

Seminars with Invited Professor Mauro Pinto

(University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”)

Visiting Period: 10–16 November 2025

Large-scale projects — such as dams, roads, ports, urban redevelopments, broadband networks, and energy systems — have profoundly shaped economies, environments, and societies in recent decades. Long promoted as engines of growth, they remain central to government strategies and are increasingly tied to public–private partnerships in sectors like energy, transport, and ICTs. After the Covid-19 pandemic, investment in digital and sustainable infrastructure gained new momentum, framed as essential for recovery, resilience, and the green transition.

This seminar cycle explores the **politics of large-scale projects**. While often presented as neutral and technical, these projects are deeply political, shaped by competing interests, partisan agendas, and struggles over legitimacy. The seminars examine how projects are advanced in “zones of exception” that weaken democratic scrutiny, how they become entangled with corruption, and how they are embedded in the electoral strategies of political parties. Together, they reveal the tension between attempts to depoliticise large-scale projects and the inevitable return of politics through conflict, resistance, and party competition.

About Prof. Mauro Pinto

Prof. Mauro Pinto is Assistant Professor of Public Economics at the University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”. His research lies at the intersection of political economy, ecological economics, and public policy. He has examined the relationship between natural disasters, reconstruction, and corruption — including the case of the 2009 L’Aquila earthquake — and has written on citizen resistance and new forms of democracy in contested urban projects such as the regeneration of the post-industrial area of Bagnoli in Naples. Alongside his academic work, he has been actively involved in civic movements in Naples, combining scholarly analysis with direct engagement in struggles around commons, environmental justice, and democratic participation.

Seminar 1 – 13/11/2025 – 12h15–13h45

Corruption and the Politics of the Interstices in Contested Large-Scale Projects: From L’Aquila to Naples

Large-scale projects are often advanced in “zones of exception” that suspend democratic scrutiny and concentrate decision-making in special agencies or commissioners. Justified by urgency or modernisation, these arrangements weaken accountability, foster corruption, and marginalise local communities.

The L’Aquila reconstruction after the 2009 earthquake shows how emergency governance enabled clientelism and malfeasance, while the regeneration of Bagnoli, a post-industrial district of Naples, illustrates how exclusionary planning provoked grassroots mobilisation. In Bagnoli, this mobilisation took shape as a “politics of the interstices”: movements positioning themselves neither fully inside nor outside institutions, experimenting with commons, assemblies, and observatories to contest opaque governance.

Together, these cases reveal how top-down approaches can both enable corruption and spark citizen resistance. Prof. Pinto will discuss these dynamics, drawing on his civic engagement in Bagnoli and his research on corruption in post-disaster reconstruction. He will exchange views with Prof. Jacinto Cuví and Prof. Vaincent Mabillard, respectively a sociologist and an economist at ULB.

References

- Farazmand, A., De Simone, E., Gaeta, G. L., Pinto, M., & Dorato, L. (2025). Impact of natural disasters on public corruption: The L’Aquila case. *Public Integrity*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2025.2554411>
- Pinto, M., Recano, L., & Rossi, U. (2023). New institutions and the politics of the interstices: Experimenting with a face-to-face democracy in Naples. *Urban Studies*, 60(11), 2176–2194.

Seminar 2 – 14/11/2025 – 09h30–11h30

Large-Scale Projects in Party Politics in Europe: Preliminary Findings from Electoral Manifestos

Large-scale projects are often described as post-political, managed through insulated procedures beyond the reach of party competition. Yet the results of ongoing research involving Prof. Pinto suggest otherwise: political parties have consistently integrated these projects into their electoral agendas, shaping how they are legitimised, contested, and prioritised.

This seminar presents preliminary results from a cross-national study of European party manifestos, using data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). By analysing commitments to infrastructure and technology across decades, the research examines how fiscal stress, economic performance, decentralisation, government effectiveness, and party ideology influence party attention to large-scale projects.



The findings show that these projects are not outside politics but embedded in partisan strategies and narratives: once framed as tools of state-led development, later as symbols of competitiveness, and more recently as vehicles for green and digital transitions. Far from neutral, large-scale projects remain a central arena of political choice.