Strategies for an urban renewal in Rome: Massimina Co_Goal

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Abstract

The paper presents a research project about the regeneration of an informal neighbourhood in Rome. To address the complexity of the regeneration process, the project relies on a combined top down/bottom up strategy. The project envisions the implementation of a Public Call to promote a set of retrofitting actions for a defined number of private houses to be involved in a co-financed refurbishment program. Main goal of the Public Call is to foster the transition towards sustainable development, transforming the existing district into a low energy district and developing new community services implemented and managed by a local community company.

Keywords: Urban regeneration; community company; co-governance; urban metabolism; participatory placemaking; social retrofitting

1. Introduction

1.1. Context: From the European Call to the INARCH Master in Sustainable Architecture

In 2015 the Department of Urban Transformation of Roma Capitale, ENEA (Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Development), the Laboratory for the Governance of Commons at LUISS...
Guido Carli University, Seci Real Estate (a property developer) and INARCH (Italian National Institute of Architecture), formed a multidisciplinary team to participate in the European Call "Smart Cities and Communities". They elaborated the CO_GOAL Project: a project aimed at the social and environmental regeneration of distressed neighbourhoods with low housing quality, in European cities. The proposal did not win European financial support, but INARCH decided to develop it further, using its methodological premises and the envisioned site in Rome, the Massimina neighbourhood, as design topic for the Master in Sustainable Architecture. Inarch Master in Sustainable Architecture is a post graduate certificate focused on strategies and tools to regenerate existing cities and architectures, turning them from being places of high environmental impacts, in “re-productive places” [1]: places able to sustain life, reducing their material flows, reusing and recycling resources, and reducing their energy needs so to meet these needs locally and through renewables sources [2], [3].

Our basic assumption is that if the challenges of sustainable development ask for the reduction of energy consumption, the enhancement of energy efficiency could be a social-collective business, able to fight spatial and social exclusion creating new (green) jobs and a new form of governance [4]. The key question is: how to trigger the regeneration processes, in distressed areas where the ownership structure is distributed in a one-flat-one-owner model, if the low carbon transition does not start from the grassroots?

1.2. The Transition Literature

In the vast academic literature about the challenges of climate change and the 'sustainability transition' [5], two main strands have not been linked yet and remain separate. On one side there is the research agenda on 'ecological modernization' [6] or technological innovation to improve resource efficiency, building performances, smart systems, from the top down [7], [8], [9]. On the other side, there is a growing research agenda to describe and sustain the value of community-led 'grassroots innovation' [10], [11], [12] as well as about new form of governance of the 'commons' [13], [14]. Bridging this divide, proposing an urban regeneration strategy able to combine the competitiveness factors of the top down models (where all the infrastructures, services and city transformations are designed and managed by the municipality and its utilities) with the citizen engagement of the bottom up models (able to mobilise the community potential), is the major contribution of the research proposal presented in this paper.

1.3. The Neighbourhood: Massimina suburb in Rome

The Massimina settlement arose spontaneously in the 60s, in the western outskirts of the Rome Ring Road (GRA). It is a typical example of a self-made settlement in the peripheral urban area between town and countryside, developed without building regulation with limited public spaces and services; absence of sidewalks and pedestrian paths; dead-end roads and absence of a coherent road system; lack of public transport; neglected green spaces. The existing buildings are mainly small buildings of low energy quality, which have undergone extensions and elevations over time. All buildings are equipped with independent boilers fired by natural gas for heating and supply of hot water, usually with low efficiency. The neighbourhood is characterised by its proximity to the landfill of Malagrotta, the biggest of Europe. The landfill, finally closed October 1, 2013, was the main site for long-term storage of municipal solid waste of the city of Rome and its province. The area is also bounded to the east, via di Casal Lombroso, by a disused quarry, in which will be carried out one of the Centrality (large mixed-use developments) provided by the 2008 city Master Plan.

The neighbourhood has a population of about 9,000 people with 14% of foreigners (against 9.5% of foreigners for Rome and 8.7% of foreigners for Italy), with a density of 5,800 inh/ km². Originally, living conditions were very difficult due to the lack of basic infrastructure. In 1985, Italy passed a law that allowed their owners to register their properties, whilst giving them the right to organise into autonomous consortia for the development of the needed infrastructure (sewer system, public lighting and roads) and the responsibility for the recovery and renewal plans for their own area. The resulting renewal plans, being based on principles of self-planning, are considered to be early examples of innovation that promotes citizens’ participation.

2. Methodology

2.1. A community-based business model

In past decades several European countries developed national policies to incentive energy efficiency measures, i.e. tax abatements for building retrofitting, but these incentives have revealed themselves good basis but not yet
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