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Received books

## The regeneration of the public city: the programme Habitat

Elena Marchigiani

Large areas of the public city of Trieste are currently afflicted by problems of social exclusion and urban decay. In order to resolve this situation, the residential districts of Greta and Ponziana, Rozzol Melara, Valmaura and via Grego have been part of a programme of activities which, since the nineties, has taken an innovative administrative approach to the regeneration of the outskirts of Trieste. "Habitat, health and community development" was set up in 1998, following the deliberations of the Town Council (Department of Social and Sanitary Services and Equal Opportunities), the Ass (local Health Service Authority no. 1 Triestina) and Ater (Public Housing Agency in the Province of Trieste), the owner of the majority of the residential buildings. The programme was born from the desire to set up territorial policies for the prevention of social hardship, whose specific intent was: to resolve problems of delay in payment and neighbourhood conflicts and improve the upkeep of green and communal areas; to reduce the number of inadequate dwellings, activate processes of mutual and self-help between residents; to coordinate social and economic activities for the most vulnerable groups (young people and minors, the disabled and the elderly). The public and tertiary sector (social cooperatives, local associations and volunteer workers) collaborate to give a prompt response to the demands of the citizens, involving them in the

definition and management of public services and activities with the aim of achieving social quality. In this way, the concept of habitat extends to encompass a project aimed at constructing public spaces and promoting the development of active citizenship dedicated to upgrading physical and social living conditions. Recognition of the importance of habitat as a means of fighting social exclusion has its roots in the recent history of public institutions in Trieste. In 1973, during the proceedings of the deinstitutionalisation of the psychiatric hospital overseen by Franco Basaglia, the first patient-driven cooperative was set up. The idea of social enterprise was born, whereby the integration of both public and private resources led to the improvement of living conditions and the opening of the world of work to those members of society who had previously been seen as the passive receivers of social assistance. From the end of the 1960s the then Iapc (Autonomous Public Housing Institute) launched an intense period of research regarding the social dimension of habitation and the needs of inhabitants. This interest led to a greater flexibility concerning interior and exterior living spaces and to the planning of dwellings for the disabled; as well as this, the elderly were assigned small, ground floor apartments in older buildings for which the Institute launched a wide reuse plan since the seventies. The nationwide debate, which in the year 2000 would bring about the Law no. 328 for the construction of an integrated system of services, therefore found favourable ground for the activation of the Habitat

programme. The programme has innovative characteristics due to the arrangement into a system of two different needs: social promotion, which today is supported by the policies of the European Social Fund (Equal); the development of integrated procedures for urban regeneration, which have been promoted over the past decade by complex EU and national projects of more recent creation (Pic Urban, Urban Italia, Contratti di quartiere). One of the peculiarities of Habitat, however, consists in the fact that it was developed from the starting point of a horizontal partnership, based on a rationalisation of the human and economic resources which the Town Council, Ass and Ater of Trieste already had available. Habitat currently avails of regional and European social funds to a small extent, although its integration in the forthcoming new activities of Urban Italia is foreseen in the future. Another characteristic aspect of the programme is its being a reflection in the course of action, which moulds itself to the specificity of places and individuals, laying the ground for a new type of governance based on the construction of subsidiary relations between the various institutions, which carry out the role of promoters and financial providers, and the tertiary sector. Demands and priorities are made in the Habitat centre, set up in each area and managed by members of the social cooperatives living in the district. It is here that the social porter's job is carried out: workers and volunteers collect requests for assistance on behalf of the Town Council and Ass as well as giving immediate help to those in

difficulty. The Ater entrusts the inhabitants belonging to social cooperatives types A and B with the job of communicating requests for maintenance. The aforementioned groups also manage the daily operations on open spaces and the cleaning of staircases and shared areas. Moreover, round table discussions are also organised periodically to discuss the problems of the district and the organisation of meetings between the inhabitants in order to create community spirit. However, Habitat is configured first and foremost as an incubator for local planning and projects. The emergence of residents associations, the development of activities with structured participation, the setting up of new collaborations with volunteer workers for integrated home help and the organisation of training courses all go to show Habitat's capacity to stimulate entrepreneurial initiative starting from the creation of a network for the sharing of participants' knowledge. Perhaps one missing element today is a process of metabolisation carried out by institutions, which should no longer be involved in a simple distribution of services. This process should lead to a stronger synergy between structural activities, ordinary physical upgrading, actions set up for social promotion and a clearer definition of collaborative planning projects between social private and promoting bodies.

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