URBANISM, IMMIGRATION AND HOUSING – PUBLIC POLICY IN THE CITY OF BOLOGNA

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Independent

Faced with the recent phenomenon of immigration, city management tools aim to meet the needs of the social services sector, introducing aspects of an anthropological and sociological nature that up until now have been of secondary importance to town planning. The main objective of Bologna's housing policy is to guarantee its availability to both Italians and foreign immigrants, considering the phenomenon of immigration a new multiethnic population scenario whose social and cultural aspects can be developed, whilst at the same time combating illegality and likewise any manifestations of discrimination or xenophobia shown by Italian citizens, promoting the principles of integration and civil coexistence. The challenge is to create a housing policy based on integration, avoiding previous town planning errors and thus preventing spatial segregation and social exclusion. The Council Structural Plan, Council Operational Plan and Urban Building Regulations, Social Housing Scheme, Rent Assistance Scheme and Metropolitan Rent Agency are some of the important tools designed to achieve these objectives. The principles of urban equity and equality continue to be the pillars of housing policy and, as in the past, citizens are encouraged to take part in the urban transformation process.

INTRODUCTION

The influence of various peoples has always been a feature of Bologna's history. Etruscans, Gauls, Romans and Lombards were responsible for its development right up until the period of decline that affected all Italian cities of ancient times1. During the 10th century, the population of the city began to rise again and there was a new period of economic growth followed by urban development and redevelopment. In the 11th century, Bologna was one of the first cities with "communal" vocations, establishing open institutes including the "Studium", considered Europe's oldest university2. Helped by the presence of the university, foreign communities began to flourish, leading to a process of integration with the native population. The 13th century was an era of important social changes, the main one being produced by the so-called Heaven's Law of 1256 with which Bologna became the first city in Europe to abolish serfdom, redeeming the serfs using public money3. Over the centuries, important urban changes altered the appearance of the city. Between the 16th and 18th centuries numerous colonnades were built at the sides of the city's main streets, these being designed to assist pedestrian movement in all weathers. To this day, the unmistakable effect they produce are the city's distinguishing feature4. In 1859 Bologna became part of unified Italy and established itself as an important hub for the country, mainly due to the railway junction that still plays an essential national role. At that time, the city began to extend outside its medieval boundary walls that were knocked down between the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century in order to facilitate traffic flow. Towards the end of the 19th century, industrial and commercial premises were built in the suburbs and new streets appeared in the old town centre, however this did not affect the city's urban coherence; this aspect proved important in the restoration and conservation process adopted by the reformist town planning that was to follow in the 1960s. In the second part of the 20th century, Bologna had to deal with a notable population shift from rural areas into the city following the new process of industrial development. Between 1952 and 1957 the city witnessed considerable population growth and new districts had to be built in order to meet the demand for housing. It was a period of intense "overbuilding" and since there were no efficient social services as yet, public housing was built with the focus on quantity rather than quality. Housing estates for the working classes were built in the extreme suburbs, exploiting the possibility of acquiring farmland by way of compulsory purchase in order to contain costs. This planning policy of building on compulsorily-purchased farmland was the cornerstone of the 1955 Development Plan that aimed to be able to deal with the expected population increase of one million people, something that did not happen; nevertheless, this property development had a positive effect on urban income[5].

REFORMIST TOWN PLANNING AS COLLECTIVE APPROPRIATION OF THE CITY

In contrast to the policies of the Fifties, at the beginning of the Sixties, Bologna witnessed the birth of reformist town planning, a term coined by the architect Giuseppe Campos Venuti to indicate the desire to gradually resolve every single planning contingency[6]. The first important piece of legislation was Act No. 765/1967)[7] and subsequently Ministerial Decree No.1444/1968)[8]. This legislation provided for the construction of housing estates in undeveloped areas closer to the city centre[9]. The plan's most important innovation was that for the first time, people living in the suburbs would have the same social services as those in the city centre. Over the years, the 1955 General Development Plan was gradually modified up until approval of the 1970 Development Plan. Introduced in 1963, Affordable Housing Programmes (PEEP) perceive this influence. Compulsory purchase orders acquired land closer to the centre where new estates were built complete with social services that were appreciated by the residents. In addition, each district was allocated its share of public green space[10]. Some of the largest developments built as part of this plan are: Borgo Panigale, Barca, Fossolo, Corticella and Pilastro. Of these, the Fossolo development is probably the one that has given the most functional and aesthetically-pleasing results. On the other hand, the Pilastro district has had the most serious problems, both in the past and at present.

FIGURE 1 The Barca district (INA Village)

FIGURE 2 The Barca district (INA Village)

FIGURE 3 Borgo Panigale district (Casteldebole area)

FIGURE 4 Borgo Panigale district (Casteldebole area)

FIGURE 5 Pilastro Village

FIGURE 6 Pilastro Village

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SEGREGATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION ▪ THE CASE OF PILASTRO VILLAGE

The complex was built in the Sixties as a public housing scheme commissioned by the former Council Housing Board (IACP) that is now known as the Emilia Romagna Housing Agency (ACER). It was intended to meet the demand for housing to be allocated to migrants from Southern Italy who were attracted by the possibility of new job opportunities. The much-discussed equilibrium in the relationship between the area's inhabitants deteriorated with the arrival of new immigrants belonging to different ethnic groups and speaking different languages. Many of the original residents, who in the past have succeeded with the somewhat difficult integration process, now display intolerance towards the newly arrived foreigners. The high density of foreign residents in this area due to the high concentration of council housing has created tension and mistrust, all too common phenomena in multiethnic metropolitan areas. Public policies need to quickly pursue the primary objective of social interaction and integration in order to guarantee social harmony and security, as well as the basic rights of each and every Italian or foreign citizen.

THE 1985 GENERAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN - A DIFFICULT CONTINUATION

The General Development Plan is considered the transformation plan because it excluded the scheduled purchase and change of use of farmland far from the built-up area; however, some areas in the outskirts were chosen for strategic changes as an alternative to the areas of expansion provided for by previous plans. These areas were the result of the interpretations of the new town plan, justifying the reformist innovations, without ignoring the successes of the Sixties and Seventies. The method's innovation involved identifying three major directions to be followed: the first aimed to develop new buildings in the suburbs, connecting housing with the service sector, and decentralising social services, integrating all this with urban green space; the second concerned innovation in the matter of transport; the third aimed to implement the structural plan with town planning forecasts designed to interpret new phenomena and emerging trends, e.g. construction of a light railway. The Plan was expanded to cover protection of architectural heritage as far as the inner suburbs (developed on the basis of the 1889 plan), extending such protection to the historical layouts and centres in the outer suburbs and those scattered over agricultural areas and the hills. In the Eighties, the General Development Plan sought to repair the suburban fabric and point development towards urban zones, taking previously built-on areas and putting them to new use. "Organic districts" was the name given to the residential areas of the consolidated fabric whose urban structure was the result of a unified design. This category includes the areas set aside for council housing from the Fifties onwards and those of the Affordable Housing Programmes. In 2004, the Provincial Land-Use Coordination Plan was introduced with the purpose of coordinating the development of provincial territory over larger areas, this being aimed at the city's neighbouring municipalities with a view to reducing the phenomenon of scatter-site housing and at the same time limiting the concentration of tertiary businesses. The 1985 General Development Plan still has unsolved problems such as derelict industrial areas awaiting redevelopment and new use and the question of the compulsory purchase of private land to create public areas. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, historiography regarding Italian town planning was based on the models of the three generations of plans that the country had tested. In the Eighties, Prof. Campos Venuti[11] observed that these followed back-to-back beginning right after the Second World War and were: reconstruction plans, urban expansion plans and urban transformation plans. These town plans have been analysed as a whole in order to appraise town planning history following the country's reconstruction (1945-1954) that was required at the end of the Second World War, a large-scale implementation of Act No. 1150 dated 1942. First generation measures were generic instruments that often encouraged property speculation. Most war destruction was concentrated in the centre of large cities close to stations or ports. In these prestigious or strategically-important areas that attracted the interest of private investors, reconstruction work often led to very large buildings with an increase in building coverage and infrastructure requirements. The first generation instruments managed neither to control nor regulate development of the cities, let alone avoid speculation, but focused on modernising the road network

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and increasing the number of built-up areas without planning their type of use. The second generation adopted a new policy: reformist town planning, the process involving small, medium and large cities without distinction. These plans tackled the question of urban expansion as necessary growth, seeking to understand urban rent mechanisms and their effect on the city. The unintentional result was that these measures benefited private landlords who were up against the Affordable Housing Programme and, despite being an important innovation, town planning standards were sometimes used improperly. Since the Affordable Housing Programme intended to use low cost areas in the suburbs for low-profit operations (council housing and public services), central areas with better facilities and services were earmarked for more profitable construction projects such as headquarters or high-tech service centres. Third-generation planning dealt with the changes caused by the need to adapt the city to new technology. This took into account new requirements such as increased demand for public transport and the need to regenerate poorly-utilised built-up or derelict areas in order to curtail the takeover of farmland. Urban morphology once again assumed key importance.

THE COUNCIL STRUCTURAL PLAN

The 1985 General Development Plan's lack of amendments and urban transformation processes were the subject of discussion during the last two decades of the 20th century. In 1995, the National Town Planning Institute submitted a proposal for legislative reform with a view to separating strategic aspects from regulatory and operational ones. This innovation took effect in Emilia-Romagna following implementation of Regional Act No. 20/2000. Many objectives were transferred to the Council Local Plan with its new constituent instruments: the Council Structural Plan, Council Operational Plan and Urban Building Regulations. The Council Structural Plan contains the strategic and structural aspects regarding the municipal area and remains in force indefinitely; the Council Operational Plan lasts for five years and contains the operational aspects and regulations governing use of parts of the municipality specified by the Council Structural Plan and liable to undergo substantial changes (such as development and redevelopment); Urban Building Regulations cover aspects of urban and rural areas that are not scheduled to undergo significant change under the terms of the Council Structural Plan and also specify building and town planning parameters as well as infrastructure costs. The changes contemplated by the Council Operational Plan are carried out using instruments called Development Implementation Plans that are provided for and regulated by Regional Act No. 20/2000. By adopting these new instruments, the city is required to follow a specific planning process that will alter its appearance in the coming years, since structural requirements, policies and implementation rules have already been decided. Democratic culture is a part of the plan's urban philosophy since it provides for greater and more widespread democratic powers for citizens.

HOUSING POLICIES SPECIFIED BY THE COUNCIL STRUCTURAL PLAN

The innovation introduced by Social Housing represents one of reformist town planning's greatest negotiating feats, since it creates a service of general interest whose purpose is to set targets with regard to integration and social coherence, as well as those relating to the functional quality of the urban fabric. Social Housing offers various types of letting agreements: publicly- or privately-owned housing with lifetime or temporary tenancy, social or subsidised rents and a waiting list system. Social Housing can be considered a means of balancing the "city system" because it specifies three components: transport, public city and environment, all of vital importance in a housing scheme. Available housing stock in the Province of Bologna consists of 20,654 homes, whilst the City of Bologna has 13,426 homes and the aim of the Council Structural Plan is to allocate 20% to Social Housing[12]. Unfortunately, the current housing crisis is different to that of the Seventies and reflects the greater vulnerability of families in the grip of an unstable property market to which many are unable to gain access. The fall in living standards of the middle classes has increased the percentage of people needing council housing, this previously consisting of poor people alone. Unlike those for the Affordable Housing Programme, all sites earmarked for Social Housing are publicly owned and were compulsorily purchased at acceptable prices using the public funds available at that time,

choosing areas of farmland far away from the city; although this choice appeared advantageous, unfortunately it led to the marginalisation of some of these areas in the remotest outskirts. The Metropolitan Rent Agency (MRA) has been set up in order to mediate between housing supply and demand. Its task is to find private homes that can be assigned with a subsidised rent, guaranteeing owners the certainty of payment, legal protection and redress for any damage, whilst at the same time seeking to restrict rent to 30% of family income. Besides the MRA, the Rent Assistance Scheme has also been established. This offers a small sum to the families in greatest financial difficulty.

IMMIGRATION AND SOCIAL HOUSING

Whilst the demographic phenomenon caused by immigration increases, at the same time, there are a greater number of problems caused by the lack of affordable housing for Italian and foreign citizens belonging to the less affluent classes. The association council housing /foreigner is often the subject of controversy. About 15,000 applications have been admitted to the Social Housing waiting lists in Bologna's Communes. Of these, 80% are concentrated in the Communes with serious housing difficulties, e.g. the City of Bologna that represents 63% of all cases. About 45% of accepted applications were submitted by foreign families[13]. Most immigrants choose to rent their homes with all of the obvious difficulties that entails. This situation has a decisive effect on their relationship with society and aspects of civil and multiethnic harmony. The Pilastro district is just one example. Despite the difficulties, with the assistance of a number of associations, the City Council continues the district regeneration project and sponsors cultural events as means of improving social conditions with the aim of mitigating and tackling the exclusion and segregation that has been created over the years. An increase in the availability of social housing is essential since economic and social marginalisation is already an emergency. The 2012 City Plan dealing with the redevelopment of areas of urban decay and that of 2015 for social and cultural regeneration of these areas are instruments offered by the Communes regardless of type or size, but they are somewhat generic and are still unable to achieve the targets set in full.

CONCLUSIONS

Reformist town planning of the Sixties and Seventies had positive and negative effects. Some districts became marginal areas, whilst many areas intended for public use were not redeveloped or reused. The 1985 General Development Plan failed to resolve several of its problems, including that of the derelict industrial areas and their compulsory purchase and the new uses for redeveloped public areas. We also need to consider that the urban reform took place during the Italian economic boom so funds were available for first-rate projects and programmes. It should not be forgotten that the difficulties caused by the economic crisis affect the property market and contribute to its instability, thus causing public confidence to fall. The high cost of private housing rental and shortage of council homes put the brake on public housing policies, whilst the failure to raise public rents hinders construction of a sufficient supply of new homes and renovation of existing ones. Although designed to be sustainable, fair and supportive, in view of the rapid succession of events, reformist town planning will probably require several more decades of consistent, but flexible, policies. The speed of social, economic and cultural changes requires that we take a more multidisciplinary outlook, highlighting the need to introduce to the modern science of urban planning a new perspective with greater emphasis on sociocultural and social security aspects. The effect of the new phenomenon of migration has altered the arrangement of the city and placed a severe burden on the Welfare State that is unable to cover the shortage of homes for Italian and foreign citizens on its own. Besides having to physically house these new citizens, there is also the need to provide facilities capable of assisting integration such as: sports facilities, cultural centres and places of worship where they can practise their beliefs legally. All this can help to forge a sense of belonging to the city, propriety and public spirit. These factors are essential in promoting every form of integration process and avoiding any sort of banlieue, Chinatown or Little Italy that have already proved to be hotbeds of decay and social insecurity. Cultural diversity represents the positive side of immigration and like all multiculturalism processes this may be the subject of controversy, therefore the concepts of interaction and integration need to be reinforced.

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Endnotes

1   G. Sassatelli & A. Donati, *Storia di Bologna, vol. 1: Bologna nell'antichità*, Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2005.

2   O. Capitani, *Storia di Bologna, vol. 2; Bologna nel Medioevo*. Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2007.

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5   G. Campos Venuti, *Bologna: l'urbanistica riformista* in G. Campos Venuti & F. Oliva (ed.), *Cinquant'anni di urbanistica in Italia (1942-1992)*. Bari, Rome: Editore Laterzi, 1993.

6   *L'urbanistica riformista: antologia di scritti, lezioni e piani* edited by Giuseppe Campos Venuti & Federico Oliva. Milan: ETAS Libri, 1991.

7   Known as the "Transitional Act", it introduced some important amendments to the 1942 Town Planning Act No.1150 including: specification of a deadline by which the Local Council is required to draw up the General Development Plan, restrictions on building where no planning instruments exist and private contributions towards primary and secondary infrastructure costs.

8   Known as the "Town planning standards decree", it specifies mandatory limits of density, height and minimum areas for educational, recreational, playground and car park facilities.

9   F. Ceccarelli & M. A. Gallingani, *Bologna: decentramento, quartieri e città (1945-1974)*. Bologna: Istituto per la storia di Bologna, 1984.

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12 *Bologna Social Housing. La condizione abitativa in Provincia di Bologna*. Metropolitan Partnership Agreement Preliminary Analysis Report. Local Planning and Transport Department: Bologna Provincial Authority, 2012.

13 Idem, p.7.

Image Sources

Pictures 1,2,3,4,5,6: photos by Arabela Vaz