

Article

# Ecological Transition without Change: A Paradox, a Misinterpretation, or a Renounce?

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**Abstract:** This paper highlights weaknesses and contradictions that emerge with the implementation of the “ecological transition” goal, ostensibly supported at all policy levels, looking at (1) how transnational, European “Green Deal” post-crisis measures are translated at the urban scale; (2) which are the main obstacles to fulfill a substantial change, and (3) which is the actual role of planning. The paper provides examples from long-lasting research in Rome, Italy, framing them critically by combining planning theory and practice and political ecology perspectives, to show that: (1) the implementation of the “ecological transition” goal at the urban scale through direct and indirect interventions makes it impossible to unequivocally assess policy results; (2) to be actually realized, “ecological transition” asks to redefine priorities among the ever existing conflicting interests in the urban space, and to revise previous planning and policy choices, while a strong resistance emerges in overcoming the “business as usual” way of operating; (3) planning regulation is ambiguous since it is used in opposite ways (both as the source of the “certainty of the right”, and as the “flexible tool” for negotiations), with the only undeniable purpose to preserve the established, dominant interests, even when evidently conflicting with the declared public goals.

**Keywords:** ecologic transition; spatial planning and development paradigms; transnational policies; planning traditions and practices; political ecology; urban citizenship; sustainable neighborhoods



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## 1. Introduction

To speak about “transition”, basically means to shift from something to something else and, possibly, to have a clear idea about the direction of the move. To indicate possible directions, and the steps to follow is (or should be) an essential planning commitment. In the case of “ecological transition”, the direction of the move has been defined by transnational bodies, such as the European Union, which presented it as an inevitable choice yet shared among member states, following the recent global crises we experienced as well as the specter of a much more serious one, that of climate.

Indeed, although Next Generation EU, which frames the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) [1], has been introduced after the COVID-19 pandemic (2019), EU post-crisis measures are expected to respond to several crises, from the global financial crisis (2008) to the Russia-Ukraine war (2019) [2], with its manifold relevant environmental and territorial implications, including those on land use [3]. Thus, the RRF is also at the heart of the implementation of the REPowerEU Plan, the Commission’s response to the socio-economic hardships and global energy market disruption caused by the new war within the continental boundaries [4]. Nevertheless, EU post-crisis measures, and RRF in particular, have a strong green, ecologic legitimization, and climate neutrality is the very first goal: “The RRF helps the EU achieve its target of climate neutrality by 2050” [1], which corresponds to Goal 13 of the United Nation 2030 Agenda (“Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”) [5], therefore, representing subsequent steps to reach the objectives defined by—and shared with—broader institutional bodies. In particular, the UN 2030 Agenda has been considered “a milestone in international sustainability governance”

also for its “goal setting” approach [6], which basically stresses and aims at changing the interpretation of “policy integration” towards a “comprehensive, reciprocal, and complex form of goal integration which differs markedly from environmental policy integration” [7].

In fact, before the Russia-Ukraine war started, with its immediate effects on the energy supply that compelled the revision of some established deadlines and goals [8], “green transition” was “the” way to follow towards (finally) a more sustainable development, making emerge a brand-new alliance between ecology and economy, where the role of private investors “is essential to achieve the SDGs” [9].

A perfect balance between the so-called “three pillars” of sustainability (ecological, economic, and social) has never been reached since sustainability became a main policy target, and now we are witnessing a revision of their inner relationship, whose outcomes are worth to be considered. Significantly, during the 1970s the principles and the reasons for environmental and social sustainability were allied to contrast with the predominance of those of economy, while with the new policy orientation we have that the environment and the economy are expected to converge towards a shared goal and to create synergies, determining (we could say: as a positive by-product) effects also in terms of social sustainability. In other words: if we will be able to obtain more economically and environmentally sustainable development, we will consequently overcome or reduce social inequalities and injustice.

The energy crisis determined by the Russia-Ukraine war, intertwined with the long-lasting global economic crisis, with its social, economic, and environmental impacts at the macro as well as the micro and everyday life levels demonstrates that we are far from this kind of result [10]. Unfortunately, the causal relations and the reciprocal impacts between the different crises, which would provide an essential framework for decision-making, are still not sufficiently analyzed.

However, after decades of austerity politics, recent European post-crisis measures such as “Next Generation EU” and, before that, the “Green Deal” which claims “no person and no place left behind” [11] and is substantiated, e.g., through the “Renovation Wave Strategy” [12], are seen and awaited as a major opportunity for recovery and relaunch for cities and territories, particularly in those countries which contested and/or suffered more than others for the previous EU political economy orientation.

Italy is among those countries. Although public discourse and the media are mostly concerned with highlighting the many opportunities opened, the national translation, and the local implementation of the above-mentioned EU initiatives pose several questions regarding the meaning and impact of the measure, particularly in the long run, and challenging planning theory as regards the very significance and role of urban and spatial planning in this time.

This paper is dedicated to unfolding the contradictions that emerge at the local level when green, ecological measures are translated into urban interventions and materialize in the city. It will use examples taken from the case of Rome, Italy, where very often the protection of historical and natural heritage and of the natural and rural environment clashes with other, stronger interests.

The aim of this paper is twofold. On the one side, it will highlight the many ambiguities and contradictions between declared goals and actual interventions that evidently derive also from diverging interpretations about the city and its future. On the other side, it signals a peculiar weakness of planning, at a moment when the capacity to foresee possible prospects, and the meaning of different options and choices would be, conversely, of the utmost importance.

We will show how the “transition” pursued through EU “Green Deal” policies can result to be limited, both conceptually and practically, exploring the implementation at the local level of the PNRR (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza) [13,14]—the national translation of the RRF (Recovery and Resilience Facility) often mentioned as RRP (Recovery and Resilience Plan) launched by the EU in 2021. We will see that, although presented as a major policy change, the idea of “transition” is bounded within the existing socio-economic

system—that is the same system that provoked the multiple crises whose effects are now expected to be contrasted or mitigated. Moreover, we will see that its achievement at the local level is heavily constrained by the strongest interests of local economic-political elites, which, far from abandoning their “paths”, find new opportunities in the extra-ordinary post-crisis planning policies. Thus, the change that these measures are able to determine is very small, and the results, both in terms of “green transition” and in terms of the reduction in social inequalities, are far from being produced.

## 2. Framing the Case

### 2.1. Methodological Note

The essay derives from long-lasting research on urban transformations in Rome, Italy, where actual stakes and real outcomes are confronted with planning goals, policy measures and policy discourses, sometimes with “unexpected” results [15]. It is a qualitative contribution, which makes use of a consistent apparatus of policy and planning documents, data, and interviews collected throughout the years; of an increasing number of secondary sources dedicated to socio-spatial transformations in Rome [16,17]; of previous research projects and their outcomes; of research activity within civil society and neighborhood associations fighting for a more just and livable city [18].

Concerning EU post-crisis measures, several ambiguities emerged in Rome from the very beginning of the implementation process, since when the PNRR projects for the city have been selected—and they remain the same notwithstanding the political discontinuity within the City Council. Thus, the case allows us to grasp the real importance given to ecological measures, as well as the role of urban and spatial planning within the process, when they come to confront long-lasting established interests and power relations. The examples reported here refer to ongoing projects, with no definite outcomes; they cannot be considered exhaustive and fully representative of the whole policy environment, nor do they allow to make an overall evaluation of the policy, nevertheless, they are able to show obstacles, ambiguities, and inconsistencies that emerge at the local level in pursuing the declared need of a green, ecological “transition”. To understand the empirical relevance of the examples, a few frames will be provided, referring to (1) the main theoretical concepts and the debate they generated; (2) the conceptualization of planning, theory and practice, at the interface between the political and the technical domains and, (3) the specificity of urban and spatial planning in the case of Rome.

### 2.2. Notes on Theory, Part 1: About Post-Crisis “Transition”, Sustainability, and Resilience in Planning Perspective

There are two main ways to look at crises: they can be interpreted as temporary malfunctions of a well-functioning system, or as a sign that the system does not work (or does not work anymore).

Asserting the need for a “transition” (being “green”, “ecological”, “energy”, or whatever), let us think that policymakers opted for the second perspective while looking at policy implementation seems to demonstrate the contrary: thus, scrutinizing policy choices allows to understand which interpretation is actually followed. However, through that “transition” cities are expected to become more “sustainable” and “resilient”: unfortunately, this is not a clarification as much as a further addition of contentious meanings to long-lasting disputed questions.

Sustainability and resilience as objectives of urban planning have been defined as “a demanding and challenging task” [19], first because the very concepts are non-univocally interpreted and contested [20,21], then, because their operationalization is even far more problematic [22,23]. Moreover, both sustainability and resilience (and the second one more than the first), have been considered all but transformative, so that their consistency with the idea of “transition” requires specifications. Sustainability and sustainable urbanism have been discussed for many years, and their theoretical, operational, and political limits have been broadly highlighted [24,25]. Resilience entered urban planning and studies

debate later, through a peculiar path. It has been initially introduced as an alternative to, or as an update of, sustainable thinking [21]. Indeed, it has been precisely in relation to the controversial success of resilience as a concept and as a policy goal that we had a noteworthy revival of sustainability. Several studies analyze the weak or controversial outcomes of putting it as a goal in urban interventions [20,23]. In any case, recent European policies refer to both sustainability and resilience as fundamental policy keywords and objectives.

However, in this contribution we will not engage in the debate on the meaning and the usefulness of those concepts, and not even in their contentious political meaning. Given the limited scope of each essay, our aim here is to concentrate on the weaknesses and contradictions that emerge with the implementation of the “ecological transition” goal, ostensibly supported at all policy levels, looking at (1) how trans-national, European “Green Deal” post-crisis measures are translated at the urban scale; (2) which are the main obstacles to fulfill a substantial change, and (3) which is the actual role of planning.

### *2.3. Notes on Theory, Part 2: About (Urban and Spatial) Planning: Conceptualizations and Models; Behaviors and Responsibility*

As mentioned earlier, it should be an essential planning commitment to indicate how to reach possible future directions for cities and territories, while the objective’s definition belongs to politics. Nonetheless, the interpretation of planning as a craft serving a political project [26], is all but widely shared since it is very difficult to separate the technical from the political dimension of urban and spatial planning [27] and, according to many urban scholars, planning should take its own political responsibility more seriously [28]. Already in the 1980s, the debate between advocates and opponents of planning as a way to direct social change was “replaced by more concrete questions concerning particular planning techniques and alternative institutional structures for achieving society’s objectives”, evidently defined outside the stricter boundaries of planning activity [29,30]. However, in the case of the European post-crisis measures, the main goal has been defined at the supra-national level through the European Union, which means that planning, at its different levels of action, is expected to suggest the right steps to follow to reach that goal and to provide the tools to realize it.

Both at the national level and at the local level, governments have been asked to make (planning) proposals consistent with the EU’s overall objectives. Seemingly, a cascade connection is able to guarantee that the more punctual intervention participates in realizing the goal. Although there is no explicit reference to modes of planning, planning systems and their functioning, the implicit reference seems to be rational-comprehensive decision-making, which is questioned both at the theoretical and operational level for more than six decades [31,32]. Among the more diffuse critiques, is the “simple” observation that that model does not correspond to what happens actually, when a decision must be taken and, even less, when it must be realized. Moreover, the way in which planning operates (spatial planning, urban planning, planning policies), is embedded into the administrative and the legal system of each country, with its own planning system [33,34], and also in the local socio-cultural environment [35,36], with its own habits and path-dependencies [37]. When they come to be implemented in each member state, EU measures and policies must find a place in each country’s planning system and in local planning traditions.

In Italy, the planning system is supposedly very hierarchical, with different levels of action which correspond to levels of government and administrative competencies. The system is assumed to work top-down, from the higher level (the national state and its ministries, which can operate through regional offices, define overall objectives, define bonds and constrictions—e.g., addressed to environmental protection—and assure the required level of coordination) towards the local level. Urban and spatial planning work at the local level mainly through the master plan, which has a regulatory nature, defines land use, assigns building rights, and indicate where and which implementations plans must be defined accordingly.

Not incidentally, we can notice that the EU policy focus on cities (rather than on regions or other government scales), in the case of Italy implies a move within the planning system that means (at least in principle) to go directly into the more enforcing level of planning. Although in the case of the RRF different policy levels are mobilized and each member state was expected to prepare its own RRP to be implemented locally, it has been highlighted that “the countries most affected by the unequal effects of the crisis have spatial planning systems that are traditionally based on the preventive assignation of rights for land use and development through a plan” [38].

#### 2.4. From RRF to PNRR—Introducing Planning into the Policy Measure

That of “Recovery and Resilience” has been introduced by the EU as a “facility”, and specifically as a financial measure to sustain each member state according to their own proposal, which should be presented as a “plan”. Thus, the RRF has been translated into RRP from each country, and the PNRR is the Italian version.

Significantly, as the case of Rome will show, the translation of the facility into a plan does not necessarily correspond to a “spatialization” or, better, to a “territorialization” of the defined policies, so much that the PNRR for Rome has been defined “a Plan without a plan” [39].

Nonetheless, the Italian PNRR has been approved and expected to fulfill EU policy in its multiple and multiscale objectives, and, as already mentioned, primarily to make the country more sustainable and resilient, with reference to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Cities (namely Goal 11) [40], and awaited spillovers effects on other member state’s plans. The following few lines of introduction to the Italian PNRR represent a synthesis of the acknowledged causal relations among recent and possible prospected crises, which ask for a shift in policy orientations.

“Following an unprecedented crisis due to the pandemic, Italy’s recovery and resilience plan responds to the urgent need of fostering a strong recovery and making Italy future ready. The reforms and investments in the plan will help Italy become more sustainable, resilient, and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions. To this end, the plan consists of 132 investments and 58 reforms. (. . . ) 37.5% of the plan will support climate objectives and 25.1% of the plan will support the digital transition” [13].

Italy chose to dedicate 37.5% of the plan to contrast the climate crisis, which means 0.5% more than the minimum level that has been fixed by the EU for all member states.

“Green transition” is indeed the first out of the six pillars on which the EU’s extraordinary measure is based, and the idea of “making mainstream” the interventions on climate and on environmental sustainability is striking in its concise definition.

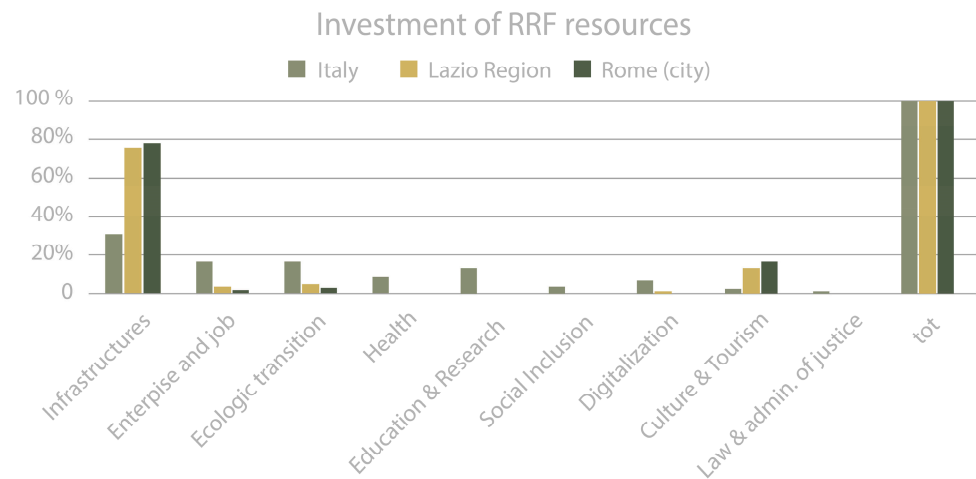
In fact, it is said that: “Reflecting the European Green Deal as Europe’s sustainable growth strategy and the importance to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, the RRF contributes to the mainstreaming of climate action and environmental sustainability. To that end, the measures supported by the RRF should contribute to the green transition, including biodiversity. Member States have put forward reforms and investments in green technologies and capacities, including sustainable mobility, energy efficiency, renewable energy, climate change adaptation, circular economy, and biodiversity. Beyond a general requirement to contribute to the green transition pillar, each Member State must dedicate at least 37% of its recovery and resilience plan’s total allocation to measures contributing to climate objectives” [41].

This statement sounds clear and unequivocal. It states that all the different targets and the related interventions, from mobility to circular economy and biodiversity, should be put in synergy towards one wider and more important goal. It implicitly refers to a shared “vision” about the future, thus implying a planning disposition and capacity. From an urban planning point of view, it should implicate not only that, e.g., future interventions in the urban space should be “climate neutral” or, better, with fewer emissions than those removed through ecosystem natural absorption capacities, but also that previous planning decisions should be revised to be consistent with this fundamental priority. This is quite a thorny

point, since in Italy the actual possibility to revise planning decisions, and particularly if they concern development areas and building rights, is very limited.

Nonetheless, it should be viable to assess if and how those essential objectives are pursued.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the proportions between the different PNRR investments in Italy, in the Lazio Region and in Rome, in absolute value, and in percentage. It allows catching the limited amount in terms of direct investments in “Ecologic transition” at the three administrative levels: national, regional (Lazio Region) and local (City of Rome).



**Figure 1.** Investments of RRF resources. Author’s elaboration on data from official PNRR documents [14].

As we can see, the minimum percentage of 37% established for climate objectives (and consequently that of 37.5% established by the Italian government) is not reached at any of the policy levels: direct investments in the field of ecological transition are just over 30% at the national level, while for the Lazio Region and for the City of Rome the percentage is very small (4.09% and 3.33%, respectively).

Thus, if not through the sole interventions under the label “ecological transition”, those objectives should be achieved through combining various interventions, thanks to the synergies among different targets mentioned before, meaning also “indirectly” which makes the evaluation of what is really pursued more complex. In other words, since “ecologic transition” is both a “pillar”, with its own specific measures, and a “transversal” aim of the whole Next Generation EU, to assess if and how it is effectively pursued it is necessary to look at urban policies and plans as a decision-making system, which should be oriented towards the defined main goal—and this means planning.

Thus, what we need to understand is if, how, and how much the “ecological transition” objectives enter the local planning, changing it if needed.

### 3. Rome in Transition: Towards What?

As explained earlier, we will consider examples from the case of Rome to highlight two basic and intertwined problems in implementing EU resilience and environmental sustainability: urban and spatial planning are very important yet undervalued tools to reach the established objectives and planning should have the capacity to support and pursue those fundamental policy goals in the face of previously defined yet incompatible choices. We will see that more and above the inconsistency between declared goals and actual interventions, there emerges an even more basic and primary question of how to ensure the achievement of the goals, particularly if urban planning does not guarantee any coherence with the transnational, supra-local defined priorities but, on the contrary, it seems keener to defend local dominant interests.

### 3.1. Examples from the Case of Rome, Italy

According to the above-mentioned essential EU requirements, the PNRR for Rome has been defined and approved. It consists of an impressive list of public works, extremely varied, which have been designed individually (instead of as part of a broader plan): it appears as a long list of punctual interventions whose accordance with the established goals, as well as inner consistency, cannot be evaluated yet. The same professor Giovanni Caudo, president of the special commission for PNRR, admitted that the overall territorial coherence will be clear “a posteriori”, thus implicitly signaling a substantial lack of planning, which indeed should foresee (or imagine) what could happen prior to its actual implementation.

Nonetheless, as occurs for any universal or general principle, to understand the real meaning of “ecological transition” it is necessary to look at how it is translated into concrete choices and put into practice.

However, in addition to individual projects, there are four “integrated projects”, which have been designed at the supra-local level for Rome, the capital city of Italy; they are “integrated” because of their expected capacity to combine different issues towards a broader objective, and because they mobilize different actors and different institutional levels. We will briefly introduce and discuss here two out of those four “integrated projects”, driven by two distinct ministries: because of their different typology, they should at least partially show how “policy integration” is going to be achieved, and the expected “green transition” thus produced. What is relevant for our argument here is that these two main projects happened to intertwine, clashing with the “green transition” priorities, rather than working in synergy and laying the foundations for a paradigm shift. Indeed, it happens to be an unexpected relationship between these two projects, and the link is provided by a greenfield, whose conflict over land use is a long-lasting local planning issue. As explained earlier, given the very structure and the functioning of RRP and of PNRR in particular, looking at systemic relations of policy choices is the only viable way to understand the actual pursuit of their declared objectives.

The two “integrated projects” are: “Caput Mundi. Next Generation Eu for major tourist events” [42,43] (Ministry of Tourism) and the so-called “Cinecittà Project”, dedicated to sustaining and relaunching the film industry (Ministry of Culture) [44].

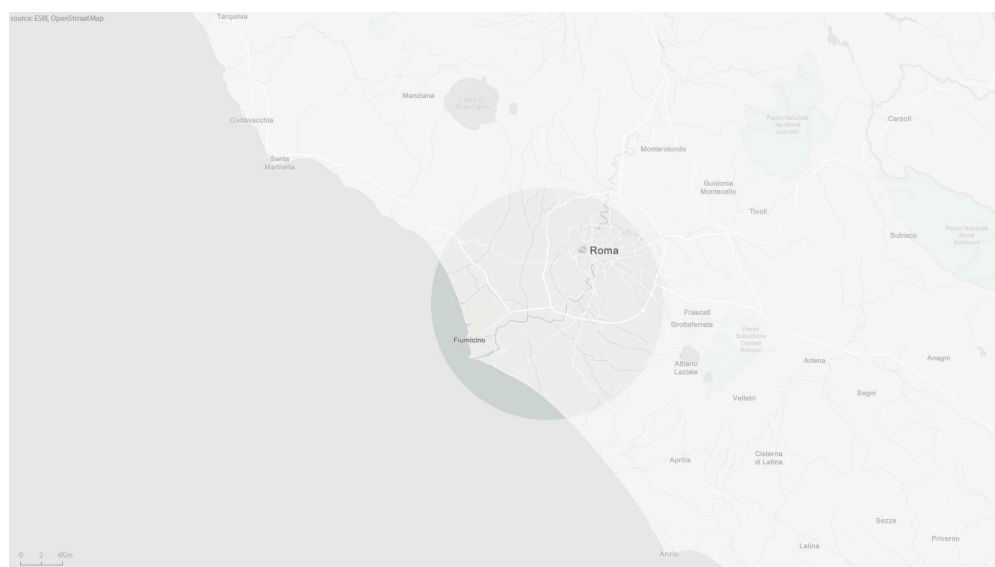
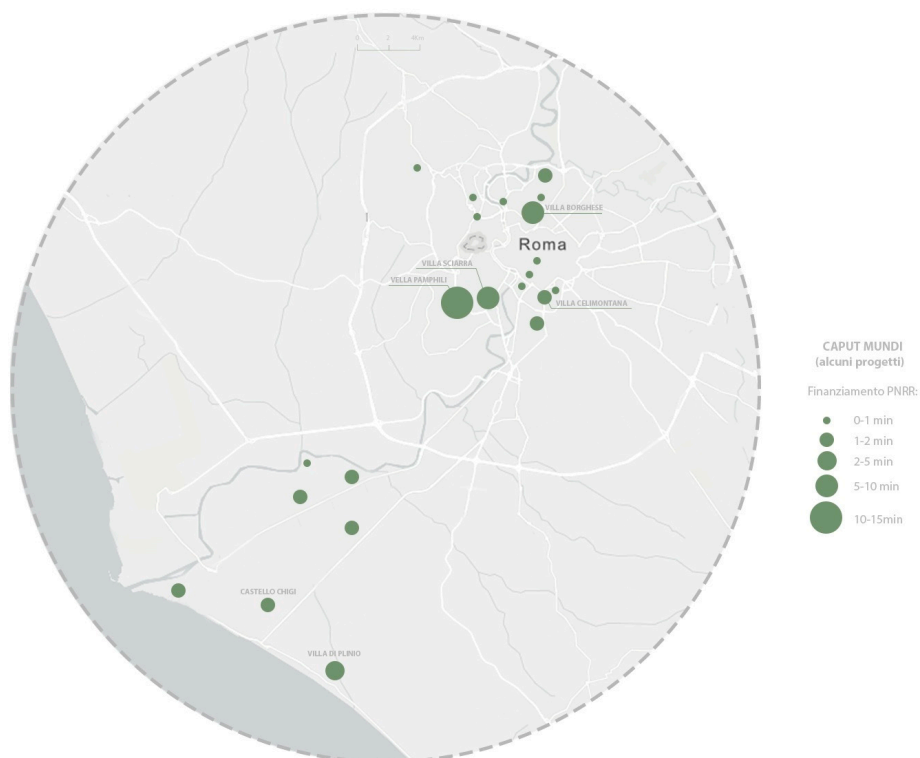
### 3.2. Integrated Projects and Clashing Goals

The “Caput Mundi” project aims to increase the number of accessible tourist sites, create sound and qualified tourist and cultural alternatives to the more crowded central areas, increase the use of digital technologies and enhance green areas and tourism sustainability. These aims correspond to three macro-objectives and will be reached through six lines of investments. “Green transition” is mobilized in explicit relation with none of the six lines, the concept of sustainability in general terms with tourism. Significantly, however, one of the investments is named “#Mitingodiverde” (literarily: “I-dye-me-green”, as an hashtag).

The introduction says: “Finally, but very important for the ‘green’ objectives that guide the Recovery and Resilience Plan, all the projects will seek to have an important environmental value, greening and regenerating the urban context and its peripheries through reforestation and the absorption of CO<sub>2</sub>. The goal is to use the archaeological and cultural heritage by collaborating in the promotion of concrete actions to combat climate change, improve the air quality of cities and create green areas for the benefit of local communities, in line with strategic priorities at the national level and considering the growing interest of public opinion on these issues. All interventions will require to provide a specially designed and enhanced green oasis; culture, archeology and green areas will be put in synergy” [42].

From Figure 2, we see that these green areas are only a few (considering also that the territory of Rome as a Municipality is very broad—as the double picture shows), mostly in the inner part of the city, and overlapping with historical parks, such as Villa Borghese and Villa Pamphili, whose socio-ecological functions are well-known and acknowledged. Thus,

in which sense this investment line will contribute to the achievement of the environmental and climate objectives?



**Figure 2.** #Mitingodiverde, part of Caput Mundi project. Sites of intervention and Funds. The picture above has been re-elaborated from B. Brollo and F. Celata, on data from the Ministry of Tourism. The picture below (author's) shows the very limited impact of the project considering the broader territory of the City of Rome, which is 1287.36 square km wide.

We should suppose that “#Mitingodiverde” is just the more direct measure of a broader plan able to ensure indirectly the fulfillment of the green goals.

On the contrary, the same objective of “greening” the city (or protecting the existing green) risks being contradicted by the other PNRR “integrated project”, thanks also to the local master plan.



### 3.3. RRP Facing the Planning System and Planning Tools

The objective of the so-called “Cinecittà Project” [44] is to strengthen the Italian film industry competitiveness, at the same time it contributes to mitigating the social and economic impact of the pandemic crisis, promoting economic growth, increasing jobs, and sustaining education and training in that same sector. This investment is articulated in three lines: 1. Construction of new studios and renewal of the existing ones, construction of new high-end theaters with additional buildings; 2. Innovative investment to boost the production and training activities of the *Centro Sperimentale per la Cinematografia* (CSC), introducing new laboratories and tools for audiovisual production and conservation, sustaining internationalization and cultural exchanges; 3. Development of infrastructures (virtual production set) for both professional and educational use, also through e-learning and strengthening professional skills and competence, with a focus on the digital ones for technological improvement, for the whole audiovisual sector and its supply chain.

Significantly, above and beyond the many intentions related to education and professional training, and a quick reference to the need of renewing the old studios (the CSC, founded in 1935, is indeed “part of the contemporary scientific and cultural background and an essential reference point for the Italian and worldwide cinema” [45]), the project is expected to be realized mainly through new “constructions”, such as new studios, theatres “with additional buildings”, laboratories, and so on. In so doing, the “Cinecittà project” would indeed sustain the most profitable sector in Rome, that of construction, feeding the more contentious branch of the urban economy, that of land rent. Moreover, in fact, the location of these new structures quickly became “the question”. Remarkably, instead of thinking about older existing structures or brownfields as the “green transition” strategy would require, a greenfield of about 60 hectares (603,000 sqm) became the preferable site.

The greenfield is in Torre Spaccata (Figure 3), a popular neighborhood in the eastern sector of Rome, which is overall characterized by the highest concentration of poverty, from the lack of facilities and public spaces to educational and socio-economic poverty [17,18,46,47]. It is also the urban sector with the highest percentage of “spontaneous” (to read: formerly illegal, unauthorized) buildings which spread like wildfire since post-WWII together with planned urban development [47,48], altogether producing a high-density, overexploited, rather poor built environment. Thus, what remains of the Campagna Romana (the peculiar Roman rural landscape) is, therefore, particularly precious, and strongly claimed by inhabitants.

The Torre Spaccata greenfield is the protagonist of a long, contested urban planning story, that we cannot retrace here, but has been precisely detailed by a local civil society association [48]. What is important to highlight is that the greenfield has been the object of several speculative sales from one owner to the other, and particularly from private to public or para-public owners that provided (usually at the benefit of privates) huge profits without any real transformation; according to the local master plan (approved in 2008), it should be a development site, while the civil society association asks for maintaining the greenfield as a park, considering also its very important historical, archeological and ecological values.

Targeting it as the potential site for the implementation of the “Cinecittà project” has had a double effect. On the one side, it acts as a legitimization of its real-estate value and of the real-estate development objectives by the current owner, Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP), a financial institution in the form of a joint-stock company under public control, which obtained it together with the acquisition of the whole company who previously owned it (Fintecna SpA). On the other side, it creates a sort of “competition” between two real-estate development projects, the one related to the PNRR “Cinecittà” integrated project, and the one previously foresaw by the master plan (an “urban centrality” [16,17] with a land-use exploitation of about 600,000 cubic meters of new buildings).



**Figure 3.** The greenfield in Torre Spaccata.

To the opposition against the prospect of developing the “Cinecittà project”, the Deputy Major for urban planning and his technical staff respond that they are “obliged” to consider what the master plan states in terms of “building rights”; if the civil society counters that the Master plan does not foresee what the “Cinecittà project” aims at realizing, the response is that this means preferring the “urban centrality”.

In this way, the landowner (CDP) has different alternatives, its position is strengthened, while the option of protecting the greenfield as an urban park became weaker, and civil society must confront the “less bad” choice. The main planning tool, the master plan, is invoked both as the source of the right and as the base for negotiation. However, in either case the “green transition” objectives, and in particular the “greening” ones, although claimed and pursued by the other mentioned PNRR integrated project, do not enter the actual planning decisions, and the previously assigned building rights are not questioned.

Going back to the previous integrated project, we see that the redevelopment involves 23 historic parks, villas, and gardens. As said, the most important interventions in terms of financing concern the historical villas—namely Villa Pamphili (12 mil. euros), Villa Sciarra (7.5 mil. euros) and Villa Borghese (5 mil. euros). It should have been desirable, and far more consistent with the declared goals of the PNRR, to use this same measure to increase and protect a very important part of the green heritage of Rome, which is its rural landscape: a fundamental component of the environmental quality, and particularly in the suburbs but, at the same time, constantly under threat by landowners and developers’ interests.

The fact that Rome is the Italian municipality with the highest increase in land take [49] is evidently not considered, although another fundamental objective of environmental sustainability, to have “zero” land take, is always present in political speeches, but subordinated to the master plan.

#### 4. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Despite their alleged urgency and priority as policies, the achievement of the “ecologic transition” goals is all but certain: there can be inconsistencies or also an evident mismatch between the declared goals, and what goes on at the local scale. Without engaging in the debate on “sustainability” and “resilience” in planning, but focusing instead on how what is declared is pursued, this paper aims at highlighting weaknesses and contradictions that

emerge when the European “Green Deal” promoted by the European Union as part of the post-crisis measure and also as part of a broader strategy addressed to combat climate change, such as that contained within the UN Agenda 2030—comes to a realization. In particular, the focus is on its capacity to produce the environmental and social change that the “transition” explicitly or implicitly addresses.

Considering examples from Rome, Italy, we evidenced that ostensibly shared goals, supported at all policy levels, find important obstacles when they come to face specific local planning and decision-making, with their socio-economic environment and path-dependencies that thwart change.

Rome is just one case out of a number of potential ones, whose exploration should help understand the ambiguities and contradictions that emerge when transnational policy goals come to be implemented in each specific local context, and when supposedly “universal” shared principles such as the priority of contrasting the climate crisis have to be translated into actual policy and planning choices, as well as making emerge what is at stake.

Since “ecologic transition” is expected to be reached through the synergies among direct and indirect measures, channeling public and private investments towards the same goal [9,50], and “policy integration” is a major change introduced by the UN 2030 Agenda, we considered the interventions included into the Italian PNRR looking at their systemic relationships. More precisely, we considered two PNRR “integrated projects” for Rome, which at least in principle should act consistently in pursuing the main declared objectives and understood the many contradictions and obstacles that these objectives must face.

Among the main obstacles to the achievement of a substantial change it emerges the actual role of planning, of urban and local spatial planning in particular. The preventive assignation of rights for land use and development which characterize the Italian planning system [38] represents a real and important barrier to the fulfillment of new objectives though supra-ordinated, if that assignation of rights is considered permanent and predominant over other rights and other interests, even if collectively recognized as more urgent and widely shared.

What we stress here is that when “green transition” goals get confronted with other objectives, their supposed strength, which should come from their derivation from the supra-ordinate decision-making level, and from a presumed shared awareness of their priority, sadly crumble, clashing against the interests of private investors, which are not able to admit the dis-economy of their traditional way of operating in the long-run, and also against the master plan used to prevent change to happen.

Concerning the different understanding of the inner relationships among the three “pillars” of sustainability, that is the “new alliance” between ecology and economy expected to produce positive societal impacts, we saw that traditional economic interests are still predominant, starting with the exploitation of urban rent [51], the environment can be just instrumentally mobilized, and societal expectations are negated or simply ignored, even in cases when the need to reduce unbalances and inequalities in the urban space is acknowledged.

On the contrary, as the Torre Spaccata case showed, civil society seems able to provide a wider and long-term perspective—that is what we should expect from planning—raising questions which indeed keep together the “three pillars” of sustainability: they are engaged with the protection of the greenfield as a park, but also from the standpoint of a more just distribution of wealth in the city, and of a higher quality of life environment and of life overall.

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