TRANSBORDER INFORMALITY

Migrant's survival tactics and their impact in the public space of Palermo, Italy

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Abstract

This research examines how migrant workers produce urban space in Palermo, Italy. Located south of the European Union, this city is a significant crossroad location where multiple cultures and societies have encountered over the centuries. Historically relegated in the Italian development agenda, Palermo exhibits severe socio-urban issues related to poverty, informality, touristification, segregation, and work integration. Its proximity to Africa makes it a clashing point between the Global North and South. Here, geopolitical tensions, migratory flows, and the degradation of Palermo's historical center have converted the area into a highly diverse space where people of varied classes and origins live and work. Therefore, this research investigates migrants' survival actions and their impact on the public space of the neighborhood of Albergheria-Ballarò, part of the city's Historic Center.

Methods used in this research were mainly qualitative, such as participant observation ethnographies combined with spatial and social mapping. Further, interviews were performed with 20 immigrants, vendors, experts, and activists. Based on a postcolonial approach, this research uses theory and methods produced in the global south to better understand an urban informality case in Europe.

This analysis revealed immigrants' various tactics, such as street vending, car-sleeping, and car-watchers. The study showed that those practices are performed similarly by immigrants and Sicilians working class. The area then becomes a popular centrality in which street vendors, excluded from the formal labor market, perform an economic survival activity while providing affordable products to the low-income community of the area. In this context, sidewalks and streets become crucial spaces of appropriation and dispute in which Immigrants and Italians create an intercultural urban order in a context of limited state involvement.

Table of contents

1. Introduction

Urban Informality, often portrayed as the hallmark of the Global South, finds resonance in the Italian city of Palermo, a strategic location inside the EU. On Palermo's streets, informal practices are more than just survival tactics of migrant workers. They reflect a broader marginalized reality, one which is also faced by the local working class. Commonalities between migrants and locals raise profound questions about the nature of informality in the European Union and its connections to race and class in the broader context of urban life in the Global North.

Traditional academic frameworks, often casting urban realities in binary terms — formal vs. informal, organized vs. unorganized, regulated vs. unregulated — fall short in capturing Palermo's complex urban fabric. Such dualities uphold formality as the modern ideal city, relegating informal urbanities to descriptions of decay, lack of shape, and compromised governance (Arteaga, 2021). Such a lens distorts perceptions and responses across the North and South. The former often associates informality with urban practices of immigrant populations, and the latter aspires to produce cities based on European or US city models.

Geographically close to Africa and adjacent to the Central Migration Route, Palermo remains a paradox despite its integration into Italy in 1861. The region is often viewed as a synonym of "backwardness" within the third-largest European economy. Here, informal work and housing are performed by both immigrants and Sicilian workers. The definitions of 'Italianness' and 'Europeanness' remain contested by immigrants arriving yearly and native Sicilians facing Northern Italian discrimination (Avallone, 2018). In this backdrop, the research investigates spatial production dynamics (Lefebvre, 1991) at the Global North and South juncture, challenging traditional definitions of informality within a European context.

This thesis analyzes the case of Albergheria-Ballarò, the most disadvantaged and intercultural neighborhood of the city's historical center (Barreiro & Gonzalez, 2020). This area is home to immigrants and working-class Sicilians who coexist amidst informal rules and influential local figures. Therefore, this research investigates the extent to which migrants' informal labor and survival practices contribute to creating diverse but contested urban spaces in the face of hyper-precarity, limited state intervention, and alternative urban governance forms. The guiding questions of the research are:

1) What are the practices and tactics that migrants perform to ensure survival, including income and housing in the City of Palermo?

2) How are these practices and tactics negotiated? What purposes and forms do they take on, and how do they relate to the existing socio-economic fabric of Palermo?

3) How do they appropriate and transform urban spaces, their functions, and usages?

This study examines urban informality from a post-dualistic perspective by focusing on the daily practices of the urban poor as producers of a new territorial order rather than passive marginalized actors (Bayat, 2000; Lutzoni, 2016; Roy, 2011, 2012; Simone, 2004). The research adheres to Roy and colleagues' transnational interrogation notion (2004), which uses one context to ask questions of another. Therefore, this research is based on and embedded in literature from the Global South, including Latin American informality (Fuentes Castro et al., 2012; Massidda, 2018; Peralta, 2017), postcolonial theories (Quijano, 2000) and on-field ethnographic methods (Guber, 2011).

This thesis comprises eight structured sections. It begins by offering an in-depth literature review on urban informality, interweaving themes like migration, economics, and street vending. Next, I delve into the research approach, my research positionality, and methodologies, setting a context for the subsequent insights of my empirical field. The thesis then transitions to Palermo, elaborating on its historical trajectory — from its unification to Sicily's internal colonization — and the shared marginalization of its local populace and migrant communities. A focused examination of the Albergheria-Ballarò neighborhood follows, sketching its unique features, governance, and the intertwined roles of the state and mafia.

Section five, with findings and analysis, is split into four nuanced chapters. The first delves into the neighborhood's public spaces, capturing their multicultural essence, chronicling the underlying disputes, and emphasizing the pivotal role of material infrastructures in the urban landscape. The subsequent chapter closely portrays the migrant experience in the neighborhood. Here, the myriad facets of often exploitative work practices, the intricacies tied to visa statuses, and the unique hurdles faced by female migrants in this gendered urban landscape are unveiled. The following section explores the Ballarò Market, emphasizing the local dynamics, migrant's role, and the ongoing transformation from a popular market to a tourist experience. Parallelly, the Albergheria Market is presented as a survivalist zone where streets and sidewalks are occupied by locals and immigrants selling second-hand or even waste-picked items. The thesis culminates with a section dedicated to synthesizing discussions and drawing informed conclusions from the research presented.

The methodology for this research predominantly utilized qualitative approaches, including nine participant observations, three go-along sessions, twenty in-depth interviews, and seven spatial mappings. In addition to primary data, this study integrated secondary data sources such as existing literature, reports, and press articles. Fieldwork was conducted between February and June 2023. I resided in the Albergheria neighborhood during this period, actively engaging with its residents and key local stakeholders.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

This literature review delves into various perspectives on the phenomena of urban informality. It surveys a broad range of definitions and geographical interpretations, emphasizing viewpoints from both the Global North and South. Particular attention is paid to literature from the Global South, as it offers significant insights into understanding urban informality across diverse geographies (Devlin, 2019; Roy et al., 2004). This review challenges the binary understanding of urban informality, embracing many theoretical perspectives on informal work and housing. Furthermore, the interconnectedness of urban informality, economy, and migration is explored, highlighting their combined influence on the phenomenon's growth. One key manifestation reviewed is street vending, which epitomizes economy, and migration, profoundly influencing public spaces and the urban landscape.

The theoretical framework builds on Lefebvre's concept of socially produced space and Certeau's (1980) notion of everyday intersected with urban informality. Lefebvre's distinction between "differential" and "abstract" spaces and Certeau's delineation of strategies and tactics provide a foundational lens. These theories are complemented by considerations of the "subaltern" and insights from scholars like Bayat and Roy. Special emphasis is given to migrant-driven urban transformations through concepts like “transient urban spaces” and translocality. Lastly, postcolonial discourses offer perspectives on racial and ethnic dynamics within urban informality.

Lastly, in 'Bridging Literature, Theory, and Practice,' I take the discussions and theories from the literature review and theoretical framework and map them onto the specific urban context of Palermo. This approach ensures that the theoretical insights gained are relevant and applicable, shedding light on the unique complexities of the Albergheria-Ballarò neighborhood and the broader urban landscape.

2.1 Urban Informality

2.1.1 Definition & Global Perspectives

Tracing the academic discourse on urban informality shows intricate and evolving definitions. Interestingly, while the term "urban informality" was academically consolidated in the '70s (Kudva, 2009; Roy et al., 2004), manifestations of the phenomenon, evident in informal settlements, existed long before its formal recognition (Fischer, 2014; Rodríguez Rivero, 2021). Initially, urban informality was defined by nonplanned, unregulated urban practices, seen as shapeless in the traditional realms of planning and architecture, and perceived as areas devoid of state intervention (Hernández & Kellett, 2010; McFarlane & Waibel, 2016). However, this perspective faces criticism for its stark contrast with the archetype of the modern, formal city (Arteaga, 2021; Lutzoni, 2016; Massidda, 2018; McFarlane & Waibel, 2016).

Emerging voices from the Global South, led by scholars like Roy, Bayat, Appadurai, and Simone, undertook the task of broadening this narrative. They addressed these analytical gaps, presenting concepts like subaltern urbanism and illustrating that urban informality is not merely spatial but also intertwined with work and informal labor dynamics in urban landscapes (Appadurai, 2002; Bayat, 2000; Roy, 2011; Simone, 2004). While extensive research on the topic prevails in the Global South, it remains underexplored in the academic realms of the North. Devlin (2019) further illuminates this by highlighting Northern urbanists' recent exploration of the domain, leaning more toward cataloging practices than theory-building. Further exacerbating this disparity is the paradoxical under-recognition of Latin American scholars despite their seminal work on informal settlements – an oversight keenly emphasized by Varley (2013). Bridging existing divergences, Roy and colleagues propose a "transnational approach" advocating for transcending geographical confines, enabling insights from one region to inform and deepen the understanding of another—a process of *transnational interrogation* (Roy et al., 2004, p.15).

Today, as evidenced by Varley (2013) and Roy (2005, p.148), urban informality is regaining momentum within international development and urban planning discourse. Devlin (2019) also points to a paradigm shift, focusing on informal practices within Northern cities. In conclusion, the discourse on urban informality, rich and multifaceted, is a testament to a pivotal convergence of Northern and Southern academic contributions. As informality finds its renewed place in urban studies, it underscores the importance of an integrated global perspective that challenges even its name.

Literature produced in the South, particularly in Latin America, tends to centralize the analysis of land tenure and the attachment to planning rules (Massidda, 2018). This is manifested in the deep study of informal settlements, v*illas miserias*, *favelas*, and slums, among other terminologies (Abramo, 2012; Arteaga, 2021; Clichevsky, 2009; Cravino, 1998; García et al., 2021; Jaramillo, 2008). Framing in time, Abramo defines urban informality in Latin America as popular urban territories at the margin of the rules and official norms that have existed from colonial times, practically all former Spanish and Portuguese colonies (Abramo, 2012). In addition, Rodríguez Rivero argues that current "*barriadas*" or shanty towns arose before the term informality was introduced and is simultaneous to constructing colonial cities in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (2021). Indeed, spaces of informality as distinct settlements have existed in Latin America since the XVI century (Fischer, 2014, pp. 12-13).

Interestingly, Latin scholars have no apparent consensus on definitions of urban informality. In this regard, Fischer (2014) stresses that definitions of underprivileged and peripheral neighborhoods are diverse. However, they generally agree on some basic characteristics: illegal or semi-legal land ownership, substandard construction, lack of formal urban planning, a predominantly poor and non-white population, and little or no access to public goods and services. Other scholars have developed more concrete parameters and aspects that characterize and identify the informal City (Cravino, 1998; Massidda, 2018). For instance, Massidda (2018) highlights the legal status of land ownership and the existence of basic infrastructure (sewage, drinkable water, storm drains, among others). Moreover, she incorporates the urban layout's morphological characteristics and visual aspects as identificatory factors. More precisely, Cravino (1998) coined ten parameters to define it, such as location, population density, and building precariousness, among others.

Moreover, many Latin American scholars' studies are not exclusively limited to defining the informal city but also to research how it is produced under the theoretical term of *social production of the habitat* (Romero Fernández, 2002). According to the author, this is defined as the "*process of evolutionary development of the habitat, spontaneous or planned, to achieve the tangible and intangible needs of traditionally excluded social sectors"* (p.5). Under this theoretical framework, it can be observed a vast diversity of research on topics such as self-construction (Giglia, 2010; Magliano & Perissinotti, 2020), clandestine land developers, and popular squatting (Abramo, 2012), land regularization (Clichevsky, 2009; Fernandes, 2008) among others. The Latin-American *social production of the habitat* is an encompassing concept that presents similarities to the subaltern urbanism understanding of Roy and colleagues (2004). Those authors

refuse to define urban informality concretely, arguing that this varies locally and that a global definition could close a rich debate. In a sense, the ambiguity of the definition allows the authors to cover the topic integrally, as they do in the book Urban Informality (Roy et al., 2004). This book extensively examines urban informality concerning informal economic and social processes and includes several informal practices, i.e., street vending.

In much of the literature from the North, there is a noticeable trend to approach urban informality through a binary lens. Examples of this include framing it as the unplanned city versus planned spaces (Hernández & Kellett, 2010), contrasting formal regulation with deregulation (McFarlane & Waibel, 2016), viewing informal morphology as a rebellious response to colonial structures (Fischer, 2014), or conflicts between regular and irregular street vendors (Recchi, 2020). According to Devlin (2019), current literature from the global North is characterized by a sprawling collection of case studies portraying diverse practices that break or challenge urban space' laws. Following, he states that, like ornithologists who just discovered an island replete with new bird species, northern urbanists mainly work to identify or explain cases, neglecting the work of theory-building or applying theories built in the global south.

Following, the author sheds some light on definitions by outlining the concepts of the informality of desire and need. According to him, the informality of desire is generally performed by middle/upper-class urban residents who defy rules through spatial practices for convenience, entertainment, efficiency, or in service of an ideological project. On the other hand, the informality of need practice is undertaken by low-income residents who break the rules to fulfill their basic income and housing needs. Hence, the objective is to "make some money, put a roof over one's head, find a way to travel cheaply between neighborhoods poorly served by public transit, and other urgent, day-to-day tasks" (Devlin, 2019, p. 122). Devlin (2019) asserts that the "informality of need" remains insufficiently theorized. In contrast, a significant portion of research focuses on the "informality of desire" practices, characterized by concepts such as everyday urbanism, tactical urbanism, and DIY urbanism.

Global North urban literature prioritizes informality study on economic practices but not as deep in habitat and housing. For instance, Sassen (2005) and her concept of the Global City provide insights into how global cities in the North feature informality, especially when these global cities are seen as the pinnacle of formal, planned urban development. At a localized, street-level scale, the literature primarily centers on street vending (i.e., Graaff & Ha, 2015; Lindell, 2019; Recchi, 2020; Roever & Skinner, 2016).

According to Recchi, most informal street vending literature covers vendors' strategies of resistance, mainly focusing on migrant street vendors' activities and the exclusion mechanisms they experience (Recchi, 2020).

The work of scholar Jennifer Robinson (2013) challenges the dichotomous understanding of informality. In her book "Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development," she contests traditional urban studies that often compartmentalize cities into developed and developing categories. She advocates for an "ordinary" approach, suggesting that all cities exhibit blends of informality and formality. Shifting the lens to the ecosystems of working-class communities, the Rosa Bonheur collective introduced the idea of "popular centrality." This framework underscores informal networks and resources in working-class neighborhoods, contributing to a survival-based economy (Collectif Rosa Bonheur, 2016).

2.1.2 Beyond dualism

Numerous scholars, primarily from the South, have critiqued the dualistic definition of urban informality, elucidating its implications and proposing theories to transcend this limitation. First, Arteaga remarks on the risks of this dualistic perspective by assigning a biased neoliberal vision, from which informal occupation is demonized and affects the state's intervention as a promoter to regularize it, whitening its situation. He states that this stereotypical vision of urban informality is linked to the culture of decadence, immorality, lack of control, and anti-state, confronting the idea of modern, capitalist, enriched, and multicultural urbanization (2021). Similarly, Varley (2013) underscores that such dualistic classifications can further perpetuate stereotypes and stigmatization instead of contributing to eradicating them. Streule et al. (2020) emphasize the problematic nature of terminology when referencing informal settlements. Labels like “favelas,” “gecekondu,” “villas miserias,” or “slums” describe a physical material form but do not describe the dynamic aspects of urbanization. Such terminology risks marginalizing those spaces (and their inhabitants) by becoming synonyms for poverty and precarity.

Other scholars have stated that dualist definitions have a strong root in urban planning models and their legal/illegal interaction with urban informality (i.e., Massidda, 2018; McFarlane & Waibel, 2016). Massidda suggests that the "informal city" is defined by its deviation from existing planning codes and remains informal only as long as these codes are imposed. McFarlane and Waibel (2016) contend that informality is not merely an unintended byproduct but a calculated result of planning policies. Furthermore, Massidda

suggests that what has been wrongly designed is the normative and legal framework instead (2018).

Numerous post-dualistic concepts have emerged, overcoming the classic dichotomy (Recio et al., 2017). Examples include "grey spaces" (Yiftachel, 2009, p.92), "intermediate spaces" (Lutzoni, 2016, p.12), and “popular centrality” (Collectif Rosa Bonheur, 2016), among others. These ideas of interconnectedness (Daniels, 2004) and formality-informality contribute to showing how limits between formal/informal have become blurry or null (García et al., 2021). According to Recio et al., the post-dualist lens treats the dichotomy as a mere heuristic device and argues for the need to go beyond the constraints generated by its fixed categories (2017, p. 141). The authors invite us to critically observe the City's order-oriented idea that focuses on regulated and neat urban space without focusing on the socio-spatial relations. McFarlane and Waibel also stated that the Latin American and Asia urbanism experience has shown the necessity to leave behind the dichotomous lens of formality as the norm and informality as deviation (2016).

In response to dominant urban narratives, scholars, including Roy et al. (2004), Roy (2011), Bayat (2000), and Simone (2004) have introduced theories such as subaltern urbanism and occupancy urbanism. These theories challenge the convention that positions the "formal" city as the norm for urban development (Lindell, 2019). Adopting a postcolonial perspective, as Arteaga (2021) highlighted, these theories may be instrumental in transcending binary conceptualizations. They contextualize urban informality as a reaction against established urban norms and a manifestation of subaltern resistance (Varley, 2013). Ananya Roy, in particular, has significantly expanded on the concept of subaltern urbanism, emphasizing the role of marginalized communities in reshaping territorial dynamics. This paradigm seeks recognition of spaces of poverty and forms of popular agency that often remain invisible and neglected in the archives and annals of urban theory (Roy, 2011). This sentiment is echoed by Swerts (2017), who states that existing research on urban informality describes marginalized communities as victims or vulnerable subjects, portraying the city as a background rather than an object of action. The influence of subaltern urbanism theory on global urban studies has been transformative, catalyzing a paradigm shift in Global North and South literature and offering a comprehensive lens to understand urban informality.

2.1.3 Economic and Migration Dynamics

This section examines the intricate interplay between urban informality, economic dynamics, and migration. Drawing on García et al. (2021), it is noted that those immersed

in informality often have migratory backgrounds, primarily accessing housing and employment within this realm. Hence, the following literature underscores the pivotal role of economic and migratory factors in shaping urban informal landscapes and practices.

First, authors such as Sassen (2005) and Mingione and Quassoli (2000) agree that the transition from a capitalist welfare model to a global capitalist one has increased informality worldwide. The latter adds that the rise of the informal economy in Western countries is also connected to a) changes in the urban configuration due to the erosion of the post-Fordist system of the industrial organization and b) migration from undeveloped countries. The internationalization of the economy led to the reorganization of economic activities, displacing productive units, downsizing, outsourcing, and expanding service jobs (Mingione & Quassoli, 2000). Similarly, Sassen explains that inequality in cities and the increase of informality in certain activities are produced by labor polarization that emerged from the rise of specialized service companies (Sassen, 2005). Therefore, the increased dynamics of socioeconomic polarization generated that people without the skills to compete for formal high-tech employment, especially immigrants, are forced to work informally, mainly in the labor-intensive tertiary sector (Recchi, 2020).

This is manifested in two urban phenomena covered in this review: informal urbanization and informal street work. First, multiple scholars argue that the causes of informal urbanization are a combination of factors related to speed decoupling between population and economic growth (Davis, 2006; Jaramillo, 2008; García et al., 2021). In that sense, Davis stresses that informal urbanization is a stark manifestation of overurbanization without economic growth, associating the last with the worldwide debt crisis and the IMF-led restructuring of third-world economies in the 80s (2006). Similarly, Jaramillo (2008) explains the case of Latin America, adding on the mentioned growth decoupling and highlighting the weak state's land use planning and housing policy. Therefore, the slow speed of economic growth is reflected in income inequality that constrains access to formal housing. Hence, a population with a migratory past, low income and educational levels, and informal jobs can only access housing through urban informality (García et al., 2021). Fernandes (2008) explains Latin America's rapid urban growth based on the use of informal mechanisms to access land and housing by millions of people in the area. Simultaneously, the effects of the rapid urbanization process, mainly located in southern cities, have also raised economic informality by increasing labor surplus (Recchi, 2020).

Different economic perspectives on informality underscore its "entrepreneurial dimensions." Hernando de Soto (2003) celebrates the informal city, characterizing the informal sector as an "invisible revolution" against bureaucratic state barriers. He promotes that lands under informal occupation should be legalized for taxation and used as credit capital in the formal financial sector (Clichevsky, 2009). However, both Clichevsky (2009) and Roy (2005; 2012) have criticized de Soto's approach, specifically his emphasis on capitalizing "informal assets." They argue that such an approach has limited long-term benefits and fails to address the deeper structural issues.

Historically, Migration has been portrayed as a driving factor of rapid urban growth, contributing to the expansion of poor urban settlements in southern cities (Roy et al., 2004). Scholars agree that one of the main characteristics of urban informality is the shared migratory background among individuals living or working in informal conditions (Fuentes Castro et al., 2012; García et al., 2021; Mingione & Quassoli, 2000; Recchi, 2020; Rodríguez Rivero, 2021). Migrants have historically faced barriers and constraints to access housing and work in the city. This shows a deep and complex relationship between migration, urban segregation, discrimination, and subordination that migrants experience (Magliano & Perissinotti, 2020). According to García and colleagues, besides having a migratory backdrop, the population that navigates urban informality is characterized by low income and educational level and being part of the informal job market (García et al., 2021).

The connection between rural migrants, immigrants, and informal work is extensively explored in academia (Avallone, 2018; Fuentes Castro et al., 2012; Mingione & Quassoli, 2000; Recchi, 2020; Rodríguez Rivero, 2021). Recchi reveals an intrinsic connection between immigrant status and street vending by arguing that migrants, mainly irregulars, face socioeconomic discrimination that forces them to seek jobs in unskilled, frequently informal labor market sectors (2020). In addition, according to Mingione and Quassoli, migrants perform informal work because they have less bargaining power due to their citizenship condition (or the lack thereof), have no legal protection, and manage a lower linguistic level. Therefore, informal activities interpreted as 'defensive strategies' are the last resource they have to guarantee income (Mingione & Quassoli, 2000). Lastly, Avallone delves into the concept of the coloniality of work, establishing a connection between migration from former colonies and informal employment within the agriculture sector, characterized by deeply exploitative conditions (2018).

2.1.4 Street Vending

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on street vending, which is particularly relevant to this study as it is one of the most prevalent practices in the studied area. Additionally, this practice is closely linked to issues of economic discrimination, migrant backgrounds, the appropriation of public spaces, and disputes over the production of urban space.

Street vending is defined as the production and selling of legal goods and services in urban public spaces, which is not officially regulated by the law and is carried out in non-permanent built structures (Recchi, 2020). Similarly, other authors use the term' street hawking' to describe this activity where individuals offer goods occupying a stationary space on the streets or being mobile from place to place carrying the products they sell (Recio et al., 2017). Multiple scholars describe this practice as an economic survival activity (Devlin, 2019; Recchi, 2020; Roy et al., 2004).

According to Recchi (2020), vendors' profiles differ among developed and developing countries. In the case of developing countries, vendors are generally marginalized, poor people, and inter-rural migrants. In the case of developed countries, the practice is performed by international migrants. Furthermore, the author states that in Europe, most street vendors have North African and Southeast Asian origins, while in North America, they are predominantly migrants from Latin America. One of the key points she makes is that vendors often have limited education and few options for formal employment. Low incomes, lack of state protection, long working hours, and unsafe work environments characterize their working conditions. Those are also influenced by the products offered and the vendor's gender, ethnicity, and origin (Recchi, 2020).

According to Roever and Skinner (2016), street vendors provide crucial services and goods affordable to informal and formal workers and the urban underprivileged. Therefore, their influence on urban life exceeds their self-employment or survival needs. Other scholars also researched how the practice can physically modify the urban space (Adebayo & Akinyemi, 2019; Lindell, 2019).

Numerous scholars have examined the remaking of space, for instance, through material infrastructures and appropriation techniques (Lindell, 2019; Peralta, 2017) and the fixed-semipermanent mobility of street vendors (Cross, 1998; Yatmo, 2008). Lindell coined the term "material infrastructures" to describe vendors' structures and objects in the public space that support their daily practice, for instance, stalls, motorbikes, and steel structures. Moreover, the authors stress that street material infrastructures have received relatively little attention compared with social infrastructures. In addition, other

authors have pointed out that those infrastructures have a social and political relevance as part of the urban landscape and people's everyday life interactions (Adebayo & Akinyemi, 2019; Angelo & Hentschel, 2015; Larkin, 2013). For instance, Adebayo and colleagues explore using wheelbarrows as a mobile instrument that enhances the earning opportunities of street vendors in Nigeria.

Regarding appropriation of vending space, Peralta explains that vendors define the section of the street they use by negotiations with other zones' social actors, for instance, residents, police, and other sellers, among others. Hence, they establish their territory's initial borders, which they maintain by gaining others' recognition and respect (Peralta, 2017).

2.2 Theoretical framework

In this thesis, the theoretical framework revolves around two pivotal theories: Lefebvre's (1991) “production of space” and Certeau’s (1980) “everyday practices.” By synergizing these with contemporary literature on urban informality, I aim to create a comprehensive lens through which to examine informal urban spaces, tactics, and strategies.

As Lefebvre posits, space is not just a static concept but is socially produced. Two primary typologies of space emerge from his theory: the "differential" - spaces of lived experiences that celebrate differences and resist homogenization, and the "abstract" – homogenized and commodified spaces that serve capitalist interests and suppress individuality and diversity. Based on the notion that spaces are not just physical constructs, social interactions, perceptions, symbols, and everyday practices mold them. In this regard, Certeau (1980) exhibits small, improvisational, everyday decisions people make to make their lives livable. The author stresses the terms "strategies and tactics," referring to the first as the overarching framework of dominant institutions and structures of power defining a specific order, for instance, spatial. In contrast, tactics are individuals' everyday actions to use and appropriate space facing those overarching structures.

By aligning Lefebvre's socially produced space with Certeau’s tactics and strategies within urban informality, other theories emerge as fundamental for this study. Drawing upon the idea of the "subaltern"—defined by Gramsci (1971) and later expanded by Santos & De Sousa Santos (2014) as counter-hegemonic practices carried out by marginalized and oppressed people in the face of social exclusion—scholars like Bayat (2000), Roy et al. (2004), Roy (2011), and Collectif Rosa Bonheur (2016) analyzed how marginalized groups navigate and shape urban spaces.

As elucidated by Bayat, the concept of "quiet encroachment" provides vivid portrayals of marginalized communities claiming and reshaping urban terrains, from land squatting to street vending. Roy has provided an extensive theoretical framework that allows me to use a post-dualistic lens to observe urban informality in the North, focusing on the agency of the subalterns. The Collectife Rosa Bonheur and its concept of popular centrality reveal the material and immaterial of working-class neighborhoods. They define it as the urban area that continues to be overlooked by capital and is socially marginalized but holds a significant value for the working classes. This space carries out three critical roles: it offers access to reasonably priced housing; it presents diverse ways of employment, income, and affordable consumption; and ultimately, it allows access to relational resources derived from a strong local connection (Collectif Rosa Bonheur, 2016).

In this research, which centers on migrant practices shaping urban space, I employ the concept of “transient urban spaces” (Bork-Hüffer et al., 2014). Everyday interactions continuously shape these urban areas and are further influenced by migration, creating translocal spaces. The latter is explained as spaces that transcend physical or administrative constraints, linking different places and social domains through continuous interactions and flows. Migration predominantly catalyzes the emergence of such spaces, fostering a translocal social capital that integrates both locals and migrants from rural and international backgrounds. Translocality does not exclusively arise from migration but through consistent communication, resource exchange, and commitments to local and translocal networks (Etzold, 2016).

Concluding this framework, I incorporate postcolonial theory to unravel the racial power within the informal dynamics of the study case. Quijano (2000) delves into the longstanding systems of racial and ethnic hierarchies, emphasizing their continued role in perpetuating social stratification and inequalities.

2.3 Bridging Literature, Theory, and Practice

The reviewed literature and theoretical frameworks offer a comprehensive insight into the multifaceted nature of urban informality, focusing on both Global North and South contexts. This blend is particularly pertinent for this study, as Palermo operates at the intersection of these two spheres, a context of immigration and large informality.

This thesis utilized the presented literature to develop knowledge that contributes to understanding a case of urban informality within Europe and first, aiming to overcome the explained dualistic approach deconstructing the normative idea of the “formal” cities and, second, collecting existing on-the-ground knowledge that contributes to reflecting

on new terminologies and future theoretical frameworks to define this kind of urbanity framed by migration and postcoloniality.

In addition, this study instrumentalizes the following theories in analyzing and interpreting the empirical findings. The concept of De Certeau's "tactics" demystifies the improvisational methods of migrants, while Bayat's 'quiet encroachment' provides clarity on how migrants and locals make a living in the area. Lefebvre's theory is used to understand how urban spaces are produced and transformed by local stakeholders, including the role of material infrastructures (Lindell, 2019). The role of street vendors is also fundamental to exploring space-making disputes and their role as not mere individual workers but part of a popular centrality (Collectif Rosa Bonheur, 2016).

Finally, ethnographic methods, such as the PATE method (Guber, 2011) and Go-along (Kusenbach, 2016), are employed to conduct fieldwork that, through the notion of everyday practices (Certeau, 1980), creates knowledge from the ground, highlighting the daily interactions and connections between immigrants and the local population.

3. Methodology

In this master thesis, a qualitative approach is employed to explore the intricate dynamics of informal practices and the significant role of migrants in a neighborhood of Palermo, Italy. The research predominantly draws upon primary data collection methods, including ethnography, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and spatial mapping. Data was meticulously gathered on-site between February and June 2023, focusing on two specific street markets within the Albergheria-Ballarò area—officially recognized as Palazzo Reale-Albergheria. Secondary data has been integrated and sourced from academic literature and various organizational reports to further strengthen the research.

The methodology, chosen carefully, aims to capture an expansive range of actions, motivations, and consequences that subjects bring forth in their daily interactions with the urban fabric. The fieldwork approach was developed under a comprehensive and respectful attitude intending to avoid adding tension or conflicts in a context with existing social vulnerability and marginalization. Therefore, interviewed migrants' identities are anonymized due to their diverse and sensible legal status and practices.

3.1 Research methods

3.1.1 Justification of methods

The election of the previously explained qualitative methods was rooted in the specific characteristic of a complex popular centrality where poor, marginalized, and generally undocumented immigrants develop their daily activities. In this area, tensions and conflicts were easily observed, mainly associated with convivial situations, appropriation of public space, drug consumption, and illicit trade activities. Moreover, the area has a negative reputation among Palermitanians, who usually avoid going.

The design of the research process was made through previous visits to the area, in which I observed the general behaviors of "outsiders" to evaluate which methods were adequate for this study. Hence, taking photos and notes in a notebook disturbed some vendors, creating what Guber denominates as "suspicion of espionage." This could place the researcher as a threatening emissary of some dominant power structure outside the community (Guber, 2011).

For this reason, I adopted mainly flexible methods that allowed me to register peoples' and space dynamics without bothering or producing discomfort for workers. Unstructured interviews with vendors and residents produced non-standardized results but provided a more effective trust-building process with the counterpart, allowing further in-depth interviews with those subjects. This strategy contributed to a better understanding of participants' feelings, motivations, and opinions on the researched topics. Similarly, participant observations were implemented passively without direct participation or interaction with the people. Differently, go-along sessions were performed from a participatory attitude due to a previous-done process of 1 to 1 trust-building. This active approach allowed me to ask questions on the way and create a more natural and free interaction with the person.

3.1.2 Participant observation

Participant observations were conducted in two public spaces in the Albergheria-Ballarò area (see Figure 1). These locations were chosen because of their vibrant street activity and their significance as central or referential points within the area. Core areas of Ballarò Market (Site n°1, Piazza Ballarò) and Albergheria Market (Site °2, Piazza Colajanni) were selected due to the presence of migrants working, consuming, and residing around the area. Observations were made for a lapse of 30 minutes conducted through different days and hours of the day, including weekdays and weekends (see Figure 2).

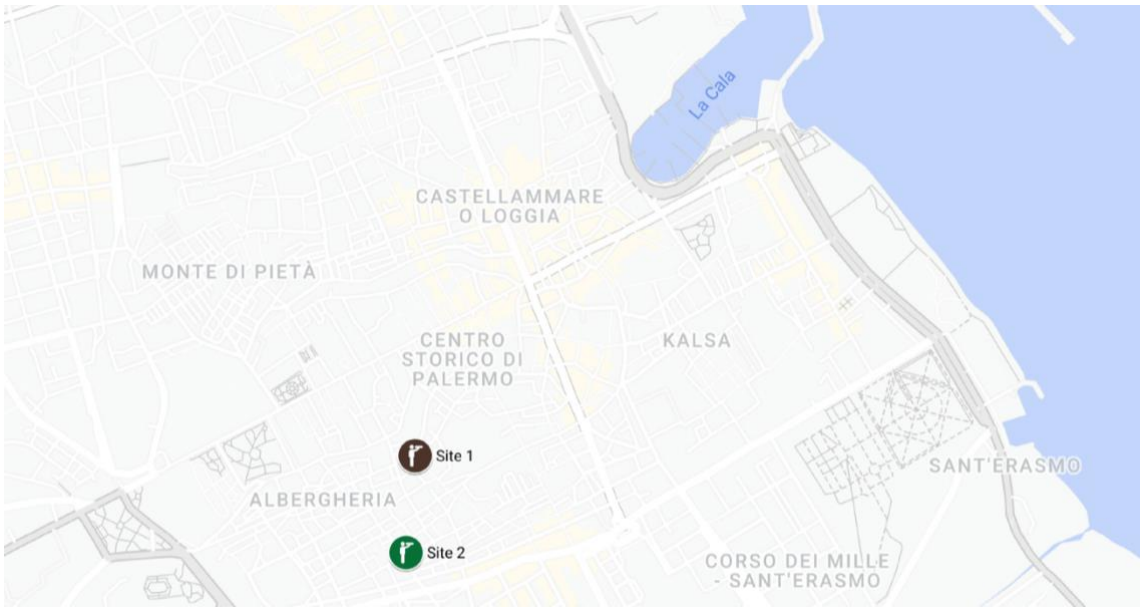

Fig. 1: Sites of participant observations, based on Google Maps

Site 1: Piazza Ballarò, Ballarò Market	Site 2: Piazza Colajanni, Albergheria Market
#1 15/03/2023 – Wednesday 09.30 to 10:00	#1 02/02/23 – Thursday 09.30 to 10:00
#2 23/03/23 – Thursday 11.40 to 12.10	#2 17/02/23 – Friday 09.30 to 10:00
#3 25/03/23 – Saturday 11.40 to 12.10	#3 03/03/23 – Friday 13.30 to 14:00
#4 25/03/23 – Saturday 21.00 to 21.30	#4 14/03/23 – Tuesday 09.30 to 10:00
	#5 01/04/23 – Saturday 09.30 to 10:00

Fig. 2: Date of observations; own illustration

The process was conducted passively by sitting or standing in a fixed position in a public space and recording live data. All field notes were digitally recorded on a smartphone using a multi-parameter observation sheet (see Appendix B). Environment sound was recorded for the first 10 minutes of the observation, thus contributing to the interpretation of collected data and providing valuable sensorial contextual information. Visual material like photos and video were limitedly recorded due to the complexity of the field and some adverse reactions from vendors.

The parameters observed were designed based on the ethnographic method named PATE (people, activities, time, and space), created by the Latin-American anthropologist Rosana Guber (Guber, 2011). Therefore, these main categories, combined with the following tailor-designed subcategories (see Figure 3), composed the observation sheet.

People	General Attendance
	People's profile: age, gender, and ethnic group
	People's occupation and way of interaction
	Attitude, body language, and gesticulation
Space	Physical components (i.e., furniture, decoration)
	Spatial movements (i.e., walking, running)
	Site context
Activities	Type of activities
	Characteristics of the activity
	Structure and organizational logic
Time & Weather	The sequence of actions observed
	Day, time, and duration of observation
	Weather and environmental conditions
Sensorial	Sounds, smells and sensations

Fig. 3: Participant observation parameters, own illustration

The people section delves into the diversity and dynamics of individuals in observed area—vendors, customers, onlookers, transients, and others. It covers their demographic profiles, occupations, interactions, attitudes, body language, and other behavioral aspects.

Space explores the physicality and layout of the place, examining the interplay of fixed and mobile elements. This includes the tangible components that constitute the area—tables, blankets, cars, trolleys, among others—and the less tangible but equally crucial aspects such as the spatial organization and type of movements.

Activities show insights into the range and nature of actions that animate the observed area. It looks at these activities' structures, characteristics, and the patterns they form.

Time scrutinizes how the temporal dimension shapes and influences the market's rhythms, flows, and dynamics, including the sequencing of actions and the pace of activities and movements.

The Sensorial category dives into the engagement of the senses within the observed area. It analyzes smells and sounds. This section also considers the emotional and psychological responses evoked by these sensory stimuli.

3.1.3 The go-along method

This method consists of a hybrid approach between participant observation and interviewing in which the researcher accompanies individuals on a daily experience (Kusenbach, 2016). Following Kusenbach's method, I carried out this activity with a vendor, researcher, and migrant consumer of the market. The implementation of the method was diverse. In some cases, I started by arranging a meeting date in advance and, on other occasions, informal conversations in which I requested to stay next to the person on the activity they were performing.

The activity was performed for between 60 and 90 minutes and entailed a participatory approach with the subject by active listening, observing, and having unstructured conversations. The go-along session with a vendor was performed by sitting next to the vendor chair in their selling area. In the case of the migrant market consumer, the activity was on the move, walking around the market with the person and witnessing the different negotiations and purchases the subject made. Similarly, the session with the researcher was walking and observing the two markets. The data register was made by recording background audio, which, combined with mental notes, eased the data analysis stage (see Appendix B).

Go-along session #1	Frank, migrant consumer of Albergheria market
Go-along session #2	Federico Prestileo, local researcher
Go-along session #3	Anonymized Albergheria's street vendor

Fig. 4: Go-along sessions performed, own illustration

3.1.4 In-depth Interviews

I conducted twenty interviews involving diverse individuals, including local immigrants, vendors, scholars, activists, and experts (see Table of Interviews in Appendix A). Each interview was semi-structured and only recorded after obtaining explicit consent. For street vendors and migrants, interview questions explored their motivations and impressions about migrating to Europe, their workplace, the current housing situation, conflicts in the public space, and the relationship between immigrants and residents. Many of these migrants and vendors were introduced to me through recommendations from other interviewees or spontaneous street encounters. In these scenarios, I presented myself, outlined the research aims and cultivated trust via consistent interactions. Interviews were conducted in varied settings—homes, streets, or at the restaurant Moltivolti. Those individuals' details were anonymized to protect their privacy.

Interviews with scholars, activists, and experts generally spanned an hour and were conducted in person at local cafés. While the semi-structured format remained consistent, specific questions were tailored based on the interviewee's expertise and their organizational affiliations. I identified these participants through my involvement in local assemblies, neighborhood gatherings, connections established at the University of Palermo, and through the organization Molti Volti.

Generally, at the end of every interview, I asked the participant to recommend others to interview later. This strategy allowed me to understand better the diverse social actors composing the social network of the area. I also intended to have a gender-balanced representation among the selected participants. However, this was challenging, given the male-dominated landscape of informal vendors and migrants. Lastly, interviews were conducted in multiple languages, such as English, Spanish, and Italian. In that sense, some participants, including myself, have used second and third languages to communicate. All quotes and interview excerpts presented in this study have been translated into English by the author for this research.

3.1.5 Spatial Mapping

This method was used to create geographical cartography representing diverse phenomena of the analyzed area. I mapped the location of informal street vendors in Albergheria Market, the location and type of fixed shops in Ballarò Market, and the market's material infrastructures to understand their presence and interpret their impact on the neighborhood's public space.

All the mapping sessions were made by following a walking fix route for a time between 60 and 90 minutes, depending on the variable mapped. The maps were created using a smartphone and through the My Maps (Google Maps) platform simultaneously as I walked around the designated routes. Three types of mappings were elaborated:

a) Street vendor's location in the Albergheria Market
- Sunday 19/02 – 09:00
- Thursday 23/02 – 09:00

b) Location and type of shops in Ballarò Market.
- Wednesday 22/03 – 09:00
- Saturday 25/03 – 12:00
- Saturday 25/03 – 20.30
- Saturday 01/04 – 17:00

c) Material infrastructures in Albergheria's Market area.
- Friday 09/06 – 09.30

a) Street vendor's location in Albergheria Market:

Street vendor's spots within the market's area were geographically labeled with a corresponding symbol and number. The criteria to define a vending spot included the presence of a person at the display area, either actively interacting with potential customers or passively seated near the stall. Additionally, considerations were made for the spacing and corridors between product displays and notable shifts in the types of products being displayed, such as transitioning from clothes to construction tools. Importantly, this mapping did not include storefronts showcasing their products on the sidewalk.

b) Location and type of shops in Ballarò Market:

This mapping identified the number and types of front shops, as well as mobile vendors working in Ballarò Market. The label "Ethnic shops" was included to categorize stores that target certain cultural or ethnic groups. This also includes stores run by people from different cultural origins or places that become popular meeting spots for migrant groups.

c) Market's material infrastructures:

Under the denomination of material infrastructures (Lindell, 2019), I mapped objects and structures placed in the Albergheria's Market area for street vending and other informal activities.

3.1.6 Secondary data sources

Academic papers and NGO reports were used as secondary data sources. The material was found using thematic keywords in the University of Vienna and Palermo databases and the websites Research Gate and Google Scholar. The following single and combined keywords were used in the search: migration, Palermo, informal work, street work, Ballarò, tactics, informality, transborder, urban space, public space, subaltern, and markets. The literature and data analyzed were presented in English, Spanish, and Italian languages.

3.1.7 Data Analysis Methods

Ethnographies and semi-structured interviews were transcribed and interpreted through content analysis. Furthermore, the coding processes involved identifying themes and patterns using the software MAXQDA. Particularly in the case of participant observations, data was analyzed through the categories of People, Space, Activities intercrossed with time, weather, and context as relevant variables to produce the results.

Spatial mapping collected data was interpreted first through descriptive analysis based on the distribution, characteristics, and volume of the data collected. Later, spatial analysis was conducted to examine patterns of space use and the relationship between observed subjects and the existing urban environment.

3.2 Research Positionality and Limitations

For this study, it is crucial to acknowledge my position as a Latin American researcher born, raised, and academically molded amidst Argentina's intense social and political conflicts. My firsthand experiences working in informal and popular settlements across Latin America profoundly shaped my viewpoint. My migration to Europe has only intensified my understanding of urban geography, underscoring the tension between the two latitudes I now inhabit. Consequently, when I delve into discussions on mechanisms and practices that produce space in both physical and social realms, my perspective is influenced by coloniality, seeing it as an enduring legacy that imposes its weight on social, spatial, and cultural norms. This theme touches upon my existence and greatly influences how I absorb, interpret, and produce knowledge on marginalized and inequitable realities.

By bridging transnational knowledge gaps, this study integrates literature and methodologies from the Global South, thereby shedding light on perspectives often overshadowed in European discourses. Such insights are valuable given these regions' vast research experiences with urban informality. In line with multiple authors (Devlin, 2019; Roy et al., 2004; Varley, 2013), I argue that Latin American, African, and Asian literature can significantly enhance our understanding of informal practices undertaken by the urban poor in the Global North.

Living in Albergheria-Ballarò from December 2022 to June 2023 significantly shaped this study. This immersion allowed me to experience the area's complex intricacies and dynamics. Furthermore, the personal relationships I fostered with numerous neighbors deepened my grasp of the local nuances and were instrumental in the successful execution of the fieldwork. As a non-European researcher, I noticed that some participants seemed more open with me. However, I remain cautious that this background might have influenced some responses, as participants might adjust their answers based on my origins.

This research into the Albergheria-Ballarò area, while comprehensive, acknowledges several limitations. Temporal restrictions mean that data collected may not encapsulate all seasonal variations, including the summer tourist season, potentially missing significant shifts in the area’s dynamics. While most interviews were conducted in

English, those with vendors and locals were in Italian—a language I acquired for this research. Additionally, the cultural and linguistic intricacies of the Sicilian dialect, which is prevalent in the neighborhood, might have created communication gaps. Defining what constitutes an "ethnic shop" presented its challenges, as interpretations can differ and potentially introduce inconsistencies in data categorization and analysis. It is also worth noting that some interview subjects were referred by local NGOs or approached directly on the streets. Although the perspective from the municipality is absent, I made multiple attempts to contact various departments within the Palermo Municipality, including the Urban Planning (Pianificazione Territoriale) and Historical City (Città Storica) divisions, but unfortunately received no response to my interview requests.

4. Case study: Street Vending and the Production of Informal Urban Spaces in Albergheria-Ballarò, Palermo

Living in Albergheria-Ballarò for six months means being inevitably challenged by the intense stimuli of the most popular neighborhood in Palermo's historic center. It is a place where I witnessed the clash of South and North, leaving me as disoriented as I was fascinated. It is the place where I observed a wealthy digital nomad living door by door with a Nigerian refugee or an irregular Tunisian worker. Certainly, explaining this neighborhood requires the reader to accompany me on a journey through narrow Medina-like paths characteristic of an organic urban fabric intertwined with various failed attempts of urban planning. On this journey, one encounters countless spontaneous activities in the streets, from street vendors of all kinds to vivid interactions carried out by neighbors communicating across balconies, clotheslines, and ropes that serve as freight elevators from the street. In Ballarò, distinguishing the divide between the private and public spheres is often challenging as the private becomes public, exposing the joys and misfortunes of a decimated population. Thus, houses' kitchens and communal areas imbue the public space with their scents and sounds.

Such a connection between what was once private and is now public showcases the harshness of a context of marginality, poverty, and housing precariousness. One can observe large families living in small, barely ventilated spaces, building facades peeling off, and construction irons protruding from walls amidst the ruins of buildings destroyed in the Second World War. Sewer drains drop vertically from the fronts of buildings, becoming façade ornaments. Through some half-open doors, one can observe narrow staircases leading to upper floors away from the neighborhood's always active and chaotic public space.

The extraordinary cultural richness of the area is staged on the neighborhood streets, underpinned by a famous millennial Ballarò Market that ensures low-cost food for the working classes and is now mutating into an Instagram-worthy tourist experience. Via Ballarò (the market's main street) transports us to a place of great vitality, where a mix of countless cultures and people intertwine, leaving their food, smells, and languages imprinted in the air. Tourists seeking Sicilian souvenirs, mafia-themed trinkets, or cannoli represent the incipient process of neighborhood transformation. Camouflaged among poorly maintained building facades are newly renovated buildings with quaint doorbells on the ground floor, displaying the names of burgeoning tourist accommodations, such as "Ballarò House" or "B&B Ballarò." Practically side by side with the doors of touristic commodification, fresh fish, squid, colorful fruits, and vegetables are exhibited, mixed

with Italian textiles and African clothes for sale. Diversity is evident and exposed; it also becomes a consumable product.

It seems that this has been the way for centuries. Palermo, a city conquered by multiple civilizations, is genuinely a melting pot of spontaneous encounters, languages, skin colors, and informal ways of living that profoundly challenge the continent's narrative. Is this Europe? I asked myself the first few times I walked through it. Perhaps it is the ignorance of a Latin American researcher educated under a discourse where the EU represents that place of progress, equity, and well-being where so many want to go. Far from that narrative is the market of Albergheria, an area of the neighborhood a few meters from the historical market where hundreds of Italians, Sicilians, and migrants cover the streets with blankets and boxes to display used and, to a lesser extent, stolen goods. Here, trash containers and house-clearing are the opportunities to find objects that can be resold. Rain or shine, the market, and the vendors will be there every morning for at least 8 hours, trying to earn a few euros that ensure subsistence.

Past noon, the market disappears. It leaves an air of desolation and a faint reverberation of all those conversations, negotiations, and movements that fed the immense liveliness of the place. Thus, as the day advances and the sun sets, the neighborhood transforms; it becomes a dimly lit space where walking the narrow corridors gives us the vertigo of a nocturnal encounter with the other. The abnormal silence of the night allows one to distinguish heated intrafamily discussions better, often amusing, often violent. The public space now seems to be locally controlled, not by cameras, but by individuals stationed throughout the neighborhood. As one walks, whistles and questions are heard from people posted among the dismantled and stacked structures of the markets. Some sell drugs, others consume them, and others simply find a place to spend the night in those corners.

The night also brings different people to the street; spaces previously occupied by historic Sicilian vendors are now places where the African community has a barbecue, listens to music, and converse. The threatening darkness for some also guarantees tranquility for others. There, where public authority does not appear, undocumented immigrants can unfold, socialize, and work. The neighborhood thus transforms into a canvas of audacity and ingenuity where excluded and marginalized people scramble to live and eat. Living here, I have witnessed some of the experiences that both Sicilians and migrants face day-to-day in the context of survival, violence, and inequality.

In the following sections, I contextualize Palermo within the larger narrative of Southern Italy, detailing the national unification/colonization process and the subsequent marginalization of its population. I then provide a profile of Palermo, highlighting its urban transformation, economic challenges, and migration patterns. Lastly, I delve into the Albergheria-Ballarò neighborhood, describing its unique characteristics, the interplay of the state and the mafia, and its significant stakeholders.

4.1 Palermo and Southern Italy

4.1.1 Colonial-Unification

As Sicily's capital, Palermo is deeply anchored in Italy's national history of unification and the incorporation of the South into the Kingdom of Italy (Regno d'Italia). This historical event, known as the Risorgimento, was a complex mid-19th-century process that transformed many separate states on the Italian peninsula into a single kingdom. According to Hawthorne, at that time, Italy was a patchwork collection of city-states and languages that were not mutually intelligible (2022). In 1860, the "Red Shirts," a volunteer force led by nationalist Giuseppe Garibaldi, conquered the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which was then integrated into Piedmont-Sardinia. The Risorgimento process lasted 50 years, culminating in the incorporation of Rome as the capital of the Kingdom of Italy in 1871.

Fig. 5: Palermo's location regarding the south of Europe, OpenStreetMap 2023

Since unification in 1861, Italy has displayed a marked disparity in the development levels between its North-Western regions and those in the South. This issue, popularized by Gramsci (1971) as the 'Southern Question,' stems from the portrayal of Southern Italy as underdeveloped, regressive, and fundamentally different from the regions of Northern and Central Italy. The author stressed that through an exploitive relationship, the

Northern bourgeoisie class profited at the expense of the South. In this context, a history of subordination and domination has labeled the South as Italy's "backward" region. This has deeply permeated and produced marginalization in regional development and labor integration (Giglioli, 2019).

Furthermore, the cultural dominance exerted by the North placed Southern Italians on a perceived lower tier (Aprile, 2011). Aprile's book *Terroni: All that Has Been Done to Ensure that the Italians of the South Became Southerners* shows some of the existing dialectics and stereotypes employed by the North. For instance, *"Terroni"* is an offensive expression that describes the underprivileged Southern farmer families that depend on the land (*terra*) to survive. The term gained popularity in the '50s and '60s during migration waves of families from the South to the industrial metropolitan areas of Milan, Turin, and Genoa (Aprile, 2011).

During my experience living in Palermo, I witnessed on national media, informal conversations, and football games racially loaded discriminatory phrases referring to Southern Italians. For instance: "*They are uncivilized and dirty*," "*They are poor because they want to be*," or "*They are Africans*." Building upon the previous point, Hawthorne theorizes that the nation's elite commonly perceived the disparity between the North and the South of Italy through an Orientalist lens, similar to how Western Scholars historically perceived and represented the Middle Eastern and Asia cultures. Underlining the geographical and racial parallels closeness between Southern Italy and the African continent (2022).

Using the word "*incorporation*" hides a set of economic, cultural, social, and spatial impositions in the frame of Italy's unification process. As I explained, this event established an asymmetric relationship between the North and South of the country. For instance, economically, policy trends favored the industrially advanced North over the predominantly agricultural South (Giglioli, 2019). Spatially, partially completed urban programs such as the *Piano Regolatore Giarrusso* intended to reproduce northern urban ideals into southern cities like Palermo. Culturally, a kind of lobotomy erased local awareness and memory (Aprile, 2011).

Here, education played a key role through schooling in which religion, cultural values, and language were spread. The Italian language was introduced as a cultural asset in contrast to the Sicilian dialect, which was downgraded into something vulgar (Del Sastre, 2013).

Federico Prestileo, a researcher from Palermo, further explains the prejudice against the Sicilian dialect by stating,

> "It is seen as vulgar, a popular thing, and as we transitioned to modernity, what before was popular became uneducated, non-modern. To be seen as a modern person, one is expected to speak standard Italian, English, French, Spanish - not the local dialect." (Go-Along #2).

Sicily's incorporation could be understood under Hechter's (1975) theory of internal colonialism used to explain the incorporation of European peripheries. According to the author, this occurs when a dominant group (usually the one controlling political power) exploits the resources of less-developed peripheral regions within its borders. This exploitation is similar to how external colonial powers have historically exploited their overseas colonies. In the paper *Producing Sicily as Europe*, the author Giglioli (2019) operates based on this concept, highlighting that the term was initially formulated in the Americas to address the persistent subjugation of indigenous peoples and individuals of non-European heritage within a context of settler colonialism. There, the hierarchical categorization of individuals based on skin color and origin (indigenous, black, mestizo, white European) profoundly transformed the global labor and power structures. Essentially, this stratification turned some people into dominators and others into the dominated, granting some rights holders while leaving others without (Quijano, 2000).

Colonialism could be defined as a process that, in almost all cases, involves a relationship of structural domination and suppression, often violent, of the heterogeneity of the subject or subjects in question (Mohanty, 2008). According to Avallone (2008), nation-states tend to eradicate heterogeneity. Focusing on Palermo, Sicilians before and now, immigrants become subjects exposed to the tension of an Italian nation-state imposing a whole set of socio-cultural values. Therefore, the marginalization of both groups and the acquisition of rights is intrinsically connected with this form of colonization that the Italian nation-state has deployed since unification. During an interview for this research, law professor Clelia Bartoli argued:

> "Migrants and Sicilians are so similar because in some ways are both colonized or marginalized…. There was the unification of Italy in 1861. The official history speaks about the unification of Italy, but it was a kind of colonization of the north on the south." (Interview AC-2).

This perspective contributes significantly to my research to explain marginalization and informality in my study case. Here, I argue that the irregular enforcement of laws and

rules in Palermo is associated with the fact that these were not formulated with local traditions and identities in mind but were imposed by a dominant authority. Following Bartoli's interview, she affirms that under the notion of the "standard," rules were imported and imposed into the area. Moreover, she continues arguing that rules are conceived not by a neutral subject but by someone who normally is middle class living in the Centre or the north with a standard of life different from many people who live here (Interview AC-2).

4.1.2 A double marginalization context

The remarkable shift from an emigration country to an immigration one is manifested in the degraded Historical Center of Palermo, where a unique scene was formed through the confluence of the Sicilian working class and impoverished immigrants. Here, both groups experience precarious livelihoods that can be explained under a double context of marginalization in a post-colonized context. First, the Sicilian working class marginalization is rooted in the North-South internal colonialism dynamics explained in the previous section, and the second is linked to the absence of Europeanity (Giglioli, 2019). A correspondence between the lack of "Italianess and Europeaness[1]" that both foreigners and Sicilians have and experience today can be observed.

First, labeling Sicily as 'backward,' uncivilized, and 'not entirely Italian' has historically provided Italian elites with a means to validate the country's modernity by attributing any perceived backwardness to its southern regions. An extensive informal economy, family-conservative values, and unofficial rules feed this concept. Hence, Northern modernity and progress ideals are vital in explaining internal migration and the need to become "fully Italian" or *un Italiano vero*[2].

Similarly, immigrants are drawn by the ideas of modernity, equity, and progress, but in this case, the European one. An interviewed migrant from Chad declares:

> "The idea of Europe says we are equals on paper, but in real life, there is a huge disparity. I can't get a job or apply for a position because I'm not a citizen…In school, people laugh at me because I don't speak the language…they see me as

[1] The author Giglioli (2019) defines "Italianness" and "Europeanness" as both legal inclusion in Italy/EU and symbolic regional traits. In her study, she refers to Tunisians regarding their citizenship challenges; for Sicilians, highlighting the difference compared to the 'Italian' or 'European' lifestyle.

[2] The phrase refers to an iconic phrase of a famous Italian song (L'Italiano by Toto Cutugno). This song portrays a stereotypical italian characteristics, showing traditions and ways of living.

> inferior. The government doesn't take any action to make them understand that we are equals" (Interview MI-2).

This lack of perceived 'Europeanness' produces varying degrees of exclusion and marginality. The phenomenon has been studied by scholars like Giglioli, who focused on Tunisian migrants' difficulties in accessing citizenship or legal residency and their subsequent informal incorporation into the labor market, stemming from a perceived 'lack of Italianness and Europeanness.' Such difficulties in obtaining regular residency permits reveal the broader challenges of integration and acceptance in a society where legal status and cultural identity are deeply intertwined (Giglioli, 2019, p739).

A quote from Avallone (2018) resonates with me when he discusses the concept of reduced citizenship or partial belonging that applies to both colonial and immigrant subjects. These individuals are defined as second-order citizens, constantly subjected to a permanent state of exception. The colonial subjects are in this state because they have been colonized, thus assimilated and rendered inferior. In contrast, the immigrant subjects are in this position because they have been incorporated and are, therefore, always at risk of being expelled. This complex relationship between citizenship, colonization, and assimilation brings broader considerations about how citizenship is practiced in a nation-state context. Since citizenship practice in a nation-state is intrinsically linked to access to human rights, individuals who are not citizens or belong to unrecognized or marginalized minorities might be excluded from these rights (Arendt, 1968).

Based on this, I argue that those (Sicilians and immigrants) who are differently incorporated and do not fully reflect the "Italian European identity" image are marginalized, downgraded, and denied certain rights, constituting part of their precarious livelihood. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of informality in Palermo, shedding light on the multifaceted ways citizenship and belonging are negotiated and contested in the city.

4.2 Palermo, Italy: A multicultural hub of migration

Palermo presents a dynamic confluence of historical layers, urban transformations, and socio-economic juxtapositions. The city hosts a population of 673,735 (Statistiche Italia, 2023), ranking Italy's fifth-largest city. Renowned as a melting pot, Palermo showcases a diverse cultural heritage marked by stark inequalities and unique spatial practices.

Khalil (2019) paints Palermo as a vibrant city shaped by the strategic interplay of its Mediterranean positioning. Throughout its history, many cultures—from Phoenicians to

the Arabs and later the Byzantines—have influenced the city's architectural and cultural milieu. A tangible manifestation of this is the *Centro Storico*[3], which stands as a living canvas of Palermo's past. The dynamic street markets, in particular, embody this layered heritage, presenting a mix of sights, sounds, and tastes that harken back to the many civilizations that once thrived here.

Under the rich historical narrative of Palermo lies an evident economic disparity. The city's employment rate for Italians is just 39.9%, significantly below Italy's national average of 60.5% (Laparelli, 2018). This economic disparity becomes particularly evident in zones like the Historical Center, marked by a proliferation of informal economies and pervasive poverty. Southern Italy has a longstanding history of economic vulnerability.

Fig. 6: Satellite Image of Palermo's Historical Center, Google Earth 2023

The 1990s saw informal employment soar to 50% (Giglioli, 2019).While there has been a reduction since then, it remains considerable at 16.7%, as cited by Istat (2023). Further accentuating the economic divide, Sicily's relative poverty rate registers at 26%, which is markedly higher than the national mean of 15% (Istat, 2018).

Palermo's urban trajectory is deeply intertwined with its Historical Center, which offers insights into the city's patterns of growth, abandonment, poverty, and informality (Picone, 2021; Takeuchi, 1990), all underpinned by mafia-driven urban influences (Scalia, 2020). Since the unification of Italy in 1861, several incomplete or partially executed urban plans have been implemented to organize the area. Among these, the "Piano Regolatore Giarrusso" of 1885 stands out. This plan proposed opening the urban fabric to create

[3] Centro Storico is the italian word to refer to the Historical Center of Palermo

main avenues and urban axes, resonating with Haussmann's Paris interventions (Prestileo, 2020).

WWII played a significant role in shaping the city's current state. The bombings of 1943 led to considerable damage in the city. Due to ineffective restoration efforts, the scars of war are still palpable today (Picone, 2021). In “Palermo Atlas” by Laparelli (2018), it is noted that about 70,000 rooms were destroyed in the city center. The post-war era also saw a marked demographic shift as the area's population diminished to less than half between 1961 and 1971. Factors like infrastructural deficiencies, mafia-driven real estate developments, and the allure of modern suburban life drove many from the city's heart to its outskirts (Takeuchi, 1990; Scalia, 2020). Economic stagnation, combined with a prolonged period of institutional neglect and the overshadowing presence of mafia interests, only exacerbated the decline of Palermo's historical center (Barreiro & Gonzalez, 2020). In that abandonment context, living in the inner City became the chance for the poorest and other deprived groups (Picone, 2021)

Fig. 7: Traces of WW2 Bombing in Palermo's Historical Center, own photography.

Over recent years, Palermo has witnessed a marked increase in tourism, with a peak of over 1 million visitors in 2016 (Laparelli, 2018). This trend has been accentuated by events like the Manifesta 12 art exhibition and the designation of multiple UNESCO World Heritage sites. Palermo's recognition as Italy’s Cultural Capital in 2018 affirmed and potentially magnified this upward trajectory in recent years. While mass tourism has provided a new source of income to the fragile local economy, it has also produced urban transformations in the Historical Center, challenging the affordability and living of Sicilians and immigrants.

Historically, Sicily was an emigration hub, with millions leaving for other continents and northern Italy to evade economic challenges. During the post-war European economic surge, Italy predominantly 'exported' its workforce to Northern countries' advanced economies while simultaneously experiencing extensive internal migration from its agrarian South to the industrial North (p.40). This shift underscores Italy's pronounced North-South disparity, casting the southern region as a realm of limited industrialization and rampant informal economies characterized by substantial labor exploitation and scarce employment opportunities (Mingione & Quassoli, 2000).

In contrast, recent decades have witnessed Palermo's transformation into an important destination for immigrants from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas (Cole, 2006). Due to its strategic location near the Central Migration Route (see figure 8) and influenced by the region's economic and social transformations, Sicily stands as the primary maritime entryway for immigrants to Italy, holding significant importance in Europe (Barreiro & Gonzalez, 2020). Giglioli (2019) suggests that factors like the Schengen Agreement 1995 and the subsequent fortification of the EU's Mediterranean borders have made Sicily a pivotal point for regulating access to the union. This enhanced border security has, paradoxically, led to a rise in undocumented sea arrivals. Moreover, African countries' socio-political and economic turmoil has intensified the migratory push toward Europe. Highlighting the magnitude of this migration trend, data from 2016 recorded 123,706 immigrants reaching Sicily through the Central Mediterranean route (Barreiro & Gonzalez, 2020). Furthermore, recent statistics show that, as of August this year, Italy has received 99,771 migrants (IOM, 2023).

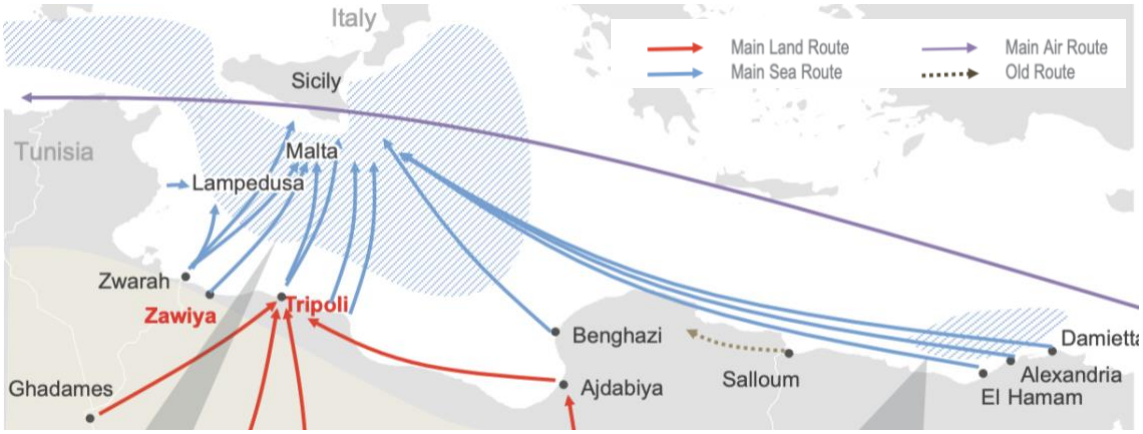

Fig. 8: Migration routes in the Central Mediterranean area, Malakooti 2015

Sicily's newcomers have become vital contributors to the island's economy. This ongoing migration trend has transformed Palermo's city center with cultural diversity, with close to 26,000 non-natives establishing their homes and businesses there (Laparelli, 2018). The phenomenon makes *Centro Storico* the neighborhood with the highest number of

foreigners in the city, with over a percentage of 23.4% of its total population (Napoli & Bonafede, 2020). Studies on residential segregation in Palermo revealed that the number of foreigners has doubled in the last decade (Busetta et al., 2016). However, it is essential to note that while many see Palermo as a transit point (Laparelli, 2018), this research sheds light on the lives of numerous transborder migrants who choose to make the city their home. These individuals persevere in the face of economic challenges, contributing to creating a new multicultural urban landscape.

4.3 Albergheria-Ballarò, the studied area

4.3.1 Introduction

This thesis focused on the Albergheria-Ballarò neighborhood, one of the four subsections of Palermo's historic center. While officially termed Palazzo Reale-Albergheria, the locale is more widely recognized by the renowned Ballarò market's name. It stands out as the historical center's most underprivileged area, with a diverse population both in class and ethnicity. Deep-seated informality and the presence of influential external actors give rise to intricate intercultural dynamics in its public spaces (Barreiro & Gonzalez, 2020).

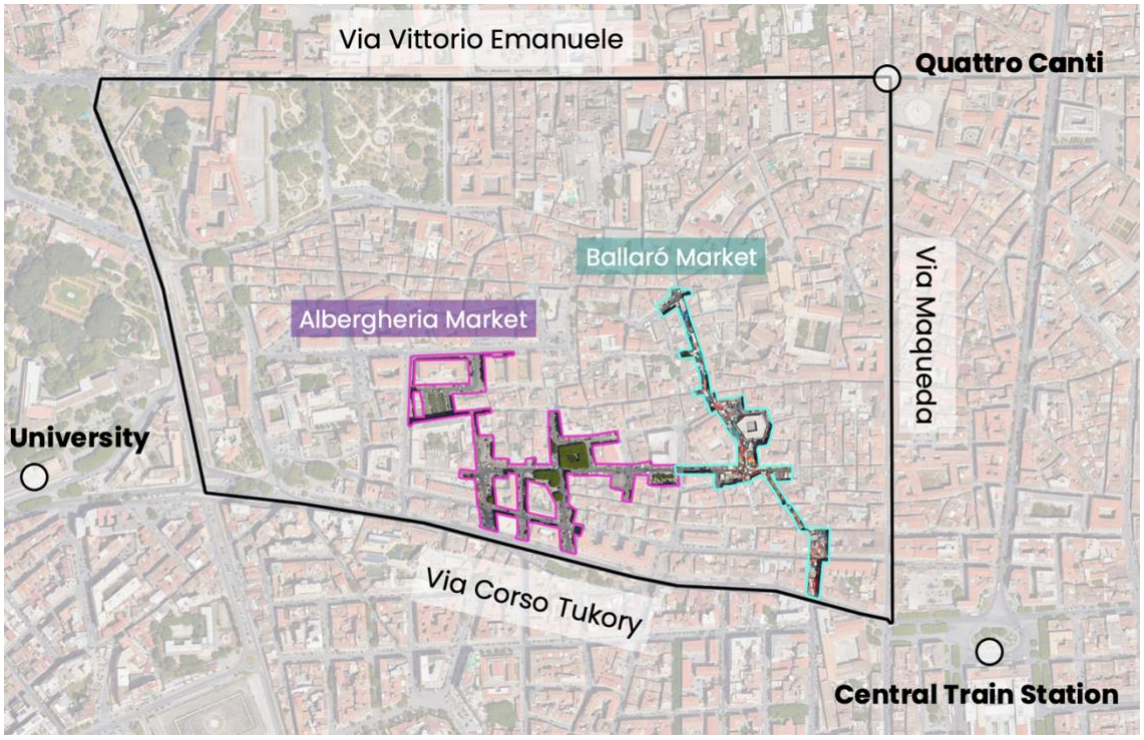

Fig. 9: Albergheria district area including two street markets, own illustration based on Google Earth

In the Albergheria district, two significant street markets operate: the historic Ballarò Market and the more recent Albergheria Market. While different, both play critical roles in shaping the area's urban, socio-economic, and spatial dynamics.

The Ballarò Market, dating back to the Arab era in Sicily, stands as Palermo's oldest and most iconic historical market (Khalil, 2019). Stretching approximately 500m from Via Casa Professa to Via Tukory, it primarily offers fresh food products, street food stalls, restaurants catering to tourists, and souvenir shops. The market is the primary economic hub and a focal point for social inclusivity, attracting tourists and Palermitans from other areas (Barreiro & Gonzalez, 2020). It is a melting pot for intercultural exchange between locals, migrants, and visitors.

On the other hand, the Albergheria Market emerged in the 2000s as a second-hand marketplace. Less picturesque and more disordered than its counterpart, this market embodies an entirely informal setting. Probably none of the vendors is authorized to occupy public land (Bartoli, 2019). Daily, hundreds of sellers use the streets and sidewalks, offering various items ranging from refurbished goods and furniture to shoes, food, and potentially stolen-origin electronics and bicycles. Serving as a survival marketplace, it sees a mix of working-class Sicilians and migrants setting up their stalls side by side, starting from the early hours.

As depicted in Figure (2), the markets are strategically located at the heart of Palermo, a mere walking distance from iconic landmarks like Quattro Canti and the Central Train Station. This prime location attracts tourists and locals frequenting the numerous institutional buildings nearby. Furthermore, the substantial footprint of both markets, sprawling across streets and sidewalks, influences the urban fabric and daily interactions of residents and passersby. The area's urban character is shaped not just by those traversing it but also by the myriad street-work infrastructures established to support the mobile vendors and the operations of the two markets.

4.3.2 A popular centrality

The Albergheria-Ballarò neighborhood vividly embodies the notion of 'popular centrality' as conceptualized by the Rosa Bonheur Collectif (2016). This concept portrays a popular or working-class centrality as a whole social and economic ecosystem that guarantees access to jobs, affordable products, and immaterial relationships. It is described as an urban space neglected by capital and marginalized socially but stands out for its abundance of relationships and resources. In an interview conducted by Delfini (2019) with the authors of the concept they emphasized that this centrality emerges from the active resistance of the working class: refurbishing deteriorated homes, repairing cars, hosting relatives, working and trading from home, and starting small businesses. Nevertheless, the theory does not intend to reflect an enchanted vision of the working-class centrality. It is described not as a charming space to its residents but one permeated with strong gender and ethnic-racial determinants, leading to further fragmentations among the bonded social subgroups.

This theory contributes to the understanding of Albergheria-Ballarò's reality, in which Sicilian working class and immigrants can be seen on the streets in a similar proportion, either working on the street, exchanging with neighbors, shopping, or just socializing. Here, the rootedness occurs through a popular and subsistence economy unfolded in a highly unregulated way in which social and labor-excluded groups meet and bond.

However, this popular centrality is forged in a peculiar context explained by historical factors, influential local stakeholders, and an omissive state role.

4.3.3 State's Absence and Mafia

The precarious socio-urban conditions of Albergheria quickly bring to light questions about the state's role in terms of intervention, mediation, and authority. A widespread sentiment was discerned throughout the fieldwork: a collective perception of the state's absence or inactivity in the area. The notion of "state abandonment or absence" is largely discussed in the North and South literature in high informality and marginalization contexts. The concept juxtaposes against the ideal of a proactive state striving for reduced inequality and enhanced democracy (Martínez Robles, 2016). Unlike this ideal scenario, the scholar Serje (2016) posits that the crux of "state abandonment" is the state's inability to assert its laws across extensive regions of its domain. In such zones, state neglect paves the way for disorder, with the dominant "law" being the might of the strongest (p.6).

This idea resonates with the case study, raising questions about the Italian State's ability to control incorporated areas such as Sicily. Drawing parallelism with other international contexts (Colombia), the inability or reluctance of the central state to exercise control over its entire territory has allowed localized powers to flourish and assert their authority (Serje, 2012). Similarly, in Sicily, historical gaps in state control provided a conducive environment for the Mafia organizations such as "Cosa Nostra" to assert dominance. Mafia organizations, deeply rooted in Sicily's socio-economic landscape, effectively disturbed state functions, illustrating a parallel yet distinct manifestation of state absence.

The 1980s marked a turning point: the landmark Maxi Trial in Palermo (1986-1987) and the subsequent assassinations of judges Falcone and Borsellino in 1992 galvanized the Italian state into more decisive actions. As a result, the Mafia's coercive influence was significantly reduced. However, from the 50s to the 90s, the Mafia's impact on the urban fabric was profound. Their significant participation became evident in the construction of suburban housing projects fostering Palermitans relocating outside the city, contributing to the deterioration of the historic center's condition. The Mafia's influence in this urban transformation stemmed from their robust territorial dominance and the extensive social ties Cosa Nostra maintained, spanning from aristocrats to everyday workers (Scalia, 2020).

Albergheria, located within Palermo's historic center, is a vivid testament to these tumultuous events. Its deterioration is reflected not only in its urban fabric but also in

specific practices, for instance, the harsh and violent "*pizzo*[4]" tactics of the Mafia in the Ballarò Market between 1985 and 1992 (Interview EXP-1). Today, the state's absence is manifested in the deficit of improvement programs oriented to socio-economic issues, infrastructure, housing, and public space. During fieldwork in the area, I noticed a marked absence of institutional presence. No mobile health units were addressing local addiction issues, no social workers interfacing with residents, no construction works directed towards public spaces, and, notably, no politicians appearing for photo opportunities in the market. A solitary instance was noted in the frame of Ballarò Market's touristification process: constructing a roof structure for the market. However, the construction is complete, remains inoperative, cordoned off, and littered with trash. As a result, my preconceptions as a researcher from the Global South, which painted a picture of a robust and present European state, were not validated in this area.

However, contrary to the notion of state absence, I argue that the state invariably exists, even in today's context of uprising neoliberal regimes. While social policies remain ever-present, they are not always geared toward enhancing the quality of life (Chiara et al., 2017). As Serje argues, the discourse on 'state absence' should shift from focusing on institutional presence within a territory to emphasizing the specific practices carried out by local and national state agencies (2012). Based on my empirical findings, rather than a complete absence, I discern an intentional omission or limited engagement by the state (Davies et al., 2017).

This deliberate lack of involvement may stem from various reasons. One potential cause could be a strategic avoidance of confronting dominant entities in the area, like criminal organizations, thereby indirectly allowing their activities to go unrecognized. Alternatively, this neglect might be a conscious strategy to let specific sectors deteriorate, paving the way for future lucrative interventions, such as real estate projects that favor specific economic interests. Such neglect might be designed to drive the community to become more receptive to or even actively seek those types of interventions. Additionally, redirecting resources away from "problematic" zones like Albergheria to other "valuable" areas, even in the face of glaring humanitarian issues, can be perceived as a manifestation of political maneuvering. Such strategies, whether stemming from calculated neglect or political actions, highlight how inactivity can be wielded as a tool of control and power (Davies et al., 2017), potentially rooted in pre-existing stigmas associated with the neighborhood.

[4]The "pizzo" refers to a protection fee usually requested by the Italian Mafia to businesses.

In Albergheria, while the state's presence appears diminished, an extensive array of local stakeholders—from civic associations and NGOs to religious institutions—step in to fill the void. This shift sees the state's social responsibilities transfer to assistance-oriented organizations (Martínez Robles, 2016). Highlighting this dynamic, Rafaela Pascoal, a researcher and consultant for UNHCR, observes that in Italy, "*the third sector has essentially replaced the state because the institutions are resource-strapped. In effect, it is civil society that is providing residents, both citizens and migrants, with greater access to their rights, more so than traditional institutions"* (Interview EXP-2).

However, In the studied area, these organizations extend beyond just offering assistance; they actively participate in the local economy, urban planning, and cultural endeavors. This involvement becomes particularly significant given the commune's role as an intermediary, liaising only with new real-state stakeholders (Interview EXP-3). Thus, as detailed in the subsequent section, the neighborhood's governance emerges as a concerted (and conflictual) effort between established historical stakeholders and dynamic civic groups introducing community-driven rules and norms.

4.3.4 Social actors and local governance of the neighborhood

Stakeholder's identification of the area confirms three main patterns in the local governance of the neighborhood. First, public institutions have limited or omissive participation in the area's daily activities. Second, there is a significant presence of illicit trading, such as drugs and stolen objects selling. While its organizational structure remains unclear, findings indicate that local Sicilians were the primary operators. Immigrants, to a lesser extent, seemed to be involved through what appears to be agreements, particularly in selling stolen objects (Interview AC-2). Thirdly, there is an intense participation of civic society organizations that have become influential in addressing and denouncing the socio-economic and urban issues of the area. According to Marco Picone, a scholar and researcher from Palermo, there is a peculiar phenomenon in which foreign people, left-wing organizations, and NGOs are undoubtedly shaping the reality of this part of the city (Interview AC-1).

Therefore, this section reveals the diverse stakeholders of the area, focusing on the constellations of civic society organizations. Their active involvement was consistently cited in various interviews conducted for this research and existing literature about the area. These organizations offer various services to refugees, migrants, and local Sicilians, ranging from shelter and food to legal assistance, language training, job guidance, healthcare, and holistic social support. Eleven such organizations were identified (see figure 10), combining on-site collected data with information from

JUMAmap, an online platform that geolocates services for asylum seekers (JUMAmap, 2023). While some are specific, offering detailed services and roles, others, such as criminal organizations and shops, are more generic.

Name	Type	Service
Centro Astalli	Organization	Sheltering, Health care, Language schools, Job orientation, Legal assistance, Psycho-social support
CLEDU	Organization	Administrative/legal assistance
ARCI Porco Rosso	Organization	Sheltering, Legal assistance, Psycho-social support
Caritas Diocesana Centro Agàpe	Organization	Sheltering
Santa Chiara	Organization	Language schools, Job orientation, Legal assistance
Molti Volti	Organization	Ethnic restaurant, Co-working space
SOS Ballarò	Organization	Neighbor assembly
Associazione Sbaratto	Organization	Associations of Albergheria market vendors
Mediterraneo Antirazzista	Organization	Cultural and sports programs
Casa Ancora	Organization	Sheltering
Associazione Mercato Storico Ballarò	Organization	Association of Ballarò market vendors
University of Palermo	Public Entity	Education
Liceo Benito Crosce	Public Entity	Secondary Education
Ersu - University dorms	Public Entity	Student Accommodation
Liceo Regina Margherita	Public Entity	Secondary Education
Commune (Municipality)	Public Entity	Public safety, infrastructure, sanitation (see 4.3.3)
Restaurants and bars	Private	Food and beverage services
Shops	Private	Retail (Groceries, Household, Fashion)
Street vendors	Private	Street Retail (Food, cigarettes, bread, second-hand items)
Criminal organizations	Private	Illicit trade (Drugs, stolen objects, exploitative prostitution)
Tourists	Private	Experience consumption

Fig. 10: Stakeholders mapping of the studied area, own illustration

The table presented categorizes stakeholders into three categories: organizations (NGOs, associations, religious groups, and more), public entities, and private actors. Organizations such as Centro Astalli and CLEDU offer various services ranging from healthcare to Italian language instruction and job guidance. On the public front, entities like the University of Palermo, nearby schools, and the local municipality hold distinct roles and involvement and have specific buildings within the neighborhood. In contrast, the private sector includes a spectrum of commercial entities like restaurants, storefronts, and street vendors, alongside more elusive influences such as tourists and criminal organizations.

Among identified organizations, some emerged more frequently during this thesis fieldwork. For instance, Molti Volti, Arci Porco Rosso, and Sbaratto were each mentioned

on six occasions. SOS Ballarò was referred to four times, Santa Chiara and Centro Agape Caritas three times each, Centro Astalli twice, and Casa Ancora was mentioned once. Although these entities carry out a range of distinct services, interconnections among them were observed, often in the form of collaborative projects or shared initiatives. These collaborations form an intricate ecosystem of organizations operating within the neighborhood, thus establishing themselves as essential resources for both migrants and locals in search of social services.

The following part of this study briefly describes the duties of Molti Volti, Arci Porco Rosso, and SOS Ballarò. I have chosen those organizations due to their broad attraction of users and involvement in the area's urban realm. In line with Barreiro and Gonzalez, I categorize them under the term Inter-Cultural Nodes. Those nodes are defined as pluralist spaces conceived as urban and social connectors in which locals and culturally diverse migrants frequently subjected to exclusion could collaborate in creative expression and dialogue on joint projects (2020).

Molti Volti is an international restaurant and co-working space renowned in Palermo. One of its founders, Roberta Lo Bianco, defines it *as a social enterprise created not as a restaurant just for business but to use food as a link* to promote values and the organization's vision. Based on their slogan "*la mia terra è dove poggio I miei piedi*" (My land is where I stand my feet), Roberta emphasizes the universal right of individuals to determine their place of residence, irrespective of motive (Interview ACT-2).

Fig. 11: Molti Volti restaurant and co-working space, photography retrieved from official website

This space provides a free co-working space and multi-purpose room where meetings, seminars, workshops, and other activities are offered for free in partnership with other local organizations. The conference room also hosts neighbors' assemblies and meetings organized by other local organizations, for instance, SOS Ballarò. While utilizing the co-working space regularly, I became familiar with its dynamics and the diverse group of visitors it attracts. Molti Volti functions as a unique melting pot. Tourists

frequent it for its international culinary offerings and attractive design. Simultaneously, migrants benefit from support and educational opportunities like Italian language and computer classes, and local activists convene to deliberate on politics and the area's plans and conflicts. Molti Volti's ethical approach and practices gather significant social appreciation within the local community.

Arci Porco Rosso is a collective hub of antifascist and antiracist political ideas and practices (2023). This organization in Ballarò serves migrants, asylum seekers, and locals, offering crucial services like complimentary legal counsel and fostering dialogue and knowledge exchange. One of its founders, Fausto Melluso, describes it as a meeting point in which a just-arrived person can meet with a law teacher not as a poor migrant but as a person, play cheese, and speak about football (Interview ACT-1). For that purpose, Arci Porco Rosso opens every afternoon as a welcome space where everyone can come. The most renowned activity of Porco Rosso is the "Sportelo San Papies," which is an unofficial help desk.

Fig. 12: Arci Porco Rosso locale, Albergheria-Ballarò, photographs from official website.

> "On Wednesday, we listen to singular stories from people….. We listen in an absolutely informal way. We are not a legal desk; we are not an official desk that gives services to people. We are not saying that we are fixing your problem. We are listening to your condition. We try to inform you concretely…we are, in particular, addressing people without documents, but not just on this, and not just on migrants; we have a growing number of Italian people...we want you to be totally aware of your perspective for you to take your own decision by your own" (Interview ACT-1)

The vision of this left-wing organization advocates for the rights of these migrants, recognizing their presence and working with authorities to find a balance between regulation and support.

SOS Ballarò functions as a continuous neighborhood assembly, distinguishing itself from traditional NGOs, associations, or cooperatives. It contains approximately 55 local organizations since 2015, and its role has been pivotal in shaping various cultural, political, social, and urban endeavors in the area (Interview EXP-1). Noteworthy contributions include improving neglected public spaces such as Piazza Mediterranea and Piazzeta Ciomo and organizing the acclaimed international street art festival Ballarò Buskers.

Fig. 13: SOS Ballarò various activities in the area, photographs from official website and LiveUnipa

As territorial connectors, they have played a part in birthing associations that aim to formalize and enhance both The Historic Market of Ballarò and Albergheria's second-hand market. Key entities, *Associazione Mercato Storico di Ballarò* and *Sbaratto*, encompass vendors and residents, fostering discussions on the operation and setting from-the-ground rules. These assemblies serve as a bridge linking vendors, residents, local organizations, and the local government.

The organization is also vocal in public campaigns highlighting the neighborhood's drug issue advocating for governmental intervention. Despite its omnipresence in various endeavors, SOS Ballarò's fluid nature means it lacks a fixed legal entity but relies on other established organizations. According to Barreiro and Gonzalez, SOS Ballarò has emerged as a main third-sector agent in the urban regeneration of the district (p.254, 2020).

4.3.5 Not Everything is Rosy: A Critical View on the NGO's Ecosystem

Civil organizations in Albergheria-Ballarò, while vital in fostering mutual understanding between locals and migrants through successful projects, are not immune to criticism. While this research acknowledges their valuable contributions, it also aims to provide constructive feedback based on critiques from migrant activists closely involved with these entities. A predominant concern arises from the apparent power dynamics disparity between well-established NGOs and emerging migrant-led ones. Notably, many of the prominent organizations, despite being intended to assist migrants, are primarily managed by white Italians or Europeans. This imbalance becomes particularly evident when it comes to accessing EU funding.

One activist from Nigeria indicated that for several individuals working in established NGOs, their participation appears more as a hobby activity rather than a dedicated activism. He commented on the limited tangible progress he has witnessed, even with the involvement of organizations such as Moltivolti and Porco Rosso. Additionally, he expressed concerns regarding the declining presence of migrant-led organizations in Palermo. In his view, migrant communities place greater trust in these organizations, emphasizing the gravity of their decreasing numbers (Interview MI-5).

Fig. 14: Migrants protest in Palermo, own photography

Furthering this discourse, another interviewee provided insights into the intricacies of this division. He noted that while migrants are frequently presented at the forefront of campaigns spearheaded by larger NGOs, they often are relegated to minimal decision-making roles. This disparity extends to fiscal dynamics, with the funds allocated to these NGOs not always directly benefiting the migrant communities. This, he suggests, may

be influenced by underlying biases. The interviewee also critiqued the leadership structures, pointing to a hesitancy to genuinely integrate African perspectives that advocate for transformative change, asserting, "*'I am not invading a country by my own principles on it…No, we want justice*".

Lastly, he alluded to potential political motivations underlying many NGOs' operations, suggesting that those holding divergent views are often marginalized, which he likens to organizational *ostracization*[5]. Finally, he underscores the marked importance of NGOs in Ballarò and Albergheria, describing the areas as hubs with *'products, fresh products*.' He then provocatively poses the question, *'And which is the product?*' only to answer with a pointed observation: 'T*he African people. They have become the product for these NGOs*' (Interview MI-8).

[5] The interviewee referred to 'Ostracization' as the social process of excluding, marginalizing, or isolating individuals or groups from a community or society.

5. Survival Tactics in Albergheria-Ballarò: A Multicultural Contested Public Space – Finding and Analysis

The upcoming chapters reveal the intricate relationship between migrants, the Sicilian working class, and the urban dynamics of Albergheria-Ballarò. In the first chapter (5.1), I outline the area's unique public space, highlighting its informal and intense public life nature. It further addresses the use of public spaces for survival tactics and introduces the concept and types of material infrastructures.

The second chapter (5.2) zooms into migrants' interactions with the local environment. It underscores their challenges in the informal, gendered labor market, navigating exclusion, exploitation, fragile visa situations, and housing difficulties. Chapter three (5.3) unpacks the Historical Ballarò Market, detailing its spatial operations, ongoing tourist evolution, and the secondary role of migrants in it. The concluding chapter (5.4) turns to the Albergheria Market, illustrating vendor space negotiation and product acquisition strategies. This chapter emphasizes the market's foundational nature, built on practices of solidarity, where migrants play a more equal role.

5.1 A Popular and Informal Public Space

5.1.1 Public space

Albergheria-Ballarò public space has vivid interactions, distinctive dynamics, and heated struggles. At first glance, it may seem chaotic, unorganized, and unpredictable, challenging idealistic perception that depicts public space as a common, shared, and peaceful place. Peralta (2017) expresses that recent hegemonic definitions of public space portray it as the place where abstract and moral values such as democracy, civility, citizenship, and consensus come to life. This refers to a notion of public space with a distinctly normative character, focusing on expected behaviors social and political practices that should occur there.

Conversely, the area’s public space is a site of conflict, violence, and dispute but also creation, solidarity, and multiculturality. To unravel its complexity, I emphasize the crucial role of social relations in the production of this space (Lefebvre, 1991). Therefore, Albergheria-Ballarò’s public space is inherently a relational space resulting from burdened social interaction constructions in time and urban material space. Social relations are tinted here by wider marginalization, poverty, and migration phenomena. Poor maintenance, degraded infrastructure, abandoned buildings, and forgotten public spaces characterize the urban material space. Along with countless mobile structures

and objects informally placed for street vending, this combination shapes a dynamic urban landscape.

Fig. 15: Albergheria-Ballarò neighborhood, own photography

Public space here epitomizes the district's unevenness. The area's history of deterioration dates back to the 1800s when the precarious residential construction and the economic conditions of the population were exacerbated by poor hygiene conditions caused by frequent epidemics and overpopulation. As a response, several urban plans were partially executed, producing demolitions to open new streets and social housing. Paradoxically, these actions also contributed to the area's degradation (Girgenti et al., 2011). WW2 bombings destroyed multiple neighborhood buildings, which remain abandoned until today, conforming to the present scene of decline.

The urban deterioration in Albergheria is rooted in its historical and structural challenges and exacerbated by contemporary issues (see Figure 16). These include its residents' economic difficulties, ineffective waste and parking management, and disputes between various city departments and public bodies (Barreiro & Gonzalez, 2020).

Moreover, street vending and drug sales intensify tensions within the area's public spaces. Therefore, Albergheria's public space can be seen as millenary palimpsest conformed by spontaneous activities, failed urban ordering plans, colonization, war, multiculturality, and a peculiar public-private life complicity.

Fig. 16: Degradation of public space and drug prevention campaign in the neighborhood, own photographs

5.1.2 Public life and multiculturality

The intertwin of public and private life plays a particular role in the neighborhood's streets. Salvatore Lucente, journalist and photographer, defines Albergheria's public space as "*somewhat unfinished… as a large open space where private life often continues within the public realm, occupying various areas"* (Interview ACT-3). In the area, houses' privacy is physically and intrinsically connected with the streets. Ground floor doors and windows fully open materialize this link, erasing the boundaries between the inhabitant's intimacy and the shared space. Spatial factors such as overcrowding and low-quality buildings (Napoli & Bonafede, 2020), poor ventilation, and dense, void-free urban fabric contribute to the case. This physical form sets the scene for a powerful socialization atmosphere in the neighborhood.

As a resident of the area, I witnessed the intense and constant interactions between neighbors. This is easily recognizable in many parts of Palermo and constitutes part of the Southern Italian cliché way of living. Marco Picone, who has studied public space and the processes of communing, argues that Southern Italy and Sicily are more inclusive territories than the traditional Anglo-Saxon distinction between public and private space. He stressed that this means one can find public spaces in unexpected areas and become public as they support or foster a sense of community (Interview AC-1). In Albergheria, one can see kids playing on the streets, families setting the table and having lunch in public spaces, transients establishing conversations through open windows and spontaneous gatherings of people around public stairs and corners of the neighborhood. However, this intertwined relationship between public and private spaces brings to light issues of domestic violence, conflicts in coexistence, and tensions over control of space.

5.1.3 Tensions and Disputes

Rather than fostering harmonious conviviality, the lax governance of public space use leads to significant tensions due to street vendors and illicit activities like drug selling and consumption. In this context, the everyday practice of contesting and negotiating for dominance over public spaces involves individuals from various cultural and ethnic communities (Barreiro & Gonzalez, 2020). For instance, migrants negotiate space and working hours with Italians to start a business there (Saetalu, 2013). Street vendors in the district replicate this situation by establishing borders for their selling territories. In line with Peralta (2017), immaterial relationships play a fundamental role in street vendors maintaining the appropriated public space through the other's recognition and respect.

As shown in section 4.3.3, I argue that the limited intervention of public authorities shifts spatial governance to an informal realm where local stakeholders assert their influence based on their leverage and individual interests. Within this informal setting, Ballarò's criminal activities take center stage, exerting a pronounced territorial influence, particularly evident at night when both addicts and sellers come into play.

Disputes and confrontations over public space in the area are commonplace. I witnessed a 2-months dispute (April to June 2023) for a small square space adjacent to my apartment reclaimed by drug consumers and neighbors. Here, the extended presence of different crack addicts during the day and mainly at night disturbed the park's neighbors. In response, some persuade them to leave through cordial conversations, others through yelling and physically pushing them away. The evolution of the dispute gathered different neighbors who performed various tasks such as organizing, confronting, and cleaning the disputed public space. As a result, the disputed space was appropriated by a family residing on the ground floor. The following photo sequence (see Figure 17) illustrates a situation reproduced throughout the neighborhood due to the appropriation of public space for commercial, recreational, or other uses.

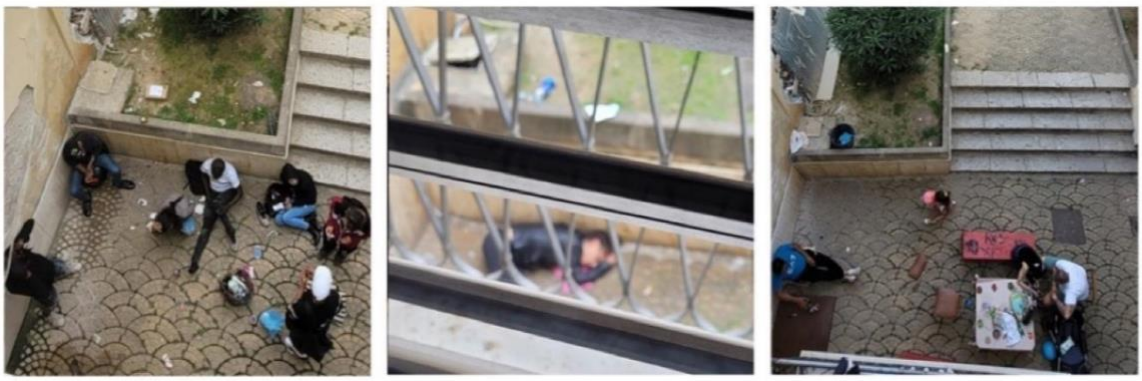

Fig. 17: Public space disputes related to neighborhood drug issues, own photographs

Recently, crack consumption has become a significant issue in the neighborhood, greatly visible in Albergheria public spaces. One can witness dozens of individuals wandering the district, appearing disoriented or "lost." Local organizations, including Arci Porco Rosso and SOS Ballarò, are actively addressing the situation. The latter has launched a campaign named "*emergenza crack*," organizing numerous demonstrations and public meetings, urging public authorities to take action.

Fausto Melluso, founder of Arci Porco Rosso, criticizes the state's approach. He contends that while authorities seem to be playing a game of "cops and robbers" with small drug dealers, they have not allocated any social assistance for those struggling with addiction. He observes that the state's primary strategy is to relocate these individuals away from tourist hotspots rather than finding sustainable solutions to address the root of the addiction issue (Interview ACT-1). This state's approach is one of the many examples of limited and omissive involvement of public authority in the real, local governance of the district.

5.1.4 The place where tactics can be deployed

The public spaces of Albergheria serve as a vivid tableau where socioeconomic precarity is juxtaposed with the resilience and resourcefulness of its residents to navigate and transcend these challenges. The streets become a vital part of the popular centrality ecosystem (4.3.2), in which residents deploy multiple survival tactics through appropriation and negotiation. Building on Bayat's (2000) and Certeau's (1980) theories, survival tactics are defined as the activities undertaken by marginalized people who modify and adapt pre-established situations to ensure their economic and social well-being.

"The public space…for those who live in that context is a strategy for survival, to not die or to not worse, like ending up in jail" (Interview MI-4). This quote, articulated by a migrant from Chad, underscores the survival role of public space for Albergheria's inhabitants.

The empirical findings of this study have identified a diverse range of tactics utilized by both migrants and working-class Sicilians within the studied area. The following table (see Figure 18) illustrates observed work and dwelling practices. Not all of these tactics are necessarily legal or ethical; therefore, this study does not endorse or glamorize them in any way. They are merely examined as ways in which people operate within this popular economic ecosystem.

Tactics	Description
Street vending	Miscellaneous of various products, such as second-hand objects, construction tools, and clothes. They were primarily observed in Albergheria's Market.
Street food	Practiced in several parts of the district, especially in Ballarò Market
Fresh food	Vegetables, fruits, fish, and others. It varies from more established to mobile stands
Small mobile vendors	Small stands selling cigarettes, bread, and others around Ballarò Market.
House clearance (*sbarazzo*)	Clearing up buildings and re-selling obtained furniture in the Albergheria Market
Appliance Refurbishment	Repair and refurbishment of used or damaged appliances for resale in Albergheria Market
Night roasters or grillers	The practice is mainly performed by the African community in Via Ballarò
Fish raffle	Selling tickets to win a large bucket of fish and seafood. Mainly purchased among the market's vendors
Unofficial parking attendants	Oversee public parking spaces and expect a small fee for their services
Waste pickers	Individuals select discarded objects from waste bins and re-sell them on the street. Mainly observed in Albergheria Market,
Drug selling	Significant illicit commercial activity spread throughout the district during the day and primarily at night.
Selling stolen objects	Illicit resale of stolen objects such as phones, bikes, and computers. Mainly during the night in Albergheria's market area, some Palermitans call the "stolen things market".
Counterfeit trade	Sale of imitation products, often of well-known brands, usually on the weekends between both markets.
Sleeping in cars	Using parked cars as shelter
Squatting	Occupying abandoned or empty buildings

Fig. 18: Table of survival tactics identified in the studied area, own illustration

The tactics observed during the fieldwork in the Albergheria district span a wide array of activities, reflecting its residents' resilience, adaptability, inventiveness, and conflictuality. From the versatile nature of street vending—where anything from construction tools to clothes and second-hand objects can be found—to the intense street food culture that predominantly thrives in the Ballarò Market. While some vendors have capitalized on the growing presence of tourists, others do it through discarded resources in the urban environment. For instance, those involved in house clearance (*sbarazzo*), turning discarded or unwanted items into selling products in the Albergheria Market. Appliance refurbishment further shows a community that can profit from personal skills, adding economic value from a personal need and highlighting the values of reuse and sustainability (see 5.4.4). The night roasters in Via Ballarò, led mainly by the African community, demonstrate the strategy to profit from the vivid socialization scene of a particular migrant group. Housing-related identified activities such as sleeping in cars or

building squatting show the local community's precarious livelihood and basic needs of the local community.

However, not all tactics observed lean on the legal or socially accepted side. Illicit activities such as counterfeit, drugs, and stolen objects trade are controversial and significantly impact public space's reputation. The intriguing fish raffle is a traditional practice lottery-like where vendors buy a number and compete for a bucket of fresh fish and seafood. The raffle or lottery method has also been used as a "*pizzo*," a protection fee paid by vendors to the local mafia[6]. Unofficial parking attendants were also observed taking care of cars for a fee in retribution. The latter is locally called "*Parcheggiatori abusivi*" and is widely problematic in other areas of Palermo, being repudiated socially and in the local press.

The results exhibited in this section highlight the multifaceted survival nature of Albergheria's streets. As different tactics emerge and coexist, they often lead to overlapping interactions, resulting in a contested public space. The diversity of activities, ranging from *'sbarazzo'* to the fish raffle and its consequential *'pizzo'*, illustrates the vast cultural backgrounds rooted deeply in Sicilian history. Moreover, the commonality of Sicilians and migrants performing similar economic activities shows the economic precarity both groups experience originated from a double-marginalization context (see section 4.1.2).

5.1.5 Material Infrastructures Colonizing the Space

The public space of Albergheria is intricately woven with an array of mobile and semi-permanent objects. These elements, vital to a broad spectrum of informal economic activities, are fundamental components of the area's urban landscape. Street work is deeply intertwined with these elements, many of which remain in the public space outside working hours.

Lindell (2019) introduced the term 'material infrastructures' to describe the tangible objects and structures informally used in public spaces to facilitate the daily activities of street vendors. Essentially, the author refers to stalls, vending tables, and foldable structures, among others. These material infrastructures enhance the spatial mobility of street workers within the city and play a crucial role in their livelihoods. Drawing from Lindell's concept, this study sheds light on the diverse material infrastructures found in Albergheria. The findings underscore the resourcefulness involved in the street

[6] Examples of the *pizzo* mafioso use are published in Palermo's newspapers. Droga, pizzo e summit di mafia in una sala da barba (Palermo Today, 2022), Palermo, pizzo ai bengalesi di Ballarò: "Mafia e odio razziale" (Lo Verso, 2023).

practices, which, by repurposing existing items, enhances the efficiency of street work and streamlines setup and storage processes. The following table (see Figure 19) contends a catalog of the observed material infrastructures.

Type	Description
Vendor Support Vehicles	Vehicles, such as cars and vans that, serve as an operational base or support for vendors during market hours.
Vendor Storage Vehicles	Vehicles, like cars, vans, and trucks that store goods for selling and semi-permanently parked overnight. Most had flat tires, showing their lasting position and role as storage places.
Pop-up metal structures	Semi-permanent or temporary metal frames and stands that can be set up quickly to support vending activities
Placeholders' objects	Usually, boxes or furniture are used strategically to reserve vending spots or parking spaces
Ape Cargo Bike	This tricycle, traditional in Southern Italy, is optimized for transporting goods.
Display Apparatus	Various objects vendors use to present and showcase their products to potential customers. These can include blankets spread on the ground, standing racks, tables, stacked plastic boxes, and wires or cords attached to walls or overhead structures
Vendor's trolleys	Objects, including shopping carts, trolleys, custom-made wheeled containers, and repurposed baby carriages, are utilized both for transporting vendor goods and displaying mobile sellers' products.
Workstations	Items utilized as workstations for manual tasks, notably for blacksmithing and ironworking
Shade canopies	Elements like canopy roofs, large umbrellas, and tarps that offer protection from weather conditions
Car Home	Parked cars that serve as shelter and home for vendors and people of the area.

Fig. 19: Table of material infrastructures observed in the area, own illustration

Fig. 20: Catalogue of material infrastructures of Albergheria-Ballarò, own photographs

POP-UP METAL STRUCTURES
#1

POP-UP METAL STRUCTURES
#2

POP-UP METAL STRUCTURES
#3

POP-UP METAL STRUCTURES
#4

APE CARGO BIKE
#1

APE CARGO BIKE
#2

APE CARGO BIKE
#3

APE CARGO BIKE
#4

DISPLAY APPARATUS
#1

DISPLAY APPARATUS
#2

DISPLAY APPARATUS
#3

DISPLAY APPARATUS
#4

SHADE CANOPIES
#1

SHADE CANOPIES
#2

SHADE CANOPIES
#3

SHADE CANOPIES
#4

VENDOR TROLLEYS
#1

VENDOR TROLLEYS
#2

VENDOR TROLLEYS
#3

VENDOR TROLLEYS
#4

VENDOR STORAGE VEHICLES
#1

VENDOR SUPPORT VEHICLES
#1

CAR HOME
#1

CAR HOME
#1

As illustrated in Figure 20, the area features diverse types of material infrastructures. Even with this diversity, specific shared attributes emerge a) the adaptation of pre-existing objects, b) the preference for cost-effective materials, c) designs that allow for straightforward assembly and disassembly, and d) the integration of wheels to ensure mobility. Moreover, many observed objects are compositions of various items, as seen in Shade Canopy #2, which links a car wheel filled with concrete, serving as a base foundation for the shade canopy. Vehicles and trolley carts are essential in facilitating the storage and movement of the sellers' goods.

Material infrastructures are utilized differently across the two primary markets of Albergheria. In the second-hand market, the usage of these items leans toward a fleeting and mobile nature. The Ballarò Market often sees them integrated more semi-permanently, deeply rooted in the Market's layout. For instance, the historic market predominantly employs shade canopies as expansive roofing structures, frequently spanning entire streets. Differently, Albergheria's market employs them as smaller, localized installations.

Display apparatuses such as blankets, racks, or pop-up metal structures are crucial in both markets. While in the Ballarò market, products are often showcased on racks or tables, in the other market, blankets on the floor are primarily used. Here, using different objects distinguishes the levels of professionalism in vending activities. Francesco Montagnani, a local researcher and member of SOS Ballarò, highlighted the nuanced expertise required when selling from the ground. He highlights the meaningful shift in vendor perception when transitioning from ground-based selling to an elevated surface—even if it is as simple as a makeshift stand using two objects and a wooden board (Interview EXP-1).

Material infrastructures profoundly influence the vendor's mindset and the neighborhood's identity. Iconic objects such as the Ape Taxi and others become important elements created by the community that forge local symbols and a different urban landscape.

5.1.6 Conclusions: A contested socio-economic resource

Public space is not a space of peace; it is a space of tensions and negotiations. Albergheria's streets diverge from idealistic definitions of public space. Such ideals speak of a peaceful normative space, uploading abstract values such as democracy, civility, and citizenship (Peralta, 2017). This conceptualization aligns with Lefebvre's (1991) notion of an 'abstract space' — portrayed as an isolated "completed product" but distanced from the complex social reality. In line with the author, I argue that the streets here are 'differential spaces' areas that are somehow uncompleted and continuously under process. They resist measuring and quantification and can not be fully captured by capitalist-modernist logic. Resistances, tensions, and informal arrangements are part of the daily production of this space. The ongoing disputes over space, particularly those influenced by the presence of drug addicts, as detailed in this chapter, underscore a continuously mutating landscape in the face of state omission. One interviewee (ACT-1) aptly captured this sentiment, noting that the state is only present to play "cops and thieves," pursuing minor drug dealers and users rather than proactively addressing the root social challenges.

Public space is the socio-economic arena to deploy survival practices. Albergheria's streets are the main physical and socio-economic resource this community has to achieve immediate needs. Public space becomes the fertile land to deploy survival practices such as street vending, waste-picking, street roasting, car-watching, sleeping in cars, and more. These informal practices of need (Devlin, 2019) showcase the diversity of methods people use to generate some income or literally, as the author says, "put a roof over their head." De Certeau's concept of 'arts of doing' (1980) enriches this perspective, framing these practices as "tactics" that navigate the power structures (or "strategies") that often impede marginalized communities from meeting their housing and income needs within a conventional system. In these street practices, social life emerges as a necessity and a guarantee for the reproduction of existence (Peralta, 2017).

Material Infrastructures are space production components. Distinctive street work infrastructures, from shade canopies to the iconic Ape Cargo Bike, are more than mere objects; they actively shape the urban landscape. Drawing from Lefebvre's (1991) theory of space production influenced by social relations, I argue for critically incorporating these material infrastructures into our understanding of Albergheria's space production. Echoing Lindell's (2019) emphasis on the intricate interplay among objects, spaces, and individuals, those become symbolic elements generators of local identity and culture.

5.2 Migrants and the Neighborhood

5.2.1 Introduction

Albergheria's urban landscape is deeply influenced by its multicultural character, evident in the diverse mix of people, languages, products, and traditions. According to Napoli and Bonafede (2020), immigrants comprise 23.4% of the historical center's population, with prominent communities from Bangladesh, Tunisia, Ghana, Mauritius, and Romania. The authors further affirm that these immigrants have played a pivotal role in sustaining the historical city's liveliness during continuous economic crises. They have supported demand for residential and commercial spaces, mitigating the shifts in the real estate market and challenges by finding viable alternative uses. As this chapter shows, their influence spans the economic and housing sectors, social interactions, activism, and the distinct character they bring to public spaces. A cultural mediator who immigrated from Tunisia articulates this diversity in the context of Ballarò:

> "The public space in Ballarò is shared by many people of different cultures and nationalities. There are minimarkets run by Bangladeshis and Africans, African and Italian traders, spaces for Moroccans and Tunisians, Italian and African restaurants, shops selling African clothes, and barbers. It is a diverse neighborhood with various occupations and nationalities". (Interview MI-3)

Easily recognized in public space, ethnic groups have dissimilar degrees of involvement in the local economy ecosystem. They participate in the Ballarò and Albergheria markets, the area's shops, and other non-regulated commercial activities. Their activities are often influenced by potential irregular documentation, leading to labor exclusion and informal work, a topic further explored in this chapter. Moreover, migrants' precarious housing conditions create a further need to use Albergheria's public spaces. As discussed in the public meeting "A Casa Loro", their dependence on these spaces for their livelihoods significantly shapes their usage and character. The following sections explain the diverse strategies migrants face to navigate life in Albergheria.

5.2.2 Informal Work Opportunities

In the heart of Albergheria, an intricate web of economic activities unfolds, revealing a landscape dominated by informal work and labor exclusion. The local phenomenon is embedded in a long-standing informal sector in the South of Italy (Mingione & Quassoli, 2000), which still accounts for 18.7% in 2021 (Istat, 2023). However, these figures, which exclude migrants in irregular conditions, might only skim the surface of the depth of

informality in places like Albergheria. The table below (Figure 21) presents the various migrant jobs identified in this research, spanning both public and private sectors.

Public space	Private Sphere
Street vending	Agriculture
○ Second-hand products	Hospitality
○ Food & vegetables	Construction
○ Clothes & bazaar	Cleaning services
○ Night roasters	Caregiving roles
○ Mobile vendors	House Clearance
Waste pickers	Unofficial indoor shops (restaurants, hairstyling, bars)
Unofficial parking attendants	Appliance Refurbishment
Drug and stolen objects trade	Prostitution
Counterfeit trade	Services (hairdressing, tailor shop)

Fig. 21: Table of migrant's jobs, own illustration

The co-founder of Arci Porco Rosso[7] describes that Albergheria operates as a magnet where migrants find a path to survival (Interview ACT-1). Consistent with Recchi's theory (2020), this often means labor-intensive roles in the private sector and street work in the public space. They predominantly work in private sectors such as agriculture, construction, hospitality, house clearance, cleaning services, and caregiving roles. In the public space, the main work activities were associated with street vending and unofficial parking attendance. Many products were offered on the streets, including clothes, tools, fresh products like vegetables, and prepared food mainly from their origin countries. In addition, reselling second-hand products is essential in the area's public space. Some shops owned and managed by Bangladesh, Senegal, and Ghana were observed, especially in the Ballarò Market area, further explained in section 5.3.2 of this study.

Unofficial parking attendance was another activity seen performed by migrants in the area. They watch over parked cars, expecting a small fee for their services. Through an interview with one such worker and discussions with residents, it became evident that this individual has become a pivotal figure in public space management. Surpassing

[7] Arci Porco Rosso is a local organization dedicated to supporting migrants. For more details, refer to section 4.3.4

even local authorities in some aspects, he maintains cleanliness, deters theft, instructs locals on proper waste disposal, and ensures overall safety. This is all achieved without formal employment or an official mandate from local officials. He reflected on his role:

> 'This is where Ballarò starts, I see this place is very important…but because of its free parking, even the commune they don't take care of the place, and it's very bad. Why it's very bad?... This land here...I stay in this land, I work here, not because of money…I do this thing because one day my name will remain here…Because of the good thing I do here.' (Interview MI-7).

Questions about domination over public spaces are prompted by this case, which offers a potentiality that the commune could use to regularize informal workers and turn them into public space guardians. However, off-the-record conversions have suggested possible ties between this activity and the extorsive behaviors of the mafia controlling territories.

> Although at a minor scale, Illicit trade was also identified as migrant practices, mainly observed in commercial activities such as counterfeit trade, drug selling, and exploitative prostitution. However, those activities are mainly controlled by the local mafia, except for some agreements between the local and Nigerian mafia, such as “Vikings” and “Black Axe” [8](Interview AC-2; MI-5).

Based on my interviews with migrants, most employment opportunities are in informal employment, characterized by unreported and unregulated arrangements between workers and businesses. Recchi (2020) and Mingione and Quassoli (2000) highlight an intrinsic connection between immigrant status and a push toward informal work sector. Migrants, especially those with irregular statuses, are often driven to such roles due to socioeconomic discrimination, reduced bargaining power stemming from their citizenship situation, lack of legal protection, and linguistic barriers. As a result, they are exposed to outcomes such as job instability, exploitation, and scams.

5.2.3 Migrant’s Journey and Visa Status

The citizenship status of migrants is a fundamental condition that shapes the subject’s opportunities, challenges, and relationship with the space—Based on the results of this study, interviewed immigrants (see Figure 22) affirmed that obtaining the documents that

[8] The terms "Vikings" and "Black Axe" refer to criminal groups with Nigerian origin, often related "cults" or "confraternities,". They operate in Palermo, other parts of Italy, Europe.

prove their regular status in Italy is the most important thing they face. However, migrant challenges start before the bureaucratic visa process when they arrive.

It starts in their origin countries and subsequently during their journeys when they are exposed to death-risk situations, work exploitation, human trafficking, and smugglers. Perceived as the most dangerous journey ever seen, an interviewee stressed that crossing the Mediterranean Sea could infer a 50% chance of dying or surviving (Interview MI-2). Another interviewee who paid 5000-6000 euros for the transport affirmed that your chances depend on affording a rubber or wood boat (Interview MI-1). The magnitude of the risk is illustrated by the Missing Migrants Project (2023), which has accounted for 27.845 the number of individuals who died crossing the Mediterranean Central route between 2014 and this year. Despite the risk and fatalities, thousands of migrants arrive in Italy yearly and seek asylum.

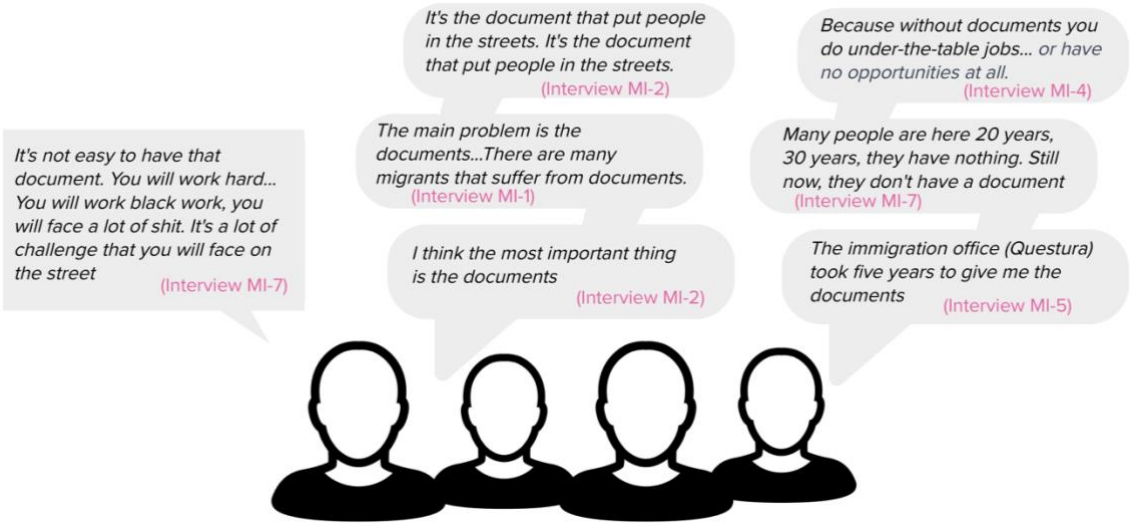

Fig. 22: Testimonies from interviewed migrants, own illustration

The migrants I interviewed emphasized the significance of the fingerprinting process soon after their arrival. The Dublin Agreement mandates that asylum seekers apply for refugee status in the first EU country they land in (Hawthorne, 2022). This can tie migrants' mobility plans to Italy, leading to extended regularization processes and a temporary inability to work in a stagnant economic context (Barreiro & Gonzalez, 2020). Consequently, numerous individuals attempt to bypass fingerprinting by escaping from reception centers.

> "When I got to Lampedusa… when you make your fingerprint, you are a refugee in that place…so me I arrived in Italy, we come plenty, but some of us run away to France, Belgium, Sweden because they don't make their fingerprints... but if you

> make your fingerprints you are immigrant for that place you cannot go anywhere…(Interview MI-7).

The identification and fingerprint phase has further implications not only in migrants' lives but also in their subsequent presence in Albergheria's underground economy. Those awaiting decisions on asylum applications, residence permit renewals, or other statuses need an economic income. Delays by immigration authorities making these decisions influence migrants' labor market integration. Extended waiting periods, sometimes spanning years, exacerbate the precarious living conditions of migrants in Palermo.

Some interviewees waited five years for the documentation, resorting to survival jobs and illicit activities with profound legal consequences (see section 5.4.3). Hawthorne (2022) posits that migrants often find themselves trapped in a legal limbo. In this context, their basic survival needs are met predominantly through irregular and frequently exploitative employment. This is mainly seen in rural zones or urban areas with minimal police oversight, like Albergheria, where it is commonly understood that law enforcement does not prioritize arresting the undocumented (Saetalu, 2013).

"The residence permit is the key to our life in this country" (Interview VEN-2). As can be seen in the presented results, visa status plays a pivotal role in migrant's life and their urban impact.

5.2.4 Work Exclusion and Exploitation

Figure 23 showcases the experiences of two migrants: one dealing with visa regularization promises and another facing work-related exploitation. Due to their foreign status, both are subjected to discriminatory treatments such as excessive underpaid working hours, the absence of formal contracts, and empty promises of visa sponsorship by businesses. Their fragile economic, visa situation and language barriers hinder them from voicing concerns, thus perpetuating precarious working conditions.

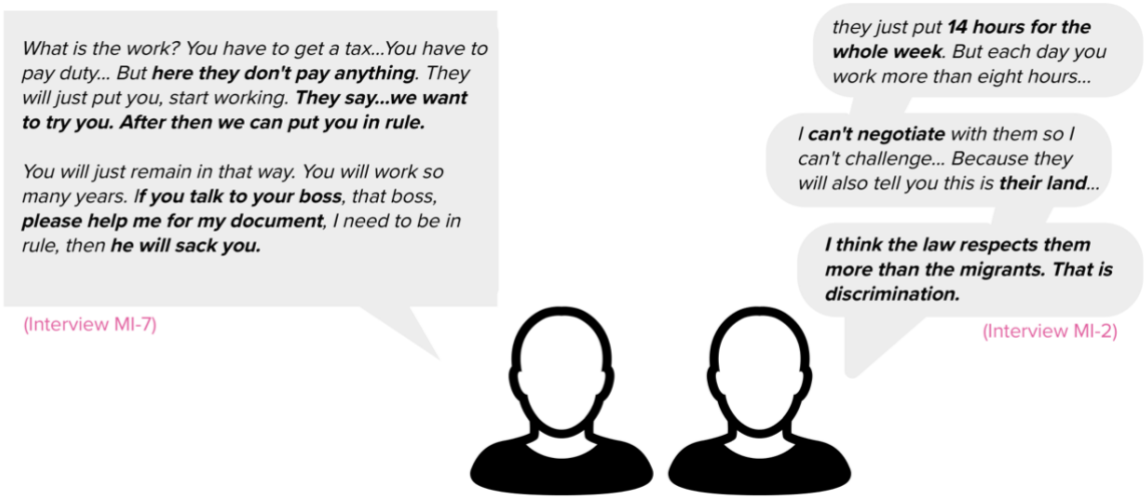

Fig. 23; Testimonies from interviewed migrants, own illustration

Exploitation can be noticed in many work sectors in the South of Italy but is highly visible in agriculture. There, migrants work temporarily and irregularly under high exploitation conditions (Mingione & Quassoli, 2000). Their participation in that activity usually involves long hours, low pay, and deprived housing conditions.

Scholars such as Giglioli (2019) and Castles et al. (2013) have shown the link between migration, the transborder labor force, and exploitation. Giglioli posits that immigration law can be an instrument to produce highly exploitative workers vital to key sectors of the economy (p.727, 2019). In line with this, Castles et al. (2013) argue that within a framework of unequal global economic and political power distribution, migration serves as a means of mobilizing an affordable workforce and extracting resources from disadvantaged nations to enhance the prosperity of others.

A vivid example of this is Campobello Di Mazara, a small locality about 100km from Palermo, receives hundreds of migrants from Senegal, Chad, Mali, and Sudan to work in the olive cropping season. Migrants live in overpopulated informal settlements, working 9/10 hours for retribution about 30-40 euros per day (Melting Pot, 2021; Redattore Sociale, 2013, 2017). According to Redattore Sociale, out of the 1200 migrants hired for this job, only 50% had a work contract (2017). The inherent isolation of agricultural labor and limited institutional oversight could potentially enable these violations of fundamental human rights. It is also plausible that there is a deliberate oversight by public authorities, possibly to favor that economic sector.

Job opportunities such as caregiving, restaurants, and agriculture sectors have vacancies because Italians are not interested in performing those jobs. Hence, they are covered by migrants (Interview ACT-2). A migrant's testimony shed light on this:

> “Italians prefer jobs that pay 50 to 70 euros a day and work at a relaxed pace. In contrast, an African worker may accept 20 or 30 euros since this amount, given currency exchange rates and familial responsibilities in Africa, is significant to them. Employers often exploit this by hiring two Africans for the price of one Italian, paying each 35 euros. These African workers typically work hard from dawn until dusk. This exploitation stems from a lack of oversight, even though the workers perform their tasks diligently." (Interview MI-3).

In this context of high exploitation, street vending seems to be a tactic that allows migrants to work independently. Furthermore, this practice acts as a refuge in the sense that it is an alternative when migrants do not have documents to work legally (Interview VEN-2). This practice has different variations in the products and manner they sell depending on the area of Palermo. While in some areas of Palermo, they exhibit their products over quick pack-up blankets; others have more sophisticated vending carts. However, far from an ideal scenario, working on the street presents complex challenges that migrants must navigate. For instance, discrimination and prejudices apply to black vendors selling food (Interview MI-5) and police persecution in some parts of the Historical Center to those who sell counterfeit products. This could result in suspending their residence permit or p*ermesso di soggiorno* (Interview VEN-2). In line with Saetalu (2013), Ballarò, as a free-police area with limited state intervention (4.3.3), creates a tranquil place where migrants can work on the streets, deploying their survival tactics. However, they are also forced to negotiate locally with the other stakeholders, including local mafias. The street then emerges as the place where immigrants can reach the social reproduction denied by the formal market (Peralta, 2017).

Furthermore, the lack of recognition of university degrees, education, and specific skills fosters migrant work exclusion and consequent presence in the informal market. A common topic in the interviews with migrants was the impossibility of validating studies taken in their home countries. Multiple testimonies gathered showed this situation, for instance:

> “You find people with degrees, that could be professors, engineers, pharmacists, doctors, but they don't find job opportunities. I've seen graduates doing any job, bricklayer, even in restaurants”. (Interview MI-3).

> “They come here, they have to go to school to say that they passed five…ten years…to have this thing…. that say I am able to make this… Even if you knew this, when you came from your country”. (Interview MI-8)

Migrants frequently take jobs that do not match their education and skills, deriving in what Castles et al. call "*brain waste*," referring to those working under their educational levels (2013, p.77). Moreover, I argue that the lack of recognition of migrants' experiences and the slow bureaucratic processes for permits significantly impact the work market and subjects' self-esteem and behaviors. They could feel diminished and hopeless by having fewer intellectual and material resources to perform other activities. From my observations in Albergheria, several individuals with migrant backgrounds, possibly influenced by their traumatic experiences, were seen using drugs like crack in public spaces. This is connected to a topic that emerged in some interviews: mental health stability becomes an important factor due to their traumatic experiences[9].

In the apparent multiculturality of Albergheria, I posit that migrant integration into the job market predominantly occurs under inferior conditions. The diverse factors, such as the unrecognizing of qualifications and the lack of citizenships, then become central to their exclusion from the formal employment sector, allowing dominance and exploitation by locals. Racial distinctions intensify this scenario. "Campo Bello di Mazzara" example mirrors Avallone's "postcolonial agriculture" theory, in which migrants and different ethnicities navigate the labor landscape amidst racial power dynamics reminiscent of past colonial structures. However, such dynamics are not restricted to agriculture alone; they are palpably present in studied areas such as the Ballarò Market and the subordinate role of migrants, further explained in this thesis. In this neighborhood, it is not just race but also gender that significantly impacts the job opportunities and conditions for migrants.

5.2.5 Female migrants in a gendered urban area

Migrants' experiences vary significantly based on gender, from their motivations for migration to their integration and opportunities in the urban environment. This study reveals that they are less visible in Albergheria's public spaces, a male-dominated urban landscape. Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, beginning with the underrepresentation of female migrants making the dangerous Mediterranean Sea crossing, accounting for only 20% of total arrivals to Europe from 2018-2020 (IOM, 2021). Predominant nationalities of women arriving in Italy (and Malta) during this period were from Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Eritrea, Somalia, and Guinea. Migration motivations

[9]Mental health concerns were frequently mentioned in several interviews with migrants (Interview MI-1; MI-4; MI-5; MI-7). These comments suggest the challenges they face in coping with traumatic experiences from both their journey and the integration process.

and reasons were primarily personal violence (62%), economic factors (15%), and war and conflicts (15%).

Empirical results show that female migrant workers are incorporated into a ‘gendered’ labor market (Cole, 2006) where they do activities such as caregiving, cleaning services, and, to a smaller proportion, street vending and prostitution. Roberta Coucheo, a social worker who researched migrant female work in the area, confirmed their main activities by stressing:

> “They take care of the elderly or do cleaning, or at most work as a waitress, and nothing more, because unfortunately, we have this prejudice that in Italy, even if they have completed their studies, unfortunately, it's not the same as the studies we do…it doesn't have the same value in Italy, it's not recognized." (Interview EXP-4).

Additionally, the interviewee highlights minimal earnings and the lack of work contracts for such irregular jobs. For instance, cleaning a house might bring 6-7 euros, while providing elderly care could be around 400 euros per month, with daily work.

Regarding street vending in the area, few female individuals practice this job. While only three African women were observed selling ethnic clothes in the Ballarò Market, some female vendors from the Maghreb and Rumania were identified in the Albergheria Market. This unbalanced proportion of women is visible in the streets, where migrant women are mainly observed doing groceries rather than managing shops or being front sellers. In line with Castles and colleagues, the reduced visibility of female migrant workers could also be connected to their high presence in indoor activities such as caregiving and cleaning (2013).

Exploitative work conditions are prevalent for migrants in both formal and informal sectors. However, alarmingly, instances of female migrants caught in human trafficking in Palermo have come to light during my interview with Roberta Coucheo. The following part of this section aims to provide a concise overview of the mechanisms through which these female migrants are introduced into Europe’s prostitution market.

Based on Roberta's detailed insights during the interview, human trafficking involving vulnerable West African women begins when a "*madam*" — essentially, an older woman who manages the business — exploits these women's economic hardships by promising well-paying jobs in Europe, such as hairdresser or saleswoman. The agreement is sailed with a "juju" ritual, a spiritual ceremony that binds the victims and their families to traffickers. Madams provide women with an initial loan to cover the migration logistics.

An initial debt of around 5,000 euros can expand up to 30,000, under various pretexts, when they arrive in Europe. Facilitating their voyage, traffickers accompany these women across different transit nations. Throughout this journey, these women face multifaceted economic exploitation— as they are forced into paying 'fees,' and physically, as they frequently endure sexual abuse. This abuse is not random; sometimes, madams deliberately orchestrate situations where the women are 'kidnapped' and then 'rescued' to instill a false sense of debt and gratitude.

Once nearing Europe, these traffickers abandon them to boats, entrusting them to other migrants or lower-level operatives with instructions to ensure their arrival. Upon reaching their destination, another madam typically awaits them, ensuring their entrapment in a life far removed from the promised jobs, compelling them into forced prostitution to repay the ever-mounting 'debt.' According to Roberta, they are paid around 10 and 20 euros per sexual service and are forced to pay not only the ‘debt’ but also rent to madam and food (Interview EXP-4). Therefore, women trapped in a cycle of debt, exploitation, and fear are often left with limited avenues for escape. Defining this practice's exact location or scale is challenging due to its concealed nature. Numerous press articles have highlighted the existence of this practice, linking it to the Nigerian mafia "Black Axe," which operates in the Albergheria-Ballarò area (Buffa, 2019; Giornale Di Sicilia, 2022; Palermo Today, 2019; Zoppi, 2019, 2019b).

As demonstrated in this section, female migrants frequently confront deeply exploitative situations that can suppress their freedom and integrity. They often remain marginalized and thus invisibilized, with their distressing work conditions and roles in the migration experience concealed in shadows.

5.2.6 Housing conditions

Migrants in Albergheria-Ballarò face substantial challenges in ensuring access to suitable housing conditions within the neighborhood. Drawn from various sources within this study, it is notorious that besides the low quality of their housing, many also endure overcrowded living situations (Napoli & Bonafede, 2020). Additionally, they confront significant barriers when seeking accommodations, often stemming from prejudices tied to their foreign status, further exacerbated by racial discrimination.

The situation of migrants in Albergheria echoes García et al. (2021) findings, which highlight that populations with a history of migration, limited income, lower education, and informal employment can only access housing via urban informality. Weak state policies for land use and housing significantly exacerbate this. In this context, an omissive state intervention, an underground local economy, and a lack of regular visa status push migrants to find informal housing solutions, consolidating their precarious livelihood.

Fig. 24: Housing conditions in Albergheria-Ballarò, own photography

In March 2023, I attended "A Casa Loro," a public screening of a short film portraying migrant's struggles to access housing in Palermo[10]. About 50 participants discussed the issue and its potential solutions. First, it was mentioned the lack of trust from landlords, who are hesitant to rent their properties due to perceived risks. Landlords may have preconceptions or fears that migrants might not be able to pay the rent consistently or could damage the property. As the short film and testimonies revealed, those fears are based on racial prejudices that affirm that Africans will make a "*bordello"* (chaos) at their properties (Interview MI-3).

On the other hand, a common requirement for renting a property in Italy is having a guarantor – a person or entity guaranteeing the tenant's rent will be paid. This can challenge many migrants who may not have such connections in Italy. Another obstacle

[10] Link to the short film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIATjMejm60&ab_channel=DiVento-SportellodiComunit%C3%A0

are the bureaucratic hurdles and lack of information migrants face to navigate the rental market, legal procedures, and requirements.

An interviewee explains that migrants often rent rooms, paying between 100-150 euros for spaces with only a bathroom and perhaps a kitchen. He describes the housing conditions as "*brutissimi*" (horrible), emphasizing that they are not truly living conditions but survival refuge from cold, water, and sun. "To rent proper house, which costs around 300 euros, one needs a work contract…, landlords demand to see proof of steady employment or income", which brings back the issue of the need for a valid residence permit (Interview MI-4).

The precarious situation of not having official contracts reinforces a cycle of informality, trapping migrants and complicating the regularization of other aspects of their lives. Fausto Melluso, the founder of Arci Porco Rosso, notes that while housing affordability and availability are challenges Italians face, the absence of a rent contract is especially detrimental for migrants. They rely on a registered residency to renew their residence permits. This dynamic gives rise to a significant market for fake rentals and fictitious residencies — a troubling system that Melluso describes as "a very terrible market…that is on the shoulders of very poor people" (Interview ACT-1).

Other strategies migrants adopt to overcome these difficulties are more radical and involve risky tactics such as squatting in abandoned buildings, living in vehicles, or sleeping on the streets. According to the results, people currently occupy trains at the Central Station and other buildings around. For instance, the organization Porco Rosso advocates on behalf of seven irregular migrants occupying a municipal building in the area, intending to prevent their expulsion, which could result in them living on the streets (Interview ACT-1). Based on information in the book Palermo Atlas, around 20 abandoned buildings were identified in the studied area (Laparelli, 2018). This study also reveals the presence of migrants sleeping in vehicles near the Albergheria Market, parked near their vending spots in the marketplace. Moreover, the presence of people sleeping on the streets in the area was also observed, although without having a precise quantification of the situation.

As detailed earlier, as a response to the problem, migrants deploy survival tactics to secure a roof, risking both legal repercussions and potential harm. This issue is not unique to Palermo; similar situations arise in cities like Milan (Hawthorne, 2022) and presumably across Italy. However, solutions were proposed at the "*A casa loro*" meeting. These ranged from establishing a "guarantee fund" to protect landlords from potential losses to incentivizing locals with vacant rooms to rent them to migrants, possibly with

municipal subsidies. Here, local organizations can act as intermediaries, signing leases on behalf of migrants to ensure more secure landlord-tenant relationships.

Another suggestion was repurposing vacant religious properties and those confiscated from the mafia for migrant housing. The discussion raised the potential for bottom-up initiatives and self-construction projects to rehabilitate buildings, thereby creating housing and working with these marginalized populations. While these proposals offer potential solutions, providing regular housing to undocumented migrants remains a significant challenge that tackles the deepest points of a system that punishes the same situation it creates.

5.2.7 Conclusions: Navigating Margins and Spaces

Migration in the urban context of Albergheria-Ballarò presents a complex interplay between the struggles for survival, legality, socio-economic integration, and access to proper housing. The visa status of migrants emerges as a central theme, fundamentally influencing their lived experiences and engagement with the urban environment. A lack of proper documentation pushes many into the informal economy and housing, where they face exploitative employment and terrible dwelling conditions. This employment precarity is further exacerbated by migrants' attempts to navigate a system that does not recognize their qualifications and skills, leading to a cycle of underemployment, work exclusion, and precarious livelihood.

Exploitative, racialized, and gendered jobs. Migrants primarily do labor-intensive roles, especially in Castles et al.' (2013) 3D jobs (dirty, difficult, dangerous) like construction and agriculture. Examples in this chapter, such as the trafficking of Nigerian women and the agricultural exploitation in Campobello Di Mazar, reveal severe human rights violations. Based on Avallone's theory, skin color and historical background influence job opportunities and conditions. Rather than neutral, labor markets are stratified by race, nationality, and gender, intensifying marginalization (Avallone, 2018). Therefore, this structure has been observed in the study case's formal and informal labor sectors.

Unrecognition triggers informality. I contend that legal barriers and unrecognized qualifications are tinted by colonial discrimination, pushing migrants towards precarious jobs in places like Albergheria. In line with Recchi (2020), reduced bargaining power and linguistic barriers, minimum state control push migrants into informal arrangements that frequently lead to exploitative situations. Drawing on De Certeau (1980), in the face of a dominant system (strategy), informality serves as a final defensive mechanism, allowing migrants to engage in economic activity (Mingione & Quassoli, 2000). This is evident in

the activities migrants perform in the area, such as street vending, waste-picking and reselling, and informal parking management.

High visibility in a male-dominated public space. Although migrants are very visible in the area's public space, this research reveals a male-dominance dynamic, with less visibility of migrant women doing street work and assigned to specific gendered labor opportunities. In line with Castles et al. (2013), the lesser visibility of female migrant workers in public spaces can be attributed to their predominant engagement in indoor professions, notably caregiving and cleaning. The assignment of specific work activities to women affirms Cole's definition of a gendered labor market in Palermo (2006). In this context, the author notes that this issue is not limited to the destination country; it originates from migrants' home nations. Women migrants arrive in Europe seeking change but often face the same patriarchal dynamics they left behind.

Visas and residence permit represent more than paperwork for migrants. They are pivotal for stability and mobility. Post-arrival procedures and prolonged asylum processes can leave migrants in a legal limbo (Hawthorne, 2022). The lack of proper documentation heavily limits job opportunities. Local state oversight offers a refuge for the undocumented to live relatively undisturbed (Saetalu, 2013).

Beyond the work market, migrants often turn to **informal housing solutions** in areas observed. Unofficial rental agreements in overcrowded spaces with poor sanitation conditions are standard. Racial and cultural prejudices and systemic obstacles such as guarantor requirements push migrants to these alternatives. Observations of squatting or street vendors living in vehicles highlight an existing feedback loop where informality in work and housing continually marginalizes migrants. Nevertheless, community-driven efforts, as highlighted by the "*A casa loro*" meeting, propose potential solutions by guaranteeing funds for landlords, repurposing vacant religious or mafia-confiscated properties, or fostering bottom-up building rehabilitation initiatives. These initiatives underscore the community's recognition of the challenges faced by migrants and the proactive involvement of local organizations in addressing the problem.

Ballarò Market

Fig. 25: Satellite Image of Ballarò's market, own illustration based on Google Earth

5.3 Ballarò market, from popular market to touristic experience

5.3.1 Socio-spatial dynamics of the market

Piazza Ballarò [11]is situated at a corner where multiple streets intersect, serving as the entrance to Historic Ballarò Market. A consolidated urban environment and a combination of temporal objects set the market's scene for the flow of hundreds of tourists, local shoppers, vendors, and residents. The urban landscape is shaped by its primary function: a marketplace. Mobile objects, termed "*material infrastructures*[12]" in this study, not only complement the primary function but also significantly modify the appearance and utilization of the space during and outside operational hours. Piazza Ballarò is enclosed by a mix of partly degraded and under renovation 3/4 story buildings. The area also hosts a few parked cars and motorbikes, which increase after the market closes.

Fig. 26: Piazza Ballarò, entrance to the historical market, own photography

Multiple material infrastructures are placed during the day and removed once the market closes (see Figure 26). Tables on the street, originating from nearby bars and restaurants, create designated areas for dining and socializing. These informal spaces are shaped as parklets decorated with furniture and plants, occupying at least half of the available public space. Following this logic, steel structures with tables offset from the

[11] Results on Piazza Ballarò (site n°1). are a combination of mixed methods such as interviews, existing literature, go-along sessions, mapping, and participant observation sessions. Data was captured at various periods, including morning, midday, and night. See section 3.1 for further detail in the methodology used.

[12] This study considers material infrastructures to market's temporal objects (see 5.1.5).

front of the shops serve as additional vending spots. Hence, walking space is considerably reduced, stretching the pedestrian transit and creating an overloaded visual landscape. By entering the market, temporary roofs made of plastic fabric partially cover the street, providing shade and shelter to visitors and vendors, giving a sense of an urban roof.

Defining the nature of this public space is challenging. According to Federico Prestileo, a researcher from Palermo, "*the site is not precisely a public space where I can do what I want because it is a place that has a function*." (Interview EXP-3). Indeed, the space has a fixed function during a part of the day, but how it is created and transformed throughout the day reveals an intense and dynamic space-making process.

Fig. 27: Material infrastructures in Ballarò Market, own photographs

The spatial movements in the area were predominantly pedestrian. People can be seen walking through the square and entering the market, with varying paces and levels of congestion. Motorbikes and a few cars traverse the square, complicating pedestrian movement due to the limited space available. Taxis and Ape[13] cargo motorbikes adapted for tourist transportation contribute to the mixed flow of vehicles and pedestrians. The spatial dynamics are further influenced by the layout of the square, which experiences high congestion at noon. Inside the market, local shoppers struggle to circulate because of tourists taking pictures.

During the day, commercial activities were prevalent, with vendors showcasing their products and services to locals and tourists. These activities ranged from established front shops displaying their merchandise to mobile vendors enticing passersby with their culinary offerings. Most products offered around Piazza Ballarò and Piazza del Carmine were oriented to tourists. While between Piazza del Carmine and Via Tukory (see Figure 25), mainly oriented to local shoppers.

[13]An Ape is a bike tricycle commonly found in Southern Italy utilized for transporting goods and people.

Figure 28 shows that most shops operated during the morning and noon, gradually closing in the afternoon. During 9-12 am, 42-45.8% of shops offered fresh produce like vegetables, fish, meat, cheese, and bread. Tourist-oriented shops played an emerging role that varied between weekdays and weekends. For instance, a variety of souvenir shops, tourist restaurants, and street food stands, among others. Local hangouts[14] and mobile vendors also constitute an important proportion impacting urban space-making. The rest of the shops offered household items, groceries, fashion, bazaar products, and a few services such as hairdressing.

Day	Shops open	Fresh products	Tourists oriented	Local Hangouts	Mobile vendors
Wednesday 22/03 – 09.00	157	45,8%	16,8%	5,8%	3,9%
Saturday 25/03 – 12.00	183	44,3%	26,8%	2,7%	8,2%
Saturday 01/04 – 17.00	109	42,6%	15,7%	6,5%	10,2%
Saturday 25/03 – 20.30	20	10%	0%	50%	15%

Fig. 28: Table of number and type of open shops in the Ballarò Market, own illustration

Shops oriented to tourists were observed setting up their businesses in the morning, placing objects on the streets to offer their products, and arranging chairs and tables. During that timeframe and in the early morning, most people observed were residents buying fresh products. Differently, the midday period showed the peak of visitors, with vendors fully engaging with tourists, inviting them to enter their restaurants, and offering all the mentioned services.

Afternoon and evening observations showcased shops slowly packing up, the progressive reduction of tourist-oriented offers, and a more vibrant social and recreation local scene popping up. To illustrate this, spatial mapping (see Figure 29) shows the reduction and distribution of open shops between noon (183) and night (20) on the same day. During this time, hangout shops such as bars, liquor stores, and restaurants oriented to locals were mainly observed.

[14]Local hangouts refer to specific locations where residents frequently congregate for social interactions, often centered around bars or liquor stores.

Fig. 29: Spatial mapping of open shops on Saturday, 25/03. Left: 183 shops at noon (12:00). Right: 20 shops at night (20:30).

Field observations revealed mobile vendors offering products such as cigarettes, food, and juice. Unlike frontshops, these vendors used portable carts for both display and transportation. They demonstrated mainly individual operations, with one person managing the mobile units and attending to customers. Mobile vendors' arrangements to obtain a place within the Ballarò Market area are uncertain. Walking around the market with the researcher Federico Prestileo, he mentioned that mobile vendors have free mobility as their impact is minimal, different from the front or established shops who have to request a permit from the local administration. However, he states that mobile vendors must dialogue with surrounding vendors for approval (Go-Along #2).

Front shops had a more structured organization; some had front vendors representing the businesses and attracting customers to their establishments. Each shop or vendor operated independently, with slight interconnection between them. Francesco Montagnani, researcher and SOS Ballarò activist, explains that vendors in the historical market have a family legacy in the profession, often initiated by their grand or great-grandparents (Interview EXP-1). Indeed, most daytime shops are run by Sicilians or Italians, with only a few operated by immigrants (see 5.3.2). This local dominance is especially evident between Piazza del Carmine and Via Tukory, an area that caters more to residents and local shoppers. In this area, vendors can often be heard singing and promoting their products in Sicilian dialect, engaging energetically with the community.

Throughout the day, Piazza Ballarò and the market see diverse visitors varying significantly depending on the hour. For instance, around noon, the crowd size was four times larger than at night. The area showed a varied ethnic composition of transients,

including locals, immigrant communities, and tourists from different origins, such as Japanese and German. Immigrant communities were predominantly African and Bangladeshi. On the other hand, most individuals observed in the market area were adults over 20, except a few infants accompanied by their parents during peak times. Gender distribution showed a higher representation of male individuals, except during peak hours when it seemed fairly balanced due to female tourists.

Fig. 30: Shoppers at fruit and vegetable stands in Ballarò Market, near Piazza del Carmine, own photo

In general, the market's atmosphere is cordial, friendly, and intense, embedded in countless sounds, smells, and visual stimuli. Vendors were proactive and charismatic in their engagements with tourists, particularly during the peak hour. They actively offered products to tourists, speaking loudly, and using phrases in English to attract potential customers.

While Sicilians established and experienced vendors appeared to dominate the space-making control of the market during the day, the nighttime atmosphere was very different. This change involved fewer and different activities with other people jumping into the scene, drastically modifying the space's perception. This can be illustrated by a female migrant who has lived there since childhood:

> "In the morning, there are many tourists roaming the streets to see... But in the afternoon, they leave, and the place looks a bit sad, especially around 4 o'clock on Sundays. That's when shops close, and the zone becomes liberated, with only a few places remaining open…After the afternoon, there is no one… it is always said that Ballarò becomes a dangerous area after midnight..." (Interview MI-6).

Indeed, the urban landscape shifts drastically at night, giving off a sense of emptiness and desolation. The yellow-toned public lighting illuminates fewer people, countless trash bags, and stacked market steel structures. Particularly at Piazza Ballarò, the space was occupied mainly by young local adults seated at the corner bars socializing, surrounded by their motorbikes and beers.

Drug selling is an important commercial activity detected among all the observations in the market, particularly at night. It significantly affects the market's reputation, interactions, and space-making dynamics. The modus operandi consists of approaching almost every person who passes by whistling or directly asking: *-Do you need anything? Hash, cocaine, weed?*. The activity becomes the protagonist after the market closes and is operated by groups of Sicilian men standing in the middle of the street and engaging in animated conversations while dominating the urban space.

Fig. 31: Nighttime at the market, own photo

Further into the market, migrant communities, predominantly people of color, become prominent figures in the urban landscape. There, they socialize, enjoy drinks, listen to music, grill meat, and engage in other communal activities. The subsequent section delves into the role these migrant communities play within the market space.

5.3.2 Migrants in the market

The participation of migrant communities in Ballarò Market is intrinsically related to the significant number of them inhabiting the area. However, within the Ballarò Market, migrant vendors play a secondary role, especially during daytime hours, when Italian and Sicilian vendors are more prevalent. As Sicilian vendors pack up and leave, the area becomes an opportunity for migrants to gather, socialize, and profit from that mingling scene. Several ethnic shops operated by or targeting diverse communities were noted in the area. I refer to Ethnic shops as retail establishments that offer goods or services for a specific ethnic or cultural group. Under this term, I included shops managed by people with diverse cultural backgrounds and those who become gathering points for migrant communities.

The proportion of ethnic shops is still a minority at the peak hour of the market. Only 12 shops out of 183 were observed, corresponding to 6.55% of total open ones.

Interestingly, this percentage grew during the afternoon, accounting for 27% of the afternoon and 40% of total shops open at night.[15] According to Roberta Lo Bianco, co-founder of Moltivolti, a critical stakeholder in the area, shops are managed by people from Bangladesh, Senegal, or Ghana. Depending on their nationality, those shops might offer diverse products; for instance, Bengali shops sell Asian food or household items, while Senegalese and Ghanese offer typical products of their countries. There are also unofficially Senegalese "*home restaurants*" that are not legally recognized. She also states that all these shops are managed not by newcomers but by migrants who arrived 20 years ago. This highlights a generation gap between traditional migrant communities (Senegal, Pakistan, Tami, Ghana, and Ivory Coast) and the newcomers. In this context, it is rare to see a newcomer working in or opening a shop (Interview ACT-2).

During the day, I observed shops offering African clothes near Piazza Ballarò, attracting tourists due to their colorful and attractive patterns. Along the market, multiple shops display a variety of fruits and vegetables that are not native to Italy or Sicily, reflecting the area's diverse culinary traditions and cultures. One African restaurant and a hair salon were found in the area, concurred only by migrants. At night, the African community was the main group inside the market area, except for Piazza Ballarò, occupied by young Sicilians. The principal meeting points were mobile vendors selling street food and a few front shops selling drinks and food.

An unofficial shop adjacent to an Airbnb's entrance and just 30m from Piazza Ballarò was the primary hub for the African community, both day and night. The modest shop had no sign, only a steel rolling curtain and a few plastic chairs outside placed over an artificial grass carpet covered by a plastic fabric roof. Every day, mainly people of color over 40 were seated calmly chatting and eating snacks. As I realized by conversing with the owner, a Nigerian migrant who moved to Sicily 30 years ago, this shop only sells products to trusted people. When I first interacted with him, I tried to buy any product, and the owner negatively responded, arguing that they were not a shop. After spending some time seated outside the shop, we got some trust and could understand the informal character of the place. It was uncertain if the reasons were related to municipal operations permit or similar. However, a sense of exclusivity was seen to keep the various migrant individuals using the space away from 'white foreigners or tourists.'

Another vital activity carried out by the same community was roasting meat in the public space. Mobile grills were managed by individuals who cooked the brochette-style rough meat, shedding light with a headlamp. Two mobile stands on Via Ballarò street between

[15] Information collected through spatial mapping on Saturday 25/03/2023 and 01/04/2023.

Piazza Ballarò and Piazza del Carmine were observed. One was managed by a female black person, who constituted an exception in a male-dominated scene. Around those mobile vendors, mainly people of color were seen every night consuming and talking with the roaster, creating one of the most active gathering points for that community. This case is also well explained by Rafaela Pascoal, UNHCR consultant and neighbor of the area, who stressed that:

> “During the night… Africans normally go out and socialize, you will see them doing that… if you know that your friends gather at night, then you buy some meat and you grill it. And that's how you make money out of it during the night…“Socializing can be an income if you know how to get money from it” (Interview EXP-2).

The last two cases illustrate the public space takeover that occurs at night and consequently profiting from socialization activities. Those two factors become crucial for migrant vendors’ practices. The first is related to the opportunity that emerges when Sicilian or Italian vendors leave the space, unraveling local power dynamics. In this connection, a migrant and cultural mediator explains the complexity of space utilization, noting the interplay between legacy, entitlement, and immigration:

> “During the working hours, from 8 am to 6 pm, specific spaces are utilized by individuals who have gained permission from the municipality. Some use this space assertively, claiming a historical familial right to it—"this place belonged to my grandfather, my great grandfather, and my father, and therefore it belongs to me" So, if you are a someone who honestly sells meat to make a living, what should I do?? After he leaves and his work time ends, my work begins because I need that space to work… The meat vendor can only operate when this space is unoccupied, essentially when the other person is completely absent”. (Interview MI-4)

The quote portrays how negotiations and entitlement play a key role in defining who uses the space and who profits from it during the day and at night. Sicilian vendors are more established in a market that produces more money than others, like Albergheria Market (Interview EXP-1). Moreover, obtaining municipal permits draws a barrier for newcomers, requiring a long time to familiarize themselves with local laws and procedures. Other factors such as prejudices, race, and origin discrimination also contribute to the migrant’s low participation in the historical market. Frank, a Nigerian immigrant who used to work selling fresh juice in the market, argues:

> “So I was selling on the streets, but you see if you are selling food and you're a black man, you know, and you're alone, it's very difficult in a way to make a living...because the people, they are racist, they think you're dirty, they think you're not hygienic enough. (Interview MI-5).

Indeed, the findings of this study indicate that within the market, there are notably few people of color vending food or fresh produce, with a small number of individuals from the Bangladeshi community selling vegetables.

Migrants in the Ballarò market navigate a complex spatial hierarchy deeply anchored in familial legacies and the distinction between "locals" and "foreigners." Structural obstacles in obtaining permits and racial biases from customers often place these migrants in a subordinate role within this historical setting. In this challenging environment, they adapt and seize economic opportunities, especially in spaces left vacant by others. Profiting from socialization becomes an economic survival activity while strengthening community bonds. However, while in Ballarò Market, migrants are informally allowed to make a living from the socialization of their community, Sicilians are allowed to profit from the gigantic flow of tourists that visit the market every day.

5.3.3 From selling products to selling tourist experiences.

Palermo is currently experiencing a surge in tourism, evident in the transformation of the Historic Ballarò Market. Several city events and cultural recognitions have contributed to this. For instance, the art exhibition Manifesta 12, Palermo's designation as the “Italian capital of culture,” and the recognition of multiple sites as UNESCO World Heritage locations. As a result, the number of tourists has doubled since 2011, reaching a milestone of 1 million visitors in 2016 (Laparelli, 2018).

According to the local researcher Federico Prestileo, this is reflected in the progressive change of market products and how vendors approach transients. The appearance of souvenirs and magnets representing Sicily’s main food dishes as the *‘arancina’* or *‘cassata*,’ and other stereotypes, are the symbols that space is changing, coming closer to the tourist’s image of Palermo’s public space (Interview EXP-3). Most identified shops are situated between Piazza Ballarò and Piazza del Carmine, converting that area into the primary tourist section of the market (see Figure 25).

Fig. 32: Distribution and type of tourist-oriented shop during Saturday peak hour (noon), own illustration based on Google MyMaps

Most of the identified tourist-oriented shops belonged to the gastronomic industry (see Figure 32). Some were restaurants (31.9%) occupying public spaces with tables and decorations, and others were street food stands with very few or non-eating places (25.5%). Souvenir shops (19,1%) exhibited diverse products such as magnets and home decoration objects. Other shops provided a range of specialized souvenirs. These included food products (6.4%) like dried tomatoes, pesto, pistachios, sweets, and other typical Sicilian products. There were also textile shops (6.4%) showcasing local symbols and colorful patterns. Meanwhile, clothing stores (6.4%) varied widely in their offerings: a fancy boutique near Via Tukory and two establishments near Piazza Ballarò specialized in African clothes. In total, tourist-oriented shops represented about a quarter of the open shops during peak hours (noon) on Saturday 25/03 (see Figure 28).

The rest of the tourist-oriented shops were an art workshop that offered paintings, some miscellaneous products, and the Ape Taxi service. The latter is a commercial activity that offers rides around the area in a three-wheel vehicle called “Ape Taxi” (see Figure 33). The itinerary of those vehicles has a stop in the Piazza Ballarò corner, where the driver parks the vehicle and waits for his customers to explore and return.

Fig. 33: Tourist-oriented shops showcasing street food, souvenirs, and the Ape Taxi tricycle, own photographs.

> "The spectacularization has completely transformed the public space. Everything becomes a spectacle not only for the tourists but also for the locals who come to see what they assume Ballarò is." (Interview EXP-3)

As the quotes illustrate, the construction of this spectacle in Ballarò is manifested in multiple signs, not only in the flourishing of souvenir items. Moreover, sellers in the Ballarò market are recognized for their unique shout, referred to as *'banniata'* in Sicilian dialect. This unique, high-pitched call, transmitted from father to son, targets potential buyers and, in modern times, tourists. This chant has become one of the leading Market attractions. Battistini and Mondino defined it as a voicescape, which refers to a sort of sound landscape fed from the multiple languages one can hear in the market (2017). According to Prestileo, the mutation of *'banniata'* is another sign of transformation. He stressed that this chant in the past spoke of the products; it did not address the potential buyer but highlighted how beautiful the products were and their low prices. Now, vendors engage directly with people, saying, '*Come here, buy this, look how lovely this is*.' (Interview EXP-3).

The Urban Risk and its Impact on Fragile Communities

The market's transformation into a spectacle is pivotal in understanding the shifts in the urban landscape and its subsequent effects on migrant communities. With its immense potential for economic and cultural value generation, the primary concern remains: Will this potential benefit the local people who operate the market, or will other private stakeholders co-opt it?

Residing in the neighborhood for several months, I witnessed the demolition, renovation, and flourishing of some luxury apartments, AirBnBs, and other rental apartments mixed with degraded and abandoned buildings. These transformations are mainly happening by some isolated private stakeholders in a context where the public authority has not

made significant investments in the area's urban conditions. A single instance is the "market's roof structure" that the Commune constructed near Piazza del Carmine to relocate market vendors (see Figure 32). However, it remains unused because of conflicts in allocating vending spots, stemming from the market's uncertain legal status.

Fig. 34: Left: New Ballaròò market roof. Center & Right: Demolition of existing buildings and construction of new residential units, own photographs.

Picone and Prestileo stressed that the previous administration enacted cultural policies to promote tourism rooted in the commodification of Ballarò Market. "The intervention of the market's roof was made to sell the image of a covered market similar to La Boqueria in Barcelona or Firenze's Central Market" (Interview EXP-3; Interview AC-1).

Therefore, the area's slow but incipient urban regeneration (mainly through the market) in a low-income neighborhood located strategically raises alarms. Its proximity to institutional buildings and the main public-private transport center suggests a potential for significant real estate profit. Nevertheless, the area faces infrastructural challenges, evidenced by deteriorating roads, inadequate sewage systems, and insufficient lighting. There is a palpable public health concern due to discarded waste and the presence of animals. Many buildings are dilapidated or abandoned. According to Montagnani (2020), Ballarò holds potential for gentrification: with investment, the area could attract a wealthier demographic than its current residents.

This potential risk of displacement is highly concerning in the context of large informality and socially fragile local and foreign populations. I have noticed different interpretations of the gentrification process status on the field. Picone affirms that the area is the beginning of a gentrification process (Interview AC-1). Conversely, Prestileo states that we should not refer under this term because there is no displacement, but foreign capital buying abandoned or empty buildings. Both emphasize caution when adapting Anglo concepts to the Southern European context.

Even though the process is still incipient and slow, the rise of tourism is already impacting the area, mainly manifested in the problems of locals and immigrants accessing affordable and decent housing. It is still uncertain how commodifying a historical market embedded in a crucial popular centrality will reshape the informal and survival arrangements people perform here to work and dwell.

5.3.4 Conclusions: The Disturbing future of a multicultural space

Ballarò Market is not only a vivid street market and the primary economic hub of the area (Barreiro & Gonzalez, 2020), it also stands as a nexus for social integration among Sicilians, immigrants, and tourists. The interplay of food stands, fresh fish, Sicilian chants, diverse people, and material infrastructures profoundly influences the identity of the neighborhood and the character of its public spaces.

Spatial Politics and Power Dynamics. Locals' differing use of space during the day and migrants at night reveal the underlying power dynamics. This pattern underscores informal societal structures in which spatial occupation and dominance are intertwined with familial entitlement and legacy. As Saetalu (p.116, 2013) states, public space in Ballarò does not belong to West Africans but to local Sicilians. I contend that migrants are situated in a subordinate role within the Market area. While they often navigate and adapt to the prevailing local urban rules, their survival tactics not only find a place within the available spaces but subtly reshape the area's dynamics.

The Role of Agency. Despite their challenges, migrants in the Ballarò Market exercise agency in various ways, from creating a nocturnal economy leveraged by socialization as an economic tool. They contest and appropriate a place that they do not possess. Drawing from the theories of Roy et al. (2004) and Roy (2011), migrants' resilience and adaptability underline their agency to create a new but multicultural territorial order in front of a locally (but also informal) contested one. While the notion of multiculturality is appealing, it only partially separates itself from the hierarchical distinctions between locals and foreigners. Spatial conflicts are intertwined with racialized practices, including Sicilians who, paradoxically, experience racialization within their homeland.

Urban Risks and The Spectacle's Impact. The transformation of Ballarò Market into a tourist attraction is evident through the proliferation of souvenir shops and tourist-centric restaurants. Changes in traditional elements, such as the '*banniata*,' the unique vendor chant, and the new products offered, symbolize significant market dynamics shifts. Nevertheless, the market's touristification has broader ramifications for the urban environment, especially affecting migrant communities and the Sicilian work and housing

conditions. As Montagnani (2020) noted, the neighborhood possesses significant gentrification potential due to its strategic location and cultural richness. With its current state’s infrastructural neglect, concerns about potential urban renewal leading to displacement arise. While the market's administration remains local for now, the looming question is whether private stakeholders might, in time, capitalize on its inherent cultural and economic value. The slow yet palpable urban regeneration, primarily driven by isolated private stakeholders without significant public authority investment, points to a forthcoming risk of displacement.

Albergheria Market

Fig. 35: Satellite Image of Albergheria's street market, own illustration based on Google Earth

5.4 Albergheria market, a survival market for immigrants and locals

5.4.1 Socio-spatial dynamics of the market

Piazza Napoleone Colajanni[16] is a square in the Albergheria district that acts as a primary node for the Albergheria Market. Commercial activities define the space, with the occupation of public areas for trading. This temporal second-hand street market gathers hundreds of vendors daily, significantly shaping the urban landscape. Around the Piazza, buildings with deteriorated facades rise to varied heights, including the former Cinema Edison, which now serves as a university building. Many front shops around the square are used as storage for market goods. Opposite the square is the Astra Bar, an active gathering spot where clients engage in lively conversations over coffee indoors and outside.

Fig. 36: Street Via Giovanni Grasso and Piazza Colajanni (left) – street vending areas, own photography.

During market hours, the Piazza's interior space appeared neglected, often littered with discarded bottles and papers. In contrast, the adjacent sidewalks were used actively by street vendors showcasing an array of items. Various *material infrastructures* (5.1.5) were identified, such as blankets, racks, foldable tables, chairs, trolleys, vehicles, and umbrellas. These elements facilitate commercial activities, demarcate territories, and set spatial boundaries within the market.

[16] Findings stem from mixed methods, including spatial mapping and participant observations in Piazza Colajanni (Site n°2) and Albergheria's Market area. See section 3.1 for further details on the methodology used.

Functioning and space distribution of the market is self-organized, involving Italians and immigrants. According to Francesco Montagnani, a SOS Ballarò member, while the public perception of the second-hand market might suggest it is improvised, the reality is quite the opposite. He emphasizes that everyone in the market feels very professional and knows how to do their job (Interview EXP-1). Indeed, despite that, at first glance, the market seemed chaotic and disorganized, in-depth observations revealed a structured functioning setup with a specific spatial order. For instance, the market has an established schedule starting early in the morning (4-5 a.m.) and finishing around noon (1-2 p.m.)—results show that the market's most active moment happens between 6 and 10 a.m. On the contrary, no vendors and very few pedestrians were observed in the afternoon.

There is a contrasting difference in the market size between weekdays and weekends. Spatial analysis conducted in the area on Thursday and Sunday showed a nearly fourfold increase in street vendors occupying public spaces. The number of vendors jumped from approximately 125 to 400 between these two days, significantly expanding urban space occupation (see Figure 37). This increased presence expands the street's occupation, bridging physically with the Ballarò Market (grey shaded in the figure), thus forming an interconnected public-commercial space. This observation underscores Montagnani's comment that the neighborhood inherently functions as a market (Interview EXP-1).

Fig. 37: Left: Thursday 09:00 - 125 street vendor spots; Right: Sunday 09:00- 400 street vendor spots, own illustration based on My Maps

Another fundamental aspect of the dynamic change of public space and the Albergheria market size is related to the weather. In this sense, observations on cloudy and cold days have shown a more significant proportion of local people in the market. Differently, some tourists and outsiders were observed coming mainly from Ballarò's market on sunny and warm days.

Space delimitation of vending areas is determined by corridors created by diverse displaying structures such as tables, pop-up metal structures, and even blankets.

Boundaries are negotiated informally under an estimated 3 meters per spot (Bartoli, 2019). However, space delimitation is flexible. During a Go-along session with a vendor, I observed that space could be shared with other vendors in need. For example, in the observed case, multiple vendor's products covered half of the 3-meter blanket. Moreover, co-management of spots was detected in which merchants temporally managed another's business while he/she was away and vice versa (Go-Along #3). Distribution of current vending spots does not correspond with existing blurred yellow lines painted by the commune on the floor attempting to create a market's layout.

Obtaining a vendor spot depends on identifying an available space and setting up their items. Once there, social interactions with other vendors progressively help vendors find more space or a better location. As an interviewed vendor explained his case:

> "I found a free spot on the sidewalk and settled there for about three months. My goal was to eventually move to the main plaza to potentially increase sales. One day, instead of setting up in my usual spot, I approached the plaza. I spoke with the association (Sbaratto[17]) to get proper credentials and set things straight. When I went to the plaza, I met a guy, now a good friend, who advised me to set up in a specific spot, assuring me it was okay. He even had an umbrella setup which he allowed me to use" (Interview, VEN-1).

Street vendors do not officially pay for their spot but contribute 1/2 euros to a raffle system. This system parallels the fish raffle in which a vendor can win a prize of meat or fish, similar to the fish raffle of the Ballarò Market (5.1.4). As described in the VEN-1 interview, the vendor perceives this system as a means to maintain order and ensure mutual benefit, stating: "Let's say this market feeds many people." This contribution is not considered bribery or a tip but an integral part of the market's operations. During my observations, I noted an individual distributing raffle numbers and later announcing the winner. This same person acts as the market's "tailor," skillfully navigating interactions to ensure a peaceful and harmonious environment (Interview, EXP-1).

Vendors' tactics for selling and displaying goods diverge notably from the Ballarò Market. Here, vendors adopt a more passive stance, waiting for customers to approach them instead of insistingly attracting potential buyers. This is explained by a local researcher stating that Alberguería's market visitors typically know what they seek. Vendors,

[17] Sbaratto is the association created to manage the Albergheria's market. It gathers vendors and local NGO's, such as SOS Ballarò, one of its promoters. Although official permits do not exist for the market, vendors can register with the association.

therefore, do not need to overly showcase or make a spectacle out of their products, given that there is a shared understanding or "language" between them and their customers (Interview EXP-3). On the other hand, vendors organize their space under a 'double stage' logic. The 'front stage,' delineated by vendor stalls, is the primary area for commercial interactions, including negotiation and bargaining. Behind this, the 'backstage' provides a socialization space for them to connect and socialize with relatives and other vendors, underlining the market's integral function as a locale for community building.

The market showcases various goods, from second-hand furniture, magazines, kitchen appliances, tools, clothing, and food (refer to 5.4.2). Instead of systematic zones of products, items are intermixed throughout the marketplace, often with a single vendor offering a varied mix. Although on a smaller scale, instances of illicit trade were identified, including selling counterfeit goods, stolen items, and drugs.

Fig. 38: Albergheria market near Piazza San Saverio, own photography

Results underscore the survivalist nature of this market's economic ecosystem. Vendors are estimated to earn an average of 5 to 15 euros daily (Bartoli, 2019; Interview ACT-1). Several testimonies show that profitability margins are slim, based mainly on adding value to resold items. In an off-the-record conversation, a female vendor shared that her approach involves purchasing low-cost items at the market around 4 a.m. to resell them later. She cited an example of buying a purse for 2 euros and selling it for 3 or getting a dress for 50 cents and selling it for 1 euro.

The modest profit margins and product prices highlight the market's popular characteristic, catering to those grappling with economic constraints. An interviewee's statement rightly captures this feeling:

> “While five hundred vendors make a living from the market, there are a thousand customers whose lives are sustained by it” (Interview EXP-1).

Lastly, one of the most prominent characteristics of the marketplace is its diverse demographic makeup, creating an intercultural but male-dominated melting pot. Women's representation in the market hovers around 30%, though they have a more pronounced presence within the market's association, Sbaratto (Interview AC-2). However, during this study, only a handful of women and children were observed participating in sales, many wearing hijabs. Age diversity ranges from adults to elderly present within the marketplace. Furthermore, the ethnic mosaic encompasses foreigners and migrants besides Sicilians and Italians. This multiculturalism resonates audibly through the area's soundscape. Languages and dialects such as Sicilian, Italian, Arabic, Nigerian, French, and English intermingle. The following section of this study covers the role of the migrant community in the functioning of the market.

5.4.2 Migrants and the Market

This study reveals the remarkable role and presence of migrant communities in the daily dynamic of the Albergheria Market. Individuals from the Maghreb region, West Africa, Bangladesh, and Romania were observed at a significant proportion together with Sicilians and Italians. Existing research from 2017 surveyed 177 vendors, showing that 50% were Italians, 30% were Romanians, and 20% were distributed between Maghrebians and Sub-Saharan from West Africa (Bartoli, 2019). Similarly, a member of SOS Ballarò estimates the composition as one-third Palermitans, one-third of Maghrebi origin, and the remaining third from Eastern Europe, including groups like Roma Sinti from Romania and Albania (Interview EXP-1).

This study's field observations and spatial mapping indicate that migrant communities work and live around the market area. Resulting in daily consumption patterns, with the market playing a central role in offering affordable goods and fostering community interaction. A spatial distribution study reveals a notable presence of Ghana, Bangladesh, and Nigeria individuals in the zone (Busetta et al., 2016). However, it is worth noting that the market also attracts residents and vendors from various Sicilian towns.

Migrants at the Albergheria market are typically economically disadvantaged individuals who have been in Italy for a long time, as indicated in interviews with Francesco Montagnani and Roberta Lo Bianco (Interview EXP-1; ACT-2). Informal conversations with these migrant vendors suggested many years of experience in the market, with a well-practiced routine from setting up to packing away their stalls. Their operations were frequently complemented by the use of vehicles for both transportation and storage of goods. Furthermore, consistent observations showed the same migrant individuals in identical spots, underscoring the regularity of their participation.

A clear relationship was observed between migrants' visa status and their participation in the Albergheria market. Despite being in Italy for a prolonged period, many individuals still lack official documentation, such as residence permits or IDs. This results in a significant number of undocumented migrants actively participating in the daily operations of the market. The unofficial nature of the market, coupled with minimal official oversight, offers these individuals a relatively "safe" working environment. Differently, Eastern European migrants, including the Roma and Roma Sinti from Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Albania, typically have regularized statuses. They commonly live within social housing complexes in Palermo's working-class areas (Interview EXP-1; Busetta et al., 2016).

In contrast to the Ballarò Market, migrants play a more egalitarian role in this marketplace's operations. I did not observe migrants being relegated to peripheral selling spots or taking secondary roles in vending activities. They often share vending spaces and collaborate in business. Clelia Bartoli, a university professor from UNIPA with extensive research on the market, elaborates upon this dynamic. She observes,

> “The precarious situation fosters connections between locals and migrants... for many, the distinction is wealth versus poverty, not nationality”. (Interview AC-2)

5.3.3 Frank’s Life Refurbishment

While in Albergheria searching to buy a bicycle, I met Frank, originally from Biafra—a disputed territory in Nigeria. He had journeyed to Europe, fleeing political persecution due to his involvement with a group advocating for Biafra's independence. His travel was fraught with challenges, crossing vast distances, enduring a significant stay in Libya, and finally facing a risky boat crossing the Mediterranean Sea. His journey culminated in his arrival in Siracusa, Italy, in 2008. Initially, the country granted him asylum and international protection. However, as the years progressed, Frank dealt with the slow pace and inefficiencies of the Italian immigration system. In his words,

> “When they delay my document, delay the food I'm going to eat, delay house where I'm going to live, delay everything, it changes the style of my life, you know.” (Interview MI-5).

This bureaucratic labyrinth forced Frank into five challenging years of clandestine life in the shadows of Italy. He undertook various informal jobs to make ends meet, from washing cars to construction and bar management. Such jobs, while providing some income, also exposed him to exploitation, fake contracts, and, at one point, an entanglement in drug trafficking, which led to imprisonment and serious legal issues.

The Albergheria-Ballarò district was essential in Frank's life among his various jobs. He earned a living there selling juice and now focuses on refurbishing appliances obtained from the second-hand market. On the 9th of February 2023, I had the opportunity to shadow Frank during one of his market visits. He goes there every morning around 5 a.m., scouting for undervalued or damaged items he can repair and resell. The day I joined him, despite the rainy streets, I noticed he also used the market for his family's needs. There, a pair of children's shoes, priced at just 2 euros on an Ape Cargo Bike, piqued his interest. After a friendly bargain, Frank secured the shoes and continued walking and sharing his business aspirations. Leveraging his proficient repair skills, he wanted to start a business selling refurbished washing machines and fridges (Go-Along #1).

Fig. 39: Frank’s refurbishment shop, own photo

Additionally, Frank told me of a plan to repurpose neglected bicycles, promoting their use in Palermo. As I continued to track his journey, I witnessed Frank’s obstacles trying to find a way out of an informal and survival economy. From landlords hesitant to lease out spaces for his ventures to bureaucratic hurdles when seeking financial assistance—Frank faced it all. By June 2023, though, he had embarked on his appliance refurbishing business, renovating a degraded shop to start offering affordable and guaranteed appliances. Despite his relentless willpower to create his own projects[18] and live a

[18] Frank co-founded the NGO 'Ikenga Voice of the World', a rare migrant-run cultural organization dedicated to hosting events for the migrant community and assisting those without documentation. It ceased operations in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

dignified life in Palermo, Frank's story mirrors hundreds of migrants who grapple with challenges, often questioning if migrating in search of a better place was worth it. Some say it was; others disagree.

5.4.4 Making a living out of trash.

The origin and type of products offered in the market are diverse, showing the numerous tactics locals and migrants perform to obtain objects they can sell in the market, from clothes, kitchen appliances, furniture, shoes, tools, food, electronic devices to books and others. It would be impossible to categorize them because there is no apparent logic in the type of products renovated weekly. Most products are second-hand, items in disuse, and others from uncertain origins. Frequently, exhibited products are broken, full of dust, and offered at minimum prices. After the market closes, many can be observed next to trash containers. In Albergheria's market, waste-picking and recycling are fundamental practices that allow vendors to do their business or – "make a living out of the trash" (Interview EXP-1).

Fig. 40: Second-hand products for sale on market streets, own photography.

Sbarazzo is a practice that consists of removing furniture and objects that people want to get rid of from their houses and later offering them in the market. In the book "*Inchiesta a Ballarò*," Bartoli explains the practices as an ancient trade, still widely practiced among the City's poorer classes. The person who practices it frequently owns an Ape 50, a small three-wheeled vehicle used to organize transports and house furniture removals. The remuneration for the service provided is the objects removed. These donated objects find in the Albergheria market a place for sale (Bartoli, 2019, p.18).

Ape Cargo Bikes are a classic component of the area's urban landscape and the primary source of mobility to transport objects exhibited in the market. It seems to be a practice led by Sicilians, but as I confirmed with an interviewee, migrants are also involved. According to one, there is a lucky factor in the practice as the clearance of certain buildings might uncover valuable objects that can be resold in the market, obtaining a significant profit (Interview MI-5). Similarly, another interviewed vendor explains that he gathers items for sale mainly through word of mouth within his social circle, leading to an overflow of donations. He makes weekly trips to small towns in Sicily to collect these items. Over time, he has honed his skills to identify valuable branded items, selectively selling them at other marketplaces where customers can pay a better price. (Interview VEN-1).

Illicit trade is a minor but famed source of objects exhibited in the market. This includes stolen phones, bicycles, drugs, and fake products like Nike shoes. Those activities have tainted the market's reputation, leading some locals to call it the "*Stolen Things Market*." Such illicit trade often seems linked to specific migrant communities, particularly Nigerians. The market's managing association, Sbaratto, prohibits the sale of items suspected of these illicit origins, further raising tension in the market's dynamics (Interview EXP-1).

A remarkable recycling practice in the market is object refurbishment. As shown in the previous section with Frank's story, individuals visit the market daily to buy broken objects they can fix and resell to their community. This practice includes buying washing machines, bicycles, fridges, and other objects to profit from the differential buying-selling cost. Some shops performing this activity have workshops in the market area, stocking the objects on the sidewalks. As one identified repairing shop Tunisian-owned shows, this practice enables people with manual skills, frequently non-recognized, to add value to the objects, extending their life out of their economic need and producing less environmental impact.

As shown in this section, the ingenuity of individuals and their often under-recognized repair skills, coupled with the knowledge of an item's value, enable them to achieve a survival-based profit within market dynamics. This scenario resonates with the notion of 'popular centrality' (Collectif Rosa Bonheur, 2016), underscoring the vast material and immaterial resources inherent in such communities.

5.4.5 A temporal city that emerges every day

Within the Albergheria market, material infrastructures (5.1.5) play a pivotal role in the vendor's daily activity, impacting significantly the public space. For instance, I identified pop-up metal structures, shopping carts, and various displaying apparatus (see Figure. Vehicles such as cars, vans, and trucks are vital operational support during market hours but predominantly function as secure storage spaces afterward. Either used as storage space a couple of blocks away from the market or as support vehicles parked next to vendors' spots. Observed vendors set up and unpack their spots by carrying their products from those vehicles. Moreover, other material infrastructures are used, such as cardboard boxes to categorize products, supermarket or baby carts to transport the goods, and placeholder objects to reserve street space for parking their vehicles.

Fig. 41: Material infrastructures map of Albergheria market area, own illustration based on My Maps

On regular walks around the area after the market's hours, vehicles full of objects inside were identified. They were located near Via Tukory, at the district's border, establishing this area as a logistic hub for vendors. The status of vehicles denoted their storage character as their tires often were flat, evidencing their fixability to the area. Moreover, two vehicles repurposed as migrant dwellings highlight the area's underlying vulnerabilities, demonstrating how some residents leverage available resources to find shelter.

On the other hand, as shown before, the nimbleness of the Ape Cargo Bike, effortlessly maneuvering through the district's narrow lanes, is particularly notable. In addition to

vehicles, precarious buildings dedicated to storage were also observed in the market's area. There, vendors pay a monthly rent to store the products they exhibit in the market every day. Some open their doors and become the selling vending spot; others are a few meters away, and vendors transport the goods.

Fig. 42: Material infrastructures in Albergheria area, own photography

5.4.6 Conclusions: Survival and Solidarity Ecosystem

Albergheria market is not merely a trading hub but a vital ecosystem underpinning sustenance. The collaborative tactics of marginalized Sicilian and migrant vendors come to the fore. Their activities underscore a deep-seated transformation of urban space, highlighting the central role of street vending.

Survival ecosystem. The significant number of users and vendors in the market underscores its pivotal role in this popular centrality (Collectif Rosa Bonheur, 2016). Under that theory, the market is not just about commerce; it channels material and immaterial resources essential for sustaining life. As Roever and Skinner (2016) point out, the role of street vendors in urban life transcends mere self-employment and personal survival. They offer affordable services and products, catering to other informal workers, the formal sector, and disadvantaged groups. This is evident in the Albergheria market, where, while 500 vendors earn their livelihood from the market, thousands of customers live thanks to it. The presence of shoes selling for one euro indicates a demand from a large segment that can only afford such prices (Interview EXP-1).

Two similar marginalized groups. Sicilian and migrant street vendors demonstrate similar and shared tactics within the Albergheria market. This scenario nuances Recchi's

(2020) binary distinction between vendors in developed and developing contexts. While Italy is globally recognized as a developed economy, the intricacies of street vending dynamics in Albergheria highlight the country's internal disparities and complex layers. This strengthens my interpretation of Sicily as an influx point between the Global North and South.

Solidarity and mutual support abound. Local and migrant vendors share physical spaces and can cover for one another's selling stands. Such practices reveal the binding power of subsistence work across different backgrounds. As the Collectif Rosa Bonheur puts it, subsistence work anchors the individual to a community governed by reciprocity (Delfini et al., 2019). Additionally, forming vendor associations like 'Sbaratto' could be seen as tactics, potentially safeguarding vendors against police or state interventions (Peralta, 2017).

Reflections on Space and Materiality. The market is both an ephemeral and spatial entity that profoundly transforms the urban space even off its working hours. "It is a sort of temporary city, which is born and dies every day" (Interview ACT-3). Lindell suggests that street vendors remain important participants in the incessant making and remaking of street space and the provisional re-spatialization of the city (2019, p. 4). Practices such as selling second-hand, recovering discarded materials, or "*sbarazzo*" (house clearance) emerge as pure survival tactics to guarantee an income. Those practices heavily relied on material infrastructures such as the Ape motorbike, pop-up structures, and other objects that became part of the urban landscape.

Stories like Frank's, as well as observed practices such as sleeping in cars or living off trash, undoubtedly speak of survival tactics in response to the ongoing marginalization these groups experience. However, this study does not, under any circumstances, praise the ingenuity and creativity of these practices. Instead, it seeks to **shed light on the precarious and challenging living conditions both groups face daily in the urban space of a city within the European Union.**

6. Discussion and conclusion

Summary of findings

Throughout this research, I comprehensively explored migrant practices in the Albergheria-Ballarò district. The findings reveal their intricate ties with the local Sicilian community, shedding light on economic survival, urban space, and power dynamics.

Upon examining the practices and tactics carried out by migrants, it is evident that these actions intertwine with the practices of the local population, rooted in a shared experience of marginalization and economic precarity. Within the notion of transient spaces (Bork-Hüffer et al. (2014), these urban zones become connection nodes, consistently reshaped by internal and external interactions. Migrants, with their translocal ties alongside locals and deep-rooted community knowledge, collaboratively harness their combined resources. Together, they create an urbanity governed by local rules that rely on public spaces to ensure these groups' continued existence and reproduction. Despite their distinct features, the two observed street markets illustrate local dynamics epitomizing street-based work in the area.

Predominant activities include street vending of food, new items, clothes, souvenirs around the Ballarò Market, and selling second-hand items in Albergheria's market. Notably, migrants were frequently seen working as unofficial parking attendants in public spaces, selling counterfeit products, and using social gatherings as opportunities to profit by selling grill meats on the streets. Depending on their nationality, some migrants also lean into offering products or services tied to their culture, as seen in grocers with Asian products and African restaurants and clothing stalls.

Most of the migrants' economic activities were primarily aimed at the local population, encompassing their communities and Sicilians. For example, Bangladeshi vendors provide vegetables essential to their native cuisine, while night roasters and African restaurants predominantly serve their community. On the other hand, street vendors in the second-hand market cater to a broader yet predominantly local demographic with financial constraints, showing that their economic practices transcend their individual needs. Drawing parallels with academic concepts like "popular centrality" by Collectif Rosa Bonheur (2016) and the street vending framework by Roever and Skinner (2016), it becomes clear that these vendors do more than just secure their livelihoods. They provide affordable services and products to a broader disadvantaged community, including other migrants and informal workers. This activity underpins a survival ecosystem that extends beyond their immediate needs.

In the housing realm, migrants and locals often resort to informal rental arrangements. Overcrowding, inadequate living conditions, and limited space often characterize these dwellings. However, migrants face even greater obstacles in accessing formal rentals due to racial stigma and preconceived notions about their way of life despite holding documents and job contracts. The lack of a registered address complicates migrants' residency permit processes and renewals, leading to an existing fake rental market (Interview ACT-1). Overall, local landlords exploit migrants' situation by renting out informally substandard places that do not meet formal market standards. As I observed, those facing even harsher economic situations have no choice but to sleep in vehicles or occupy abandoned buildings.

Although multicultural coexistence between migrant and Sicilian communities appears to occur complementary and without major conflicts, there are instances where the vulnerabilities of migrants are exploited. Besides the informal renting example, in the Ballarò Market, migrants are relegated to a secondary role, being able to use the space once Sicilians have departed (see 5.3.2). Other examples discussed in this thesis, including human trafficking for prostitution (5.2.5), underpayment for caregiving roles, agriculture exploitation (5.2.3), and other forms of exploitation, highlight the intersectionality of race and gender in this issue. As observed in the area, inhabitants of popular centralities are often subjected to gendered and ethnic-racially fragmenting and creating other social subgroups (Delfini et al., 2019). In contrast, the Albergheria market exhibited greater solidarity and mutual assistance. Local and migrant vendors collaboratively divided and co-managed selling spots within a predominantly male-dominated landscape.

These local governance dynamics showcase the area's complex disputes and negotiations influenced by race, gender, and origin in a context of familiar entitlement. This is increased by influential stakeholders, such as criminal organizations engaged in illegal activities such as drug trafficking and the sale of stolen goods. Civil organizations play a vital mediating role in this contested space, channeling proposals and ideas between stakeholders and with the local authorities. They are truly Inter-Cultural nodes (Barreiro and Gonzalez, 2020) connecting locals and migrants in joint projects. However, while migrants actively engage in initiatives facilitated by those local organizations, the management remains predominantly Italian, often excluding migrant activists from European funding, relegating them to beneficiaries rather than decision-makers.

The tactics employed by both migrants and Sicilians in public spaces transform the area significantly, making it a unique, vibrant, and multicultural neighborhood. The presence

of infrastructural materials throughout the district serves the street vendors, leaving a lasting impact on the urban landscape. This not only facilitates functionality for vendors but also contributes symbolically to the identity and culture of the area. Various objects, characterized by their simplicity and utility, like shopping carts, metal structures, and storage vehicles, populate the streets, fostering an intricate interplay between people, objects, and the urban environment. Their presence significantly alters the use of space, giving it a defined character for commerce, transactions, or socialization.

Interpretation of findings

The observed tactics and their spatial implications are framed into a context of double marginalization, migration, and informality. First, Sicilian locals and immigrants' intertwined histories reveal recurring patterns connecting migration with marginalization. This dynamic is set against a historical backdrop marked by Italy's peripheries incorporation or what Hetcher (1975) defined as internal colonization. This event placed Southern Italy economically and culturally behind standards imposed by the growing industry of the North in the past. Here, the earlier movement of Sicilians emigrating outwards mirrors the current trend of immigrants arriving in Sicily, all in pursuit of a better life.

In this confluence, Sicilians and immigrants find common ground: Albergheria-Ballarò. They live, work, and socialize there, fostering a new multicultural identity while contending not the same but similar hardships. Both groups have faced colonization: Sicilians internally by northern Italy (see 4.2.1) and most immigrants from European empires in Africa or Asia. This echoes the findings of Magliano and Perissinotti (2020), who emphasize that migrant populations have historically been affected by internal borders that give rise to and perpetuate various forms of subordination, discrimination, and segmentation.

Despite the shared histories, their paths toward integration within the Italian nation-state have diverged. Sicilians underwent a process of becoming "fully Italian" and then "European." Immigrants, on the other hand, face a constant challenge to assimilate, often perceived as perpetual outsiders and minorities or, as Avallone (2018) suggests, "second-order citizens. Giglioli's (2019) concept of the absence of "Italianness and Europeanness" speaks to this common marginalization. Neither group conforms to the stereotypical Italian citizen—a homogeneous, modern, white individual. Historically, Sicily's assimilation into the Italian identity was fostered through imposed education, language, urban planning, and legal systems. A parallel can be drawn between Europe's past colonial practices and its contemporary exportation of knowledge and standards.

Here, top-down impositions of norms and values often met resistance, leading to alternative, "informal" lifestyles that diverge from dominant narratives of prosperity and modernity. I argue that this informality stems from externally imposed structures that clash with local realities, attempting to homogenize subjects and practices, often erasing local identities in favor of a "northern" way of life seen as superior. I suggest that such informality is not a mere deviation but a reaction to the misalignment of imposed structures with local needs and identities—furthermore, a response to structures that, as an outcome, produce marginalization and exclusion. For instance, the exploitative North-South dynamics (Gramsci, 1971) and the cultural hegemony (Aprile, 2011), which pictured local knowledge and dialects as inferior. Compounding these are restrictive immigration policies leading migrants to a legal limbo (Hawthorne, 2022), the fortification of EU borders triggering undocumented arrivals (Giglioli, 2019), and a pervasive disregard for foreign qualifications. Notably, the labor market reveals gendered biases affecting both groups. Those structural mechanisms leave migrants and locals racialized, excluded, and marginalized from power, political, and social structures.

For Gramsci (1971), the "subalterns" refer to groups marginalized and subordinated in society, lacking direct access to cultural, social, and political systems. They encompass those outside the established power structures and dominant cultural narratives. In light of this, my study delved deeply into how subalterns influence the urban space. Following Roy et al. (2004), the research underscores their agency and pivotal role in crafting a distinctive urban order within the researched area. In line with the scholar Marco Picone, Albergheria-Ballarò is the spatialized version of its community, which is heterogeneous and composed of multiple ethnicities and origins (Interview AC-1). This new-order spatialization is shaped by the daily survival practices that use the public space as a material and immaterial resource to make a living.

In places where community-driven rules are more influential than national directives, unique forms of local governance and economies emerge that differ from national social expectations. While these forms might exhibit traces of solidarity and cooperation, they are not necessarily equitable or redistributive. Instead, they often operate based on individual interests, power dynamics, and the territorial influence of criminal organizations.

A distinct urban character emerges amidst these intricate relationships involving doubly marginalized individuals. It goes beyond the traditional binary view of the formal city described as "regulated, institutionalized, organized" in contrast to its informal "chaotic, unregulated, decayed" counterpart. This thesis shows that this space is governed by

rules not set by official authorities but created from the bottom (Interview AC-2). A pivotal question arises in this context: Can this emerging neighborhood address and rectify deep-rooted inequalities by fostering inclusive, community-managed urban spaces in Albergheria?

This question is particularly pertinent given the area's ongoing touristification and transformation. One wonders if we are witnessing a transition from Lefebvre's conceptual "differential space" — a heterogeneous and lively landscape— to a commodified, homogenized abstract space (1991). The underlying concern is whether Albergheria-Ballarò can sustain its unique quality without being entirely captured by capitalist and modern dynamics in an area where touristic souvenirs and Airbnb are starting to emerge.

Final reflections

Lutzoni (2016) contends that formal and informal urbanities should be recognized as legitimate and simultaneous ways of urban making. Building upon ideas of interconnectedness (Daniels et al., 2004), I maintain that these urbanities are deeply intertwined, with their demarcations often ambiguous. In light of this, there is a strong need for adopting intermediate or alternative terms to prevent stigmatization and overgeneralization.

Given this backdrop, I advocate for describing this way of producing space outside the confines of antagonism. Considering the urban space here is shaped by individuals with histories tied to migration and colonization—including both Sicilians and immigrants. Standardized rules never truly found footing; differently, cultural diversity and the drive for survival carve out a distinct urban space. Adopting a postcolonial approach to studying cities in Europe illuminates other realities experienced not only by migrants but also by Europeans within the Global North. This provides a deeper understanding of what is traditionally labeled as 'urban informality,' challenging the notion that it is solely associated with the Global South or exclusively with immigrants in Europe.

Consequently, I advocate for a perspective that legitimizes urban forms created by marginalized groups, not as chaotic or deficient but as alternative expressions of urbanity. This reconceptualization underscores local knowledge and practices responding to structural injustices and the pressing imperative to confront the unacceptable living conditions endured by Sicilians and migrants within the European Union.

Study implications

The findings from the Albergheria Ballarò investigation offer a significant recontextualization of urban spaces crafted by subaltern groups in Europe, highlighting the need to recognize spaces that move beyond the traditional formal-informal spectrum. The implications of my study include the following:

1) Post-dualistic Spaces: The alternative urban order observed in Albergheria Ballarò illuminates the potential for creating inclusive urban environments. Such spaces underscore the significance of community-driven and solidarity approaches to urban evolution. For instance, the local parking attendant, who addresses public space issues and cleanliness where they work, could inspire to transform this practice into public space guardians. This creates roles that care for public spaces and integrate marginalized populations into formal employment.

2) Market Formalization: Formalizing markets should be joint with local vendors, emphasizing collective benefits over individual profits. Existing local vendor associations like Sbaratto can serve as essential liaisons with the municipality.

3) Migrant-led organizations: Local groups should foster migrant-led organizations, assisting in establishing and facilitating access to EU funding, thus empowering these groups for more significant decision-making.

4) Reform Immigration Processes: Authorities must critically assess how immigration laws contribute to urban marginalization. The study reveals that bureaucratic delays in visa processes can result in exploitative work and housing situations.

5) State Intervention in Precarious Livelihoods: The state must urgently address marginalized communities' precarious conditions urgently. While their resilience is commendable, it often results from systemic oversight. Partnering with established local organizations can amplify interventions, utilizing their on-ground presence and expertise for effective solutions.

Limitations

While this research offers an in-depth analysis of the Albergheria Ballarò district, its primary focus on this area might limit its applicability to broader contexts in Palermo or Italy. The study's temporal boundaries could neglect evolving local dynamics beyond the investigation period. Furthermore, despite a thorough methodological approach, there is potential for inherent biases given my foreign status and the selected interview participants. The challenges in consistently defining "ethnic shops" may also introduce

variability in data interpretation. Although I advocate for new terminology, I recognize that this study still utilizes the term "informality." Given the term's widespread recognition, this choice was made to facilitate reader comprehension.

While efforts were made to incorporate diverse perspectives, criminal organizations such as the mafia presented challenges due to the extended fieldwork required, the risks involved, and the associated ethical concerns, Lastly, the absence of insights from the municipality not only represents an unresolved gap in the research but also underscores their scarce involvement in the topic covered.

Future research

The Albergheria Ballarò study illuminates two pivotal directions for future research. First, a deeper exploration within Albergheria Ballarò's Sicilian community can yield a granular understanding of their unique challenges, contributions, and aspirations. Second, exploring similar spaces in other parts of Europe and post-colonized places would be insightful to develop a post-formal terminology further to describe these types of urban spaces shaped by subaltern populations.

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7.2 Credits for figures

Disclaimer: All figures not listed in the below were created by the author of this thesis and do not require external attribution.

Fig. 1: Google Maps. (2023). Map of Palermo Historical. Google. Accessed August 15, 2023.

Fig. 5: OpenStreetMap contributors. (2023). Map of the South of Europe. OpenStreetMap. Accessed August 15, 2023. https://www.openstreetmap.org

Fig. 6: Google Earth. (2023). Satellite image of Palermo's Historical Center. Google. Accessed August 15, 2023.

Fig. 8: Malakooti, A. (2015). Map of migration routes in the Central Mediterranean area. *Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots*. Report for IOM. https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/altai-migration-trends-accross-the-mediterranean-v3%281%29.pdf

Fig. 9: Google Earth. (2023). Illustration of Albergheria district area including two street markets. Google. Adapted by author.

Fig. 11: Molti Volti. (2023). Photograph of restaurant and co-working space. Molti Volti Retrieved August 15 of 2023 from www.moltivolti.org

Fig. 12: Arci Porco Rosso. (2023). Photographs of the locale in Albergheria-Ballarò. Retrieved August 15 of 2023 from www.arciporcorosso.it

Fig. 13: SOS Ballarò & LiveUnipa. (n.d.). Photographs of SOS Ballarò's activities in the area. SOS Ballarò Facebook page and LiveUnipa.
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Fig. 25: Google Earth. (2023). Satellite image of Ballarò's market. Google. Adapted by author.

Fig. 32: Google My Maps. (2023). Map showing distribution and type of tourist-oriented shop during Saturday peak hour. Google. Adapted by author.

Fig. 35: Google Earth. (2023). Satellite image of Albergheria's street market. Google. Adapted by author.

Fig. 37: Google My Maps. (2023). Illustration showing street vendor spots. Google. Adapted by author.

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8. Appendices

A. Interviews

Table of interviews

Code	Category	Name	Activity	Gender	Origin	Mode
AC-1	Academic	Marco Picone	Researcher & professor of Urban Geography at UNIPA	Male	Italy	In person
AC-2	Academic	Clelia Bartoli	Professor at Law Department UNIPA	Female	Italy	In person
AC-3	Academic	Barbara Lino	Advisor for the Commune and UNIPA professor	Female	Italy	In person
ACT-1	Activist	Fausto Melluso	Founder of Arci Porco Rosso	Male	Italy	In person
ACT-2	Activist	Roberta Lo Bianco	Co-founder of Molti Volti	Female	Italy	In person
ACT-3	Activist	Salvatore Lucente	Journalist & photographer	Male	Italy	Zoom
EXP-1	Expert	Fracesco Montagnani	Researcher & activist co-founder of SOS Ballaro	Male	Italy	In person
EXP-2	Expert	Rafaela Pascoal	UNHCR consultant	Female	Portugal	In person
EXP-3	Expert	Federico Prestileo	PHd Researcher & activist	Male	Italy	In person
EXP-4	Expert	Roberta Coucheo	Social worker and researcher on gender issues	Female	Italy	In person
MI-1	Migrant	Anonymus	Studying to be a mediator. Work part-time	Male	Bangladesh	In person
MI-2	Migrant	Anonymus	Working in a restaurant	Male	Nigeria	In person
MI-3	Migrant	Anonymus	Cultural mediator	Male	Tunisia	In person
MI-4	Migrant	Anonymus	Cultural mediator and activist	Male	Chad	In person
MI-5	Migrant	Frank	Repairing appliances	Male	Nigeria	In person
MI-6	Migrant	Anonymus	Waitress	Female	Congo	In person
MI-7	Migrant	Anonymus	Car-watching	Male	Ghana	In person
MI-8	Migrant	Anonymus	Activist	Male	Libia	In person
VEN-1	Street vendor	Anonymus	Vendor at Albergheria market	Male	Italy	In person
VEN-2	Street vendor	Anonymus	Former street vendor and coordinator or vendor's association	Male	Marrocco	In person

B. Ethnographic methods

Multi-parameter observation sheet filled digitally during participant observations

Site 1: xxxxxxx	people				space			activities			time		sensorial aspects
image of the area	***Who is here?***	***Profile: gender, age, and ethnic group (optional)***	***Ocupation and way of interaction between people observed.***	***Attitude, body language and gesticulation***	***Physical components***	***Spatial movements***	***Context***	***type of activities***	***characteristic of the activity***	***structure***	***actions***	***When and for how long?***	***sounds***
	General attendance. Who is here during the whole observation time? What relationship do they have with the observer?	*i.e: Age: Babies, kids, young adults, languages you heard, etc*	*General occupation of observed people, how do they interact between each other*	*i.e.: sitting, standing, in a hurry, defensive attitude, relaxed, agressive, etc*	*Furniture, objects, decoration of the space*	*Speed and type of movement, i.e: walking, running/jogging, supported, wheelchair, carried, toddler, skateboard, etc*	*How is the space where this specific place is located? Is there something contextual happening? any externalities*	*Specific activities you observe in the area, i.e., people waiting for the bus, consuming food, doing a commercial activity, a*	*Duration and number of people who perform the activity, how they perform it*	*Organization logic of the activity, who is in charge, which is work distributed*	*Order of actions performed by observed people*	*Arrival time, duration of the observation*	motorbikes passing near (many) few car's horn noises
Observation 1: Date - Day - Time - Weather													
Observation 2: Date - Day - Time - Weather													
Observation 3: Date - Day - Time - Weather													
Observation 4: Date - Day - Time - Weather													
Observation 5: Date - Day - Time - Weather													