

# CIVIS

A European Civic University



## SCUOLA CADLOLO'S PARENTS ASSOCIATION: FROM INFORMALITY TO FORMALITY



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Primary School Alberto Cadlolo IC Virgilio of Rome is based in the Via della Rondinella, 2 in the I Municipality of Rome. The building was built in 1925 and has always been used as a public school. It is located right in the city centre of Rome, close to some of the most important touristic sites like Piazza Navona or the Saint Angelo's Castle.

The CIVIS group was invited to the school on 25. 05.2022 by the parents' association, which was constituted around four years ago. They started as an informal group of parents involved in after school activities, with a social and cultural aspect. For example small parties for the children in the summer or on holidays like Christmas and Halloween. As some bigger needs occurred, like an usable library, the association began to create a closer contact with the municipality and decided to transform into a formal organisation in order to get funds from the city. From this point on the activities got even more diverse. Business English classes for the parents, Volleyball, acting classes or yoga. The possibilities for activities are manifold and develop throughout the years.

The aim of this paper is to understand how their experience from going from an informal activity to a legal, formal and regulated one changed their opportunities and also their obstacles. Another important aspect we would like to underline is how their relationship developed within the urban space and how they are contributing to the regeneration of a neighbourhood, sometimes eclipsed by mass tourism.

## 1. LEGAL APPROACH

### 2.1. Definition of informality – formality and model

The formal-informal dichotomy has always been debated in the literature, which still does not provide any consistent definition. We can highlight two strands that are particularly relevant for the current policy dialogue. The first strand is the notion of informal as being outside the reach of different levels and mechanisms of official governance and formal as being reachable by these mechanisms, which underlies many official definitions of 'informal enterprises' as those that are not registered and are legally outside the tax net, many analytical investigations of enterprises and activities that operate illegally, in violation of formal state rules and regulations, even though informality and illegality are not considered to be equivalent in this notion. The second strand has to do with the nature of organisation. The informal is often identified with 'lacking structure' and the formal with 'structured'—the term 'unorganised sector' is often used. These two dimensions—the reach of official governance and the degree of structuring provide an initial entry to a framework for capturing the many definitions that abound in the literature. The distinction between the two dimensions is not redundant. The two dimensions do, however, interact.

According to the four “informal public law” models, Cadlolo School can be recognised in the “pact of collaboration” model (before becoming formal).

The pact of collaboration model is adopted by municipalities that have chosen to approve the regulation for the collaboration between municipalities and their citizens for managing common urban goods. Pacts of collaboration are those stipulated between city authorities and citizens, or citizens groups, who decide to use or regenerate urban spaces and assets for collective purposes. In this case, the initiative can start either from the administration itself or from its citizens, but the real novelty is the all-important negotiating tool that is called upon to regulate this kind of relationship. The nature of the agreement allows the parties to redefine in a creative and non-standardized manner, except for the simplest implementations, solutions that are commensurate with their concrete objectives and the specific factors at hand, making it possible to build – even in this instance – an “informal public law” determined by the subjects involved.

This model aims to define a more structural solution, which implies a general choice determined by the municipal regulation which confers on the pacts of collaboration the power to create self-managed forms for the general interest. It thus constitutes an authentic governing model. It should be noted that in this case, the municipalities’ regulation resolutions also implement another Constitutional principle, that of Article 117, Section 6, which leaves to local authorities the general discipline of their organisation and activities, as a full expression of autonomy.

## 2.2. Structure of the association

The association of parents started as an unrecognised and informal organisation in order to organise simple activities like school parties. As the requests got more complicated like building a library, the association needed to become formal in order to get funds and be able to reach some solutions to these demands. For this purpose, the association made a collaboration agreement with the Istituto Comprensivo Virgilio and the Municipality of Rome. By that, the association of parents became formal and turned into the parents’ committee of the A. Cadlolo primary school.

The parents’ committee of the primary school “alberto cadlolo” of Rome is the organ that allows parents to participate in the life of the school and is like an unrecognised association. The committee, set up for an efficient connection between families and the school, does not pursue any profit, has a democratic structure and is an independent body from any political organisations or movements. It is based on solidarity and participation, pursuing social, civil and cultural pursuits.

The committee’s purpose is to contribute to the life of the “Alberto Cadlolo” IC Primary School Virgil of Rome by proposals and initiatives, promoting the model of open school driven by similar educational interests, integrating with the social and urban fabric of the historic centre of Rome through fair and profitable collaboration with educational institutions and local reference bodies. It is driven by cultural values such as equality between individuals, the integration of different cultures and traditions, the protection of self-expression and thought.

The objects of the committee are to promote the exchange of information between parents, communication between representatives of class and relations with other collegial bodies and the school management; organise training initiatives, courses and activities; analyse inner problems and promote the participation of parents in the life of the school by formulating proposals; find the funds to finance specific activities; sign collaboration agreements with institutional and private subjects in order to develop projects and initiatives of various kinds.

The committee is made up by the following main bodies: the assembly of class representatives; the assembly of all parents; the executive board; the president, vice-president and the secretary. In order to participate, the exercise of parental authority attending the cadlolo primary school is required.

The assembly of class representatives is composed by all class representatives elected by parents and it elects the executive committee. It can be convened on initiative by the president or by the written request of at least 10 parents. The parents' assembly is made up of all Alberto Cadlolo Primary School parents; it is a moment of democratic participation which deals with the school issues and parents' requests. It can be convened at least once a year on the initiative of the president or a written request of at least 10 parents. The executive board is the decision-making body of the parents' committee, made up by 7 members, chosen among all the school parents. It decides projects to implement, the agreements to be stipulated, and elects the president. The executive board decides by majority (half plus one of the members). The members remain in office for three years and can be reconfirmed. The president is the legal representative of the committee, provides over the parents' assembly and the class representatives one. The vice president assists the president and replaces him during his absence in all his functions. The secretary deals with the drafting of the official communications of the committee and records the results of the meetings. The decision making is a result of the collaboration of the three parts of the agreement. Although, legally, the teachers and the director of the School are the ones who have the last word. To avoid conflicts, the committee has tried to build a friendly relationship with the teachers, based on trust. As the parents said, the teachers (and even the Municipio) always ask for their opinion and they make decisions all together.

### 2.3. Collaboration agreement

A collaboration agreement between the IC Virgilio (school), the parents committee of Cadlolo primary school and the municipality of Rome was established in order to encourage an enlarged, pluralist, responsible participation, free, inclusive and in solidarity with school and city life, and with the intention of implementing the principle of subsidiarity through the implementation of educational, social, cultural, intercultural, recreational, sporting and environmental actions to be carried out also in concert with the municipality and with the Scholastic Institute. The collaboration agreement has the aim to harmonise and strengthen the interventions aimed at expanding, integrating and strengthening the educational offer, creating initiatives consistent with their own purposes in favour of the children and adults, in the context of mutual areas of competence, sharing the same social and cultural values and purposes.

The agreement also wants to create a complex activities project, which includes hobbies, sports, arts, etc. which will take place in school hours and extra school hours the whole week, in order to reunite both parents and children but also the entire neighbourhood. In order to organise the activities, the committee can collaborate also with private associations.

The municipality is responsible for the definition for the general guidelines and the dissemination throughout the territory of the initiatives for the social and cultural promotion of citizenship, the monitoring and the control of the correct implementation of the agreement, and the maintenance of the school building within its competences. On the other hand, the school is responsible for the detention of training needs expressed by internal users to be carried out after school hours, (pupils, parents, teachers, staff), not foreseen by the committee, also in order to provide useful elements for the definition of general guidelines at the municipal level. The committee is responsible for the organisation of the school activities, both recreational and educational ones, the unused space care and cleaning, the communication between school, parents and municipality, the news and information spread.

### **3. INTERPRETATIVE APPROACH**

#### 3.1. Formality and informality

When we are talking about formality, we are talking about formal law. And in our case, we are talking about formal public law. Informality, on the other hand, can be legal or illegal. To understand informality, we can think about cities' communities. The Professor of Administrative Law, Fabio Giglioni, explains in great terms what informality is all about:

“Actually, cities can be also seen as a free association of human beings who share urban land and spaces for better value of their interests. From this perspective cities are able to exhibit a polity itself with the task of ruling the territory interests. Taking the clue from the Frug’s insights again, cities would be considered a «creature of community» too. That way allows the law to rediscover its social origin, its ability to be creative and innovative. Emphasising this second mark means dealing with the law of the cities in a new way. To push the emergence of this new institutional reality is the growing lack of state rationality to meet social demands, especially in the local scope. The well known phenomenon of urban sprawl is a clear demonstration: It is increasingly giving rise to inaccuracy, decay and abandonment of many urban goods because of the incapacity of the local authorities to manage this transformation in an ordered way with the classical planning tool. This forces cities to experience re-generation and re-use of urban goods, like buildings, parks, cultural goods, dismissed factories and so on, in a way local authorities and community pool together in order to make those goods resourceful again [...]” (Giglioni 2017).

Moreover, when an informal group is illegal, one of their main goals, most of the time, is to achieve legality.

### 3.2. Narrative and main aim

When we asked the association of parents about their narrative, they told us they don't have one. But as we took this under consideration, we realised that they actually do have one. They told us that the main reason they started the association was because they were feeling like there was not much connection between the Municipality and the citizens of Rome. That is why they wanted to create a bridge between the school and the Municipio so as to help the Municipio to be closer to the citizens and to take more effective decisions referring to the public law and more especially, the law referring to the School. Furthermore, they wanted to create a network between the citizens of the school's area for achieving a safer space for the kids, when all the parents will know each other and be able to take care of every child if that is necessary. That model they want to install is the model of the "Village within a big city" as they call it.

### 3.3 Umbrella model

In Italy parents' committees are mandatory but the associations are not. This parents' association is possible to be created but it will not be necessary formal. Let's not forget that the Cadlolo's School parents' association was not formal at the start, but through legal actions, it ended up to be. The parents told us that the creation of the association in their school was something very innovative for Rome. Several associations have been created in other cities of Italy, but in Rome none. The Cadlolo School aims to spread this parents' association /Village Model to the whole of Rome and help the city to create an "umbrella" which will be covering all of Rome with parents' associations. The goal is to help citizens to benefit from what a Village-like network can offer to their children and bring Rome's Municipio closer to the schools and the citizens. If this is done, then the municipality will be able to have better knowledge of the citizen's problems and help them more effectively so as to create a better city for everyone.

## 4. ECONOMIC APPROACH

In terms of how this project relates to circular economies within the city, or what economic impact it does have in general on the district, there are several things to address. On the one hand, the parents did acknowledge that the main aim of the association is social, not economical. That is, even though it is constituted like a support network, more a social helping, rather than an economic one. Also taking into account the economical capital of the parents of the school. This does not mean that there is a sharing of economic resources within the association, in an informal way because there is no economic fee for belonging to it, nor obligation to support economically whatever activity the association is organizing.

But one of the main economical impacts that the parents' association has in terms of the local economy is its relation with other associations, little enterprises, and the local busi-

ness. For instance, for activities within the school like theatre, or dance, they always pursue to collaborate with local associations like them. These informal decisions become very important, as they make sense to their narrative of “small village within a city”.

Another essential example to address this economical approach is how they have made local business (shops, restaurants, bars, etc) participants of important days for the school and the students like Halloween or Christmas. This shows that even though there might not be a real economical impact in terms of economical revenue, there is an impact on making businesses, normally focused on tourism (due to the area where they are located), more connected to the neighbourhood.

It also could be said that, though the impact tries to get out of the school, it tends to stay in the parents sphere. This is, because as they themselves admit, many of these local businesses are owned by parents or other relatives of the children.

## **5. ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH**

Now we want to look at the parents' association through an anthropological lens. There it is very important to look at the impact they have on the participants, the children, the neighbourhood and the other connected parts.

The association first got active four years ago for several reasons. The main one was the wish of the parents to give their children a possibility to experience several activities that were not necessarily connected to the school education. But there was also the wish that these activities were bringing a sense of community and belonging to the pupils of the school. Out of this vision the parents got active and realised some of their ideas. Another motivation for the after-school activities was the fact that many of the parents are both working and can not get to the school in time after the regular classes to fetch their child(ren). With the after-school activities the parents were sure to have their children in good hands, being educated in several areas, like for example sports and forming even closer connections with their schoolmates. Out of these different motivations there has developed a bigger narrative – to build a village within the metropole Rome, where the citizens know, trust, and support each other.

Now we want to look at the impact the vision and mission of the association has on the participants of all levels, meaning, the children themselves, the school, the parents, and the neighbourhood of the school. I want to start with the impact on the children, which is manifold. First of all they get access to different cultural activities like theatre or writing. This can be inspiring and an addition to the normal curriculum they have at the school. Through this they can form different hobbies and interests which might get important in their future, which can be underlined through the work of Bourdieu - *Distinction: A social critique of the Judgement of taste* (see Bourdieu 1984). There he explains the 3 different capitals a person can achieve and how they are connected to a certain habitus. This habit and especially the social and cultural capital can evolve and gain more aspects through



the activities after school. Besides this variety of education the children get an access to, they are also able to experience this with their peers from school. They can form more intense connections and even friendships through this. This can happen not only within their class but with any student of the school since the activities are not connected to the classes they have at school. This leads to a more intense feeling of belonging and connection through the whole school. The pupils are also able to form relationships with older or younger children which helps them in many ways in their social development (see Eva Wanghofer, 2014). Another aspect that has an impact is the fact that the participants of the association can work as a role model for the kids. They see that their parents are active in supporting the association and working on the sense of community in their neighbourhood. This work can influence the way the children look at volunteer work and also activism. One of the participants also underlined that this experience, which she could have herself, had a huge impact on her and her activism. This perspective can also be underlined by the paper of Mustillo et. al. (see Mustillo et. al. 2004).

The school itself also can see an impact of the work done by the association. First of all the school can profit by the changes and improvements, done with the money and time the association has put into the school. Due to this it was already possible to build a library which is of good use in a school. But there are also other plans; Most importantly to renovate the building of the school in cooperation with the association and the municipality. We can see here that the connection between the school, municipality and association is quite intense, especially when it comes to important decisions for the school. This means that they have a tight network in which they work closely together. The decision making of important matters within the association, that involve the school and municipality is also part of this network. Because of this, the participants of the parents' association are constantly in contact and in conversation with the teachers and the officials at the municipality. In the end they have to come to a decision that suits every stakeholder, but the teachers have the last word in this. One can say that the school only has a positive impact from the work of the association. The rooms that are used by the association and the other projects are not used in the afternoon anyways and the participating projects are responsible for cleaning. Also the association is working on improving the school in many ways like the building of a library or renovating the building. For this the school gets money from the municipality and gets a huge support of the parents regarding the planning of the projects. On the other hand the teachers are involved in the decision making and have even the last word here.

It is also important to look at the impact this experience has on the parents that are involved in the association and the activities the association is producing. Throughout the intense work with the other parents and the trust in looking after their children a connection between the parents could evolve. The value of this was pointed out by one of the parents presenting the work of the association. The reason for this is the fact that the social reality of adults changed after becoming parents. Some of the friendships and close social connections they might have had changed or even disappeared after having children. This is due to the fact of different realities which are connected to priorities in life and the amount of time available for others. Within the association many parents

shared this experience and could form new connections and friendships within similar realities. So it not only gave a sense of belonging and connection within their neighbourhood to the pupils of the school but also to the parents of the children.

This leads us to the impact that the association has on the whole neighbourhood of the school. We already analysed that through this experience the pupils but also the parents were able to form friendships and social connections within the neighbourhood. But also closer connections towards the owners of the shops and restaurants in the surrounding of the school could be formed. The same can be said regarding the church and the people working there. These connections lead to a trusting behaviour that creates a sense of security within the neighbourhood. Due to this the vision of the village within the city can be supported and the children can play in the streets of the centre of Rome with people looking after them and their security. Also the vision of support and help when needed in the community is possible through this.

As already looked at in the economic part the group of parents of this school had a certain background especially regarding their expertise gained in their field of work. Out of this social resource the school has a wide range of activities that they can offer to the pupils but as they said, also to the citizens of the neighbourhood. But not only these people have access to diverse and relatively cheap experiences. Since the war in the Ukraine started there is an offer especially for some of the refugees of this conflict given to adults and children. The association made it possible to host a class just for Ukraine pupils with an Ukrainian teacher in the afternoon meanwhile the week. But also sport activities in which the children can participate along with the Italian pupils. Meanwhile the children have activities at the school, there are Italian classes offered to the mothers. Since all of them, children and their parents have experienced things that might lead to a trauma, the association is also working on a project to provide psychological support for all of them. This shows us that the participants of this association might be in a privileged position but that they try to open the experience as much as possible in this framework and give something back, not only to their own children but also civilians of the neighbourhood and some refugees in need. But it also has to be looked at the fact that the Italian classes for the refugees started as people from Ukraine fed to Italy and not for refugees from countries like Afghanistan or Syria. That does not mean that the association might not expand this very valuable experience towards refugees from other countries.

A big fear of the representatives of the association was connected to the fact that their work is linked to the school and their children being pupils of the school, therefore the time of participation is limited. A big issue is who might take on the huge legal responsibility that the presidency of the association brings with it after the children, or the parents who are the main actors in the association, leave for another school. If no one of the new parents is offering to take on the responsibility the project might collapse or change its character. Here we can see an obstacle to the change from an informal organisation to a formal one. There are clear legal responsibilities that have to be fulfilled. And since this is an association all this lies on one person who has to sign the contact with the municipality.

## 6. CONCLUSION

We now had a look from four different perspectives on the parents association and the legal, interpretative, economic and anthropological views gave us very interesting insights on the work the association is doing and which services and also connections they are producing. We realised that through this work done by the parents, the school changed its character. It is no longer just a school, used in the hours in the morning and midday but it became a sort of community centre for the whole neighbourhood and was filled with life also in the afternoon and evening hours. Because of this the vision of a village within a city is already alive in many ways. Especially regarding the connections and relationships the citizens of this departure in Rome have and the resulting trust and sense of security that goes along with this. The aim to spread this model also to other parts of Rome is quite eager, but the analysis we just did shows that it could provide many important and good experiences, not only to the children, but also to the parents and the whole neighbourhood. One of the obstacles this model could help overcome is the lacking presence of the municipality regarding social needs in the district. But an issue that could rise with the model is the support of creating bubbles within the city, since the exchange with the other districts could even be lower through this model. This aspect could lead to intensification of problems that seem to rise in many European cities, but with the knowledge of this possible problem one can try to find solutions to produce all the positive outcomes on the one hand and on the other hand try to stop the creation of bubbles in the city. Another important aspect is that the model can't be copied completely, but it has to be adapted to the different needs within the different districts of Rome. Many of them have different solutions to the same problems, for example looking after the children in the afternoon. This has to be taken into consideration when thinking about copying the model and vision of Cadlolo School. For making this project real in all of Rome, the municipalities of the different districts should also play an important role, since the connection between the association and the municipality is quite close and the funding they provide play an important role in realising many of the projects.

Since our question in the beginning was what the change from a formal to an informal association brought with itself, we want to conclude our report with our findings regarding the chances and obstacles that occurred through this change.

Legally and politically, the transformation from informality to formality has brought new relationships between the school, the parents' association, and the school, which also brought to new possibilities and chances for Cadlolo school to renovate itself in terms of activities, structure, organisation and the neighbourhood involvement.

In economic terms, the collaboration with the municipality made the access to grants, funds, and resources easier to provide to children and family. But also to actually make the project a reality within the school, so as to have money to reform some rooms, the

library or other economical needs that they had. Being just an informal group, they would not have access to those economical resources.

As already mentioned in the anthropological part, the association has brought a lot of value to the participants and the whole neighbourhood. The change from informal to formal also brought an even closer relationship to the employees of the municipality, which might have made things easier in some regards for the parents' association. But there is a great fear that no one is willing to take over the amount of legal responsibilities that the president of the association has to take on. This is an obstacle that occurred with the change, because of the contract the association had to make with the municipality. Since only one person can be legally responsible for the association this is a huge decision to make for one of the parents, and there might be no one who wants to follow the first president. This might look different, if the association would still be informal.

In conclusion one can see that by going from informal to formal, the chances for the association are manifold. Regarding the most legal, political and economic aspects the change had a positive outcome. The only big obstacle that occurred with the change is the huge amount of legal responsibility that rests on one person, which might even put the whole project in danger. It would be interesting to follow the future developments of the association and to keep in touch about possible solutions regarding this problem. Especially because they want to act as a model that could be copied for the whole of Rome.

## **7. LITERATURE:**

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**Mustillo, S., Wilson, J. and Lynch, S. M.** 2004: Legacy Volunteering: A Test of Two Theories of Intergenerational Transmission. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 66 (2): 530-541.

**Wanghofer, Eva** 2014: *Kinder brauchen Kinder. Lern- und Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten in altersgemischten Gruppen*. Diss. Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, Institut für Erziehungs- und Bildungswissenschaft. Graz.

## 8. ATTACHMENTS:

Pictures of the visit at the School

