

THE MATTEOTTI VILLAGE BY GIANCARLO DE CARLO: PARTICIPATORY ARCHITECTURE BEFORE AND AFTER THE MILLENNIALS

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between city and art is a combination of considerable interest for those who deal with and study the city and urban planning. Just as cities change and evolve rapidly, art also evolves towards participatory and social use. City and art, urban planning and quality of life are the basis of the relaunch of the Matteotti district of Terni. The Matteotti village, built between 1970 and 1974 by the architect Giancarlo De Carlo, constitutes one of the first Italian examples of 'participatory architecture', the employees of the Acciai Speciali Terni factory and future inhabitants of the neighbourhood actively collaborated in the design, with the coordination of the sociologist Domenico De Masi and the manager Gian Lupo Osti. The intervention in the Matteotti neighbourhood is still the subject of studies today by university departments, scholars and architecture enthusiasts from all over the world. The relationship between space and society, a theme very dear to architect De Carlo, sees culture and art as a key to understanding and relaunching the territory, in this case the village 50 years after its construction. The Giancarlo De Carlo study centre, a cultural and scientific association founded in 2014, together with two other local associations, through a survey aimed at the current inhabitants of the neighbourhood, thus drawing inspiration from participation, created 'Abit in Living', an artistic and cultural event to investigate the profound link between clothing, a symbol of personal identity and living, understood as a physical space that characterises a lived-in portion of territory. The event has a precise vision: to create a dialogue between fashion, design, architecture and society, reflecting on the mutual influence between the way of dressing and the way of experiencing spaces. In this way art can change the residents' perception of the architecture itself, creating an immersive experience, as a relaunch and revitalisation of the entire village.

Keywords: urban planning, participatory architecture, Giancarlo De Carlo, millennials, generation Z, urban regeneration, resilience, artistic event.

1 INTRODUCTION

Participatory planning is a democratic design method, but certainly not innovative. It is a form of design that encompasses the association and union of multiple points of view, with the aim of creating the best possible solution in terms of projects, plans and strategies.

'Participatory planning in the social field is a methodology that involves the collaboration of the various actors of a community (citizens, associations, recipients of an initiative, administrators and technicians) who, through moments of elaboration, are involved in the conception or implementation of a common project that has positive effects on the participants and their group' [1].

In summary, the key elements of participation processes are the involvement of multiple actors, the sharing of ideas and solutions by all those involved, and the spread of awareness of the future needs of the community and the place in which it lives.

In Europe we can start talking about participatory planning at the end of the 19th century thanks to Patrick Geddes, a Scottish sociologist and urban planner. Geddes' theories have identified an innovative and ecological tool for planning and redevelopment of the city and the territory, it was he who experimented with these theories in various participatory urban



recoveries [2]. The involvement of citizens in environmental policy was sanctioned for the first time, at an international level, in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, with the Earth Summit on Environment and Development, it is principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, a fundamental principle of sustainable development. In the last 30 years in the European context, participatory planning has found further confirmation, in 1994 with the Aalborg Charter, then in 1998 with the Aarhus Convention, in 2000 with the European Landscape Convention and finally in 2001 thanks to the SEA, Environmental Assessment Strategy [3]. We can talk about architecture and participatory planning only with a view to sustainable development, a development that therefore intends to satisfy both the needs of the current and future generations.

2 THE MATTEOTTI VILLAGE

In Italy, only in the mid-20th century did this method begin to be adopted. Over the years, this first Italian example of applied design would appear in specialised sector magazines but would also become the subject of studies and research by university departments and scholars passionate about architecture from all over the world.

We are at the end of the 1960s and we find ourselves in a medium-sized city in central Italy, with a purely working-class identity, which takes the name of Terni. The Second World War is now behind us, but it severely damaged the city with 108 bombings, the advanced stages of reconstruction and the completely Italian ability to get back on its feet are making Terni a modern city with a strong identity. On the outskirts of the city centre there is an area called Cesare Balbo village, never completed due to the war and damage in previous years. Società Terni, a well-known steel factory, has a double bond with the city and its inhabitants. It is thanks to entrepreneurial activities such as Società Terni and its workers that Italy has been able to change pace and grow from an economic point of view, and become one of the reference nations in Europe. And it is precisely the Terni Company, thanks to its manager Gianlupo Osti, a key figure of the Company, who takes the responsibility and the intention of redeveloping a part of the city [4].

The area identified for the construction of the new complex is an area located on the south-eastern outskirts of the city, it was the one where the Cesare Balbo Village already stood, a neighbourhood built in the fascist era and made up of four-family houses, with a portion of land for use agricultural annex, which was to be demolished and entirely replaced by the new complex, which will then take the name of Villaggio Matteotti. For this reason, he decides to entrust the project to a leading figure in Italian architecture and urban planning; after a close round of names the choice goes to an architect from Genoa, his name is Giovanni De Carlo. The architect wants to experiment and create a tailor-made village for the future inhabitants of the neighbourhood, the factory employees. These actively collaborated with the designers through the mediation of specialised figures; in this specific case the architect was involved with a team of sociologists which also included Domenico De Masi, a sociologist who had already collaborated with the Terni Company. This is how through interviews, meetings and exhibitions, the interdisciplinary team collects the needs and requirements of future users, making use of a truly participatory method, thus only thanks to listening is it able to overcome the actual design phase. To redevelop the village, the architect identified 45 alternative housing units, with 15 different typologies. Each typology presents three alternative internal spaces, the author's creativity does not stop here, in fact he tries to study a way to connect and relate the units and future users who worked for the Terni company. The project includes pedestrian paths with raised walkways, spaces with service functions and dialogue between them [5]. The housing units planned for the redevelopment of the village are 840 in total, spread over an area of 20 hectares.



However, in 1974, approximately a quarter of the total extension envisaged in the initial project was completed, which involved the construction of approximately eight hundred new homes, while only two hundred and fifty were built. The Matteotti village created is made up of five parallel buildings in exposed concrete and a series of common spaces, including a kindergarten, rooms for social activities and areas intended for commercial activities. The Village is supported by a network of elevated pedestrian walkways and on the ground that connect the residences and services to each other. The entire complex is divided into four very similar longitudinal modules, plus a fifth, located at the east end, structured as a 'graded' and multiple building: it is in fact shorter than the others and is made up of an extra floor. The remaining blocks house the different apartment variants designed in collaboration with the inhabitants. The different colours of the windows make private homes easily distinguishable from public services.



Figure 1: The Matteotti Village in the 1980s. (Source: Gabriele Basilico, *placing Cinisello Balsamo (MI)*, Museum of Contemporary Photography.)

3 INCLUSIVENESS TO COUNTERACT GENTRIFICATION

It is important to point out a concept: participation is something very close to inclusiveness but not the same thing.

Giancarlo De Carlo speaks about participation, but the most important thing is that he organised an exhibition, before asking the inhabitants of the Matteotti village, about modern architecture. He shows architecture from different parts of the world in April 1970 in 'Galleria Poliantea' in Terni (a prestigious space for contemporary art during these years); Giancarlo De Carlo's conception of participation is a little bit strange: he thought that people must be stimulated with solicitations that the designer considered positive.

The list of architectures that De Carlo wants to show included 'Westminster Court' in Roxbury Massachusetts by Carl Kochand Associates; a residential zone in Santa Monica,

California by De Marsand Reay, Pietro Belluschi, Charles Eames; Housing in Coulsdon, London, UK by Team 4 (Su Brumwell, Wendy Cheesman, Norman Foster, and Richard Rogers). The projects that were chosen to be displayed in the exhibition were only four: the Siedlung Halen in Bern, Switzerland by Atelier 5; housing complex in Kingsbury, London by Clifford Wearden and Associates; residential complex in Ham Common, in London, by James Stirling and James Gowan and St. Francis Square Cooperative in San Francisco by Marquisand Stoller architects. Three years later, a second exhibition devoted to the Nuovo Villaggio Matteotti was held from 13 to 17 October 1973 [6].



Figure 2: Conference on urban cooperation: Presented by sociologist Domenico De Masi and architect Raynaldo Perugini, 2016. (Source: Alessio Patalocco, private archive.)

For this project Giancarlo De Carlo works with a heterogeneous group of different specialists, including engineer (Vittorio Korach), sociologists (as Domenico De Masi and Fausto Colombo) and other architects (such as Cesare De Seta and Valeria Fossati-Bellani). As mentioned, the most important person for the New Villaggio Matteotti was surely Gianlupo Osti who made the decision to take the path of participation despite initial resistance from the planning group itself. It is a fact that, when Gianlupo Osti left the management of the Terni company, there was no one to support the neighbourhood project and it was stopped at 25% of the total.

3.1 The inhabitants today

Interview with Sara Massarini on 2nd July 2024.

Sara Massarini, a sociologist who also works with Centro Studi Giancarlo De Carlo, made an investigation conducted between September 2019 and concluded in June 2020. The goal of the survey was to take a snapshot about the quality of life in Villaggio Matteotti 'today' and investigate the inhabitants' perceptions regarding quality of life, safety and, generally, how the neighbourhood is perceived in terms of relationship with the city, services and urbanistic connections. This section is an interview with her about the last social investigation has not yet been published.

Who are the inhabitants of the Matteotti village today?

The strongest fact is that there has been no turnover: the inhabitants of Villaggio Matteotti are still the same ones who settled at the time of construction; it is an elderly village, there is continuity of residents and a conservative identity of that.

Where there are no first inhabitants to take part in the participation, there are their children or grandchildren.

The neighbourhood remained faithful to the first composition of 1974, there are few new entries who have gone to live in the village, especially those who have not family ties with the old workers.

Why?

Because, probably, it is a good place; so the inhabitants have not sold their house: there is a stable bond between the inhabitants and the neighbourhood (in the urban meaning), therefore there is such satisfaction that it allows them to remain in the apartment and living in the neighbourhood itself, partly confirmed also by questions that I posed just to know this.

There is a strong 'sense of affection' for you?

Surely a strong bond between old inhabitants and the neighbourhood and also a high sense of affection and belonging to the neighbourhood: they are proud of it and its history as if it were a sort of uniform which identifies them with the neighbourhood itself and the history of the city of Terni.

One of the main perceptions by their inhabitants, is that Villaggio Matteotti is quiet and pleasant: for them there is more positive than negative qualities in the architectural concept of the village.

Who are the new inhabitants of Villaggio Matteotti?

They are different and have different lives not linked to the steelworks: the composition of the household, almost a third is a small family unit: two parents with a husband or just a couple of partners; someone living with a parent or children, but surely are not linked to the world of steelworks.

What about technical aspects of the village?

We asked for the degree of satisfaction with respect to the technical aspects: there is a request for renovation of the buildings, almost all were unsatisfied with thermal insulation. The highest percentages of dissatisfaction were about that, very important if compared to the architectural conception of the apartments: people need to redo the external facade (perceived as a priority) with acoustic insulation, solutions for humidity and other similar critical issues. However, they are satisfied about solar exposure and privacy: these two aspects seem particularly appreciated.

What about accessibility and architectural barriers?

Accessibility and architectural barriers generate a high degree of satisfaction because evidently there is a question of habit. The residents who have been there since the beginning have normalised it as an issue so they do not think that it is a question to solve. There is a high degree of satisfaction about interiors: size of the apartments, private gardens, the general design of the apartment is satisfactory, the size of the terraces and balconies are strong points of satisfaction.

The critical points concern above all the technical aspects and natural deterioration of the materials.



About the social and public services: what is the point of view of the residents; they require reorganisation of common spaces, reconversion of unused spaces or other specific questions?

They ask for different alternatives: mostly they desire to convert spaces into a recreational club or as a grocery store, maybe mixed as a bar/pub or pharmacy. Probably this is the result of advanced age: they miss a place in which to spend free time together and without paying excessively for drink or for coffee. We asked also for an after-school, library, etc... but they do not ask for that.

About the green spaces near the neighbourhood: how they perceive that?

There is a strong sense of belonging, as we said, they are proud in living there, but however there is a non-closure: they understand well the importance of the connection with the city and they perceive that, but the park near their houses is considered outside the neighbourhood, probably because it is a meeting point for kids (so, not them) who mess around until late; they perceive it as a place unprotected and unsafe for them, even if frequented but considered 'outside' a village; a place that can be improved and perfected.

How do you see the next generation of villagers? Who will be the future inhabitants?

I think that in the next twenty or thirty years, it will have different connotations from its construction to today: the identity of the neighbourhood until now has been preserved and not renewed. What can be expected is a change for unchangeable personal reasons, it will depend on many things: the administration, the activities, from the services it offers, from the connections, from the greenery.

For the future inhabitants I can tell that the apartments have still a high cost, so many are unsold or vacant: the houses are uninhabited and would therefore lead to deterioration. We have to expect a change and, certainly, a positive one because there is so much potential.

The most important factor that explains all the data is the fact that there is a housing continuity: those who went to live there at the time of construction chose to stay here; this is a focal point around which everything revolves.

The progressive degradation of the Matteotti Village has not affected the neighbourhood much, it has signs of degradation due to the vacant premises and the public places that are abused or not legally occupied, but the quality of life that inhabitants perceived is still high. This high satisfaction is probably given by the high 'sense of affection' for the place established with the dynamics of participation at the time as well as the fact that one can objectively live well [7].

3.2 Inclusiveness and regeneration

Inclusiveness '[...] is a term used to designate in a general sense orientations and strategies aimed at promoting the coexistence and valorisation of differences through a critical review of the conventional categories that regulate access to rights and opportunities, combating discrimination and intolerance produced by judgements, prejudices, racism and stereotypes. Unlike integration, whose primary focus is the individual as a segment of a distinctly delimited organic totality, inclusiveness postulates the construction of contexts made sensitive to diversity, within which social action ensures equality of opportunity for each subject, dignity, power and representation, in full respect of individual orientations, skills and aptitudes. The term has spread in Italy since the 1990s, especially in the educational and training fields, finding wide application in school teaching in the following decades to denote educational strategies aimed at responding to the needs of the entire student population, with

priority for vulnerable subjects, respecting and valuing individual differences and defining specific skills and multilevel and multidisciplinary forms of teaching. At the same time, the term has seen widespread use in the debate on gender issues to problematise the conventional assignment of social roles based on the binary model of sexuality (i.e., the full recognition of gender identity socially attributed to the biological sex to which one belongs), questioning the sexist discriminations rooted in the foundations of linguistic structures: in this context, in recent years there has been a rejection [...] of those conventions that hinder the identification, naming and understanding of differences, as in the case of the overextension to mixed groups of the use of the masculine plural in inflected languages, whose replacement has been proposed – although hindered by the absence of phonic correspondence – with graphic symbols such as the [schwa], the asterisk and the snail acting as a neutral suffix.’ [8].

Amnesty international complements this contribution on inclusiveness in an interesting way by speaking, generally, about *broad language*: ‘We can call *broad language* when, consciously, we choose to not use words, way of speaking, tones, etc., that promotes discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, or other discriminatory messages. We prefer broad language to inclusive language because *inclusive* implies separation between people included and people excluded. This vision comprehend that included people must include the second group. We trust that to overcome discrimination we must think that we have to abandon the separation between people A and people B also when is perpetrated with good intentions.’ [9].

Maybe it is better telling that *inclusiveness*, generally referred to the humanities and social matters, must be understood as *broad language* and *broad comprehension*; in architecture and public environmental design it can be translated as something like *broad spaces* or *broad connections* where are included also *affordance* of architectural places, *broad communications* for physical, cognitive and sensory disabilities, even if only temporary or partial.

It can be deduced that inclusiveness, in the architectural sense, must be still utilised also in the participation but using, better, broad design concept.

When Gianlupo Osti with Domenico De Masi and Giancarlo De Carlo did the first questionnaires and began the participation process, there was not the same attention to the *inclusive* questions: all public paths have a lot of stairs without the possibility of using alternative routes for physically disabled; the variety of public spaces does not facilitate orientation in cognitively disabled people; there are no routes for blind or visually impaired people [10].

Certainly, a starting point for a good regeneration can be just that: growing accessibility and inclusiveness with no difference between *special* and *normal* paths.

3.3 No gentrification but sustainability

There is also another important point to consider when someone speaks about urban regeneration and sustainability: the social sustainability of our regeneration.

To do that we must consider the new inhabitants of Villaggio Matteotti and their actual sense of place: how they identify themselves and how future generations will be able to identify themselves in this neighbourhood.

In the end we know, from the research work of Sara Massarini, that inhabitants are still the same but they are changing: the original ones become old and the new ones do not have any link with steel industries and, also, with the usual working-time of the old working-class. Surely they need more flexibility of spaces and more accessible paths: the old inhabitants do not feel that as a problem to solve because (probably) their sense of affection prevents them

from being objective observers. We have experience about ancient people that have to send their children or grandchildren to do the shopping for them.

Surely we must pay attention to another fact that can happen in this village: the gentrification of this place. Gentrification is a process guided by a sort of fake promise: 'if we do this, we improve' [11].

Only that afterwards everything becomes so beautiful that it costs too much even for those who lived there before the improvements themselves. Everything becomes so expensive that the old inhabitants are no longer allowed to live in the same places where they were born.

So it is important, just to maintain social sustainability of each intervention, that public administrations or others associations (without business missions) must realise redeveloping or urban regenerations, because, in this way, it is more difficult to fall into the 'trap' of gentrification: '[...] the word *gentrification* carries within it the worst of condemnations: the loss of the soul of a neighborhood, the impoverishment of the characteristics (and inhabitants) that are custodians of the authenticity and genuine flavor of the city [...]' [11]; for Irene Rinaldi, instead, gentrification is '[...] the result of a political attitude that allows the private market for housing and commercial activities to revive the fortunes of a forgotten area; if it does so, it does by making choices for which [the market] will tend not to have to account to anyone!' [11].

It is important that all actions of regeneration must be driven by public interests or citizens commitment, surely not by market.

3.4 Matteotti village: sustainable is not only senseable

In the last twenty years we have witnessed new paradigms of correct urbanisation. Smart city, resilient city, senseable city: must the ideal city be one of these, must it contain each of these definitions or is there a definition that includes them all? *Senseable city* is a concept of city theorised by Carlo Ratti, engineer, architect and urban planner, head of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. *Senseable*, according to the urban planner, is a city equipped with sensors and digital devices, with which it is possible to study the ways in which urban space is used, as well as capable of listening to the needs of its citizens [12].

Does the term accurately represent the city that citizens of the new millennium need? Is it a universal term valid for every modern and contemporary city in the world? There is a concept valid for every city, in turn extendable to each of its areas and neighbourhoods: sustainable city. Within the concept of sustainability lie the concepts of inclusiveness, resilience, equality and security. To become sustainable, a city must put the people who live there at the centre and not exclusively economic interests. Only through the promotion of active participation will it be possible to raise awareness among people of eco-friendly policies, with the creation for example of resilient and inclusive public spaces, thanks to an efficient and parsimonious use of available resources.

As Powell says, 'we did not inherit the world from our fathers, but we borrowed it from our children and we must return it to them better than we found it'.

The Matteotti village of Terni in the new millennium wants to be and become sustainable, a village that intends to satisfy the needs of the current citizens living in the village, without compromising the ability of future generations, therefore from a social, economic and above all environmental point of view.

4 EVENTS FROM CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

One of the last cultural events that wants to activate a virtuous cycle of regeneration is an event called 'Abito nell'Abitare' explicated in the next paragraph. This event is promoted by



three different associations: the 'Centro studi Giancarlo De Carlo', 'Katiopa – exclusive events' and 'Axò – Architetti all'opera'.

The 'Centro studi Giancarlo De Carlo' is a cultural and scientific association founded in December 2014, with the aim of protecting and enhancing the architectural heritage represented by the Matteotti Village in Terni; and then also range into other related contexts. Dealing with issues related to architecture, sociology, industrial archaeology, urban policies and artistic production, the study centre refers ideologically to the thought of the architect Giancarlo De Carlo, to whom it is named, in a sort of shy homage, which received, among other things, the consent of the Giancarlo De Carlo e Associati firm.

The association deals with cultural and educational initiatives such as, but not limited to, exhibitions, conferences and seminars; It also carries out support activities for study, research and training in collaboration with the university world, other third sector bodies and the public administration. It also promotes research works focused on the theme of 'space and active society' and new publications, with a view to producing reference material for certain areas of study, such as, in particular, architecture, art and history. A specific scientific committee, within the study centre, has the task of evaluating and supporting such work. In order for the research promoted to be as complete, accurate and scientifically valid as possible, the study centre encourages collaboration with subjects coming from different realities, in order to create a multicultural and interdisciplinary study.

The activity of the study centre aspires, in short, to create moments of meeting and intellectual exchange, sharing of knowledge, as well as human and collective growth, ideally pursuing from below that realistic utopia desired by the architect De Carlo.

'Katiopa-Exclusive Events' has as its main objective to give life to exclusive events, connecting and enhancing the richness of the various artistic and cultural expressions, welcoming and celebrating every nuance of creativity.

It aims to become a hub of originality and inclusiveness, a point of reference that acts as a springboard for debuting artists and a showcase for already established ones, welcoming and celebrating every nuance of inventiveness.

The mission is to inspire, entertain and connect different artistic sectors, amalgamating works and creativity of various talents, with the attention of contextualising them and presenting them to an aware and selected audience.

The heart of its identity is to become a hub of creativity and inclusiveness in the central regions of Italy, which celebrates diversity and multiculturalism through exclusive evenings, embracing voices and stories from every corner of the world, enhancing the richness of artistic and cultural expressions and uniting different cultures in a unique experience.

'AXO – Architetti all'Opera' is a non-partisan, apolitical, non-denominational cultural association. It aims to enhance the image and professionalism of the architect, encourage and launch every initiative aimed at his training and professional improvement and orientation and the free circulation of ideas and initiatives. It intends to promote, protect and enhance the historical, artistic and landscape heritage through the organisation and participation in demonstrations, forums, events and publications.

It supports and organises the activation of projects, courses, calls for tenders and prizes with schools, universities, professions, public institutions, bodies, companies and private associations for the promotion of the culture of architecture. Born from a group of architects, the association is open to all people who love the aesthetic sense because architecture is the art of creating well-being and passing on beauty.



4.1 'Abito nell' Abitare' a new cultural event

In Italian language *Abito* is a word that comes from the Latin *habitus* or *habere* in the sense of *to behave* [cit. Treccani]. Generally, it means dress (especially with regard to its characteristics) or, in other meanings, the 'way of dressing'; very close to the sense of *Identity* that considers an interface, the projection of our identity outwards and towards other people. A dress for men or for women; a dress for man that wants to be considered woman or only *female* or *genderless*. There is also a dress to work, for the winter, mid-seasons and summer. *Abito* also refers to something of 'a very good clothing' and, in ecclesiastical context, it means the liturgical dress or becoming a priest ('indosserò l'*abito*' means 'I'll become a priest').

In Italy we often say: 'L'*abito* non fa il monaco'. Literally is something like 'the dress does not make the priest' and the meaning is that appearances are often deceiving, connecting the word *Abito* ('dress') with appearance, not only in the visual and aesthetic matter, but also as perceived by people who relate to us also in the behaviour meaning. But this word *Abito* is also a verb: literally 'Abito qui' is 'I live here'. The Italian language, as everyone knows, may not indicate the person subject to the verb because the verb is always conjugated.

So, *Abito* means at the same time 'Dress' and 'I live'; the unconjugated verb is *Abitare* 'to live'. *Abitare* from Latin is 'to inhabit' and derive from *habere* 'to have': 'Abitare una grande casa' is, literally, 'living in a big house'. This word has less meanings than *Abito* but is connected to a property: probably who lives (*Abita*) in this house is also the owner.

Italians also use the verb 'vivere' as 'to inhabit', maybe closer to the sense of 'to live' or 'living' than *Abitare* but with a very small difference. Finally, 'Abitato', the past participle of *Abitare*, is generally used as substitute of 'neighbourhood'.

So *Abito nell'Abitare* means at the same time: 'A dress in the neighbourhood' or 'I live in a place where people live'; this word pun is the core of this last event of Centro Studi Giancarlo De Carlo: a fashion show where the identity of Villaggio Matteotti and their inhabitants is expressed by the dress as the architecture of the neighbour had done in the period 1969–1974, the years of participation.

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