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Problems relating to the upgrading of public property through measures of demolition and reconstruction

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With local finance disrupted and a growing national debt, Italy is the country that possesses the most extensive amount of public property in the world in terms of areas and buildings. It is the task of the public administrations to restore value to this property, promoting measures that appeal to the market.

The difficulty lies in reconciling conditions of project sustainability from the standpoint of public and general interest with conditions that permit an adequate economic return on investments for private entrepreneurs.

The starting point for this is correct programming by the Public body that assumes, directly or through design contracts, the task of preparing the preliminary design of the measure. The programme for the measure has a greater probability of success when some amount of public resources is present, insufficient to sustain the costs of the entire upgrading operation, but important for keeping down the costs of operations not otherwise attractive.

The cases examined regard a District contract in the municipality of Lissone and an Urban rehabilitation programme (Pru) in the Municipality of Pieve Emanuele.

In the case of Lissone the project proposal regards the upgrading and rehabilitation at urban scale of a sizable part of municipal territory, today lacking in identity, by improving road and pedestrian relations, increasing and upgrading the services, green areas and social housing (the total demolition and reconstruction of the district

owned by Aler, the upgrading and rehabilitation of municipally owned housing, and the increase and typological differentiation of housing, constructing new housing units on an assisted basis). Completing these measures are the construction of underground garages, and a significant increase in the services (a civic centre, a multifunctional gymnasium), the upgrading of the existing commercial structure with neighbourhood shops and a medium-size food market). The strong points of the project, able to attract a significant share of co-financing by private sources, are the assisted-type housing, the commercial structures, the privately-run services and the remote heating system, larger in dimension than that required solely by district users. It is also envisaged that the central heating station will in future house other cogeneration modules.

The means of implementation chosen is known as the integrated contract (Art. 10 of the Merloni Law), able to be subdivided into the two sequential phases of programming and the preliminary design of the measure, inclusive of feasibility studies and of the technical performance specifications for presenting the proposal to the market, and the tendering phase for awarding the execution and management of the measure.

The private operator will in part carry out the public initiatives, as a traditional contracting firm, and in part be responsible for the construction and the management under concession of the housing units, and the commercial and service structures. He should derive an operating profit from the sale and/or management of these structures which can make the whole operation remunerative and

sustainable within the times laid down.

All the operating conditions will be set out in a conventional agreement between administration and operator.

The operation concerned is a very complex one from the standpoint of economic/financial feasibility, considering also the risk factors connected with carrying out a number of measures and respecting the established times, with particular reference to the demolition and reconstruction operations and the linked problems of managing the mobility of the inhabitants to allocated elsewhere.

The case of the Pru of Pieve Emanuele is a different one. In this the district concerned consists of 8 derelict 9-storey buildings, for tertiary use, and 4 long, low buildings, also partly derelict, to be used as deposits and workshops on the ground floor and offices on the upper floors. The high building density, the anomalous orientation of the structure with respect to the urban mesh, the mono-functional use, the derelict state and the lack of services characterize it as a largely run-down urban area.

The settlement transformation proposed by the Pru makes it possible, through an operation of partial demolition of the existing buildings and of the simultaneous building of adjacent municipal areas, to reduce both the average height and the density of the sector, bringing about the integration of the future renewed district with the surrounding urban fabric. The mono-functional use of tertiary type will be replaced by residential use, for various typologies of users (social building, assisted building and free market or private building) associated with commercial structures, offices, service handicrafts, and integrated by urban and

district public services, leisure amenities and a completely renewed road system, with differentiated automobile, pedestrian and cycling flows.

As for the Lissone measure economic sustainability is guaranteed not only by free and assisted building, but also by the commercial part of the measure, with the joint presence of a large sales structure, medium-size commercial areas, public businesses, catering and service handicrafts, to which are added office areas, a number of sports facilities and leisure amenities, and the cogeneration station for heating and the supply of hot water to the whole district.

The choice of developing the system of public spaces at different levels enables aggregates obtained from demolition operations to be used in loco, with a noteworthy lowering of costs of disposal.

The carrying out of the measure is assigned to Asset srl, which has recently acquired the ownership of the area; this is a new company of the Azienda lombarda per l'edilizia residenziale di Milano (Aler Milano), set up to promote and carry out integrated projects, co-financed by the public and the private sectors.

Asset contributes the design, the ownership of the areas and adequate guarantees on the financial market, based on its vast range of properties. On this basis it seeks operators interested in carrying out the measure in ways yet to be defined (in a direct way, or through tendering or by means of sale of assets).

The typology of implementing the measures examined is a new facet of negotiated programming which in the last few years has made great strides forward in the management of urban upgrading operations promoted by

private actors.

In these operations, which stem from private proposals, the task of public administrations is that of assessing the urban and environmental sustainability of the measures and verifying the congruity of the counterpart in infrastructures and services offered to the community.

In the operations of developing public areas with recourse to private capital, on the other hand, an error in setting up the measure spells failure.