

Social housing as a response to housing needs; the case of Biccari neighborhood in Foggia

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ABSTRACT: The theme of “home” and its implications is a central issue in the Italian political and cultural debate. However, this debate seems to have shifted the interest from a more pragmatic approach that saw the house as a simple good of shelter to a more complex one, which sees the house as the “result of a complex network of material and immaterial, social and economic relations” [Ricci, 2008]. The paper investigates the “housing problem” in a specific context of the municipality of Foggia, referring to economic and social housing. After a brief excursus on the urban development of Foggia, which led to the creation of residential satellite districts, the case of the Biccari district is examined. The district for consistency and conformation of economic and social housing compartments stands as an interesting experimental design area. The purpose is to propose possible scenarios for the redevelopment of a neighborhood with strong polarities but is currently configured as a dormitory district. The idea of proposed regeneration starts from the analysis of the possible type of users and then the definition of possible housing scenarios that can give a new impetus to the area under study and optimize public housing that is currently underutilized. This leads to the proposal of intervention on the entire body of the neighborhood with the optimization of the existing and the completion of some urban voids with new buildings in which to operate with a housing mix that is capable of transforming the entire neighborhood into a co-operating community.

Keywords: Affordable housing, Living space, Regenerative process, Housing needs

1 INTRODUCTION. THE CITY OF FOGGIA AND THE HOUSING CRISIS

Foggia is the third most populous city in Puglia and the second by extension. Some circumstances mark the urban development of the city, among which the most important are the earthquake of 1731 (which destroyed much of the old town), and the heavy bombing suffered during the Second World War. The city, therefore, in the course of its history, has had to reinvent itself and rebuild. The philosophy undertaken was to maintain unchanged the urban layout of the nineteenth-century city (divided by the railway), favoring the development of new peripheral areas that were conceived as rural villages. These areas of expansion were characterized by two founding factors: the clear separation between the areas of economic and social housing and the private ones and a partial implementation of the expansion plans with the only realization of residential areas (both public and private) to the detriment of services and green areas. This, combined with the lack of new public housing, has led to the emergence of a growing

condition of discomfort, ghettoization, and social exclusion.

Today the city of Foggia has a high socio-economic degradation and housing backwardness that led it to cover the penultimate place (106th) among the 107 Italian cities monitored by the dashboard of “Il Sole 24 ore” (Il Sole 24 ORE, 2022) on “quality of life” for the year 2021

Table 1. 2021 evaluation of the municipality of Foggia in the national ranking according to the national dashboard on the quality of urban life (<https://lab24.ilssole24ore.com/qualita-della-vita/foggia>).

Final ranking 2021		RANK	VAR.2021/2020	MEDAGLIE		
		106°	-6▼	0	0	0
INDICATORE	100%	51°	RANK	VAR.21/20	MEDAGLIE	
Richness and consumption		94*	-1▼	0	0	0
Business and work		102*	0=	0	0	0
Justice and Security		107*	-4▼	0	0	0
Demography and society		89*	-79▼	0	0	0
Environment and services		100*	-10▼	0	0	0
Culture and leisure		94*	-11▼	0	0	0

1.1 Overview of the main social housing interventions in foggia

In the mid-nineties, the problem of the requalification of the public housing patrimony fully invested the city of Foggia. In those years, the municipality had to face growing housing and social problems to be included by resolution of the CIPE of 13/11/2003 n. 87, among the Italian municipalities with greater housing tension.

The regeneration process had to deal with a social, economic, and demographic framework radically changed compared to the tradition that had determined the origin of these areas. As is happening in the rest of Italy, the configuration of housing demand was no longer compact, legible, and translatable into clear and defined models, as had happened in the past. The area of housing need, in fact, presented highly diversified socio-economic profiles and ways of life: the elderly, immigrants, foreigners, young couples, students, and large families, unsuitable for access to economic and social housing, but at the same time unable to withstand the free private market.

The municipality of Foggia tried to cope with all this by launching specific interventions of Social Housing. However, these were conceived as punctual and time-limited interventions, and although they have brought positive effects, their contribution to solving the housing problem has been small. The Social Housing projects implemented in this context were aimed primarily at housing assistance activities rather than constructing new buildings and housing solutions. Among the many initiatives, the most significant ones in terms of funding received and social impact on the territory are:

- “I built my house,” aimed at facilitating access to housing through the strengthening of orientation services for social integration and through the testing of new forms of social housing;
- “Re-Housing” aimed at providing access to housing and employment by foreign citizens and immigrant families through a path of self-renovation of some living spaces;
- “Welcome to my home” aimed at accompanying people who live in situations of fragility and economic disadvantage through paths of re-acquisition of financial autonomy to allow the possession and maintenance of the house.

Comparison with the regional public building framework.

Today, in Apulia, most of the public housing is owned by the five Regional Agencies known as ARCA (Agenzie Regionali per la Casa e l’Abitare)¹

This public housing stock is supplemented by housing owned by individual capital municipalities and a few other more populous municipalities. In this sense, it emerges that the public building stock of Foggia (about 7187 accommodations in 2012) is about 60% of that of the regional capital (Bari had 11772 in 2020) but is equivalent to 11% of the entire public housing stock of the region (about 65441 accommodations).

At the same time, calculating the incidence of the public building stock regarding the overall housing quotient of the individual capital municipalities and regarding the number of families living there, it emerges that the public building stock of Foggia comes to house 12% of resident families and corresponds to 13% of the urban housing stock, resulting, in this sense, in terms of incidence higher than that of the regional capital (equal to 9%). This datum, while on the one hand, justifies and confirms the strong socio-economic impoverishment of the reality of Foggia, also highlights how structural interventions to enhance the public housing stock can affect a significant percentage of the local population, being able to provide effective support to its socio-economic and cultural growth.

Table 2. Analysis of the public housing stock of Foggia in relation to the housing stock of its territory and other municipalities in Puglia. Source: Author.

	BARI	FOGGIA
ARCA Public Houses (ORCA)	8653	5090
Municipality Public Houses	3119	2097
Total Public Houses	11772	7187
Percentage of municipal public housing compared to total regional public housing stock availability	18%	11%
Residents (ISTAT 2016)	324.198	151.726
Number of households (ISTAT 2016)	137.099	58.469
Availability of municipal public housing compared to the number of households in the municipality	9%	12%
Total number of houses (ISTAT 2001)	131.497	55.926
Number of private houses	119.725	48.739
Incidence of public assets on housing stock	9%	13%

1. These Agencies were established in 2014, with R.L. No. 22, following the transfer to the regions of the housing assets of the National Agency IACP (Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari), to ensure greater financial, organizational,

patrimonial and technical autonomy in the implementation and management of housing services.

2 THE ARCA ASSET OF THE CITY OF FOGGIA

The city of Foggia has an urbanized area of about 135 square kilometers, and it is divided into 21 districts. From the analysis of the building consistency and the state of conservation of the buildings owned by the ARCA, carried out on direct detection of the data of the agency “ARCA Capitanata,” it appears a homogeneous distribution of assets in almost all districts.

ARCA’s 11,292 housing units can be essentially categorized into four different construction periods:

1. *period 1933 -1956* (corresponding to the last phase of the first INA-Casa seven-year period), with 73 buildings (equal to 21% of the public housing stock of ARCA in Foggia);
2. *1956-1963 period* (corresponding to the second INA-Casa seven-year period), which coincides with the coming into force of the Rutelli-Vitale PRG, with 153 buildings (equal to 44% of the public housing stock of ARCA in Foggia);
3. *period 1964-1992, up to the coming into force of the Benevolo PRG* currently in force, with 102 buildings (equal to 29% of the public housing stock of ARCA in Foggia);
4. *period 1993 – up to the present, with 18 buildings* (equal to 6% of the public housing stock of the ARCA of Foggia)

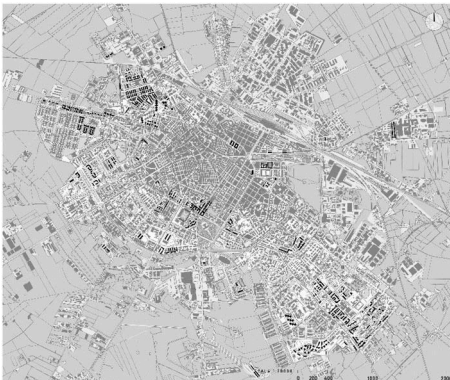


Figure 1. Distribution of the public housing stock in the city of Foggia.

Thus, most of the buildings belong to a construction period between the first and second INA-Casa septennia, and only a small portion of this asset has been alienated over the years.

From this picture, it emerges how Foggia, in line with European and national policies, has received, especially in the post-war period, considerable attention in terms of public housing, thanks to the action of expansive policies, able to provide a significant

number of affordable housings with good housing standards (Balchin, 1996).

This expansionary phase was followed, starting in the 1970s and 1980s, by a substantial withdrawal of the state from direct intervention, the decentralization of responsibilities from the central government to local governments, the tendency to privatize large parts of the public housing stock, the deregulation of the private housing market and the political preference given to the expansion of homeownership, with the consequent contraction of the rental sector (both social and private). This condition has favored the supremacy of the market as the prevailing distribution channel of housing (Edgar et al., 2002) and has favored the economically strongest social groups while penalizing the most vulnerable, often unable to find a satisfactory housing solution on the market at affordable prices (Palvarini, 2010).

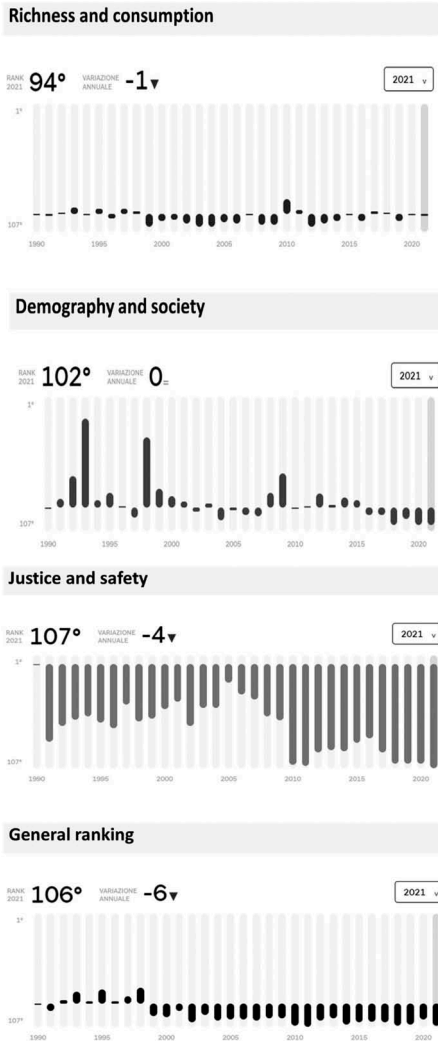
This phenomenon overlapped perfectly with the process of progressive loss of social stability in the city of Foggia. In the period 1990-2020, the reduced wealth and low rate of consumption of its inhabitants (Tab. 4a) associated with the increasingly low rates of employment and business growth, but also with a rapid increase in the rates of youth dispersion (Tab. 4b), has led to a progressive increase in social safety problems (Tab. 4c) and a general lowering of the quality of life that has led Foggia, according to the quality of life ranking of Il Sole 24 ORE (The Sun 24 Hours, 2022), to the penultimate place (106th out of 107) of the national rank (Tab. 4d).

The dramatic dimension of this phenomenon of loss of quality of urban life has an obvious reflection in the growing public housing needs of the city. The correlation of regional data on co-housing households and households in improper housing (ARCA Capitanata, 2012: 75) reveals the absolute criticality of Foggia’s condition compared to the entire regional picture. In particular, reading some data on the housing emergency of the Municipality of Foggia detected by the ASA Programming following the deliberation of the C.C. n.102 of December 13, 2004, having as object “Housing emergency. Approval of the agenda”, it is observed that approximately 656 families live in improper lodgings and that, overall, the evaluation of the housing emergency leads to consider that not less than 2,500/3,000 lodgings are necessary to face the requirements of as many families (9,000 inhabitants) that are in a condition of urgency (Karrer, 2005: 33). These values are much higher than those found in the other provinces of Apulia and much higher than the national figure.

Towards an interpretative model of public living.

The process so far described highlights four different levels of attention from which as many design paths are derived.

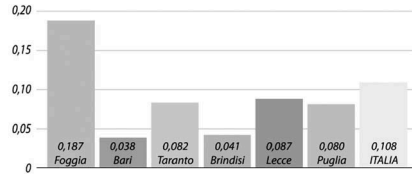
Table 3. Classification of Foggia according to the quality-of-life dashboard parameters in reference to the period 1990-2021. Source: (Il Sole 24 ORE, 2022).



1. A high level of inadequacy of the available public assets in relation to the city’s housing needs. This need cannot be quantified by relying on a linear statistic comparing Foggia to other cities of equal size. This need is, in fact, all the greater the lower the quality of life and the lower the socio-economic condition of a specific urban reality and varies extremely strongly as the specific features of the individual urban districts in which a city is divided vary. The answer to this first question lies not only in increased public investment but above all in the

Table 4. Regional Comparison of Cohabitation Indices and Regional and National Comparison of Improperly Used Housing Index. ISTAT 2001 census data. Source: Arca Capitanata, 2012: 75.

PROVINCE	Housing conditions		Total
	In cohabitation	Not in cohabitation	
Foggia	1.431	234.149	235.580
Bari	1.788	524.000	525.788
Taranto	711	199.104	199.815
Brindisi	1.043	140.462	141.505
Lecce	1.961	273.709	275.670
Puglia	6.934	1.371.424	1.378.358



- construction of incentives and concessions in favor of a massive involvement of the third sector in the creation and management of new generation “public condominiums.”
2. The high age of much of the city’s public housing stock. Over 55% of the houses in question date back to the 1970s. Their technical, energetic, and plant engineering quality is very low, and, most times, the advanced state of material degradation not only affects the social stability of the families housed but, even more concretely, their well-being and physical safety. It is essential, in this sense, to invest significant resources to be dedicated to the technical, plant, and architectural regeneration and the extraordinary maintenance of this important heritage.
 3. High attrition in housing reallocation. This condition is strongly conditioned by the misalignment between the life cycle of households and the timing of housing reorganization. This very often leads to two opposing conditions: on the one hand, large apartments inhabited by elderly couples, with the consequence of a strong under-utilization of public property and with high management costs (especially energy); on the contrary, there are small apartments inhabited by young couples in the phase of family expansion with obvious phenomena of housing overcrowding. In both cases, therefore, a condition of strong housing deprivation is determined. As a possible solution, it would be necessary to activate immediate housing scheduling and monitoring processes that allow a rapid facilitation of housing exchange associated with the guarantee of rootedness within the social context (neighborhood) of belonging.

4. A strong lack of equity of treatment in the satisfaction of housing needs. We often forget the condition whereby different social, cultural, and economic groups have different needs and require different social, cultural, and economic support instruments. Just as often, we forget that different age groups have special housing needs that make them more or less fragile in relation to the urban context, the type of services offered, and the assistance they can count on.

A more appropriate solution would be, for example, to guarantee individuals living alone (young people, students, the elderly, divorced people, or couples over seventy) essential housing with spaces for collective living and social interchange in which to guarantee assistance and support at home, or, for single-parent families with children, the availability of housing in complexes with the presence of spaces and associations (or even social networks) to support the assistance and accompaniment of children.

Regarding all this, it is impossible to think of adopting a unified housing solution for all the conditions highlighted or, even less, a specific solution for each of them. The result would be that of a total ineffectiveness of the solutions adopted (even in the presence of considerable public investment) as happens more and more often with public intervention policies or, on the contrary, the economic impossibility by the public to deal with a problem of similar dimensions with the consequent immobilization of the public administrative machine.

Pursuing a settlement model based on social housing (managed by the third sector and co-financed or facilitated by the public), widespread (and not concentrated in closed urban sectors), integrated (inserted in the continuum of the urban fabric made up of private housing) and diversified (through the use of a typological-housing mix), it is possible not only to face the housing emergency by maximizing public economic resources and available space but also to avoid strong concentrations of fragility and social degradation that would inevitably take root in that urban context and expand to the point of affecting the future of the entire city.

The tool of typological-functional diversification of buildings (housing, co-housing, collective housing, ...) associated with the mix and the construction of specific levels of interaction between various categories of needs and resources (housing for the elderly or single-parent couples crossed with those for students and casual workers, for example, can allow the development of networks of mutual support and social support of extraordinary interest for the construction of operating from the bottom community) is, without doubt, the most useful tool to ensure not only the mere satisfaction of housing needs but also to ensure an effective growth of the community.

This theme is, on the other hand, very different from that of the typification and separation of different categories of needs that lead to the construction of houses for the elderly, student housing, co-housing for divorced people, and that inevitably leads to the emergence of marked forms of segregation and isolation of individual social categories identified as fragile and abandoned to their own fragility.

From all this starts the scenario of a technical design not only of the single building but also of the individual urban districts that characterize each city. Every single neighborhood or urban sector presents, in fact, for the social specificity that characterizes it and for the singularity of its built fabric, of the spaces and public functions enclosed in it, a condition of uniqueness that becomes over time attractive to other categories of inhabitants but also able to transform this specificity in an engine of acceleration and development of the entire urban community.

An exploratory intervention: the Biccari district as an example of a form to be inhabited.

In order to show the effectiveness of a regenerative approach that starts from the dimension of the neighborhood and operates within its urban specificity, an emblematic case study is that of the Biccari district.

The neighborhood is located north/west of the city's urban development. It has three important polarities with high potential for the development of the neighborhood and the social revitalization of the entire city. These three polarities are:

- the “Ospedali riuniti” Hospitals of Foggia;
- the Biomedical Pole;
- the University of Agriculture.

These three important poles create a housing demand made up of users who stay in the city of Foggia for a limited but temporally variable time, according to the specific category of user, from a few days to an entire year. These city users are, in the specific case, university and medical workers (students, nurses, doctors, university teachers) and family members of hospitalized patients. Such a wide range of users requires a form of housing that differs from the traditional housing concept. This must be able to adapt to the different needs of users in transit but also able to build links with the context (social and urban) not only to allow their adaptation (feeling part of a social network) but also to try to produce benefits for the communities of the neighborhood.

The choice of the case study has therefore fallen in the Biccari district for the particular condition of these housing requests and a condition of underutilization of public housing. These, in fact, are composed of 90% of buildings in line, with housing between 80 square meters and 100 square meters, and an occupation that sees the prevalence of households with less than 4 users.

The public properties of ARCA Capitanata are concentrated in three compact compartments, which we can identify through the main streets on which they face: via Ugo La Malfa, via Nicola Patierno, via Martiri di Via Fani. The construction period of the three compartments is between 1964 and 1994, with a prevalence of buildings of 4 floors above ground, all in line and with a frame structure.

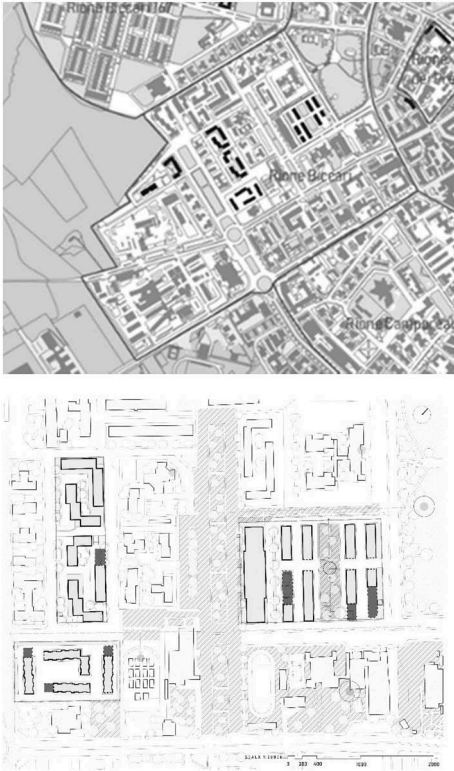
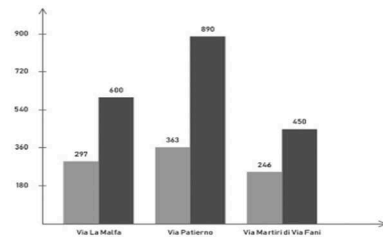


Figure 2. Distribution of the public housing stock in the Biccarei district.

The resident population in these areas is investigated through demographic analysis, aimed at understanding the family consistency in terms of numbers and anagraphical age of the members of each housing unit. Data show that most households (75% for Via la Malfa, 78% for Via Patierno, and 73% for Via Fani) are composed of 1, 2, and 3 users, with an average age of over 60 years. In particular, starting from what is reported in the R.L. n. 10 of 2014 in relation to the average number of users in relation to the surface of the housing and comparing the housing quotient expressed by the existing surfaces with the resident population, it shows a use equal to 50% of the residential capacity of all the public housing stock here present. We are, in effect, in the situation illustrated in the following graph:

Table 5. Comparison of actual (light) and potential (dark) users in the three-building subdivisions.



From all these aspects starts the proposal for the redevelopment of the neighborhood and its public property. Therefore, the key aim of the proposal is to redefine or increase the public housing quotient of the neighborhood, aligning it with the functional and social needs of the area under study and simultaneously providing the neighborhood with some community services.

The proposal is based on the possibility of implementing the cubature of the district through the inclusion of volumes functionally, spatially, and dimensionally diversified according to the individual compartments of intervention. For buildings with ground floor pilotis, the intervention of redevelopment and reuse of space includes the creation of a building basement whose new volumes are allocated to complementary services of living and public services in the neighborhood. In the first case, we talk about complementary services to the housing function (such as laundries, co-working spaces, bike-parking, and multipurpose spaces), while in the second case, we talk about commercial spaces to support residences.

The housing issue is addressed in two distinct ways:

1. The re-functionalization of existing buildings through the redefinition of housing surfaces
2. The realization of new cubage in the urban voids identified in the immediate vicinity of the buildings under consideration.

2.1 The re-functionalization project

The phase of redistribution of the net usable surface of the existing buildings was based on the insertion of additional volumes in the facade to expand the net usable area, insert more housing per floor, and provide each housing with outdoor spaces (balcony/loggia). This redistribution and optimization of surfaces have been achieved with double action:

1. redistribution of a typical plan leaving the accommodations with their original surface but optimizing their distribution inside;

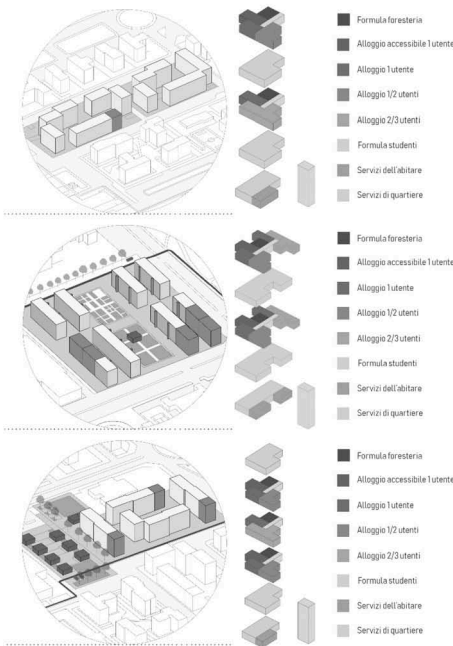


Figure 3. Identification of the re-functionalization and new building interventions and the different types of building and urban additions taken into consideration.

2. re-functionalization of the typical floor by inserting additional surfaces/volumes to allow an increase sufficient to insert 3 accommodations per floor.

These three accommodations are divided as follows: 1 accommodation for a family of 4 users, 2 accommodations for small nuclei (1 or 2 users). The accommodations in question have been configured as traditional housing, with living area and sleeping area, optimization of distributors, and insertion of two toilets. The increase in volume has been placed

on alternate floors and configured as bow windows and balconies/lounges with two different functions:

1. In the sleeping area, this surface expands the bedrooms by providing them with a study.
2. In the living area, it is the kitchen-dining area that benefits from the additional volume. These areas are related to the living room through an open space. The compromise reached in this new configuration of the existing building has seen, however, the organization of the living area in a single environment

This policy of punctual volumetric implementation of the building bodies finds its maximum development in the sector of via Ugo La Malfa. The volumetry, in addition, is equipped with an autonomous supporting structure, leaning against the existing one, and compared to the road, produces a continuous and uniform building front, which takes up the colors and shapes of the existing buildings.

2.2 *The integration of a new housing quotient*

Choices about the housing types to be built “ex-novo” were made considering the diverse user base identified in Section 3. The structure of the housing form has been diversified by function and use of the dwelling. The starting point was to abandon the idea of traditional housing equipped with its own autonomous functional spaces and open to the possibility that some semi-public functions of living could be shared and/or remodeled according to specific cases. Therefore, starting from the desire to ensure the inhabitant/user’s satisfaction with the “basic needs,” we have aggregated spaces and surfaces, thinking of an organism in continuous change. One of the parameters used was to classify the needs and related living spaces through the levels of privacy required for specific actions. Thus, there was a shift from a more private space, which assumes no level of sharing, to a more public space with high levels of sharing. From this type of study, we thus deduced the spaces that had to remain private and could not change over time.

The useful floor area (230,00 sqm) and the 4 residential floors have been organized to respond to the functional “mixite” principle: accommodation for students/workers with 8 beds and small and medium-size accommodation for city-users/single-parent households/divorced people/self-sufficient elderly people. Therefore, the building is configured with semi-independent housing cells, designed to offer users private spaces of relevance (bedroom, study, and toilet) and shared spaces related to the living area (kitchen, living room, dining room, and terraces). This choice falls on the possibility of creating interaction and sharing between users with shared needs. Generally, the typical plan is organized

with two entrances: one that gives the possibility to enter directly into the common living area, and the other that gives direct access to their private area. The living area has ample space and outdoor terraces. The more private area is not equipped with only bedrooms but is conceived as a personal mini-accommodation equipped with a bedroom, toilet, room adaptable to the user's different needs, and terrace shared with 1 or 2 other mini-accommodations. The decision to allocate larger spaces to individual functions has resulted in the articulation of space more attentive to privacy needs but with high degrees of flexibility. The additional room (not less than 11 sqm) can have multiple destinations, depending on the user who uses the mini apartment:

1. Study for a student;
2. Bedroom for a child, for divorced parent who occasionally takes in a child;
3. Bed for grandchild/children/caregiver, for an elderly self-sufficient person;
4. guest room for a young couple;
5. Relaxation space for a single working person.

Next to these types of the standard plan, some mini apartments (which sometimes take the configuration of studio apartments) have been associated, including a living area for all users who do not wish to live, even temporarily, in a condition of sharing some functions. Finally, we tried to give an answer to the “gray belt” population that is the bearer of new needs but cannot find an adequate response in the current real estate market.

3 CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, the choices of intervention are based on the re-functionalization of the existing heritage through punctual interventions and on the new building of the urban voids next to the pre-existing ones. This process has led to an increase in the housing quotient, and a better correspondence to the needs of users referred to that sector. Moreover, the minimal accommodations equipped with shared spaces have allowed settling in the new construction, with the same useful surface compared to traditional accommodations, a greater number of individuals.

Therefore, the re-functionalization of the existing has led to the creation of 150 housing units (against 120 units initially present), with an increase of 25% in the number of apartments in the same buildings. The accommodations have been divided as follows: 60 accommodations for 5 users (40% of the total), 60 accommodations for 1/2 users (40% of the total), and 30 accommodations for 4 users (20% of the total). This has made it possible to reallocate the

smallest families who already lived in the building to different housing solutions according to their size, but always within the building they initially lived.

The new buildings (5 in total) were instead organized as mini apartments with shared functions (in particular, the spaces of the living area). These aggregations and sharing of functions have allowed to produce, with the same built volume, a higher number of accommodations (70 accommodations) compared to the previous solution. These accommodations have been divided as follows: 10 accommodations for 8 users (14%), 30 accommodations for 1 user (43%), 20 accommodations for 1/2 users (29%), and 10 accommodations for 2/3 users (14%).

The comparison between pre- and post-intervention brings the public housing patrimony of the district to a total of 240 accommodations against the initial 120 accommodations and, therefore, to an effective doubling of the hosted households. In conclusion, the intervention has increased the number of dwellings by 120 units, has diversified the housing offer, and has given the possibility to produce new levels of sociality and networks of mutual support among the different social groups involved. Therefore, with this approach, it is possible to redefine the quality of urban places and accompany their community's growth and quality of life equitably.

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