

Socio-spatial transformations at the urban fringes of Rome: Unfolding suburbanisms in Fiano Romano

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Abstract

Today, suburbs and urban fringes are pivotal places for understanding contemporary urban transformations because the majority of the world's urban population live in suburbs. Suburbanization (i.e. the process of combining the non-centric population, economic growth, and spatial expansion) and suburbanisms (suburban ways of living) are key concepts for observing these transformations, framed under the umbrella of the post-suburban theoretical framework. This paper relies on a post-suburban standpoint as it enables the complexity of the diverse transformations at the urban edges to be addressed. On such basis, this paper discusses the outcomes of a qualitative case study conducted on the most recently built neighbourhood of Fiano Romano, a suburb of Rome that has faced a number of socio-spatial transformations over the past two decades. The study illustrates the diverse complexities related to the provision of welfare services and public amenities such as water and social infrastructures. In so doing, the article unfolds the shape of a 'new suburbia' characterized by emerging socio-spatial changes that lie in processes of peripheralization, which characterize many contemporary post-Fordist suburban areas, especially at the present time of the coronavirus crisis. The article points out the centrality of suburban ways of living in studying issues involving both spatial planning and governance of welfare. Furthermore, the article highlights the idea that new inequalities and deprivations are taking place in diverse suburban areas, and that such aspects deserve further governance agendas able to meet the suburban social demands that differ from traditional urban vulnerabilities.

Keywords

Post-suburbanization, suburbanization, suburbia, urban fringes, welfare

Introduction

Urban peripheries inform us about the fragilities that have affected diverse urban populations for many decades (Anderson, 2000; Wacquant, 1993). Nonetheless, when we talk about urban peripheries today, we face a plethora of concepts that shift our gaze towards suburbs (Beauregard, 1995; Güney et al., 2019; Harris and Vorms, 2017; Keil, 2017a). Considering that the majority of the world's urban

population actually live in suburbs (Phelps, 2021), suburbs today epitomize the uneven worldwide urban expansion through diverse forms of peripheral areas where the urban and the rural intermingle (see

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Harris & Lehrer, 2018). Recent studies acknowledge that ‘the suburban’ may be viewed as an all-encompassing field (De Vidovich, 2019) for dealing with the contemporary societal and urban transformations led by manifold governmental actions and ways of living (Hamel and Keil, 2015; Keil, 2013, 2017a). Two concepts lie behind the understanding of the present suburban planet (see Keil, 2017a): (1) suburbanization, or the combination of the non-centric population and economic growth with urban spatial expansion (Ekers et al., 2012); and (2) suburbanisms, or the suburban ways of living (Fava, 1956; Keil, 2017a; Walks, 2013). The interplay between these two concepts invites us to observe how the urban outskirts are changing. On such basis, this article entwines the issues of building expansion (in a low-density pattern), governance of welfare services, and societal changes. The focus is on the town of Fiano Romano located at the northern edges of Rome, the capital city of Italy. The research shows that many interwoven transformations at the urban outskirts result in emerging peripheral conditions that affect both the daily lives of the people (i.e. suburbanisms) (Keil, 2017) and decision-making processes. Such trajectories of peripheralization have also been recently discussed as a result of the current crisis caused by the new coronavirus. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has disclosed layers of ‘suburban inequalities’ in access to healthcare services (Biglieri et al., 2020). Although this paper does not address the unevenness of the landscape of care in suburbs that emerged with the coronavirus crisis, it tackles issues of inequalities related to welfare services’ provision, and how these inequalities are producing nuanced socio-spatial gaps at the urban outskirts. The case study determines the consequences of an ill-ruled expansion of a neighbourhood (Palombaro Felciare) in Fiano Romano that led to tangible difficulties in the governance and provision of basic services such as drinking water for an area that experienced a remarkable (and little expected) demographic increase. These difficulties are discussed herein as effects of extended urbanization processes driven by a massive residential expansion, which involved numerous issues regarding the provision and accessibility of basic services. For this reason, this paper acknowledges that unprecedented

forms of suburbanism and suburbanization processes are giving shape to new typologies of in-between territories.

This article thus aims to contribute to the knowledge about the various suburbanization processes that are only now beginning to be uncovered globally (Keil, 2017a). Such an attempt entails a confrontation with the pivotal historical transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, wherein we place the conceptual shifting from ‘urban constellations’ (Gandy, 2011) to ‘suburban constellations’ (Keil, 2013) in the study of large urban areas. While Fordism was characterized by industrial areas settled in peripheral zones, post-Fordism involved a decentralization of economic activities through a flexibilization of space and spatial forms across the urban context. This article fits into this historical shifting, and it discusses such flexibilizations by focusing on the contemporary social and spatial transformations that have occurred at the northern edges of Rome.

On such basis, the research framework dealt with the transformations of the suburban context by moving away from the viewpoint that new suburbanisms are mere conditions for a more decent livelihood (De Jong, 2014; Kotkin, 2005). Rather, it adopted a critical perspective that fell within the contemporary ‘post-suburban’ framework. The concept of post-suburbia enables us to address the intricate issues of the site-specific economic, demographic, geographical, institutional, and cultural conditions of urban edges, moving beyond the mono-functional North American residential sprawl (Phelps et al., 2006, 2010; Phelps and Wood, 2011) by also providing both geographical and conceptual frameworks not only for the spatial implications of contemporary suburbanization but also for the political action of the urban in-between (Young and Keil, 2014). In Italy, these insights have been recently observed under the umbrella of the post-metropolis and regional urbanization (see also Balducci, 2017, 2017a), inspiring further inquiries about governance complexities and socio-spatial transformations at the urban in-between outlined within the post-suburban framework (De Vidovich, 2020). These issues have also been addressed by other European research that focused on the new planning trajectories for governing the contemporary transitions at the urban fringes

(Attademo and Formato, 2019). In this article, special attention is given to suburbanisms as keys to understanding the complex developments that are currently taking place in the suburban peripheries.

On the basis of these premises, this article aims to answer a number of research questions on general to specific issues. What are the main socio-spatial changes behind the post-suburban transformations occurring at a global scale? What kind of complexities do these changes present to local administrators? How do local governments tackle the uneven socio-spatial transformations lying behind new suburbanisms? To find the answers to these questions, this paper offers some considerations from the post-suburban patterns of Palombaro Felciare in Fiano Romano.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. First, the article introduces the post-suburban debate as the groundwork for the empirical activity, also with reference to the complex adoption of post-suburban theory in Italy (De Vidovich, 2020). To attain this article's purpose, the post-suburban argumentation lies on a shifting from global debates to national instances about the contemporary uneven transformations at the urban edges, and beyond the dominant North American models, by observing a 'European variation' (see Bontje and Burdach, 2005; Phelps, 2017; Phelps and Parsons, 2003). Second, research methods are illustrated with reference to qualitative fieldwork. Third, the article describes the overall context of the extended urbanization of Rome and the uncertain construction of a metropolitan scale. Fourth, the article grounds into the empirical work, addressed in two parts: it reports the outcomes of the qualitative fieldwork by describing the emerging social and spatial complexities from Fiano Romano, at the northern fringes of Rome, by analysing the effects of an unrulid building expansion. The paper points out that an uneven (post)suburbanization process has resulted in a complex lack of public facilities that in turn has affected the daily lives of the inhabitants and has generated a number of emerging social demands. A brief comment on the latest local masterplan contributed to the study. In a second strand from the empirical part, the article discusses the main findings and the related issues behind such socio-spatial

changes, by arguing that they are revealing new patterns of inequalities in a 'new suburbia' of Rome, from both the physical and conceptual side. From this viewpoint, the article highlights the relevance of suburbanisms and (post)suburban areas in studying the territorial configuration of welfare governance across urban regions after decades of localism and local welfare system development (Andreotti and Mingione, 2016; Bifulco, 2017; Cochrane, 2003; Davoudi and Madanipour, 2015). The final discussion stresses two aspects: the remarkable issue of the heterogeneity of post-suburban forms and urban fringes, and the importance of differentiating local welfare at the urban outskirts from the consolidated repertoire of welfare planning within the urban cores, as the understanding of suburbanisms is different from that of the ways of living in the traditional urban peripheries.

Post-suburbia from global to local

One of the main features of today's urban development is the expansion of extended urban regions and their peripheries. As urban regions stand at the centre of new globalized economies (Soja, 2015) they have become a key observatory of contemporary urban economic and socio-spatial transformations, but they also represent an important scale for the governance of highly complex societies (Brenner, 2004; Le Galès, 2002). Yet, alongside the global economy and the forms of agglomerations and polycentrism connected with it, the global phenomenon behind the development of urban regions encompasses other societal and environmental impacts. In this respect, suburbanization is a diversified process that assumes a close interplay between economic growth and the movement of people to non-centric places within a broader urban and spatial expansion (Ekers et al., 2012). Such trajectories are associated with manifold migration flows, whether from downtowns or from more faraway places. As such, the suburbs have become the new arenas for politics, modes of governance, and ways of life, where the notions of community are redefined because they are manifested in different ways and at different scales (Keil, 2013). Furthermore, we have entered an era where urban and suburban politics are

less separated from each other, standing in between the old demarcation lines within cities and regions (Young and Keil, 2014). Against this backdrop, MacLeod (2011) states that the uneven spatial development of city-regions requires ‘nimble’ urban politics that can incorporate and mobilize new connectivities and centralities and can democratize the governance between overlapped political relations. According to Allen and Cochrane (2007), the more fluid set of regional political relationships and power plays today calls into question the usefulness of continuing to represent regions politically as territorially fixed in any essential sense.

Among the plethora of theories and research investigating the ways in which city-regions are governed, the concept of post-suburbia has increasingly assumed significance in navigating political conceptual nodes and issues (Keil and Young, 2011). In general terms, the term ‘post-suburbia’ was initially used to distinguish a new era of urbanization (Phelps and Wu, 2011) that corresponds to the post-Fordist phase, and *prima facie*, ‘post-suburbia’ defines the contemporary era after the archetypical suburbia (Charmes and Keil, 2015; Phelps et al., 2010; Phelps and Wood, 2011; Phelps and Wu, 2011). Yet, the concept has come to assume manifold meanings. John Teaford (1997) coined the notion of ‘post-suburbia’ to acknowledge the fundamental change in the metropolitan sprawl not only from the structural and morphological viewpoints but also in terms of the political management. This conceptualization introduced ‘a growing divorce between urban and anti-urban values [. . .],’ arguing that ‘it is no longer possible to ignore [the] social, cultural, economic and political transformations produced by suburban expansion and its impact on city-regions’ (Hamel and Keil, 2015: 5). In this sense, post-suburbia can be seen as a global phenomenon (Phelps and Wu, 2011) largely investigated through several pieces of research on multiform place-making processes (Phelps et al., 2006). Globally, post-suburbia entails an understanding of the post-Fordist ‘urbanized’ infrastructural development that paved the way for the worldwide expansion of scattered suburbs. According to Phelps and Tarazona Vento (2015), the term is a key to understanding contemporary suburbanization in its heterogeneity, by tackling the

variety of capitalist, welfare, planning, housing, and land ownership systems and industry structures and ideologies present. Pagliarin and De Decker (2021) points out that post-suburbia stresses the political inconsistencies currently inherent in the emergent uneven development of different-sized areas with different timings and diverse geographical contexts. On such basis, post-suburbia provides both a geographical and conceptual framework for political action (Keil and Young, 2011). Tzaninis (2020) remarks that post-suburbia calls for approaches ‘beyond the common city/suburb dichotomies that often lack a deeper, qualitative understanding of the meanings of how the contemporary relationship between city and the (post) suburb has evolved and is evolving’ (p. 4). Therefore, the term captures the profusion of terms relating to a nascent urban form and over which there is only a partial consensus (Phelps et al., 2006). This article tackles such partial consensus by investigating the novel suburbanisms that have emerged in an Italian (post)suburban area, and by also highlighting the break with the traditional notions of the city (Gottdiener and Kephart, 1995).

With reference to Italy, the post-suburban viewpoint sets out a sensible framework for observing the particularities of post-Fordist in-between settlements (see De Vidovich, 2020). Since the second post-war period, Italian cities have developed in such a way that there came to be a strong interplay among the patterns of roads, valleys, and water supply networks, which eventually shaped the morphologies of many cities (Lanzani et al., 2015). A model of diffused urbanization (Indovina et al., 1990, 2009) characterized the territorial reconfiguration of the countryside and midtowns, especially from the late 1970s to the 1980s, through diverse trajectories that were very different from the North American ones (Lanzani, 2012). Such trajectories entailed a reproduction of typical urban ways of living in formerly non-urban environments, resulting in ‘diffused cities’ (Indovina, 1989). Polycentrism, infrastructural development, and a trend of unauthorized construction, especially in the south (Curci et al., 2017), have strongly characterized post-Fordist (sub)urban development in Italy.

Moving from global debates to contextual specificities, we can say that post-suburbia provides an

analytical lens for observing these overarching features of diffused urbanization at a time of increasing relevance of suburban areas in studying 21st-century urban transformations. With reference to Italy, this research effort also faced governance challenges related to the long-standing weaknesses of governmental agendas targeted for territories with diffused urbanization (Lanzani, 2003; Lanzani et al., 2015; Lanzani and Zanfi, 2019). In this framework, Rome is an insightful context of analysis as it presents peculiar processes of extended urbanization of the countryside, together with aspects referred to as a weak and ambiguous metropolitan configuration that distinguishes it from the other urban cores of Italy, for instance, the global city-region of Milan (Balducci et al., 2011, 2017) or the Mediterranean urban node of Naples. Before introducing the context of analysis, the research methods that were used in the study are presented.

Research methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach to look into contextual and site-specific post-suburban changes. By providing some of the outcomes of research fieldwork, the article identifies and reports the challenges and complexities faced by both the inhabitants and the administrators of the target area. Qualitative methods allow more room for the researcher's subjective and arbitrary judgement compared with other research methods as they are less rigorous than quantitative analyses and are based on hypothetico-deductive methods (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Also, qualitative approaches are grounded on a personal knowledge of the object of study (see Polanyi, 1958) and, as such, they seem appropriate for demonstrating a lack of knowledge about the issues addressed by the case study. Until the recent writing of a collection of essays on the topic (see Cellamare, 2016a), the urban fringes of Rome were little explored compared with the city and its urban peripheries. The choice of the qualitative–deductive approach meets the aim of disclosing new issues about ill-explored urban edges, whereas the statistic–inductive approach would be useful for systemizing and quantifying the emerging tensions in these unexplored areas. As suburbs are generally

transitional in time and space (McManus and Ethington, 2007), a qualitative case study will enable the researcher to read through such transition by observing how a suburban area has changed over the years. In this respect, the case study fosters a 'dialectical reading' of the social conditions in a suburban area (see Peck, 2015) by adopting an approach that sees the suburbs as places of both disorder and possibility, which can overcome the traditional tendencies of imposing order in suburban research (Keil, 2018). The investigated socio-spatial transformations are noteworthy materials for setting out the basis for further possible local governance agendas.

The discussion of the case study draws on the outcomes of research fieldwork enriched by some semi-structured interviews of privileged informants. First, site visits were conducted within the period from June 2018 to March 2019 to observe the local context. Second, eight semi-structured interviews of both the inhabitants and local governors of the target area were carried out, organized as follows: three interviews of local governors of the municipality of Fiano Romano and five interviews of local inhabitants, three belonging to a local civil committee and two local shopkeepers. For the sake of synthesis, only three noteworthy statements from the eight conducted interviews were reported. The research benefits further from a brief comment on the most recent local masterplan targeted for Palombaro Felciare,¹ the target area of the empirical analysis. This institutional document also acted as a guide material during the interviews.

According to the study's purposes, a qualitative research toolkit comes in handy to describe the social and spatial complexities emerging at the aforementioned urban fringe. As the study also aimed to highlight the relevance of suburbanisms in examining local transformations and the relevant planning and governmental actions, qualitative fieldwork was conducted to disclose some new insights 'from the territory', on a local scale of analysis. In this case study, new 'suburbanities' and 'suburbanisms' (see Keil, 2018) were discussed in relation to the emerging difficulties in the provision of some welfare services. Ultimately, this research endeavoured to provide an empirical contribution to the

recent theoretical debate on post-suburban Italy (see De Vidovich, 2020), which stressed how new suburban understandings are helpful for reading the complexities behind the diverse forms of the typically Italian diffused urbanization in time and space. In this respect, in this article, the post-suburban approach repositions the peripheral conditions at the urban edges, and to do so, it applies the new insights obtained from diverse local actors.

The research is framed into the complex understanding of metropolitan Rome. Before discussing the empirical materials that were used in the study, an introductory note on Rome at a glance is necessary.

Rome: extended urbanization and metropolitan ambiguities

With a surface area of 1,286.89 km², Rome is the largest municipality of Italy, seven times as large as the second most populous city of Italy, Milan (181.67 km²). Processes of ‘extended urbanization’ (Brenner, 2014; Keil, 2017a; Monte-Mor, 2014) are considered representative of the urban area of Rome (Cellamare, 2017), where landscape transformations have revolved around three main themes (Cellamare, 2016b, 2017): (1) dwelling and real estate within and beyond the municipal boundaries; (2) morphologies of settlements and service provision; and (3) relationship between the organization of more recent settlements and the organization of everyday lives.

According to the three aforementioned epiphenomena, new peripheries have emerged at the municipal outskirts of Rome, mainly through the varying movements by the middle classes seeking new residential solutions between the urban and the rural, the latter considered less congested and deprived than the urban peripheries of Rome (the so-called borgate). As late as the 1970s, Rome was a big city with a concentration of activities in the historical city centre surrounded by small towns with a rural identity (e.g. Monterotondo, Guidonia, and Tivoli). The increasing urbanization and the construction of metropolitan-scale politics characterized the 1980s and 1990s, although the metropolitan strategies were limited to the administrative duties of the provincial head, without any strategy to ameliorate the services and the infrastructures of the changing landscape at the outskirts of Rome. During the

two aforementioned decades, Rome witnessed a massive process of suburban expansion through the ‘explosions’ of small towns into scattered suburban constellations (see Cellamare, 2016a). Such changes led to an emerging polycentrism of Rome’s urban region (see Salvagni and Morassut, 2005) albeit not sustained by institutional arrangements (Cellamare, 2016a, 2017).

A historical development of unauthorized settlements and speculative housing developments characterized the urban expansion of Rome even beyond its large municipality until recent years, by also generating a parallel informal housing market (Cellamare, 2017). While high-rise buildings and public housing stocks are typical of the ‘inner’ urban periphery, single-family dwellings and medium-sized condos shape the peri-urban fringes of Rome. In such areas, daily life (as a complex social activity) is increasingly divorced from the territory where it takes places. Consequentially, new trajectories and territorial organizations have arisen: (1) policies aimed at promoting polycentrism and regeneration of peripheries, foreseen by the 2008 Rome Masterplan and strengthened by former positive experimentations, such as the shopping centre Porta di Roma or the University of Tor Vergata; (2) the development of new areas, often badly connected with the consolidated urban core of Rome and developed as a result of masterplans only partially enacted in the past; (3) the development of settlements next to the major highways or railways stations; (4) the emblematic development of the so-called city of GRA (Grande Raccordo Anulare) (Pietrolucci, 2012), where GRA is the ring-road highway encircling Rome tracing a boundary between the city and the suburbs of the urbanized countryside (i.e. the places of extended urbanization); and (5) the reorganization of urban hierarchies regarding transit networks and services, which saw the growth of a number of towns outside the urban core.

These reorganizations produced a new stratification of settlements in increasingly anthropized rural areas. Nonetheless, a resulting inequality surfaced between territories and in terms of service allocation, infrastructures, political engagement, and environmental changes (d’Albergo & Moini, 2011). Such inequalities led to unprecedented conflicts between the centre and the peripheries and within each

municipality at the urban edges of Rome, related to the inadequacy of transit networks or welfare services. The combination of these factors accounts for the ambiguous metropolitan dimension of Rome (see d’Albergo et al., 2016, 2019) in both institutional and spatial contexts. There are two reasons for such ambiguity (d’Albergo, 2015). First, a structural issue regarding space and economics accounts for the difference between Rome and its outskirts, which are not seen as a part of a wider ‘metropolitan fabric’. Second, the social and political aspects impeded the creation of a political leadership that could sustain the institutional and scalar change towards possible improvements in the complicated government of Rome. In other words, questions of scale are not considered important, and the sum of the material factors (economic and policy actions with physical impacts on the urban spaces) and non-material factors (representation, discourses, and scalar or transcalar relations) explains the ambiguity of and contradictions in the problematic metropolitan dimension of Rome (d’Albergo et al., 2019). This article focuses on a suburban constellation located within this challenging institutional framework.² The focus on the case study of Fiano Romano is articulated in two parts: first, the following section describes how the both societal and spatial transformations occurring in the town are resulting in new layers of inequalities in the accessibility to welfare services. This inquiry leans on excerpts from interviews of local administrators and inhabitants. Second, a final section before the conclusion discusses the complexity and the emerging tensions behind such socio-spatial inequalities, by framing these issues as part of a new suburban understanding, where governance and planning of services deserves further agendas, even targeted on the local scale.

Spotlight on Fiano Romano: socio-spatial transformations at the urban fringes of Rome

Many scholars have recently outlined a transition phase of metropolitan Rome (see Coppola and Punziano, 2018). Outside GRA, a new suburban fabric has been formed due to the emergence of differentiated ways of living (Cellamare, 2016a; Leonardi,

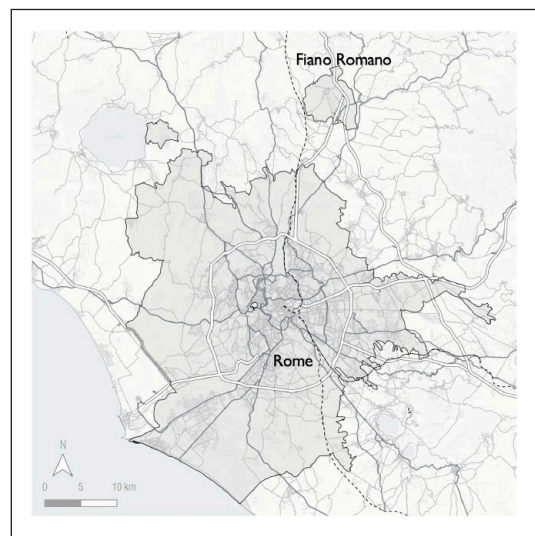


Figure 1. Location of Fiano Romano.
Source: author’s elaboration of GiStat and Open Street Map data.

2013). The suburb of Fiano Romano epitomizes the turbulence of the extended urbanization of Rome, resulting in a constellation of towns that strongly modified the countryside. Fiano Romano is one of these towns composing the northern urban fringe of Rome, located 30 km from the urban periphery of the capital city (see Figure 1), and its relation to the capital city is predominantly determined by a motorway road connecting the Milan–Naples Highway to Rome. A great expansion in residential buildings accompanied the demographic increase of the town. According to the Istat census data, within the period from 2001 to 2011, Fiano Romano experienced a 64.84% population increase, and such a trend continued unabated, with a population increase from 13,059 to 15,688 from 2011 to 2017. These changes inevitably affected the land use by fuelling an increase in the construction of houses mostly for residential use in the areas located at the bottom of the historical city centre (Figure 2). Data shows that a migration flow from Rome has been a key factor of the population increase: in 2003, 45.16% of the new inhabitants of Fiano Romano came from Rome, whereas in 2008 the new inhabitants from Rome accounted for 55.57% of the whole town population.³ A contemporary reproduction of the North



Figure 2. Boundaries of Palombaro Felciare, Fiano Romano.

Source: author's elaboration.

American ‘bourgeois utopia’ (Fishman, 1987) made up of greener places and large houses away from congested downtowns has accompanied the middle classes’ outflow from Rome to the *Agro Romano* countryside. Such a flow thus retrofitted the rurality surrounding Rome into a changing territory due to the incessant process of urban sprawl and the inability of public policies to manage the increasing difficult coexistence between urban and rural land uses (Lelo, 2017).

The interest in studying Fiano Romano was sparked by previous studies carried out on the area of Palombaro Felciare, one of the most recent neighbourhoods in the municipality (see Vazzoler, 2015, 2016). Such studies revealed how s-regulation (see De Leo and Palestino, 2017) and housing speculation affected the most recent urban development of the area. The notion of ‘s-regulation’ was adopted by Carlo Donolo (2001) to describe the distortions of complex rule systems due to the presence of organized crime. Many Italian urban planners see the concept of s-regulation as crucial to acknowledging the combination of informal, unlawful, or particularistic powers in territorial transformations, especially with reference to settlements’ development (De Leo,

2018). Such trajectories are rooted in the history of Italian land transformations (Curci et al., 2017).

In the early 2000s, recent trends inspired by such s-regulations sparked insightful studies on Fiano Romano revolving around the concept of ‘urban intensity’ adopted to read citizens’ uses and practices for interpreting the urban beyond the physical aspects, focusing instead on the sum of the inhabitants’ trajectories, practices, and ways of living (Vazzoler, 2015). Dealing with such ‘intensities’ entails an understanding of the contemporary suburbanisms at the northern edge of metropolitan Rome. The area of Palombaro Felciare is located to the right of Via Tiberina, the ancient Roman consular road that today serves as a ‘market road’ (*strada mercato*) (see Figure 2), a quintessential artefact of suburban Italy, where main services and shops are accessible to the scattered populations (Indovina, 2009). The area is predominantly characterized by low-density houses. Land use for private housing has been progressively exploited over the decades. According to European Environmental Agency and CORINE land cover data,⁴ the variation of anthropized land (i.e. land whose use has shifted from rural and agricultural to urbanized land) increased by 62% from 2000 to 2006.

The neighbourhood of Palombaro Felciare began to develop in the late 1990s through a little-governed expansion of residential settlements. Until that period, the area was predominantly rural. Today, there are vacant lots that offer various fragmented housing solutions and that are still available for new constructions. However, the private-led development of the area neglected the infrastructural provision of basic urban standards. This has resulted in the collective disappointment of the inhabitants, who are mainly ‘newcomers’ especially from the increasingly congested, unsecure, and unconnected urban peripheries of Rome. A key issue is the massive development of private houses through an unruly process: in an area where a single dwelling was foreseen for each lot, an average of four houses per lot were built thanks to the agreement among the construction company, the landowner, and the purchaser. Also, such houses were constructed in diverse private-led building typologies with diverse volume dimensions. As noticed by Vazzoler (2016), the 1974



Figure 3. Streets' typology in Palombaro Felciare: unpaved self-led side streets of the main streets without sidewalks.
Source: author.

Masterplan envisaged low-density planning in the agricultural areas at the bottom of the historical nucleus of Fiano Romano, with the construction of new single–double family dwellings ‘with greenery’ (casa con orto). Although updated, the variations of this masterplan did not change such legislative framework. Nonetheless, many houses were built with much higher volumes (see Interview 1). Some of these, for instance, were equipped with a private garage or an attic although this is not permitted by the building regulation. Such process had negative consequences: the absence of sidewalks on the main streets; the presence of scattered self-led sideways, usually unpaved (see Figure 3); and a lack of accessible facilities (groceries, commercial activities, pharmacies, etc.) in a mesh of streets perfunctorily carved out by private dwellings.

Consequently, the daily use of private cars is unavoidable for the new dwellers of Palombaro Felciare. Furthermore, frequent problems in the supply of basic public services such as the water supply emerged. In this case, the purification plants for water treatment and the pipelines for channelling the water supply to private houses were not outfitted with a system that could cope with such a massive expansion. As stated earlier, from a technical viewpoint, the unrulid expansion of Palombaro Felciare did not observe the regulation of urban standards,

hence making the fair provision of facilities per person difficult (see Vazzoler, 2017). The interviews of two members of the Committee Palombaro Felciare,⁵ a civic organization established to handle such problems, confirmed these living conditions. The history of Palombaro Felciare reveals a strong private development made possible by the absence of governmental monitoring of the building expansion, as pointed out by a member of the citizens' committee:

I noticed that new houses were appearing, exceeding the legally permitted volumes. Construction's norms were violated from 2003 to 2007: the maximum cubic capacity was 2,000m³, but some new houses have a 4,000m³ capacity. I realized that no attention was dedicated to this increasingly anthropized landscape. However, the collective effort to contest such irregularity was possible only through the direct interest of the inhabitants, but only 50 inhabitants out of 300 signed the decision to contest the speculation. As a consequence, today Palombaro Felciare results in a suburban dormitory without public facilities.

[Interview 1, 1 June 2018]

This type of s-regulation (see De Leo, 2018) is determined by the apparent prioritization of the private interests of housing purchasers and landowners over the public infrastructures that need to be built to regulate building expansion. The first concern was to provide most of the residences with a private green space and a parking lot. However, the unlawful side of s-regulative forms emerged. In 2005, the Court of Rieti ordered the confiscation of a specific contested area and convicted the people concerned of the crimes of unauthorized construction, allotment, and abuse of office. On 9 July 2011, the first-instance judgement convicted members of the public planning authority, local administrators, constructors, and two house owners. The second instance (28 March 2012) absolved the latter two and convicted the administrators with a non-custodial benefit (Vazzoler, 2016). Today, the outcomes of a poorly equipped public space intertwine with the shortage of municipal economic resources. To face a process of retrofitting of the public facilities in Palombaro Felciare, a viable solution has been introduced in 2016 with the new local masterplan PUA (Piano Urbanistico Attuativo) (see Figure 4). PUA aims to

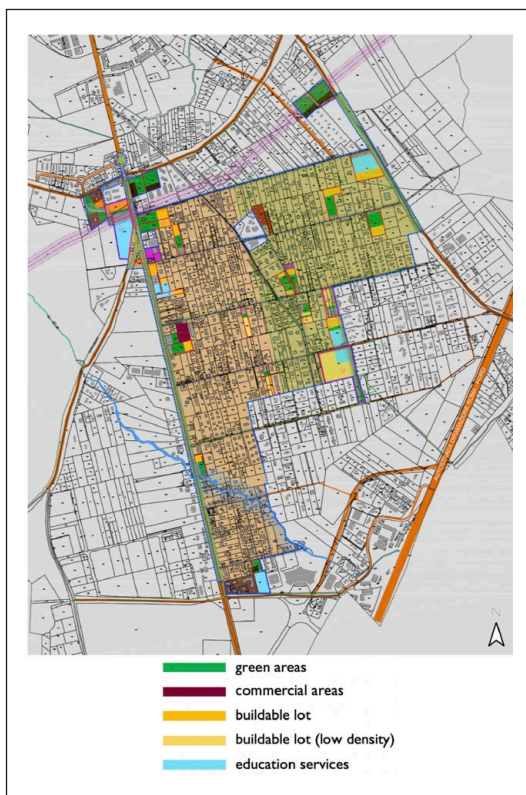


Figure 4. PUA (Piano Urbanistico Attuativo – local masterplan) for Palombaro Felciare (2016).
Source: Municipality of Fiano Romano, Urban Planning Department.

recast the public space of Palombaro Felciare after the 2012 judgements. In particular, the new masterplan enables the building of facilities in some specific areas that have not yet been transformed, through the mechanism of ‘compensatory disposal’ (*cessione compensativa*), which identifies a part of a privately owned plot for the construction of public facilities (this division of the target areas is also indicated in Figure 4). Foreseen developments identified by PUA were discussed with the director of the municipal Public Affairs Office of Fiano Romano, who pursues the expected goals of the municipality and addresses the slowness in the implementation of PUA:

The intervention by the Court of Rieti was a watershed, as the municipality realized the problems of land speculation in Palombaro Felciare. The new PUA aims

at creating pieces of publicness, by building sidewalks, squares, parking lots and facilities. In this view, supermarkets came as first, implicitly seen as the first basic need, to be reached usually by private transport. Health, school and social services are ensured in the town, but the implementation of PUA is running slowly. Today, the challenge is to contrast a rationale led by settlements modalities not interested to the public facilities, but rather oriented to the privatization of space.

[Interview 3, 10 July 2018]

According to the director, the development of public social, education, and health infrastructures is not possible with only the public effort. Therefore, no infrastructures are foreseen to be built in the near future. In this respect, Figure 4 shows the expected planning initiatives to provide social infrastructures in Palombaro Felciare, although the development of such infrastructures is slow due to the difficulty in taking charge of these processes solely by the public authority. Such problematic condition was also acknowledged by a member of the *Comitato Palombaro Felciare*:

PUA looks like a remedial method to the past mistakes, but there is a risk that it will not be applied. The only public expenditure cannot afford the development of those basic services envisaged by PUA. As a consequence, some primary goods are lacking. Water, for instance, is poorly provided, and after the housing development, its distribution is undersized. The administrators are aware of such problems, but at this moment, they only fixed 250mt of pipelines in a street, whereas some plots of the area suffer an under-provision.

[Interview 8, 13 March 2019]

While water scarcity still affects much of the area and the collective efforts of the civic *Comitato* to resolve the related dispute are slowly finding the support of the Regional Administrative Court, privatization of the space led by the housing market is still ongoing to entice new dwellers to the new detached suburban fabric of Palombaro Felciare. However, the emerging ways of living in the transformed neighbourhood of Fiano Romano disclose a condition of unexpected deprivation: basic social infrastructures such as health centres, primary and secondary schools, municipal helpdesks, groceries,

and pharmacies are not accessible by walking. Connection to Rome, on which the town is still dependent, is primarily guaranteed by road systems, although both the inhabitants and the local administrators consider the public transport road system (COTRAL) weak. Yet, mobility is predominantly through road systems, as the closest railway station of Passo Corese (where an Amazon Ltd. warehouse is located) is reachable with a public bus service. Automobile dependency is a key feature of Fiano Romano. Such general unevenness in infrastructural provision that emerged as a result of the (post)suburban expansion points out three key themes from the fringes of Rome (De Vidovich, 2018): (1) governability: within a metropolitan framework (legitimized by the new institutional level of the *Città Metropolitana*), the improvement of the living conditions in one of the fastest expanding suburbs requires a collective understanding of the inhabitants' needs and social demands; (2) intensity: the multi-dimensional effects of the growth of Palombaro Felciare overlap with each other, from the mutation of the society of Fiano Romano to the condition of 'peripherality' that affects the population (Vazzoler, 2015); and (3) suburban infrastructures: from transit networks to the pipelines for water supply, infrastructures make suburbanisms work, ensure connections, and meet the inhabitants' basic needs. Against this framework, the post-suburban fringe of Fiano Romano unfolds themes involving both technical and social interventions, calling for a redefinition of the factors affecting well-being, welfare provision, and the choices regarding equity and justice (see de Leonardis, 2002) lying behind the welfare rationale.

Building a new suburbia

This section goes back to the key contents of the literature review on post-suburbia, in view of the outcomes of the qualitative inquiry into Fiano Romano. Patterns of uneven s-regulation, shortages in the supply of basic services such as water, and diverse weaknesses in welfare provision characterize the emerging 'suburbanisms' of the area, especially Palombaro Felciare, the target area in this study. The qualitative description, enriched by some interviews and a comment on a public planning document (see

Figure 4), form a narrative of an emerging post-suburban condition where the most recent phase of building expansion led to unexpected consequences. The qualitative description of what had transpired in Fiano Romano (see also Vazzoler, 2015, 2016) provides some novel insights about the socio-spatial changes that occur at the urban fringes, which represent the quintessential context of Italian post-suburbia (De Vidovich, 2020).

All over Europe, suburban peripheries are disclosing significant processes of societal transformation. The case of Fiano Romano, with a focus on the new neighbourhood of Palombaro Felciare, unfolds remarkable insights about the fragmentation and governmental weaknesses involved in (post) suburban development. In particular, the research outcomes point out the difficulty of dealing with the emerging social demands in a context where building expansion was little governed in recent decades. Thus, the key challenge today is to create a 'new suburbia' by referring to the social fabric and the suburban ways of living put in motion by a new population subgroup (see also Kontuly and Tammaru, 2006). Suburbanisms represent the leverage for recasting local agendas facing emerging demands, as revealed through the discussion of Palombaro Felciare. According to the discussed theoretical framework, research on new suburban patterns at the urban fringes entails the adoption of a post-suburban approach (Charmes and Keil, 2015; Keil and Young, 2011; Phelps et al., 2006, 2010) to address global debates and perspectives with contributions from local contexts, according to the local features, typologies, and specificities of post-suburbanization.

Nonetheless, two caveats must be considered in understanding new post-suburban forms. The first refers to the spatial differentiations and interpretations of the heterogeneous suburban and post-suburban areas. Fiano Romano is largely considered part of the urban fringes at the outskirts of the metropolitan area of Rome (Cellamare, 2016a, 2016b; Vazzoler, 2016). A European study has recently defined the urban fringe as the external crown of the city that takes shape as a puzzle of heterogeneous fragments predominantly served by road mobility infrastructure, resulting in modern neighbourhoods, a historical rural nucleus, and industrial areas crossed

by dense infrastructure networks (van Tuijl, 2019). As recently stated by Paris (2019), such fragmented fringe territories are habitually considered destinations of the functions of supporting the urban machine of the ‘consolidated city’. Yet post-suburban areas manifest different phenomena across varying densities and urban intensities, and such phenomena demand an overall understanding from a suburban viewpoint, where the processes fuelling the urban productivity are part of a larger contextual scenario of diverse social, economic, and environmental processes. Against this backdrop, post-suburbia is a comprehensive contemporary perspective with a two-way aim: (1) to navigate the heterogeneity of post-suburbs, from the urban fringes such as Fiano Romano to the more informal *kampungs* and peripheries of the Global South and the recent high-rise expansions; and (2) to grasp the complexity of post-suburbanization as an overarching process not ascribable only to the supply of urban functions.

The second aspect that must be considered to be able to understand the new post-suburban forms pertains to the challenges for governance agendas considering the difficulties of facing an increasingly fragmented and uneven development of urban regions (Lawton, 2018). The case study on Fiano Romano tackled issues of provision and delivery of basic services after a significant unruly suburban expansion. Through a review of previous research (Vazzoler, 2016, 2017), the paper framed the contemporary weaknesses as welfare fragilities by also discussing the infrastructural developments foreseen by the most recent local masterplan (PUA) for Palombaro Felciare.

The focus on local welfare weaknesses, however, necessitates some clarifications. Welfare provision rearrangement took place from the late 1980s with the development of local welfare systems (Andreotti et al., 2012), seen as more sustainable for tackling a fair provision of welfare services with the aim as well of stimulating social cohesion (Andreotti and Mingione, 2016). Although many projects and programmes for the localization of welfare services have been carried out in recent decades (Bifulco and Centemeri, 2008; Bifulco et al., 2008; Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2017; Laino, 2018), the exploration of local welfare in the post-suburban context involves

new dynamics, limits, and perspectives. Historically, local welfare deals with the visible vulnerabilities experienced by urban peripheries, tackled through projects for the empowerment of the disadvantaged population (Van Berkel and Borghi, 2008), the territorialization of social policies (Bifulco, 2016; Clarke, 2004; Moreno and McEwen, 2005), the citizens’ participation in the decision-making process (Guarneros-Meza & Geddes, 2010), and the integration of these different policy fields. Nevertheless, the reproduction of this formula, which characterized a vibrant local welfare planning period from the 1990s to the early 2000s in Italy and the rest of Europe, is hardly visible at the suburban latitudes, with rare exceptions (Calvaresi and Cossa, 2013). In this respect, this paper suggests that the urban outskirts identified in post-suburban areas demand interventions that deviate from the consolidated actions undertaken in urban neighbourhoods.

In the complex metropolitan dimension of Rome (d’Albergo et al., 2019), the understanding of what is occurring at the urban fringes such as Fiano Romano also entails a retrofitting process for local welfare agendas in view of the emerging vulnerabilities that strongly differ from those of the typical urban poor tackled by local welfare agencies in the peripheries of cities. Ultimately, the case of Fiano Romano raises a key question concerning suburban governance, which deserves broader attention according to what is illustrated herein. Who actually governs post-suburban transformations? What is the main institution responsible for the local service provision and infrastructural development in the suburban constellations of urban fringes? Also, with respect to the Italian multi-level framework, are the urban regions effectively being governed on a metropolitan scale? This question is premised on the qualitative findings from Fiano Romano in this study, which point to a weak governmental framework for the metropolitan area of Rome and the towns that make it up.

Concluding remarks

As Scott and Storper (2015) argue, ‘urbanization processes are profoundly shaped by the social and property relations of capitalism, though they cannot

be reduced to functionalist expressions of those relations because they are also shaped by ideas, interests and politics' (p. 9). This paper investigated the manifold complexities of post-suburban transformations by discussing the case study of an ill-governed building expansion in a neighbourhood in the fringe town of Fiano Romano in Italy, and the resulting social demands characterized by the emerging shortages in basic necessities. By 'assuming that life on the global urban periphery is changing rapidly in a set of post-suburban constellations that provide novel insight into the urban condition' (Keil, 2018: 2), this study, through a qualitative investigation of the urban fringes of Rome, developed an exercise of 'post-suburban understanding' as a way to observe the contemporary transformations of urban Italy. In so doing, the study obtained a number of insights related to welfare provision, which necessitates further investigations of the related interests, ideas, and politics, as invoked by Scott and Storper (2015). The study navigated the broad field of service provision with a particular reference to the emerging lack experienced by the inhabitants of Palombaro Felciare, one of the most recently built neighbourhoods in Fiano Romano. Such weaknesses have been framed and observed as emerging issues calling for a redefinition of local welfare and service delivery agendas. The problems of insufficient water supply, automobile dependence, and inaccessible primary services and goods are novel welfare issues. In this respect, a recent local masterplan (PUA) for the area of Palombaro Felciare is slowly attempting to make up for past governance faults.

Insights from Fiano Romano have been discussed according to the main features of the global focus on post-suburbia (Keil and Young, 2011; Phelps et al., 2006, 2010; Teaford, 1997), with the aim of disclosing some post-suburban peculiarities from Italy (De Vidovich, 2020). Such an outline attributes a pivotal role to 'global suburbanisms' (Keil, 2013, 2017, 2017a) as key themes for engaging with welfare and social infrastructure issues. On the basis of previous studies (Vazzoler, 2015, 2016), the current study grounded its reflection on the narratives of suburban ways of living in the area of Palombaro Felciare in the town of Fiano Romano,

through an analysis of the main deficiencies pointed out by some local inhabitants. The investigated patterns of suburbanism in this urban fringe (see van Tuijl, 2019) of the largest Italian metropolitan area unfolds a body of unsolved governance complexities: the role of governance actors, the slowness of implementation, and the emerging social demands of a new group of people who moved to Fiano Romano, particularly to Palombaro Felciare, over recent decades. This case study at the urban fringes of Rome illustrated the processes behind the development of a new suburbia. With the aim of contributing to global post-suburban studies, the article discussed the case study that epitomized the peculiar processes of extended urbanization of Rome (Cellamare, 2016b, 2017), also affected by the peculiar ambiguity of the metropolitan scale of government (d'Albergo et al., 2016, 2019). Fiano Romano is located at the core of a key transit area shaped by an important motorway junction (see Figure 2), a landscape of warehouses for storage and delivery, and a growing built environment, but the tensions related to such contextual aspects do not seem adequately addressed in the governance agendas for Rome's urban region. This article invokes the centrality of such contextual post-suburban features and suburbanisms as key governance challenges, and highlights that the scale and scope of the suburban regeneration challenge that planning and scholars will have to address 'are signaled in the fact that the greater part of intraurban differentiation is de facto outside of those areas we regard as cities proper' (Phelps, 2021: 4). Moreover, many studies agree that new inequalities and deprivations are taking in place in very diverse suburban areas from physical, socio-demographic, and economic viewpoints. As suggested in the introduction, the complexity of the shortages at the edges of urban cores is also made noticeable by the current unprecedented coronavirus crisis (Biglieri et al., 2020; Connolly et al., 2020), and hence, post-suburban inequalities are not only related to planning and territorial governance, but also to care, well-being, and welfare provision within a wider debate on the recasting of social infrastructures post the coronavirus crisis.

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Notes

1. Link to the whole document of the *Piano Urbanistico Attuativo Palombare Felciare* (i.e. the local master-plan): http://www.comune.fianoromano.rm.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3476&Itemid=1498
2. The National Law 56/2014 established the 'Metropolitan City' (*Città Metropolitana*) as a new institutional actor that replaced the Province in 14 urban areas: Rome, Milan, Naples, Turin, Palermo, Bari, Catania, Florence, Bologna, Venice, Genoa, Messina, Reggio Calabria, and Cagliari.
3. Data retrieved by Vazzoler (2016) based on Istat (Italian National Statistics Institute) report the incidence rate of cancellations from the Civil Register (*Anagrafe*) of Rome on the total number of new citizens inscribed in the Civil Register of Fiano Romano (years 2003, 2008, and 2012).
4. Data retrieved from *Atlante dei territori post-metropolitani*: <http://www.postmetropoli.it/atlante/>
5. Interviews of the former president and of a member of the *Comitato Palombaro Felciare* (then named *Coordinamento dei Comitati Civici di Palombaro Felciare*) on 1 June and 11 July 2018 and on 13 March 2019.

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