

# Journal of Urban History

## The housing struggle in Milan in the 1970s: influences and particularities

Journal:	<i>Journal of Urban History</i>
Manuscript ID	JUH-18-11-128.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Research Article
Keywords:	house squatting, Italy, social housing, Milan, 1970s, struggle for housing, Youth movements - Italy
Abstract:	<p>The article examines the housing occupation movements in Milan in 1969-75, relating them to the restricted supply of cheap housing – a situation that created difficulties for newly arrived immigrant. Housing occupation activists were influenced by the experience of squatting in other European cities, a phenomenon that particularly fascinated the educated young, who participated in the movement, supported by organizations of the radical left. The movement’s political project was to take the class struggle outside the factories, to attack “urban income growth” as a tool of capitalist domination. Compared to other Italian experiences, there was less involvement from the underclass, and the aim of obtaining a house was secondary to the project of maintaining political conflict at a high level. The movement waned in the late 1970s, due to the fact that the revolutionary groups’ drive for political mobilisation no longer coincided with the social housing needs of young people.</p>

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

1

# The housing struggle in Milan in the 1970s: influences and particularities

## Introduction

The illegal occupation of vacant housing, or *squatting*, is a phenomenon that has been noted in several European cities on a cyclical basis, especially in the more intense phases of urbanisation associated with industrial development. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, phases of resurgence of the phenomenon were recorded in many cities, immediately after the Second World War,<sup>1</sup> and then in a number of successive waves between the Sixties and the end of the century. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the occupation of buildings is still a phenomenon present in Europe<sup>2</sup> and one that also affects the whole world, both in developed and undeveloped countries, where levels of *unauthorised habitation* are significant.<sup>3</sup> However, these situations are difficult to compare with one other.<sup>4</sup>

The recurrence of the phenomenon of abusive occupation suggests that squatting is a cyclical and conflictual response to the urgent requirement of having a dwelling place. While this is undoubtedly true, it is not enough to allow us to deduce that all illegal housing occupation, or that any period of recrudescence of this kind of occupation, are expressions of the same form of political project or of the same type of social movement. This article aims to illustrate the specificity of the case study in Milan, in the context of a movement that developed in Italy in the early Seventies, which in turn

2

1  
2 was also influenced by a more general European “phase” of squatting that began a few years  
3  
4  
5 earlier, with the intention of including this Italian experience in the historiographical debate on the  
6  
7  
8 phenomenon of housing occupation. The scale of analysis therefore concerns Milan, its housing  
9  
10  
11 situation in the context of the Italian housing situation in general, the social subjects involved in the  
12  
13  
14 housing struggle and the methods adopted. The temporal aspect focuses on the period 1969-1975,  
15  
16  
17 to illustrate the reception of a form of struggle that was spreading throughout Europe. In this  
18  
19  
20  
21 particular case study, however, there was an originality involved in terms of form and size, often  
22  
23  
24 different from contemporary Italian experiences and from successive phases in the housing  
25  
26  
27 occupation movement. While it is beyond doubt that the phenomenon of illegal building occupation  
28  
29  
30 is endemic in Italy,<sup>5</sup> every period of squatting has its own specific history and particular methods of  
31  
32  
33  
34 action, together with its own specific impact on public opinion.  
35  
36

37 In particular, in Milan, more so than in the other major Italian cities, the housing occupation  
38  
39  
40 movement was able to absorb the influence of the transgressive, communitarian model that  
41  
42  
43 inspired squatting in other northern Europe cities. With this influence, the Milanese movements  
44  
45  
46 soon imbibed a lexicon of “struggle” that was not yet common in Italy, and which mixed the  
47  
48  
49 economic and political critique of urban speculation with the aspiration to build an alternative life –  
50  
51  
52  
53 ideas emanating from the so-called counter-cultures in northern Europe and the USA. The result  
54  
55  
56 was the desire to live in a different way, based on a concept of community rather than the  
57  
58  
59 traditional family home. These were the first manifestations of utopian ideas that would become  
60

3

1  
2 more widely rooted in Italy only in the Eighties; but such notions also represented, in the concrete  
3  
4  
5 experience of struggle, a reason for friction between the young militants and the older occupying  
6  
7  
8 families. The northern Europe connection also, in some cases, gave rise to common experiences  
9  
10  
11 of struggle, especially in Germany.<sup>6</sup> These were experiences that involved a number of Italian militants,  
12  
13  
14 mostly from Milan, as part of a more general interchange of reciprocal influence.<sup>7</sup> It was a link, moreover,  
15  
16 that was facilitated by geographical and social factors: northern European capitals were relatively close, and  
17  
18 they were visited by many bourgeois students and young people, who also played a leading role in the extra-  
19  
20 parliamentary movements in Milan.  
21

22  
23 The frequent European experience of many young Milanese is also linked to particular generational and  
24  
25 social factors, compared to the housing occupation movement in other Italian cities, and in Rome especially.  
26  
27 In Milan, the social composition of the movement included a significant majority of wage-earners with a  
28  
29 guaranteed income, mostly industrial workers, employees of urban service companies and lower middle-  
30  
31 class office workers. More than in other Italian contexts, but similar to the situation in other European cities,  
32  
33 there was a considerable presence of young people. These were mostly males who had recently moved to the  
34  
35 city to work in industry and the tertiary sector, but equally important was the participation of young middle-  
36  
37 class high school and university students, which included a large female component.  
38

39  
40 The sub-proletarian presence, on the other hand, was essentially a minority, especially in relation to the  
41  
42 dynamism of the labour market in the city. In Milan, the relationship between housing demand and supply  
43  
44 (of economic and council housing) was less dramatic than in other large cities, something due above all to  
45  
46 the huge expansion of construction that continued to affect the municipalities in the province. In a city  
47  
48 relatively small in terms of area (about 180 sq. kms), the demographic and social pressure was channelled  
49  
50 into the neighbouring municipalities, each of which constituted an autonomous reality, sometimes covering a  
51  
52 large territorial area, with its own urban and building planning and its own resources to meet the demand for  
53  
54 housing.  
55

56  
57 A further interesting element with regard to the specificity of the Milanese experience involved the role  
58  
59 played in the housing struggle by tenants who had already been assigned council housing: these were mostly  
60  
organized by trade unions and associations created by left-wing parties.

4

Squatting in Milan was not, therefore, an anomalous experience, but it did represent a process that developed its own specific characteristics, which can make interesting reading.

The article, therefore, necessarily describes the most relevant episodes, with the intention of proposing them as elements in a more general debate on housing occupation movements.

### European examples and the first occupations in Milan

The experience of housing occupation in Milan, and more generally in Italy, was part of a period that affected much of Western Europe, and involved shared needs and practices. The first stimulus, of course, was to find accommodation for those who did not have it. Another common element was the spirit of *deconstruction* of society and culture. Occupation was therefore a manifestation of an anti-capitalist approach to habitation – at the same time both an *instrument*, and *objective*, of struggle. A common finding by scholars is also the significant presence of young people amongst both the organizers of squatter movements and the occupants themselves. This was a presence related to the 1968 student rebellion and the activism of the young, educated middle-class.<sup>8</sup> However, youth activism also involved the new generational composition of the working class in the most industrially developed cities. Another common point in the experiences of European squatters was the difficult relations with the parties of the traditional left, which had themselves in previous decades organized protests about lack of housing and also occupied vacant buildings. It was a tension that derived from the libertarian sentiments of the youth

5

1  
2 movements, from their desire to be “independent” from institutional politics, bringing to political  
3  
4  
5 action their own existential needs.<sup>9</sup>  
6  
7

8  
9 There is a great deal of literature regarding the European squatter movements between the 1960s  
10  
11 and the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> In relation to the many experiences studied, only those elements – objectives and  
12  
13  
14 methods – that were adopted as examples by the Italian squatter movement, especially in Milan,  
15  
16  
17  
18 are taken into consideration here.  
19

20  
21 The various European housing occupation manoeuvres were designed to respond to different  
22  
23  
24 needs: to find shelter for evicted people; launch a radical critique of the gentrification of central  
25  
26  
27 districts; fight for the preservation of historic buildings and neighbourhoods; create new ways to  
28  
29  
30 experience community life; and force the authorities – national, and, especially, local – to construct  
31  
32  
33 economic housing for the working classes. These were all features that were also present in the  
34  
35  
36  
37 Milan movement, which, however, more than the other European examples, placed great  
38  
39  
40 emphasis on the ideological side of things. The aim was to try to channel the various initiatives in  
41  
42  
43 the direction of a permanent social mobilisation in the city, in the hope of replicating the experience  
44  
45  
46 of struggle that had characterized the factories in the *autunno caldo* – the “hot autumn” – of 1969.  
47  
48  
49  
50 This often led to an exploitation of initiatives that meant that, with the insistence on urban conflict,  
51  
52  
53 sight was lost of the most immediate objective – providing people with housing.  
54

55  
56 In England, the most lasting movement began in December 1968, with the Squatting Campaign,  
57  
58  
59 promoted by Labour activists and the radical left. The goal was to induce authorities to rent out  
60

6

1  
2 vacant council property, while awaiting the planned demolition and redevelopment of the  
3  
4  
5 neighbourhoods.<sup>11</sup> The main tools of political intervention were legal counselling for the homeless  
6  
7  
8 against eviction and in favour of the assignment of new housing, and protest activity, including the  
9  
10  
11 occupation of parts of vacant buildings. A permanent expression of the movement was the Family  
12  
13  
14 Squatting Advisory Service (FSAS), which became a fixed presence in many suburban districts of  
15  
16  
17  
18 London and later in other English and Welsh cities. Squatting itself was therefore an accessory  
19  
20  
21 practice, which did not trigger a real mass movement; for example, in 1971, at the height of the  
22  
23  
24 campaign, a hundred families were involved in the London occupations. The FSAS also revived  
25  
26  
27 the practice of illegal occupation by other political players. According to some estimates, in the  
28  
29  
30 Greater London Area in the mid-Seventies, there were more than 35,000 illegally occupied  
31  
32  
33  
34 apartments, in addition to several thousand occupants who had legalised their position by reaching  
35  
36  
37 agreements with property owners. The number of occupied buildings rose to almost 50,000 when  
38  
39  
40 those in other English cities were included.<sup>12</sup>

41  
42  
43 Many groups acted independently; their members were above all young people, pertaining to the  
44  
45  
46 bohemian world that animated the countercultural movements in London. Beginning with the  
47  
48  
49 occupation of Piccadilly in 1969, these groups occupied fixed locations in central areas, forming  
50  
51  
52  
53 communes and practicing alternative lifestyles. These in particular were the occupations that  
54  
55  
56 aroused the emulation of young “protesters” in other Western European cities. In the varied  
57  
58  
59 panorama of English squatting, other visions also existed. One of the most radical was that of the  
60

7

1  
2 Marxist student leader Piers Corbyn and his group, who considered the occupation of housing as  
3  
4  
5 an instrument of anti-capitalist struggle; however, they soon abandoned the practice in order to  
6  
7  
8 commit themselves to providing stable political representation for the interests of the “Squatters  
9  
10  
11 and Tenants” of publically-owned property, presenting candidates for local elections.<sup>13</sup> Another  
12  
13  
14 type of protest employed by squatters was the attempt to resist the redevelopment of certain  
15  
16  
17 neighbourhoods, implemented by city authorities with the demolition of old buildings in order to  
18  
19  
20 build offices or luxury homes. One case was Tolmers Square in London, near Euston Station.<sup>14</sup>  
21  
22  
23 Other, different events included the frequent “waves” of short-term occupations in the seaside town  
24  
25  
26 of Brighton that began in the summer of 1969. This was not a permanent political movement, but a  
27  
28  
29 succession of influences from various youth subcultures, with a rapid evolution of political and  
30  
31  
32 existential sensibilities.<sup>15</sup>  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37 Another phenomenon that fascinated and influenced young Italians in the Sixties and Seventies  
38  
39  
40 was the squatting situation in Holland. In particular, in Amsterdam, housing occupation intensified  
41  
42  
43 from 1965-66, mainly involving couples who were too young to be allowed access to public  
44  
45  
46 housing, and this was followed by the intervention of libertarian and counter-cultural groups such  
47  
48  
49 as the Provos. But it was only in 1969-70 that housing shortages and the youthful protest  
50  
51  
52 movement converged to turn squatting into a movement that was able to mobilise mass  
53  
54  
55 demonstrations in the city.<sup>16</sup> Overall, the occupation phenomenon had a major impact, with over  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60 9,000 people involved as inhabitants of occupied homes in Amsterdam alone, and about 50,000



8

1  
2 people throughout the whole of Holland.<sup>17</sup> By the mid-Seventies, however, the mass movement  
3  
4  
5 had run out of steam, even though small groups of young people continued to occupy some  
6  
7  
8 abandoned buildings, either as a strategy to find a home or to create independent spaces for  
9  
10  
11 cultural activities.<sup>18</sup>  
12  
13

14  
15 The Danish squatting experience started up in 1963-65 in Copenhagen, where old, disused private  
16  
17  
18 buildings in the city centre were occupied to form a sort of autonomous community (*Republic*  
19  
20  
21 *Sofiegården*). With the momentum of student protest, in 1968-1971 a radical mass movement  
22  
23  
24 (*Slumstormerbevægelsen*) was formed in Denmark, but it was soon fragmented by ideological  
25  
26  
27 disagreements. The minority, and most ideological wing, Marxist-Leninist in tendency, directed its  
28  
29  
30 activism towards the local districts, establishing grass-roots organizations to defend the rights of  
31  
32  
33 tenants and the quality of life in the suburbs. Others took part in the well-known experience of  
34  
35  
36 Christiania, the self-managing community in central Copenhagen.<sup>19</sup>  
37  
38

39  
40 In Western Germany, squatting (*Hausbesetzerbewegung*) affected many cities, assuming specific  
41  
42  
43 features in each one.<sup>20</sup> Some generalization is still possible: practically all the squatter  
44  
45  
46 organizations were hostile towards capitalism and housing as private consumption as part of their  
47  
48  
49 program,<sup>21</sup> and were in favour of creating autonomous spaces where communal life could flourish.  
50  
51

52  
53 Another significant issue related to the preservation of old buildings. There is the case, for  
54  
55  
56 example, of Frankfurt, where the occupation movement managed to bring together different needs  
57  
58  
59 and expectations and was also able to involve immigrants, Italians especially. In Frankfurt, from  
60

9

1  
2 1970 to 1973, activists banded together to protest against the gentrification of the city centre that  
3  
4  
5 wanted to turn it into a citadel of financial offices, mobilizing against scarcity of housing and high  
6  
7  
8 rents. The occupation of vacant houses, both private and public, involved workers' families, flanked  
9  
10  
11 by a protest movement against rising prices and in favour of the auto-reduction of bills and rents.  
12  
13  
14 The squatter movement put down strong roots in working class neighbourhoods, and, through  
15  
16  
17 bargaining with the local authorities, obtained certain tangible results, such as for example the  
18  
19  
20 introduction of housing cost allowances for urban workers. The Frankfurt movement, however,  
21  
22  
23 failed in the original goal the promoters had set themselves, which was to prevent the  
24  
25  
26 transformation of the town centre into a conglomeration of office blocks. Too many interests were  
27  
28  
29 involved, and the value of those areas too high, for the conservationist intentions of the activists to  
30  
31  
32 be acknowledged. By the mid-Seventies in Frankfurt, the housing occupation movement was over,  
33  
34  
35 and protest was instead focused on issues of high rents and domestic utilities.<sup>22</sup>  
36  
37  
38

39  
40 The first Italian reactions to these new stimuli from Europe took place in Milan in April 1967, when  
41  
42  
43 a few dozen members of the local beatnik culture decided to follow the example of the Dutch  
44  
45  
46 Provos. They rented uncultivated land in the southern suburbs of the town in order to set up a tent  
47  
48  
49 city and create a space for community life. The initiative was not formally illegal, but people of  
50  
51  
52 every political persuasion in Milan were scandalised. The press named the Via Ripamonti  
53  
54  
55 encampment *Barbonia City* (Tramp City) and painted it as a provocation that would undermine  
56  
57  
58 Milan's civil coexistence and decorous lifestyle. In early June, the police destroyed the tent city and  
59  
60

10

1 charged more than 250 participants, thus putting an end to an experience that had for the first time  
2  
3  
4  
5 brought generational conflict to Milan – conflict that was focused mainly on the enormous  
6  
7  
8 difficulties involved in finding recreational spaces and accommodation.<sup>23</sup>  
9

10  
11 The following year Milan became one of the nerve centres of the '68 student uprising.

12  
13 One theme that was at first not particularly emphasised within the context of global protests  
14  
15 relating to university education was the issue of out-of-town students. There were more than  
16  
17  
18 20,000 of them in Milan, but only 2,300 beds available in student lodging-houses, and prices were  
19  
20  
21 high.<sup>24</sup> The private market was inaccessible due to the inflated prices that had followed the surge in  
22  
23  
24 immigration over previous years. The issue of the occupation of buildings that young people could  
25  
26  
27 live in thus suddenly convulsed the student movement. The first real squat of the period in Milan  
28  
29  
30 started on 28 November 1968, when a few hundred out-of-town students occupied the former  
31  
32  
33 Hotel Commercio in the city centre's Piazza Fontana. This was a disused building, owned by the  
34  
35  
36 municipality, that was due to be demolished in order for the area to be redeveloped. Some families  
37  
38  
39 that had recently been evicted from areas in the centre immediately occupied the former hotel, and  
40  
41  
42 were then joined by artists and exponents of the counterculture. The occupants renamed the  
43  
44  
45 building the *Students and Workers' House* and, thanks to the solidarity of the trade union  
46  
47  
48 associations of certain companies involved in the social struggle, restored essential services to  
49  
50  
51 make the edifice habitable. Meetings were held in the communal areas and cultural initiatives and  
52  
53  
54 political debates were promoted in tandem with the students' movement and those fighting for the  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

11

1  
2 rights of social housing tenants and the evicted. The community of the former hotel, supported by  
3  
4  
5 many students in the Faculty of Architecture, developed an in-depth analysis of the municipal  
6  
7  
8 urban planning policy, criticising in particular the plan to expel the lower classes from the centre in  
9  
10  
11 order to make way for offices and luxury shops. Milan's first squat, in other words, immediately  
12  
13  
14 tried to combine the residential requirements of the university students' proletarian faction with the  
15  
16  
17 free expression of the youth community, within the context of a political debate regarding the city's  
18  
19  
20  
21 destiny.

22  
23  
24 Despite the widespread sympathy of members of the City Council, which had a centre-left majority,  
25  
26  
27 the occupation of the Hotel Commercio did not really lead anywhere. It was hampered by frequent  
28  
29  
30 clashes between the occupants' "spontaneist" methods of organization and the aspirations of the  
31  
32  
33 Marxist-Leninist groups, who wanted to turn the former hotel into a stronghold to bring revolution to  
34  
35  
36 the city. After a relentless press campaign, in mid-August 1969 the police forced the occupants out  
37  
38  
39 and the hotel was immediately demolished.

40  
41  
42  
43 From the brief picture given here, it emerges that, between the late 1960s and the early 1970s,  
44  
45  
46 examples of urban struggle occurred throughout Western Europe. The various experiences of  
47  
48  
49 squatting, however, outside the narrow groups of militants who promoted the occupations, lacked  
50  
51  
52 the ability to bring social subjects together in a stable and organized manner. The leap in quality in  
53  
54  
55 this direction came out of the Italian experience at the beginning of the Seventies, which was able  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

12

1  
2 to bring a mass perspective to the housing occupation movement and present a framework for  
3  
4  
5 making demands that could promote social and institutional change.  
6  
7  
8  
9

### 11 12 **The housing crisis in Italy** 13

14  
15  
16 In Italy, the “urban crisis” – the housing crisis and urban inefficiency – exploded as a matter of  
17  
18  
19 political conflict during the period 1968-69 and intensified in the early Seventies.  
20  
21

22  
23 Congestion in the cities, the precarious conditions of housing stock, the inadequacy of services,  
24  
25 the stagnation of investment in the private construction sector and the difficulties of municipal  
26  
27  
28 finances brought social tension around the housing question to the forefront.  
29  
30

31  
32 Private-sector construction had slowed down in the second half of the Sixties, after having been  
33  
34  
35 responsible, in contrast to the rest of Europe, for building the majority of new housing since 1950.<sup>25</sup>  
36  
37

38  
39 This was made possible by a very favourable tax regime. The result was a housing market  
40  
41  
42 primarily aimed at the middle classes, the only ones who could access mortgages to finance the  
43  
44  
45 purchase of houses, or who could afford the rents, which were rising faster than both wages and  
46  
47  
48 the average prices for consumer goods.<sup>26</sup>  
49

50  
51 The public authorities were struggling to participate in the construction of public housing in a  
52  
53  
54 significant way. The difficulties were caused by the lack of success of the housing policies of the  
55  
56  
57 first centre-left national governments, starting with the failure to reform the urban planning act of  
58  
59  
60 1942, mainly due to resistance from building interests (owners and constructors), who were

13

1  
2 opposed to any form of restriction.<sup>27</sup> The legislation enacted actually allowed subdivision of plots by  
3  
4  
5 private individuals even in the absence of detailed urban planning. The new buildings were mostly  
6  
7  
8 located on the outskirts of the city, where land prices were lower, and consequently municipalities  
9  
10  
11 had to borrow in order to pay for new infrastructure and services. An initial attempt at reform,  
12  
13  
14 implemented with law no. 167 in 1962, allowed municipalities to purchase the areas for primary  
15  
16  
17 urbanisation and for the construction of public buildings at preferential prices, but the state funding  
18  
19  
20 allocated for these operations was inadequate. A new provision in 1967 (law no. 765) finally  
21  
22  
23 obliged the municipalities to adopt detailed regulatory plans in accordance with certain national  
24  
25  
26 standards, but the law was suspended for one year, during which several new construction permits  
27  
28  
29 were granted in derogation of any planning.<sup>28</sup>  
30  
31  
32

33  
34 More than twenty national public bodies (railways, post office, pension and welfare funds, etc.)  
35  
36  
37 were involved in the construction of public housing in Italy. In 1963, law no. 60 created GESCAL, a  
38  
39  
40 national body financed through automatic deductions from employees' pay, which invested part of  
41  
42  
43 its assets in financing buildings, or more often in the amortisation of mortgages contracted by other  
44  
45  
46 institutions that constructed "economical" housing; that is, not necessarily destined for the neediest  
47  
48  
49 but rather for the middle classes, who could become homeowners through the rent-to-own process  
50  
51  
52 (deferred sale with monthly payment).<sup>29</sup> However, property constructed through public financing  
53  
54  
55 had a low incidence, which reached its peak around 1961, with 10.3% of the stock, and, according  
56  
57  
58 to the most pessimistic surveys, plummeted to 2.6% in 1971.<sup>30</sup>  
59  
60

14

1  
2 One of GESCAL's functions was to provide financial support for the work of the IACPs (the  
3  
4  
5 Autonomous Institutes of Public Housing), which had been formed at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century  
6  
7  
8 on the initiative of local administrations, in the wake of law no. 254 of 1903. The history of some  
9  
10  
11 IACPs was long and full of achievements, and in the early Seventies there were 102 spread  
12  
13  
14 throughout Italy. In those years, however, IACPs struggled to find the necessary capital to meet the  
15  
16  
17 demand for housing with cheap rents, especially in the large cities. When funding arrived from  
18  
19  
20 GESCAL, the envisaged building specifications had prices that were too low for the construction  
21  
22  
23 market and the IACPs were thus forced to take on further debts to complete the tenders, turning to  
24  
25  
26 the banks and the rather high interest rates that the market imposed.<sup>31</sup> This situation slowed down  
27  
28  
29 building activity, imposed cuts on the maintenance costs of buildings and entailed increased  
30  
31  
32 expenses for tenants. The construction cost of public housing was further burdened by urban  
33  
34  
35 planning expenses: in the Sixties and Seventies the IACPs only had access to the marginal and  
36  
37  
38 peripheral areas of the city, where land was cheaper but where there was a lack of infrastructure  
39  
40  
41 and services, which still had to be built. According to the normal market mechanism, the private  
42  
43  
44 areas adjacent to new plots allocated to public housing also benefited from public investments for  
45  
46  
47 urbanisation, hence these areas increased their value and attracted private investments for new  
48  
49  
50 residential building. The "virtuous" aspect of the market, therefore, expanded the demand and  
51  
52  
53 supported the construction industry, but its collateral effect was to increase the costs of public  
54  
55  
56 housing, occasioning higher rents, and to increase the deficit in the local authorities' balance  
57  
58  
59  
60

15

1  
2 sheets. The reasoning is presented here in a somewhat didactic way, but it is pivotal for an  
3  
4  
5 understanding of the motivations of the anti-speculation battles against “urban income growth”,  
6  
7  
8 which was an important feature for the house occupation movement, and which also permeated  
9  
10  
11 the more cautious intentions of the reformist parties.<sup>32</sup>  
12  
13

14  
15 The cycle of conflict that began in winter 1968-69 was a sudden acceleration of the struggles  
16  
17  
18 against the high rents that had been charged for over a decade, after the abolition of the legal  
19  
20  
21 limits on rents established in the post-war period, and was characterised by the rapid mobilisation  
22  
23  
24 of new social actors and by the practice of new forms of collective action. This transformation  
25  
26  
27 initially occurred within the context of the traditional tenants’ associations. The foremost of these  
28  
29  
30 organisations was UNIA (the National Union of Tenants and Assignees), which was established  
31  
32  
33 nationally in 1964 as a unitary political expression of the trade unions and leading parties of the  
34  
35  
36 left. However, other organisations were present, too. In Milan, for example, there was APICEP (the  
37  
38  
39 Provincial Association of Public Housing Tenants), which organised the tenants of the IACP  
40  
41  
42 houses and was associated with the PCI (Italian Communist Party). There were also spontaneous  
43  
44  
45 committees in the neighbourhoods of the major cities, the result of activism that involved  
46  
47  
48 sympathisers from the parties of the left, social Catholicism, and trade unions: from the mid-Sixties  
49  
50  
51 they endeavoured to act as mediators with the municipal administrations in order to address the  
52  
53  
54 difficulties of life in the city outskirts.  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



16

1  
2 The associations of the tenants that had been allocated public housing had on occasion conducted  
3  
4  
5 protests involving the autoreduction of rent (by as much as 30%) or the suspension of payment of  
6  
7  
8 ancillary expenses. These were mainly demonstrative protests, aimed at inducing the proprietary  
9  
10  
11 body to renegotiate the most adverse situations and improve the quality of services; as a longer-  
12  
13  
14 term goal, the intention was to obtain the tenants' participation in the management of public  
15  
16  
17 housing buildings. The new cycle of struggles took up those same tools again, but also extended  
18  
19  
20 them to private homeowners, and, as one of the forms of pressure against high rents and long  
21  
22  
23 waiting lists for the allocation of public housing, the practice of squatting was also deployed. The  
24  
25  
26 trade union associations called for the symbolic occupation of vacant public buildings as a form of  
27  
28  
29 demonstrative struggle.<sup>33</sup> The outcome of these actions was traditionally identified as a unitary  
30  
31  
32 mobilisation of protest, which took the form of a national strike in support of housing on 19  
33  
34  
35 November 1969, followed by intense parliamentary efforts and union mobilisation to provide a  
36  
37  
38 response to the housing problem.<sup>34</sup>  
39  
40  
41

42  
43 The result was the *House Reform Act* of 1971 (law no. 865), which imposed price controls in the  
44  
45  
46 housing market, effectively initiating public intervention in the sector. The law suppressed – at least  
47  
48  
49 formally – GESCAL, attempting to bring the general planning of public housing to government level  
50  
51  
52 and to organise it operationally at the level of the Regions (which were established in 1970). The  
53  
54  
55 legal instruments were then strengthened to allow the municipalities to expropriate building land at  
56  
57  
58 controlled prices; but clearly this was not done with sufficient caution, because the numerous  
59  
60

17

1  
2 disputes that ensued inevitably led to the municipalities capitulating to private individuals. Law no.  
3  
4  
5 865, furthermore, envisaged the “democratisation” of the management of the IACPs, including  
6  
7  
8 trade union representation on their boards of directors. However, the aspects of the housing law  
9  
10  
11 that had the greatest impact did not become significantly operational until 1981, when more  
12  
13  
14  
15 detailed implementation rules were established and financing started to be made available.<sup>35</sup>  
16  
17

18 From the point of view of the unions and the parliamentary left, law no. 865 was an excellent result,  
19  
20  
21 because it recognised the importance of the home as a “social service”, hence associating it once  
22  
23  
24 more with welfare policies and national economic planning. Thus, in 1972, the tenants’ union UNIA  
25  
26  
27 amended its organisation (the name became SUNIA), and definitively condemned the practice of  
28  
29  
30 illegal occupation, as did the PCI and the PSI (the Italian Socialist Party). The analyses that formed  
31  
32  
33  
34 the basis of these attitudes contained important elements of truth. For the unions and the parties of  
35  
36  
37 the left, the practice of squatting triggered a war among the poor, slowing down as it did the  
38  
39  
40 allocation of public housing. It was also noted that the majority of the operational figures in the  
41  
42  
43 illegal occupation movements belonged to the underclass, and that they expressed no general  
44  
45  
46 political design more complex than that of solving their own housing needs.<sup>36</sup>  
47  
48  
49

50 In effect, the housing problem had led to the spread of the practice of illegal occupations precisely  
51  
52  
53 in the middle in the gestation period of law no. 865. In Rome, in particular, the movement had  
54  
55  
56 taken on mass characteristics, with the apolitical underclass as a dominant presence. In the early  
57  
58  
59 Seventies, 3,000 apartments were illegally occupied in the capital, mostly in outlying areas, and  
60

18

1  
2 thousands of other citizens practiced the “total autoreduction” of their rent. The struggles were led  
3  
4  
5 by a myriad of self-governed committees, often supported by organisations of the extra-  
6  
7  
8 parliamentary left (Lotta Continua-LC, Avanguardia Operaia-AO, and later also Autonomia  
9  
10 Operaia), who, however, could not be called the real political protagonists of a movement that was  
11  
12 largely spontaneous and not always coordinated. The most emblematic outcomes of that period in  
13  
14  
15 Rome were the occupations in the San Basilio district between the winter of 1973 and the tragic  
16  
17  
18 days of 5 to 8 September 1974, when, following evictions by the police, a bloody battle broke out in  
19  
20  
21 the neighbourhood. Shots were fired both by the police and by groups of protesters, leading to the  
22  
23  
24 death of one of the protesters and several casualties.<sup>37</sup>

25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31 The history of the housing occupation movements in Rome would also witness other  
32  
33  
34 manifestations of the problem, now covered in a detailed historiography.<sup>38</sup> Let us, however, turn  
35  
36  
37 our attention to what was occurring in Milan at the same time, in order to illustrate both the  
38  
39  
40 distinctive and autonomous nature of this experience.

#### 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 **Milan: the housing shortage and the social actors involved**

48  
49  
50  
51 Most of the demographic growth in Milan took place between the end of the Fifties and the mid-  
52  
53  
54 Sixties: the population rose from 1.2 million inhabitants to 1.58 (in 1961), and then passed the 1.7  
55  
56  
57 million in 1971. Growth was just as intense throughout the metropolitan area (the province), which  
58  
59  
60 had fewer than 2 million inhabitants in 1951 and over 3 million in 1971.<sup>39</sup> The increase in

19

1  
2 population was accompanied by significant real estate development: in 1951 the city had just over  
3  
4  
5 1 million residential units, which rose to more than 1.5 million in 1961 and to 1.85 million ten years  
6  
7  
8 later. Growth in the entire urban territory was even more striking, rising from 2.1 million in 1961 to  
9  
10  
11 3.1 million in 1971 (a percentage greater than the demographic growth itself).

12  
13  
14  
15 Most of the construction was carried out by the private sector: in cities, by large real estate  
16  
17  
18 companies and in the province mainly by small building firms. Public housing, however, was on  
19  
20  
21 average more active in Milan than in the rest of Italy: at least 15% of the new constructions in the  
22  
23  
24 city were built with public intervention (construction or financing).<sup>40</sup> The main player in Milan public  
25  
26  
27 housing was the IACP, which was managing 415,000 premises in 1970. The majority of these were  
28  
29  
30 built with the construction logic of the self-sufficient neighbourhood, hence located in outlying  
31  
32  
33 areas, which meant that that the association incurred enormous urbanization costs.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore,  
34  
35  
36 in order to build, the IACP was obliged to borrow from the banks, a further item to add to the  
37  
38  
39 burden of the rents.<sup>42</sup>

40  
41  
42  
43 However, the IACP was not able to meet the growing demand for social housing. In the early  
44  
45  
46 Seventies there were 37,000 unprocessed applications for social housing in Milan: these were not  
47  
48  
49 homeless people, but mainly families who were no longer able to afford private-market rents.<sup>43</sup>

50  
51  
52  
53 Almost a fifth of the applicants were still living in lower-class city centre neighbourhoods, without  
54  
55  
56 indoor toilets or effective heating systems, sometimes even without running water. They were the  
57  
58  
59 victims of the gentrification of the city centre, which property speculation had triggered and which  
60

20

1  
2 would be brought to completion over the following decades. There were almost 200,000 privately-  
3  
4  
5 owned premises in the city, left without maintenance and in conditions of extreme dilapidation,  
6  
7  
8 given that their owners wanted to empty them and put them on the market, converted into luxury  
9  
10  
11 homes or tertiary housing. The city centre population actually began to decrease: 5.3% of the  
12  
13 population lived there in 1951, but only 2% in 1971, despite the significant demographic growth.<sup>44</sup>  
14  
15  
16  
17

18 It is extremely difficult to quantify what the overall housing needs in the city and its surrounding  
19  
20  
21 territory were, as the estimates of the time were incompatible with one another and often  
22  
23  
24 ideologically oriented. According to one cautious estimate from ISTAT, in 1971 the demand was for  
25  
26  
27 170-200,000 premises (350-450,000 for the metropolitan area overall); a few years later the urban  
28  
29  
30 planning programme for the Milan area calculated this need at around 550,000 premises, 190,000  
31  
32  
33 of which were needed extremely urgently.<sup>45</sup> The City Council, political parties and city newspapers  
34  
35  
36 were quickly inflamed by the political controversy centred around vacant housing. According to  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
SUNIA, this numbered around 36,000 premises;<sup>46</sup> market prices, however, made balancing supply  
and demand a very difficult matter for the working and lower-middle classes.

A political battle broke out over the numbers. According to Lotta Continua, in the mid-Seventies in  
Milan there were 400,000 workers available to occupy vacant houses. While the figure itself is  
implausible, the calculation is quite an interesting one, attempting as it does to include in the  
housing demands the requests of young people intent on "affirming their independence from the  
family".<sup>47</sup>

21

1  
2 The seriousness of the housing situation had in effect made it difficult to grasp some of the newer  
3  
4  
5 features of the overall demand for housing, created by the evolution of society: above all, with  
6  
7  
8 reference to young people, whose position at the centre of things had been developing ever since  
9  
10  
11 the era of student rebellion. The institution of social housing itself, however, had been conceived  
12  
13  
14 exclusively for families with children. In contrast to West Germany, France and England, studio  
15  
16  
17 flats were not constructed as social housing, and even the private market imposed minimum  
18  
19  
20 dimensions well above European standards and beyond the needs – and the means – of young  
21  
22  
23 couples.<sup>48</sup> Every other non-traditional form of cohabitation – from homosexual families to  
24  
25  
26 communes – were not take into consideration by the projects of the various political forces, not  
27  
28  
29 even those of the extra-parliamentary left, until at least the second half of the Seventies.<sup>49</sup>  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34 It was In Milan that the new wave of housing protest marked more clearly than elsewhere its break  
35  
36  
37 with the past. The most significant innovation did not concern the methods, but rather the social  
38  
39  
40 actors involved, comprising the lower segments of the middle class, highly-unionised and  
41  
42  
43 politicised workers, students, and exponents of alternative cultures. Compared to situations such  
44  
45  
46 as Rome, the participation of the sub-proletariat was less evident. This kind of multi-class  
47  
48  
49 participation, and the dissimilar expectations and cultures involved, also posed new problems for  
50  
51  
52 the squatter movement. In fact, from the point of view of the most politicised factions, the urban  
53  
54  
55 struggle was also conceived as a political laboratory that was an extension of the factory struggle  
56  
57  
58 “within society”. Nevertheless, the dynamics of a socially composite movement, such as the one  
59  
60

22

1  
2 created around squatting, were not the same as those of the factory struggle, involving different  
3  
4  
5 practices and hopes in one specific area, which only sporadically gave rise to the objective  
6  
7  
8 identified by the legendary slogan “Let’s take over the city”.<sup>50</sup>  
9

10  
11 The political flaw of the political squatting movement of Milan in those years lay squarely in its  
12  
13  
14 weak links with the workers’ struggle.<sup>51</sup> While occupations were often carried out with the  
15  
16  
17 involvement of worker activists, the entire movement found itself in difficulty above all in  
18  
19  
20 comprehending the different rhythms of urban social struggle, which were unhampered by a rigid  
21  
22  
23 ideological harness.  
24  
25

26  
27 In short, political squatting was the mass manifestation of differing needs. Many people, especially  
28  
29  
30 among the student population, formed their identities as adults, citizens and militants in  
31  
32  
33 occupations, and they sought an experience of communal life in squatting, in order to feel part of a  
34  
35  
36 group of equals, following a path into politics that was both adventurous and romantic.<sup>52</sup> Together  
37  
38  
39 with these figures, there were members of the proletariat who had lost their homes through eviction  
40  
41  
42 for falling behind on rent, or who could not wait the long periods required before the allocation of  
43  
44  
45 social housing. It was, in any case, a fairly insignificant minority of the needy that engaged in this  
46  
47  
48 radical form of struggle.  
49  
50  
51

52  
53  
54  
55  
56 **From rent strikes to housing occupation**  
57  
58  
59  
60

23

1  
2 From 1970 onwards, the housing occupation struggle in Milan developed above all on the basis of  
3  
4  
5 two different social conditions: social housing tenants and the evicted accommodated in reception  
6  
7  
8 centres. Mobilisation was promoted by militants of the radical left.  
9

10  
11 The tenants' struggle had already been developing for several years in the broader context of the  
12  
13 defence of wages against the erosion caused by the high cost of living. In 1968 in Quarto Oggiaro,  
14  
15 an outlying IACP district populated by nearly 40,000 people, the tenants decided to reject the rent  
16  
17  
18 increase established by the proprietary body and initiated what was then defined for the first time  
19  
20  
21 as a "rent strike". The struggle was implemented in different ways: some tenants decided not to  
22  
23  
24 pay the increase applied, some simply stopped paying, and some groups chose to align their rent  
25  
26  
27 with a symbolic percentage of 10% of the head of the household's monthly wage. The initiative,  
28  
29  
30 which began with the backing of the traditional tenants' associations, was above all demonstrative  
31  
32  
33 in nature; however, it lasted for more than a year and a half and was quite successful, involving  
34  
35  
36 almost 40% of the IACP tenants in Quarto Oggiaro.<sup>53</sup> Then, in 1970, it also spread to other  
37  
38  
39 peripheral districts. Not all of these were predominantly proletarian in composition: in Gallarate  
40  
41  
42 (a zone in the north-west of Milan), for example, the social housing inhabitants were primarily  
43  
44  
45 lower-middle class white-collar workers. Overall, around 18-20% of the tenants of the districts  
46  
47  
48 involved in the struggle practiced some form of rent strike, costing the IACP around 5 billion lire a  
49  
50  
51 year.<sup>54</sup>  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



24

1  
2 The movement expanded further into the working-class belt of the city in 1970-71, where one fifth  
3  
4  
5 of the IACP tenants practiced rent autoreduction.<sup>55</sup> The main artificer of this struggle was the  
6  
7  
8 Unione Inquilini-UI (the Tenants' Union), founded in 1968 and consisting of militants from the  
9  
10  
11 radical left.<sup>56</sup> The UI lacked centralised management, a characteristic that was an attraction  
12  
13  
14 towards its initiatives, but the organisation was not able to exercise effective coordination between  
15  
16  
17 the various neighbourhoods in the struggle, nor to connect the housing struggle with the workers'  
18  
19  
20 initiative in the factories.  
21  
22

23  
24 The practice of the rent strike, meanwhile, extended throughout the city, also taking in some  
25  
26  
27 working class neighbourhoods closer to the centre (Paolo Sarpi, Porta Romana), where it was  
28  
29  
30 used against private landlords, mostly large real estate companies. To extend the struggle further,  
31  
32  
33 some LC activists managed to mobilise a group of homeless families who were housed in  
34  
35  
36 municipal shelters for the evicted, and in September 1970 they occupied a rent-to-own IACP  
37  
38  
39 building in the Gallarate district.<sup>57</sup> The practice of illegal occupations by evicted people was fairly  
40  
41  
42 common, but these were isolated initiatives which sometimes even led to an agreement with the  
43  
44  
45 IACP; this time, the manoeuvre had political intentions, with the ambition of expanding the front in  
46  
47  
48 the housing struggle. The collective occupation in Gallarate only lasted one day and the eviction  
49  
50  
51 led to violent clashes with the police. However, a new front had indeed been opened and its  
52  
53  
54 watchword was the *right* to a home, with several hundred tenants and activists ready to "defend"  
55  
56  
57 the occupations and oppose the police. The occupation in Gallarate was repeated on Christmas  
58  
59  
60

25

1  
2 Eve 1970, with the same outcome: immediate eviction and violent clashes, while the fifteen  
3  
4  
5 occupying families took refuge in the student residence, the *Casa dello Studente*. The ground was  
6  
7  
8 also prepared on a symbolic level, with the linking of the desperate needs of the homeless with  
9  
10  
11 student activism.  
12  
13  
14

15 In January 1971, 25 families of evicted people occupied an IACP building in Via Mac Mahon, in the  
16  
17  
18 north-western Ghisolfa district, a neighbourhood of social housing where construction had begun at  
19  
20  
21 the start of the twentieth century. The occupied house was a building that was not yet complete,  
22  
23  
24 intended for middle-class tenants through the rent-to-own process. In this case, too,  
25  
26  
27 encouragement and support for the occupation had come from young members of LC, and the  
28  
29  
30 latter joined the fray against the police, who were swiftly on the scene. The family heads arrested  
31  
32  
33 in Via Mac Mahon received summary trials and were, unexpectedly, unconditionally acquitted by  
34  
35  
36 the magistrates; the municipality then arranged for social housing apartments to be allocated to  
37  
38  
39 them.<sup>58</sup>  
40  
41  
42

43 The success of the Via Mac Mahon experience induced some sectors of the extra-parliamentary  
44  
45  
46 left to make squatting their main weapon in the urban struggle. In truth, the tenants' associations  
47  
48  
49 were considerably more cautious about a struggle that united the anger of the homeless and the  
50  
51  
52 spotlight-seeking of certain extreme left groups. In Milan, the urgency to obtain a house and the  
53  
54  
55 willingness to resort to radical action involved perhaps a few hundred evicted people who were still  
56  
57  
58 in municipality reception centres. However, it also involved the search for independence of several  
59  
60

26

1  
2 thousand young immigrants, mostly males, who actually had jobs but, as regards accommodation,  
3  
4  
5 could only find very modest lodgings or rooms to rent with 3 or 4 beds crammed into them and  
6  
7  
8 exorbitant rents charged.<sup>59</sup> In this *milieu*, the LC's bold attitude ended up prevailing, and they  
9  
10  
11 assembled a considerable operational force from the avant-garde revolutionary workers'  
12  
13  
14 movements in certain factories (Pirelli, OM, Magneti Marelli, Fargas), together with other groups  
15  
16  
17 from the student movement and the Catholic left (ACLI – the Christian Associations of Italian  
18  
19  
20 Workers), once again raising the level of the conflict with the occupation of Viale Tibaldi, starting on  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25 1 June 1971.

26  
27  
28 It was an experience that would be celebrated in the collective imagination of Milan's protest  
29  
30  
31 movements,<sup>60</sup> and it did, in fact, present some innovative characteristics and conclude with certain  
32  
33  
34 important concession. However, it also led to the tragic death of a child, intoxicated by the gas fired  
35  
36  
37 by police during the eviction.<sup>61</sup> The target of the occupation was a building that had not yet been  
38  
39  
40 completed, located on the ring road but not far from the centre. Built by the IACP in an area where  
41  
42  
43 old social housing had been demolished, it was due to be sold on rent-to-own terms to middle  
44  
45  
46 class tenants. The group of occupants rapidly grew to a total of 75 families; there were families of  
47  
48  
49 militant workers, many young couples with children, and retired elderly people. More than in any  
50  
51  
52 other previous situation of this kind, the social background of the occupants was highly diversified;  
53  
54  
55 also present were dozens of young militants, on hand to provide defence. During the course of the  
56  
57  
58 brief occupation, a series of initiatives also took shape, which aimed to establish the experience on  
59  
60

27

1  
2 a community basis<sup>62</sup>: a medical clinic and a nursery for the children were opened and a communal  
3  
4  
5 canteen was set up. More actively than in the past, support was sought from the neighbourhood  
6  
7  
8 population and above all from the factories in the area, which were still numerous. Eviction,  
9  
10  
11 however, was not long in coming, on 5 June, and the occupants took refuge in the Polytechnic, at  
12  
13  
14 the invitation of the students and the Board of the Faculty of Architecture.<sup>63</sup> They were then also  
15  
16  
17 evicted from this new haven by the police, who launched a military takeover of the university. This  
18  
19  
20  
21 time, it was the ACLI Catholics who took in the occupants, while, in the city, mobilisation reached  
22  
23  
24 its broadest consensus in a mass demonstration in favour of housing rights (12 June). This was  
25  
26  
27 attended by far left, progressive Catholic and trade union organisations (but not by either the PCI  
28  
29  
30 or PSI).<sup>64</sup> The centre-left municipality was forced to respond to the situation, and assigned a house  
31  
32  
33 to all the occupant families at a rent commensurate with the income of the family head (10-15% of  
34  
35  
36 their salary, as requested by the organisations involved in the struggle).  
37  
38

39  
40 However, the housing situation was still critical. In Milan there were two hundred thousand  
41  
42  
43 residents in 57,000 dwellings that were essentially uninhabitable, primarily in run-down areas in the  
44  
45  
46 centre or the old suburbs (the Romana, Ticinese, Padova, Sempione, and Garibaldi districts).<sup>65</sup>  
47  
48  
49 Then there were the young people without families and the many students whose militancy in the  
50  
51  
52 occupation movement had allowed them to develop conditions of community life outside the  
53  
54  
55 parental home or away from their dreary student lodgings.  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

28

1  
2 After Viale Tibaldi, there was a lull in mass occupations; or rather, there were no conspicuous  
3  
4  
5 events, but instead a steady trickle of small, primarily symbolic occupations.<sup>66</sup> The main  
6  
7  
8 organisations of the far left attempted to strengthen their presence in the neighbourhoods, even  
9  
10  
11 participating in the *Consigli di zona* (local councils), decentralized bodies of municipal  
12  
13  
14 administration. These, however, were dominated by the political majority of the municipal council.  
15  
16  
17  
18 On the housing front, the political objective had become the reform of law no. 865/1971 and decree  
19  
20  
21 no. 1035 of 1972, which established the regulations for the allocation of social housing, but which  
22  
23  
24 set the rents on the basis of thresholds that were too high – according to the tenants’ movement –  
25  
26  
27 because the “fair profit” of the IACP was something that continued to be acknowledged, being  
28  
29  
30 given more weight than the “right to housing” of the working classes.<sup>67</sup> And so criticism of the  
31  
32  
33 “urban income growth” returned, finding further expression in the theoretical elaborations of  
34  
35  
36 Architecture students and professors, who challenged the city’s urban planning policy.<sup>68</sup>  
37  
38  
39  
40 The confrontation over housing took on new characteristics in the struggle against the gentrification  
41  
42  
43 of the city centre, creating the conditions for merging with the union struggles, because the process  
44  
45  
46 of “valorisation” of the city centre also involved the closure and demolition of the premises of  
47  
48  
49 certain local companies situated in central areas, whose disused land was now the object of  
50  
51  
52 property speculation. The most emblematic case was that of the centrally-located Garibaldi  
53  
54  
55 district,<sup>69</sup> its mixed social composition comprising families of long-settled proletariat, local artisans  
56  
57  
58 with their workshops, low-income pensioners, young people in makeshift accommodation,  
59  
60

29

1  
2 members of the middle class and intellectuals. The protests against the redevelopment schemes,  
3  
4  
5 implemented by leaving buildings to decay so that they could be demolished and then rebuilt, had  
6  
7  
8 begun in 1969, when they also involved rent strikes, mostly relating to private property companies  
9  
10  
11 that were purchasing the apartment buildings. All the parties represented in the City Council  
12  
13  
14 declared themselves favourable to solutions that would avoid the expulsion of the inhabitants and  
15  
16  
17 called for restoration interventions at the expense of the municipality. However, no incisive action  
18  
19  
20 was taken and the Council of State rejected the municipality's attempts to expropriate the buildings  
21  
22  
23 on Corso Garibaldi in order to commence redevelopment.<sup>70</sup> Then, in 1972, construction sites for  
24  
25  
26 the underground railway were opened in the neighbourhood, making several interventions and  
27  
28  
29 some demolitions a matter of urgency. Faced with this perspective, a new front was opened in the  
30  
31  
32 struggle, adopting an explicitly anti-capitalist orientation and based on the refusal of the very  
33  
34  
35 concept of urban regeneration.<sup>71</sup> The solution proposed was self-management of the  
36  
37  
38 neighbourhood by the inhabitants, and the main tool was summarised in the slogan: "proletarian  
39  
40  
41 rent = 10% of wage", to oblige the owners to carry out the necessary renovations. It was an  
42  
43  
44 example of a struggle to preserve the original features of an old neighbourhood, something that  
45  
46  
47 until that moment had not been of interest to the Milan housing movement. Even though far from  
48  
49  
50 the revolutionary projects of those years, in the long run the results were not insignificant: starting  
51  
52  
53 from 1981, the municipality's agreements with the building companies and large real estate owners  
54  
55  
56 made it possible to launch the redevelopment of the district.<sup>72</sup> Thus, for a few decades, the  
57  
58  
59  
60

30

1  
2 disintegration of the variegated social *milieu* of the Garibaldi district slowed down; despite this, by  
3  
4  
5 the end of the century, it had lost all the characteristics of a working-class settlement.  
6  
7

8 In general, the Milan housing movement was never really able to activate conservationist  
9  
10  
11 struggles as a practice in historic neighbourhoods. The revolutionary left organisations, which  
12  
13  
14 gradually abandoned the “take over the city” slogan, tended instead to consider the occupation of  
15  
16  
17 buildings as an exemplary act, rather than an operation that was actually capable of reaching  
18  
19  
20 lasting objectives, if not in terms of mobilisation. On the other hand, the UI did not seem able to link  
21  
22  
23 its occupations to broader mobilisation involving entire neighbourhoods, which had socially mixed  
24  
25  
26 compositions. In short, it was not possible to combine the requirements of the “needy” elements  
27  
28  
29 who were in search of a home with the difficulties of those who had homes, but in run-down  
30  
31  
32 buildings and neighbourhoods, or with the various protest initiatives that continued to flourish in  
33  
34  
35 local districts around themes relating to quality of life (green spaces, services, etc.). Every  
36  
37  
38 demonstrative action and every activity involving the neighbourhoods in the struggle required the  
39  
40  
41 constant presence of professional activists, which in turn triggered rivalries between the various far  
42  
43  
44 left groups; it was a situation that led that to a reduction in occupations as an instrument of  
45  
46  
47 struggle.  
48  
49  
50  
51

52  
53 In the spring of 1974, a new impulse in the occupation movement began to concern itself with the  
54  
55  
56 large number of vacant apartments (there were more than 35,000 in the city).<sup>73</sup> In March, a  
57  
58  
59 committee of aspiring public housing recipients – approximately 650 families – supported by the  
60

31

1  
2 main extra-parliamentary left and ACLI organisations, occupied a building complex in Via Marx in  
3  
4  
5 the western suburb of Baggio. The condominiums, totalling 1,100 apartments, had been built for  
6  
7  
8 the managers and employees of large public companies; but allocations were very slow, and the  
9  
10  
11 criteria involved rather questionable.<sup>74</sup> The aim was to keep attention focused on the delays in  
12  
13  
14 social housing policy and to bring the “anger of the workers” back into the city at a moment when  
15  
16  
17 conflict in the city factories was at a low ebb.<sup>75</sup> Several of the family heads of the occupants were  
18  
19  
20 employed by the companies and organisations to which the allocations were due,<sup>76</sup> and many  
21  
22  
23 others were militant workers in large factories in Milan. This social composition resulted in more  
24  
25  
26 careful management of the movement, at least in its intentions. The organising committee  
27  
28  
29 maintained contacts with the factory councils of several companies, obtaining their solidarity and  
30  
31  
32 support for the protest marches that were organised in the city centre throughout the spring.  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37 There were too many occupying families for the apartments that were already habitable, and to  
38  
39  
40 avoid obstructing the construction site, causing interruption to the works and a freeze on the wages  
41  
42  
43 of construction workers, the committee also identified another objective. On 27 March, other  
44  
45  
46 apartment blocks were occupied in Via Cilea, in the Gallarate district. The complex, of around  
47  
48  
49 500 homes, had (almost) been completed by the private company Monte Amiata, which had  
50  
51  
52 obtained building permits from the municipality with a mandate to build affordable housing. The  
53  
54  
55 construction, planned primarily by the architect Carlo Aymonino, a well-known professional and  
56  
57  
58 member of the PCI, had none of the traditional features of social housing.<sup>77</sup> Rather than the  
59  
60



32

1  
2 achievement of a new vision of this kind of habitation, in the occupants' opinion it was a matter of  
3  
4  
5 speculation – the construction, in other words, of luxury apartment blocks in an area restricted to  
6  
7  
8 cheap housing. A group of occupants also presented a complaint to the judiciary in relation to this  
9  
10  
11 situation,<sup>78</sup> the manifestation of one of the multiple currents involved in the occupation, intended as  
12  
13  
14 it was to accompany demonstrative action with legal initiatives. A further element was the intention  
15  
16  
17 to make use of union support to negotiate with the municipality for the allocation of social housing  
18  
19  
20 to the occupants. The large group of young people supporting the occupation, however, seemed  
21  
22  
23 more intent on coming to blows with the police. The occupation committee, organised with  
24  
25  
26 delegates from each staircase and each building, took all these sensitivities into account and tried  
27  
28  
29 to work out a synthesis<sup>79</sup> – a difficult operation that paralysed every other initiative to link the  
30  
31  
32 occupation together with the neighbourhood, where many social protest groups were active.<sup>80</sup>  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37 However, on 4 April, the police evicted the occupants from the complex in Via Marx; no major  
38  
39  
40 incidents were reported, given that most of the occupants already intended to move to Via Cilea. In  
41  
42  
43 the Gallarate district as a whole, though, the number of occupying families decreased over the  
44  
45  
46 following weeks, when it emerged that there could be no satisfactory solution to the struggle. On 2  
47  
48  
49 May, with a substantial deployment of police forces, the Via Cilea complex was cleared; the  
50  
51  
52 eviction marked the de facto end of the mass movement.<sup>81</sup>  
53  
54  
55  
56 The most significant response of the municipal institutions to these new episodes of occupations  
57  
58  
59 with mass characteristics came a year later. On 29 April 1975, in its final hearing before the  
60

33

elections, the City Council approved the “Velluto Plan”, named after the city planning councillor.

The plan aimed to improve infrastructure in the outlying districts and to make available affordable

housing with 80,000 dwellings, in particular through the refurbishment of run-down buildings. This

was an important decision; but its achievement would also turn out to be a very troubled process.<sup>82</sup>

This new period of municipal interventionism was certainly influenced by the social pressure of

housing occupation, even though many of the participants in the movement had nurtured other

ambitions of social transformation.

### **The conclusion of a cycle (and new scenarios)**

This article has illustrated the circulation within Europe and the reception in Italy of housing

occupation as a form of struggle adaptable to different circumstances and different political

objectives. In Milan, the spread of this practice in the early Seventies was promoted by the need

for non-traditional dwellings, something that mainly interested the younger generation influenced

by student protest. While the presence of traditional families was significant, it was much less

numerous than in Rome. The families constituted above all the “mass of manoeuvre” of the

occupation movement, whose objectives were chosen with little attention to the occupants' needs,

but rather to demonstrate the vitality and mobilisation capacity of the social movement. Yet, the

mass dimension that the occupations assumed was made possible by the scarcity of rental

housing for the most recent influx of immigrants, and also by the form of the urban real estate

34

1  
2 market which, due to the very high prices, made it difficult for single-income working-class families  
3  
4  
5 and the lower segments of the middle classes to access housing.  
6  
7

8 The practice of squatting was deployed in many directions, following the traditions of housing  
9  
10  
11 occupation in other European cities. More often than in other situations in Italy, extra-parliamentary  
12  
13  
14  
15 left-wing organizations firmly committed themselves to these struggles, sometimes even in  
16  
17  
18 competition with one another, as they sought hegemony over the “movement”, which was showing  
19  
20  
21 signs of weakening within the factories.  
22  
23

24 The period of squatting described here achieved certain important contingent results in Milan, such  
25  
26  
27 as agreements for granting public housing to occupants, and also results at an institutional level,  
28  
29  
30 with the active commitment of the municipal administration and the development of social  
31  
32  
33 participation in public housing neighbourhoods. The revolutionary aspect was a failure, however,  
34  
35  
36 despite being long fuelled by the ideological rhetoric of left-wing groups. The periodization of the  
37  
38  
39 cycles of struggle was once again marked by the economic situation.  
40  
41  
42

43 From the mid-Seventies, there was less conflict in the factories,<sup>83</sup> this being the main point of  
44  
45  
46 reference for every extreme left initiative in the city. The new economic phase reduced immigration  
47  
48  
49 to Milan and thus reduced pressure on the real estate market of cheap housing, which became  
50  
51  
52 sufficient to respond to lower middle class demand. This particular social segment therefore lost all  
53  
54  
55 interest in the housing struggle.<sup>84</sup>  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

35

1  
2 Finally, the Milanese squatting period failed to establish a long-lasting recognition of the needs of  
3  
4  
5 young people.<sup>85</sup> A separation between the oligarchic strategies of the organizing groups of the  
6  
7  
8 housing occupations and young people, who constituted the main operational mass, was a  
9  
10  
11 phenomenon common to other European situations; but it was less evident in Rome, where there  
12  
13  
14 was a considerable underclass base – a base that had dramatic requirements for survival and that  
15  
16  
17  
18 was homeless.  
19

20  
21 In Milan, the housing issue gradually returned into the hands of the trade union organisations of  
22  
23  
24 tenants assigned to public housing, who ended up incorporating certain instances of the  
25  
26  
27 occupation period, proposing their own (restrictive) interpretation of rent commensurate with  
28  
29  
30 income.<sup>86</sup>  
31  
32

33  
34 Squatting did not disappear as a form of struggle, but its characteristics and ambitions altered;  
35  
36  
37 essentially, it became more fragmented, but more widespread, managing to keep social alarm high  
38  
39  
40 without making possible meaningful steps forward in the political movement that supported it. The  
41  
42  
43 phenomenon still awaits more precise quantification, which in those years not even the police were  
44  
45  
46 able to provide.<sup>87</sup> In most cases, only a few apartments were occupied, mainly by young people.  
47  
48

49  
50 The areas affected were those bordering on the centre, in run-down buildings that had been  
51  
52  
53 abandoned by their tenants for this reason. When the occupation seemed to stabilize – in the wake  
54  
55  
56 of negotiations with the owner of the building – the squatters' community life began with a basic  
57  
58  
59 renovation of the apartments, attempting above all to consolidate the privacy aspect.  
60

36

1  
2 Occupations were increasingly rarely connected with the extreme left organisations that grew out  
3  
4  
5 of '68; and fewer attempts were made to establish links with the struggle in the factories. This  
6  
7  
8 *proletariato giovanile* (young proletariat),<sup>88</sup> which still occupied vacant premises in the second half  
9  
10  
11 of the Seventies, acted above all in order to find themselves a dwelling place within the context of  
12  
13  
14 movements produced by alternative existential requirements: generational rebellion, feminism,  
15  
16  
17 ecology, anti-consumerism, the arts and, for some, the drug culture. Their intention was to  
18  
19  
20  
21 intervene with regard to these issues in terms of the problems of the neighbourhoods,<sup>89</sup> thus  
22  
23  
24 moving into the spaces that the parliamentary left had deserted and that were also gradually  
25  
26  
27 abandoned by the revolutionary left. This was a brief, convulsive period, which re-elaborated, from  
28  
29  
30 an exclusively youthful point of view, the preceding period of struggle involving housing occupation.  
31  
32  
33  
34 It marked the transition towards the longer-lasting era of the spread of occupied social centres that  
35  
36  
37 would begin at the end of the Seventies.<sup>90</sup>  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> To limit ourselves to the best-studied examples in Great Britain and France, see: James Hinton, "Self-Help and Socialism: the Squatters' Movement of 1946," *History Workshop Journal* 25 (1988), 100-126; Charles Johnstone, "Housing and class struggle in post-war Glasgow," in Michael Lavalette and Gerry Mooney, eds., *Class struggle and social welfare* (London, 2000), 139-154; Bruno Duriez and Michel Chauvière, eds., *La bataille des squatters et l'invention du droit au logement, 1945-1955* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, 1992); Rosemary Wakeman, "Reconstruction and the Self-Help Housing Movement: The French Experience," *Housing Studies* 14 (1999), 355-366; Minayo Nasiali, "Citizens, Squatters, and Asocials: The Right to Housing and the Politics of Difference in Post-Liberation France," *American Historical Review* 119 (2014) 434-459.

<sup>2</sup> Claudio Cattaneo and Miguel A. Martinez, eds., *The Squatters' Movement in Europe: Commons and Autonomy as Alternatives to Capitalism* (London, 2014); Pierpaolo Mudu and Sutapa Chattopadhyay, eds., *Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy* (Abington, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> See Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, a New Urban World* (New York, 2006); Felipe Hernández, Peter Kellett and Lea K. Allen, eds., *Rethinking the Informal City* (New York, 2010); UN-HABITAT, *World Cities Report 2016. Urbanization and Development. Emerging Futures* (Nairobi, 2016) (<http://wcr.unhabitat.org/main-report/>; last access July 2018).

<sup>4</sup> See for example Fraia Anders, Alexander Sedlmaier, eds., *Public Goods versus Economic Interest. Global Perspectives on the History of Squatting* (London, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Cesare Di Felicianantonio, "Spaces of the Expelled as Spaces of the Urban Commons? Analysing the Re-emergence of Squatting Initiatives in Rome," *International Journal of Urban and regional Research* 41 (2017), 708-725.

<sup>6</sup> See Giuseppe Zambon, *Francoforte è il nostro futuro. Emigrazione e lotta per la casa in Germania* (Milan, 1978); David Templin, *Freizeit ohne Kontrollen: Die Jugendzentrumsbewegung in der Bundesrepublik der 1970er Jahre* (Göttingen, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> See for example: Manus McGrogan, "Vive le Révolution and the Example of Lotta Continua: The Circulation of Ideas and Practices Between the Left Militant Worlds of France and Italy Following May '68," *Modern & Contemporary France* 18/3 (2010), 309-328; Alexander Sedlmaier, *Consumption and violence: Radical protest in Cold-war West Germany* (Ann Arbor - MI, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Holger Nehring, "Generation, Modernity and the Making of Contemporary History: Responses in West European Protest Movements Around 1968," in Anna von der Goltz, ed., *Talking 'bout my generation: Conflicts of Generation Building and Europe's "1968"* (Göttingen, 2011), 73-95.

<sup>9</sup> See Donatella della Porta and Dieter Rucht, "Left-libertarian movements in context: a comparison of Italy and West Germany, 1965-1990," in Craig J. Jenkins and Bert Klandermans, eds., *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements* (London, 1995), 229-272; George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Edinburgh, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> For a comparative perspective see: Miguel A. Martínez López, "The squatters' movement in Europe: a durable struggle for social autonomy in urban politics," *Antipode* 45 (2012), 866-887; Hans Pruijt, "The logic of urban squatting," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37 (2013), 19-45; Bart van Der Steen, Ask Katzeff, and Leendert van Hoogenhuijze, eds., *The City is ours. Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from 1970s to the Present* (Oakland-CA, 2014); Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen, eds., *A European Revolt: European perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s*

(Basingstoke, 2016); Alexander Vasudevan, *The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting* (London, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> See Ron Bailey, *The Squatters* (Harmondsworth, 1973); Kesia Reeve, "Squatting Since 1945: The Enduring Relevance of Material Needs," in Peter Somerville, Nigel Sprigings, eds., *Housing and Social Policy: Contemporary Themes and Critical Perspectives* (Abingdon, 2005), 197-217.

<sup>12</sup> See E.T.C. Dee, "The Right to Decent Housing and a Whole Lot More Besides: Examining the Modern English Squatters' Movement," in SqEK, Claudio Cattaneo and Miguel Martinez, eds., *The Squatters' Movement in Europe: Commons and Autonomy to Capitalism* (London, 2014), 87-88; John Davis, "The Most Fun I've Ever Had?", Squatting in England in the 1970s," in Anders and Sedlmaier, eds., *Public Goods*, cit., 238.

<sup>13</sup> See Quintin Bradley, *The Tenants' Movement: Resident Involvement, Community Action and the Contentious Politics for Housing* (New York, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> The battle over the district opened in 1973, coming to an end a few years later with the defeat of the occupants' proposals to control the redevelopment of the area. See Nick Wates, *The battle for Tolmers Square*, 1st. ed. 1976 (Abingdon, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> See Nick Wates and Christian Wolmar, *Squatting: The Real Story* (London, 1980); Needle Collective and the Bash Street Kids, "Ebb and Flow: Autonomy and Squatting in Brighton, 1973-2012," in van Der Steen, Katzeff, and van Hoogenhuijze, eds., *The City is ours*, cit., 153-178.

<sup>16</sup> See Hans Pruijt, *The power of the magic key: The scalability of squatting in the Netherlands and United States*, in SqEK, Cattaneo and Martinez, eds., *The Squatters' Movement in Europe*, cit. 110-120; Lynn Owens, *Cracking under Pressure: Narrating the Decline of the Amsterdam Squatters' Movement. [Solidarity and Identity.]* (Amsterdam, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Eric Duivenvoorden, *Een voet tussen de deur. Geschiedenis van de kraakbeweging 1964-1999*, Amsterdam, Arbeiderspers, 2000 ([www.iisg.nl/staatsarchief/publicaties](http://www.iisg.nl/staatsarchief/publicaties); last access July 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Hugo Priemus, "Squatters in Amsterdam: Urban social movement, urban managers or something else?," *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research* 7(1983) 417-427.

<sup>19</sup> See Håkan Thörn, Cathrin Wasshede and Tomas Nilson, eds., *Space for Urban Alternatives? Christiania 1971-2011* (Vilnius, 2011) (<https://gupea.ub.gu.se>; last access July 2018).

<sup>20</sup> See Johannes Schütte, *Revolte und Verweigerung. Zur Politik und Sozialpsychologie der Spontibewegung*, Giessen, Focus-Verlag, 1980. With regard to Berlin, another main area of protest, not dealt with here: Belinda Davis, *The city as theater of protest: West Berlin and West Germany*, in Gyan Prakash, Kevin M. Krause, eds., *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life* (Princeton - NJ, 2008), 247-274; Alexander Vasudevan, "Dramaturgies of dissent: the spatial politics of squatting in Berlin, 1968," *Social & Cultural Geography* 12 (2011), 283-303.

<sup>21</sup> Fraia Anders and Alexander Sedlmaier, "Squatting means to destroy the capitalist plan in the urban quarters': Spontis, Autonomists and the Struggle over Public Commodities (1970-1983)," in Martin Baumeister, Bruno Bonomo and Dieter Schott, eds., *Cities contested. Urban politics, Heritage, and Social Movements in Italy and West Germany in the 1970s* (Frankfurt-on-Maine, 2017), 277-300.

<sup>22</sup> We will not dwell on other experiences which have been less studied; there are some brief historical references to occupations in the early Seventies in Greece and Vienna in van Der Steen, Katzeff, and van Hoogenhuijze, eds., *The City is ours*, cit., 63-94, 255-276.

<sup>23</sup> See John N. Martin and Primo Moroni, *La luna sotto casa. Milano tra rivolta esistenziale e movimenti politici* (Milan, 2007), 121-127.

<sup>24</sup> G. Natale, "L'occupazione dell'Hotel Commercio a Milano," *Quaderni Piacentini* 1969, no. 37, 109-114.

<sup>25</sup> The share of public investment in housing in Italy in the Fifties was, on average, 15%, dropping to an average of 7% in the Sixties. In the period 1961-65 in West Germany, the incidence of public spending on house construction was 27%, in France 32%, in Great Britain 40%, in the Netherlands 42%, in Austria 45%,

and in Sweden 58%; Giorgio Ruffolo, *Riforme e controriforme* (Rome, 1975), 52. See also F. Indovina, "La produzione di case per abitazione nel processo economico," in Id., ed., *Lo spreco edilizio* (Padua, 1972), 63-102; Roelof Verhage, *Local Policy for Housing Development: European Experiences* (Abingdon, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> "Risparmio e struttura della ricchezza delle famiglie italiane nel 1969," in Banca d'Italia, *Bollettino* 26 (1971) ([https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/indagine-famiglie/bil-am1969/Indagine\\_sulle\\_famiglie\\_sul\\_1969.pdf](https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/indagine-famiglie/bil-am1969/Indagine_sulle_famiglie_sul_1969.pdf); last access July 2018).

<sup>27</sup> See Franco Ferraresi and Antonio Tosi, "Crisi della città e politica urbana," in Luigi Graziano and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *La crisi italiana, 2, Sistema politico e istituzioni* (Turin, 1978), 559-605; Federico Oliva, "L'uso del suolo: scarsità indotta e rendita," in Fabrizio Barca, ed., *Storia del capitalismo italiano dal dopoguerra a oggi* (Rome, 1997), 545-577.

<sup>28</sup> See Alfredo Viganò, Sergio Graziosi and Mario Ganino, "Milano Vendesi. Vent'anni di malgoverno urbanistico della città," *Relazioni sociali. Rivista mensile di critica politica economia e cultura* 10 (1970), 9-107; Enrico Berbenni, "La grande espansione: dal primo al secondo ciclo edilizio," *Storia urbana* 38/148 (2015), 103-150.

<sup>29</sup> Law 60 put an end to the experience of the INA-Casa programme, enacted by law no. 54 of 1949 with the aim of supporting employment and constructing affordable houses. The financing of GESCAL-Gestione Case per i Lavoratori (Management of Houses for Workers) was guaranteed by a tax of 0.35% on all employees' incomes, and of 0.70% of the amount paid by the employer; the tax was only abolished in 1998.

<sup>30</sup> The estimate is by Paolo Nardi, Vincenzo Pontillo, Carlo Tresoldi, *Il finanziamento degli investimenti in abitazioni tramite gli istituti di credito speciale* (Rome, 1975). At the end of the Sixties, Italy and Belgium (4.9%) were in last place among EEC countries for the financing of public housing, behind West Germany with 8.6%, the Netherlands with 9.7% and France with 8.2%, all countries in which a decrease in public investments had been noted in that period; see Renzo Stefanelli, "L'intervento pubblico. Confronti internazionali," in Indovina, ed., *Lo spreco edilizio*, cit., 147-161.

<sup>31</sup> See the case study: Enrico Berbenni, "Finanziare l'edilizia. Percezioni, progetti e realtà nella Lombardia del miracolo economico," *Storia urbana* 38/152-3 (2015), 139-165.

<sup>32</sup> See for example Giovanni Cavallera, Ugo Intini and Emanuele Tortoreto, *Italiani senza casa* (Milan, 1971).

<sup>33</sup> See [SUNIA], "Bozza di tesi per l'assemblea nazionale costitutiva dell'organizzazione unificata degli inquilini del settore pubblico e privato," [1972], mimeographed in the ISEC Foundation - Sesto San Giovanni (henceforth only ISEC), Archivio della Federazione milanese del PCI (AFMPci), Commissione casa e territorio, folder 197, file 6; Yann Collanges, Pierre G. Randal, *Les Autoréductions. Grèves d'usagers et luttes de classes* (Paris, 1976), 53-57.

<sup>34</sup> See Stefania Potenza, "Riforma della casa e movimento sindacale," in Indovina, ed., *Lo spreco edilizio*, cit., 252-303.

<sup>35</sup> The operative instrument was resolution no. 236 of 19 November 1981 of the Interministerial Committee for Economic Planning - CIP; the first financing of the law no. 865 had been pre-arranged by law no. 457 of 1978, which established the *Piano decennale per edilizia residenziale pubblica*.

<sup>36</sup> Virgilio Vercelloni, "Intervista collettiva su: l'utenza della casa," *Mensile d'informazione degli architetti lombardi* 1978, no. 6; see also ISEC, AFMPci, Commissione casa e territorio, folder 202, file 59.

<sup>37</sup> On San Basilio, see: Massimo Sestili, "Sotto un cielo di piombo. La lotta per la casa in una borgata romana. San Basilio settembre 1974," *Historia magistra, Rivista di storia critica* 1 (2009), 63-81; Gian Giacomo Fusco, *Ai margini di Roma capitale. Lo sviluppo storico delle periferie: San Basilio come caso di studio* (Rome, 2013). For a general outlook, see Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni ottanta* (Rome, 2003), 487-488.

<sup>38</sup> See: Luciano Villani, "The struggle for housing in Rome. Contexts, Protagonists and Practices of a Social Urban Conflict," in Baumeister, Bonomo and Schott, eds., *Cities contested*, cit., 321-345; Maurizio Marcelloni et al., *Lotte urbane e crisi della società industriale: l'esperienza italiana* (Rome, 1981); Aldo



Tozzetti, *La casa e non solo. Lotte popolari a Roma e in Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi* (Rome, 1989); Mathias Heigl, *Rom in Aufruhr: Soziale Bewegungen im Italien der 1970er Jahre* (Bielefeld, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Official data taken from ISTAT, *General population census, ad annum*; rounded figures.

<sup>40</sup> See Sergio D'Agostino, "La residenza nell'area metropolitana milanese: evoluzione dal 1960 ad oggi e tendenze in atto", typescript (1982), in ISEC, AFMPci, Commissione casa e territorio, folder 203, file 68.

<sup>41</sup> Valeria Erba, "La programmazione edilizia e pianificazione degli interventi di edilizia popolare in rapporto allo sviluppo urbanistico di Milano," in Maurizio Boriani, et al., *La costruzione della Milano moderna. Casa e servizi in un secolo di storia cittadina* (Milan, 1982), 297-338.

<sup>42</sup> On the "rent jungle" in Milan, see the documents and time series collected in July 1980 by Milan city council in ISEC, AFMPci, Commissione casa e territorio, folder 199, file 11.

<sup>43</sup> Data gathered by the IACP office of statistics referring to June 1972, in ISEC, AFMPci, Commissione casa e territorio, folder 198, file 9.

<sup>44</sup> Data referring to the "circle of the Navigli canals"; Alessandro Buzzi-Donato, "Struttura demografica e residenziale di Milano nei dati dell'XI Censimento generale della popolazione," *Quaderni di documentazione e studio del Servizio statistico del Comune di Milano*, 5 September 1975, 11-204.

<sup>45</sup> Data in ISEC, AFMPci, Commissione casa e territorio, folder 132, file 18

<sup>46</sup> Leaflets of SUNIA, 16 September 1976, in ISEC, AFMPci, Commissione casa e territorio, folder 197, file 6; see also "Perdura la crisi dell'edilizia abitativa," *Corriere della sera*, 16 June 1973.

<sup>47</sup> Speech by Mauro Bacchini, in "Atti dell'Assemblea nazionale di Lotta continua (Roma, 26-27-28 luglio 1976)", in *Lotta Continua - Bollettino congressuale*, 1976, no. 199.

<sup>48</sup> See the speech by Virgilio Vercelloni at the conference *Milano e la città europea: dal piano ai progetti di attuazione*, Milan 8-9 February 1980, typescript in ISEC, AFMPci, Commissione casa e territorio, folder 197, file 7. In essence, a policy for social housing for young people should have provided for the construction of studio flats below 45 m<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> The issue of foreign immigrants only arose in the early 1980s, when there were already almost fifty thousand immigrants from the "Third World" in Milan; see Giorgio Paolucci, "Aprire anche agli stranieri le case IACP," *Corriere della sera*, 10 October 1982). The unions also began to press for the allocation of social housing to the *families* of immigrants; see ISEC, AFMPci, Commissione casa e territorio, folder 201, file 41.

<sup>50</sup> "Prendiamoci la città," *Lotta Continua*, 12 November 1970. An English version of the LC project in Ernest Dowson, "Take Over the City," in *Working Class Struggles in Italy*, a monographic issue of *Radical America* 7 (1973), 79-112.

<sup>51</sup> "Fabbrica e quartiere," *Giornale dell'Unione Inquilini*, December 1970.

<sup>52</sup> Indications in this direction in Alberto Melucci, *L'invenzione del presente. Movimenti sociali nelle società complesse* (Bologna, 1991).

<sup>53</sup> Andreina Daolio, ed., *Le lotte per la casa in Italia: Milano, Torino, Roma, Napoli* (Milan, 1974), 40.

<sup>54</sup> Massimo Todisco, "Le lotte sociali a Milano," *Quaderni Piacentini*, 1974, no. 52, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Daolio, ed., *Le lotte per la casa in Italia*, cit., 47, 65; according to the IACP, arrears of IACP tenants in Milan in 1968 amounted to 9.72%, rising to 21% in 1971, with very pronounced peaks in predominantly proletarian districts (for example: Tessera 57.8%, Forze Armate 47.6%,).

<sup>56</sup> Francesco Di Ciaccia, *La condizione urbana. Storia dell'Unione inquilini* (Milan, 1974).

<sup>57</sup> See "La casa si prende l'affitto non si paga," *Lotta Continua*, 1 October 1970.

<sup>58</sup> See "Alloggi agli sfrattati," *Corriere della sera*, 26 January 1971; "La guerra di via Mac Mahon," *Giornale dell'Unione Inquilini*, May-June 1971.

<sup>59</sup> "Sulla distruzione dei ghetti milanesi," *Giornale dell'Unione Inquilini*, November-December 1971.

<sup>60</sup> Many songs were composed recalling this episode, and sung in marches; including: *Via Tibaldi*, by Franco Trincale (1971); *Tarantella di via T.* by Canzoniere del proletariato (1971); and *La ballata di via T.*, by Anton Virgilio Savona (1972); see <https://www.antiwarsons.org/index.php?lang=it> (last access July 2018)

<sup>61</sup> See: “Quaranta famiglie occupano un edificio,” *Il Giorno*, 2 June 1971; “L’organizzazione è la forza della lotta,” *Lotta Continua*, 11 June 1971; “L’occupazione proletaria di via Tibaldi,” *Giornale dell’Unione Inquilini*, July-August 1971.

<sup>62</sup> See Lea Melandri, “Via Tibaldi e il comunismo,” *L’erba Voglio*, September 1971, 7-11.

<sup>63</sup> Fiorella Vanini, ed., *La rivoluzione culturale. La Facoltà di architettura del Politecnico di Milano 1963-1974* (Milan, 2009), 16-17, 45-46, 64-65.

<sup>64</sup> “In corteo dal Politecnico al Castello gli estremisti dei gruppi extraparlamentari,” *Corriere della sera*, 13 June 1971.

<sup>65</sup> Todisco, *Le lotte sociali a Milano*, cit., 82.

<sup>66</sup> See for example “Cento famiglie danno battaglia,” *Giornale dell’Unione Inquilini*, March-April 1972.

<sup>67</sup> “La nostra valutazione politica sugli obiettivi del SUNIA,” *Giornale dell’Unione Inquilini*, June 1973.

<sup>68</sup> A very influential book in those years was Alain Lipietz, *Le tribut foncier urbain. Circulation du capital et propriété foncière dans la production du cadre bâti* (Paris, 1974).

<sup>69</sup> Andreina Daolio, “Appendice: Milano tre anni di lotta nei quartieri,” in Indovina, ed., *Lo spreco edilizio*, cit., 212-221; Mario Boffi, et al., *Città e conflitto sociale. Inchiesta al Garibaldi-Isola e in alcuni quartieri periferici di Milano* (Milan, 1972).

<sup>70</sup> “Il centro storico in tribunale: la sentenza,” *Edilizia popolare. Rivista bimestrale dell’Associazione nazionale fra gli IACP*, July-August 1976.

<sup>71</sup> Unione Inquilini, *No all’espulsione dal centro*, mimeographed leaflet, 1972 in ISEC, Fondo L’Unità, folder 7, file 34; see also ISEC, Archivio personale di Emanuele Tortoreto, vol. 41, papers 45-48.

<sup>72</sup> Erba, “La programmazione edilizia,” cit., 313-317.

<sup>73</sup> “Perché le occupazioni. Lettera aperta dell’UI al sindaco di Milano,” *Giornale dell’Unione Inquilini*, April 1974.

<sup>74</sup> On the occupations in Via Marx and Via Cilea, see *Lo scontro di classe sul territorio. Iniziativa capitalistica e lotte sociali a Milano. Atti del seminario indetto dal Comitato d’occupazione di via C. Marx e via Cilea e dai docenti del laboratorio di Produzione del territorio, Facoltà di architettura del Politecnico di Milano, 27-28 giugno 1974*, mimeographed (Milan, 1975).

<sup>75</sup> See “Lotte operaie ’72-’73,” *Rosso. Giornale dentro il movimento*, October 1974, 24-31.

<sup>76</sup> A survey on the social composition of the occupants in “Milano: dall’occupazione, un programma generale per la casa,” *Lotta Continua*, 5 April 1974.

<sup>77</sup> Monte Amiata had listed the complex in its balance sheet with a value of 4.2 billion lire, but after the occupation, offered to sell it to the municipality of Milan for 15 billion, while the municipality offered 7 billion, out of its total budget of 10 billion for social housing. On the architecture of Via Cilea, see Claudia Conforti, *Il Gallaratese di Aymonimo e Rossi 1967-1972* (Rome, 1981).

<sup>78</sup> The rationale was that after years of paying GESCAL contributions, the occupants were deprived of their right to a home because of the construction company’s speculation. The complaint led to the Guardia di Finanza conducting some judicial searches in the offices of the Monte Amiata company.

<sup>79</sup> “Il movimento delle occupazioni,” *Giornale dell’Unione Inquilini*, summer [sic] 1974.

<sup>80</sup> See Emanuele Tortoreto, “Lotte e politica al Gallaratese,” *Urbanistica* 1978, no. 68/69, 99-107.

<sup>81</sup> The municipality subsequently purchased a part of the complex in Via Cilea, in order to sell it at favourable conditions to tenants that had an IACP house, but whose incomes were too high for them to be entitled to public housing.

<sup>82</sup> See Valeria Erba, "I piani di 167 e le strategie di intervento per la ristrutturazione," *Urbanistica* 1978, no. 68/69, 89-93.

<sup>83</sup> Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London, 2003), 357-361.

<sup>84</sup> A 1974 survey had highlighted that social housing tenants considered a rent of 15-25% of the head-of-family's wages as acceptable; Luigi Madia, "La spesa per l'abitazione nei bilanci familiari," *Edilizia popolare* 1974, no. 11.

<sup>85</sup> Echoes of this disappointment can be found in many letters to the newspaper *Lotta Continua*: see *Care compagne, cari compagni: Lettere a Lotta Continua* (Roma, 1978), 28-29, 89-91, 211-212, 258-259, 310-311, 349-351.

<sup>86</sup> SUNIA asked that the rents of social houses be set using a system called *equo canone* (fair rent), commensurate to 10-12% of the average income of the families renting in the district. SUNIA, *Dossier dell'equo canone. Denunce e proposte degli inquilini della Lombardia*, (1977), mimeographed, in ISEC, AFMPci, Commissione casa e territorio, folder 199, file 12

<sup>87</sup> See for example the scant information in the Archivio centrale dello Stato (Roma), Ministero dell'Interno, Gabinetto, Fascicoli correnti 1971-75, folder 297. A partial collection of cases in Fabio Antoniotti, *Casa Morigi: Trentasei anni di abitare sociale a Milano*, degree thesis (Milan Polytechnic, Faculty of Architecture, AA. 2011-12), 17-22.

<sup>88</sup> The reference is to the *Festival del proletariato giovanile*, organised by the underground magazine *Re Nudo*, held in Parco Lambro (Milan) from 1974 to 1976. See: "4° Festival di Re Nudo," *Re Nudo*, June 1974; and *Rosso. Giornale dentro il movimento*, supplement to no. 11/12, July 1976.

<sup>89</sup> See Carla Sorlini, ed., *Centri sociali autogestiti e circoli giovanili. Un'indagine sulle strutture associative di base a Milano* (Milan, 1978), 91-154.

<sup>90</sup> On this further phase, which is not dealt with here, see Pierpaolo Mudu, "Resisting and Challenging Neoliberalism. The Development of Italian Social Centers," *Antipode* 36 (2004), 917-941; Consorzio Aaster et al., *Centri sociali: geografie del desiderio. Dati, statistiche, progetti, mappe, divenire* (Milan, 2006).