


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Experiences of political mobilization and popular participation in Milan's working-class neighbourhoods: 1945–1967

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Abstract

The years 1945–55 were a period of reconstruction for Italy; the following decade was one of economic growth. An aspect of this transition is analysed here, in relation to the forms of social integration created in working-class neighbourhoods. The case-study focuses on Milan, and the two organizations studied are the *consulte popolari* (the 'people's councils'), created by the left in the immediate post-war period, and the 'social centres' created in the mid-1950s by the IACP (the Autonomous Institute of Public Housing). Both were attempts to involve the new, outlying suburbs in the city's political life, each of them trying to adapt to different political phases. Both, I would like to suggest, succeeded in achieving certain results.

Introduction

This article deals with two different experiments for the development of social integration in the working-class districts of Milan. The sociological concept of integration has its own history and various shades of meaning.¹ In the Italian post-war period, it was interpreted by all political groups and scholars in a positive sense, as 'social cohesion'; in relation to our area of analysis, it was a question of developing a neighbourhood community as a necessary precondition for developing civil co-existence.² The immediate objectives of social integration were to teach the interiorization of values and models of behaviour suited to urban life (relations with the neighbourhood, use of public spaces, etc.), and, starting from these basics, to stimulate action towards the pursuit of collective goals, which thus concerned the interests of the neighbourhood community, in a dialectical relationship with the whole city and its administration.³ The availability of a house as a guarantee of

¹There is a critical review of the concept, in relation to the themes of urban living, in J. Foot, *Milano dopo il miracolo. Biografia di una città* (Milan, 2015), 55–7.

²See for example F. Alberoni and G. Baglioni, *L'integrazione dell'immigrato nella società industriale* (Bologna, 1965), 100.

³Istituto lombardo studi economici e sociali – ILSSES, *L'integrazione sociale in cinque quartieri di Milano*, vol. I, *La partecipazione sociale* (Milan, 1964).

social peace was an opinion shared by all political forces, and, starting from the early 1950s, the goal became, more explicitly, to make home-ownership available to the lower-middle classes and working-class families. This policy, initially supported mainly in a Christian-social context, was gradually accepted by all parts of the political spectrum.⁴

After the war, the objectives of building and urban reconstruction were accompanied by that of the social inclusion of the inhabitants of working-class neighbourhoods through political participation. In this case, too, it was a 'reconstruction', which stimulated the citizens of working-class neighbourhoods to find, after 20 years of the Fascist regime, methods of co-operation, or conflict, suitable for the rules of democracy. In Milan, the working-class districts, whether the old traditional areas or those of more recent construction, underwent significant changes in their composition from the immediate post-war period to the 1960s, following the destruction of bombed housing, displacement due to war (probably over 250,000 people),⁵ the return of people after the war and immigration into the city of those looking for work. From the point of view of the mass parties, this social commingling aggravated the shortcomings of political participation.⁶ The involvement of all these citizens was therefore a priority in terms of educating them in democratic participation, as well as exploiting their electoral heft.

The mobilization strategies taken into consideration here sought to respond to the needs of a political activity that was integrated with life, and had in common a particular attention to the relationship between living conditions and the city, in relation to various situations of want: difficulty in finding low-cost housing, building degradation and urban decay, and lack of services and public transport in newly built neighbourhoods and spontaneous settlements. The scale of intervention identified was the 'neighbourhood' – whether this was an aspect that was urbanistically and historically significant or only imagined. To focus on the tools used to develop socio-political inclusion, two very different experiences were chosen as case-studies: both of them, however, with a similar outcome, namely that of arousing, in different political phases, *public action*,⁷ at the neighbourhood level, as an integral element of democratic politicization and an instrument of social change.

⁴About the Milanese debate, see Camera confederale del lavoro di Milano, *Case per i lavoratori e affitti equi*, Milan, 26 Jan. 1963, cyclostyled in Istituto per la storia dell'età contemporanea (ISEC), Fondo Emanuele Tortoreto (T), Serie Partito socialista italiano (PSI), fol. 766.

⁵This is a conservative estimate; see G. Consonni and G. Tonon, 'Le condizioni abitative dei ceti popolari e le lotte per la casa dal 1943 al 1948', in G. Bonvini and A. Scalpelli (eds.), *Milano tra guerra e dopoguerra* (Bari, 1979), 650–1.

⁶L. Ganapini, 'Dopo la guerra civile', in I. Botteri (ed.), 'Dopo la liberazione. L'Italia nella transizione tra la guerra e la pace: temi, casi, storiografia', *Annali dell'Archivio Storico della Resistenza bresciana e dell'età contemporanea*, 4 (2008), 15–32.

⁷'Public action' in this case means the interdependence between different scales of political intervention, with the involvement of parties, institutional actors and civil society, with the aim of mediating between different interests and producing shared rules for collective activities. See J. Commaille, 'Sociologie de l'action publique', in L. Boussaguet, S. Jacquot and P. Ravinet (eds.), *Dictionnaire des politiques publiques*, 4th edn (Paris, 2014), 599–607.

The *consulte popolari* (people's councils) were neighbourhood organizations inspired above all by the parties of the social-communist left (the Communist Party – PCI – and the Socialist Party – PSIUP until 1947, then PSI).⁸ These organizations were also present in other cities governed by centre-left municipal councils (Bologna, Turin, Livorno) and, with fairly different results, in Rome as well. The *centri sociali* dealt with here, on the other hand, were established in the newly built neighbourhoods by the IACP, the Autonomous Institute of Public Housing of Milan, the body that managed the vast majority of public housing in the city and province.⁹ Social assistance in working-class neighbourhoods had been introduced in 1946 by the Homeless Relief Administrative Committee – CASAS – an organization financed with funds from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, which operated mainly in central-south Italy.¹⁰ The experience of the IACP social centres, however, broke away from the paternalistic system of the first form of social assistance to the homeless, to constitute an original example of public intervention in the area.

These were obviously two initiatives that were organized differently. The *consulte* were forms of political mobilization, subordinate to the national and local action of the parties that ran them; their ambition was to mobilize, and instruct in political participation, all those who came to live in the neighbourhoods. The social centres,¹¹ on the other hand, were also institutional bodies with educational tasks, primarily aimed at those assigned to public housing apartments, but, run as they were by social workers who worked to develop collaboration between citizens, they soon broadened their scope to include the whole neighbourhood. Both experiences, with their own terminologies, and according to the political conditions of their time, worked in the same direction: that of communicating, in a participatory, democratic and pluralist way, the tensions of social life in outlying, working-class neighbourhoods.

The setting is Milan, which at the beginning of this process was a city with a building heritage that had been severely tested by the war. In addition to some of its most important symbolic buildings, almost a fifth of the housing stock had been made uninhabitable by the bombing and at least half of the public housing apartments were unusable.¹² Over 1.2 million people lived in the city. Reconstruction was, therefore, a matter of pressing urgency: over 50,000 families lived in a situation of cohabitation and tens of thousands in improvised housing (cellars, attics, warehouses, parts of destroyed buildings). In addition to these,

⁸For the political scenario in Milan, see M. Punzo, 'Ricostruzione postbellica: politica e amministrazione', in *Storia di Milano*, vol. XVIII (Rome, 1995), 706–34; E. Landoni, *Il laboratorio delle riforme. Milano dal centrismo al centro-sinistra: 1956–1961* (Manduria, 2007).

⁹A. Pedretti (ed.), *Case popolari: urbanistica e legislazione: Milano 1900–1970* (Milan, 1974).

¹⁰See M. Dellavalle and E. Lumetta, 'Il progetto UNRRA-Casas: assistere e riabilitare attraverso l'edilizia', in M. Dellavalle and E. Vezzosi (eds.), *Servizio sociale di comunità e community development in Italia: 1946–2017* (Rome, 2018), 157–77.

¹¹In today's political lexicon, the term *centri sociali* refers to examples of extra-institutional, confrontational, political aggregation. The events dealt with here refer to a use of the expression that goes further back in time, encompassing neighbourhood activities of help, based on volunteering, or on institutional initiatives of assistance.

¹²G. Pertot and R. Ramella (eds.), *Milano 1946. Alle origini della ricostruzione, la città bombardata, il censimento urbanistico, gli studi per il nuovo piano, le questioni di tutela* (Milan, 2016), 299–309.

there were the self-built settlements, famously known in Milan as ‘coree’ because their spread occurred during the Korean War. At the city perimeter, according to estimates of the time, there were 4,600 illegal houses, but at least another 60,000 people lived in self-built neighbourhoods in 24 municipalities in Milan’s immediate hinterland.¹³

In readapted housing, and later in the new neighbourhoods, the inhabitants were gathered together by chance, the only points of contact being the same landlord and having to organize their existence in a new scenario. Bringing discipline to this process required the commitment of welfare bodies, a national strategy against the high cost of living, the intervention of political forces, the social inclusion of these inhabitants and restricted illegal activity (such as housing occupation) in order to stem the infiltration of criminality and social disorder. Two decades later, the situation was very different: the city had been rebuilt and had expanded. Milan had just gone through the economic ‘miracle’ and had more than 1.6 million inhabitants, of whom about 480,000 had immigrated in the previous five years.¹⁴ The metropolitan area, i.e. the 93 municipalities of the Milanese hinterland, and especially those located to the north, had grown even more rapidly (around 35–9 per cent between the 1951 and 1961 censuses), reaching almost 900,000 inhabitants (with almost 8 per cent living in illegally built houses). The themes of mobilization, control and social cohesion in the working-class neighbourhoods once more arose in these new circumstances.

The *consulte popolari*

The story of the *consulte* began in the first months of 1946 in the Affori district,¹⁵ an old working-class area on the northern outskirts, which had remained an autonomous municipality until the 1920s and still presented a sense of continuity with the rest of the city. The initiative was started mainly by PCI militants, already representatives in the working-class suburbs of the CLN – the National Liberation Committee. After the liberation, in several working-class areas, for a few months the CLN committees played the role of intermediaries with the municipality, social security institutions and relief agencies – this last including the Housing and Accommodation Committee, made up of the political parties in the CLN and various welfare bodies – in order to help tackle the housing emergency in the city.¹⁶

¹³L. Meneghetti, ‘Immigrazione e habitat nell’hinterland Milanese. I casi di Bollate, Pero, Rho’, in G. Petrillo and A. Scalpelli (eds.), *Milano anni Cinquanta* (Milan, 1986), 267–70; J. Foot, ‘Revisiting the coree. Self-construction, memory and immigration on the Milanese periphery, 1950–2000’, in R. Lumley and J. Foot, *Italian Cityscapes. Culture and Urban Change in Contemporary Italy* (Exeter, 2004), 46–60.

¹⁴About another 80,000–100,000 people, living in the city for years but without residence, were regularized starting in 1955, when Milan municipality decided to forgo the 1939 Fascist law against urbanism, which prohibited those who did not have a stable job from immigrating into cities. The Fascist ruling was only repealed with Law No. 5 of 10 Feb. 1961. On the demography of Milan during the period, see L. Guiotto, ‘L’occupazione e le condizioni di vita e di lavoro’, in Petrillo and Scalpelli (eds.), *Milano anni Cinquanta*, 25–36; G. Petrillo, ‘Immigrati a Milano, 1951–1963’, *Annali dell’Istituto milanese per la storia della resistenza e del movimento operaio*, 1 (1992), 631–61.

¹⁵See P. Montagnani, *Un’esperienza democratica: le consulte popolari* (Milan, 1947); E. Tortoreto, ‘Le iniziative popolari per il decentramento amministrativo a Milano’, *Il foro amministrativo*, 44 (1968), 268–91.

¹⁶See C. Ziviani Pianciamore, ‘Storia e funzioni del CLN della Lombardia nel periodo della ricostruzione’, in Bonvini and Scalpelli (eds.), *Milano tra guerra e dopoguerra*, 219–30.

In March 1946, when an assembly was held in Milan consisting of the various committees that had sprung up in the neighbourhoods, the Affori *consulta* was just one of many groups; its name, however, ended up being adopted by others. In 1947, there were about 50 *consulte* in Milan: more than two-thirds of these, however, existed only in name and did not carry out any form of continuous activity. The PCI's plan was, in fact, above all to make its presence felt in neighbourhood organizations. The issue of disastrous housing conditions, while it also produced a sense of commitment in intellectuals and militants, was considered above all a tool for consolidating consensus, with the resolution of problems entrusted more to the capacity of the left to influence central government policy rather than initiatives originating from the working-class districts themselves.

On 31 May 1947, a government reshuffle excluded the left from the Italian government, but there remained a valid relationship of collaboration within the Constituent Assembly. In Milan, the alliance between the left and the Christian Democrats (DC) continued to sustain the municipality led by socialist Antonio Greppi, which, after the defeat of the left in the 1948 national elections, was a stable presence in the city until March 1949. From the point of view of political tactics, from 1948 the *consulte* were useful to the left above all in terms of countering the increasingly widespread presence of political Catholicism in working-class neighbourhoods. In particular, the ACLI, the Christian Association of Italian Workers, had abandoned its predominantly trade union aspects in order to create institutions and associations that offered social assistance, professional education courses and recreation for the inhabitants of popular neighbourhoods.¹⁷

In contrast to the Catholic approach, however, from the point of view of the left, the resolution of the housing emergency had to be part of the struggle waged at a national level against the high cost of living. The proposed solution was to freeze rents, an explicitly classist manoeuvre focused on the fight against real estate earnings. There was not, however, enough attention paid to the question of the reconstruction and financing of the building stock, and, more generally, insufficient consideration was given to the political importance of urban planning and construction, even though this stirred a wide-ranging debate among left-wing intellectuals.¹⁸ Such an attitude effectively excluded the *consulte* from involvement in the matter of the new regulatory plan, which the Greppi municipality had launched: it was provisionally approved in 1948 and, after many revisions, applied in 1953.¹⁹

In December 1947, the *consulte* held their first congress in Milan.²⁰ From a certain perspective, the movement seemed a success. At least 20 councils were active, in many cases formed, alongside communists and socialists, by militants of the

¹⁷A.M. Locatelli and N. Martinelli, 'I cattolici milanesi e le inchieste sulla casa: CISL e ACLI (1950–1970)', in D. Adorni and D. Tabor (eds.), *Inchieste sulla casa in Italia. La condizione abitativa nelle città italiane nel secondo dopoguerra* (Rome, 2019), 340–6.

¹⁸E. Tortoreto, 'La mancata difesa di Milano dal 1951 al 1950: considerazioni sulle linee politiche della ricostruzione edilizia', *Storia urbana*, 1 (1977), 97–133; G. Consonni, 'Milano. La ricostruzione tradita', *Storia urbana*, 41 (2018), 113–34.

¹⁹See F. Oliva, *L'urbanistica di Milano. Quel che resta dei piani urbanistici nella crescita e nella trasformazione della città* (Milan, 2002).

²⁰ISEC/T, Serie Consulte popolari (C), fol. 2300, *Primo congresso delle consulte popolari rionali*, Milan, 21 Dec. 1947, cyclostyled.

Republican Party, the Italian Women's Union (UDI) and veteran associations. They were joined by spontaneously organized tenant committees. Representatives of the DC, however, were absent, since they did not believe that they could continue the unitary experience of the CLN in the context of bodies that were indefinite in nature and not even officially recognized by the municipality. In any case, a city steering committee was appointed, decided by the parties and divided directly between them: six representatives of the PCI, two socialists, one republican and one social democrat (PSLI at that time), who, however, withdrew, with reasons similar to those of the Christian Democrats. In 1948, a statute was drawn up which assigned deliberative powers, not to the assemblies, but to the dialectic of the associations and parties that made up the backbone of the *consulte*, according to a hierarchy that was well illustrated by the composition of the steering committee. While participation in the assemblies of some *consulte* was reasonably large, thanks to the presence of militants and intellectuals, their function was still not terribly clear in terms of political action. Their most relevant activity had been the distribution of basic necessities and subsidies financed by popular subscription and the food parcels provided by the high commissioner for food and by the Ministry for Post-War Assistance, active up to the first months of 1947. A series of petitions were then handed to the municipality with regard to individual cases of extreme distress in relation to housing or suspension of the supply of services.²¹ It was, above all, activity involving assistance; in certain cases, however, some initiatives were carried out that were not insignificant, such as the creation of a network connecting company stores and co-operatives in order to realize sales outlets in districts where there were no shops.

After 1949, with the exclusion of the left from the municipal government as well, the *consulte* went into operational lethargy: many broke up, most no longer held assemblies due to lack of participation and to the disinterest of the party cadres who should have been encouraging them.²² From the point of view of the left, mass organizations of this kind were not functional in terms of the political battle, given the left's minority status, that, in the city as well, was going to take place. The *consulte* were designed to build civil society in the suburbs, which were perceived as aggregations of inhabitants with a weak sense of class identity. Political participation, discussion in assemblies, the sharing of difficulties and the search for ideas in common were the tools of social pedagogy that the leftists had found most fruitful. This direction was not pursued univocally, because it clashed with the need of individual parties to make their presence felt in the neighbourhoods and to manage to win their votes. However, these districts were rarely homogeneous on a socio-economic level, and the mobilization managed to involve the most culturally and politically prepared minorities – something that did not guarantee the hegemony of the left there. The issues that the neighbourhood assemblies were able to come together around and address were mostly related to protests about the scarcity of public transport; the need hygienically to redevelop the areas that had been bombed; the lack of playgrounds for children; and the possibility of opening schools

²¹'Consulte popolari rionali e amministrazione comunale', *Le consulte popolari*, July 1948, 1–2.

²²ISEC/T-C, fol. 2299, M. Galimi, 'Relazione del lavoro svolto nelle consulte popolari di Milano', 29 May 1949, typescript.

in the suburbs or of going ahead with the reconstruction of those that had been damaged. These are the constant elements that emerge from reading the people's councils' *Quaderni delle rivendicazioni*, the lists of complaints and protests compiled occasionally from 1946 and then annually in 1951–55 by the steering committee, to be submitted to the city council.²³ These lists, however, are testimony to the existence of social issues addressed to the municipal legislator, in terms of urban planning for example, which the municipality paid no heed to – at the annual presentation, the leading municipal authorities intervened only rarely. It would not, after all, be until 1968 that matters such as green areas and 'social infrastructures' would become part of the debate on urban building standards.²⁴ Not even left-wing parties were able to come to terms with these grievances from the various districts. The source was predominantly an interclassist one, and as such the form it took was unexpected. It was, in fact, a modern kind of feedback from the inhabitants, a request for participation, which to be properly cultivated would have required effective responses from city officials and more support from the parties.

Mobilizing and organizing the city, starting from the neighbourhoods, required different methods from those that were known about and practised in factories. Where the matter of housing was concerned, mobilizing a variegated section of civil society necessarily brought into play requirements that were not similar in character to those developed by unions and parties within the factories. The large factory, with its model of trade union organization, was not the only socio-productive reality in Milan. Unlike Turin, for example, the Milanese labour market was highly segmented and characterized by a high level of horizontal workforce mobility between different sectors, and between both large and very small production units. Professional identities were therefore mostly still undefined, especially for the recent immigrants, and class identity was not very homogeneous. From the left's point of view, this collective identity had to be constructed in the working-class neighbourhoods; but the right arguments were required. In working-class districts, the conflict, which for the left should essentially have focused on the battle against the earnings of builders and owners – housing as an *exchange value*, in other words – found its creativity instead based upon the *use value* of the home and the neighbourhood: in short, on the quality of life. The mobilization of the neighbourhoods managed to develop political subjectivities that were not especially relatable to the contingent projects of the left – above all, that of building up a reservoir of votes. The *consulte*, then, were inspired by a mythology of neighbourhood unity that had also guided the planning of the new working-class neighbourhoods,²⁵ but which had little basis in reality, and which would have demanded innovative organizational practices and a more marked attention to the problems of the inhabitants. This was also the case in relation to the various types of inhabitant: there were tenants of private individuals and public bodies, a number of different generations, slum dwellers and illegal occupants of disused buildings,

²³ISEC/T-C, fols. 2240–97, a complete collection of the *Quaderni*. See also Comitato cittadino delle Consulte di Milano, *Giustizia per i rioni periferici* (Milan, 1956).

²⁴E. Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People. How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (London, 2018), 17–18.

²⁵Critical elements on the utopia of self-sufficient and homogeneous neighbourhoods in M. Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana, 1944–1985* (Turin, 1986), 23–46; for a theoretical approach, see *idem*, *Progetto e utopia. Architettura e sviluppo capitalistico* (Turin, 2007).

and small commercial and artisanal activities. This all added up to a series of ‘questions’ that could not be provided with univocal answers.

In addition, in direct competition with the effectiveness of the *consulte*, the PCI and PSI committed their organizational resources above all to the tenants’ union which, organized in ward committees, ended up overlapping with and obscuring the councils. In the parties’ view, it was a matter of organizing homogeneous realities through taking into account the various demands: building more public housing, freezing rents and halting evictions.²⁶ The union also offered legal protection to registered tenants and attracted a higher level of participation.

The *consulte*, therefore, were gradually dwindling. Overall, around 350 people in the city attended the *consulte*, mostly delegates from the PSI and the PCI. Independent participants had practically disappeared, something also true of the city steering committee: this had been enlarged to 15 members, nominated by the parties, but held meetings with only 5 or 6 delegates.²⁷ In 1954, the council’s periodical was shut down due to lack of funds. Finally, the city committee, which had been inactive for several years, also dissolved in March 1958, formally marking the end of this particular experience.

A comparison with the *consulte* in Rome

The experience of the *consulte* did not involve only Milan, but local cases must be studied to understand its political meaning and how it functioned, given that the outcome and impact of this mobilization initiative was very different in the various contexts.

While limiting ourselves to a glance, the case of Rome must be considered.²⁸ The *consulte* were set up in the city in March 1949, with the establishment of a co-ordination centre of various bodies in the city districts. Some arose from the transformation of the CLN party cells in the historic working-class districts, others through the spontaneous initiative of the inhabitants of the suburbs – the 35 created by Fascism to respond to the housing emergency and the dozens of spontaneous settlements built by ‘irregular’ immigrants.²⁹ The PCI became the hegemonic force of these initiatives, due above all to the fact that it was able to interpret the needs that inspired the spontaneous movement in the neighbourhoods with regard to the issues of housing and the high cost of living. It also showed itself willing to share certain issues with them, such as the exercise of direct democracy, hostility towards the local administration and the use of extremely radical forms of protest.³⁰ This was exactly what they

²⁶ISEC/T-PSI, fol. 1773, AMIST, *Lettera aperta ai senatori*, Milan, 18 Jan. 1951, cyclostyled. The AMIST (Milan Association of Tenants and the Homeless) was founded in June 1945 at the Milan Chamber of Labour; in 1949, it backed the founding of a national union, the UIST. See P. Daniele, *Un sindacato per il diritto alla casa: l’esperienza dal ’45 agli anni ’80 in Italia* (Rome, 1982).

²⁷ISEC/T-C, fol. 2300, letter from the president of the city committee, the communist R. Bandiera, to the Milan federations of the PCI and PSI, 24 Jun. 1955.

²⁸Rome’s historiography is already richer than that of Milan, starting with A. Tozzetti, *La casa e non solo. Lotte popolari a Roma e in Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi* (Rome, 1989).

²⁹That is, those denied residence in the city by the Fascist law against urbanism. For a quantification of informal settlements in Rome, see A. Clementi and F. Perego, *La metropoli spontanea. Il caso di Roma* (Rome, 1983).

³⁰See, for example, U. Viccaro, *Storia di borgata Gordiani: dal fascismo agli anni del ‘boom’* (Milan, 2007).

tried to avoid in Milan, where the city council was centre-left and the *consulte* had been developed to compete for territory with Catholic bodies.

The urban and social scenario of Rome and Milan were also very different in the immediate post-war period: Rome was a huge city in terms of area,³¹ and the boundaries of urbanization were broken up by large tracts of agricultural land. There was space to respond to the demand for social housing, but there was also the need to provide the various settlements scattered throughout the enormous municipality with dignity and urban efficiency. In Rome, moreover, the inhabitants of the suburbs were used to playing an autonomous leading role in initiatives specifically centred around the issues of lack of infrastructure. In addition, even more difficult than in Milan, the model of building class consciousness could not be borrowed from labour organization and factory workers: the inhabitants of the working-class districts and suburbs were only partially involved in the experience of the workers' union, with the underclass far more prevalent.³² Neighbourhood identities, however, were highly developed, their foundations lying precisely in the shared problems of living in working-class settlements.³³

To simplify things, if in Milan the struggle for housing was the instrument of the left for the mobilization of working-class neighbourhoods and especially of the new settlements, in Rome it was rather a matter of taking the lead in a mobilization that was already traditionally present, widespread and shared,³⁴ in order to turn it into an instrument of electoral success. Following this line, which I would call an attempt to 'discipline the struggle', the Roman *consulte* continued their work until 1972, able as they were to maintain a leading role throughout the various evolutions of the struggle for housing and services.

In Rome, the *consulte* also participated in certain forms of struggle that were not practised in Milan, above all with 'reverse strikes' – that is, the execution of essential public works by the unemployed in the settlements.³⁵ In 1963, the *consulte* participated in the occupations of IACP houses in the Tufello district, an experience that was repeated, with some reluctance, in the following years, until it merged into the 1968–70 period of the housing struggle, alongside – even if in political competition with – the organizations of the extra-parliamentary left. More generally, in the immediate post-war period, the left, and the PCI in particular, had no project for mass political struggle outside parliamentary, institutional and factory conflict.³⁶ The flexibility of the Roman *consulte*, however, allowed them to maintain a lasting and stable presence in the struggle for housing and in neighbourhoods – a front that was instead considered secondary in Milan.

³¹The size of the municipality of Rome is about 1,300 km²; Milan covers an area of only 180 km². See R.C. Fried, *Planning the Eternal City. Roman Politics and Planning since World War 2* (New Haven, 1973).

³²L. Villani, *Le borgate del fascismo. Storia urbana, politica e sociale della periferia romana* (Milan, 2012), 330.

³³ S. Ficacci, 'Tra mestiere e quartiere. La classe operaia romana alla ricerca di una identità', in G. Zazzara (ed.), *Tra luoghi e mestieri: spazi e culture del lavoro nell'Italia del Novecento* (Venice, 2013), 81–104.

³⁴ P. Salvatori, 'Associazione e lotte operaie', in V. Vidotto (ed.), *Roma capitale. Storia di Roma dall'antichità a oggi* (Rome and Bari, 2002), 241–68.

³⁵ See G. Cantarano, *Alla riversa. Per una storia degli scioperi a rovescio 1951–52* (Bari, 1989).

³⁶ The analysis of V. Foa, 'Prefazione', in F. Levi, P. Rugafiori and S. Vento, *Il triangolo industriale tra ricostruzione e lotta di classe, 1945–1948* (Milan, 1974), vii–xxvi.

From IACP social centres to neighbourhood committees

From 1951, in the public housing sector, districts financed by the INA-Casa project began to be built in Milan, launched by Law No. 43 of 28 February 1949. Funding was provided to the IACP, which had provincial powers and could therefore plan interventions with a metropolitan perspective. In the case of Milan, half of the 1.2 billion lire financed was spent within municipal boundaries.³⁷ The choice of areas was made by the municipality, which privileged the northern outskirts of the city, in districts outside the ring road and disconnected from the rest of the urban fabric. The ‘self-sufficient’ design of the neighbourhoods was therefore an obligatory one: there were areas for socializing, areas for shops, a church and extensive green spaces. The buildings were constructed with care and thought, as part of a constant dialogue between rationalist-school designers and financiers.³⁸ The most significant constructions included the Harar district (1951–55) in the San Siro area (north-west), concentrated in nine buildings of five or six floors, which delimited a central area devoted to green spaces, services and a series of single-family terraced houses. The 942 apartments generally consisted of four rooms, with particular care given to the hygienic aspects of ventilation and sunshine. In 1956–59, also in the north-west, the Vialba I district was built in Quarto Oggiaro, following the demolition of the pre-existing village.³⁹ The three- or four-storey houses repeated the urban model of the Harar district, with the buildings gathered around the spaces for common services.

On the initiative of the IACP, the Feltre neighbourhood was built in 1957–63, in the immediate north-eastern suburbs. Aesthetically, it was one of the most successful projects: conceived as a small town, consisting of a nucleus of four-storey buildings, with streets and squares for shops and common areas, and within this ‘village’ three nine-storey buildings were built. In the extreme northern suburbs, near Affori, the Comasina district was built in 1955–58, with financing shared between INA-Casa and other bodies. The general volumetric plan was provided by the IACP, while the construction was handled by a variety of architects. The result was one of the largest self-sufficient social housing districts in Italy, with 84 buildings and 11,000 rooms; it became a centre of immigration, mainly for workers and low-level white-collar employees from northern Italy, amounting to over 10,000 inhabitants.⁴⁰ Until the late 1980s, however, it remained isolated from the rest of the city’s urban fabric.

³⁷Overall, 3,947 dwelling units were built in the city of Milan during the first seven years of the INA-Casa plan (1949–55); see *Edilizia popolare. Rivista dell’Associazione nazionale fra gli IACP*, 2 (1955), n. 6.

³⁸For INA-Casa’s realizations in Milan, see R. Pugliese (ed.), *La casa popolare in Lombardia, 1903–2003* (Milan, 2005); P. Di Biagi (ed.), *La grande ricostruzione. Il piano Ina-casa e l’Italia degli anni ’50* (Rome, 2001).

³⁹Further interventions by the municipality and the IACP, carried out by 1967, determined the building saturation of the Quarto Oggiaro area in a few years. It was characterized as an immigration district due to the wide availability of social housing. See R. Torri and T. Vitale (eds.), *Ai margini dello sviluppo urbano. Uno studio su Quarto Oggiaro* (Milan, 2009).

⁴⁰M. Grandi and A. Pracchi, *Milano. Guida all’architettura moderna* (Milan, 2008). See also J. Foot, ‘Migration and the “miracle” at Milan: the neighbourhoods of Baggio, Barona, Bovisa and Comasina in the 1950s and 1960s’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 10 (1997), 184–211.

Over the following years, the city grew around these islands of rational construction with no real unifying project. The original provisions of Law No. 43 of 1949 provided for half of the project's new buildings to be sold to tenants on an 'option to purchase' basis, but in reality the number of homes sold with this particular formula was higher and would further increase after 1955, with the start of the second phase of the construction plan.

The events and accomplishments of the INA-Casa project have a well-established historiography:⁴¹ in the context of this particular analysis, it is worth pointing out a collateral but essential aspect of the project, and that is the 'education' of the new small owners from a practical, and in a certain sense 'moral' point of view. In fact, social workers were installed in the new INA-Casa housing complexes, to be co-ordinated, from September 1954, by the *Ente di gestione del servizio sociale*, the Social Service Management Authority (EGSS).⁴² The task of these mediators was to teach the new owners how to act in relation to the city administration, to the new housing areas and to service companies.⁴³ The broader goal, however, was to build neighbourhood communities, developing co-operation initiatives between the inhabitants, an idea in tune with the mid-1950 initiatives of social Catholicism.

The unusual element in Milan, in terms of social assistance in the outlying neighbourhoods, was that the city had its own autonomous, significantly widespread, institution. On the initiative of the Milan IACP, the Institute for Family Social Services (ISSF), was founded in July 1954, initially an institution under private law and then, from 1958, recognized as a moral entity.⁴⁴ Its function was to provide the inhabitants of Milan's IACP districts with a service to help them overcome the problems resulting from adaptation to the suburban neighbourhoods. The most traditional function of the social workers involved (exclusively women) was based on traditional case-work – in other words, practical help in the relationship between the persons assigned to the accommodation and the institution, in relation to the organization of services and utilities.⁴⁵

The activity of the ISSF has not yet been studied in detail, and, more generally, urban history and social movements could benefit from in-depth analysis of the concrete work of social workers in working-class neighbourhoods. Here, my main topic is the evolution of the ISSF and its activity from 1963 to 1964, in a period that, compared to the decades immediately after the war, marked a profound change in society. In national terms, Italy's phase of accelerated economic

⁴¹See the recent essays in S. Zeier Pilat, *Reconstructing Italy. The Ina-Casa Neighborhoods of the Postwar Era* (Burlington, 2014).

⁴²In 1963, as the INA-Casa project came to an end, the EGSS became the ISCALL (the Social Service Institute for Workers' Housing) and continued operating until 1972. See A. Sotgia, 'Una fonte per lo studio della città pubblica: il servizio sociale nei quartieri Ina-Casa (1951–1972)', *Città e storia*, 3 (2008), 415–33.

⁴³C. Trevisan (ed.), *Il servizio sociale nei quartieri di edilizia pubblica. Sei anni di attività dell'EGSS* (Rome, 1961).

⁴⁴The ISSF was declared a moral entity with decree no. 1223 of 9 Nov. 1958. The deed of incorporation was signed on 2 Jul. 1954; The president of the ISSF was DC member Camillo Ripamonti, who since 1952 had also been president of the IACP.

⁴⁵See M. Cacioppo and M. Tognetti Bordogna, *Il racconto del servizio sociale. Memorie, narrazioni, figure dagli anni Cinquanta ad oggi* (Milan, 2008).

development had come to an end on the economic front,⁴⁶ while, from December 1963, the first centre-left government was in power, with the participation of the PSI. Significant immigration was still an ongoing phenomenon in Milan, its peak being reached in the 1971 census survey, when the city numbered over 1.7 million inhabitants. Over 55 per cent of the Milanese lived beyond the ring road, where most of the newly built public housing was located. The expansionary cycle of construction, however, which had been mainly supported by the private sector, had almost completely stopped.⁴⁷ The return on capital was in fact declining due to the economic situation and to numerous other factors specific to the sector: the introduction, in 1963, of the tax on building land; the power of the municipalities to expropriate, at favourable prices, areas to be used for public housing (Law No. 167 of 1962) and the end of the INA-Casa public building plan.⁴⁸ Thus, in a decade, rents had grown faster than consumer prices and wages and at the IACP alone 26,000 requests for public housing were outstanding.⁴⁹ New sources of conflict might therefore emerge from the working-class neighbourhood, and this would have affected the IACP, which in Milan ran almost all the management of public buildings.⁵⁰ It would also, of course, have affected local politics, which would have had to deal with that conflict, or which could benefit from it in electoral terms.

Following the INA-Casa policy, by 1959 the Milan IACP had also started selling its apartments to tenants.⁵¹ The sociological structure of the working-class districts, therefore, was developing in a new direction, and the social centre was responsible for new and broader tasks. It was a matter of 'training' the new option-to-purchase tenants in the commitments involved in building ownership and making them an active part of maintaining the neighbourhood's decorum and social co-existence. This was the direction taken by the ISSF. The inspirational idea for the new direction coincided with the more explicitly secular interpretation of the community philanthropy model developed by the industrialist Adriano Olivetti,⁵² that of setting down roots by starting from the identification of a territorial and urban area that could be defined as a 'community'. The ISSF thus settled into the city's main IACP neighbourhoods, with the aim of developing their social-assistance project mainly in the context of *community work*.⁵³

The ISSF created seven social centres in total. The target areas of the operation were above all the neighbourhoods that had just been built: the 'new

⁴⁶G. Petrillo, *La capitale del miracolo. Sviluppo lavoro potere a Milano 1953-1962* (Milan, 1992).

⁴⁷Between 1951 and 1960, 6,030 new buildings had been built in Milan for approximately 117,000 apartments; almost 80 per cent had been built by private individuals, 15 per cent by public bodies and the rest by building co-operatives (*Città di Milano. Rassegna mensile del Comune e bollettino di statistica*, 1952-1961).

⁴⁸See M. Preite, *Edilizia in Italia: dalla ricostruzione al piano decennale* (Florence, 1979).

⁴⁹6,500 of whom asked for an option-to-purchase house. G. Cavalera and A. Lodola (eds.), *IACP della provincia di Milano: 1909-1960. Cinquant'anni di storia e di attività dell'edilizia popolare in Milano* (Milan, 1962).

⁵⁰As of 30 Jun. 1960, the IACP owned almost 43,000 apartments in Milan, and managed another 20,200 pertaining to various entities (source: IACP Milan).

⁵¹Following decree no. 2 of 17 Jan. 1959. Regarding the first results of the decree, see ISEC/T-Comune di Milano, fol. 2068, Centro ricerche economiche e sociali, *Indagine sulla periferia di Milano* [1961], typescript.

⁵²C. Olmo (ed.), *Costruire la città dell'uomo. Adriano Olivetti e l'urbanistica* (Turin, 2001).

⁵³See Harry L. Lurie, *The Community Organization Method in Social Work Education* (New York, 1959).

suburbs'.⁵⁴ Two centres were established in the Comasina district, in the north-west of Milan,⁵⁵ with other centres situated in the working-class areas of Lorenteggio, Stadera-Barona, Molise and Corvetto, running from south-west to south-east, and Varesina, in the north-west.⁵⁶ The names of the neighbourhoods, in reality, recalled the toponyms used in that period to designate the main IACP settlements.⁵⁷ Those in the southern areas had been built in 1925–44, mostly in semi-rural areas, but in the early 1960s these constituted the 'bridgeheads' of urban expansion towards the south-eastern hinterland. The Stadera-Barona district, along the Naviglio canal, included one part not far from the centre and a more peripheral settlement, where Milan municipality had, starting in 1886, built some 'housing for the poor', with shared toilets and bathrooms. Further IACP interventions in 1928–30 expanded the built-up areas. The neighbourhood was integrated into the city through private construction which, according to a 1964 survey, occupied over 70 per cent of the built-up area.⁵⁸ About half of the neighbourhood was inhabited by blue-collar workers and lower-middle-class white-collar employees. Many lived as tenants in private buildings that were in a state of deterioration, while there were still many uncovered canals in the area, together with a lack of important services. The Lorenteggio district was built in open countryside along the Naviglio Grande in 1938–44, then expanded by the IACP during the 1950s both towards the neighbouring municipalities and in the direction of the ring road (the Giambellino, Gelsomini and Inganni districts). It was an immigration zone from the immediate post-war period and, according to the 1964 survey, over 65 per cent of the inhabitants were immigrants, mainly from southern regions. In the neighbourhood, there was also a *corea*, which housed 300 families and contained a shelter for the evicted. Lorenteggio is nowadays considered one of the most interesting examples of development in Milan,⁵⁹ but until the late seventies it was a neighbourhood known for its poorly maintained urban and building context and petty crime.

The first buildings of the Corvetto area, built by the IACP in 1925–29, were also in open countryside along the Via Emilia. As part of the INA-Casa funding, the municipality built a batch of affordable housing in 1949–52, which the IACP extended southwards in 1950–55. The neighbourhood was isolated from the city until 1960, when motorway junctions were built in the area. Meanwhile, integration of the neighbourhood with the metropolis stimulated private construction, which mainly built houses to be put up for sale. The Molise district (the Piazzale Cuoco-Insubria area) was built by the IACP in 1933–38 along the ring road and consisted of 700 basic working-class housing units – while there were indoor toilets, washrooms and showers were shared in the courtyards. The district, however, was already well connected with the rest of the city by the 1950s, and there were also

⁵⁴L. Cavalli, *La città divisa. Sociologia del consenso e del conflitto in ambiente urbano* (Milan, 1965), 95–107.

⁵⁵One of the two ISSF centres was however closed in 1966.

⁵⁶ISEC/T-PSI, fol. 355, *Prima assise sulla periferia milanese*, Milan, 31 Mar. 1962, cyclostyled.

⁵⁷See IACP della Provincia di Milano, 1908–1983. *Dal lavatoio al 'solare'* (Milan, 1984).

⁵⁸P. Gennaro & Ass., *Indagine sulle aspettative dei quartieri periferici*, file 8, *Rapporto di sintesi* (Milan, 1964).

⁵⁹F. Infussi (ed.), *Dal recinto al territorio. Milano, esplorazioni nella città pubblica* (Milan, 2011).

industrial areas and a fruit and vegetable market. Finally, the Varesina district represented a series of historical interventions by the IACP starting in 1909, along the road to Varese. In 1945–52, the IACP added new five-storey social housing buildings (the Pompeo Castelli, Mangiagalli II and Varesina lots) to the two- or three-storey houses with enclosed courtyards that had been built previously. It was an area predominantly for blue-collar workers, located near the Alfa Romeo factories and dotted with numerous mechanical workshops.

Even taking into account the fact that the six INA-Casa social centres, which were concentrated mainly in the north and west of the city in Baggio, San Siro (Harar) and Comasina, performed the same function, the distribution did not cover the entire peripheral belt. To the north-west, for example, was the experimental district of QT8 (1946–61),⁶⁰ with the idea of extending outwards from the first section of the Gallarate district, completed by the IACP in 1958 and then further expanded until 1974. Gallarate, built with the prefabrication technique, was a 'dormitory area', where construction was completed well in advance of services. In the early 1960s, there were already around 15,000 inhabitants, mainly lower-middle-class workers.⁶¹ Perhaps the need to serve this type of user with a social centre did not seem particularly urgent to the ISSF.

In addition, the operational areas that the social centres had to cover were too vast, especially since the orientation towards the practice of community work required them to be available to the entire population and not only to those tenants assigned by the various bodies.

This tendency in the direction of community work was progressively adopted by all the initiatives run by the Italian Federation of Social Centres (FICS), established in 1957 and in which the ISSF also participated.⁶² The demand for participation coming from the neighbourhoods could not be answered only in terms of the services that the social centres traditionally offered. The political maturation and participation of the neighbourhoods in the social dialectic, meanwhile, was also developing in other ways. The most relevant body capable of mobilizing active minorities was the National Union of Tenants and the Homeless (UNIST). This association did not have particularly deep roots among IACP tenants, but rather among the tenants of private individuals: it was organized by left-wing militants and had connections with the Chamber of Labour. The general strike in the city against expensive rents in September 1963 demonstrated a significant mobilization capacity, mostly arising from conflict with the government and the municipal administration. The union perspective was traditionally directed towards the government, with the request for legal provisions that would limit rent increases.⁶³ Dealing with the minutiae of life in the neighbourhoods was a different matter, however, and mobilizations with stronger links to the territory developed from

⁶⁰G. Tonon, 'QT8, il quartiere sperimentale della Triennale. Storia e bilancio di una esperienza milanese', in Pugliese (ed.), *La casa popolare in Lombardia*, 141–53.

⁶¹Currently, the neighbourhood, enlarged in the seventies mainly by private building, has over 60,000 inhabitants. It is a pleasant suburban district, thanks to extensive public green spaces and the good level of availability of services.

⁶²ISEC/T-Serie Istituto Servizio Sociale Familiare (ISSF), fol. 2166, FICS, *Verbale assemblea di Roma del 13 maggio 1966*, typescript.

⁶³ISEC/T-PSI, fol. 419, UNIST-Milano, *Equo affitto e politica edilizia*, 11 Apr. 1964, cyclostyled.

the presence of the social centres themselves – in practice, the only spaces, together with Catholic parishes, that could be shared in the working-class neighbourhoods. Tenant associationism often developed in close contact with social centres. In 1954, a small association of IACP tenants had been formed, and this actually grew and developed in the assemblies at the ISSF social centre, until it was established in 1962 as an influential reality under the name of the Provincial Association of Tenants of Economic and Working-class Housing (APICEP).⁶⁴ The political composition of the association was varied: while communist and socialist organizers were in the majority, the ACLI was also present, as were some parish priests. Community work bore fruit, in other words, but it also posed a complex problem for ISSF operators, forced to reconcile their work within the community with the tensions aroused in the working-class suburbs by the spirit of activism and social protest.

In 1963, the ISSF commissioned the American sociologist Peter L. Sandi to study the possibility of introducing party representatives to the social centres. Sandi's opinion was that launching a policy of this kind was absolutely to be avoided, in order not to create imbalances within the social centre and the marginalization of minority positions. The question was discussed during the session of the ISSF board, given that the exclusion of parties and associations would clearly weaken the effectiveness of the social centres: they wanted to make them 'the only institution capable of stimulating dialogue between bodies and organizations, with the aim of finding solutions to neighbourhood problems through joint action'.⁶⁵ In the end, a prudent line was taken, which discouraged, but did not prohibit, an organic relationship between the social centre and the parties or the curia. The goal of creating neighbourhood communities required that the social workers also take on the responsibility of political mediation between the various elements. The ISSF explicitly stated that the tasks of the social workers included soliciting and promoting the creation of committees capable of bringing together different perspectives with a view to achieving common objectives.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, in the neighbourhoods, the associative dynamics went on, supported with autonomy of judgement by the ISSF social workers. The territory east of Naviglio Pavese extended southwards from the southern district called Chiesa Rossa until it was integrated in the 1980s with the large area of Rozzano, beyond the borders of Milan and the motorway ring. Here, in the 1950s, the IACP acquired a great deal of agricultural land and in 1960 began to build self-sufficient neighbourhoods, culminating in 1971 with the completion of the towers in the Gratosoglio zone. This area on the extreme outskirts was characterized over the last 30 years of the century by activism and tenant protest.⁶⁷ The first settlement was in the Chiesa Rossa area, a neighbourhood of 11,500 small apartments, built

⁶⁴ISEC/T-ISSF, fol. 2208, Statuto e regolamento della costituzione dell'associazione, typescript. For the history of tenant associationism, see A. Agustoni and C. Rozza, *Diritto alla casa, diritto alla città. Questione abitativa e movimento degli inquilini a Milano 1903–2003* (Rome, 2005).

⁶⁵ISEC/T-ISSF, fol. 2165, ISSF Directive to social workers, 5 Jul. 1965, typescript, 1.

⁶⁶ISEC/T-ISSF, fol. 2165bis, *Sintesi dei principii, dei metodi e delle finalità che caratterizzano il servizio sociale attuato dall'ISSF presso i centri sociali di proprietà dell'IACP di Milano*, Apr. 1967, cyclostyled.

⁶⁷M. Boffi et al., *Città e conflitto sociale. Inchiesta al Garibaldi-Isola e in alcuni quartieri periferici di Milano* (Milan, 1975), 125–6.

using the prefabrication technique. It was inhabited by the less affluent workers, in an area that was still predominantly rural, where urban services and public transport were scarce. It was here, in Chiesa Rossa that a tenants' committee was set up as the first residents settled in, which, by 1966, had 1,000 member families out of 1,900 residents. The social workers had managed to move this committee in a pluralist direction, which had given rise to a board mostly composed of socialists and DC, but with the presence of independent members. In the opinion of ISSF social assistance, it was a success in terms of the pluralist mobilization of civil society: however, the board of the new committee had been elected by only 270 votes, and the great majority of tenants seemed to show no interest in these activities.⁶⁸ Several other examples might illustrate the aporias involved in the function of social centres in the development of associationism.⁶⁹

The formula of the neighbourhood committee, starting with the enlisting of the public housing tenants, not only affected the social centres but also other actors. In Gallarate and Quarto Oggiaro, the committees were promoted by the APICEP; in the Molise district by the PSI and PCI; in Corvetto, still by the left; in the Barona district by the ACLI; in Comasina, option-to-purchase and other tenants formed two separate neighbourhood committees. In many cases, however, the social centres were the meeting place for all these various bodies. The low level of participation displayed by many committees was due to a lack of clarity with regard to what the tasks and spaces of these new bodies were. At first, they had found some consensus as instruments helpful in mediating with the bodies that managed the buildings; the hope of some – and the risk according to many others – was that the neighbourhood committees would become organizations of dissent, disrupting the plan for an orderly mobilization of the working-class neighbourhoods that had inspired their promoters. The ISSF, ignoring the indications of caution observed in the first phase, was oriented above all towards involving the associations present in the neighbourhood – teachers, women, cultural circles – and also, fatally, towards establishing a relationship with the political parties, with a disciplinary function for the mobilization of the suburbs, and strictly on as equal a footing as possible in the formation of the steering committees.

The parties making up Mayor Pietro Bucalossi's municipal council in 1964 – DC, PSI and PSDI – were interested in introducing decentralization, with neighbourhood councils included as consultative bodies. Nobody thought of recognizing committees created spontaneously or at the request of the ISSF, or other social centres, as organs of decentralization, but the goal of developing civil society in the suburbs and organizing it into committees was strengthened by the prospect of a reform of municipal representation, which included consultation with the neighbourhoods. By the end of 1967, however, 16 district 'promoting committees' had been set up in Milan with regard to decentralization, pending regulations. These committees, bodies organized by the upper echelons, but not necessarily active at assembly level, were made up of representatives of neighbourhood centre-left

⁶⁸ISEC/T-ISSF, fol. 2167, C. Porta, *Puntualizzazioni sul comitato inquilini quartiere Chiesa Rossa*, 20 Mar. 1966, typescript.

⁶⁹See ISEC/T-ISSF, fol. 2179, M. Penco, *Comitato di quartiere Lorenteggio: documento programmatico*, 16 Feb. 1967, typescript.

parties (from the DC to the PCI), and some other associations; their headquarters were mostly at the ISSF social centres. Their purpose was to 'establish a dialogue with the population of the neighbourhood, with the administrative and political bodies, and between these and the population'.⁷⁰

In 1968, the new centre-left municipal council, headed by the socialist Aldo Aniasi, approved the decentralization regulation. The 20 Milanese Zone Councils (CZ), took office for the first time in March 1969; they were proportionally composed of delegates from the parties present in the city council.⁷¹ Investigating how these councils worked is not the objective of this article, but certain case studies have shown that, thanks to the support of the parties that made up the CZ, they sometimes managed to play a role in the interests of private individuals and the municipal authorities, regarding specific needs in the districts (public green areas, shopping centres and public transport).⁷²

The issues addressed by the CZ were no different from those that had emerged, with broad consensus, in the context of the neighbourhood mobilizations implemented by the *consulte* between the 1940s and 1950s.⁷³ They were matters that were also easily shared in social centre assemblies. However, in addition to these, autonomous, and often conflicting, initiatives continued to develop. The IACP, and numerous private tenants, affected by the high rents of the 1960s and 1970s and the evictions that resulted, moved towards creating committees dedicated to political dissent. They were influenced by the new climate of student protest and worker discontent, as well as by the intense controversies regarding parties, even those on the left.⁷⁴ The new generation of ISSF social centre operators, faithful to the institute's founding spirit, also helped support the creation of tenant movements that were willing to fight back through rent strikes, utility strikes or the occupation of public buildings. As a consequence, the IACP drastically reduced funding,⁷⁵ and the centres, and the ISSF itself, were definitively suppressed by presidential decree no. 616 in 1977.

Conclusion

With the introduction of administrative decentralization, and thus the end of social centres, the responsibility for providing assistance to neighbourhood tenants and inhabitants passed to the local authorities. The other significant issue, however, the creation of neighbourhood community, was abandoned. Decentralization zoning was itself an artificial operation, based on topographical divisions that could only roughly adapt to the identities that, starting from the search for ways to give voice to common needs, the new outlying districts had strenuously attempted

⁷⁰ISEC/T-ISSF, fol. 2182, *Consiglio provvisorio del quartiere Gallaratese. Statuto*, typescript, 2.

⁷¹See Comitato di coordinamento dei comitati di quartiere (ed.), *Decentramento urbano e partecipazione sociale* (Milan, 1968). Only in 1980 did the CZ become an elected body.

⁷²A. Majocchi, 'Decentramento, urbanistica e lotte per la casa', in U. Dragone (ed.), *Decentramento urbano e democrazia. Milano, Bologna, Roma, Torino, Pavia* (Milan, 1975), 102–22; F. Goio and L. Venco, 'Decentramento comunale e interessi collettivi: ricostruzione di due processi decisionali a Milano', *Il Politico*, 44 (1979), 114–41.

⁷³'Tavola rotonda. Partiti di massa, democrazia e decentramento', *Rinascita*, 27 (1971), 7–10.

⁷⁴F. Di Caccia, *La condizione urbana. Storia dell'Unione inquilini* (Milan, 1974).

⁷⁵'La situazione dei centri sociali ISSF', *Il Giornale dell'Unione Inquilini*, Mar.–Apr. 1972, 2.

to construct over the previous decades. The civil and political mobilization of the suburbs was once again exclusively the task of the parties, the unions and now also of extra-parliamentary groups, essentially re-exhuming dilemmas similar to those of the post-war period: neighbourhood mobilization could also, in fact, produce responses contrary to the hoped for political objectives, resulting in conflict. On the other hand, with no involvement in the future of the city, the suburbs could end up on the margins of the social democratic world and would risk becoming prey to criminal elements.

I have tried to describe here the processes involved in the most important attempts made to bring about the social and political integration of the working-class suburbs. Two different instruments were deployed to do this, the expressions of two different eras in Italian history. The *consulte*, which grew out of the CLN, became an expression of the Popular Democratic Front, an electoral alliance between the PCI and PSI; after the defeat of this political formula, in the years of the Cold War, they disappeared. They were effective experiences from the point of view of political awareness and the formation of a democratic conscience in the working-class districts. In terms of practical achievements, however, the *consulte* could never identify objectives involving feasible types of transformation: the leadership of the left-wing parties was unable to involve them in the most obvious issues relating to participation in the urban context in the reconstruction phase – in other words, in the debate regarding the regulatory plan. All the *consulte* could do was make their voices heard on matters that were often fragmentary and of little significance – voices that either protested too weakly or made requests that were too trivial, which the left-wing parties were not interested in amplifying, given that they considered them too specific and particularistic and an obstacle to their national political plans.

The social centres were founded in order to provide social assistance in the period of the ‘economic miracle’, but the reversal of the economic trend and political change in the Milanese administration took things in a different direction. From 1961, city councils were based on the centre-left alliance between the DC and the PSI; and also the PCI showed itself to be open to collaborating with regard to policies for the suburbs. The ISSF social centres interpreted the integration of outlying neighbourhoods according to the ideas of that centre-left political period: the methods chosen were derived from the hegemony of the guidelines of Christian ecumenism and secular and socialist reformism. The neighbourhood committees, conceived within the context of the ISSF, were intended to become ‘schools of democratic life’.⁷⁶ For their advocates, the committees were a victory of grassroots mobilization, which called for institutional representation in the city government.⁷⁷ For detractors, they were an attempt to sterilize latent social struggle. Both interpretations contain elements of truth and they are not really alternatives. The congenital defect of the neighbourhood committees was the criterion governing their political

⁷⁶ISEC/T-PSI, fol. 355, *Prima assise permanente sulle periferie*, Milan, 31 Mar. 1962, cyclostyled.

⁷⁷This was the opinion of the ISSF vice-president (1966–75), E. Tortoreto, ‘L’iniziativa popolare per il decentramento amministrativo a Milano’, *Comunità. Rivista mensile*, 21 (1967), 253–98. See also M. Lucchini and F. Schiaffonati, ‘Il decentramento comunale a Milano’, *Città e società. Studi e analisi sui problemi delle comunità urbane*, 4 (1969), 75–106.

composition, which reflected that of the parties in the city council (including the communists): this was a logic that did not arise from the needs of the districts themselves but instead was a matter of the city's political equilibrium.⁷⁸

The *consulte* and the social centres contributed to the mobilization of the suburbs, and to the development of the inhabitants' ability to organize themselves, transforming certain elements of widespread hardship into objects of political demand, within a pluralist framework. The aim was to avoid wide-ranging conflict with the development of a reformist method, linked to the discussion of individual problems. The attempts, in their diversity, were substantially effective, but necessarily provisional. Effective, because, in the neighbourhoods, they were able to tap into and build a debate, which, beginning with questions of hardship, came to present the issue of housing as something intimately connected with the needs of social living.⁷⁹ A vision of the city was put forward that presented certain innovative features compared to mass party and municipal government agendas. In Milan, during the intensely radical opposition of the decade 1968–77, no fresh attempts were made to stimulate social movements in the neighbourhoods, to understand the changes that were taking place and the different needs that were being expressed, or to find a way to deal with them within a context of dialogue and mediation.

⁷⁸B. Dente, A. Pagano and G. Regonini, *Il decentramento urbano: un caso di innovazione amministrativa* (Milan, 1978).

⁷⁹See A. Latham and J. Layton, 'Social infrastructure and the public life of cities: studying urban sociality and public spaces', *Geography Compass*, 13 (2019), 1–15.

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