The Italian social city: the search for a model

The Leumann Village by Pietro Fenoglio, Valdagno by Francesco Bonfanti, Torviscosa by Giuseppe de Min, Pujiang by Vittorio Gregotti

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Abstract: The search for an "Italian" model of a social city began in the eighteenth century with the foundation of the Bourbon colony of San Leucio and re-emerges widely with the Italian company towns, after the industrial revolution between the nineteenth and twentieth century (Leuman, Valdagno, Torviscosa, etc). Reconsidering the experiences of Italian working cities in the complex game of passages between real cities and ideal cities, allows to elaborate new reflections that take into account, after centuries, the performance and quality of settlement models to investigate and prefigure new contemporary interventions to be implemented also in other urban cultures.

Key words: Leumann, Valdagno, Torviscosa, Pujian, the Italian Social City.

The Company Town and the concept of Social City

In the book *History of the Italian Republics of the Middle Ages* the historian and economist Simondo Sismondi (1773-1842), Swiss and anti-Napoleonic, claims that the greatest Italian contribution to the history of Europe consists in aesthetic inventiveness combined with a true cult for the social and political energy that breaks every rule.[2]

This aspect of Italian culture, affirmed since the Renaissance, has influenced for centuries the complex relationship between the idea of a city to be realized and that which was being realized. So between the *ideal city* and the *real city*,[3] between formal models and social logic that underlie the construction of a new enjoyable urban environment, destined for a happy society. In particular, within the broader framework of ideal cities, in Europe and in the United States of America, from the

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2. Berardinelli 2016.
3. De Seta, Ferretti, Tenenti 1987; De Seta 2011.

second half of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century,[4] a special type of settlement is affirmed, the industrial city, named also as *company town*, social city, workers' village, city of harmony. The working villages, built to complement existing cities or built as new foundations in the countryside, are the testimony of socialist or organic paternalism, an entrepreneurial and cultural strategy that has characterized above all industrial production since the Industrial Revolution. Among the first Italian workers' villages, therefore, we find Crespi d'Adda, Schio, Collegno, Valdagno, Torviscosa made respectively by Cristoforo Benigno Crespi, Alessandro Rossi, Napoleone Leumann, Gaetano Marzot, Franco Marinotti, "enlightened" entrepreneurs for whom the culture of Central Europe has had some significance biographically and intellectually. The places where the workers' villages were founded were chosen for their proximity to waterways useful for transport and production, for the availability of local crops, for the presence of local production activities and manufacturing skills. The architects responsible for building the workers' villages are Italian engineers and architects, Pietro Fenoglio, Francesco Bonfanti, Giuseppe De Min, personalities who are directly or indirectly sensitive and informed about urban innovations taking place in Europe and overseas.

The "social city" becomes a theory once realized, it is an "autarchic" model for the society produced by entrepreneurs illuminated by the philanthropic spirit; it is therefore a city, so to speak, "daughter of praxis".[5]

The company towns, in general, present an intrinsic, almost interdependent link between architecture and the urban form, between the aspirations of the client and the constructive elements, between the social order and the physical environment. Basically, in this type of interventions, the main interest of the architect is the control of the urban scale, the quality of public space and places for collective entertainment as the recreation centers, and the updating of housing solutions with respect to hygiene standards, stand out.

The aspect that, in the eyes of Renato De Fusco,[6] makes these experiences the product of a "minor history" is probably the

4. Gabetti 1981.

5. Erseghe, Ferrari, Ricci 1986, p. 13.

6. De Fusco, Terminio 2017.

prevalence of a historiographical point of view that has identified in the Modern Movement – specifically in the city of foundation of the fascist ventennio (two decades)[7] more known in literature – the emblem of the dominant architectural quality.[8]

Alessandra Muntoni,[9] in fact, speaking of the Pontine cities of Fascism, defines the theory of "disurbament" (disurbanism) as a minority culture. The distance between the vicissitudes of the Italian workers' villages from ideological-artistic exercises, on the other hand, makes them free experiments from the architectural point of view, although they fully correspond to the conceptions of social paternalism.

Reconsidering the experiences of Italian company towns in the ongoing game of passages between real cities and ideal cities, allows to elaborate new reflections that take into account, at a distance of almost one hundred years, the performance[10] of settlement models to prefigure new contemporary interventions or parts of them to be implemented also in other urban cultures.

Several scholars – Renato De Fusco[11] and Giorgio Ferrari,[12] for example – consider the workers' villages – on the genre of Collegno, Valdagno, Torviscosa – experiments well distant from the Garden Cities, the Siedlungen and the New Towns affirmed in Europe and the experiences of the Modern Movement (Ernst May, Bruno Taut), although they have been conceived under the impulse of analogous or economic-like circumstances inspired by them, even if programmatically. De Fusco argues that the Company towns represent a «sort of 'minor history', however, so compact and motivated by a hundred conceptual supports to determine a whole in itself so strong as to constitute a base, a platform, a step on which the architecture of the twentieth century then rose».

Returning to the story of the Company Towns, the role and culture of client-entrepreneurs certainly was decisive. As Ferrari's texts points

7. Muntoni 2007 pp. 297-310.

8. This is a historiographical destiny similar to the one that has characterized the limited critical success in Rome, for example, of architects such as Mario De Renzi, Pietro Aschieri, Giuseppe Capponi, whose repertoire presents different "stylistically" or hybrid solutions, often framed as positions not exactly consistent with the Italian historiography of the decades immediately following.

9. Muntoni 2007.

10. Barbera 2009.

11. De Fusco, Terminio, op. cit., 2017.

12. Erseghe, Ferrari, Ricci 1986, p. 11.

out, Adriano Olivetti chose the BBPR while Gaetano Marzotto – less Olivetti's ideologue – chose Francesco Bonfanti, a young man of excellent "Roman" training, but "unripe compared to the debate on the city and less known to the publicists of those years." Moreover, an aspect that still makes the analysis of Italian company towns still interesting – many of them are all still inhabited and / or transformed into museums –, besides the issues regarding the industrial archeology, is the diversity of architectural languages and of the settlements with which they were interpreted with respect to the dominant languages of contemporary culture: the virtuous use of the Stile Liberty (Leumann), the experiments of coexistence or hybridization of different styles, (Valdagno), the proposition of spatial metaphysics atmospheres (Torviscosa). Therefore, the conception underlying the social city is similar to that which some scholars considers at the basis of the distinction between design and fashion, that is, "a utopian vision of reality".[13]

Leumann (1875) – the commercial value of the corporate aestetics

The Leumann village, like the case of Crespi d'Adda and Schio, presents similarities with the German company towns built in those same years, above all from the point of view of the general planimetric view and for the housing units (59 cottages and 120 lodgings), according to the model of the semi-detached cottage with the common garden (house with vegetable garden) which soon replaces all over Europe compared to the row houses inspired by the model of the barracks (used for workers who had no family).[14] Also the size of the settlement, about 6 hectares, is comparable with the other Anglo-Saxon cases highlighted. In the second half of the nineteenth century the Stile Liberty, more generally the Art Nouveau in Europe, corresponds to the most advanced expression of the research on language. Leumann precedes Valdagno and Torviscosa for almost sixty years and derives directly from the Utopian tradition that led to experiences like New Harmony[15] in Indiana, founded in 1814 and purchased in 1825 by Robert Owen, an

13. D'Averio [2013/2014].

14. Scolari 1975, p. 118.

15. Michelangelo Sabatino gave a lecture cycle at Dottorato di Architettura e Progetto della Sapienza nel 2016 dal titolo Architettura & Utopia: Il Caso di New Harmony, Indiana, Architettura & Organicismo; Il Caso di Riverside, Illinois; Architettura & Società: Il Caso di Columbus, Indiana.

English industrialist known for his experience in the textile village of Lanark (1784) and who had produced a series of projects to perfect the scheme and pursue his reformist ideas. Another comparable example is the city of Pulmann, in the state of Washington, which, however, had a short life: its decadence originated from the long strike of 1894 employees, following the great Chicago strikes of previous years. The case of Pulmann is still interesting for the attention to the aesthetic quality of the town, and its disclosure because, as Ornella Selvafolta claims, in the logic of financial investment: «The aesthetic took on a commercial value and as such had to be applied, beyond that to the residences of the workers, to the place of work to which the function of transmitting the corporate image was delegated. [...] To promote productive efficiency and disseminate the image of corporate fortune were, moreover, necessary objectives in an era in which competition [...] required ever new forms of propaganda».[16] (Fig. 1)

Valdagno (1933) - roman experiments of urban architecture in Veneto

The wealth of entrepreneurial and professional skills that gave rise to the experimentations of Italian workers' villages was considered and absorbed in the numerous interventions that followed them in a very limited way. For example, the Plans for Economic and Popular Construction built in Italy for about twenty years (1964-1984), have shown the prevalence of urbanism on architecture, indexes on the form, the urban planning norm on the architectural one. And in the long essay by Alessandra Muntoni[17] on the Pontine cities already mentioned the origin of the antagonism of the Piacentinian / Giovannonian model of the "city building" and the urban plan as we have experienced it for decades in Italy is well delineated. The contribution of Mosè Ricci in the essay on Francesco Bonfanti analyzes and compares the outcome of the projects for Valdagno (almost an action plan) and of Francavilla a Mare (an urban plan). Ricci defines that conceived by Bonfanti for Francavilla as a "concrete utopia" because «based on trust in the institutions' capacity to react to the distortions that the mechanism of rent generates in the development of the territory. Factor that in Valdagno,

16. Selvafolta 1982, pp. 55-56.
17. Muntoni 2007, op. cit.

for example, had not constituted impediment to the growth of the new city, this development being completely internal and functional to the logic of industrial capital, planner and owner of the areas at the same time. The characteristics of the reference to the foreign models of the rationalist tension and of the overall utopian character of the project seem to share Francavilla's experience with the best plans of the period of reconstruction».[18]

For several decades, however, this type of experience has been scarcely considered by critics and academics and has not been the primary reference for public institutions. The volume on Francesco Bonfanti published by Erseghe, Ferrari, Ricci in 1986 demonstrates the conscious choice of an eccentric study theme compared to the "core" of architectural studies practiced in Italy during the seventies and eighties: «The social city is a cultural model that disputes the canons of the garden city (which will lead to the creation of undifferentiated suburbs), instead connecting ideally to the theories of the Cité Industrielle of Garnier and to the new experiences of the Berlage Urban Expansion Plans. The references are to a non-utopian urban conception, but strongly anchored to the idea of the city, to the intervention on the existing city and not to the theorizing of improbable new cities. [...] Here the relationship between designer Bonfanti and Marzotto commissioner – but also creator – recalls the "Lyonese" association between Garnier and Henriot. Beyond the different ownership form (public in Lyon, private in Valdagno). [...] The cultural formation of Francesco Bonfanti has certainly had a weight: a cultural formation strongly rooted in the Roman studies of the period in which Giovannoni's thinking constitutes a large part of Italian urban planning and architectural culture; a cultural education which, at the same time, is immediately open and available to the new trend of Milanese rationalist architects. The Twenties and Thirties were years of considerable turmoil in the architectural debate on the problems of the city, on the relationship between architecture and industrial development, on the relationship between form and function, between ancient and modern; a debate that crosses Europe beyond political regimes, forming a real "cultural current"».[19] (Fig. 2)

18. Erseghe, Ferrari, Ricci 1986, p. 110.
19. Gregotti 1985.

Torviscosa (1938) - the form of the rural industry

Torviscosa is a "hybrid" case between a company town and a rural foundation city,[20] since it is part of the land reclamation territories that were then destined for the viscose manufacture (SNIA) obtained from the cellulose extracted from the *canna gentile* (in English 'giant cane'), which became particularly necessary after the crisis of 1929 and between the two wars due to the lack of cellulose in Italy. To reinforce production, the area of Bassa Friulana was chosen, in particular the old village of Torre di Zuino. The appointed architect, Giuseppe de Min, from the Milanese generation of Muzio and Portaluppi, although less well known, had already worked for SNIA and was related to Franco Marinotti, who became general director in the 1930s and raised the financial fortunes.[21] The assignment to Torviscosa will strengthen the links between de Min and the company for subsequent work in Milan, Varedo, Cesano Maderno, the restoration of Palazzo Grassi in Venice, purchased in 1949 by the Società Immobiliare Veneta. The company was presided over by Marinotti who, among other things, was already involved in the creation of "semi-suburban villages" in the province of Milan, designed by Piero Bottoni and Mario Pucci, according to very strict compositional "rationalistic" formal solutions. The manual by Dagoberto Ortensi on rural buildings, published in 1931, is particularly of those years, as is the volume by Giuseppe Pagano and Guarniero Daniel on Italian rural architecture preceded by the writings of Pagano on Casabella. And of those years the affirmation of the idea that the architect should be interested as well as of territorial architecture, as envisaged by the figure of the "architetto integrale" conceived by Giovannoni. In fact, rural planning is one of the themes dealt with by the 1st Congress of the National Institute of Urban Planning (INU), held in Rome in June 1937. The architecture of Torviscosa's houses and factories is all covered in brick curtains, with the exception of the square, which is conceived in a similar way to the public spaces of the Pontine foundation cities. In fact, the project perspectives seem almost to allude to the metaphysical atmospheres of some paintings by De Chirico. But the spatial, proportional, and dimensional

20. MUNTONI 2007, pp. 297-310.
21. Vedi: http://www.primiditorviscosa.it/la-citta/larchitetto-giuseppe-de-min/

relationships of both De Chirico and Torviscosa's works could also be considered a natural evolution of the urban space idea of the Piazza di Ariccia by Bernini: but this is a nexus that deserves more demanding investigations and that in this seat it seems useful only to pin.

Franco Marinotti, among other things, entrusts Filippo Tommaso Marinetti with the writing of the *Poem of Torre Viscosa*; the first draft is of 1938, from which probably came the inspiration for the name of Torviscosa (Fig 3).

Utopias, revolutions and reforms

The social city, conceive in a wider sense, has much older origins. The essays by Laura Schram Pighi, a scholar of literature, help to understand that the social city is an "imaginative archetype, central in the narrative of Italian utopia",[22] especially if we analyze those one hundred and fifty years neglected by the official literature that instead help to understand how pertinent the cultural link, sometimes loose and transmitted under track, between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. And so the continuous and significant thread that links the views of Francesco di Giorgio Martini, the treatises of Filarete, the utopian works of Thomas More and Tommaso Campanella, the works of Canaletto and Piranesi, the futuristic posters of Marinetti, the cities of agricultural and industrial foundation, some works by Italo Calvino, science fiction literature. Thus allowing to distinguish new elements useful for renewed readings, beyond the consolidated critical and historiographic options and some commonplace summary. This brief reflection does not intend to investigate the problem of the classification of the above-mentioned urban experiments, for which reference should be made to the studies of De Fusco or Patetta.[23]

This imaginative, aesthetic, but above all political and social culture crosses partly the European nineteenth century, from the emphasis of Napoleonic neoclassicism – not without philanthropic and reformist elements also applied to enlightened urban experiments (Paris, Milan, Parma) – all enthusiasm of the new progressive ideas emerged as a result of the first Industrial Revolution, then the ideal of

22. Schram Pighi 2003.
23. Patetta 2014.

the Garden City (Howard) and the Industrial City (Tony Garnier). After the agrarian cities built during fascism and after the *company town,* this type of experiments rarely had any operational replication in the long and profitable production of economic and popular housing districts in Italy, from 1964 onwards.

The importance of San Leucio. The agricultural metropolis - Ferdinandopoli

In Italy, as historians tell us, the social city has much older origins. It was in 1778 when Ferdinando IV di Borbone built a hospice for the poor and a factory in San Leucio, his personal hermitage, northwest of the long axis of water games of the Royal Palace of Caserta and a short distance from the English garden built by Carlo Vanvitelli and John Andrew Graefer. The Belvedere Casino built by the previous feudal lords, the Gaetani d'Acquaviva,[24] had already been transformed by Francesco Collecini, a student of Vanvitelli, according to the successful model developed in the Italian Renaissance by combining classic and agricultural production and manufacturing. Andrea Palladio had been a great interpreter. The father of Ferdinand IV, King Charles III of Bourbon, whose impulse was fundamental for the start of the excavations of Pompeii, had used some statues taken from the ruins to adorn the pavilions of classical inspiration of the palace. On the advice of the minister Bernardo Tanucci, Charles III had sent some young people to France to learn the art of weaving to be used in the royal establishments. In 1778 Domenico Caracciolo took over from Tanucci who, on a project by Collecini, established a community known as Real Colonia di San Leucio, based on its own rules (social rules), whose dwellings «two long terraced houses not dissimilar from those designed for Pienza, a Tuscan urban utopia of a great humanist Pope»[25] had running water and toilets. Collecini also designed, together with the sovereign Ferdinandopoli, a circular, symmetrical, radial, concentric city, organized around a square of about 160 meters in diameter which, enriched with the statue of the sovereign, would have seen the real mess tangent to it. The city was not built, but the colony was gradually

24. D'ALESSANDRO 2009, pp. 69-82.
25. D'ALESSANDRO, op. cit., p. 70.

established, was formally established in 1789. The interest that raises the story of the historians and scholars for the historians and scholars is concentrated around the unusual "living contradiction" represented by "a place inhabited by the king and from his workers", as Lucio d'Alessandro argues in his essay entitled *San Leucio: the utopia of a king, between the management of space and the contradiction of the times* and whose idyll was interrupted only by the French Revolution and the Neapolitan Republic.[26] The plan of Pierre Charles L'Enfant for Washington, an urban work that combines the city with a grid and the city made of axles and concentric radials, dates from 1791. Moreover, it is reminiscent of Alexander, for Benedetto Croce it was a "caprice of sovereign",[27] for Cesare de Seta a "realized utopia", for Agostino Gori[28] a first attempt at socialism, because Naples was a complex, populous city, full of social conflicts, difficult to transform" physically "and to correct good governance and on the costume also because of the influences of the physical environment, as highlighted by the Duke of Noja in his letter[29] of 1750, which stimulated with a narrow and tortuous streets a riotous people while in San Leucio "the apartments of the sovereign were directly intercommunicating with the factory workshops".

Moreover, d'Alessandro delves into the meaning of utopia, appealing to Mannheim and to the idea that «every age produces and accumulates (in differently located social groups) those ideas and values that condense, so to speak, tendencies, not still realized and fulfilled, representing the needs of each age. [...] Mannheim's definition of utopia not as something unrealizable but, on the contrary, as a set of ideas and aspirations which, while preventing the existing reality from turning into absolute, conceives it, vice versa, as a possible *topies*, and which is characterized precisely by the total or partial feasibility of the *utopia*, well can agree with the history of San Leucio». Therefore, Mannheim writes «Utopia is therefore an evolutionary potential implicit in every social system».[30] Thinking about San Leucio, one can not but mention the studies of Eugenio Battisti, a student of Lionello Venturi, a scholar

26. Striano 1986.
27. Croce 1998, p. 36.
28. Gori 1909.
29. Carafa 1750, p. 16.
30. Mannheim 1957.

of studies on utopia, especially the essay *An experimental city of the '700: San Leucio published in Utopias for the eighties: interdisciplinary studies on themes, history, projects*,[31] or even *San Leucio as utopia and events of the Italian program*[32] – figure, among other things, close to Vittorio Gregotti, so much to have involved him in the design group for the University of Calabria. And those of Giuseppe Cilento in *The Neapolitan agrarian metropolis in the eighteenth century*[33] which highlights «the expansion of the 'rational' characteristics of the design that can and must serve to expose the organic soil of a reorganization of an elegant and bourgeois class that prefigures, on the agrarian threshold of the territory, the new metropolises of transition. [...] Towards the recomposition of a new aesthetic space given by the imagination of the southern metropolis».

Chinese university campuses: an example of a social city in China

Having recalled the original experience of San Leucio and the industrial cities between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it would seem, after a few centuries, that the experience of the Italian social city has run out without continuity, interrupted at first by the effects of world conflicts on many productive activities of the country and then by the slow disappearance of the historical moment in which "humanitarians were socialists".[34] In recent decades many new cities have been built, especially in the East, especially in China, where the city is happening at unprecedented rates, as several studies document, in particular Thomas Campanella in his *The Concrete Dragon*.[35] In particular, there is a newly founded settlement whose design approach allows some interesting reflections in comparison with the topics discussed up to now. Several European architects, such as Kolhaass in Masdar in the United Arab Emirates and Gregotti in Pujiang in China, have experimented with the theme of "new town" or "foundation city" in very different cultural contexts, transferring settlement models, recalling them from past experiences, and hybridizing them with today's local culture and

31. Saccaro del Buffa, Lewis 1986.
32. Battisti 1973.
33. Cilento 1983, p. 92.
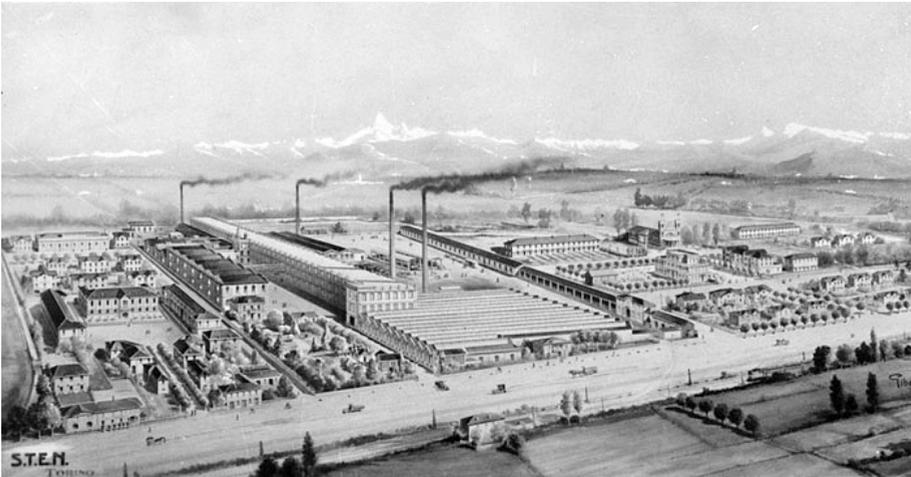34. Barbera 1989, p. 50.
35. Campanella 2008, *passim*.

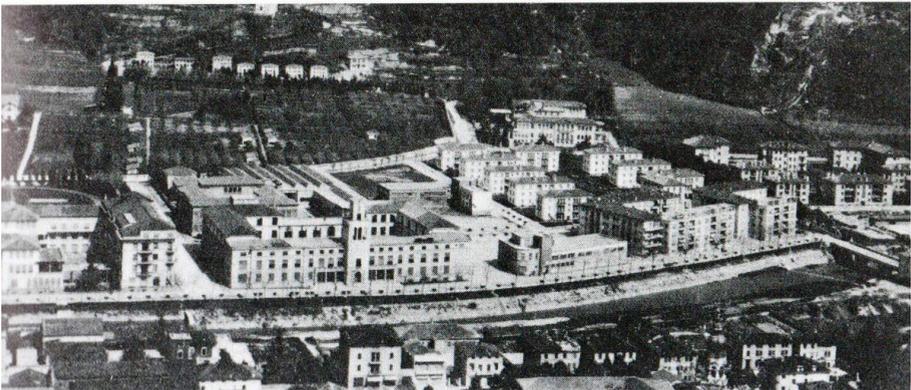*Fig. 1. Villaggio Leumann (1875).*

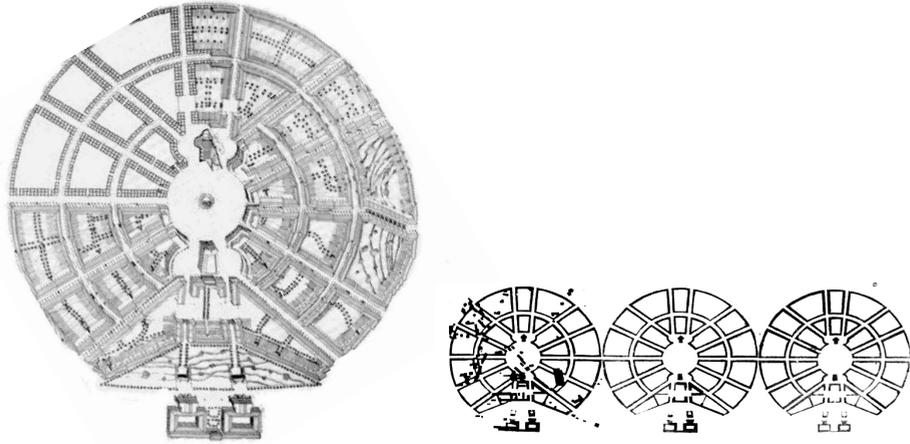*Fig. 2. Valdagno (1933).*

Fig. 3. Torviscosa (1938).

Fig. 4. Ferdinandopoli (1791). Collecini's project, the radial city, for the silk processing next to the Reggia di Caserta.

Fig. 5. Tsinghua University Campus (today).

Fig. 6. Pujiang, Gregotti & Associati (2001).

demand. Pujiang, in particular, allows some interesting reflections regarding the topics discussed up to now. Designed by Gregotti Associati as part of the *One City program, the Nine Towns Development Plan* – launched by the Chinese government in 2001 without ever being fully realized – was conceived in a very different political-historical framework from the one in which the cities were conceived Italian workers or social workers. The *Nine towns* were in fact designed for the "new" Chinese *upper middle class*: three cities according to the urban tradition of the country that designed it (Songjiang, Anting, Lingang) for 200 thousand and 500 thousand inhabitants; the other seven, smaller, for 80-100 thousand inhabitants. The goal of the administration was to create a new urban-rural structure able to value Shanghai as a global metropolis of international importance, to regulate the urbanization of the suburbs, creating an attractive mechanism that could induce the population to move from the capital to the new cities suburbane.[36] All this did not happen according to the program: the reality was implemented not according to the program, but adapting to the rapidity of the transformations and of the demand.

But before proceeding with any further study on Pujiang, it is necessary to clarify, in order not to be misunderstood that, in the Italy-China comparison, the examples of "social city" more coherent from a political-economic point of view to the case of Italian workers' cities are the so-called "unit of work" or *danwei*, established with the People's Republic of China. And, in particular, in the framework of the work units (both rural and industrial) still physically distinguishable in the urban pattern of the largest Chinese cities University campuses are certainly significant examples of Chinese "social city". In fact, the Polytechnic University of Turin and Tsinghua University recently conducted a research entitled *Beijing Danwei, Industrial Heritage in the Contemporary City*.[37] Personally, I have visited several of them, in particular spending a few months on the campus of Tsinghua University of Beijing – founded in 1911 as a Preparatory School for young people who would later be sent to the United States of America. It is almost as big as a small-medium Italian city, and stands on the

36. Pimpini 2012, p. 137.
37. Bonino, De Pieri (eds) 2015.

ruins of some Qing imperial gardens, not far from the Summer Palace and Yuangming Yuang and has been gradually expanded. The campus, until not many years ago, was able to provide accommodation to all teachers, employees and students. Even retired professors were entitled to housing within the confines of their institution and lived in two areas of the Tsinghua University campus that in 2004 were referred to as "the elephant cemetery".

Pujiang, Shanghai: transferring models works out?

But in the years that followed, as soon as the Chinese university system admitted forms of spin-offs with professions and industry, teachers and officials had the opportunity to increase their annual salary and thus become – along with most of the public employees in the country – the new Chinese middle class. And therefore to aspire to a different quality of life, more in line with Western standards. The housing model developed by the developers that has established itself on a large scale is that of the "gated communities" derived from American culture. So many teachers of Tsinghua, certainly many of their children, have moved to more distant areas from the workplace, in new residential areas in which, by accessing the badge, they find more comfortable accommodation, although they are not provided by the unit of work, but they must be bought:the campuses in the meantime have been restructured, modernized, expanded.

Taking into account the historical-political events of their country, among other things, not having their own cultural models, the new Chinese middle class has looked for them elsewhere, drawing on modernist and vernacular models. It is enough to cross the endless residential fabrics of the Chinese megalopolis to understand how the most different and unthinkable experiments have been practiced. Of the *One City program, Nine Towns Development Plan*, only six cities have been built and many of which are not yet fully inhabited, but whose apartments have been partly sold, as Wade Shepard relates in *Ghost Cities of China*[38] and her blog (www.thevagabondjourney), «the planners did not want to make a corny, romanticized replica of their country's architectural traditions, so they flipped to the other extreme and built what they called Huangpu

38. Shepard 2013.

River». But Chinese cities can be dormitory neighborhoods even when they are not ghost cities. A similar phenomenon has also occurred in the London Olympics area, where many residences were bought only for financial investment: «So I was taken a little off guard that the place turned out to be more of an overtly clinical replica of some institute of technology — or, much worse, a 1980s era Brooklyn housing project. As I walked through the wide, empty streets below the towering cubes posing as houses, the lack of character and life grew startling. Boxes sticking up out of the earth make unconvincing homes. [...] Official numbers on how many people actually live in Shanghai's Italy town are not available, but it is clear that the vacancy rate is at least 90%. I could pretty much count the other pedestrians that I saw in the entire place on one hand. Everybody else were security guards at the gates of the housing complexes, street cleaners, and errant construction workers going to and from building sites on the other side of the development».[39]

It seemed to us that beyond Shepard's ungenerous comments on the project for Pujiang, there seemed to be security guards at the gates of the housing complexes and street cleaners. It is interesting to underline that, although the theme is profoundly different from that of the Italian working cities, the themes and concepts of space proposed by the Milanese architect reflect the close interdependence between architecture and urban form. In fact, the plan of Pujiang, more than in Venice, makes us think of the Sozgorod of Leonidov of 1930 and the Soviet socialist tradition.

In the book *Il sublime al tempo del contemporaneo*[40] Gregotti clarifies the state of the program ten years after its start-up and discusses the contradictions and specific difficulties of the Chinese case that have led Pujiang to form a core of foundation in the metropolitan area of Shanghai acquiring a new meaning from that for which it was designed respect to the relationship with the river and the territory. What is interesting to highlight in this project is the overall design concept of tgand the architectural scale. Pujiang is a *new town*, therefore a newly established city in the countryside of the metropolitan area of Shanghai,

39. SHEPARD, *ibidem*.
40. GREGOTTI 2011.

organized on an urban grid system over an area of 2.6 square kilometers. Vittorio Gregotti argues that «the urban design has lost (or rather rejected) in the Western world much of its capacity for social mediation, a capacity that today seems even unknown even in third countries, in the face of both urban phenomena of great metropolitan concentration and of territorial dispersion. [...] The problem, therefore, was not so much to return the original features of the Chinese city as to imagine what result could be achieved by comparing the tradition of the European historical city with anthropogeography and Chinese cultures and the particularity of their non-monumental architectural tradition, with the expectations of a society in strong movement of transformation, and that often has forgotten even the reasons of its own civilization. Nor could we forget the influence (and today still felt) of the Soviet bureaucratic-stylistic principles throughout the 1950s».[41]

Like many of the Italian working-class villages of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Pujiang is designed above all on an architectural scale unlike the Chinese cities built in the last decades, grown according to modalities deduced from the American grid *planning*. This feature places Pujiang, according to its designer, in continuity with the historic Chinese city made of court houses and fenced blocks crossed by canals – although it is set on large blocks of 300 x 300 meters that insist on a network of canals that allude to the settlement model of the nearby and historic water city, Zhaojialou. The words of Vittorio Gregotti, not unlike the advertising messages of the developers, tell the way in which this type of city was designed, with a certain degree of abstraction that makes us think of Renaissance views of ideal cities: «the joints are made up of presence of the canals and the insertion in the chess board intersections of elements that are constituted as meters of the street perspectives (in some cases 60-80m wide) otherwise infinite or limited only by the vegetation (the presence of closing seabeds is very little practiced in the tradition)».[42] Whatever the intentions and qualities at stake were, the new foundation cities exported by Italian architects abroad in the last decades could not fail to confront the most typical commercial demand of the market economy. Despite Gregotti accuses

41. GREGOTTI, *ibidem*. (e-book)
42. GREGOTTI, op. cit. (e-book)

Koolhass arguing that «... he once supported a city without history and ideologies in which everyone does what he wants. Now he has repented and converted into an echo: a merchant fashion, because if you are not green today you do not sell. But his is just the typical opportunism of who represents the state of things, not the alternative. I accuse the archistars of being like the Soviet architects, only that instead of socialist realism they adopt that of money».[43]

  If Professor Gregotti has his good reasons to claim his ideas. After this lengthy survey, we can summarily understand that much of the success of some settlement models (cities of foundation), especially in the long run, is due to the lucidity of the "prince" and the clarity and quality of his intent, as well as that of the architects to whom these he has entrusted himself to interpret. So, the best architects who identify with a certain historical moment, compared to new facts and balances, tend to have a deep nostalgia for their own "prince" and to misjudge those who try to adapt when the Prince has changed. In any case, in most of the cases dealt with in this text, clients and architects have handed over to generations to come an important architectural heritage, qualified and usable for a long time.

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43. Rigatelli 2011.

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