SpinTime, Scomodo and La Redazione: an informal reality that became fundamental for people in need and young people

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Introduction to the paper

In this paper we will consider the editorial place of the youth magazine Scomodo, La Redazione, and the urban regeneration site Spin Time Labs in the context of urban regeneration and informality. The focus point will be the experience of young people in an informal social project. We will begin by examining the concept of informality through the lenses of law and anthropology and by giving some general information about Scomodo, La Redazione and Spin Time Labs. Then we will consider the projects through legal, political, economical and community aspects. Afterwards we will shortly compare it with other informal projects in Rome and in Tübingen, Germany, in order to show an outsider perspective. At the end, we will present a Swot analysis and discuss shortly the future prospects of Scomodo. Our finding will be mostly based on our visit in Spin Time Labs on May 24, 2022 and on the information presented by the hosts and their website.

Informality from the perspectives of law and anthropology

Informality as a concept exists in different disciplines stretching from social sciences to economics, law and geography. According to Polese, informality also refers to an activity carried out by individuals that in some way bypasses the state or higher regulating authority. Informal activities may exist beyond or in spite of the state, are deliberately hidden and happen in the space "between two formal rules". Through their agency citizens can thus contribute to the governance of the state through uncoordinated acts of disobedience.¹ Many organizations and projects work at grassroot level in a gray zone in a not necessarily legal way. Sometimes informality is forced, but unlike earlier considered, it can also be a choice. It brings back the cultural, ecological and social needs of the citizens.² Informality brings a lot of risks, such as the retreat of the administration from their social tasks, intersectional discrimination by the municipality, and the risk of inequality between citizens.³

In the beginning informality was used to describe the forced "shadow economies" by marginalized groups, like immigrants, or citizens of developing countries.4 Western sciences have only recently started focusing to study informality in developed countries as well. As the discipline of law considers the principles of legality, formality and transparency very important, it has traditionally seen informal institutions as illegal and only focuses on formal institutions. However, public authorities are not always concerned with informal experiences,

Polese, Abel (2021): What is informality? (mapping) "the art of bypassing the state" in Eurasian spaces – and beyond. In Eurasian Geography and Economics. p. 3.

² Polit, Karin (06.04.2022): Transforming urban spaces into green cities: anthropological perspectives on Germany and India [PowerPoint presentation]. *Urban regeneration through informality*.

³ Giglioni, Fabio (01.04.2022): The Challenges of Informality for Law in Urban Regeneration [PowerPoint presentation]. *Urban regeneration*

through informality.

⁴ Polit (06.04.2022)

for example, if they benefit the community with social services. This is why according to Giglioni, law should focus on informal experiences as well.⁵

What is Scomodo?

Scomodo is the biggest Under25 editorial staff in Italy, it was born in Rome in 2016 from the idea of two high school students who wanted to create not only an editorial project but a concrete cultural movement. This community grew up every year and expanded in a national dimension. In the last years it landed also in Milan, Turin and Naples so it covers both the North, the Center and the South of Italy. Today there are 1000 students involved, 315 thousand copies printed (almost 280 thousand of them were distributed for free).

The underlying principle of this project is to provide alternative information, based on a slow and critical approach. The newspaper is printed monthly and it's composed of three different sections: actuality, culture and "The Plus" that changes every time. Furthermore, at the end of every year it's created **Presente**, the only publication for a fee, which focuses on the young generation and tries to fight the prejudice that the young generation is always called "The future" instead of "The present".

In their website they describe themselves like this

our vision: a society in which children have an incisive role in shaping the reality in which they live

our values: courage, democracy, participation, sustainability, curiosity, equal opportunities, social justice and complete political and economic independence.⁶

The health emergency situation due to Covid19 did not stop Scomodo. In summer 2020 it opened in Rome **La Redazione**, a multifunctional space open to the city within the **Spin Time Labs** urban regeneration site. About 1300 volunteers took part in the construction of the space in two years.

History of the building

The occupation of the building which is located in the center of Rome, near the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, began on October 12, 2013, as a demonstration conducted by the movement for housing rights *Action*. This building was the national headquarters of the social security for civil servants, the INPDAP, which was then disposed of and absorbed by the INPS. As our hosts from Scomodo explained, during the economic crisis the Italian state put several buildings up for sale, including this one, to monetize a profit.

Despite being sold to a large company, the building continued to be unused so Action decided to appropriate it with an illegal occupation to steal it from the sole purpose of profit and return it to the needs of the community. In this way 11 thousand square meters were made available for the housing emergency: from the first to the eighth floor, in fact, there are

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⁵ Giglioni (01.04.2022)

⁶ https://www.leggiscomodo.org/chi-siamo/

170 families of different nationalities. The other five thousand square meters are designed for cultural, social and educational events.

From that moment on, relations with institutions have never been simple, with a succession of political parties or public figures who defended or criticized this initiative. Among the many it is interesting to remember the moment in which after numerous eviction threats the entire building was deprived of electricity: the intervention of Father Konrad Krajewski, almsgiver of Pope Francis, was decisive for the return of light. Since that day in 2019, the Vatican has been supporting the bill costs for the community that lives within Spin Time Labs.

Why they are an example of informality

La Redazione is an occupied multifunctional center built and managed by a group of young people. This social practice takes place outside of the officially sanctioned channels and institutions, so it is in the scope of informality and indeed illegality. Since the social experience is based in an unauthorized occupation and involves the violation of certain laws and regulations (among them are the property rights of the owner), informality and illegality tend to overlap. Though informal and illegal, social experiences in general and especially La Redazione and its actors have a complex connection with the law and the institutions⁷, although the main reaction they face from the local public authorities is repression. Such social experiments attempt to address social demands, which the state and the administration failed to address especially in a local scope, and that is why they are mainly acceptable from the local community and also sometimes are tolerated from the state.

The risk and the potential of being an informal place and the openness of the experience

The Scomodo project needed a place to house its activities but also to build a community. The establishment of this political and cultural space in an occupied building emerged as a necessary response to the housing crisis but also as a political choice.

First of all, they wanted to demonstrate that a public building which was supposed to be used for societal reasons, was sold for profit and afterwards was abandoned and left to decay. So, the basic idea was to reactivate the use of the abandoned urban good with the aim to bring it back to the society, to revive the social meaning of a public asset, to build a community for the young generation and to host political, social and cultural events that can promote the political engagement of the society. Through its activities and research, Scomodo intends to propose a way of achieving the social meaning of the public property. The public property is supposed to house the real needs of the society and the absolute abandonment of an urban good comes in controversy with this state responsibility.

⁷ Giglioni, Fabio (2017): Order Without Law in the Experience of Italian Cities. In *Italian Journal of Public Law*, 9(2). Available online: https://iris.uniroma1.it/handle/11573/1067177

The decision to house the project in an occupied building has resulted in having conflicts with the local authorities and facing the continual risk of being evicted. This fact creates an uncertainty that may act as an obstacle to the normal operation of the center. These types of social experiences where illegality and informality overlap and where there is no recognition from the institutions are more likely either to end soon or to follow the path of searching for some kind of formal recognition that leads to a more appropriate legal solution⁸.

Although his social experience rises outside the traditional circuits of legality, we can see that it has developed a complex relationship with the local public authorities. Firstly, Scomodo people came to the realization that, to make a greater social impact, the social experience should open to the institutions, to challenge them but also to discuss with them and make proposals.

The complexity of the relationship with the institutions can be seen for example from the fact that on the one hand they experience the continual risk of being evicted by the local authorities, but on the other hand the municipality have called once the participants of Scomodo to express themselves on a serious issue regarding local governance. It is clear that their opinion is taken seriously by the municipality. We could say that in this case Illegality is tolerated and can lead to the creation of informal relationships of coexistence developed on a political level⁹. What can play a significant role in the continuation of this status of coexistence are the provision of social services from the associations that are active in Spin Time Labs and the ideological support from the neighborhood and from public figures.

However, the illegal status of the experience creates great uncertainty and challenges the survival of the project. It is also important for Scomodo to participate in calls for finance. These are mainly the reasons why Scomodo people aim the legalization of the experience by negotiating with the administration a model that can be implemented in their own case, but also in other cases. They pursue a model where the building will belong to the public administration or the *Action* or to both of them, but the collective enjoyment of the asset will be ensured. The owner should take care of the governance of the building, the services and the maintenance and the social events. The realization of such a model, would bring to the social experience a full legal recognition and would give the opportunity to Scomodo and Redazione to continue with their activities while maintaining the characteristics they have now (democratic function through assemblies, open political and cultural events, social services).

Political implications and the relation with the administration

The speakers underlined many times how being inside La Redazione or inside SpinTime Labs is a political gesture and not a light one; it is a gesture that in their opinion is linked to a certain way of interpreting what should be a public, open and social space. In Italy this idea is sustained by the left, the more conservative parties condemn, most of the time, this way of interpreting an unused space.

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⁸ Giglioni 2017

⁹ Giglioni 2017

In Rome the administration changed at the end of 2021 from the populist party "Movimento 5 Stelle" (which cannot be defined in the classical division Left-Right) to a more progressive and leftist administration, the mayor is from the main leftist party which is called "Partito Democratico". We asked the speakers what their relationship with the administrations and their answer did not surprise us. The populist administration was unmovable and not very prone to dialogue, they were afraid, maybe, to take a step which could be considered too wide. The new administration is more prone to have a dialogue but from the speakers' perspective they don't have enough ideas on how to cope with a situation like that. Scomodo is trying to put more pressure, they are not trying to seek for direct financing but actually they are participating to European calls to gain funds for their activity, this could be a way to gain a more supranational recognition by the institutions which, in my opinion, could lead to more pressure on the administration who may be forced to tackle this situation in a more concrete way.

Their political involvement has also been shown thanks to their initiatives which shifted from a more anarchic view to a more social and leftist view. "Notti Scomode" of course takes the occupation on a whole other level and the declared objective of those initiatives was to gain economic and social support but in my opinion i'd say that one of the main objectives was to create discomfort maybe to the administration and to the ordinary life of the people who live in Rome. While now their political involvement led them to host more debates and seminars on various social and civic topics which could really leave a more long-lasting impact on the young people that go there. We could conclude by saying that through the social work of La Redazione they maybe are trying to collaborate to the formation of a more critical generation while at the same time leaving a progressive and leftist trace on them.

To what could lead this pressure? They declared actually they are looking for a dedicated legislation which could turn La Redazione (and SpinTime Labs) into an archetype which could be used as an example for future situations alike.

A small circular economy

In the Spin Time building, the ideal of the circular economy is in force and an attempt is being made to build a self-sustainable community. In particular, the building hosts various activities aimed at this purpose: the headquarters of XNovo, an association of young people that promotes sustainable fashion, against the waste, through the recycling and transformation of old clothes thanks to the intervention of street artists and students of fashion and visual arts academies. There is also a carpentry that recycles waste materials which supported the construction of the Scomodo editorial office in the garage of the building.

The dialogue and collaboration of the Scomodo children with the activities present at Spin Time Labs gives life to truly interesting events for the young people of the city. An example are the appointments of the *Circular Underground Market* organized by XNovo and hosted by La Redazione once a month: each visitor can bring the clothes he or she no longer uses and exchange them for other products that interest him, this takes place through a non-economic exchange but linked to the ancient tradition of bartering. Once you bring your clothes to the Xnovo counter the guys give you a number of buttons based on the value of the product, these buttons then allow you to buy as many clothes based on their estimate. It

is very interesting how a button, an element that tends to unstitch from the shirts and then be abandoned, becomes an instrument of barter and replaces the normal exchange currency to convey the idea of a circular and sustainable economy.

How do they gain economic support?

Also the newspaper *Scomodo* has shown remarkable growth in this direction: starting from simpler crowdfunding strategies, it currently has a real self-sustainable structure from an economic point of view. Since the first years of activity these guys began organizing parties in different abandoned places of Rome in order to draw the attention of the public authorities on their potential. *Scomodo Nights* were an opportunity to promote the newborn newspaper and convey the ideal of a new youth participation within the city and in the same time a tool to raise funds. In the journal's website they're defined as

white nights of culture to finance the newspaper and expand its number of readers. Set up in the abandoned places of Rome, they manage to put thousands of girls and boys in relationship in usually inaccessible or forgotten places which, thanks to an intense redevelopment work, return to have - at least for one night - a social and cultural function.¹⁰

One of the main income for the editorial staff is certainly the number of subscriptions to the newspaper.

"Slow and in-depth information every month to your home"11

Each subscriber receives three copies directly at their home, so as to be able to support Scomodo not only economically but also through a distribution between friends and relatives. However, to remain consistent with its mission of involving the youth population, the newspaper is also distributed free of charge in various points throughout Italy, whose interactive map is present on the site, thanks to the activity of hundreds of volunteers and the collaboration of newsstands and independent libraries creating a real network with them.

After this first period of communication and fundraising, the editors of the newspaper understood the importance of more authoritative supports: *Scomodo* thus opened up to dialogue and collaboration with various national and international non-profit organizations, like Banca Etica, Greenpeace e Treccani and carried out targeted editorial publications with prominent figures of the contemporary culture. Today they can boast the involvement of about 300 renowned artists in their publications and cultural festivals in which they have participated in Italy and beyond (for example in Cannes, Zurich, Krakow, London, Madrid and Warsaw).

The building of a strong local community

"La Redazione is a cultural center of permanent innovation and a resource for the community, a response to building abandonment and an opportunity for rebirth for the city." 12

¹⁰ https://www.leggiscomodo.org/chi-siamo/

¹¹ https://www.leggiscomodo.org/abbonati/

¹² https://www.laredazione.org/#5

The space of La Redazione is open from morning to evening, from Monday to Saturday (except for special Sunday events). The first visit is open to all, from the second time you have to register with an annual card costing 5 euros to use the services and support the community that keeps it standing. Inside, the visitors can find: a soundproofed study room with Wi-Fi and heating, a cafeteria and a common area where they can share books, DVDs, board games and much more. It is a real youth gathering center, which after the pandemic made it possible to gradually overcome distance to return to dialogue and contact with each other. The idea is to share space but also habits: every day a social lunch is organized and they try to spend moments of conviviality together to alternate them with moments of study or more critical reflection.

With this in mind, conferences or appointments with specific themes are organized weekly: for example, every week there is a screening of short films and independent films, followed by a debate which is often attended by guests from the sector. In the last two years, the issues addressed have been closely linked to the current socio-political debate: gender identity and sexual orientation with the related legal problems and public opinion positions; the risks of climate change, with a focus on what we individuals can do in our own small way to contribute to the protection of our planet; the difficulties and shortcomings of the administration in the management of migratory flows and the obstacles that immigrants must face in order to be received in a dignified and regulatory way.

Therefore the same issues that we find in the *Scomodo* newspaper are then reported in *La Redazione* to allow the debate to come out of the sheets of paper and feed a critical and conscious discussion, creating opportunities for comparison and personal growth. To facilitate participation and entice young people to feel welcome, an assembly is held every week open to all and on the various social pages of the space their presence is encouraged and new ideas are constantly requested to broaden the perspective and make their own contribution.

The only space that is not open to everyone but only to the editors of the newspaper is an editorial office, to allow them to work and write with more concentration. But even here the total openness to collaboration is reaffirmed and *Scomodo* continually invites young people to try their hand at writing articles, even just to try, so as to expand their team and enrich themselves with multiple views.

Visiting Scomodo and SpinTimeLabs

The information and the analysis provided in this paper are based on our conversation with some of the members of the Scomodo project and the observations we made during our meeting. The meeting took place at the Redazione, a cultural place of permanent innovation, located at the garage of the occupied palace Spin Time Labs. Spin Time Labs, located in a multicultural neighborhood of the city, is a huge building, previously abandoned and now regenerated thanks to the engagement of informal groups.

As we walked in the Redazione, we could see a spacious center hosting numerous activities. The walls were full of decoration with posters and there were table footballs and sofas where people could hang out; there were a big bookcase, a café, tables for studying or working and

a set of benches for people to sit and participate in political conferences and cultural events. During the presentation we could see a lot of young people passing by, studying or hanging out and socializing.

La Redazione has really managed to be an open place, a meeting point for the young generation that always tries to find new ways of getting involved and managing the different challenges of the present. In the Redazione, Scomodo editorial project is trying to highlight several social and political problems and give voice to the young generation.

Impact for the community

La Redazione and Scomodo play an important part in the life of the local community. Especially for young people it offers a safe place to spend free time, to make friends and to be creative. Most of them live in the building or go to the nearby school. The space and functionality thus resemble an unofficial youth center with its small café, books, second-hand coaches and table football. The place radiates comfortability, self-made and informality which all appeal to young people looking for their own special space. As already mentioned, La Redazione also organizes various events based on the interests and needs of the visitors. For example, during the week of our visit a sex education lecture took place in order to give young people an access to reliable health information in a comfortable atmosphere. Furthermore, La Redazione as a space was built by the young people themselves in two summers. The project formed a bond of solidarity between them while constructing together a common space of their own. Even further, taking part in the activities forms a political act of taking space.

Spin Time Labs as a building offers various social services ranging from cheap rooms and an upcycling workshop to co-working spaces, a small music studio and collective theatres. 360 people from 28 nationalities live in the upper-level floors together. Over 25 informal groups from art and culture to small enterprises occupy the building. This might be one reason why the neighborhood supports the social projects in the illegally occupied house. The inhabitants also strengthened the ties to the neighbors by inviting them over to visit the house.

However, informality brings with itself risks for the project and the community. Different projects and movements in the house do not necessarily share the same interests and views about the organization or about the future. Especially the perspectives of different generations and nationalities create tension in the decision-making despite the weekly assemblies. The inhabitants of the house fought against the discrimination between themselves by organizing a photo exhibition of the people in the house. Moreover, insecurity about the future is a challenge that continues to haunt the visitors as well as the volunteer organizers. Although circumstances might feel steady for some time, there is always the chance of the threat of an eviction. This creates stress for the users who have built the community together to be shared. This insecurity has been fought by concentrating on positive and practical common projects, such as organizing photo workshops for the children, to keep up the spirits and to strengthen the solidarity between the inhabitants.

Giglioni's Model

I think that The Scomodo experience is actually in between models and it really depends on the perspective you adopt, of course they want to be recognized, so, they want to fit inside the recognition model, they want that the administration takes a formal and defined position on the experience, they want to be regulated and be able to move inside a more formal and legal framework. At the same time in my opinion the current administration, even if SpinTime (consequently also Scomodo) is in the eviction list, is more prone to toleration rather than the recognition in order to build a more formal experience. They may be afraid to evict them because it could lead to more homeless people or the lack of a certain social asset (La Redazione) which became an important informal center for young people.

Comparison with Casapound

Now we would like to make a short comparison between SpinTime occupation and Casapound occupation. First, let's introduce Casapound, it's an Italian neo-fascist movement which has its legal head office in an occupied place in the center of Rome (Via Napoleone III n°8). This place was occupied back in 2003 by some right-wing activists and during the years the offices, that once were offices of the Ministry of education, have been transformed in houses which have been restructured by the people who live there 13, they do not pay any rent, only the expenses linked to the maintenance of the "condominium". In 2018 lived there 18 families, from parents with small children to retired people, mostly, if not completely Italian 14, from this we can definitely underline two aspects that make these experiences different: first we can say that in the SpinTime building there are living mostly immigrants while, due also to the nature of the far right movement which is more linked to the concept of nationalism, the Casapound building hosts mostly Italian people, the second difference I can highlight is of course the different purposes that they have, while SpinTime transformed a whole floor into a place where is possible to gather and do social and cultural activities Casapound is only focused on giving a place to live to Italians in need.

Talking about the relationship with the administration we can talk on how in April 2022 the building occupied by Casapound has been put in the eviction list¹⁵. No concrete actions had been made yet by the leftist administration, but we need to underline that in 2019 the populist (Movimento 5 Stelle) administration removed the relief inscription "Casapound" from the Façade of the building. Right before the second ballot the new Mayor R. Gualtieri declared that he wanted to proceed right away with the eviction of the Casapound Building¹⁶. Another difference can be spotted also because the leftist administration seems prone to have a dialogue with the representatives of SpinTime while with Casapound it seems different, they only want to proceed with the eviction. This could be linked to the values that Casapound is trying to perpetuate, which are not the same of the leftist administration while maybe Spintime and Scomodo are seen more as opportunities to enrich the community of the municipality

¹³ https://www.ilpost.it/2020/06/04/casapound-occupazione/

¹⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G42UwVTkd1I&ab_channel=La7Attualit%C3%A0

https://www.adnkronos.com/casapound-sede-roma-inserita-in-piano-sgomberi_2cBH2bm0ds1HhvoX3wPLtf?refresh_ce

¹⁶ https://www.voutube.com/watch?v=wwl5en-d54Q&ab_channel=LaRepubblica

Tübingen and how it copes with occupations

The comparison between Tübingen and Rome gives interesting perspectives into the perception of occupied house movement. Tübingen has a long history of occupied and self-governed houses by students and workers. For example, the 50 years ago occupied Epplehaus has been growing into a semi-formal space for concerts, group meetings and as a youth center. Unlike in other cities the occupied buildings have been tolerated and even become part of the official student dorms or been bought off as a self-governed housing project, such as Schelling, which also provides a give-away shop for second-hand items and a Foodsharing station. Like Spin Time Labs, also these projects work on grassroot democratic level with regular assemblies.

In Tübingen not a few occupations occur as a protest against the contradiction of increasing rents and the high amount of empty private houses and apartments. As a university town this creates enormous problems for students looking for a cheap room. The legal situation does not support giving houses to those who would live there. However, the city has an interest to buy uninhabited private buildings and might support the aims to create living space for the residents. A recent occupation of the abandoned "Gartensia" in July 2019 intended to provide every homeless person a shelter. The swatters provided room for exchange through events and a small café. The city was also supportive of the new housing project and tried to act as a mediator, but the owners were still reluctant to sell the building with lower prices. During the pandemic and due to internal problems, most of the original occupants moved out and the house became the shelter of a few homeless people. They received several threats of eviction by the police and in January 2022 the water, gas and electricity supplies were turned down. Now the house stands empty again. Gartensia is an unlucky example of a house occupation, but it illustrates well the extraordinary situation in Tübingen, where the city as an authority might indirectly support the occupation of private buildings.

The future of Scomodo

As we hint while talking about the Giglioni's models, the future of experiences like La Redazione and SpinTime is very uncertain due to some aspects, both internal and both external. The main threat to La Redazione is surely eviction which could lead to the need to find a new space to hold the social seminars and meetings, but at the same time a new space where the young people that write for Scomodo could produce their articles; this could lead to a shortage of the finances of Scomodo since an important part of those will be addressed to the payment of a non-occupied place. The future could also be bright for them. We think that this administration, if the pressure that the people from Scomodo are trying to put on them works, could really create something good and positive for the community and the neighborhood.

In any case, it is clear to us that Scomodo and Redazione built a new and innovative model of experiencing the city. The holding of cultural and political events, the attempt to adopt circular economy strategies, the connection with neighborhood's everyday life are, for us,

¹⁷ Janßen, Ulrich (05.08.2021): "Übrigens": Ein Wohnprojekt mit hohen Ansprüchen. In *Schwäbisches Tagblatt*. Available online: https://www.tagblatt.de/Nachrichten/Ein-Wohnprojekt-mithohen-Ansprüchen-511497.html?StoryId=530413, last accessed on June 6, 2022.

Schwäbisches Tagblatt (04.01.2022): Gartensia soll bis Freitag geräumt werden. Available online: https://www.tagblatt.de/Nachrichten/Gartensia-soll-bis-Freitag-geraeumt-sein-530413.html, last accessed on June 6, 2022.

important examples of how people can come together, be active and creative and actually bring change to the way we live the cities.

Swot analisys

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
ACCESSIBILITY SUSTAINABLE MODEL DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT MULTICULTURAL AGGREGATION OF YOUNG GENERATION SOCIAL IMPACT FOR THE COMMUNITY	INEXPERIENCE LACK OF CREDIBILITY LIMITS OF INFORMAL EXPERIENCES LACK OF FUNDS DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, NO UNIC VIEW
OPPORTUNITIES FREEDOM OF ACTION AND CHOICE AUTONOMY GO REPLICABLE MODEL SUPPORT OF PUBLIC FIGURES NETWORK WITH HIGH SCHOOLS SUPPORT OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD	THREATS RISK OF BEING KICKED OUT ILLEGAL OCCUPATION INTERN CONFLICTS NO ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER ASSOCIATIONS