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European Planning History in the 20th Century

A Continent of Urban Planning

Edited by MAX WELCH GUERRA, ABDELLAH ABARKAN, MARÍA A. CASTRILLO ROMÓN and MARTIN PEKÁR

ROUTLEDGE

EUROPEAN PLANNING HISTORY IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The history of Europe in the 20th century is closely tied to the history of urban planning. Social and economic progress but also the brute treatment of people and nature throughout Europe were possible due to the use of urban planning and the other levels of spatial planning. Thereby, planning has constituted itself in Europe as an international subject. Since its emergence, through intense exchange but also competition, despite country differences, planning has developed as a European field of practice and scientific discipline. Planning is here much more than the addition of individual histories; however, historiography has treated this history very selective regarding geography and content.

This book searches for an understanding of the historiography of planning in a European dimension. Scholars from Eastern and Western, Southern and Northern Europe address the issues of the public led production of city and the social functions of urban planning in capitalist and state-socialist countries. The examined examples include Poland and USSR, Czech Republic and Slovakia, UK, Netherlands, Germany, France, Portugal and Spain, Italy, and Sweden. The book will be of interest to students and scholars for Urbanism, Urban/Town Planning, Spatial Planning, Spatial Politics, Urban Development, Urban Policies, Planning History and European History of the 20th Century.

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EUROPEAN PLANNING HISTORY IN THE 20TH CENTURY

A Continent of Urban Planning

Edited by Max Welch Guerra (resp.), Abdellah Abarkan, María A. Castrillo Romón and Martin Pekár

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3.6

NEGLECTED NARRATIVES OF POST-WAR ITALIAN CITIES

Actors and Rationalities in the Shaping of the Ordinary Residential Landscape

Gaia Caramellino and Nicole De Togni

A Multi-Layered History

The modernization and growth of the Italian cities in the post-WWII years have often been portrayed as the outcome of a homogeneous process and a uniform project by canonic studies in the fields of planning history. The disciplinary viewpoint of city planning favored interpretations that concentrated on 'linear' sequences of policies and tools often providing partial perspectives, mainly centered on the history of the City Plan (Insolera 1962; Falco and Morbelli 1976; Oliva 2002), while the notion of 'public city' was often used as an interpretative category to write and understand the contemporary Italian urban history (Di Biagi 2008; Laboratorio Città Pubbliche, Di Biagi and Marchigiani 2009; Infussi 2011). The historiography of postwar residential architecture, on the other hand, has mostly focused on iconic interventions and experimental solutions meeting the requirements of an exceptional clientele (Mazza and Olmo 1991), or alternatively, has described postwar Italian cities through the history of their public housing estates (Di Biagi 2001).

Meanwhile, a significant part of the built environment of postwar Italian cities, made of a plurality of objects and cultural positions, has been largely overlooked – if not stigmatized – as a low-quality, unplanned side effect of the processes of land and building speculation resulting from a quantitatively oriented culture. This essay aims to highlight the complexity outlined by the multiple and stratified narratives concerning the history of post-WWII Italian cities, assuming the specific perspective focused on the study of the ordinary residential landscape. Overcoming a series of established interpretations and diffuse representations, a set of underexplored standpoints are suggested, proposing to read the composite and fragmented urban environment of the postwar Italian cities as the result of stratification of processes, policies, spatial forms, actors and disciplinary tools rarely investigated in their complex relations.

The close observation of ordinary buildings and neighborhoods built between the 1950s and 1970s mainly – but not only – through the private initiative can contribute to dismantling the shared images of postwar Italian cities and the dominant narratives on the trajectories of their urbanization. Rarely studied from a holistic perspective, this quantitatively relevant built environment can be observed through the layering of multiple readings: some narratives are already consolidated, while others should still be built from the methodological, theoretical and operative viewpoints of the different disciplines.

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Growing attention to the study of the 'ordinary city' recently emerged, which has contributed to providing a set of different interpretations in the fields of an architectural history interested in everyday practices, urban studies and urban geography (Amin and Graham 1997; Robinson 2006; Agarez and Mota 2015; Avermaete 2015).

This article rather uses the interpretative category of 'ordinary' to describe the large tangible and intangible heritage that lies between the two extremes, generally much more explored, of stigmatization (Goffman 2003) and the economic driven capitalization of projects and parts of cities.

The use of this category to describe the ordinary character of the residential environment produced in Italy during the years of the building boom can offer a new angle for the comparative investigation of the urban history of European cities during the same period, taking into account the obvious specificities of the local contexts. In the framework of a scholarship in urban history that often adopted the lens of housing to investigate diverse aspects of postwar urban growth and territorial planning (Ballent 2005; Foot 2007; Parvu 2010; Parvu and Sotgia 2012; De Biase *et al.* 2014; Clerc and Engrand 2013; Allweil 2017; Swenarton 2017), recent research addressed the study of Italian ordinary housing through the lens of collective buildings for the urban middle class (Bonomo 2007; De Pieri *et al.* 2013; Caramellino and De Pieri 2015; Caramellino, De Pieri and Renzoni 2015), significantly contributing to outlining a methodological perspective and fostering the use of the tools of investigation typical of urban history.

From the point of view of planning, historical studies of the ordinary built environment bring to light a fragmented process of urban growth, largely driven by the production of housing and services based on the emergence of demands for innovation and social emancipation (Renzoni 2018) and often implemented through punctual processes of negotiation (De Togni 2018). The construction of the ordinary post-WWII residential landscape in Italy was often the effect of the cumulative interventions of a variety of public and private actors, assuming forms of mutual interaction that contributed significantly to building important sectors of the public city and left evident traces on the contemporary urban environment (Caramellino and Renzoni 2016) (Figure 3.6.1).

The ordinary residential landscape is also inextricably linked to the construction and fortune of individual and collective, local and diffused narratives, intercepting issues of a spatial (at different scales), political but above all experiential nature. The built environment that constitutes such a large part of the Italian cities, as well as the critical fortune or misfortune of some projects, attests to urban and social visions, possible relationships with national and international models and research, readings of the present and ideas of the future that manifest themselves in professional but also political and legislative cultures, as well as in collective imagination. The perspective of public history, oral history and the study of individual and collective memories can contribute to exploring the relationship between the inhabitants, the physical and social everyday spaces and their practices of use (Piccioni 2006; Portelli *et al.* 2006). Living spaces are in fact not only the built products of material relations but can rather be investigated as repositories of stratified collective, familiar and individual stories, memories and imaginaries.

The research on Italian cities could thus take advantage of and refine these perspectives, combining a detailed long-term historiographic analysis open to urban history and questioning the traditional 'linear' reading of planning history, with an exploration of public and collective history which generally has little correspondence with dominant narratives and established interpretative frameworks (Caramellino and De Pieri 2015). This approach would also contribute to broadening the spectrum of conventional sources, including nonspecialized press, family archives, promotional materials, oral sources and documents produced through participatory

FIGURE 3.6.1 Mirafiori neighborhood, Turin (Italy).

Source: Photography Michela Pace 2014.

processes and community studies. Moving from the exploration of the ordinary residential environment of post-WWII Italian cities, the essay will cross different and divergent forms of construction and transmission of individual and collective memory, aimed at putting the production of historical knowledge and imagery under focus.

Building and Planning the Ordinary City: Actors, Visions, Strategies and Negotiation Tools

The comprehension of the complex processes of construction and expansion of postwar Italian cities should interweave with a multiplicity of approaches, methodological perspectives and scales of observation, ranging from the living units to the private, subsidized or public collective buildings to the urban facilities and public spaces, intersecting the city on different levels and interpreting its neighborhoods as a material and immaterial heritage that can only be investigated by fusing investigation tools, sources and methods from diverse disciplines.

The study of ordinary housing offers a specific perspective to address the Italian urban history and to discuss and question a series of established narratives and images of the Italian city during the building boom, allowing a more nuanced history based on multiple times and forms of development as well as a set of new interpretative keys and tools of analysis to emerge (Caramellino and Zanfi 2013).

As seen in the previous paragraph, the ordinary and stratified residential landscape produced by the urban development processes that touched Italian cities during the years of the economic boom has been investigated in recent years by adopting a plurality of different angles and research strategies (amongst others, see Vidotto 2006; Foot 2007). This ordinary environment,

made of residential buildings and estates, often grew in the absence of strong forms of public control and took shape through the stratification of processes, spatial forms and actors whose relations have rarely been explored.

Enriching the current historiographical perspective, this essay introduces multi-layered narratives using research on housing policies, on the multiple actors involved and on their strategies and operative tools, on their interferences with the circulation of formal and technical models and policies, on the processes of structuring and building services, on the role of the general and the specialized press, on the fortune of models and references and on the definition itself of ordinary. These multiple layers are themselves interrelated, often highlighting the weakness of an interpretation usually based on the public-private dichotomy and the state-market paradigm.

As a set of recent studies have demonstrated, a close observation of the rationality, agency, structure and strategies of some major actors operating at diverse levels in the building sector can provide new elements to understand the processes at work in the construction of the ordinary urban landscape (Martin, Moore and Schindler 2015; Miller Lane 2016; Theocharopoulou 2018) and to discuss diffuse images and the canonic representation of the building processes of post-WWII cities, bringing to light unexplored aspects and new interpretative lines on their urban history.

Until very recently, Italian urban history has condemned the patterns of urban growth and the architectural production prevailing during the building boom, and has mostly dispensed with the study of this part of Italy's cityscape built through the rationalities of the market (Cederna 1956; Secchi 2005). The contribution of private developers has therefore been mostly neglected by the historiography of post-WWII Italian cities, and the new neighborhoods of expansion often appeared to be led by economic and building 'speculation' targeting the private sector and not the common good, being stigmatized for their low architectural quality and anonymous character.

Architectural historians, for their part, have concentrated their efforts on the study of a limited number of experimental solutions elaborated by outstanding architects, intending to define a canon of Italian postwar modernism that stood out against the vast quantity of the average building production. The lack of attention for the diffuse forms of this 'average' production, representative of more diffuse practices, is also confirmed by the divorce that seems to emerge between the histories of Italian postwar architecture and the history of the multifaceted professional fabric that answered the massive demand for houses and effectively contributed to the construction of the postwar urban environment (Poletti 2011; Capitanucci 2013).

However, actors of diverse size and with diverse cultural competencies and capacity for action (public administrators, real-estate developers, building companies, banks, architects and engineers, real-estate agencies, building and housing cooperatives, insurance companies …) were the main protagonists of the massive building expansion and of the unprecedented processes of transformation that altered the structure of postwar Italian cities, largely guided by private initiative and by the production of housing (Caramellino 2015).

Large-scale, national real-estate companies like Società Generale Immobiliare, responsible for the construction of more than 70 residential complexes in Italy between 1945 and 1975, or insurance companies active in the design and construction of houses and neighborhoods for its employees and the market, like INA Assicurazioni, provide fascinating lenses to investigate the role of private developers in influencing the forms of urban growth during the building boom, through the construction of new relevant portions of the city conceived for an emerging urban middle class interested in living in the new neighborhoods of urban expansion (Bonomo 2007; Caramellino, De Pieri and Renzoni 2015). Their building activity, strategies of localization and policies of land purchase cross diverse phases of the construction of the Italian ordinary city since

WWII, influencing the direction of urban growth and interweaving crucial moments of the contemporary planning discourse on the definition of new planning tools – from the approval of the new General City Plans (PRG) to the implementation of new housing and facilities policies (De Magistris 1999).

In the framework of an Italian planning and architectural culture deeply affected by the debate around the notion of *quartieri* and on the postulates of territorial planning, the relationship between the private actors and the public sector takes on different forms, interweaving with and influencing the diverse moments of the production of the 'public city': from the first plans for postwar construction recovery to the two 7-year INA Casa programs to the subsidized housing implemented through the Tupini Law and which, subsequently, under Law 167 approved in 1962, allowed a considerable part of the funds allocated to public housing to be used for the construction of new estates by private initiative (Di Biagi 2008; De Pieri 2013; Caramellino and Sotgia 2014).

The building and residential policies of the developers concentrated on the purchase of building land and on the design and construction of new neighborhoods in the fast-spreading suburban areas. This approach was strengthened during the 1960s, when their residential agenda started to change according to the new directions taken by public housing programs, the national planning discourse and the changing ways of living, when new private residential sectors began to be developed on public land along the newly equipped axes under construction in the new areas of expansion defined by the Economic Building Plans (Peep). During the same period, the attention of the developers started to move toward the urban dimension of the house, with the introduction of new research on the *quartieri integrati* (integrated neighborhoods), new 'large-scale, self-sufficient' equipped residential districts with a network of facilities and infrastructures that helped to produce a new relationship with the public administrations through the use of planning agreements encoding a relationship of subsidiarity between public and private (Puzzuoli 2003). The paradigm of the *quartiere integrato* was used to encourage the design and construction of public space as infrastructure aimed at connecting the residential units with the urban environment, conceiving public space as places of mediation, where the private initiative and the forms of public intervention continuously intersected outside of the indications of the City Plan.

The forms and strategies of intervention in the building market during the years of the building boom intersect the geographies of the urban development and the main moments of the definition of new planning tools and policies, contributing to delineating models of expansion aimed at influencing the direction of urban growth. Residential programs and policies offer a precious insight into the inner workings of city-making practices. Real-estate developers are capable of interweaving diverse strata of the urban market by addressing the articulated demands of diverse social groups of customers, and of responding to the specific variables of each local context: from the economic housing to the 'intensive buildings', from the slab blocks for the lower-middle class and the *palazzine* for the upper-middle-class to the most exclusive 'fully equipped' residential complexes (with swimming pool, tennis court, private garden and common facilities), up to self-sufficient residential districts and new satellite cities located at the edge of the municipal boundaries that become the new ground of negotiation between the public and private developers on the design of public space (Caramellino, De Pieri and Renzoni 2015).

It, therefore, seems possible to dismantle established stories that depicted the construction of postwar Italian cities as a homogeneous process and the outcome of a single project that adopted a specific angle based on the history of the City Plan. However, looking at the diverse actors on the market, a rather fragmented and incremental process of construction of new urban sectors is revealed: it is implemented through a series of punctual interventions, agreements and forms

FIGURE 3.6.2 View on Piazza Pitagora, Turin (Italy).

Source: Photography Michela Pace 2013.

of interaction and negotiation between the public and private sector, which often took place without any suitable planning and management from the public authorities.

The interplay between private actors and public policies emerges to be one of the defining traits of the period and its analysis can contribute to problematizing the state-market paradigm. The urban expansion was largely carried out through private initiatives, but these were directly and indirectly supported by various forms of public funding that aimed to promote access to home ownership for a large part of the urban population. The systems of private houses and facilities show a typical outcome of the building process that guided the construction of the ordinary landscape between the 1950s and 1970s when public facilities were often implemented as a result of negotiation processes between public initiative and private participation, and private developers contributed to the urbanization and equipping of Italian cities, using public land devoted to economic housing for private developments (Caramellino and Renzoni 2016) (Figure 3.6.2).

Recent research is currently questioning the canonical perspective of planning history, interpreting the postwar Italian cities as a succession of planning acts based on the confidence in a linear and continuous growth.

Among the studies enriching the traditional functional approach to the issue of spatial control addressing underexplored disciplinary tools of planning, the lens offered by recent interpretations of the specific instrument of planning agreements opens up to a history that is stratified, complex and not merely technical. It allows close observation of the multiple forms of construction of the urban landscape, particularly concerning the interweaving of entrepreneurial strategies, design cultures, regulation and administrative and bureaucratic organization, leading to a reinterpretation of cultural and professional backgrounds and of social and negotiation

processes, which is crucial for a complex reading of the Italian cities in the second half of the twentieth century.

In the Italian legislative context, planning agreements are long-standing arrangements between the public administration and the public or private actors, aimed at the discipline and organization of goods for planning purposes, through which the involved operators define the mutual obligations for the interventions.

Since the birth of Italy as a unitary state, the planning agreements have taken on different forms and objectives, reflecting the impact of economic and political power on public and private actors and the orientations of legislation that only officially framed them in 1967. Their relationship – as tools of negotiation or implementation – with the City Plans has long been at the center of a disciplinary and legislative discussion confronting the protection of public interests with the defense of private initiative. They have been interpreted in the postwar planning debate mainly as technical measures to overcome the lengthiness of the procedures foreseen in the postwar City Plan, often favoring private interests (Vercelloni 1961; Graziosi and Viganò 1970; Tortoreto 1977); up to the 1980s, they were depicted as the main tool of speculation and alteration of planning policies by private actors, highlighting their diffused use in the 1960s to negotiate volumetric limits and uses provided for the City Plan, in some cases unhinging its predictions (Campos Venuti 1986).

In relation to the ordinary residential landscape, they rather reflect a rich experience of punctual negotiation (De Togni 2015), discussing tools and practices, professional and administrative networks, demands for social emancipation and the renewal of planning processes at the center of a complex system of actors and habits and disciplinary and critical positions. They often facilitated the implementation of the City Plan through direct and friendly execution, defining building density constraints, distances between buildings and perimeter limits, green areas, services and parking spaces before the introduction of standards and the legislative definition of the tool. Their role and outcomes in the construction of the physical city – most frequently explored regarding residential buildings in the expansion areas (Zanfi 2013; Caramellino and Renzoni 2016) – can also be read within the consolidated urban fabric: they influenced the definition and implementation of the Italian urban transformations at the most variegated scales, offering an underexplored perspective on housing, public facilities, collective services and urban spaces, addressing their cultural matrices and the complexity of the originating and resulting context.

The use of planning agreements provides a unique opportunity for negotiation between the municipality and a wide variety of players (individual owners, builders, temporary assignees, real-estate companies etc.) who dialogue to define the methods, timing and features of interventions that vary from personal concerns regarding private properties to the construction in the collective interest of primary infrastructure, services and green spaces: although built directly by private individuals or on areas made available by them, they contribute significantly to the construction of the public city.

The planning agreements can therefore be analyzed as catalysts of the relationships between public and private law and moments of unprecedented interaction between traditional actors as clients, professionals and the administration. The study of planning agreements could become part of a historiographical methodology oriented to the investigation of a disciplinary context that sees the need to move from a functional representation and architectural interpretation for exempla and models to a complex reading of architecture and planning. This, therefore, allows the close observation of the forms of negotiated construction of the urban landscape, in particular concerning the interweaving of business strategies, design cultures, administrative and bureaucratic regulation and organization.

Through their investigation, it is possible to intercept at various levels the history of planning, policies, building ownership, land regime and real-estate activities that shaped the Italian cities and the ordinary built stock, originating a complex narrative that could enrich the consolidated studies.

Conclusions

The stratification of diverse and, in some cases, conflicting narratives (administrative, institutional, professional, individual, collective) on postwar Italian cities brings to light the potential of a set of innovative research strategies, methods, practices, tools and sources for the study of the diffuse forms and the multifaceted dynamics of growth of the ordinary city.

In the framework of increasing interest for alternative and hidden narratives of Italian urban history, the investigation of the ordinary residential environment can contribute to rethinking the representation and perception of the construction and modernization of postwar Italian cities in a period of great urbanization and changes in the concept of urbanity itself.

The interrelation between the stratified set of sources (institutional documents, technical publications, promotional materials published by the building companies and real-estate operators, popular press, familiar sources, individual and collective memories…) can contribute to providing new insights into the history of the planning discourse, the professional practice and the domestic cultures, supporting the shaping of a more structured view and a more nuanced narrative of the forms and times of urban growth in booming Italy.

The variously oriented studies on the ordinary residential landscape could therefore contribute to enriching the narrative on the Italian urban, architectural and planning history, experimenting with new research strategies and objectives and proposing an underexplored use of less conventional or established sources and tools of investigation. The resulting stratification of narratives could offer an unprecedented framework to interpret and discuss the postwar process of construction of the city and its legacy on the contemporary urban landscape, encouraging a comparative perspective that can contribute to broadening the reflection thereon at the European scale.

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