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Demolishing and rebuilding to upgrade parts of cities

Manuela Ricci

In Italy having recourse to demolition is a sporadic occurrence. At the beginning of this century, people started talking of 'urban rehabilitation programmes'. Art. 23 of the 'rider on infrastructures' to the Budget of 2002 expressly foresaw the promotion of these programmes, which however did not take off due to the failure to allocate financing. Such measures have not been promoted in Italy on a massive scale for reasons of two kinds. Because demolition is not part of our culture and because, at least for the time being, instances of advanced dilapidation have not occurred in Italy together with social risks as serious as in other parts of Europe. Today, however, there exist some clear situations that could potentially denote the necessity of resorting to demolition: in districts, now largely dilapidated, where the owners rent out their premises to persons in low-income social groups; this enables them to feel that they do not have to carry out maintenance operations but to obtain in any case revenues even more than proportional to the value of the premises. Time will provide answers to these doubts; but it will also be important to reflect on two elements: the comparison between the costs of an upgrading operation without and with demolition, and the distribution of said costs among the various actors concerned; the 'freeing' of the land revenue which generally accompanies demolition and reconstruction operations, especially if these occur in urban sectors well connected with the consolidated city. The problems to be addressed

regard the need for public management and, in cases of private accommodation.

French policy: from Prus to Cucs

France has put into effect a policy of urban renewal (rénovation urbaine) with demolition and reconstruction measures based on the Borloo law (August 2003) - loi d'orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la rénovation urbaine - with the aim of reducing social inequalities and territorial development differences by means of the promotion, by the State, of the territorial communities and of the Etablissements publics, of action programmes of orientation pour l'aménagement et le développement du territoire for 'sensitive urban zones' (Zus). The law foresees, in the social housing sector, a fresh supply of 250,000 housing units and the rehabilitation of 400,000; and the demolition of 250,000 units in the period 2004-2011. The government has allocated 4 billion euro over 8 years. To implement the plan a National urban renewal agency (Anru) has been established; this, through a sort of 'guichet unique', handles the funds set aside by the government and by the public and private partners involved in the plan which is carried out through Urban renewal projects (Pru). By July 2006, Anru had validated works, for the forthcoming 5 years, worth 21.9 billion euro: 188 priority districts, added to which there are 341 supplementary districts, have already benefited from this action (cfr. Plate 1). Accompanying these grandiose measures there have been no few problems. The meagreness of the resources earmarked for social accompaniment compared with those set aside for demolition and reconstruction; the

weakness of the integration between the financial channels for social accompaniment and for building and the lack of integration noted also within the social accompaniment channels; the considerable weight of the 'expulsions' from the districts coming under the Prus of the weak population sectors in order to favour 'social mixité', with burdensome problems of rehousing; the little importance attributed by the renewal policy to the intermunicipal dimension, which appears the most pertinent one above all concerning habitat policies and taking the urban management of 'proximity' into account. An important question brings us to consideration of the timing: to the non-coincidence between the times of the Anru and the times of the decision (by the administrations and by the population). The community would need to do preparatory work on the memory of a district, and the administrations would need to devote themselves with greater attention to programming. One last question arises: the districts outside of the Prus must not be forgotten about and not be left to become run down, otherwise the risk will be having to intervene with costly actions in the near future. In relation to these nodes, the government has launched a new contract instrument for the Zus: its Urban contracts of social cohesion (Cucs) to be stipulated between State and municipalities (which ought to be active as from 1 January 2007). A new agency is set up, called the Agence nationale de cohésion sociale, which deals with the human aspect, as opposed to the Anru, for which instead is reserved the built aspect. The Cucs is a strategic action document drawn up by the local partners. It defines the urban and social

project to be promoted to reduce the development wastage between the priority territories and their urban contexts, with the aim of a better integration of such areas into the city. The Cucs, which is based on a 'diagnosis' drawn up by the promoting partners as a whole, specifies the objectives to be reached accompanied by detailed indicators, at the same time defining the action programme. Recently the Div (Délégation interministérielle à la ville) has issued a methodological guide for drawing up Cucs, stating that the cohesion contract cannot be regarded as the mere addition of a social action programme to the operations of urban renewal. Hence, it is a question of strengthening the synergy between urban renewal operations and social development actions.