

## **HOUSING POLICIES AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE: THE MILAN METROPOLITAN AREA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research has the goal to define a scenario of the transformations that have taken place in the metropolitan area of Milan subsequent to those housing policies that, starting from the evaluation of critical issues and potential areas of intervention, propose possible integrations and modifications of the procedures actually adopted. In Italy, the satisfaction of housing needs is part of a complex picture that requires integrated policies and a common action of territorial governance at metropolitan level. In a context where the housing demand is critical, not only in terms of quality, but also quantitatively, it is necessary to adjust the housing policies to the growing social vulnerability of large and different sections of the population. The current debate is focused on promoting the development of Social Housing as a resource to ensure social security and inclusion. With reference to the principles of sustainability accrued during several debates among local operators, public and private stakeholders

and research institutes, some case studies of urban transformation in the metropolitan area of Milan have been analyzed in this paper, with a specific focus on the project “Figino: sustainable suburb”. This project is a private initiative oriented to achieve the maximum coordination with the public social housing policies, to maximize amount of rented accommodations with low charge, with fee agreement or with social rent.

Key words: Social housing, Innovative policies, Sustainable Suburb, Quality of life.

### The Housing Deprivation

The housing deprivation can be defined as a multidimensional phenomenon, with reference both to situations of deficiency in the quality of the dwelling and to the living conditions of people, determined by family status, by economic and business situations, creating an objective limitation to access housing, both as property and as rental.

The elements that contribute to cause housing deprivation are essentially determined by the physical characteristics of the dwelling, such as the surface per capita, the provision of services and facilities, indoor environmental and health conditions, the social type of people as young couples, singles, workers, immigrants, families, seniors, college students; by the housing cost related to the trend in rents or mortgages and their impact on the income of households.

The housing deprivation, as well as being multidimensional, it is also a dynamic phenomenon that connects the housing situation to dynamic processes of job insecurity or relational, and to changes regarding family and social structures. A logical consequence of this analysis is the need to diversify the nature of distress, its causes and the actors involved, trying to understand its possible aspects.

The housing deprivation is gradually increasing in the EU countries<sup>i</sup> and it is no longer found only in large urban centres, but it also covers the medium size towns. Moreover, in many cases the government commitment is no longer enough<sup>ii</sup>. One cause of this phenomenon is represented by the progressive increase in recent years of real estate values with respect to the value of people’s income and with respect to the purchasing power of households.

The effects of the crisis on employment and incomes are not indicative of a future significant decrease in the gap, despite the recession in the real estate sector<sup>iii</sup>. Although the size of the phenomenon requires the adoption of urgent measures for the reduction of discomfort, in many European countries policies to provide immediate actions to the housing emergency are still not effective<sup>iv</sup>.

The perception of housing deprivation is directly related to the urban size and to the quality of the environment where the housing is located, that is the block and the

neighbourhood. The nearby quality is determined mainly by the provision of services, such as green areas, community services and proximity to public transport networks that link the district with the rest of the town. Furthermore, subjects like social security and environmental quality assume ever greater importance in the perception of citizens, and contribute substantially to improve the urban residential environment. In Italy, Law N° 199, December 18, 2008, “Conversion into law, with amendments, of Decree-Law N° 158, October 20, 2008, on urgent measures to limit the housing deprivation of particular social groups”<sup>vi</sup>, aims to reduce the housing deprivation and to promote proper accommodation for the weaker groups of society.

In November 2010 in Rome the second report on the housing situation in Italy was illustrated, which outlines a framework of strong discomfort growing in the population<sup>vi</sup>.

### Policies and Instruments

In the mid-nineties the Italian towns have addressed the problem of housing deprivation and urban regeneration, with a range of policies, tools and processes. In those years, the crisis of Fordist city has revealed millions of square meters of industrial areas. This situation has forced a reflection on urban identity and allowed to address the issue of large urban void areas, through transformation processes.

Especially in the major Italian towns large-scale projects of urban transformation have started, essentially linked to the idea of the urban plan intended as an instrument of adjustment: new districts arose, new urban centers were implemented, through the refunctionalization of large brownfield.

Therefore, several processes of urban regeneration and social recovery were started, both in the suburbs, and in the neighborhoods of public housing (ERP) through programs such as Urban Renewal Program, the District Contracts, the development of actions at local level.

The towns faced the problem by using consistent regional, ministerial and European resources, to work on the extraordinary nature of urban regeneration as a factor of reconstruction of the social cohesion.

We are currently in a phase where it is essential to move from the logic of extraordinary to the ordinary one, not only because extraordinary resources are running out, but also because these resources have to be absorbed by the culture of planning, which results in the ordinary actions taken in the territory.

The urban question is based on a complex thought: it must refer to an interpretation that allows to modify the structure of the town, that is the hardware. Often, who deal with social problems neglects this aspect, but the hardware is critical for people's lives; at the same time it is essential to invest on resources, energies, identities and

conflicts, that is the software of the town. On the contrary, who is involved in the infrastructure often considers the software an accessory. Only the combination of hardware and software allows the town to be able to act and change in a systemic logic.

Since the town is already inhabited, it is necessary to introduce on houses some policies so called of second generation, with the aim of ensuring a total urban quality, consisting of services, mixité and connections. All this is about ensuring support systems in contexts of social vulnerability and promoting policies of social neighbor. However, it must be remembered that territories are complex systems consisting of layered forms, with spatial conformations that represent constraints that cannot be changed but that must be considered.

To address issues of social sustainability of urban transformation, local communities must be provided with tools and cultural and economic resources have to be networked. All processes of regeneration and urban renewal contain the risk of gentrification, the expulsion of the weakest groups of the population. It is necessary to govern with the aim of protecting the inhabitants of the territory, introducing tools to promote the general growth of life quality, enhancing the identity, the memory and the history of the territory. It is essential to provide opportunities not only to those people who are at risk of social exclusion, but also to those ones of the intermediate class, encouraging mixité to avoid situations of chronic discomfort.

In this sense, the “complex urban programs” have expanded the scope of urban policies. These instruments, by their nature interdisciplinary, try to link the goals of the ERP with those typical of urban, construction and environmental recovery, facing the problems relevant to the maintenance of the residential assets and to improve the quality of settlements.

The suburbs, social and physical, of the industrial towns have become places for experimentation and transformation. Some areas have become attractive sites for the housing market, both residential and commercial; others, such as ERP areas, have been affected by urban renewal projects designed to act on the elements of physical weakness and social disadvantages. These projects, managed through the District Contracts or Urban Programs, despite having origins in the urban planning, go beyond the segmentation of individual initiatives, entering into the interdisciplinary nature of the new policies of government of the territory and makes reference to a concept of urban regeneration included into a new paradigm that links the physical recovery to social policies and participation processes.

Among the objectives of these initiatives there is the consolidation of social cohesion pursued by the growth of a sense of belonging to the district and the promotion of a shared identity.

### The Housing Policies in Lombardy

As part of the definition of a framework of knowledge concerning the housing situation in Lombardy, it is appropriate to refer to some innovative experiences developed in the last years at the local level by public authorities and associations to extend the possible solutions of the housing issue and to overcome the limits of the regulatory framework in terms of housing deprivation. These pilot initiatives, for their experimental nature have required the introduction of innovative formulas of action, sometimes not provided by the institutional system. However, the analysis of these interventions may be useful to provide points for being replicated and to reflect on the need for an adequate regulatory support to improve their effectiveness.

These experiences are designed to make the access to adequate housing easier, using solutions going from supporting the rental, the provision of social housing rents, from self-building or self-recovery, up to forms of assistance and mediation of relationships between owners and tenants.

The satisfaction of housing needs is part of a complex scenario, which requires integrated policies and an extensive action of regional governance in the metropolitan area.

In a system with more and more limited resources, the aim should be to build houses for the weaker groups of the population, enabling the potential of new financial instruments and of the legislative developments in the urban planning area, also in order to reduce the high cost of the land, especially in the large towns.

In this logic, the laws for Social Housing construction should be reviewed with the objective to link the effective planning and the management of public housing policies with the policies of inclusion, able to guarantee the population a participation in the social life.

### The Observatory of Lombardy for the housing situation

In a situation where the demand for housing has considerable issues, not only qualitative but also quantitative because of significant demographic and social changes (increase of precariousness of labour relations, increased immigration, strong demand for rental purposes of study or work, etc.), the Lombardy Region is going to adapt the housing policies to the growing social vulnerability of larger and larger segments of the population.

It is necessary to strengthen the support for a range of housing services to be included in a regulatory framework that modifies the current ERP system in a service of public interest, to ensure the access priority for the citizens.

This system, based on a variety of subjects, procedures and operational mechanisms to ensure adequate resources in time, is the new Social Housing service governed by the Region. In this context, the re-launch of a new system of social housing is developed through a new definition of the role of municipalities and the reorganization of ALER (Lombard Housing Company).

At the same time, the evaluation procedures of the existing assets are renewed and the performance standard for new construction and for the ordinary and the extraordinary maintenance are defined. Special attention is paid to the study of new construction methods for achieving sustainable residential buildings with reduced costs and environmental impacts, for the enhancement and the management of public assets, for the training of public administration operators and for the diffusion of good practices. The available resources are aimed at the creation of new dwellings with low rent, for students, for temporary workers, for young couples and other categories that are characterized by conditions of social deprivation.

At this regard, several tools are used, including:

- The Framework Agreement for the Development of the Territory, which is the instrument of territorial governance based on the principles of “habitability and living conditions”;
- The District Contracts are the instrument of local governance of the housing policies within the established urban realities, able to integrate the housing policies, welfare, safety, training and employment; - innovative projects through public and private partnerships, allow to maximize the amount of resources for the construction of new dwellings for rental (the social housing projects);
- The tenders notices, issued in response to an emergency housing.

To address these problems, is developed the Regional Observatory for the housing situation, in collaboration with the European networks of social housing, can properly assess not only the impact of policies and best practices in place, but also to acquire additional knowledge, focused to establish a register of the social housing assets.

#### A Housing Policy for the Metropolitan Area of Milan

The Milan metropolitan area has been characterized for many years by a strong housing crisis that has created not only difficulties in responding adequately to the growing demand for housing, but it is a dissolution of a social right, a public gap on the issue of the right to housing.

The exponential increase of the value of the rent has widened the range of housing exclusion, including new sectors of the population that were most guaranteed in the

past, but it has also compromised even more the situation of the most vulnerable social groups. Furthermore, the new legislative frameworks have reduced, and in many cases cancelled, the access to ERP for those who would need and deserve. The sales policies have reduced the overall supply of social housing and made even more critical the response to a dramatic emergency.

The housing demand in Milan is very heterogeneous in its social composition, but it has, as a common feature, the difficulty in finding adequate housing at prices related to the incomes of certain population groups. Often in the last years, speculative real estate and land processes have addressed choices on urban planning in Milan, editing, in a profound way, the town's appearance and its social composition.

In an integrated view of the territory, which is the most important place where contradictions and social conflict develop, choices must be made concerning the real estate development, the infrastructures and the services in the territory, in accordance with the need to protect the living conditions of the population.

Therefore it is important to put the housing issue at the heart of local administrative initiative, particularly for the rent, as unresolved problem that affects thousands of families. Income and social conditions are the major items on which to set a housing policy model and a project to reactivate the local welfare system of protections and rights with respect of vulnerable subjects. As required by Law N° 9, February 8th, 2007, "Interventions to reduce the housing problems for particular social groups"vii, the Milan Town Council has approved an extraordinary plan for the house. The measure covers a range of interventions aimed to upgrade and revitalize the social housing neighborhoods, with initiatives that address, in an integrated way, housing issues, with particular regard to the most vulnerable groups. In Milan are being implemented in parallel the first interventions promoted by the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers, DPCM of July 16th, 2009, "National Housing Plan"viii, through the activities of Deposits and Loans Fund Investments Sgrix (CDPI), with the establishment of the Investment Fund for Livingx.

The case study is part of this regulatory framework and represents the successful attempt of the Social Housing Foundation to develop, in partnership with the government, a plan that not only offers accommodation but it will be able to dynamically draw the fabric of the town.

#### Case Study: the Figino Neighborhood in Milan

The Fondo Abitare Sociale 1 (FAS1), the outcome of an initiative by Fondazione Cariplo implemented by Fondazione Housing Sociale, is proving effective in paving the way for innovative projects and instruments responding to the requirements of the Piano Nazionale di Edilizia Abitativa (or Piano Casa Nazionale – National Housing Plan –DPCM 16 July 2009). It provides a means for responding to the housing needs

of an intermediate swath of home-seekers whose income is too high to entitle them to public housing and too low to make market-rate housing affordable.

In December 2008, the City of Milan held a public procedure which resulted in development of the Figino neighborhood being awarded to Fondo Abitare Sociale 1. The administration evaluated proposals based on a comprehensive set of requisites addressing such aspects as the partnership relationship with the city, the integration of services/amenities and housing, the integration of the project into the urban context, energy efficiency and sustainability, types of leases, the tenant selection process, and the financial plan.

The proposal development process included public and social inputs from the city administration and other stakeholders. The principal references used in developing the proposal were:

- The preparatory document, an integral part of the competition announcement, drafted by the Department of Architecture and Planning of the Milan Polytechnic (DiAP). It provides an in-depth background of the area designated by the City of Milan for experimentation with innovative social-housing management methods based on ethical financing;
- A third-party (Associazione MeglioMilano) assessment of the urban qualities of the Figino area to establish a baseline for monitoring project impact;
- Meetings held by DiAP with local interests to gain an understanding of local needs and get feedback on potential approaches;
- Brainstorming sessions with local service-sector representatives to come up with additional options to increase the social value of the project.

In the proposal submitted to the City, FAS1 undertook to organize an international design competition. The competition concluded in March 2010 with the winners for the Figino neighborhood being the Favole, Garbin, Matucci, and Sarnostudios.

The Figino neighborhood lies in northwest Milan at its boundaries with the municipalities of Pero, Rho, and Settimo Milanese. It is delimited by Via Novara, the west ring road (Tangenziale Ovest), the Molino Dorino access road, and the Boscoincittà park. Situated along an axis running from Milan to the Rho-Pero fairgrounds, an area slated for intense development in the run-up to Expo 2015, Figino has a clear-cut identity although it is relatively isolated among extensive unbuilt green areas. Figino preserves a number of urban and architectural features characteristic of its origins as a farming town that was eventually engulfed by the city. The town is characterized by a succession of farm buildings and courtyards along the sinuous course of via Zanzottera and Via Morelli, creating a continuous façade



punctuated by the entryways to the courtyards. The courtyards open outward to embrace the surrounding countryside while also delimiting the residential clusters that represent a most typical aspect of rural village life. A sparser and more recent fabric of buildings extends further into the countryside. The configuration of the historical nucleus of Figino was an important reference in the typological choices throughout the project. The development of the Masterplan was guided by the idea of re-evoking the generative pattern of a rural courtyard, open and fragmented, giving onto a broad, open green area.

The project was conceived on two specific scales: a supra-local level and a neighborhood level. The supra-local scale comprises the relationship between the redevelopment area, the Boscoincittà park, and the system of surrounding parklands and rural lands: the Parco dei Fontanili in Rho, the Quinto Romano woods, and the Giretta woods. This set of environmental elements must be contemplated in relation to plans to develop the green areas in light of Expo 2015. It is fundamentally important here to avoid creating gaps in a potentially continuous flow among all the surrounding green areas, both those currently existing and those planned for the near future.

The neighborhood scale, on the other hand, means taking into account Figino's identity as a town with a compact urban fabric of low-rise buildings and a number of characteristic landscape elements. The development of the Masterplan thus entailed formalizing and consolidating the following objectives:

- Create a linear park in the southern section of the project area to establish continuity between the public space of the project, the farmlands, and the Boscoincittà system;
- Reaffirm the prevailing presence of a dense fabric of low-rise buildings typical of Lombard lowland towns and villages, characterizing it with a new central focus in the form of an "urban piazza" that will establish a close relationship with the center of Figino;
- Construct a new piece of urban fabric strongly characterized by structures arranged around courtyard sand punctuated by a tower to represent the volumetric identity of the project in dialogue with the surrounding land and the verticality of the bell tower of the nearby Church of San Materno;
- Design a system of pathways within the project area that contribute to connecting the redevelopment area with the historical center of Figino and to the surrounding system of green areas. In particular, plans call for an exclusively pedestrian route that runs the full length of the project area. This area is characterized by a variable breadth and high transversal permeability, establishing a relationship and allowing ample flows between the town center and the new "Sustainable Neighborhood", the new park with garden plots, and the countryside south of the project area.

### Conclusion

The architectural plan represents only a part of the overall redevelopment program, which extends to the management of the housing units and services in support of community life and its amenities.

There are currently few services/amenities benefiting daily life in the neighborhood. This is partially due to the current dimensions of the residential community, which is not large enough to support most commercial enterprises. The new public space, which will be created for the neighborhood in the project area, is designed to be effectively usable by all inhabitants of Figino. It will be integrated, in terms of position and drawing power, into Figino's current urban focus, centered around the church and the cooperative.

Public spaces assume particular importance in a social housing project as places of interchange, both physical and symbolic, between the new development and the existing community. We might say that the quality of the new public space and the value it succeeds in generating are the "dowry" that the project brings to its union with the existing neighborhood. The amenities planned for the project area are arranged around the new public space and along the promenade. These services/amenities fall into two general categories: local-urban services and integrated residential amenities. The approach used in the design of services/amenities is the creation of what are called "Service Systems", i.e., services/amenities consisting of a number of interconnected functions. The Service Systems associate urban-scale functions with activities on the neighborhood or the exclusively residential level, sharing a common usership or area of application (health, environment, etc.). In addition to responding to specific needs, a distinctive characteristic of the planned amenities is that they are also designed, where possible, to offer the community places to meet and socialize.

The creation of a social mix served by a balanced array of functions, where a variety of amenities are integrated into the residential facilities and contribute to improving quality of life and assuring effective management, represents the main aim of this project and the overall mission of Fondazione Housing Sociale. The development of a sense of community identity and attachment to the place where one lives represents one of the most critical elements in encouraging participation in community life. Guiding residents from being the simple beneficiaries of a service to becoming protagonists in improving their condition and context is the most fundamental goal to achieve. The solution to social housing and new housing needs is not simply a question of going back to building more dwellings; it is also, and most importantly, a question of seeking new integrated and sustainable housing options. The challenge is to transform housing from a critical or static element - as it is presented now with increasing frequency to a factor that contributes to the flexibility, urban development, and social cohesion of our communities.

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