

Paolo La Greca, Francesco Martinico, Sara Occhipinti, Agatino Rizzo¹

A Long and Winding Road toward Integration: Peripheries in a Medium Sized City of Southern Italy

Peripheries in contemporary cities: The case of Catania

Contemporary cities are often the outcome of an aggregation of different parts grown in an informal way. In these systems sometimes the expression 'periphery' loses its original meaning of outwards bounds distinguished from the centre (De Carlo 1993). The same happens in Catania, a medium size city of southern Italy where the settlement system is characterized by a complex combination of marginal neighbourhoods intertwined with richer and more vital ones. This is particularly true in transition areas between the main municipality and the surrounding towns, a quite common phenomenon in large conurbations of western countries. However, here another occurrence parallels this one, the presence of large historic neighbourhoods that show characters of economic, social and functional marginalization where illegal activities are concentrated as well as urban blight. Looking more in depth, these areas, that can be defined "at risk", represent a highly heterogeneous set as far their formation process and settlement pattern are concerned. Their other relevant feature is the strong resistance to change both from physical and social points of view, even if specific actions have been taken to improve or upgrade them.

The reasons of these resistances are, as usual, diverse and complex (Secchi, 2005). Some of them are ancient and already analysed (see bibliography below) other are more recent and less studied. This paper presents a set of results that are emerging from an ongoing research on Catania Metropolitan area that can contribute to the general understanding of the problems related to areas in medium sized western cities beyond the limits of the analysed case study.

The formation of peripheries in Catania

In the proposed case study, it is therefore useful to distinguish between old and new peripheries. The first ones were settled during a very long period, from the city reconstruction after the devastating earthquake in 1693 to the end of 1940s. They are mainly inner parts of the city that coexist side by side with dominating downtown areas and with changing parts of the central city. The second ones have developed, both with or without formal planning consents, from 1950s. They surround a large area of the historical centre mainly toward South and North West.

Old peripheries are, in some cases, the result of reconstruction policies implemented after the 1693 earthquake. These included a sort of zoning that divided the city into two sectors: one for rulers' and upper class palaces and religious orders and the other for low-income population. This was obtained by imposing real estate prices and by defining design rules for the road network with clear dimensional hierarchies (Dato, 1983)

Two elements have marked the growth of new peripheries during the outstanding population growth of the city that increased more than 20% in the 1951-1961 decade. The first one was the localization strategy of social housing, the second one was the exploding phenomenon of illegal, or self-help, housing from the 1950s. Social housing schemes were based on the idea of building "satellite" towns for low-income newcomers from inner rural areas. This was the most relevant outcome of the welfare policies of the main city local government: This subsidised estates were initially implemented via a piecemeal approach

and later included in the overall scheme of the first, and so far unique, modern master plan of the city, designed by the prominent Italian planner Luigi Piccinato in 1960s. Illegal housing, a quite common feature of urban expansion in Southern Europe and Mediterranean countries (Kreibich, 2000), is a diversified phenomenon that includes a large set of social actors and that has produced different settlement forms, not always characterised by social and physical marginalization. However, some of the worse illegal settlements have been built near, or even inside, the major social housing schemes, contributing to their social and physical deprivation.

Peripheries in Catania metropolitan area

Understanding the vibrant scenario of contemporary peripheries in Catania requires a look at the dynamics of the metropolitan system that includes a large area north of municipal borders of the main city. This settlement system has acquired, since the 1970s, the main features of the typical urban sprawl that characterises the majority of western cities (Nigrelli 2000). The Catania Metropolitan Area encompassed 27 municipalities, according to the official designation approved by the Regional government. The analysis of population data from national censuses in the period 1961 – 2001, shows clearly the relevance of the metropolitanisation phenomenon in this area. In forty years, the entire population of the Metro Area grew more than 27%, while the main city lost 16% of its inhabitants and the other 26 municipalities increased of 107%. Therefore, in 2001 about 57% of total population in Catania Metro Area lived outside the main city. This settlement system has overwhelmed the rural areas spread along the slopes of Mount Etna, compromising completely the existent landscape and generating relevant congestion phenomena.

The main reasons of this transformation are comparable to the well-known ones that characterize richer city regions of western countries: the search of new residential models, like detached or semidetached housing, the diffusion of private cars and lower real estate prices outside the main city. In addition, the lack of tight zoning regulations in smaller municipalities engendered the rise of the sprawl in these areas adjacent to the northern boundaries of the main city where the *Piccinato* master plan, approved in 1969, reduced severely the building ratio per square meter.

The frantic speculative building activity that had been conducted approximately since the 1970s produced a new urban landscape that wiped out the agricultural activities. Farms were parcelled in small plots, sometimes without permissions, but mainly according to poorly designed master plans that were just tools for distributing building consents based on mere quantitative criteria. The result was the set up of a quite inefficient conglomerate of mono-functional residential settlements some of them with the shape of suburbia, others with higher densities, but all unified by considerable levels of inefficiency. Following this initial phase, the distribution of non-residential functions has become more widespread. This includes not only commercial activities but also offices, services and manufacturing. According to 2001 Census, about 50% of all businesses units (including all sectors) were located outside the main city. Within the 27 municipalities of the official Metro Area, the 12 ones that surround the main city show a greater complexity of functions. In these municipalities there are the majority of value added services and productions like software houses or other value added activities (Martinico, 2005, 2006).

Analysis of Social and Urban Data

In this paragraph, we briefly discuss the outcomes a larger research on the city peripheries based on GIS analysis of Census data from 1991 to 2001 (Fregolent, in press). The analysed data shows some elements useful for a classification of the peripheries into different groups (fig. 1).

Peripheries at risk in old city centre

These neighbourhoods were built (fig. 2) after the *Val di Noto* earthquake (1693) and they have developed mainly nearby the destroyed city walls.

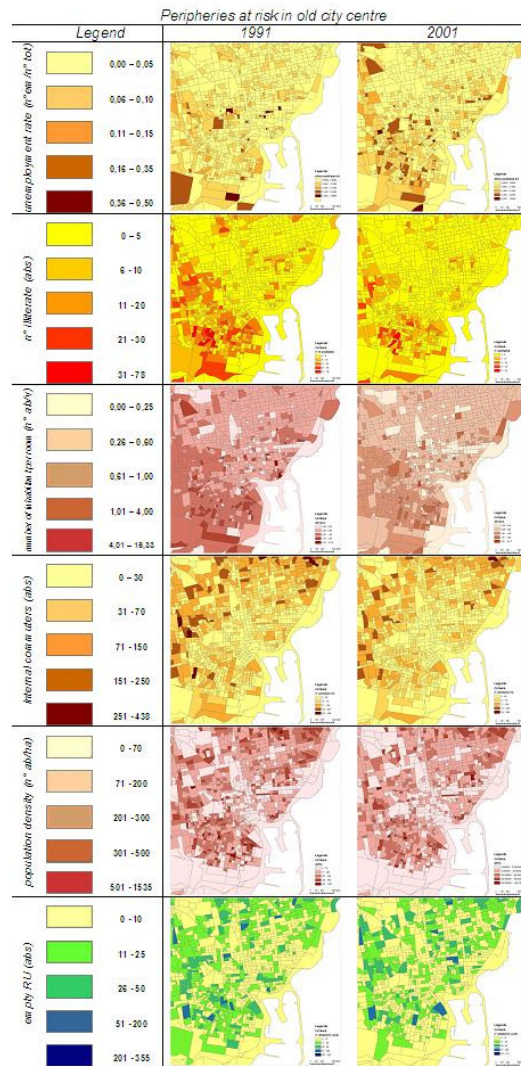


Fig. 1 –GIS analysis of Census data (Source: ISTAT)

New Peripheries

The majority of them were built according to the detailed plans for public housing, based on Modern Architecture criteria (Fig 3, 4). Their implementation was mainly oriented to the construction of residential buildings, whereas the other indispensable services (roads, sewers, lighting, schools) were partially built. Several illegal settlements belong also to this group, with mixed building typologies developed along existing roads or on low cost areas (mainly lava flow fields).

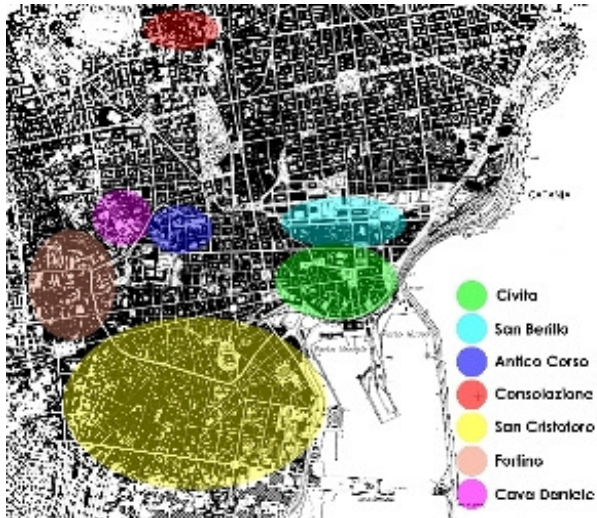


Fig. 2 – Peripheries in old city centre

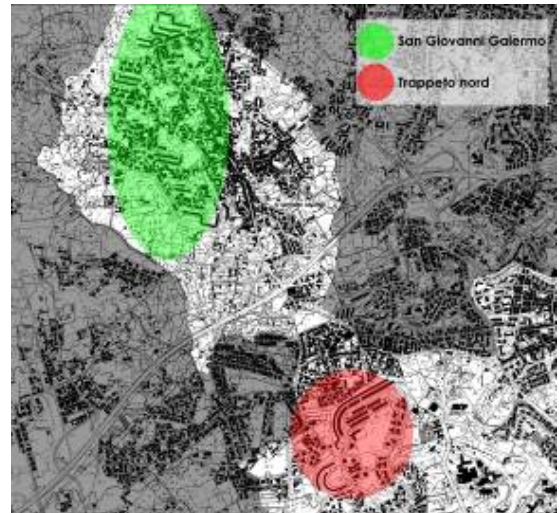


Fig. 3 – New peripheries, north of old city

Peripheries in metropolitan area

The Catania Metropolitan Area, as previously described includes a wide range of settlements. Some of them were developed without consent along Catania administrative border with poor quality buildings and urban layouts based on a lattice of narrow roads, a pattern that is similar to the majority of these self-help peripheries (Fig. 5). Others are located far from the main city, they are also characterised by very limited amount of amenities (like schools, roads, health facilities, etc.).

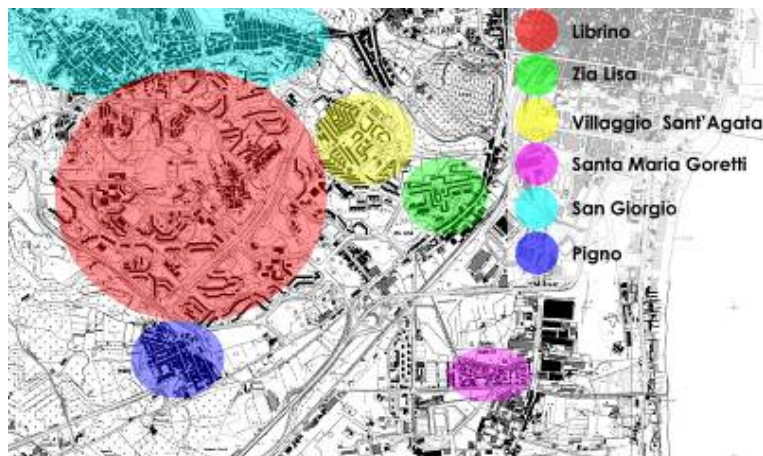


Fig. 4 – New peripheries south of old city

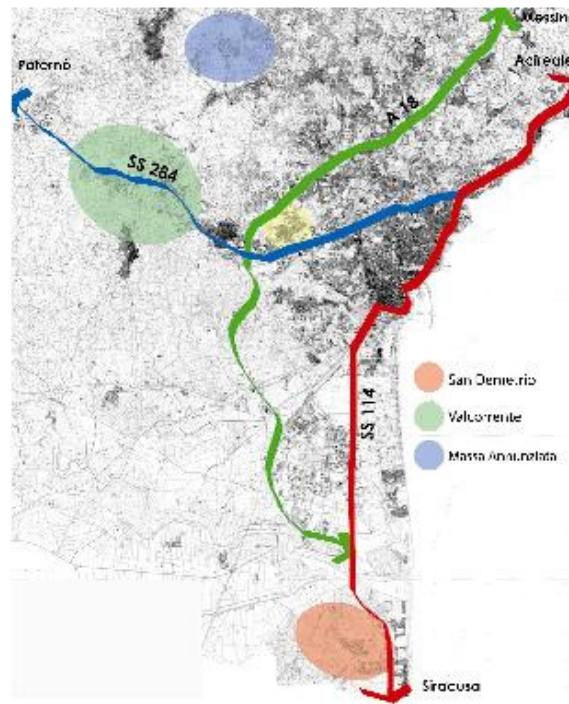


Fig. 5 – The Peripheries at risk in Catania Metropolitan Area

The data analysis (Fig. 6, 7) reveals, among the others, the following aspects. Old peripheries are characterized by high unemployment rate. The number of illiterates is higher than in Metropolitan Area. This fact can be associated to the high rate of juvenile criminality in these areas. The number of inhabitants per room is low because of the contraction of the average number of family members. Commuters from home to city centre are higher than Catania's average because these areas still do not have basic urban services. Everyday thousands of people move to city centre looking for basic needs like schools, markets, shopping, administrative offices, etc.

The population density is high in peripheries located in city centre and low in peripheries built according to plans for public housing. In general, the number of empty residential units is low, apart from some areas located in city centre. However, immigrants from Africa, Asia and East Europe often occupy these empty and dilapidated buildings, which are also the oldest. Peripheries tend to be populated by younger people (less than 20) a group that requires the type of services (schools, social and entertainment structures) that are less available in these neighbourhoods.

In particular, it is interesting the location of non-EU immigrants in the main city. The number of immigrants, revealed by the official Census, that lives in new peripheries is quite low. This datum contradicts what normally happens in European cities. In addition, these groups live almost everywhere in the city centre (both in old peripheries and in wealthier neighbourhoods). It is likely that these dynamics depend on the following elements:

1. it is more simple for immigrants to find houses in poor areas within downtown districts because rents are lower;
2. old popular markets, characterized by informal jobs are localized in downtown districts;
3. the immigrants can not apply for public housing programmes that are reserved to the Italian citizens only;
4. recent peripheries are too far from the city centre, where the majority of immigrants work, mainly in the informal sector.

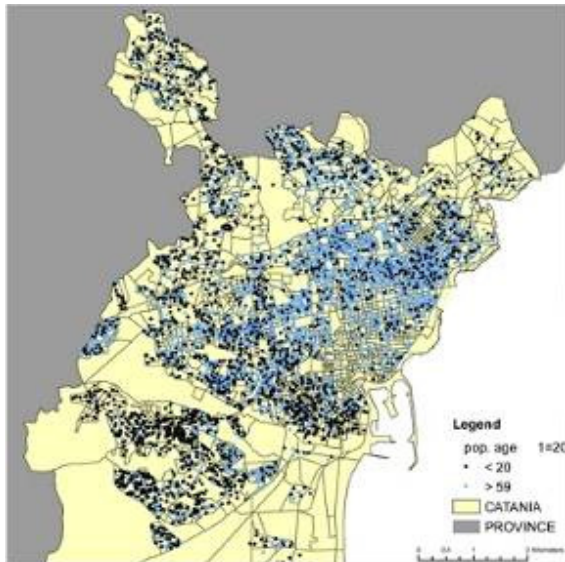


Fig. 6 – The age of population

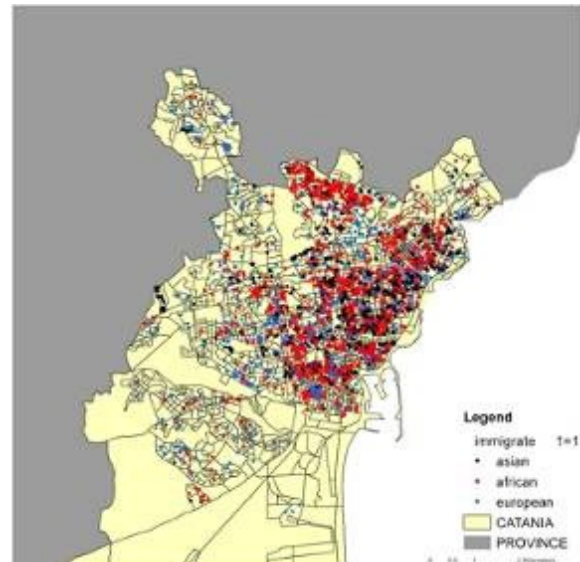


Fig. 7 – Location of non EU immigrants

Three peripheries in detail

Among the peripheries described above, three cases are particularly relevant: the areas of *S. Cristoforo*, *Librino* and *Trappeto Nord*, because in all of them, there have been recently urban renewal actions or because they host initial forms of grassroots associations. The first one belongs to the group of old peripheries the other two are large public housing projects built in the last thirty years.

For each of them, a brief analysis of the main Plans, Projects and Programs, both European and National ones, have been conducted revealing some elements of incompleteness and inefficiency both in the planning approach and in the realization. We have compared the traditional planning tools and the new ones noticing that the reasons of their partial failure include the lack of a comprehensive approach to urban renewal and of a proper involvement of social actors, as well as the absence of appropriate management from the relevant institutions.

Finally, the main spontaneous community initiatives have been highlighted. These associations express a sort of “resistance” to the prevalent social-economical and political dynamics (Paba, 2004). In the “best” cases, these practises are the first signs of the building of a “citizenship”, founded on cooperation and on shared values, capable to self-organizing. Among these practices some try to gain space in the formal channel of the public action, others use methods that we can define indifferent, if not alternative (Lanzara, 2004).

San Cristoforo

The place

San Cristoforo is a neighbourhood located on the southern edge of the oldest part of Catania. Its northern border is *Via Plebiscito* the street that follows the contour of the old city walls. Great part of this area has origin from the large lava flow that in 1669 surrounded the city changing the entire geography of the area and moving hundred of metres ahead the coastline. The urban fabric in *San Cristoforo* appears quite homogeneous, with a prevalence of single storey row houses, middle class two-storey residential buildings, but also small industrial and handicraft buildings. The area has a very limited endowment of public equipments and services (mainly schools and churches). Even public spaces (from squares to sidewalks) are almost inexistent. In this area, there were originally artisans activities progressive dismissed even if in the area remain a limited amount of production facilities.

The eastern part near the port is inhabited by a residual fishermen community. The

presence of the fish wholesale market is one of the peculiar elements since the most powerful mafia families traditionally dominate this activity. A way of living where ancient and modern behaviours stay together is a typical character of *San Cristoforo*. People use narrow public spaces, but above all the courts and the alleys, according to community “rules”. The area seems to oppose a sort of resistance to modernization and keep up the reputation of a high risk locality, especially in its parts that are in extreme degradation, where illegal activities flourishes (drugs trafficking, clandestine butchery, bets on horses’ races or dog-fights).

Plans, Programs and Projects

From several years, *San Cristoforo* has been in the spotlight for the disastrous urban and social-economical conditions, and for the high rate of criminality, above all the juvenile delinquency. Therefore, both the 1969 master plan and the new programmes have selected *San Cristoforo* as an “ideal” intervention area useful to experiment recovery policies.

In the *Piccinato* master plan (1969) the area is considered a “pocket” of underdevelopment and poverty, badly endured by the rest of the city that aspired, in those years, to become the *Milano del Sud* (Fig. 8). Therefore, this large slum, considered without any environmental and historical value, needed a radical renewal action. The subsequent detailed plan (Fig. 9) proposed the total cancellation of the original fabric and its replacement with a new settlement, based on rationalist planning principles. The plan has not been implemented for various reasons, including the lack of interest from local contractors to build the residential compounds. Lately, the *Piccinato* master plan was substantially changed to enable the carrying out of the *Piano Integrato d’Intervento* (September 1998). This new version was based on an opposite conception where the preservation of historical fabric was prevailing.

The EU Programme, *Urban I* (1996), chose as target area some parts of the historical centre including *San Cristoforo*. It was aimed at restoring better life conditions through: economic activities development, containment of social marginalization and actions aimed at physical and environmental improvement (La Greca, 2002, 2003). The target-area presents both dilapidated building stock and socio-economic problems. The programme included also the involvement of the University of Catania that had some already defined projects, for teaching and education buildings into the target-areas. However, none of the new academic buildings was localized in *San Cristoforo*. *Urban I* began in 1996 and so far, great part of the infrastructures provided for *San Cristoforo* have been built. These include two social centres located in abandoned cinemas and some other minor actions, mainly street furniture. The social and economical actions and the following phase of management seem to be less effective. After a little time, the social centres have been closed, the educational courses for primary schools finished and the allocation of funds for local handicrafts has been concentrated in the “strong” part of the target-area. In addition, mainly existing entrepreneurs, instead of new ones, have benefited from these subsidies.

The *Programma integrato d’intervento - Pii* (1998) is a national program aimed at urban renewal of heavily degraded areas, based on integration principles, differentiated actions and public-private co-financing. In *San Cristoforo* the *Pii* was based on the guiding idea of restoring the “city effect”, through the replacement and renewal of the residential buildings and the creation of urban multi-functionality (Fig. 10). The plan provides for the creation of new public spaces and services, such as the replacement of parts of the heavily degraded original fabric with a new square. The Programme concerns a limited part of the area and seems not giving enough care to the effects induced on the surrounding urban fabric. Moreover, it seems that the expectations generated by the future urban renewal are causing an up rise of rents. This is also accelerating the abandonment of the area, a phenomenon that is already taking place. So far (2006), only the design and the expropriation of the areas zoned as public spaces have been financed, but works have not started yet. The realization of residential compounds that need private funds has not been started.



Fig. 8 Urban blight in S. Cristoforo



Fig. 9 Urban Renewal Plan for San Cristoforo (1966)



Fig. 10 Integrated Programme for San Cristoforo (1998).

Associations

S. Cristoforo presents a sort of “schizophrenic” social identity. It is at the same time, an enclave, within “normal” city, but also a place with a rich inner liveliness.

The most important association that acts in the area is the GAPA (an acronym that means Young People Absolutely for Action). Today GAPA is enough “integrated” in the area and it represents a possible alternative for the education, cooperation and redemption of the habitants. The GAPA does not want to replace the State role, but to stimulate institutions, not “nursing” the local community but appealing to its vitality and “converting” it to a greater consciousness of its rights and capacities. It appears that in San Cristoforo exists a system of social relationships able to disregard both the institutional inefficacy and the policies that tend to parcel out cities.

Librino

The place

Librino is known in Catania public opinion as the “satellite-city”. It is one of the largest public housing estates built in Italy since the end of 1970s according to a detailed plan designed by Kenzo Tange. The plan concept proposes a road network adapted to the hilly contour of the site and characterized by a “ring-shaped” system that surrounds the area and divides it into 10 super-blocks (fig. 11, 12). The plan defines only three building typologies: tower houses, linear condominiums and multi storeys terrace houses in a version that would adapt to the steep terrain morphology.

Some of collective equipments and urban infrastructure generously devised in the plan, as far as the great part of public spaces and greenbelts, have to be still built or

completed. These works are proceeding with a strong delay compared with the building of dwellings. There is a contrast between the dense and ordinary housing and the emptiness due to the absence of the planned greenbelts and amenities (Fig. 13, 14). The presence of service sector is almost inexistent. The area is a mono-functional settlement, a dormitory where people return at the end of the day after working, buying, studying in the city-centre. Librino expresses in an ostentatious way the separation between working and living places. Many habitants have come from the historical areas of the city and they still maintain strong links with their neighbourhoods of origin. The area offers a bad quality of life and it looks like a “passing place” in which habitants do not feel care and identification. In addition, it appears unsustainable that the “satellite-city” inhabitants live separated into two groups based on their social class. The first includes people living in housing cooperatives, separated and isolated in gated plots; the second one is made of the inhabitants of public housing, where as usual, there is an unclear distinction between residential system and public spaces (Newmann, 1996).

Plans, Programs and Projects

Librino is somewhat a never-ending story; local governments always promise its completion, above all during the election campaigns, but they lately they always disregard it. Furthermore, the project, appear nowadays rather out-of-dated. The role assigned to *Librino* in 1969 general master plan was to balance towards south-west the city settlement system. The detailed plan, proposed by Kenzo Tange, provides for a self-sufficient town for 60.000 habitants, with a clear separation between car roads and pedestrian footpaths, with amenities concentrated at the centre of each super-block in a central area. The original plan was later modified in order to include some illegal residential settlements that were developed in the area during its approval process. Some public facilities already built have been vandalised because of the lack of capacity of municipal government to manage them, others have to be still completed. So far, *Librino* have still no gone along the entire path that will lead to the dignity of being a town, overcoming the current condition of a “monster neighbourhood already inhabited by about 40.000 inhabitants.

Associations

About thirty years after the beginning of its construction the inhabitants of Librino still live in a sort of limbo marginalized in a place without history. In *Librino* the relationship between the inhabitants and the place appears completely different from other areas, like *San Cristoforo*, where this relationship is marked by very strong and often noxious linkages.

Moreover, it seems that there is not an appropriate consideration in planning tools about the future of this large part of the city. The completion of the original detailed plan continues to be proposed without an in depth discussion with local community. The two attempted revisions of the general master plan have not introduced any change for this area.

Instead, *Librino* gets bad press not only for the “traditional” stigma attached to public housing estates, but also because, occasionally there are upsurges of social tensions connected with the allocation of public dwellings or episodes related to the high rate of juvenile delinquency.

The society here is characterized by a widespread and deep-rooted sense of precariousness, by subculture and poverty that represent a fruitful ground for the growth of the mafia’s mentality.

Some groups of volunteers operate in Librino carrying out actions like after-school activities for children and youngsters, legal assistance, cultural activities or political actions aimed at increasing the awareness of basic civil rights. Some of these groups formed the main association of Librino, called the “Iqbal Masih”. The inhabitants have asked for the support of these associations, especially for claiming needs like repairs in the sewage system, the completion of social housings or their allocation to the applicants, a process that usually lasts for many years. However, alternating phases of acceptance and rejection characterises the relationship between the inhabitants and these groups. They also complain for the lack of recognition or their work from the local government. An example is the destiny

of the theatre that was vandalised and restored many times but never committed to one of these groups for their management.

The relationship between the community and the institutions is almost inexistent both for the lack of real interest from local government, but also for a traditional mistrust towards the institutions. Political consensus in areas like this is gained by promising personal rewards with direct face-to-face contact. Shared community values or collective assets are negligible for local politicians because they are not perceived as important by the community. The only political party present in Librino is *Forza Nuova* a minority extreme right-wing group.



Fig. 11 Librino. The detailed master plan by K. Tange (revised version)



Fig. 12 *Librino*. Detail of the model showing the central motorway and Urban Centre



Fig. 13 *Librino* The central urban motorway and residential buildings in the background



Fig. 14 *Librino*. The empty spaces among public housing

Trappeto Nord

The place

Trappeto Nord was a rural area until the 1970s, on the hills along the north border of the municipal territory of Catania. Citrus fruit orchards mixed with lava fields were the main feature of this urban fringe where a large public housing estate for about 17.000 inhabitants was built according to a detailed plan designed by a public agency.

The plan proposes an high-density concept that features a huge double-band multi storeys block of flats with a central street, about 500 metres long, planned for more the 5,000 people. On the other side of a road that leads toward Mount Etna, there is another mega crescent-like residential building. Amenities are concentrated in a central area surrounded by green connective, but so far, they remain only a planning proposal, since only a school and a few parking lots have been built. In spite of the planned generous endowment of public realm nowadays, there are not squares, churches or other public spaces for social life. This area like Librino is a dormitory containing only residential buildings. However, inhabitants have tried to cope with the lack of premises suitable for commercial business, occupying public realm with provisional structures built along the 500 meters building, the so-called “long snake” (fig.15). These small spaces between the street and the residential building garage, initial zoned as green spaces have been converted into shops, bars, trade unions offices but also into private terraces or kitchen gardens.

Plans Programs and Projects

This area was designated from the 1969 *Piccinato master plan* as public housing estate but its implementation as been in charge of a state owned agency that proved to be particularly inefficient in completing the plan. In recent years the area was the target of ad hoc national program for deprived urban areas the so called *Contratti di quartiere*. These programmes require agreements to be subscribed by local institutions and private developers.

The programme, proposed and approved in 1999 for *Trappeto Nord* was aimed at the completion of the planned amenities, mainly green areas and a multi-functional building, containing public services, social and cultural facilities. The quite unsuccessful framework the of original plan was not challenged by the proposed programme, considering that it introduces only negligible differences (Fig. 16) The *Contratto di Quartiere* is officially into execution, but in April 2006 none of the actions included have been completed.

Associations

Trappeto Nord contains all the features of the modern ghetto: a physical and social system characterized by segregation and poverty. The great part of the city juvenile delinquency comes from this area and here the criminality is strongly rooted. It is not by chance that *Trappeto Nord* is nicknamed “the Bronx of Catania”

Otherwise than in *San Cristoforo* and *Librino*, in *Trappeto Nord* there are not any volunteer associations. This settlement appears completely secluded from the rest of the city both from physical and social point of view. The public school is the only public institution in this area, but it operates in a climate of considerable hostility even from the local government. In 2005 this school was excluded from municipal funds allocation for education in risk areas.



Fig. 15 - The incomplete fronts of buildings personalized by the inhabitants



Fig 16 *Contratto di quartiere* in Trappeto Nord

Peripheries at risk: a scenario of resistance

The scenario of peripheries at risk in Catania agglomeration, briefly outlined above, shows some specific features related to their dual nature: the presence of secluded enclaves within the historic centre and the new neighbourhoods in several parts of the metropolitan area. The new metropolitan span of the settlement system is one of the factors that have to be considered in order to understand the current state of these peripheries, mainly characterised by their resistance to change.

The first element is the crystallization of the difference between northern and southern settlements. Northern neighbourhoods have been strengthened by the presence of the majority of the middle-class residential areas. This has happened especially in the first ring of municipalities that surround the main city. Consequently, these areas increased their capacity of attracting value-added urban functions, whereas the southern and western sections have been trapped in a mechanism of selection of urban functions. Therefore, they have continued to host low-income residential areas, social housing estates, and less valuable non-residential activities. This tendency has been reinforced by the partial implementation of the planning indications. For example, in *Librino* the detailed plan provided for a “city centre” that includes offices, a hotel, commercial activities and a University faculty. In addition, in an adjacent area the master plan indicates the site for the new facility of one of the main city hospitals, currently located in the old city centre. After more than twenty years, none of these new functions has been established in the area. A strong opposition against this decentralization process has come also from public institutions that have rejected constantly the hypothesis of moving some of their offices there. The presence of these

activities would have substantially changed the destiny of the so-called “satellite town” contributing to its transformation from the current state of dormitory.

The second relevant phenomenon is the lack of integration of northern and western peripheries that, in spite of their proximity with richer and more integrated localities, appear still separated. The urban growth of the metropolitan system has “passed over” these areas not only from physical point of view but also from the functional one. In particular, the settlements of *Trappeto Sud* and *San Giovanni Galermo*, where social housing schemes are concentrated, are nowadays enclaves marked by low functional complexity and poor urban quality, inhabited by low-income families, sometimes with problems of social integration or deviance. The condition of this transition zones between the main city and the conterminous municipalities testifies how these neighbourhoods resist to spontaneous processes of functional evolution. This is mainly typical of public housing schemes, whereas the same has not happened in settlements built for speculation by entrepreneurs. Actually, these last have slowly but consistently changed their initial mono-functional condition of residential districts (Sanfilippo et. Al., 1976). Physical proximity with higher status functions or activities was not enough to reverse the destiny of public housing settlements that have still the stigma of being the city's ghettos.

For instance, the two large settlements of *Monte Po* and *Nesima Superiore*, have not get consistent advantages by the growth of a very large commercial district established in the 1980s in a nearby area that belongs to the municipality of *Misterbianco*. In addition, between 1970 and 1985, they were surrounded by a large self help development of illegal houses that took place on the lava fields of 1669, a process that produced an unplanned and rather chaotic settlement around them. Similarly, *Trappeto Nord*, has not improved thanks to the proximity of the university campus that hosts a range of scientific departments, including a large part of the teaching hospital of the faculty of medicine. In spite of this, the neighbourhood appears dilapidated and with major problems of criminality, in strong contrast with the surrounding settlements of middle-class condominiums and cottages. A proper wall ad a sort of no-man's land separate the social housing settlement from the surrounding areas.

The third phenomenon is the birth of a new type of degraded peripheries that can be defined as “metropolitan peripheries”. They are often characterised by problems similar to those of the other types but their morphology is quite similar to middle class suburbia. They are often less easy to define since they show an ambiguous nature of being in between the condition of stable dwellings and a semi-rural settlement. This is still a typical condition in the surroundings of large and medium cities in Sicily where many people, even not particularly wealthy, live for part of the year in a second house in the countryside. One of these settlements is located in the southern section of the Catania municipal territory called *San Demetrio* and it is characterised by a very simple subdivision with buildings mainly belonging to a mixed typology, detached multi-storeys houses often inhabited by extended families.

The analysis of the new peripheries shows limits and faults of both planning approaches and of their implementation. This depends on many factors including the lack of effective forms of structure planning and the limits of regional legislation that was formed through a piecemeal process of narrow-minded addenda and amendments to previous norms. One example of these normative limits is the possibility of assigning plots for subsidised housing projects in area zoned for agricultural activities, in contrast with ordinary planning procedures.

As far as the design of public housing projects is concerned, it is useful to compare it with the one of private initiative projects where planning and design efforts are often less that minimal. The comparison highlights a typical paradox: in the first ones planning prescriptions and design criteria have been interpreted dogmatically, producing crystallised and over-expanded public space and making difficult the introduction of commercial activities. On the contrary, speculation settlements appear “flexible”, that is capable of accepting and incorporating new functions and uses in spite of their poor quality, marked mainly by a limited quantity of open spaces for walking and parking. Nevertheless, these differences represent also the starting point for devising a positive transformation of planned settlements, since the

abundance of undefined or abandoned open spaces, as it happens in *Librino* and *Trappeto Nord*, represents a chance for upgrading initiatives. Similar opportunities do not exist in neighbourhoods built according to “market” principles, where the level of congestion is becoming paramount.

These observations are confirming the long lasting tradition of criticism about the results of the applications of planning principles inspired to Le Corbusier and the International Congress of Modern Architects, starting from the seminal contribution of Jane Jacobs (1961). However, in the examined case, these elements play a double role: they become even more critical due to the partial completion of the original projects but open also more interesting possibilities of introducing corrections. On the same direction, it is reasonable to interpret the self-made adaptations, like the ones of *Trappeto Nord*, which reveal the latent vitality of these places.

The analysis of the actions undertaken shows that recent policies that have been launched to cope with the problem of peripheries at risk, have a limited capacity of solving structural problems. This is true not only for social issues but also for the actions aimed at increasing the lacking endowment of infrastructures and services. In particular, both the Urban Programme and The Integrated Programme for San Cristoforo have had marginal effects on target areas. The *Contratto di Quartiere* for *Trappeto Nord* has been even less effective considering that it has had major management difficulties and does not go beyond the starting phase.

The analysed case study confirms the findings of an increasing number of studies about new policies that cope with the crisis of contemporary cities, summarised by Hall (2002). There is an growing dichotomy between traditional tools, and the increasing diversity of urban problems. Indeed, most of the traditional planning strategies were defined during the era when housing problems were the key ones in western cities. Moreover, the new approaches to urban problems constantly strive for innovation but tend too often to be still limited to land use regulation.

The case confirms that society dynamics tend to diverge from the “codified” project of the city to be implemented via traditional programs. The idea of the city that is embedded in these plans is still the product of an intellectual *elite* legitimized by technical know-how and power. On the contrary, a city is not the product of the mind or, at the opposite, of chance. Ordinary people do not perceive clearly neither the brilliant ideas of the designer or a sophisticated plan nor the current complexity that prevent a thorough comprehension of what is going on. Nowadays, it seems that social questions do not get proper answers from contemporary cities. These requests have to find new ways for emerging in an increasingly hierarchical global society, if it is true that “You do not enjoy the seven or the seventy-seven wonders of a city but the answer that it gives to your question” (Calvino, 1972). Participatory issues play an increasingly central role in the formation of plans and programs but this does not implies that they are effective or relevant. Standard practices are still an arena where few strong political and economic actors have a say, even in a participatory decision processes.

The analysed case reveals how the most impelling requests come from the peripheries at risk. A great deal of interest of the rehabilitation processes has concentrated toward these areas. Here the participation has often be reduced to a “label” unavoidable in order to comply at the call for bids for national or European funds but this does not change the traditional way in which the ruling class manages projects.

In *San Cristoforo* and in *Librino* grassroots groups were born in order to give answers to the faults of local institutions. Some of these associations at the beginning were established with humanitarian aims but eventually they are operating for increasing the awareness of local communities toward basic rights of citizenship. However, they were not able to play an effective role in defining the actions implemented in these years. In addition, their role was mainly limited to supporting requests for basic rights (e.g. housing, services) but less concerned with more complex themes like the right to safety, justice or urban quality.

This sort of “social immaturity” casts a different light over the future of these localities in comparison to similar places in western cities. For instance, the examined situation

appears quite far from what happened recently in the French *banlieues* where the widespread awareness of social differences was among the reasons for the burst of violence.

In Catania, inhabitants of the examined peripheries still have major difficulties in holding the spotlights in order to acquire a relevant role in decision processes. Accordingly, grassroots movements are so far only a prologue in the long way for increasing the capacity of the inhabitants of “wording” their questions and getting proper answers from local society.

Quoted references

- Calvino, Italo (1972) *Le città invisibili*, Torino: Einaudi
- Dato, Giuseppe (1983) *La città di Catania. Forma e struttura 1693-1980*, Roma: Officina.
- De Carlo, Giancarlo (1991) «La città contemporanea», Occhialini, Etra, Connie, *La città contemporanea - Atti del convegno*, Catania: Ilaud - Quecm.
- Fregolent, Laura (ed.) (2006, in press), *Periferie come Banlieues?* Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Hall, Peter (2002) «Planning: millennial retrospect and prospect», *Progress in Planning*, n. 57
- Jacobs, Jane (1962) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities: The Failure of Town Planning*, New York: Random House.
- Kreibich, Volker (2000) “Self-help planning of migrants in Rome and Madrid”, *Habitat International*, no. 24
- La Greca, Paolo (2002) «Catania. Le radici del rinnovamento», Palermo, Pier Carlo, Savoldi, Paola (eds), *Il programma Urban e l'innovazione delle politiche urbane. Esperienze locali: contesti, programmi, azioni*, Milano: Franco Angeli.
- La Greca, Paolo (2003) «Programmi e politiche di rigenerazione urbana nell'area metropolitana catanese», *Urbanistica*, n.122.
- Lanzara, Giovan Francesco (2004), «Comunità-rifugio o laboratori per l'innovazione?», *Urbanistica*, n. 123.
- Martinico, Francesco (2005) «The Clumsy Metropolis Urban Dynamics and Globalization in a Metropolitan Area of the Southern Italy», La Greca, Paolo (ed), *Planning in More Globalized and Competitive World*, The Hague-Roma: ISoCaRP – Gangemi.
- Martinico, Francesco (2006) «Dalla Milano del Sud all'Etna Valley. Le attività industriali nell'area metropolitana catanese», *L'Universo*, anno LXXXVI n. 2.
- Newman, Oscar (1996), *Creating Defensible Space*, Washington: US Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Nigrelli, Fausto Carmelo (2000), «Catania. Un futuro da metropoli», D'Amico R. (ed), *Catania. I quartieri e la metropoli*, Catania: Le nuove muse.
- Paba, Giancarlo (2004) «Insurgent City, Topografia di un'altra Firenze», *Urbanistica*, n. 123.
- Sanfilippo, Ernesto Dario, et alii (1976) *Urbanistica e quartieri. L'abitazione nell'area catanese*, Documenti dell' IDAU ,Catania: IDAU - Università degli Studi di Catania.
- Secchi, Bernardo (2005), *La città del XX secolo*, Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Additional references

- «Dossier Catania» (1990), *Spazio e società* n. 52.
- Brancati, Melita, La Greca, Paolo, Sanfilippo, Ernesto Dario (1996) «Dal paesaggio al piano. Il litorale e la periferia sud di Catania», *Quaderno del Dipartimento di Architettura e Urbanistica dell'Università di Catania*, No. 17.
- Dato, Giuseppe (1980) *La città e in piani urbanistici, Catania 1930-1980*, Catania: Culc.
- Sanfilippo, Ernesto Dario (ed.) (1990), *Catania, città metropolitana*, Catania: Maimone.

ⁱ Università degli Studi di Catania, Dipartimenti Dau e Astra