

Housing the Singles. Models, Policies, and Experimentations in the Italian Domestic Culture and Space, 1930-50

Original

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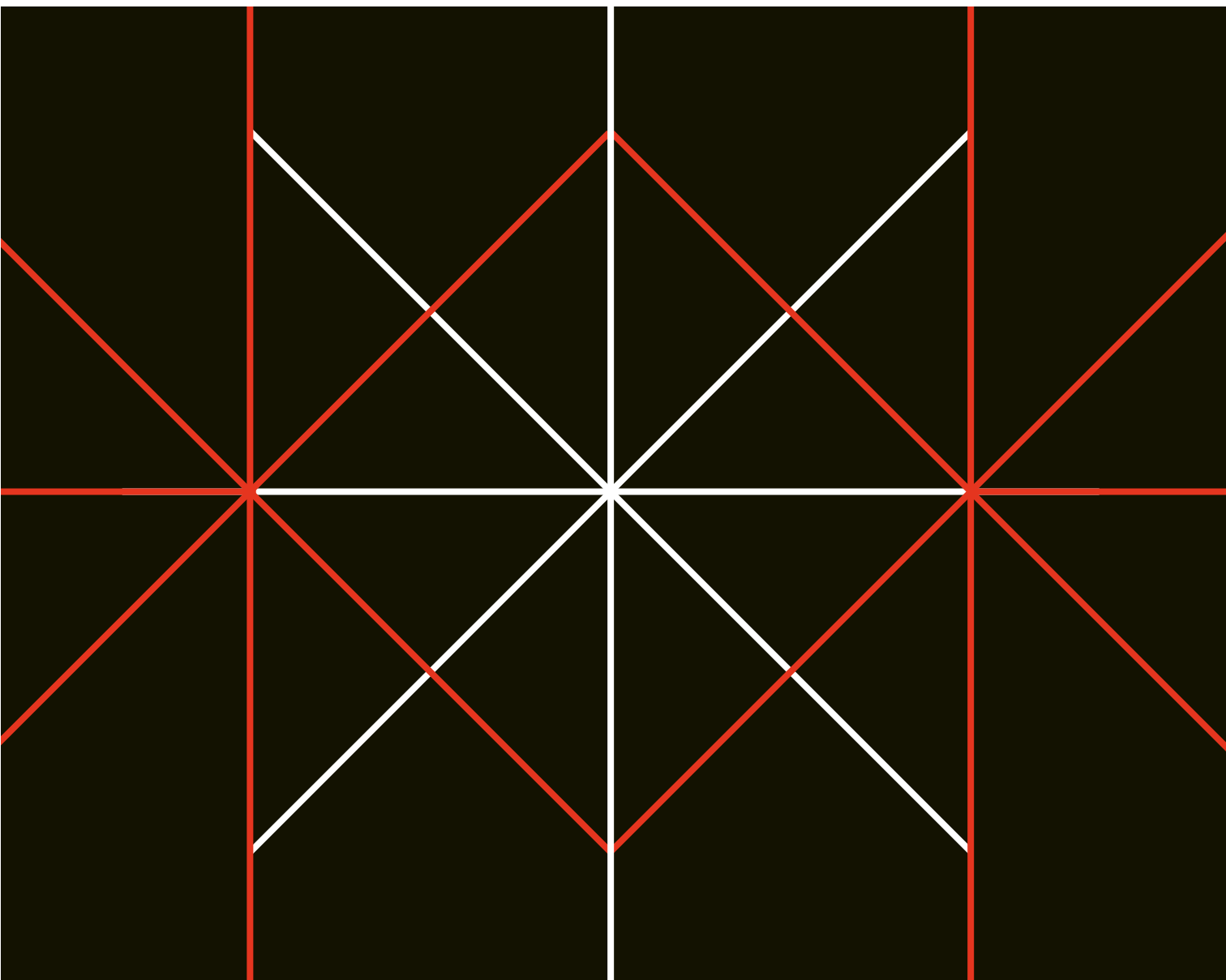
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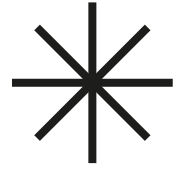
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PhD in Architecture.
History and Project

GENERAL INDEX

000

INTRODUCTION

Torino 10125. Out of the DASP-Home.* An Introduction	0010
DASP Constellation Map <i>in movement</i>	0012
Legenda. How to read this publication	0014

001

XXXVIII CYCLE

Map of XXXVIII Cycle PhD Candidates	0018
XXXVIII Cycle PhD Candidates research	0020

002

XXXVII CYCLE

Map of XXXVII Cycle PhD Candidates	0054
XXXVII Cycle PhD Candidates research	0056

003

XXXVI CYCLE

Map of XXXVI Cycle PhD Candidates	0098
XXXVI Cycle PhD Candidates research	00100

004

XXXV CYCLE

Map of XXXV Cycle PhD Candidates	00132
XXXV Cycle PhD Candidates research	00134

005

DASP ACTIVITIES

ACC Lectures	00138
European Researchers' Night	00140
DASP Lunch Seminars	00142
"Progetti & Storie" Publication series	00144
Workshops and Conferences	00145

006

COLOPHON

00147

HOUSING THE SINGLES. MODELS, POLICIES, AND EXPERIMENTATIONS IN THE ITALIAN DOMESTIC CULTURE AND SPACE, 1930-50



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In the first half of the 20th century, singleness was in the spotlight of a vibrant architectural debate as it frequently featured in the principal architectural media of the time, including magazines, exhibitions, and congresses. The rapid industrialization process at the turn of the century encouraged the emergence of new household patterns and lifestyles for which there was no accommodation in the housing market, thus requiring the definition of new models such as dormitories, boarding houses, hostels, and minimal dwellings, targeting heterogeneous social classes (Eckhold Sassin, 2020; Eisen, 2012). The popularity of those models peaked in the 1930s, principally in German-speaking countries, France, the UK, Czechoslovakia, and the USSR where houses and interiors designed for single people became the epitome of modernity and progress (Schmid et al., 2019). In those same years, a different position emerged in Italy. The projects and models circulating in the media were imbued with fascist rhetoric and motivated by an ideological propaganda significantly oriented towards the notion of the nuclear family and strict gender norms (Bellassai, 2007; Casciato, 2000). However, a closer analysis reveals that these proposals also feature houses and interiors designed for singles, as proved, among others, by the *Progetto di casa in serie per scapoli* (1934) by Guido Fiorini and the *Stanza per un uomo* (1936) designed by Franco Albini. Further, similar examples can also be traced in the post-war context, permeating the culture of the Italian economic miracle.

The significance of these projects and their conception in

the Italian context have thus far been overlooked by most surveys of the history of Italian residential architecture and undervalued in the academic literature, despite their importance to the history of housing. Indeed, scholarship has primarily focused on housing programmes tailored to the needs of Italian families, neglecting single-person households. So, to what extent has the condition of singleness, through the cultural industries and the international debate, succeeded in permeating the Italian architectural debate and thus in reframing design culture and home-related narratives between the 1930s and the 1950s? This research aims to challenge existing approaches that consider the history of housing in Italy as solely centred on the nuclear family model by examining the different representations, imageries, and media coverage of housing programmes, houses, and interiors designed for single people from the 1930s to the 1950s. This chronology provides insight into the continuity and discontinuity of debates about new housing forms in Italy between the pre-war and post-war periods and a reflection on the narratives and lexicon associated with these models from

Bellassai, S. (2007). The masculine mystique: antimodernism and virility in fascist Italy. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 10(3), 314–335.
Casciato, M. (2000). The 'Casa all'Italiana' and the idea of modern dwelling in fascist Italy. *The Journal of Architecture*, 5(4), 335–353.
Eckhold Sassin, E. (2020). *Single People and Mass Housing in Germany, 1850–1930*. Bloomsbury Visual Arts.
Eisen, M. (2012). *Vom Ledigenheim zum Boardinghouse. Bautypologie und Gesellschaftstheorie bis zum Ende der Weimarer Republik*. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag.
Schmid, S., Eberle, D., & Hugentobler, M. (2019). *A History of Collective Living*. Basel: Birkhäuser.



Crimella (1936). VI Triennale, Mostra dell'arredamento, Stanza per un uomo di Franco Albini. © Fondazione La Triennale di Milano

both typological-architectural and social perspectives.

The research draws on the geographies and cultural matrices that shaped the Italian experience and explores different interpretative keys, ranging from the codification of models and imageries to the normative framework. The approach to the theme is firmly grounded in the methods, strategies, and sources of historical research, and it also encompasses a range of studies and fields of research that have approached the topic from the perspectives of interior and design history, social history, and more. This study

intends to decipher and illustrate the representations associated with singleness by combining research on secondary and existing sources with a novel perspective on some archival materials, highlighting the richness of this hitherto unexplored theme, the common threads, and the international dimension of the debate in Italy. Ultimately, this study offers an original contribution to the history of housing and interiors, intending to influence the current debate on the conception and circulation of non-normative patterns of habitation in Italy and elsewhere.



“The PhD Program in Architecture. History and Project (DASP) was born out of two long lasting traditions of doctoral level studies and research in the area of Architecture at Politecnico di Torino. The PhD Program programmatically investigates the complexity of architectural cultures starting from the multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary interweaving between the history and the design of buildings, cities, territories.

On the one hand, in fact, urban and architectural composition and technology of architecture favor an interpretation of the project as a tool for measuring the stratifications of theoretical elaborations, technical

innovations and modifications of built environment. On the other hand, the historical disciplines for architecture and the city, far from a local vision and thanks to the cooperation with other histories (the economic, social, anthropological and aesthetic ones), trace paths that can be traveled by architects and urban planners, but also by other humanities scholars, such as philosophers and linguists”

Marco Trisciuglio

(from the document Proposal for the accreditation of doctorates - a.y. 2023/2024, presented to the Italian Ministry of University and Research on June 5th, 2023)