016; Myers *et al.* 2021), it remains a contentious topic in the public and political debate. Survey data and social media analyses point to growing ideological polarization about climate change and climate solu-

tions (Bayes & Druckman 2021; Falkenberg *et al.* 2022). While this trend might be more pronounced in certain contexts (e.g., US politics), it has been noted that right-wing political actors across the globe fuel this polarization by spreading climate contrarian claims (Falkenberg *et al.* 2022; Lewandowsky 2021). Such organized disinformation campaigns shape public opinions about climate change (Chater & Loewenstein 2023; Oreskes & Conway 2010). According to a YouGov survey conducted in 2020, the statement that “the idea of man-made global warming is a hoax that was invented to deceive people” was rated as “probably true” or “definitely true” by, for instance, 27% of respondents in the US, 16% in Germany, and 14% in Italy (Ibbetson 2021). Yet, a shift has been observed recently in that these contrarian claims increasingly target climate solutions rather than climate change as such (Coan *et al.* 2021) – a development that scholars have coined “new denial” (Nicolosi *et al.* 2025). Understanding when and why people adopt such claims and refrain from acting in climate-friendly ways is important to identify and overcome potential barriers to sustainability.

Research has so far largely focused on right-wing political ideology as core psychological determinant of climate change denial and opposition to climate policy. The current article sheds light on another ideology that has yet received (too) little scholarly attention in the context of the sustainability transformation: the conspiracist worldview. People who endorse this worldview “believe that it is commonplace for networks of people with malevolent intentions to exact elaborate hoaxes on the public and to do so in near-perfect secrecy” (Hornsey 2020: 586). The current article reviews the emerging body of empirical work on the relationships between conspiracist worldview, belief in conspiracy theories and misinformation, and climate-related behaviors. Thereby, it aims to improve our understanding of the relative importance of conspiracist worldview and political ideology in the climate domain and to provide a more nuanced view on whether conspiracy beliefs actually pose an obstacle to sustainability.

1.1 How worldviews shape appraisals of climate change and climate-related behaviors

When speaking of worldviews in the current article, I refer to “people’s broad, cognitive orientations towards the world” (Hornsey 2021: 36). The term worldview is sometimes used interchangeably with the term ideology, which becomes apparent in definitions of ideology as “a system of beliefs and values that represent one’s worldview” (van Bavel & Pereira 2018: 214). This terminological ambigui-

ty notwithstanding (for a more detailed discussion on the worldview concept, see Koltko-Rivera 2004), choosing the term worldview seems adequate for the current purpose, because it allows to capture and compare a broad array of general beliefs in the ecological and socio-political sphere. Given that worldviews determine how we navigate through the (social) world, it seems reasonable to assume that they provide a basis for how people appraise climate change and act in response to it.

In environmental psychology, there is considerable theorizing and empirical work on the so-called ecological worldview, which comprises the general belief that human activity is potentially harmful to the natural environment (Dunlap *et al.* 2000; Stern 2000). At the core of political psychology is the examination of the structure, antecedents and consequences of political worldviews (or ideologies), which are classically conceived as a unidimensional construct ranging from left (or liberal/progressive) to right (or conservative), but more fine-grained approaches focusing on different aspects or types of political ideologies also exist (Jost *et al.* 2009). More recently, yet another worldview has attracted the attention of psychologists, focusing on the role of powerful actors in secretly determining the fate of the world. This worldview has been called conspiracist worldview (Hornsey 2020), conspiracist ideation (Lewandowsky, Gignac & Oberauer 2013) or conspiracy mentality (Imhoff & Bruder 2014). These worldviews find expression in people’s more specific beliefs and behaviors, for instance, in the climate domain.

The ecological worldview is a core component of one of the most prominent psychological theories that aim to explain when and why people engage in pro-environmental (including climate-friendly) behavior – the value-belief-norm theory (Stern 2000; Stern *et al.* 1999). According to this theory, individuals develop an ecological worldview when they endorse a biospheric value orientation (i.e., “values emphasizing the environment and the biosphere”; de Groot & Steg 2007: 320), which can be distinguished from orientations towards altruistic or egoistic values. People with a more pronounced ecological worldview are more likely to judge the environmental consequences of human behavior as severe and acknowledge that humans have the capacity to reduce these consequences (Stern 2000). The value-belief-norm theory predicts that people act in environmentally-friendly ways out of a sense of moral obligation. In support of this prediction, research has shown that individuals who self-identify as pro-environmental persons feel morally obliged and, hence, act more environmentally-friendly (e.g., intend to use green energy or choose sustainable products; van der Werff *et al.* 2013). Moreover, people

who are generally committed to environmental protection (i.e., they highly value the goal of protecting the environment) are more likely to support environmental policies (Kaiser *et al.* 2023).

Past research has demonstrated that individuals' political ideology is an important psychological predictor of how they appraise climate change and climate policies. In a nutshell, those on the political right tend to deny the existence of climate change and human contribution to it to a larger extent than those on the political left. This is supported by a large-scale meta-analysis of roughly 200 empirical studies across 56 nations (Hornsey *et al.* 2016), in which political affiliation (i.e., self-reported support for a certain political party) and political ideology were more strongly related to climate change denial than demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, income, education). Similar results emerged when looking more specifically at the personal values associated with a right-wing political ideology. People who endorsed the view that businesses should operate freely without government regulation (i.e., free-market ideology), valued independence and self-reliance (i.e., individualistic values) or embraced existing social status structures (i.e., hierarchic values) were more likely to deny climate change. It has been argued that those on the political right are more skeptical of climate change and climate science, because the solutions suggested to fight climate change (e.g., governmental regulations) are in conflict with these personal values (Hornsey 2021; Lewandowsky 2021). Interestingly, ideological factors statistically contributed more to climate change denial than, for instance, (objective and subjective) scientific knowledge or personal experience of extreme weather events (i.e., one of the consequences of climate change; Hornsey *et al.* 2016). The relationship between right-wing political ideology and climate change denial has been confirmed in subsequent multinational studies (Berkebile-Weinberg *et al.* 2024; Hornsey *et al.* 2018). These studies also suggest that denying climate change might be consequential in terms of individuals' climate-related behaviors. In fact, climate change denial was related to lower support for climate change mitigation policies (e.g., a carbon tax) and lower intentions to engage in climate-friendly behaviors (Hornsey *et al.* 2016). Moreover, a direct connection between a right-wing political ideology and rejection of climate policy is evident in many studies (Bergquist *et al.* 2022; Berkebile-Weinberg *et al.* 2024). This relationship becomes even more pronounced, when individuals' own political party affiliation is made salient (Unsworth & Fielding 2014). This suggests that social (or specifically political) affiliation is an important motive of engaging in climate policy support or opposition (Ehret

et al. 2018; van Boven & Sherman 2021). In sum, those on the political right seem to be more likely to oppose climate policies, because these policies are in conflict with their personal (e.g., individualistic or hierarchic) values and because they rely on the cues provided by their political parties.

1.2 Extending the scope: Conspiracist worldview as another dimension of political attitudes

Drawing on findings from the US, scholars have argued that political ideology (on a left-right dimension) is not the only relevant worldview to explain how citizens look at politics (Uscinski *et al.* 2021). In fact, they propose an additional (presumably independent) "anti-establishment" dimension that contains populist, conspiracist, and Manichean worldviews. Individuals who score high on this dimension dislike "elites", favor narratives that distinguish between "us" (i.e., "the good people") and "them" (i.e., "the evil elites") and have a strong aversion against the existing political order. Notably, an anti-establishment orientation can be found both on the political left and right (Uscinski *et al.* 2021). This parallels the theorizing in research on conspiracy beliefs, where a conspiracist worldview has been conceptualized as a generalized political attitude next to traditional (i.e., left-right) political ideologies – one that is characterized by strong prejudice against powerful groups (Imhoff & Bruder 2014). Indeed, large multinational studies on the empirical relationship between conspiracist worldview and political ideology suggest that those at the political extremes (either left or right) are more likely to endorse a conspiracist worldview compared to political moderates (Enders *et al.* 2023; Imhoff, Zimmer, *et al.* 2022). This research highlights that conspiracist worldview and political ideology are distinct constructs that might have differential effects in the climate domain.

In the psychological literature, conspiracy theories are usually defined as explanations of important events based on the assumption of secret plans forged by powerful groups to serve their own benefit or to harm the public (Douglas *et al.* 2017; Sassenberg *et al.* 2023). Conspiracy belief then is the extent to which one personally thinks that such an explanation is true, for instance that "climate change is a hoax invented to deceive the public". Inspired by the observation that believing in one conspiracy theory is often related to believing in other (unrelated) conspiracy theories, scholars proposed the concept of a conspiracist worldview. This worldview is thought of as a relatively stable person characteristic that is endorsed to a lesser or stronger degree by different individuals and that shapes how they appraise soci-

etal events. Individuals with a more pronounced conspiracist worldview have a stronger tendency to see (any) societal events as the result of secret arrangements by powerful actors with mean intentions and accordingly are more likely to believe in (any) specific conspiracy theory (Imhoff, Bertlich & Frenken 2022). Accordingly, the term conspiracy belief comprises both the general tendency to belief conspiracy theories (i.e., conspiracist worldview) and the belief in specific conspiracy theories (e.g., about climate change). Despite growing interest in the topic (Douglas & Sutton 2015; Tam & Chan 2023; Uscinski *et al.* 2017; van Prooijen *et al.* 2025), the psychological literature is only about to understand which role conspiracy beliefs and particularly a conspiracist worldview play in shaping individuals' appraisals of climate change and climate-related behaviors.

The following section reviews the literature on the relationships between conspiracist worldview, specific (conspiracy) beliefs in the climate domain and climate-related behaviors. Notably, the focus of this review is on climate change rather than environmental issues more broadly. This is mostly due to the lack of empirical studies linking conspiracy belief with environmental topics other than climate change (e.g., biodiversity loss, pollution). Although individuals' attitudes and behaviors towards climate change and other environmental issues are often highly correlated and reflect the same underlying motivation (Kaiser 2021), it cannot be ruled out that the effects of conspiracy beliefs might vary depending on the specific issue. In line with the psychological literature (Stern 2000; Stern *et al.* 1999), I use a broad conceptualization of climate-related behavior that includes private-sphere behaviors (e.g., private energy consumption, transportation behavior), public-sphere behaviors (e.g., expressing support for climate policies), and climate activism (e.g., protesting for stricter political regulations). Adding to this conceptualization, the current review treats activism that is directed against the implementation of climate policies as a separate category that has so far not been considered in the broader literature. Going beyond previous reviews, different types of specific conspiracy beliefs are distinguished – including those referring to climate change itself or climate policies, but also belief in conspiracy theories that allege political climate inaction (and are thus “climate-friendly” in nature). According to the conceptual model depicted in Fig. 1, these specific conspiracy beliefs act as a link between the general conspiracist worldview and climate-related behaviors. In the case of available evidence, effects of conspiracist worldview are compared to those of political ideology and other worldviews.

2. CONSPIRACY BELIEFS AS AN OBSTACLE TO THE SUSTAINABILITY TRANSFORMATION?

Most research has focused on belief in misinformation and conspiracy theories that deny the existence or anthropogenicity of climate change, which is sometimes summarized under the term climate change denial (Biddlestone *et al.* 2022; Hornsey *et al.* 2016; Lewandowsky, Gignac & Oberauer 2013; Lewandowsky, Oberauer & Gignac 2013; Tam & Chan 2023). Yet, analyses of online content suggest that conservative think tanks and lobby groups put an increasing effort in spreading misinformation about climate policies and particularly renewable energy (Coan *et al.* 2021; Nicolosi *et al.* 2025) and that their narratives become much more sophisticated than outright climate change denial (e.g., by acknowledging climate change as such but justifying a delay in climate action; Lamb *et al.* 2020). Currently, however, only few empirical studies have investigated different types of climate misinformation or conspiracy theories and their effects (e.g., Spampatti *et al.* 2024, 2025). It should be noted that psychological research often does not clearly distinguish between misinformation and conspiracy theories, although the two can be conceptually separated. A defining feature of misinformation is the truth value of a statement, but widely accepted definitions are more or less strict in this regard. They range from more lenient definitions such as “publicly available information that is misleading or deceptive relative to the best available scientific evidence [...]” (Southwell *et al.* 2022: 98) to stricter ones such as “information that turns out to be false” (Lewandowsky 2021: 2). Definitions of the term conspiracy theory are usually neutral with regard to the truth value of a statement and refer to them as “explanations for important events” (see above) that might be true or not. Nevertheless, scholars have associated a certain epistemic risk with believing in conspiracy theories as they usually show properties (e.g., large numbers of assumed conspirators) that make them by default less likely to be true (Douglas & Sutton 2023). However, there are cases in which conspiracy theories can be conceived as plausible (Frenken *et al.* 2024), reflect majority positions (Pummerer *et al.* 2025) or social realities (such as country-level corruption; Alper & Imhoff, 2023), or even turn out to be true (e.g., in case of Exxon Mobil suppressing information on the climate impact of burning fossil fuels; Supran *et al.* 2023). One other important distinction is that conspiracy theories by definition refer to secret arrangements of powerful actors behind societal events, while misinformation does not necessarily relate to such arrangements. From a practical viewpoint, it might still be reasonable to look at the two constructs

jointly, because (a) in reality (e.g., on social media) both occur and are disseminated side by side, (b) conspiracy theories sometimes contain misinformation and vice versa, and (c) empirical studies show that agreement with misinformation and conspiracy theories on specific topics (e.g., wind energy, electric vehicles) is highly correlated and forms a coherent index (Bretter *et al.* 2025; Winter *et al.* 2024).

2.1 Conspiracist worldview and climate change denial

The earliest studies investigating the conspiracist worldview in the climate domain, examined its correlations with climate change denial. Notably, these studies operationalized climate change denial in a way that captures agreement with statements opposing the scientific consensus about climate change (e.g., “Humans are too insignificant to have an appreciable impact on global temperature”) and, thus, represent instances of misinformation according to the abovementioned definitions. Conspiracist worldview was measured via agreement with several logically unconnected conspiracy theories (e.g., “The Apollo moon landings never happened and were staged in a Hollywood film studio” and “The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. was the result of

an organized conspiracy by U.S. government agencies such as the CIA and FBI”) that formed a coherent scale. These studies conducted in the US found that endorsing a conspiracist worldview was related to lower acceptance of climate science (Lewandowsky, Gignac & Oberauer 2013; Lewandowsky, Oberauer & Gignac 2013). Using similar measures, no reliable relationship between conspiracist worldview and climate change denial could be found outside the US in a large-scale study covering 24 nations (Hornsey *et al.* 2018). In all these studies, the relationship between political ideologies and climate change denial was more pronounced, but mainly occurred in English-speaking countries. Other studies measured the conspiracist worldview with more abstract items about the role of (political) elites in secretly arranging societal events (e.g., “Much of our lives are being controlled by plots hatched in secret places”) rather than agreement with single specific conspiracy theories. These studies – again conducted in the US – find much larger and more stable correlations between a conspiracist worldview and climate change denial (Uscinski *et al.* 2021; Uscinski & Olivella 2017). Adding up to this work, a recent set of studies found that the conspiracist worldview (using both types of measures described above) was strongly associated with climate change denial among convenience samples in the US, UK, and

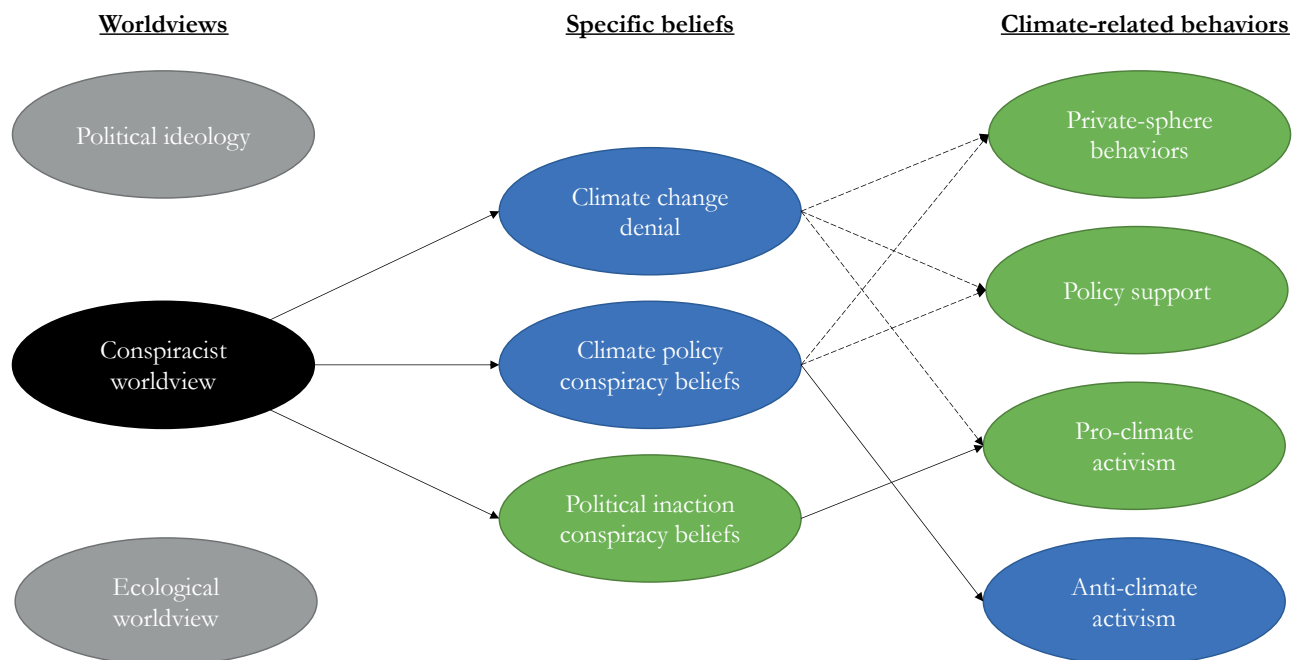


Figure 1. Conceptual model displaying the empirical relationships between conspiracist worldview, specific (conspiracy) beliefs and climate-related behaviors. Solid (dashed) lines represent positive (negative) empirical correlations, green (blue) circles denote positive (negative) conceptual links to climate-related behaviors. Political ideology and ecological worldview (but not their empirical correlates) are retained for illustrative purposes. *Source:* Production of the author.

Germany (Winter, Pummerer & Sassenberg 2025). Despite the apparent heterogeneity of effects, it seems that overall, those with a stronger conspiracist worldview are more prone to engage in climate change denial and to believe in climate change conspiracy theories. However, these results might depend on the national context under investigation and on the concrete measure of conspiracist worldview. It should also be taken into account that over the last years the topic of climate change has become more politicized and maybe more central to the beliefs of those holding a conspiracist worldview, which might explain larger correlations in more recent studies. In any case, climate change denial does not seem to be only a matter of political ideology, but at least to a certain degree also of a conspiracist worldview. As of now, research in this area has rarely compared the relative effects (i.e., statistically controlling for the respective other construct) of political ideology and conspiracist worldview in a systematic way, which makes it difficult to judge their relative importance when it comes to climate change denial.

2.2 Conspiracist worldview and climate policy conspiracy beliefs

More recently, psychologists have started to investigate the relationship between conspiracist worldview and agreement with misinformation and conspiracy theories about climate policies (rather than climate change itself). This work has so far mainly been conducted in the context of renewable energies. A first remarkable finding across these studies is that misinformation and conspiracy theories about these technologies are much more prevalent when compared to those about climate change in other studies (reported above). For instance, in a study with over two thousand German citizens (quota-based for age, gender, education, and federal state), 26% of the participants tended to believe in conspiracy theories (e.g., “The municipality withholds important information that would speak against the construction of the wind turbines”) about a (hypothetical) local wind energy project (Winter *et al.* 2022). Even higher numbers were found in a follow-up study covering a range of misinformation statements and conspiracy theories about wind energy (e.g., “Climate scientists manipulate facts in order to portray wind energy in a particularly positive light” or “The underground power cables of wind turbines can cause cancer in local residents”). Here, in quota-based (for age, gender, and education) samples in Australia, the UK, and the US, between 15% and 45% of participants (depending on the exact statement and the country) agreed with such claims (Winter *et al.* 2024). These find-

ings could be extended to the context of electromobility with quota-based (for age, gender, and education) samples in Austria, Australia, Germany, and the US (Bretter *et al.* 2025). In these surveys, some misinformation statements were even believed by a majority of the populations (e.g., over 50% of Germans and Austrians agreed that “Electric vehicles are more likely to catch fire than petrol cars”) and overall, more participants agreed than disagreed with misinformation about electric vehicles.

These studies consistently identified the conspiracist worldview as the main psychological determinant of agreement with misinformation and conspiracy theories. Conspiracist worldview was measured with the Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire including items such as “Events which superficially seem to lack a connection are often the result of secret activities” (Bruder *et al.* 2013). Indeed, the conspiracist worldview explained up to 20% of variance in misinformation agreement in the context of wind energy (Winter *et al.* 2024). At the same time, political ideology was not a consistent predictor of misinformation agreement, but if anything, those on the political right were more likely to agree with such claims. The ecological worldview was related to less agreement, but only explained about half the variance compared to conspiracist worldview (Winter *et al.* 2024). Although the central role of conspiracist worldview was evident in the context of electromobility, too, there were slight differences when it comes to the role of the other worldviews. A more right-wing political ideology was linked to more agreement with misinformation about electric vehicles, but the role of an ecological worldview was negligible (Bretter *et al.* 2025). Overall, conspiracist worldview explained about six times the variance of agreement with misinformation about electric vehicles compared to all other included predictor variables together. These effect sizes are striking and underscore the importance of conspiracist worldview in predicting agreement with misinformation and conspiracy theories about climate policies, while political ideology seems to play only a minor role in this context. These studies investigated beliefs in misinformation and conspiracy theories on a very general level. However, a recent study looked at conspiracy beliefs about local political issues. In this study with a sample of London citizens, the conspiracist worldview was related to belief in conspiracy theories about the implementation of a low emission traffic zone in the city center (e.g., that it “[...] is a money-making scheme for the government rather than a genuine effort to reduce emissions”) (Douglas *et al.* 2025). These findings underscore that the conspiracist worldview is a relevant predictor of more specific (conspiracy)

beliefs about political measures intended to reduce carbon emissions.

A rather new avenue of research has brought forth the notion of conspiracy theories that accuse politicians of deliberately doing too little to combat climate change in favor of secret agreements with industry, at the same time being aware of and accepting the negative consequences for future generations. On the one hand, these conspiracy theories are fundamentally different from the ones classically studied, because they acknowledge climate change itself and the need for political climate action. On the other hand, they share all definitional criteria with other conspiracy theories (i.e., secret arrangements, powerful groups, malevolent intentions). These political inaction conspiracy theories are shared by a majority of people and appear quite plausible as a row of studies conducted in Germany shows. Here, a majority of participants agreed with statements such as “Discussions between politics and business on climate issues take place behind closed doors” or “When it comes to climate protection, politicians do what they want without considering the interests of future generations” (Pummerer *et al.* 2025). In these studies, conspiracist worldview strongly predicted agreement with these statements, which underscores that they qualify as conspiracy theories. On the contrary, political ideology was not a consistent predictor of political inaction conspiracy beliefs, which might be surprising given that such narratives seem to resonate more with the political left. More systematic research on the role of conspiracist worldview and political ideology in predicting (different types of) political inaction conspiracy theories is necessary.

Overall, it can be concluded that conspiracist worldview predicts different types of conspiracy beliefs in the climate context, ranging from climate change conspiracy beliefs (or climate change denial) to climate policy conspiracy theories and political inaction conspiracy theories. In contrast, political ideology seems to be particularly relevant for climate change denial, but less so for climate policy and political inaction conspiracy beliefs. Compared to the conspiracist worldview, believing in specific conspiracy theories might be a more proximal predictor of climate-related behaviors. The empirical work linking both conspiracist worldview and more specific conspiracy beliefs with climate-related behaviors will be reviewed in the following.

2.3 Conspiracy beliefs and private-sphere climate-friendly behaviors

Predictors of private-sphere climate-friendly behaviors are intensely studied in environmental psychology

(Steg & Vlek 2009). This group of behaviors comprises relatively mundane everyday actions such as switching off the light when leaving the room or buying seasonal fruits and vegetables, but also more impactful behaviors such as buying an electric car or insulating one's home. Psychological research is only beginning to understand how conspiracist worldview and specific conspiracy beliefs shape these behaviors. In a recent set of studies, participants in Germany and the UK with a pronounced conspiracist worldview (measured with the Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire) reported lower frequencies of private climate-friendly behaviors (e.g., wearing warm clothes instead of turning up the heating at home, buying seasonal fruits and vegetables) (Winter, Pummerer & Sassenberg 2025). Interestingly, in the same research, US participants with a stronger conspiracist worldview (measured via agreement with several specific conspiracy theories not related to the climate-domain) were actually more likely to engage in private climate-friendly behaviors (e.g., use public transport, reduce one's meat intake). Whether this inconsistency appeared due to different national contexts, the type of measure used or the specific behaviors investigated remains an open question for future research. Another set of studies, though, demonstrated quite convincingly that conspiracist worldview (again, measured with the Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire) was related to lower intentions to buy an electric vehicle across quota-based samples in Austria, Australia, Germany and the US (Bretter *et al.* 2025). Notably, in these studies, right-wing political ideology predicted lower purchase intentions for electric vehicles to a similar degree, but the ecological worldview did not play a meaningful role. Thus, overall, the conspiracist worldview seems to be associated with a lower readiness to perform climate-friendly behaviors in the private sphere.

Somewhat more empirical research has been conducted on the relationship between specific conspiracy beliefs and private climate-friendly behavior. In the abovementioned studies (and other than for conspiracist worldview), climate change conspiracy beliefs were consistently related to a lower frequency of performing private climate-friendly behaviors (Winter, Pummerer & Sassenberg 2025). This is in line with meta-analyses covering several individual studies that have linked belief in climate change conspiracy theories and climate change denial with lower intentions to show private climate-friendly behaviors (Biddlestone *et al.* 2022; Hornsey *et al.* 2016). One of these individual studies tested this relationship in an experimental design, thus, allowing for causal interpretations. In this study, participants who were confronted with a text promoting climate change conspiracy theories afterwards reported a lower likeli-

hood to act in a climate-friendly way (e.g., buying energy-efficient household appliances) compared to those not reading a climate conspiracy text (Jolley & Douglas 2014). The relationship between climate change conspiracy beliefs and lower (self-reported) climate-friendly behaviors in the private sphere has been confirmed in longitudinal studies in China and the US (Chan *et al.* 2023). Beyond the climate domain, exposure to climate change conspiracy theories can reduce individuals' intention to engage in politics more broadly (e.g., voting in an election; Jolley & Douglas 2014). Furthermore, this study suggests that the effects on political disengagement could be explained by increased feelings of political powerlessness induced by the conspiracy theories. Thus, being confronted with a climate change conspiracy theory can have detrimental effects on individuals' readiness to engage in climate action and political behavior more generally. However, more recent studies using a very similar design found that whether climate change conspiracy beliefs translate into lower climate-friendly behavioral intentions might depend on characteristics of the person receiving the conspiracy theory (Mang *et al.* 2024). Conspiracy beliefs referring to a concrete policy or product might be even more strongly and directly linked to private climate-friendly behavior. Indeed, individuals who believe in misinformation and conspiracy theories about electric vehicles show lower purchase intentions (Bretter *et al.* 2025). However, more research is needed given that this relationship has so far been empirically investigated in only a single study.

2.4 Conspiracy beliefs and climate policy support

Verbally expressing support for climate policies can be seen as a form of public-sphere climate-related behavior (Kaiser *et al.* 2023; Stern 2000). Given its inherent political nature, a growing body of work examines whether climate policy support is shaped by (both general and specific) conspiracy beliefs. In the context of wind energy, the conspiracist worldview has been identified as a central predictor of lower policy support. For instance, in a quota-based German sample the conspiracist worldview strongly predicted a lower likelihood to vote in favor of a planned wind farm and explained five times more variance than political ideology (Winter *et al.* 2022). This pattern of results could be replicated in a longitudinal study design allowing to draw conclusions about the temporal relationship between the variables. Here, an increase in conspiracist worldview predicted more negative attitudes towards wind farms close to one's hometown four months later (Winter, Pummerer, von Oertzen *et al.* 2025). In the context of electric vehi-

cles, conspiracist worldview and (right-wing) political ideology turned out to be equally strong predictors of lower policy support – while the ecological worldview was almost irrelevant (Bretter *et al.* 2025). In further studies, the conspiracist worldview predicted lower support for local (Douglas *et al.* 2025) as well as national and international climate policies (Lezak & Thibodeau 2016). However, in the latter case, conspiracist worldview did no longer significantly predict lower policy support when statistically controlling for other worldviews including (right-wing) political ideology – which remained a significant predictor of lower policy support. This suggests that the stability and size of the relationship between conspiracist worldview and (lower) policy support over and above other worldviews might depend on the concrete policy domain or setting.

A considerable amount of research has examined how belief in climate change conspiracy theories and misinformation relates to policy support. Based on meta-analyses on the correlates of climate change conspiracy theories (Biddlestone *et al.* 2022) and climate change denial (Bergquist *et al.* 2022; Hornsey *et al.* 2016), these specific beliefs are clearly negatively related to support for climate policies (e.g., carbon taxes). This is further corroborated by individual studies testing the effects of exposition to climate change misinformation (Cook *et al.* 2017; McCright *et al.* 2016; Ranney & Clark 2016; Spampatti *et al.* 2024; van der Linden *et al.* 2017). A similar pattern occurs for beliefs in misinformation and conspiracy theories about specific policies or climate change mitigation measures. In the contexts of wind energy (Winter *et al.* 2022, 2024; Winter, Pummerer, von Oertzen *et al.* 2025), electric vehicles (Bretter *et al.* 2025) and low emission traffic zones (Douglas *et al.* 2025), these specific beliefs predicted lower expressed support for the respective policies. In this domain, a single experimental study has been conducted that leads to similar conclusions. Here, participants who received a seeming news article that alleged a conspiracy of fossil fuel companies behind the promotion of the carbon capture technology supported the implementation of this technology to a lesser degree compared to participants who did not read conspiratorial content (Bolsen *et al.* 2022). Overall, the available empirical evidence speaks for a strong relationship of belief in conspiracy theories and misinformation about a specific policy with lower support of this policy.

2.5 Conspiracy beliefs and climate activism

Public support for climate policies is crucial for their implementation. Yet, citizens can express their opin-

ion about a policy (or policies more generally) in more (publicly) visible forms, for instance, participating in protests, signing petitions, joining citizens' initiatives, or writing letters to politicians. These behaviors have been conceptualized as climate activism (Stern 2000) and the dominant approach is to investigate activism that aims for stricter and more comprehensive climate change mitigation measures. However, the same behaviors can be performed with the goal of preventing or reversing the implementation of climate policies (e.g., protesting against the construction of a wind farm or against higher carbon taxes). Given that entirely different beliefs and motivations might underlie these different forms of activism, it seems necessary to distinguish between pro-climate and anti-climate activism in this review. Although the conspiracist worldview has been linked to an increased readiness to perform (predominantly non-normative) activist behaviors (Gkinopoulos & Mari 2022; Imhoff *et al.* 2021), only a handful of studies so far investigated this relationship in the climate domain.

Research on pro-climate activism shows no consistent relationship between the conspiracist worldview and support for radical pro-climate activist groups (e.g., the "Last Generation") with the two constructs being either slightly negatively related or unrelated (Pummerer *et al.* 2025). This result calls for a closer inspection of the role that specific conspiracy beliefs play in this context. On the one hand, believing in a conspiracy theory that alleges political inaction in the domain of climate change (e.g., "When it comes to climate protection, politicians do what they want without considering the interests of future generations") is related to higher support for radical pro-climate activist groups (Pummerer *et al.* 2025). On the other hand, confrontation with a climate change conspiracy theory video reduced the likelihood that participants in an experiment signed a petition aimed at mitigating climate change (van der Linden 2015). As reviewed above, the conspiracist worldview is related to all sorts of different specific conspiracy beliefs in the climate domain. Accordingly, it might be that in the context of climate activism the effects of specific conspiracy beliefs (pulling into different directions) cancel each other out, overshadowing any direct effects of conspiracist worldview on pro-climate activism. This highlights that more conceptual nuance is needed to fully understand this relationship.

A clearer picture emerges when looking at anti-climate activism – a phenomenon that is only about to attract attention in psychological research. In this work, both the conspiracist worldview and specific conspiracy beliefs about a concrete climate policy were correlated with stronger intentions to engage in political action

against these policies. For instance, believing in misinformation and conspiracy theories about wind farms (e.g., about their seeming health consequences or impact on bird populations) strongly predicted the intention to protest or sign petitions against wind farms (Winter *et al.* 2024). Similarly, believing in conspiracy theories about low traffic zones in the city center was related to higher normative (e.g., send a complaint to city councilors) and non-normative (e.g., verbally or physically attacking people who are in favor of the policy) political action intentions with regard to this local climate policy (Douglas *et al.* 2025). Although providing only initial evidence, these studies show that (general and specific) conspiracy beliefs potentially come with behavioral consequences that can be detrimental to the implementation and success of climate policy measures.

3. EVALUATION OF THE EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND CRITICAL REMARKS

This article reviewed the empirical evidence on the relationships between (a) the conspiracist worldview and specific conspiracy beliefs in the climate domain, (b) conspiracist worldview and climate-related behaviors, as well as (c) specific conspiracy beliefs in the climate domain and climate-related behaviors. This emerging body of research suggests that the conspiracist worldview predisposes individuals to belief (different types of) specific conspiracy theories that, in turn, are related to (different types of) climate-related behaviors (see Fig. 1). Crucially, the conspiracist worldview in many cases explains unique (and often bigger) portions of variance beyond established ideological predictors of climate-related behaviors such as political ideology or the ecological worldview. Yet, in many studies these different worldviews are not systematically compared with each other. The reviewed findings highlight the need to acknowledge the conspiracist worldview as a relevant factor in predicting climate-related outcomes and to examine its correlates and consequences more closely. Some work points out that populist attitudes (which are closely related to a conspiracist worldview) might reinforce the relationship between political ideology and climate policy support (Huber *et al.* 2020). Accordingly, it can be worthwhile to consider not only additive, but also interactive effects of conspiracist worldview with political ideology or other worldviews in the future. In addition, it should be critically acknowledged that most of the reviewed studies do not measure actual climate-related behaviors but rely on reports of behavioral intentions, which are prone to biases (e.g., social desir-

ability). What is more, the conceptual model displayed in Fig. 1 resonates with the dominant approach in the literature to view the conspiracist worldview (or worldviews in general) as the basis for (i.e., the cause of) more specific beliefs and behaviors (Hornsey 2021; Imhoff & Bertlich *et al.* 2022). Yet, this approach can be criticized, because it is mostly based on correlational findings and ignores other potential causal pathways. There is evidence that people sometimes endorse conspiracy theories to justify or rationalize their behaviors (van Prooijen & Böhm 2024) and even an increase in conspiracist worldview might occur in response to changes in more specific beliefs (Liekefett *et al.* 2023; Winter, Pummerer & von Oertzen *et al.* 2025). Thus, as plausible as the reasoning behind the displayed conceptual model is, future research should account for bidirectional relationships and test them rigorously in experimental study designs.

As of now, the majority of research focuses on the negative correlations of conspiracy beliefs with climate-friendly behaviors and portrays conspiracy beliefs as a potential obstacle to the sustainability transformation, accordingly. In line with this view, research has linked the conspiracist worldview with belief in misinformation and conspiracy theories about climate change (e.g., that climate change is a hoax) or climate policies (e.g., that wind farms or electric vehicles pose a health threat). These specific beliefs (and in many cases conspiracist worldview itself) are related to outcomes that are harmful to the climate such as a lower frequency of or intention to perform climate-friendly behaviors in the private sphere (e.g., to buy energy efficient household appliances), lower support of climate policies (e.g., the extension of wind energy, higher carbon taxes) and higher willingness to protest against the implementation of such policies. Based on this work, one could well justify the position that conspiracy beliefs pose an obstacle to the sustainability transformation (Biddlestone *et al.* 2022; van Prooijen *et al.* 2025). However, this dominant approach ignores two crucial aspects that leave room for a different, more nuanced conclusion. First, the conspiracist worldview is not inherently marked by a lack of environmental concern. Actually, empirical findings show that the conspiracist worldview and the ecological worldview are not substantially related to each other (Winter *et al.* 2024). Thus, the relevant dimension on which those endorsing a conspiracist worldview base their judgements in the climate domain is probably not so much whether their behavior protects or harms the climate, but rather if their behavior is in line with or opposed to what established authorities (e.g., scientists, politicians) promote. This means that the negative relationship between conspiracist worldview and climate-

friendly behaviors potentially only holds as long as climate action is (perceived to be) promoted by established authorities. On the contrary, this relationship might be attenuated or even reversed in cases where, for instance, governments reduce their efforts to protect the climate or actively promote policies with a negative climate impact (e.g., expand fossil fuel industries). Second, the dominant approach ignores that there are specific conspiracy theories that can be seen as climate-friendly such as the ones that blame politicians of knowingly harming the climate and future generations. One of the empirical papers reviewed above shows that believing in such conspiracy theories is related to more support for pro-climate activism (Pummerer *et al.* 2025). Studying the conspiracist worldview in different societal and political contexts as well as a broader array of conspiracy beliefs (including climate-friendly ones) and behavioral outcomes, therefore, seems pivotal to get a more nuanced understanding of the role that the conspiracist worldview plays in the sustainability transformation. To gain a complete picture of the link between conspiracy beliefs and environmental issues more broadly, research beyond the climate domain is necessary. There is reason to assume that this relationship might vary depending on the specific topic and that in some cases, conspiracist worldview is positively linked to pro-environmental attitudes. For instance, those with a stronger conspiracist worldview were more sensitive to the potential environmental dangers of genetically-modified foods (Lewandowsky, Gignac & Oberauer 2013) and supported the phase-out of nuclear energy in Germany to a stronger degree (Imhoff & Bruder 2014). Whether these attitudes reflected a genuine interest in protecting the environment or, for instance, a skeptical view on certain technologies remains unclear. In addition, it seems likely that these relationships can change over time and depend on the socio-political context.

4. CONCLUSION

Worldviews play a crucial role in determining how citizens appraise climate change and climate action. While previous research has mainly considered the role of (right-wing) political ideology in this context, the current article adds the conspiracist worldview as another ideological base of more specific beliefs and behaviors in the climate domain. Crucially, the endorsement of a conspiracist worldview predisposes people to believe in misinformation and conspiracy theories about climate change and climate policies. Conspiracist worldview also predicts less private climate-friendly behaviors, less

climate policy support and anti-climate activism – and it often does so to a stronger extent than (right-wing) political ideology. Yet, the conspiracist worldview is also related to believing in “climate-friendly” conspiracy theories that allege secret arrangements and mean intentions on the part of politicians to deliberately delay climate action. These specific conspiracy beliefs are related to a support for pro-climate activism. This review shows that the relationship between conspiracy beliefs and climate-related behaviors might be more complex and diverse than often assumed. Accordingly, it seems premature to judge the conspiracist worldview and specific conspiracy beliefs as a barrier to the sustainability transformation per se. Rather it seems to depend on the type of conspiracy beliefs and potentially also the socio-political context they are embedded in. Future research needs to disentangle these different aspects conceptually and empirically. This would help to clarify when and how conspiracy beliefs affect climate-related (or broader environmental) behaviors and how the associated societal challenges could be addressed by communicators and institutions.

REFERENCES

- Alper S., & Imhoff R. (2023), «Suspecting Foul Play When It Is Objectively There: The Association of Political Orientation With General and Partisan Conspiracy Beliefs as a Function of Corruption Levels», in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 14(5): 610–620, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506221113965>.
- Bayes R., & Druckman J. N. (2021), «Motivated reasoning and climate change», in *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 42: 27–35, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2021.02.009>.
- Bergquist M., Nilsson A., Harring N., & Jagers S. C. (2022), «Meta-analyses of fifteen determinants of public opinion about climate change taxes and laws», in *Nature Climate Change*, 12(3): 235–240, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-022-01297-6>.
- Berkebile-Weinberg M., Goldwert D., Doell K. C., Van Bavel J. J., & Vlasceanu M. (2024), «The differential impact of climate interventions along the political divide in 60 countries», in *Nature Communications*, 15(1), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-48112-8>.
- Biddlestone M., Azevedo F., & van der Linden S. (2022), «Climate of conspiracy: A meta-analysis of the consequences of belief in conspiracy theories about climate change», in *Current Opinion in Psychology*: 101390, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101390>.
- Bolsen T., Palm R., & Kingsland J. T. (2022), «Effects of Conspiracy Rhetoric on Views About the Consequences of Climate Change and Support for Direct Carbon Capture», in *Environmental Communication*, 16(2): 209–224, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2021.1991967>.
- Bretter C., Pearson S., Hornsey M. J., MacInnes S., Sasenberg K., Wade B., & Winter K. (2025), «Mapping, understanding and reducing belief in misinformation about electric vehicles», in *Nature Energy*, 10: 869–879, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41560-025-01790-0>.
- Bruder M., Haffke P., Neave N., Nouripanah N., & Imhoff R. (2013), «Measuring individual differences in generic beliefs in conspiracy theories across cultures: Conspiracy mentality questionnaire», in *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00225>.
- Chan H. W., Tam K. P., & Hong Y. Y. (2023), «Does belief in climate change conspiracy theories predict everyday life pro-environmental behaviors? Testing the longitudinal relationship in China and the US», in *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 87: 101980, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2023.101980>.
- Chater N., & Loewenstein G. (2023), «The i-frame and the s-frame: How focusing on individual-level solutions has led behavioral public policy astray», in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 46, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X22002023>.
- Coan T. G., Boussalis C., Cook J., & Nanko M. O. (2021) «Computer-assisted classification of contrarian claims about climate change», in *Scientific Reports*, 11, 22320, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-01714-4>.
- Cook J., Lewandowsky S., & Ecker U. K. H. (2017), «Neutralizing misinformation through inoculation: Exposing misleading argumentation techniques reduces their influence», in *PLoS ONE*, 12(5): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0175799>.
- Cook J., Oreskes N., Doran P. T., Anderegg W. R., Verheggen B., Maibach E. W., ... & Rice K. (2016), «Consensus on consensus: a synthesis of consensus estimates on human-caused global warming», in *Environmental Research Letters*, 11(4): 048002, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/11/4/048002>.
- De Groot J. I. M., & Steg L. (2007), «Value orientations and environmental beliefs in five countries: Validity of an instrument to measure egoistic, altruistic and biospheric value orientations» *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 38(3): 318–332, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022107300278>.
- Douglas K. M., Green R., Toribio-Flórez D., Biddlestone M., De Gourville D., & Rowden C. (2025), «Conspir-

- acy Theories About Local Political Issues», in *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 35(6), <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.70198>.
- Douglas K. M., & Sutton R. M. (2015) «Climate change: Why the conspiracy theories are dangerous», in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 71(2): 98–106; <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096340215571908>.
- Douglas K. M., & Sutton R. M. (2023), «What Are Conspiracy Theories? A Definitional Approach to Their Correlates, Consequences, and Communication», in *Annual Review of Psychology*, 74: 271–298, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-032420>.
- Douglas K. M., Sutton R. M., & Cichocka A. (2017), «The psychology of conspiracy theories», in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(6): 538–542, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417718261>.
- Dunlap R. E., Van Liere K. D., Mertig A. G., & Jones R. E. (2000), «Measuring endorsement of the new ecological paradigm: A revised NEP scale», in *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3): 425–442, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00176>.
- Ehret P. J., Van Boven L., & Sherman D. K. (2018), «Partisan Barriers to Bipartisanship: Understanding Climate Policy Polarization», in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 9(3): 308–318, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550618758709>.
- Enders A., Farhart C., Miller J., Uscinski J., Saunders K., & Drochon H. (2023), «Are Republicans and Conservatives More Likely to Believe Conspiracy Theories?», in *Political Behavior*, 45(4): 2001–2024, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-022-09812-3>.
- Falkenberg M., Galeazzi A., Torricelli M., Di Marco N., Larosa F., Sas M., ... & Baronchelli A. (2022), «Growing polarization around climate change on social media», in *Nature Climate Change*, 12(12): 1114–1121, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-022-01527-x>.
- Frenken M., Reusch A., & Imhoff R. (2024), «‘Just Because It’s a Conspiracy Theory Doesn’t Mean They’re Not Out to Get You’: Differentiating the Correlates of Judgments of Plausible Versus Implausible Conspiracy Theories», in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506241240506>.
- Gkinopoulos T., & Mari S. (2022), «How exposure to real conspiracy theories motivates collective action and political engagement ? The moderating role of primed victimhood and underlying emotional mechanisms in the case of 2018 bushfire in Attica», in *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12923>.
- Hornsey M. J. (2020), «Why Facts Are Not Enough: Understanding and Managing the Motivated Rejection of Science», in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 29(6): 583–591, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721420969364>.
- Hornsey M. J. (2021), «The role of worldviews in shaping how people appraise climate change», in *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 42: 36–41, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2021.02.021>.
- Hornsey M. J., Harris E. A. Bain, P. G., & Fielding K. S. (2016), «Meta-analyses of the determinants and outcomes of belief in climate change», in *Nature Climate Change*, 6(6): 622–626, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2943>.
- Hornsey M. J., Harris E. A., & Fielding K. S. (2018), «Relationships among conspiratorial beliefs, conservatism and climate scepticism across nations», in *Nature Climate Change*, 8(7): 614–620, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0157-2>.
- Huber R. A., Fesenfeld L., & Bernauer T. (2020), «Political populism, responsiveness, and public support for climate mitigation», in *Climate Policy*, 20(3): 373–386, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2020.1736490>.
- Ibbetson C. (2021, January 18). Where do people believe in conspiracy theories? <https://yougov.co.uk/international/articles/33746-global-where-believe-conspiracy-theories-true>.
- Imhoff R., Bertlich T., & Frenken M. (2022), «Tearing apart the «evil» twins: A general conspiracy mentality is not the same as specific conspiracy beliefs», in *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 46: 101349, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101349>.
- Imhoff R., & Bruder M. (2014), «Speaking (un-)truth to power: Conspiracy mentality as a generalised political attitude», in *European Journal of Personality*, 28(1): 25–43, <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.1930>.
- Imhoff R., Dieterle L., & Lamberty P. (2021), «Resolving the puzzle of conspiracy worldview and political activism: Belief in secret plots decreases normative but increases nonnormative political engagement», in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 12(1): 71–79, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619896491>.
- Imhoff R., Zimmer F., Klein O., António J. H. C., Babinska M., Bangerter A., Bilewicz M., Blanuša N., Bovan K., Bužarovska R., Cichocka A., Delouvée S., Douglas K. M., Dyrendal A., Etienne T., Gjoneska B., Graf S., Gualda E., Hirschberger G., ... van Prooijen J. W. (2022), «Conspiracy mentality and political orientation across 26 countries», in *Nature Human Behaviour*, 6(3): 392–403, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01258-7>.
- IPCC. (2023). Summary for Policymakers, in *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report*

- of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. IPCC.
- Jolley D., & Douglas, K. M. (2014), «The social consequences of conspiracism: Exposure to conspiracy theories decreases intentions to engage in politics and to reduce one's carbon footprint», in *British Journal of Psychology*, 105(1): 35–56, <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.12018>.
- Jost J. T., Federico C. M., & Napier J. L. (2009), «Political ideology: Its structure, functions, and elective affinities», in *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60: 307–337, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163600>.
- Kaiser F. G. (2021), «Climate change mitigation within the Campbell paradigm: doing the right thing for a reason and against all odds», in *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 42: 70–75, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2021.03.024>.
- Kaiser F. G., Gerdes R., & König F. (2023), «Supporting and expressing support for environmental policies», in *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 87, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2023.101997>.
- Koltko-Rivera M. E. (2004), «The Psychology of Worldviews», in *Review of General Psychology*, 8(1): 3–58, <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.8.1.3>.
- Lamb W. F., Mattioli G., Levi S., Timmons Roberts J., Capstick S., Creutzig F., Minx J. C., Müller-Hansen F., Culhane T., & Steinberger J. K. (2020), «Discourses of climate delay», in *Global Sustainability*, 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2020.13>.
- Lewandowsky S. (2021), «Climate Change Disinformation and How to Combat It», in *Annual Review of Public Health*, 42: 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth.42.1.1>.
- Lewandowsky S., Gignac G. E., & Oberauer K. (2013), «The role of conspiracist ideation and worldviews in predicting rejection of science», in *PLoS ONE*, 8(10): e75637, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0075637>.
- Lewandowsky S., Oberauer K., & Gignac G. E. (2013), «NASA Faked the Moon Landing-Therefore, (Climate) Science Is a Hoax: An Anatomy of the Motivated Rejection of Science», in *Psychological Science*, 24(5): 622–633, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612457686>.
- Lezak S. B., & Thibodeau P. H. (2016), «Systems thinking and environmental concern», in *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 46: 143–153, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2016.04.005>.
- Liekefett L., Christ O., & Becker J. C. (2023), «Can conspiracy beliefs be beneficial? Longitudinal linkages between conspiracy beliefs, anxiety, uncertainty aversion, and existential threat», in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 49(2): 167–179, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672211060965>.
- Mang V., Epstude K., & Fennis B. M. (2024), «When do conspiracy theories shape behavioural intentions? The moderating role of the need to evaluate», in *Personality and Individual Differences*, 218, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2023.112481>.
- McCright A. M., Charters M., Dentzman K., & Dietz T. (2016), «Examining the effectiveness of climate change frames in the face of a climate change denial counter-frame», in *Topics in Cognitive Science*, 8(1): 76–97, <https://doi.org/10.1111/tops.12171>.
- Myers K. F., Doran P. T., Cook J., Kotcher J. E., & Myers T. A. (2021), «Consensus revisited: quantifying scientific agreement on climate change and climate expertise among Earth scientists 10 years later», in *Environmental Research Letters*, 16(10): 104030, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ac2774>.
- Nicolosi E., Medina R., Brewer S., Vorkink M., & Allred A. (2025), «The new denial: climate solution misinformation on social media», in *Global Sustainability*, 8: e31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2025.10016>.
- Oreskes N., & Conway E. M. (2010), *Merchants of doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*, Bloomsbury Press, New York.
- Pummerer L., Ditrich L., Winter K., & Sassenberg K. (2025), «Belief in a Norm-Consistent Climate Policy Conspiracy Theory and Non-Normative Collective Action», in *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 55: 343–358, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.13094>.
- Ranney M. A., & Clark D. (2016), «Climate change conceptual change: Scientific information can transform attitudes», in *Topics in Cognitive Science*, 8(1): 49–75, <https://doi.org/10.1111/tops.12187>.
- Sassenberg K., Bertin P., Douglas K. M., & Hornsey M. J. (2023), «Engaging with conspiracy theories: Causes and consequences», in *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 105: 104425, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2022.104425>.
- Southwell B. G., Brennen J. S. B., Paquin R., Boudewyns V., & Zeng J. (2022), «Defining and Measuring Scientific Misinformation», in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 700(1): 98–111, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162221084709>.
- Spampatti T., Brosch T., Mumenthaler C., & Hahnel U. J. J. (2025), «Blueprint of a smokescreen: Introducing the validated climate disinformation corpus for behavioural research on combating climate disinformation», in *British Journal of Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.70012>.

- Spampatti T., Hahnel U. J. J., Trutnevyte E., & Brosch T. (2024), «Psychological inoculation strategies to fight climate disinformation across 12 countries», in *Nature Human Behaviour*, 8(2): 380–398 <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01736-0>.
- Steg L., & Vlek C. (2009), «Encouraging pro-environmental behaviour: An integrative review and research agenda», in *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 29(3): 309–317, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2008.10.004>.
- Stern P. C. (2000), «Toward a coherent theory of environmentally significant behavior», in *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3): 407–424, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00175>.
- Stern P. C., Dietz T., Abel T., & Guagnano G. A. (1999), «A Value-Belief-Norm Theory of Support for Social Movements: The Case of Environmentalism», in *Human Ecology Review*, 6(2): 81–97.
- Supran G., Rahmstorf S., & Oreskes N. (2023), «Assessing ExxonMobil's global warming projections», in *Science*, 379: eabk0063, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abk0063>.
- Tam K. P., & Chan H. W. (2023), «Conspiracy theories and climate change: A systematic review», in *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 91, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2023.102129>.
- Unsworth K. L., & Fielding K. S. (2014), «It's political: How the salience of one's political identity changes climate change beliefs and policy support», in *Global Environmental Change*, 27(1): 131–137, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2014.05.002>.
- Uscinski J. E., Douglas K., & Lewandowsky S. (2017), «Climate Change Conspiracy Theories», in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science* (Issue September 2017, pp. 1–37). Oxford University Press, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.013.328>.
- Uscinski J. E., Enders A. M., Seelig M. I., Klofstad C. A., Funchion J. R., Everett C., Wuchty S., Premaratne K., & Murthi M. N. (2021), «American politics in two dimensions: Partisan and ideological identities versus anti-establishment orientations», in *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(4), 877–895, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12616>.
- Uscinski J. E., & Olivella S. (2017), «The conditional effect of conspiracy thinking on attitudes toward climate change», in *Research and Politics*, 4(4), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168017743105>.
- van Bavel J. J., & Pereira A. (2018), «The partisan brain: An identity-based model of political belief», in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 22(3): 213–224, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2018.01.004>.
- van Boven L., & Sherman D. K. (2021), «Elite influence on public attitudes about climate policy», in *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 42: 83–88, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2021.03.023>.
- van der Linden S. (2015), «The conspiracy-effect: Exposure to conspiracy theories (about global warming) decreases pro-social behavior and science acceptance», in *Personality and Individual Differences*, 87: 171–173, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.07.045>.
- van der Linden S., Leiserowitz A., Rosenthal S., & Maibach E. (2017), «Inoculating the Public against Misinformation about Climate Change», in *Global Challenges*, 1(2): 1600008, <https://doi.org/10.1002/gch2.201600008>.
- van der Werff E., Steg L., & Keizer K. (2013), «It is a moral issue: The relationship between environmental self-identity, obligation-based intrinsic motivation and pro-environmental behaviour», in *Global Environmental Change*, 23(5): 1258–1265, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2013.07.018>.
- van Prooijen J. W., & Böhm N. (2024), «Do Conspiracy Theories Shape or Rationalize Vaccination Hesitancy Over Time? », in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 15(4): 421–428, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506231181659>.
- van Prooijen J. W., Šrol, J., & Maglić M. (2025), «How belief in conspiracy theories could harm sustainability», in *Nature Human Behaviour*, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-025-02243-0>.
- Winter K., Hornsey M. J., Pummerer L., & Sassenberg K. (2022), «Anticipating and defusing the role of conspiracy beliefs in shaping opposition to wind farms», in *Nature Energy*, 7(12): 1200–1207, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41560-022-01164-w>.
- Winter K., Hornsey M. J., Pummerer L., & Sassenberg K. (2024), «Public agreement with misinformation about wind farms», in *Nature Communications*, 15(1): 8888, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-53278-2>.
- Winter K., Pummerer L., & Sassenberg K. (2025), «Not that different after all: Pro-environmental social norms predict pro-environmental behaviour (also) among those believing in conspiracy theories», in *British Journal of Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.70030>.
- Winter K., Pummerer L., von Oertzen T., Hornsey M. J., & Sassenberg K. (2025), «Conspiracy belief and opposition to wind farms: A longitudinal study», in *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 104: 102620, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2025.102620>.



Citation: Benoist, L. (2026). «I Don't Need Climate Change to Be an Ecologist»: Far-right Ecological Activism, or When Climate (Almost) Doesn't Matter. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 145-156. doi: 10.36253/smp-17060

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

ORCID:
LB: 0009-0002-2074-814X

«I Don't Need Climate Change to Be an Ecologist»: Far-right Ecological Activism, or When Climate (Almost) Doesn't Matter

LISE BENOIST

Department of Human Geography, Uppsala University, Sweden
E-mail: lise.benoist@kultgeog.uu.se

Abstract. This article examines how far-right activists from groups within the French extra-parliamentary far right that have incorporated ecological issues into their agenda relate specifically to climate change. In doing so, it aims to further tackle the why and how of climate acceptance/denialism *within* far-right ecologism. The analysis of in-depth interviews reveals that, while climate change is widely acknowledged, the denial of its anthropogenic causes persists. However, the interviewed activists' disengagement from climate issues also stems from their perception of such issues as further entrenching a political and economic status quo they claim to oppose, as well as overshadowing other ecological issues fundamental to their ecologism. This results in an ecological activism where climate issues, when not entirely absent, are deemed redundant, and are therefore relativised rather than simply opposed. The findings reinforce the importance of the environment/climate division and the obsolescence of the denier/non-denier dichotomy, while providing additional perspectives on the articulations of these dimensions. The article concludes on the implications of these findings, as well as on how far-right ecologists see ecological issues as embedded in a broader «anthropological crisis» that they aim to mitigate, and which should be further investigated.

Keywords: far-right ecologism, far-right activism, climate denialism, France.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

«Is the right doomed to climate scepticism?» asked the title of a 2019 article in *Éléments* magazine, a major outlet of the *Nouvelle Droite*, heading a scathing critique of the presence of climate scepticism within the right. The authors condemned the conspiracy theories associated with global warming, deeming them worthy of a «bad James Bond scenario» and mocking those who confuse climate events with the weather. The article however caused an important backlash among the readership, much to one of the authors' regrets (interview with author 2024). In 2023, at the yearly colloquium of the catholic-identitarian Academia Christiana youth movement on the theme of ecology, while one presentation advocated the seriousness of the IPCC reports and warned on the consequences of anthropogenic global warming,

another dismissed a made-up emergency. Late 2025, the vice-editor-in-chief of *Éléments* urged his peers to surmount their climate scepticism to take ecological issues seriously in a segment on the conservative Radio Courtoisie. Comically, the radio host had to make sure listeners were not offended, reassuring them this was not meant as «an insult». Such examples illustrate the ambiguity of the French extra-parliamentary far right with regards to climate issues: while there is an apparent willingness to move beyond climate scepticism, such attempts seem like lonely islands in a sea of persistent opposition.

Notwithstanding, the French far right has noticeably foregrounded the theme of environmental protection in its political agenda. At the parliamentary level, the *Rassemblement National* has defended a patriotic and rural ecology (Benoist, Turner, and Bailey 2024; Bivar 2022; Boukala and Tountasaki 2019). At the metapolitical level, the *Nouvelle Droite* and its heirs have long developed an identitarian version of environmentalism linking identity preservation to environmental protection based on its fundamental concept of ethno-differentialism (François 2016), some of its thinkers later adopting sharper anti-consumerist and growth-critical positions (Carle 2017). Both sides have mobilised the key themes of localism and rootedness when addressing ecological issues (Benoist 2024; Carle 2023). This also applies to the more activist side of extra-parliamentary far-right milieu, which is the focus of this article.

This nationalist activist milieu is broadly composed of three main branches: national-revolutionary, i.e., neo-fascists known for their emphasis on social issues (see Lebourg 2010), the more than century-old monarchist counter-revolutionary movement (see Winock 2015) and identitarian (see Jacquet-Vaillant 2021). Across these traditions, French far-right activist groups have in recent years actively integrated the question of ‘ecology’ (*écologie*) to their activism, most often in articulation to anti-globalist, anti-consumerist and/or anti-capitalist slogans that have historically permeated the successive groups banned and restructured in the last decades (Lebourg 2010; Jacquet Vaillant 2021). This ‘far-right ecological activism’ has primarily taken the shape of conferences on related topics, from local lectures to national yearly colloquiums such as the one mentioned above, but also of communication campaigns, with the primary objective being the (intellectual) training of current and new activists. This educational component has gone hand in hand with activities of litter collection in green spaces or urban outskirts, boycotts, and small-scale vegetable gardening – similar to the far-right ecological activism performed in other European countries (e.g., Bulli 2019;

Hurd and Werther 2013; Lubarda 2023). Such developments testify of a willingness to include ecological issues in far-right activism, beyond political communication and strategic outreach alone.

However, while the focus on environmental and nature protection is apparent, how do climate issues in particular play out in the motivations behind these recent far-right activist mobilisations on *écologie*? This article aims to address this question through the analysis of interviews conducted with far-right activists concerned and involved with ecological issues. More specifically, it investigates the role of climate change in their ecological motivations by asking: are concerns over climate change present at all? If so, how are climate related issues perceived and why? The findings reveal an ambivalence towards both the phenomenon of climate change and the related mitigation policies. While the denial of anthropogenic causes persists, new justifications emerge showing how the disengagement of the interviewed far-right activists with climate issues equally stem from their perception that such issues further entrench the political and economic status-quo, as well as overshadow other (and broader) ecological issues in which their ecologism is grounded in. This results in an ecological activism seldom motivated – if at all – by concerns over climate change.

In discussing the above, the contribution of this article is threefold. First, it provides missing empirical data for the scholarship on non-party far-right engagement with environmental and climate issues which has overwhelmingly focused on political parties (e.g., Gruber 2024; Schwörer and Fernández-García 2024; Voss 2019; Weisskircher and Volk 2025), albeit notable exceptions (e.g., Brodtmann 2025; Bulli 2019; Jones 2023). Second, few studies are based on interviews with far-right actors themselves on this topic (exceptions include Lubarda 2023; Pietiläinen 2024), reflecting a wider lack of close-up insights into the micro level individual activists of far-right movements and hence their motivations (Blee and Creasap 2010; Boumaza and Campana 2007; Caiani 2023). Third, by scrutinising the why and how of climate scepticism *within* far-right ecological activism, the article further challenges a conceptual dichotomy between climate denialism and ecofascism that has often underpinned the field and overshadowed the examination of the fundamental environment/climate division that enables the *coexistence* of both climate sceptic and pro-environmental positions (following e.g., Forchtner and Kølvråa 2015; Forchtner and Olsen 2023; Hanson 2024; Lubarda and Forchtner 2023; Weisskircher and Diermeier 2025).

The next section outlines the conceptual framework. Then, a subsequent section provides details on the methodology before moving on to three empirical-analytical sections. The article concludes with a summary of the insights and their implications for future research.

2. FAR-RIGHT ECOLOGISM: BETWEEN DENIALISM AND ECOFASCISM

Most of the (far-)right is rather known for denying climate change and promoting anti-ecological policies while defending fossil capital (e.g., Allen et al. 2024; Malm and The Zetkin Collective 2021). Although this remains the dominant trend, there are far-right extremist actors, referred to as ecofascist, who see in climate and environmental threats a rationalisation for attacks on racialised populations, reviving neo-Malthusian fears and misanthropic ideas (Bhatia 2004; Macklin 2022; Moore and Roberts 2022). As shown by recent scholarship, a conceptual premise for the understanding of contemporary manifestations and mutations of far-right ecologism in context-specific realities requires examining how the two overlap rather than viewing them as either-or categories (see also Benoist, Turner and Bailey 2024).

First, far-right actors, electorally and beyond, have promoted their own vision of ecological politics, emphasising how 'blood and soil' organicism is not confined to far-right violent margins. Conflating (a pure) nature with (a pure) nation through imaginaries of romanticised rural landscapes inhabited by rooted local people threatened by a globalist ideology and the globalist elite implementing it (e.g. Benoist, Turner, and Bailey 2024; Forchtner 2019; Forchtner and Kølvrå 2015; Lubarda 2023; Ungureanu and Popartan 2024), environmental protection has served as another anti-immigration justification and the defence of national borders (Hultgren 2015; Pietiläinen 2024; Turner and Bailey 2021). Scholars have consequently elaborated on the ideological underpinnings of a broader ecofascist ideology structured around the regeneration of national greatness through the return to a supposed 'natural order' and the violent expulsion of unwanted racialised Others (Campion 2021; Moore and Roberts 2022), or suggested the more encompassing term of «far-right ecologism» (Lubarda 2023) as a framework to study the variety of far-right engagements with ecological issues, within which the empirical material is situated.

Second, climate scepticism is evolving, as shown by traditionally climate-sceptic far-right actors moving away from outright denialism to «yes but» positions, partially acknowledging climate change and some

related policies (Caiani and Lubarda 2023; Forchtner and Lubarda 2023; Vihma, Reischl and Andersen 2021). Lubarda (2023) also finds partial climate acceptance in his interviews with far-right ecological activists of both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary groups in Hungary and Poland. Others furthermore emphasise the heterogeneity and volatility of pro/against positions in relation to renewable energy and climate change in general among far-right parties, often driven by strategic contextual choices rather than ideological coherence (Schwörer and Fernández-García 2024; Weisskircher and Volk 2025). Moreover, in their study of far-right contributions in the EU parliament, Forchtner and Lubarda (2023) do not only show that scepticism towards the reality of anthropogenic climate change is actually residual, but that the opposition lies in how climate issues are being addressed. Hanson (2024: 46) reaches a similar conclusion in her study of the Spanish Vox, whereby she finds that «discursive articulations of climate change are not actually about climate change», but about progressive global climate mitigation strategies.

Third, such a dichotomy appears all the more obsolete when climate scepticism in fact usually *co-exists* with pro-environmental stances on the far right. While the difference between *environmental* issues and *climate* issues has long been remarked (Farstad 2018), studies have demonstrated how far-right parties can simultaneously support local/national environmental protection whilst opposing transnational/global climate policies (Forchtner and Kølvrå 2015). Forchtner and Olsen (2023) call this a «double vision», whereby the perception of concrete environmental preservation is contrasted with abstract global climate change. This pitting of nature protection against climate mitigation has been particularly visible in conflicts over the implementation of renewable energy (e.g., Weisskircher and Diermeier 2025).

In other words, climate denialists might mobilise ecofascist tropes around the natural environment, and far-right ecologists can overlook climate issues altogether, as these are two connected yet fundamentally different topics with their respective connotations, symbolic weight and sometimes conflicting goals. Against this background, it is crucial to instead pay closer attention to the environment/climate articulations *in relation to* one another, as well as to examine the different forms this partial climate acceptance takes by looking deeper into the why and how behind the salience of climate scepticism in far-right ecologism (Forchtner and Lubarda 2023, Hanson 2024).

While research on climate scepticism has conceptually moved to broader discussions on climate *obstruction*

in order to include strategies of delay and inaction that likewise obstruct the

implementation of effective climate policies (e.g., Ekberg et al. 2022), I here specifically refer to Van Rensburg's (2015) threefold classification of climate scepticism to analytically grasp the aforementioned evolutions. This framework differentiates outright/literal denialism of the *evidence* of climate science (i.e., the trend, cause and impact of climate change) from *process* scepticism (i.e., the production of the data) and scepticism towards the policy *response* (i.e., global cooperation, efficacy). These three categories are not mutually exclusive and show the varied manifestations of doubt and/or rejection within climate denialism. Importantly, as emphasised by Forchtner and Lubarda (2023), both response and process scepticism can exist independently of evidence scepticism.

In the next section, I describe the methodology behind the subsequent analysis of the presence and role of climate issues in far-right extra-parliamentary ecology in France.

3. METHODOLOGY

The analysed data consists of in-depth semi-structured interviews (two hours on average) conducted with 34 activists from far-right extra-parliamentary groups in France between 2024 and 2026¹. The methodology is grounded in an ethnographic approach to interviewing (Trundle, Gardner, and Phillips 2024) and a standpoint of situated ethics of care and critical empathy (de Coning 2023; Obst 2024; Segers, Gelashvili, and Gagnon 2023). That is, I consider taking the respondents' claims seriously (Pasiëka 2019) and at times climbing «empathy walls» (Hochschild 2018: 233) as preconditions for both achieving a deeper understanding of my participants' worldviews and accessing the field in the first place.

Respondents were initially recruited by directly contacting (via social media, email) extra-parliamentary far-right groups, identified through online monitoring, which have conducted some form of activism under the banner of *écologie* in the last years. I snowballed from there, most often thanks to participants not only providing further contacts but also vouching for me. Despite a handful of rejections or lack of response, I interviewed activists from some 15 different groups across France,

primarily based in medium-sized to large cities, even though some respondents lived in the countryside.

All activists have been given a pseudonym. To further protect their anonymity and avoid unnecessary platforming, I do not list nor associate them with the specific groups they are affiliated with. Yet, it is noteworthy that half of the respondents come from the national-revolutionary tradition, followed by monarchists and (catholic)-identitarian activists. Additionally, all respondents but four are men, and all but five were aged 35 or less, with one-third even aged 25 or less. Such demographics reflect a milieu of male-dominated youth groups. However, only one quarter were students at the time of the interview, with a majority being employed.

Importantly, while the theme of *écologie* is never the primary reason to become engaged on the far right, ecological concerns nonetheless play an important role in shaping the worldviews and motivations that lead to this specific activism. Lastly, while the term «activist» homogenises a variety of engagement and experience backgrounds, there is a 'leadership bias' in the data, with more than half of the respondents having some level of responsibility in their respective group, locally or nationally when applicable. While it is a result in itself, it is also because access to the field is mediated by such gatekeeping respondents. The collected data nonetheless enable a substantial examination of current far-right ecological activism as saturation was reached both in terms of interview content and potential (willing) interviewees.

The analysis of the interview material drew from the successive steps of thematic analysis (Ahmed et al. 2025; Braun and Clarke 2006). While the interviews addressed the role of ecological issues at large in the participants' past, present and future activist engagement, the present article focuses on aspects relating to climate issues. I proceeded by first isolating relevant excerpts in the transcripts which I then coded inductively. I then regrouped the numerous codes into six more coherent themes: overcoming denialism; the denial of denialism; partial acceptance; global technocracy; green capitalism; no need for climate change; beyond climate change. These themes form the three empirical subsections presented below and the concluding reflections.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Mutated scepticism: Partial acceptance and the denial of denialism

This section shows how climate scepticism remains dominant among far-right activists who are nonetheless concerned with ecological issues, yet in a mutated form.

¹ Two interviews from 2022 were integrated into the analysis but these participants were interviewed again in 2024. The analysed material is part of a broader PhD data set including field observations at events and interviews with (intellectual) figures of the extra-parliamentary milieu, such as the ones referred to in the introduction.

Regularly, respondents communicate at the beginning of the interview their awareness of the dominance of climate-scepticism and overall anti-ecologism on the (far) right. This observation and willingness to change it appear as the point of departure for far-right ecologically oriented activism. A majority of respondents communicate at the beginning of the interviews their wish to overcome an overall anti-ecological «Pavlovian reflex» which consists of opposing all topics emanating from the left. Whether it is on the grounds of ecology being essentially a conservative and hence right-wing issue, or because they simply think it should not belong to any political side in particular, there is a shared understanding that, either way, as nationalists, they *should* care about ecological issues (see also Lubarda and Forchtner 2023).

As Quentin and Antoine (_2024) separately mention, their political camp is rather known for people proudly driving 4x4s and eating meat just to provoke ecologists. Laura (_2024) was upset about such widespread views and consequently decided to push ecological issues, including climate, in the group she is active in. Personal experiences of climate change sometimes ground these motivations, such as for Anthony (_2024) who used to doubt whether climate change was real until he observed how the vegetation has changed: «We see the consequences, so we are forced to acknowledge [that it is caused by climate change]». Similarly, Jérémy (_2025) declares: «We see it, we live it, we know it. No one can say they don't notice it», echoing other observation-based acknowledgements of climate change by the activists interviewed by Lubarda (2023:100). As a result, Sébastien (_2024), like others trying to convince their peers about the importance of ecological issues, is pleased to see an «ideological shift» at work in the milieu:

...with people really tackling this topic head-on, even if there are some conspiracist remnants that are ideological dead ends [...] So, at some point, one also needs to have the humbleness to say: we are not scientists, maybe the researchers who have studied this topic for years have a bit more legitimacy than a Youtuber doing research in his underwear from his bedroom [laughs]².

Sébastien is at first sight correct about the «shift»: climate change as such is only doubted by two respondents, making outright denialism of the phenomenon indeed residual. However, the acceptance is only partial: acknowledging the phenomenon does not imply acknowledging its causes, nor does it mean that climate

change is a source of worry or motivation for the activists. Evidence scepticism (Van Rensburg 2015) towards the anthropogenic origin of climate change remains in fact striking, with almost two-thirds of the respondents either opposing or questioning the extent of human responsibility. They fall into two categories.

First, a minority only, undermines the specificity of the current situation by using typical arguments around 'climate has *always* changed'. Alongside, the harmfulness of CO₂ emissions is disputed, with a couple of respondents even considering that they are in fact beneficial to life on Earth (Pasek 2021). For example, Valentin (_2024) believes that «more CO₂ would be beneficial for nature» and thinks «that CO₂ has a very minor share, I mean *really* minor, I mean *insignificant* in global warming. And the share of human responsibility [in CO₂ emissions], let's not even talk about it.»

Second, and a majority, acknowledge the specificity of contemporary global warming, but instead of outright rejecting human responsibility they rather question its *extent*. Many blame it on not being able to know for sure, despite the scientific consensus about it and their otherwise usual assertiveness on other topics. For example, Alexandre (_2024) explains: «I am incapable, with the knowledge I have, of settling the question. I therefore believe that the debate should remain open. [...] I have to admit that these are questions that are too technical and beyond my understanding». Similarly, Maxime states: «I don't have a definite opinion. [...] So, actually, I am incapable of saying... I have read many things about it, but I cannot be 100% convinced.»

This situation of partial acceptance whereby climate change is acknowledged but its causes are questioned is, according to Adrien (_2025), quite representative of the milieu: «I have the feeling that, around me, yeah, people are a bit like me: “yes, there is a global warming. What's the impact of humankind on it? I don't know”». An observation confirmed by Romain (_2024): «There is an undeniable global warming, but I think, and for my other comrades too, that human impact is not as significant as one would want us to believe.»

Yet, interestingly, such sceptical positions are perceived by the respondents themselves as *having overcome* denialism, resulting in an interesting denial of denialism. When asked about where he stands in relation to the climate question, Vincent (_2025) answers firmly: «Ah no no, I *do* believe in climate change, I am *not* a climate-denialist. I have been though», implying that it is not the case anymore. Still, he continues and downplays its anthropogenic nature: «But I can be a bit more nuanced on the importance... Humans have an impact, that is for sure. But the level of importance... [...] I can-

² A reference to a 2024 climate-denialist video from the well-known far-right Youtuber *Le Raptor*.

not assess it. It exists, but I don't really know to what extent.» Similarly, Mathieu (_2025) answers in a surprising twist:

Yes, of course, I am interested [in climate change]. And to me there is no debate. I mean, of course human activities have an impact on the climate. But... whether there is a global warming due to human activities... No, I don't think so. Or it is minimal.

Despite a few exceptions, the interviews reveal a partial acceptance grounded in a mutation *within* climate scepticism rather than a move away from it, as the acknowledgement of the phenomenon but not of its causes and impacts still falls under evidence scepticism (Van Rensburg 2015). Nevertheless, they show how climate change is not the repulsive topic that it used to be, and, as shown below, is viewed as yet another symptom of a much broader ecological crisis. But let us first turn to another argument that explains the disregard for climate-related issues: the equation of climate mitigation policies with furthering, rather than breaking with, a politico-economic status quo they claim to oppose.

4.2 Global technocracy and the hypocrisy of green capitalism

Two further themes coded from the interviews that help to understand the respondents' rejection and/or disengagement from climate change are that they view climate mitigation as a cornerstone of increasing technocratic decision-making as well as of the greening of capitalism. They are grouped here insofar as both relate to response scepticism (Van Rensburg 2015) fed by the perception of climate change as a convenient excuse for furthering a political and economic status-quo rejected by the activists. Benjamin (_2025) exemplifies this suspicion well as he declares:

Regarding climate change, it is rather what comes out of it that bothers me. It is a gateway to a discourse on adaptation to the [economic and political] system, which I think can precisely serve [its own] interests. This is why I don't take a stance on this issue. Is it anthropogenic? Is it natural? This question seems secondary compared to what the system can make of it... I always question why something is brought to the forefront.

According to Maxime (_2024) the fundamental problem lies in the necessary global dimension of climate governance:

global climate equals global answer, equals globalism, equals COP, so, actually, ecology disappears from the top and the people are kept at a distance. We create citizens assemblies to give them the impression that they participate... [But global warming] is a keystone for technocracy.

The rejection of climate governance based on its global and hence supranational character taking the power away from the people is not surprising coming from the far right, which commonly mobilises an anti-globalist rhetoric in the promotion and rejection of ecological policies alike (e.g., Forchtner and Kølvrå 2015; Lockwood 2018). This is visible in the interviews too, as respondents often display response scepticism, connected to process scepticism (Van Rensburg 2015) as it is grounded in distrust of (political) elites, who are furthermore perceived as illegitimately attempting to control people's everyday lives (e.g., use of car) while themselves living carbon-intensive lifestyles (e.g., international travels).

Yet, global climate governance is not only denounced for infringing on national sovereignty, but also because it would, to many interviewed activists, in fact further aggravate the situation by not addressing the root cause of ecological degradation. To Guillaume (_2024), it is globalisation, which has brought the very problems it is now trying to solve:

Ecological issues come from globalisation, for the most part, and so now we say: "there are these problems, so we need more globalisation, we need a global system to handle that"... To me, because the problem comes from globalisation, it is completely absurd to say that we need more globalisation to end the problem of globalisation.

For Baptiste (_2025), it is the «techno-capitalist system and the myth of infinite growth» that ought to be tackled. Until then, he will consider the political and economic elites' ambition to fight global warming as «hypocrites» with false «solutions». Similarly, Jonathan (_2026) considers not fundamentally challenging «hyper-liberal capitalist modernity» as «bailing out water out of a sinking boat instead of fixing the holes». It is a similar justification that underpins common declarations that contrast the limited carbon impact of individual citizens with that of global trade, albeit often tied to a relativisation of national responsibility.

Others likewise associate climate mitigation-related policies with means to perpetuate the current economic system deemed destructive. This criticism for example takes the shape of attacks on market-based mechanisms such as carbon-compensation schemes. This specific target has also been noted by Forchtner and Lubarda

(2023) at the EU level, but also by Hurd and Werther (2013) who saw how far-right ecological activism in Germany addressed the problem of the commodification of nature. To Alexandre (_2024), these are mere ways to «recycle capitalism». Guillaume (_2024), Hugo (_2022) and Lucas (_2022), separately but similarly denounce how they allow a nonsensical equivalence between units of nature, such as trees that can be cut somewhere and replanted somewhere else. To Guillaume (_2024), this is facilitated by an abstract conception of nature which, as also explained by Lucas (_2022), results in «trying to count things that cannot be counted. Nature is not a stock of CO₂... [and it] cannot be represented administratively in tables with numbers». Moreover, to Sébastien (_2024), carbon accounting more broadly can be misleading, pointing to how France's carbon footprint can appear satisfying while it might only be the result of the delocalisation of industries and hence of outsourcing production and the emissions that come with it.

While Marie (_2025) is suspicious of climate change having created «a new and very profitable market», Maxime (_2024) summarises:

capitalism, under the green banner of global warming, continues to advance... Everything must generate profits. And so, when there is a wasteland, you have to build a wind turbine... Behind [wind turbines] there is however an industry running on oil [...] Seeing how much global warming profits capitalism, I tell myself, there is something suspicious there [...] And so, warmism doesn't provide a basis to oppose capitalism. On the contrary: it gives a green stamp to capitalism.

Climate mitigation is therefore associated with greenwashing, as many respondents deplore and mock the contradictions of a *green* capitalism, deemed a hypocrisy. This includes ridiculing attempts at global climate governance, pointing to the powerlessness of successive COPs notably due to their permeability to the lobbying of multinational companies.

This section has shown how many respondents see climate mitigation politics as furthering existing politico-economic problems rather than solutions to them. This view, a form of response scepticism (Van Rensburg 2015), illustrates how the interviewed activists' disregard for climate issues is indeed connected to a rejection of what is done under the banner of climate change mitigation (Forchtner and Lubarda 2023; Hanson 2024). Let us now move on to how the disengagement with climate change is also fed by the perception that it overshadows other, equally or more important ecological issues, at times making climate issues redundant altogether.

4.3 *Beyond climate change: more environment, less (or no need for) climate*

The first two sections have discussed how evidence and response scepticism (Van Rensburg 2015) permeate the interviewed activists' perception of climate change and related policies. In this last empirical section, I examine two other recurring themes that highlight an equally important facet explaining why the interviewed far-right activists do not give climate change the focus of their ecological concerns and activism. On the one hand, the respondents consider climate issues to be reductionist and diverting attention from much more diverse ecological issues that ought to be addressed. On the other hand, many declare that they simply not «need» climate issues to be ecologists. In that sense, the activists' ecologism is not only directed *against* current climate mitigation policies but also presented as going *beyond* climate issues.

A dimension that already emerges in the previous section is the criticism of climate-centrism as many respondents complain about a perceived dominance of climate issues within ecological issues.

For instance, Guillaume (_2024) thinks that «an ecologism fixed solely on the question of global warming can be dangerous», as, following his example on the carbon compensation schemes, he concludes that «[it] doesn't prevent the destruction of nature». In doing so, he points to the potential harmfulness of carbon reductionism, in light of conflicts that can arise between environmental protection and climate mitigation (Weiskircher and Deirmeier 2025). This dimension is also present when other respondents denounce soil and biodiversity damage caused by wind turbines for example. Or in the case of Hugo (_2022), who says that, while having «no doubt that global warming is happening [...] there is no point saying we'll try to reduce by 0,5 degrees if, at the same time, we approve the concretisation of coasts», implying that the focus on mitigating global warming as such might eclipse what he perceives as equally important issues such as soil artificialisation and landscape degradation.

Respondents indeed explain wanting to address other ecological issues, considered overshadowed and overlooked by this perceived predominance of climate issues in the public debate. In fact, it is sometimes an aspect that contributes to suspicion, such as in the case of Théo (_2024), who explains being cautious as he «avoid[s] playing in the narrative of elites who make everything about global warming as if it was the only ecological problem that exists». Thomas (_2024) likewise considers that if climate change is «one dimension of the problem, it is far from being the only one. Sometimes we focus on

this and forget all the other dimensions of the ecological problem [while] there are many more.» A similar criticism about the reduction of ecological issues to climate change is also present in Forchtner and Olsen's analysis of a German metapolitical outlet (2023: 230) and among Lubarda's activist interviewees (2023: 103).

One of these left out dimensions, according to the participants, is the matter of environmental pollution, which appears to be a central source of ecological worry for many. Pierre (_2024) expresses such concerns as he states: «it is not *only* about CO2. It is about the pollution of rivers, of landscapes, the industrialisation, the concretisation...» It is in this vein that Nicolas (_2024) prefers to talk about «ecological disruption» rather than «global warming» in order to better encompass and hence provide a more accurate description of the current situation:

because it targets both global warming [with] climate change, rising water levels ... but it also targets everything related to pollution which will negatively impact our quality of life. So, air pollution, water pollution, light pollution, everything connected to endocrine-disruptors, oestrogen in water... Many issues like these. And it enables one to convey that there is indeed a disruption of an ecosystem, an ecological disruption precisely, a disturbance of this ecosystem, rather than [just] warmism.

This terrain of pollution is deemed by the interviewed activists to have been left aside by more mainstream climate-focused ecologism and therefore aim to occupy it, in what some even conceive as a left/right division of labour on ecological issues. This focus on environmental pollution over climate issues is often analysed by scholars, and justified by the far-right itself, by the tangibility argument (Forchtner and Kølvråa 2015; Forchtner and Olsen 2023). Here too, respondents legitimise their focus on local/national ecological problems because they are «concrete» and therefore more engaging than an abstract call to «save the planet». The tangibility of local actions is in turn many times presented as an antidote to a feeling of powerlessness in front of global climate issues. To some, it is even a matter of being pragmatic. For example, Nicolas (_2025) focuses on fighting environmental pollution and on climate change adaptation since he believes that «a global policy to reduce carbon emissions and cut production – a precondition to fighting global warming – will never happen».

Yet, beyond the tangibility element and in line with the respondent's understanding of ecological issues as much broader than climate change alone, another important argument explains the disengagement with climate issues: the interviews reveal how climate change

is in fact considered by many respondents as a redundant element in their ecologism.

When I ask Maxime (_2022) and Guillaume (_2024) who both separately declare to show «little interest» in the topic why is it the case, they respectively reply: «It's because I don't need climate change to exist to preach ecology and degrowth», and «I don't need... Basically, even if global warming didn't exist, I would still be an ecologist. I still wouldn't want forests to be destroyed to build supermarkets instead... It is not decisive in my ecologism.» Such declarations highlight how disinterest can be explained by the activists' perception that they have «many other good reasons to be ecologists» *already* (Thomas_2024).

Respondents indeed emphasise how their knowledge about detrimental human impacts on the environment both exceeds and precedes climate issues. As Florian (_2024) expresses it:

yes, ok, [global warming] seems to be true, but... it just seems to be a corollary of the thesis that we have an impact on the environment... even if I were to get the certainty that global warming is indeed real or not, well, it would actually change [silence] nothing about what I believe. It would only simply confirm that humans have an impact on [the environment], it would be an example [of that] with climate change you know, and it would tell us that we obviously need to be careful, which we already knew.

In sharper words, Alexandre (_2024) similarly asserts a sentiment of redundancy:

It is clear that we've destroyed the environment and that [...] half of the things we eat are totally artificial etc., that this harms our health [...] so, yes, at some point, we are not going to debate for a thousand years about how many degrees the Earth is going to warm.

This last empirical section has focused on how the interviewed far-right activists situate their ecologism as going beyond climate issues. This leads us to concluding reflections on the role of climate issues in far-right ecologism and far-right activism more broadly, and the implications for future research.

5. CONCLUSION: NOT A CLIMATE BUT AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CRISIS

This article has examined how climate issues are perceived by activists concerned with ecological issues from extra-parliamentary far-right groups in France. The analysis of in-depth interviews has highlighted the multifaceted and ambivalent ways in which far-right activists

relate to climate change, beyond mere rejection or instrumentalisation. While grounded in a willingness to overcome climate scepticism and develop their own ecological politics, the outcome remains closer to an overlooking and relativisation of climate issues altogether.

The findings, revolving around three dimensions, show that despite an overwhelming acknowledgement of the reality of the phenomenon of climate change, scepticism towards its anthropogenic origin remains dominant. Furthermore, the opposition to climate mitigation policies is tied to a criticism of technocratic governance and the greening of capitalism. Both amount to evidence and response scepticism, connected to an underlying but less dominant process scepticism (Van Rensburg 2015). Beyond scepticism, a third dimension concerns the perceived redundancy of climate change for their ecologism, as far-right ecologists focus on other ecological issues deemed overlooked and overshadowed by climate issues.

The analysis therefore indicates that accepting the reality of climate change, rather than being a main driver, seems to function as 'just another reason' integrated into concerns over other ecological issues, which only comes to reinforce and legitimise existing adjacent ecological beliefs and advocacy. Consequently, there is little doubt that ecological engagement on the far right is not primarily channelled through concerns over global warming. Far-right ecologically motivated activism therefore results in an ecologism where climate change (almost) does not matter.

Importantly, the findings reveal that while climate issues are relativised as part of other/broader ecological issues, these very ecological issues are themselves understood as problems caused by the political and economic underpinnings of liberal capitalist modernity. This is what leads activists like Nicolas (2024) to root «ecological disruption» in a wider «anthropological disruption». Indeed, ecological issues on the far right are seen through the prism of an anthropological decline that funnels environmental and cultural pollution alike (Benoist forthcoming) and ultimately opposes a narrative of a broader «anthropological crisis» rather than a «climate crisis».

This leaves us with important implications for future research on the articulations of ecology and climate in the (anti-)ecological politics of the far right, but also for studies on the far right more broadly. First, as confirmed by this empirical case, climate scepticism can be an integral part of far-right ecologism. This further highlights the decreasing relevance of the denier/non-denier division (Dannemann 2023) while reinforcing the need to conceptually integrate the differentiation between environmental issues and climate issues that underpins the

«double vision» of the far right (Forchtner and Olsen 2023). Moreover, it calls to pay further attention to how real or imagined conflicts between nature protection and climate mitigation can be mobilised by the far right electorally and beyond, and the broader ramifications of such 'beyond climate ecologism' for climate obstruction (Eckberg et al., 2022; Weisskircher and Deirmeier 2025).

Second, this 'decoupling' of anthropogenic climate change from ecological issues, while nonetheless acknowledging some of the threats posed by global warming, enables a narrative of climate *adaptation* that sidelines engagement with climate mitigation and its foundations (e.g. global CO₂ emissions). Indeed, the recognition of climate-related threats but not their anthropogenic causes helps explain how denial and pro-environmental stances can coexist, and illustrates how moving from outright denial may lead directly to nationalist and securitised adaptation discourses. This in turn further points to how climate-changed futures are likely to be organised around a racialised inclusion/exclusion antagonism (Dannemann 2023; Malm and the Zetkin Collective 2021; Moore and Roberts 2022; Pietiläinen 2025), and the need to study far-right appeals to localism and ecologically resilient communities as manifestations of it (Benoist 2024; Varco 2023).

Third, as the findings corroborate how the far right tends to oppose what is done in the name of climate change rather than the phenomenon itself (Forchtner and Lubarda 2023; Hanson 2024), they also reveal how the inherent contradictions of 'green' capitalism can further fuel scepticism towards climate mitigation more broadly, while reinforcing an extra-parliamentary far right which already mobilises a criticism of economic growth and anti-capitalist narratives in relation to ecological issues (Benoist 2024; Forchtner and Olsen 2024; Forchtner and Gruber 2024). Further research should continue to account for and delve deeper into the wider societal critique within which far-right ecologism is situated, in order to understand the appeal of an «anthropological crisis» framing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers, as well as Bernhard Forchtner and Baša Lubarda, for their valuable comments. I am also grateful to the participants in the 2024 REXKLIMA workshop «Far-right Politics in the Context of the Climate Crisis» (TU Dresden) for their feedback on an earlier version of this paper.

The 2023-2026 data collection was enabled thanks to fieldwork funds from The Swedish Society for Anthro-

pology and Geography (SSAG) and The Royal Swedish Academy of Science (KVA). Travels for the two 2022 interviews were funded by the Formas grant 2018-01702.

The data handling was enabled by resources provided by the National Academic Infrastructure for Supercomputing in Sweden (NAISS), partially funded by the Swedish Research Council through grant agreement no. 2022-06725.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. K. et al. (2025), «Using Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research», in *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 6: 100198, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jlmedi.2025.100198>.
- Allen, I. K., et al. (2024), *Political Ecologies of the Far Right: Fanning the Flames*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.
- Benoist, L. (2024), «Far-Right Localism as an Environmental Strategy in France», in *Nordia Geographical Publications*, 53(1): 111-121, <https://doi.org/10.30671/nordia.140962>.
- Benoist, L., Turner J., and Bailey D. (2024), «Ecofascism in the Shadow of “Patriotic Ecology”: Nativism, Economic Greenwashing, and the Evolution of Far-Right Political Ecology in France», in *Politics*, 46(1): 173-192, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02633957241273649>.
- Bhatia, R. (2004), «Green or Brown? White Nativist Environmental Movements», in A. L. Ferber, (ed.), *Home-Grown Hate. Gender and Organized Racism*, Routledge, New York, pp. 205–225.
- Bivar, V. (2022), «The Patriot Ecology of the French Far Right», in *Environmental History*, 27(4): 618-624, <https://doi.org/10.1086/721413>.
- Blee, K. M., Creasap K. A. (2010), «Conservative and Right-Wing Movements», in *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36(1): 269-286, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.012809.102602>.
- Boukala, S., Tountasaki E. (2019), «From Black to Green: Analysing Le Front National’s “Patriotic Ecology”», in B. Forchtner (ed.), *The Far Right and the Environment. Politics, Discourse and Communication*, Routledge, London, pp. 72-87.
- Boumaza, M., Campana A. (2007), «Enquête en milieu “difficile”», in *Revue française de science politique*, 57(1): 5-25, <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfsp.571.0005>.
- Braun, V., Clarke V. (2006), «Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology», in *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2): 77-101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Brodthmann, C. (2025), «Exclusionary Environmentalism: Exploring Gender and Antifeminism in Far-Right Ecologisms», in *Environmental Communication*, 20(1): 198-215, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2025.2596614>.
- Bulli, G. (2019), «Environmental Politics on the Italian Far Right: Not a Party Issue?», in B. Fortchtner (ed.), *The Far Right and the Environment. Politics, Discourse and Communication*, Routledge, London, pp. 88-103.
- Caiani, M. (2023), «Framing and Social Movements», in *Discourse Studies*, 25(2): 195-209, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614456231154734>.
- Caiani, M., Lubarda B. (2023), «Conditional Environmentalism of Right-Wing Populism in Power: Ideology and/or Opportunities?», in *Environmental Politics*, 33(4): 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2023.2242749>.
- Campion, K. (2021), «Defining Ecofascism: Historical Foundations and Contemporary Interpretations in the Extreme Right», in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 35(4): 926-944, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2021.1987895>.
- Carle, Z. (2017), «Contre-révolutions écologiques: Quand les droites dures investissent la défense de la nature», in *Revue du Crieur*, 8(3): 44-61, <https://doi.org/10.3917/crieu.008.0044>.
- Carle, Z. (2023), «From Metapolitics to Electoral Communication: Visualising “Nature” in the French Far Right», in B. Forchtner (ed.), *Visualising Far-Right Environments. Communication and the Politics of Nature*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp. 166-185.
- Coning de, A. (2023), «Seven Theses on Critical Empathy: A Methodological Framework for “Unsavoury” Populations», in *Qualitative Research*, 23(2): 217-233, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941211019563>.
- Dannemann, H. (2023), «Experiments of authoritarian sustainability: Völkisch settlers and far-right prefiguration of a climate behemoth», in *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 19(1), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2023.2175468>.
- Ekberg, K., et al. (2022), *Climate Obstruction: How Denial, Delay and Inaction Are Heating the Planet*, Routledge, London.
- Farstad, F. M. (2018), «What Explains Variation in Parties’ Climate Change Salience?» in *Party Politics*, 24(6): 698-707, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068817693473>.
- Forchtner, B. (2019), «Nation, Nature, Purity: Extreme-Right Biodiversity in Germany», in *Patterns of Prejudice*, 53(3): 285-301, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2019.1592303>.
- Forchtner, B., Gruber M. (2024), «Far-Right World Ordering from the Margins: Ethno-Ecological

- Degrowth and the Nation in the Swiss Democrats' Discourse About the Natural Environment», in *Global Studies Quarterly*, 4(3), <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksae068>.
- Forchtner, B., Kølvrå C. (2015), «The Nature of Nationalism: Populist Radical Right Parties on Countryside and Climate», in *Nature + Culture*, 10(2): 199-224, <https://doi.org/10.3167/nc.2015.100204>.
- Forchtner, B., Lubarda B. (2023), «Scepticisms and beyond? A Comprehensive Portrait of Climate Change Communication by the Far Right in the European Parliament», in *Environmental Politics*, 32(1): 43-68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2022.2048556>.
- Forchtner, B., Olsen J. (2023), «Double Vision: Local Environment and Global Climate Change through the German Far-Right Lens», in B. Forchtner (ed.), *Visualising Far-Right Environments. Communication and the Politics of Nature*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp. 229-252.
- Forchtner, B., Olsen J. (2024), «Against the Promethean: Energy Throughput and the Far-Right Politics of Degrowth», in *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 7(5): 2078-2096, <https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486241266794>.
- François, S. (2016), «L'extrême droite française et l'écologie. Retour sur une polémique», in *Revue Française d'Histoire des Idées Politiques*, 44(2): 187-208, <https://doi.org/10.3917/rhip1.044.0187>.
- Gruber, M. (2024), *Climate Politics in Populist Times: Climate Change Communication Strategies in Germany, Spain, and Austria*, Routledge, London.
- Hanson, J. (2024), «Looking beyond Climate Contrarianism: Nationalism and the Reterritorialization of Climate Discourse in Spain's Vox Party», in *Nordia Geographical Publications*, 53(1): 39-61, <https://doi.org/10.30671/nordia.121511>.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2018), *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, The New Press, New York.
- Hultgren, J. (2015), *Border Walls Gone Green: Nature and Anti-Immigrant Politics in America*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Hurd, M., Werther S. (2013), «Nature, Volk and the Heimat. The Narratives and Practices of the Far-Right Ecologist», *Baltic Worlds*, 2: 13-19.
- Jacquet-Vaillant, M. (2021), «Le mouvement identitaire français: Pour une approche mixte des marges en politique», PhD thesis, Paris 2.
- Jones, D. (2023), «The National Socialist Movement of the United States and the Turn to Environmentalism – Greenfingers or Brownshirts?», in B. Forchtner (ed.), *Visualising Far-Right Environments. Communication and the Politics of Nature*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp. 63-82.
- Lebourg, N. (2010), *Le monde vu de la plus extrême droite : Du fascisme au nationalisme-révolutionnaire*, Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, Perpignan.
- Lockwood, M. (2018), «Right-Wing Populism and the Climate Change Agenda: Exploring the Linkages», in *Environmental Politics*, 27(4): 712-732, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2018.1458411>.
- Lubarda, B. (2020), «Beyond Ecofascism? Far-Right Ecologism (FRE) as a Framework for Future Inquiries», in *Environmental Values*, 29(6): 713-732, <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327120X15752810323922>.
- Lubarda, B. (2023), *Far-Right Ecologism: Environmental Politics and the Far Right in Hungary and Poland*, Routledge, London.
- Lubarda, B., Forchtner B. (2023), «Far-right narratives of climate change acceptance and their role in addressing climate skepticism», in *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 54(6): 386-396, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2023.2257622>.
- Macklin, G. (2022), «The Extreme Right, Climate Change and Terrorism», in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 34(5): 979-996, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2022.2069928>.
- Malm, A., The Zetkin Collective (2021), *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism*, Verso, London.
- Moore, S., Roberts, A. (2022), *The Rise of Ecofascism: Climate Change and the Far Right*, Polity, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Obst, M. (2024), «Methodology for the Disliked: A Call for Situated Ethics in Close-up Research with Anti-Gender Groups», in *Qualitative Research*, 25(5): 1022-1040, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941241288194>.
- Pasek, A. (2021), «Carbon Vitalism: Life and the Body in Climate Denial», in *Environmental Humanities*, 13(1): 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-8867175>.
- Pasieka, A. (2019), «Anthropology of the Far Right: What If We like the “Unlikeable” Others?», in *Anthropology Today*, 35(1): 3-6, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12480>.
- Pietiläinen, S. (2024), «“They Will Not Survive Here”: Bordering, Racialisation, and Nature in the Politics of the Finnish Populist Radical Right», in *Journal of Language and Politics*, 23(3): 369-390, <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.23085.pie>.
- Pietiläinen, S. (2025), «The Racialised Geographies of the Far-Right: Climate Politics in Finland and Rus-

- sia», *Nordia Geographical Publications*, 54(6): 1-58. <https://doi.org/10.30671/nordia.173286>.
- Schwörer, J., Fernández-García, B. (2024), «Climate Sceptics or Climate Nationalists? Understanding and Explaining Populist Radical Right Parties' Positions towards Climate Change (1990–2022)», in *Political Studies*, 72(3): 1178-1202, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217231176475>.
- Segers, I. B., Gelashvili, T., Gagnon, A. (2023), «Intersectionality and Care Ethics in Researching the Far Right», in *Feminist Media Studies*, 24(5), 1219–1224, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2023.2280884>.
- Trundle, C., Gardner, J., Phillips, T. (2024), «The Ethnographic Interview: An Interdisciplinary Guide for Developing an Ethnographic Disposition in Health Research», in *Qualitative Health Research*, 35(13): 1395-1409, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497323241241225>.
- Turner, J., and Bailey, D. (2021), «“Ecobordering”: Casting Immigration Control as Environmental Protection», in *Environmental Politics*, 31(1): 110-131, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2021.1916197>.
- Ungureanu, C., and L. A. Popartan (2024), «The Green, Green Grass of the Nation. A New Far-Right Ecology in Spain», *Political Geography*, 108: 102953, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2023.102953>.
- Van Rensburg, W. (2015), «Climate Change Scepticism: A Conceptual Re-Evaluation», *SAGE Open*, 5(2), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015579723>.
- Varco, M. (2023), «Volk Utopia: Racial Futures and Ecological Politics on the German Far-Right», in *Geoforum*, 153: 103823, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2023.103823>.
- Vihma, A., Reischl, G., Andersen, A. N. (2021), «A Climate Backlash: Comparing Populist Parties' Climate Policies in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden», in *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 30(3): 219-239, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10704965211027748>.
- Voss, K. (2019), «The Ecological Component of the Ideology and Legislative Activity of the Freedom Party of Austria», in B. Fortchtner (ed.), *The Far Right and the Environment. Politics, Discourse and Communication*, Routledge, London, pp. 153-183.
- Weisskircher, M., Volk, S. (2025), «The People against the Sun? Ideology and Strategy in Far-Right Parties» Climate Obstruction of Solar Energy», in *Environmental Politics*, 35(2), 240–271, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2025.2458380>.
- Weisskircher, M., Diermeier, M. (2025), «Climate action versus environmental protection? How far-right and environmentalist messengers shape public attitudes towards renewable energy infrastructure in forests», in *Environmental Politics*, 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2025.2569733>.
- Winock, M., (2015), «L'Action française», in Id. (ed.), *Histoire de l'extrême droite en France*. Points, Paris, pp. 125-156.



Citation: Hilmar, T. (2026). Victims of the Green Transition: Harm Narratives in AfD's Climate Skepticism. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 157-168. doi: 10.36253/smp-17182

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

ORCID:
TH: 0000-0001-5112-6752

Victims of the Green Transition: Harm Narratives in AfD's Climate Skepticism

TILL HILMAR

Department of Sociology, University of Vienna, Austria
E-mail: till.hilmar@univie.ac.at

Abstract. This article examines how politicians from Germany's main far right party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), delegitimize climate policies and climate action in their political communication. To this end, it analyzes more than 430.000 tweets posted between 2009 and 2023. Drawing on combination of computational and qualitative analysis, it investigates how the negative effects of climate action is framed through narratives. The findings reveal two major strategies: first, climate policies are portrayed as harming specific "deserving" groups – like citizens, taxpayers, commuters, and workers – whose livelihoods are said to be threatened by rising costs; second, pro-climate actors are vilified as "naïve", "delusional", and a threat to the moral order of society. Through these affective narrative configurations, AfD communication positions the party as the rational defender of the "middle of society", effectively inverting the climate script by shifting attention from environmental catastrophe to alleged economic and social decline.

Keywords: climate skepticism, victimhood, Germany, AfD, narrative, LLM.

1. INTRODUCTION

European climate policy ambitions have undergone a dramatic development within the span of just a few years. Around 2019, the political momentum seemed to move decisively toward progressive legislation and a broad consensus on the need to decarbonize the economy. The passing of the *European Green Deal*, with its net-zero commitment, provided far-reaching legal frameworks for the corporate sector and ambitious national targets. Yet, following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a growing backlash has taken shape. Persistently high energy prices have strained European economies and households. Today, worrying signs are emerging: European governments are considering relaxing prohibitions on oil and natural gas drilling; German conservatives are calling into question the 2035 ban on internal combustion engines. Europe faces mounting pressure from a climate-denialist Trump administration vested in fossil-fuel industry interests and from the ongoing challenge of reducing its dependence on Russian energy imports.

The populist radical right, rising across Europe, has singled out climate policies as a central target of attack (Dickson & Hobolt, 2025; Schwörer & Fernandez-Garcia 2024). Anti-climate rhetoric has become a winning card through which distrust in political institutions and anti-elite sentiment can be mobilized. Climate policies, it appears, increasingly function as a “wedge issue” (Dickson & Hobolt, 2025), that allows far-right actors to channel broader political discontent.

This development has been closely tracked by the social science literature. In particular, rich research on the populist radical right’s climate skepticism (Forchtner & Lubarda, 2023; Lockwood, 2018; McCright *et al.*, 2016; Norgaard, 2011) and its various facets such as denialism, nationalism, distrust in science and political institutions, conservative ecologism, and Manichean worldviews has emerged. These ideological components can vary in their intensity and specific form of articulation across actors in the European landscape (Caiani & Lubarda, 2023); together, they constitute the ideational “mix” that fuels far-right backlash against the green transition.

In order to advance our understanding of how climate skepticism works in everyday political communication, this article argues that we need to look more systematically at the patterns through which climate policies are delegitimized. As Patterson (2023: 70) argues, examining delegitimation in this context “helps to bring together material and interpretive drivers of counteraction, with moral judgments made by involved actors that give backlash particular escalatory force and volatility”. Thus, in the following, I interrogate specific negative framings of concrete climate and environmental measures to identify recurring patterns in them.

The article examines the case of the German populist radical right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019; Havertz, 2019). Germany provides a particularly instructive context, as it long positioned itself at the forefront of European climate politics, pursuing an ambitious program of renewable energy expansion, industrial decarbonization within its export-oriented economy, and the transformation of heating infrastructure. In recent years, however, these efforts have met a growing political backlash (Weisskircher & Volk, 2025). Using a large language model as part of a computational social science approach (Bonikowski & Nelson, 2022; Stuhler *et al.*, 2025) in combination with qualitative analysis of narrative (Blum & Kuhlmann, 2019), I study a near-complete corpus of Twitter/X communication produced by AfD-affiliated accounts – comprising 434,772 tweets between 2009 and 2023 – to trace patterns in

how actors from this party sought to delegitimize climate action and climate policies.

The analysis reveals how the delegitimization of climate action in AfD communication operates through constructions of victimhood. A first strategy is to portray climate policies as harming specific social groups like citizens, taxpayers, commuters, and workers, whose everyday livelihoods are said to be threatened by rising costs. These narratives, it emerges, revolve around dramatizing the economic consequences of climate policies – an important finding given that the economic dimension of climate skepticism has so far received comparatively limited systematic attention (but see Bohr, 2016; Hilmar, 2025; Küppers, 2024). A second strategy is to cast pro-climate actors as villains who are a threat to the moral order of society. Overall, through narrative configurations of victims, villains, and threats, AfD politicians seek to present themselves as the rational defenders of the “middle of society” against policies portrayed as economically destructive and socially misguided. In doing so, they effectively invert the climate script: they shift the focus from environmental catastrophe to a different looming danger, namely, economic and social decline, to which this party presents itself as the only answer.

2. CLIMATE SKEPTICISM IN CONTEXT

2.1 *The far right and dimensions of climate skepticism*

Climate skepticism constitutes an important ideological bedrock for the populist radical right (Lockwood 2018, McCright *et al.* 2016), hereafter referred to as the “far right” here as a shorthand. Still, as far as these parties’ positions on the environment, climate change, and climate policies are concerned, there is considerable variation across the European landscape. For example, Manuela Caiani and Balsa Lubarda (2023), in their study of political manifestos of Polish, Hungarian, and Italian populist radical right parties, demonstrate that positions on these issues are not homogenous and do not adhere to a simple “either-or” logic. These parties are not uniformly anti-environmentalist; indeed, many propose distinct environmental agendas that shape their proposals and policy frameworks. In the following, I provide a brief overview over the key themes that existing research has found to be associated with various forms of climate skepticism.

Denialism. Sometimes, far right parties outright deny climate change, arguing that while ecological changes are occurring, they are natural and cyclical, not human-caused (McCright *et al.*, 2016). This stance

is closely linked to disinformation and efforts to sow doubts about these phenomena. It is also known as “evidence skepticism” (Van Rensburg, 2015), contesting the veracity and truth-claims about climate science. However, recent literature suggests that outright denialism is just one approach among many and not always the most prominent. Forchtner and Lubarda (2023) for example note that while far right parties in the European Parliament may reject climate change, they sometimes acknowledge it but argue that the EU is not the main contributor to the problem, pointing instead to other countries like China or the US.

Distrust in science. This broader phenomenon typically manifests as a criticism of “expert culture”, where climate scientists are viewed as an illegitimate elite (Huber *et al.*, 2022). These actors also often articulate their own version of “scientific” talk and evidence. To the extent that the legitimacy of those who design or promote climate measures is challenged, this can also be understood as “process skepticism”. It might also be articulated as a form of “response skepticism”, which questions the effectiveness of policy measures and points to their potential harm for society, the economy, or the environment (Van Rensburg, 2015).

Nationalism, national sovereignty discourse. Kulin *et al.* (2021) in a large European cross-country comparison, find that nationalist attitudes are a strong predictor for climate skepticism. They typically argue that climate laws and climate mitigation undermine national sovereignty. Yazar and Haarstad (2023) demonstrate the significance of regional identities that the far right successfully mobilizes in its efforts to undermine decarbonization, drawing on the cases of Germany and Poland.

Conservative ecologism. Another important source of skepticism stems from deep-seated value orientations and ideologies centered around particular notions of a moral order of nature and society. “Eco-fascism”, a particularly radical variant of such a strand, rooted in blood-and-soil ideology and 19th-century ideologies of Social Darwinism, inspires an eschatological strand within contemporary far-right environmentalism (Lubarda, 2024). As an intellectual tradition, it also surfaces in niche circles within these parties. Among the strands of conservative ecologism as alternative environmental belief systems, there are also spiritual and esoteric variants, depending on the national and regional context.

Manicheanism. Far-right climate discourse often employs antagonistic portrayals of the left, caricaturing its goals. Climate activists are regularly constructed as social figures associated with particular negative traits (Heide, 2025). It typically identifies and labels its enemies as communists, internationalists, and greens

in this way (Lubarda 2024: 61-66). Additionally, the far right engages in strategies of criminalizing climate activism, denouncing groups like Last Generation as “climate terrorists”.

These elements of climate skepticism are well documented. But are there recurring patterns that structure how they are communicated in relation to specific climate policies?

2.2 Delegitimizing climate policies: The role of narrative and victimhood constructions

The goal of the present analysis is to interrogate the strategies through which pro-climate action and policy measures are delegitimized (Patterson 2023). This starts from the recognition that, on the one hand, climate policy is not a singular object. It may refer to a range of instruments like environmental regulations, decarbonization and phase-out schemes, as well as tax and subsidy mechanisms designed to incentivize green and sustainable consumer behavior. Which of these policies become focal points of far-right contestation is an open, empirical question. On the other hand, the way far-right actors frame these policies must be understood as part of a broader space of policy communication. There is active meaning-making at work concerning the scope, effects, and efficiency of specific measures. Such processes of meaning-making affect how policies evolve and endure over time, as they shape the extent to which actors support these instruments. The far right may not be designing the policies in question, but it is actively participating in the public construction, and contestation, of climate policies’ meaning and legitimacy.

One strand of the public policy literature, the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), makes an important contribution in this regard by proposing that policy communication operates through narratives (Blum & Kuhlmann, 2019; Habelitz *et al.*, 2024; Somers 1994; Poletta *et al.* 2011). Political communication, in this view, is effective to the extent that it works through stories – in particular, accounts that link the effects of policies to specific outcomes for particular groups in society: *Who benefits? Who loses?* Narratives reduce complexity. Policies typically have a wide range of interconnected consequences, but policy narratives foreground selected effects, especially clear benefits or negative impacts on specific groups, or on the broader trajectory of society. In this way they associate a policy with a recognizable marker of identity. Blum and Kuhlmann (2019: 342), drawing on narrative theory, argue that meaning-making around involves the depiction of characters – “heroes”, “villains”, and innocent “victims”

– as well as a plot and a moral (or resolution). These are affective forms of political messaging (Habelitz *et al.*, 2024). By analyzing these elements and their interplay, we can systematically identify the actors constructed as enacting or supporting a policy, the target groups defined as beneficiaries or victims, and the causal linkages (construed as part of the suggested resolution of the story) that connect them.

Constructions of social groups reveal a great deal about those who put them into circulation – there are moments of social classification and evaluation at work in policy narratives. Through them, actors articulate visions of moral order and of the acceptable consequences of political intervention to this order; therefore, group construction itself becomes a site of legitimization and delegitimization. Here, I thus adopt the analysis of narrative elements found in the NPF with a particular focus on constructions of victimhood. Such constructions are particularly powerful because they raise the question of blame and guilt. It is through the portrayal of victims that the actions of the villains become intelligible and morally questionable; one must show who is suffering from specific policies and how. At the same time, these constructions offer empathetic points of identification, creating a space in which audiences can align themselves with those depicted as harmed.

A rich body of work demonstrates how the mechanism of constructing victimhood is central to far-right political rhetoric in other domains, such as nationalism and historical memory (Elgenius & Rydgren, 2022). Nationalist appeals rely on the invocation of social groups portrayed as having been “wronged”, casting them as victims of injustice and betrayal. Scholarship on the politics of memory demonstrates how historical narratives of victimhood and perceived injustice are central to nationalist mobilization and ethnic conflict (Malinova, 2021). There is also growing research demonstrating how emotions of victimization circulate in the public, fueled by mobilization strategies by the far right. As studies on resentment and grievance politics make evident (Betz, 2022; Damhuis & Rashkova, 2024), the construction of negatively affected groups and individuals is at the heart of far-right political appeals.

In the field of climate policy, narrative elements have largely been treated as secondary, if catchy, rhetorical features rather than as central mechanisms of climate skepticism. The underlying patterns of victimhood constructions have not yet been described in a systematic manner. Which negative outcomes are emphasized, and for which social groups? Who are cast as the bad guys within these accounts?

3. CONTEXT, METHODS AND ANALYSIS

3.1 *AfD and the backlash to the green transition in the German context*

Germany constitutes a rich and instructive case for interrogating contemporary dynamics of climate skepticism in the European context. It has long assumed a leading role in ambitious decarbonization efforts such as the energy transition towards renewables (*Energiewende*), the coal phase-out, as well as the departure from nuclear energy. As Europe’s largest industrial economy and an export-oriented powerhouse, with a central role for the automotive sector, Germany’s decarbonization goals are connected to its industrial strategy. Berlin’s ambitious climate agenda has also been increasingly contested. The country has witnessed strong civil society mobilization, including large-scale protests by groups like Fridays for Future. Yet in more recent times, it has experienced pronounced backlash, with polarization surrounding measures such as the heating law, carbon pricing, or renewables (Weisskircher & Volk, 2025). Rising energy prices following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have further amplified these tensions. Climate skepticism gains political salience in Germany precisely because it unfolds within the context of an ambitious pro-climate agenda.

AfD has been a key driver in this backlash, increasingly pulling conservative actors along in its wake. Founded only in 2013 (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019), initially by a group of economists advocating German monetary sovereignty and opposing EU bailouts, the party was first primarily anti-EU in orientation. After 2015, migration became one of its core mobilizing issue for the party. Economic themes remain crucial to the party’s self-understanding – AfD has never abandoned its ordoliberal beginnings, dynamically combining welfare chauvinism with a free-market stance (Havertz 2020). The attack on the energy transition increasingly became a core issue central to the party’s identity and mobilization. Growing polarization on climate among the German population in recent years has been linked to the AfD’s electorate, whose positions have moved further away from centrist attitudes on these issues (Coffé *et al.*, 2026).

Like other far-right parties and actors in Europe, AfD maintains an ambivalent relationship to environmental concerns (Caiani & Lubarda, 2023). On the one hand, it invokes the goal of “protecting nature” and can be situated within a heterogeneous landscape of far-right environmentalism. On the other hand, climate denialism and skepticism toward scientific evidence are core elements of the party’s profile. The 2016 party program

cast doubt on anthropogenic climate change, a position reiterated in the 2025 federal electoral program. Energy policy is a domain in which the party articulates a hard-nosed political economy stance. AfD campaigns against the energy transition, mobilizes against wind and solar expansion (Weisskircher & Volk, 2025), and opposes the coal phase-out, advocating a return to nuclear energy. It has also adopted Kremlin-friendly positions, calling for the restoration of Russian gas supplies after 2022 and, paradoxically, seeking to justify this position in terms of Germany's "energy sovereignty".

3.2 Sampling, corpus construction and analysis

The following analysis studies a large, novel dataset that comprises a near-complete Twitter/X communication of AfD-associated politicians between 2009 and 2023. Studying text data, I draw on a mixed-methods approach, but guided by a qualitative research interest (Bonikowski and Nelson 2022): to identify recurring patterns of meaning in this communication, and understanding these patterns in context. The approach combines text-analytical tools for corpus construction, a large-language model for structured text extraction, and qualitative interpretation. Data for this article consists of 434,772 tweets posted by 230 AfD-affiliated accounts (see Appendix 2). The sample relies on a comprehensive and systematically compiled inventory of party-affiliated Twitter accounts developed by König *et al.* (2022), which records the set of identifiable AfD-affiliated accounts in 2021. Tweets posted by these accounts between 2009 and 2023 were subsequently collected and analyzed. Unlike studies that sample on specific climate policies like heating laws or wind energy, this corpus enables an inductive identification of recurring patterns of political rhetoric over time.

Studying text data, I draw on a mixed-methods approach, but guided by a qualitative research interest (Bonikowski & Nelson 2022): identifying recurring patterns of meaning in this communication, and understanding these patterns in context. The approach combines text-analytical tools for corpus construction, a large-language model for structured text extraction, and qualitative interpretation.

To construct the subcorpus that contains tweets referencing climate or the environment, I adopt a keyword-based filtering strategy based on an externally validated reference corpus (see Appendix 2 for keywords and details). Keyword-based approaches are common computational text analysis, but this approach increases methodological rigor. It yields a subcorpus of 13,828 climate-related tweets.

For the analysis, I combine an automated procedure, employing a large language model (LLM), with qualitative analysis (Bonikowski & Nelson, 2022). The application of LLMs in qualitatively oriented research is developing rapidly, bringing many opportunities and challenges. This article follows state-of-the-art practices in sociological computational social science to identify and mitigate potential biases (Chae & Davidson, 2025; Stuhler *et al.*, 2025; Than *et al.*, 2025). A key advantage that closely aligns with the research interest of this article is that the use of a large language model enables a scaled implementation of what Stuhler (2022) describes as a relational approach to text in sociology. It entails understanding the roles of agency: *actors who do something to others*, expressed in grammatical relations in the text that can be identified as semantic relations. Information extraction from unstructured text, previously a domain that required fine-tuned approaches like word embeddings, becomes possible thanks to LLMs based on Generative AI (Stuhler *et al.*, 2025; Than *et al.*, 2025). Yet crucially, the information extraction task employed here is not equivalent to delegating annotation or interpretation to the model. The procedure serves a more limited purpose: identifying and extracting specific relational elements from the text according to predefined criteria. Thus, the goal is not to have the model replace interpretation, but to instruct it to systematize information that is already present in the material in a consistent and scalable manner to allow for targeted manual, in-depth reading and interpretation.

I choose the model LLama 3.1 8b Instruct, as it is an open-source model available to social science community via the Ollama platform and is the best fit for the article's purposes (Chae & Davidson, 2025, see Appendix 2). I conduct the qualitative analysis based on the patterns

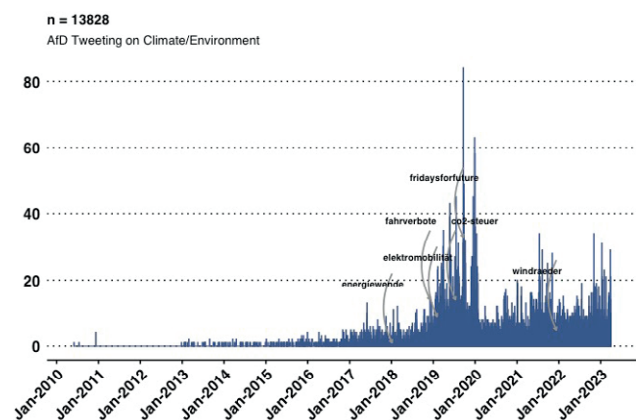


Figure 1. AfD Accounts Tweeting on Climate/Environment between 2009 and 2023.

Table 1. Top results of information extraction performed by the LLM. *Note:* Counts include only tweets coded as *climate_action_present = YES*, ensuring that the analysis focuses on narratives referring to specific climate policies or actions identified by the model

climate_action	count	responsible_actor	count	impacted_entity	count
klimaschutz	528	grüne	202	bürger	259
klimawandel	330	cdu	107	arbeitsplätze	176
energiewende	291	grünen	107	deutschland	151
fridaysforfuture	275	bundesregierung	93	umwelt	126
klima	258	spd	87	wirtschaft	114
klimahysterie	188	eu	85	menschenleben	97
klimapolitik	184	klimaterroristen	81	europa	82
klimawahn	163	afd-fraktion	63	natur	73
co2-steuer	151	klimaaktivisten	59	steuerzahler	66
umweltschutz	128	die grünen	57	klima	64
co2steuer	119	altparteien	52	sozialstaat	59
klimaaktivisten	111	habeck	52	kinder	54
klimanotstand	109	@die_gruenen	50	menschen	51
greta	93	merkel	50	industrie	48
klimapaket	90	fdp	44	deutsche	46

extracted by the model. Specifically, I use the model’s results to identify families of meaning within different types of climate action extracted by the model (see Table 1 below) and generate segments of 50 randomly selected tweets for each cluster, which are then analyzed in depth using narrative analysis (Blum and Kuhlmann 2019).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive patterns

A first look at the corpus reveals the evolution of AfD’s climate-related discourse on this platform over time (Figure 1). The trends show visible peaks around climate topics, with debate intensifying between 2017 and 2019 and reaching a major peak in 2019. This period coincided with key political developments, including the passage of the *Bundes-Klimaschutzgesetz* (also known as *Klimapaket*, climate law) by the German Bundestag at the end of 2019, as well as large-scale climate protests that year, when movements such as Fridays for Future became highly visible. Figure 1 also includes selected references to specific climate policies and action types that appear most frequently in the corpus, as identified by the LLM. Each is linked to the day on which it was mentioned most often. The figure shows that discourse around the *Energiewende* (energy transition) has been present for a longer period of time, while the introduction of the German carbon pricing scheme (*CO2-Steuer*) corresponds to the passage of the *Klimaschutzgesetz*. Debates around wind turbines (*Windraeder*) appear as a more recent issue.

Table 1 should be regarded as an approximation of aggregate patterns rather than a precise ranking of frequencies (see Appendix). The model performed strongly in identifying climate-action references, but attributing responsible actors and affected entities proved more challenging. As the extraction of climate-action references achieved the highest validation scores, this category serves as the basis for the following qualitative analysis. Within the top results, I manually identified three particularly prominent semantic fields, or narrative families. They were generated through iterative reading of tweets associated with these climate-action references and served as heuristic entry points for the qualitative analysis. Within each family, I selected terms that were both prominent in the corpus and substantively specific, avoiding generic terms like “klima” or “klimawandel” that would dilute the analytical focus. They are as follows: (1) formal policy instruments and governance measures like *Energiewende* (energy transition), *CO2-Steuer* (carbon tax), or *Klimapaket* (climate law); (2) climate activism and movement actors like *FridaysForFuture*, *Klimaaktivisten* (climate activists), or *Greta*; and (3) explicitly delegitimizing counter-frames like *Klimahysterie* (climate hysteria) or *Klimawahn* (climate madness). These categories make evident that the AfD’s climate discourse references specific policies as well as activist actors and context-specific rhetorical labels, especially compounds with a negative attribution.

The selection of the keywords within the three narrative families was accompanied by a qualitative inspection of tweets associated with candidate terms, which confirmed that the selected references exhibited greater thematic variation and substantive specificity than more

frequent but more diffuse alternatives. Based on the terms, for each narrative family, I drew a random sample of 50 tweets containing the corresponding references. By drawing tweets at random, the analysis was less dependent on a small number of especially visible or rhetorically striking examples. The aim was to capture different manifestations of the broader narrative family. The qualitative analysis nevertheless revealed substantial overlap between the families. They therefore do not constitute discrete narratives so much as they point to interconnected patterns of meaning that recur across different objects of climate-related discourse.

4.2 Policy instruments and climate measures (*Energiewende, CO₂-Steuer, Klimapaket*)

A dominant pattern emerges in how AfD politicians narrate policy instruments such as the energy transition or carbon taxation: they are framed as threats to specific, deserving groups in society. The recurring core argument is that such policies make everyday life more expensive and thereby prevent certain groups from meeting their basic needs. Climate policies are thus typically narrated in terms of their economic consequences. As one tweet states, energy transition plans “come at immense cost to citizens. Especially drivers and homeowners are being squeezed” (2019-09-05). Another claims that the energy transition “means very concretely: driving more expensive – air travel more expensive – meat more expensive – rents rising – 100,000 jobs at risk” (2021-05-06).

In some instances, AfD actors go beyond monetary harm and invoke tangible physical danger. The group addressed is the “consumers” who, it is suggested, will “freeze” in winter, while “Germany is saving the world’s climate”, implying that their suffering is being justified in the name of a higher moral purpose (2021-09-17). The irony intends to underscore the claim that ordinary citizens are being sacrificed for abstract, global goals. Against these allegedly harmful and threatening effects, AfD actors portray themselves as the advocates of those affected. One account, speaking from the perspective of a landlord, states: “I have not increased the advance payments, but I have informed the tenants that, just as with gasoline, new taxes will also lead to higher heating bills. And that only one party, the AfD, has opposed this CO₂-tax by all means” (2021-02-15). Here, the party presents itself as the sole defender of those burdened by rising prices.

At times, this framing is linked to broader socioeconomic claims about poverty: “2 million Germans TOO POOR TO #HEAT... The so called #energy transition continues to drive up the costs of #driving, heating,

and #housing” (2021-02-15). While invoking economic deprivation, these narratives do not speak on behalf of the poor. Instead, they allude to the risk of impoverishment for the middle class. That is how AfD actors carefully delineate the *deserving* social groups in their moral vocabulary. The recurring thread is the portrayal of basic needs under threat: heating, housing, and car use, framed as essential elements of everyday life. These narratives construct a “middle-of-society” form of economic victimhood, implying that basic economic rights are under threat.

The claim that climate policy makes life more expensive also plays a central role in constructing *villains* within the narrative. The argument is that rising costs could have been avoided – yet instead, this outcome was actively pursued. The burden is framed as the result of intentional action by political elites. As one tweet states: “The CO₂ tax does not serve the environment, but green clientelism!” (2021-01-29). Here, pro-climate actors are introduced as pursuing particularistic interests rather than environmental goals. The Greens, it is argued, are in reality motivated by hidden agendas.

Another strand singles out economic mismanagement and waste, arguing that climate policy benefits the *wrong* groups while ordinary citizens and innocent families suffer: “I could burst with anger. Hundreds of millions of euros thrown out the window for nothing. In the name of the nonsensical #energy transition and climate hysteria. Wind farm operators rejoice - citizens and families in Germany must foot the bill” (2021-02-15). In some cases, this argument is linked to migration, suggesting that climate policy serves entirely different, and darker, purposes: “The CO₂ tax merely serves to finance illegal migrants. Why should the climate change because of higher taxes?” (2019-07-05). In this logic, environmental policy is dismissed as a cover for redistribution toward undeserving outsiders. Similar narratives are directed at the EU. German “savers” and “renters” are portrayed as victims, with the German government adding further burdens through climate taxation: “After #Draghi and the #ECB, also on behalf of the federal government, expropriated German savers and destroyed their pensions and life insurance, the government is now collecting the rest through #wealth tax, #CO₂ tax, and #property taxation” (2019-09-29).

Narratives that delegitimize specific policies and instruments also portray abstract, valued entities as under threat. A recurring theme defines the nation as a whole – Germany – as the victim. The argument is that green policies drive up prices, and Germany is being duped. Germans are made to pay, while other countries allegedly evade responsibility. A variation of this

theme is the claim that historical or national achievements are under threat, often framed in economic terms. For example, German “prosperity” (*Wohlstand*) itself is depicted as being destroyed by the energy transition. As one tweet states: “In Germany, the federal governments of the past 17 years have squandered the postwar prosperity of the Federal Republic through the #energy transition, the #euro rescue, unqualified migration, #climate policy, #COVID-lockdowns, and the #sanctions against Russia. Now we are back where we were in 1949 + without hope” (2022-11-11). Prosperity, as a collective national achievement rooted in the postwar order, is invoked as being deliberately dismantled.

Economic frames are widespread in these narratives. But other abstract entities also appear threatened. For example, AfD politicians also argue that nature itself is suffering from climate policies. Instead of protecting the environment, it is suggested that climate policies damage it. Sometimes the claim is presented in general terms; in other cases, it is accompanied by references to supposed insider knowledge or technical intricacies that seem to substantiate it. As one tweet argues: “The next so-called #green technology massively subsidized by the state is turning out to be an environmental super-disaster. Rainwater can dissolve heavy metals from the building components. And it all ends up in groundwater and drinking water #Energiewende #Solar“ 2018-05-13).

Notably, AfD politicians frequently place climate policies alongside other measures that they take issue with, such as the wealth tax or sanctions against Russia. This work of cultural association is quite powerful: by grouping various policies together, climate action is embedded within a broader narrative of harmful government intervention. Such associations reduce complexity, presenting diverse policy domains as part of a single, coherent narrative pattern suggesting ignorance or bad faith.

4.3 Climate activists and movement actors (*FridaysForFuture*, *Klimaaktivisten*, *Greta*)

A second family of references emerges around attempts to portray climate activists and social movement actors in a negative light by emphasizing the alleged harm their actions cause to society. Here, the overarching thread is that climate activism is fundamentally misguided. Activists are depicted as irresponsible actors who engage in actions that are portrayed as potentially life-threatening. A particular focus in this regard is on activists who glued themselves to the streets and staged visible protests by blocking traffic. These actions occurred frequently in Germany in 2022 and 2023. The protests were unpopular among the gen-

eral public, and AfD politicians draw on this sentiment to delegitimize the climate movement as a whole. One tweet, for example, claims that “climate activists carry out life-threatening interventions in road traffic, preventing emergency services from reaching accident victims or the sick”. The tweet further argues that these individuals should not be described as “activists” but rather as “terrorists” and that they should be “locked up” (2022-11-04). The “terrorism” charge, of course, is a particularly severe form of delegitimation.

The theme of “life-threatening” activism also relies on stories that are taken out of context or exaggerated. One prominent example concerns the widely circulated case of a cyclist in Berlin who was severely injured in an accident in the fall of 2022 and later died. A viral claim suggested that emergency responders had been unable to reach the scene because climate activists were blocking the road. The story spread on social media and was used to assign blame to climate activists. However, the claim later proved to be false: investigations by the Berlin General Prosecutor’s Office, reported in April 2023, found that the protest had not caused the delay (*Berliner Morgenpost*, 2023). By that time, AfD actors and others had already circulated the explanation widely. The case illustrates how victimhood narratives can be instrumentalized. Another line of argument focuses on claims of damage caused by climate activism to buildings, infrastructure and other valued public spaces. One tweet states: “The actions of the #climate activists are taking on ever greater proportions. The damage is considerable, for example at the #BER airport” (2022-11-28).

Charges of hypocrisy against climate activists are particularly widespread. This critique is directed strongly at the young activists who, in the general public, may appear as altruistic, genuinely concerned representatives of the climate movement. AfD politicians therefore subject their motives to especially intense questioning and discrediting. They accuse them, for example, of having different motives: “It is becoming increasingly clear: climate activists are not concerned with climate or environmental protection”, but instead seek to “abolish the system” (2022-11-02). Activists are also regularly portrayed as acting out of financial self-interest, sometimes with the claim that they are being paid to stage protests. The goal of these characterizations is to argue that pro-climate actors are a threat to the moral and social order.

Tweets target prominent figures of the climate movement, most notably Greta Thunberg. Her youth and public persona are mocked as naïve or juvenile. The aim is to suggest that the expectations and hopes invested in her are fundamentally misplaced. Such attacks are typically linked to claims about the *real* problems facing

society, especially economic ones. In this way, materialist arguments are mobilized to dismiss climate activism as purely ideological. One tweet states: "Oh God... NO ONE could possibly have foreseen this... First the #car dies. Then the #jobs die. Then #regions die!!! But thanks to Saint #Greta, jobs and #money and #bread will rain down from the sky" (2019-10-03). Here, Thunberg is invoked ironically as a quasi-religious figure, while the alleged economic consequences of climate policy, in particular, the decline of industries, and regions, are foregrounded as the real stakes of the debate. The protests are placed within a broader narrative of national decline. Another example juxtaposes Fridays for Future demonstrations with claims that Germany is in "recession," that "short-time work is at a high," and that "insolvencies are increasing" concluding with the question: "When will the German Michel wake up?" (2019-09-27).

4.4 Rhetorical labels (*Klimahysterie, Klimawahn*)

A third family uses rhetorical labels introduced to discredit pro-climate action. This line of attack revolves around charges of irrationality and emotional excess. As in the delegitimization of climate activists, the argument follows a now familiar pattern: an economic crisis is allegedly unfolding, but the actors in question seem to ignore this, and instead appear as distracted by climate politics. One tweet claims: "Climate hysteria will lead to much higher unemployment! Ignorance and stupidity have a price!" (2019-11-29). The supposed victims of climate hysteria are "hardworking commuters and workers" who are portrayed as bearing the real costs of climate policies (2019-05-27).

Here, climate policy is framed as irrational and destructive. This allows AfD representatives to position themselves as the voice of reason. A key narrative vehicle is the portrayal of the climate movement as a kind of religious cult or sect. As one tweet states: "Greta staged as a messiah: stop the climate cult and return to reason! The 16-year-old self-declared climate activist Greta Thunberg on the cover of the current issue of *Time*. No to climate madness! Yes to life!" (2019-05-21). In such narratives, a broader, arguably mythic storyline emerges. Society is portrayed as being governed by delusional elites who are accelerating national decline. Greta Thunberg appears in this story as a kind of *false prophet*, symbolizing a misguided movement that has captured, and inebriated, political and cultural institutions. Here, victimhood constructions take on an almost epic dimension: it is no longer merely particular social groups that are portrayed as threatened, but society, and Western civilization itself. The recurring motif of "climate hys-

teria" thus functions as a diagnosis of collective delusion: political elites – like the "green elite party" (2019-05-27) – and climate activists are depicted as part of the same irrational camp.

5. DISCUSSION: STRATEGIES OF DELEGITIMIZATION IN CONTEXT

This article has examined the Twitter/X communication of politicians from Germany's main far-right party, AfD, on climate issues. The main goal was to understand the specific strategies through which these actors seek to delegitimize pro-climate action. An important contextual factor is that, for a significant period of time, Germany stood at the forefront of progressive climate politics in Europe, not only at the level of consumption, but also in efforts to transform its economy, setting decarbonization targets for its industrial base and energy supply. AfD's discourse is therefore best understood as a backlash against this progressive agenda.

As an analytical framework, the article has argued that examining narrative structures, with stereotypical character roles such as victims and villains, can reveal elementary dynamics of how policy communication and contestation unfold in the public sphere (Kuhlmann and Blum 2019). Based on the insight that victimhood constructions are critical to the far right's political rhetoric in other domains (Betz 2022, Elgenius and Rydgren 2022), this article paid special attention to this element in climate discourse, asking specifically which groups, individuals, or entities are portrayed as negatively affected or suffering from climate action.

The patterns identified in the empirical material correspond closely to several strands of climate skepticism discussed in the literature (Lockwood 2018, Forchtner and Lubarda 2023, Caiani and Lubarda 2023), particularly response skepticism, process skepticism, and Manicheanism. Throughout the material, a strong focus on the perceived negative distributional and economic consequences of climate policies emerges. The patterns of harm and blame identified here can be classified as instances of response skepticism (Van Rensburg 2015), the form of skepticism that questions the effectiveness and efficiency of climate policies. Economic harm narratives portraying groups in the "middle of society" (like citizens, commuters, renters, and workers) as victims reflect response skepticism about the societal consequences of climate policy. Arguments that such policies make everyday life more expensive, and that they cause specific socially worthy groups to suffer, are employed to undermine confidence in these policies. AfD rhetoric

conjures elements of class resentment here, but it also maintains a careful boundary: rather than speaking from the perspective of the economically marginalized, it speaks on behalf of those who are imagined as *deserving*, as entitled to fair treatment by political elites.

Accusations of elite manipulation and corruption arguably reflect process skepticism (Van Rensburg 2015) and distrust in governing institutions. Here, a recurring theme was the claim that elites act intentionally against the interests of citizens, frequently coupled with allegations of hidden monetary motives, as in the notion of “green clientelism” (see Bohr 2016). These arguments can, as we saw, also be linked to themes of nationalism and national decline, often articulated in conjunction with economic arguments and images.

The depiction of activists as dangerous or irrational actors who harm the social and moral order resonates with the Manichean logic identified in studies of far-right climate discourse. This is visible, for example, in portrayals of activists as “terrorists”, of the climate movement as a delusional cult, and of Greta Thunberg as a kind of false prophet. Such narratives mobilize the good-versus-evil binary opposition that is typical of populist discourse. Interestingly, direct distrust in climate science itself was less prominent in the material; it tended to appear more indirectly. Instead, political elites and activists were the primary targets of delegitimation. This may be because science skepticism lends itself less easily to the kinds of harm constructions foregrounded here. The hotly debated issue of the German heating law (Haas *et al.*, 2025) exhibits a very similar grammar of moral conflict, structured around “trigger points” (Mau *et al.*, 2026) and social figures constructed in public discourse (Heide, 2025). The AfD was very successful in capitalizing on this pivotal discussion around the energy transition. Since that debate only started in 2023, it is not covered in the dataset used here.

An important insight from this analysis is the salience and overall importance of economic references in delegitimizing climate policies (see also Hilmar, 2025). This dimension of climate-skeptical discourse currently remains somewhat underexplored in the existing literature. While some authors have identified elements of it (Bohr, 2016; Küppers, 2024), the findings here suggest that it plays such a central role that it warrants much more systematic study. To be sure, the AfD’s context may be specific in this regard. The party has deep roots in ordoliberal economic thought (Havertz, 2019). Still, this may not be limited to the German case. Further research should compare these patterns across cases and examine more closely how other far-right parties construct victimhood narratives in connection with economic arguments.

Overall, a key feature of AfD’s delegitimization discourse on Twitter/X is the attempt to position the party as the rational voice of the “middle” of society. Pro-climate actors are portrayed as irrational, “hysterical”, “naïve”, as part of a “sect” or “religion”. These labels function as a form of social mapping that, in turn, is meant to assign credibility to the AfD. By depicting its opponents as delusional, the party casts itself as the actor that protects what is truly valuable and that speaks with reason in the face of uncertainty. In the context of the looming climate crisis, uncertainty, and even catastrophe is acknowledged, but the source of danger is redefined. The imminent danger is not climate change itself. Instead, this rhetoric evokes a different apocalyptic horizon: social decline, demographic crisis, and economic collapse allegedly caused variously by a redistributionist, communist left, by Greens, or by a broad alliance of “irresponsible” pro-climate actors. Through such narratives, the party seeks to insert itself forcefully into the struggle over who can claim the position of the truly rational, judicious actor in the climate debate.

FUNDING

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon Research and Innovation Action program under Grant Agreement no. 101132327. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.”

REFERENCES

- Arzheimer K. and Berning C.C. (2019), «How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Their Voters Veered to the Radical Right, 2013-2017», in *Electoral Studies*, 60: 102040.
- Berliner Morgenpost (2023), «Tote Radfahrerin – Ermittler entlasten Klimaaktivisten», 13 April, available at: <https://www.morgenpost.de/bezirke/charlottenburg-wilmersdorf/article238131987/letzte-generation-betonmischer-unfall-toedlich-44-jaehrige-radfahrerin-keine-schuld-staatsanwaltschaft.html>.
- Betz H.-G. (2022), «Economic Resentment or Cultural Malaise: What Accounts for Nativist Sentiments in Contemporary Liberal Democracies», in *Handbook on Migration and Welfare*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, pp. 351-366.

- Blum S. and Kuhlmann J. (2019), «Stories of How to Give or Take – Towards a Typology of Social Policy Reform Narratives», in *Policy and Society*, 38(3): 339-355.
- Bohr J. (2016), «The 'Climatism' Cartel: Why Climate Change Deniers Oppose Market-Based Mitigation Policy», in *Environmental Politics*, 25(5): 812-830.
- Bonikowski B. and Nelson L.K. (2022), «From Ends to Means: The Promise of Computational Text Analysis for Theoretically Driven Sociological Research», in *Sociological Methods & Research*, 51(4): 1469-1483.
- Caiani M. and Lubarda B. (2023), «Conditional Environmentalism of Right-Wing Populism in Power: Ideology and/or Opportunities?», in *Environmental Politics*, 1-21.
- Chae Y. and Davidson T. (2025), «Large Language Models for Text Classification: From Zero-Shot Learning to Instruction-Tuning», in *Sociological Methods & Research*, 55 (2): 501-567.
- Coffé H., Crawley S. and Givens J. (2026), «Growing Polarisation: Ideology and Attitudes towards Climate Change», in *West European Politics*, 49(1): 1-29.
- Damhuis K. and Rashkova E.R. (2024), «The Politics of Resentment: What Is It and How Is It Mobilized by Populist Radical Right-Wing Parties in Different Contexts?», in *Frontiers in Political Science*, 6: 1390228.
- Dickson Z.P. and Hobolt S.B. (2025), «Going against the Grain: Climate Change as a Wedge Issue for the Radical Right», in *Comparative Political Studies*, 58(8): 1733-1759.
- Elgenius G. and Rydgren J. (2022), «Nationalism and the Politics of Nostalgia», in *Sociological Forum*, 37: 1230-1243.
- Forchtner B. and Lubarda B. (2023), «Scepticisms and Beyond? A Comprehensive Portrait of Climate Change Communication by the Far Right in the European Parliament», in *Environmental Politics*, 32(1): 43-68.
- Haas, T., Sander, H., Fünfgeld, A., & Mey, F. (2025). «Climate obstruction at work: Right-wing populism and the German heating law», in *Energy Research & Social Science*, 123: 104034.
- Habelitz N., Kuhlmann J. and Blum S. (2024), *The Role of Emotions in (Climate) Policy Narratives: How Can It Be Analysed?*, CIDAPE Working Paper.
- Havertz R. (2019), «Right-Wing Populism and Neoliberalism in Germany: The AfD's Embrace of Ordoliberalism», in *New Political Economy*, 24(3): 385-403.
- Heide J. (2025), «Polarizing Social Figures? Climate Activists in German Media and Popular Discourse», in *European Societies*, 27(5): 959-991.
- Hilmar, T. (2025), «Cassandra from the far right: how the German and Austrian populist radical right links climate skepticism with economic issues», in *Environmental Politics*, 1-30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2025.2560188>
- Huber R.A., Greussing E. and Eberl J.-M. (2022), «From Populism to Climate Scepticism: The Role of Institutional Trust and Attitudes towards Science», in *Environmental Politics*, 31(7): 1115-1138.
- König T., Schünemann W.J., Brand A., Freyberg J. and Gertz M. (2022), «The EPINetz Twitter Politicians Dataset 2021: A New Resource for the Study of the German Twittersphere and Its Application for the 2021 Federal Elections», in *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 63(3): 529-547.
- Kulin J., Johansson Sevä I. and Dunlap R.E. (2021), «Nationalist Ideology, Right-Wing Populism, and Public Views about Climate Change in Europe», in *Environmental Politics*, 30(7): 1111-1134.
- Küppers A. (2024), «'Climate-Soviets', 'Alarmism', and 'Eco-Dictatorship': The Framing of Climate Change Scepticism by the Populist Radical Right Alternative for Germany», in *German Politics*, 33(1): 1-21.
- Lockwood M. (2018), «Right-Wing Populism and the Climate Change Agenda: Exploring the Linkages», in *Environmental Politics*, 27(4): 712-732.
- Lubarda B. (2024), *Far-Right Ecologism: Environmental Politics and the Far Right in Hungary and Poland*, Routledge, London.
- Malinova O. (2021), «Politics of Memory and Nationalism», in *Nationalities Papers*, 49(6): 997-1007.
- Mau S., Lux T. & Westheuser L. (2026), Trigger points. In *Trigger Points*, Bristol University Press.
- McCright A.M., Dunlap R.E. and Marquart-Pyatt S.T. (2016), «Political Ideology and Views about Climate Change in the European Union», in *Environmental Politics*, 25(2): 338-358.
- Norgaard K.M. (2011), *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Patterson J.J. (2023), «Backlash to Climate Policy», in *Global Environmental Politics*, 23(1): 68-90.
- Polletta F., Chen P.C.B., Gardner B.G. & Motes A. (2011), «The Sociology of Storytelling», in *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37(1): 109-130.
- Schwörer J. & Fernández-García B. (2024), «Climate Sceptics or Climate Nationalists? Understanding and Explaining Populist Radical Right Parties' Positions towards Climate Change (1990–2022)», in *Political Studies*, 72(3): 1178-1202.
- Somers M.R. (1994), «The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach», in *Theory and Society*, 23(5): 605-649.

- Stuhler O. (2022), «Who Does What to Whom? Making Text Parsers Work for Sociological Inquiry», in *Sociological Methods & Research*, 51(4): 1580-1633.
- Stuhler O., Ton C.D. and Ollion E. (2025), «From Codebooks to Promptbooks: Extracting Information from Text with Generative Large Language Models», in *Sociological Methods & Research*, 54(3): 794-848.
- Than N., Fan L., Law T., Nelson L.K. and McCall L. (2025), «Updating “the Future of Coding”: Qualitative Coding with Generative Large Language Models», in *Sociological Methods & Research*, 54(3): 849-888.
- Van Rensburg W. (2015), «Climate Change Scepticism: A Conceptual Re-Evaluation», in *SAGE Open*, 5(2), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015579723>.
- Weisskircher M. and Volk S. (2025), «The People against the Sun? Ideology and Strategy in Far-Right Parties' Climate Obstruction of Solar Energy», in *Environmental Politics*, 1-32.
- Yazar M. and Haarstad H. (2023), «Populist Far Right Discursive-Institutional Tactics in European Regional Decarbonization», *Political Geography*, 105: 102936.



Citation: Caiani, M. & Pennucci, N. (2026). Far-right Climate Skepticism Across Europe: The Transnationalization of Narratives? *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 169-182. doi: 10.36253/smp-16838

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Far-right Climate Skepticism Across Europe: The Transnationalization of Narratives?

MANUELA CAIANI^{1,*}, NICOLÒ PENNUCCI²

¹ *Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy*

² *Université de Namur, Belgium*

E-mail: manuela.caiani@sns.it; nicolo.pennucci@unamur.be

*Corresponding author

Abstract. This article explores the evolving relationship between radical right actors and environmental issues in Europe, focusing on whether a transnational environmental politics is emerging within the radical right beyond the traditional stance of denialism. Through a quantitative text analysis (Topic Model and Dictionary Based Content Analysis) of Facebook data (77116 posts) from political parties, social movements, and leaders across seven European countries (138 actors from Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Austria, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic), we aim to identify the frames and narratives used by radical right actors to discuss environmental issues. The study is guided by two central research questions: (a) How do political ideologies along the classic right – left axis influence the framing and positioning of environmental issues among radical right actors in Europe? (b) Are there more similarities or differences across these actors, and are there indications of cross – border alignment? Building on these inquiries, we investigate whether radical right actors are increasingly adopting an environmentalist position, distinct from denialism, to articulate a climate ideology rooted in far-right values such as nationalism, identity preservation, and anti – globalism. By identifying shared frames and narratives, our study seeks to uncover potential patterns of transnationalization in radical right environmental discourses, shedding light on the interplay between ideological evolution and strategic positioning in response to environmental challenges. This study provides both an empirical contribution and a typological – analytical perspective, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how radical right actors currently discuss and frame environmental issues.

Keywords: far-right, climate skepticism, environmental discourse, transnationalisation, social media.

1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues and climate change have increasingly become a battleground for the far-right. On September 23, 2025, President Donald Trump addressed the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly, dismissing renewable energy sources such as wind power as a “joke” and

sharply criticizing the UN's climate initiatives. "This 'climate change,' it's the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world, in my opinion," Trump declared. "All of these predictions made by the United Nations and many others – often for bad reasons – were wrong. They were made by stupid people who have cost their countries fortunes and deprived them of any chance of success. If you don't get away from this green scam, your country is going to fail." Trump has long been a critic of climate science and policies aimed at helping the world transition to green energies like wind and solar. His speech however marked a step further: it included false statements and made random connections between aspects of the social and political reality constructing a new frame.

This prevailing perspective characterises the far-right in the USA and beyond, as sceptical with regard to climate protection. Previous studies have shown that the far-right often criticise ambitious climate policies at both the European and national levels (Huber et al., 2021; Tosun and Debus, 2020; Vihma et al., 2020). The denial of the human impact on the climate is a position espoused by certain political parties, a notable example being Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). The hostility exhibited towards liberal, cosmopolitan and green elites, as well as the rejection of international commitments, is coherent with the stance of opposition to climate protection as an alleged elite endeavour (Caiani and Lubarda 2023). However, it is important to note that certain right – wing populist parties and far-right movements also advocate for environmental protection as a means of safeguarding national identity. In this interpretation, climate change can also be a concern for the far-right because it poses a threat to the environment of the nation state. One must observe that far-right movements frequently reinterpret climate science as a means of manipulation (Eslén-Ziya and Giorgi 2022).

In this article we focus on Europe and the political discourse of the far-right on climate change. In particular we examine far-right climate skepticism across seven European countries (France, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Italy, England and Czech Republic), asking *how much and how* environmental issues are integrated in the political discourse of the far-right¹, including both political parties and not party social and political movements of the far-right, and whether a shared environmental discourse is developing transnationally. More in particular, we are interested in evaluating whether there is a shift in the far-right environmental discourse from denialism

to something more elaborated, engaged and nuanced, as well as whether these "frames" are commonly developed across far-right actors in European countries.

(Common) narratives and similar frames (or "cognitive schemas") on environmental issues and climate change may facilitate exchanges across national borders (Snow and Benford, 1999), as well as the potential alignment of these forces around common political regressive agendas on environmentally delicate issues (Zeller 2024). We thus qualify transnationalization in the far-right when groups and organizations from more than one country place similar discursive emphasis (and construct similar cognitive frames) on specific issues (Froio and Ganesh 2019). As noted, transnational exchanges among far-right forces do not necessarily result in organizational collaborative endeavours, but can also be manifested in the dissemination of analogous frames pertaining to issues, as well as practices. This may have an important impact on the development of a common collective identity on certain issues (e.g. on gender, see Lavizzari and Siročić, 2022; Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017). In fact, mainstream politicians and commentators are concerned that right – wing forces could exploit a "climate backlash". According to anti – racism campaigners and academics, the adverse effects of the climate crisis and globalisation have resulted in marginalisation and vulnerability for many citizens, e.g. farmers, in Europe, making them susceptible to the influence of populist politicians and far-right discourses and mobilisations.

Methodologically the analysis combines computational and qualitative approaches (e.g. Bonikowski and Nelson 2022; Pennucci, 2023), using text statistics to build a corpus of 61500 Facebook posts (2008–2024) by far-right organizations in the last two decades, in order to unveil the saliency and forms of the far-right engagement on environmental issues and climate change as well as the similarities and differences across countries in terms of framing of these environmental issues (for a similar methodology Hilmar 2025)². In a nutshell, we look at how much (intensity) and how (forms) far-right actors across seven European countries are talking about environmental issues through their official Facebook pages. Our focus on environmental issues is due to the fact that in the midst of the fourth wave of far-right politics in postwar Europe (Mudde, 2019), it is evident that the ideological core of the far-right discourse is expanding beyond the traditional topics of race, ethnicity, nationalism, and immigration, now encompassing new issues.

¹ We follow scholars who adopt a broad and inclusive definition of the category 'far-right,' one that also encompasses related labels frequently used in the literature, such as 'radical right' or 'populist radical right' (Wondreys and Mudde 2022).

² The data have been collected within the framework of the project AUTHLIB on Neofascism in Europe (<https://www.authlib.eu/>)

Frame, as a concept developed especially (but not exclusively) in social movement studies, is defined as a cognitive instrument that allows making sense of the external reality (see also for an application to the radical right Caiani 2023). It is very much fitting to capture new ideas on social orders and political assets of power. Interpretative frames also produce new definitions of the foundations of collective solidarity, to transform actors, identity in a way which favours action. In doing so, framing processes also allow for the definition of the self and the opponents, namely developing identity frames (Tilly, 2003, p. 139). Frames are very often produced by organizational leadership, which provides the necessary background within which individual activists can locate their actions (Snow and Benford, 1988). As it is the case for any collective actor, far-right organizations have to motivate individuals to action, providing actual and potential followers with rationales for participating and supporting their organizations. In particular, diagnostic frames allow for the conversion of a phenomenon into a social problem, potentially the object of collective action; prognostic framing also involves the suggestion of future developments that could solve the identified problems; and motivational frames are needed to produce the motivations and the incentives for action. Indeed, in order to convince individuals to act, frames must generalize a certain problem or controversy, showing the connections with other events or with the condition of other social groups; and also demonstrate the relevance of a given problem to individual life experiences (Ibid.).

2. THEORY: FAR-RIGHT AND CLIMATE SKEPTICISM

A few years ago, Foucart (2010), coined the concept of “populisme climatique” (i.e. “climate populism”), to indicate the instrumentalisation of the sciences. The election of Donald Trump also triggered the expression of negative positions towards sustainable transition policies for populist parties worldwide (Selby, 2019). In the wake of Donald Trump’s election, various far-right groups worldwide have begun to voice their concerns about climate change, often using the term “climate change science denialism” to describe their position. This term refers to a strong belief that climate policies are costly for the economy and society. Additionally, there has been a rise in nationalist sentiments, driven by the perception that international bodies like the EU and the UN are exerting undue influence on national governments (Vihma et al 2020).

The mainstream literature on political science talks about far-right actors as denialists or sceptics when it

comes to their relationship with environmental issues (Dobson, 2016; Lowles, 2021).

Undoubtedly, the environment has become an increasingly important arena of political conflict for the far-right and right – wing populist actors in recent years. Leaders such as Mateusz Morawiecki (Poland’s PiS), Viktor Orbán (Hungary’s Fidesz) and the Italian party Lega have all publicly embraced ecological issues, as evidenced by statements such as those in the 2019 Lega manifesto. On the surface, these claims resemble those of Green parties. However, given the historical hostility of far-right populist parties towards environmental protection (Tosun and Debus, 2020; Vihma et al., 2020; Huber et al., 2021), one must ask whether these positions reflect a genuine ideological shift or are merely strategic responses to political opportunities.

With regard to the ideological dimension, earlier research indicates that far-right populist actors are often critical of ambitious climate policies at both European and national levels. Indeed, right – wing populist ideology might shape environmental discourse by privileging national sovereignty over global policy frameworks (Farstad 2018); drawing on nostalgia and “retropias” – the idealization of past environments as templates for restoration (Elçi 2022; Hanusch and Meisch 2022); or framing “the people” against “polluting outsiders” or elites who are accused of shifting climate costs onto ordinary citizens (Lubarda 2017).

Studies have shown that nationalism is often a stronger determinant of environmental positions than traditional left-right divides, environmental values, or political trust (Kulin et al. 2021). Moreover, populist attitudes further encourage climate skepticism and opposition to environmental protection (Huber 2020), acting as an amplifier of ideological dispositions (Huber et al. 2021). Finally, in the far-right social movement sector, ideologies can take the form of ecofascism, emphasizing blood – and – soil notions of homeland and purity (Hughes et al. 2022; Lubarda 2020). Pittnerová and Kopeček (2025) for example examine how the Czech far-right populist party Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) frames environmental issues, especially the European Green Deal. While not denying climate change, the SPD casts transnational initiatives as ineffective and harmful to national interests, instead promoting national solutions tied to food and water quality, “Czech traditions”, and economic sovereignty. This shows how far-right populists embed environmental debates within identity – based and anti – EU narratives. A discourse analysis of how Germany’s far – right – ranging from populists to neo – Nazis – frames climate change. They often express skepticism, sometimes combining nature

ideals with ethnic or sovereigntist messaging (Forchtner et al. 2018).

Despite the common anti – environmentalist framing, recently the literature acknowledges heterogeneity. Some far-right factions adopt “green” populist discourses, for instance in anti – extractive or climate justice movements (Buzogány and Mohamad – Klotzbach 2021), or in broader far-right ecologism (Forchtner and Lubarda 2023). Still, much research remains focused on their climate denialism and anti – establishment stance against “green lobbies”. In conclusion, this literature review suggests some emerging trends in the relationship between the environment and far-right actors: nationalistic frames to climate policies (Pospieszna and Vetulani Cegiel, 2021; Timmer and Docka Filipek, 2018); eco – nationalism (Falkner 2025³), conditional environmentalism (Caiani and Lubarda, 2023), denouncing the socio-economic negative effects of green policies (Yazar and Haarstad, 2023). In this study, we treat these new trends as emerging frames adopted by the far-right to deal with environmental issues.

In sum, a growing body of literature signals a recent development in the scholarship on the far-right and the environment, by suggesting a shift from denialism to other discursive strategies employed by far-right actors to deal with the environment. Nevertheless, these emerging strategies adopted by the far-right to look at the environment are far from being systematized in the field.

In this article, we address these issues by examining various types of far-right actors – including both political parties and social or political movements – across seven European countries and over time. In doing so, we seek to bridge a traditional division of labour in the literature (see Caiani et al., 2012) between social movement scholars, who have typically analyzed the discourse of collective actors on the progressive side, and party politics scholars, who have focused primarily on far-right parties and electoral behaviour.

3. METHODS AND SOURCES

This study is based on a comparative design to analyze far-right political communication across seven European countries: Italy, France, Austria, the United Kingdom, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland. Facebook data from all the available far-right actors have been collected from 2008 to 2024 (Caiani, 2025). The empirical focus is on the environmental discourse of far-right actors on social media. Data was collected through

CrowdTangle, extracting all available posts on the environment. In total 61.500 posts were collected, roughly 10.000 per country.

The research relies on a triangulation of computational and qualitative methods, combining large – scale text classification with qualitative frame analysis. We proceed through several steps.

The first step involved thematic classification of all posts into standard far-right issue areas: immigration, gender, education and culture, environment, social policy, and other. This classification was carried out using a multilingual BERT – based transformer model. To fine tune and validate the model, a manually labeled dataset of 100 posts per category was created, stratified by country (15 posts per country per category). This dataset was then split into training, validation, and test sets. The model performance on the classification task is reported in methodological annex, which details a confusion matrix, precision, recall, and F1 scores.

The second step was focusing on posts classified as dealing with the environment. Following this initial thematic classification, the analysis zooms on the frames used in order to talk about environmental content. Posts classified under the environment category underwent a two – stage frame analysis. First, a qualitative, inductive manual coding of frames was conducted. Posts from all seven countries were read and manually annotated to identify dominant interpretive frames used by far-right actors when discussing environmental issues. The reviewed relevant literature was used in order to check for relevant frames, however the process of annotation was primarily inductive. This qualitative coding produced a codebook of recurring frames that can be consulted in the methodological appendix (Appendix 3).

Consequently, an LLM based classification using a few shot prompt based method was performed in order to ask a Large Language Model (gpt 4o) to classify all the environmental content into one of the spotted frames. Metrics on the evaluation of the model are available in the methodological appendix (Appendix 3 – GPT Analysis performance)

This two – level content analysis allows us to answer the core research questions concerning the centrality of environmental issues in far-right discourse (BERT based content analysis) and the interpretive frames through which these issues are communicated (computational frame analysis). Specifically, thematic classification and keyword extraction provide insight into the relative prominence and substantive content of environmental discussions, while frame analysis reveals how such content is ideologically framed and presented to the public.

³ <https://www.lse.ac.uk/events/economic-nationalism>

4. SALIENCY AND FORMS OF FAR-RIGHT DISCOURSES ON ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACROSS EUROPE

When looking at the issue saliency of environmental matters in the far-right discourses, studies based on electoral manifestoes signal a slowly increasing interest in mobilising this topic (e.g. see Caiani and Lubarda, 2023). Figure 1 presents the relevance of the environment in the (social media) debate of the far-right in the last two decades (2008-2023) in our seven European countries (both political parties and not party groups).

While environmental issues are generally under-represented compared to other issues of debate in the discussions of far-right groups in Europe such as immigration, gender nationalism, etc. (e.g. Caiani et al. 2024), they are not absent in the far-right discourse on social media (Figure 1). Moreover, our data reveal meaningful cross-national variation in their relative salience. The Czech Republic stands out with the highest proportion (nearly 8%), suggesting a comparatively stronger engagement with environmental topics in its public discourse. This may reflect heightened political attention, media coverage, or civic activism around environmental concerns in that context.

Mid-range values are observed in Hungary, Poland, France, and Austria, all ranging between approximately 5 and 6%. These figures indicate a moderate but notable level of environmental discussion, particularly in Central and Eastern European countries. This pattern is noteworthy,

as it challenges common assumptions that Western Europe is more environmentally engaged, and suggests that Eastern European countries may be experiencing a growing environmental awareness, potentially linked to local environmental degradation, EU environmental policy pressures, or increased civil society mobilization.

By contrast, Italy and the United Kingdom exhibit the lowest percentages, with environmental content representing less than 4.5% of total posts. This suggests a relatively marginal position of environmental issues in their broader discourse, possibly overshadowed by more pressing political or socio-economic topics.

Overall, while environmental themes remain a minority focus across all countries, the observed differences underscore the uneven integration of environmental concerns into national public agendas, with Eastern and Central European countries showing relatively higher levels of engagement than some of their Western counterparts.

4.1 What does the far-right talk about when it talks about the environment? Subthemes

Before going deeper into the development of the frames (i.e. justifications and reasons) of far-right positioning on environmental issues, namely framing and the symbolic construction of the political and social reality of the far-right vis a vis this issues, we can look at the main sub-themes mobilized by these actors when dealing with

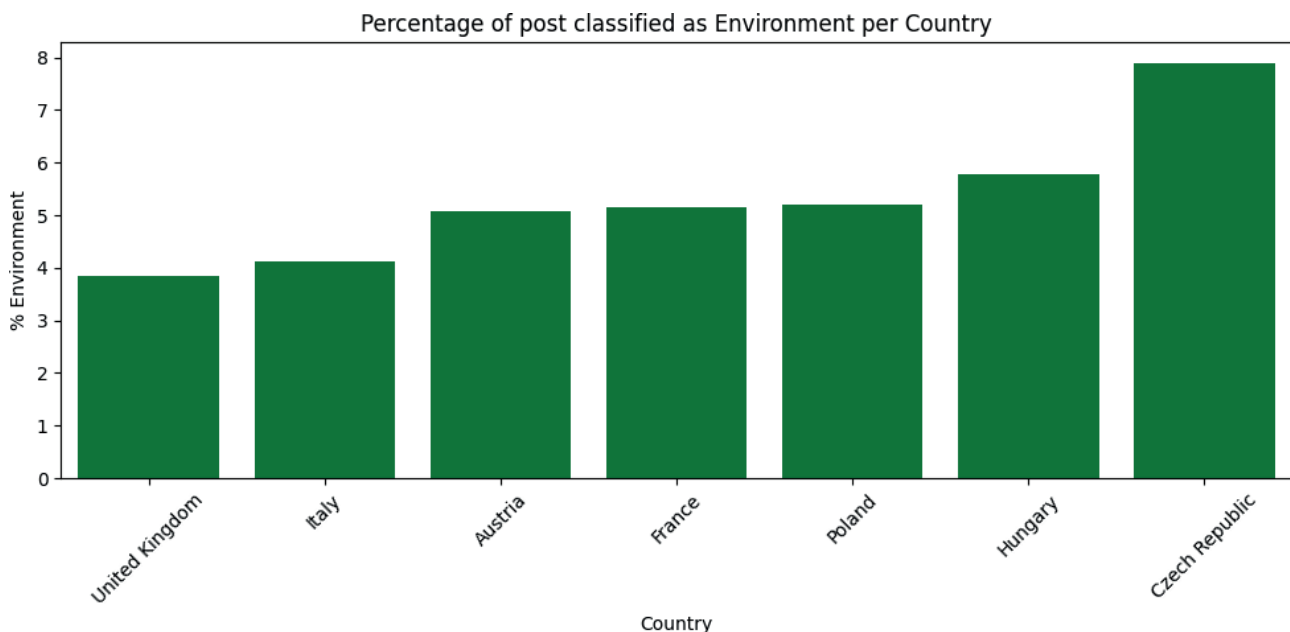


Figure 1. The relevance of environment in the (social media) debate of the far-right in the last two decades (2008-2024).

the environment (i.e. keywords as proxy of sub-themes in environmental issues from the far-right). To this end, we used the most prominent words used by far-right actors in posts classified as environmental. Through this strategy we aimed at using words as a proxy of sub-themes. Overall, the data reveals that far-right environmental discourse is not uniform across Europe. While some countries integrate mainstream ecological language, others emphasize national sovereignty, traditional values, or infrastructural concerns, by leaving open the hypothesis that despite ideological alignments and diffusions, national contexts still matter for the independent development of communication on climate issues.

Figure 2 summarizes the top 20 words on the environment overall, in order to have an idea of what subtopics are more talked about in the European selected countries. What follows is the most used 20 words overall.

The aggregated data on the top 20 most used environmental keywords across countries provides insight

into how environmental themes are selectively appropriated in far-right political communication. The lexical distribution reflects a pattern of engagement that is heavily skewed toward generic and infrastructural terms, with a notable absence of systemic, scientific, or justice-oriented language typically found in progressive environmental narratives.

The term *green* dominates the distribution by a large margin. Its semantic ambiguity allows far-right actors to signal environmental concern while avoiding alignment with progressive environmentalism. “Green” is often used as a symbolic placeholder – denoting tradition, purity, or national identity – rather than as a commitment to ecological sustainability or transformation.

Following green, terms such as *energy*, *gas*, *electricity* and *climate* occupy prominent positions. These terms suggest a focus on resource management, energy security, and economic infrastructure rather than environmental degradation or ecological justice. In far-right

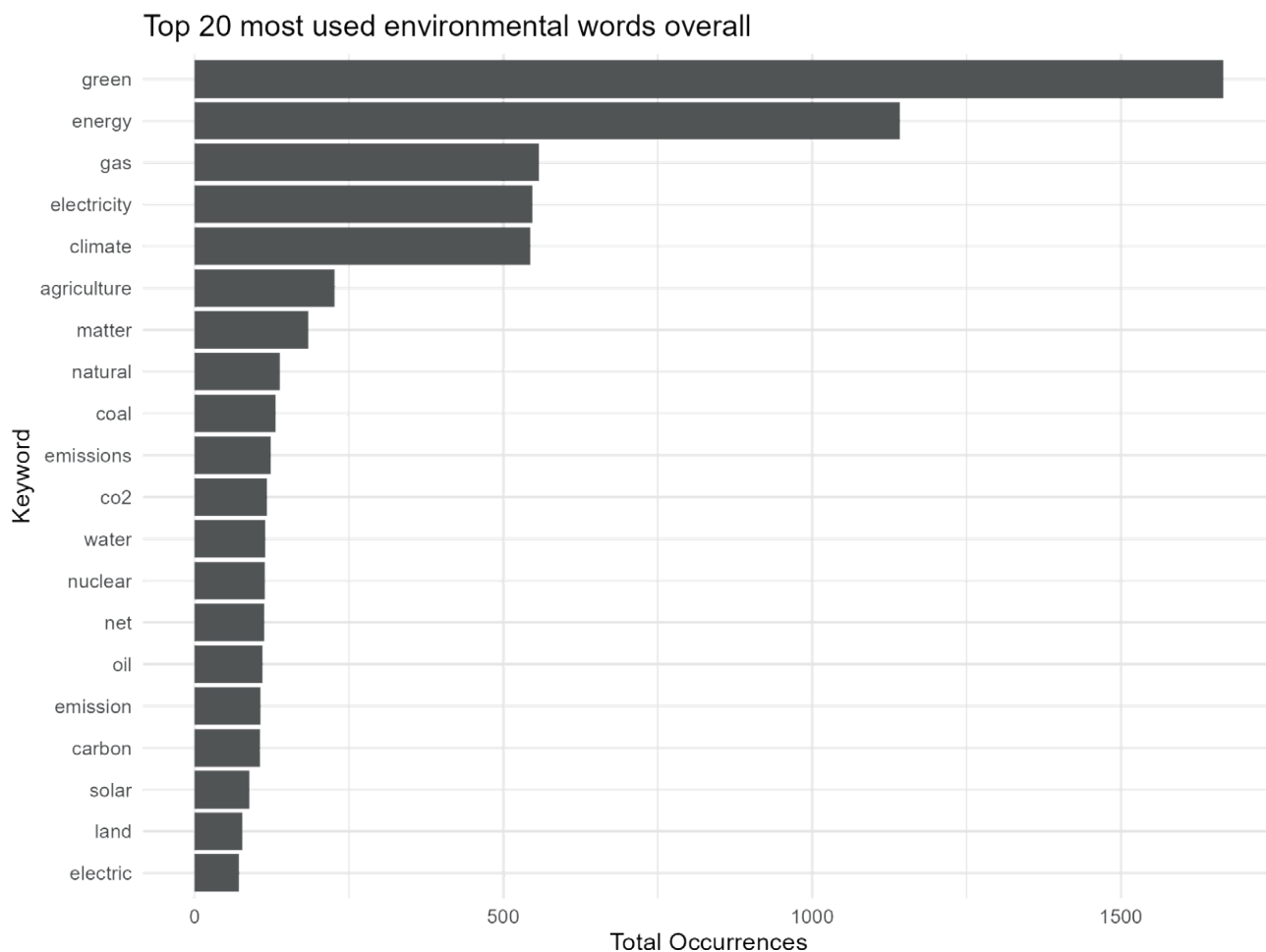


Figure 2. Most used environmental words overall.

narratives, this vocabulary is often mobilized to advocate for national energy independence, anti-globalist policy stances, and protectionist economic strategies. Words like *nuclear* and *coal* further indicate a tendency to valorize domestic or “traditional” energy sources, often positioned against renewable alternatives promoted by global institutions or environmental NGOs.

The limited occurrence of terms like *carbon*, *emission*, *solar*, and *land* is equally telling. These are central in climate science discourse but appear only marginally in far-right communication, reflecting either indifference or strategic avoidance of climate accountability. Moreover, the near absence of justice-related or biodiversity terms (e.g., ‘sustainability’, ‘equity’, ‘ecosystem’, ‘biodiversity’) reinforces the view that far-right environmentalism is primarily technocratic, economic, or nationalist in orientation.

In summary, the overall keyword profile illustrates that the far-right engages with environmental discourse through a narrow set of depoliticized and infrastructural terms. This allows for the projection of environmental concern without adopting the epistemic, ethical, or global dimensions of ecological thought. The result is a form of “post-environmentalism” aligned with nativism and technonationalism – what can be conceptualized as a strategic reframing of ecology within the bounds of identity politics and state sovereignty.

As the analysis suggests, the difference in keywords not only suggests a difference in subthemes developed in each country, but also a potential different framing of environmental issues. In order to further unpack this dimension, the next section will highlight the frame analysis on environmental content in order to unpack the way far-right organizations talk about the environment on Facebook.

5. FRAMING FAR-RIGHT SKEPTICISM ON CLIMATE CHANGE: A CROSS COUNTRY OVERVIEW IN EUROPE

More in detail, when looking at the framing of the far-right on environmental issues and climate change (intensity) through our two steps procedure the following key frames emerge, as shown in Table 1. These frames account for the different ways through which climate issues can be discussed by far-right actors, both political parties and not-party organisations. The frames result from a double process: on the one hand, they derive from a deep reading of the relevant literature that helps highlight innovative frames used by the far-right in dealing with environmental issues. On the other hand, they derive from an inductive reading of a sub-

Table 1. Typology of Far-right Frames on Environmental Issues and climate change: broader categories.

1. Denial and Scepticism

Frames that challenge the scientific basis of climate change or question its significance.

2. Policy Engagement Frames

Frames that acknowledge environmental issues but reorient them through nationalist, economic, or anti – globalist logics.

Economic Frame (Conditional Environmentalism) → Criticizes green policies for their economic costs, framing environmental concern as secondary to growth, competitiveness, or energy independence.

Nationalistic Frame → Positions environmental policy as a matter of sovereignty, insisting climate decisions should be taken at the national level to protect domestic interests.

Anti – Globalist Frame → Rejects the influence of supranational, unelected, or “undemocratic” bodies (e.g., EU, UN) in shaping environmental governance.

3. Populist / Reactive Frames

Frames that attack the legitimacy, consistency, or motives of environmental actors.

4. Neutral Frames

Frames that mention the environment in descriptive terms without adopting a clear ideological or political stance.

Source: Far-right actors post on environmental issues and climate change, from 2008-2024.

sample of the dataset. The result of the process is summarized in Table 1.

The first frame represents the classical denialist position of far-right actors on the environment. Frame two and three represent policy engagement frames as they try to develop an argument for the discussion of environmental issues based on economic and political arguments that are coherent with the overall ideological milieu of the far-right. Elite Ipocrisia and Climate Activism as a Misplaced Ideology are populist frames as they are negatively framing environmental advocates as the enemy. Finally, ineffectiveness of climate policies is a frame related to response scepticism.

It is noteworthy to say that this analysis confirms that the far-right still only uses diagnostic and identitarian frames. Prognostic frames were not detected.

This means that despite a shift towards a more nuanced and engagement relationship with the environmental issues, the employed frames are still reactive and oppositional, still lacking a proper positive and policy oriented engagement towards concrete proposal and solutions on the environmental issues.

In particular, economic frames refers to post dealing with the economic problems and harms caused by climate policies. In a nutshell it sustains an opposition to progressive climate policies on the basis of negative economic effects for the population. While this first frame represents an economic argument against climate policies, nationalistic and anti – globalist frames sustain a political argument against climate activism and progressive climate policies through the classical far-right distinction between national and supranational settings where to discuss political issues. These posts either denounce the fact that climate policies are often dictated by non democratic and illegitimate supranational bodies or that key decisions on the environment must be taken by looking at the national interest by national institutions looking at the interest of national people. In both cases there is a nationalistic frame to look at environmental issues that is centred on either cheering nationalism or criticizing globalism.

Elite hypocrisy is a frame that sustains an oppositional argument against environmental issues. Indeed it denounces hypocritical or incoherent behaviour by climate advocates. Climate activism as a misplaced ideology contains posts dealing with the logical inconsistencies or contradictions of climate activism and progressive policies. Oppositional frames are coherent with populist interpretations of the matter implicitly dividing us and them on identitarian lines, with the us defined through the negation of them in an oppositional way. Finally, the ineffectiveness of climate policies denounces fallacy in the application of climate policies in terms of results and efficiency.

While the climate denialism frame is still present, this analysis demonstrates that competing frames are on the rise and make the plethora of environmental frames developed by the far-right more complex and multifaceted. Despite employing economic, political and populist frames, what is constant is the reactive and negative dimension of all these frames. In a nutshell, the vast majority of the vehiculated content is critical towards progressive policies and climate activism rather than building concrete alternative policies. They either deny climate change or the climate issue or build economic or political arguments against the adoption of specific policies, by advocating economic costs or nationalistic justification to oppose a certain set of policies or positions.

Finally they either denounce the hypocrisy of climate advocates behaviour or the inefficacy of specific progressive policies. The argument against climate change and environmental progressivism is therefore more complex, by going beyond denialism and scepticism. However, it appears that far-right actors rarely talk about concrete climate and environment issues in a constructive and concrete way in terms of positive ideas and actions. They are not denying or sceptical all the time, but still construct innovative frames in a negative and reactive way.

In terms of relevant frames, the “Nationalistic Frame” (982 occurrences) emerges as the most clearly defined and dominant ideological narrative. This frame typically constructs the environment as an extension of national identity and sovereignty. Nature is portrayed as a sacred national resource under threat from globalization, immigration, or supranational institutions (e.g., the EU or UN). This framing allows far-right actors to co-opt ecological language while redirecting it toward exclusionary and protectionist ends, a hallmark of ecological nativism or eco-nationalism.

The “Economic Frame” (263) reflects a discourse that emphasizes cost, efficiency, and national economic interests in environmental debates. Rather than promoting ecological sustainability for its own sake, this frame instrumentalizes environmental themes to advocate for national industrial competitiveness or energy independence—frequently in opposition to climate regulation perceived as detrimental to domestic economic growth.

Frames such as “Elite Hypocrisy” (242) and “Anti-Globalist Frame” (108) point to a populist logic underpinning far-right environmental narratives. These frames position environmentalism as a domain controlled by unaccountable elites or foreign interests. Climate policy is framed not as a moral imperative but as a vehicle for elite manipulation or geopolitical control, further deepening the far-right’s anti-establishment appeal.

Less frequent but still ideologically significant are frames like “Climate Activism as Ideological Manipulation” (93), “Denial or Scepticism” (68), and “Ineffectiveness of Climate Policy” (50). These reflect a discursive strategy that seeks to discredit climate science, portray climate activism as politically motivated (often leftist or globalist), and frame environmental policies as either futile or damaging. The relatively low frequency of outright denial suggests a shift from classical climate scepticism toward more subtle delegitimization strategies.

Taken together, the chart highlights that far-right actors do not reject environmental discourse outright but reshape it through the lenses of nationalism, economic protectionism, and anti-elitism. This strategic reframing allows them to appeal to environmental concerns without

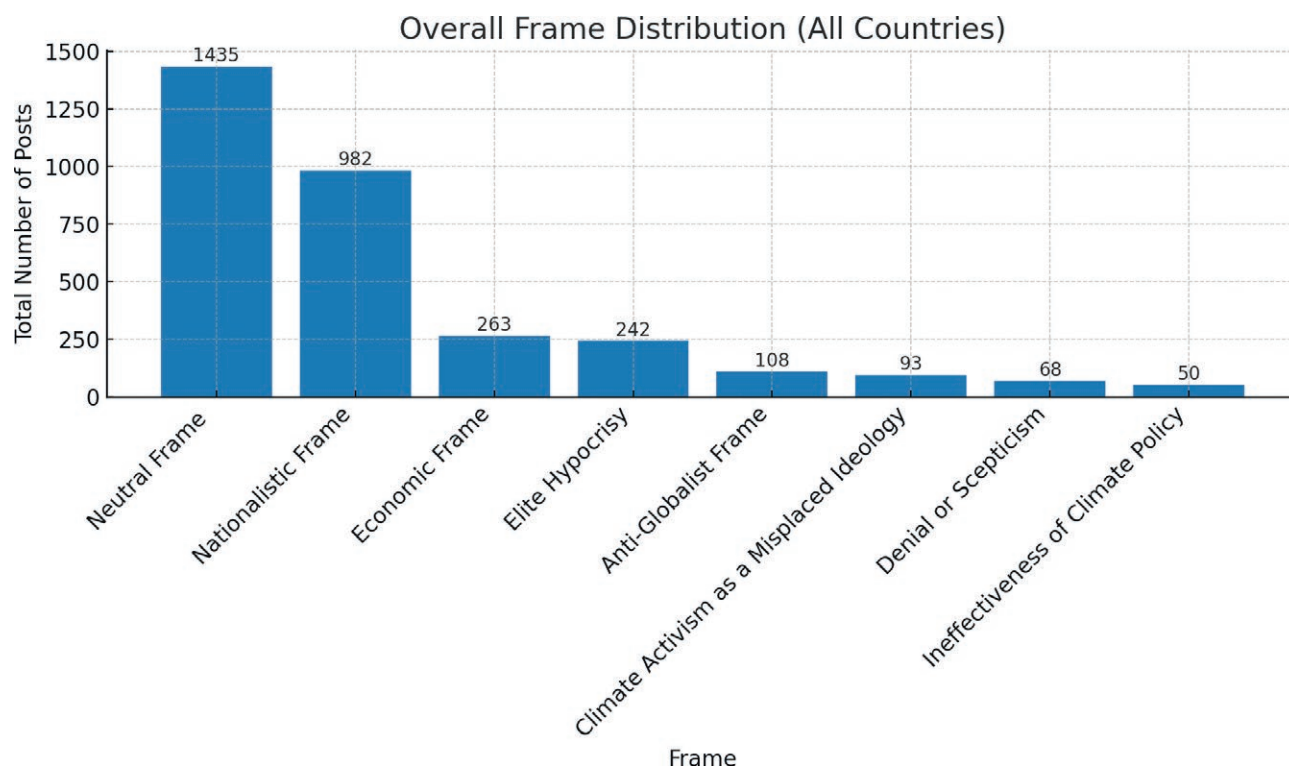


Figure 3. Overall Frame Distribution.

endorsing the foundational values of environmentalism—equity, interdependence, and global cooperation.

In particular, when looking at similarities and differences across countries (Figure 3), we see that the English far-right wing rhetoric on the environment is often built through a populist dichotomous style dividing us and them with identitarian frames. As a consequence Elite hypocrisy is the most employed frame in this country. Such an operation is most often seen in the denunciation of hypocrisy of left wing and progressive climate advocates frame that is used towards left wing activists for the environment. Such a populist interpretation is also present in the anti-globalist frame that portrays the elites as developing a plan to enrich themselves through green policies. At the same time, the economic frame of the environmental issue is still present in the UK, for instance climate policies are seen as an obstacle to economic growth. The argument against green policies in the UK is also sustained by the argument that they are ineffective.

The far-right discourse on the environment in Poland is dominated by nationalistic and economic frames. One important issue for the Polish debate on the environment is agriculture. Indeed, in recent years (2023-2025), Polish agriculture has been at the heart of

a heated public debate over the rollout of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027 measures and investments under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). While Brussels demands stricter environmental and digitalization standards for farms, growers on the ground decry the unsustainable costs of upgrading machinery, precision-farming technologies, and agro-ecological practices. “Green” requirements – such as reduced pesticide use, nitrogen emission limits, and eco-scheme payments tied to ecological conditions – have sparked numerous protests and roadblocks since 2024, led by groups like Rural Solidarity, which urge the Polish government to revise funding criteria and strike a balance between sustainability and profitability. This tension highlights the central challenge of the green transition: how to finance modernization without overburdening farm households, while preserving competitiveness in domestic and international markets.

Several posts in the Polish dataset deal with such a reform of the sector endorsed by left wing forces that is said to be disruptive for the economy by right-wing actors and contrast the national Polish interest. In this respect, while agriculture as a keyword was detected, the post contained an economic frame, which was most of the time built on the opposition between the common

sense of the right-wing position, defending basic economic rights of the sector vs the green ideology of the left which lack common sense and is said to produce economic damage to the Polish economy.

The European Green Deal is also framed under economic terms by denouncing the high cost of its implementation in the name of what has been defined as a “quasi-religious madness”. Similarly to what concerns the agricultural sector, even in this case the economic argument is paired with the distinction between ideology and common sense.

Energy is also an important theme touched upon while talking about the environment. Most often this theme is treated under nationalistic frames as an attack from Germany to Polish energetic independence.

The anti-globalist frame in Poland is usually associated with anti-EU sentiment as well as with the idea that global governance is an elite conspiracy whose goal is to make technocrats rich at the expenses of common people: “we threaten the Green Deal, Fit for 55, EU taxes, eliminating combustion cars and other climate crazies that destroy agriculture and the entire economy! It is these crazy values that we want to stop, and for this we want to bring in as many MEPs as possible in the European Parliament elections!”. On the same note, on the anti-EU side of the frames, the implementation of the EU green deal is seen as a betrayal of the Polish people by the Law and Justice.

Often the anti-globalist sentiment is paired with a frame of elite hypocrisy. When a denial/skepticism frame is detected, there is still an attempt at a scientific development of the argument, rather than simply denying a statement, by suggesting that a constructive attempt at a counterargument is being made. For instance, they denounce the development of electric cars as a scam. Coal is a recurring word in the post classified as dealing with the environment. When the word occurred, most often the post was treated through an anti-globalist perspective. The underlying argument is that emerging and competitor economies will produce coal at the expense of the West which is not doing so anymore because of green regulations. This is framed as a geopolitical problem with emerging countries being conceded a competitive advantage in the production of coal at the expense of the west.

The nationalist frame was often detected when the keyword was “eco”. Most of the time the actual word was eco-fanatic; or eco-nazi. Usually when this is the keyword, the frame is a nationalistic one that depicts a distinction between us vs them, namely the nation vs the globalist elite.

Such a frame has a populist structure which is also seen in another used frame, namely the one of elite

hypocrisy. Rather than denying climate change, these posts point out to the incoherent behaviour of globalist environmentalists with the aim of destroying their credibility.

The economic frame is also widespread among posts dealing with the topic of electric cars: “Interestingly, electricity has become 100 percent more expensive in 5 years!”. Sometimes there are also posts dealing with electric cars that develop a counternarrative by stating that electric cars are actually worse for the environment than their internal combustion competitors. This line of argument is skeptic towards the new technology thus developing a new denialism/skepticism frame. As for before such a denialism/skepticism is developed through supposedly scientific counterargument, making far-right actors more engaged in the scientific debate, by developing their argument through the quotation of right-wing intelligentsia.

In Italy the main framework used in order to talk about the environment is the economic one. Notably, elite hypocrisy is substantially present, suggesting a style of reporting news from progressive policies or ideas with a comment pushing towards hypocrisy. Coherently with the general trend, nationalistic and economic frames are used to talk about the environment. Similarly, in France as well the elites are attacked for being hypocritical concerning their allegedly green ideology vs their actual behaviors, as the following post demonstrates: “three months ago Emanuelle Wargon, (new secretary of State for ecology) defended palm oil use for children’s nutrition”. However, the denial/skepticism frame is extremely rare in the France context, demonstrating the shift towards a more nuanced and engaged argument.

Besides neutral content, the nationalistic frame is the most widely used in the Czech Republic when the far-right deals with the environment. The economic frame is largely present in the Czech Republic specifically when dealing with the theme of electricity or energy. For instance, the clean energy transition is seen as EU imposed measures that will destroy the Czech economy. Interestingly, even in cases when the classification is economic, the post has some aspects of anti globalism and nationalism as the following example clarifies: “clean energy transition policies as EU imposed measures that will destroy Czech economy”. An example is the critique of the green deal, interpreted as a plot of the EU to harm the Czech economy. Indeed, the economic argument in these themes is built through the development of a nationalistic and anti globalist rhetoric. This is strictly connected with the geopolitical implications of the energy theme and so it is natural that the economic

and political arguments are often merged when framing these issues by right-wing actors in the country.

The economic argument against energy policies is often mixed up with the need to go on in buying Russian gas. Again, the economic and geopolitical argument against green energy policies go hand in hand.

Still dealing with energy policy, some issues are framed in order to demonstrate the inefficacy of green policy. One example is a post dealing with the fact that solar panels have been destroyed due to natural causes in Texas, demonstrating that building these panels is useless because they cannot resist natural events like storms. This is interesting because it does not deny the need of green policies on energy, it rather builds the argument for their inefficacy. When dealing with energy, in the Czech Republic the frames are economic, nationalistic and anti-globalist, by putting together a narrative that makes the global elite responsible for the economic crises and at the same time picturing a nationalistic management of the energy policy as the only possible solution. Sometimes, such rhetoric is further strengthened by the denunciation of the effectiveness of green policies.

In the Czech Republic, a lot of posts dealing with energy have to do with the harm to the Czech-Russian relationship as a consequence of green policies.

Besides this peculiar element of framing, in the Czech Republic as well the demonization of the enemy is part of a broader strategy against green political actors. The populist manichean division between us and them is present there as well and an example is the following: “We are at war, but at war with the green lunatic”. This is sometimes backed by denialism and skepticism towards green policies and arguments.

Most often, the economic argument is linked to a comparative analysis between countries, such as the Czech Republic, that still adopt European framework on energy policies vs Visegrad countries that dare to develop an independent agenda. Thus, the economic argument is often interlinked with a distinction between countries who are under the European control (anti-Globalist frame) and countries which undertake nationalist policies on energy (nationalism) with the aim of “thinking about their own citizens”. For instance, National government is said to enact climate protectionist policies as corrupt and knowingly damaging Czech citizens.

In this respect, the economic argument, although prevalent in the post, is still embedded in a populist distinction between global elites and nationalistic governments. The wellness of the citizen is one of the two poles, the other one being the corrupter (European and globalist) elites who are trying to enrich themselves

through green policies that are on the contrary making ordinary citizens poorer.

The discussion on energy policies and its economic negative sides is also interlinked with euroskepticism. So the economic argument is shaped through nationalistic or anti-globalist frames that eventually lead to euroskeptic rhetoric. Also the use of the frame on the criminalization of the elite is interlinked with economic arguments on energy policies. Sometimes, indeed, they use the term thief to refer to politicians guilty of making the energy prices go up.

Finally, Nationalistic and economic frames are the most employed in Austria as well. Anti globalist frames are present in Austria notably in the form of the EU pushing an anti-democratic agenda through the green deal: “Austria is marching in steps with Europe towards eco-dictatorship”. More in general, the environmentalist agenda is seen as a globalist plot at the expense of common citizens who are impoverished by these measures, as the following post exemplifies: “in June 2020, the World Economic Forum announced its plans for a great reset; what may sound nice at first glance turns out to be a dystopia on closer inspection. Crises such as the corona crisis or the climate crisis; serve as a pretext for realising the new world order, designed by globalists”. At the same time, such a globalist plot is said to be developed by leftist and progressive actors at the national level. Besides such a nationalistic and anti globalist approach, the Austrian far-right also develops a populist understanding of climate activists by portraying them as both inconsistent and corrupt, by denouncing their criminalization and at the same time hypocrisy, as in the following example: “with 114 private jets to the climate conference at the luxury resort in Italy”. (all tables disaggregated per country are available upon authors request)

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, the literature shows a shift from outright scepticism of the far-right on environmental issues and climate to strategic framing, *balancing shared ideological tendencies with country-specific contexts*. Economic critiques, nationalist arguments and selective engagement with international institutions are now central to far-right environmental discourse, highlighting the complexity and evolution of their relationship with environmental politics.

This article has investigated this still under researched dimension in the scholarship on the far-right, showing how far-right actors in Europe have integrated environmental issues into their political discourse, with

a particular focus on discursive framing and potential cross-national emulation or resonance. The findings reveal a strategic reframing of environmental discourse by far-right actors: rather than rejecting environmentalism outright, they co-opt it to reinforce pre-existing ideological narratives. Such nuanced engagement, occasionally manifesting as conspiratorial forms of political conflict, emphasizes the necessity of examining the evolution of far-right discourse amid global challenges like climate change and its possible repercussions on public perception and policy. In the light of our results, we therefore argue that the growing presence of environmental themes in the far-right's discourse might signal not only a shift in issue salience, but also the emergence of new interpretive schemas that travel across borders and political contexts and that can be a threat to sustainable development (Žuk and Žuk 2024).

Interestingly, a potential debate arises between the diffusion of common ideas and frames due to a shared ideological milieu, and the emphasis on national specificities that shapes different nationalistic responses and positions in each country.

While the overall salience of environmental discourse varies across countries, we observe clear patterns of convergence in framing. The recurrent use of nationalist and anti-globalist frames, the critique of green policies' economic costs, and the demonization of climate activists suggest the emergence of transnational discursive templates. These shared frames operate as ideational infrastructures that enable far-right actors to articulate common grievances and identities across borders, reinforcing the potential for symbolic alignment even in the absence of formal coordination.

Aligning with studies on collective action, we can therefore argue that there exists a potential for the emergence of transnational coalition-building among far-right actors (Van Dyke and Amos 2017).

In conclusion, the far-right's engagement with environmental issues represents a *discursive mutation* rather than a return to outright denial. By framing climate politics as threats to sovereignty, prosperity, and cultural identity, far-right actors appropriate ecological themes while challenging mainstream narratives. Understanding this evolution is crucial for assessing both the ideological trajectory of the far-right and its potential influence on public debate and policy, also in terms of politicization of new political identities related to new socio and political climate change inequalities.

REFERENCES

- Bonikowski, B. & Nelson, L. K. (2022), «From ends to means: the promise of computational text analysis for theoretically driven sociological research», in *Sociological Methods & Research*, 51(4): 1469-1483, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00491241221123088>
- Buzogány, A. and Mohamad-Klotzbach, C., (2021), «Populism and nature—the nature of populism: New perspectives on the relationship between populism, climate change, and nature protection», in *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 15(2): 155-164, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12286-021-00492-7>
- Caiani, M. (2023), «Framing and social movements», *Discourse Studies*, 25(2): 195-209.
- Caiani, M. (2025), *La transnazionalizzazione della destra radicale*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Caiani, M., della Porta, D. and Wagemann, C. (2012), *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right: Germany, Italy, and the United States*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Caiani, M. & Lubarda, B. (2023), «Conditional environmentalism of right-wing populism in power: ideology and/or opportunities?», in *Environmental Politics*, 22(4): 591-611, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2023.2242749>
- Caiani, M., Tranfić, I., Eren, B. & Pennucci, N. (2024), *Paper on the forms of cooperation among authoritarian forces*. "AUTHLIB". Available Online: <https://www.authlib.eu/forms-of-cooperation-among-authoritarian-forces/> (Accessed 23 October 2025)
- Caiani, M., Pennucci, N. (2026). Far-Right Climate Skepticism Across Europe. In: Caiani, M., Solinas, M., Trenz, HJ. (eds.) *Conspiracism and Political Conflict*. Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-13933-7_12
- Campos, S., Rodrigo, D.E., Barcelos, B., Severo, G., (2019), Conspiracy theories and anti-environmentalism in Bolsonaro's Brasil, in I.K. Allen, K. Ekberg, S. Holgersen, A. Malm, (eds.), *Political Ecologies of the Far-right, Fanning the flames*, Manchester University Press: Manchester.
- Dobson, A. (2016), *Citizenship and the environment: the ecological citizen*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elçi, E. (2022), «Politics of nostalgia and populism: evidence from Turkey», in *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(2): 697-714, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000666>
- Eslen-Ziya, H. & Giorgi, A. (2022), *Populism and science in Europe*. London/New York: Palgrave.
- Falkner, R. (2025), Conference on climate change and eco-nationalism hosted at the London School of Eco-

- nomics and Political Science: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/events/economic-nationalism>
- Farstad, F. M. (2018), «What explains variation in parties' climate change salience?», in *Party Politics*, 24(2): 135-152, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068817693473>
- Forchtner, B., Kroneder, M. & Wetzel, C. (2018), «“Don't confuse me with facts”: right-wing populism, institutional distrust, and climate change scepticism in Germany», in *Environmental Politics*, 27(4): 591-612.
- Forchtner, B. & Lubarda, B. (2023), «Scepticisms and beyond? A comprehensive portrait of climate change communication by the far-right in the European Parliament», in *Environmental Politics*, 32(1): 43-68.
- Foucart, S. (2010), *Le populisme climatique: Claude Allègre et Cie, enquête sur les ennemis de la science*. Paris: Denoël.
- Froio, C. & Ganesh, B. (2019), «The transnationalisation of far-right discourse on Twitter: Issues and actors that cross borders in Western European democracies», in *European Societies*, 21(4): 513-539, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2018.1494295>
- Grigoropoulou, N. & Small, M. L. (2022), «The data revolution in social science needs qualitative research», in *Nature Human Behaviour*, 6(7): 904-906. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01333-7>
- Hanusch, F., & Meisch, S. (2022), «The temporal cleavage: the case of populist retrotopia vs. climate emergency», in *Environmental Politics*, 31(5): 883-903, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2022.2044691>
- Hilmar, T. (2025), «Cassandra from the far-right: how the German and Austrian populist radical right links climate skepticism with economic issues», in *Environmental Politics*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2025.2560188>
- Huber, R. A. (2020), «The role of populist attitudes in explaining climate change scepticism and support for environmental protection», in *Environmental Politics*, 29(6): 959-982.
- Huber, R. A., Maltby, T., Szulecki, K., & Ćetković, S. (2021), «Is populism a challenge to European energy and climate policy? Empirical evidence across varieties of populism», in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(7): 998-1017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.1918214>
- Hughes, B., Jones, D., and Amarasingam, A., (2022), «Ecofascism: An examination of the far-right/ecology nexus in the online space», in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 34(5): 997-1023.
- Kuhar, R. & Paternotte, D. (Eds.) (2017). *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: mobilizing against equality*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Kulin, J., Johansson Sevä, I. & Dunlap, R. (2021), «Nationalist ideology, right-wing populism, and public views about climate change in Europe», in *Environmental Politics*, 30(7): 1111-1134, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2021.1898879>
- Lavizzari, A. & Siročić, Z. (2022), «Contentious gender politics in Italy and Croatia: diffusion of transnational anti-gender movements to national contexts», in *Social Movement Studies*, 22(4): 475-493.
- Lubarda, B. (2017), Polluting outsiders: green nationalism as a concept – case study: Latvia, in Aydın, M., Şirin Pınarcıoğlu, Ö. Uğurlu (Eds.), *Current debates in public finance, public administration, and environmental studies* (pp. 437-457). London: IJOPEC.
- Lubarda, B. (2020a), «Beyond ecofascism? Far-right ecologism (FRE) as a framework for future inquiries», in *Environmental Values*, 29(6): 713-732, <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327120X15752810323922>
- Lubarda, B. (2020b), «“Homeland farming” or “rural emancipation”? The discursive overlap between populist and green parties in Hungary», in *Sociologia Ruralis*, 60(4): 810-832, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12289>
- Mudde, C. (2019). *The Far-right Today*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Pennucci, N. (2023), «Resisting right-wing populism in power: a comparative analysis of the Facebook activities of social movements in Italy and the UK», in *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 21(3): 234-257, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2023.2262973>
- Pittnerová, Š. & Kopeček, L. (2025), *No to the “mad” Green Deal, yes to “quality” Czech food: How the far-right populist Freedom and Direct Democracy messages on environmental issues*. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Advance online publication, 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2025.2525145>
- Pospieszna, P. & Vetulani-Cęgiel, A. (2021), «Polish interest groups facing democratic backsliding», in *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 10(2): 158-180, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41309-021-00119-y>
- Selby, J. (2019), «The Trump presidency, climate change, and the prospect of a disorderly energy transition»; in *Review of International Studies*, 45(3): 471-490.
- Snow, D. A. & Benford, R. D. (1988). “Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization”. In Klandermans, B., Kriesi, H. & Tarrow, S. (Eds.), *From structure to action: international social movement research* (Vol. 1, pp. 197-217). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Snow, D. A. & Benford, R. D. (1999), “Alternative types of cross-national diffusion in the social movement arena”. In della Porta, D., Kriesi, H. & Rucht, D. (eds.),

- Social movements in a globalizing world* (23–39). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tilly, C. (2003), *The politics of collective violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Timmer, A. D. & Docka-Filipek, D. (2018), «Enemies of the nation: understanding the Hungarian state's relationship to humanitarian NGOs», *Journal of International and Global Studies*, 9(2): Article 3.
- Tosun, J. & Debus, M. (2020), «Right-wing populist parties and environmental politics: insights from the Austrian Freedom Party's support for the glyphosate ban», *Environmental Politics*, 30(1-2): 224-244.
- Trump, D. J. (2025), Speech at the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 23 September 2025. [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7Y8_0zAzXc
- Van Dyke, N. & Amos, B. (2017), «Social movement coalitions: Formation, longevity, and success», in *Sociology Compass*, 11(7): e12489.
- Vihma, A., et al. 2020. Climate Change and Populism. Comparing the Populist Parties' Climate Policies in Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Report, 64, Helsinki FIIA.
- Wondreys, J. & Mudde, C. (2022), «Victims of the pandemic? European far-right parties and COVID-19», in *Nationalities Papers*, 50(1): 86-103.
- Yazar, M. & Haarstad, H. (2023), «Populist far-right discursive-institutional tactics in European regional decarbonization», *Political Geography*, 105: Article 102936, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2023.102936>
- Zeller, M. (2024), «Framing conspiracism: violent right-wing extremist trends in post-pandemic Europe», Paper presented at the conference Conspiracies and Conflict, 7-8 November 2024, Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence.
- Žuk, P. & Žuk, P. (2025), «Power, Environment, and Depoliticized Conflict in Social Space: Threats to Sustainable Development from the Perspective of Environmental Activists in Poland», in *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 115(3): 671-687. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2024.2445289>



Citation: Guerra, N. (2026). Ecofascism's Dual Legacy: Local Revolts and Imperial Dreams in Italy. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33): 183-199. doi: 10.36253/smp-17050

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

ORCID:
NG: 0000-0003-2519-7041

Ecofascism's Dual Legacy: Local Revolts and Imperial Dreams in Italy

NICOLA GUERRA

University of Turku, Turku, Finland
E-mail: nicola.guerra@utu.fi

Abstract. This study analyzes the ideological and political frameworks of three Italian radical ecofascist movements: the National Anarchists (N-As), the Alliance of Italian Anarchist Nationalists (ANAI), and National Resistance - National Autonomists (NR-NA). Employing a multi-methodological approach, with a particular emphasis on inductive qualitative thematic analysis, the research reconstructs the ideological foundations of these movements, focusing on the pivotal role of nature within their doctrines. These groups are identified not merely as far-right environmentalists, but as genuine ecofascists, who elevate natural laws above human legislation, drawing on an organicist worldview rooted in nature. The study reveals their rejection of nationalism and the nation-state, which they perceive as tools of capitalism, and underscores their distinctly anti-liberal political eclecticism, which is explored in its various dimensions.

Keywords: ecofascism, far-right environmentalism, Italian far right, environmentalism.

1. ECOFASCISM IN FOCUS: UNTANGLING A COMPLEX IDEOLOGY AMID RISING ATTENTION

Scholarly engagement with ecofascism has intensified in recent years, largely as a reactive response to episodes of politically motivated violence (Campion 2021; Darwish 2024; Hughes et al. 2022; Macklin 2022; Tarin 2023), rather than as the outcome of a sustained, coherent, and long-standing theoretical tradition. Earlier academic contributions, spanning the late 1980s through the 1990s, remained sporadic and were primarily concerned with tracing the historical, cultural, and ideological roots of ecofascist thought, rather than examining it as a contemporary political phenomenon (Bramwell 1985; 1989; Staudenmaier 1999a; 1999b; Olsen 1999).

It was only in the 2000s, and particularly from the second decade of the century onwards, that scholarly interest began to expand, with research progressively shifting towards a range of interconnected analytical domains, including the circulation of ecofascist discourses across digital environments and print media, the structural and motivational dynamics underpinning their development, and the interpretative frameworks through which ecofas-

cist movements articulate their identities and worldviews (Forchtner 2020; Hughes et al. 2022; Moore and Roberts 2022; Darwish 2024; Loadenthal 2022; Lubarda 2020; 2024; Malm and The Zetkin Collective 2021; Forchtner and Gruber 2024).

The developments observed and documented throughout the 2020s have been instrumental in directing scholarly attention towards the contemporary intersections between far-right and/or neo-fascist ideologies and ecological concerns. Notwithstanding the rapid expansion of this burgeoning body of literature, a fundamental conceptual ambiguity persists: no stable or universally endorsed definition has yet emerged to delineate what constitutes an ecofascist movement or political organisation, thereby rendering the term analytically contested within the academic field (Guerra 2025).

Precisely for this reason, recent scholarship has increasingly interrogated whether ecofascism constitutes a sufficiently robust analytical category capable of capturing the complex and heterogeneous interactions between environmental concerns and far-right political projects. This issue of conceptual framing must therefore be clarified prior to articulating the research questions and establishing the significance of the selected case studies examined in this article.

Some authors, regarding the classification of ecofascism as unduly restrictive, have advanced the concept of Far-Right Ecologism (FRE) as a broader and more flexible analytical framework, designed to account for the plurality of normative orientations that arise at the intersection of far-right ideology and ecological thought. These include, *inter alia*, organicist worldviews, spiritual and naturalist belief systems, authoritarian imaginaries, projects of economic autarky, nostalgic narratives, and forms of dualistic moral reasoning (Lubarda 2020).

Within this interpretative reconfiguration, ecofascism is no longer treated as an autonomous ideological formation; rather, it is subsumed within a wider analytical inquiry into the ways in which environmental discourses are appropriated, rearticulated, and mobilised across the far-right spectrum (Hughes et al. 2022). Proponents of this approach further contend that far-right ecologism affords greater conceptual precision than the category of ecofascism, insofar as it frames these dynamics as a mode of political practice that sustains hierarchical social orders and capitalist relations, while simultaneously drawing upon ethnonationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, and, in certain instances, the legitimisation of violence (Moore and Roberts 2022, 13).

While the FRE framework has undoubtedly played a pivotal role in opening a previously neglected field of inquiry, it concurrently perpetuates the assumption that

environmentally oriented actors on the far right remain analytically indistinguishable from the broader far-right milieu. In this regard, the FRE perspective would benefit from a more systematic and sustained engagement with the expanding corpus of scholarship on far-right climate scepticism and environmental denial, which foregrounds the internal contradictions and ideological tensions inherent within these movements (Forchtner and Lubarda 2022; Vowles and Hultman 2021; Barla and Bjork-James 2021). Moreover, such undifferentiated approaches risk generating reductive and stereotypical interpretations, for instance by collapsing ecofascism into a mere rhetorical façade for racism or reductively branding it as ‘racial capitalism’ (Iosifidis 2026), thereby obscuring its more complex ideological configurations and variegated articulations.

The FRE approach is further constrained in its capacity to capture processes of intra-far-right differentiation and fragmentation, particularly with regard to distinguishing between fully fledged ecofascist formations and actors who merely appropriate ecofascist or environmentalist motifs in a selective manner. The former are typically structured around an organicist cult of nature and characterised by anti-systemic, anti-statist, extra-parliamentary, and markedly anti-modern orientations, frequently advancing insurrectionary strategies or envisaging the gradual erosion of the nation-state, which they regard as an obsolete political form. By contrast, far-right militants who incorporate ecofascist elements tend to remain firmly anchored in nationalism and statism, promoting a hyper-nationalist vision of a strong and sovereign state, conceived in organicist terms as the ‘brain’ governing the social body. Within this framework, ecological discourse is subordinated to broader projects of authoritarian governance and national consolidation (Guerra 2025; Forchtner and Kølvrå 2017).

Accordingly, the present article adopts the perspective of those scholars who conceptualise ecofascism as an autonomous ideological formation, and it is therefore instructive to revisit and refine existing definitional accounts. Champion (2021, 926), for instance, characterises ecofascism as a synthesis of revolutionary aspiration and reactionary politics. Within this framework, ecofascist thought is oriented towards the symbolic renewal of a collectively imagined community, the cohesion of which is presumed to have been eroded. This perceived decline is attributed, albeit indirectly, to the rupture of an allegedly primordial bond with nature – a dislocation ascribed to the advance of modernity in its various manifestations, including industrialisation, urbanisation, cultural pluralism, consumerism, and the ascendancy of individualism. From this standpoint, the restoration of an idealised natural order is envisaged as the principal

mechanism through which authenticity, hierarchy, and collective strength may be reconstituted (Campion 2021; Benoist, Turner and Bailey 2026).

Within ecofascist thought there resides a distinctly palingenetic vision, oriented towards restoring society to a communitarian form (Griffin 1991, 33). This imagined community is not equated with the nation-state – regarded instead as a product of modern decadence, shaped by Masonic, capitalist, and individualist forces (Guerra 2025) – but rather with an organic social order believed to have once existed. Ecofascism thus seeks to reclaim the purported benefits once conferred upon its members by recreating a lost society, whose decline is attributed to the intrusion of “impurities” that have weakened it and rendered it vulnerable to its enemies (Campion 2021).

It is further important to note that ecofascism is not articulated as a fixed or systematically codified doctrine; rather, it is more appropriately understood as a political-theoretical orientation grounded in the primacy of an “organic” conception of society. This conception not only diverges from the nation-state but is explicitly opposed to and posited as an alternative to it, being instead anchored in the idealisation of micro-communities modelled upon those deemed “traditional.” Within these reimagined communities – constructed in deliberate opposition to the national framework – the subordination of individual interests to the integrity of nature, conceived as a coherent and hierarchically ordered whole, constitutes the central tenet of ecofascist thought (Guerra 2025).

Although the term itself exhibits a considerable degree of conceptual fluidity and remains subject to ongoing processes of rearticulation, a measure of internal coherence is nonetheless sustained through the recurrent emphasis on organicism. In accordance with this logic, nature is envisaged as an indivisible and overarching organism, a supreme totality within which all constituent elements participate in a state of functional equilibrium. Ecofascist imaginaries subsequently transpose this organicist vision onto society itself, which is similarly construed as a living entity governed by principles of hierarchy and functional differentiation. Within such a framework, individuals are assigned specific roles or “missions” in accordance with these principles, thereby contributing not merely to the welfare, but more precisely to the presumed “health” of the collective body (Guerra 2025).

2. MAPPING ECOFASCISM: OBJECTIVES AND ANALYTICAL METHODS

Having thus clarified the profound divergence in the respective orientations towards the nation-state and

nationalism between far-right movements exhibiting ecological sensitivities and explicitly ecofascist formations, the present article turns to the Italian context. More specifically, the analysis concentrates on three extra-parliamentary groups that can be clearly identified as distinctly ecofascist: the National Anarchists (N-As), the Alliance of Italian Anarchist Nationalists (ANAI), and National Resistance – National Autonomists (NR-NA) (Guerra, 2025). The object of analysis is deliberately circumscribed to groups that have already been examined and classified in the literature as explicitly ecofascist (Guerra 2025), operating – within the scope of this study – primarily in Italy, and more specifically in Northern Italy. The decision to focus on overtly ecofascist formations necessarily entails a degree of geographical delimitation; however, this should not be regarded as restrictive. On the contrary, such delimitation enables the level of analytical precision required to distinguish systematically between genuinely ecofascist formations and instances of ecological sensibility within the broader far-right milieu.

Furthermore, these groups are characterised by documented patterns of transnational collaboration, thereby offering a potentially fruitful avenue for future research on ecofascist transnationalism. Finally, Italy itself – having for decades constituted a central locus for far-right activism, ecofascist currents, and hybrid anti-hegemonic ideologies such as Red-Brownism (Ferraresi 2012; Marano and De Feudis 2021; Guerra 2024; 2025) – may be considered a particularly privileged observational setting for the purposes of this inquiry.

Within this analytical framework, the research questions seek to arrive at a precise conceptualisation of the specific form of ecofascism adopted by the three movements under examination, with particular attention to how they position themselves in relation to the nation-state and nationalism as ecofascist actors. Do they articulate an intensified form of hyper-nationalism, or rather a communitarian, anti-statist, and anti-nationalist orientation?

Furthermore, the study interrogates their stance vis-à-vis liberal-capitalist modernity. Can these formations be interpreted, as some scholars have suggested, through the lens of “racial capitalism” (Iossifidis 2026), or do they instead advance explicitly anti-capitalist critiques? Finally, the research seeks to determine the organisational and aggregative characteristics of the ecofascist communities envisaged by these groups, with particular emphasis on their internal structure, modes of cohesion, and socio-political logics of formation.

From an analytical standpoint, this study builds upon recently published research on the three movements under examination (Guerra 2025) and extends it

through a more sustained interrogation of their relationship to the state, nationalism, and the idealised community conceived in organicist terms. This constitutes a form of analytical deepening that does not rely exclusively on secondary literature, but instead adopts a practice-oriented methodological approach, engaging directly with textual materials produced and disseminated via the movements' official websites and social media platforms. Collected throughout 2024, these sources allow for a more fine-grained empirical elaboration and critical refinement of the findings established in previous scholarship, while also enabling a more rigorous assessment of the extent to which the empirical evidence speaks to, and fulfils, the research objectives formulated in this study.

Building on existing knowledge of the three groups and recognising the inherently complex and multilayered nature of radical discourse, this study adopts a multimethod analytical framework designed to capture both the surface-level textual structures and the latent conceptual foundations of ecofascist thought. Such an approach is particularly necessary given the propensity of radical movements to mobilise heterogeneous cultural, social, and political repertoires while simultaneously deploying sophisticated rhetorical strategies.

These forms of communication seldom operate through transparent or uniform linguistic mechanisms; rather, they are characterised by shifting rhetorical registers, symbolic encoding, and contextual ambiguity. As Fairclough (1992) has argued, language does not merely reflect social structures but actively participates in their constitution and reproduction, particularly in relation to power and domination.

The principal methodological approach adopted is thematic analysis, which functions as a key interpretative instrument by enabling the systematic identification of semantic regularities and discursive focal points across extensive textual corpora. Through the detection of recurring motifs and conceptual configurations, this method provides insight into the normative orientations and strategic concerns underpinning a movement's communicative practices (Braun and Clarke 2006). In this sense, thematic analysis facilitates a shift from surface-level content description towards a more critical interrogation of how themes are constructed, hierarchised, and discursively legitimised.

It is therefore necessary to engage simultaneously with explicit argumentative structures and implicit processes of meaning-making. This requirement is particularly salient in the study of radical movements, whose communicative strategies frequently rely on indirect reference, metaphorical framing, and semiotic signalling, thereby necessitating both textual and contextual forms

of interpretation. In this regard, Wodak and Meyer (2009) emphasise that methodological pluralism, which is a constitutive feature of thematic analysis, enhances analytical robustness by enabling findings to be triangulated across multiple interpretative lenses, thereby yielding a more nuanced and comprehensive account of politically saturated discourse. On this basis, the present analysis adopts a composite thematic framework, integrating political discourse analysis, thematic categorisation, and linguistic register analysis in relation to the collected communicative materials produced by the groups under examination.

As articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006, 79), thematic analysis provides a systematic means of identifying, examining, and presenting recurrent patterns of meaning, while remaining sufficiently flexible to accommodate a wide range of epistemological and theoretical positions. Such methodological openness is of particular relevance when engaging with radical discourses, which frequently resist stable ideological typologies and may simultaneously articulate contradictory, overlapping, or internally tensioned positions.

The thematic analysis employed in this study is explicitly non-deductive. As Gibbs (2007, 48) cautions, deductive strategies may constrain analytical sensitivity by foregrounding pre-established categories that risk obscuring salient dimensions of the data that do not readily conform to predetermined thematic structures. By contrast, an inductive approach, as adopted here, foregrounds attentiveness to emergent meanings and sustains a close engagement with the ways in which actors within radical movements construct, negotiate, and reconfigure their belief systems.

This approach is particularly valuable for capturing processes of ideological transformation, insofar as radical narratives often evolve dynamically in response to shifting political, social, and cultural contexts. In this regard, Clarke et al. (2015, 89) emphasise that inductive analysis facilitates a grounded reconstruction of meaning-making processes, rendering it especially well suited to tracing discourses whose content, emphasis, and internal coherence may change over time.

Moreover, inductive thematic analysis facilitates a more differentiated representation of ideological diversity within radical movements. By allowing themes to emerge organically from the corpus, this approach avoids treating such movements as ideologically monolithic and instead brings into relief the plurality of voices, internal tensions, and situated experiential standpoints that constitute their discursive landscapes. As noted by Lune and Berg (2017, 167), inductive procedures are particularly well suited to illuminating the het-

erogeneity inherent in radical milieus, thereby enabling a richer and more fine-grained account of their ideological configurations.

For these reasons, an inductive thematic approach offers distinct analytical advantages over deductive alternatives, insofar as it enables a more nuanced understanding of the narratives, motivations, and symbolic repertoires underpinning radical ideologies. As O'Brien (2006, 45) observes, classificatory clarity derived from inductive thematic analysis facilitates a structured comprehension of ideological formations and the socio-political environments within which they operate.

For clarity and transparency, it is appropriate to specify the textual corpora collected and examined. In the case of N-As, their communications were observed and compiled from a fragmented online presence, disseminated across various far-right and environmentalist networks through comments, as well as via the movement's official international Facebook page. By contrast, the communications of ANAI were sourced from the official Facebook page of the Italian branch, which also articulates a clearly defined political programme. Regarding NR-NA, the texts collected and analysed were retrieved from the movement's official online platform entitled National Resistance.

From both a methodological and analytical standpoint, it is also worth noting that this study pertains to what may be defined as the phase of ideological development and social-media-based communication of the three movements. This phase is, however, explicitly interrupted over the period 2013–2020, as the groups transition towards a communicative regime increasingly reliant on encrypted channels and thereby less exposed to public visibility and collective scrutiny. Where relevant within the analytical framework of the study, verbatim quotations from the groups' writings are reproduced in quotation marks. These, however, do not constitute the primary object of inquiry; rather, as previously clarified, such texts function as the empirical textual corpus for thematic analysis aimed at reconstructing the underlying ideological architectures.

3. DECENTRALIZING POWER: N-AS' VISION FOR A FEDERATION OF DIRECTLY DEMOCRATIC ECO-COMMUNITIES

In the Italian context, the National Anarchists (N-As) emerged in the late 1980s within milieus closely associated with the intellectual currents of the *Nouvelle Droite* (ND) (Guerra 2025), to which the group's discourse makes both implicit and explicit reference. This

is evidenced by citations and conceptual borrowings from Alain de Benoist, which situate the group within a discernible ideological lineage and genealogy of influence stemming from the ND. It should nevertheless be noted that, rather than constituting a coherent or unified doctrine, the ND is more accurately understood as a heterogeneous ideological formation whose contours resist conventional political classification. Numerous scholars have characterised it as an assemblage or constellation of interrelated ideas, encompassing positions ranging from ethnonationalist and far-right orientations to discursive elements more commonly associated with anarchist thought (Griffin 1991; Taguieff 1994; François 2014). Consequently, the existence of a stable ideological relationship does not, in itself, provide a sufficient basis for automatically clarifying or determining the group's political positions.

A defining characteristic of the ND is, moreover, the absence of a fixed programmatic text or authoritative manifesto. Instead, as Kaplan (1997) observes, it operates through a network of mutually reinforcing discourses that intersect with multiple strands of contemporary right-wing ideology. This discursive openness contributes to its capacity to mobilise supporters from diverse backgrounds, united less by a shared blueprint for political action than by a convergent rejection of liberal universalism and the cultural foundations of modernity. Within this framework, themes such as ethnocultural identity, critiques of globalisation, and selective engagements with environmentalism occupy a central place, drawing on a wide array of philosophical and political influences (de Benoist 2012). It is within this sense – and within this complex and internally heterogeneous constellation – that the N-As are most appropriately situated.

What should be emphasised in examining the relationship between the N-As and the ND is that, within the latter's intellectual universe, Alain de Benoist accords a foundational status to ecological thought, treating it not as a peripheral concern but as a structuring principle of his broader worldview. His engagement with environmentalism functions primarily as a critique of modern civilisation, understood as driven by industrialisation, technological rationality, and mass consumption, which together produce both a rupture between human communities and the natural world and the erosion of traditional social and cultural forms. For de Benoist, ecological thought is not reducible to technical or policy-oriented solutions, but rather constitutes a fundamental critique of modernity itself (de Benoist 2012). Environmental degradation is thus interpreted as a symptom of a deeper civilisational crisis, rooted in instrumental and anthropocentric conceptions of nature, whereby eco-

logical crises reveal profound existential ruptures rather than merely failures of governance or technology.

Having delineated, so to speak, the political family to which the N-As may be ascribed, it is important to note that even a preliminary examination of the group's digital output reveals a marked absence of formal manifestos or systematically articulated doctrinal statements. Rather than advancing a coherent programme, the movement communicates its positions through fragmented and often implicit discursive interventions.

Nonetheless, a preliminary assessment of the N-As' materials indicates that the ideological core of the movement is organised around a clearly identifiable thematic nexus, namely the overarching sacralisation of the natural world, which is treated as the ultimate source of normative authority. A qualitative thematic analysis of N-As communications reveals three analytically distinct yet mutually reinforcing domains that structure the movement's worldview: the symbolic and normative status of nature, conceptions of economic organisation, and imaginaries of political authority and statehood. These three thematic clusters are internally configured in such a way that the understanding of nature – elevated to a transcendent normative reference point – occupies a foundational position, permeating and shaping the remaining dimensions of the ideology (Guerra 2025).

With regard to the thematic cluster concerning the symbolic and normative status of nature, the N-As conceive the natural order as governed by immutable principles that lie beyond the reach of human will or legislative intervention. Human attempts to override these principles – particularly those driven by anthropocentric hubris and technological domination – are portrayed as violations of an eternal natural order. Accordingly, social organisation is envisaged as a form of collective life that must be modelled in accordance with natural laws. This orientation gives rise to an organicist conception of society, in which human communities are understood as inseparable components of a wider ecological and normative totality. Within this framework, recurring formulations assert that “human society can neither act nor regulate itself according to normative principles that contravene those established by Nature,” and that “to violate the sacred principles of Nature entails the death of the social organism, as when the roots of a tree are severed or a source is dried up.”

With regard to the second thematic cluster, contemporary economic systems are subjected to a sharp critique, particularly insofar as they are associated with capitalist rationality and productivist imperatives that are seen to “erode natural equilibria”. Such practices are interpreted as symptomatic of a broader civilisa-

tional rupture between humanity and the natural world. Importantly, this position extends beyond conventional environmentalist discourse by asserting that “the legitimacy of human legal and political arrangements should ultimately derive from their conformity to natural principles”, rather than from abstract, anthropocentric notions of progress or utility.

Within this framework, economic organisation, according to the N-As, cannot contravene an organicist conception of social life, whereby human communities are expected to mirror the structural logic of the natural world, operating as cohesive and self-regulating wholes rather than as aggregates of autonomous individuals. Society – and its economic system – is thus envisaged as a “living system in which each component – whether individual, group, or institution – derives its meaning from its contribution to the continuity and equilibrium of the collective body.”

Organicism, as a broader intellectual tradition, conceptualises social order – of which the economic sphere is merely a component – through biological metaphors, portraying societies as organisms composed of interdependent elements whose cooperation ensures survival and stability (Sermonti 1966; 1992; Guerra 2025). Within N-As discourse, the perceived breakdown of the reciprocal relationship between humanity and nature is attributed to the ascendancy of capitalist and productivist logics, which are depicted as having dismantled inherited social bonds and replaced them with atomised forms of existence driven by material self-interest. The resulting condition is described as one of “existential disorientation”, characterised by individualism, economic competition, and the erosion of collective meaning.

The second domain, concerning economic organisation, is characterised by a radical rejection of capitalism. Capitalism is depicted in highly moralised and confrontational terms as a “destructive force responsible for social disintegration and environmental degradation”. This oppositional rhetoric is designed both to challenge liberal-economic assumptions and to mobilise political engagement by framing capitalism as a pervasive source of systemic harm affecting both society and nature.

It is within this thematic framework that the N-As propose an alternative centred on the collectivisation of productive enterprises, envisaged as institutions to be administered directly by workers through participatory mechanisms such as factory councils. This model reflects a historical lineage that draws on the ideological experiments of the Italian Social Republic (RSI), the final phase of fascist rule, during which efforts were made to reframe fascism as a socially radical and anti-capitalist project (Osti Guerrazzi 2012; Rocca 2009; Tosi 2008). A

symbolic reference point for this synthesis is the figure of Nicola Bombacci, whose political trajectory – from co-founder of the Italian Communist Party to advocate of fascist socialisation – embodies the convergence of radical left and fascist economic imaginaries. His execution alongside Benito Mussolini in Piazzale Loreto has rendered him a potent emblem within narratives that seek to legitimise anti-capitalist positions rooted in fascist historical experience (Niccolai and Vincenti 2022; Guerra 2026a).

The N-As argue that, once what is represented as “capitalist domination” has been overcome, economic activity may be reconfigured as unfolding within a competitive environment, provided that no single actor is able to acquire monopolistic control. In this configuration, market exchange is not rejected outright, but rather redefined as acceptable only insofar as enterprises are liberated from private ownership and reorganised along collective lines.

Such a position closely parallels the intellectual legacy of revolutionary syndicalism, a tradition that sought to reconcile anti-capitalist struggle with the selective retention of market dynamics (Sorel 1908; Labriola 1906; Olivetti 1914a; 1914b). Revolutionary syndicalism advanced the principle that productive units should be transferred into the hands of workers themselves, thereby enabling direct participation in management and decision-making while preserving inter-enterprise competition. As Guérin (1965) famously argued, market mechanisms need not disappear under conditions of socialisation, provided that production is governed by workers rather than by capital. From this perspective, competition is stripped of its exploitative character and subordinated to democratic control, ensuring that economic activity is no longer dictated exclusively by profit maximisation.

This rearticulated understanding of the market also illuminates the specific variant of organicism endorsed by the movement, which departs significantly from authoritarian interpretations of the organic metaphor. In contrast to models that attribute a privileged or commanding role to a single institutional centre, this conception rejects the notion that any single component of the social or economic order should exercise dominance over the others. The movement explicitly refuses to equate the state with a directing “brain” responsible for the regulation of the entire social body. Classical political theory distinguishes between authoritarian organicism – where the state exercises hierarchical control over subordinate elements (Schmitt 2001; Müller 2025) – and non-authoritarian organicism, which emphasises functional plurality and reciprocal interdependence (Dur-

kheim 1984; Spencer 1860). Freund (1968) associates the former with rigid social ordering and the subordination of individual autonomy to an overarching authority. By contrast, non-authoritarian organicism conceives of society as a network of interacting parts, each retaining a degree of autonomy while contributing to overall systemic stability. As Agamben (1998) suggests, an authentically organic conception must accommodate plurality and continuous interaction rather than impose uniformity from above. The movement’s adherence to this latter interpretation is reinforced by its explicit repudiation of the nation-state, which it associates with coercive “centralisation” and “chauvinistic nationalism”.

Indeed, the dissolution of the nation-state constitutes a central political objective of N-As. The movement aligns itself with autonomist initiatives in Italy and abroad that contest the legitimacy of state sovereignty, conceiving the state as an institutional apparatus fundamentally oriented toward the protection and reproduction of capitalist interests rather than the pursuit of social justice. In accordance with classical Marxist critiques, the state is represented as a structural facilitator of capital accumulation, inherently predisposed to privileging economic elites over the broader populace. This perspective closely resonates with Harvey’s (2005) conceptualisation of the nation-state as an instrument that sustains the requisite conditions for capitalist expansion. Consequently, state policies are interpreted as mechanisms through which socio-economic inequalities are reproduced and entrenched, thereby consolidating wealth and power within a narrow and structurally advantaged minority.

This critique extends to the very concept of the nation, which is understood as historically constituted through processes of capitalist development, particularly during the Industrial Revolution. The consolidation of national identities is thereby interpreted as being closely intertwined with the functional imperatives of industrial capitalism, insofar as processes of economic integration and intensifying competition generated novel forms of political organisation. Such assessments resonate strongly with Hobsbawm (1992), who famously observed that the nation-state emerged as a central actor within the global capitalist system, binding national identity to imperatives of economic performance and productivity.

Within this interpretative framework, the ideological hybrid often labelled “anarcho-fascism” – from which the movement’s nomenclature appears in part to derive – assumes a significant symbolic role. This fusion of anarchist and fascist elements, notwithstanding its internal contradictions, operates as a populist critique of contemporary political arrangements and appeals to

constituencies disillusioned with liberal-democratic governance (Kinna 2019; Nilsson 2017; Donovan 2013). In the Italian context, such ideological crosscurrents are not novel, but rather traceable from the fascist period through to post-war far-right formations, including the Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari (NAR), whose praxis has been characterised by what has been described as ‘armed spontaneity’ (Guerra 2024).

In this respect, N-As does not merely identify an adversary, but also articulates and projects a normative vision of the future. In the envisaged post-statist order, political life would be reorganised around self-governing communities interconnected through “voluntary federative arrangements”. Governance within this putative “federation of communities” would be grounded in principles of direct democracy, whereby decision-making authority is vested directly in the demos rather than being mediated through elected representatives. Instruments such as referenda and popular initiatives are thereby valorised as mechanisms capable of ensuring immediacy of participation and democratic accountability. Representative democracy, by contrast, is dismissed as a merely formal construct, ostensibly “concealing oligarchic domination by economic and financial elites” beneath the “normative façade of liberal constitutionalism”.

This communitarian and federalist vision resonates strongly with de Benoist’s theorisation of ‘small homelands,’ which privileges regional belonging and cultural particularity over homogenising national or global identities. For de Benoist (1999), political communities ought to be understood as historically sedimented constellations of shared destiny, embedded within specific cultural and territorial contexts. The emphasis on local identities is thereby advanced as a corrective to the perceived cultural erosion associated with globalisation, fostering forms of solidarity and continuity which, it is argued, large-scale political units tend systematically to undermine (de Benoist 2006). This outlook aligns closely with ethnopluralist thought, which advocates the preservation of cultural diversity through the maintenance of distinct, territorially bounded communities. In de Benoist’s formulation, ethnopluralism rejects both assimilationist universalism and integrative multiculturalism, instead positing that coexistence is best secured through separation and reciprocal recognition (Held 2018; Sen 2007).

The movement’s endorsement of this model is inseparable from its broader denunciation of global capitalism, depicted as a homogenising force driven by multinational corporations that reduce populations to interchangeable consumers. Globalisation is interpreted as an extension of Western capitalist dominance, perpetuating structural inequalities at the expense of Africa and

the Global South. In response, the movement gestures towards alternative imaginaries of resistance, including forms of pan-African nationalism symbolised by figures such as Thomas Sankara, whose legacy is invoked as an example of anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist defiance.

4. GREEN INSURRECTION: ANAI’S VISION FOR ORGANIC MICRO- COMMUNITIES BEYOND THE STATE

The second organisation examined in this study, ANAI, appears to be deliberately withdrawing from mainstream social media platforms while signalling its intended convergence with National-Anarchist networks (N-As). This strategic repositioning is explicitly conveyed through a statement published on its Facebook page¹: “By now, the project has become somewhat restrictive on Facebook. In the meantime, we are joining en masse the National-Anarchist Movement group.” This shift is further reinforced by a celebratory post welcoming the presence within the group of Troy Southgate, described in the following terms: “It is a great honour for us to have in our group the father of National Anarchism, Troy Southgate. Together, for the Third Way.” Southgate is a British political activist and theorist, initially associated with the European far-right milieu, from which he subsequently distanced himself. In the 1990s, he founded the International Third Position (ITP), a movement characterised by a synthesis of nationalism, spiritual traditionalism, and anti-capitalism. He is most prominently recognised for elaborating the ideological current of National-Anarchism, a doctrine that endeavours to synthesise elements of anarchism with ethnically and culturally delimited identities, while simultaneously rejecting both global capitalism and the centralised state, and advocating for the establishment of autonomous, self-governing communities grounded in distinct ethno-cultural formations.

The ANAI Facebook group, which at its last recorded update prior to the shift towards encrypted channels comprised 156 followers, is characterised by the circulation of both programmatic and organisational content. Within this online space, discussions took place regarding possible strategic developments, including the establishment of an official web presence, the creation of a territorial section, and the launch of a membership recruitment campaign; the latter proposal was ultimately rejected by users. From the outset, the group demon-

¹ The page of the movement, although it has now been stripped of many posts, can be accessed at the following address: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100068855184254>.

strates a clear effort to distance itself from the nationalist far-right milieu. In this regard, the protest formation associated with the so-called 'Forconi' movement – an Italian grassroots protest wave that emerged in 2013, initially involving farmers, lorry drivers, and small business owners mobilised against austerity measures, taxation, and perceived political and economic elites – is explicitly repudiated due to its perceived proximity to Forza Nuova, which ANAI militants dismissively and polemically rebrand as "Fogna Nuova" ["New Sewer"]. Furthermore, although the movement appears to be structured through informal and decentralised networks – consisting of localised cells or groups lacking stable coordination, and defined more by ideological and theoretical coherence than by formalised organisational structures with territorial continuity – it nevertheless appears to have been active primarily, if not exclusively, in Northern Italy.

ANAI, as a movement, is notable for two defining characteristics. First, it articulates a codified six-point programme, publicly accessible online; second, its rhetoric is explicitly revolutionary in tone, advancing insurrection as both a legitimate and immediate instrument of political action. These six points, which constitute the foundation for the present thematic analysis, may be conceptually organised into three principal domains: conceptions of political authority, economic principles, and the ideological elevation of nature.

Within the first of these domains – namely, conceptions of political authority – three key points articulate a categorical rejection of the nation-state (Guerra 2025). In their shared aversion to the national state, a further divergence emerges between ANAI and the N-As. Whereas the latter emphasise the gradual erosion of state power through support for autonomist initiatives, ANAI instead advocates an abrupt and forceful overthrow, framing "revolution" as an urgent imperative. The ANAI programme insists that the dismantling of the state must occur "without delay". In one post, it is stated: "We are slowly but inexorably expanding. LONG LIVE THE ITALIAN PEOPLE, DEATH TO THE TYRANNICAL STATE!"

In the aftermath of this rupture, the movement proposes the establishment of autonomous micro-communities, each comprising only a few thousand members. These units are conceived as self-governing entities, forming the basis of a broader federated structure intended to replace the abolished nation-state. This conception foregrounds decentralisation and the localisation of political organisation, reflecting a stronger affinity with anarcho-fascist thought and a pronounced scepticism towards hierarchical authority.

Still within the shared aversion to the nation-state as the principal enemy, it is important to note that,

unlike the approach adopted by the N-As, ANAI does not provide guidelines regarding internal governance mechanisms for collective decision-making. There is no explicit commitment to the form of "direct democracy" envisaged by the N-As; instead, the emphasis is placed on what is regarded as the overriding priority, namely immediate action and the operationalisation of revolutionary objectives. In line with this prioritisation of revolutionary necessity, the language deployed throughout the programme and its accompanying texts is highly charged, characterised by exhortations to "rebellion", imperatives for mobilisation, and a rhetoric designed to instil urgency and militancy among adherents. This discursive strategy seeks to translate core ideological principles into concrete action, framing insurrection as both a moral and strategic necessity (Guerra 2025).

Through this combination of anti-statist ambition, advocacy for small self-governing communities, and radical rhetorical style, ANAI constructs a vision of political transformation that is both immediate in execution and decentralised in organisation. Its programme, therefore, presents a coherent, if uncompromising, model in which revolutionary upheaval precedes the establishment of federated, locally autonomous communities, underlining the movement's rejection of conventional structures of authority and representative governance.

Within the corpus of ANAI's political programme, a distinct conceptual axis emerges concerning the organisation of the economy. This axis, articulated primarily in the fourth and fifth points of the movement's manifesto, advances a radical critique of prevailing capitalist structures. The fourth point envisions the total dissolution of capitalism, framing it as a structural condition that inhibits genuine social and economic emancipation. Complementing this, the fifth point proposes an alternative configuration: a systemic reorganisation in which economic enterprises are both socially appropriated and democratically administered by workers' councils, yet remain capable of engaging in competitive market dynamics. In this respect, ANAI's economic thought intersects with that of the N-As, reflecting a hybrid model in which socialisation and worker control coexist with market mechanisms. The movement's theoretical orientation draws upon the syndicalist legacies of the Italian Social Republic (RSI), while simultaneously resonating with the ethnopluralist and "small-homeland" paradigms articulated by de Benoist (1993; 2006). In its programmatic text, it is stated: "Economic Revolution for the creation of a free market composed exclusively of FaSinPat (Fábricas Sin Patrón), factories in which the owners are the workers themselves, who discuss and decide production strategies through factory assemblies."

The final point of ANAI's programme extends this critique to the natural environment, positioning ecology as a foundational parameter within which human action must be circumscribed. The establishment of a federal fund for environmental stewardship exemplifies the movement's assertion that nature constitutes a non-negotiable framework, threatened by what it identifies as "protracted capitalist exploitation" and the imperatives of extractive productivism. While traces of organicist thought are discernible, they remain subordinate and less systematically elaborated than in N-As doctrine. ANAI's orientation is resolutely forward-looking: it conceives the contemporary state system as inherently disintegrative and advocates its deconstruction in favour of forms of collective organisation more closely aligned with human and ecological interdependence – a vision that bears conceptual affinities with Franco Freda's critique of modernity (Freda 2000), as well as with de Benoist's ethnopluralist critique of liberal universalism and his concomitant emphasis on culturally and territorially embedded plural communities, and, more broadly, with "small-homeland" imaginaries of decentralised, identity-bound political organisation.

Freda's political theory elucidates the mechanisms of societal disintegration under liberal modernity, diagnosing a pervasive erosion of cultural cohesion and social solidarity. Modern institutions, characterised by bureaucratic centralisation and the promotion of individualism, are seen as alienating, severing the individual from the historical and communal matrix in which identity and purpose are grounded. Freda proposes a return to organically constituted communities, in which localism, historical consciousness, and the reaffirmation of shared values constitute the foundations of societal regeneration. While his intervention does not explicitly call for the abolition of the nation-state, it implicitly valorises decentralised forms of political and social organisation that counteract fragmentation and restore collective coherence (Freda 2000).

In synthesising these themes, ANAI articulates a framework that is both radical and theoretically nuanced. Its programme envisages the socialisation of production, the decentralisation of political authority, and the primacy of ecological stewardship, all within a critique of capitalist and statist paradigms. At the intersection of historical syndicalism, ethnopluralist philosophy, and critiques of liberal modernity, ANAI formulates a conceptual architecture in which economic, ecological, and social dimensions are inseparably interwoven, reflecting a coherent, if uncompromising, theoretical vision.

5. BEYOND CAPITALISM: NR-NA'S QUEST FOR A GREEN, ORGANIC, AND INDEPENDENT EUROPE

The National Resistance–National Autonomists (NR-NA), which for several years communicated online through dedicated pages – at least until 2021², when its communicative activity shifted towards encrypted channels – exemplify a political formation whose communication strategy and ideological architecture are notably intricate, diverging significantly from the movements previously examined. The group is active in Northern Italy, with a particular concentration in Piedmont, and includes a subsidiary organisation known as *Resistenza Femminile* [Female Resistance], which operates under the slogan "Pink revolution against capitalism." Within its public political communication, four conceptual domains emerge as foundational to its discourse: institutional organisation, ideological orientation, economic conception, and the positioning of nature within its broader worldview.

The movement's economic perspective constitutes a central axis of its political reasoning. Capitalism is framed as an "instrument of global homogenisation" and as the engine of a so-called New World Order, whereby "human societies are reduced to networks of consumers" rather than autonomous communities. In response, NR-NA advocates robust state intervention in economic processes, rejecting free-market paradigms in favour of centralized control intended to protect local autonomy and counteract transnational economic domination. This economic critique resonates with a broader Third Positionist orientation, which seeks a synthesis of nationalist principles with selective socialist interventions, positioning itself against both liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism, while often aligning rhetorically with anti-imperialist struggles beyond Europe (Guerra 2025).

Ideology, however, remains a defining feature of NR-NA's programme. Unlike other contemporary far-right currents, the movement explicitly frames its positions within a coherent theoretical structure. Its nomenclature – National Autonomists – signals the primacy of autonomy as a guiding principle, merging commitments to national identity with advocacy for localized governance and cultural self-determination. In doing so, the group differentiates itself from conventional authoritarian nationalisms, which prioritize centralised power and the maintenance of ethnic or cultural homogeneity. The ideological scaffolding of NR-NA reflects affinities with Third Positionism and the neo-fascist tradition, incor-

² The two primary websites used for communication are the following: <https://resistenza-nazionale.blogspot.com/> and <https://autonominazionalisti.blogspot.com/>.

porating critiques of liberal democracy and globalization while emphasizing decentralisation, self-governance, and a reconfiguration of power to mirror the collective will (Bale 2002; Shaffer 2018; Guerra 2024).

Institutionally and geopolitically, the group advances the vision of a European or Eurasian empire. This aspiration draws upon the intellectual legacies of Jean Thiriart and the *Jeune Europe* movement of the 1960s, which envisaged a continental unification capable of counterbalancing American geopolitical influence. Thiriart's advocacy for a continental-nationalist synthesis – a Euro-Soviet or proto-Eurasianist framework – underpins NR-NA's rejection of traditional nation-state chauvinisms in favour of a supranational structure capable of harmonizing the interests of constituent polities (Thiriart 1984; Sauveur 1978; Guerra 2024). Here, the conception of empire is both normative and strategic: it functions as a unifying principle for Europe, conceived as a geopolitical entity under external constraint, and as a corrective to the fragmenting effects of globalization.

NR-NA's environmental discourse constitutes the fourth thematic axis, intimately connected to its organicist philosophy. Nature is conceived as a normative matrix, whose “eternal laws” ought to “guide human legislation and societal organisation”. The movement frames ecological degradation as a direct consequence of capitalist expansion and unrestrained productivism, advocating the protection of natural systems as a civilizational imperative. This organicist vision extends from the individual to the collective, implying that just as humans must align with ecological laws, nations and continental entities must embody internal cohesion and harmony. In this sense, the European/Eurasian empire functions as a macrocosmic expression of organicism, promoting balance among nations and safeguarding cultural and political integrity against external domination (Guerra 2024).

Finally, NR-NA's programmatic communication illustrates a complex interplay between autonomy, empire-building, economic critique, and ecological concern. By synthesizing nationalist principles with Third Positionist economic strategies, and by situating environmental stewardship within a broader organicist framework, the movement articulates a coherent theoretical architecture. Its vision juxtaposes the imperatives of local self-determination with supranational harmonization, presenting an ideological and practical alternative to the nation-state-centric and market-driven logics dominant in contemporary Europe. In doing so, NR-NA situates itself at the intersection of neo-fascist revivalism, national autonomist theory, and organicist political philosophy, while retaining a distinctive critique of globalization, liberalism, and transnational hegemony.

6. ECOFASCIST AGENDAS: A POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF SHARED VISIONS AND DIVERGENT PATHS

Following a comprehensive analysis of the ideological frameworks of the three groups under examination, it has become evident that the first two – by virtue of their substantial ideological convergence and their present *de facto* amalgamation – may appropriately be treated as a single analytical category, hereafter designated as National Anarchism (NAn). By contrast, the third group, identified as NR-NA, shall hereafter be designated as National Autonomism (NAut) for the purposes of this political analysis. Both strands are generally subsumed within the broader analytical category of national-revolutionary movements (Macklin 2005), and have at times been, albeit somewhat reductively and in explicitly polemical terms, characterised as a form of fascist rebranding (Sunshine 2008).

However, the present analysis has facilitated the identification of two eco-fascist axes within the Italian radical landscape, thereby necessitating a systematic examination of both convergences and divergences, including the respective models of mobilisation associated with these ideological profiles and the broader cultural and political contexts within which they are embedded.

The key distinction between National Anarchism and National Autonomism lies in their respective positions on state authority. For the National Anarchists (NAn), the state is viewed as an oppressor that enforces multiculturalism and imposes artificial boundaries, thereby hindering the natural development of communities. As such, the movement vehemently rejects the nation-state, which it perceives as the driving force behind a “capitalist dictatorship” (Guerra 2025). NAn advocates for a dual approach to resisting the state. The first approach, aimed at long-term objectives, supports autonomist movements in order to weaken the state. The second, rooted in the desire for immediate revolution, promotes insurrection against the state. Both approaches operate within a framework of ethnopluralism (de Benoist 1993; 1999; 2006; Taguieff 1994), which envisions the establishment of homogeneous communities that collaborate federatively. Once the state is overthrown, NAn envisions a federation of communities or small homelands governed by direct democracy, rejecting the ‘deception of liberal representative democracy’.

In contrast, National Autonomism (NAut), while critical of the centralization and authoritarianism of the state, does not advocate for its destruction. Instead, it proposes autonomist reforms to better accommodate local specificities and autonomy, envisioning a federation of these autonomies within the state (Guerra 2025).

However, NAut also perceives the nation-state as a fundamental reality and as complicit in the processes of capitalist globalization, which it views as detrimental. Drawing on the ideas of Jean Thiriart and his 1960s movement *Jeune Europe* (Thiriart 1984; Sauveur 1978; Guerra 2024, 116-133), NAut idealizes a European and/or Eurasian empire as the preferred model. The objective is therefore not to reconfigure the nation-state along autonomist lines, but rather to establish an imperial structure in which distinct national identities are harmonised under a central authority, grounded in mutual respect and reciprocal recognition.

The economic perspectives of the two strands of eco-fascism – National Anarchist (NAn) and National Autonomist (NAut) – originate from a largely similar analysis but propose solutions that are only partially aligned. Both NAn and NAut are resolutely opposed to capitalism, which they regard as an unequivocal evil, with NAn advocating for its “absolute abolition”. Additionally, both movements critique globalization, viewing it as a capitalist tool designed to “create a homogenized world of consumers, upon whom customs, governments, and consumption patterns can be imposed”. The solution they propose involves the socialization of enterprises, drawing inspiration from the experience of the final phase of Italian republican fascism, which sought to reclaim the revolutionary and social roots of the movement (Legnani 1998; Martone 2008; Burgwyn 2018). For both NAn and NAut, companies should be owned by the workers and managed by workers’ councils (Guerra 2025). However, the two movements diverge in their views on the role of the market. According to NAn, once companies are socialized and liberated from capitalist influences, they should operate freely within a competitive market. In contrast, NAut views the free market as inherently problematic and argues that the market should be regulated by designated institutions to ensure control over economic practices.

Ideologically, as suggested by their respective names, significant differences exist between the two movements. The National Anarchists (NAn) align themselves with anarchism, which informs their staunch commitment to the overthrow of the nation-state. In contrast, the National Autonomists (NAut) have their roots in Marxist autonomism (Wright 2017; Cuninghame 2002), maintaining that the state functions as an instrument of the ruling class that oppresses workers and undermines collective self-management, thus requiring reform rather than abolition. In the Italian context, as reconstructed in this analysis, NAut identifies with Third Positionism, expressing affinity for National Bolshevism and left-wing fascism (Brandenberger 2002; Parlato 2000),

particularly in regard to the socialization of companies. Despite these ideological differences, both movements share a complex and eclectic identity, characterized by strong anti-American and anti-Western sentiments. Furthermore, both NAn and NAut express solidarity with nationalist movements in Africa and the Global South, advocating for the liberation of these regions from what they perceive as American and capitalist domination (Guerra 2025).

Both the National Anarchists (NAn) and National Autonomists (NAut) adhere to ethnopluralist principles, though these are more pronounced in the case of NAn, which envisions homogeneous, federated micro-communities. NAn’s version of ethnopluralism is pushed to its extreme and correlates with its anarchist foundations: the more homogeneous and circumscribed a community, the less oppressive it is perceived to be for the individual. While NAut also embraces ethnopluralism, it does so within a broader framework that advocates for the reform of the nation-state along autonomist lines, recognizing local specificities. Both movements reject supremacist ideologies and racial discrimination (Guerra 2025); rather, their ethnopluralism is rooted in the preservation of cultural particularities within communities. In both cases, there is a notable admiration for heroic models, even from African nationalism, as exemplified by figures like Thomas Sankara (Lanzano 2022). Their rejection of multicultural society is not driven by ethnic discrimination, but by opposition to capitalism, globalization, and the creation of a homogenized world, where ‘from Paris to Bangkok or from Brest to Beijing, individuals are reduced to undifferentiated consumers’.

The positions of the National Anarchists (NAn) and National Autonomists (NAut) regarding nature are largely aligned, with both movements recognizing nature as embodying the “supreme organicist principle”. They assert that no human law or custom should contradict the laws of nature, which they regard as the ultimate regulator. Human organization and laws, according to both movements, must reflect the principles of nature, and humans should abandon their arrogance of considering themselves “in the likeness of God”. This anthropocentric view is seen as the root cause of humanity’s violation of natural laws and exploitation of nature for productivist and profit-driven purposes. Both NAn and NAut identify “exploitative capitalism” as nature’s greatest adversary, arguing that it not only plunders and degrades the environment but also distorts the organic relationship between humanity and nature, turning it into one of supremacy that humans arrogate to themselves (Guerra 2025). NAut proposes the creation of a Federal Fund for the construction of a European empire,

which would allocate resources to environmental preservation and the restoration of a healthy, organic bond between humanity and nature.

In terms of mobilization, the initiatives of the two groups differ in scope, consistent with their respective ideological frameworks. NAn's actions are predominantly local, reflecting its goal of forming self-sufficient micro-communities that would federate through organic collaboration. In contrast, NAut engages in broader initiatives, including national-level actions. These divergent forms of mobilization reflect the movements' differing approaches to activism. Linguistically, both groups employ the rhetoric typical of political radicalism, characterized by assertive language, confrontational tones, and invectives against perceived enemies. However, NAn's discourse is more heavily infused with calls for immediate insurrectionary action.

For both movements, the organicist principle, derived from the laws of nature, forms the core of their entire ideological framework. The federal structure they propose – whether it involves micro-communities or states reformed along autonomist lines – is modeled on the collaboration observed between the organs of the human body or living beings in nature. The federated entities must function according to these natural principles. Capitalism, and by extension the United States, which is viewed as its primary exponent and exporter, is perceived as a fundamental adversary, as it violates the organicism rooted in the laws of nature. According to the movements, capitalism not only destroys nature but is also grounded in a 'predatory logic' and individualistic selfishness that disregards the community, 'because capitalism has no community,' and undermines collective long-term well-being. The movements argue that capitalism's focus on short-term profit maximization is inherently at odds with the principles of nature, which prioritize balance and sustainability over time. This divergence from natural law forms the basis for categorizing both the National Anarchists (NAn) and National Autonomists (NAut) as eco-fascist movements.

From an ideological and cultural standpoint, both movements exhibit significant complexity and eclecticism. NAn, which blends elements of anarchism and nationalism, has diverse and heterogeneous roots, drawing on both anarchist and nationalist traditions. Traditionally, anarchism has been linked to anti-nationalist sentiments due to its opposition to hierarchical structures, including the state. However, in specific contexts, such as national liberation struggles, anarchism has intersected with nationalist movements. For instance, anarchist groups in Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) demonstrated a form of anarcho-

nationalism, prioritizing regional autonomy and cultural identity while rejecting centralized authority (Ealham, 2010). The synthesis of anarchism with national identity often emerges in situations where national oppression is seen as a form of domination, thus aligning anarchism with national liberation movements (Hobsbawm, 1992). However, the nationalism embraced by NAn should not be equated with conventional chauvinism, which the movement refers to as "old, incapacitating chauvinism". Instead, it embodies an identity-based, ethnopluralist form that defines small communities or homelands, which do not seek dominance over others but aim to establish federative relations based on mutual respect. This ideological framework reveals a form of eclecticism that draws from both anarchist culture and revolutionary or leftist fascism (Buttignon 2010; Rimbotti 2018; Dell'Orco 2013).

In the case of NAut, the movement combines elements of nationalism with leftist autonomist thought. Autonomism itself emerged from the radical leftist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in Europe, as a critique of both capitalist state systems and traditional Marxist structures, emphasizing direct action, self-management, and workers' autonomy (Wright 2017; Quadrelli 2020). NAut, however, diverges from traditional autonomist ideology by integrating nationalist elements in opposition to globalization and the 'predatory New World Order'. It advocates for a form of nationalism that calls for the autonomist reform of states, urging them to recognize their internal specificities, which would then be federated into a broader European empire.

7. CONCLUSIONS ON ECOFASCISM: EXAMINING TWO MOVEMENTS IN PROGRESS

The first conclusion is that the two movements, the National Anarchists and the National Autonomists, should indeed be classified as ecofascist based on a definitional framework which identifies ecofascist movements as those that centralize organicism, inspired by a nature-based cult, within their ideological structure (Campion 2021; Guerra 2025). However, these movements cannot be categorized as Far-Right Ecologism (FRE). While they are deeply ecological in orientation, their ideology is characterized by eclecticism and syncretism, incorporating elements from revolutionary and left-wing fascism, revolutionary syndicalism, a revised form of Marxism, as well as anarchism and autonomism (Guerra 2025). Additionally, defining them merely as ecological would be reductive, as the core ideological focus of these movements is not merely the preservation

of nature, but its elevation as a model and normative standard for human society.

The syncretism and ideological eclecticism of the two movements, however, may initially seem inconsistent with the definition of fascism, even when considering the concept of ecological fascism. Yet, when viewed through Sternhell's definition of early fascist ideology (Sternhell 1985; Sternhell et al. 2010), the classification of the two movements within the framework of ecofascism becomes more certain. Conversely, if one adopts the more recent definitional approach to fascism and neo-fascism – where various movements are grouped under a singular 'black phenomenon' based on shared traits such as extreme nationalism and anti-immigration stances – the attribution of ecofascist ideology to these movements loses significance. This is attributable to the fact that both movements reject conventional conceptions of nationalism, which they critique as inherently chauvinistic and structurally complicit with capitalism, while likewise opposing the principle of an authoritarian nation-state. In conclusion, although both Autonomist Nationalists and Anarcho-Nationalists may be classified under the rubric of ecofascism, such a designation is tenable primarily within Sternhell's definitional framework of fascist ideology, which foregrounds organicism as a central criterion distinguishing ecofascism from other forms of right-wing or far-right environmental thought.

A further conclusion can be drawn by observing how the ideological structure of these two movements, along with their positions on geopolitical issues – such as their radical anti-Americanism, their rejection of capitalism (which they consider abolished), and the Autonomist proposal for a Eurasian empire modeled on the ideas of Thiriart and Jeune Europe (Thiriart 1984; Sauvcur 1978; Guerra 2024, 116-133) – aligns ecofascism with the phenomenon of Red-Brownism. Red-Brownism is characterized by a political hybridization in which anti-liberal, neo-fascist, and radical Marxist elements converge in opposition to a shared enemy, identified as liberal democratic values, the capitalist system, the unipolar world order led by the United States and the West, and the very concept of the West itself (Guerra 2026a; 2026b). The ideological eclecticism of both the National Anarchists and the National Autonomists fits squarely within the still-evolving development of so-called Red-Brown politics, understood as a syncretic, antiliberal, anti-capitalist, and anti-Atlanticist ideological formation whose contours remain in flux.

Moreover, the two ecofascist movements, despite their strong orientation towards ideological production, have participated in ecological, anti-speciesist, and animal rights demonstrations within the framework of the

Offensiva Animalista [Animalist Offensive] movement in Italy. The presence of these two ideological strands has generated tensions within segments of the contemporary radical left, oscillating between a degree of acceptance within broader dissident milieus and outright rejection of their participation. The latter position is primarily justified by the labelling of National Anarchists and National Autonomists as "fascists". In a document produced by the network of movements known as 'Anti-speciesism is anti-fascism', in addition to confirming the activism of National Anarchists and National Autonomists in northern Italy and in cities such as Turin, Ivrea, Bergamo, Verona, and Rimini, it is stated that: "For us it is inconceivable to give space not only to the fascists and racists of the third millennium, but also to those who mingle with them and share their analyses, trajectories, and struggles" (Antispesfa undated). This reflects an explicit opposition not only to the National Anarchists and National Autonomists themselves, but also to those elements within the radical left that advocate dialogue or thematic cooperation with them. These dynamics constitute internal tensions that are, moreover, not uncommon within both the far right and the far left, and are closely linked to the broader ideological consolidation of so-called Red-Brownism (Guerra 2026a; 2026b).

Although the Red-Brownism milieu in Italy exhibits a high degree of ideological production and geopolitical theorisation, both within extra-parliamentary and parliamentary spheres (Guerra 2026a; 2026b), it is characterised predominantly by convergences of thought rather than by a genuine cohabitation of public and protest spaces. Instances of spatial co-presence during environmental protests and demonstrations nonetheless highlight one of the central uncertainties surrounding Red-Brownism, namely whether such convergences – articulated in explicitly anti-liberal, anti-capitalist, anti-American, and anti-Western registers – may, in the future, extend beyond the realm of discursive exchange and social media communication into embodied forms of political practice.

An analysis of the ideological structure of Italian ecofascism suggests that it may potentially constitute both a possibility and an opportunity for the convergence of new forms of radicalism. Movements such as ecofascism, Red-Brownism, and radical anti-liberal Eurasianism (Guerra 2024) could, under certain conditions, coalesce into a unified front of dissent against the liberal-democratic world order, which they collectively subject to sustained critique, contingent upon the resolution of any potential divergences in historical interpretation along the traditional political cleavage between the right and the left.

This critique, as articulated within anarcho-nationalist discourse, characterises the liberal-democratic system as “falsely democratic,” grounded in the perceived farce of representative governance, which, by obstructing direct democracy, is seen as serving the interests of lobbies, multinational corporations, the financial elite, and the ultimate beneficiaries of capitalism. Within this interpretative framework, such actors are accused of violating nature and alienating humanity, while manipulating state structures and governing populations as though they were a herd directed toward consumerism and socio-political alienation.

Future research will be essential both for further theoretical and empirical elaboration of ecofascism as a distinct ideological formation, and for a more systematic examination of its possible intersections with other radical movements that challenge the liberal-democratic and Western international order.

REFERENCES

- Agamben, G. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Antispefa. Undated. *Conoscerli per isolarli: Resistenza Nazionale e Autonomi Nazionalisti Italia*. Italy: Antispefa.
- Bale, J. M. 2002. “National revolutionary” groupuscules and the resurgence of “left-wing” fascism: the case of France’s Nouvelle Résistance. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 36(3), 24–49.
- Barla, J., and Bjork-James, S. 2021. Introduction: Entanglements of Anti-Feminism and Anti-Environmentalism in the Far-Right. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 36(110), 377–387.
- Benoist, L., Turner, J., and Bailey, D. 2026. Ecofascism in the shadow of ‘patriotic ecology’: Nativism, economic greenwashing, and the evolution of far-right political ecology in France. *Politics*, 46(1), 173–192.
- Bramwell, A. 1985. *Blood and Soil: Walther Darré and Hitler’s Green Party*. London: Kensal Press.
- Bramwell, A. 1989. *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Brandenberger, D. 2002. *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Braun, V., and Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2): 77–101.
- Burgwyn, H.J. 2018. Socialization Projects. In H. J. Burgwyn and A. Osti Guerrazzi, *Mussolini and the Salò Republic, 1943–1945. Italian and Italian American Studies* (pp. 127–139). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Buttignon, I. 2010. *Compagno Duce: fatti, personaggi, idee e contraddizioni del fascismo di sinistra*. Bresso: Hobby & Work.
- Campion, K. 2021. Defining Ecofascism: Historical Foundations and Contemporary Interpretations in the Extreme Right. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 35(4), 926–944.
- Clarke, J. N., Braun, V., and Hayfield, N. 2015. Thematic analysis. In *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences* (pp. 1–18). Singapore: Springer.
- Cuningham, P. G. 2002. *Autonomia: a movement of refusal: social movements and social conflict in Italy in the 1970’s*. London: Middlesex University.
- Darwish, M. 2024. Fascism, nature and communication: a Discursive-affective analysis of cuteness in ecofascist propaganda. *Feminist Media Studies*, (2024), 1–21.
- de Benoist, A. 1993. Democracy Revisited. *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary*, 95, 65–75.
- de Benoist, A. 1999. *The New Right: A European Perspective*. New York: Arktos Media.
- de Benoist, A. 2006. L’identité et la différence: Une réflexion sur la politique et la culture. *Revue d’Études Autrichiennes*, 34(2), 45–67.
- de Benoist, A. 2012. *On Being a Pagan*. New York: Arktos Media.
- Dell’Orco, D. 2013. *Nicola Bombacci, tra Lenin e Mussolini*. Cesena: Historica.
- Donovan, J. 2013. Anarcho-Fascism. *Conuter-Currents*, March 4.
- Durkheim, É. 1984. *The Division of Labour in Society*. London: Macmillan.
- Ealham, C. 2010. *Anarchism and the City: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Barcelona, 1898-1937*. Edinburgh: AK Press.
- Fairclough, N. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ferraresi, F. 2012. *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy after the War*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Forchtner, B. 2020. *The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication*. London: Routledge.
- Forchtner, B., and Gruber, M. 2024. Far-Right World Ordering from the Margins: Ethno-Ecological Degrowth and the Nation in the Swiss Democrats’ Discourse About the Natural Environment. *Global Studies Quarterly*, 4(3), 1–13.
- Forchtner, B., and Kølvrå, C. 2017. Extreme right images of radical authenticity: multimodal aesthetics of his-

- tory, nature and gender in social media. *University of Leicester. Journal contribution*, 1-31.
- Forchtner, B., and Lubarda, B. 2022. Scepticisms and beyond? A comprehensive portrait of climate change communication by the far right in the European Parliament. *Environmental Politics*, 32(1), 43-68.
- François, S. 2014. The Nouvelle Droite and 'Tradition'. *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 8(1), 87-106.
- Freda, F. G. (2000). *La disintegrazione del sistema*. Padova: Edizioni di Ar.
- Freund, J. 1968. *L'État et la société*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit
- Gibbs, G. R. 2007. *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Griffin, R. 1991. *The Nature of Fascism*. New York: Routledge.
- Guérin, D. 1965. *Anarchismo e socialismo: un'antologia*. Roma: Edizioni Avanguardia.
- Guerra, N. 2024. *The Italian Far Right from 1945 to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*. London: Routledge.
- Guerra, N. 2025. The dark green agenda: tracing ecofascist ideologies and identities in Italy. *Identities*, 1-21.
- Guerra N. 2026a. Red meets brown: investigating the antiliberal political convergence of Italy's extremes. *Modern Italy*, 31(1), 119-135.
- Guerra, N. 2026b. Red-Brownism: from its post-Soviet foundations to present-day political faultlines. *European Politics and Society*, 27(1), 165-193.
- Harvey, D. 2005. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Held, D. 2018. *Models of democracy*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. 1992. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hughes, B., Jones, D., and Amarasingam, A. 2022. Eco-fascism: An Examination of the Far-Right/Ecology Nexus in the Online Space. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 34(5), 997-1023.
- Iossifidis, M. M. J. 2026. Ecofascism, far-right ecology, and neo-Malthusianism. In: Vaughan, A., Braune, J., Tinsley, M. and Mondon, A., eds. *The Ethics of Researching the Far Right: Critical Approaches and Reflections*. Manchester University Press; 57-72. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaplan, J. 1997. *The New Right: A Critique*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Kinna, R. 2019. *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide*. London: One world Publications.
- Labriola, A. 1906. *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale. II edizione*. Roma: E. Cagnoni & C. Soc. ed. Avanguardia.
- Lanzano, C. 2022. Italian fascists quoting Samora Machel and Thomas Sankara. *ZAM*, October 4.
- Legnani, M. 1998. Potere, società ed economia nel territorio della Rsi. *Italia contemporanea*, 213, 781-800.
- Loadenthal, M. 2022. Feral fascists and deep green guerrillas: infrastructural attack and accelerationist terror. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15(1), 169-208.
- Lubarda, B. 2020. Beyond Ecofascism? Far-Right Ecology (FRE) as a Framework for Future Inquiries. *Environmental Values*, 29(6), 713-732.
- Lubarda, B. 2024. *Far-Right Ecology. Environmental Politics and the Far Right in Hungary and Poland*. London: Routledge.
- Lune, H., and Berg, B. L. 2017. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. London: Pearson.
- Malm, A., and The Zetkin Collective. 2021. *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism*. London: Verso.
- Marano, S., and De Feudis, M. 2021. *Fare Verde. La terra e la rugiada. Storia di un'associazione eretica, idee per un'ecologia profonda*. Massa: Eclettica.
- Martone, L. 2008. *Guerra civile e diritto: una costituzione per la Repubblica di Mussolini*. Macerata: Edizioni Università di Macerata.
- Macklin, G. D. 2005. Co-opting the counter culture: Troy Southgate and the National Revolutionary Faction. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 39(3), 301-326.
- Macklin, G. 2022. The Extreme Right, Climate Change and Terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 34(5), 979-996.
- Moore, S. and Roberts, A. 2022. *The Rise of Ecofascism: Climate Change and the Far Right*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Müller, A. 2025. *The Elements of Statecraft*. London: Imperium Press.
- Niccolai, G. and Vincenti, F. 2022. *Nicola Bombacci. Passione e rivoluzione*. Massa: Eclettica.
- Nilsson, J. 2017. *Anarcho-Fascism: Nature Reborn*. Stockholm: Logik förlag.
- O'Brien, C. 2006. Classification of radical ideologies: Towards a typology. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(1), 43-61.
- Olivetti, A. O. 1914a. *Azione diretta e mediazione*. Napoli: Società Editrice Partenopea.
- Olivetti, A. O. 1914b. *Cinque anni di sindacalismo e di lotta proletaria in Italia*. Napoli: Società Editrice Partenopea.
- Osti Guerrazzi, A. 2012. *Storia della Repubblica sociale italiana*. Roma: Carocci.
- Parlato, G. 2000. *La sinistra fascista: storia di un progetto mancato*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

- Quadrelli, E. 2020. *Autonomia operaia. Scienza della politica e arte della guerra dal '68 ai movimenti globali*. Rimini: Interno4.
- Rimbotti, L. L. 2018. *Fascismo rivoluzionario: il fascismo di sinistra dal sansepolcristo alla Repubblica Sociale*. Firenze: Passaggio al bosco.
- Rocca, R. 2009. *Fascismo e socialismo: il caso della Repubblica Sociale Italiana*. Rome: Istituto di Studi Politici.
- Schmitt, K. 2001. *State, Movement, People: The Triadic Structure of the Political Unity, 1933: The Question of Legality, 1950*. Corvallis: Plutarch Press.
- Sen, A. 2007. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. London: Penguin Books.
- Sermonti, R. 1966. *Stato Organico. Unica Democrazia Seria*. Roma: Settimo Sigillo.
- Sermonti, R. 1992. *L'uomo, l'ambiente e se stesso*. Roma: Settimo Sigillo.
- Shaffer, R. 2018. Pan-European thought in British fascism: the International Third Position and the Alliance for Peace and Freedom. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 52(1), 78–99.
- Sauveur, Y. 1978. *Jean Thiriart and the European National Communitarianism*. Brussels: Edition Machiavel.
- Sorel, G. 1908. *Réflexions sur la violence*. Paris: Marcel Rivière.
- Spencer, H. 1860. The social organism. *Westminster review*, lxxiii, 90–121.
- Staudenmaier, P. 1999a. *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience*. Chico: AK Press.
- Staudenmaier, P. 1999b. *Fascist Ecology: The 'Green Wing' of the Nazi Party and its Roots in Romantic Environmentalism*. Milwaukee: Marquette University.
- Sternhell, Z. 1985. *Nè destra nè sinistra: la nascita dell'ideologia fascista*. Napoli: Akropolis.
- Sternhell, Z., Sznajder, M., and Ashéri, M. 2010. *Naissance de l'idéologie fasciste*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Sunshine, S. 2008. Rebranding fascism: National-anarchists. *The public eye magazine*, 23(4), 18–24.
- Taguieff, P.-A. 1994. *Sur la Nouvelle Droite: jalons d'une analyse critique*. Paris: Descartes et Cie.
- Tarin, C. A. 2023. Healing the Open Wound of Ecofascism: Notes on Care in/from the Borderlands. *Environmental Communication*, 18(1-2), 167–172.
- Thiriart, J. 1984. *L'empire Euro-Sovietique de Vladivostok a Dublin l'après-Yalta: la mutation du communisme: essai sur le totalitarisme éclairé*. Brussels: Edition Machiavel.
- Tosi, G. 2008. *L'industria e il lavoro nella Repubblica Sociale Italiana*. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso.
- Vowles, K., and Hultman, M. 2021. Dead White men vs. Greta Thunberg: Nationalism, Misogyny, and Climate Change Denial in Swedish far-right Digital Media. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 36(110), 414–431.
- Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. 2009. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Wright, S. 2017. *Class Storming Heaven Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*. London: Pluto Press.



Citation: Coufal, L. (2026). Drill, Baby, Drill. How Misogynist and Far-right Narratives Are Connected to Issues of Environmentalism. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33):201-214. doi: 10.36253/smp-17021

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

ORCID:
LC: 0000-0003-1678-8835

Drill, Baby, Drill. How Misogynist and Far-right Narratives Are Connected to Issues of Environmentalism

LINDA COUFAL

Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Czech Republic
E-mail: linda.coufal@fsv.cuni.cz

Abstract. Through empirical observation of far-right politicians currently present in national politics of several countries, as well as scientific research, we know, that far-right ideology goes hand in hand with misogyny and anti-environmentalism. Nevertheless, this ideological triad hasn't been subject to scientific scrutiny. There is research on far-right ideology and patriarchal misogyny, on far-right populism and anti-environmental attitudes and further on anti-environmentalism and patriarchal gender roles. This article connects these three research paradigms through quantitatively assisted discourse analysis of environmental issues in an online forum of Incels (involuntary celibates). Incels are an online community of misogynist extremists, or far-right white supremacists, depending on which academic and security agency sources one considers. This ambiguity of Incel ideology makes them a perfect candidate to research the ideological triad of far-right, misogyny and anti-environmentalism. The analysis shows, technocratic and knowledgeable engagement with scientific or policy issues frequently coexisting with, and lending legitimacy to, conspiratorial interpretations. Incel environmental discourse does not simply reject climate science but selectively reinterprets it in ways that reinforce far-right worldviews, demonstrating how environmental issues can function as sites where scientific (mis)information, misogyny, and far-right ideology mutually reinforce.

Keywords: far-right, misogyny, anti-environmentalism, incels, climate denialism.

1. INTRODUCTION

When Donald Trump, on his first day of presidency, revitalised the old republican slogan 'drill baby drill' (abandoned after the BP Deepwater Horizon Spill in 2010) and quit the Paris Agreement yet again, perhaps fewer people were surprised by this connection between climate science denialism and far-right populism than in his first term. Nevertheless, certain media commentators have still been dazed by the sheer amount of climate-destructive policies that Trump signed as executive orders (Friedman, 2025). On the other hand, his misogynist and transphobic executive orders have not come unexpectedly, as these issues have been intensely present in the campaign as

well as in the infamous Project 25 (Dewan & Harmon, 2025). This example shows how far-right ideology can go hand in hand with misogyny and anti-environmentalism. Surprisingly, this ideological triad has not been subject to scientific scrutiny, although we see right-wing governments adopting misogynistic and anti-LGBTQ policies globally and increasingly engaging in climate denialism through criticism or outright abandonment of green policies.

In far-right rhetoric, green policies and climate justice movements are often labelled as “gender ideology” alongside feminism, LGBTQ+ rights movements, and a variety of rights-based policies in an attempt to discredit them (Kováts, 2017). “Gender ideology” is a term pioneered by the Holy See in the 1990s (Kaiser, 2022) that has proven to be a “symbolic glue” for all conservative, radical-right, and nationalist movements (Kováts, 2017), and is viewed as harmful to the nation and a foreign imposition (Heinemann & Stern, 2022). The far right frequently employs gender as a “meta-language” to negotiate broader anxieties about inequality, power, cultural change, and national identity (Dietze & Roth, 2020). The “obsession with gender” can act as a condensation of cultural anxieties (Butler, 2020). Gender equality norms, including increased acceptance and legal rights for LGBTQ+ people, are sometimes framed as part of a negative “globalization agenda” (Fangen & Skjelsbæk, 2020), which is loosely linked to the “New World Order” conspiracy theory. This discourse creates a “them/us” divide, delegitimizing any perspective that is labelled this way (Kováts, 2017).

Far-right climate science denial tapped into public distrust of the state and the establishment using a rhetoric that was both populist and patriarchal. Far-right climate science sceptics describe themselves as marginalized, banned and oppressed dissidents. By using terms like “elite” or “the fancy people,” they framed climate change advocates as a detached and exclusive group, disconnected from the realities of ordinary people’s daily lives (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014, p. 91). Forchtner (2019) identifies evidence scepticism and process scepticism (scepticism towards scientific, bureaucratic and political processes) and performance of patriarchal masculinity as root explanations of the connection between far-right political orientation and climate science denialist attitudes.

The connection between the far-right, misogyny and anti-environmentalism has historical roots that reach back to European colonization, and to ideas of the Enlightenment. In this paper, I briefly explain the joint history of white supremacy and heteropatriarchal gender order, which both rely on extractivist logic of relations,

therefore providing fertile ground for climate science denialism. White supremacy, heteropatriarchal gender order, and climate-destructive attitudes combine in mainstream far-right ideology. I conceptualize them as a dark triad of politics and conduct an exploratory, quantitatively assisted discourse analysis of discussions about climate science and climate policies on incels.is, an online forum on the intersection of white supremacy and extreme misogyny. Researching the discourses on this particular forum uncovers the practical interplay of the dark triad of politics in one of the far-right subcultures.

2. THE DARK TRIAD OF POLITICS: CONNECTING MISOGYNY, WHITE SUPREMACY AND CLIMATE DENIALISM

Climate change denial, misogyny and white supremacy are not separate issues. They are interconnected manifestations of a shared desire to maintain a social order in which white cisgender heterosexual men hold power (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014; Daggett, 2018). In contemporary cultures, they usually appear hand-in-hand in the ideological repertoire of far-right parties and movements (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014; Byrne, 2020; Daggett, 2018; Dietze & Roth, 2020; Fangen & Skjelsbæk, 2020; Forchtner, 2019; Hartman, 2024; Heinemann & Stern, 2022; Jylhä et al., 2020; Lockwood, 2018). The far right can be defined as a political ideology that combines nationalism, authoritarianism, and exclusionary identity politics, often rooted in racial or ethnic superiority (Mudde, 2007; 2019). White supremacy is a power structure prioritising white male superiority (Ferber, 2007), and is often named as the main ideology of the far-right (Stinton, 2019). Misogyny, on the other hand, is a system that polices and enforces patriarchal gender norms and expectations. These norms and expectations have been changing, but to this day encompass the idea that men are entitled to sex, care, affection, and admiration, as well as claims to knowledge and power, and women are expected to provide these and to not take them away (Manne, 2017). Climate denialism, on the other hand, is different from white supremacy and misogyny in a sense that it is not a systemic structure; rather, it is a set of attitudes that reject the existence of scientific consensus on climate change and global warming (Diethelm & McKee, 2008). But the racial prejudice of white supremacism, as well as the gendered prejudice of misogyny, “requires a rejection of scientific method. The same is true of climate change denial” (Byrne, 2020, p. 30).

It is not just the rejection of scientific method and scientific consensus that connect this ideological dark triad of politics; it is rather a commitment to a particular logic of relations on which patriarchal capitalism stands. This logic of relations relies on narratives about masculinity that separate it from femininity and of culture separated from nature, which creates an arbitrary dichotomy of men = culture who rule over women = nature (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014, p. 91). This patriarchal dichotomy functions not only in the subjugation of women and nature but also of men of colour, who have been depicted as feminine and therefore subordinate (Clary, 2015). “Domination of both bodies as well as land has [...] been intimately connected to whiteness, from the period of so-called European discovery” (Hartman, 2024, p. 379).

This logic of relations that structures the relations between men, women and their varied others, while privileging whiteness and heterosexuality, is the same structure that justified European colonial conquests (e. g., Badinter, 1997; Butler, 2011; Connell, 2002; Lugones, 2007; Manne, 2017; Oyěwùmí, 1997), and that justifies environmental destruction to this day. Sustaining an economy based on energy sources that inherently produce toxic byproducts during extraction and refining has always depended on sacrifice zones and entire groups of people deemed less than fully human, making their exposure to harm in the name of progress seem justifiable (e. g., Chakrabarty, 2009; Daggett, 2021; Lockwood, 2018; Klein, 2014). Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the global oil industry relied on a range of coercive and oppressive actions by Western governments and oil corporations to maintain artificial oil scarcity and maximize profits. While publicly advocating democratic values, Western powers simultaneously profited from and upheld authoritarian regimes and extremist groups in the Middle East and North Africa (Daggett, 2018, p. 30).

3. INCELS: ON THE INTERSECTION OF WHITE SUPREMACY AND MISOGYNIST EXTREMISM

Research in climate science denial overwhelmingly finds that the performance of patriarchal ‘breadwinner’ masculinity is connecting different groups engaged in this denial (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014; Daggett, 2018; Frochtner, 2019; Hartman, 2024; Hultman, 2013). At the same time, radical right parties and movements often promote rigid, binary, and patriarchal constructions of gender. This typically involves a belief in essential differences between men and women and the idea that each gender has naturally ordained roles to fulfil (Heinemann

& Stern, 2022). The attachment to the idea of two (and only two) sexes as hierarchically arranged binaries is logical if we consider far-right ideological grounding in racial superiority, often named white supremacy. The gender binary was invented to advance the racist project of colonization. It emerged around the eighteenth century and posited that a specific form of binary sex/gender difference – a complementary male-female couple – manifested in social relationships, became a defining characteristic of Whiteness. By establishing White Europeans as the only group to fully embody this ideal, the concept of the gender binary served as a crucial tool in constructing and naturalizing racial differences and White supremacy (Markowitz, 2024). The gender binary was imposed through colonialism (Lugones, 2007; Markowitz, 2024), as European powers forced indigenous societies, which often had more fluid understandings of gender, into Western models of male and female roles (Lugones, 2007; Oyěwùmí, 1997). This erasure of diverse gender identities was part of a broader effort to dominate and “civilize” non-white peoples, further intertwining white supremacy with strict gender norms (Markowitz, 2024).

In the systematic research review by Frochtner (2019), several publications identified that people scoring high on the desire to protect the status quo also score high on climate change denial. Hartman (2024, p. 377) claims that a shared commitment to the structural power of whiteness is what connects pro- and anti-environmental fractions of far-right. These findings demonstrate, that climate science denialism is not just a policy choice of the far-right, but a logical culmination of their ideological commitments to white supremacy and misogyny. “Money is rarely enough on its own to stabilize a status quo. Coal and oil do more than secure profit and consumerist lifestyles. They also secure worldviews and political subjectivities” (Daggett, 2021, p. 650).

In this paper, I am exploring the interplay of the dark triad of politics in one of the contemporary subcultures in the online far-right ecosystem. I am interested in how climate change and its impacts are discussed in this online subculture (RQ1) and how specific strategies of mitigation are discussed in this subculture (RQ2). In particular, I scrutinize the ideological signalling present in this discussion, and in the quantifiable patterns in this discourse. For this research, I have chosen one of the groups of the manosphere: a diverse group of forums, communities, and web pages loosely structured around the idea that boys and men are victimized in contemporary culture due to feminism (Champion & Frank, 2021). Manosphere has recently gained prominence in the media landscape as one of

the most influential far-right adjacent online subcultures, and Donald Trump has been effectively courting the manosphere in his appearances on various podcasts during his presidential campaign (Caramanica, 2024). In particular, out of the whole manosphere, I choose to study incels, a group that is considered to be the most radical of the whole manosphere, due to the fact that they are the only group to which acts of domestic terrorism have been linked (Tomkinson et al., 2020). I believe studying the most radical end of the ideology is beneficial, because the material contains sort of a ‘pure form’ of the ideology, while it has been observed that users within the manosphere move from less radical to more radical groups (Ribeiro et al., 2021), making incels the potential endpoint of users’ trajectory through this online subculture.

Incels are at the intersection of extreme misogyny and white supremacy. They are conceptualized as misogynist extremists (e. g., Coufal & Wedel, 2025; O’Hanlon et al., 2024), but because of their intense racism and homophobia, they are often labelled as white supremacist (e. g., DiBranco, 2022; Perliger et al., 2022). Incels, short for “involuntary celibates,” are members of an online movement primarily composed of men who feel unable to form romantic or sexual relationships despite desiring them. They mobilize around their inability to find a sexual partner. Many incels believe that physical appearance, social status, and genetics determine romantic success, and personal effort and qualities play a negligible role, leading to fatalistic or nihilistic worldviews. Some members express frustration and self-loathing, while others blame women and society for their situation. Incels have been linked to online harassment and, in extreme cases, real-world violence (Tomkinson et al., 2020). They mobilize on forums that are overtly misogynistic, promoting violence against women and stripping women of human qualities (Wedel & Coufal, 2025; Sugiyura, 2021). Incels are selected as a case study for climate science denialism on the intersection of misogyny and white supremacy because (1) they are the most radical group of the manosphere and therefore the endpoint of misogynist radicalization; (2) they are difficult to classify because of the overt misogyny as well as racism present on the forum; and (3) far-right climate denialist politicians express interest in mobilizing the manosphere as their electoral base.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this article, I am interested in four topics of climate change and environmentalism. These topics are:

climate change, severe weather events (RQ1), energy transition, and diet transition (RQ2). Two of these topics are broad topics generally mapping the discourse about the environment, climate change, and its viscerally felt impacts (climate change and severe weather events). The next two topics are the two most impactful areas of climate change mitigation and can be divided into environmentally friendly vs environmentally destructive dimensions (energy transition and diet transition). Each of these topics is represented by a series of keywords which are displayed in Appendix 4 §1. These keywords have been selected based on the scientific consensus on these topics as described by United Nations educational material on Climate change (United Nations 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d), and have been deliberately selected to be as neutral as possible. Because the data presented in later parts of this paper often includes climate change denialism, in the Appendix 4 §2, I summarise the scientific consensus on these topics as described by the United Nations (Ibidem).

The data used in this article are sourced from the incel forum incels.is. This forum is one of the most popular incel forums and has over 6 million posts. The timeframe of these posts spans from November 2017 when the forum was created to September 2024 when the data collection was finished. The public part of the forum was downloaded in its entirety, which resulted in 6,194,904 messages. The data was pre-processed in 3 steps – firstly, stop words were removed based on the list of English stop words from the nltk Python library, secondly, the simple preprocess function from the Gensim Python library was applied to the data to create standardized tokens, and lastly, from these tokens bigrams were created. On these tokens consisting of bigrams and unigrams, the word2vec model was trained.

The word2vec model (Pennington et al., 2014) transforms a text corpus into a so-called vector space, a numerical representation of the corpus. In this vector space, each word is assigned a sequence of numbers, which is called a word vector. The probability that any two words will appear in the same context determines this numerical representation. Therefore, words that appear in the same context in the corpus end up close to each other in the vector space (Mikolov et al. 2013). The same context can mean that the words are used next to each other in the text, or that the text surrounding these words is close to identical even though the words are not used next to each other. This means that synonyms will have very similar vectors and, therefore, will be close to each other in the vector space. That is why I refer to these words that are close to each other in the vector space as contextual synonyms, or seman-

tically similar words. Another property of word vector spaces is that the meaning of words can be discovered through analogy tasks. For instance, the trajectory between vectors for “king” and “man” is analogous to the trajectory between vectors for “queen” and “woman” (Mikolov et al., 2013).

This ability to learn the meaning of words from the corpus has been shown to carry biases present in the corpus. For example, in the general English language corpus, the word vector for “receptionist” would be closer to the word vector “she” than “he” and the word vector “captain” would be closer to “he” than “she”, suggesting implicit bias in the usage of the English language about who can occupy which position. This was shown first by Caliskan et al. (2017), who found that the association between word vectors of professions with female word vectors increased with the percentage of women in that profession. The same increase in association was found for first names and the percentage of women carrying that first name. Several papers have described this troublesome attribute of text representation in a vector space, and many researchers are trying to develop ways to remove the learned bias from the vector representation of a text (Garg et al. 2018; Gonen & Goldberg 2019). However, for this research, this attribute of word2vec is precisely the thing of interest, as I am interested in the quantifiable biases, assumptions, and ideological connections present in the studied material.

For closer analysis of the data, I leaned on discourse analysis, which is well suited to uncovering the traces of ideology in varied cultural texts. Although this application of discourse analysis was limited because the synonym graphs only consisted of individual words, the word2vec algorithm was developed following Wittgenstein’s and Firth’s (Firth and Palmer 1968) approach to discovering the meaning of words through the contexts in which they are used, which is the key grounding principle of this analysis. Discourse analysis is apt to uncover discourses’ accumulation into “productive performances” through the repetition of certain discursive patterns (Butler 2011; Gill 1996). Word2vec is a suitable computational approach to quantify discourse if we are interested in these “productive performances” through the repetition of discursive patterns in large quantities of data. To analyse the discourses, I created discourse maps (the procedure is described in Appendix 4 §3, and is similar to the procedure in Coufal et. al., 2025). By treating the biases encoded in word embeddings as analytically meaningful rather than as noise, this analytical method called computationally assisted discourse analysis uncovers how themes are embedded in broader ideological formations.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 *The topic of climate change*

The topic of climate change has been captured by three keywords – climate change, global warming, and climate crisis, and is visualized in Figure 1. Immediately, when looking at the discourse map, it is apparent that climate change is a polarizing issue in the incels.is forum. Firstly, we can see that two keywords – global warming and climate change – are positioned very close to each other, suggesting that they are understood to be interchangeable. On the other hand, the keyword climate crisis is located rather far away and surrounded by very different discourse than the other two keywords. Scattered in the discourse map in between other words and bigrams, we find ‘coronavirus’, ‘war on drugs’, ‘war in ukraine’, and ‘world hunger’, suggesting that climate change is regarded similarly as other important societal issues that last a long time and are subjected to political attention – or so-called polycrisis (Morin and Kern 1996).

In the closest proximity to the keywords global warming and climate change (Figure 1, Appendix 4 §4) are words ‘globalism’ and ‘nwo’, which stands for new world order, a conspiracy theory ‘that a secretive power elite with a globalist agenda is conspiring to eventually rule the world through an authoritarian one-world government—which will replace sovereign nation-states’ (Wikipedia contributors, 2025c). Globalism is often used by far-right movements to refer to Jewish people, and is used interchangeably with the New World Order and Deep State conspiracies (Wikipedia contributors, 2025a). In close proximity to these conspiracy theories are words describing social systems like ‘capitalism’, ‘anarchy’ and ‘communism’, suggesting that the conspiracy theory of globalist new world order is discussed with the same seriousness as real social systems. Further away, we see words and bigrams like ‘globohomo’, ‘gun control’, ‘holocaust’, ‘white genocide’ and ‘woke culture’. White genocide is a white nationalist conspiracy theory, claiming there is a deliberate plot (often blamed on Jewish people) to cause the extinction of white people (Wikipedia contributors, 2025d). Globohomo is a ‘supposed promotion of homosexuality, neoliberal economics, and progressive values coupled with the paternalistic curtailment of freedoms by corporate and political interests’ (Wiktionary 2024). The conspiracy theories of ‘globohomo’ and ‘white genocide’ are connected through their antisemitism and homophobia. Jewish people have been stigmatised as sexually deviant and disobeying patriarchal gender norms for centuries. Today, we see many of these antisemitic tropes tightly connected to anti-lgbt protests (Center on Extremism, 2023).



Figure 1. Discourse map of climate change topic.

From these words we can discern that climate change is connected to so-called ‘woke culture’ (in the map close to ‘war on drugs’, ‘coronavirus’, ‘holocaust’ and ‘white genocide’) and its ideas of social injustice. Woke, as a derogatory term for social justice activism and ideas, began to be used in 2010 and is often employed to deny any claims of racial, misogynist or homophobic injustice (Wikipedia contributors, 2025e). From the proximity of these words and their meaning, we can understand that climate change is seen in this discourse as a plot by the evil political elites, who are trying to eradicate white people through the promotion of homosexuality. This is in line with what Forchtner found in his systematic review of climate change and the far-right research. He writes: “climate change might be doubted and climate-change policies rejected because activities combating climate change are linked to “cosmopolitanism”, “globalism,” a “liberal world government” and a loss of [national] sovereignty—all themes strongly opposed by the far right” (Forchtner, 2019, p. 5).

On the other hand, in the close proximity to the keyword ‘climate crisis’ (Figure 2, Appendix 4 §4), we find terms like ‘our knowledge’, ‘its effects’, ‘major economic’, but perhaps more importantly ‘neoliberal capitalism’, ‘meat industry’, ‘environmental destruction’, ‘political corruption’, and ‘corporate power’. This suggests discourse that actually resembles the scientific consensus

(United Nations 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d), as well as discourse used by climate change activists (Chen et al. 2023). This stark contrast in the language used implies that the forum contains both people who believe in the science of climate change and people who deny it, as can be said about far-right politics in general (Hartman, 2024). Interestingly though, these people use vastly different vocabularies when talking about this issue, which is perhaps symptomatic of the broader societal discussions – two camps with largely different vocabularies and contexts of discussion, that end up disconnected from each other when the discourse is quantified, likely because they don’t necessarily talk to each other even though they are in the same forum.

5.2 The topic of severe weather events

Another topic of inquiry is severe weather events, which is perhaps the most directly observable impact of climate change. The discourse surrounding severe weather events is displayed in Figure 2 and was captured using three keywords – ‘extreme weather’, ‘hurricanes’ and ‘floods’. The last two are positioned very closely together in the discourse map (Figure 3, Appendix 4 §4) and surrounded by words like ‘tsunami’, ‘drought’, ‘storms’, ‘earthquakes’, ‘plagues’. Further away we see ‘social collapse’, ‘civil wars’, ‘bombings’, ‘catastrophes’,

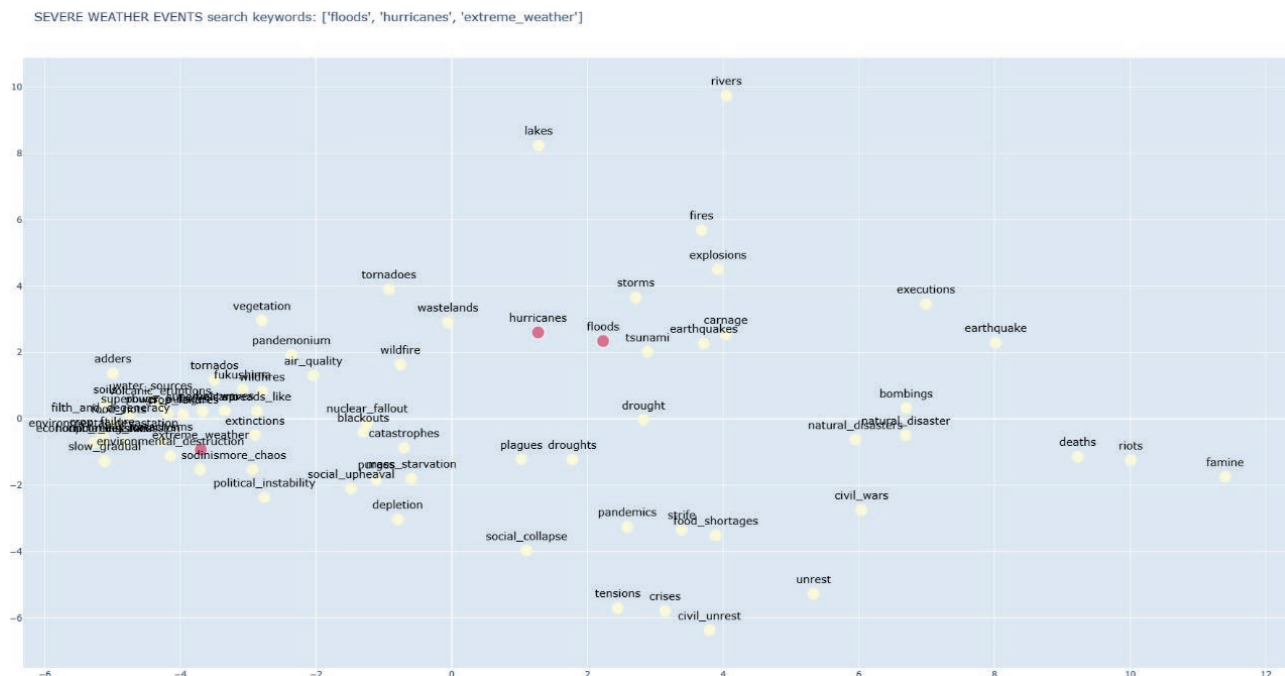


Figure 2. Discourse map of severe weather events topic.

‘nuclear fallout’, ‘wildfire’, etc. This suggests that these two examples of common severe weather events are associated more broadly with other ‘natural disasters’, and it shows that incels perceive the potential of these events to cause ‘social collapse’.

The bigram keyword ‘extreme weather’ (Figure 4, Appendix 4 §4) stands further away from the other two keywords and is tightly knit with the discourse that surrounds it. Zooming in on the discourse reveals words like ‘supervolcano’ and ‘volcanic eruptions’, which suggests that incels perhaps justify the presence of extreme weather by volcanic activity – an argument often iterated by climate science denialists (Ramos et al., 2024). The rest of the words revealed in the contextual synonyms map suggest a certain analytical discussion of impacts of extreme weather events. We find words like ‘cataclysm’, ‘environmental destruction’, ‘water sources’, ‘power outages’, ‘superbugs’, ‘food riots’, ‘crop failures’ and ‘environmental devastation’. On the other hand, the closest word to the ‘extreme weather’ keyword is ‘sodinis’, which is the name of a mass killer motivated by extreme misogyny (Kimmel 2013). This discourse map suggests a wide variety of perspectives on the topic ranging from serious discussions of the societal impact of severe weather events to reiterating climate denialism, and even tying ‘extreme weather’ to misogynist mass murder.

5.3 The topic of transition: environmentally friendly dimension

The next two topics subjected to analysis in this paper are diet transition and energy transition. Both of these topics are divided into environmentally friendly vs environmentally destructive dimensions. Firstly, looking into the environmentally friendly diet transition discourse map, displayed in Figure 3, we see that the keywords ‘vegan’ and ‘plant based’ are relatively distant from each other, even though they are describing the same thing.

We see that the keyword ‘plant based’ is surrounded by relatively technocratic discourse about diet. We see words like ‘low calorie’, ‘high calorie’, ‘high carb’, ‘animal products’, ‘gluten’, ‘processed foods’, etc. On the other hand, the keyword ‘vegan’ has brought into the discourse map a rather different set of words. In Figure 5 (Appendix 4 §4) we find ‘satanist’, ‘hippy’, ‘homo’, ‘weeaboo’, ‘sissy’, ‘conservacuck’ and ‘demon possessed’. These are derogatory terms often used in far-right online spaces as insults, and suggest not only that ‘vegan’ is viewed as a similar insult to ‘homo’, ‘sissy’, ‘weeaboo’ and ‘conservacuck’, but also ties Satanic ritual abuse (moral panic conspiracy theory about satanic cults ritually abusing children) with homosexuality and vegan diets (Wikipedia contributors, 2025b). These two camps of discourse again suggest something similar to the climate change

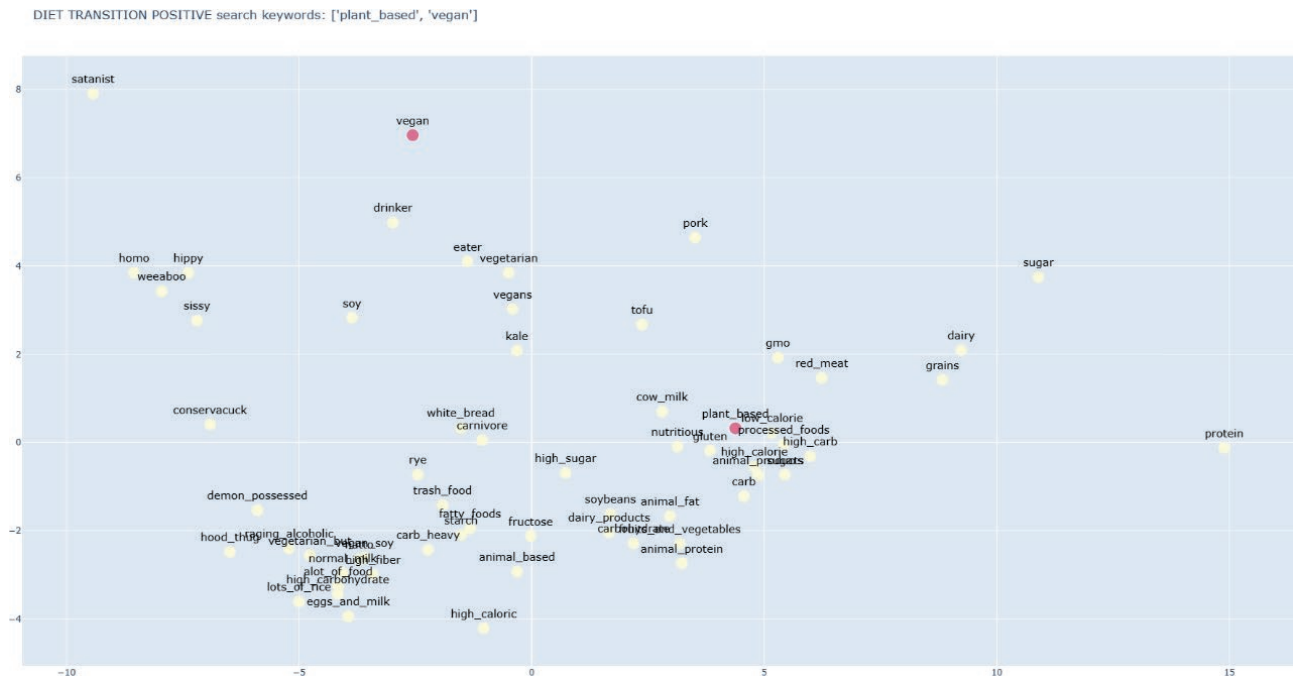


Figure 3. Discourse map of diet transition topic, environmentally friendly dimension.

ENERGY TRANSITION POSITIVE search keywords: ['green_energy', 'renewable_energy', 'solar_panels', 'wind_turbines']

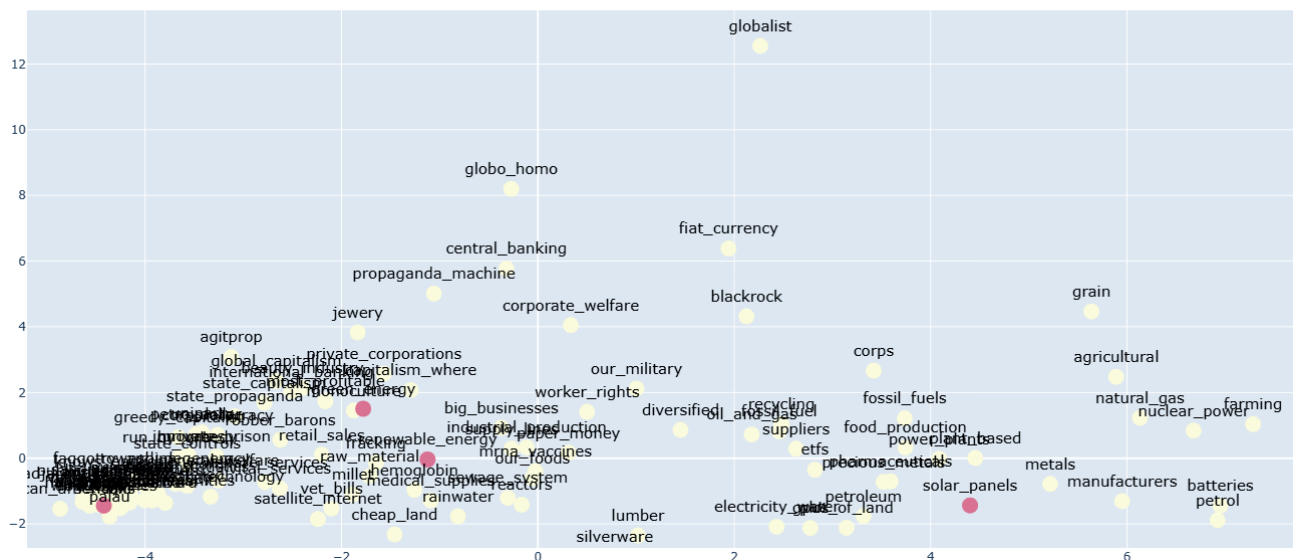


Figure 4. Discourse map of energy transition topic, environmentally friendly dimension.

discourse map, that is, an existence of two completely different and separate discourses – one very technocratic, the other intensely political and conspiracy-driven.

In the environmentally friendly discourse map of energy transition, displayed in Figure 4, we find these

keywords: 'green energy', 'renewable energy', 'solar panels' and 'wind turbines'. We see that discourse in this map is again relatively varied. We see 'power plants', 'recycling', 'metals', 'batteries' and similar technocratic terms, but also find association with far-right conspiracy

Interestingly, with the keyword wind turbines (Figure 6, Appendix 4 §4), we arrive at a rather dense cluster of derogatory discourse about Aboriginal people and communities. Overwhelmingly, we see words like ‘srilanka’, ‘mexican americans’, ‘uoguelph’ (University of Guelph), ‘suomi’ (indigenous people of Finland), ‘vanuatu’, ‘palau’ (countries in Oceania), ‘Vojvodina’ (region in Serbia), ‘svalbard’ (islands in the north of Norway), ‘mauritania’, ‘osterreich’ (Austria in German), ‘hani’ (region in Turkey), ‘qld’ (country in Australia) and ‘australasia’. This suggests rather in-depth discussion of wind turbine deployments across the world. For example, in Vojvodina, Serbia, a largest wind farm in the country was recently built (NOVA.news 2023) and University of Guelph opened first wind powered building in 2005 (Renewable Energy World 2005). Forchtner (2019, p. 4) writes that wind turbines are often attacked in far-right discourse as a response to climate change. From the discourse map, the discussion seems rather technocratic; however, a slight tint of far-right ideology is suggested by the words ‘faggotry and degeneracy’ and ‘state control’ present in the cluster.

Looking at the discourse map of environmentally destructive diet transition, displayed in Figure 5, with keywords ‘meat’, ‘dairy’ and ‘carnivore’, we see very similar results as with the ‘plant based’ keyword in the environmentally friendly diet transition discourse map (Figure 3). In fact, ‘plant based’ is present in the discourse map along with other words that are discussing diet-related issues. Nowhere in the map is any term that suggests a political dimension of discussion of these issues. This shows that diets that include meat are viewed as neutral, non-controversial dietary choices among many other dietary options, and are discussed in a depoliticized way (unlike vegan diets, which are, according to the discourse in Figure 8, homosexual and satanist).

Zooming in on the keywords ‘fossil fuels’, ‘greenhouse gas’ and ‘carbon emissions’ in Figure 7, Appendix



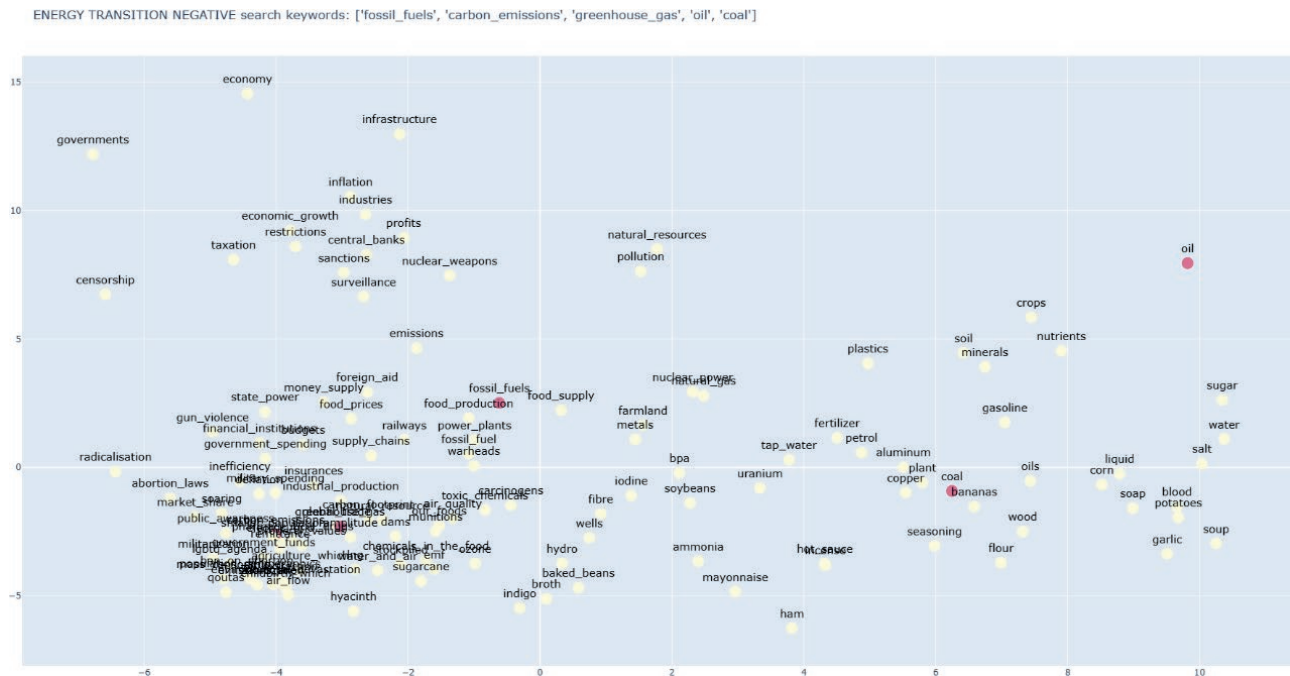


Figure 6. Discourse map of energy transition topic, environmentally destructive dimension.

4 §4, which are positioned closest together in the discourse map, we find a mix of words carrying technocratic and negative meaning. Among technocratic words, we find ‘emissions’, ‘food production’, ‘power plants’ or ‘railways’. Among negative words, we find ‘surveillance’, ‘nuclear weapons’ or ‘censorship’. Close to ‘fossil fuels’, we also find discourse about the impact of their use with words like ‘carcinogens’, ‘toxic chemicals’, ‘air quality’, ‘water and air’ and ‘carbon footprint’. This discourse can be found between the keywords ‘fossil fuels’ and ‘greenhouse gas’. The closest contextual word to greenhouse gas is the word ‘global trade’, which suggests a discursive connection between climate change and the capitalist economy. In a close contextual cluster around the keyword ‘carbon emissions’ we find ‘smaller population’, ‘electric grid’, ‘remittance’, ‘pharmaceutical drugs’ and ‘property values’. Further away but still in proximity, we find words like ‘mass censorship’, ‘lgbtq agenda’, ‘quotas’, ‘militarization’, ‘environmental destruction’ and ‘ban on abortions’, which suggest that ‘carbon emissions’ are connected to some conspiracy thinking. Incels often engage with scientific knowledge, and participate in a selective (re)interpretation of it to justify their world-views (Cannito and Ferrero Camoletto, 2022; Daly and Reed, 2022; Johansson Wilen et al., 2024). Energy scholars have become increasingly sceptical of the concept of “energy transition,” arguing that its widespread use among engineers, economists, policymakers, and the

general public places disproportionate emphasis on fuel substitution and relies on overly technocratic models of change (Daggett, 2021, p. 644). This scientific criticism of energy transition could have served as a basis for the connection incels draw between carbon emissions, global capitalism, and far-right conspiracy theories. The fact that it is now relatively well known that the concept of carbon footprint (very close to greenhouse gas in the map) has been invented by fossil fuel publicists to shift the responsibility for climate change from petro-companies to individuals is likely only supporting this shift to conspiracy thinking.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that misogyny and climate change denial within far-right movements are not separate or incidental phenomena, but interrelated expressions of a broader project to preserve racialized, patriarchal power (white supremacy). Drawing on scholarship on far-right ideology, coloniality, and political ecology, it demonstrated how rigid gender binaries, opposition to feminism and LGBTQ+ rights, and hostility toward climate science are rooted in a shared commitment to maintaining the structural dominance of whiteness and heteronormative masculinity. Climate denialism functions as an identity-protective strategy that defends fos-

oil-fuel-based social orders historically tied to authoritarianism, racial hierarchy, and the exploitation of both labor and land. By situating climate change denial within longer histories of colonialism, capitalist extraction, and gendered domination, it underscores that far-right resistance to climate action is best understood as part of a wider backlash against egalitarian social transformation. This paper conducted quantitatively assisted discourse analysis in the incels.is forum – a manosphere forum which lies at the intersection of misogynist extremism and white supremacy and is part of the wider ecosystem of far-right online subcultures. The analysis focused on four overarching climate change-related topics – climate change, severe weather events, diet transition, and energy transition.

The discourse analysis reveals that environmental topics within the incels.is forum are deeply polarized and fragmented, with climate change, severe weather events, energy transition, and diet transition articulated through sharply divergent discursive frames. Climate change emerges as a particularly contested issue, split between a denialist discourse rooted in far-right conspiracy theories – linking global warming to “globalism,” “woke culture,” and antisemitic and homophobic narratives – and a smaller, distinct discourse aligned with scientific consensus and climate justice critiques of neoliberal capitalism. A similar two-camp tendency is present in discussions of severe weather events, which range from analytical engagement with societal impacts to climate denialist explanations and even misogynist violence. Diet and energy transitions further illustrate how environmental mitigation is selectively politicized: vegan diets are heavily stigmatized through misogynistic, homophobic, and conspiratorial language, while meat consumption remains depoliticized; renewable energy is discussed through a mix of technocratic detail, capitalist critique, and far-right ideology, whereas fossil fuels are largely normalized through neutral or instrumental framings.

All of the discourse maps reveal large variance in the tone in which these topics are discussed. Across topics, technocratic and knowledgeable engagement with scientific or policy issues frequently coexists with, and lends legitimacy to, conspiratorial interpretations. These findings suggest that incel environmental discourse does not simply reject climate knowledge but selectively reinterprets it in ways that reinforce far-right worldviews, demonstrating how environmental issues can function as sites where scientific information, misogyny, and extremist ideology become mutually entangled.

FUNDING

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Research and Innovation Action program under Grant Agreement no. 101132327. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

REFERENCES

- Anshelm, J., & Hultman, M. (2014). A green fatwā? Climate change as a threat to the masculinity of industrial modernity. *NORMA*, 9(2), 84–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2014.908627>
- Badinter, E. (1997). *X Y, On masculine identity*. Columbia University Press.
- Butler, J. (2011). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. Taylor & Francis.
- Butler, J. (2020). *Gender, whose Fantasy*.
- Byrne, G. (2020). Climate change denial as far-right politics: How abandonment of scientific method paved the way for Trump. *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment*, 11(1), 30–60. <https://doi.org/10.4337/jhre.2020.01.02>
- Caliskan, A., Bryson, J. J., & Narayanan, A. (2017). Semantics derived automatically from language corpora contain human-like biases. *Science*, 356(6334), 183–186. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aal4230>
- Cannito, M., & Ferrero Camoletto, R. (2022). The Rules of Attraction: An Empirical Critique of Pseudoscientific Theories about Sex in the Manosphere. *Sexes*, 3(4), 593–607. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sexes3040043>
- Caramanica, J. (2024, November 14). Where to Find the Avuncular Donald Trump? Check the Manosphere. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/14/arts/donald-trump-podcasts-men.html>
- Center on Extremism. (2023). *Antisemitism & Anti-LGBTQ+ Hate Converge in Extremist and Conspiratorial Beliefs* | ADL. Anti-Defamation League. <https://www.adl.org/resources/article/antisemitism-anti-lgbtq-hate-converge-extremist-and-conspiratorial-beliefs>
- Chakrabarty, D. (2009). The Climate of History: Four Theses. *Critical Inquiry*, 35(2), 197–222. <https://doi.org/10.1086/596640>
- Chen, K., Molder, A. L., Duan, Z., Boulianne, S., Eckart, C., Mallari, P., & Yang, D. (2023). How Climate Movement Actors and News Media Frame Climate

- Change and Strike: Evidence from Analyzing Twitter and News Media Discourse from 2018 to 2021. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 28(2), 384–413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612221106405>
- Christensen, A.-D., & Jensen, S. Q. (2014). Combining hegemonic masculinity and intersectionality. *NORMA*, 9(1), 60–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2014.892289>
- Clary, F. (2015). Dismantling Southern Codes of Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Demystified Image in Hal Bennett's *Lord of Dark Places* (1970). *Babel*, 31, 75–101. <https://doi.org/10.4000/babel.4072>
- Collins, P. H. (2019). *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478007098>
- Connell, R. W. (2002). Globalization, Imperialism and Masculinities. In M. Kimmel, J. Hearn, & R. W. Connell (Eds), *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities* (pp. 71–89). SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452233833>
- Coufal, L., Saresma, T., & Kosonen, H. (2025). Fight with words: Misogynist extremism on an incel discussion forum. *NORMA*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2025.2513103>
- Coufal, L., & Wedel, L. (2025). Radicalization within a network of misogynist extremists: A case study of an incel forum. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1), 852. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05161-8>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Daggett, C. (2018). Petro-masculinity: Fossil Fuels and Authoritarian Desire. *Millennium*, 47(1), 25–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829818775817>
- Daggett, C. (2021). Energy and domination: Contesting the fossil myth of fuel expansion. *Environmental Politics*, 30(4), 644–662. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2020.1807204>
- Daly, S. E., & Reed, S. M. (2022). “I Think Most of Society Hates Us”: A Qualitative Thematic Analysis of Interviews with Incels. *Sex Roles*, 86(1–2), 14–33. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-021-01250-5>
- Dewan, S., & Harmon, A. (2025, January 24). Trump Bars Transgender Women From U.S. Prisons for Female Inmates. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/23/us/trump-transgender-inmates-prison.html>
- DiBranco, A. (2022). Mobilizing Misogyny. In E. K. Carian, A. DiBranco, & C. Ebin (Eds), *Male Supremacism in the United States: From Patriar-*
- chal Traditionalism to Misogynist Incels and the Alt-Right* (1st edn, pp. 3–20). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003164722>
- Dietze, G., & Roth, J. (2020a). Right-wing populism and gender: A preliminary cartography of an emergent field of research. *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond*, 7–22.
- Dietze, G., & Roth, J. (2020b). Right-Wing Populism and Gender: A Preliminary Cartography of an Emergent Field of Research. In G. Dietze & J. Roth (Eds), *Gender Studies* (1st edn, pp. 7–22). transcript Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839449806-001>
- Fangen, K., & Skjelsbæk, I. (2020). Editorial: Special issue on gender and the far right. *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 21(4), 411–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2020.1851866>
- Ferber, A. L. (2007). The Construction of Black Masculinity: White Supremacy Now and Then. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 31(1), 11–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723506296829>
- Firth, J. R., & Palmer, F. R. (1968). *Selected Papers of J. R. Firth, 1952–59*. Indiana University Press. <https://books.google.cz/books?id=gaAbAQAAIAAJ>
- Forchtner, B. (2019). Climate change and the far right. *WIREs Climate Change*, 10(5), e604. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.604>
- Friedman, L. (2025, January 21). 3 of the Most Important Trump Executive Orders on Climate. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/21/climate/trump-climate-change-executive-orders.html>
- Garg, N., Schiebinger, L., Jurafsky, D., & Zou, J. (2018). Word embeddings quantify 100 years of gender and ethnic stereotypes. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(16), E3635–E3644. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1720347115>
- Gill, R. (1996). Discourse analysis: Practical implementation. In *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences* (pp. 141–159). BPS Books Leicester.
- Gonen, H., & Goldberg, Y. (2019). Lipstick on a Pig: Debiasing Methods Cover up Systematic Gender Biases in Word Embeddings But do not Remove Them. *CoRR*, abs/1903.03862. <http://arxiv.org/abs/1903.03862>
- Hartman, M. R. (2024). Beyond Climate Denial: White Supremacy and the Growth of Nationalist Environmentalism on the Right. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 18(3), 376–392. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jsrnc.23634>
- Heinemann, I., & Stern, A. M. (2022). Gender and Far-right Nationalism: Historical and International Dimensions. Introduction. *Journal of Mod-*

- ern *European History*, 20(3), 311–321. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16118944221110721>
- Horta Ribeiro, M., Blackburn, J., Bradlyn, B., De Cristofaro, E., Stringhini, G., Long, S., Greenberg, S., & Zannettou, S. (2021). The Evolution of the Manosphere across the Web. *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, 15(1), 196–207. <https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v15i1.18053>
- Hultman, M. (2013). The Making of an Environmental Hero: A History of Ecomodern Masculinity, Fuel Cells and Arnold Schwarzenegger. *Environmental Humanities*, 2(1), 79–99. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3610360>
- Johansson Wilén, E., Wemrell, M., & Gunnarsson, L. (2024). Gender knowledge production and epistemology in the incelosphere. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2024.2427192>
- Jylhä, K. M., Strimling, P., & Rydgren, J. (2020). Climate Change Denial among Radical Right-Wing Supporters. *Sustainability*, 12(23), 10226. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122310226>
- Kaiser, S. (2022). *Political Masculinity: How Incels, Fundamentalists and Authoritarians Mobilise for Patriarchy* (V. A. Pakis, Trans.). Polity Press. <https://books.google.cz/books?id=42VsEAAAQBAJ>
- Kimmel, M. S. (2013). A Glance Back: A Brief History of American Angry White Men. In *Angry white men: American masculinity at the end of an era* (pp. 46–53). Nation Books.
- Klein, N. (2014). *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. The Climate*. Simon and Schuster.
- Kováts, E. (2017). The Emergence of Powerful Anti-Gender Movements in Europe and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy. In M. Köttig, R. Bitzan, & A. Petö (Eds), *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (pp. 175–189). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43533-6_12
- Lockwood, M. (2018). Right-wing populism and the climate change agenda: Exploring the linkages. *Environmental Politics*, 27(4), 712–732. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2018.1458411>
- Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System. *Hypatia*, 22(1), 186–209. JSTOR.
- Manne, K. (2017). *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Oxford University Press. <https://books.google.cz/books?id=Mpc4DwAAQBAJ>
- Marwick, A. E., & Caplan, R. (2018). Drinking male tears: Language, the manosphere, and networked harassment. *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(4), 543–559. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1450568>
- Mikolov, T., Chen, K., Corrado, G., & Dean, J. (2013, January 16). *Efficient Estimation of Word Representations in Vector Space*. International Conference on Learning Representations. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Efficient-Estimation-of-Word-Representations-in-Mikolov-Chen/f6b51c8753a871dc94ff-32152c00c01e94f90f09>
- Morin, E., & Kern, A. B. (1996). *Terre-patrie*. Ed. du Seuil.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (1st edn). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037>
- Mudde, C. (2019). *The Far Right Today*. Polity Press.
- NOVA.news. (2023). *Serbia: The largest wind farm in the country will be built in Vojvodina*. <https://www.agenzia-nova.com/en/news/serbia-in-vojvodina-sorgera-il-parco-eolico-piu-grande-del-paese/>
- O’Hanlon, R., Altice, F. L., Lee, R. K.-W., LaViolette, J., Mark, G., Papakyriakopoulos, O., Saha, K., De Choudhury, M., & Kumar, N. (2024). Misogynistic Extremism: A Scoping Review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 25(2), 1219–1234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231176062>
- Oyèwùmí, O. (1997). *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://books.google.cz/books?id=G6boby2boIYC>
- Pennington, J., Socher, R., & Manning, C. (2014). GloVe: Global Vectors for Word Representation. *Proceedings of the 2014 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing (EMNLP)*, 1532–1543. <https://doi.org/10.3115/v1/D14-1162>
- Perliger, A., Stevens, C., & Leidig, E. (2022). *Mapping the ideological landscape of extreme misogyny*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. <https://readme.org/s/mapping-ideological.pdf>
- Ramos, R., Rodrigues, M. J., & Rodrigues, I. (2024). Climate Change Denialism: Critical Analysis of Arguments in Confrontation with Climate Science. *Climate Literacy in Education*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.24926/cle.v2i1.6150>
- Renewable Energy World. (2005). *University of Guelph’s First Wind-Powered Building*. <https://www.renewable-energyworld.com/wind-power/university-of-guelphs-first-wind-powered-building-37864/>
- Stinton, C. (2019). Combining the aberrant with the ordinary: The role of white supremacy in the far-right radicalisation of women. *Journal of Applied Psychology and Social Science*, 5(1), 86–115.
- Sugiura, L. (2021). *The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women*

- en. Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/9781839822544>
- Tomkinson, S., Harper, T., & Attwell, K. (2020). Confronting Incel: Exploring possible policy responses to misogynistic violent extremism. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 55(2), 152–169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2020.1747393>
- Wedel, L., & Coufal, L. (2025). Radicalization or relief: Divergent impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown on incels by seniority. *New Media & Society*, 14614448251336432. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251336432>
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing Gender. *Gender and Society*, 1(2), 125–151. JSTOR.
- Wikipedia contributors. (2025a). *Globalism*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Globalism&oldid=1268330464>
- Wikipedia contributors. (2025b). *LGBTQ grooming conspiracy theory*—Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=LGBTQ_grooming_conspiracy_theory&oldid=1327993119
- Wikipedia contributors. (2025c). *New World Order conspiracy theory*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New_World_Order_conspiracy_theory&oldid=1270608064
- Wikipedia contributors. (2025d). *White genocide conspiracy theory*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=White_genocide_conspiracy_theory&oldid=1268520503
- Wikipedia contributors. (2025e). *Woke*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Woke&oldid=1270478732>
- Wiktionary. (2024). *Globohomo*. <https://en.wiktionary.org/w/index.php?title=globohomo&oldid=82658270>



Citation: Poli, S., Giannoni, P. & Moretti, G. (2026). Ageism in Healthcare and Social Care Settings in Europe: A Scoping Review. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33):215-225. doi: 10.36253/smp-17097

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

ORCID:

SP: 0000-0002-3663-174X

PG: 0009-0007-8062-9392

GM: 0009-0008-8154-0821

Passim

Ageism in Healthcare and Social Care Settings in Europe: A Scoping Review

STEFANO POLI*, PAOLA GIANNONI, GIADA MORETTI

University of Genoa, Italy

E-mail: stefano.poli@unige.it; paola.giannoni@edu.unige.it; giada.moretti@edu.unige.it

*Corresponding author

Abstract. Ageism is a widespread, complex form of discrimination negatively affecting older adults' health, well-being, and access to healthcare and social services. In rapidly ageing societies, particularly in Europe, it has become a critical social determinant of health, shaping clinical decision-making, professional practices, organizational routines and health policies. Despite growing research on ageism, evidence remains fragmented, highlighting the need for systematic synthesis. This scoping review maps recent literature on ageism toward older adults in healthcare and social care settings. Searches were conducted in Scopus and PubMed for peer-reviewed articles published between 2021 and 2025, following the COVID-19 emergency. Fifty-five studies in European contexts were included and analysed using Template Analysis with MAX-QDA. Findings show that ageism operates across four interrelated levels: internalized/self-ageism, individual/interpersonal, institutional/organizational, and structural/systemic. These levels are associated with a range of specific outcomes: internalized stereotypes, psychological distress, compromised clinical communication, ethical implications, biased service design, health and digital inequalities. While educational and organizational efforts are effective, they remain insufficient. Addressing ageism requires integrated, multilevel strategies, combining education, organizational change, policy interventions, and age-inclusive technological design.

Keywords: ageism, older adults, healthcare, social care, scoping review.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of ageism, first introduced by Butler (1969), refers to discrimination based on age and was defined as “prejudice by one age group toward other age groups” (Butler 1969: 243), rooted in fears of ageing, decline, and loss of social value. Although initially conceived as applicable across the lifespan, the term is now predominantly used to describe negative attitudes and practices directed toward older adults. Thus, beyond multidimensional theoretical approaches to generative patterns and predictive factors (Bytheway 1995; COST 2015; Snellman 2016), ageism can be broadly defined as a set of stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory practices that negatively affect old-

er people's self-esteem, well-being, and social recognition (WHO 2021; Paoletti 2024).

Attention to ageism has grown alongside the rapid demographic shift toward older populations, particularly in Europe, one of the world's oldest regions. As of 2024, individuals aged 65 and over accounted for 21.6% of the EU-27 population, with an old-age dependency ratio of 37% (Eurostat 2025), and further ageing projected through 2050 (UN 2024; WHO 2025). These demographic trends pose significant challenges for health and social care systems, increasing demand for chronic care and long-term support while potentially intensifying ageist practices under conditions of resource constraint (Mikton *et al.* 2021).

In healthcare and social care contexts, ageism operates at multiple levels, shaping clinical interactions, organizational routines, and institutional norms. Empirical evidence shows that age-based stereotypes influence clinical judgment and care pathways, contributing to symptom under-recognition, restricted access to diagnostics or treatments, and age-based prioritization rather than need-based decision-making (Chrisler *et al.* 2016; Chang *et al.* 2020). These mechanisms disproportionately affect older adults with complex or chronic conditions.

Beyond formal care settings, ageism also manifests through everyday interactions and personal beliefs. Older adults may internalize negative age stereotypes, which are associated with poorer mental health, reduced autonomy, lower social participation, and diminished engagement in health-promoting behaviours (Levy 2017; McDarby *et al.* 2022).

Above all, public discourse and institutional communication often reinforce representations of older adults as uniformly frail or dependent, a tendency particularly amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, when age-based policies legitimized paternalistic and restrictive practices (Previtali *et al.* 2020; Poli 2020; Ayalon *et al.* 2021).

Thus, despite the growing body of research on ageism, existing evidence remains fragmented across disciplines, settings, and methodological approaches, with limited integration between theoretical frameworks and empirical operationalization. In particular, studies addressing ageism in healthcare and social care often focus on isolated outcomes or single levels of analysis, while comparatively less attention has been paid to how ageism is measured, translated into professional practices, and addressed through training and organizational interventions, especially in the post-pandemic European context.

Accordingly, this scoping review aims to systematically map recent evidence on ageism toward older adults

in healthcare and social care settings, with particular attention to post-pandemic theoretical mainstreams in Europe, and a specific focus on measurement approaches, professional training initiatives, and documented outcomes of ageism, in order to inform future research, policy, and practice.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE SCOPING REVIEW

This contribution considers the socio-healthcare domain broadly, encompassing clinical and community-based services, the validation of research and diagnostic instruments, educational contexts (university-level or specialist training) for health professionals, and experimental studies, including those involving artificial intelligence.

The primary objective of the review is to provide a structured and comprehensive classification of recent studies addressing ageism in later life within healthcare and social care sectors. To this end, a scoping review methodology was adopted in accordance with the PRISMA extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines (Tricco *et al.* 2018). This approach is particularly suited to mapping heterogeneous bodies of evidence, clarifying key concepts, examining methodological approaches, and identifying research gaps (Peters *et al.* 2017; Munn *et al.* 2018). Moreover, scoping reviews allow for the inclusion and comparison of studies adopting diverse research designs and epistemological perspectives (Pham *et al.* 2014). Relevant studies were identified through searches in the Scopus and PubMed databases. Articles were included if they contained the terms “ageism” AND “health” AND (“older” OR “elder*”), were published between 2021 and 2025 (following the end of the global pandemic emergency), written in English, published (excluding “in press” articles), available in full text, involved populations aged >60, and were conducted in or explicitly referred to European or North American contexts (given the limited availability of accurate territorial filters in PubMed). A wide range of publication types was considered, including empirical studies, reviews, clinical trials, evaluation and validation studies, and practice-oriented contributions.

The initial search yielded 213 records, of which 6 duplicates were removed. The remaining 207 titles and abstracts were screened, excluding 148 articles that did not meet the predefined classification criteria. Screening and classification were performed by three independent reviewers who assigned binary scores (1 = present; 0 = absent) for three criteria: target population (i.e., recipi-

ents of ageist behaviors or internalized ageism), concept (ageism conceptualized as attitudes or practices enacted by healthcare or social care professionals, including studies validating relevant measurement instruments), and context (hospital settings, community-based social care services, or professional training aimed at counter-acting ageism) (Grosse and Kokorelias 2025; Springer *et al.* 2025). Only studies achieving the maximum cumulative score of 9/9 were retained. Geographical relevance was ultimately confirmed through full-text screening, in line with established scoping review practices. Therefore, a final territorial screening was applied, restricting the review to studies conducted in Europe, given its advanced demographic ageing and relevance for the analytical framework adopted.

After the screening process described in Fig. 1, we obtained a final sample of 55 articles, which were deemed eligible and imported into MAXQDA (version 24) and analyzed using Template Analysis (Cardano 2020). This involved developing an initial codebook through both inductive and deductive processes, which was iteratively refined by integrating or removing concepts during analysis.

For the publication year 2025, contributions available as of December 3, 2025 were considered. For each article, a structured data extraction form was completed

to collect publication metadata, intervention setting, clinical area, sample size, methodological approach, and research techniques.

The results of the scoping review are first presented by outlining the descriptive characteristics of the included studies, followed by findings from a template analysis. This method enabled the development of interpretative categories, initially derived deductively from the literature and previous classifications (Springer *et al.* 2025; Cesari *et al.* 2025) and then refined iteratively (Cardano 2020), providing a structured yet flexible framework to identify recurring patterns, themes, and relationships across studies. The analysis focused on two main dimensions: types of ageism and its outcomes and consequences.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Study characteristics

All studies included in this scoping review (n=55) refer to the European context. Most studies were published between 2022 and 2024 (n=39), and the main disciplinary fields were nursing (n=17), public health (n=15), and medicine (n=11). Research was conducted in a variety of settings, mainly clinical training (n=20), health systems (n=15), and community services (n=12).

Studies were grouped into four clinical areas: “health professions education and workforce” (n=21) focuses on students, professionals, and training; “clinical care of older adults” (n=14) covers geriatric and long-term care; “health systems, services, and policy” (n=15) includes access, governance, and public health interventions; and “ethical, conceptual, and methodological issues” (n=5) comprises theoretical, ethical, and methodological research.

Regarding healthcare levels, most studies addressed the micro-level (n=25, direct interactions) or macro-level (n=20, systems and policies), with fewer at the meso-level (n=8, organizational processes) or multilevel (n=2). Studies engaged mainly multi-actor collaborations (n=26) and students/trainees (n=18), with other actors including healthcare professionals, organizations/policy makers, society/media, and industry/technology. Quantitative designs were most common (n=23), followed by qualitative (n=9), reviews (n=9), conceptual/theoretical studies (n=9) and mixed methods (n=5).

Table 1 provides a detailed summary of the included studies and their characteristics.

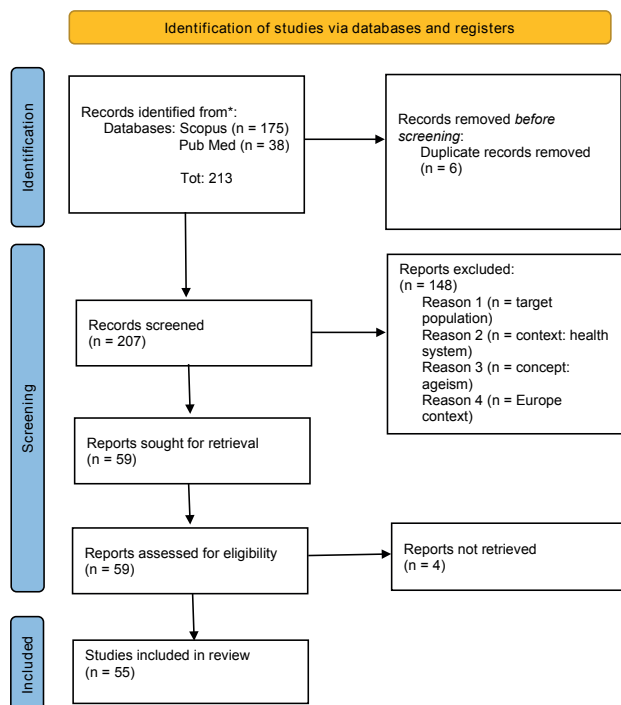


Figure 1. Flow diagram of the selection of articles included in the study.

Table 1. Characteristics of the studies included in the scoping review (n=55).

	Number of Articles
<i>Publication Year</i>	
2021	7
2022	14
2023	11
2024	14
2025	9
<i>Disciplinary field</i>	
Public Health	15
Medicine	11
Nursing	17
Healthcare Management	7
Psychology	5
<i>Setting</i>	
Community Services	12
Clinical Training	20
Health System	15
Hospital	3
Specialist Services	2
Residential / Long-Term Care	3
<i>Clinical Area</i>	
Health professions education and workforce	21
Clinical care of older adults	14
Health systems, services and policy	15
Ethical, conceptual and methodological issues	5
<i>Healthcare level</i>	
Micro	25
Meso	8
Macro	20
Multilevel	2
<i>Actors</i>	
Multi-actors	26
Students / Trainees	18
Healthcare Professionals	7
Organizations / Institutions / Policy makers	2
Industry / Technology / Research	2
<i>Study Design</i>	
Quantitative	23
Qualitative	9
Mixed Methods	5
Review	9
Conceptual / Theoretical	9

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

3.2 Qualitative template analysis: types and outcomes of ageism in healthcare and social care settings

The analysis of the 55 included studies led to the identification of a multi-level structure of ageism and its outcomes. Four interrelated levels emerged inductively from the data: internalized/self-ageism, individual/interpersonal, institutional/organizational and structural/systemic, each associated with specific patterns of outcomes.

Internalized or self-ageism (n=5) captured the process through which older individuals internalize societal and institutional stereotypes, shaping self-perceptions and expectations about ageing. This level was associated with internalized stereotypes and self-stigma (Aytulun and Erden Aki 2022), psychological well-being and emotional vulnerability, including loneliness and perceived risk (Naughton-Doe *et al.* 2024; Gallistl *et al.* 2024; Bel-lanova *et al.* 2024), as well as subjective experiences of frailty and health (Chenhuichen *et al.* 2024). These processes contributed to altered health-related behaviors, reduced agency in decision-making, and forms of self-limitation in the relationship with healthcare services.

Individual/interpersonal ageism (n=19) referred to age-based stereotypes, attitudes, and discriminatory practices enacted in everyday interactions within healthcare and educational contexts. At this level, ageism was associated with negative or ambivalent attitudes and stereotypes toward older adults (Lampersberger *et al.* 2023; Pons *et al.* 2025; Elvira-Zorzo and Vega Rodríguez 2025; Catalao *et al.* 2025), representations of ageing among students and professionals (Heckemann *et al.* 2022; Schüttengruber *et al.* 2022; Cerqueira *et al.* 2023), and implicit or ambivalent forms of ageism (D'hondt *et al.* 2024; Piaton *et al.* 2024). These attitudes influenced educational trajectories and professional orientations (Özdil *et al.* 2021; Knight *et al.* 2022; Castellano-Rioja *et al.* 2022; Nitschke *et al.* 2022 ; Allué-Sierra *et al.* 2023). In this domain, several studies explicitly operationalised ageism using validated scales and measurement tools, aimed at quantifying ageism and assessing explicit or implicit ageist attitudes (Schüttengruber *et al.* 2022; D'hondt *et al.* 2024). Interpersonal ageism also affected clinical communication and the quality of care in direct one-to-one interactions, shaping patient-professional relationships, decision-making processes, and experiences of healthcare. In particular, studies highlighted age-based assumptions in clinical interactions and care practices (Martínez-Angulo *et al.* 2023a; Martínez-Angulo *et al.* 2023b), exclusion or marginalization of older patients in preventive pathways such as screening (Gram *et al.* 2023), and the role of age-related anxieties and stereotypes among healthcare trainees in influencing attitudes toward older patients and care delivery (Draper *et al.* 2024).

Institutional/organizational ageism (n=9) concerned age-based dynamics embedded in organizational structures, professional practices, and educational systems within healthcare settings. At this level, ageism was associated with organizational practices and workforce outcomes, including the influence of age stereotypes on professional well-being, motivation, and intention to leave the workplace (Helaß *et al.* 2024), as well as the

role of age-related beliefs in shaping burnout and quality of working life in long-term care contexts (López-Frutos *et al.* 2022). Institutional ageism also emerged in relation to education and training processes, highlighting how formal learning environments can both reproduce and mitigate ageist attitudes. Studies documented the impact of educational interventions and training models on attitudes toward ageing and older patients (Başer and Hisar 2024; Bouwmeester Stjernetun *et al.* 2024a; Bouwmeester Stjernetun *et al.* 2024b), professional identity and career orientation toward geriatrics (Pearson *et al.* 2025), and the development of competencies and awareness related to ageism in healthcare practice (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2021; Fernandes *et al.* 2022), including the validation of scales for measuring ageist attitudes in students (Piaton *et al.* 2023).

Structural/systemic ageism (n=22) referred to age-based inequalities produced and legitimized at the macro-social level through healthcare systems, public policies, ethical frameworks, and socio-cultural norms. At this level, ageism was associated with health inequities and unequal access to care, including disparities in diagnostic testing and service availability (Trevisan *et al.* 2021; Miralles *et al.* 2021), missed or delayed healthcare during crises and policy responses (Settels and Leist 2022; Rodriguez-Rodriguez *et al.* 2022), age-based resource allocation and prioritization (Pinho and Araújo 2022; McDonald 2022), and clinical outcomes shaped by age-related decision-making and prescribing practices (Paar *et al.* 2024; Fumagalli *et al.* 2025). Structural ageism also emerged as a driver of global mental health inequities (Teaster and Giwa 2023) and vulnerabilities among specific populations, such as older adults with rare diseases (Uwitonze *et al.* 2024). Beyond material inequalities, structural ageism was reflected in ethical, normative, and symbolic dimensions of ageing, including debates on dignity, vulnerability, and epistemic justice in healthcare (Langmann 2023; Bortolotti 2025; Langmann *et al.* 2025), intersectional forms of age-based disadvantage related to gender and social inequalities (Bows *et al.* 2024; Costa *et al.* 2025), and age discrimination in public health and legal frameworks (Nitschke *et al.* 2021; Lloyd-Sherlock *et al.* 2022). Finally, studies highlighted the emergence of digital ageism and its implications for service design and technological innovation in healthcare. Research showed how stereotypes about older adults' digital abilities shape professional attitudes and technological practices (Mannheim *et al.* 2021), while broader socio-technical transformations in healthcare risk reinforcing inequalities and exclusion of older populations (Stypińska & Franke 2023). Other contributions emphasized how implicit ageist assump-

tions can influence participatory design processes and the co-creation of services for older users (Comincioli *et al.* 2022), as well as how regulatory and technological frameworks may embed or mitigate algorithmic bias and age-based discrimination in digital health systems (Van Kolschooten, 2023).

Overall, these findings illustrate how ageism operates across multiple interconnected levels, generating heterogeneous but systematically related outcomes. A detailed synthesis of types of ageism, associated outcomes, and mapped studies is provided in Table 2.

4. DISCUSSION

This scoping review provides a comprehensive and policy-relevant synthesis of recent European research on ageism toward older adults in healthcare and social care contexts. By systematically mapping 55 studies published between 2021 and 2025, the review highlights the multidimensional and multi-level nature of ageism and its consequences, showing how age-based discrimination is not confined to individual attitudes but is embedded in professional practices, organizational arrangements, and structural features of healthcare systems. The analytical framework emerging from the review, distinguishing internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural forms of ageism, offers a useful lens for understanding how these dimensions interact and generate cumulative effects on health outcomes, access to care, and professional conduct.

One important contribution of this review lies in its attention to internalized or self-ageism, which, although addressed by a limited number of studies, emerges as a significant pathway through which broader social and institutional ageism affects older adults' well-being. The evidence suggests that internalized stereotypes shape self-perceptions of health, frailty, and vulnerability, influencing help-seeking behaviors, engagement with healthcare services, and participation in decision-making. From a policy perspective, these findings point to the need for public health strategies that counter negative societal narratives about ageing and promote more diverse and empowering representations of later life. Interventions aimed at improving older adults' health literacy and agency should therefore be understood not only as individual-level initiatives but also as components of broader efforts to address ageism as a social determinant of health.

At the interpersonal level, the review confirms that ageist attitudes and stereotypes remain widespread among healthcare students and professionals, with tan-

Table 2. Types of ageism and associated specific outcomes: evidence from the scoping review (n=55).

Type	Specific outcome	Studies
Internalized / Self Ageism	Internalized stereotypes and self-stigma	Aytulun & Erden Aki, 2022
	Psychological well-being	Naughton-Doe <i>et al.</i> 2024; Gallistl <i>et al.</i> 2024; Chenhuichen <i>et al.</i> 2024; Bellanova <i>et al.</i> 2024
Individual / Interpersonal Ageism	Attitudes and stereotypes toward older adults	Özdil <i>et al.</i> 2021; Knight <i>et al.</i> 2022; Heckemann <i>et al.</i> 2022; Schüttengruber <i>et al.</i> 2022; Castellano-Rioja <i>et al.</i> 2022; Nitschke <i>et al.</i> 2022; Cerqueira <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Allué-Sierra <i>et al.</i> 2023; Lampersberger <i>et al.</i> 2023; Piaton <i>et al.</i> 2024; D'hondt <i>et al.</i> 2024; Gümüşler Başaran <i>et al.</i> 2024; Pons <i>et al.</i> 2025; Elvira-Zorzo and Vega Rodríguez 2025; Catalao <i>et al.</i> 2025
	Clinical communication and care quality	Gram <i>et al.</i> 2023; Martínez-Angulo <i>et al.</i> 2023a; Martínez-Angulo <i>et al.</i> 2023b; Draper <i>et al.</i> 2024
Institutional / Organizational Ageism	Organizational practices and workforce outcomes in hospital and socio-healthcare settings	López-Frutos <i>et al.</i> 2022; Helaß <i>et al.</i> 2024
	Education and training effects	Fitzpatrick <i>et al.</i> 2021; Fernandes <i>et al.</i> 2022; Piaton <i>et al.</i> 2023; Bouwmeester Stjernetun <i>et al.</i> 2024a; Bouwmeester Stjernetun <i>et al.</i> 2024b; Başer and Hisar 2024; Pearson <i>et al.</i> 2025
Structural / Systemic Ageism	Health inequities and access to care	Trevisan <i>et al.</i> 2021; Miralles <i>et al.</i> 2021; Crosignani <i>et al.</i> 2021; Pinho and Araújo 2022; McDonald, 2022; Rodriguez-Rodriguez <i>et al.</i> 2022; Settels and Leist 2022; Teaster and Giwa 2023; Uwitonze <i>et al.</i> 2024; Paar <i>et al.</i> 2024; Fumagalli <i>et al.</i> 2025
	Ethical, normative and symbolic outcomes	Nitschke <i>et al.</i> 2021; Lloyd-Sherlock <i>et al.</i> 2022; Langmann 2023; Bows <i>et al.</i> 2024; Bortolotti, 2025; Costa <i>et al.</i> 2025; Langmann <i>et al.</i> 2025
	Digital ageism and service design	Mannheim <i>et al.</i> 2021; Comincioli <i>et al.</i> 2022; Stypińska and Franke 2023; Van Kolschooten 2023

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

gible implications for clinical communication, care quality, and professional trajectories. A substantial portion of the literature focuses on educational settings, underscoring the formative role of health professions training in shaping representations of ageing and older patients. Notably, many studies highlight implicit and ambivalent forms of ageism, suggesting that discrimination may persist even in contexts where explicit attitudes appear neutral or positive. This has important implications for policy and regulation in health education: curricula should systematically integrate ageing and ageism as cross-cutting themes, emphasizing reflective practice, ethical reasoning, and sustained exposure to older adults in varied care settings. Regulatory bodies and accreditation agencies may play a key role in promoting minimum standards for age-inclusive education across health professions.

Institutional and organizational ageism represents a critical meso-level dimension connecting individual attitudes with system-level outcomes. The reviewed studies show how age-based stereotypes are embedded in organizational cultures, workforce management practices, and service delivery models, particularly in hospital and long-term care contexts. These dynamics affect not only older patients but also healthcare workers, contributing to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and intentions

to leave among staff working with older populations. At the same time, the evidence indicates that organizationally supported training and educational interventions can mitigate ageist attitudes and strengthen professional competencies. From a policy standpoint, this suggests the importance of embedding age-inclusivity into organizational governance, quality assurance frameworks, and workforce strategies, rather than treating ageism solely as an individual ethical issue.

Structural and systemic ageism emerges as the most extensively documented level in the reviewed literature, reflecting growing concern about age-based inequities in healthcare access, resource allocation, and policy responses. The findings illustrate how ageism is institutionalized through healthcare policies, legal frameworks, and crisis management strategies, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Age-based thresholds for diagnostics, preventive services, or intensive treatments exemplify how chronological age is often used as a proxy for vulnerability, efficiency, or social worth, rather than clinical need or individual preference. These practices raise critical ethical and governance issues and underscore the need for policy instruments that explicitly address ageism within health systems. Integrating age-sensitive equity assessments into health policy design and evaluation could represent a concrete step toward reducing

structural ageism and ensuring that resource allocation decisions are transparent, proportionate, and justifiable.

An emerging and particularly policy-relevant theme concerns digital ageism and technological innovation in healthcare. Several studies highlight the risk that digital health tools, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic decision-making may reproduce or amplify age-based biases if older adults are inadequately represented in design, testing, and implementation processes. Assumptions about limited digital competence among older people can lead to exclusionary service models and reinforce existing inequalities. These findings point to the need for regulatory and governance frameworks that explicitly consider age-related bias in digital health technologies, as well as for participatory approaches that involve older adults in co-design and evaluation. Addressing digital ageism is especially urgent given the rapid expansion of digital healthcare and its growing role in shaping access, quality, and continuity of care.

From a methodological perspective, the predominance of quantitative and cross-sectional designs highlights the need for more longitudinal, mixed-methods, and intervention-based research capable of capturing how ageism evolves over time and across institutional contexts. Greater conceptual and measurement consistency would also strengthen the evidence base and support more effective policy translation. While this review deliberately focused on the European context, the structural mechanisms identified are likely to operate across different welfare regimes, suggesting the value of comparative and transnational research to inform policy learning.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The restriction to English-language publications and to two major databases may have led to the exclusion of relevant studies, and, consistent with scoping review methodology, no formal quality appraisal was conducted. Moreover, the heterogeneity of ageism conceptualizations and outcome measures limits direct comparability across studies. Nevertheless, the review provides a robust and timely synthesis of a rapidly expanding field, offering a policy-relevant framework for understanding how ageism shapes healthcare systems and outcomes.

Overall, the findings indicate that tackling ageism in healthcare requires coordinated, multi-level policy action. Interventions focused solely on individual attitudes are unlikely to produce sustainable change if organizational routines and structural incentives remain unaltered. Conversely, system-level reforms that overlook everyday clinical interactions risk remaining symbolic. An integrated approach, linking education, organizational governance, health system design, and regulatory oversight, is therefore essential to promote equitable,

age-inclusive, and person-centered healthcare systems in ageing societies.

5. CONCLUSION

This scoping review highlights ageism as a pervasive and structurally embedded phenomenon in healthcare and social care systems, with far-reaching implications for older adults' health, well-being, and social inclusion. By synthesizing recent European evidence, the study demonstrates that ageism operates across interconnected levels, from internalized beliefs to systemic policies, producing cumulative and mutually reinforcing effects. Addressing ageism, therefore, requires moving beyond isolated interventions toward integrated, multi-level strategies that simultaneously target individual attitudes, professional practices, organizational cultures, and policy frameworks.

The findings underscore the importance of early and continuous education on ageing and ageism within health professions training, as well as the need for organizational commitment to age-inclusive practices in workforce management and service delivery. At the policy level, greater attention is needed to ensure that healthcare systems do not rely on chronological age as a proxy for vulnerability or value, particularly in contexts of resource scarcity and technological innovation. Finally, the emerging evidence on digital ageism calls for inclusive design, ethical oversight, and regulatory safeguards to prevent the reproduction of age-based inequalities in digital health.

Overall, this review contributes to consolidating ageism as a key social determinant of health and provides a conceptual and empirical basis for future research and action aimed at promoting equity, dignity, and justice across the life-course and within increasingly complex and digitalized health systems

REFERENCES

- Allué-Sierra L., Antón-Solanas I., Rodríguez-Roca B., Anguas-Gracia A., Echániz-Serrano E., Fernández-Rodrigo M. T., ... and Satústegui-Dordá P. J. (2023), «Ageism and nursing students, past or reality?: A systematic review», in *Nurse Education Today*, 122: 105739.
- Ayalon L. and Tesch-Römer C. (2018), *Contemporary perspectives on ageism*, Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73820-8>
- Ayalon L., Chasteen A., Diehl M., Becca R. L., Shevaun D. N., Rothermund K., Tesch-Römer C., and Hans-

- Werner W. (2021), «Aging in times of the COVID-19 pandemic: Avoiding ageism and fostering intergenerational solidarity», in *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 76(2): 49–52. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbaa051>
- Aytulun A. and Erden Aki Ö.S. (2022), «Relationship Between Perceived Ageism, Autonomy, And Symptoms Of Depression And Anxiety During The COVID-19 Curfew In Old Age Psychiatric Patients», in *Turkish Journal Of Geriatrics/Türk Geriatri Dergisi*, 25(3).
- Başer G. and Hisar F. (2024), «Effect of interventions for health care students to develop positive attitude toward the elderly: A meta-analysis study», in *Geriatrics & Gerontology International*, 24(12): 1370-1379.
- Bellanova M., Romaioli D. and Contarello A. (2024), «Stemming the “ageism pandemic”: A qualitative inquiry with older adults in residential care facilities during the COVID-19 outbreak», in *Journal of Health Psychology*, 29(4): 332-346.
- Bortolotti L. (2025), *Epistemic Justice in Mental Healthcare: Recognising Agency and Promoting Virtues Across the Life Span*, Springer Nature.
- Bouwmeester Stjernetun B., Gillsjö C., Odzakovic E. and Hallgren J. (2024a), «“It’s like walking in a bubble”, nursing students’ perspectives on age suit simulation in a home environment—group interviews from reflection seminars», in *BMC nursing*, 23(1): 124.
- Bouwmeester Stjernetun B., Hallgren J. and Gillsjö C. (2024b), «Effects of an age suit simulation on nursing students’ perspectives on providing care to older persons—an education intervention study», in *Educational gerontology*, 50(3): 240-253.
- Bows H., Bromley P. and Walklate S. (2024), «Practitioner understandings of older victims of abuse and their perpetrators: not ideal enough?», in *The British Journal of Criminology*, 64(3): 620-637.
- Burnes D., Sheppard C., Henderson C. R., Jr. Wassel M., Cope R., Barber C. and Pillemer K. (2019), «Interventions to reduce ageism against older adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis», in *American Journal of Public Health*, 109(8): e1–e9. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305123>
- Butler R. N. (1969), «Age-ism: Another form of bigotry», in *The Gerontologist*, 9(4): 243–246. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/9.4_Part_1.243
- Bytheway B. (1995), *Ageism. Rethinking ageing*, Buckingham, PA: Open University Press.
- Cardano M. (2020), *Defending qualitative research: Design, analysis, and textualization*, Routledge.
- Castellano-Rioja E., Botella-Navas M., López-Hernández L., Martínez-Arnau F. M. and Pérez-Ros P. (2022), «Caring for the elderly enhances positive attitudes better than knowledge in nursing students», in *Medicina*, 58(9): 1201.
- Catalao M. J., Arco H., Carrajola N. and Tavares J. (2025), «Ageism among newly graduated nurses: The influence of sociodemographic variables and gerontogeriatric nursing education», in *Nurse Education in Practice*, 83: 104285.
- Cerqueira A. F., Ramos A. L. and Palma J. (2023), «Ageism in nursing education: Students’ views of ageing», in *Social Sciences*, 12(3): 142.
- Cesari M., Canevelli M., Zhang W., Thiagarajan J. A., Azzolino D., Cherubini A., ... and Moorthy V. (2025), «Enhancing the methodology of clinical trials in older people: A scoping review with global perspective», in *The Journal of nutrition, health and aging*, 29(6): 100582.
- Chang E. S., Kanno S., Levy S., Wang S. Y., Lee J. E. and Levy B. R. (2020), «Global reach of ageism on older persons’ health: A systematic review», in *PloS ONE*, 15(1): e0220857. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0220857>
- Chenhuichen C., O’Halloran A. M., Lang D., Kenny R. A. and Romero-Ortuno R. (2024), «The lived experience of frailty: beyond classification and towards a holistic understanding of health», in *European Geriatric Medicine*, 15(2): 435-444.
- Chrisler J. C., Barney A. and Palatino B. (2016), «Ageism can be hazardous to women’s health: Ageism, sexism, and stereotypes of aging», in *Journal of Social Issues*, 72(1): 86–104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12156>
- Comincioli E., Hakoköngäs E. and Masoodian M. (2022), «Identifying and addressing implicit ageism in the co-design of services for aging people», in *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(13): 7667.
- COST (2015), «Ageism. A multi national, interdisciplinary perspective», in *EU Framework Programme Horizon 2020. European Commission*, Retrieved May 22, 2015, from http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/isch/Actions/IS1402.
- Costa J. R., Quintero-Flórez A., García-Cabrera E., Romero-Barranca J. and Vilches-Arenas Á. (2025), «Ageism and the feminization of old age: A Systematic review», in *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 106084.
- Crosignani S., Fantinati J. and Cesari M. (2021), «Frailty and geriatric medicine during the pandemic», in *Frontiers in Medicine*, 8: 673814.
- D’hondt S., Aujoulat I. and Degryse J. M. (2024), «Development and validation of a revised ambivalent age-

- ism scale for use in the health care sector: The AASHc», in *The Gerontologist*, 64(4): gnad136.
- Draper E. J., Meiboom A. A., van Dijk N., Ket J. C., Kusurkar R. A. and Smalbrugge M. (2024), «How do ageism, death anxiety and ageing anxiety among medical students and residents affect their attitude towards medical care for older patients: a systematic review», in *BMC medical education*, 24(1): 199.
- Elvira-Zorzo M. N. and Vega Rodríguez M. T. (2025), «Changing Attitudes Towards Retirement and Ageing Through Flipped Classroom and Collaborative Learning: A Social Psychological Study with Psychology and Social Work Students», in *Social Sciences*, 14(9): 562.
- Fernandes J. B., Ramos C., Domingos J., Castro C., Simões A., Bernardes C., Fonseca J., Proença L., Grunho M., Moleirinho-Alves P., Simões S., Sousa-Catita D., Vareta D. A. and Godinho C. (2022), «Addressing Ageism—Be Active in Aging: Study Protocol», in *Journal of Personalized Medicine*, 12(3): 354. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jpm12030354>
- Fitzpatrick J. M., Hayes N., Naughton C. and Ezhova I. (2021), «Evaluating a specialist education programme for nurses and allied health professionals working in older people care: A qualitative analysis of motivations and impact», in *Nurse Education Today*, 97: 104708.
- Fumagalli C., Zampieri M., Presta R., Pini G., Vetere G., Argirò A., ... and Cappelli F. (2025), «Prognostic Value of Malnutrition, Frailty, and Physical Performance in Transthyretin Cardiac Amyloidosis: Insights From a Prospective Multicenter Cohort Study», in *Circulation: Heart Failure*, e012777.
- Gallistl V., Richter L., Heidinger T., Schütz T., Rohner R., Hengl L. and Kolland F. (2024), «Precarious ageing in a global pandemic—older adults' experiences of being at risk due to COVID-19», in *Ageing & Society*, 44(5): 991-1009.
- Gram E. G., Knudsen S. W., Brodersen J. B. and Jønsson A. B. R. (2023), «Women's experiences of age-related discontinuation from mammography screening: A qualitative interview study», in *Health Expectations*, 26(3): 1096-1106.
- Grosse A. and Kokorelias K. (2025), «Exploring ageism in medical education: A scoping review of the educational factors affecting the attitudes of medical students and junior doctors towards older inpatients», in *Australasian journal on ageing*, 44(1): e70016.
- Gümüşler Başaran A., Genç Köse B. and Kefeli Çol B. (2024), «Elderly Discrimination, Willingness to Provide Care to the Elderly and View on Aging of Students in Some Departments in the Field of Health», in *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, 5035-5045.
- Heckemann B., Schüttengruber G., Wolf A., Großschädl F. and Holmberg C. (2022), «Attitudes towards oldest-old adults (age ≥ 80 years): A survey and international comparison between Swedish and Austrian nursing students», in *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 36(4): 1083-1093.
- Helaß M., Greinacher A., Müller A., Friederich H. C., Maatouk I. and Nikendei C. (2024), «The role of negative age stereotypes and sociodemographic factors in the intention to leave among German university hospital nursing staff», in *INQUIRY: The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, 61: 00469580241277912.
- Knight R. L., Chalabaev A., McNarry M. A., Mackintosh K. A. and Hudson J. (2022), «Do age stereotype-based interventions affect health-related outcomes in older adults? A systematic review and future directions», in *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 27(2): 338-373.
- Lampersberger L. M., Schüttengruber G., Lohrmann C. and Großschädl F. (2023), «Nurses' perspectives on caring for and attitudes towards adults aged eighty years and older», in *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 37(2): 458-471.
- Langmann E. (2023), «Vulnerability, ageism, and health: is it helpful to label older adults as a vulnerable group in health care?», in *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*, 26(1): 133-142.
- Langmann E., Kainradl A. C., Weßel M. and Rokvity A. (2025), «Endometriosis in later life: an intersectional analysis from the perspective of epistemic injustice», in *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*, 28(1): 151-159.
- Levy B. R. (2017), «Age-stereotype paradox: Opportunity for social change», in *The Journals of Gerontology*, 57(Suppl. 2): S118-S126. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnx059>
- Lloyd-Sherlock P., Guntupalli A. and Sempé L. (2022), «Age discrimination, the right to life, and COVID-19 vaccination in countries with limited resources», in *Journal of Social Issues*, 78(4): 883-899.
- López-Frutos P., Pérez-Rojo G., Noriega C., Velasco C., Carretero I., Martínez-Huertas J. Á., Galarraga L. and López J. (2022), «Burnout and quality of life in professionals working in nursing homes: the moderating effect of stereotypes», in *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13: 772896.
- Mannheim I., Wouters E. J., van Boekel L. C. and van Zaaen Y. (2021), «Attitudes of health care professionals toward older adults' abilities to use digital

- technology: Questionnaire study», in *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 23(4): e26232.
- Marques S., Mariano J., Mendonça J., De Tavernier W., Hess M., Naegele L., Peixeiro F. and Martins D. (2020), «Determinants of ageism against older adults: A systematic review», in *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(7): 2560, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17072560>
- Martínez-Angulo P., Munoz-Mora M., Rich-Ruiz M., Ventura-Puertos P. E., Cantón-Habas V. and López-Quero S. (2023a), «“With your age, what do you expect?»: Ageism and healthcare of older adults in Spain», in *Geriatric nursing*, 51: 84–94.
- Martínez-Angulo P., Rich-Ruiz M., Ventura-Puertos P. E. and López-Quero S. (2023b), «Integrating shared decision-making, expressing preferences and active participation of older adults in primary care nursing: a systematic review of qualitative studies and qualitative meta-synthesis», in *BMJ open*, 13(6): e071549.
- McDarby M., Ju C. H., Picchiello M. C. and Carpenter B. D. (2022), «Older adults’ perceptions and experiences of ageism during the COVID-19 pandemic», in *The Journal of social issues*, 10.1111/josi.12557. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12557>
- McDonald T. (2022), «Lethal ageism in the shadow of pandemic response tactics», in *International Nursing Review*, 69(2): 249–254.
- Mikton C., de la Fuente-Núñez V., Officer A. and Krug E. (2021), «Ageism: a social determinant of health that has come of age», in *Lancet* (London, England), 397(10282): 1333–1334. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)00524-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)00524-9)
- Miralles O., Sanchez-Rodriguez D., Marco E., Annweiler C., Baztan A., Betancor É., ... and Vall-Llosera E. (2021), «Unmet needs, health policies, and actions during the COVID-19 pandemic: a report from six European countries», in *European geriatric medicine*, 12(1): 193–204.
- Munn Z., Peters M. D., Stern C., Tufanaru C., McArthur A. and Aromataris E. (2018), «Systematic review or scoping review? Guidance for authors when choosing between a systematic or scoping review approach», in *BMC medical research methodology*, 18(1): 143.
- Naughton-Doe R., Barke J., Manchester H., Willis P., & Wigfield A. (2024), «Ethical issues when interviewing older people about loneliness: reflections and recommendations for an effective methodological approach», in *Ageing & Society*, 44(7): 1681–1699.
- Nitschke I., Gegner U., Hopfenmüller W., Sobotta B. A. and Jockusch J. (2022), «Student perceptions of age and ageing—an evaluation of Swiss dental students receiving education in gerodontology», in *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(12): 7480.
- Nitschke I., Hahnel S. and Jockusch J. (2021), «Health-related social and ethical considerations towards the utilization of dental medical services by seniors: influencing and protective factors, vulnerability, resilience and sense of coherence», in *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(4): 2048.
- Özdil K., Öztürk G. K., Çatiker A. and Büyüksoy G. D. B. (2021), «Views of senior nursing students on the problems of the elderly during the COVID-19 process and attitudes against ageism», in *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Hemşirelik Fakültesi Elektronik Dergisi*, 14(4): 357–369.
- Paar E., De Lai E., Držaić M., Kummer I., Bužančić I., Ortner Hadžiabdić M., ... and Fialová D. (2024), «Fall risk-increasing drugs and associated health outcomes among community-dwelling older patients: A cross-sectional study in Croatian cohort of the EuroAgeism H2020 project», in *Acta pharmaceutica*, 74(4): 635–653.
- Paoletti I. (2024), «Ageism: The Need for New Imagery for Growing Old», In Paoletti, I. (eds) *Creating New Meanings For Old Age*, pp. 35–62. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-5041-2_2
- Pearson G. M., Dowling S., Ben-Shlomo Y. and Henderson E. J. (2025), «Inspiring tomorrow’s geriatricians: a qualitative exploration of the facilitators and barriers to medical students choosing geriatric medicine», in *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, 1–15.
- Peterson J., Pearce P. F., Ferguson L. A. and Langford C. A. (2017), «Understanding scoping reviews: Definition, purpose, and process», in *Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners*, 29(1): 12–16.
- Pham M. T., Rajić A., Greig J. D., Sargeant J. M., Papadopoulos A. and McEwen S. A. (2014), «A scoping review of scoping reviews: advancing the approach and enhancing the consistency», in *Research synthesis methods*, 5(4): 371–385.
- Piaton S., Adam S., Roger-Leroi V. and Vallet G. T. (2024), «Implicit ageism in dental students: general representations of ageing health and specific representations of the mouth», in *Educational Gerontology*, 50(7): 659–670.
- Piaton S., Roger-Leroi V., Vallet G. (2023), «Specific form of ageism in dental care: Convergent validity of the Ageism Scale for Dental Students and its implications

- for education», in *European Journal of Dental Education*, 27(2): 368-373.
- Pinho M. and Araújo A. (2022), «How to fairly allocate scarce medical resources? Controversial preferences of healthcare professionals with different personal characteristics», in *Health Economics, Policy and Law*, 17(4): 398-415.
- Poli S. (2020), «Invecchiamento e Coronavirus: la costruzione sociale del rischio e la marginalizzazione degli anziani oltre il lockdown», in *Società Mutamento Politica*, 11(21): 271-280. <https://doi.org/10.13128/smp-11967>
- Pons E. G., Pinazo-Clapés C., Galan A. S., Pinazo-Hernandis S. and Esquivia I. C. (2025), «Ageism and suicide: A structural equation modeling analysis and evaluation of a high-fidelity simulation-based intervention for future healthcare professionals», in *Geriatric Nursing*, 66: 103674.
- Previtali F., Allen L. D. and Varlamova M. (2020), «Not only virus spread: The diffusion of ageism during the outbreak of COVID-19», in *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 32(4-5): 506-514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08959420.2020.1772002>
- Rodriguez-Rodriguez V., Rojo-Perez F., Perez de Arenaza Escribano C., Molina-Martínez M. Á., Fernandez-Mayoralas G., Sánchez-González D., Rojo-Abuin J., Rodríguez-Blázquez C., João Forjaz M. and Martin Garcia S. (2022), «The impact of COVID-19 on nursing homes: study design and population description», in *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(24): 16629.
- Schüttengruber G., Stolz E., Lohrmann C., Kriebner U., Halfens R. and Großschädl F. (2022), «Attitudes towards older adults (80 years and older): a measurement with the ageing semantic differential-a cross-sectional study of Austrian students», in *International journal of older people nursing*, 17(3): e12430.
- Settels J. and Leist A. K. (2022), «The role of country-level availability and generosity of healthcare services, and old-age ageism for missed healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic control measures in Europe», in *Journal of aging and health*, 34(6-8): 1016-1036.
- Snellman F. (2016), «Whose ageism? The reinvigoration and definitions of an elusive concept», in *Nordic Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19012276.2015.1125301>.
- Springer F., Matsuoka A., Obama K., Mehnert-Theuerkauf A., Uchitomi Y. and Fujimori M. (2025), «Quality of life in older patients with cancer and related unmet needs: a scoping review», in *Acta Oncologica*, 64: 42602.
- Stypińska J. and Franke A. (2023), «AI revolution in healthcare and medicine and the (re-) emergence of inequalities and disadvantages for ageing population», in *Frontiers in Sociology*, 7: 1038854.
- Teaster P. B. and Giwa A. O. (2023), «Ageism as a source of global mental health inequity», in *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 25(10): 765-770.
- Trevisan C., Pedone C., Maggi S., Noale M., Di Bari M., Sojic A., ... and Epicovid Working Group (2021), «Accessibility to SARS-CoV-2 swab test during the COVID-19 pandemic: Did age make the difference?», in *Health policy*, 125(12): 1580-1586.
- Tricco A. C., Lillie E., Zarin W., O'Brien K. K., Colquhoun H., Levac D., Moher D., Peters M. D. J., Horsley T., Weeks L., Hempel S., Akl E. A., Chang C., McGowan J., Stewart L., Hartling L., Aldcroft A., Wilson M. G., Garritty C., ... and Straus S. E. (2018), «PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR): Checklist and explanation», in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 169(7): 467-473. <https://doi.org/10.7326/M18-0850>.
- United Nations (2024), *World population prospects 2024: Highlights*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- Uwitonze J. P., Duminy L. and Blankart C. R. (2024), «Identifying health inequities faced by older adults with rare diseases: A systematic literature review and proposal for an ethical spectrum and resource allocation framework», in *Health Policy*, 149: 105176.
- Van Kolfshoeten H. (2023), «The AI cycle of health inequity and digital ageism: mitigating biases through the EU regulatory framework on medical devices», in *Journal of Law and the Biosciences*, 10(2): lsad031.
- WHO (2021), *Global report on ageism*, World Health Organization.
- WHO (2025), *Ageing and health*, World Health Organization.



Citation: Baglioni, L.G. (2026). L'artificazione nelle mode. Una lettura sociologica. *Società Mutamento Politica* 17(33):227-234. doi:10.36253/smp-17645

© 2026 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

ORCID:
LGB: 0000-0001-8025-2424

Passim

L'artificazione nelle mode. Una lettura sociologica

Artification in fashion. A sociological reading

LORENZO G. BAGLIONI

Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italia
E-mail: lorenzogrifone.baglioni@unifi.it

Abstract. Can fashion be considered one of the possible worlds of art? Fashion, the aesthetic economy par excellence, is more often associated with craftsmanship than with art. However, a progressive artification of fashion regarding the function and structure of clothing is undeniable, at least in relation to specific contexts, actors, and creations. This process originated with the early talented tailors and evolved through both the historical and new avant-gardes. As a bodily simulacrum, the garment is capable of amplifying symbolic meanings – all the more so in the case of an art-garment. Using a sociological key, this essay analyzes the relational dynamics, the normative dimension, the characteristics of artisticity, and the stages of artification in fashion, considering the different approaches adopted by fashion designers and artists.

Keywords: fashion sociology, creative authorship, art garments, artification strategies, artification phases.

1. PREMESSA

La moda, ben diversa dal semplice abbigliamento, è un processo creativo che vede coinvolti numerosi e differenti attori (Kawamura 2006) rispetto al quale l'accostamento all'arte appare una rodada strategia di comunicazione (Baglioni 2019). Si tratta di un espediente retorico che i propri attori utilizzano allo scopo di impossessarsi del valore aggiunto dell'arte impiegandolo a proprio vantaggio. In tal modo, fanno leva sulla comune appartenenza di arte e di moda alla vasta sfera della cultura. La moda costituisce però un'economia estetica (Entwistle 2002), mentre l'arte non viene mai accostata all'economia. Nelle economie estetiche, come anche la gioielleria o il furniture e i tanti altri settori del lusso o del design, il lato economico e il lato creativo sono parimenti rilevanti.

Nella moda, estetica e mercato entrano perciò a pieno titolo nel processo di produzione culturale. Nell'arte, il processo di produzione culturale è fondamentalmente legato al lato creativo, mentre il lato economico viene considerato, a torto o a ragione, come marginale. Quindi, al di là del fatto

che un'opera d'arte abbia un proprio valore di mercato (Beatrice 2025), le considerazioni di tipo economico non sono o non dovrebbero essere rilevanti nel processo di produzione culturale legato all'arte (Heinich 2004). Con la moda accade il contrario, perché il valore di mercato e l'utilità funzionale convivono con il valore estetico e concettuale degli abiti.

Esiste perciò una sorta di 'peccato originale' della moda, anche se non sempre è così (Kim 1998; Miller 2007). Diviene allora interessante osservare e riconoscere gli episodi di artificazione nella moda ossia i percorsi che conducono alla sua trasformazione da non-arte in arte (Shapiro e Heinich 2012).

Sociologicamente, la relazione tra arte e moda è osservabile rispetto agli attori (e quindi agli stilisti, ma anche agli artisti, che si cimentano nel campo vestimentario), agli oggetti (e quindi agli abiti d'arte e, più in generale, alle opere d'arte a carattere vestimentario) e alle istituzioni (come musei, gallerie, accademie, università, pubblicazioni scientifiche, performance o sfilate) (Pedroni e Volontè 2012).

Rispetto agli attori, cosa può fare di uno stilista un artista? Cosa determina la trasversalità di uno stilista rispetto all'arte e alla moda? Sono fundamentalmente le sue pratiche a dirlo. Quindi se si definisce e se viene definito artista, se fa mecenatismo artistico, se collabora con artisti, se appare stilisticamente innovativo, se appare indipendente dalle tendenze dominanti, se riesce a sollevare riflessioni su temi che sono socialmente rilevanti, se appare disinteressato rispetto al tornaconto economico o se mostra un percorso formativo e professionale peculiare.

Rispetto agli oggetti, perché un abito viene considerato un'opera d'arte? Perché si tratta di un oggetto unico, prezioso o innovativo, perché non ha utilità pratica come abito da indossare, perché è esteticamente o concettualmente capace di far riflettere, perché si trova in un museo o in una collezione.

Rispetto alle istituzioni, in base a cosa diviene possibile accostare arte e moda? Accade quando i musei ospitano raccolte di abiti o retrospettive su stilisti, quando le accademie d'arte e le università attivano corsi dedicati alla moda, quando le pubblicazioni scientifiche individuano punti di contatto tra arte e moda o quando le performance e le sfilate divengono happening di arte e moda.

Sia che si tratti di attori, di oggetti o di istituzioni, è innegabile che tra arte e moda esistano similitudini e ibridazioni, così come differenze e conflitti, e questo sia all'epoca della nascita della moda e sia al giorno d'oggi (Calò e Scudero 2009).

La moda aspira ad essere considerata un'arte perché le porta prestigio, ciò le concede una sorta di 'patente di

nobiltà' che ne legittima il pregio e ne giustifica gli eccessi – ovviamente, tutto questo serve anche ad aumentare i prezzi degli abiti e la notorietà degli stilisti. Al contrario, nessuna arte aspira ad essere considerata una moda.

L'arte è circondata da un'aura d'eternità, mentre la moda è passeggera per definizione. L'arte è 'seria', mentre la moda è 'frivola'. L'arte è contenuto estetico o concettuale, mentre la moda è fatturato e utilità. In realtà, trattandosi di fenomeni della cultura, arte e moda si influenzano reciprocamente da sempre, in misura maggiore o minore a seconda delle contingenze e degli specifici casi, oggi ancor più di un tempo. In una società complessa e mutevole come quella attuale, le possibili connessioni tra arte e moda sono infatti molto più frequenti e molto più diversificate (Mariani 2022).

2. TRA ARTE E ARTIGIANATO, IL POSTO DELLA MODA

Appare opportuno sottolineare che, diversamente da quanto è avvenuto in passato, oggi l'arte non appare separata dalla quotidianità delle esperienze personali e dei fatti sociali, non è qualcosa di autoevidente e di totemico. Proprio per questo, anziché di arte, appare più proficuo parlare di mondi dell'arte (Becker 2004), da immaginare come l'insieme degli aspetti relazionali e normativi che coinvolgono attori, oggetti e istituzioni appartenenti a ciascuno di essi – dal creatore di opere proprie all'esecutore di opere altrui, dal tecnico al pubblico, dall'assessore alla cultura di un ente territoriale al socio di un ente culturale e così via.

Ciò suggerisce che la produzione e che la comunicazione dell'arte oggi si basano su di un'ampia divisione del lavoro, per cui molte persone che non sono artisti in senso proprio forniscono comunque legittimazione, supporto, servizi e spazi necessari alla creazione e alla diffusione dell'arte. Ciò suggerisce anche che è possibile ricostruire le dinamiche e gli equilibri di questi ambiti a partire dalle pratiche di coloro che ne fanno parte.

In ogni mondo dell'arte, i membri individuano chi sia artista e quali siano le istituzioni di quell'ambito, definiscono ciò che è arte e ciò che non è arte in quell'ambito. In sostanza, i membri decidono chi o cosa sta dentro o sta fuori rispetto a quello specifico mondo dell'arte, che è uno dei tanti mondi dell'arte possibili. Ognuno di questi ambiti è animato da un fermento culturale che viene condiviso dai propri membri. L'uso di un linguaggio accomunante lo facilita, così come facilita l'originalità e la fruibilità del fare arte, creando condivisione e comunicazione – ad esempio, 'quinta diminuita', 'la bemolle maggiore' o 'adagio sostenuto' significa-

no qualcosa di ben preciso per gli addetti ai lavori della musica, mentre un esterno ne ha spesso solo una vaga idea. Ciò significa che l'opera d'arte è come se venisse costruita in quanto tale attraverso un processo collettivo che coinvolge autori, critici, galleristi, collezionisti, pubblico e quant'altri interessati (Becker 1974).

Parlare di mondi dell'arte vuol dire sottolineare l'esistenza di un complesso plurimo di manifestazioni artistiche negli ambiti più disparati della società. Non esiste un'arte che manifesta la propria alterità e la propria superiorità rispetto alle molte possibili forme culturali pregiate, ma ci sono tanti mondi dell'arte che sono altrettante forme culturali pregiate e che possiedono ciascuno la propria specificità relazionale e normativa.

Non si tratta – come avrebbe fatto Leon Battista Alberti (Borsi 1973) – solo di suddividere tra pittura, scultura o architettura, piuttosto si tratta di osservare ambiti ben specifici – ad esempio, i graffitari o i musicisti di fado, i creatori di Non Fungible Tokens o i Breakdancers. La suddivisione in mondi dell'arte appare particolarmente dettagliata ed è senz'altro destinata ad aumentare e ad approfondirsi al giorno d'oggi, in un panorama artistico costellato da opere d'arte non facilmente discernibili dagli oggetti e dalle azioni del comune quotidiano (Danto 2010).

Appare di particolare interesse sottolineare il criterio d'intenzionalità che contraddistingue i mondi dell'arte, strategico nella lettura sociologica (Husserl 2002). In questo caso, intenzionalità significa che l'arte è ciò che coloro che fanno parte di uno specifico mondo dell'arte considerano come tale (Maus 1969). Da ciò discende che una persona è considerata artista perché si dice artista e perché è riconosciuta come artista. L'arte è la sua attività perché lui/lei e gli altri membri dello stesso ambito etichettano questa sua attività come arte. L'affermazione e il riconoscimento di questa intenzionalità legittimano la persona come artista e definiscono le sue creazioni come opere d'arte.

Ciò significa che se il fine di ogni mondo dell'arte è la produzione di arte, i propri membri condividono la capacità di comprendere il 'senso' o il 'valore aggiunto' di quel tipo di forma culturale pregiata che essi stessi chiamano arte. Tutto questo dà luogo a tante definizioni di arte quanti sono i mondi dell'arte, tante definizioni di arte che segnalano i confini dei diversi mondi dell'arte (Miller 2012). Non si tratta di ambiti chiusi, ma tendenzialmente permeabili, ognuno di essi addensato attorno alla propria definizione di arte. Sono dinamici al proprio interno e sono porosi verso l'esterno. Cambiano nello spazio e nel tempo, potendo giungere a contaminarsi o a ibridarsi. Sono aperti alla ridefinizione della propria arte, del novero dei propri attori, dello statuto dei propri oggetti e del ruolo delle proprie istituzioni.

Diversamente da altre discipline che tentano di definire a priori lo status dell'artista o dell'opera d'arte, la sociologia pone in evidenza le relazioni interpersonali e istituzionali che animano questi ambiti, così come pone in evidenza le norme tacite e palesi che li regolano. Intendere l'arte come un insieme di diversi ambiti fatti di persone, opere e istituzioni, consente di lasciare sullo sfondo le questioni dell'estetica o della novità, del gusto o dell'unicità, della bravura o della genialità, che sono argomenti mancanti di oggettività a fronte della tangibilità delle relazioni e delle norme. Ogni mondo dell'arte è perciò individuato da un reticolo relazionale particolare e da un sistema normativo specifico che sono funzionali alla propria esistenza. Adottando determinate strategie di artificazione, la moda può rivelarsi, in tutto o in parte, uno di questi ambiti.

L'essere considerata un'economia artistica, relega però la moda nell'artigianato, non l'avvicina all'arte. La differenza tra arte e artigianato, che sostanzialmente non si pone nella Classicità (Tatarkiewicz 2020), viene sancita con chiarezza solo a partire dal Rinascimento (Kristeller 2005). Da quel momento in poi, l'artigianato viene definito come un'attività finalizzata all'utilità, mentre l'arte viene definita come un'attività finalizzata all'estetica. A fianco delle già esistenti Arti Liberali, relative alle lettere (grammatica, retorica e dialettica) e alle scienze (aritmetica, geometria, astronomia e musica), vengono introdotte le Belle Arti a carattere figurativo (pittura, scultura e architettura).

Se nel corso dei secoli il senso dell'arte muta riflettendo le trasformazioni della società (Heinich 2022), la definizione di artigianato resta invariata. Ciò mette in luce l'opposizione binaria tra ciò che è utile, l'artigianato, e ciò che non lo è, l'arte (Derrida 1969). La principale motivazione per assegnare alla moda il suo posto nell'artigianato risiede proprio nella sua utilità ossia nella sua funzione vestimentaria. Ha però senso chiedersi se tutta la moda sia una forma di artigianato.

A questo scopo, e a fianco dell'artigianato, appare opportuno contemplare l'esistenza dell'artigianato artistico (Becker 2004), dando luogo ad una tipologia che approfondisce la semplice dicotomia tra artigianato e arte. L'artigianato comune produce oggetti utili, mentre l'artigianato artistico produce oggetti utili dotati di contenuto stilistico. In entrambi i casi, la produzione si rivolge alle necessità della clientela, che avvenga su iniziativa del produttore o su commissione del cliente. Al contrario, almeno convenzionalmente, l'arte non è 'utile' in senso proprio, non 'si offre' alla clientela e non produce 'su commissione', ma viene immaginata come un atto di creatività personale sganciato da altre determinanti sociali.

È possibile calare questa tipologia che individua artigianato, artigianato artistico e arte in ambito vestimentario. La produzione di abbigliamento è equiparabile all'artigianato, realizza abiti utili per essere indossati. La produzione di moda è equiparabile all'artigianato artistico, realizza abiti utili per essere indossati, in più dotati di contenuto stilistico. In entrambi i casi, si tratta di abiti che vengono creati e replicati per la clientela. Possono essere abiti di largo consumo, come nel caso dell'abbigliamento, o di consumo più esclusivo, come nel caso della moda. Solo i secondi, oltre a ricoprire una funzione vestimentaria, possiedono anche un valore stilistico aggiuntivo, il cosiddetto 'contenuto moda'.

Per gli abiti d'arte la questione appare diversa. Gli abiti d'arte si distaccano completamente dai meccanismi del mercato, essendo pezzi unici, decisamente particolari, inaccessibili alla clientela sotto numerosi punti di vista. Questi abiti vengono creati appositamente con l'intenzione di realizzare oggetti che escono dall'alveo della normalità, che si rivelano esteticamente o concettualmente pregnanti. Si tratta di abiti che superano i concetti di utile e di stile per approdare all'arte, al mondo dell'arte della moda.

3. QUANDO LA MODA SI FA ARTE

La produzione di un abito d'arte appare possibile attraverso la sospensione della 'normalità' dell'abito stesso – con riferimento ai canoni della sartoria europea. Per raggiungere questo fine si utilizzano strategie particolari che mutano la struttura vestimentaria, incidendo su materiali, forme e convenzioni ovvero sugli elementi costitutivi dell'abito. Si tratta dell'anticonvenzionalità dei materiali, la trasgressione delle forme, la sovversione delle convenzioni, il surrealismo e il pastiche (Crane 2000). Utilizzando queste strategie, i creatori d'abiti d'arte contribuiscono a dare vita al mondo dell'arte della moda.

L'anticonvenzionalità dei materiali conduce all'utilizzo vestimentario di materiali sperimentali, inconsueti, riciclati, deformati, strani, non necessariamente splendidi e costosi. Come Rabanne nella collezione di abiti fatti in dischi di metallo e plastica uniti da ganci d'acciaio (Kamitsis 1999) o Margiela che utilizza materiali di recupero, tipo guanti, sciarpe o piatti rotti, per fare nuovi capi e accessori (Evans 2003).

La trasgressione delle forme conduce a realizzazioni vestimentarie architettoniche, ardite, asimmetriche, sproporzionate o aberranti, lontane dall'imperativo artigianale del fatto 'a regola d'arte'. Come Balenciaga con le forme astratte dell'abito a sacco e del baby doll (Miller 2007) o McQueen con le scarpe Armadillo, che alterano completamente la postura e la forma del piede (Bolton 2011).

La sovversione delle convenzioni conduce alla collocazione non conforme all'ordine vestimentario di capi, particolari e accessori. Come Miyake che elimina taglie, generi e stagioni trattando l'abito come un modulo ingegneristico (Miyake e Fujiwara 2001) o Michele che applica fiocchi, pizzi e trine a capi maschili (Geczy e Karaminas 2018).

Il ricorso al surrealismo conduce alla creazione di associazioni inattese tra forme vestimentarie e forme altre. Come Victor e Rolf che trasformano quadri con cornici dorate in abiti da indossare come se fossero tele spezzate (Spindler e Baudot 2018) o Browne con abiti fatti in un tessuto che riproduce l'anatomia umana, simile ad un corpo sopra il corpo (Bolton 2023).

Il ricorso al pastiche conduce alla combinazione di particolari e di stili vestimentari di periodi e di luoghi differenti, ma anche allo slittamento da abito a costume, che sia etnico o di scena, tipicamente eccentrico o teatrale. Come Galliano che mescola estetiche di periodi storici diversi (Wilcox 2007) o Gaultier che fonde l'etnico con il feticismo (Loriot 2011).

Ogni mondo dell'arte nasce e si trasforma nel tempo e nello spazio. Al proprio interno si sviluppano determinati rapporti sociali e si stabiliscono le norme che lo regolano (Pedroni e Volontè 2012). Ogni membro occupa in esso una posizione ben precisa, per cui ci saranno posizioni dominanti, analoghe o subordinate a seconda dei casi. Questo perché ogni mondo dell'arte è immaginabile analiticamente come uno spazio tridimensionale in cui la collocazione di ciascun membro dipende dalla quantità di capitali di cui dispone (Bourdieu 2005). Si tratta di capitali di tipo economico (ricchezza in beni mobili e immobili), culturale (ricchezza in cultura, competenza e conoscenza) e sociale (ricchezza in contatti e relazioni). La loro sommatoria nello spazio tridimensionale, individuando la collocazione di ciascun membro, ne evidenzia lo status in quello specifico mondo dell'arte, ne rivela il prestigio personale.

Esistendo differenze posizionali, i rapporti tra i membri possono essere orientati alla collaborazione o alla competizione, dando luogo a configurazioni tipiche (Elias 1996). La finalità ultima per ciascuno di essi è raggiungere posizioni di maggior prestigio personale. Questo perché i membri in posizione dominante, grazie al loro status elevato, sono in grado d'imporre le norme che vigono all'interno di quel mondo dell'arte. Sono inoltre in grado d'influenzare anche la collocazione dei membri all'interno di quel mondo dell'arte, agendo da correttivo rispetto ai capitali a disposizione dei membri stessi. Questa duplice capacità di incidere sulle norme e sulle relazioni è un'evidente manifestazione di potere (Weber 1999). Si tratta di un potere che consente d'influ-

ire sul significato di arte, sullo status dell'artista, sull'artisticità delle opere e sulla legittimità delle istituzioni dedite all'arte.

È perciò evidente che occupare una posizione dominante all'interno di un mondo dell'arte risulta cruciale rispetto a molti fini. Può influenzare l'intenzionalità di quello specifico mondo dell'arte, indicando ciò che è etichettabile come arte e ciò che non lo è, includendo o escludendo. In tal modo, i membri in posizione dominante traggono un vantaggio per sé e per i propri sodali (Bourdieu 1991). Non a caso, l'utilizzo dell'etichetta di arte, di artista, di opera d'arte o di istituzione artistica appare strategica in termini di notorietà e di redditività, consentendo facilmente processi di distinzione sociale anche nella moda (Bourdieu 1983). Boicottando la normalità stilistica attraverso l'innovazione della struttura vestimentaria, i creatori di abiti d'arte si collocano fuori dal mainstream della moda. La loro intrinseca diversità li qualifica come sperimentatori o come provocatori (Crane 1997).

Gli sperimentatori sono quei creatori fortemente innovativi che si rapportano alla moda come gli artisti d'avanguardia si rapportano all'arte accademica. Kawakubo utilizza la decostruzione e l'astrazione per creare abiti che ridefiniscono radicalmente la silhouette corporea e l'uso del tessuto (Butler 2024). Van Herpen utilizza la tecnologia per creare sculture indossabili che sembrano provenire da un mondo alieno (Van Herpen e Pitiot 2023). I loro approcci trasformano la moda in un impegno concettuale fortemente influenzato da architettura e antropologia, immaginando estetiche di altro tipo. Si tratta di creatori non accademici e non convenzionali che si considerano degli artisti. I loro interlocutori non sono i consumatori, piuttosto sono gli intellettuali e i creativi. Più che un abito o un accessorio, creano un oggetto significativo in sé, come un'opera d'arte, come un'esperienza di sperimentazione estetica o concettuale applicata alla moda.

I provocatori sono quei creatori fortemente dissacranti che giocano con le mode, gli stili, i generi e l'arte stessa, che usano l'abito come commento critico alla società e al sistema moda. Westwood, con le sue radici nel punk, utilizza lo stile per esprimere la propria ribellione nei confronti dei dettami sociali (Westwood e Kelly 2015). Gvasalia, in tempi più recenti, dà vita ad abiti e accessori che sconfinano nel kitsch e che alludono al ready-made, elevando repliche di oggetti quotidiani a lussuosi simboli di status (Sun e Kim 2022). Questa provocazione non è fine a sé stessa, ha piuttosto lo scopo d'invitare a riflettere il pubblico della moda sul senso attuale del consumo e dell'estetica. Si tratta di creatori che sono refrattari alla retorica dell'autorialità, del genio e della cultura. La loro

critica è densa d'ironia e autoironia, è diretta a colpire sia la normalità della moda e sia l'artisticità della moda. Sono perciò anticonsumistici e antidivistici, creano un oggetto allo scopo di scuotere e di stupire.

4. IL PERCORSO DI ARTIFICAZIONE NELLA MODA

Il percorso di artificazione nella moda mostra tre tappe successive: il secondo Ottocento, il primo Novecento e il secondo Novecento. La prima tappa nasce con la moda stessa, con gli esordi dell'alta moda, aperta alle suggestioni dei fermenti artistici del tempo (Matta 2015). I primi sarti talentuosi creano in completa autonomia e presentano modelli vestimentari propri. In tal modo, rompono con la tradizione della sartoria su commissione dichiarandosi artisti. Da ciò emerge con estrema chiarezza il criterio dell'intenzionalità, dicendosi il creatore di abiti un artista, come nel caso di stilisti del calibro di Worth o di Poiret (Morini 2020).

All'epoca, pur creando abiti a proprio gusto, questi stilisti realizzano abiti di moda, non abiti d'arte. Si tratta di abiti fatti 'a regola d'arte', magnificamente sartoriali, ma non di abiti che sono frutto di una reale sperimentazione artistica. Questa trasformazione rimane confinata nell'ambito dell'artigianalità artistica, non rientra nell'ambito dell'arte, conservando la funzione e la struttura vestimentaria dell'abito. Rappresenta però un episodio fondamentale, poiché inventa la moda come realtà estetica e produttiva separata dall'abbigliamento (Baglioni 2019).

La seconda tappa è foriera di una trasformazione che aspira ad andare oltre, che aspira ad entrare nell'ambito dell'artisticità grazie al clima di forte sperimentazione delle prime avanguardie (Nigro Covre 2021). L'arte prende a coinvolgere una pluralità di ambiti, anche quello vestimentario, emergendo chiaramente nelle creazioni surrealiste di Schiaparelli (Carron de la Carrière 2022), puriste di Vionnet (Golbin 2009), futuriste di Balla (Pautasso 2021) o simultaneiste di Terk Delaunay (Malochet e Bianchi 2006).

Si tratta di abiti d'arte in senso proprio, fatti da stilisti e da artisti che creano utilizzando l'abito come oggetto delle proprie sperimentazioni, un abito che conserva la funzione vestimentaria, ma innova la struttura vestimentaria. Il fatto 'a regola d'arte' viene superato da contenuti estetici e concettuali ulteriori. Stilisti e artisti condividono una medesima intenzione, facendo dell'abito d'arte un oggetto da indossare con un valore aggiunto realmente artistico, non semplicemente stilistico – come accade invece per l'artigianato artistico.

La terza tappa sorge con l'emergere delle nuove avanguardie (Poli 2003), innescando una trasformatio-

ne significativa. L'arte mostra di essere ovunque e tutto appare artificabile, approdando ad una sperimentazione più profonda e radicale, una sperimentazione totale che riflette e che influenza la vita stessa dei creatori d'arte (Bourriaud 2015). L'abito prende a funzionare come una sorta di 'pretesto' ed entra a far parte di quella vasta produzione di significati che è tipica dell'arte contemporanea. Ciò accade perché l'abito e il corpo sono tra loro strettamente collegati, permettendo di veicolare significati potenti e comprensibili proprio attraverso questo tipo di oggetto. Non a caso, il vestire è un tassello importante nella costruzione dell'identità, nell'affermazione di sé e nel riconoscimento degli altri, ben comunicando significati socialmente comprensibili (Bovone 2014). Essendo un fatto socialmente condiviso, il vestire è un'esperienza personale che non si confina nel privato, ma che accomuna, essendo qualcosa che tutti fanno e che è per tutti è chiaro.

Se l'abito comunica, l'abito d'arte comunica con ancora maggior forza per via della sua peculiarità estetica o concettuale. L'abito diviene perciò un veicolo privilegiato della sperimentazione artistica. La funzione vestimentaria non costituisce più un limite all'artisticità dell'abito, al contrario, diventa una sorta di megafono per la diffusione e per la comprensione dei significati dell'arte contemporanea nel discorso pubblico e nello spazio pubblico. Il fatto di essere indossato, o potenzialmente indossato, esalta la significatività culturale dell'abito d'arte, come se fosse una seconda pelle o come se fosse il corpo stesso, creando perciò impatto emotivo e coinvolgimento fisico.

Si realizza in tal modo una trasformazione in chiave metonimica, dove il senso figurato prende il posto del senso letterale, per cui l'abito prende il posto del corpo, al di là che venga indossato o meno (Trasforini 2012). L'abito d'arte è un corpo, è il corpo che 'lo abita' o è il corpo che 'non c'è', con tutti i possibili rimandi e tutte le possibili evocazioni. Per l'abito di moda accade il contrario, il corpo è l'abito. Come ci mostra ogni volta il rituale della sfilata, l'abito prende il posto del corpo. La moda utilizza il corpo come un semplice manichino, realizzando così un ribaltamento, come in un gioco di specchi in cui la chiave metonimica viene applicata in senso del tutto opposto.

Non solo, è interessante andare a sottolineare anche il diverso approccio utilizzato da artisti e stilisti nella creazione di abiti d'arte, una diversità che si riflette nella funzione e nella struttura dell'abito ovvero nel suo uso e nel suo aspetto. Tra gli artisti, l'esplicita equivalenza tra abito e corpo dell'abito d'arte consente di abbandonare il legame sia con la funzione vestimentaria e sia con la struttura vestimentaria, realizzando così una duplice rot-

tura. Non più, o non necessariamente, abito come oggetto da indossare e non più, o non necessariamente, abito come oggetto fatto con certi materiali, certe forme e certe convenzioni. Un ottimo esempio viene dalle creazioni di Sterbak (Trasforini 2010), i cui riferimenti vestimentari costituiscono un supporto fortemente evocativo per la riflessione sulla condizione umana.

Al contrario, tra gli stilisti, e in particolare per coloro che danno prova di essere sperimentatori o provocatori, l'abito d'arte conserva la funzione vestimentaria, in evidente continuità con la vocazione professionale del creatore, ma abbandona la struttura vestimentaria, realizzando così una singola rottura. In tal modo, l'abito mantiene la propria utilità, ma diventa l'occasione per la sperimentazione di materiali, forme e convenzioni alternative, come evidenziano le creazioni architettoniche e scultoree di Capucci (Blum 2011).

In conclusione, la trasformazione di senso dell'abito inteso come materia di sperimentazione artistica si delinea con le avanguardie storiche e si approfondisce con le nuove avanguardie. Un abito d'arte è tale perché è fatto con finalità artistica, manifestando così una precisa intenzionalità del creatore, che può essere più affine all'ambito dell'arte o a quello della moda. In particolare, mentre l'artista giunge ad un superamento sia della struttura e sia della funzione vestimentaria, lo stilista abbandona la struttura vestimentaria conservando spesso inalterata la funzione vestimentaria, continuando così ad intendere l'abito come oggetto da indossare. In entrambi i casi, l'intervento creativo si realizza sull'abito in quanto simulacro corporale, erede delle tante esperienze che nel corso del primo e del secondo Novecento hanno reso possibile questo tipo di sperimentazione estetica e concettuale. In buona sostanza, se l'abito d'arte è capace di convogliare significati potenti e comprensibili è perché costituisce il rivestimento del corpo e, tramite una facile traslazione di senso, è il corpo stesso, è un simbolo della persona.

Quanto detto non descrive però un'artificazione della moda, piuttosto un'artificazione nella moda. Si tratta infatti di esperienze non generalizzate, ma tipiche di un ristretto numero di creatori. Potendo sfruttare il valore aggiunto dell'arte, essi costituiscono un'élite in seno alla moda o, detto altrimenti, costituiscono il mondo dell'arte della moda.

RIFERIMENTI BIBLIOGRAFICI

- Baglioni L.G. (2019), «L'invenzione delle mode e il mutamento sociale», in *SocietàMutamentoPolitica*, 20: 207-217.

- Beatrice L. (2025), *La commedia dell'arte. Dietro le quinte del contemporaneo tra musei, mercato e provocazioni*, Marsilio, Venezia.
- Becker H.S. (1974), «Art as Collective Action», in *American Sociological Review*, 6: 767-776.
- Becker H.S. (2004), *I mondi dell'arte*, Il Mulino, Bologna.
- Blum D.E. (2011), *Roberto Capucci: Art into Fashion*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, New Haven.
- Bolton A. (2011), *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
- Bolton A. (2023), *Thom Browne*, Phaidon Press, New York.
- Borsi F. (1973), *Leon Battista Alberti. Opera completa*, Electa, Milano.
- Bourdieu P. (1983), *La Distinzione. Critica sociale del gusto*, Il Mulino, Bologna.
- Bourdieu P. (1991), «Le champ littéraire», in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 89: 3-46.
- Bourdieu P. (2005), *Le regole dell'arte. Genesi e struttura del campo letterario*, Il Saggiatore, Milano.
- Bourriaud N. (2015), *Forme di vita. L'arte moderna e l'invenzione del sé*, Postmedia books.
- Bovone L. (2014), *Rappresentarsi nel mondo. Comunicazione, identità, moda*, Franco Angeli, Milano.
- Brunelli G. (a cura di) (2023), *L'arte della moda. L'età dei sogni e delle rivoluzioni*, Dario Cimorelli, Milano.
- Butler R. (a cura di) (2024), *Rei Kawakubo: For and Against Fashion*, Bloomsbury, London.
- Calò G. e Scudero D. (2009), *Moda e arte*, Gangemi, Roma.
- Calvesi M. (2008), *Le due avanguardie. Dal futurismo alla pop art*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- Carron de la Carriere M.S. (2022), *Shocking: The Surreal World of Elsa Schiaparelli*, Thames & Hudson, London.
- Crane D. (1997), «Postmodernism and the Avant-Garde: Stylistic Change in Fashion Design», in *Modernism/Modernity*, 3: 123-140.
- Crane D. (2000), *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Danto A.C. (2010), *Oltre il Brillo Box. Il mondo dell'arte dopo la fine della storia*, Marinotti, Milano.
- Derrida J. (1969), *Della grammatologia*, Jaca Book, Milano.
- Elias N. (1996), *Il processo di civilizzazione*, Il Mulino, Bologna (ed. or. 1939).
- Entwistle J. (2002), «The Aesthetic Economy: The Production of Value in the Field of Fashion Modelling», in *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 3: 317-339.
- Evans C. (2003), *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Geczy A. e Karaminas V. (2018), *Libertine Fashion: Sexual Freedom, Rebellion and Style*, Bloomsbury Visual Arts, London.
- Golbin P. (2009), *Madeleine Vionnet, puriste de la mode*, Éditions Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris.
- Heinich N. (2004), *La sociologia dell'arte*, Il Mulino, Bologna.
- Heinich N. (2022), *Il paradigma dell'arte contemporanea. Strutture di una rivoluzione artistica*, Johan & Levi, Milano.
- Husserl E. (2002), *Idee per una fenomenologia pura e per una filosofia fenomenologica*, Einaudi, Torino (3 voll., ed. or. 1913).
- Kamitsis L. (1999), *Paco Rabanne*, Editions Assouline, Paris.
- Kawamura J. (2006), *La moda*, Il Mulino, Bologna.
- Kim S.B. (1998), «Is Fashion Art?», in *Fashion Theory*, 1: 55-72.
- Kristeller P.O. (2005), *Il pensiero e le arti nel Rinascimento*, Donzelli, Roma (ed. or. 1965).
- Loriot T. (2011), *The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal.
- Malochet A. e Bianchi M. (a cura di) (2006), *Sonia Delaunay. Atelier Simultané 1923-1934*, Skira, Milano.
- Mariani D. (2022), *Arte e moda. Storia e risultati di un sodalizio irrequieto*, Postmedia, Milano.
- Matta G. (2015), *Gli sviluppi dell'arte moderna in Europa dalla fine dell'Ottocento ai primi anni del Novecento*, Gangemi, Roma.
- Mauss M. (1969), *Manuale di etnografia*, Jaca Book, Milano (ed. or. 1947).
- Miller L.E. (2007), *Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972): The Architect of Fashion*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.
- Miller S. (2007), «Fashion as Art; is Fashion Art?», in *Fashion Theory*, 1: 25-40.
- Miller S. (2012), «Dal ballo al museo: come l'abito diventa opera d'arte», in Pedroni M., Volontè P. (a cura di), *Moda e arte*, Franco Angeli, Milano.
- Miyake I. e Fujiwara D. (2001), *A-POC Making: Issey Miyake and Dai Fujiwara*, Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein.
- Morini E. (2020), *Interazioni fra moda e arte. Boldini, Poiret, Genoni*, Mimesis, Milano.
- Nigro Covre J. (2021), *Arte contemporanea. Le avanguardie storiche*, Carocci, Roma.
- Pautasso G.A. (a cura di) (2021), *Moda futurista. Eleganza e seduzione*, Abscondita, Milano.
- Pedroni M. e Volontè P. (2012), «Introduzione. Oggetti, pratiche e istituzioni di due campi sociali correlati»,

- in Pedroni M., Volontè P. (a cura di), *Moda e arte*, Franco Angeli, Milano.
- Poli F. (a cura di) (2003), *Arte contemporanea. Le ricerche internazionali dalla fine degli anni '50 a oggi*, Mondadori, Milano.
- Schiaparelli E. (2016), *Shocking life*, Donzelli, Roma.
- Shapiro R. e Heinich N. (2012), «When Is Artification?», in *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 4.
- Semeraro G. (2001), *Di stoffa in stoffa. Tessuti dell'arte contemporanea da Alberto Burri a Rosemarie Trockel*, EDIFIR, Firenze.
- Spindler A. e Baudot F. (2018), *Viktor&Rolf: Fashion Artists*, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.
- Sun H. e Kim M. (2022), «A Study on the Aesthetic Characteristics of Demna Gvasalia Fashion Design from Neo-Deconstructivism», in *Journal of Communication Design*, 1: 212-225.
- Tatarkiewicz W. (2020), *Storia di sei idee. L'arte, il bello, la forma, la creatività, l'imitazione, l'esperienza estetica*, Aesthetica, Milano.
- Trasforini M.A. (2010), «Tagli d'habitus. Corpi culturali, linguaggi tessili e arte metonimica», in Mora E. (a cura di), *Geografie della moda*, Franco Angeli, Milano.
- Trasforini M.A. (2012), «Abiti smodati. Dall'arte tessile alla clothes art», in Pedroni M., Volontè P. (a cura di), *Moda e arte*, Franco Angeli, Milano.
- Van Herpen I. e Pitiot C. (2023), *Iris van Herpen: Sculpting the Senses*, Lannoo Publishers, Tiel.
- Weber M. (1999), *Economia e società*, vol. I, Comunità, Torino (ed. or. 1922).
- Westwood V. e Kelly I., (2015), *Vivienne Westwood*, Odoja, Bologna.
- Wilcox C. (2007), *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957*, V&A Publishing, London.

Appendice bio-bibliografica su autori e autrici

Lorenzo Grifone Baglioni is a sociologist, Coordinator of the Department of Social Sciences at Unicollege Institute, Director of the Academic Publishing Centre, and Editor of the journals *Studi di Sociologia* and *Società Mutamento Politica*. Among his principal publications are *Citizenships of Our Time* (*Società Mutamento Politica*, 2016, special issue), *Prometheus in Chains* (Rubbettino, 2013), *Choosing to Participate* (Firenze University Press, 2011), *Sociology of Citizenship* (Rubbettino, 2009), and *A Generation in Transition* (Firenze University Press, 2007).

Lise Benoist is a PhD student in Human Geography at Uppsala University and a Human Ecology graduate from Lund University. A former member of the Zetkin Collective, she co-authored *White Skin, Black Fuel – On the Dangers of Fossil Fascism* (Verso, 2021). Her doctoral research draws on ethnographic methods to examine how far-right extra-parliamentary activism mobilises ecological issues, with particular attention to place, locality, and the broader appeal of ecological themes within neo-fascist activism. She is co-editing *Global Far-Right Ecologies – Trends, Issues and Responses* (Routledge, forthcoming 2026).

Tommaso Bertazzo is a PhD student in Social Sciences at the University of Padua, Italy. His main research interests focus on urban and rural studies, community studies, and Romani studies, and he has written on migration and political participation. In addition to the two works co-authored with V. Romania (2025a, 2025b; see above), his recent publications include *Building Participation. The Participatory Dimension in Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Emilia-Romagna* (2022) and *Participating Migrants* (2021).

Arturo Bertero is a political sociologist whose research focuses on political belief systems, with particular attention to conspiracy beliefs and their links to broader sociopolitical attitudes. His work has appeared in journals such as *Network Science*, *Social Indicators Research*, and the *Italian Political Science Review*.

Cecilia Biancalana is a tenure-track researcher in Political Science at the Department of Culture, Politics and Society of the University of Turin, where she teaches Public Communication and New Technologies, and Public and Political Communication. Her research focuses on the transformation of political representation and communication in response to major changes driven by technological innovation, populist dynamics, and the climate crisis.

Carmelo Bruni, PhD, is Associate Professor in the Department of Social and Economic Sciences at Sapienza University of Rome, where he teaches Social Policy, Sociology of Poverty and Inequality, and Social Service Design. He chairs the Master's Degree Programme in Design, Management and Evaluation of Social Services (ProSS) at Sapienza University of Rome. His recent publications include *Emigrazioni e immigrazioni polacche in Italia. Doppi sguardi* (with Carchedi, Kowalska & Raczynski, 2025, Maggioli Editore) and *I bisogni delle persone senza dimora*, in S. Mauceri and L. Di Censi (eds.), *Povertà estreme* (FrancoAngeli, 2024).

Manuela Caiani is Associate Professor in Political Science at the Scuola Normale Superiore, where she is part of the COSMOS (Centre on Social Movement Studies) research team. She received her PhD in Political Science from the University of Florence (2006) and holds the Italian Abilitazione for full professorship in Political Science and Political Sociology. Her research focuses on populism, radical right politics, nationalist movements, social movements, and political participation in Europe, drawing on qualitative methods of social research. She is Convenor of the SISP Standing Group on Political Participation and Social Movements, and Co-director of the International Observatory on Social Cohesion and Inclusion (OCIS). She has directed and collaborated in numerous international projects (Horizon, FP4–FP7, PRIN, Jean Monnet) and published widely, including in *Social Movement Studies*, *European Journal of Political Research*, and *West European Politics*.

Linda Coufal is a researcher in the field of political sociology. Their expertise lies in misogyny as a political ideology, misogynist extremism, the manosphere movement, the anti-gender movement, and climate change denialism.

Paolo Do is a Research Fellow in the Department of Sociology and Social Research at the University of Trento. He also collaborates with the Department of Social and Economic Sciences (DiSSE) at Sapienza University of Rome. His publications include *L'uso dei saperi. Lavoro, valore e critica dell'accademia* (The Use of Knowledge: Labour, Value and the Critique of Academia; Ombre Corte, 2019), *Cattedrale* (Cathedral; Nero, 2017), *Bodies, Logistics and Labor* (Nero, 2016), and *Il tallone del drago* (The Dragon's Heel; DeriveApprodi, 2010).

Matteo Finco (PhD in Social Sciences, University of Macerata) is Research Fellow at the Department of Social Sciences and Economics of "La Sapienza" University (Rome). His recent publications include "Claims Inflation, Modern Individualism and Immunity. Paradoxes of Inclusion in the West," in *The New Faces of Obscurantism in Western Societies, Quaderni di Sociologia*, 96, LXVIII, 2024, pp. 49–78; and (with others) "Building Elderly Care Trainings for Migrants and Refugees. A SWOT Analysis of the HERO Training in Four Mediterranean European Countries," *Frontiers in Public Health*, 2025.

Paola Giannoni holds a European PhD in Social Sciences (Sociology curriculum, 2022) and is currently a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Department of Education Sciences (Di.S.For.), University of Genoa. Her research focuses on social inequalities, with particular attention to ageism and the social inclusion of older adults.

Andrea Gollini is Director of Caritas Diocesana Reggio Emilia–Guastalla and Adjunct Professor of Anthropology of Religions at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Brescia). He holds a PhD in Social Work and Personal Social Services and conducts research on poverty, relational social work, and community-based welfare transformation, connecting academic reflection with practice-based inquiry within Caritas networks in Italy.

Nicola Guerra is Adjunct Professor and Independent Researcher in the Department of Italian, Faculty of Humanities, University of Turku, Finland. His research focuses on political violence and radicalism across the ideological spectrum — including far-right, far-left, and

red-brown extremism — and on the historical development of political terrorism in post-war Europe. He also studies the relationship between radicalism, intelligence, and geopolitics, the links between language, ideology, and hate speech, and the role of subcultures and social movements in political mobilisation, including eco-radicalism and ecofascism.

Till Hilmar is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Sociology, University of Vienna, having previously held a postdoctoral position at Bremen University's SOCIUM Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy. He is a faculty fellow at Yale University's Center for Cultural Sociology and an associate editor of the *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*. His research spans cultural and political sociology, social transformation, and inequality, combining qualitative, meaning-centred methods with computational approaches. He currently leads the Horizon project CIDAPE, on inequality, climate change, and political emotions.

Riccardo Landini is a tenure-track Assistant Professor of Sociology in the Department of Human and Social Sciences at eCampus University, where he teaches Methodology of Social Research. His research interests include public attitudes toward climate change, the influence of religiosity on social and political attitudes, and political behaviour.

Moreno Mancosu is Associate Professor of Political Sociology at the University of Turin (Italy) and Affiliate at Collegio Carlo Alberto. His research focuses on political behaviour, public opinion, conspiracy theories, and misinformation.

Maria Alessandra Molè, PhD in Theory and Research in Educational and Social Sciences, is a contract lecturer in Sociology at Roma Tre University and at the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute. Her research focuses on urban poverty and social interaction in ordinary and institutional settings, from an ethnomethodological and conversation-analytic perspective. Recent publications include *Comunicare attraverso le chat: nuove pratiche nel servizio sociale* (with M. Sanfelici and U. Nothdurfter, 2026, FrancoAngeli) and *Dal testo letterario all'interazione in classe. Un'analisi etnometodologica delle sessioni di lettura ad alta voce* (2025, Studi di Sociologia).

Giada Moretti obtained a Second-Level Master's degree in Methodology and Advanced Techniques of Social Research (2023, Sapienza University of Rome) and

is currently a PhD candidate in Social Sciences (Sociology track) at the University of Genoa (Di.S.For.). Her research interests focus on social inequalities, with particular attention to identity representations, the inclusion and activation of older adults, and good practices for combating ageism.

Maria Chiara Pedroni, PhD, is a Research Fellow at the Free University of Bolzano-Bozen. Her research interests include homelessness, critical approaches to social work, social work education, and eco-social work.

Nicolò Pennucci is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Université de Namur, where he works on the ERC-funded project POLSTYLE. He works on political communication and comparative politics, employing computational methods for text analysis on social media data, and holds a PhD in Political Science and Sociology from the Scuola Normale Superiore.

Stefano Poli is Full Professor of General Sociology at the University of Genoa, where he teaches General Sociology, Methodology of Social Research, and Sociology of Ageing. His research focuses on social inequalities and public policies concerning the older population. He is Scientific Director of the university's Interdepartmental Centre/Observatory on Inequalities and Social Policies, and a member of the Scientific Committees of the Centre for Longevity and Active Aging and of AMAS, the Academy for Healthcare Management.

Vincenzo Romania is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Padua. He has written on migration, identity, and interaction. His recent works, both co-authored with T. Bertazzo, include *Romani People in Italy. The Different Shades of Segregation* (Routledge, 2025) and "From Ghetto to Habitus Factory. Roma Camps in Italy: An Empirical Extension of Loïc Wacquant's Theorisation," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (2025).

Anna Maria Paola Toti is Associate Professor at the Department of Social and Economic Sciences of Sapienza University of Rome, where she teaches History of Sociology and Sociology. She serves as Faculty Delegate for Disability, Specific Learning Disorders, Equal Opportunities, and Inclusion, and as Secretary of the AIS (Italian Sociological Association) Section on Sociological Theories and Social Transformations. Her recent publications include *Max Weber e le immagini del mondo. Una Zeitdiagnose della modernità* (2026, in *Max Weber dopo Max Weber*, eds. P. De Nardis and V. Vandi-

ni, Bordeaux) and *Crossing Stigmatizing Spaces of Homelessness and Mental Distress* (with P. Do, L. G. Fassari and G. Pompili, 2024, *Sicurezza e Scienze Sociali*).

Giuseppina Tumminelli is Associate Professor of Political Sociology at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Palermo, where she previously coordinated (2014–2022) the Observatory on Migration in the Sicilian Region for the Pedro Arrupe Institute. Her research focuses on migration and mobility, political socialisation, and vulnerability. She is a member of the scientific committees of the "Migrare" University Centre and of fio.PSD (Italian Federation of Organizations for Homeless People). Her publications include *Coesione e inclusione sociale: l'accesso alla casa* (with P. Rodríguez Aznar, 2025, *La Rivista di Servizio Sociale*) and *Empowering Migrant Inclusion* (co-edited with R. T. Di Rosa, 2024, Springer).

Kevin Winter is a senior researcher at the Department of Sustainable Behavior and Management, University of Hohenheim. He received his doctorate in psychology from the University of Tübingen (2019) and previously held research positions at the Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien (Tübingen) and an interim professorship at the University of Wuppertal. His research examines the predictors and consequences of belief in conspiracy theories, particularly in the environmental domain, as well as the psychological drivers behind acceptance of and opposition to climate policies such as wind energy expansion.

INDICE

VOL. 16, N° 32 • 2025

- 5 Introduction, *Anna Maria Paola Toti, Maria Alessandra Molè*
- 13 Misery of Position and the Crisis of Possibility. New Forms of Poverty in Contemporary Democracies, *Anna Maria Paola Toti*
- 23 Dwelling as a Wicked Problem: Housing, Inequality and Precarious Life Trajectories, *Maria Alessandra Molè*
- 35 From Ferrarotti's *baraccati* to Roma camps. The long wave of housing marginality, *Vincenzo Romania, Tommaso Bertazzo*
- 47 Collaborative Housing Strategies: The Case of "Widespread Reception" by Caritas Diocesana in Rome, *Carmelo Bruni, Matteo Finco*
- 59 Dwelling Among the Ruins, *Paolo Do*
- 71 The Right to a Home: Housing Strategies and Social Inclusion of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors and Youth Foreigners, *Giuseppina Tumminelli*
- 81 «Two Heads Are Better Than One but They Must Be Good Ones»: Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Social Work With «people Living on the Street», *Andrea Gollini*
- 95 Legal Aid at the Margins: realizing Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness in Italy, *Maria Chiara Pedroni*
- 157 Victims of the Green Transition: Harm Narratives in AfD's Climate Skepticism, *Till Hilmar*
- 169 Far-right Climate Skepticism Across Europe: The Transnationalization of Narratives?, *Manuela Caiani, Nicolò Pennucci*
- 183 Ecofascism's Dual Legacy: Local Revolts and Imperial Dreams in Italy, *Nicola Guerra*
- 201 Drill, Baby, Drill. How Misogynist and Far-right Narratives Are Connected to Issues of Environmentalism, *Linda Coufal*

PASSIM

- 215 Ageism in Healthcare and Social Care Settings in Europe: A Scoping Review, *Stefano Poli, Paola Giannoni, Giada Moretti*
- 227 L'artificazione nelle mode. Una lettura sociologica, *Lorenzo G. Baglioni*
- 235 Appendice bio-bibliografica su autori e autrici

SPECIAL ISSUE

CLIMATE CHANGE AND FAR-RIGHT POLITICS: BETWEEN ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION

MANUELA CAIANI, NICOLÒ PENNUCCI

- 107 Climate Change and Far-Right Politics: Between Adoption and Adaptation, *Manuela Caiani, Nicolò Pennucci*
- 117 Populist Attitudes, Ideology, and Climate Change Beliefs: A Comparative Analysis of Six European Countries, *Moreno Mancosu, Cecilia Biancalana, Riccardo Ladini, Arturo Bertero*
- 131 An Obstacle to the Sustainability Transformation? How Conspiracy Beliefs Shape Climate (In)action, *Kevin Winter*
- 145 «I Don't Need Climate Change to Be an Ecologist». Far-right Ecological Activism, or