

“CONTESTED URBAN BODIES: THE PRODUCTION OF LIBERATED SPACES IN THE TOURIST CITY OF NAPLES” BY MARTINA LOCOROTONDO

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Contested Urban Bodies: The Production of Liberated Spaces in the Tourist City of Naples by Martina Locorotondo (2026) offers a rich, theoretically informed and empirically grounded contribution to contemporary debates in urban studies, critical geography, and tourism research. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Naples, the book interrogates the ways in which tourism-led urban transformation reshapes not only spaces and economies, but also bodies, subjectivities, and political practices. Locorotondo’s central concern lies in understanding how grassroots initiatives, particularly those organised around the occupation and collective management of abandoned public buildings, emerge as both a response to and a critique of the neoliberal reconfiguration of the city.

The book is situated within a growing body of literature on touristification, gentrification, and the right to the city (Cocola-Gant, 2018; Gravari-Barbas & Guinand, 2017, 2025; Mendes, 2018, 2022), yet it distinguishes itself through its sustained attention to embodiment and to the material practices through which urban space is produced and contested. Locorotondo conceptualises the city as a site where bodies (residents, activists, tourists, workers) are differentially valued, regulated, and mobilised. This embodied perspective allows her to move beyond abstract analyses of urban restructuring and to foreground the lived, sensorial, and affective dimensions of urban conflict. In doing so, the book contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how power operates through everyday spatial practices.

Methodologically, the work is based on in-depth ethnographic research conducted over several years, combining participant observation, interviews, and engagement with activist networks and municipal actors. This approach enables the author to capture the complexity and internal tensions of the movements she studies, avoiding romanticised portrayals of urban resistance. Rather than presenting Liberated Spaces as coherent or unified entities, Locorotondo carefully documents the negotiations, contradictions, and frictions that characterise their daily functioning. This empirical richness is one of the book’s major strengths, offering readers an intimate view of how alternative urban practices are sustained over time. Building on this ethnographic detail, the text shows that such frictions are not merely obstacles but generative moments through which commoning is continuously reworked. Repair emerges as a multidimensional practice that exceeds technical maintenance, encompassing the reconstruction of collective memories, the forging of social bonds, and the production of new political subjectivities. By situating these practices within the pressures of touristification and neoliberal urban transformation, Locorotondo demonstrates how the Liberated Spaces operate as counter-hegemonic infrastructures that prioritize use value, care, and social reproduction over commodification. Crucially, the figure of the activist-inhabitant captures how ordinary residents become political subjects through everyday acts of repair, inhabitation, and storytelling. These processes, Locorotondo and Fishwick (2026) argue, prefigure alternative urban futures, revealing repair not only as a strategy of survival in a broken city but also as a practice of counter-power capable of expanding the horizons of urban commons and collective governance.

The early chapters establish the theoretical and contextual foundations of the study. Locorotondo situates Naples within broader discussions of urban neoliberalism and tourism-driven development (Gravari-Barbas & Guinand, 2017; Santos-Izquierdo *et al.*, 2026), while also emphasising the city’s specific historical and political trajectories. Naples is presented not merely as a passive victim of global tourism dynamics, but as a place where long-standing traditions of informality, political struggle, and civic experimentation shape

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contemporary responses to urban change. This contextualisation is crucial, as it prevents the analysis from becoming overly generalisable and instead highlights the situated nature of urban struggles.

A key conceptual contribution of the book lies in its articulation of Liberated Spaces as both spatial and corporeal processes. These spaces – often former schools, convents, or public buildings – are not simply reclaimed territories, but sites where alternative forms of social reproduction, governance, and political subjectivity are enacted. Locorotondo draws on feminist and post-Marxist theories of the commons to show how collective management practices challenge dominant property regimes and market logics (Benjamin & Turner, 1992; Shulz, 2026). At the same time, she remains attentive to the vulnerabilities of these spaces, including issues of sustainability, exclusion, and institutional co-optation.

Tourism plays a central role in the analysis, not only as an economic force but as a cultural and symbolic one. The book demonstrates how tourism redefines urban value by prioritising certain aesthetics, narratives, and uses of space, often at the expense of residents' everyday needs. Locorotondo examines how tourist imaginaries of Naples – rooted in ideas of authenticity, disorder, and spectacle – intersect with urban policies and investment strategies. In response, liberated spaces can be read as attempts to reclaim alternative narratives of the city, grounded in collective care, political participation, and cultural production.

One of the most compelling aspects of the book is its examination of the relationship between grassroots movements and local government. Locorotondo explores the emergence of forms of new municipalism in Naples, where municipal authorities have, at times, recognised and even legitimised occupied spaces through legal frameworks that acknowledge their role as commons. This analysis avoids simplistic binaries between state and resistance, instead revealing a dynamic field of negotiation in which activists engage strategically with institutions while seeking to preserve their autonomy. The book thus offers valuable insights into the possibilities and limits of institutional recognition for radical urban practices.

Throughout the text, the author pays close attention to the role of the body as both a site of control and a medium of resistance. The regulation of bodies – through policing, surveillance, labour precarity, and housing displacement – is shown to be integral to the production of the tourist city. Conversely, collective bodily practices such as assemblies, performances, protests, and everyday acts of care become central to the making of liberated spaces. This embodied lens enriches the analysis and connects urban struggles to broader debates on biopolitics and social reproduction (Minca, 2009).

While the book's focus on Naples is a clear strength, it also raises questions about the transferability of its findings to other urban contexts. Locorotondo is careful not to present Naples as a model to be replicated, yet readers may still wish for a more explicit engagement with comparative cases. Nonetheless, the theoretical framework developed in the book provides useful tools for analysing similar dynamics in other tourist cities, particularly in Southern Europe and the Global South.

In terms of style and structure, the book is clearly written and well organised, balancing theoretical discussion with empirical narrative. The author successfully weaves together voices from the field with analytical reflection, allowing participants' experiences to inform broader conceptual arguments. At times, the density of theoretical references may pose challenges for readers unfamiliar with critical urban theory, but this is largely offset by the clarity of the ethnographic material.

The endorsement I wrote for the book: “Through a decolonial feminist lens and activist ethnography, Locorotondo offers a powerful intervention into urban geography. By centering the everyday labor of Naples' *abitanti attive*, this book challenges dominant narratives of tourist urbanism, revealing the city as a contested, lived space shaped from below. A vital contribution to critical urban studies and the geographies of resistance”.

Overall, *Contested Urban Bodies* makes a significant contribution to interdisciplinary scholarship on urban transformation, tourism, and social movements. Its emphasis on embodiment, commoning, and everyday practices offers a refreshing perspective on debates that are often dominated by macro-economic or policy-oriented analyses. The book will be of interest to scholars and students in urban studies, human geography, sociology, and tourism studies, as well as to practitioners and activists engaged in struggles over urban space. By foregrounding the contested production of both bodies and spaces, Locorotondo provides a compelling account of how cities are continuously remade through conflict, cooperation, and collective imagination.

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