

– WE CAN BE **HEROES** –

Exploring Europe for a better world

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HERO #3

OCCUPATION
with GIULIA

THE PROJECT

CAN YOU INTRODUCE YOURSELF ?

Hello, I'm Giulia, I'm 20 years old and I was an active member of [Cinema America Occupato](#).

CAN YOU TELL US THE STORY OF THIS PLACE, CINEMA AMERICA ?

Cinema America is a closed cinema in [Trastevere](#), in the center of Roma. It was a theatre from 1920 to 1954 and became a cinema until 1997. The new owner wanted to demolish it to build a residential building instead. Since it's such an important part of Trastevere history, about 15 families created a neighbour's association to protest the owner's project.

In 2012, with a group of students, we have met these families and understood how important this place is for the community. It's not common in Italy to find as much passion for a public space. So, we decided to illegally occupy the cinema to create plenty of activities there. We called it [Cinema America Occupato](#). We were 200 students coming from different fields but not especially cinema. I studied education for example. We weren't film addicts, we discovered Cinema during the occupation, it was a pretext to create something new with people of the district. At the beginning, we really thought the occupation would last 3 days maximum because we were sure that the police would throw us out. But the occupation carried on during 2 years.

« **It's not common in Italy to find as much passion for a public space.** »

CAN YOU SUM UP CINEMA AMERICA OCCUPATO IN ONE SENTENCE ?

In Italian, it's quite simple : "spazio polivalente" which means "popular multiplex". For me, a cinema is a multipurpose place where you can watch a film of course but also study, do theatre or listen to music. In Cinema America Occupato, we created a room where you can study. A lot of students came and, at the end of the day, stayed to watch a film. We also created a kind of "theatre laboratory" with workshops and a show at the end of the year.

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THE CHALLENGES

WAS IT DIFFICULT TO MOBILIZE NEIGHBOURS AND CONVINCE THEM ?

It was not difficult because people were happy to see the cinema reviving. It was important for them : Lots of people came to watch films in this square, study or only to read a book. This experience shows that when people love a project, they support it and act for it. I don't know why, but I think people needed to do it.

But we don't only mobilize Romans ! A lot of authors and professionals from the cinema industry heard about our sit-in. They supported us and came here to present their movies and discuss with people. Meeting a filmmaker and asking him "why have you decided to do that ?", this is something rare !

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WHAT WERE THE PROBLEMS YOU ENCOUNTERED WHEN DEVELOPING THIS PROJECT ?

The main problem was bureaucracy, rules. You can't do anything without completing so much forms. We wanted to create some activities with seniors, but it was so difficult to manage and a waste of time and energy for everybody. We gave up the project, what a shame...

Another difficulty was to manage this place. It's a long way to agree on common rules with 200 people. We had no rules at the beginning, and we had to build it together. It was not easy, but we did it !

« This cinema was both a common place and my house ! »

DID YOU LIVE IN THE CINEMA DURING THE OCCUPATION ?

Yes I lived there during two years ! It was funny, it was busy, sometimes dangerous... I was only 15 years old ! It was a funny experience because I felt at home even if I didn't live with my parents, I was only with my friends. At the same time, it's also a place where all people of this area come. This cinema was both a common place and my house ! I slept there and I came back home maybe 2 times every week. I went to school every morning and after I organized theatre workshops.

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AFTER THE OCCUPATION

AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE OCCUPATION ?

In September 2014, the owner threw us out of the cinema. At the same time, Ministry of Culture decided to protect this building. It can't be demolished anymore. We tried to buy it with local actors and artists : filmmakers, photographers, authors, producers, etc. But we didn't have enough money. Now we are trying to respond to a public offer : another cinema in Trastevere will be renovated. We really want to manage this place, this time in a legal way.

The occupation was over but we didn't lose. We continued to create activities linked with Cinema America Occupato. For example, all summers we organize an [open air cinema festival](#) on the square. This year we had 80 000 participants and we showed 69 films. Every Saturday, we showed a Disney cartoon for kids and then a famous horror movie for adults. After midnight, we distributed tiny radios to everyone so they could keep listening to the movie without the noise disturbing direct residents on the square.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO FINANCE THIS FESTIVAL ?

We work with different associations, Ministry of Tourism, Lazio Region and shops around. Everybody is welcomed to this festival with free pricing. We are all volunteers during this fest, and we transfer this revenue in our project of cinema renovation

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APPROACH OF LIFE

WHY HAVE YOU DECIDED TO ENGAGE IN CINEMA AMERICA OCCUPATO ? WHAT WAS THE "TRIGGERING FACTOR" FOR YOU TO ACT ?

As I told you before, it's not common in Italy to see so much enthusiasm for a public space. And there is no other place in Rome where people can watch a film for free. All cinemas are very expensive, you have to pay 10 euros for a ticket. People came from other districts of Roma and sometimes from out of the city to be there and watch a movie together.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION IN LIFE ?

A lot of people thought that occupation was a bad thing. At the end, they understood that if you want the best for a place, if you have beautiful ideas and if you want to do it, so an illegal occupation could be a good thing. It's important to follow your dreams, and work hard to make it possible.

AND DID YOU MAKE YOUR DREAM COMES TRUE ?

« **It's a hobby, a work, it's everything !** »

I think yes. During these years, I created everything I wanted. I started when I was 14 years old. And now it's a hobby, a work, it's everything ! And I couldn't imagine 5 years ago that now I'll probably manage my own cinema. This is incredible !

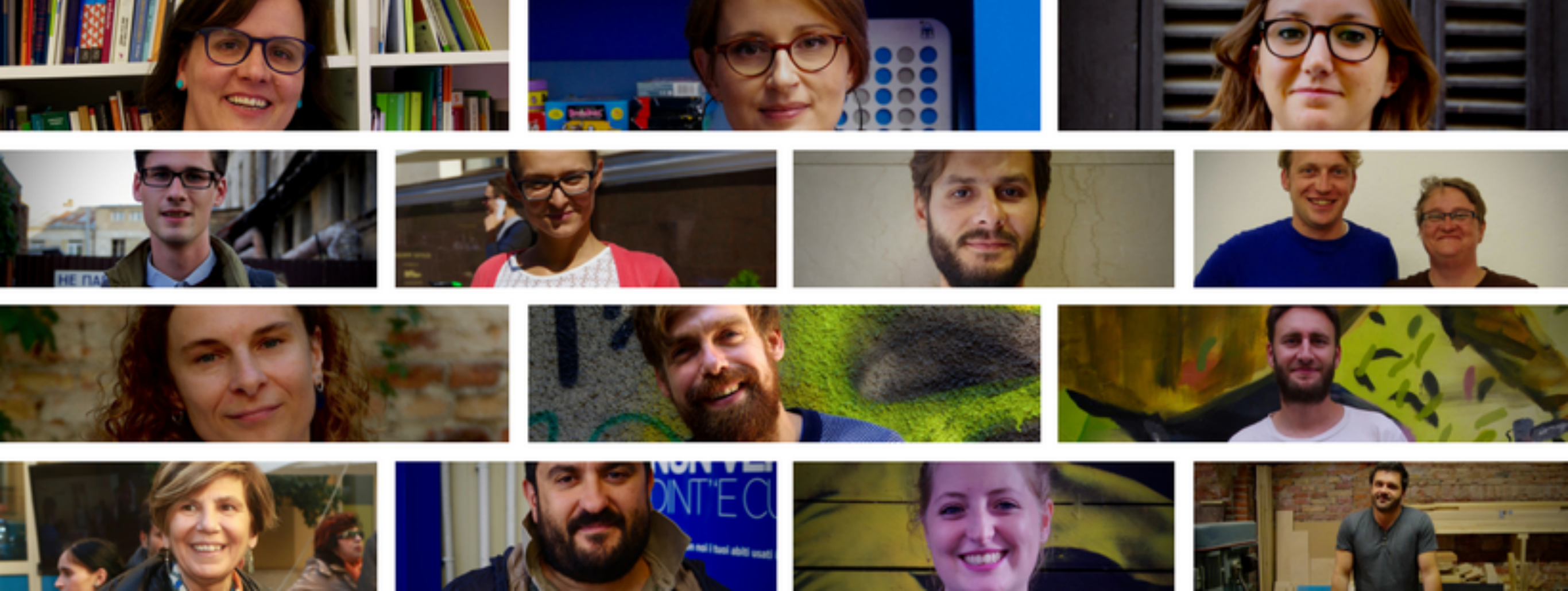
CAN YOU GIVE ME ONE WORD/ADJECTIVE/FEELING TO SUM UP YOUR ENGAGEMENT ?

I would say "dream". At the beginning, it was only a dream. I became member of Cinema America Occupato thinking it was not possible to sit there for more than one week. And here I am !

« **It's important to follow your dreams, and work hard to make it possible.** »



credit : Cinema America Occupato



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