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ADAPTIVE CITIES THROUGH THE POST PANDEMIC LENS

Ripensare tempi e sfide della città flessibile nella storia urbana
Times and Challenges in Urban History

X Congresso AISU / 10th AISU Congress

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RETROFITTING TARCHOMIN (PL). ADAPTING A PLATTENBAU NEIGHBORHOOD TO CURRENT LIVING PRACTICES

RIPENSARE TARCHOMIN (PL). ADATTARE UN QUARTIERE PLATTENBAU ALLA CONTEMPORANEITÀ

Al giorno d'oggi 14 milioni di persone in Polonia vivono in quartieri basati su tecniche di costruzione legate alla prefabbricazione eredità del secondo dopoguerra. Il contributo esplora i caratteri di questi luoghi, ne riconosce criticità ed opportunità di trasformazione e prova a proporre un approccio operativo orientato alla loro rigenerazione a partire dal caso di studio del quartiere Tarchomin a Varsavia.

Parole chiave

Tecnologia Plattenbau, prefabbricazione, residenza pubblica, rigenerazione urbana, Tarchomin

Keywords

Plattenbau technology, prefabricated buildings, public housing, urban regeneration, Tarchomin

In the Eastern Block after WWII, the population growth, and the rapid movement from rural areas to the cities, generated a severe housing deficit. National programs promoted the construction of public housing, often organized in large estates and recurring to innovative technologies for that time. These processes influenced the industrialization of the construction sector, the experimentation in architecture and urban planning and, in Poland and other countries, the diffusion of a prefabrication technique called Plattenbau, from the German words: platte (slab) and bau (building).

The industrial conception of this technique, based on the combination of simple elements, produced housing neighbourhoods around the major Polish cities. Within the different examples, it emerges an influence of the logic of the plattenbau from the composition of pieces to the organization of the spaces. This influence became evident in the inner distribution of the single units, in their combination in blocks and the in the configuration of the public spaces that embrace the buildings and the public services that were located among them. Plattenbau technology created a peculiar identity and a recognizable aesthetic for these urban spaces. Thanks to this technique, central governments and urban authorities produced a fast-growing, low-cost housing stock, responding to the housing crisis and improving the living condition of the newcomers.

Indeed, this transversal and iterative approach produced a specific urban landscape that nowadays recurs in the suburbs of many different cities in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, but also in eastern Germany, Sweden and even the Netherlands. After the 1989 reforms, the replacement of large workers' public housing estates with private construction developers caused the fall of the era of prefabricated neighbourhoods and a reduction of the scale of investments in the early 1990s. The rapid ripening of materials, the lack of maintenance for shared spaces and commons, as well as the ageing of the population or the reduced social variety of the inhabitants emerged as recurring problems for those neighbourhoods. Therefore, research about how to rethink these neighbourhoods is needed. The future of large, prefabricated housing estates is one of the key problems of sustainable urban development in eastern Europe. In post-Communist nations, this kind of housing remains predominant for a long time due to its acceptable condition and often lack of other choices for less affluent families. Today, 14 million people in Poland live in buildings built in prefabrication technology and, therefore, there is a need for universal urban solutions that could be applied globally to increase the quality of life of millions of citizens.

The proposed contribution explores the opportunities and the operative approach to the transformation of such districts, without using a lot of resources and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the intervention. Starting from their background in urban planning/urban design, the authors focused on the case study of the Tarchomin district in Warsaw.

The neighbourhood presents typical problems of 70s Plattenbau housing estates, with a mix between housing, public spaces (green and mineral ones) and services, a convenient location, and a favourable connection to the city centre. Due to these features, the district attracts families and young people, and it has a population formed of different age groups (children, elderly). The context analysis and the critical reading of current conditions took into account also the level of happiness of the inhabitants, crime statistics, the risk of gentrification and its potential in terms of re-development. The homogeneous and repetitive design of these blocks is an opportunity to evaluate in a single case a set of solutions and a design protocol that could be implemented on a large scale, to activate several processes and obtain a diffused regeneration. But this approach must optimize resources, tackle urban trigger points that can activate private resources, and be able to involve the local communities in those experiences.

The authors developed a design proposal, based on four different scales to adapt the neighbourhood to current needs of inhabitants. The interventions are trans-scalar, and they transform single unit's functional layouts, modernize the structure of the buildings, implement the semi-public spaces surrounding the estates and reflect on the relationship between the district and the urban level.