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The public city

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The country that proclaimed itself united as Italy on february 17, 1861 was in many senses a multi-faceted and in some cases even contradictory concoction of peoples and cultural and social attitudes. The cities built over many centuries with their monuments and gardens represented one of the most uni- fying elements and provided a model for other european countries that looked at italian cities as a unicum, a treasure not just to Italy but to entire humankind. The garden of Europe was how Italy was known at the time it was approaching its unification. Its population was 22 million, 26 million if we consider its present borders. In 1861, Rome and Venice, Naples, Milan, Turin and Palermo were the only cities with over 100,000 residents, three in the north, two in the centre and two in the south. In 1871 the situation had already changed.

The public action promoting the unification of Italy is most notably remembered for its economic but also engineering effort to provide the country with roads, a railway network and the Alpine tunnels.

The histories of Italy unification reflect the minor role the public action played, instead, in the develop- ment of cities. While the construction of infrastructure was free of contradictions and its financial impact was accepted as a necessary and shared sacrifice in view of the modernity it would bring, cities had an altogether different fate. In this context, public intervention in the housing question, a primary social issue after the unification due to the phenomenon of urbanization generated by industrial deve- lopment, appears even more relevant. Looking back at 150 years of Italian history, we can say that the housing policy shaped public action in the construction of the city.

During the 150 years since the unification of Italy, there have been three fundamental moments when public institutions were, more or less directly, committed to deal with the 'housing issue'. The first of these was at the beginning of the 20th century, when the Luzzati law established social and low-income housing as mainly funded, at least until 1919, by municipal resources. At the end of the first world war a housing crisis emerged as the result of several elements, mainly the urbanization of huge masses of workers and the slowing down of building production due to private investors' lack of interest in an economic sector that was still seen as hardly safe and profitable.

The State intervened with rent control measures to slow down the raise of rents and with several decrees that contributed to the Testo unico law in 1919. Tax breaks were provided to the builders who promoted new housing projects and extended until 1928 as well as made available for all kinds of private housing plans.

The second phase coincided with the twenty year-long fascist regime that established state-sponsored housing plans. The State intervened directly by forming ad hoc institutes (Incis was one of these) that managed the construction of housing for the so-called middle-class: mainly public servants. During the same period the Istituti case popolari (Icp, Institutes for social housing) acquired a more substantial role in the construction of housing for the lower classes. In 1931 there were 59 institutes operating in 94 provinces, while in 1936 there are as many as 78. But a look at investments reveals that the government had a preference for state-sponsored housing. Indeed, that was the period when the difference between investments for social and state-sponsored housing became more evident. Between 1936 and 1940, about 921 million liras were invested, 42% for the construction of social housing and 58% for the construction of state-sponsored housing.

The third phase was after the second world war: the period now remembered for the two seven-year Ina casa plans (the so-called Fanfani plan) and, later on, for the public intervention made possible by law 167 in 1962. Partly financed by contributions levied on both workers' pay checks and employers as well as by the State, the Ina casa plan was so successful that between 1951 and 1954 it produced almost 3% of all new rooms, a percentage of public construction never achieved since. Instead, law 167 of 1962 gave the Municipalities the right to acquire areas to be used for the following three types of housing: sovvenzionata (subsidized, low-income housing); agevolata (assisted, mainly produced by hou- sing cooperatives) and convenzionata (under 'convention' agreements, built by real estate companies and subject to a maximum, of buying price or rent, imposed by the Municipality through the conven- tion) for the construction of social and low-income housing programs financed by the Gescal levy esta- blished in 1963. It was in the cities, in their suburbs, that the housing issue became a social issue. It started in Turin with the strike of July 3, 1969, in largo Traiano. The strike, against high rent rates, evictions and the cost of living, was marred by incidents and clashes with the police. Although that period is mainly remembered for student demonstrations, the most successful strike was held on november 19, 1969 as a general unitary strike for the housing issue. During those years, the workers' fights, and the pressure the major industrial concerns put on the government, secured their right to a house, and with it their right to the city. As we know, those fights were successful. The approval of the housing law n° 865 of 22 October 1971 marked the beginning of a powerful public intervention. The public intervention developed in those years left some problematic consequences, such as the high crime rate and dereliction the housing districts it built are now well-known for. Let's review, instead, what it left in terms of building stock: today in Italy about 850,000 families live in houses built by public plans. State intervention in the construction of social and low-income housing began in the early 20th century and ended at the beginning of the

21st. The state's gradual disengagement from the 'housing issue' was decreed by the reduction of funds, cut in half between 2002 and 2004, transferred from state to regions for public housing plans. Today Italy allocates 0.1% of its Gdp for housing-supporting initiatives, the lowest percentage in the EU countries, where the average is 0.72%, with France spending 1.9%, Sweden 0.7% and Spain 0.73%. It is just another way of reading the 150th anniversary of Italy's unification: the end of state intervention in what was in many senses the main, if not the only, way to build the public city in united Italy.

Eco-cities

Rosario Pavia

Ecology has now forced its way into architecture and construction. Ecological settlements are multiplying, in Europe and around the globe, from Solar city in Linz, to the zero emissions BedZed district in London, to the neighbourhood of Hammarby in Stockholm, Bo01 in Malmö, Vauban di Freiburg, Nordhavn in Copenhagen and the italian examples of Casanova in Bol- zano and San Rocco in Faenza. Numerous interventions are promoted by cities participating in the Transition towns movement, which is pragmatically and optimistically preparing for a future without oil. Representing an ecological sensibility has become a 'must' for the architects of the star system: all great projects are now intended to be eco-sustainable, sometimes with sobriety and scale, as in the work of Renzo Piano, though more often than not through exhibition and spectacle, typical of recent work by Norman Foster. We can examine, as one example, his Crystal island for Moscow: a completely artificial space designed for up to 30,000 people living in an enclosed, self-sufficient city of glass, detached from its context. The technology employed to ensure ecological sustainability becomes the moral and political justification for the intervention, placing economic, social and landscape sustainability in the backseat. This line of intervention is more easily welcomed in countries with centralised governments: Foster has been invited to work in Russia, China, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates. The latter is currently home to the construction of Masdar, a zero-emissions and zero-waste city. This city for 50,000 people is financed by the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company, strongly interested in experimenting with new technologies for the production of renewable energy. After oil, we must prepare for the future. Masdar is proposed as an ideal model. Even its square plan refers to a newly founded city. It cost will be enormous. The city walls will protect it against desert winds, but also against the prob-able ghettos populated by immigrant workers building Abu Dhabi's wonders. China is also searching for its role in this field. The 2008 Beijing Biennial was used to present the city of Caofeidian, to be built alongside the port in Tangshan. This completely energy self-sufficient city was designed by ArchA, run by Pier Paolo Mag- giora. Also in China, Dongtan Eco-city, near Shanghai, designed by Arup engineering, intends to challenge Masdar for the position of the world's most eco-sustainable city. Undoubtedly, the most important commissions in this sector are being developed by large engineer- ing companies. Som (Skidmore, Owings and Merrill) was commissioned with the transformation of Treasure island, the artificial island located at the base of the Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco bay, into a sustainable model city of California's environmental policies. The Masterplan for

the island, characterised by a grid of streets set at a 35° angle to optimise solar exposure and ventilation, clearly reveals the functionalist approach traditionally favoured by the group. Of the most recent proposals of eco-sustainable cities, innovative research in urban morphology can be found instead in the proposal by Mvrdv for the korean city of Gwanggyo, designed for 70,000 inhabitants, the master plan by the Danish group Big (Bjarke Ingels group) for Zira island in the Caspian sea and the design hypotheses advanced by another Danish group, Effekt, for the island of Gadeokdo in South Korea. Many eco-city proposals resemble gated communities for a social élite and complex machines of technological experimentation, rather than general operative models. They are paradoxical eco-cities, precisely due to the un-sustainability of their costs, their vast consumption of energy (even if renewable) and their blatant sub-ordination to the requests of the real estate market which pushes for the creation of new urban terrains through enormous movements of earth, exemplified by Cafeidian, for the most part constructed on artificial islands created in the middle of the sea. Also of interest for their confrontation with urban planning instruments, the rigidity of their ownership, the plurality of interests at hand, the complexity of their decision-making processes and the diffi- cult though necessary sharing of programmes with local citizens, are the experiences of Giuseppe Campos Venuti, who has experimented across Italy with an ecological approach to urbanism applied to numerous plans, the most successful of which may be that for Reggio Emilia. The most ecological city in the United States of America is Portland, Oregon, for the most part the result of the work of Gil Kelley, the director of the city's urban planning office. Over the course of thirty years, and through a patient and inclusive political programme comprised of public works, projects developed for the long-term, public private partnerships and recourse to mana- gement companies, together with debates and initiatives designed to foster the shared pursuit of objec- tives, Portland has radically transformed its very structure. Portland is an exception within the American scenario: its model is structured around rail-based public transport, urban re-densification, offering attractions for young people, thanks to the quality of its urban environment and the effectiveness of its incentives, its parks and agricultural areas connected with ecological corridors and bicycle paths, the efficient collection of waste re-utilised for the production of energy. The results are evident, though only after a lengthy process that is still underway. The confrontation with real problems and the conditions of crisis being faced by large cities is determinant for understanding how ecology can translate into actions of urban planning. Curitiba, in southern Brazil, is a city of 2.5 million inhabitants that has become, over the course of 30 years, the most ecological city in the country thanks to the enlightened, inventive and continuous efforts of its mayor, the architect Jaime Lerner, who was capable of promoting a series of exemplary and strategic projects, in partnership with local citizens. Using a plurality of programmes (from vast pede- strian areas to basic infrastructures to efficient public transport, not a costly subway system but biofuel driven buses travelling in dedicated and specially designed lanes, to the drainage of water and protection against flooding, the recycling of waste, an increase in the amount of public parks and urban gardens and bicycle paths) the city managed to gradually improve its environmental conditions and the quality of life for its inhabitants. The success of these programmes was made possible by specific and original initiatives of public sup- port in education, culture, employment, micro-credit and social housing. In an opposing context, the city of Detroit, once the most industrialised city in the Usa, is now the sub- ject of actions of urban transformation that touch upon the most profound ecological issues. The economic decline of the city produced significant demographic contractions; Detroit is now home to some 850,000 inhabitants (half its population in 1950), with the consequent abandonment of resi- dential lots (respectively 33,500 and 91,000). The decay of buildings and the presence of vast untended areas increasingly tend to define the scenario in the peripheries of Detroit. The model of suburban expansion is no longer sustainable. The local government is no longer capable of supporting its costs. The solution identified by Detroit's mayor, Dave Bing, assisted by Toni Griffin, professor or urban planning at the Harvard Graduate school of design, is a strategic plan for development focused on the contraction of the city, the demolition of buildings in the peripheries that can no longer be used, building densification along a select number of urban axes, the revitalization of central areas now used for tertiary functions by adding new residential and cultural programmes, the rehabilitation of intermediate districts, coupled with fiscal and economic incentives for attracting new categories of entrepreneurs and residents (young people, artists and creatives). The solution is assuming the form of a strategic plan based on the participation of local citizens and economic operators. As part of the model of development, natural elements (the river, whose depuration has begun, and urban lands, reconverted into agricultural terrains and parks) are presented as environmental infrastructures atop which to build a new urban form. The challenge is difficult, yet the premises for an innovative programme of intervention are all present. Perhaps the most significant example in Europe in terms of its political and cultural intensity was the consultation for the development of Le Grand Pari(s), promoted directly by french president Nicolas Sarkozy, as a means of reconsidering the structure of metropolitan Paris at the vast scale and in the long-term. It is the first time in Europe that politics appears to have developed an awareness that the metropolitan dimension and the environmental question are not only central themes for the development of a country, but that they must be confronted based on a global vision and programmed over time. For the first time since the great

projects of Modernism, there is an attempt to interpret and give form to the future. The consultation was witness to the participation of ten interdisciplinary design groups. All of their contributions considered the scenarios and commitments defined under the Kyoto Protocol. The most relevant contributions include those made by the team led by Richard Rogers, which returned to and developed the principles expressed in his City for a small planet from 1997; that of Grumbach which focused its project on the Seine, using it as an environmental infrastructure that connects Le Havre with Paris; the group coordinated by Bernardo Secchi and Paola Viganò that proposed a break with the still dominant radially-centric nineteenth century model of Paris, using an open and permeable urban system, a ville poreuse that creates space for biodiversity, water and nature.