

ESF-IIU CONFERENCE

Cities and Media.
Cultural perspectives on Urban Identities in a Mediatized
World.

Whose house is this? Housing needs
and urban development projects on
local newspapers

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From demand to policies for housing

- | Institutions are frequently demanded to solve problems related with the demand for housing of the population such as public housing provisions, urban planning, building standards...and externalities associated with housing (traffic, cost of land, environmental costs, social costs of integration...)

Housing as a public good

- | Housing provisions reflect the social structure of a society and constrain or favour the well-being of communities and individuals. Moreover, housing standards and urban settlements are objects of institutional regulation. For all these reasons housing programs constitute an important issue in **redistributive policies**.
- | Household preferences and collective rules of different social groups (ethnic, socio-economic classes, lifestyles) in terms of housing preferences may not converge. The clash of interests among the population may give rise to a **collective dilemma** that institutions have to solve; the approach used is relevant thus for the relationship between the public and the private sphere.

A new approach to urban planning

- | In the last twenty years there has been a move from top-down policies to **participated social interventions**. The involvement of communities and neighborhoods' has become a relevant aspect in urban policies and side effects of housing policies (gentrification, ghetto areas) stimulated a **different approach to urban planning**.

The testimony of a urban project on a middle size historical town

- | **Time and space:** a two year project of collaboration with the Municipality of Trento (population over 104.000 at census survey, 2001).
- | **Action and reflection:** Compliance with urbanistic laws which required a forecast of housing needs in 2008 and re-definition of the image of the town by means of a variety of actions à from economic aspects to social quality of life (public housing, architecture and new settlements planning)
- | **Objects and subjects:** A group of researchers and members of the public administration activated monitoring programs and promote cooperation with a variety of – private and public - actors involved in housing issues.

The historical town of Trento

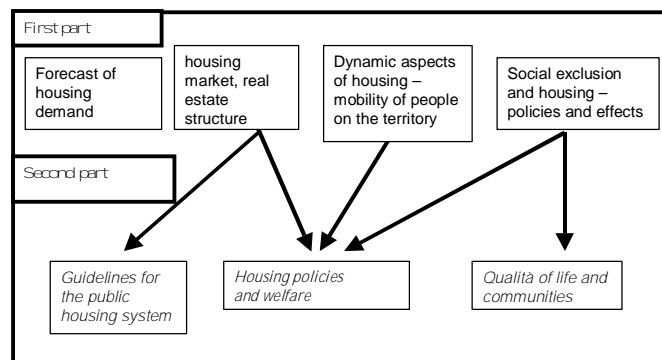


The urban context of Trento

In the last 10 years the town undergone major changes in its urban structure:

- | Re-definition of the **economic structure** of the town (de-industrialization, service and professional industry)
- | Social and **demographic changes** (professionals, immigrants, elders, single parents and new families)
- | **Urban changes** (gentrification of the town center, growth of suburban area, rise in the cost of housing)
- | **Rise of externalities** in small towns of the surroundings (traffic, land cost, access to public services)

The structure of the project



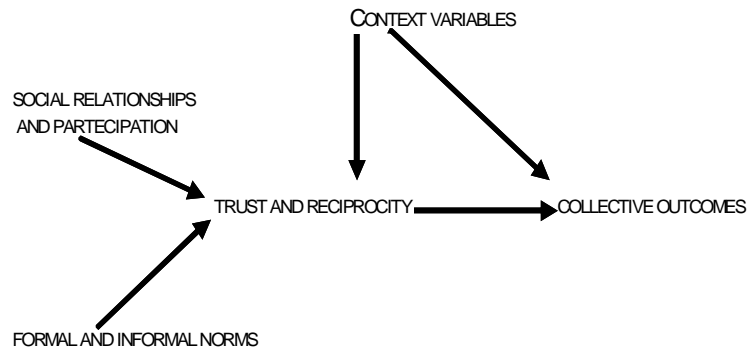
Quantitative and qualitative aspects of housing

- | Census and administrative data (population and groups)
- | Ecological data (suburbs, center)
- | Territorial mobility (network analysis)
- | Impact of social policies related with housing
- | Statistical forecast of demand
- | Interviews to public and associative representatives,
- | Focus groups with community representatives and leaders of grassroots' groups
- | Social representation of housing issues on the local newspapers.

The explicit aims of the project

- | Initially the projects began as a request of compliance with urban planning laws (forecast of housing needs in 2008). The system of public housing - aprox. 3600 residential units in 2004 - was also in need of re-definition and reform in entrance criteria, building standards, as well as community and identity issues.
- | One of the implicit aim of the project was to recognize the relevance and **quality of relations in social policies** and its potential side effect of new residential area on neighborhood social texture.à **Social capital as a form of social integration.**

Social capital and collective outcomes



ref. Ostrom e Kahn, (2001).

The implicit aims of the project

1. The project evolved in the two years and activated **several independent pathways** in new urban dwellings.
1. Several actions of the projects were reported on local newspapers and discussed **in grassroots associations** or inside institutions at higher level (regional government) during its final phase.
2. The municipality tried to extend part of the project to **other small municipalities of the surroundings**. Several actions directed to the local communities and public presentations were carried on during the second part of the project.

The project and the public

The roundtables in most of the cases were directed by an **independent organization** or a collective one; the subjects of such discussions varied from the impact of demographic change to the problem of waste management.

The aim of such public actions was double:
to **create reflexivity** and favour social participation (as forms of collective goods) and
to **integrate the theoretical contribution** on how to interpret housing conflicts (intentionally produced vs perceived).

How the project was seen on local newspapers

The use of **local newspapers** in the research group was essential.

- | As a source of information on events and aspects connected with the project (meeting of associations, local protests in a specific suburbia) à **what's on?**
- | As a form of evaluation of the impact and the scope of the project (reform of the public housing sector in the city board and in grassroots associations) à **what are we doing?**

The analysis of the local press

- | Three periods of observation of the local press (2 local newspapers and three local magazines);
- | The periods refer to specific phases of the projects and the results of the analysis were used as a form of feedback on actions and public presentation and discussions of the project.
- | Each period lasted two months and for each of them the articles referring to the project were selected and analysed (**content analysis**). Frequency, main characters, subject and references to other issues were coded and reported.
- | The following text is a synthesis of these findings and of a general reflection on the results of the project.

The private and the public perspective of housing.i

Institutional actors during the project promoted a roundtable of community leaders and stakeholders to define guidelines for the public housing system. Specifically **two main roundtables** were activated:

- a- Reform of criteria of access to public housing
- b - Creation of community service centers (Poli sociali) defined on the basis of social composition of residential area (social demand) and not on administrative bases

These opportunities for collective discussions received a good attention from the media (local newspapers) but were also seen as a form of pressure from actors excluded in the process (groups of tenants, landowners, etc.)

The private and the public perspective of housing.ii

- | The reform of the criteria of access to public housing was carried on smoothly by the municipality board in collaboration with the regional government.
- | The economic aspects of housing reform received as much attention as the esthetic (architecture of the new urban developments, types of settlements) and communicative aspects.
- | The newspapers, however, paid attention to the image of the town of Trento as it emerged in the public debate and underlined the relevance of the participatory aspects of the project for this **process of identity creation**.

The project reported on local newspapers-i

- | Only in few cases the project was perceived in its originally form of a participated system of interventions (multiple actors reported in the articles, reference to more than one issue of urban policies).
- | In most of the news reports the aim of the project (contribute to the creation of new commons – in terms of shared knowledge and rules of behavior applicable to the housing problem) was missed with the main exception of the **new territorial traffic control program (2005)**.

The project reported on local newspapers-ii

- | The media underlined the efforts of the municipality board to build a network of public administrations (Trento municipality and small towns in the area).
- | However the collaborative initiatives to approach collective problems (traffic, transportation and commuters mobility, access to public social services) were most frequently connected to the presence of a specific sponsor (another municipality, the regional board or the provincial government, associations of interests).
- | The image of the project was reported most frequently as a **top down driven process**.

The project reported on local newspapers -iii

- | The presence of different groups of users of the public housing system, however, was not emphasized in the press. Few references in articles cited ethnic and class differences in access to public housing or reported the presence of discriminations.
- | The presence of a reform of housing criteria was intentionally not seen as a product of the project.
- | The project give the opportunity to change approach in the housing reform debate; from a political process it gradually became a **an institutional administrative reform** with contents aimed to reflect a change in the management of the urban communities.

Some final observations on how to interpret housing conflicts:

- | Housing preferences have a direct effect on the housing provision system but also on the public space and the demand for public services à **dilemma of public goods and preservation of individual rights**
- | Rules of access concerning the public housing system need a constant update with changes in social structure (stability of users) à **adaptive perspective in rule making**
- | Local resources (from green spaces to identity) are difficult to re-create in new urban dwellings and need a special attention by institutions à **modification of rules of behavior**

References

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Web sites of the municipality of Trento, Trento Urban Center and of the Project leader (IRSRS Research Institute).

- | www.irsrs.isite.it
- | www.casacittà.tn.it
- | www.comune.tn.it