# Il Fiasco.

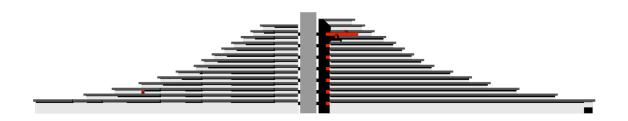
The reasons behind Scampía's failure.

History and Theory Studies

Term 1 Essay

Student: Carlo Alberto Campolo

Tutor: Georgios E.



Dedicato all'Architetto Francesco (Franz) Di Salvo. Affinché la sua Visione possa ispirare la mia generazione a non smettere mai di sognare e progettare un futuro migliore.

Roma - Lunedi, 30 aprile 1962 DARTE PRIMA

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LEGGE 10 aprile 1962, n. 166. Modificazione alla legge 27 ottobre 1957, n. 1031. La Camera dei deputati ed il Senato della Repubblic

IL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA

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IL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA

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In 1962 Italy was under the presidency of Giovanni Gronchi, a member of what was considered to be the successor of the Italian People's party: the Christian Democrats party. This was a Catholic-inspired centrist political party composed of both left- and right-leaning political factions. During his last year of presidency (having been in the position from May 11th 1955 until May 11th 1962) he had to direct the country through one of the biggest booms in the construction industry. Alongside the Italian economic boom (miracle) - miracolo economico Italiano - which took place between the 50s and 60s of the 20th century, in the post-war years, where Italy had been affected by a strong economic growth and technological advancement.

Between 1958 and 1963, more that 10 million Italians moved from rural areas towards more economically developed and industrialised areas of the country. Unemployment rate was under its 3% threshold value and average income pro capita nearly doubled: from 577 US dollars in 1952 to 970 US dollars. In order to take full advantage of this unexpected huge step forward, Italy had to implement new laws and regulations facilitating and encouraging this expansion.

Already in 1948 the Italian Republic Constitution had clearly solidairistic foundations coming from both the two main political parties of the time, the Christian Democrats and the Italian Communist Party, which, inspired from almost opposite values, paradoxically shared social policies aimed at giving the individual what they needed to live with decency in the difficult times after the war. So, while *art.* 2 of the Constitution granted the inviolable human rights, *art.* 3 stated that all individuals are entitled to an 'equal social dignity' and share the right to the full development of their personality, and *art.* 47 commits the Republic to support the access of the people's saving to the housing property (which, at any rate, is more the promotion of a right *on* housing than of a right *to* housing).<sup>2</sup>

In 1951, Law no. 1402 allowed listed municipalities to enact "reconstruction plans". After almost ten years, in 1960, the Italian National Institute of Planning (*Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica*, founded in 1930) promoted the creation of a Code of Planning to coordinate housing planning with the more comprehensive of economic programmes.

Law 167/1962 was one of many statute laws enacted in this period, this one in particular on April 18th 1962. After many years of discussion regarding social housing, the Italian government promulgated this specific law in order to "favour the acquisition of building sites to be destined towards social and economical housing projects. *Legge n.167* was composed of 20 *articoli* (sections,) broken down, in turn, into a series of paragraphs.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Derbyshire, J Denis and Derbyshire, Ian. *Political Systems of the World*. pg. 117

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Scotti, Gerardo. *Il diritto alla casa tra la Costituzione e le Corti.* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, n. 111. Legge 18 aprile 1962, n. 167.



The first gathering of the CIAM in Switzerland (1928)

In order to be covered by this law, the municipalities had to fulfill a series of conditions which enabled them to 'take advantage of this law' and receive funds for the construction of new social housing structures.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, newly built projects which were approved, funded and realised in accordance with law 167, had to have the following:

- Building(s) destined for economic and social housing.
- Structure and facilities operating final complementary services, both urban and social, such as: security surveillance (e.g. police station), sanitary services, and green areas.

This law introduced the 'Plans for Popular Economic (Social) Housing' (*Piani di Edilizia Economica e Popolare*). Among the people who signed and approved this law, the most renown ones were Giovanni Gronchi, the third President of the Italian Republic (from 1955 to 1962), Amintore Fanfani (Prime Minister of Italy and Minister for Public Works), and Giacinto Bosco (Seals' Keeper and Minister of Grace and Justice).<sup>5</sup>

Law no. 167 of 1962 was promoted by Ministry Sullo with the intent to support the acquisition of areas available for the construction of social housing estates, a move which had been studied for almost ten years. For the first time in Italy, the power of eminent domain could be used not only to acquire the land required for public intervention, but also to acquire the land needed to build estates for social housing.

Under the provisions of the Social Housing Plans, the municipalities were allowed to plan their investments in the housing sector by acquiring buildable land paying an indemnity which was lower than the property's market value.<sup>6</sup>

This was Italy's response, following the 1929 Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in Frankfurt, specifically regarding 'The minimum dwelling' and in 1930 in Bruxelles. The International Congresses of Modern Architecture was an organisation which was founded in 1929, it was a gathering of some of the leading architects from the period and it organised events all across Europe in order to discuss the latest topics and issues in the world of architecture, with a specific attention to modernist architecture. Events such as the 1929 CIAM were crucial to divulge and address, on an international scale, the most interesting and emergent architectural topics and plan how to act. These occasions in particular (CIAM '29 and '30) saw many important figures related to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> These conditions were as such:

a) Municipalities with a population over 50 000 inhabitants; or over 20 000 in some cases with special acceptance.

b) Municipalities with recognised structures/facilities related to health, ability to stay (over night), or tourism.

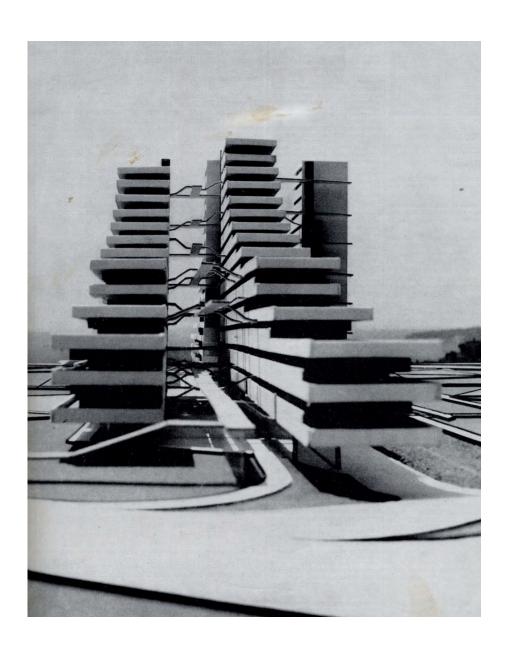
c) Municipalities with an 'overcrowding index' (indice di affoliamento) over 1.5.

d) Municipalities in which an extraordinary demographic increase is in place (currently occurring).

e) Municipalities in which the percentage of 'unhealthy' homes is over 8%.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, n. 111. Legge 18 aprile 1962, n. 167.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Università Alma Mater di Bologna. Dossier scientifico sulla legislazione in materia urbanistica.



Model of one of the Vele, showing Morandi's design

the architectural field such as Walter Gropius and Alvaro Aalto discussing in regards of a solution to the pressuring demand for inexpensive housing which could be accessible for everyone - the so-called "alloggio minimo" within which an individual could fulfill his/her basic biological necessities.<sup>7</sup>

The Vele project was designed by Arch. Francesco (Franz) Di Salvo and took thirteen years to get from paper into reality. Di Salvo's original project planned 7 structures (identified as A-B-C-D-F-G-H,) building approximately 1192 housing units for 6500 people.8 They obtained the name they are now so well known as *le Vele (the Sails)*, because of their sail-like shape: shortening the length of the building's plan as you go up. This also relates to one of Di Salvo's main interests in the design of the project - to obtain as much as natural light as possible - and, by reducing the floor area on the upper floors, each floor will have a sort of roof-terrace which people could use for their daily activity such as socialising, drying clothes, or even sun-bathing. Foreseen, in addition, green areas of ~700 square metres each, pedestrian paths, playground for children to play in, and domestic facilities. As well as a series of 'centres' such as: education centre(s), religious areas, commercial zones, cultural centre(s) and sanitary structures.

'Social spaces' were one of the core and essential aspects of this project, as they act as catalysts to encourage social interaction among the inhabitants of the Vele and, by doing this, trying to keep the 'process' of living in this type of housing very dynamic and alive. Communal spaces and commercial zones were designed to bring people together and, to a certain extent, speed-up the adaptation to a new 'home,' permitting the users to welcome the Vele into their daily life, not only as a sleeping structure (as initially perceived when referring to this project as the development of a 'città dormitorio' - literally translated as 'dormitory city') but rather as a multi-functional space, with - in part - the vision of utopian megastructures<sup>9</sup> and how they could improve the lives of their dwellers by being more than just four walls and a roof for your bed; keeping in mind the definition of 'megastructure': "a large prefabricated structural construction 'to which smaller pods, capsules and partitions - mostly pre-fabricated - could be added or taken away." Le Vele were built on this idea, where the most 'basic' module would be the housing units which, thanks to the modularity of the project, could be then enriched with different areas serving different purposes.

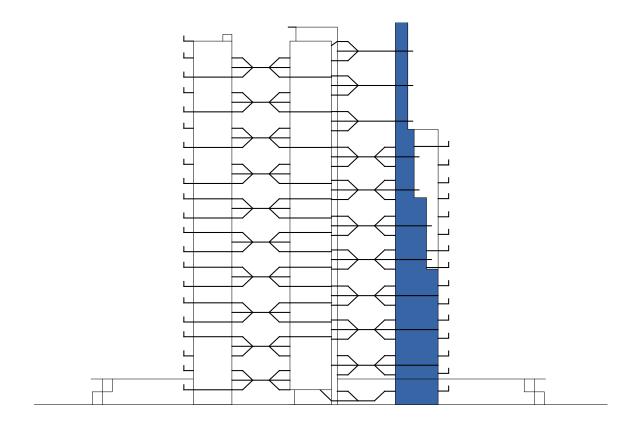
Open-air 10.80m wide platform corridors, with cross-levelled staircases allowing both vertical and horizontal circulation across the different floors of the building, and created apertures throughout different levels to see the adjacent floors while walking towards the house's door, as well as aiding the intake of light and ventilation from the outside. This was also possible thanks to the help provided by Riccardo Morandi, one of Italy's most prominent structuralists of that time, who provided Di Salvo with a 'struttura a cavalletto' (trestel-like structure) which made it possible to use an unconventional

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Fusco, Gaetano. Francesco Di Salvo: opere e progetti. pg. 87.

<sup>8</sup> Sicignano, Enrico. "Le Vele di Scampía a Napoli ovvero il fallimento dell'utopia" in Costruire in Laterizio. pg. 369

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Scaletti, Lavinia. Vele di Scampia: failure and possible future of an emblematic housing project in Naples. pg. 15

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibid, quoting also J. Alison, Future Cities.



Section drawing of a Vela

connection system to bridge the two sides of the building instead of other less-beneficial options.<sup>11</sup>

During these years of construction, as the construction companies - the first one being the one which started working on the project but went bankrupt during the realisation of the first structure, the latter being the one which then took the project after that and completed the construction works - which were in charge of the project, repeatedly changed building materials and structural layout of the building, compromising, by doing so, the fundamental concepts which Di Salvo heartedly believed in and based his project on, those such as *flexibility, adaptability, and 'organicity' (organic quality.)*<sup>13</sup> A clear consequence of this can be noticed when taking into consideration that, due to the construction company not being able to realise and implement the trestle-like structure as planned by Di Salvo (the structure designed by Morandi, supposed to sustain the external corridors between the two halves of the building), the two sides had to be placed closer to each other, reducing the space in-between them from the original 10.80m to 8.42m.<sup>14</sup> This inevitably decreased the amount of natural light entering the slit where the corridors to access the housing units are located, negatively influencing on the inhabitants psychology and becoming an overall *malus* for the project, contributing to its failure.

In May 1980, pressured by the Neapolitan population - due to their urgent need for a place where to sleep and a shelter in which to feel safe - the city council opened the doors of the Vele to its soon-going-to-be inhabitants. Many of the Vele's units were assigned to families even though structural connections to utilities such as the water and sewage network, gas, and the electricity grid were not made adequately. These were first allowed and accepted because of the urgency of the situation but what were supposed to be quick and temporary solutions to these problems stayed and are still the same nowadays.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time people started to get used to living in the Vele, even if it felt like living in an incomplete building (as it actually was), the lack of any type of social facility - what was supposed to be the very heart and key strength of Di Salvo's project - worsened things even more, leading the inhabitants towards a state of social isolation. These were originally thought to be implemented in order to allow people living inside the Vele to get to know each other, enjoy some time in the building they lived in even though they did not want to stay inside their homes; places where to communicate and make the Vele feel more than just four walls and a roof under which one sleeps but rather use the project to live through a new life-style. Nowadays this is considered 'wasted space' as it could have been used to allow more housing units to fit and therefore allow the sheltering of more people.

<sup>11</sup> Sicignano, Enrico. "Le Vele di Scampía a Napoli ovvero il fallimento dell'utopia" in Costruire in Laterizio n. 65. pg. 371

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Left image: Casabella, n. 337, 1969. pg. 25. Right image: Fusco, Gaetano. Francesco Di Salvo: opere e progetti. pg. 81

<sup>13</sup> Fusco, Gaetano. Francesco Di Salvo: opere e progetti. pg. 69

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Sicignano, Enrico. *"Le Vele di Scampía a Napoli ovvero il fallimento dell'utopia"* in *Costruire in Laterizio n*. 65. pg. 371

<sup>15</sup> Ibid pg. 371



Irpinia earthquake aftermath

Unlike the way it was planned, the first police station in the Scampia area was only opened in 1987, 12 years after thousands of families had moved in. The lack of adequate surveillance on site 'encouraged' the growth of micro-criminality in the area, mostly linked to the Neapolitan Camorra and their drug-related activities, making the innocent ones who live in the Vele either feel unsafe or pushing them to seek for the criminal organisation's protection and therefore having to work for them.

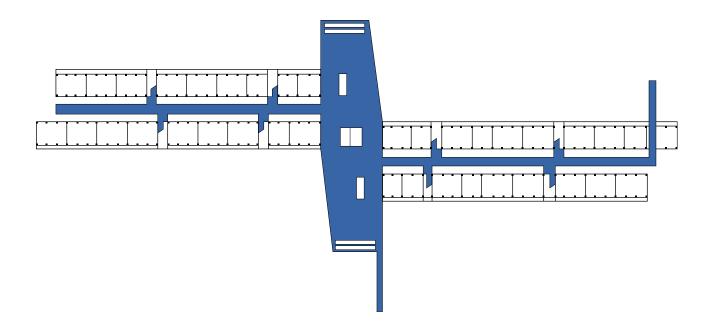
Only six months after people started to move inside the Vele (even though not yet completely finished as the units still had to be fully furnished and finalised) following a major earthquake in 1980 in the area of Irpinia, which measured a 6.8 on the Richter scale with an X (extreme) Mercalli intensity, 250 000 people in southern Italy (including Naples) were left without a home. This was probably due to the high number of ancient houses severely damaged by the catastrophe. This gave rise to an unprecedented increase in the demand for social housing but, due to a lack of political coordination and stability, most of the units were illegal squatted rather than being officially assigned.

Due to such events, what was supposed to be a new model for a new social architecture, ended up becoming one of the most controversial buildings of today, especially in a context such as the outskirts of some of Italy's main cities. Reading the many articles written regarding the current situation of *le Vele*, it is possible to understand the 'doomed' state in which this project has been uncaringly lead into.

On a side note, during this same period, another very well known project was being built in the Roman periphery: the *Nuovo Corviale* project designed by Arch. Mario Fiorentino (with the help of Eng. Riccardo Morandi) in 1972 and built between 1975 and 1984. This was a milestone project for a social housing structure, which can be also considered to be in parallel and twinned with Scampia's Vele because of their utopia vision and mega-scale. Its 960 metres length and 11 floors generated over 1200 housing units.

To be noted that its objective was to contradict the concept a generic and 'templetable' design of social housing. The Nuovo Corviale was born from the idea of having a very specific structure and program, in an equivalently specific location. Within its Spina Servizi ("Spine of Services"), located at the middle of its length, the following are present: the city's *Municipio XI* offices, ASL Roma D (Rome and Lazio's Health Agency) mental illnesses centre, and the *Gruppo XV* firefighters body station. Other activities such as elder's centre and supermarket are also present, in a different part of the structure. The Nuovo Corviale was designed with the intention of allowing it to function as an independent and autonomous system, almost as if it was a city on its own — with independent management and services.

Sadly, Corviale's course followed Scampia's fate: the lack of control over the project, the bankruptcy of the originally appointed construction company, and the illegal squatting of the housing units became the roots of the failure of this project, leading the building to how people know it nowadays - isolated and neglected.



Plan drawing of a Vela showing housing units.

Today the Vele are in a state of abandonment from the Neapolitan local authorities and community, this is probably because of the project becoming an international icon for inadequate architectural management - leading the structure to the current state, almost as an unpleasant tumour which cannot be removed because the removal operation would be too expensive - and this is one of the many reasons for why a part of the series of buildings of the Vele is still there and many times used as an asset by the city's criminal gangs (malavita) for illegal activities such as drug dealing.

Testimonies from a video-documentary of people living in *le Vele* makes one clearly understand the urgent need for action towards the rehabilitation and both structural and environmental improvements needed to re-stabilise a situation which the State completely lost its control over — inhabitants who don't have a home are forced to move into one of the many unfinished units of *le Vele* in Scampía, using plywood boards as dividers, by placing them in front of the holes where doors are supposed to be, and being exposed everyday to a dangerous amount of asbestos which is slowly killing them.

After careful consideration regarding all of the key factors which played a fundamental role in the project's conditions during and after its realisation, it has to be understood that Di Salvo's Vele are not a absolute failure: the reason behind the word *Fiasco* is as complex as the project's story itself.

## Le Vele di Scampia is not a failure.

Even though some people may hate it, criticising each possible minute detail of the project, it is impossible to ignore the fact that Scampia became a symbol of Naples, people came to know because of Scampia thanks to its *fiasco*. Humans learn from their mistakes and, therefore, it would be childish of ourselves to not appreciate the project for what it became, not to take note of the good which came out of the Vele and keep it as one of the foundation pilotis on which to build future ideas, developing *onto* these *fiascos*, filtering the failures from the potential of a great project, such as the one dreamt by Franz, who unluckily had to live the rest of his life forced to see his project torn apart and abused from the Italian chaotic management. As one of the most famous and significant case studies for social housing in Italy, le Vele's project deserves to be seen as a milestone and achievement in the context of Italian architecture, fuelling the hunger for new Architecture and everpushing the boundaries for a more organised society in order to avoid situations like the one which happened with Di Salvo's project reoccur.

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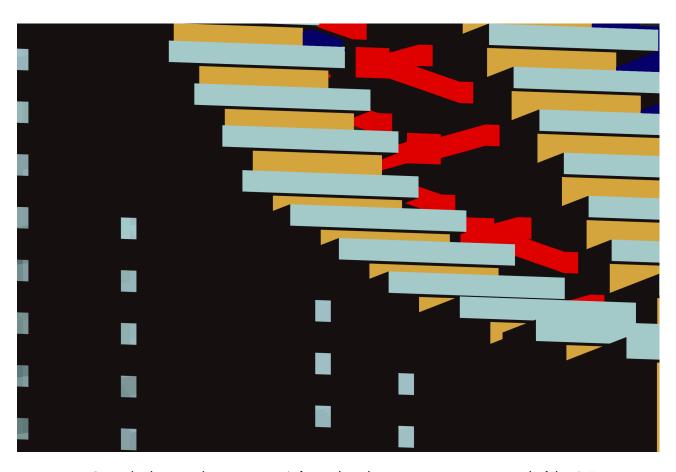
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"Quando il vento dei soprusi sarà finito, le Vele saranno spiegate verso la felicità." ("When the wind of the oppressed will be over, the Sails will be set towards happiness.")