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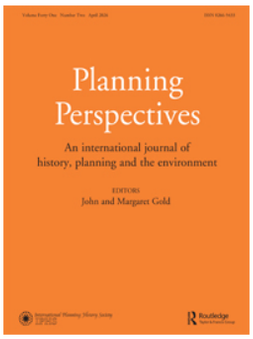

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Architecting the city: Luisa Anversa and the post-war Italian debate (1950–1970)

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the built work of Luisa Anversa (1920–2022), an architect who graduated from the School of Architecture of Rome in 1950, to position her contribution within the Italian debate on architecture and urban design. During the years between post–war reconstruction and the economic boom, Italian architects were called to redefine their political and professional roles. In this context, public housing programs offered a new generation of Italian architects opportunities to experiment with urban schemes and to shape cities in anticipation of rapid growth. Despite producing more than fifty projects – from social housing to holiday resorts – Anversa's work has so far received limited scholarly attention. Yet her training and early collaborations make her trajectory particularly useful for reassessing key developments in the architectural and planning discourse of post–war Italy. From the mid–1950s onward, Anversa engaged in this debate through temporary collaborative practices and close partnerships with several prominent colleagues. While the composition of these groups changed over time, reflecting the fluidity of the period, she consistently maintained a commitment to rigorous design principles, adapting them to shifting design scales and bureaucratic frameworks. This paper offers a first analysis of Anversa's approach to planning through architecture, focusing on public housing projects developed during the late reconstruction and early economic boom, drawing on the rich documentary heritage of her private papers.

KEYWORDS

Luisa Anversa; Italian post-war urban design and planning; public housing programmes

Introduction

Luisa Anversa (1926-2022) belongs to the generation of architects who began their professional careers immediately after World War II. Over the course of a prolific career, she realized a wide range of projects, spanning from public housing to large-scale private commissions. Yet, she never took direct part in the building and land speculation that affected Italy from the post-war reconstruction through the economic boom of the 1960s. Her architectural practice and interests were consistently oriented toward the city, with a strong emphasis on the interplay between urban scale and architectural morphology.

Luisa Anversa was born in Milan in 1926 and moved to Rome in 1941. After completing the high school program, she enrolled in the School of Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano. Back in Rome in 1945, she attended the History of Urban Design course taught by a young Ludovico

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Quaroni, as well as two architectural design studios under Arnaldo Foschini, who would become a key reference in Anversa's professional development, as well as for many other architects in the post-war years. Although often overlooked in historiography, Foschini played a pivotal role in shaping Italian architectural culture after Rationalism, supporting architects trained under his influence. In the 1950s, from his institutional standpoint as head of the INA-Casa public housing programme – despite his antecedents as a member of the Fascist Party – Foschini became a proponent of an 'architecture entrusted to architects', positioning the discipline within the broader project of Italy's post-war reconstruction under the Marshall Plan. It was in this context that Anversa began her career, participating in the reconstruction and engaging with successive phases of the country's housing public programmes through to the 1980s.

This paper aims to situate the profile of Luisa Anversa within the Italian architectural debate and practice of the second half of the twentieth century. With the support of recent historiography and archival material, it attempts to reassess her work and her capacity to navigate a variety of professional and cultural contexts, not only within architectural and academic spheres, but also in the political domain.[1] As a practitioner, she worked both individually and as part of collaborative teams alongside leading architects and planners of the time, including Luigi Piccinato, Ludovico Quaroni, Mario Fiorentino, and Carlo Aymonino (Figure 1). In academia, she progressed from a teaching assistant to a tenure-track professor in 1972, while also being involved in the Unione Donne Italiane (Italian Women's League) and, from 1968, in the Roman branch of the Italian Communist Party. She held numerous institutional positions in Rome, including membership of the Urban Planning Commission of the Municipality from 1962 to 1972, and again from 1982 to 1991. In this respect, Anversa emerges as a multifaceted figure of a politically engaged female architect.

Housing projects are the central focus of this study. They not only constitute the largest share of Anversa's portfolio but also serve as a key reference for observing the evolution of Italian architecture from the immediate post-war period through the years following the economic boom. While most studies tend to concentrate on the investigation of *centri direzionali*, university campuses, or holiday resorts – which emerged briefly only to disappear almost immediately – housing schemes actually absorbed the efforts of Italian architects for more than two decades, until the weakening of mass housing policies in the 1980s.

An analysis of Anversa's housing portfolio makes this trajectory particularly evident, and it is along this line that the study seeks to position her contribution and engage with the broader architectural debate. Compared to the extent of her work – more than fifty projects ranging from public housing and resorts to university campuses, schools and law courts – Luisa Anversa's contribution to the Italian debate has been largely overlooked. By examining her housing projects, this paper aims to explore Anversa's design trajectory as an example of how urban design and planning could be guided through a set of recurrent and well-codified architectural components – elements that contribute to making the city a physical entity. Rather than relying on diagrams or other intermediate tools, in fact, Anversa operated directly with buildings, streets, collective facilities, and courtyards, persuaded that architecture and the city were, above all, about creating places for people to live. In this context, a critical overview of her approach to housing can be seen as an alternative to mainstream interpretations that have traditionally viewed the Italian architectural debate as an arena essentially dominated by ideological positions. The analysis of her projects is therefore aimed at revealing not only Anversa's approach to urban design and planning but also, more

[1]Capuano, *Luisa Anversa;* De Dominicis, Di Donato (eds.), *Piccoli Paradisi.*

Figure 1. Luisa Anversa and Ludovico Quaroni, at the centre, with a group of students during a field trip in Basilicata, Italy. Photograph, 1952. Luisa Anversa Papers.

broadly, at unveiling the material conditions and pressures within which Italian architects operated at both national and international levels.

The paper develops around two main cores organized chronologically, reflecting Anversa's major contributions in the field of housing: the first covers the three schemes realized during the post-war reconstruction, as part of a bold public programme housing promoted by the INA (National Institute of Insurance); the second focuses on three housing projects developed after 1962, when a new law governing the design and construction of public housing was introduced. Between these two sections, an intermezzo discusses Anversa's position within the architectural and political debate of the late 1950s and the early 1960s. The intermezzo aims to situate her work within a major transition in Italian architectural discourse by analysing two projects carried out for Italconsult, a company shared by some of the leading figures in the Italian industrial landscape.

Situating Luisa Anversa in the early post-war Italian context

Luisa Anversa's professional position throughout the 1950s reflects the complexities of the national debate as well as the range of opportunities and constraints that architectural practice faced at the outset of post-war reconstruction. With a country to rebuild, both in physical and cultural terms, there were many opportunities to work and to debate the future and role of architecture as a discipline. Both within and outside academia, Italian architects sought new forms of expression. However, the way in which architectural practice evolved in the immediate post-war years was not so different from the procedures that had been in place during the Fascist era. Projects were shared among early – and mid-career professionals through local calls launched on a rolling basis, orchestrated at the national level by a circle of senior architects. There was a great deal of work to be done, particularly in the field of private and public housing, and no one was left behind.

Like the majority of Italian practitioners in the second half of the twentieth century, Luisa Anversa was involved in Italy's mass housing initiatives from the immediate post-war reconstruction period until the mid-1980s, when a general decline in the Italian public welfare system began. Her engagement in housing design, however, is remarkable for its exceptional temporal continuity.

Beginning in 1943, with the UNRRA-Casas (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration – *Comitato Amministrativo Soccorso ai Senzatetto*), Italian mass housing mobilized a broad spectrum of practitioners, fostering extensive experimentation in architectural and urban design. The publication of the first *Manuale dell'architetto* (The Architect's Handbook) in 1946, together with the proliferation of new laws, technical manuals, and compendiums, marked the increasing institutionalization of housing production at the national level. Research clusters, professional debates, and design competitions spread across a country devastated by the Second World War and still grappling with the legacy of Fascism. In this context, Italian architects were called upon to articulate a new architectural language explicitly positioned in opposition to Rationalism.

In parallel, mass housing became a central issue in political debate, and 'a house for everyone' emerged as a popular slogan of the *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democracy). In 1947, the Minister of Labour and Social Security, Amintore Fanfani, put forward the *Piano INA-Casa*, which two years later was enacted as Law No. 43 under the title *Provvedimenti per incrementare l'occupazione operaia, agevolando la costruzione di case per lavoratori* (Measures to increase workers' employment by facilitating the construction of housing for labourers). A professor of statistics in Milan, Fanfani promoted an ambitious programme situated at the intersection of economic policy and urban planning. Conceived simultaneously as an employment scheme and a mass housing initiative, the plan was developed in collaboration with the *Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni* (National Insurance Institute). Its objectives extended beyond reducing unemployment to addressing the acute housing shortage through the realization of new neighbourhoods.

Despite its limited prominence in historiography, this national initiative should be understood as a pivotal moment in the urban development and expansion of Italian cities, as well as a major employment programme that helped lay the foundations for the economic boom of the 1960s, benefiting broad segments of the population. Spanning fourteen years and articulated in two phases, it remains the longest public housing programme in Italy, coordinating the construction of approximately 760,000 housing units.

By 1949, Italy counted approximately 2,000 registered architects. Professionals from across the country participated in the INA-Casa programme, whose office was initially dominated by Roman architects, including Adalberto Libera, Renato Bonelli, Carlo di Maria, and Giulio Roisecco. By

1951, 1,210 architects and engineers were listed on the INA-Casa professional register.[2] As the programme gained momentum, political authorities leveraged urban planning to foster a broad restoration of the architect's professional role.

Initially, architects participating in the INA-Casa programme operated on a strictly local basis, each confined to projects within their own cities – Neapolitan architects in Naples, Milanese architects in Milan. As the programme advanced, however, increasing exchanges and interactions emerged. The 'geography' of architects' networks expanded from a local to a national scale, while a clear predominance of the then-young architects from Rome persisted – Carlo Aymonino, Pietro Barucci, Carlo Chiarini, Federico Gorio, Piero Maria Lugli, Michele Valori. This expertise cultivated and coordinated at the national level, assumed a leading role in subsequent mass housing initiatives, continuing until the progressive decline of public welfare in the late Seventies.

Although the number of women architects began to increase as early as the immediate post-war period, female participation in the INA-Casa programme and subsequent initiatives remained extremely limited, largely confined to collaborations with painters and ceramists or to administrative positions. Among the few exceptions – such as Giuliana Genta in Rome and Stefania Filo Speziale in Naples – Luisa Anversa's contribution is particularly noteworthy.

After obtaining the degree, in 1950, Luisa Anversa worked as an individual practitioner for two years. During that time, she applied to be included on the shortlist of architects and engineers eligible to submit a design proposal to the INA-Casa programme. Assignments were made to individuals or groups of practitioners either directly or following calls issued by the municipalities on a rolling basis. Projects were generally expected to minimize costs while maintaining an urban, respectable appearance. In this framework, Anversa developed several proposals, typically in the form of isolated blocks, as in Paceco and Scilla, or small clusters, as in the INA-Casa neighbourhood competition in Novara.[3] Of this initial portfolio, the four-unit residential complex in Scilla (Figure 2) was the only project to be completed. However, more opportunities soon followed, particularly through the increasing number of initiatives promoted by authorities such as INCIS (Istituto Nazionale Case Impiegati dello Stato) or FIE (Fondo Incremento Edilizio). It was in this context – a national competition launched by the latter in 1954 – that Anversa received her first design award.

The proposal involved two workers' housing schemes to be built on the outskirts of Rome and was developed in collaboration with her former classmates Carlo Aymonino and Pietro Moroni. Both schemes reflected prevailing trends among younger Roman architects at the time, particularly the arrangement of volumes in an apparently spontaneous and unplanned configuration. This was the very technique that Anversa had previously adopted in her own past projects; a technique that echoed what Aymonino did for the Tiburtino project with Ludovico Quaroni and Mario Ridolfi in 1949, albeit with a stronger urban focus.

Perhaps due to the calibre of the participants – which included Giancarlo De Carlo, Franco Albini, and Michele Valori, among others – the FIE competition received significant coverage in national magazines. In particular, Anversa's proposal was published twice: in *Urbanistica*, alongside the other first-prize winners and introduced by a foreword by Luigi Piccinato,[4] and in *Casabella-Continuità* as part of a lengthy piece by the architect Mario Coppa.[5] The latter, which praised the communitarian spirit of the layout and the architects' non-ideological approach, was part of a

[2]Beretta Anguissola, *I 14 anni del piano INA-Casa,* 80.
[3]INA-Casa, progetto per case in Scilla, Luisa Anversa Papers.
[4]Piccinato, "Il significato urbanistico del concorso".
[5]Coppa, "Nella città il quartiere".

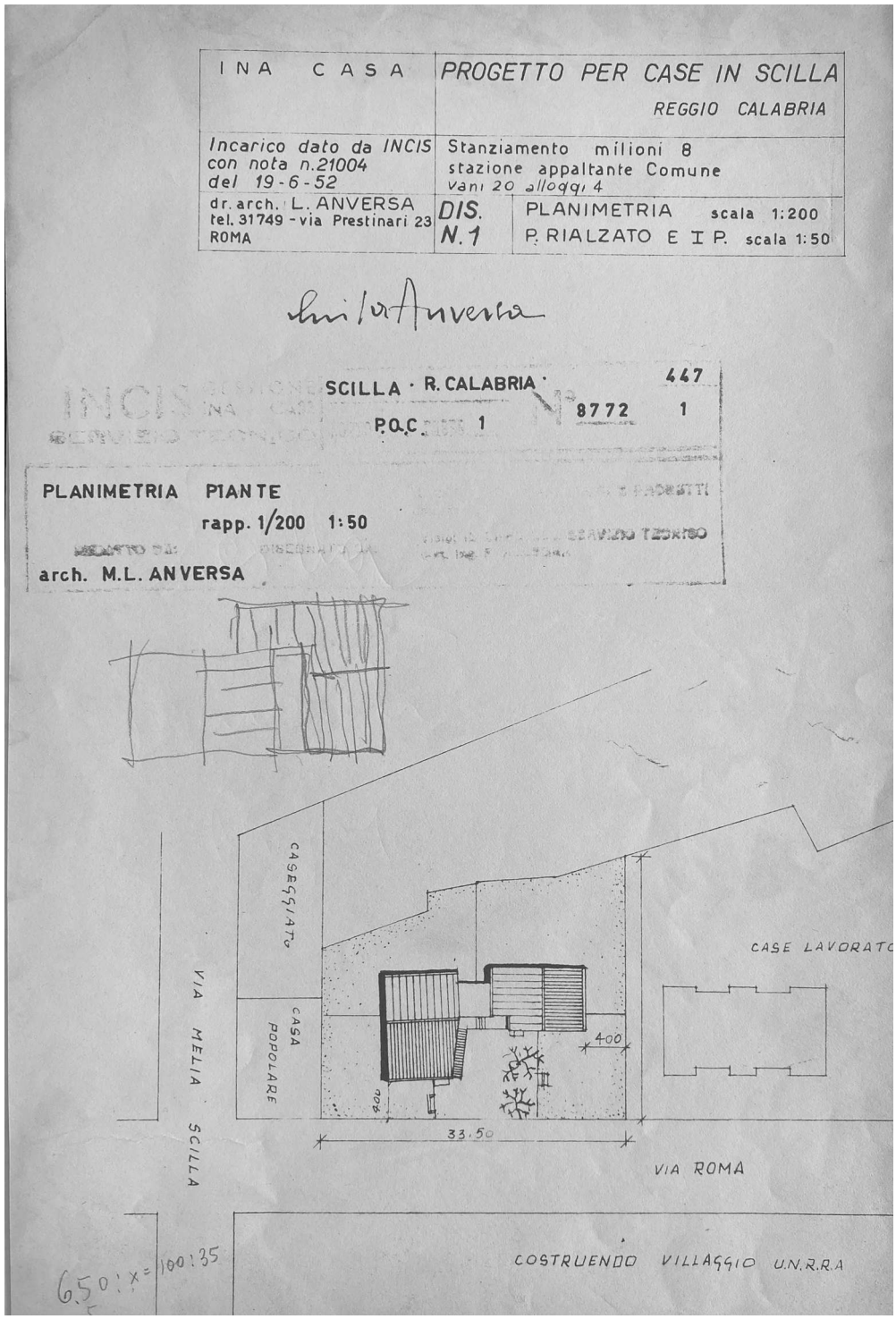

Figure 2. INA-Casa neighbourhood, Scilla, Italy. Site plan, 1950s (date unknown). Luisa Anversa Papers.

1959 issue that featured two other projects by Anversa: the third-prize proposal submitted for the Spine Bianche neighbourhood competition in Matera, in 1955;[6] and a sector of another housing district in Matera, Serra Venerdì, designed and built between 1955 and 1957 following her prize at the Spine Bianche neighbourhood competition.[7] The two schemes had been carried out in collaboration with two building engineers, Gabriele Belardelli and Cleto Morelli, with whom Anversa had set up a design firm in 1952.[8] As leading member of this partnership, Anversa would continue to submit proposals to other competitions of national relevance – particularly the series for the law courts in Bari, L'Aquila, and Terni, for which she was awarded the third, second, and first prize, respectively. However, in parallel, the three also developed their own professional trajectories, each working as part of various teams involved in the planning and design of larger INA-Casa housing schemes. This fluid professional condition was fairly common at that time, and Anversa was no exception. Approached by Mario Fiorentino, who was fresh from his involvement in the Tiburtino pilot project, she began collaborating with him on the design of two INA-Casa neighbourhoods in Siracusa, Sicily, and Naples, acting as a co-design supervisor.

To the architects involved in the programme, the INA-Casa Design Office offered a set of guidelines that materialized in the form of a design manual in two volumes. The idea, as the member of the Design Office Renato Bonelli recalled, was to 'instruct a method and cultivate a young generation of architects, guiding them towards a new professional direction'.[9] Instead, the manual turned out to be the basis for a 'normative aesthetic', as David Escudero has recently suggested.[10] The structure of manuals followed a twofold approach, with suggestions and examples alternating with norms and recommendations. At the heart of it all was the residential unit, which was intended to define and structure the urban environment while addressing the spiritual and material needs of its inhabitants. Inhabitants, it was said, were real people, not abstract entities, and therefore they did not deserve the strategies of repetition and iteration that had so often been implemented in pre-war schemes. This translated into a new approach to building sites, whose occupation had to be organized in a way that no areas were left undesigned.

To this end, the Design Office provided architects with an inventory of pre-organized typological schemes based on Adalberto Libera's previous research and including examples from Germany and Scandinavia. These schemes were nothing more than models serving as blueprints, which architects would then adapt to circumstances and use to develop their own design output. In addressing the issue of adaptation, however, the Design Office urged architects to embrace extensive design freedom – especially in morphological terms – and to emphasize the emotional dimension as much as possible. The aim was to influence the well-being of future inhabitants by appealing to their psychology and devising a varied yet familiar environment so as to overcome the monotony and uniformity of prewar design schemes. Projects, of course, were expected to be developed and presented in accordance with this line of thinking. Sketches, isometric views, and one-point perspectives were encouraged to contextualize the proposals and verify their continuity with the surrounding environment.

This wealth of inputs had a strong impact on the mindset of Italian architects, yielding significant albeit sometimes unexpected results, particularly during the programme's first 7-year period. The quest for contextualization resulted in an overwhelming diversification of buildings and

[6]"Quartiere 'A' Spine Bianche".
[7]"Quartiere 'B' Serra Venerdì".
[8]Crupi, *Cleto Morelli*.
[9]Carfagna, *L'architettura tra le case*; Di Biagi, *La grande ricostruzione*; Zeier Pilat, *Reconstructing Italy*.
[10]Escudero, *Neorealist Architecture*.

architectural details. The Tiburtino estate, conceived as the programme's testing-ground, provided the most compelling example of this trend. Designed by Mario Ridolfi and Anversa's early mentor Ludovico Quaroni, along with a team of young colleagues – including two of Anversa's future professional partners, Mario Fiorentino and Carlo Aymonino – the neighbourhood was to be built on an empty plot of land four kilometres outside the city of Rome. As Manfredo Tafuri observed, 'exiled from the city, the Tiburtino scornfully turned its back on it'.[11] The scheme was intended as the programme's first opportunity to experiment with the guidelines set out in the manuals.. However, it soon translated into a manifesto of Neorealism in architecture, with its 'rich assortment of idiosyncratic features like chimneys and ornamented balustrades' clearly referencing folk culture and the rural environment of its future inhabitants.[12] The reason why the design team turned to this stock of elements is clear. As Tafuri has observed, to be exalted was the craftsmanship 'that constituted the necessary mode of production of the complex, welcoming it as an antidote for alienation'.[13] The quest to withdraw from abstraction and uniformity had finally resulted in a vernacular language applied to a vaguely informal plan. Ironically, as Pier Vittorio Aureli has argued, this approach ended up reinforcing the political agenda of Christian Democracy.[14]

Things, however, were set to change during the second phase of the programme, which started in 1958. Given that the majority of architects involved in the programme and animating the debate leaned to the left, this was not unexpected. While the programme did not issue any explicit recommendations against diversification or in favour of unification, architects tended to smooth their stance, distancing themselves from the prodigality of detailing that had characterized the 1950s. As Leonardo Benevolo put it some years later:

This profusion was simply formal. It referred to the inventiveness of the individual designer, resulting in an overwhelming variety of building typologies, heights, volumes, materials and colours. However, this variety is a mere illusion, as no diversity in social content could ever justify the diversity of solutions deployed by the architects.[15]

The years of the INA-casa and the departure from neorealism

Projects awarded to Fiorentino's group were among those that marked the beginning of the programme's second round. Assignments for large residential sectors were typically divided among multiple professionals, and the same applied to the projects assigned to Fiorentino's team. In Soccavo, Naples, Fiorentino was required to co-direct planning and urban design operations with the team of architect Giulio Sterbini. The duo, however, was only tasked with the northern part of the neighbourhood, while the general planning coordination was in charge of the Neapolitan planner and professor Giulio De Luca.[16] Each team was therefore responsible for the design of one or two specific typologies, depending on the layout's organization. At Soccavo, Fiorentino, with Anversa, oversaw the design of the five tower-like residential buildings and the three linear housing blocks alongside the main street. Against the complexity of this organizational framework, however, there was a consensus that the overwhelming fragmentation of the Tiburtino should somehow be overcome; this, however, had to be pursued without resorting

[11]Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana*, 17.
[12]Aureli, "The Hardcore Discipline of Coordination".
[13]Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana*, 17.
[14]Aureli, "The Hardcore Discipline of Coordination".
[15]Leonardo Benevolo, "La progettazione dei quartieri INA-Casa".
[16]"Quartiere Soccavo Canzanella a Napoli (settore nord)".

to abstraction and uniformity, while maintaining a focus on how to articulate the spatial qualities of a city. For Fiorentino and Anversa, this shared belief led to renewed attention to elements such as streets, loggias, porticos, enclosures, and courtyards – all of which refer directly to architecture and its materiality.

Since the beginning of the INA-Casa Programme, a focus on architecture and its materiality has been the most direct response to recommendations issued by the Design Office. For many, especially in the early years, this took the form of a paternalistic manoeuvre intended to break with the Fascist past, contextualizing buildings and providing their future inhabitants with a familiar, domestic atmosphere. This was the case of the Tiburtino estate, where this ambition translated into the mimicry of a fragmented peasant environment.[17] What happened with the projects that Anversa developed in Naples and Siracusa with Fiorentino, however, speaks to something different. Unlike Tiburtino and other schemes by Fiorentino, such as San Basilio and Orto Nuovo, the projects for Naples and Siracusa articulated this focus morphologically rather than linguistically. Such a decision – to emphasize the physical dimension of architecture morphologically rather than linguistically – had multiple motivations and carried significant implications.

The first involves a radical change in the layout. Compared to Fiorentino and Anversa's earlier experimentations in housing design, these two schemes follow a new set of rules based on alignments and orthogonality. There seem to be multiple reasons why this shift occurred. Among them was the need to address the outcomes of Tiburtino, where constraints such as low budget, a tight schedule, and an unskilled workforce compelled architects to indulge in variations. This was one of the main regrets Ludovico Quaroni expressed in his 1957 article *Il paese dei barocchi*:

In our desire to design a neighbourhood as a sequence of spaces, we forgot that these spaces had to be, above all, a composition of buildings arranged according to the rules of perspective. The Tiburtino design resulted from a specific mood translated into bricks, blocks and plaster, and like any mood it had to be overcome.[18]

In response to this plea, architects embarked on a search for a new morphological order. While incorporating typological variations, this order reflected the need to withdraw from the rural and idyllic imagery conveyed by projects such as Tiburtino or, to a lesser extent, San Basilio. To reassert the urban vocation of the two schemes, Fiorentino and Anversa placed particular emphasis on building morphology and structure. The latter was left exposed, projected outward in a way that Roberto Gargiani has called 'the vocation to urban ordering of the skeleton'.[19] The exposure of the concrete skeleton had multiple effects. First, it enabled architects to overcome the typical fragmentation of earlier housing schemes, with individual units now pieced together by the unifying agency of the concrete frame. Consequently, it became the medium to negotiate the relationship between the buildings and the outside space, allowing the latter to be, in a sense, physically connected with the former. Besides that, however, the exposure of the concrete skeleton allowed the architects to frame variations in buildings and outer spaces within a coherent visual and technical logic based on standardization and repetition. In so doing, the design team succeeded where the Tiburtino project had failed.[20]

Articulating the physicality of architecture in morphological rather than linguistic terms also implied a radical shift in the design focus. Following Quaroni's plea, all agreed that the aim was

[17]Casciato, "Neorealism in Italian Architecture".
[18]Quaroni, "Il paese dei barocchi".
[19]Gargiani, *Eretici italiani dell'architettura razionalista. Razionalismo emozionale per l'identità democratica italiana 1945-1966*, 245-250.
[20]Gestione INA-Casa, Napoli – Località Soccavo Canzanella; Edificio E. Piante fondazioni e p. terra – prospetti. Edificio F. Piante fondazioni e p. terra – prospetti; Luisa Anversa Papers.

Figure 3. INA-Casa neighbourhood in Soccavo, Naples, Italy. Photograph, 1950s (date unknown). Luisa Anversa Papers.

to withdraw from the emphasis on detailing that had characterized the early phase of the programme. Anversa and Fiorentino responded by redirecting their focus towards elements mediating the relationship between buildings and the outside space. In this respect, the 'vocation to urban ordering of the skeleton' proved particularly useful. The exposed concrete skeleton, in fact, provided both the conceptual and physical framework in which urban and architectural elements were to be inscribed (Figure 3). Thus, the design team moved forward. It began conceiving the neighbourhood as a dynamic sequence of streets, loggias, porticos, shafts, enclosures, and courtyards, all organized according to the overarching logic of the concrete frame. As Renato Bonelli has observed, despite being the smallest and least visible of these elements, a crucial role in this context was played by the shaft.[21] It was the shaft, in fact, that enabled Fiorentino and Anversa to maximize the number of housing units in a single row, and therefore use this row as a morphological element. Supplied with ventilation shafts, the three linear housing blocks designed by Fiorentino and Anversa served as a thick wall-like limit against which the entire neighbourhood layout was to be organized.

The approach tested in Soccavo was confirmed and further developed in the Santa Panagia housing scheme, undertaken by Fiorentino and Anversa in the same period. Of particular interest, in this context, is the short description of the project that Fiorentino himself provided in a book

[21]"Quartiere Soccavo Canzanella a Napoli (settore nord)"; Bonelli, "Santa Panagia".

published in 1985, shortly after his death, and significantly entitled *La casa*. At Santa Panagia, the idea was:

To provide a design that echoed the atmospheres and dimensions of Siracusa's ancient city, the sense of enclosure and shade it provided, and the role that walls and other outsized elements played in its morphological organization. It is an attempt of total design where nothing is left to chance and where architectural typology and urban morphology help to define spaces and their attributes, particularly concerning spatial hierarchies, transitions, and sequences. It is a proposal in which the plan becomes architecturally significant, and the norm stands out because of its clarity and morphological role, making the long-lasting construction process easier.[22]

In the Santa Panagia project, the design team built upon the experience developed at Soccavo, operating on multiple levels. At the organizational level, great emphasis was placed on the relationship between architectural typology and urban morphology, with the former providing the basis for the latter's configuration. Buildings of different shapes, sizes and heights aggregate in rows and courtyards, and alternate to inform the role and size of outdoor areas. Once again, shafts were used to maximize the number of housing units in the fat apartment blocks flanking the alleyway, allowing for a more compact layout. In this context, Fiorentino and Anversa did not refer to typology as an abstract entity, but rather as the basic physical element upon which to organize a city sector and shape its outside spaces. It is upon this physicality, therefore, that they relied to echo a continuity with the existing urban fabric. Alongside organizational and configurational concerns, in fact, there was also a need to establish a physical, perceptual and atmospheric connection with the surrounding city, in order to avoid the fragmentation and sense of displacement that had manifested in Tiburtino and other projects of the programme's first round. As Quaroni had warned, at stake were the city and its image. Indeed, the concept of urban imageability was becoming increasingly influential within Fiorentino's entourage. As Hilda Selem had shown in her discussion of Fiorentino's projects for San Basilio and Orto Nuovo in 'The Architectural Review',[23] concepts regarding the perceptual form of the city developed in the United States by Kevin Lynch were entering the Italian debate, strongly impacting the way architects observed, understood, and designed the city.[24] The reference to pre-organized typological schemes prepared by the INA-Casa Design Office and included in the recommendation manual was therefore abandoned in favour of a renewed attention to the surrounding city and its features, which turned out to be the new norm to follow. In Santa Panagia, this line of thinking materialized in a series of spatial devices derived from alignments, enclosures, and carefully calculated openings – in other words, a set of formal operations aimed at reproducing the attributes and atmosphere of a city. Indeed, the Santa Panagia project developed along a 30-meter-wide, tree-lined alleyway with apartment blocks and terraced courtyard houses on either side. At both ends, the alleyway opened onto two large squares where neighbourhood facilities – two schools, a church, a community centre, and green areas – are located. Furthermore, a second row of linear and terraced buildings provided additional open areas, including courtyards alongside the alleyway and lanes behind the two squares (Figure 4). A series of spatial connections and transitions were expected to further enrich this articulation. Porticoed ground floors, setbacks, and the varying alignment of buildings were intended to fix the elements together and ensure the site had a visual and physical continuity with the existing city, in line with the architects' claims.[25] As a result, the outdoor space emerged

[22]Fiorentino, *La casa*, 114.
[23]Selem, "Urbs in rure."
[24]Lynch, "The Form of Cities."
[25]Bonelli, "Complesso residenziale a Santa Panagia, presso Siracusa".

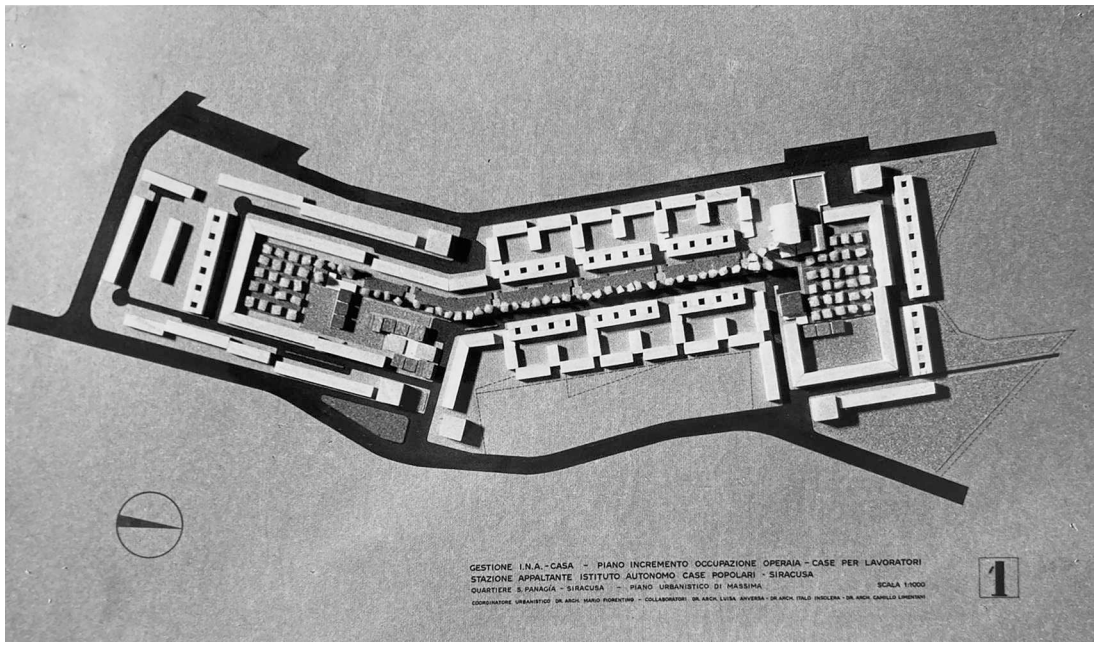

Figure 4. INA-Casa neighbourhood in Santa Panagía, Siracusa, Italy. Model, 1950s (date unknown). Luisa Anversa Papers.

as a carved void where urban attributes were intended to materialize. As Carlo Aymonino would emphasize some twenty-five years later in a retrospective interpretation, Santa Panagia was more than a neighborhood: it was rather a 'piece of city' where 'courtyards, squares and streets were somehow reinvented and re-designed'.[26]

To understand the source of these developments, it is helpful to take a step back and look at the 1955 competition for the Spine Bianche neighbourhood in Matera, which many Italian architects saw as an immediate opportunity for redemption – and whose layout is widely regarded as marking the beginning of a new trend following Tiburtino.[27] Both Fiorentino and Anversa took part in the competition, being awarded second and third prizes, respectively. The two had not yet worked together, and their solutions had very little in common.[28] Whereas Fiorentino's proposal relied on the iteration of a single morphological element, resulting in a series of open courtyards that were almost literally modelled on Scandinavian and Northern European examples – particularly on the project for the city of Vällingby[29] –, the layout developed by Anversa featured a much wider variety of solutions. Streets alternated with squares and smaller enclosures, while buildings arranged in double or triple parallel rows offered multiple visual perspectives towards a central focal point housing community facilities. In this respect, the way in which Anversa organized the layout appears to foreshadow much of what she and Fiorentino would later implement in Santa Panagia and, to a lesser extent, Soccavo. To further clarify her contribution to the latter, however, it is worth looking at a project she undertook for the Serra Venerdì housing scheme in Matera,

[26]Aymonino, "I progetti dal 1955 al 1965".
[27]Chiarini; Girelli, "Dal Tiburtino a Matera".
[28]"Quartiere 'A' Spine Bianche".
[29]Markelius, Selem, "Nuovi sviluppi urbanistici a Stoccolma". Selem was Fiorentino's main partner in the Spine Bianche competition.

carried out with her associates immediately after Spine Bianche. As the architect in charge of the design and construction, Anversa had the chance to address multiple aspects. The focus on the urban vocation of architectural elements, however, seems to have been her priority by far, with podiums, porticoes and loggias being instrumental not only in shaping the buildings but most importantly in adjusting their relationship with the outside spaces.[30] In Soccavo, this emphasis would merge with Fiorentino's focus on exposed concrete and rusticated surfaces, resulting in a configuration based on a new morphological order. Against this backdrop, it is therefore unsurprising that the design team replicated the set of solutions initially adopted in Santa Panagia and Soccavo for a neighbourhood project they would develop a few years later in Caserta (Figure 5).[31] However, the site's different size and layout required substantial adaptations, producing interesting consequences for the neighbourhood's overall configuration. As in Soccavo – and to a certain extent Santa Panagia – the housing stock included linear and tower-like buildings, with elevations partitioned according to the structural grid. In parallel, the architects implemented a single, unifying morphological order consisting of an outsized courtyard around which buildings aggregated – essentially a scaled-up replica of one of the two squares at Santa Panagia, nearly twice its size and height. After all, the architects' primary interest was in providing a physical and visual continuity with the existing city, and Caserta's late Baroque urban layout, which differs in size and grandeur from Siracusa's smaller building pattern, might have influenced this choice. On the other hand, the decision to scale up the courtyard may also have been influenced by the new direction the national debate had taken on the eve of the 1960s. While the recommendations issued by the INA-Casa Programme remained substantially unchanged, public housing schemes developed between the late 1950s and the early 1960s began to incorporate large-scale design and planning concepts, in line with the discourse about the *grande dimensione* and the *città territorio*.[32] As such, the scheme adopted for the Vanvitelli neighbourhood resulted in a paradoxical autonomous entity, with its big rectangular courtyard abstracting the main characteristics of the existing city in a single formal gesture. In formal terms, this translated into a genuine urban figuration that stood out from the existing background while maintaining physical continuity with the surrounding city. A decisive counterbalance to abstraction, once again, came from the attention that architects drew to architecture and its materiality. Of particular interest, in the case of the Caserta neighbourhood, is the care they took in addressing planted and paved areas. In addition to housing blocks, the plan also included a small provision of collective facilities, as required for the *unità di vicinato* (neighbourhood units) of the first seven-year phase of the INA-Casa. Among these is the children's play area: 'a basin made of tufo blocks, filled with sand and covered with brick pavement'.[33] An attention to detail that was evident as early as Soccavo, where the paving was designed down to the setting of the tiles, and that became a key project feature in Santa Panagia and Caserta, having been implemented since the initial design phase.[34] In a retrospective analysis about the fading of neorealism, Anversa acknowledged that it unfolded gradually, with vernacular revivals alternating with a more rational posture.[35] As part of this transition, the approach adopted by Anversa and Fiorentino for the three INA-Casa projects distanced itself from vernacularisms or linguistic revivals. Instead, it drew inspiration from the city and its morphological stratifications, achieving

[30]"Quartiere 'B' Serra Venerdì".
[31]"Quartiere INA-Casa 'Vanvitelli' a Caserta, 1964-1967"; Gestione INA-Casa, Caserta – Località Collimozzi. Planimetria. Luisa Anversa Papers.
[32]Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana*, 45.
[33]Gestione INA-Casa, Caserta – Località Collimozzi. Planimetria. Luisa Anversa Papers.
[34]Gestione INA-Casa, Napoli – Località Soccavo Canzanella. Planimetria delle sistemazioni esterne. Luisa Anversa Papers.
[35]Capuano, *Luisa Anversa*, 201.

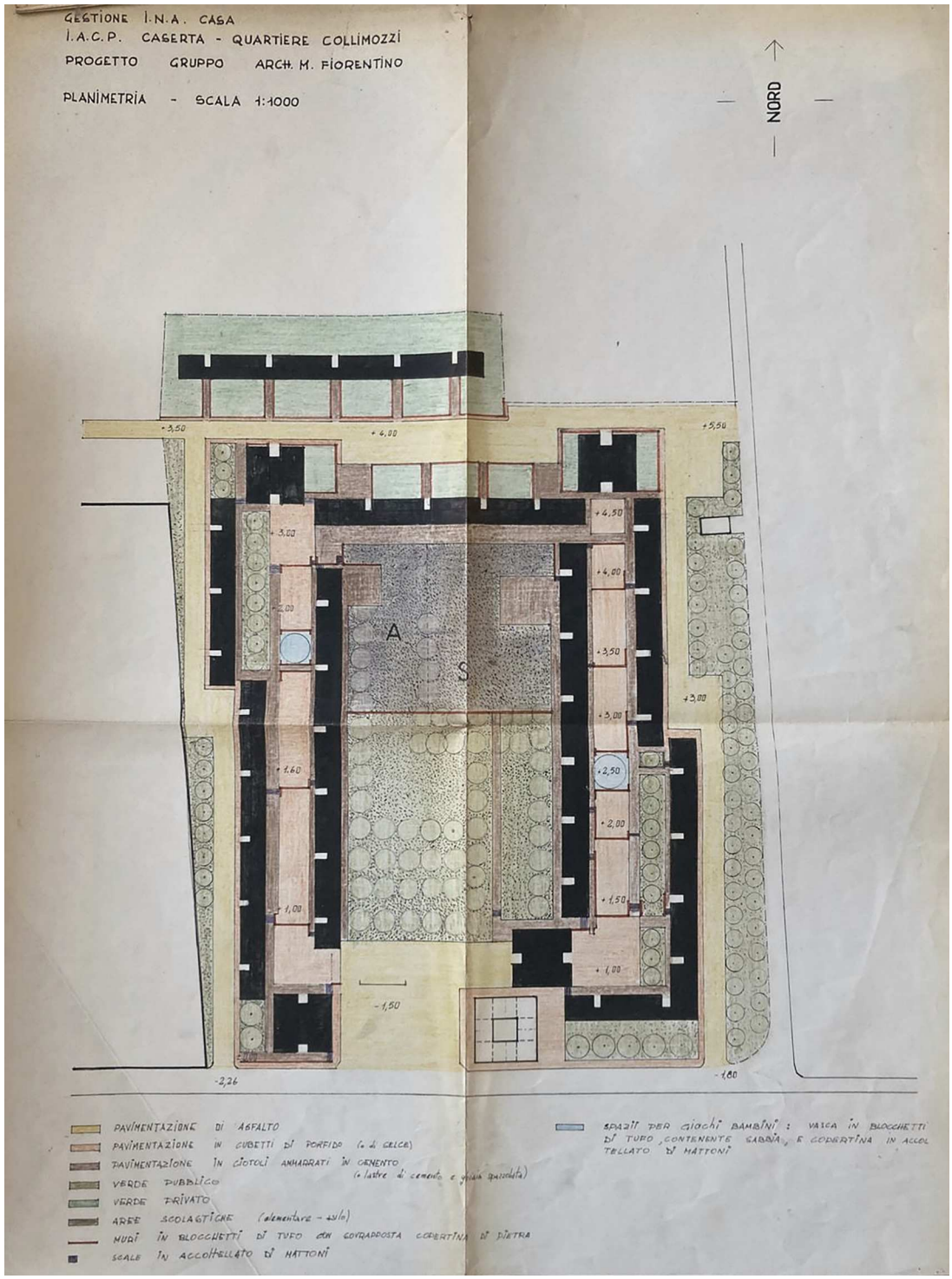

Figure 5. INA-Casa neighbourhood, Caserta, Italy. Site plan showing the treatment of outdoor spaces, 1960s (date unknown). Luisa Anversa Papers.

results that went well beyond the programme's original scope and aims. This enabled Anversa – more than Fiorentino – to engage with the debate around notions such as the *città territorio* or the *grande dimensione* from a rather eccentric position. From Anversa and Fiorentino's standpoint, in fact, abstraction did not imply a generic indefiniteness or openness, as it did for those who steered the debate in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but rather a process of distillation in which the essential characteristics of a city were, nonetheless, preserved. This is precisely what Anversa achieved during a decade of design activity focused almost exclusively on housing: abstracting the characteristics of a city into housing schemes while pursuing a non-ideological spatial and social continuity with the existing city.

To this end, it is instructive to consider the impact of the Santa Panagia project on the late-1950s debate, an influence extending far beyond the authors' immediate circle. Apart from Renato Bonelli's brief, its significance was first recognized by the Milan-based journal *Casabella-Continuità*, which featured an illustrated reference to the project in a 1960 article by Aldo Rossi, Gianugo Polesello, and Francesco Tentori.[36] Notably, the three authors framed the plan within a broader discussion about the growth of cities and the role of the urban periphery, highlighting its potential as a model for fostering both human and physical proximity through the articulation of indoor and outdoor spaces. In this respect, their observation implicitly anticipated key concerns that Aymonino would later emphasize, with courtyards, squares, and streets serving as morpho-typological instruments to counter urban dispersal, promote a more compact city and enhance overall urban imageability. Although this alignment only emerged retrospectively, it does not seem coincidental. Indeed, in the second half of the 1950s, Aymonino, Rossi, and Tentori had played a leading role in reorienting neorealism toward realism, seeking a 'tradition' that drew on the lessons of the nineteenth-century city while engaging with contemporary development challenges. For Tentori in particular, one such challenge was the interplay of social practices and housing culture, which he considered a primary concern for architecture.[37] However, by 1962, the debate would observe a shift in focus, and the new perspective offered by the *grande dimensione* and the *città territorio* appeared to render these earlier ideas less central.[38] Anversa, however, did not abandon them.

Between practice and political engagement: the projects for Italconsult

After ending her collaboration with Fiorentino, Anversa drew on strategies developed within the INA-Casa projects to inform and refine her own distinctive approach. Building on the emphasis on continuity and the physical dimension of architecture – first pioneered in the Materan period and then consolidated with her colleague –, she came to develop a personal interpretation of the role that architects and planners claimed for themselves – and the discipline – in those years. The end of post-war reconstruction and the growing economic prosperity confronted architects with new demands as well as unprecedented working conditions. Commissions increased in number, from both the public and private sectors, along with the size and scale of projects. Between 1964 and 1969, Anversa designed two large public housing schemes for approximately 35,000 inhabitants in Rome (Tor de' Cenci) and Naples (Secondigliano); two proposals for a workers' housing complex in Córdoba, Argentina, for 4,000 people on behalf of FIAT; three resorts for 600 guests

[36]Polesello, Rossi, Tentori, "Il problema della periferia nella città moderna".
[37]Durbiano, *I nuovi maestri,* 26.
[38]Piccinato, Quilici, Tafuri (per lo studio AUA di Roma), "La città territorio. Verso una nuova dimensione".

each, expandable up to 5,000; and a tourism development plan in Tunisia for around 10,000 people.[39]

While her colleagues became increasingly involved with notions such as the *grande dimensione* and the *città territorio* – obliterating the communitarian stance and meeting the demand for a new city with the design of large urban facilities and business districts –, Anversa continued to pursue her own approach in the field of housing and associated facilities. Of particular interest in this context is her contribution to the *Unione Donne Italiane* (National Union of Women), an association of women that aimed to raise awareness of gender issues within the Italian political arena. Inspired by a profound antifascist determination, the *Unione Donne Italiane* (UDI) developed a long-standing commitment to defending women's rights throughout the post-war reconstruction period and subsequent economic boom. This activism gained particular momentum between the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the so-called Italian 'economic miracle' prompted the UDI to draw increasing attention to women entering the workforce and to the acknowledgement of housekeeping as a profession. Anversa contributed to this discussion as a speaker at the 1962 UDI seminar entitled *The work of women and the protection of childhood.*[40] Her standpoint was that of a thirty-seven-year-old architect with a decade of experience in housing and neighbourhood design, and a profound familiarity with practical matters as well as long-term, strategic issues. This is evident from the title of her contribution, 'Childhood facilities in the framework of municipal planning', in which both stances were included.[41] Issues addressed by Anversa were rather fundamental, ranging from the plot area and the sphere of influence to the location of each childhood facility, particularly in public and low-income residential areas. Interestingly, the more Anversa presented her observations in detail, the clearer the picture became, as did the emphasis she placed on the need for a general normative plan. Starting with fine-grained analysis, the scope of her thoughts increasingly expanded to encompass the entire city and its planning. Indeed, for Anversa, childhood facilities had to be planned to minimize walkway distance from home, facilitate women's daily duties, and ultimately reinforce the sense of community within the neighbourhood. Likewise, the number of children in each class should not exceed twenty. In 1962, with Italian architects obsessed about the *grande dimensione*, Anversa's attention to such small figures was not obvious. Yet, her fine-grained approach was not intended to obliterate large-scale issues, which emerged instead as the normative background in which transformations should be inscribed. In this context, her commitment to integrated design (*progettazione integrale*) promoted within and through the newly established *Società di Architetti e Urbanisti* (Architects and Planners Society) is not surprising. The *Società di Architetti e Urbanisti* – of which Anversa was a member – was an association of architects and planners, all more or less involved with academia, who had graduated in the immediate post-war years and dedicated themselves to the reconstruction of the country. The society was established in 1957 to encourage architects and planners to play a larger role in decision-making processes and had a considerable impact on the debate, particularly among undergraduate students. Indeed, the establishment of the SAU gave way to a series of similar initiatives: amongst them was the one leading to the birth of the AUA, *Associazione Urbanisti e Architetti* (Association of Urban Planners and Architects), which included a young Manfredo Tafuri.[42]

[39]Notizie sull'attività didattica, di ricerca e sperimentale, Luisa Anversa, Luisa Anversa Papers. Capuano, *Luisa Anversa*.
[40]Unione Donne Italiane, *Il lavoro della donna e la tutela della prima infanzia. Atti del Convegno Nazionale, Roma 3–4 luglio 1962*.
[41]Anversa, "Attrezzature per l'infanzia nel piano della pianificazione comunale".
[42]The AUA's core group included: Barbera, Bracco, Bini, Fattinnanzi, La Perna, Maroni, Moneta, Piccinato, Ray, Quilici, Rossi-Doria, Teodori and Tafuri. See Malfona, "Typewriting Architects: projects and research from the AUA studio and the role of Manfredo Tafuri"; Leach, "Choosing History. Tafuri, criticality and the limits of architecture".

The fact that a shift in the debate was brought about through the agency of the SAU is widely acknowledged, as is its role in the birth of the AUA group and in the formulation of the idea of *città territorio*.[43] Despite its members sharing a common professional perspective, however, the SAU had no explicit political agenda and included profiles with diverse political commitments. Within this context, the position of Luisa Anversa was rather unique. Although firmly committed to an integrated design approach, she would never dismiss the significance of Olivetti's communitarian ethos – unlike figures such as Manfredo Tafuri, who would later lead the debate on the *città territorio*, or SAU members like Pietro Moroni, a former associate of Anversa, who actively contributed to animating the discussion on architecture and the city within the Italian Communist Party together with Aymonino, Rossi and Tentori.[44]

While sharing many similarities with positions later expressed by AUA members – including Tafuri –, Moroni's stance also reflected the articulation of the debate within the Communist Party, of which he was a member.[45] During the second half of the 1950s, before the focus shifted to the *grande dimensione,* architects affiliated with the party fuelled the national debate by urging their colleagues to withdraw from the vernacularisms of the neorealist wave and to return to models rooted in the nineteenth-century European urban tradition.[46] Wagner's Vienna, Haussmann's Paris, and Hegemann's Berlin, just to mention a few, re-entered the national debate through the pages of *Casabella-Continuità* and the work of its young editors Polesello, Rossi, and Tentori. Anversa had been associated with this realist position since 1960, when Polesello, Rossi, and Tentori discussed her Santa Panagia project in *Casabella-Continuità*, emphasizing the way in which its morpho-typological layout sought to enhance urban imageability and human proximity. However, by the early 1960s, with the publication of *La città territorio* and a shift in focus in the leftist élite, this emphasis shifted toward a vision that aimed to expand the role of architects. As the interest toward business districts and large urban facilities gained prominence, the notion of integrated design, which had developed within the SAU, evolved further. Architects such as Aymonino pushed to incorporate disciplines like economics and demography into architecture to sustain wider and more transformative interventions. At the same time, terms such as 'indeterminacy' and 'programme' became the new buzzwords, aiming to expand the architect's sphere of action in the name of a new flexibility.[47]

Against this backdrop, Anversa's contribution to the 1962 UDI Congress features a way of pursuing 'integrated design' from an inverted perspective. This is quite evident from the contents and the way in which she organized her speech. Rather than seeking to incorporate other disciplines into architecture, Anversa positioned architecture as a resource for other fields, thereby challenging the approach pursued by the orthodox supporters of the *grande dimensione*. In parallel, although the undisputed process of growth involving Italian cities, she kept her focus on specific issues and small-scale figures, in the belief that planning should not emerge from a generic, flexible programme but rather from a thorough, fine-grained analysis of facts.

This multifaceted – and at times somewhat eccentric attitude, – which owed much to the leftist debate yet emerged as an alternative to its intellectual orthodoxy, was partly rooted in Anversa's biography. Although she consistently professed her support for the Italian Communist Party,

[43]Tentori, "Progetti di architetti romani".
[44]Moroni had collaborated with Luisa Anversa in 1954 for the *Fondo Incremento Edilizio* neighborhood project. Luisa Anversa Papers.
[45]Durbiano, *I nuovi maestri,* 79.
[46]Polesello, Rossi, Tentori, "Il problema della periferia nella città moderna".
[47]Aymonino, Barucci, Samonà, Melograni, Tafuri, Sacco, Charini, Marcialis Ray, "Dibattito". See also Aymonino, Bracco, Greco (eds.), *La citta territorio. Problemi della nuova dimensione. Un esperimento didattico sul Centro direzionale di Centocelle in Roma.*

directing her activism toward concrete initiatives such as those promoted by the UDI, formal membership came only in 1968, in the aftermath of the student protests that shook the academy. On the other hand, Anversa's family life and social milieu were shaped by close ties to some of the most influential members of the former *Partito d'Azione* (the Action Party). She was a close friend of Piero Calamandrei, Ferruccio Parri, as well as of Elena Croce – daughter of the philosopher Benedetto Croce – and through her, of Raimondo Craveri, Elena's husband, who had strong connections with the emerging industrial world of Northern Italy. Within Anversa's professional life, Craveri would emerge as a key figure. Between the late 1950s and the early 1960s, he served first as the head of Fiat Concord, the Argentinian branch of the Italian automobile corporation, then as a manager of Italconsult, and finally as the founding CEO of the newly established Valtur, a company aimed at promoting tourism development in Southern Italy through the establishment of new resorts. It was likely through his agency that Anversa was asked to prepare a proposal for a workers' housing complex near Córdoba, Argentina, in 1966 – the same year in which, this time under Craveri's direct patronage, she began serving as a consultant and later as lead architect for the design of Valtur's first two resorts in Southern Italy.[48]

In the projects for Italconsult and Valtur, carried out during the same period, Anversa had the opportunity to further elaborate concepts and ideas first developed during the INA Casa period, while directing her work toward innovative and relatively unexplored references. Despite apparently diverging in their purpose, the two assignments shared significant similarities. Valtur was, in fact, established by Italconsult and the Italian Automobile Club, with FIAT also involved – albeit indirectly – through a substantial shareholding. Against this background, it comes as no surprise that the two building programmes were comparable in several respects. In both cases, the ambition was to create a new residential compound *ex nihilo* in areas characterized by little or no prior urbanization, a condition that Anversa addressed by insisting on neighbourhoods' autonomy and self-sufficiency. The programmes were also comparable in scale, as both the two Valtur resorts and the FIAT workers' compound were intended to accommodate between four and five thousand people in their final layout. For the FIAT housing estate in Cordoba (Figure 6), this ambition translated into two alternative proposals, both drawing on the latest European trends in housing design. Each proposal featured a significant presence of clustered single-family units and a civic centre. However, in one of the alternatives, a series of five-story hill-shaped housing blocks was introduced. As Anversa emphasized in the project report, the objective was twofold. On the one hand, the introduction of collective housing blocks offered the most straightforward and cost-effective way to reduce average construction expenses. On the other hand, the presence of a series of high-rise buildings would give the scheme a distinct visual and physical identity, setting it apart from the future surrounding city as a coordinated, purpose-built initiative. At the same time, the high-rise blocks would allow the scheme to serve as a node for expected urban growth, especially for their capacity to accommodate dwellings, facilities, and circulation structures. Inhabitants' needs and desires, Anversa underlined, were expected to evolve, as would the relationship they established with their living environment. In this context, the response lay once again in strong morpho-typological diversification, this time made possible by the presence of high-rise, hill-shaped buildings. Although at this design stage the housing configuration was intended to remain very abstract and generic, with little or no detail provided for residential plans, Anversa did not fail to emphasize the qualities of her schemes related to physical aspects. In the project description, elements such as walls, enclosures, and patios, together with topography-related features – including the hill formed

[48]Capuano, *Luisa Anversa;* De Dominicis, Di Donato (eds.), *Piccoli Paradisi.*

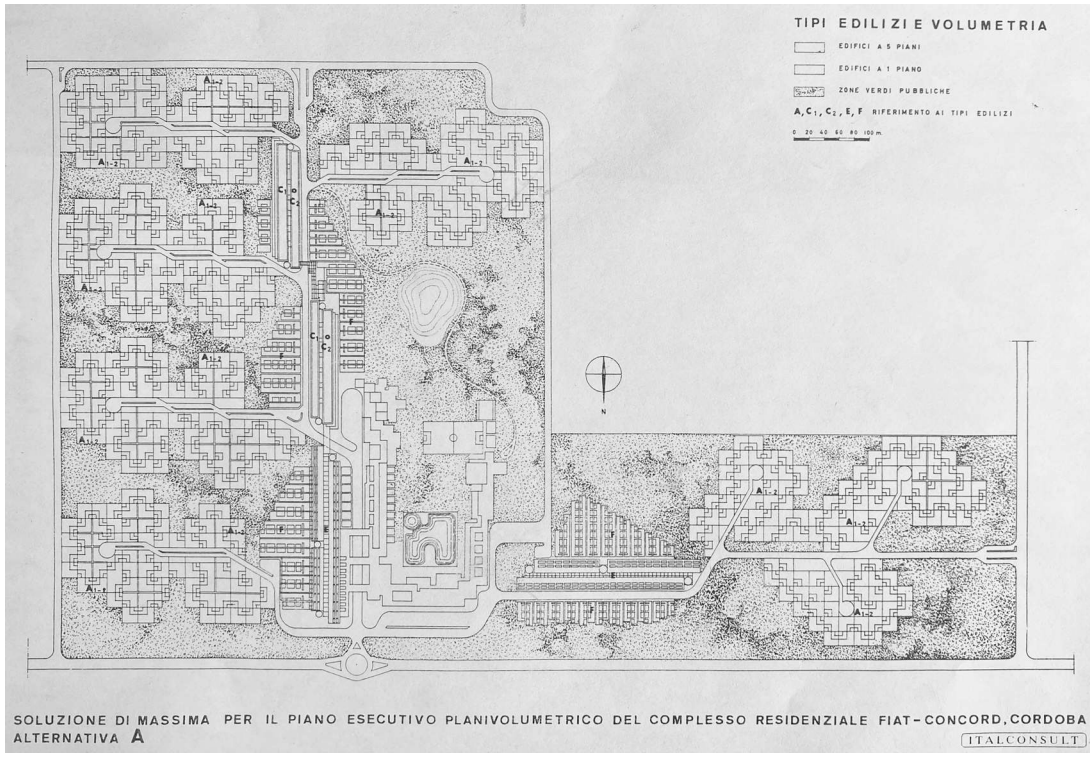

Figure 6. FIAT housing estate, Córdoba, Argentina. Masterplan, 1966. Luisa Anversa Papers.

through building excavations – were brought to the foreground as the key features through which to articulate a sense of place and familiarity, in response to inhabitants' needs and aspirations.[49] These aspects would be further explored in the two resort projects developed for Valtur between 1966 and 1968. After all, such concerns were not new to Anversa; yet they were to become the very features that allowed her to distance her work itself from the coeval debate. Design hypotheses elaborated for the two Valtur resorts between 1966 and 1967 were expected to be realized in a few years. Anversa and her younger collaborators – among them, Vieri Quilici, former member of the AUA group and co-author of *La città territorio* with Manfredo Tafuri and Giorgio Piccinato – were responsible for developing and overseeing the entire design agenda, from user profiling and the building programme to the resorts' overall size.[50] Initially, Valtur conceived the resorts as residential assets to be rented on a seasonal basis, expected to grow from an initial core of six hundred to accommodate up to five thousand people. Their potential users were to be the affluent middle-class families that had been emerging in the early 1960s in the wake of the national economic – and demographic – boom. To this end, Valtur offered an all-inclusive holiday formula designed to relieve guests of all everyday duties, with restaurants, childcare and housekeeping facilities placed at the heart of the programme, and leisure still in the background. It is therefore unsurprising that the two resorts were conceived as self-contained environments that aimed to abstract the spatial,

[49]Soluzione di massima per il piano esecutivo planivolumetrico del complesso residenziale Fiat-Concord, Cordoba, Italconsult, August 1966. Luisa Anversa Papers.

[50]The design team for the two Valtur resorts included Belardelli, Anversa's associate, and three former AUA's members: Barbera, Maroni and Quilici.

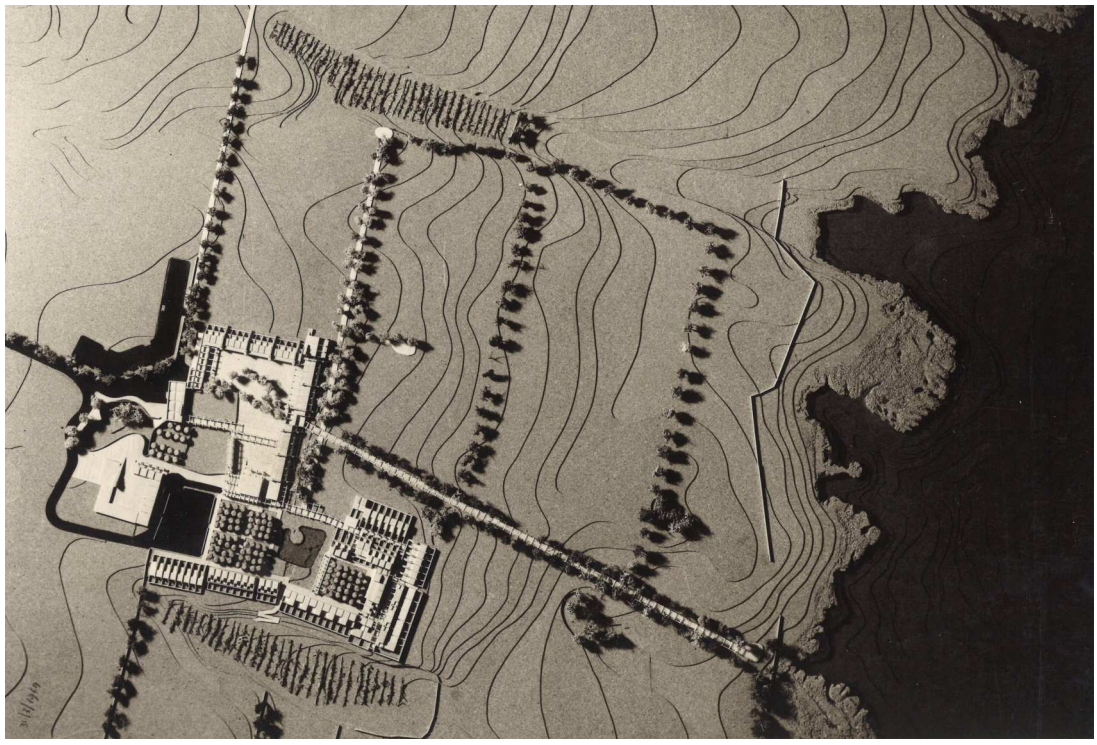

Figure 7. Valtur resort in Ostuni, Italy. Model, 1969. Luisa Anversa Papers.

functional, and atmospheric features of a city.[51] In these respects, they strongly differed from earlier projects developed by Quaroni, Gardella, Giancarlo De Carlo for Punta Ala, Arenziano or Ameglia – just to mention a few of those published in a 1964 *Casabella-Continuità* special issue on coastal developments –, against which Anversa's schemes appeared far denser, and much closer in character to a new town.[52] Design options, once again, drew on the morpho-typological variations she had tested in earlier works, particularly Santa Panagia and Cordoba, which served as implicit references for the resorts of Ostuni and Isola di Capo Rizzuto, respectively (Figure 7). Despite diverging in their overall configuration, the two solutions shared a similar attention to a set of codified and recurrent architectural elements. From this perspective, they are much more similar than their layouts might suggest. However, when associated with a holiday context and the societal transformations the country was undergoing, this approach resulted in a groundbreaking effect, far exceeding the architect's expectations or intentions and becoming one of the key features of Valtur's resorts. While designed to relieve families – and women in particular – of childcare and housekeeping, in line with Anversa's political engagement, the Valtur resorts, with their warren of streets and residential units, became the involuntary backdrop to a revolution in customs, triggering a short-circuit in social relationships and anticipating new forms of communitarian aggregation. Much of this outcome was due to the size and character of their spaces, in which a sense

[51] Albergo-Villaggio Valtur di Ostuni; Albergo-Villaggio Valtur di Isola di Capo Rizzuto. Luisa Anversa Papers. Valtur, s. 553, IRI-Istituto di Ricostruzione Industriale Papers, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome. See also: Anversa, Belardelli, Barbera, Quilici, Maroni, "Consuntivo di un'esperienza di progettazione: dialogo fra i progettisti"; Aymonino, "Due insediamenti turistici nel Mezzogiorno".
[52] Rogers, "Homo additus naturae"; Tentori, "Ordine per le coste italiane".

of estrangement and familiarity, as well as diversity and sameness, coexisted over the duration of a stay.[53]

Urban design through housing: large-scale schemes of the mid 1960s

In the 1960s, following the competition for the CEP neighborhood in Mestre and the publication of *La città territorio,* a debate over the urgency of new urban forms and reforms spread among Italian architects, planners, and politicians. In response to increasing real-estate speculation, the *Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica* (National Institute of Urban Planning) – of which Anversa was a member and director of the regional section from 1952 to 1958, and again from 1968 to 1976 – presented an 'Urban Planning Code' in 1960, proposing a drastic shift in land-use regulation. The reform, however, took a few years to be implemented, and Italian cities continued to expand.

In 1963, the INA-Casa Programme came to an end, while the Law no. 167 for public and affordable housing (*Legge per l'edilizia economica e popolare*) had been introduced the year before. This law marked a series of reforms promoted by the Christian Democratic government and the then Minister of the Public Works Fiorentino Sullo, aiming to regulate the relationship between urban land rent, economics, and urban planning. Although conceived as a directive on housing, Law No. 167 sought to stimulate new forms of urbanization. In particular, it introduced the so-called *Piano di zona*, a more flexible planning instrument entrusted to individual municipalities for application within their respective administrative boundaries. No longer centralized at the national level, mass housing assumed a significant role in structuring urban growth, with the *Piano di zona* intended to respond to the specific planning and demographic needs of individual contexts. In this way, a new phase in Italian urban planning began.

Each Italian city reflects a different trajectory under Law No. 167. The lack of national surveys, however, complicates historiographical reconstructions.[54] Among the initiatives launched to enforce the law in its early stage, a design competition was promoted in 1965 by the ISES, *Istituto per lo Sviluppo dell'Edilizia Sociale* (Institute for the Development of Social Housing). The competition focused on a site included within Naples' Piano di Zona, the Lot U in the area of Secondigliano.[55] Drafted by the local architect Giulio De Luca, the Piano was approved immediately before the launch of the competition. At its core were two areas at the edges of the city's eastern and northern peripheries – Ponticelli and Secondigliano, respectively – each designed to accommodate approximately 65,000 inhabitants.

Although it has not been widely analysed, the competition for the Secondigliano area appears to represent a sort of compendium of the Italian contribution to the international urban design debate in the 1960s. A total of 421 proposals were submitted at the first competition stage, corresponding to around 3300 architects from all over the country. This number was first reduced to 397 proposals that met the competition requirements, and then to 236 selected for an exhibition-debate, which, however, was never held.[56] The project awarded for Secondigliano was submitted by Federico Gorio together with Vittorio De Feo, Mario Manieri Elia, Elio Piroddi, and Sergio Musmeci. As the initiative implicitly aimed to generate multiple assignments, eleven teams were selected to

[53]De Dominicis, Di Donato, "The Genesis of the Valtur Villages in the Correspondence of Luisa Anversa, 1965-1971".
[54]De Pieri, *Tra simili*.
[55]Riviezzo, *Forme di città nuova*.
[56]Competition announcement, Concorso ISES, b. 265. Pietro Barucci Archive, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

develop similar projects in other cities, all within the scope of the new 167 Law: those coordinated by Luisa Anversa, Pietro Barucci, Claudio Dall'Olio, Luciana De Rosa, Antonio Di Carlo, Alfredo Lambertucci, Piero Maria Lugli, Paolo Portoghesi, Pio Ulivieri, Vincenzo Bacigalupi, and Giulio Roisecco. The selection appears not to have been strictly based on the proposals themselves, but rather on the architects' profiles, who were predominantly from Rome and were all included in the INA-Casa list of professionals. Compared to the 1950s, however, the cultural context had changed: architects and engineers' associations firmly opposed the process, ultimately leading to the resignation of the ISES president, Arnaldo Foschini, who, by coincidence, had previously served as president of the INA-Casa Programme. Foschini, through the selection, aimed to assign direct commissions within his specific professional circle of former students and collaborators – including Luisa Anversa – as had been common practice in Italy in previous years. The announcement of the results, however, prompted architects and engineers to strongly criticize the competition, its procedures and the fees, sparking a major national dispute that ultimately led Foschini to resign, officially due to health reasons.[57]

The competition had no concrete outcome in Naples. The repertoire of housing models and solutions developed by Italian architects for Lot U in Secondigliano was largely left aside, and only three of the eleven selected teams eventually obtained an assignment elsewhere. These were the teams led by Luisa Anversa, Pietro Barucci, and Claudio Dall'Olio, who, in December 1965, received a joint commission to design a 412-unit housing complex in Rome.[58] The site was part of the city's *Piano di zona* and located in the so-called Spinaceto area, a veritable piece of countryside on the southern outskirts of the city. Within the newly formed association, Barucci's role appears to have been predominant, as he himself has noted in his autobiographical record.[59] He personally oversaw the construction site and the agreement with a contractor involved in several of his commissions at that time, the COGECO. Both the typological and formal solutions – including the helical staircases – partly incorporated his proposal for Secondigliano, essentially resulting in a building-level design without a genuine urban imprint.

By contrast, for Luisa Anversa, the reference had always been in the city, as witnessed in the project report that accompanied her proposal for Secondigliano (Figure 8):

Italian architectural design continues to be framed within extemporaneous and uncoordinated planning; the conviction that only through strong ideas is it possible to offer alternatives to the incoherent development of the urban context led me to take part in the competition announced by ISES for a neighbourhood in Naples (1965). The main objective was to propose a more complex urban structure, organized according to a hierarchy of relational systems and conceived to create an essential node for future urban developments – where a large T-shaped structure formed by powerful tall buildings that both penetrate and enclose a wide tree-lined space plays the role of establishing a structure so strong that it conditions future building expansion according to its own ordering intent.[60]

According to Anversa and her collaborators – Gabriele Belardelli, Claudio Saratti and Giovanni Zani –, the project was expected to guide the further development of Secondigliano, with its effects extending well beyond the area assigned for the competition. Moreover, the proposal was conceived

[57]Telegram by the National Order of Architects (30 December 1965), Complesso ISES Spinaceto, b. 44. Pietro Barucci Archive, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.
[58]Engagement Letter (30 December 1965), Complesso ISES Spinaceto, b. 44. Pietro Barucci Archive, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.
[59]Barucci, *I fortunati decenni. 1950-2000*.
[60]Notizie sull'attività didattica, di ricerca e sperimentale, Luisa Anversa, Luisa Anversa Papers; Zevi, "Concorso Nazionale Ises di selezione progettisti per un quartiere a Secondigliano".

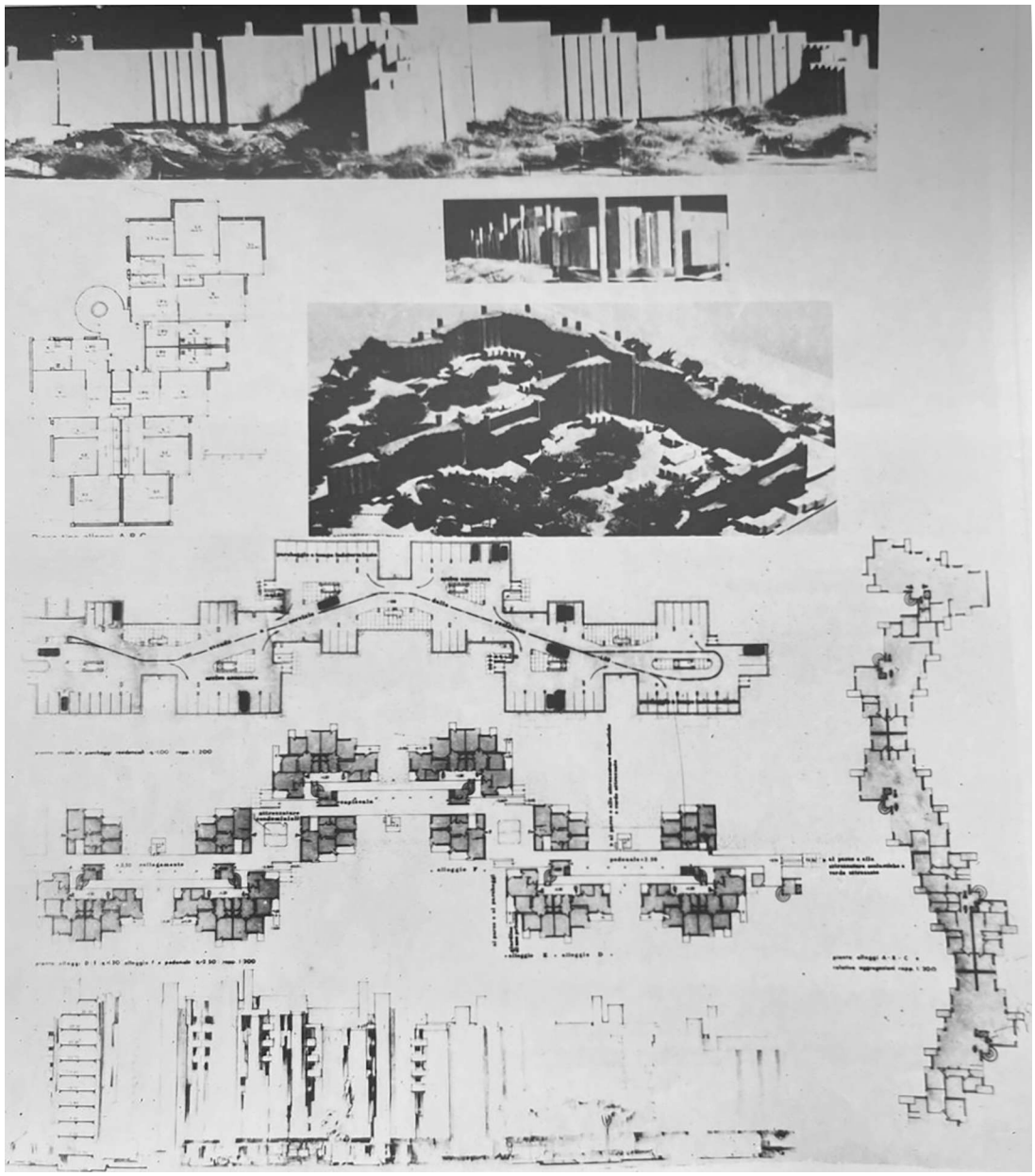

Figure 8. Design proposal for the ISES competition in Secondigliano, Naples, Italy, 1965. Luisa Anversa Papers.

to be adaptable to different contexts, serving as a hypothesis for a generally applicable urban form. It was a suggestion for the city of Naples, but also a solution replicable in diverse urban contexts, depending on specific circumstances. At the same time, it offered a critique of the validity of zoning and urban codes in general, reflecting a search for a proper interpretation of the European urban design debate, which ranged from new towns to grand ensembles. In Italy at the time, this pursuit for new planning formulations provided fertile ground for an outstanding body of theoretical work that soon emerged as a key reference. It is sufficient to recall *L'architettura della città* by Aldo Rossi

or *La torre di Babele* by Ludovico Quaroni, both of which achieved immediate international recognition.[61] From an architectural point of view, this transition materialized in the exploration of megastructures – large, machine-like buildings in which architects sought to condense living, commercial, business, and even circulation functions. As Reyner Banham would underline, for Italian architects, 'architecture was still the city's last best hope, and megastructure was architecture's last best hope'.[62]

Anversa's approach to large-scale housing schemes of the 1960s can be inscribed in this atmosphere. At first glance, both Secondigliano and, to a different extent, Tor de'Cenci, can appear as megastructures in the way suggested by Reyner Banham.

Beyond constraints embodied by the national and local planning legislation, Anversa's hypothesis for Secondigliano emerged as a critical reading of the existing city and its natural environment, as well as a thorough investigation of the relationship between the city and its northern outskirts. The proposal aimed at establishing a strong morphological continuity across the site and beyond, reflecting on new forms of urbanization in opposition to plans envisaged by local planning authorities and the Piano di Zona. Existing trees were the most important element that architects took into account to organize the buildings' layout. Trees were not simply preserved; they became part of the rationale for the organization and location of collective facilities, which were initially excluded from the competition brief. The design of both buildings and open spaces sought to balance housing and facilities while freeing the maximum amount of ground from building occupation. In an attempt to investigate and reinterpret mass housing typologies, buildings were conceived as a continuous structure operating at the intersection of the architectural and urban scales: a T-shaped high-rise block and a series of lower buildings, together materializing a metropolitan, stepped skyline in which residential units, circulation, and commercial facilities coexisted.[63] Notably, volumes were concentrated in proximity to a high-speed road in order to reinforce the perception of this metropolitan image.

By contrast, the housing complex in Spinaceto – assigned to Anversa, Barucci and Dall'Olio as compensation for the second prize in Secondigliano – was limited to a single residential compound consisting of four linear blocks and one bowed slab. As in Secondigliano, however, the design was strongly influenced by the presence of a high-speed road system, namely Via Pontina, which became a key element in the overall layout. Near Spinaceto, as part of the mass housing plan implemented under Law no. 167, Luisa Anversa collaborated with Carlo Aymonino for the design of another bold residential complex for 35.000 inhabitants in an area south of Rome known as Tor de' Cenci. Planned the year before the ISES competition, and thus developed in parallel, the project pursued similar ambitions, as described in the project report:

The same programmatic principles determined the fundamental features of the design and organization of Tor de' Cenci (1964), in which the entire settlement was conceived as a 'piece of city' – a comprehensively planned sector to guide future urban expansion, serving as a basis for a general system for implementing master plans and as an opportunity to study town-design issues. In this context, an effort was made to avoid merely generic zoning or volumetric indications.[64]

Initially, in the project for Tor de' Cenci, design principles were suggested by the dramatic site topography. The area was located south of Rome and offered a panoramic viewpoint over the countryside and towards the sea. Benefiting from this location, Anversa and Aymonino resolved to

[61]Rossi, *L'architettura della città;* Quaroni, *La torre di Babele.*
[62]Banham, *Megastructures. Urban Futures of the Recent Past,* 72.
[63]Zevi, "Concorso Nazionale Ises di selezione progettisti per un quartiere a Secondigliano".
[64]Notizie sull'attività didattica, di ricerca e sperimentale, Luisa Anversa, Luisa Anversa Papers.

Figure 9. Tor de' Cenci neighbourhood, Rome, Italy. Model, 1964. Luisa Anversa Papers.

preserve as much as possible the existing vegetation while slightly reshaping the ground to accommodate two crescent-shaped blocks looking south. By her own admission, Anversa was obsessed with topography and its modelling. The two rings were intended as the last outpost of planned urbanization, mediating the relationship between the city and the countryside. To the north, the connection to the city was instead assigned to a series of linear blocks forming a veritable axis, where collective facilities – particularly commercial and administrative – were to be located.

In developing this strategy, architects made extensive use of the cross-section as an instrument to unfold and control spatial relationships at multiple levels: between the neighbourhood and the surroundings, between buildings and the topography, and ultimately, at a smaller scale, between housing units within individual or groups of buildings.

In these respects, the Tor de' Cenci project (Figure 9) represents a veritable milestone in Anversa's approach to housing and urban design. At the same time, it once again demonstrates her capacity to address and fine-tune a consistent set of themes, even as professional partnerships changed. Aymonino, a former student colleague and friend of Anversa, was a leading figure in the national debate. He had been a prominent advocate of the shift from neorealism to realism in Italian architecture before championing the concept of the *città territorio*.[65] In the years following the Tor de' Cenci project, he would serve as the design leader of the Gallaratese neighbourhood, widely acknowledged as one of the most influential housing schemes in Italy in the second half of the twentieth century. Although some of Gallaratese's key aspects had already been addressed in Tor de' Cenci, the pioneering aspects of the latter have often been overlooked, dismissed as a homage – even 'deferential', in Tafuri's eyes – to Quaroni's proposal for the 1959 CEP neighbourhood

[65] Aymonino, Bracco, Greco (eds.), *La citta territorio. Problemi della nuova dimensione. Un esperimento didattico sul Centro direzionale di Centocelle in Roma*. The book includes papers by Aymonino, Quilici, Tafuri and Tentori, among others.

competition in Mestre, on the edge of the Venetian lagoon;[66] so had its image become associated with the contemporary fascination with megastructures. The influence of Quaroni's scheme, a veritable turning point in the Italian debate, is of course, indisputable. However, similarities largely end with the presence of circular-shaped residential blocks. In Quaroni's 1959 project, in fact, these resulted from an intellectual abstraction intended to provide the neighbourhood with a clear and immediate imageability. Emerging from a high-density and low-rise residential mat, Quaroni's residential sweeps are nothing but morphological figurations echoing the image of a future – mechanized – city, while offering little or no insight into their actual typological or formal organization. Understood in this way, they were mainly aimed at representing the structure – or the diagram – of a generic city and the degrees of flexibility of its layout. In the Tor de'Cenci project, instead, abstraction did not come at the beginning but rather emerged as an outcome of the design process. With their stepped configuration, crescent-like blocks rose from the ground and shaped the hilly landscape of the site while enclosing collective facilities. This was made possible by Anversa and Aymonino's organization of the building stock through the use of cross-sections as an instrument of spatial organization and control (Figure 10). As their height and width varied, residential slabs developed in single or multiple rows; accordingly, the size and nature of spaces between blocks also varied. When observed through the lens of drawings produced by the authors – sections, but also one-point perspectives – these spaces are anything but diagrammatic. Rather, they are imbued with physical qualities, with drawings conveying the specific urban atmosphere a citizen might experience while moving through the neighbourhood. At first glance, the Tor de' Cenci's massive layout might appear aligned with the most recent trends on megastructures. A closer analysis, however, reveals numerous similarities with Anversa and Aymonino's earlier exercises, particularly in the way it was presented.

Design strategies are translated into a piece of the city, that is, into an environment abstracting urban attributes into a single, albeit articulated, formal gesture. Although endowed with a high degree of autonomy, the design developed in continuity with the surrounding landscape. Unlike Quaroni's residential circus, whose image was reflected in the waters of the Venetian lagoon, Anversa and Aymonino's scheme emerged directly from the site topography. At the same time, however, it operated as an autonomous entity. On the one hand, the neighbourhood was functionally self-sufficient from the rest of the city, with facilities located on the north–south axis. On the other hand, its image and atmosphere were highly distinguishable, its spaces being conceived upon typical figurations – such as the ring – drawn from the nineteenth-century city.

In this respect, the Tor de' Cenci project transferred and adapted to a larger scale the rationale underpinning the three INA-Casa schemes. Physical continuity, however, was no longer established with the existing city but with the open landscape of the Roman countryside, which the project offered in a novel and compelling interpretation. This reference to landscape, however, did not result in the mimicry of a rural settlement, as was the case with the Tiburtino estate. Rather, ten years after Tiburtino's completion, Tor de' Cenci approached the landscape as a backdrop to formalize the figurations of the city to come. The debate had shifted; so had the scale and size of housing projects. In this respect, while relying on concepts consolidated a decade earlier, the Tor de' Cenci project aligned with the debate while foreshadowing concepts and tools that would later become emblematic of other, much more iconic, projects. Amongst them was Fiorentino's Corviale, for which the lead architect – Anversa's earlier professional partner – would explore

[66]Tafuri, History of Italian Architecture, 84.

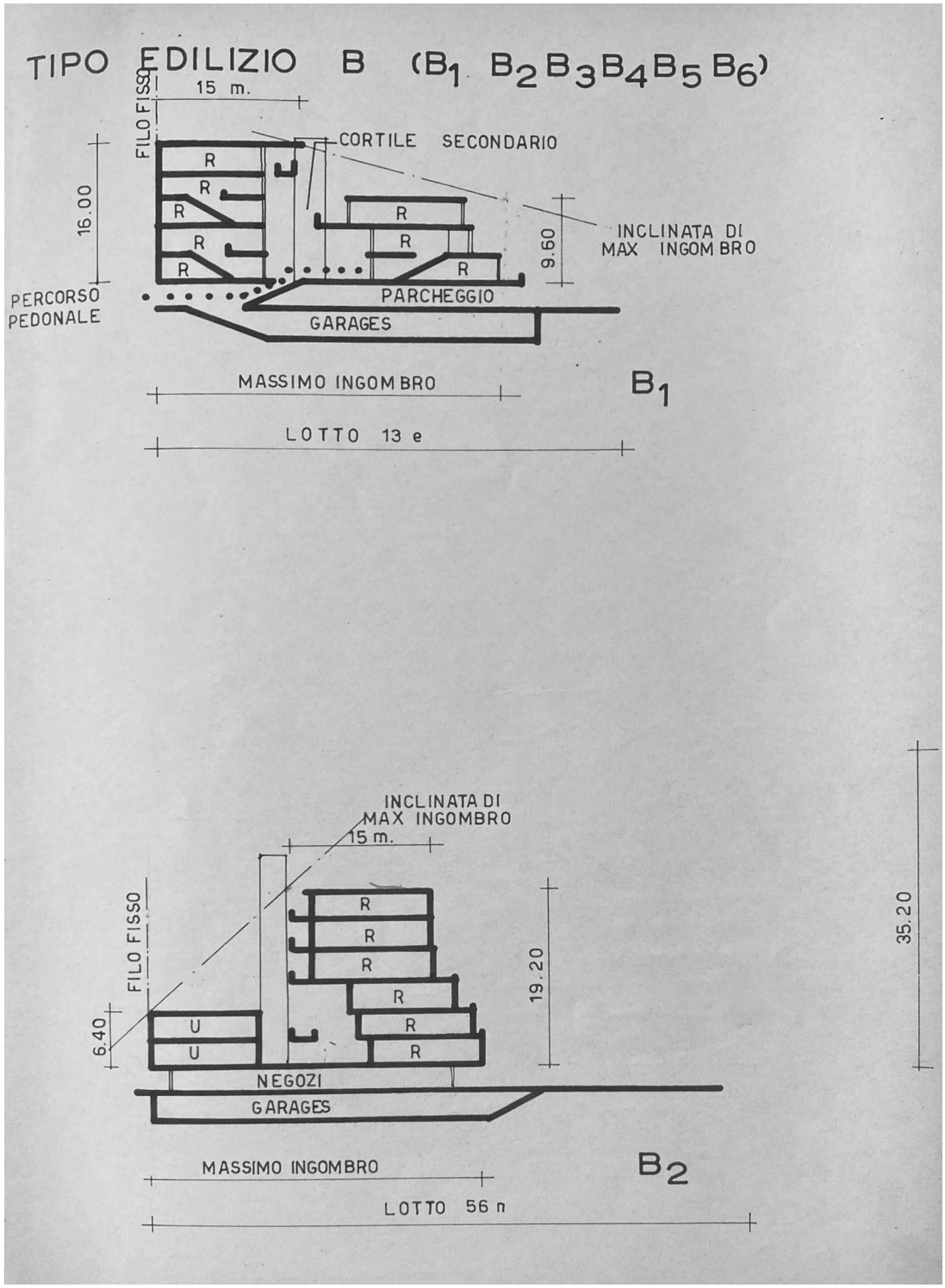

Figure 10. Tor de' Cenci neighbourhood, Rome, Italy. Excerpt from the building type's cross-sections board, 1964. Luisa Anversa Papers.

alternative morphologies through the systematic use of cross-sections, that is, exactly what Anversa and Aymonino did in Tor de' Cenci to typify and materialize the layout.[67]

Conclusions

In the second half of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Anversa consolidated her reputation in both professional practice and academia. Even before attaining a professorship in 1973, she continued to participate in – and win – competitions, while also receiving new commissions. As one of her collaborators emphasized, Anversa was the only architect he knew for whom work naturally came without being sought.

In 1972, while overseeing the construction of a third Valtur resort in Sicily and designing the new church of Gibellina, she led the design team for the new campus of the University of Cagliari, having been awarded the competition's first prize. In the same year, she took on another public residential project for the town of Tuscania, struck by an earthquake. In all these exercises, she refined and fine-tuned her pragmatic approach, providing theory with empirical evidence. Despite her involvement in numerous non-residential public projects, housing remained the core focus of Anversa's research until 1985 and beyond, when she served as team leader for one of the last public housing schemes in the city of Rome, at La Mistica, and coordinated the design and construction of a residential complex in L'Aquila.

By observing mass housing as a tool to architect the city, the contribution and experimentation of Luisa Anversa emerge as central yet still overshadowed figures within Italian architectural history. In this context, the present paper aims to contribute to repositioning Anversa's professional profile within the Italian planning debate of the second half of the twentieth century. Rather than proposing a comprehensive analysis, this study highlights the relevance of housing projects as a privileged lens for addressing broader urban design questions. From this perspective, it becomes significant to unfold Anversa's approach to research and design as an example of how architecture and planning could be guided and pieced together through a set of recurrent, codified and non-ideological relations, systems, and patterns. While filtering through and permeating different phases of the Italian debate on the city and its planning, these elements became, in Anversa's architecture, instruments of design innovation capable of producing tangible outcomes beyond their theoretical implications. In other words, unfolding Anversa's trajectory may help to understand how design strategies and practices persisted, percolating through ideological boundaries and permeating different theoretical environments, thereby providing the basis for further conceptualizations. It is precisely through this persistence, therefore, that theory can take root and materialize beyond episodic manifestoes or stances. Not surprisingly, Anversa herself was persuaded that the transition out from neorealism had not occurred smoothly or without conflicts.

This perspective may open up to a more general reflection on the role of projects and design strategies as critical sources. The international narrative of post-war Italian architecture has largely been cast upon figures whose influence is strongly tied to theoretical writing – such as Ludovico Quaroni, Carlo Aymonino, or Aldo Rossi. However, these theoretical constructs did not always correspond to operative design instruments, at times proving largely ineffective when translated into concrete architectural practice.

Situated at the heart of a constellation including figures such as Aymonino, Fiorentino and Quaroni, with whom she collaborated, Anversa's work might offer an insight to stabilize and, at the same

[67] Quaroni, "Itinerario dell'architetto Mario Fiorentino 1958-1970"; "Unità d'abitazione per un quartiere alle Tre Fontane, Roma"; Fiorentino, *La casa*; Veronese, *Mario Fiorentino. L'utopia della grande dimensione.*

time, cross-fertilize the geography of the Italian post-war discourse on architecture and the city. Only a few architects, like Anversa, focused their research and practice on the 'making of the city,' actively shaping it while producing a limited theoretical corpus, yet without falling prey to professionalism. Their work offers a material body of knowledge, embedded in urban design decisions, negotiated spatial processes and professional relationships. From this perspective, projects themselves can be considered as critical tools for observing and interpreting the city and its development.

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Authors Contribution

This work is the result of a joint research initiative conducted by the two authors. Filippo De Dominicis authored the chapters entitled: "The years of the INA-Casa and the departure from Neorealism", "Between practice and political engagement: the projects for Italconsult" and "Conclusions." Aurora Riviezzo authored the chapters entitled: "Introduction", "Situating Luisa Anversa in the early post-war Italian context", and "Urban design through housing: large-scale schemes of the mid 1960s.".

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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