

## CHAPTER 2.

### GREEN SPACE: EUROPE'S GREENEST

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*“Oggi abbiamo delle cime di rapa appena arrivate.”* Your waiter in the small trattoria near Campo de’ Fiori will switch to passable English if necessary, but not by default. An older man who has probably worked in the same family-run restaurant all his life, he has short white hair and wears a tight white vest over a white shirt and black trousers. He is telling you that they

have just received a crate of *cime di rapa*, a kind of broccoli flower, and this comes as a tacit recommendation to order seasonal and local. If you have a reasonable, special request, a simple red sauce or a green salad, the kitchen will usually be happy to fulfill it even if it's not on the menu, but beware that if you ask for artichokes in June or peaches in October your waiter will not conceal his disdain. His expertise is food, not communication. If asked, he is happy to explain the subtle differences between *cicoria* and *biedina* and other cooked greens. He will tell you how they are best served and he will know exactly where and when they were harvested or gathered.

If the *trattoria* serves meat, you will be offered a limited range of cuts chosen by the trusted butcher off of the carcass you may have seen hauled off a truck double-parked outside his shop nearby earlier in the day.

If instead you are in the mood for seafood it's likely that a cart will be wheeled out for you on which a small array of shiny fish glisten in the sun. This is not an illustration of the types of fish they have, like photographs of menu items to facilitate ordering. These are the *actual* fish they have today; pick one and they will send it back to the kitchen to be cooked. The fish is almost certainly from yesterday's Mediterranean catch, just as the steak was cut from animals slaughtered a few days earlier, and the fruit and vegetables are seasonal and local.

### ***Kilometro Zero***

Most of what is brought to your table originated within 100 kilometers. Ironically, the product likely to have travelled the farthest is the one we have already seen to be abundant locally: water. Depending on your response to the question *frizzante o naturale*, sparkling or still, you may be brought *Ferrarelle*, from

around Naples or *Levissima* from the Alps, or any of hundreds of other brands of bottled water. It is possible, though by no means common, that you will be served *Egeria*, Rome's *Acqua Santa*, which has started adding the words "0 Km" to its label. Less likely still, you might be offered simple tap water. Although it is clean and tasty, it is a bit too heavy in calcium for many, and more importantly, it cannot be used to inflate the check. New restaurants, like Porto Fluviale in the Ostiense quarter, have started offering their own bottled water, purified in house and served in their own branded bottles.

You are eating lunch in the heart of Rome, in a building that has stood here for centuries and probably housed a variety of functions before being converted to its current use. If you are a visitor to Rome, chances are you arrived on foot from nearby and will be walking or taking public transit or a cab to your next destination. But you might be surprised at how many "locals" eating at nearby tables actually came by car, leaving tons of steel blocking the alleys nearby. And at other hours, delivery vans clog the same narrow streets. You can still encounter hand carts wheeling crates of fruit through busy streets, or a butcher negotiating a corner with a side of beef slung over his shoulder (or, for that matter, a gallery owner hauling an 18th century landscape painting or contemporary bronze sculpture.) Unlike Venice, though, where deliveries can only make the last few hundred meters from water by foot, Rome relies heavily on motorized vehicles to get food to the table. They may be tiny three wheeled *Api* vans, or even *Vespas* with crates precariously strapped to the back, but they add to the noise, emissions and general hazards nevertheless. In her book *Hungry City*, architect Carolyn Steele points out how amazing it is that cities are even capable of taking care of the complex task of feeding millions of residents and visitors every day.

In Rome the consequences of getting our food, ourselves and our waste in and out of the dense historical center are visibly amplified. Rare are the restaurants with back doors for delivery, never mind loading docks. Everything, and everyone, usually comes in and out through one front door. This is another case of “making visible the obscure,” and one that makes it easy—at least for those of us who spend a lot of time prowling Rome at all hours—to judge food quality without even asking for a menu. The frozen food truck parked on the sidewalk is worse negative advertising than any scathing reviews on Trip Advisor. And empty cardboard cartons from food multinationals, piled amongst empty water bottles waiting for trash pickup, speak poorly for both the environmental commitment and gastronomic quality of the restaurant that dumped them.

If the topic of green brings to mind parks and gardens, you may be surprised that discussions of green space in Italy often return to the subject of food. (True, this could be said of discussions of *anything* in Italy, but green and food are particularly connected). In Italy food is still grounded in place and time. It is local and seasonal. On the one hand, choice is limited; you won't find fresh tomatoes in December. On the other hand, when tomatoes are in season you can choose between dozens of varieties and, within them, from infinite exemplars. Each peach is unique, not selected (or engineered!) to meet restrictive “ideal” standards of size, shape, and appearance. Variety is, of course, not a value in itself—think of the hundreds of TV channels with nothing worth watching. No, variety means little unless it provides value. Usually, in nature, variety (let's call it bio-diversity) exists for a reason and it is to make an ecosystem more resilient and capable of adaptation. By editing variety out of our produce in the name of standardization we have boxed ourselves into a particularly grim corner.

Whereas industrial systems rely on power, regenerative systems rely on information. Wes Jackson argues that we are experiencing not a boom in information but an impoverishment, in that species are being lost at an alarming rate, and biodiversity equals information<sup>1</sup>. In fact, the demise of multifarious biological species, to be replaced by monoculture farming parallels the globalization of culture, with the elimination of dialects, craft-skills and literary or artistic diversity. About 6,000 different languages are spoken around the world. But the Foundation for Endangered Languages estimates that every year the world loses around 25 mother tongues. Likewise, genetic engineering, far from synthesizing new species is working to eliminate natural complexity and reduce species to a small, manageable number.

Food is not just limited in time; it is also limited to a reasonable distance from its place of production. This is not to say we can't get any food anywhere; it's just a question of cost and impact. Proximity has clear benefits when it comes to food, the most obvious being that the closer food is to its final destination the fresher it is on arrival. It is estimated that 40% of the ecological footprint of today's cities is tied to food, much of this not in the production and processing phases but afterwards, in delivery, refrigeration, preparation and disposal. Much of Rome's produce comes from within the city limits themselves. Without leaving the confines of the city it is common to see sheep grazing, dairy cattle, vegetable crops and even vineyards. This is partly because the administrative boundaries of Rome contain over 1,200 square kilometers, drawn far beyond the settled zone of the city at the time of Italy's unification in preparation for eventual expansion. But it is also a question of culture. Romans recognize that without accessible, productive agricultural land, much of what makes cities thrive would be impossible.



*Artichokes at the Campagna Amica Farmer's Market*

## **Slow down, Food**

Italy, thankfully, is behind the times when it comes to dumbing down food, but it has been moving in this direction nevertheless. Here, as elsewhere in the developed world, food provision has moved from small shops to supermarket chains in recent decades and multi-national fast food chains have started to make inroads into the country, after perhaps France, most associated with local gastronomic traditions. In the mid-eighties, in reaction and resistance to this trend, Carlo Petrini, an Italian food writer from Piedmont, launched the Slow Food movement. The occasion was a very specific (and symbolic) grassroots campaign to keep McDonald's out of Rome. Although the campaign failed—McDonalds first location at the Spanish Steps was followed by hundreds more throughout the country—Petrini astutely exploited the inevitable media spotlight that big brands attracted

and diffused it across the rich terrain of Italian food culture. He turned a critique into a commodity, and a successful one at that, with some 800 local chapters and members in 150 countries. Food, whether fast or slow, is still business.

Most of my *gastrofighetti* friends (“foodies” sounds better in Italian) will agree that while Rome is still a great city for people who eat, of late it has been easier to pay excessively to eat mediocre food. On the one hand this is the fault of a not-always-informed public that succumbs to the attraction of a good location and deceptive marketing; the checked tablecloths and chianti flask will cajole a surprising number of tourists. But there has also been a disturbing infiltration of organized crime into the food business, exemplified by the purchase of notable restaurants and cafes by shell companies belonging to known criminal families.<sup>2</sup> Roberto Saviano, journalist and author of *Gomorra*, in a recent article on what he terms “Camorra Food Inc.” describes how almost every branch of the food business in Italy (and not only) has been infiltrated by criminal organizations. “Our every action,” he writes, “from the first thing we do in the morning through dinner, can enrich the clan unbeknownst to us.”<sup>3</sup>

Even when there are no insinuations of wrongdoings, the arrival of big food in Rome is disconcerting. I recently attended the inauguration of the giant high-end food emporium Eataly in Rome’s Ostiense neighborhood, a vibrant but marginalized urban area that is already a magnet for foodies. Food Blogger Katie Parla<sup>4</sup> describes Eataly as resembling “an upscale food court at an American mall,” and in answer to the obvious question why, quotes Nicola Farinetti, son of the chain’s founder: “Unfortunately the world of small food shops, those small places

dedicated to quality food, like Americans imagine, died many years ago.”

Thankfully, this is not entirely true although, if it were, what irony to think that those same Americans who have introduced the world to one-stop shopping are now waxing nostalgic for a more diversified food market that this “optimized” distribution has supplanted. Nearby in Testaccio, the traditional daily produce market has recently been relocated to a new structure but is still thriving, as is a weekend farmers’ market set up in a repurposed industrial space nearby. Even with its through-the-roof prices, high-end food boutique Volpetti is going strong. And the *Città dell’Altra Economia*, which has struggled to promote fair trade, organic farming and other sustainable practices, is still striving to continue activities in the former slaughterhouse (which itself gave rise in the 20th century to many of Rome’s famous meat dishes.)

Most Americans I know in Rome are un-enthusiastic about Eataly. They are far more inspired by the Rome Sustainable Food Project at the American Academy in Rome. Launched by writer and restaurateur Alice Waters and chef Mona Talbott with the aim to construct a replicable model for sustainable dining in an institution, the project develops relationships with local farmers and provenders as well as growing almost all of its own produce. Few passersby on the quiet street on the Janiculum Hill know that behind the facade of the grand beaux-arts palace, designed a hundred years ago by American architects McKim, Meade and White, kitchen staff and volunteers are busy cultivating a vibrant and productive garden. Dining in the Academy courtyard recently opposite architect Carolyn Steele, an expert on eating and urbanism, we discussed the changing role food is finding in cities. Thanks to Slow Food and a vast and viral range



of food-related ventures, citizens are starting to ask where their food comes from. And they want to know more about the people or corporations responsible for it. Some people may be fooled by checkered table-cloths out front and ignore the frozen food trucks out back, but more and more frequently people want to look in the kitchen and hear the true stories behind the bounty on the dinner table.

### **Roman Locavores**

The global food industry is not new. When Rome's population exceeded one million it was at the center of a vast food network; the Mediterranean rim provided grain, oil (olive, that is), wine, citrus and other fruits while the sea itself was tapped for fish. Salt and spices often came from distant shores.

Born of agriculture (Romulus, legend has it, plowed a furrow to define the boundaries of Roma Quadrata), Rome long maintained a reverence for its humble farming origins. Temples to Saturn and Ceres (Agriculture and Grain) were especially venerated. Sacred plants, the olive, fig and grape, were cultivated in the Forum (where they can still be seen today thanks to 20th century replanting). Cicero wrote that "of all the occupations by which gain is secured, none is better than agriculture, none more profitable, none more delightful, none more becoming to a free man." Pliny the Elder wrote extensively about agriculture in his *Naturalis Historia* and the 2nd century BCE writer Cato dedicated a whole treatise to farming, considering it not just necessary but noble. Land ownership was among the most respected sources and symbols of wealth in Republican-era Italy. Farmland was awarded to returning soldiers as a prize for heroic actions on the battlefield, and family farms were amassed through strategic marriages. The city of Rome grew surrounded by productive farmland. Anthony Majanlahti's book *The Fam-*

*ilies That Made Rome* describes how power for much of the city's history has meant land<sup>5</sup>. Mergers, marriages, acquisitions and the likes led to larger and larger estates, and since land is limited, part of this expansion required the privatization of what had been held in common. And land speculation was not only a local affair.

By the height of Rome's imperial power, agriculture had become a global enterprise. Ships arrived from Africa at the port near Ostia at the mouth of the Tiber carrying amphora filled with grain, olive oil, sardines (whole and processed), salted mackerel, and a fermented fish sauce known as *garum*. A stone relief found in Ostia (now in the Vatican Museums) depicts men unloading bags of grain and barrels (of wine?) from a ship. Although Egypt was called Rome's breadbasket, wheat might come from Sicily, Sardinia, Spain or almost anywhere else in the region. Apparently, even India and China were in on the outsourcing, as testified by Roman finds in Arikamedu and accounts of ancient Roman ambassadors in both Indian and Chinese writings.

Since shipping cost significantly less by sea than by land — 1/60th according to some estimates —, boat building was a big industry. So big, in fact, that by the 2nd century trees for masts were so scarce they had to be imported from the Dalmatian coast, and later from England. Central Italy had been for all extents and purposes deforested. Clive Ponting, in *Green History of the World*, describes the destruction of Tuscany's beach and elm forests, sacrificed for fuel and construction timber. In order to import food from distant sources, it became necessary to import other materials and slaves from distant sources, which in turn led to the need of more ships and labor to propel them, a vicious circle indeed. In fact, like any unsustainable system, Roman trade imploded.

By the 5th century it was no longer feasible to transport food across great distances, but neither was such long-distance agriculture necessary to feed Rome. From over a million the city's population had dropped to less than 50,000. With so few inhabitants, large tracts of urban land were abandoned, becoming what would later become known as the *disabitato* or uninhabited land. No longer needed to shelter the masses, these empty lots were either left to nature (and grazing animals) or planted with orchards, vineyards and garden vegetables. According to Richard Krautheimer, by the 15th century the city could be divided into *abitato*, the inhabited section mostly near the river, and the vast area of *disabitato*. A visitor to Rome in the Renaissance would find a cow pasture in the place of the old Roman Forum. The Imperial palaces on the Palatine Hill had crumbled and become overgrown with vineyards. Over half of the city was now uninhabited, used in most cases for orchards and gardens.

The presence of predominantly spontaneous green space from the Renaissance onwards is well-illustrated in the city plan exquisitely surveyed and drawn by GiovanBattista Nolli. In the heart of the ancient city, where the Roman Forum once stood, Nolli writes *Campo Vaccino*, or field of cows, and along the Via Sacra where the triumphal processions once marched he draws a simple line of trees. Everywhere on this map the words *vigna* (vineyard), *villa* and *orte* (garden) paint a picture of a surprisingly green city. Jim Tice of the University of Oregon writes "Nolli's rendering seems to prove that the urban center had a vital and complementary hinterland that not only served as a retreat for its wealthy families and ecclesiastics but one that presumably served as its bread basket."<sup>6</sup> The walls of Rome no longer separated urban from extra-urban but allowed for both urban fabric and productive green space to coexistence within their perimeter.

It might be said that the city was healthier than it had ever been. According to Charles Waldheim, in the *disabitato* we can find “agrarian models for contemporary urbanism.<sup>7</sup>” More and more, architects today are turning to landscape as a laboratory for sustainable cities and Italy provides rich precedents.

In the medieval city of Siena, in the heart of Tuscany, a similar situation to 18th century Rome is strikingly evident, perhaps more so because of the smaller scale of the city and its limited development in more recent times. Looking out from the *loggia*, the great covered terrace, of the *Palazzo Pubblico*, you note the red brick walls of the city that sweep out across the rolling hills, dividing verdant farmland from (more) verdant farmland. In the early 14th century Siena was on a steep growth curve, battling neighboring Florence for status as Tuscan stronghold. Construction began on its massive cathedral enlargement and new city walls were made ready to embrace an expanding population. Then in 1348 the plague hit. Siena lost 30-50 percent of its population and never rebounded. The church was left unfinished as it still stands today and the city would never again grow to reach its new walls.

One of the people who died in Siena that year was Ambrogio Lorenzetti, the painter who ten years earlier had frescoed the walls of the Council Room in the the *Palazzo Pubblico*. Entitled *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* the paintings depict the city in various guises, from virtuous to villainous. What they have in common, apart from the clustered palaces, markets, towers, churches, streets and walls in varying states of disrepair is the presence, beyond the walls, of agricultural land. For Lorenzetti a city cannot exist without the country; they are bound together in inevitable unbreakable whole, a fact which dominated cities of the past. While it is the rare city today that

has not broken this bond to its neighboring countryside, Siena, thanks to its abrupt downturn in the 14th century, has preserved it. Today, after viewing Lorenzetti's paintings, and then climbing to the loggia to view both heart of the city and its surrounding bucolic landscape, you can descend into the orchards and cultivated fields of the *Orti Pecci* a five minute walk away. Here you see residents harvest the crops which will grace their tables at dinnertime.

### **Land and its Limits**

The example of Siena — and really any medieval town — is of the establishment of city limits and a clear, black-and-white relationship between city and country. Most often this has meant creating a city where there was only land. Vitruvius describes the first steps in choosing a healthy site, laying out the city grid and defining its limits, the future walls, roads and gates. But the history of urbanization has often been the creation of land out of “nothing.” Venice as we know it was created in a lagoon on 117 islands. Amsterdam is still creating land on which to concentrate new expansion, such as the Borneo Sporenberg residential project or Zeeberg. Dubai's Palm Island is the most recent and spectacular example, and one of the least sustainable.

Land could also be fabricated where there was none by draining swamps, through land reclamation projects such as the Pontine marshes, where in the Renaissance the Medici launched an ambitious but eventually unsuccessful project to drain the swamps and claim as theirs any dry land thus created. In 1922 the Fascist government launched the “battle of the swamps” which would be fought principally by immigrants from the Veneto and Friuli regions, who were called upon for their experience with canal construction and management. The strategy was comprised of three phases: land reclamation, agricultural settlement and

malaria elimination. Today the Pontine Marshes are marshes no more, but the canals and much of the agricultural land created out of thin air (or rather murky water) is now threatened by the impact of urbanization. The population of the Pontine marshes has gone from under a thousand residents in the 1920s to over half a million today, and the provincial capital of Latina (founded from scratch as the fascist new town of Littoria in 1932) is second in size only to Rome in the Lazio region. To address the problem of environmental pollution, the Province of Latina recently signed an agreement with M.I.T.'s Project for Reclamation Excellence to design a master ecological plan for the most polluting part of this region. Landscape architect Alan Berger, who launched the project while at the American Academy in Rome, talks of the creation of an artificial nature. "We are trying to invent an ecosystem in the midst of an entirely engineered, polluted landscape,<sup>8</sup>" he says. Almost a century after the creation of new towns in former swamps, entropy has resulted in a vague blend of urban and rural, quite the opposite of the clear limits depicted in Lorenzetti's painting. Berger's team is working to engineer a new, artificial wetland to do the job of filtering pollutants that nature has always done.

Globally, we see simultaneous trends of deforestation to create agricultural land and, elsewhere, the conversion of agricultural lands to "urban" use. In Europe, 2 percent of agricultural land is lost to development every ten years. 60 percent of earth's land surface was once forested; now less than half of that remains, a condition that leads to massive erosion and drought. About 11 percent of the global landscape is now cropland. Deforestation is not a new phenomena, although its rapidity and scale has escalated aggressively.

In ancient Rome, the landscape was viewed as something to

dominate and then replicate with precision. Barbara A. Kellum writes of the first emperor Augustus as “well aware of the evocative nature of plants and trees...famed for choosing to decorate his own villas, not so much with handsome statues and pictures as with terraces and groves.” Evidence of Plato’s student Theophrastus shows that deforestation was already a problem in the Greek world, bringing a combination of drought and flooding. According to writings by Pliny the Elder, flooding of the Tiber was a problem in the first century CE, and his nephew Pliny the Younger describes the high-water table at the family villa near Rome. Although there is no conclusive evidence linking these hydrological problems to deforestation, we know that they are paralleled by a massive clearing of forests for agricultural land, lumber and fuel. And though deforestation declines along with population in the middle ages, by 1500 Europeans were again consuming one ton of wood/person/year. Only at the turn of the new millennium, as part of the UN millennium development goals, has the direction shifted.

Ironically, in Rome itself, in this very moment when the world is rediscovering the importance of biodiversity, of local food production, and of green zones as essential to human habitation, the green “capitol” of Italy’s green capital is disappearing like rain forests in Brazil. A more local, though more anachronistic, analogy that comes to mind is the destruction of antiquities in Renaissance Rome, usually carried out by exactly those humanist patrons who claimed a renewed enthusiasm for antiquities; in a similar manner the speculative growth currently consuming the *campagna romana* is often promoted as “green.” Today more and more streets are paved over and, worse, large tracts of former farmland become “urbanized” with residential enclaves claiming to provide the best of both worlds, access to city conveniences while immersed in a green context. I often question why

we use the term “urbanization” to refer to turning land which can produce food for a dense, adjacent population at minimum energy cost into toxic structures which may never be inhabited and, if they are, will require huge expenditures in energy to do so. Perhaps, instead, the maintenance of productive green land, gardens, orchards and grazing land, in close proximity to dense, pedestrian-friendly streets is far more urban than the construction of low-density, single-function buildings.



*The disabitato in Campo Vaccino as drawn by Piranesi, circa 1750*

## The Picturesque Landscape

At the same time land was turning into pure commodity, artists and writers began transforming its image into art, giving birth to a new aesthetic of pastoral beauty: the picturesque landscape. Painters like Poussin, Salvator Rosa and Claude Lorraine made images of fictional rural scenes which inspired landowners to make them real, but on purely visual terms. Any sense of the



multifaceted ecosystem was enslaved to the tyranny of the picture. True, in order to allow a natural looking landscape to take form some landscape designers such as the 18th century Englishman Capability Brown adopted a rudimentary understanding of ecology with native plants and controlled wetlands, but it was a far cry from sustainable land management.

Rome's countryside fuels this passion for the romantic landscape, in this case introducing another component: the ruin. The traveller on his or her grand tour has long described, sketched, painted and photographed scenes of a sublime landscape littered with the remains of ancient villas, tombs and other monuments to Rome's greatness. The famous portrait of "Goethe in the Roman Campagna" by Johann Tischbein shows the German writer in a classical pose, but the landscape beyond is the same you would see in Paul Bril's "Capriccio" a century earlier, or Thomas Cole's dramatic landscape a century later. The Roman countryside is timeless in its decay, and will inspire landscapes around the world but especially find its way into the romantic English gardens of William Kent, Humphry Repton and "Capability" Brown himself.

Similarly, this less formal English garden design will infect Europe, showing up in Rome's Villa Borghese which Scottish landscape painter Jacob More redesigned in the late 18th century. While walking through this great park, a tourist on her way to see Bernini statues and Caravaggio paintings at one of the world's most beautiful small house museums might stop a passerby to ask "where is the Villa Borghese?" To which the answer, uttered with amusement or exasperation, is "you are in it, Madam." In fact, the Italian term *villa* refers to the estate, not the buildings on it, a linguistic fact which sheds light on the Italian understanding of the connection between the built and the

green environments. Here, in the Piazza di Siena where horses are still trotted around regularly, or in the nearby valley of the deer where the animals are no longer hunted, we understand the inspiration of Frederick Law Olmsted in his design of New York's Central Park, and of Clarke and Rapuano, the architects who brought Roman landscape to New York during the New Deal.

Camillo Sitte, writing in 1901, two years before the death of Olmsted, called parks "the lungs of the city." That same year Ebenezer Howard wrote *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* and, in Italy, architect Rodolfo Lanciani would publish his famous archeological map of Rome, the Forma Urbis. Another architect, Giacomo Boni, was at the same time busy excavating what would become one of the world's densest archaeological parks, the Roman Forum. In London, observing the biological growth of the city, Patrick Geddes invented the science of ecological urbanism as we know it. Although it would be Tansley, in 1935, who first used the term Ecosystem, Geddes envisioned the end of the Paleotecnic age (the age of petroleum) to be replaced by a sustainable Neotecnic age. From Italy to England, the early 19th century saw a rethinking of cities and their landscapes, from archaeology to ecology.

Unlike the archaeologists "unburying" Rome, American environmentalists were until recently still fixated with "greening" everything, mistaking nature for wilderness. This may be because there was still wilderness worth saving when early environmentalists like Emerson and Thoreau wrote. As any scout knows, by living in nature, even with the best intentions, we risk damaging it; even Thoreau once famously burned down a hundred and fifty acres of forest by accident.

In Europe, where the modern environmental movement was

born when there was no undisturbed nature left, the focus is less on preserving and more on integrating human culture with the rest of the natural world. As a species we thrive on nature as the exception to the rule, not as our natural condition. As Andres Duany and other new urbanists are quick to point out, given a choice, people walk less in green areas than in urban ones—there’s simply less to attract you there. Instead, a balanced blend of biodiversity and social diversity, or nature and culture, result in a more desirable habitat for humans.

### **Europe’s Greenest Capital**

Between farmland, villas and archaeological areas Rome has more green space per capita than any other European capital: 222 square meters compared to Paris’ fourteen square meters. Some of this is private gardens, and there are a few large parks such as the Borghese and Doria Pamphilj “villas.” A large portion is farmland, although this is being urbanized at a rate of seven square meters a second, a number constantly on the rise (15,000 hectares of Agro Romano are threatened with destruction)<sup>9</sup>. Illegal building in protected archaeological areas takes place undisturbed. Even the parks become “urbanized,” invaded by concessions, commerce, “temporary” constructions in the name of recreation and profit and often removed effectively from the public domain<sup>10</sup>. But despite these incursions of the city into its green space, Rome remains a potentially model green city.

In large part this is thanks to the resilience of nature. Tenacious and pervasive, it sometimes just takes over, creeping up the walls of *palazzi* or dripping from the parapets of *terrazze*. In addition to visual beauty this seasonal vegetation on buildings can go a long way in protecting surfaces from direct sunlight which would otherwise gradually traverse masonry walls and

radiate heat to interior rooms. And since many creeping plants either drop their leaves or can be seriously pruned back in the winter, the walls tend to be exposed to the sun when the warmth is desired.

Rome's climate is a blessing for plant life. It rarely freezes and long dry spells, though they happen, rarely dry out the ground that has been dampened by long rainy winters and underground streams. Between the grey basalt cobblestone of most city streets, green is wont to grow when left un-trampled.

### **Urban Agriculture**

Beyond the psychological comfort and energy performance, Rome's green space continues to provide just what was discussed at the top of the chapter: food. Already containing more farmland than most cities within its boundaries, and boasting a high sense of local food tradition, Rome is well-positioned as a model for inner-city farming. This doesn't result automatically in a sustainable city, of course. According to Ian McHarg, "farming is another kind of mining, dissipating the substances of aeons of summers." But the re-emergence of urban agriculture, in diminution since the mid-twentieth century, is a sign of positive change.

Urban agriculture doesn't bring the country to the city but finds urban synergies that allow for production of the food needed close to the people who need it. In addition to drastically reducing the energy and emissions costs of food transport and ensuring greater freshness, the presence of green space in our cities has direct environmental, social, economic and psychological benefits.

When we talk about urban agriculture it is not about interspers-

ing acres of farmland between apartment buildings, a strategy which would would negate the density and intensity of cities. While there may be a place for large, shared plots in either central parks or in perimeter green belts, an even greater potential lies in the insertion of gardens throughout the city, on rooftops, terraces, in the leftover spaces between infrastructure and urban fabric, and even in the vertical shells of multistory buildings.

A truly green future for Rome will not be based on new “green” real-estate speculation or new “green” parking structures for new “green” automobiles. It must, as a bare minimum, demand, as does London, that any new development be transit oriented, but far better would be a moratorium on the sub-urban conversion of rural land. Then the process of urbanization in the true sense—smart, cradle-to-cradle, resource-based, pedestrian-oriented, bottom-up, zero-emissions, eternally-contemporary city-making, can carry on.

The long but now accelerating process of destruction of the Roman countryside dates back to the establishment of Roma Capitale in 1870 (Rome as capital of Italy, but capital also in the sense of “wealth in the form of money or other assets”), the result of a long battle fought in the name of “republican” ideals against clerical and noble special interests. In 1870, the royalist and capitalist interests prevailed and the breach in the walls of Rome opened on September 20 of that year let into the city a wave of speculative development which would deface and deform the fabric which had taken two millennia to evolve, and seen some of the most sophisticated urban designs, from the proto-modern metropolis of the Roman Empire to the dynamically dispersed city of the Baroque Era. In the place of either an idea or a design for the city, master plans were enacted and subsequently ignored, easily bypassed by variants and loop-

holes. Year after year, with increasing frequency under the city's former "progressive" left-wing mayor (progress = neo-liberal modernization of real estate speculation) and the city's former "conservative" mayor (conserving the interests of Rome's rich and powerful), large tracts of rural land guilty of falling within the city limits are condemned to a future of cement and automobiles.



*Pine forest in Rome's largest public park, Villa Doria Pamphili*

### **The Third Landscape**

French landscape architect Gilles Clément describes a "third landscape" of urban or rural sites left behind (*délaissé*): "transitional spaces, neglected land (*friches*), swamps, moors, peat bogs, but also roadsides, shores, railroad embankments, etc. ...inaccessible places, mountain summits, non-cultivable areas, deserts; institutional reserves: national parks, regional

parks, nature reserves.” On the fringes of Rome, remnants of discarded civilization have long provided ripe ground for grassroots, bottom-up urbanization, spontaneous reuse of unused “blight” areas by the city’s sub-proletariat, a truly Roman phenomenon recognized by Pasolini among others. As elsewhere in the developing world, the forces of speculation have been quick to suppress any real city-forming tendency in the name of urban renewal, but the territory, like nature, shows its resilience.

In Rome there is a third kind of green space, one particular to the eternal city, in which history persists in the form of archaeological ruins. From the Palatine Hill or the Roman Forum in the heart of the city, to the surviving swathe of undeveloped land in the *Campagna Romana*, the Park of the Appian Way, these spaces are neither nature nor artifice but a hybrid of the two. The presence of archaeology keeps building at bay and allows for green to thrive, while the controlled presence of non-invasive species transforms the dry, funereal archaeological landscape into a green-scape which enriches the surrounding city. Here amidst the ruins edible plants thrive: olives, grapes, cherries, citrus fruits, wild greens and berries, and Rome’s ever-present umbrella pines that produce abundant pine nuts.

Luigi Canina, appointed Commissioner of Antiquities for Rome in 1839, must have anticipated this synergy when he decreed that the Appian Way, the so-called *Regina Viarum*, be protected as a park dedicated to archaeology. Walking along the Appian Way, well within the city limits, it is still possible to find the road blocked by a herd of sheep. They are grazing in the archaeological park under the watch of their shepherd, keeping the grass trimmed around the ancient tombs as they have done for millennia. Their milk is used at the nearby farmhouse known as the Casale della Vaccareccia to produce fresh ricotta cheese that you

may well be served at your trattoria in the heart of the city a few miles away.

## Notes

1. Wes Jackson, *Consulting the Genius of the Place: An Ecological Approach to a New Agriculture* (Los Angeles: Counterpoint Books, 2010)
2. <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2011/09/29/ristoranti-di-lusso-appalti-ecco-il-business.html>. This is just the tip of the iceberg; at time of press the “MafiaCapitale” scandal is still unfolding. According to Marco Miccoli and Franco La Torre of the center-left Partito Democratico, “one out of five restaurants in Rome is controlled by organized crime.” [http://www.donellamattesini.it/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1677:roma-allarme-camorra-e-ndrangheta&catid=40:blog&Itemid=111](http://www.donellamattesini.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1677:roma-allarme-camorra-e-ndrangheta&catid=40:blog&Itemid=111)
3. Roberto Saviano, posted on 07/23/2012 at [http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/07/23/news/camorra\\_cibi-39529644/](http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/07/23/news/camorra_cibi-39529644/).
4. <http://www.parlafood.com>
5. Anthony Majanlahti, *The Families That Made Rome*. (London: Random House. 2006)
6. Jim Tice, "The Forgotten Landscape of Rome: The Disabitato" University of Oregon, Department of Architecture, University of Oregon, [?http://nolli.uoregon.edu/disabitato.html](http://nolli.uoregon.edu/disabitato.html) Posted: April 15, 2005,
7. Charles Waldheim, “Notes Toward a History of Agrarian Urbanism,” in *Places Journal*, Nov. 2010.
8. Alan Berger quoted in "Italy, a Redesign of Nature to Clean It" By



Elisabeth Rosenthal Published in New York Times: September 21, 2008

9. More than seven square meters of land per second have been consumed for more than fifty years. Growth was more intense during the 1990s when it reached ten square meters a second.  
<http://www.cinquequotidiano.it/territori/1-inchiesta/2014/01/24/comune-di-roma-consumo-suolo-inarrestabile-dal-1956-video/>
10. For another example of the privatization of public space, city authorities recently granted a noted American university exclusive access to a public park, Villa Sciarra, for a day, on the occasion of the granting of an honorable degree to Pink Floyd founder Roger Waters.