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The XXI century periphery: Turin and the urban crisis

Original
The XXI century periphery: Turin and the urban crisis / Armando, A. - In: Projects for an inclusive city. Social integration through urban growth strategies / Ognen Marina, Alessandro Armando. - STAMPA. - Skopje : City of Skopje, 2015. - ISBN 978-608-65584-9-9. - pp. 30-42

Availability:
This version is available at: 11583/2667264 since: 2017-03-17T16:53:05Z

Publisher:
City of Skopje

Published
DOI:

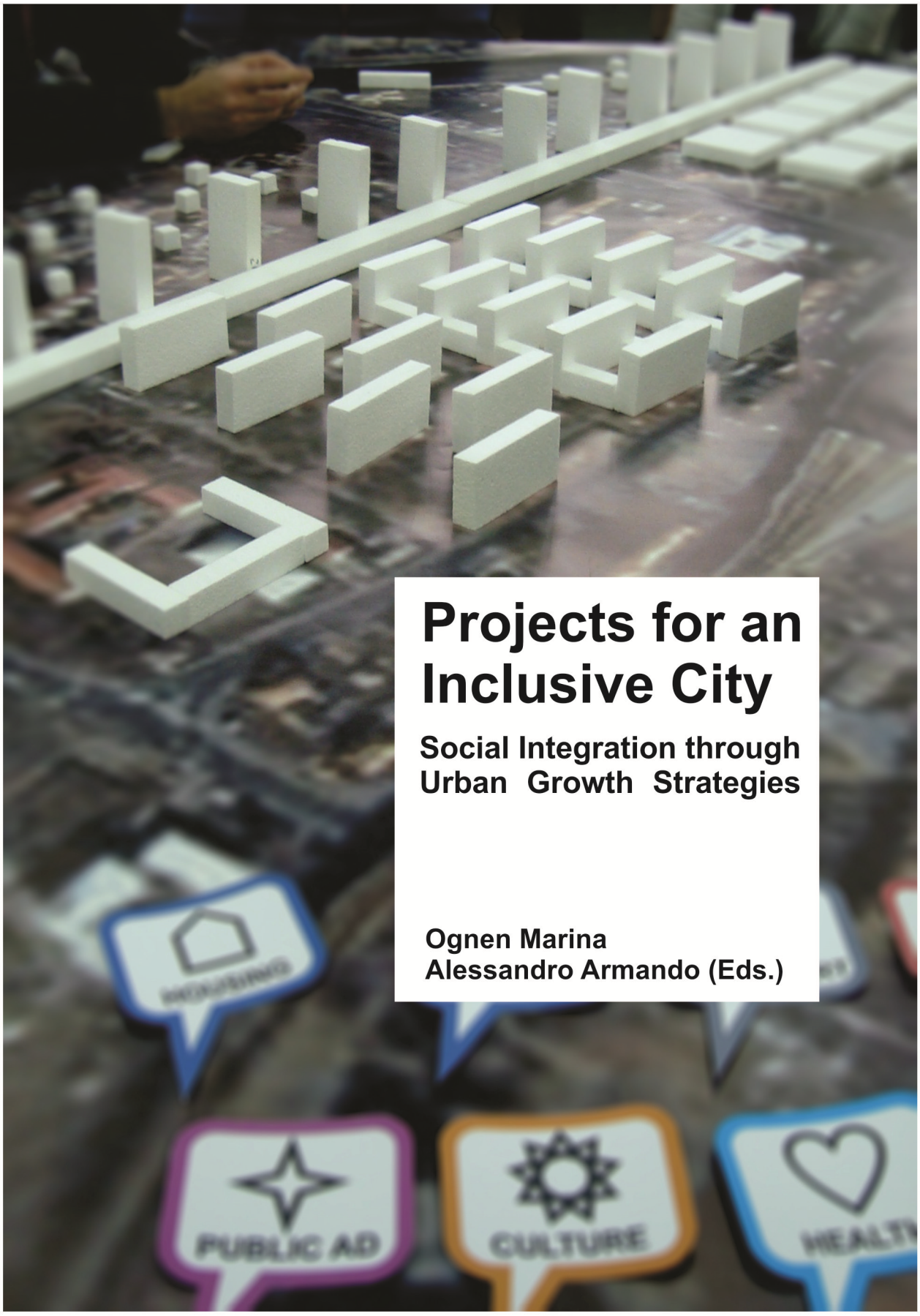
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27 November 2026



Projects for an Inclusive City

Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies

Ognen Marina
Alessandro Armando (Eds.)

SINERGI Project

Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies

The SINERGI Project (Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies) is a network of twinned cities that provides exchange of knowledge, experience and good practices of partner cities, Universities, civic organizations and social groups enabling better social integration through joint development of urban growth strategies. The project has enriched the sense of identity and mutual understanding between European citizens by bringing upfront problems and issues of urban life that are shared among them, but also by sharing common values, history and culture in an open dialog.

The network organized two seminars as a platform for creative and open debate between local authorities, academics, experts, civil activists and citizens from local communities about the problem of social integration in ever-growing cities. The SINERGI Book One: “The Projects for an Inclusive City” is the result of these two seminars. The purpose of this book is to provoke decision-makers and citizens to challenge their perception of the city and, through critical understanding of mutual interests and shared values, to create a sustainable and lasting network of cities and active citizens.

Projects for an Inclusive City

Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies

Edited by
Ognen Marina
Alessandro Armando

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Alessandro Armando

The XXI century periphery: Turin and the urban crisis

ABSTRACT:

The crisis affecting the city of Turin needs to be framed in the Italian situation for its general outlines: plunge of the building sector production, contraction of the real estate market, housing crisis. The major planned scenarios seem to be stuck, despite the best intentions of the city government in offering favourable conditions to entrepreneurs. Looking at the peripheral areas of the city, the situation seems to be particularly dramatic. In the increasing competition for localizing new opportunities of development along the urban territory, the suburbs seem to be condemned to exclusion. In absence of favourable benefits, the entire mechanism of urban transformation seems to stop irreparably. The planning tools and procedures have always implied a sort of automatic pressure coming from the development profits, which are now becoming widely uncertain. In a pessimistic projection, cities like Turin could find themselves in a situation of marginality within a globalized real estate market: a sort of XXI century periphery of the world capitalization, where the possibility of driving the public transformation by leveraging private investments is increasingly weakening. We can suppose that, in this situation, the role of urban design and planning should deeply change in order to provide new tools in governing the future development.

KEYWORDS: *urban crisis, inclusive urban design, suburbs, urban regeneration, city planning tools*

1 INTRODUCTION

The urban development in Turin has been facing a dramatic crisis since 2008/2009. Regardless of the possible predictions concerning a future recovery of the real estate market, the duration of this crisis made evident the weakness of urban policies based on the assumption of the unquestionable appeal of real estate investments. At first, the paper will focus on the general situation in which the present crisis emerged in Turin, mainly focusing on the difficulties in using the ordinary planning and design instruments to drive the urban transformation. In the second part, the case study of “Mirafiori sud” neighborhood will be analyzed, in order to describe a specific effect of this situation.

2 WEAKENING CITY, WEAKENING PROJECT

2.1 Five years of slowing down

The crisis affecting the city of Turin shows some features that can be referred to other European medium-large cities with around one million inhabitants, and it needs to be framed in the Italian situation for its general outlines: plunge of the building sector production, contraction of the real estate market in order to avoid the collapse of prices, housing crisis depending on many factors, mostly demographic. About the production, the Italian National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) provides the *index of production in construction* (IPC) at the national scale, by measuring the variation in building production based on data from 2010. In September 2014 the IPC had a -10,6% annual rate, after a negative series which lasted for years: -8,8% in 2013, -15,4% in 2012, -6,8% in 2011, -3,5% in 2010.

Related to the real estate crisis, the National Association of Building Contractors (ANCE) provides the processing of a general frame about the variation of investments in the Italian building sector, estimating a -33,5% loss in the 2008-2015 period. ANCE estimates also a -53,6% decreasing rate of trade in the Italian housing market between 2007 and 2013. Even if, in the first semester 2014, after this long negative series, many cities started to get a positive trend reversal – among them Turin, with a +10,8% compared to the same 2013 period; but it still seems to be too early to consider it a permanent effect of recovery.

Related to the relationship between housing crisis and demographic factors, a recent report by ANCE (July 2014) describes the situation: «A high request of houses is still evident in Italy, fed by the population growth and, above all, by the number of families. Between 2006 and 2011, Italy registered a 1,6% increase of population. Yet, the growth of families has been higher: in the same period they had a 9% rate, with an average increase of 316.000 family units per year. In contrast with the strong increment of families, the housing production has been progressively and sensitive reduced , with a 59% decrease – according to data on building

permits (Istat). Therefore, between 2004 and 2011, there were 228.000 new houses built per year against the average yearly growth of 316.000 families. By comparing new houses to new families, the potential overall requirement is around 700.000 dwellings»

Beyond these general situation troubles, which are common to other major Italian cities, Turin features some specific effects of the crisis, such as 40.000 vacant flats (2011, Istat) and a large amount of already approved, but never started, executive plans for new developments. Above all, in Turin, the set of top-down scenarios of urban development struggles to go ahead according to strategic lines and priorities. Even the major projects considered as decisive to lead the urban transformation are having a hard time. Piedmont Region holds the Italian record for the unfinished major public works, waiting for a total amount of 293 million distributed on 25 projects (Ministry of Public Works data): actually this circumstance is mainly due to the lack of public funds from the national government.

The last branch of the “Spina Centrale” project – the main infrastructural work coming from the 1995 Master Plan of the city – is far from being complete, and the arrangement of the surface boulevard starts ten years after the completion of the first half: in December 2014 the first calls for tenders have been published and the completion work should be between March and May 2015. Nevertheless, the arrangement of the northern part of the boulevard is only provisional, renouncing to connect the infrastructure to the airport highway, as formerly designed in the main plan.

The metropolitan railway system (SFM) has been modified many times, but after twenty years of works, it still doesn’t manage to connect the main poles of the territory. The metropolitan railway network had been designed on five main lines, which now seem to be eight. However, the former representation of the network (2011) didn’t include some of the existing standard lines and provided for the connection with the airport, which is not available at present.

The main areas of strategic development such as those included in the “Variante 200” project are waiting to be implemented, because after many years no investors seem to be interested. All these projects which were considered as a priority struggle to become real. The infrastructural project for the western axis of Corso Marche, adopted by the Provincial Government in 2009, never went beyond concept. Both in the North-East (Corso Romania) and in the South-West Districts, the adoption of new plans didn’t enhance any initiatives by developers. The major scenarios seem to be stuck, despite the best intentions by the city government in offering favourable conditions to entrepreneurs. Even the in central city, usually considered as unquestionably attractive, the trades are going to become increasingly difficult, causing a downward trend in the numerous public auctions. The City Council is going to sell many public buildings, as the former Courthouse, together with other public offices located in the

city centre. At the same time there are many historical buildings for sale, which were transferred to the City by the State property: most of them are dismissed barracks, and in some cases there are very important monuments, such as the Cavallerizza Reale, part of the historic complex of the Savoia's Royal Palace.

Looking at the peripheral areas of the city, the situation seems to be even more dramatic. In the last twenty years the suburbs, particularly in the southern part of the city, have taken advantage from successful regeneration projects, mainly supported by EU funds. With the URBAN II programme European Union contributed 10.7 million euros to urban regeneration in the "Mirafiori Nord" suburban area of Torino. The goal of the URBAN Community Initiative was «economic and social regeneration of cities and of neighbourhoods in crisis in order to promote sustainable urban development». The second round of URBAN ("URBAN II") covered the period 2000-2006, supporting 70 deprived urban areas across the EU. Total funding from the EU alone was 728.3 million euros and this attracted as much again in matched funding from both public and private sectors.



Figure 1. Turin Metropolitan Area and its development areas: housing and mixed use (orange), services (yellow), industry (red), university (pink). (Urban Center Metropolitano 2011)

After the end of this positive phase, old, usual problems could re-emerge in the near future, since the City Government is reducing its compensative policies because of the critical situation of the public budget. The suburbs are becoming increasingly onerous for the urban policies, since they don't have anything to offer, especially in terms of real estate appraisal. Some areas have started to raise from the status of ghetto after many years of commitment and big public investments, but they risk to go back to their former condition. The reduction of local services (public transportation and maintenance, public surveillance); the low-value of the real estate stock, unfit to the present market

requirements; the empty flats and the general low rate of occupancy in many residential blocks; the increasing poverty and the rising of illegal uses in some marginal areas, such as temporary lodgings, unlawful activities, slums, vegetable gardens and dumps: these are all factors which have been reduced and are now starting to re-emerge, as if they were at an inertial point, kept back only by a contrasting, temporary effort. This trend could lead the suburbs back to the condition of non-autonomous places, requiring for a continuous assistance, incapable of producing their own economic and social stability.

2.2 Urban design is weakening

In a scenario of increasing competition for localizing new opportunities of development along the urban territory, the suburbs seem to be condemned to exclusion. Some scholars started to propose forms of "urban scrapping" (*rottamazione urbana*, Della Puppa 2007), trying to define when a development intervention of demolition and reconstruction can be considered economically sustainable by measuring urban density, real estate and land values: «In general, the low interest in demolition and reconstruction projects is evident where the buildings value has decreased, but is not cancelled. Therefore, the economic convenience to destroy the fraction of value still embedded in properties is advantageous if the zoning density can grow three or four times, nevertheless with transformations not necessarily coherent with planning goals and with the carrying capacity of the sites» (Micelli 2014). According to these hypotheses, the chances for a successful (and convenient) development would rise by increasing the planned densities. But there are many places where the increase of density wouldn't probably have any effects, since the real estate market is saturated.

In absence of favourable benefits, the entire mechanism of urban transformation seems to stop irreparably, both in terms of new economic enterprises and in terms of social inclusion and regeneration of the depressed areas of the city. The planning tools and procedures have always implied a sort of automatic pressure coming from the development profits and the real estate cumulative capitalization, which are now becoming widely uncertain. Until few years ago, the planning destination of urban zones to transformation – especially to residential and commercial uses – triggered almost immediately a process of investments, negotiations, constructions and trades. Between 1995 and 2010, the average yield of dwellings in the central parts of the greater Italian cities was 9,3%, and 8,1% in the midsized cities: that is more than the gold yield in the same period (8%) (CISS, 2011). Now, in Turin, this trend has definitely stopped. While the real estate market is recovering in Milan, like in most of the European "secondary capitals", many observers are forecasting a future of concentration of sales and investments which would exclude smaller centres from a real recovery, but even a faster transformation of the Real Estate economy on the global scale according to new demographic balances and distributions of wealth. To this extent,

the PwC Report about the 2020 situation focuses on the future growth of the world population: «Although Africa's population will still be growing fast in 2020, Europe's population growth will be stalling. The middle classes are projected to grow by 180% between 2010 and 2040, with the highest proportion of middle-class people set to live in Asia rather than Europe as soon as 2015. And between 2010 and 2020, more than one billion additional middle-class consumers will emerge globally». In a pessimistic projection, cities like Turin could find themselves in a situation of marginality within a globalized real estate market: a sort of XXI century periphery of the world capitalization, where the possibility of driving the public transformation by leveraging private investments is increasingly weakening. We can suppose that in this situation, the role of urban design and planning should deeply change in order to provide new tools in governing the future development.

2.3 Designing the (urban) effects

The decreasing economic advantage generated by the investments in the real estate market threatens the opportunities of defining the future physical form of the city collectively, through public processes of debate and inclusive actions of decision-making. Nevertheless, urban systems never stop transforming themselves even if they can get worse or better: Turin municipality will not give up designing and building its urban quality through tentative actions of development, recovering and renewal, despite the worst forecast about economic growth. The alternative option to development is not stillness, but decline. This challenge will involve not only design and planning disciplines, but also those fields of knowledge focused on the effectiveness of the implementation processes: asset, investment and construction management, decision-making and stakeholder analysis disciplines, economics, etc. Furthermore, when the opportunities and resources are scarce, urban design tools are useless to achieve the material process of development. In these cases, design tools cannot limit their effect in picturing the most desirable, rational, useful vision of transformation: that is, they cannot only propose the vision which would produce the best effects once achieved.

Rather, design tools should provide for changeable scenarios about relatively good solutions: that is a set of alternatives whose main virtue is, at least, the realistic possibility of being achieved.

The possible intervention on the built environment could not only be a strategy of maintenance, survival and low growth, according to less striking scenarios; but also, on the opposite, a strategy of planned speculation and exploitation of the available assets, whereas we can measure the effective chances to gain economic and social advantages from them. This approach implies to integrate the design practices to a set of instruments which can associate the economic feasibility to bureaucratic procedures and decision-making processes, in the course of time.

Among the various places which could be closely observed, trying to consider them as case studies for an experimentation about urban design tools, the southern periphery of Turin seems to be particularly appropriate. In the second part of this paper, I will describe the urban evolution of Mirafiori Sud, both in its criticalities and in the opportunities which the neighborhood can offer for the future transformation.

3 MIRAFIORI SUD: as a case study for public transformation processes

The southern suburbs of Turin, stuck between the huge factory platform of the FIAT, its logistic cluster and the Sangone River corridor, represent an emblematic case of how the European metropolitan peripheries are facing a new kind of problems in the last years. Some urban economists, like Ezio Micelli, are even starting to suggest that our cities will have a hierarchized development in the future, with the unavoidable crisis of a part of their territories: «Where the expectations of real estate appraisal cannot overcome the value of the existing asset, the hypothesis about the city scrapping (Dragotto, India, 2007) – that is the urban renovation throughout demolition and reconstruction – seems unlikely, while it is credible a more selective intervention aimed to increase the value of the existing building asset» (Micelli 2014 (2)). Considering this condition, what can we say of the destiny of those places with low appraisal, which never had benefits from the city governments neither in the phases of economic growth? Do we have to abandon them to collapse?

Mirafiori Sud has a very recognizable urban structure. There are some features which mark out the area, either as weaknesses or as opportunities, composing a singular physical territory with many internal grades of coherence. In this description I would like to consider this material space as the main subject, as the final reference of any recovering strategy we can imagine and propose. This concern is about the possibility of exploiting and recycling many local resources that, at present time, are underestimated by the contemporary urban policies.

3.1 The Sangone river and the evolution of the southern periphery

The industrial development of the city from the end of 19th century to the end of 20th century caused a huge urban expansion, but it progressively excluded the river areas from the city sight and plans. During the second part of 1900s, Turin has developed ignoring the natural opportunities offered by its watercourses (except for the historical waterfront of the Po River, or the Dora channel within the northern industrial city, then covered by the settlement of the steel factory district). The river area of Sangone has to be tackled through these traces. The area was the site of the XVI century royal palace of «Mirafiori» (then destroyed at the end of the XVIII century by the French army). In 1911 the site was developed as the first airport of the city and continued working until 1950. Since 1938, the district started being affected by the settlement of the new FIAT factory

“Mirafiori”, whose influence extended the whole city and territory at least until the 1970s.

The place we are considering around the Sangone River is not part of the urbanized territory until 1964-66, when some new blocks of social housing were built to host people coming from many different slums. They were mostly immigrants from southern Italy, which arrived to Torino hoping to work at the FIAT as factory workers, but there were also war refugees coming from the new Yugoslavian territories of Istria at the end of the 1940s. The social situation in the area continued to be very critical during the 1970s and 1980s. Despite some efforts in providing basic public services, the neighborhood was a place of exclusion and criminal concentration, where it could be even dangerous to enter. However, the 1970s were also a decade when the residents started to self-organize in neighborhood associations and councils, setting a formal interaction with the city administration. In 1976, the mayor Diego Novelli created 10 city districts, each with a local council, and this area became part of the “district 10”.

Until the early 1990s there were not any dedicated projects about the reclamation and the redesign of the riverbank. This stroke of Sangone was not accessible and it was surrounded by illegal vegetable gardens, huts, garbage and some small activities of gravel excavation from the river bed. In 1997 something started to change, thanks to the enhancement of a series of European programs and funding on the renewal of the suburbs. The City of Torino launched the “Suburbs Project” (*Progetto periferie*), and the “Artom” Urban Rehabilitation Program (PRU) was approved. The plan provided for many interventions on the park, on the buildings (some of them were demolished and rebuilt) and on new service facilities (for sports, leisure, social integration and assistance). But the most relevant issue was that the EU guidelines imposed that the new rehabilitation programs had to include a formalized agenda of negotiation and social inclusion (the PAS, *Plan for Social Negotiation*).

The phase in which the “Progetto periferie” started, corresponds to a period of wide rethinking about the strategies for developing the city. The surveys for a new general urban plan (Piano Regolatore Generale) by Vittorio Gregotti and Augusto Cagnardi started in 1989 and the Plan was approved in 1995. In 1998-2000 the First Strategic Plan (the first in Italy) was launched and adopted by the Municipalities of the Metropolitan Area, and in 2006 the second Strategic Plan was achieved. After having been chosen for the XX Olympic Winter Games in 1999, Torino opened the Olympics seven years later, on February 2006. (Figure 2 and 3).



Figure 2. Sangone River area in 2001. (Città di Torino, Settore Grandi Opere del Verde)



Figure 3. Sangone River Park project. (Città di Torino, Settore Grandi Opere del Verde)

3.2 The edge of the city along the river park, the green uses as an integration of neighborhood, infrastructures and landscape

The Sangone River Plan started being implemented in 2006 as well, and is still under development (the first lot ended in 2008). Today the river is accessible from the new Colonnetti Park, and the Artom neighbourhood has radically changed its appearance. The quality of the urban space, the presence of many service facilities and associations of citizens, as well as the improvement of the road infrastructures and of the bike paths enable this district to achieve a qualitative level of urban life that would have been unthinkable 25 years ago. The big effort made to achieve (and not simply regenerate) the Sangone riverbank is now starting to be noticeable at the territorial scale. The City plans for the Colonnetti and Sangone Parks, as well as the “river contracts” signed with the neighbour municipalities, are recomposing a continuous pattern of public green land, enabling the access to the river and the territorial connection by turning a physical barrier into a large-scale corridor. At the same time, those activities which had composed the edge of a separated riverbank – such as gardens, football fields, small cultivations – find themselves into a renovated and connected space. The project is still ongoing: a new bicycle path will be located on the western border of the FIAT factory, connecting Mirafiori to

the Grugliasco agricultural park; the Park will integrate the existing vegetable gardens on the south side of Strada del Drosso, as well as the agricultural areas at the Drosso Castle.

3.3 The strategic challenges of the area through the district plans

The so-called south-western district of the metropolitan area includes some important strategic previsions, which have still been waiting for some years to be implemented (and, maybe revised). Recently, the Society Torino Nuova Economia (TNE), which is responsible for the redevelopment of the former FIAT areas, has sold a lot in the B zone and a portion of 47.000 square meters in the C zone. In the A zone, where it has been already built the Design Center of the Politecnico, there are ongoing negotiations to develop a new 30.000 m2 commercial development. In the same A zone, the City is planning to develop other 7.000 m2 of university residence, according to the program "Torino University City" launched by the City government in 2013. The program tries to combine an integrated proposal of the Turin's Research and education offers, together with the promotion of a series of buildings and areas that should be sold and developed within the TUC program by private partners. Other initiatives are still facing the students' residential needs through the "Alloggiami" project by the ONG Fondazione Mirafiori.

The expected developments for transportation infrastructure, planned during the last ten years, don't seem to be implemented in the short term: neither the Corso Marche project, with the planned Mirafiori square, nor the extension of the second Metropolitan line in its southern branch are among the works to be financed in the medium term agenda. Nevertheless, it is possible that the future developments, both in the TNE areas and the new residential blocks on the northern side of the FIAT factory, could help a local recovery in the next years. In 2015 maybe the working activities inside the FIAT factory will increase, with the starting of a new line of production for the Maserati SUV "Levante". Still, all these strategic programs do not involve the urban areas on the southern edge of the district. Even thinking about a positive trend, capable to invert the present crisis, the neighborhood between Anselmetti street and the boulevard Unione Sovietica seem to remain in a sort of shadow, despite the important achievements about the Sangone River Park.

3.4 The quality of living and the identity of places

Looking at the micro-scale of the neighborhood other questions emerge: who are the inhabitants of Mirafiori Sud and what is their relationship with the neighborhood today? Did they keep a connection with the memory of the working-class identity? What kind of urban quality can we imagine in these places, what do people expect (or claim) to get for improving their use of the places where they live? How many ways of living are (or could be) there at present? The association Fondazione della Comunità di Mirafiori ONLUS has been enhanced since 2008. Moreover, the

involvement of the citizens in the renovation programs for the neighborhood is not only desirable in terms of social inclusion and democratic participation to decision-making phases. It is also a matter of effectiveness, especially if we consider the need to renew the residential asset of the area, which is owned mainly by the same inhabitants. If the public policies cannot offer any consistent funds for renovation according to the usual top-down processes of governance, any intervention on the existing buildings will require the pervasive interaction with these fragmented owners. To get an overall transformation it could be necessary to coordinate the cluster of small properties – too small to be considered individually, too many to be integrated in a standard project.



Figure 4. Mirafiori Sud neighborhood in 2014 (drawing by Elisa Taraglio).

4 CONCLUSIONS

The urban economic crisis in these last years doesn't allow for any imminent possibility of structural interventions on these suburbs and, in general, on those areas which would ask for compensations without being capable of giving back immediate profits to capital investments. This "low-voltage" dynamics produces situations in which the depressed areas continue to be such, until they become emergencies for the whole city. Today our industrial periphery, which has been the emblem of the Fordist city for decades, is emptying, the real estate prices are decreasing and the satellite activities of the automotive sector are dramatically shrinking. At present, there are no conditions of an economic, demographic or even

criminal pressure, that could bring these territories among the priorities of the urban development agenda. On the other side, there would be many resources, if it were possible to valorize the territorial capital: availability of empty buildings, low prices of the real estate stock, green areas with a good spatial quality, historical heritage, natural environments, proximity to the highway – and in the future also to the metropolitan line and to the railway. Are there any possibilities of combining the resources of this territory – its capital of buildings, green areas, land, facilities – in order to make it capable of redeveloping, starting from its own assets and powers? Or do we have to think about a future of certain decline, depending on compensative assistance coming from a weaker welfare system, always placed out of (and above) the local dimension? And, in the worst case, would it be possible to conceive a city which even shrinks along its edges, through a strategy and not only by reckless abandonment?

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Acknowledgments

This book was made possible with the support of EACEA within the 'Europe for Citizens Programme' 2007 – 2013 for the SINERGI Project (Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies). The content of the book is a result of two SINERGI thematic seminars. The first SINERGI thematic seminar entitled "Learning from the Cities" was held in Zagreb, Croatia in July, 2014. The second SINERGI thematic seminar "New urban issues, new approaches" was held in Lisbon, Portugal in April, 2015. The selection of texts that were presented during the two seminars have been used for the book "Projects for an Inclusive City". The structure and the content of the book is a result of the projects, research and activities of the participants of SINERGI thematic seminars, put into prospective of the debate about inclusive and exclusive cities, comparing the existing situation in city management, legislation and urban practices with the objective of further development of critical and creative debate and exchange of knowledge between decision-makers, city administration, experts and citizens.

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With the support of 'Europe for Citizens Programme' 2007 - 2013



Credits

Editors
Ognen Marina
Alessandro Armando

Publisher
City of Skopje

Proofreading
Evgenija Zafirovska

Printing
ALPEKO GRUP & Saniko Printing House

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација
Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски", Скопје
316.334.56:711.8(082)
316.334.56:911.375.1(082)
PROJECTS for an inclusive city : social integration through urban growth strategies / edited by Ognen Marina, Alessandro Armando. - Skopje : City of Skopje, 2015. - 328 стр. : илустр. ; 25 см
Фусноти кон текстот. - Библиографија кон трудовите

ISBN 978-608-65584-9-9
а) Урбана социологија - Јавни простори - Зборници
COBISS.MK-ID 99804426

With the support of 'Europe for Citizens Programme' of the European Union

Europe for Citizens

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