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HUMANITIES ESSAY

Participation in non-market housing as collective city-making: Revisiting Bologna, 1962–77

Kim Trogal,[1] **Anna Wakeford Holder** [2]

1 Canterbury School of Architecture and Design, University for the Creative Arts, GB

2 Sheffield Creative Industries Institute, Sheffield Hallam University, GB

Corresponding authors: Kim Trogal (ktrogal@ucreative.ac.uk), Anna Wakeford Holder (a.wakeford-holder@shu.ac.uk)

Abstract

This essay examines architectural histories of Bologna from 1962–77 focusing on inhabitant involvement in collective housing production. 'Red Bologna' in this period has been cited as a politically progressive example of participation in urban administration and planning. This dominant architectural narrative is indeed compelling, and has contemporary relevance, due to Bologna's concerted city-scale attempts to limit economic speculation and provide low-cost dwellings at a time of extreme housing crisis. We offer new perspectives by analysing three sites of participation which, while concurrent, have not previously been addressed together. This essay re-reads these cases, drawing on Anarchist perspectives – a tradition present in Italy but often overlooked in favour of official Marxist or autonomous Marxist currents of the day – to explore questions of sociality, social hierarchy and property. It therefore contributes to contemporary debates around the democratisation of housing and the possibilities offered for self-organisation and wider urban engagement.

Keywords:

Bologna, Italy, housing design, cooperatives, participation, tenant actions, urban administration, urban planning, collectivism, Anarchism, Marxism

Introduction

In this essay we examine architectural histories of Bologna from 1962–77 with a focus on inhabitant involvement in collective housing production. Bologna in this period has been held up as a politically progressive example of participation in urban administration and planning. Indeed, the city is often referred to as 'Red Bologna' in a nod to the hue of its historic centre, its status as a stronghold of anti-Fascist partisans during the Second World War, and the dominance of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in local administration until the 1990s (Figures 1, 2). Our focus on 'Red Bologna' emerges from an interest in the spatial impacts of municipalism and political possibilities for architecture, where the practices of direct democracy in local government are used to advance social and economic justice.

Recent discourse around 'new municipalism' has revived an interest in the capacities of local government to foster more progressive practices, such as the self-governance of services and public goods, including childcare, healthcare, and energy [1]. Housing scholars and activists are today advocating for both the democratisation of housing and for the democratic possibilities housing offers [2: p. 2]. Their argument is that creating opportunities for self-organisation, expanding the scope of who can participate and providing lived experiences of decision-making and horizontal forms of organisation, may also provide the means to contest real estate and concentrations of property, while offering opportunity for wider engagement in the city [2: p. 7].

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Figure 1: 'Bologna la Rossa' – the streets around the centre of Bologna and its university [Photographs by Anna Wakeford Holder, February 2023].

Figure 2: Bologna as seen from the Torre degli Asinelli, 2015. [Courtesy of Shoestring: CC BY-SA 4.0; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bologna_the_red,_seen_from_the_top_of_the_Tower,_Bologna,_Italy.JPG].

Coming from a 21st-century British perspective, the dominant narrative of 'Red Bologna' in the field of architecture is indeed a compelling one. In this headline story, municipal architects used urban planning as an attempt to limit economic speculation and provide low-cost housing. It stands in contrast to other Italian cities of the time, where the housing crisis remained acute. Despite large-scale, state-funded programmes for housing provision such as INA-Casa, by the mid-1970s public housing in Italy accounted 'for less than 3 percent of all housing construction' with the majority of new dwellings being privately provided and financed [3: p. 12]. Following Italy's rapid industrialisation in the 1950s with the accompanying mass migration from rural areas to urban centres, many Italian cities witnessed squalor, overcrowding and the emergence of shanty towns on their peripheries [4]. This was therefore a poverty that existed alongside new buildings, such as hotels and private housing, whose locations and forms were driven only by financial speculation [5: p. 246].

Bologna's development was intended to act as the 'poster child' for the Communist city administration, demonstrating their competence and fitness for government. The PCI's advances in municipal planning took place in a context where the multiple voices of the student, autonomous and feminist movements, among others, frequently met with authoritarian responses and violence. This culminated with the police killing in March 1977 of Francesco Lorusso, a militant of the Lotta Continua group in Bologna, the raid on Radio Alice, and the city subsequently being placed under siege [6].

It was also in this period that the progressive demands and achievements of social and labour movements in Europe and North America were being denounced by liberal and conservative voices as constituting a threat to the viability of western democratic societies [7]. The movements thus revealed a profound tension at heart of western democracies, which Anarchist thinkers had perhaps long understood, in that genuine forms of collective participation came to be seen as antithetical to (elite) order and governability [8; 9; 10]. 'Red Bologna' hence offers an important historical precedent with which to explore issues of participation and democratic practices in civil society. We are specifically interested in the politics of those participatory approaches, how they

intersect with processes of production of the built environment, and how they were critically received at the time.

To do so, the essay brings together three case studies of non-market housing in Bologna, focussing on their participatory dimensions. These include proposals for the renovation of workers' housing in the city centre; the construction of new-build housing cooperatives in the suburbs; and efforts to address infrastructural problems undertaken by a tenants committee in a dormitory suburb. All three case studies can be understood as products of the same historical moment in the same city, and while each has been documented individually, they have not before been discussed together.

Our research is based upon analysis of secondary sources from the professional architectural press in Italy at that time, and from architectural and social histories of Bologna and Italy. This however is supplemented by fieldwork visits and archival research to consult sources in Italy from the city municipality, the cooperative movement, the publications of leftist political groups, and smaller local archives. In addition, we undertook six semi-structured interviews with activists who were active during the period from 1962–77, as well as scholars who have studied Bologna's housing organisations during the period. We worked with an independent researcher and practitioner, Rossella Tricarico, who has supported our research throughout by liaising with the archives, organising/conducting/translating interviews, as well as translating key documents.

Reclaiming Bologna's historic centre for workers' housing: PEEP Centro Storico

In terms of our first case study example, Bologna's urban development planning during the 1960s made expedient use of Italy's 'Piano di Edilizia Economica e Popolare' (PEEP, or Plan for Economic and Popular Construction). Brought into effect in 1962, PEEP was a national planning mechanism for the creation of urban social housing and subsidised housing development. It devolved the provision of housing to a local level, meaning that when planning new neighbourhoods, city municipalities had a duty to plan also for wider services such as schools, clinics, playing fields, sports centres, and the infrastructures for transport and power [11: p. 28]. Significantly, the 1962 legislation granted local municipalities the powers to expropriate areas or buildings that formed part of their plans for social housing [12]. In this period, under the leadership of consecutive Communist mayors, Bologna established a decentralised mode of governance through neighbourhood councils, which in its later phase attempted to engage citizens' participation in urban planning issues [13; 14; 15].

As a follow-up, the PEEP Centro Storico (Plan for the Historic Centre) became a central story in Bologna's architectural history and urban form, and as such provides us with an opportunity to examine how an architectural project can sit at the intersection of these two policies. This plan for central Bologna mobilised the skills of architects in surveying and cataloguing the city's historic fabric with the aim of preserving low-cost, non-commodified dwellings for working-class inhabitants (Figures 3, 4, 5). It was part of an urban conservation strategy that soon became internationally renowned [16]. The approach was significant in its shift of focus away from individual buildings towards conserving the central historic area en masse. It thus served as a centrepiece of the PCI's agenda in Bologna: a 'standard bearer' for socialist urban development [17].

Headed by a team of architects and urban planners – Pier Luigi Cervellati, Roberto Scanavini and Carlo de Angelis – the PEEP Centro Storico relied on a piece of public housing legislation passed in 1971, itself a significant outcome of Italy's 1969 general strike, and the culmination of multiple autonomous actions in factories that had taken place consistently in the preceding years [5]. Using the 1971 law the plan for the *centro storico* had several interlinked intentions. It proposed to remove many areas from financial speculation and instead to expropriate properties by specifically naming housing as a 'public benefit'; it sought to preserve the city centre as a whole, rather than individual monuments in isolation; it sought to preserve working-class housing while allowing existing residents to continue to live there after renovation had taken place; and it also aimed to de-commodify the housing by transferring dwellings from private rental tenure to co-operatives [18]. Furthermore, their plan aimed to maintain existing uses in the historic centre through the refurbishment of artisan workshops as well by as supporting the expansion of Bologna University.

Figure 3 [following page]: Scenes of street life in the city centre [Courtesy of Paolo Monti: CC BY-SA 4.0; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paolo_Monti_-_Servizio_fotografico_(Bologna,_1969)_-_BEIC_6330959.jpg].


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Figure 4 [previous page]: Scenes of street life in the city centre [Courtesy of Paolo Monti: CC BY-SA 4.0; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paolo_Monti_-_Servizio_fotografico_(Bologna,_1969)_-_BEIC_6330959.jpg].

Figure 5: Small-scale housing with workshops and shop-units below in central Bologna: the preservation and renovation of many of these buildings is the result of the PEEP Centro Storico plan of the 1960s [Photographs by Anna Wakeford Holder, February 2023].

In doing so the 1972–73 PEEP Centro Storico followed in wake of the wider urban vision for the city that had been already inaugurated by Cervellati's predecessor, Guiseppe Campos Venuti [19]. Both the PEEP Centro Storico, and the wider 1960s plan for Bologna which preceded it, should be seen as 'top-down' initiatives, with municipal architect-planners being those working to achieve housing reform. The municipality's newsletter, *Bologna Notizie del Comune*, was used to inform citizens about the municipality's building initiatives and progress, as well as shape the debate. It included regular updates on the housing crisis, with multiple articles being authored by Cervellati, Scaravini and de Angelis as a method to publicise and explain their design proposals [20; 21].

Figure 6 [previous page]: Inauguration of the exhibition on the survey campaign of the historic center of the municipality of Bologna, at Palazzo D'Accursio, 1970 [Courtesy of Paolo Monti: CC BY-SA 4.0; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons].

Figure 7: [above] Inauguration of the exhibition on the survey campaign of the historic center of the municipality of Bologna, at Palazzo D'Accursio, 1970 [Courtesy of Paolo Monti: CC BY-SA 4.0; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons].

The 1970 exhibition "Bologna Centro Storico: An ancient city for a new society" at Palazzo d'Accursio and Archiginnasio presented the plan to citizens (Figures 6, 7). The plan was based upon research earlier in the decade, led by an architectural historian, Leonardo Benevolo, to survey and categorise Bologna's built fabric [17]. This was exhibited alongside a selection of Paolo Monti's photographs of the city, who was commissioned to survey the city. His images were used to provide a visual coherence to what was otherwise abstractly conceived by the planners as the 'historic centre' [22]. The architects' drawings followed the style of medieval drawings of the *centro storico*, aiming to convey to the public a continuity in 'ways of living' [23]. De Pieri and Scrivano argue that this emphasis on visual representation in the 1970 exhibition was also aimed to enlist support for the plan among Bologna's cultural elite [22: p. 39].

Likewise, in November 1972 the follow up plan for Bologna's *centro storico* was presented publicly via a Citizens Assembly in the San Leonardo Theatre in the central Irnerio district [24]. These assembly meetings were established as part of the municipality's wider decentralisation programme and they represented a more concerted effort to promote citizen participation. For this particular assembly, Pier Luigi Cervellati presented the plan for the *centro storico* alongside Bologna's deputy mayor. This was followed by a debate, during which a split emerged between the responses of owner-occupiers and landlords on one side and those of tenant occupants on the other, 'with the dispossession of private property owners [becoming] a central point of contention' [13: p. 221]. Cervellati reassured the audience that all prices paid for expropriated properties would be determined by the city's revenue office on the strict basis of existing legislation [24]. He stated that individual owner-occupiers would still be able to live there but a different financial assessment would be made if you were a landlord.

However, following strong pressure from property owners, and supported by centrist and right-wing political parties, the intended strategy of expropriation was ultimately replaced by long-term contracts [25]. These contracts enabled property owners to access finance – via a grant, loan, or a combination of those two – to renovate their buildings [3: p. 82]. Existing housing cooperatives in Bologna were unwilling to take on these renovated properties due to the high operating costs that would be involved, while the municipality was also reportedly uninterested in developing a policy to manage them directly [26: p. 156]. In wake of the global 'oil crises', by 1976, following what has been described as the PCI's 'historic compromise', Bologna – and indeed all of Italy – ushered in a programme of economic austerity. By that date, only 58 projects to renovate buildings had been completed [13: p. 221]. In 1980, the PEEP Centro Storico was cancelled and instead the task of redeveloping Bologna's ageing core was turned into five separate plans [27: p. 246].

PEEP on the urban periphery: Participation in housing cooperatives

In terms of the second case study, the 1962 PEEP city plan identified several large suburban sites around Bologna for development, including Beverara, Barca, Fossolo and Corticella [28]. Each design for these areas included civic centres, commercial districts, elementary schools, sports centres and religious centres, alongside new housing. The provision of these peripheral districts was partially allocated as buildings to be constructed and managed by housing cooperatives [29].

Bologna's history of housing cooperatives dates back to the 1880s, incorporating a range of 'Red' (Socialist), 'White' (Catholic) and secular organisations [30]. Between 1952 and 1966 the number of housing cooperatives in the city more than doubled, increasing from 64 to 143 in total [15: p. 202]. This rapid growth was further enabled by the municipality's adoption of the PEEP city plan, with these cooperatives having 47% of the 63,000 rooms built under that plan [31; 15: p. 237]. To speed up building, the cooperatives made use of industrialised prefabrication in order to reduce construction costs. This, in conjunction with the municipality's acquisition of land at agricultural prices, meant that Bologna's cooperatives could offer new-build suburban housing at a reduced cost – reportedly 30-40% lower than those dwellings built for the private market [12: p. 3].

Bologna's housing cooperatives in this period largely supported property ownership among the city's lower middle-class. A common funding condition required inhabitants to raise an amount equal to one quarter of the construction cost, a sum that only those with well-paid jobs could afford [28: p. 40]. Funding which came via Gestione Case per i Lavoratori (GESCAL, financed by contributions from workers' salaries and employers' contributions) enabled cooperatives to reduce building costs and provide a greater level of subsidy, yet came with key restrictions in terms of property ownership and governance [28: p. 40]. For this reason, during the PEEP programme, the majority of cooperative housing that was ultimately built was for individual ownership (*proprietà divisa*) rather than shared ownership.

Figure 8: PEEP Fossolo (1970–71) is an example of one of the five neighbourhoods on Bologna's then periphery, financed through the PEEP plan, and constructed and managed by building and housing cooperatives. System-built concrete-framed housing in towers and linear blocks is set around a landscaped park and an elementary school. Future residents were involved in decision-making about the plan form of apartments, and also influenced the inclusion of shared spaces in the towers for a library, gymnasium, and meeting room/ entertainment space [Photographs by Anna Wakeford Holder, February 2023].

Bologna's housing cooperatives were also often organised to serve different sectors of workers [32]. Important exceptions to this included the Cooperativa Risanamento and Cooperativa Urbanistica Nuova, which advocated for and built collective dwellings (*proprietà indivisa*). The Cooperativa Edificatrice Inquillini senza Tetto was set up specifically for homeless people [30: p. 39]. Cooperativa Edificatrice Giuseppe Dozza (formerly La Federale) offered *indivisa* dwellings and, furthermore, worked with more mixed constituencies, including migrants from the agricultural south, a population often excluded and marginalised within Italy's housing provision [32]. As the director of this cooperative told us, the cooperatives can thus be seen as a locus of social and economic participation:

> There were a lot of immigrants coming from the south of Italy asking for the houses and thanks to the cooperatives they were able to find a job and a house too. The house became a tool for integration. The buildings were equipped with common spaces used as gathering spaces. [32]

In the suburban development sites under the PEEP plan, both large and small cooperatives received allocations of apartments. The overall design was produced by a consortium, Consorzio Cooperative Costruzioni (CCC), while the actual construction was undertaken by a separate building cooperative


SUPERMARKET

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Figure 9 [previous page]: PEEP Fossolo, view from Viale Felsina 27, construction Fortepan, Bologna 1972 [Courtesy of Fülöp Imre: CC BY-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons].

Figure 10: Page spread from La Cooperazione di Abitazione, Una Realta da Conoscere. Bologna, 1970 – a publication promoting and celebrating the achievements of the building cooperatives [Courtesy of Fondazione Barberini].

(Figures 8, 9). The architect Ettore Masi, who was director of research at CCC, developed a participatory approach to bring residents into the design process [33: p. 552]. In the promotional material for the Association for Cooperative Building, testimonials included those such as from Maria Armaroli, a housewife, who stated: 'I was able to modify the project; in fact, I almost designed my own apartment' [12: n.p.] (Figure 10). In some ways, it meant that this kind of approach risked becoming something more akin to privatised consumer choice. Masi indeed observed that the proposals made by inhabitants 'in the name of beauty was nothing more than an affirmation of adherence to market products', something that his design team attempted to distinguish and counter through their dialogue with future inhabitants [28: p. 37-38].

As well as becoming involved in design discussions about individual apartment layouts, collective discussions were held with housing cooperative members about the wider functions and designs of the blocks [28: p. 37]. Masi and the CCC design team believed that affirming one's right to articulate desires about one's home constituted an entry point into discussions about the management of collective buildings and spaces – and hence encouraged a broader understanding of and participation in the local settlement and then the city [28: p. 38]. Angiolino Betti, a surveyor and resident, declared:

> After a few months of living in this cooperative, having solved the big problem of having a house ... we began to take an interest in the problems of the neighbourhood such as nurseries, schools, greenery, sports facilities… Through the Barca neighborhood meetings, we gained insight into all the neighborhood's various problems, ... we examined the solutions proposed by the Municipality's Technical Office, integrating them with our own observations. [12: n.p.]

Similarly, Romano Rizzi, a street cleaner and resident, stated:

> In my building, there are people who are very interested in managing the services. In a few meetings, we decided what to do, and we chose some of us for various roles, [for example, overseeing] how we use the common areas, supervising cleaning, etc... Together we decided what games to include: volleyball, basketball, etc. We put together a little playhouse for the children, and in the summer we meet either at the Malcantone or often on the shared terrace to discuss what needs to be done. [12: n.p.]

This tendency to shift interest from one's individual apartment to wider concerns about the neighbourhood and its planning, was also reported in the journal of the Italian cooperative movement, *Il Movimento Cooperativo* [34: p. 3-4]. The experience of neighbourhood engagement and activism at Fossolo saw members of the three towers of the Murri Cooperative initiate a club for sports, recreation and cultural activities that was open to all citizens, and this was subsequently expanded to include a library of books donated by residents, the running of a café, and the production of children's performances. These initiatives were understood within the cooperative movement as being a critical part of an anti-capitalist housing model, with dwelling being understood as a set of place-based services, activities and practices that were catalysed by the new residential districts – and as the prerequisites for developing forms of self-management [35].

However, it is also clear that engagement with wider neighbourhood planning in some instances could become that of defensive self-interest in which cooperative residents 'isolate[d] themselves and adopted a NIMBY-style attitude to block the provision of other public buildings and services.' [36: p. 134]. One example of this was a petition to relocate a primary school by a distance of 50 metres because local residents living in a cooperative housing scheme did not want to 'attract children who were considered "outsiders" to the property' [36: p. 134].

Figure 11: The buildings on via Salgari, Pilastro, 1977 [Courtesy of MGiordani: CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons].

Tenant actions in Pilastro and participation in non-institutional politics

As a third case study, the suburban district of Pilastro – which had originally been a post-war INA-Casa development on agricultural land to the northeast of Bologna – was expanded substantially in subsequent phases of the PEEP city plan from the early-1960s (Figures 11, 12). The first initiative under PEEP consisted of low-rise dwellings both for owner-occupation and social-rent and was built by the IACP Bologna between 1965–66 [37]. The later 'Virgolone' scheme was a 700-metre-long curved structure with 552 apartments, built in 1975–77. When the first 411 families moved into Pilastro in 1966, the estate still lacked fundamental services, not least a heating system, shops, schools, green spaces, cultural spaces, bus service and post box [38]. Those infrastructural services that were provided, such as gas, electricity, water and elevators, came at a high cost for residents [36]. It resulted in the rents at Pilastro being substantially higher than at other PEEP schemes which had received GESCAL contributions [36: p. 132]. This was because, to build Pilastro, the IACP had to take out loans, leading to higher rents to repay the debt [36: p. 132].

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Figure 12: Linear housing block 'il Virgolone' (1974–76) in Pilastro, on the periphery of Bologna [Photographs by Anna Wakeford Holder and Kim Trogal, February 2023].

Two residents of Pilastro, Luigi Spina and Oscar de Pauli, who were former union activists, established a Comitato d'Inquilini (tenants' committee) in response to the unfavourable conditions there. This committee contained several active Communist members who were in the PCI [36], yet it aimed above all to be a non-partisan group for the 'safeguarding, coordinating and protecting the collective interests of ... the inhabitants of the neighbourhood' [38]. One of its co-founders, Oscar de Pauli, told us:

> Comitato d'Inquilini organized several assemblies, engaging people living in Pilastro from different backgrounds and social conditions. The first assembly happened close to the church, which drew a large number of people, launching the Comitato's activities. [39]

The tenants' committee pursued action via formal channels of negotiation, discussing conditions in the neighbourhood with the municipality and the IACP to ask for the services and facilities that were missing. Their aim was to improve the quality of life by increasing the services and preserving the landscape. For example, the Comitato was able to change the design for the construction of some new houses in order to preserve a public green area and to avoid the problem of dwellings being erected too close to each other [39].

The Comitato's work brought results, including the founding of a sports club and a kindergarten, as well as obtaining access for local children to attend schools in neighbouring areas [39; 36: p. 135-136] (Figure 13). Whenever formal channels of communication were unsuccessful, the committee also employed direct action, organising strikes or demonstrations in Bologna's city centre to raise awareness

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Figure 13: Biblioteca Luigi Spina, the public library of Pilastro, has inhabited this former farmhouse since 1974. It was renamed in 2003 after Luigi Spina, the first president of the residents' organisation, Comitato Inquilini del Pilastro. The library has been further renovated and expanded in recent years, and one facade is now decorated with a large image of Spina [Photograph by Kim Trogal, February 2023].

and garner public support [36: p. 126-127]. As an example, the Comitato organised a time-limited rent strike, with the IACP agreeing to lower the bills that residents were charged for heating [36: p. 129]. The Comitato sometimes took a DIY approach to the lack of infrastructure. The municipality's failure to provide a stop for the children's school bus meant that it often had to stop in a different part of the estate each day, causing some children to miss it. After exhausting formal channels, Oscar de Pauli simply painted a bus stop sign in the street [39].

In conflict with both the Comitato and the municipality, other activists came to animate Pilastro. In July 1971, some 42 apartments in via Frati in Pilastro were occupied by squatters [40]. The squatting, organised by Lotta Continua and other leftist groups, included large families who had hitherto been living on the outskirts of Bologna in dilapidated conditions. Within only a few days these squatters additionally set up a canteen and a clinic, managing their protest through an organised assembly of the 'heads of households' [36: p. 130]. Then, after one week, the apartments were cleared by the police, with families being rehoused by Irnerio College [40]. The Comitato felt that the extra-parliamentary leftist groups such as Lotta Continua and Potere Operaia, whose strategy deliberately involved heightening confrontation, had 'chosen Pilastro for their own experiments' and were exploiting the situation of the migrant population there [38]. But in the context of the PCI's hegemony in Bologna generally, and in the Pilastro neighbourhood specifically, those activist groups found themselves less able to gain ground than they could in other northern Italian cities [15]. The PCI said it was sympathetic to the needs of those who were squatting, but their official national policy was against squatting on principle, as it meant that the squatters' needs were being pitted against those already on housing waiting lists [3].

In the later part of the 1970s squatting developed as part of the radical, creative and cultural practices of the Marxist autonomist movement. In the city centre, young Bolognese citizens – following the writings of Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and others – began to understand the emergence of contemporary media, on TV and in films, magazines, etc as the forces that were shaping people's desires towards a capitalist society. They regarded the participation in and making of culture and languages as the means for autonomy [41], whereby 'revolutionary' culture and actions was not driven by a desire to take over the mechanisms of the state, as the PCI had done in Bologna, but rather saw the state as part of the problem. 'Traumfabrik' ('Dream Factory') was amongst the most famous squatted apartments in the historic centre, lasting from 1976–83 as a site for experimental forms of cultural expression such as music, art, drawing, and performance [42]. This squatted house was 'for everyone', and so the front door was always left open [43]. 'La Tregenda', a squatted basement, was founded as a women-only space, fostering the elaboration of feminist creativity and politics.

Elsewhere in Bologna, the dwelling at 19 via Marsili was home to Franco 'Bifo' Berardi and others during the 1970s and 80s. Berardi was well known for co-founding the independent station, Radio Alice, and the publication, *A/Traverso*. He described this house as a place of collective life which was home to many activities beyond its primary functions. The domestic arrangements and practices of informal, collective living in which these new cultural forms and media emerged were thus also the sites of creative experimentation [44].

Diverging Marxist perspectives about housing and social reform

In Italy this period of architectural history has typically been interpreted through dominant strands of Marxist thinking [26; 45]. Marxist critiques of housing in Italy at the time were permeated by the 'reformist vs revolutionary' dichotomy. For many Marxists, improvements to housing provision were seen as a mistaken political strategy because it would prevent the realisation of the working class as being a class for itself [4]. The PEEP cooperatives, well respected for a higher standard of construction compared to new dwellings in the rest of Italy, were also seen as politically limited due to their enabling of private ownership [12]. They were criticised for providing largely for lower-middle class residents, thus excluding those who were most in need [31; 46].

During this period many splits emerged in the Italian left over what were either profound or nuanced differences as to the correct overall political strategy. Most notably there was a schism within Italian Marxism between, on one hand, the 'Eurocommunism' pursued by the PCI – which was now committed to a parliamentary route to change and the generation of a Gramscian counter-hegemony via civil society organisations and cultural changes – and a plethora of far-left Marxist groups and parties on the other – which questioned whether the PCI as the official Italian Communist Party and other existing left-wing institutions such as trade unions could even be salvaged. These different views became a central point of contention and fault line among Italy's Marxist groups [47]. The critiques of the PCI and trade unions which were launched by the workerist and later the autonomist groups, while diverse, generally meant these existing institutions were regarded as an 'effective mechanism for curtailing the radical energies and disrupting progressive political development' [48: p. 71-72].

During the 1950s, new forms of workers' control over economic production had been seen as a key objective by some Italian Marxists, yet those forms subsequently came to be seen as 'neo-capitalist' instruments, with cooperative organisations being criticised for increasingly resembling private companies and corporations [46]. The workerist shift away from policies of self-management resulted from Mario Tronti's re-conceptualisation of labour as inherently part of capitalism rather than outside of it, and therefore its own enemy [47: p. 35-36]. The formation of worker cooperatives, a category in which we could include the construction cooperatives involved in the PEEP, was therefore politically ambiguous.

Other Marxist groups in Italy took a more pragmatic approach, recognising the already existing reach of cooperative organisations and the practical benefits to be gained from collaboration with them [15]. Housing cooperatives, with their many different types, were also drawn into the debate. In a 1971 article in *Contropiano*, Giorgio Ciucci and Mario Manieri-Elia distinguished between the different lineages of cooperation in housing, and while arguing strongly for *indivisa* dwellings, they nevertheless pointed to the equivocal political status of housing cooperatives. Specifically, they drew attention to how cooperative members were being separated from the struggles over rent, breaking solidarity with the wider working-class movement including in the fundamental struggle over wages [49].

Introducing Anarchist perspectives to read participation differently

In order to bypass some of these entrenched debates within 1970s and 80s Italian Marxism, we will now turn to a pragmatist strand of Anarchist thought in our analysis. Doing so allows us to foreground a different set of concerns in relation to participation and housing. It means framing the Bolognese sites and practices discussed above less in terms of their relation to, and limitations in, confronting liberal democracy and capitalism. Instead, our aim is to open up the question of what capacities these participatory practices in housing offered for people's self-actualisation; what possibilities they gave for the removal of exploitation and authority; and how they connected to opportunities for the collective ownership and management of housing.

Anarchist thinking in Italy, while developing in parallel to autonomist Marxism, represents an entirely separate political lineage and one that is minor in comparison. In Bologna, there were Anarchist tendencies visible in the 'creative wing' of the autonomist Marxism and the Movimento del '77 (Movement of 1977), but nevertheless they remained politically distinct categories until the later development of the social centres in the 1980s and 90s [50]. Just as Italian Marxism was heterogeneous and continuously evolving, Italian Anarchist groups

were also divergent, yet commonalities included the rejection of authoritarian social and organisational structures in favour of decentralised, bottom-up practices with an emphasis on self-management [50: p. 415].

Within 20th-century Italian architecture, Anarchist practice is most familiar through the work of Giancarlo De Carlo. In 1948, when contributing to discourse about the housing question within Anarchist literature, De Carlo drew attention to direct actions such as the illegal occupation of uninhabited buildings, housing strikes, and the establishment of cooperatives, while at the same time highlighting an understanding of housing as infrastructural – namely, that it is through housing that one engages with provision of public services, extending activities of self-management into the community [51; 52; 53: p. 163]. In response to De Carlo's involvement in the design for Villaggio Matteotii (1970–74), Manfredo Tafuri argued that the participatory process there was important because of the contradictions that it exposed and the social forces that it activated. In the case of Villaggio Matteotii, participation was hence understood as a flexible instrument of experimentation, a process with unforeseen consequences which might branch out in different directions in terms of the production of space and the capacities for its appropriation [26; 54; 55].

In our own analysis, we focus on property, sociality, social hierarchies established through expertise, and the relationships between direct actions and state-led participation as the key dimensions. By exploring participation in housing through an Anarchist lens, these aspects allow us to foreground the processes and politics of the social production of the built environment – thus showing that participation in planning, design and management is deeply entangled with city-level politics, the micro-politics of the housing project, and the patterns of sociality within the neighbourhood.

The criticism of Bologna's housing cooperatives, that they used public funds from workers' taxation to enable private homeownership, could be countered by Colin Ward's explicitly Anarchist articulation of housing ownership. Following the writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Ward distinguished private property that could be used to 'extract profit from labour' ('real property'), from individual homeownership as a condition that could enable greater personal autonomy [56]. This is a view that also resonates with 21st-feminist scholarship in geography, which tends to emphasise that the issue of ownership is less significant in, for example, the creation of commons and common spaces, than the practices and relations that surround them [57].

The Bolognese cooperatives did not use property to leverage profit from labour in the way that private renting would, neither did they seek to profit from residents' future labour in the form of mortgage debt. In this regard, those housing cooperatives justly claimed success in their ability to offer lower-cost dwellings. A more significant problem was the right of those inhabiting the dwellings to sell their property at market rates, preventing future inhabitants from benefitting from low-cost accommodation. This policy, however, was outside of the control of the cooperatives or the architects, having been established as a condition of the funding needed to build the housing.

The extent to which the Bologna housing cooperatives fostered practices of self-help, beyond the process of initial construction, revealed itself to be much more limited. The anthropologist Mathilde Callari Galli's post-occupancy study of Fossolo highlighted what was a more atomised existence. There, sociality and participation outside the domestic realm did not take place as it had perhaps been hoped for [4]. Her work suggests a greater limitation in the work of Bologna's housing cooperatives than the structuralist critiques that Italian Marxists identified. Going further, we would add that the housing provision itself centred around nuclear families and through that, it reinforced traditional gender roles at a time when they were being questioned and contested. At this juncture, many Italian women had jobs outside the home, but the gendered expectations placed upon them (including those which were self-imposed) saw domestic work, such as cooking, as an opportunity to fulfil conceptions of creating a loving and caring home [58]. The physical spaces of individual apartments in the Bolognese schemes thereby constrained the occupants, not necessarily as a result of the type of ownership, but because of the social and physical infrastructures they were situated within.

What Callari Galli argues about Bologna's cooperatives is that the model of the house was taken as an already understood and formulated cultural product, one that came from 'an elitist and exclusive culture, completely alien to the way of life of those who have to use and manage it' [4]. They thus imposed on inhabitants

spatial shifts in the social practices of living, cooking, eating and relating in family roles. The types of conversation around future residents' desires for apartment layouts and spaces were therefore not able to incorporate understandings of the implications of physical spaces of housing on living practices in ways which were meaningful to participants.

Ettore Masi, while he neither made any reference to Giancarlo De Carlo nor to his own political affiliations, similarly articulated participation as a means for the environmental education of citizens – i.e. that taking control of one's immediate environment was seen as an affirmative act rather than a consumer choice. This act involved a negotiation with the professional and 'expert' knowledge of the CCC's architects and engineers. Masi argued that this expert knowledge needed to be challenged, specifically pointing to inadequacies of the standardised data that his designers were working with. While designs developed in-situ with inhabitants could be seen from a design perspective as 'irrational', with 'wasted space, confused distribution, irrational lighting' [28: p.37], in Masi's view this was preferable to designing the 'perfect' accommodation for a non-existent family [28: p. 37]. Masi believed that participation should affirm the inhabitant's fundamental right to determine their own home, and so it was less important for a design to be 'right' than for inhabitants to declare that they 'wanted it that way' [28: p. 37].

Reflecting on the participatory process in the PEEP plan, Masi wrote that 'we cannot claim that our achievement has had any appreciable effect in altering the economic and social structure, which was one of the basic points in our programme' [59: p. 77]. Instead, he saw that its value lay in the informal discussions with inhabitants that took place when projects were under construction, enabling families to engage much more closely with the design of their future home [59: p. 77]. That being said, the extent to which participants were able to engage with expert knowledge was variable. In regard to the Dozza Cooperative, Guido Bossi explained to us that separations were made between the levels of information and detail in which residents were asked to engage at the design and construction stages:

> In the beginning the management of the *indivisa* cooperative was not asking people to take part in all the decisions, because there were discussions about material costs and technical details that required professional knowledge [32].

This participatory role shifted post-occupancy to involve cooperative members as representatives in 'management committees'. However, this still remained a reporting rather than a decision-making role. This was due to the recognition that there might be families in more fragile states or greater situations of need who would not be in a position to represent themselves in decision making. Thus, an 'overseeing' management, acting without personal interest was seen as beneficial. In this case, the expert's authority can be read as one that is established through competence and experience, a temporary relation rather than something imposed through hierarchical rank. What is undisclosed and would merit further exploration elsewhere, is the question of what norms and relations that professional knowledge brought and the extent to which it was able to be challenged.

The cooperatives offering *indivisa* property still claimed their 'social vocation, by preserving the quality of the spaces ... giving importance for example to green spaces' [32]. So, while the shift in inhabitants' interests from a concern with their own home to their locality tended to be more limited overall, Bologna's cooperatives nevertheless managed to take care of shared and public spaces in a way that the INA-Casa developments of the previous decade had not [60].

The citizen-led forms of participation at Pilastro moved between: making demands to the municipality and the IACP; a more DIY approach in terms of direct actions; and initiating and supporting local organisations within the community. The Comitato's participation in housing issues was in some ways quite different to that which was imagined and conducted by architects at the time, and quite far from the creative manifestations and productions of the later autonomist movements. As a form of participation in housing, it was instead

one that was directly led by its inhabitants, albeit at moments being caught up in both ideological and generational struggles within left-wing politics. Over time the Comitato at Pilastro became incorporated into the Sindicato Unitario Nazionale Inquilini ed Assegnatari (SUNIA, the Italian National Union of Tenants and Assignees). That organisation had been established by the PCI to bring together local housing groups in larger Italian cities. Giovanni Cristina describes the Comitato's shift into SUNIA as one that saw the organisation become less spontaneous and more bureaucratised [36: p. 143]. While participation in the group waned as a result, Cristina argues that 'the bottom-up demand of public services and the gradual construction of aggregation spaces and associations by organised dwellers had definitely set the foundation for a social life and for building a sense of community' [36: p. 135].

The Comitato's experiences in engaging with state institutions however reveal the wider limitations of the structures for participation in Italian social housing at that time. Public forums, such as the neighbourhood assemblies in Bologna, were intended as moments to share the municipality's projects, opening up only to the possibility for small adjustments [61]. The real agenda was driven by the PCI, via local councils. This may explain why the early presentations of the PEEP plan in the Pilastro neighbourhood drew substantial interest and participation from residents, yet at presentations of later phases it was noted that the assembly was 'almost totally deserted.' [36: p. 143] While Cristina attributes the loss of interest and 'non-participation' to the municipality's failure to deliver on its previous plans [36: p. 142-143], it can also be seen as a recognition by inhabitants that these meetings were not opportunities to formulate collective planning.

The participatory mechanisms established by the municipality in Bologna were not conceived to enable people to determine their own environments but rather had emerged historically from a different rationale. As early as 1956, the Christian Democrat mayoral candidate Giuseppe Dossetti had conceived of a vision of decentralisation in a 'White Paper for Bologna'. This vision was driven by his concerns about the impacts of urban expansion; an extension that risked a loss of identity and the 'communal spirit' of the city, with the historic features of the city seen to be disappearing [15: p. 146-150]. While Dossetti believed that dialogue between municipality and citizens needed to be increased, decentralisation in Bologna from the outset was thus conceived as a tool for integration and creation of belonging, rather than as an actual forum for direct democracy [29]. The PCI's adaptation of the policy was no less so, with it regarding decentralisation as a means to make local government more efficient and to build public consensus and expand its political base [15: p. 162-220].

The PCI's decentralisation programme established 15 neighbourhood councils for Bologna, each consisting of 20 members who were not elected by residents but rather were appointed by the city council. These candidates were carefully selected to replicate the balance between already elected parties within the city council [14: p. 78-132; 15]. This response was precisely due to the PCI's fears that:

> … without an exact replication of the political forces present, individuals or small groups of activists might be able to wield a disproportionate influence on the political life of their locality. [15: p. 214]

Thus the members of Bologna's neighbourhood councils, rather than being understood as responsible to local inhabitants, were municipal employees responsible to the corresponding Councillor's Office. Their power was also limited: bylaws established their role as consultative bodies with only an advisory capacity, although later phases saw the neighbourhood councils' decision-making powers expanded to include the ability to form and approve their own budgets, issue building permits, formulate planning proposals for their neighbourhoods, and propose policies for the city council's deliberation, and so on [14].

The later introduction of Neighbourhood Working Commissions, and Committees for the Social Management of Services, did enable citizens to participate directly to some extent in local state-led decision-making [14]. Other avenues included the use of neighbourhood assemblies, citizen petitions and citizen ballots, which were open to all residents to gather views about neighbourhood policy – but again only had advisory power. While the civic centres were locations of services, neighbourhood offices, and important sites of cultural participation [62], they were therefore not centres of collective decision-making [15]. This was noted by Ettore Masi in his reflection about the Bologna cooperatives' experiences of engaging inhabitants in discussions about the

future of their district in neighbourhood assemblies, remarking that the latter were shaped by a hierarchical vision and process [28: p. 38].

In this sense, participation in Bolognese housing took on a more liberal formulation, working to complement the existing structures of representative democracy. The Marxist critique of state institutions as a means to maintain capitalist relations and processes, can be deepened through an Anarchist lens which would recognise that 'hierarchy, privilege, and authority in liberal democracy is not simply rooted in economic power but includes a variety of mechanisms' [63: p. 1329]. Specifically with relation to concerns about the neighbourhood assemblies, these mechanisms may be formal, such as restricting access to information or material resourced, but also informal in terms of the reproduction of hierarchical relations of gender and ethnicity.

Conclusion

In this essay we have constructed an alternative architectural history to show some of the diverse ways participation in housing took place in the city of Bologna in the 1960s and 70s. By borrowing from Anarchist thought we seek to move beyond the dualisms that tended to characterise Italian Marxist thinking in that era. Anarchist understandings of participation emphasise the potential to effect changes in the day-to-day, and to prefigure forms of solidarity and sociality in a desired future. This shifts attention away from the Marxist emphasis in Italy at the time, which saw improvements in people's living conditions as removing the required confrontation between the working class and capital. The dominant Marxist politics – whether of the PCI or various autonomist groups – ultimately sought the unity of the working class and regarded intellectuals as playing a leading role in generating that unity. This led them to both ignore or subordinate other forms of oppression, needs and desires [48], as well as neglect the examination of power relations within their own groupings [5; 64]. Bologna's counter-cultural and feminist movements from the late-70s and 80s became an important exception to these tendencies.

Our account places importance on the hierarchies that inflected the everyday relationships across the three cases of participation. Sometimes, these hierarchies were overtly and formally established through the authority of the state to shape the processes by which participation could take place. In the design processes of new-build cooperative housing the professional knowledge of architects and engineers facilitating participatory design processes served to embed societal norms about gender and family relations. In other, informal cases, such as the squatting that took place temporarily in Pilastro, the modes of organising maintained gendered hierarchies.

Through the discussion of these three case studies we have contributed to a more pluralistic understanding of participation in housing in Bologna during this period which aims to move away from any judgements of 'success' or 'failure'. Rather, by exploring the variety of different ways in which the citizens, state and third-sector organisations collaborated or contested to shape housing provision, we wish to recognise the plural possibilities and relational roles in shaping the built environment for use rather than for profit. Even within the limitations discussed in this essay, Bologna remains important today as a living example that participatory non-market housing can be achieved on a larger scale, rather than as isolated experiments.

Competing interests

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