

Learning from the periphery (of power)

In Italy the phenomenon of informal settlements, although deeply rooted in society, is still defined by the negative term of «abusivismo». Unauthorized building activity is still regarded as a mere accident in the path of history and official urban planning. Indeed it is a matter of fact that these events have characterized the development of urban space from the Italian postwar period until nowadays. As the architect Italo Insolera said addressing the city of Rome, from this period on illegal building activity is not one of the main problems of the city, but the growing modus of the city itself.

During a workshop last summer, we started as a transdisciplinary working group to research along the roads Casilina and Prenestina in Rome. In collaboration with local inhabitants, Consorzi di Autorecupero and neighbourhood assemblies we researched the specific areas of Borghesiana and Finocchio as an example of self-built, self-organized and self-urbanised neighbourhood in order to know more about the history and the actual situation of these settlements. Starting from everyday life, perception and knowledge of the local inhabitants will provide in our opinion a consciousness and understanding of contemporary European urban space and of the ongoing urban transformations in high-level privatized on the one side and at the same time highly informalized, self-organized and self-made urban space.

Location

The area between the consular roads Casilina and Prenestina was completely built in an informal way. In the whole area of the municipality of Rome you find similar settlements, even if not so extended as in these zones. Every period of informal building activities and urban legislative as well as recovery procedure can be observed there. Finocchio was built by rural migrants from south and central Italy from the fifties. Now the local neighbourhood's assembly is fighting for public spaces, schoolhouses, public transport.

Valle Borghesiana was developed by internal migration within the city of Rome from 1970 on. It is part of the legalisation procedure called «Toponimi». In Italy, these are the second generation of recovery and legalisation plans for informal houses built until 1994. The legislation and practice that the municipality of Rome applies for the urban recovery is really innovative and unique. These projects for the rehabilitation and creation of primary infrastructure are promoted and financed by the local people who are organized as associations and consortia. Subsequently, the projects are reviewed and approved by the municipal council. On the one hand, the new administration structure leaves more room for the political participation of citizens, on the other hand the micro conflicts are now mainly negotiated within the community and then implemented by private enterprises. This procedure provides considerable benefits to the municipality of Rome and can be understood as a general trend of downsizing of the welfare state. In the case of Finocchio, the notion of self-management and self-organisation is also very controversial. The neighbourhood's assembly is covering the duty of the municipality without having the power and the mandate to execute.

Building by one self

Normally the new settlers build with the help of the whole family and with friends, working mostly by hand. Building enterprises at that time were afraid of confiscation of their machines, because of the illegality of the building site. People worked while being blackmailed. Often they had to pay municipal police and other control bodies on the side to be able to continue building. They used to work at night or put someone on lookout duty to warn them when police arrived.

As the whole area was not connected to running water and electricity the inhabitants developed single or collective methods. At night, the inhabitants used batteries which during the day got charged in car repair shops or in already connected settlements.

They took turns in putting gasoline in the generator for the water pump and electricity. The water of the well was not drinking water, or not enough for everyone. Drinking water was sometimes transported by tanker trucks to Borghesiana.

Once in a hot summer the trucks didn't manage to bring drinking water to all settlements in Rome who were not connected to running water, so some inhabitants decided to hijack the water tanks for the inhabitants of Due Colli.

The area of Due Colli was finally connected to electricity in 1986/1987. The connection to the sewerage was completed in 2000 and the street lighting and paved roads were finished in 2006. Everything in this area was an achievement that came from struggles, negotiation and self-organisation. The collective efforts in building and in providing primary services to the community has led to elaborate forms of social cohesion and responsibility. The situation of the roads and their safety in the area is still a big problem and from the municipality there is no solution in sight. As we discussed about it, one of the old inhabitants told to the local chairman: «Mauro why do we not solve this problem as we've always done before? We'll collect money and then build the roads ourselves». This shows a nostalgic way of thinking about the «illegal periods» of self-organisation in the settlement. At least fast and efficient solutions were worked out by the inhabitants even if in illegality. With the legalization this is not possible any more.

Migration

These areas formerly built by migrants from southern Italy currently are favourite residential zones by international migrants, who find lower housing prices here compared to most central areas of Rome. At the same time, part of the second generation of local settler leaves the area. Some go to other quarters of Rome, some to north Italy and some leave for other European countries. In August 2008, 100 immigrants waiting for regularization of their political asylum were displaced, after the landing in Lampedusa by the Italian ministry of the interior to Borghesiana. The inhabitants were very astonished because this happened all of a sudden.

Migrant labour force in Rome is mostly employed in services, or in the building industry. One of the Bars in Finocchio was formerly called the «Polish Bar», now actually the «Rumanian Bar» by local inhabitants. As a woman told us, the Bar works like an informal employment office. You go there when you look for jobs on a daily basis. This is a consolidated practice in the building sector of Rome. The same woman told us about the «integrated migrants» and mentioned the new cooperatives founded by migrants working in the building sector. There must be a big but invisible community of Chinese migrants in Finocchio. They live and work in the same flats in a sweatshop-like situation. When we asked where they are visible an activist told us: you can find them in the park on the top of the hill on Sunday morning, with their portable, because there is an open wireless connection which they can use.

Perspectives

With our description of self-organisation and self-management in within informality, we decided to take a look from the periphery to the centre. By centre and periphery we do not only mean the location in urban space, but the different degrees and the relationship of power.

These issues are in our opinion of imminent importance since the municipal council of Rome is led by a major of the right wing party Popolo della Libertà and traditionally left quarters of Rome, included Borghesiana and Finocchio, changed the political majority during the municipal elections in 2008.

By Susanna Perin

This article is a short version of a lecture held in Pula, Croatia at the Conference «Post Capitalist City» in August 2009 by Antonella Perin and Susanna Perin.

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Ciudad Valdeluz. Die Stadt im Tal des Lichts. 70 Kilometer von Madrid, in der Leere der kastilischen Hochebene, sollte das Spanien der Zukunft entstehen. Gebaut wurde eine Stadt für die gehobene Mittelschicht, bis die Immobilienkrise kam. Das Einzige, was jetzt noch fehlt, sind Menschen.

Ciudad Valdeluz hat sogar Anschluss an den Hochgeschwindigkeitszug Madrid Barcelona. Pro Tag nutzen nur 15 Menschen den schicken neuen Bahnhof, der auch mit EU-Geldern finanziert wurde. Ohne Bahnhof hätte hier niemand eine

Wohnung gekauft, da ist sich José Luis Maximiliano sicher. Jetzt kümmert sich kein Politiker mehr um die Stadt. Es gibt keine Arztpraxis, keinen Bus in die nächste Stadt, keine Kneipe und keine Polizei. Einen privaten Wachdienst müssen die Einwohner selbst bezahlen. Ihre Steuern aber dürfen sie dennoch abführen.



Dongtan. Auf der Insel Chongming sollte für knapp eine Milliarde Euro die erste CO₂-neutrale und autofreie Ökostadt Asiens mit sehr hoher Energieeffizienz, durchdachter Abfallentsorgung und guter Luftqualität gebaut werden. Erstes Planziel war eine Einwohnerzahl von 25'000 im Jahr 2010 und Ziel 500'000 bei Ende des Projekts 2050.

Pro Einwohner sollte eine Bewirtschaftungsfläche von 2,2 Hektar nicht überschritten werden. Die Wasserversorgung sollte rein umweltneutral mit Solar- oder Windenergie betrieben werden. Da die Planstadt auf einer Insel liegt, sollten sämtliche Fährverbindungen nur mit umweltneutralen Schiffen erlaubt werden und den Passagieren und Einwohnern sollte empfohlen wer-

den, kürzere Entfernungen an Land zu Fuß oder mit dem Fahrrad zurückzulegen.

Das Ökostadt-Projekt hätte im Wesentlichen zur Eröffnung der Shanghai World Expo im Jahr 2010 fertig gestellt werden sollen. Bis Mai 2009 wurden zwar ein Tunnel und eine Brücke auf die Insel sowie ein halbes Dutzend Windgeneratoren und ein ökologischer Landwirtschaftsbetrieb fertig gestellt, doch die geplanten Häuser, die geplante Kläranlage sowie der geplante Energiepark wurden nicht gebaut; das Projekt wurde eingestellt und jeder Hinweis auf Dongtan von der Homepage der Expo in Shanghai entfernt.