

The Quarto Cagnino District in Milan (1964-1973): Rationalist Figuration for a New Dimension of the Urban Space

MARCO LUCCHINI

Abstract

The Quarto Cagnino district, like other Milanese social housing settlements, has a distinctly marked identity and, as with any other architectural work, its framework calls for formulating a well-founded judgement based on the understanding of its context and the reasons that led the designers towards specific choices in form. The district designed for 1100 dwellings (approximately 5000 inhabitants) was built in two distinct phases between 1964 and 1973. Regarding the settlement plan, the Quarto Cagnino appears as a largely scaled construction organised into one main building, to which are connected four aligned buildings, perpendicular to the main body and alternately placed on either side. Quarto Cagnino faces with the problem of the integration of the dwellings providing an adequate amount of services, of which the scarcity had been one of the deficiencies of large popular districts. The image of the large dam, referring also explicitly to the theme of city walls, was associated with the idea of a constant permeability. The stereometric and Cartesian volumes of the buildings are built upon a powerful base of reinforced concrete that seems to lift itself from the ground thanks to a grid of cylindrical pillars. The open plan of the ground floor is an obvious reference to Le Corbusier and his Unité d'habitation quoted almost literally. The open ground floor enables secondary roads to be drawn underneath the buildings, emphasizing the image of the great structure that connects with communication networks and guarantees a good development of service activities: some to the scale of the district such as primary and secondary schools, gymnasiums and the church, others to the scale of the building itself such as common spaces in which to gather.

Keywords

Social housing districts, Milan, outskirts, dwellings architectural design, modernist architecture, Quarto Cagnino.

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Settlement evolution and urban morphology

The Quarto Cagnino district, like other “Milanese” social housing estates, has a distinctly marked identity and, as happens with any other architectural work, its framework calls for formulating a well-founded judgement based on the understanding of its context and the reasons that led the designers towards specific choices in form.

Milan is a city with a centripetal structure organised in radial and circular configurations, primarily determined by the urban development plans Beruto (1887) and Pavia Masera (1912). The “historical” outskirts, that developed between the 1900’s and 1970’s, exterior to the ring road drawn in the Pavia Masera plan, are generally characterised by infrastructures, residential buildings and above all industrial areas, of which the majority are currently out of use and have been reconverted into residential or commercial buildings.

In the urban sector in which the Quarto Cagnino district is constructed, bordered on the north side by an extensive array of sports facilities for football and equestrian events, and on the south side by the bank of the Naviglio Grande¹, the productive activities were relatively absent in that zone, with the exception of gravel pits (partly conserved and converted into park grounds). The growth of such activities was hindered, up until the post-World War II period, by the presence of vast agricultural estates of civil or religious property and by the presence of a substantial system of military settlements constituted by the Caserma S. Barbara with the Piazza d’Armi and by the Military Hospital. These are important elements of considerable size within the area, although they are introverted constructions and are incapable of directing further urban development². From the 1950s the area was involved, as were all the outskirts of Milan, in a turbulent growth in urban development resulting from both the Italian “economic miracle” and internal immigration. In the maps produced by the IGM (Military Geographic Institute) in 1950, the configuration of countryside is shown as clearly recognisable, whereas the 1972 technical municipal map presents it as an entirely constructed area.

The urban fabric accommodates predominantly residential facilities, though its morphology is porous and inconsistent; its principal geometric composition is constituted by the overlapping of historical roads that connect the city with the surrounding territory and the elaboration of rectangular and triangular road grids resulting from the town planning maps from the early 1900s. The historical lines trace a triangular figure, of which its three sides are the roads to Novara (via Novara), to the rural village of Baggio (via delle Forze Armate) and, finally, the secondary path (the current via Carlo Marx) that connects the former two between them, passing through the small district of Quarto Cagnino³. The second system of roads defines several major arteries; the ring road (viale Murillo via Bezzi, planned in 1912), the linear via Harar to which the sports facilities of the San Siro area are juxtaposed, and a road configuration in V (via Morgantini and via Gulli) that connect the Caserma S. Barbara with the city.

The urban planning throughout the whole of the 1900s, besides not having an overall urban vision, greatly favoured the initiatives of the private sector and didn’t succeed in generating a true “construction process” for the city⁴, that is to say a “collective construction” that develops through the mutual confrontation between various actors of the “urban scene”. The evolution of the planning was characterised by uncoordinated fragments, with a pervasion of private constructions and a large problem of unauthorised construction, culminating in an extensive mass of disorganised structures.

1 The Naviglio Grande is a navigable channel constructed between the XIII and XIV century for the transport of merchandise and is now used for touristic navigation and sporting activities such as rowing.

2 Boriani, Maurizio; Morandi, Corinna; Rossari, Augusto: *Milano contemporanea. Itinerari di architettura e urbanistica*. Torino: Designers Riuniti Editori, 1986, p.257.

3 It refers to a small commune village formed from the Middle Ages, originally located at four miles from the Duomo from which its name derives, and for which the Theresian cadastre of 1771 counts 239 people. It was first annexed to the village of Trenno, and then in 1923 to Milan along with all the other small villages of the suburban strip called the “Corpi Santi” (holy entities).

4 Grandi, Maurizio; Pracchi, Attilio: “Le vite degli altri. Osservazioni sull’edilizia residenziale milanese recente”. In *QA Quaderni del Dipartimento di Progettazione dell’Architettura* 24, “Casa e città”. Giugno 2009. Boves (Italy), pp. 84-85.

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[Fig. 1] Aerial view of Quarto Cagnino district

Baffa, Matilde; Montaldo, Vincenzo; Tutino, Sandro: “Quartiere Gescal di Quarto Cagnino”, in *L’Architettura Cronache e Storia*. N° 248. June 1976. Milano: Etas.

The town planning map of 1953 maintained many green zones, however, over the course of the following years the pressure to construct residential facilities imposed a rapid transformation in the urban setting.

While the network of roads trace a weak yet recognisable regularity, forming urban blocks of relative uniformity, the characteristics of each building’s anatomy and the design of open space are both decidedly incoherent: in a micro-urban scale the clear difference can be noted between the unifying design that forms a large part of the urban fabric and the patchwork of fragments in which it is arduous to find a unity of any sort.

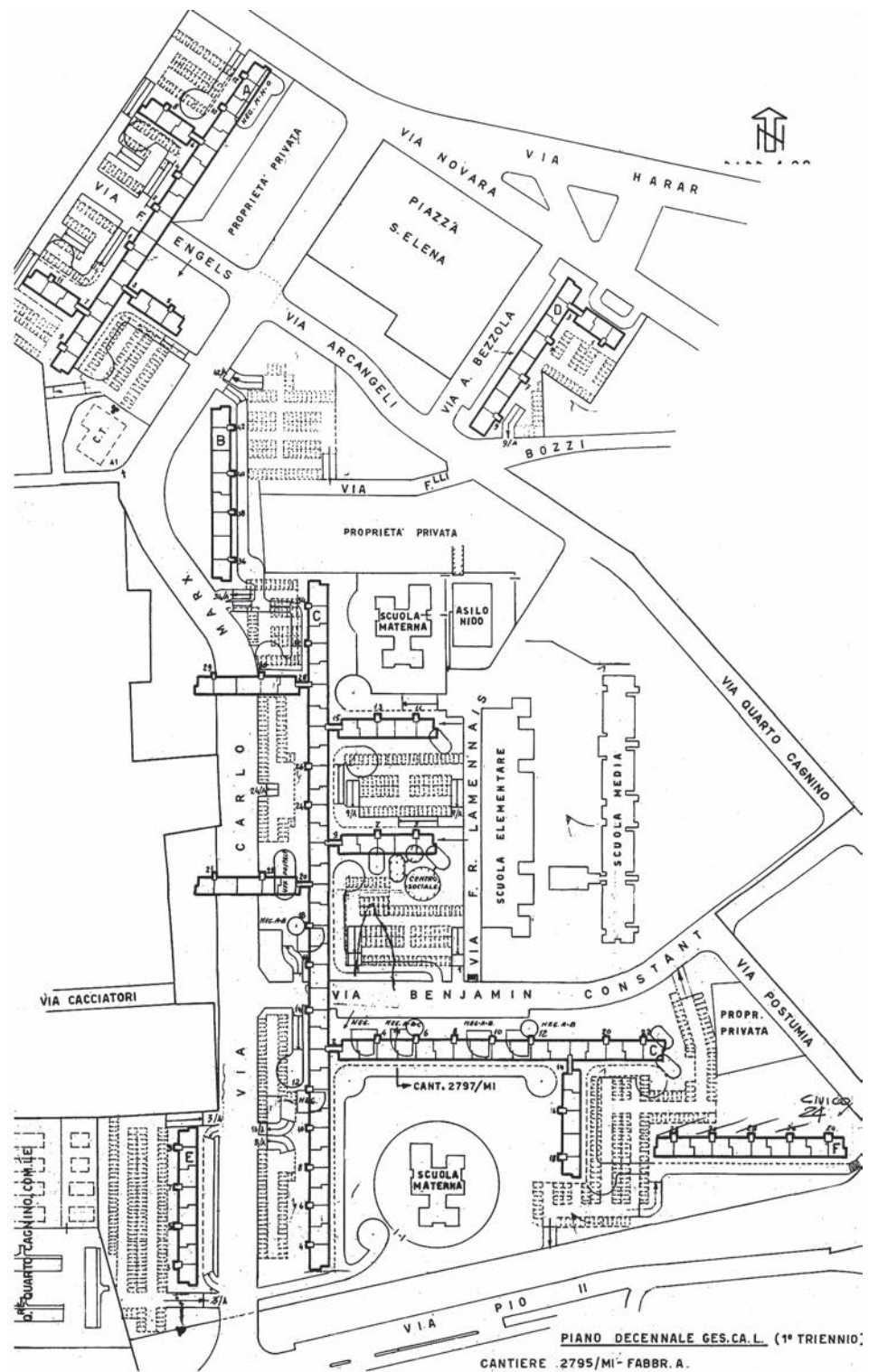
As in many other parts of Milan the following planning happened in a series of chapters. The “zone planning” maps had a very revealing role, whether they were considered as tools for implemented planning established by the Law n. 167 of 1963 in which specific areas were decided to be destined for social housing. Many of these areas were built on merely because they were available. In one of these areas, lot n.11, was constructed the Quarto Cagnino district.

The district designed for 1100 dwellings (approximately 5000 inhabitants) was built in two distinct phases between 1964 and 1973. In the first phase the task of designing a settlement for 6000 inhabitants, in an area identified within the framework of the Zoning maps, was given by Gesca⁵ to Vincenzo Montaldo, Matilde Baffa, Pier Fausto Bagatti Valsecchi and Luigi Ghidini. In 1967 the urban planning project was delivered.

In the second phase, the contracting authority of Gesca, or rather the IACP, worked alongside other architects (Lorenzo Forges Davanzati, Luigi Ghiaini, Antonio Grandi, Laura Lazzari, Gianemilio Monti, Aldo Monzeglio, Guglielmo Mozzoni, Piero Ranzani, Ugo Rivolta, G. Rossi, Achille Sacconi, Mario Silvani, A. Sorteni, Alessandro Tutino, Virgilio Vercelloni) that dealt with the building designs [Fig.1].

The project was assigned to an “intervention programme” that defined quotas and technical restrictions, including the number of dwellings, their dimensions, the models of distribution and the constructive requirements. The designers found themselves therefore strongly conditioned by these restrictions. The district embodies an example, often uncommon in Italy, of a coordinated programme capable of bringing together roughly 50 cooperatives and various groups, this way pursuing an organic and unitary solution, increasing the quality and availability of public services.

5 After the WWII the Italian government provided funds for building public housing districts for the working-class. A public organism called INA-Casa, since 1959 to 1963, was created in order to plan new low income districts. After 1963 INA-casa was substituted by Gesca which stood for *Gestione Case Lavoratori*.



[Fig. 2] Quarto Cagnino cadastral plan
Aler Archive.

From the self-sufficient district to the vast residential unit

Regarding the settlement plan, the Quarto Cagnino appears as a largely scaled construction organised into one main edifice, stretching for 360 metres north to south, to which are connected four aligned buildings, perpendicular to the main body, each 50 metres long and alternately placed on either side. The north and south boundaries of the district are defined by two smaller structures that provide aligned buildings that still follow the system of alternative perpendicular positioning [Fig. 2].

On the north side, the building abandons the north-south orientation of the main structure as to remain perpendicular to via Novara. On the south side however stands a building of 160 metres long, located east of the main structure, defining an open, west-facing building to which are juxtaposed two other shorter bodies.

In each project there is a critical component. Manfredo Tafuri observed in criticism two fundamental possibilities for conception a project: on one side, it enables

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[Fig. 3] Most relevant social housing district in west part of Milan
Graphic elaboration by Marco Lucchini.

to rigorously evaluate the facts, distinguishing truth from mystification, revealing dialectical transformations and recognising their meaning; on the other side, it allows the understanding of a “meeting point between history and the project planning”⁶, in which criticism takes on an “operative” meaning, establishing a relationship between what has previously been built, and what will be built in the future. Joseph Rykwert underlined the intersecting link between, criticism, type and design. “I consider that the conception of a project also includes the criticism of a certain number of buildings. It is from this number of buildings that our ideas derive [...] and from all these architectural type components that originate from the very beginning of history and that can be manipulated at need”⁷.

The critical component present in the Quarto Cagnino primarily concerns the relationship between public housing and the city’s configuration. Milanese public housing structures have constantly had an emblematic quality, and unlike the majority of private buildings, that are of a fragmentary nature resulting from a myriad of isolated episodes, it has succeeded in expressing a common trait thanks to the spatial continuity of its form. One of the reasons for this is due to systematic interventions; rendered possible by the passing of various legislations, beginning with the Luzzatti Law of 1903 and the following Consolidated Law of 1908, that through the Istituto per le Case Economiche e Popolari di Milano (Institute for affordable social housing in Milan) enable Public Institutions to directly intervene in the construction of real estate.

Over the course of a century, when the cycle of low income housing ends following the depletion of funding and the transformation of the independent institutions for social housing, a considerable part of Milan’s urban fabric became shaped by ERP settlements characterised by a clear correlation between settlement types and the form of open space. Thanks to this coherence, the public housing districts in Milan have become open-air museums in which the transformations of the relationship between built form and space resulting from different ideas of the city can be clearly read. In the early 1900’s, the ERP districts modelled themselves on the bourgeois neighbourhood, homogenising its components and providing improved communal services. Around the 1930’s, a rather radical change occurred, due mainly to the work of a group of rationalist architects united in the project of Casabella. “Public

6 Tafuri, Manfredo: *Teorie e storie dell’architettura*. Bari: Editori Laterza, 1968, p. 161.

7 Rykwert, Joseph: “L’architettura, la critica la moda”, in *Casabella* 506, october 1984. Milano: Electa, p. 51.



[Fig. 4] Harar district: Building A designed by Figini and Pollini
Marco Lucchini's archive.

housing” became “housing for everyone”. The regularity of the design and its ability to be reproduced, notions introduced with the ideology of the machine, are brought together with settlement models based on high density and complete detachment from the 19th century continuous facade, criticising the system of real estate gain and sprawling expansion of the city [Fig. 3].

The impossibility to intervene on land revenues stopped the rationalist districts that were built in Milan, like the Gabriele D’Annunzio district (now incorporated into the vaster neighbourhood of San Siro 1932-1952) and the Fabio Filzi district designed by Franco Albini alongside Renato Camus and Giancarlo Palanti, from achieving the paradigmatic spatial characteristics of the famous *Siedlungen* of the Weimar Republic in Germany, considered, due to the favourable social and political conditions that allowed them to be built, an “accomplished utopia”⁸. The same principles are recognisable in urban-scale projects such as “Milano Verde” (1938, with R. Camus, G. Mazzoleni, G. Pagano, G. Palanti) and the “Piano A.R.” (1944-45, with I. Gardella, G. Minoletti, G. Pagano, G. Palanti, G. Predaval, G. Romano) in which rationalism sought to modify urban form. The city’s organisation was represented metaphorically and indirectly, which can be seen also in the choice of figurative references to avant-garde artworks present in the expressive representation of modern architecture. From this point of view, Quarto Cagnino takes on the rationalist reasoning, expressing criticism towards both land management overcome by the market, and the ways in which ERP districts were expanding.

Towards the end of the 1950’s (at which point Milan counts 1.6 million inhabitants), it was already clear how the projections of the PRG of 1953 would no longer be coherent with the reality of urban development and important housing demands that were often answered with unauthorised building and self-built dwellings that in their aggregation formed. The decentralising of settlements that had been planned had turned into an increased overcrowding of the outskirts of the city. The absence of a real revision of land owning regulations brought low-income housing to be built in inexpensive areas incidentally located in the city’s periphery. The 120 thousand public housing dwellings planned in 1961 turned into a galaxy of settlements localised in whichever areas were available to construct on, that is to say the most distant suburbs.

The politic forces of reformism and social democracy, present in the central majority promoted by INA-casa, found an agreement with urbanistic and architectural culture of rationalist extraction: the common settlement model they both shared was that of the “self-sufficient neighbourhood” considered the settlement form most able to direct urban development. In fact the district seemed capable of filtering the passage between the small community in which the inhabitants could recognise each other and the larger scaled city. Not far from Quarto Cagnino is the Baggio II district of which the urban planning, that was supervised by Cerutti and Marescotti, draws a settlement configured around a centre, focused on the Church of the Madonna dei Poveri designed by Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini, a church that recalls the idea of a place for a small community to gather.

At the end of the second seven-year planning period of INA-casa (1956-1963), some of the most significant districts either built or nearing completion were QT8 (1943-1963), Feltre, Harar, Comasina, Gallaratese I and II, Gratosoglio; these districts were however exceeded by the enlargement of scale to which Milano was going towards, passing from an urban to a metropolitan scale. Urban space acquired a new dimension: the image of the city that was linked to the capacity of the built environment to delineate space through the use of roads and squares, already called into question by the rationalist figurations, was disappearing in the discontinuous space of the dispersed sprawl of the network structures⁹. (Fig 4)

8 Tafuri, Manfredo: *La sfera e il labirinto*. Torino: Einaudi, 1980, p. 255.

9 Piccinato, Giorgio ; Quilici, Vieri ; Tafuri, Manfredo : *La Città Territorio. Verso una nuova grande dimensione*, in *Casabella-Continuità* 270, december 1962. Milano: Domus, pp 16-19.

scaled constructions the residential structure would have expressed a character of permanence and a strong identity able to stimulate in individuals the feeling of belonging to a community¹⁰. Some kilometres distance from Quarto Cagnino, the residential complex Monte Amiata by Carlo Aymonino and Aldo Rossi is one of the sharpest representations of this approach in its confrontation with city, and also in its failure. Indeed the hypotheses formulated by the two architects were based on an idea of the city as an aggregation of architectural types capable of affecting urban space through the use of form and architectural language. Monte Amiata is a famous work of architecture, often a destination of architectural tourism yet foreign to its surrounding context and incapable of interacting with the latter, enclosed in the opposition between Aymonino's welcoming eloquence and the erratic and laconic approach of Aldo Rossi.

Quarto Cagnino responds to a different reasoning. While in large residential units the relationship between type and urban form is ambiguous, imbricating ideological models that tend to reduce or eliminate the particular nature of the architectural type accentuating instead its universal aspects, Quarto Cagnino searches to converse with its urban context and above all with the pre-existing rationalist features. References to rationalism can be seen in the use of open blocks that enable to freely articulate space, in the stereometric volumes and in the search of an essential order for urban planning. The way in which is organised the relationship between full and open space with an alternation between relatively dense environments and others more rarefied is in fact a reinterpretation of the INA Harar district (Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Gio Ponti, Piero Bottoni) that is adjacent to Quarto Cagnino. The dialog between the two districts is based on a common approach to address the complexity of the city which is expressed in the "turbine"¹¹ figure formed by the "horizontal skyscrapers" in Harar, and in the use of *redans* in Quarto Cagnino [Fig. 5].

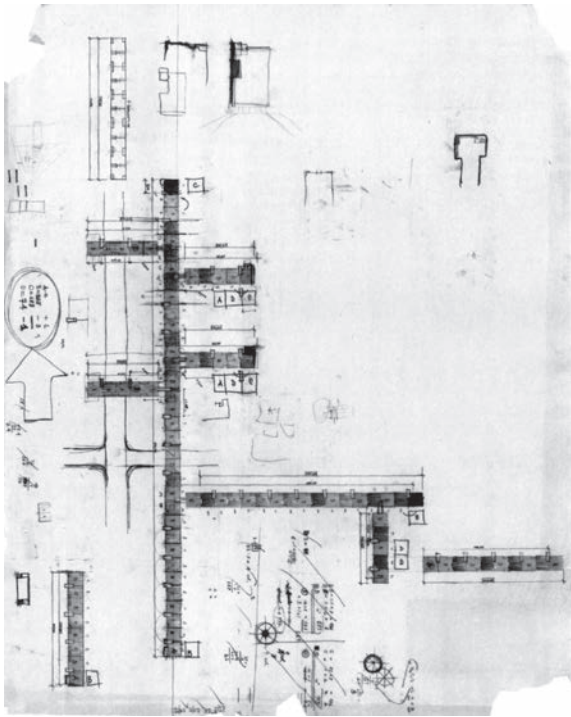
The settlement arrangement of Quarto Cagnino is a response to a critical situation of public housing and of the outskirts of the city: if during the 1950's with the construction of the Harar district it was still possible to imagine an indemnification of the outskirts, at the end of the 1960's however it was considered too late. In that time, due to the Law 167, the planning of social housing benefitted from the low cost of peripheral areas, often in agricultural areas not yet urbanised. During the construction of a new district, the municipality carried out primary works of urbanisation (roads, water works, sewers, electricity) that were then made use of by private bodies who divided the free areas and split them into lots, the area having gained in value thanks to these works of urbanisation. The lots initially defined by the Law 167 turned out to be too peripheral and oversized with the result of creating isolated enclaves that were difficult to connect to the city. Lot number 11, destined to become Quarto Cagnino, was a large empty space in an urban area already greatly compromised by speculation and made troublesome by the presence of largely scaled buildings like the military barracks and the S. Carlo Hospital. As it has been noted¹², these difficulties weren't solely due to being peripheral regions but arose from the interaction between the peripheral location and the distortion of the centripetal urban development of Milan for which it is impossible to achieve a centralised growth with the subsequent marginalisation of the periphery.

The district takes on a linear configuration that ideally connects the Parco di Trenno (1971), the Piazza d'Armi, the ERP settlements stood around via Forze Armate and via Lorenteggio. The referential scale is that of the urban landscape, evoked not only by the physical dimensions of the construction but also by its form. The latter is probably not immune to some megastructural tendencies, but doesn't possess the same peremptory character or the appearance of a "manifestation that hurls itself

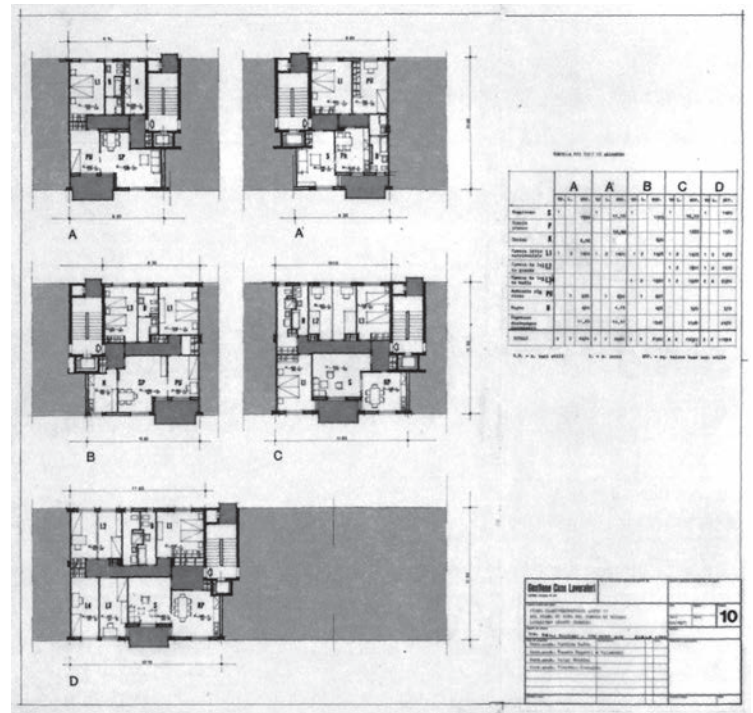
10 Acocella, Alfonso: *Architettura contemporanea Italiana. Gli anni Settanta*. Firenze: A-linea 1981, p. 110.

11 Protasoni, Sara: *Casa "A" ad alloggi duplex e insulae nel quartiere di via Dessiè a Milano, 1951-55*, in Gregotti, Vittorio, Marzari, Giovanni (Ed.): *Luigi Figini Gino Pollini. Opera completa*. Milano: Electa, 1996, p. 369.

12 Baffa, Matilde; Montaldo, Vincenzo; Tutino, Sandro: "Quartiere Gesca di Quarto Cagnino", in *L'Architettura Cronache e Storia* 248. June 1976. Milano: Etas, p. 83.



[Fig. 7] Apartments types
Matilde Baffa and Ugo Rivolta's archive.



[Fig. 6] Arrangement of apartments
Matilde Baffa and Ugo Rivolta's archive.

like a dam towards the threshold of urban development” as described by Manfredo Tafuri when mentioning the Corviale district by Mario Fiorentino in Rome¹³. Corviale was explicitly associated, by the same Tafuri, with Monte Amiata by Rossi and Aymonino as a symbol of the impossibility to relieve the outskirts of the city from a cultural signature that could only erect “insecure dams”¹⁴, introducing diversity to the homogeneity of urban disorder. Diversity that evokes mechanisation and detachment, and guide towards an inhabitable space arranged in a large residential unit not unlike that of Le Corbusier with “magnificent and mobile buildings”¹⁵ able to move freely in the space like large steamboats that sail by the coast of Rio de Janeiro. Quarto Cagnino partially refers to this line of thought. Relationships with the site can no longer occur in a contiguous setting like that of the historic town: references to the context are understandable through an intellectual dimension that in the case of Quarto Cagnino refers to the rationalist culture. The configuration of the district probably recalls the manner in which the Siedlungen Siemenstadt and Romerstadt interact with the surrounding context: the linear buildings by Otto Barting and Ernst May make use of their length to adopt a landscape scale interacting respectively with the railway and the riverbank. Quarto Cagnino draws a metaphorical limit to the city’s expansion and is one of the few ERP districts in Milan to efficiently succeed in doing so.

Distribution characteristics and organisation of the dwellings

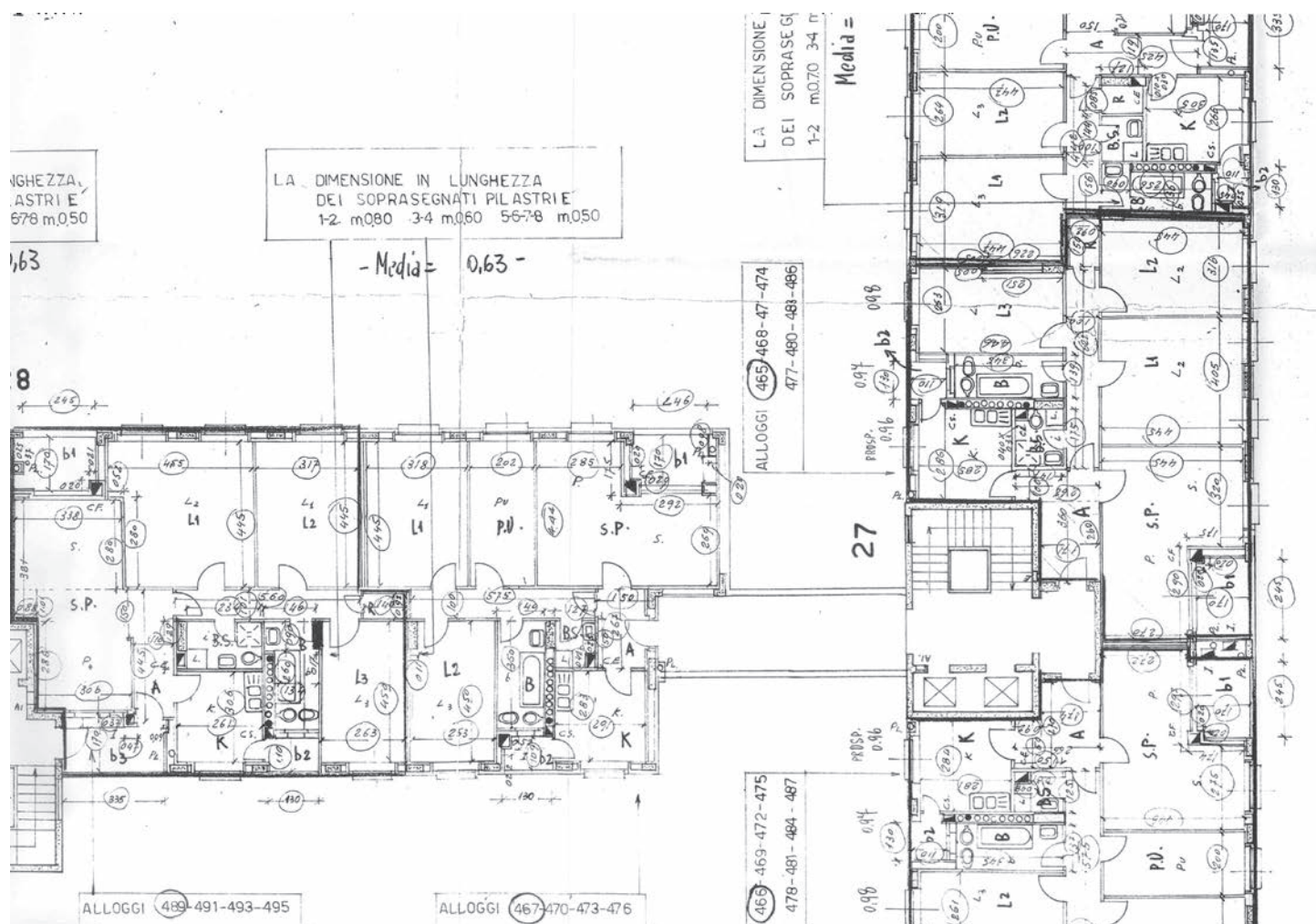
For the reasons previously stated, the relationships between the apartments and the urban context are devoid of any mediation. The transition from domestic to public space occurs abruptly and without a micro-urban scaled fabric acting as a filter. The steamship is docked to the quayside, and the passengers pass directly from the port to their cabin. If they want, they are able to contemplate the city from the deck. Metaphors aside, the problem of a too direct relationship between domestic space and public space is present also in other open block settlements built in Milan during the same period. Usually, this is due to a schematic planning of the settlement design. On the other hand, in Quarto Cagnino the designers deliberately worked on a change of scale between dwellings and open space in accordance with the desire to offer a contemplative view of the city.

13 Tafuri, Manfredo: *Storia dell'Architettura italiana 1944-1985*. Torino, Einaudi 1982, pp. 154-155.

14 Tafuri, Manfredo: *Diga insicura. Sub Tegnime Fagi*, in *Domus* 617, may 1981. Milano: Domus p. 24.

15 Le Corbusier: *Precisazioni sullo stato attuale dell'Architettura e dell'Urbanistica*. Tentori, Francesco (ed). Roma-Bari, Laterza 1979.

The organisation of the dwellings has been strongly restricted by the Gescal



[Fig. 8] Typical plan: construction draw
Aler Archive.

regulations [Fig. 6]. The buildings are 11 metres deep, distributed by a system of stairwells that allow to access two apartments. This system allows for transversal ventilation in the apartments. The apartments are of various dimensions (type A, B, C, D) but always show the same organisation set upon a central path that runs along the longitudinal axis of the building [Fig. 7]. The distribution of the rooms is therefore a “double comb” as is often the case in many houses built by the Milanese rationalist movement. Each apartment is subdivided into two large areas: the first space corresponds to the living-dining room (nearly the entire living area) and is of double exposure (it overlooks on both sides of the building) and is equipped with a double loggia; the second space in turn corresponds to the bedrooms and other facilities. The living-dining room is adjacent to the stairwell so as to form a symmetrical block made up of the two living rooms of each apartment served by the said stairs. The entrance to the living area is not directly visible: the stairwell protrudes from the building's main volume and opens onto a loggia that passes in front of the living area and allows access to the apartment through a route set between the living room and the kitchen. The latter forms a core along with the sanitation facilities disposed along the centre of the entry route but directed instead towards the facade; this was necessary to be able to naturally ventilate at least one of the bathrooms as requested by the regulations that are still currently applicable. The relationship between the stairwell, kitchen and living room and the way in which the services are arranged in a right angle recalls Franco Albini's solution for apartment distribution in the Filzi and Mangiagalli II districts. (Fig 8)

However, the buildings are not completely isolated from each other: there are indeed connexions between each building made up of walkways that connect the head of one building with the facade of another, perpendicular to the previous building. In this case the stairwell no longer protrudes from the main body and



[Fig.9] Historical view of a building
 Baffa, Matilde; Montaldo, Vincenzo; Tutino,
 Sandro: “Quartiere Gescal di Quarto Cagnino”,
 in *L’Architettura Cronache e Storia*. N° 248.
 June 1976. Milano: Etas.

serves three apartments: two directly and one indirectly with use from the walkway. Regarding the façade, this solution translates as a relatively permeable connexion that resolves the problem of union between one building and another.

Those who designed Quarto Cagnino aimed immediately to address the problem of the integration of the dwellings providing an adequate amount of services, of which the scarcity had been one of the deficiencies of large popular districts. The image of the large dam, referring also explicitly to the theme of city walls, was associated with the idea of a constant permeability. The stereometric and Cartesian volumes of the buildings are built upon a powerful base of reinforced concrete that seems to lift itself from the ground thanks to a grid of cylindrical pillars. The open plan of the ground floor is an obvious reference to Le Corbusier and his *Unité d’habitation* quoted almost literally. The open ground floor enables secondary roads to be drawn underneath the buildings, emphasizing the image of the great structure that connects with communication networks and guarantees a good development of service activities: some to the scale of the district such as primary and secondary schools, gymnasiums and the church, others to the scale of the building itself such as common spaces in which to gather. The entrance to the building, a topic that was dear to architects that took on medium to high level housing projects, but often completely neglected in ERP districts, results in large pillars that surround the stairwells, assuming an indicative role [Fig. 9].

The continuity of the urban form found a correspondence in the uniformity of the facade in coherence with the topic that states that buildings of large dimensions need to be considered at the same scale as the landscape. For this reason the layout of the facades were drawn rigorously with a regular system of openings with the use of almost square windows and loggias. From some points of view the horizontal sequence of windows gives the impression of seeing ribbon windows.

The district recently underwent extraordinary repair work, finalised with the insulation of the facades with a cladding insulation system, colourfully plastered with light yellow and grey. This operation disposed of the original cladding made up of large grain concrete plaster of a dark and consistent colour with the addition of vertical scoring in the material. The colours and materials brought up images of stone components, giving consistence to the idea of a “fortress”, of a signal able to indicate the limit of a large industrial metropolis. The new wall cladding has had



[Fig. 10] Current view of the district
Marco Lucchini's archive.

a negative effect on the districts image. Indeed, the light yellow takes on a kitsch aspect, transforming the architectural construction into a disproportionate object of design. The uniformity is one of the aspects of the city's outskirts that owes its "dramatic" beauty to the hard and anonymous image it portrays, not unlike the urban landscapes of Mario Sironi who captured very efficiently that hardness. The colourful plaster seems to mock the hardness of the periphery and is the manifestation of an uncultivated superficiality. Furthermore, the imprint of the formwork on the pillars and the concrete base has been removed, deleting the reference to brutalism [Fig. 10].

Secondly, the compact aspect of the wall mass has been brought into question by the smoothness of the new cladding, complete with flashy metal strips, both horizontal and vertical, inverting the tectonic image: the cohesion and hardness of the original shell have been converted into the display of static uncertainty of the insulating cladding. As with other districts, Quarto Cagnino has been redeemed by the tenants that have purchased the ownership. As a consequence, with the transition to a condominiumal management the open plan ground floor has been fenced off, rendering pointless all reasoning made by the designers concerning the continuity of the open space.

Conclusions

This type of district, considered to hang somewhere between a large residential unit and a megastructure, despite detaining a certain cultural depth has inspired



[Fig. 11] Current view of the district
Marco Lucchini's archive.

a low level of satisfaction in its users, at least during the period in which it was publicly owned. The inhabitants suffered from the lack of services, its distance from poles of centrality and its peripheral location. These are concerns that are due to poor urbanistic choices and politicians' inability to face up to the pressure of property speculation.

Today's settlement transformations in Milan have lost their critical ability, apart from in sporadic cases such as Portello and Bicocca districts. The majority of recent settlements are built in follow up to decisions concerning financial capital that are quite far from the general interests of the city. The urban plans, nowadays called PGT (Plans of Territorial Governance), subject to political policy changes, have assisted or attempted to counter the arrogance of property investors. The more recent settlements of which Santa Giulia, City Life, La città della moda, Expo and the future plans that are putting forward for the construction of a new (and useless) football stadium, are incoherent fragments in which it is often arduous to recognise an innovative urban design. The residential districts built on the sites of abandoned areas often show an urban configuration similar to those that date back to the 19th century, or else a simple juxtaposition of constructed blocks. Quarto Cagnino is on the other hand witness to the idea of a city or even the extreme attempt to counter, thanks to architectural tools, the degradation of an urban architecture that is characterised by a unitary and recognisable design.

Indeed, if we confront the urban plan of Quarto Cagnino it is easy to recognise an order in which a critical position in respect to the city is inherent.

Quarto Cagnino can be considered, for this reason, an urban architecture in which the largeness of scale and the Modern theme of the residential unit of extensive dimensions have been skilfully used in order to limit the disadvantages of its random and peripheral placement.

It is regretful to state how the modifications to the external cladding, although justified by the necessity to contain energy dissipation, have had, as it can be seen, a negative impact on the character and identity of the buildings. It is a consequence of the disjunction between architectural culture and society that is reflected in a total absence at the time in which we are addressing the theme of public housing.

Quarto Cagnino is a settlement able to bear witness to a period and a constructional process specific to the city of Milan. It should not be considered as a separate element of its own right, but as part of an urban and regional scaled system represented by the social housing in Lombardy and as a heritage that should have been preserved.

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