A COLLECTIVE HOUSING FOR ALL

From squatting and emergency to a Class A Collective Housing through a participatory process

The project answered the housing emergency of 80 migrants that were squatting in a building in the outskirts of Turin. The structure, previously used as a care home for elderly owned by a Missionary Congregation, is composed of 5 floors, plus basement and roof terrace, for a total of 1750 sq mt and has been abandoned for around 10 years before being occupied by the migrants. The first idea was not to send the occupants away, but to find another solution.

At the request of the Property and the Donors and in order to go through all bureaucratic procedures, the Association Insieme per Accogliere onlus has been established, and, with the coordinator of the project, the planners and social workers, it has decided to turn the building into a Collective Housing.

The relevance of the intervention lies in three main aspects:

Methodologically, it was based on team working and multidisciplinary approach, involving all stakeholders - beneficiaries, public authorities, property, donors, professionals - , with the aim to give the people in need a dignified home, together with a social inclusion and integration program.

From the architectural point of view, we are faced with a green intervention: the upgrading and the reusing of an abandoned building, led to a Class A structure and eco-friendly use of land and built environment.

Finally the process has been a successful case of the legalization of an illegal and degraded situation.

68 RESIDENTS 5 FLOORS & BASEMENT
20 SPECIALIZED WORKERS
250 sq mt ROOF 1500 sq mt SURFACE
850 sq mt BACKYARD

TIME SCHEDULE
January 2014 | Occupation
June 2014 / June 2015 | Preparatory and feasibility phase
June 2015 / November 2015 | Architectural project definition
November 2015 / January 2018 | Construction Works
January 9th 2018 | The building has been licensed for residential use
2018 / Ongoing | Follow up
SOCIAL EQUITY AND URBAN INCLUSION

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At each level of the process, the key factor has been the continuous cooperation between all stakeholders.

Firstly, a building’s end use agreement was signed with the Property; then the dialogue with Public Housing Offices has been fundamental to frame the intervention and define the documents needed to properly follow all the bureaucratic procedures – even with a one-off case – and to obtain construction permits. A public convention with the City of Turin Administration has been drawn up, in order to declare the intervention’s goals and define the designated use of the building, according to the Master Plan of City and Public Housing code standards and specifications.

Despite the emergency condition in which the process started, it was implemented following the strictest regulations on quality and safety, aiming to reach a final product of highest standards, in which the intervention on the 6-story building meant to give back to the community an example of collective housing and dignified living conditions.

The interventions were designed keeping in mind flexibility and different users’ needs, willing to define a building open to everyone and adaptable to future needs.

The guiding vision was that different users, different uses and a proper management of consumption could be key factors for social inclusion and economic sustainability.

Social inclusion and economic sustainability were translated into flexible space design, accessibility, and use of passive energy solutions to contain the running costs of the building.

Specifically, University Residences regulations have been applied, being those the most restrictive and demanding. From first to fourth floor, the building is composed by single or double rooms, with co-ed complete bathrooms; a big communal kitchen at each floor, corridors and galleries are the common spaces for the residential community. A big kitchen and a large room at the ground floor are intended to be open to neighbourhood and the city; in the basement there are a guest house, a laundry and a space set up to host a craft workshop or a small-scale enterprise; the backyard offers, as well as relaxing, a good area for growing.

These elements turn the project a variety of opportunity to create exchanges, to build social inclusion, to foster economic sustainability.
To manage the security process in the best way, according to the strict Italian codes, self-building works took place during the suspensions of companies' work, previously planned. In this way the beneficiaries could be directly involved into the rehabilitation and maintenance process. Some were voluntary works while others were paid, when the workers had already been trained and skilled.

A capacity building program through professional trainings was organized for the beneficiaries. The participation of the Collective Housing future inhabitants into its refurbishment process, such as painting and finishing works, increased their sense of ownership, community and involvement into the project.

Thanks to the diversity of the professionals composing the team, the project was implemented with a multidisciplinary approach, a key to its success.

PARTECIPATION & MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Share knowledge, promote discussion, reflection and awareness, and collaborate in the advancement of the ‘social production of habitat’

Team working

On one side, a team of technical experts composed by architects, engineers, energy experts and self-building trainers led the construction phase, while at the same time a team of social workers and educators collaborated to ensure inclusion along the whole process. Different way of thinking met together in the team and into many hours of profitable debates.

Space use and distribution were discussed during the design phase, while the upgrading of the energy efficiency was designed with the aim of decreasing the running costs of the building and of finding solutions compatibles with users' habits.

Even the formal definition of the intervention (“Residenza Collettiva” – Collective Housing) has been decided in team: this definition is essential to give the possibility to migrants to establish residency, necessary condition to have access to health and welfare.

The fund-raising activities were also coordinated as a part of whole the process, being this an important phase in a collective project.

Self-building and Safety

The occupants/residents were living in the building during the works: not to displace people has been one of the first requests. This commingling between residence and work led to a very complex building site management and to a specific timeline: firstly, the basement has been restored, in order to predispose the rooms for the residents of the other floors during the works. So the works proceeded one floor at a time: the residents of the floor undergoing renovation, move to the basement, then collaborate for the finishing, then move back to the restored floor. It means that the basement was utilized as a ‘temporary’ accommodation for those living in the floor undergoing refurbishment, creating a rotation of people through the temporary space.

Finishing works, common spaces decorations and movings of families in the building were coordinated by the project team and were possible thanks to the help of many volunteers that have joined the project.

Participation, both inescapable and fundamental from an emotional and social point of view, required a rigorous organization of the building site, specifically in order to ensure the ongoing safety both in and out the worksite.

Safety has been primarily synonymous of information: signs and alerts hung on the walls and the doors, delimitation of the constructing areas, and above all debates and talks with inhabitants.
RIGHT TO HOUSING

Defend, promote and enable access to adequate and dignified habitat for all as a ‘Fundamental Human Right’

“La Salette” underlines the relationship between conformative planning systems, urban practises and new housing needs. During this process, public and private stakeholders have been involved and activated, the space has been regenerated with a multidisciplinary approach, together with setting of co-management and small scale informal economic activities. The whole process was made possible thanks to the simultaneous presence of inhabitants and social workers and volunteers. Specific pieces of rules were identified and articulated in a sort of technical and legal tool consistent with the current legal framework, despite the very rigid Italian legislation system. The Italian planning system is defined as urbanism and conformative: in response to a local community social need, not foreseen by the existing plan, the proponent of an eventual response to that need could not propose a solution though responding to a territorial development objective. The concept of intervention’s predetermination within standard? systems does not include the promotion of voluntary territorial development proposals, despite their possible contribution to general development objectives. Predetermined interventions prevail on development objectives, so if territorial needs are not foreseen by the plan, responding by parts becomes necessary. In this case, the intervention was divided into parts, assembling a technical and juridical construct, resulting into an overlap of normative fragments belonging to the existing legislative apparatus. Nevertheless, this ad-hoc juxtaposition cannot ensure the automatic realisation of further interventions on the same site, being tailored on this case. In conclusion, the rigidity of legislatively proscribed urbanism may turn into a sterile legislation, when “unexpected” projects and new social needs emerge. Utilizing a smart mix of the current rules and context-specific solutions will allow urbanism to answer the needs of new social realities faced by urban centres.

The case of “La Salette” demonstrates how to ensure the right to housing through a process of regularisation of a squatting. The unauthorized use of the abandoned building for housing purpose by around 80 migrants, started in 2014 and ended in 2016, with the legalized use of it as Collective Residence, thanks to a rigorous administrative process and a refurbishment.