



PRESS RELEASE

Boom of shared gardens in Rome

Shared gardens in Rome had this year a 50% increase: from an initial number of 100 they passed to a record of 150, spread all over the city. It looks like the people of Rome surrounded by abandoned public spaces and derelict so called “green urban areas”, tucked up their sleeves and brought back to life and use a good number of spaces. All this is recorded by the latest data collected by *Zappata Romana* (www.zappataromana.net) in its map on line. *Zappata Romana*'s web site is visited by more than 30 thousand people a year. The site in both Italian and English offers information as well as suggestions and a small handbook. Each recorded existing garden (from edible to shared gardens to guerrilla actions) has a short presentation, its location, a picture and whenever possible information is given for contacts.

Zappata Romana in order to push its work adopted the motto “it can be done”. It looks like this message has reached many people in Rome. Confronted by the lack of initiative of the Public Administration, the citizens decided to do something for their own benefit and to the benefit of the community as well. Not only shared gardens were brought to life but also soccer fields, basket fields, gymnasiums and spaces for dogs or open air urban spaces have just simply been nurtured and cared for the existing “green life”.

Along the *Appia Nuova* street, groups of citizens take care of the flowerbeds: the same is happening in *Guarico* street and in “*via dei Guastatori*”, situated in E.U.R. – in “*via Giolitti*” nearby the *Termini* Railroad Station. A character of his own is “il signor Piero”: all by himself he took in charge the green life in the *Mostacciano* district, he desperately needs somebody to help him. People living nearby “*Osteria del Curato*” put on line a map of all the spaces they take care of, adding a list of names indicating each person responsible for a specific tree. Countless are the actions and the interventions performed by the Guerrilla Gardening groups who take care of the existing plants and trees all over the city following the steps of the recidivous “*Giardinieri Sovversivi Romani*”.

Shared gardens in Rome give a chance to make friends and to create a new community life. At “*Tor Sapienza*” Rom children had an opportunity to participate and get integrated thanks to the *Sar San* shared garden project. On the other end, disabled people were offered the same opening through “*Coltivatore*” and “*Orto capovolto*”. Unemployed workers of former *Eutelia*'s company found a way to stay together and keep human relations through “*Eutorto*”.

Shared gardens are open air livable public spaces where different generations, from grandparents to grandchildren, can interact in harmony with their roles. This happens in the *San Giovanni* district within the *Santa Caterina* gardens open to families; the same at “*Dame d'Erbe*” in the *Labaro* area; at the garden in *Castruccio Caro* street in *Pigneto* or in the historical shared gardens located in *via dei Galli* (*San Lorenzo* area); in the *Mandrione* street; in *Morozzo della Rocca* street (*Casal Bertone* area); in the *Cellulosa* Park (*Casalotti* district) runned by *Legambiente*.

In some cases shared gardens experiment new alternative ecological models and foster know how exchange as it happens at: *Fermenti di Terra* in the *Giardini Persiani Nuccitelli* (*Pigneto* area); *Orto Maestro* (*Centocelle* area); *Cambiologica* on *via Veientana*; *Cinorto* (*Ostiense* area); *Ortofficina* in *Via Prenestina* following the example set by *Casale Garibaldi* with its *Lavagnaquadra*'s shared garden and by the *Orti Urbani Garbatella*.

Great social and environmental potentialities can be found in the new *Orti Tre Fontane* and those located in the *Aguzzano* Park. Strong educational relevance and cultural setting characterize the *Ortolino* garden maintained by the *Di Donato* school, situated within the historical garden of the

Acquario Romano. Similarly the *Anna Magnani* garden which relies on the good care of another school the *Fontanile Anagnino*.

Rather unique stands the *Hortus Urbis* (www.hortusurbis.it). It is a garden with educational characteristics. It hosts only selected plants among those used in Ancient Roman times recorded by Latin authors. This garden is located within the *Appia Antica* Regional Park, nearby the *Cartiera Latina* now dismissed, on the Appian way n.42/50. *Hortus Urbis* grew in a neglected space of the park, along the ancient sacred river *Almone*. Everything was made possible by the generous work of volunteers from several of the already existing shared gardens who have decided to participate to the project of *Zappata Romana* and the *Appia Antica* Park. *Hortus Urbis* welcomes on every Sunday children promoting for them lab activities.

So as it happens in London, Barcelona, Berlin in spite of the unconcerned attitude (to use an euphemism) of the Capitoline Administration, Rome experiments public spaces and green areas as new models to get in touch with nature, to increase the asset of a positive collective social interaction, giving back to all the citizens abandoned areas transformed into spaces for human relations.

No need for the Romans to invent anything new: it was enough to go back to the old tradition, witnessed by the Nolli's Map of Rome, dating 1748. Nolli reports the gardens still existing from ancient time both within and outside the city walls. Not to forget the gardens from WW II and those cultivated by the railway men, still existing today.

Confronted by the citizen's concrete action and initiatives, the Capitoline administration reacted following the old political style. There is in Rome only one public urban edible garden, run by local authorities for which 400 thousand euros were invested. Beside this there are four more gardens slowly growing that cost 70 thousand euros each. A new office has been created called "Orti urbani". It overlaps procedures and activities pertaining to a pre existing office called "Adozione Aree Verdi Comunali". This doesn't seem to improve the situation.

Simple common sense rules would foster public intervention's efficiency:

- it should be recognized and guaranteed the citizen's possibility to get organized and act in order to realize public gardens and to run them with relevant cultural, economic and social objectives;
- it would be useful to remove bureaucratic and social economic entrances avoiding useless obstacles to the development of shared gardens and promote active participation;
- it is in the interest of the Public Administration to support shared gardens since they are instruments for landscape and environment safeguard for the promotion of positive interaction among citizens, associations, schools and public institutions.

"Daje e daje" sooner or later it will become evident that shared gardens are a big opportunity to Rome.

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