

2nd International Symposium "NEW METROPOLITAN PERSPECTIVES" - Strategic planning, spatial planning, economic programs and decision support tools, through the implementation of Horizon/Europe2020. ISTH2020, Reggio Calabria (Italy), 18-20 May 2016

Social housing: the environmental sustainability on more dimensions

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Abstract

A new social question has emerged after the deep social and economic transformations in the European cities: the problem of the presence of quarters in crisis or disadvantaged suburbs that now are the symbol of urban areas with big uncertainties and tensions where people, in a society where the division is not more vertical but horizontal, have difficulties to find a real “urban and social integration” in a situation of crisis of the citizenship rights, in particular that one of living in a decorous house in liveable quarters. To resolve these problems, many European cities have indicate a way of qualitative transformation betting on a new city planning and a new architecture inclined to the sustainability with the principal aim of “create” a new city to face the economic and social crisis. The eco-sustainable re-qualification of whole urban segments has been actualized as an experimental field of innovation, of the transformation of the city, and of the regeneration of marginal urban areas, through public actions of increasing of the conditions of life with a use of a series of typical elements of an experimentation of “sustainable planning” that can modify the habitable existing city. The restoration of a decorous environment in disadvantage quarters, their re-qualification with the development of adequate activities and services, above all with the solutions of HOUSING, represent an especial step towards the redemption from the economic and social exclusion of these urban areas, that translates into a high unemployment rate, in a danger for the public health and in the diffusion of the criminality.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of ISTH2020

Keywords: Social Housing; eco-sustainable re-qualification; urban quality

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1. Introduction

The principal main of the social cohesion is more and more an essential vehicle of the sustainable development, but it is often put to the test by the social-demographic transformations that are underway in a part of Europe for many years and that is very important in the social tensions and conflicts of our cities.

This phenomenon is causing problems of concentration of the weak classes in particular areas of the city, above all in the urban suburbs, now real “social dump”, in a spiral of difficult solution. More and more deep requests of social inclusion, of sufficient accessibility to places and services, sustainability, certainty, and a house in a not-dormitory quarters come from the weak classes of these areas.

The interaction of all these “urban quality” requests will increase gradually with the growing of people in situations of hardships, because of the persistent economic crisis: in this sense the city planning has a balancing function between the social responsibility and the city, in particular about the problem of the house that will become a good (private or not) that has to be more and more protected, above all for the people in disadvantage situations.

This is possible only increasing the capacity of social listening and interacting with all the other experts that study the city, finding responses to create a social urban space and to research a city that lives consciously the problems of the necessary transformation.

This work wants to discuss about these questions and wants to show how the approaches have been different in Europe and Italy, above all about the creation of new and regenerate areas, with a new proposal of sociality and with a particular attention to the housing problem.

2. The quarter. More than living in it.

In the last twenty years, many European cities have indicated a way of a qualitative transformation, betting on a new city planning and architecture in favor of a strategic vision of their territory with the principal aim “to invent” a new city able to face the social and economic crisis (Tourain 1999).

The social residential construction industry has become a fertile ground for the experimentations of new solutions based on the principle of low cost energetic efficiency and housing quality. All this because of the growing of low cost accommodations request.

The sustainability in the construction industry is not a luxury, but a new housing policy, a social responsibility, and also a “social housing”. In this sense, we do not talk about a single building, but about whole quarters, and urban realities that should have to be reorganized and re-built respecting the criteria of sustainability, through the reorganization of all the services related to the housing and the city, as the people and merchandises transportation, the energy, the use and the recycle of materials, the water, the spaces of aggregation and socialization, the nature in the city, the proximity agriculture also because, it is still the city the main infrastructure for the sustainable life and economy of the future (ANCE Lombardia and Legambiente 2010).

There are many possible definitions of social housing, but a useful interpretation may be that one of CECODHAS (2005), in according with which it is the offer of adequate accommodations and people services, with a clear social aim, in favor of people that cannot satisfy their housing needs on the free market (because of economic reasons or the lack of an adequate offer).

This definition highlights the exigence of considering the theme of “house project” through an approach that join the real estate aspects with the social and “intangible” ones of the services because it represents the totality of accommodations and services, of actions and instruments for the people that are not able to satisfy their housing needs for economic reasons or for an inadequate offering (Ellin 2012).

In the past, they think that it was necessary to give a house to everyone: nowadays they think they have to guarantee a house at low energetic consumption to all. Now we are witnessing a transition period because, after having defined the correct methodologies to make the buildings energetically efficient and achieve the goal of “sustainable house”, it appears necessary to make the whole urban, territorial, and geographic system that contains it as such.

Implement redevelopment projects requires knowledge of the phenomena social, economic and cultural processes that modify space-society relations. (Mangen 2004).

Some of the most important projects engaged in the theme of a new settlement sociability, have been realized in the

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