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The Redevelopment of The Heritage of Social Housing in Italy: Survey and Assessment Instruments. The Case Study of Pilastro Neighborhood in Bologna

Andrea Boeri^{a*}, Ernesto Antonini^a, Danila Longo^a, Rossella Roversi^a

^aUniversity of Bologna, DAPT - Department of Architecture and Territorial Planning, Bologna 40136, Italy

Abstract

The increasing importance of social housing in order to deal with the emergency caused by the pressing demand, places in the foreground the need to redevelop the existing public housing heritage.

The paper proposes the deepening of one case study, the Pilastro neighborhood, a significant example of social housing high density settlement, situated in the outskirts of Bologna in order to brought out the technical, functional and social factors, on which the level of quality of the settlement and the phenomena of social uneasiness depend. It also highlighted some factors that may pose a resistance to the measures of improvement.

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1. Actuality of the social housing topic in Italy

In the decade 1996-2007 the Italian real estate market had a cycle of intense growth, with a production of over 2 million new housing units and a 6.5% average annual rate of growth (Cresme, 2008), and a strong positive trend in sales, slowed only until late 2007 because of the incipient global economic crisis. The 10% decrease in sales in 2008 over the previous year means a reduction of about 80,000 transactions (Nomisma, 2008). The phase of dynamism in the housing market has further increased the proportion of housing ownership, which has exceeded 80%, while the share of housing for rent was reduced to 17.2% (ISTAT 2007), confirming the continued decline already registered in the past: -5.4%, from 2001 to 2005,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +39-335-6350077; fax: +39-547-338307

E-mail addresses: andrea.boeri@unibo.it

and a further decline from 18.8% to 17.2% from 2005 to 2007 (Censis processing on Federcasa data). The supply of rental accommodation is growing farther away from the European average and even more than those of most EU countries (Germany 55%, France 38%, UK 31%, Cecodhas data [1]).

Despite the predominance of home ownership, the demand for houses to rent hasn't decreased, driven primarily by the increased number of households, which from 2000 to 2007 grew by more than 2 million. Since the primary housing need of traditionally weak social groups is still not completely satisfied, a new additional demand is emerging, expressed by a diversified low income population, such as the elderly, young couples, students, immigrants, temporary workers. So not only the marginalized segments of society are involved, but also large portion of the middle class, that has swiftly grown poor and it is looking for a housing affordable to their income levels; which doesn't allow the access even to the large surplus of 5.5 million unoccupied homes on the market.

The situation that is occurring, therefore, has some highly peculiar critical features: a strong housing exclusion that affects large and relatively heterogeneous social groups, coexists with a surplus of unfilled stock, also recently built, with consequent effects of urban sprawl. The impulse of new categories of demand, expressing specific needs and expectations, shows the urgent necessity for more rental housing [2]. Since 1991, household incomes have increased by about 20% while the increase of rents in urban areas was 66.7%, making a rent at market prices inaccessible for many of them.

This has highlighted the issue of housing placing it on the political agenda and renewing the interest in social housing. The term "social housing" is to mean all the activities, initiatives and instruments implemented by public institutions or private operators to reduce the social disadvantage of individuals or groups who fail to meet their housing needs in the market (for economic reasons or for lack of an adequate supply), allowing them access to a satisfactory living environment and social development.

It's difficult to estimate the number of families who live in poor housing conditions because this can take many forms. In 2004, a survey of Banca d'Italia has estimated that 3.3 million households are in poor housing conditions. This is more than 15% of the entire population, despite the survey only under an economic parameter (when the cost of rent or the mortgage reaches 30% of disposable income) and a physical index (the overcrowding of housing) and not considering other factors instead.

The picture seems bound to evolve negatively because the economic crisis will tend to shrink further the households incomes and the demand pressure will become more intense.

On the supply side, in Italy the assets of public social housing, managed by the "Aziende Casa" (social housing public companies), amounted to just under 940,000 units, including 768,000 for rent. The public park represents less than 4% of the total stock of housing in use, but it covers nearly 18.8% of the housing for rent (ISTAT-CGP 2001). This reduced supply of social housing does not affect significantly the market, and it is shrinking even further because of the privatization of the public property [3]. The sale of housing to individuals, introduced by L.560/93, allowed the sale of approximately 200,000 units and led to a fragmentation of the estate that has complicated its management and administration.

On the other hand, public engagement has been gradually diverted to a substantial dismantling of a direct intervention. Since the '80s until today, the public housing supply has reduced of 90%, mainly because of the end of the Gescal regime (1995-1998) that had until then guaranteed stable financing: from more than 30,000 new social housing per year (34,000 units in 1984), domestic production has fallen to a few hundreds per year (1,900 in 2004).

The current Italian social housing situation is very fragmented, related to occasional financings or to emergency measures: the prolonged weakness of the housing national policy did not allow the establishment of a defined scenario in which each Region would move to meet the specific needs of its territory.

Considering the complexity with which the problem occurs, the response to the growing housing problems require a multidisciplinary approach, implemented with complementary actions: in addition to

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