

## The right to housing: from occupation to transitory collective housing in Turin. The case of via La Salette

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**Abstract:** The case of "La Salette" transitory collective housing (Turin, Italy) problematises the relationship between conformative planning systems and urban practices. Since the occupation of an abandoned space for housing purpose in 2014 by around 90 migrants, the housing use "legalization" of an abandoned private building, was reached in 2018. Urban stakeholders have been involved and activated, the space has been regenerated with a multidisciplinary approach and housing co-management and small informal economic activities have been set. It was possible by the simultaneous presence of inhabitants and works and by people's self-maintenance. Specific pieces of rules were identified and articulated in a sort of technical and legal tool consistent with the current legal framework. The Italian planning system is defined as urbanism (EC, 1997) and conformative (Janin Rivolin, 2008, 2017): in response to a local community social need, not foreseen by the existing plan, the proponent of an eventual response to that need could not propose a solution, not included in the existing plan, although responding to a territorial development objective. The concept of interventions' predetermination within conformative systems does not include the promotion of voluntary territorial development proposals, approved because of their contribution to development objectives. Predetermined interventions prevail on development objectives, so if territorial needs are not foreseen by the plan, responding by parts is necessary. In this case, the intervention was divided into parts attributable to preordained determinations, assembling a technical and juridical construct, resulting in an overlap of normative fragments belonging to the existing legislative apparatus. Nevertheless, this ad-hoc juxtaposition cannot ensure the automatic realization of further interventions on the same site. In conclusion, although the inflexibility of conformative urbanism, the production of a sort of new rule, has permitted the realization of an "unexpected" project.

**Keywords:** temporary collective housing, legalization, self-production, co-management

## Introduction

This work is based on project reports, elaborated for the commissioning and for the Compagnia di San Paolo, one of the donors, and on technical reports for professionals. In particular, reference was made to Guiglia e Sordo (2018). This work was presented in June 2019 in: XXII Conferenza Nazionale SIU. L'urbanistica italiana di fronte all'agenda 2030 per lo sviluppo sostenibile. Portare territori e comunità sulla strada della sostenibilità e della resilienza Bari - Matera, 5-7 Giugno 2019

The initiative called “Collective Transitory Housing of La Salette” in Turin was carried out by members of the civil society and the Church organizations to provide a response to housing emergency and social segregation. In particular, the project regarded a building constructed in 1958, initially used as boarding-school, then as a home for elderly, finally decommissioned in 2008<sup>1</sup>. In 2014, it was illegally occupied by a group of 90 refugees arrived by the immigration wave in 2011. In 2014 the Turin Diocese, Pastoral Office for Migrants and the Diocesan Caritas activated a complex work programme, in accordance with the owner and occupants of the building and with the “Solidary Committee Refugees and Migrants”<sup>2</sup>, aimed at:

- sharing the progressive housing regularization process,
- supporting people in becoming independent in housing, labour and social terms,
- improving housing conditions throughout the physical refurbishment of the building,
- defining and realizing, even in a med-and-long-term perspective, a new transitory and self-managed housing solution, specifically addressed to vulnerable people (Guiglia & Sordo, 2018).



*Figure 1* View of the building from via Madonna de la Salette, before the intervention.

Source: Architettura senza Frontiere Piemonte.

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<sup>1</sup> The building is in *via Madonna de la Salette* and belongs to “Missionari di Nostra Signora de La Salette” complex of buildings. It is composed of 5 floors above ground and one floor underground, each one being 250m<sup>2</sup> floor surface.

<sup>2</sup> Groups of volunteers who have accompanied the construction of the self-management model and promoted a sense of belonging to the structure.



*Figure 2* View of the building from via Madonna de la Salette, after the intervention.

Source: Architettura senza Frontiere Piemonte.

In May 2015 the no-profit association “Insieme per accogliere”<sup>3</sup> was tailor-made, with the participation of the Pastoral Office for Migrants, the Diocesan Caritas and the Missionaries of Nostra Signora de la Salette. This association - since the agreement for the loan-for-use of the building, granted by the Order of La Salette - instructed Cecilia Guiglia e Paola Sacco, professionals belonging to “Luoghi Possibili”<sup>4</sup> to coordinate the technical and participatory architectural interventions, and instructed the Cooperativa Orso<sup>5</sup> to carry out the social support. The first level of participation consisted in building a sort of “collective commissioning”<sup>6</sup>, composed of owners, inhabitants, representatives of the Diocese, Solidary Committee Refugees and Migrants and social workers.

After that, other technicians were involved to solve specific problems, selected by the specific competencies, experience and attitudes, firstly Architettura Senza Frontiere Piemonte<sup>7</sup>. They composed the project team<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The association was created in May 2015 in order to regularize the residency of the occupants.

<sup>4</sup> It is a group of interdisciplinary projects, born in 2004, expert on housing and urban regeneration. It coordinates the technical and social aspects of architectural intervention.

<sup>5</sup> The Cooperative was born in 1987 and usually works in Torino, Cuneo, Asti on the labour, migration, integration and youth policies. From 2009 it works also with refugees.

<sup>6</sup> “Collective commissioning”: aspiration to share with other actors project key elements, according to a feedback-loop approach.

<sup>7</sup> Architettura senza Frontiere Piemonte ONLUS is a no-profit association, located in Turin, funded in 2006, belonging to the international network Architecture sans Frontière International, inspired by the principle of the Chart of Hasselt, on the basis of which intervenes with cooperation and local development project in the South and in Italy, in presence of social, urban and territorial emergency. It proposes the architecture as an inclusive and interdisciplinary practise addressed to participatory architecture with the local communities.

Since the mid-2015, the team started the works in parallel to the social support of inhabitants and supported to the labour and social integration. The total value of the intervention was approximately euro 880.000, reached thanks to private financings by donations and calls.

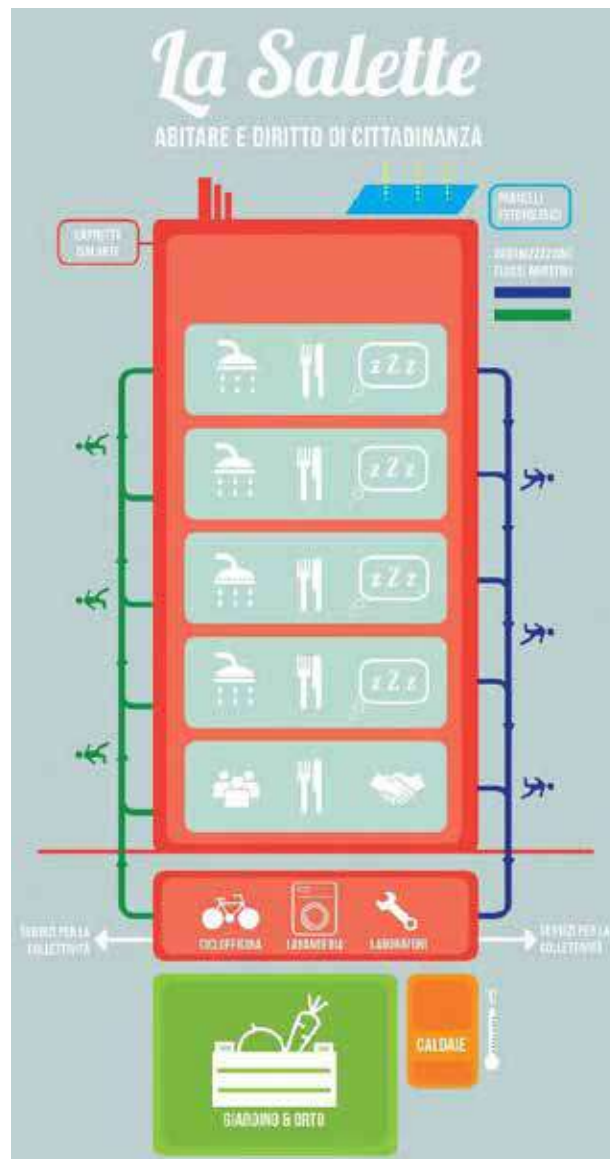


Figure 3 Graphics of the final uses Fonte: elaboration by Paola Sacco and Andrea Sassano.

<sup>8</sup> The project team is composed of Cecilia Guiglia, Paola Sacco (Luoghi Possibili) Valeria Cottino, Veronica Gai, Annalisa Masetto (ASFP), and the free-lances Mario Alessio, Ivan Castagno, Daniele Filippa, Daniela Re.

The part of the building for residential use was functionally divided by floors into rooms and common services, on the basis of the observation of occupants' behaviour in this structure and in other experience: limited size of the common spaces, number of inhabitants per area and natural tendency to gather by nationality. The team of the project expressed the need to build good neighbours' relationship – even throughout the use of the garden – and identifying spaces able to economically contribute to the management of the building. In the observation of the spontaneous practices of use of these spaces by the occupants, one of the most relevant and complex issues – particularly in case of self-management, regards the right to accommodate friends in their own rooms. Because of that, a part of the basement could be used as guest-rooms.



*Figure 4* View of the garden, before the intervention. Source: Architettura senza Frontiere Piemonte.



*Figure 5* View of the garden, after the intervention. Source: Architettura senza Frontiere Piemonte.

The realization of this collective housing was not obvious at all, because the national and local regulations do not foresee this type of final use, nor the realization of building works in an already inhabited space, although with the objective of social inclusion, in a logic of self-construction. Therefore, it was necessary to identify every single legal reference, and unifying all of them in a technical-legal device, acceptable by the current urban planning system. Indeed, in Italy, the planning system is conformational and urbanism (EC, 1997; Janin Rivolin, 2008, 2017). Because of that, it is necessary to identify the existing planning rules which are valid to justify the proposed intervention, in order to conform it to the regulatory system in force.

This implies various operational difficulties: with respect to the real social need expressed by a part of the local community, but not previously defined by the plan, the promoter of a project is not allowed to propose solutions that, even responding to territorial development objectives, are not foreseen by the previously established rules.

Because of the rigidity of the rules in force, the first problem was the temporariness of the migrants' reception and integration process determined by the features of social housing<sup>9</sup>. The reception would be considered as equivalent to the touristic activity, not permitting to certify the legal residency, that is necessary to obtain the resident permit for migrants. Because of that, the residential final use was selected and connoted as "collective", thanks to "Insieme per Accogliere" who nominated a head of the building among its members. To do so, the municipal offices made use of an existing agreement on these issues between Turin Diocese and Municipality of Torino, that permitted to go ahead, maintaining the same designated use. In fact, the change of designated use would have taken two years and would have been too expensive.

According to the Turin Municipal General Master Plan, the area is designated to be used for private services of public interest (art. 3 comma 15 & art. 8 comma 68) and the building was used as a care home for elderly. Keeping the use classified in the same macro-category, it was possible to convert the final use into "reception" (art. 3 comma 15), avoiding the payment of the land occupation fee and limiting the necessary adaptation. In order to respect the legal parameters as private service of public interest, it was necessary to add some sleeping places available for the public authority.

Further, the guidelines for projects of university residences were consulted (All. A al D.M. n. 27/2011)<sup>10</sup>, so that the dimensional standards were coherent with the existing practice of use, designing space to respond to the inhabitants who were more interested into the number of sleeping places than into available private rooms. Even regarding functions and standards, the university residence was taken as a reference. So, the compresence of the residential functions and related services must be ensured, in order that the need for both privacy and social life is satisfied.

Regarding the sizing of rooms and technical rooms, the traditional residence regulation was taken as a reference, adapting spaces to the hygienic requirements, demanded by the regulation for the living quarters (D.M. Sanità 5 luglio 1975)<sup>11</sup>. Also, the fire regulation does not imply the option of "collective housing": after considering the hygienic residence regulation, the hotels' regulation was used and a fire-escape was installed, not required for the traditional block of flats, but compulsory for the touristic ones (D.P.R. n. 151/2011)<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> The permitted permance is maximum 18 months, according to "Linee Guida per il Social Housing in Piemonte", Delibera Giunta Regionale 5 novembre 2007 n. 27-7346.

<sup>10</sup> Allegato A. Decreto Ministeriale 7 febbraio 2011 n. 27. Pubblicato nella Gazzetta Ufficiale del 28 aprile 2011 n. 97

"Standard minimi dimensionali e qualitativi e linee guida relative ai parametri tecnici ed economici concernenti la realizzazione di alloggi e residenze per studenti universitari, di cui alla legge 14 novembre 2000, n. 338".

<sup>11</sup> Decreto Ministeriale Sanità 5 luglio 1975. Pubblicato nella Gazzetta Ufficiale del 18 luglio 1975 n. 190 "Modificazioni alle istruzioni ministeriali 20 giugno 1896, relativamente all'altezza minima ed ai requisiti igienico-sanitari principali dei locali di abitazione".

<sup>12</sup> D.P.R. 1 agosto 2011 n. 151. Pubblicato nella Gazzetta Ufficiale del 22 settembre 2011 n. 221. "Regolamento recante semplificazione della disciplina dei procedimenti relativi alla prevenzione degli incendi, a norma dell'articolo 49, comma 4-quater, del decreto-legge 31 maggio 2010, n. 78, convertito, con modificazioni, dalla legge 30 luglio 2010, n. 122".

Although the complex regulatory framework, the self-construction was taken into consideration, with the purpose of actively involving the occupants, making them responsible in the maintenance and management of the good, and offering them an opportunity of professional training. Nevertheless, there is no national, nor local regulation for the self-construction and it emerged that in Italy there is a regulatory gap for the self-construction that is actually experimental. Even if this practice is mentioned in different normative and project proposals, this practice, implying the active participation of not qualified people in a building site, has not a defined application field. The only authorized person, even if with limitations, to access the building site without being a technician or a worker, is the owner or the tenant. Further, the voluntary work and the no-profit associationism are not foreseen and regulated in a building site and the self-construction is not promoted at the political level. Thus, it was necessary to convert the concept of self-construction in self-refurbishment and self-maintenance.

Since the dialogue with the Ministry of Work, it has been understood that it was necessary to identify labour contracts in the self-refurbishment, throughout an association, the internship, apprenticeship, in a cooperative or in a company, with all the related obligation, but they were complicated options, that would have demanded the involved companies a professional training oriented to the recruitment.

Therefore, a tenure title was provided to the occupants who had to become members of a voluntary association as to ensure insurance cover, even when the building-site is open. Because of the critical points illustrated so far, it was not possible a global involvement of inhabitants, and just some works were self-realized, with the support of traineeship. The project options, driven by money saving criterion, foresaw that 50% of the works for completion were realized by inhabitants as volunteers and the 30% as workers. In particular, some occupants attended a carpentry course at Scuole Tecniche San Carlo in Turin, and some of them were assisted by voluntary craftsmen. All the occupants got involved in the works of his related floor, throughout precise planning of works. Since it was not possible to transfer the inhabitants during the whole period of intervention, the work was divided by floors. The work in each floor lasted 5 weeks and was then suspended for ten days each time, to make possible the works of completion and the moving with the help of volunteers. Given the presence of the inhabitants in the structure, the security plan was studied in detail to ensure a net division between working areas and living areas.<sup>13</sup>



*Figure 6* View of the roof, before the intervention. Source: Architettura senza Frontiere Piemonte.

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<sup>13</sup> The spaces of the building site were as more as possible independent on the living spaces, to avoid interferences. The underground floor was refurbished and temporarily used to lodge inhabitants during the works in their respective floor.



*Figure 7* View of the roof, after the intervention. Source: Architettura senza Frontiere Piemonte.

In architectural and plant engineering terms, the project foresaw some distributive modifications to improve the functionality of the building and respect the current regulation (among the others: Legge 13 del 1989 e s.m.i.<sup>14</sup> for the elimination of architectural barriers), with the remake of the bathrooms and the access-ramp to the ground floor for disabled people and the reactivation and testing of the elevator.

Besides, after an analysis of consumptions and dispersions, taking into account the relationship costs/benefits of the fire regulation, but also the typology of building and of users, interventions to improve the building energy performance were identified. The proposed solutions are divided into two typologies: the ones on the building envelop and the ones on thermal and electric plants.

From the experience in La Salette, it emerged that housing practices and policies in Italy framed the social precarious conditions within temporariness, but these conditions cannot be solved in periods of time predetermined by a general legal provision and, because of that, the concept of temporariness was replaced by transitoriness. Indeed, in the Piemonte Region, the social housing model foresaw a residential time limited to only 18 months, even if it can be renovated in some cases by leaving and entering again the house. It is also true that it was expressed by the inhabitants the need not to respect a predefined period of time, as usually imposed by the traditional reception institutional projects because the social and economic inhabitants' problems did not allow at all how long it takes them to become independent. Further, the building management expenditure should have been compatible with the solutions, mostly informal, of the self-sufficiency economy. It meant to operate outside of the tradition current legal and practical framework, already set for the formalization of social housing.

The participation to the process permitted to observe from inside some dynamics: not predefined periods of time and informal economies are not compatible with the current categories regarding residence, workplaces and use of economic resources. In fact, migrants tend to send almost all the gained resources to countries of origin and many of them are not able, if not supported, to save money to invest in their future in Italy.

The cooperation among the above-mentioned private actors permitted the housing self-management. For example, activities inside the structure able to ensure small income to support the house expenditures, especially for whom was not continuously autonomous. Further, it was possible to observe the regional, national and European trajectories followed by migrants, strictly connected to their work activities.

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<sup>14</sup> Legge 9 gennaio 1989, n. 13 “Disposizioni per favorire il superamento e l'eliminazione delle barriere architettoniche negli edifici privati”.



It was clear that the answer to the housing need must consider the feature of the seasonal work, the opportunities that are activated by their networks, that are available even in an uncertain and sudden way. For example, a compatriot from another country calls for a short period another “brother” or “cousin” and he expects not to lose their right to live in the house that partially built as well while going the visit his compatriot. Therefore, the answer has to be extremely flexible, without giving up having a shelter, as ensured by the collective residence.

Initially, a self-managed approach was assumed, regarding the house management, but when works ended, it was clear that the inhabitants would have not been able to continue the “collective housing” experience all by themselves. There were no relevant conflicts, but certainly defining a shared decision on the economic criteria for the sustainability of the house was taking more and more time. Consumption, maintenance and caring of the “housing space” were the object of the daily debate. Since that point, it was changed the way to organize the floor assemblies. With the efforts of the social workers and the *Comitato Migranti*, it was possible to convince all the inhabitants to subscribe to a “Housing Pact” on the shared rules for living the house. After that, self-management and accompanying were replaced by co-management and coaching.

The process, especially regarding the economic aspects, which will be gradually modulated towards a higher management capacity of the housing expenditure, is still on-going and needs further time to reach the independence of individuals.

It is evident that for some of them, it will not be possible in a short time, but the long-term objective remains the independence on the external economic support, for the conviction that the dignity of people is firstly based on having the autonomous right to choose.

In conclusion, this experience represents a bottom-up policy for the social and urban inclusion in response to the large movement of people, based on a new kind of social and spatial organization – the “collective housing” – as a result of an urban community.

It does not consist only of refugees’ reception, but migration trajectories overlapping existing physical and social structure, with new lifestyles, new needs, generating innovative spaces and new urban functions, negotiating with the urban government a new social legitimation and housing legalization. This intervention emerged for the listening skills of the actors’ mutual needs – representing the basis to elaborate proposals – for a social and political approach, by the composition of the sensitiveness and competencies, always with a multi-disciplinary perspective.

In conclusion, given the results in social and organizational terms, and the limited conflicts during the realization process, this experience questions the rigidity of the conformational urbanism and show that, throughout a strategic mix of the current rules, it is possible to create a new rule that allows the realization of unforeseen interventions.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors of the current article thanks all the ones who have made possible the realization of the “transitory collective housing of La Salette”. In particular, they thank the promoters: Diocese of Turin, throughout the Pastoral Office for Migrants and Caritas Turin, the occupants and the “Comitato di Solidarietà Rifugiati e Migranti”; the supporters: Diocese of Turin, Compagnia di San Paolo, IREN, network of parishes (Unità pastorale 10) and Unicredit spa; the makers of the intervention: the project and coaching team, composed of the Cooperativa Orso, Luoghi Possibili, Ufficio Pastorale Migranti, Architettura Senza Frontiere Piemonte Onlus, “Comitato di solidarietà rifugiati e migranti”; the collaboration of the associations Casematte and ConMOI.

They also thank the companies and the high-qualified craftsmen, who took part in works, accepting the experimental dimension of the intervention, that required an additional effort, in terms of ideas and energies.

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