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# POLITICS OF ARCHITECTURE. DESIGN STRATEGIES WITHIN BUREAUCRATIC CONSTRICTIONS



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Theory of the Architectural Project

The primary intent of this research is to explore the relationship between architectural practice and policy measures in Italy within the specific case of the 110% Superbonus. The investigation originates from the following question: does the activity of architects involve only dealing with stunning and attractive projects, or is it a practice that primarily responds to contingency and, therefore, creeps into even the most “technical” conditions?

From ecological policies to the ecology of design practice. In recent years, Italy and all other European countries have been called upon to identify and implement strategies for the “ecological transition,” that is, the path aimed at achieving climate neutrality. This process also involves the intervention of architecture. Italy has an extensive and often energy-inefficient building stock (Bellicini, 2022). In recent decades, modes of intervention in the area have changed: there has been a gradual concentration on the issues of rehabilitation and redevelopment of the existing building stock. Politically, there has been the emergence of a ‘bonus season,’ or a series of measures enacted in a few years, that incentivize the redevelopment of the built heritage through discounts and tax breaks. The roundup of bonuses sees its culmination in the Superbonus 110% that arrives in Italy in 2020 as the flagship strategy on the energy front of the PNRR, i.e., the document by which the country is called upon to communicate to Europe the strategies it intends to put in place to respond to the most relevant

climate and economic issues. Within this scenario, it is not easy to identify the place of the figure of the architect. On the one hand, there is almost the exclusion from the enjoyment of the economic benefits of the Superbonus; on the other, both the refusal of many professionals, for more often than not ideological issues, to deal with the type of intervention in question, and the adherence of a conspicuous component of the category that has dedicated an entire period of its activity, ending up specializing in this field. It is of undoubted interest to explore these aspects further to understand better what role the figure of the architect plays in such specific contexts.

Is the Superbonus architecture? This research protrudes to a twofold purpose: on a large scale, it is the intention to research and make evident the connections between the evolution of the policy measure and the practice of architects; on a micro scale it aims to understand, through the observation and deployment of the practice of the firms and the study of their projects,

Armando, A., Durbiano, G. (2017). *Teoria del progetto architettonico. Dai disegni agli effetti*, Carocci Editore, Roma, Bellicini, L. (2022). Il mercato del rinnovo edilizio residenziale, nuovi e vecchi driver per il settore delle costruzioni, in *TECHNE Journal of Technology for Architecture and Environment*, volume 24, 26-32. Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford University Press. Yaneva A. (2018). “Editoriale. Nuove voci nell’etnografia dell’architettura”, *Ardeth*, volume 2, 24-32.



how it is possible to make architecture through the application of such specific and stringent forms of intervention. The reasons for the choice of the 110% Superbonus are thus threefold: the contingent nature of the case; its structural complexity and evolution over time; and its being inscribed in a broader, decades-long issue that concerns, in general, one of the main ways of doing architecture today, namely attention to ecological transition and intervention in the built environment (Bellicini, 2022).

Exploring and describing architects' practice. A method of inquiry. The empirical part of the research takes place in four Italian cities: Turin, Milan, Venice and Naples. These are very different cities in terms of historical, geographical and urban characteristics. An attempt will be made to understand whether these differences have in some way affected the implementation of the measure differently or, on the contrary, whether common trends of approach and/or effects achieved can be recognized. The instrument chosen for data retrieval is that of the interview, following a criterion of analysis that does not put any critical pre-reading ahead of what was found in the field: it will be the narratives and materials collected that will direct toward appropriate conclusions. (Latour, 2005). The interview revolves around a specific object: architectural projects. It is planned, at first, to involve the owner of the firm and later the professional who has followed the project most personally, both from a technical and bureaucratic point of view. The main interest is to understand how architects “inter-act” with the political dimension of the measure, what the moments of contact between the evolution of a legislative measure and the action of designers are and how they occur. It also seeks to understand whether the application of this specific measure has somehow optimized and/or changed certain stages of design, whether it has involved different actors than those present in previous projects, and how the “collective” of actors involved in the design and implementation process has changed (Latour, 2005). Accordingly, an attempt is made to recognize “design styles with Superbonus.”

The project as a “socio-technical object.” The underlying assumption is that architecture is a “collective process of negotiation, in which a variety of non-human entities (materials, models, software, renderings) take part” (Yaneva, 2018). The theoretical framework starts from architectural design theory, with a primary focus on the issue of the “describability of architectural practice” and the conception of design as a “socio-technical object,” the result of a decomposable process (Armando, Durbiano, 2017). In a design process that is as intricate in its contingent aspects as it is in the norms established in the political context, it seems particularly interesting to research, observe, and document the architect's ability to interpret in different ways what a norm establishes, in order to creep into its folds and make them act as a function of the success of a project.

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