Extended summary

Live in the public city
housing and hypotheses of new sustainability

Curriculum: Architecture ,Construction and Structure

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Abstract.

A crisis (from greek κρίσις, choice) is a stressful or traumatic change for an individual or an unstable and dangerous social situation. What of the today living is in crisis? I would say almost everything: our environment, our work, our belief, our families, our socialization, our language and our living way. And the living is tied to everything, and certainly affects much of that all. So living in a crisis is the challenge that has arisen the present work. The crisis of urban sprawl, a city self referenced, without a center, and self-built in a piecemeal way. And in this city in crisis, what is the house that now we aspire to live? What is the sense that the social housing may still have within the existing city? Is it possible to use the public housing to trigger mechanisms of regeneration and urban renewal? The research aims to identify the social housing's project as one of the possible fields of architectural, urban and landscape planning experimentation, to respond to social, individual and environmental emergencies of our time. The research was developed according to three different levels of detail. The first level has been involved in identifying the theoretical matrices that have long accompanied the historical events of social housing. The second level is employed to analyze the dynamics between demand and supply of social housing in Eu-

rope. The third level of research presents specific project experiences, carried out in the last three years within the Department of Architecture, Buildings and Structures, Faculty of Engineering of the 'University of the Marche. Here is presented a work completed at the end of 2011 based on a study conducted together with the Municipality of Civitanova Marche. Built a framework of reference, in a second phase of work, implementation plans of some areas of public housing (ERP) of the town of Civitanova Marche, were drawn up. Finally, as part of a tutor activity at the University of Ancona, were presented some of the thesis, which discussed the issue of residence in the construction of the city.

Keywords. Contemporary architecture, social housing.

1   Problem statement and objectives

In recent years, the subject of social housing has returned to the forefront of public debate – not only from the cultural point of view of urban and architectural issues.

A rather significant series of issues linked to theoretical, technical, economic and social policies have come together, so as to lead one to envision the possibility of a re-thinking of new ways of living, housing and the whole residential issue in new figurative and expressive terms.

In this sense, the European policy agenda is outlined clearly and provides common goals for the next decade, all somehow intersected with the housing issue: economic regeneration, environmental sustainability, employment, integration, equity and safety. These are urgent issues that society faces, the same ones that give substance to the debate in the field of urban planning and architecture. There are many factors that led to the return of social housing at the heart of our discipline, and all together, seem to call for a transformation of the conventional way of designing and building the public house.

We live in a society which has been, and indeed, is being transformed, increasingly displaying a-typical features: multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic, leading to an increasingly varied and diverse housing demand. The increase in the number of families, the phenomenon of immigration, population ageing, the shrinking of the average family up to a single individual, are all factors that create a substantial multiplication of the types of users and diversification of the quantity and quality of the demand for social housing. Besides the emergence of these social dynamics we have simultaneously witnessed a progressive and mature environmental awareness with regard to safeguarding the earth, which has essentially expanded the framework of requirements that the so called "efficient house" must satisfy.

What is the house that we now aspire to live in like? How many times will it have to adapt to the changing nature of our existence? What is the purpose of public housing in the varying urban fabric of our modern city? Would it be possible to use public housing to trigger mechanisms of urban regeneration and upgrade in our cities? How could old urban structures – such as apartment buildings, districts, quarters and suburbs – evolve within the enlarged city? Our research aims at identifying the project of public housing as one of the possible fields of architectural experimentation and urban and landscape planning, which will eventually meet the multiple and often contradictory social issues (integration, mixitè), individual needs (user differentiation) and environmental emergencies (urban regeneration and sustainability) that characterize our time, setting in motion a research process which will outline the next housing trends.

2   Research planning and activities

The research has been developed on three different levels of investigation.

The first level identifies the theoretical bedrock that has long accompanied the historical phenomenon of social housing. The issue of housing, even if already in existence in all its seriousness in the nineteenth century, becomes central in the twentieth century, when it becomes common belief that it is the responsibility of the State and its ramifications to improve living conditions inside the cities. In Italy, as in the rest of Europe, public housing belongs largely to the twentieth century.

To chronicle the steps of the project – at least the last portion that precedes us – allows us to reconstruct the indisputable leading role that public housing had in developing the disciplines of design and in shaping our cities, at least until the seventies. If we isolate along the path some key stages of this evolution of thought we will better understand the limitations and successes of what has already been done and re-read the facts in the proper context. All this is not just a backdrop against which modern thoughts and ideas take on meaning, but a boost toward the quest for new answers to new circumstances, avoiding the a priori stance towards the new at all costs.

The second level analyzes the dynamics between demand and supply of social housing in Europe by reviewing historical data and current trends as well as phenomena such as aging population and migratory flows. Based on these dynamics we can develop the profile of current users and their possible future mutations. On the side of suppliers, EU member states are characterized by a great diversity of housing situations and national policies. The analysis of the different European welfare systems has provided a clear overview of the different approaches and results in terms of response, highlighting problems and differences.

The third level of research features specific project experiences, carried out over the last three years within the Department of Architecture, Buildings and Structures, Faculty of Engineering at the 'Università Politecnica delle Marche'. The project was completed at the end of 2011 based on a study conducted together with the Municipality of Civitanova Marche. This collaboration has initially built a framework of reference that identifies the standards and guidelines for the quality of urban and environmental sustainability in the implementation plans of Residential Public Housing (ERP) of the town of Civitanova Marche.

Subsequently, a second phase of work, has developed plans for its implementation in some of these areas. Finally, as part of the tutoring activities carried out at the section of Architecture at the Department of Architecture of Civil Engineering, Building and Architecture, University of Ancona, some graduation thesis were presented, which discussed the issue of housing in the building of a city, dealing with it from a typological point of view, more experimental in nature.

3   Analysis and discussion of main results

The purpose of the research is to propose public housing as a possible testing ground for a new researching process which will define a renewed concept of housing, urban centres and architecture. From a building style focused on supplying public house accommodations – which has first characterized the post-war reconstruction period and then the expansion era – we have to move to a production model based on the demand for housing: from quantity to quality.

Compared with the objective of the thesis, the expected results do not consist in the development of a new cheap building system or a new type of construction. It seems very clear that the problem cannot be reduced to an attempt to replace an obsolete type of house with another, with updated techno-typological performances. Meeting the needs of modernity probably involves the need to experience less-conventional overall patterns of living, alternative spatial organizations – at least in part – to those laid out by the old zoning rules, structures that are much more open to differences and changes of living. The aim of the thesis is to identify design strategies able to meet the demand of individuality consistently with the needs of the community on energy conservation and environmental sustainability which seem to direct the architectural response toward new forms of collective housing, denser and more concentrated in favor of a more collective – and no longer individual – use of resources. At the same time we outline the practical ways in which the project will actually build the city and not merely its effect.

4   Conclusions

To change the structure of cities, at least what we continue to call 'cities', to modify the very culture of living and its relationship with the land and the environment. To plan and upgrade our urban centres through housing is the result we want to achieve, both within the consolidated city, through projects of upgrade, reuse and completion and in enlarged cities, at the outskirts, in remote areas, through residential building and reconstruction of the landscape. The issue of energy saving requires a general rethinking of building density and calls for an abandoning of the idea of garden city spread over the territory, to embrace back the concept of high-density city, from detached houses to high-rise apartment buildings. The idea of a model city is that of a 'multiplicittà' (multiplecity) able to bind its historic centre with its outskirts and the countryside, and where construction quality control and the building of public spaces, the presence of heterogeneous functions (mixité urban) and a social mix, are necessary conditions to guarantee high-quality life in our cities, rediscovering the meaning and the importance of being together and of public living.

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