

W11 - Metropolitan housing policies: balancing between housing and urban challenges

Housing scenario: settling and form new housing for social and environmental requires. Rome, Milan, Turin.

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abstract

In recent years in Italy, many surveys deal with lack of housing as social problem. The number of informal settlements and families without permanent housing is increasing, yet a huge quantity of new housing is revealed crossing the outskirts our cities (343.770 dwellings by private investors in 2007).

The analysis of some different housing strategies operating in Italy (such as urban sprawl and completion in Rome, sustainable district in Milan, housing regeneration through participation in Turin) is the opportunity to reflect on:

1. location of new interventions. New housing are settled at the edge of the city (which attract private investor - for availability of free areas and better economic conditions – and many people looking for homeownership and a private garden) or are taking the place of wide urban void (ex-industrial area); or they are urban acupuncture for housing regeneration.

2. the quality of housing and built environment. How difficult is to suggest solutions to the social (new ways of living, social sustainability) and environmental requires (technologic and urban sustainability)?

3. policy choices: social housing as opportunity for affordability, social needs, land control and private sector. In Rome, Milan or Turin, housing policies are try to balance between private investors and public control, mostly defining housing sustainable rules and social support actions.

Analysing new housing settlements we can find new way for financing social housing, methods of defining new housing typologies and those criteria for quality in order to reach better living conditions. Rome, Milan and Turin reach different results, but all of them are showing how an integrated policy and social housing can be a change for regenerating housing market.

Paper

Contemporary Housing issue

After many years of neglect, the housing issue, in Italy, is again the subject of politics, economy and the media. In the last years, many surveys and daily news have often dealt with the housing situation in Italy, particularly in the outskirts of big cities. The voices of the media consider, again, the housing issue as an expression of social exclusion and the lack of houses as the main cause of the low urban quality of life. As described in recent economical and social studies, the housing disadvantage is no longer a character of suburbs and slums only.

It could involve, however, all the part of the cities and all the social units of the vulnerable contemporary society: people living in overcrowded or self-built houses; but also temporary workers, students, elderly who find it difficult to obtain a social dwelling or a flat appropriate to their needs.

The debates on the main newspaper focus on a social-political denounce. It spurs, in the early two thousand, some of the larger municipalities such as Rome or Milan to monitor typological, social and economical situation of the housing market. As the result of these analyses, the situation seems characterized by a state of "lack" of houses.

The situation in Rome, according to the Municipal Decree n. 110 of 2005, is so composed: about 21,000 families live in overcrowded dwellings or in co-housing; 496 families live in public residence; about 17,000 people (of which 27% are elderly and disabled) ask for a housing economical support; 2600 apartments are unlawfully occupied; 273 families are homeless or live in reception centres. The estimated need for housing is about 68,466 rooms. In order to achieve this quantity by 2011, the City of Rome and the Region start a joint housing program which, among other things, identifies building areas to realize 20,000 new rooms. In the same way, in 2002 the City of Milan works in collaboration with the Aler (Lombardy Agency for residential social housing) to estimate the need for housing. They start a joint housing policy identifying 48 new areas for public housing for the 12.000 estimated dwellings.

Short analysis of a paradox

However, there are some contradictions in the Italian housing situation. While the informal settlements and the number of homeless are increasing (about 20,000 evictions carried out in 2007), the number of house built increase from 160,000 in 2000 to 350,000 in 2007. How to explain this paradox?

First of all, real estate investments grow because of the economic situation and the increase in rents. However, the rise of home ownership (30.6% in 1971, 62.5% in 2001 and 73.4% in 2008) and, consequently, of the loans to buy a house determine the stagnation of the housing market. At the same time, the real estate market is unattainable for middle class, too. It is not rich enough for the housing free market; it is not to poor to live in a public dwelling.

On the other hand, the public housing policy has been gradually restricted during the last fifteen years. The number of social houses built decreases from 22.000 in 1988 to 1900 in 2006. Even the 17,7 % of Italian families live in rent, the social rent is available only for the 4% of residents, that is a very low number compared to 35% in the Netherlands, to 17% in France and to 20% in England.

The production of housing has, therefore, been borne by private investors, also because of the failure of urban planning strategies in controlling the growing of the city and quality of the urban intervention.

The urgent and growing demand for housing is the result of many problems, such as the reduction in rental housing, the use of dwelling as office, the sale of public housing estate, the increase in evictions, the crisis of the welfare state and the reduction in family income.

To these problems, we should add some sociological consideration, which can be useful to deeply explain the changes in the housing demand either lasting or temporary (such as those demands. That means to consider who the users are. Statistics and sociological surveys describe new social organization because of socio-economical patterns and working organization, such as the delay of young generation in creating a family or in achieving a permanent job. By one hand, the number of family looking for home is increasing because the reduction of the family size from 4 to 2 people. Second, the impact of immigration on Italian housing demand is even more relevant considering that the 20% of contracts of sale of houses is made by immigrants. At least, as never before in our history, we assist to a national migration of young students and workers. These elements, among many other questions, express new way of life, favouring new form of cohabitation and affect the demand for new housing typologies.

At the same time, a different system of social relation is deeply changing our society, leading to community as social reference for housing. These communities are mostly composed by young people, most of which are students, young workers or artists. These “creative group” – as R. Florida defined this new social unit – ask for a quality of living that could not be completed inside home. As we can see in some roman district, for instance, the community life acts in the public space of the neighbourhood. If houses are transformed in co-houses with office and laboratory, the local dimension is the place where communities grow and develop itself. In Italy, this means a return to traditional way of city life and to local dimension, which have been forgot in the last decades.

We could now consider the housing issue as the result of problems that all houses of the real estate market do not provide a solution for. The houses built, actually, are not suitable for the need and quality of housing expressed. The housing supply should be conformed for new users. Unfortunately, the housing solutions shaped for the traditional family are still under construction, mainly in districts build by private investors. These houses could not satisfy the demand for housing mostly from typological and dimensional point of view.

New users would demand smaller dwelling than the build ones (average size of 83 square meters in 2001). They need for flexibility, temporary and, above all, affordable house. The local governments seem unable to give a solution to this demand. In absence of a political strategy, existing spaces are spontaneously adapted to the new living models. The result of this self-made transformation are the invented housing typologies, as the “shop-house” that spread over Milan or Rome changing the ground floor of nineteenth and twentieth century building.

From living to welfare. Public intervention and social action.

Widespread public dissatisfaction with housing supply affects the quality of life in the long run. The social and physical situation in large residential estate built after the Second World War is in decline, as in other European countries.

Consequently, the media have increasingly associated great public estate with crime and social exclusion, identifying place with society. There is the assumption that the poor quality of architecture has negative effects on individual and social behaviour. Although it is desirable to overcome this identification, we should consider how much the quality of public space and urban facilities affect the quality of daily life. For this reason, the housing policy should focus on people, on community services and, of course, on relations between inhabitant and urban space.

Accepting the idea that when inhabitants are satisfied with their housing conditions they don't have socio-political claim, it is understandable why housing policies transform housing issue in welfare research. The search for a widespread welfare is the basis of housing policy, not only in Italy. It is conformed as a tool for solving the housing and environmental issue, qualifying the public building and solving social conflicts. Moreover, welfare is a prerequisite for sustainable development and therefore for social, technological, environmental and economic sustainability.

The issue of housing – so defined – calls for public intervention with an integrated policy, where objectives and instruments are in common between housing, social and economical interventions. The collaboration between housing and social policies is particularly evident in the regeneration of existing residential estate. The evaluations on housing settlements show, in fact, that urban renewal can not be effective if it does not include social support action and if citizen are not directly involved. Normally, social actions are services to support and help citizens during the spatial renewal, and they take the form of local offices similar to English Estate Office. These types of services were already tested, since 1994, by the Special Suburbs Program in Turin (in particular during the renewal of social housing in via Grosseto). In recent year, the local offices assume a permanent character with the Urban Centre, where municipality informs citizen about ongoing urban policies. The next step is made by the Spazio Abitare in Milan. This office is created with the aim to promote a more direct relationship between the municipality and tenants trough meetings, information and assistance.

Other times, as in some Roman Corviale district, the renewal is promoted by the tenants, who are reclaiming the use of common space, transforming it into collective meeting places for activities of different types (dance courses, local TV, community garden). Everywhere there are more initiatives for social support, such as incentives and actions to reduce the housing rent.

Renewal the existing and address the future. Three case studies.

The specific issue of housing has been object of few fragmented political actions and it is mysteriously disappeared from the political agenda for many years. The actual government Piano Casa does not attempt, however, a comprehensive solution to the housing issue. It addresses only partial and marginal aspects. In the lack of a government policy, each municipality or region tries different strategies and methods.

A synthetic analysis of the strategies that are currently experienced in Rome (urban expansion and completion), in Milan (renewal and construction of large sustainable urban districts) and in Turin (rehabilitation and sustainability), is an opportunity to reflect on political decisions and on the housing scenario they define.

1. Rome. Public Acupuncture and new municipal role

Rome expands very quickly toward the neighbouring town with which, slowly, it will unify. The urban satellites rise at the edge of town, where the availability of wide open areas with better economic conditions attracts private investors and many users looking for a more affordable house. The new scenario reveals itself beyond the “consolidated city” and surprise for the quantity of houses that rise *sudden* and *quiet*. They are sudden because they grow quickly and, although included in the City Master Plan, often isolated in the roman land. They are silent because some of their characteristics (arches, gables, columns, pink-yellow walls) are indifferently repeated everywhere. Sometimes, it seems that new houses are trying to express new local features. More often, it seems that the new building respond only to the quantity need of housing giving up the typology revolution and the social issue. Many of the new housing private estate are characterized by the lack of public space, that is often substitute by the shopping centre used as the principle for settlements. The large urban districts are built by private investors and often have low urban and architectural quality. The environmental issue is sometimes ignored or addressed only with solar panels. Observed by car, the new landscape almost seems a new form of urban sprawl.

The new municipal Master Plan, finally approved in 2008, identifies the “transformation city” as the place for building new housing. The Plan defines general strategies (such as the strengthening of the underground network) and specific action to the scale of neighbourhood, such as renewal and social housing. The aim of the Master Plan is to trigger widespread quality through complex intervention and acupuncture of social housing, with high architectural and urban quality. Actually, it is possible to identify the new public city among the areas of private initiatives. These are the 32 new "167" areas of the PEEP second additional manoeuvre. They are small-scale public housing, which are planned as the completion of the largest districts of social housing built in the nineteenth century or the integration of ex-abusive areas. Simultaneously, the Plan addresses the urban transformation trough eighteen Urban and Metropolitan Centralities located in suburbs or urban voids. These are used to trigger the regeneration of surrounding areas. For this reason, Centralities are identified on the basis of existing social and cultural identities, the transport system and on the potential for transformation. They are designed to accommodate about 20% of the programmed buildings in the Master Plan and to define new housing models. Although nine of eighteen Centralities are already under construction, the aim to lead a broad process of urban regeneration seems far away. The problem is that, in the meantime that the programs achieve the aim; the local government seems unable to play a supervising role in building process. The only control on private building is related to the location of the new urban district and in the brief to use energy-saving systems in each new residential building.

There is a strong dichotomy between the expanse of new homes and the strategy of the General Master Plan focused on urban identity, transformation, complexity and quality. It is therefore necessary to define general methodological choices and design criteria. The aim should be to overcome the dichotomies between social support initiatives (in 2005, forms of economic support involving 15,000 family), privatization and sale of public housing. For this reason, the recent attempts of the municipality are very important experiences, as The Practice Code for social housing in the new 167 areas. More important is the program for the

renewal of the area Giustiniano Imperatore, begun in 2004 and still in progress. It is an attempt to establish new procedures and systems of government of the territory, never tested before. The City assumes the role of coordination of the urban transformation process, which is possible only through participation of citizens, grouped into consortia. Citizens are asked to decide on the transformation of their compartment (minimum unit of intervention, identified by a general master plan). The municipality assists inhabitants during design and building phase: promotes the design competition for the master plan; defines the general pattern, conditions and advancing stages; establishes criteria to optimize the finances (even if no public money is invested); offers dwellings and commercial rooms until the completion of the restructuring. The aim of the program is to enhance the value of building heritage and qualify residential areas by replacing the degraded housing and promoting new construction, environmental regeneration and public space. The result is a complex project focused on green areas, public spaces and participation.

2. Milan. A new idea of the city.

Whoever visits Milan in this period will see an impressive building and expansion process. The new completed “parts of the city” redefine the identity of Milan in a wider development program, focused on housing and neighbourhood.

An integrated framework of actions was established by the Municipality, on the basis of a preliminary survey of housing conditions and of the city quality of life. The program aims at: shaping the city, better living conditions, solve the needs of the weaker social class, and respond to the housing demand of the new users, boosting the economic system, foster solidarity, security and legality. In other words, the Milan attempt is to rethink the city for inhabitants. Housing is therefore perceived as a service to society; neighbourhood becomes a tool for strengthening social cohesion. The development strategy is made by renewal and new building, in balance between social and economic-financial questions. In this way, the Municipality acts in each public housing estate for recovering abandoned or degraded spaces, improving energy efficiency, defining housing aggregation to respond to typological issues, transforming the ground floor of housing buildings for commercial and special housing typologies. Along with the building principles, the municipality also defines social support actions to encourage the use of public spaces for aggregative, recreational and cultural use.

The first experiences of this program are promoted with the design competition *Abitare Milan*, in 2005, in eight of 46 areas identified for public housing and social rent. They are new urban and open space models for about 1200 new housing. The design competition is intended as a tool to inform and monitor the quality of the built environment. For each area, the municipality prepares, indeed, design guidelines and a master plan for defining strategies and programs. On the basis of the needs and characteristics of housing demand, the competition promotes sustainability, flexible dwelling and a close relationship between housing and local services.

However, these tools seem to be not very effective to contrast the interest of private investors in big urban districts, even if they derived by a public-private partnerships. Big new quarters are changing the perception of the city. Many critics are afraid for a definition of the future city scenario as the result of private interests than of a municipal development.

Although new buildings are very different architectural experimentations, they shape a unique idea of city whether is the architect who coordinates the project

(N. Foster, R. Piano, G. Valle, C. Zucchi). The city proposed in the urban districts of Portello (152,000 sqm floor area, of which 50% for residence), Montecity - Rogoredo - Santa Giulia (about 270,000 square meters of residence) or Bicocca is a city formed on public space as a factor determining the quality of living. Districts have different density areas and functions and are shaped around public space or parks (Portello Park occupies approximately 50% of the total area). The result is a sustainable city, surrounded by nature, as already suggested in 1995 in an exhibition at the Triennale di Milano, when nine projects focused the development of the city on the natural environment.

3. Turin. Architecture is democracy.

In Turin, the urban history is linked to the social, economical and political one, maybe more than in other Italian cities. The succession of international sport and cultural events mark stages of transformation, since 2006. The city of cars, known until the nineties for his grey workers suburbs, is now the city of research, innovation, design and science. The transformation, announced 25 years ago, has been realized with the renewal of industrial areas into cultural spaces, was bettered with the URBAN program to involve all aspects of urban life (social, cultural, architectural). The transformation begun in the nineties and arrives today at the experiments for a sustainable city.

The redevelopment of the city is based on the quality of life and has been achieved by involving citizens through the use of participation, particularly of bottom up type. Already in 1994, the Special Suburbs Program (integrated program for coordination of urban and social renewal) use participation as a useful tool for regenerating disease housing district. For the renewal of La Falchera district, for instance, participation was concentrated in the development of a community centre and it has facilitated the transformation from a place of social exclusion in a pleasant green neighbourhood. The involvement of the population appears, moreover, a distinctive character in many of the activities promoted by the municipality. It is used for comparison on the programs and for the effective realization of major events (the Olympics would not have been possible without the voluntary cooperation of citizens).

We can say that the city of Turin wants to define its identity by encouraging an open and direct participation of its citizens. Already by 1998, the City promotes the Communication Special Project to communicate activities and initiatives in the municipal area. Recently interventions that will reshape the city in the coming years has been presented and discussed during a conference in the San Carlo Square organised by the last UIA Congress "Transmitting Architecture", The aim of this meeting was to inform and involve the people in architecture and urban program. The city has pursued the metamorphosis of the physical aspect trough a policy to shape a new shared image of the city. Turin presents itself, since 2001, as a "renaissance city." This image seems to have worked, as evidenced by a recent study commissioned by the Urban Centre to the CRESME ("perception of urban quality after the recent transformation"), which has been conducted on a sample of 3,500 households. Turin can be well described as the city of democracy and of dialogue with citizens, not by chance recently chosen as the venue for the first Biennale Democracy.

After several interventions focused on redevelopment the residential areas, the railway and the industrial sites (Master Plan prepared by Gregotti in 1995), the Strategic Plan of 2000 defines the lines of the new transformation which is taking

place at this moment. The Plan establishes an urban vision, which aims to transform Turin in a European metropolis and in a city of culture, by 2010. The vision of city will be achieved through improving the urban quality of life. In this direction, municipality addresses its attention to hinterland, where there will be built new planned residence building. All the experiences of recent years will converge in the new expansion, from the use of participation as a democratic practice till the architectural experimentations, which has achieved its best-known result in multicolour Olympic Village.

The use of integrated policy make the Turin case study one of experiments closer to some of the European housing policy. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the first Italian energy self-sufficient settlement is set in Settimo Torinese, on the outskirts of Turin. It is the Laguna Verde district: about 815,000 square meters on a former industrial area.

Nearby, there is a residential experiment very interesting because of the synthesis of low environmental impact (sustainability), high level of satisfaction of tenants through different typologies and flexibility (social factor) and low cost of building and selling (affordability, economic factor). It is the Casa 100K€, designed by M. Cucinella in collaboration with Italcementi, which provides 100 square meters dwelling, sold at 100.000 €. The result is a green building on a green area, which produces enough power to cover the cost of the loan and where everyone can choose the housing components by a designed abacus. Flexibility is possible with the use of a prefabricated structure. The project tries also to force the process of social inclusion suggesting the sharing of facilities, of communal services and even working tools.

Transformations of Turin, supported by huge investments (€ 7,500,000 in 1994-2004) and a great capacity for governance of the territory, led by centrality of the landscape and projects to that one of individual, democracy and culture. Once again the focus is on the individual. Although the new sustainable interventions are still few, already they foretell the future of Turin as democratic and sustainable city.

Between private and social housing: one possible scenario.

The expansionary phase of the building market is an exception in Italian history because of the quantity of investment. Although the amount of buildings recalls the post-war reconstruction, contrary to those neighbourhoods, the new settlements do not take into account the importance that the resources and local availability can have in preventing environmental degradation and social exclusion.

The urban and architectural forms seem determined more by aesthetic reasons than by local, social and environmental issues related to housing. In other words, the attention to people given by the national programs is not always transformed by the projects in appropriate place for living. Often, new houses give up both typological research and urban space as a place for improving welfare, preferring articulated and improbable volumes. Evaluations and surveys on outskirts are pushing for a more integrated residential design, where urban space is configured as a service and support to the residence. Even if sometimes, as in Milan, the public space is a prime characteristic of the housing program, it is not always well dimensioned. Moreover, the urban character of new interventions is independent from the place where they be. Many times, as in private housing in Rome, the intervention is build on traditional pattern but without public space as

centre of urban life. The solar panels on the roof are the only way to identify contemporary interventions. The fear is that the future scenario of our cities will be marked by private interest or by artistic ambitions of the designers.

The need to renew the city and to consider the sustainability (environmental, economic, technological and social) impose new parameters for building. As the case-studies show, everywhere the voices of politics, economics and media ask for the return of government intervention, that should be centralized, egalitarian and, in future, European.

The social housing is the instrument identified to pursue a broad process of urban regeneration that involves all urban issue. It may be the opportunity to trigger urban renewal and to secure, tomorrow, a sustainable urban development. Even small public settlements, such as 167 in Rome, may have an important role in urban regeneration. The new 167 areas are an opportunity to define alternative models to dispersal and large urban schemes. They are the occasion for defining open and well connected urban system, characterized by mixité, local services and new housing typologies. They are the chance to use the voids and degraded areas in the city (as in Milan) and to enhance the public buildings (as the former military barracks, and areas in disuse). The residence can be the opportunity to define urban and residential solutions attentive to ways of living (such as, for example, cohabitation) and to sustainability, particularly to the social one.

Above all, the public housing can help to change the housing market through social rent, the prevision of social dwellings in each residential building, new modes of financing (non-speculative resources such as ethical funds) or opening to new owners (encouraging, for example, the management of private businesses with no-profit). The spread of public-private partnership requires, however, complex issues that affect the ability of the composition of interests, the economical feasibility and the financial management.

The most important question remains how to establish and enforce effective quality criteria, which go beyond methods for saving energy. There are even more building regulations and facilities to increase the use of technological sustainable system. Yet, there are not so many tools for quality control at each level. The definition of design criteria is not a guaranty for quality building. Probably it will be necessary to define alternative cultural models for providing an overall view of the housing issue. The quality of interventions in the Giustiniano Imperatore area is ensured by the fact that all steps have been planned with a comparison between several proposals.

It is important to remember that housing is a fundamental part of life. When people has no home or it is not appropriate to the needs, people become more vulnerable and insecure. "It is no longer sufficient to make buildings" but it is necessary "to create them in such a way that gives meaning to the space around them, for the entire community" (A. Smithson).

We must, in short, to think housing beyond the dwelling. We should go back to the neighbourhood and community dimension. As Z. Bauman urges, architects should design space of coexistence and place for living considering urban, architectural, environmental and social issues.

These notes accompany a presentation describing the Italian complex housing scenario with dates and design of the new housing estate in Rome, Milan and Turin.