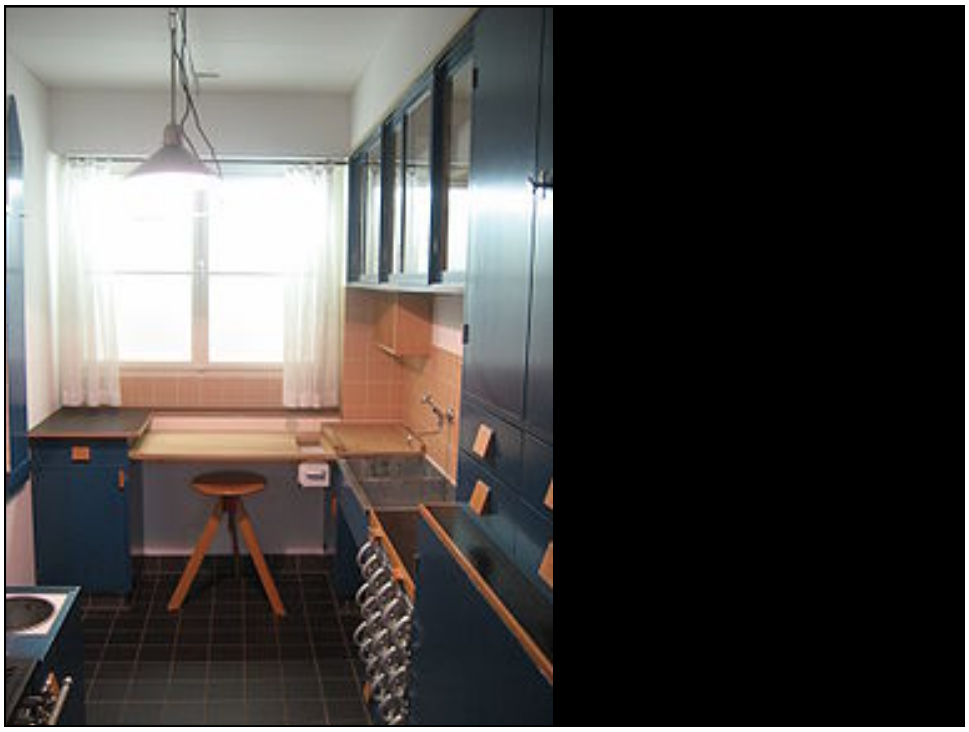
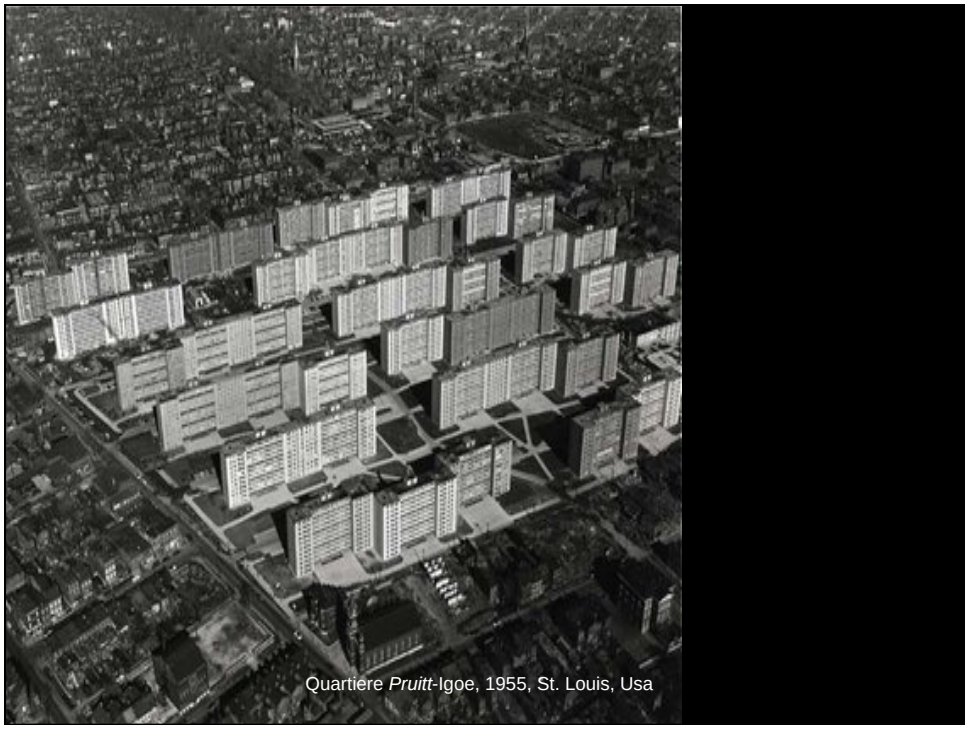
POLITECNICO DI MILANO

Master of Science in Urban Planning and Policy Design

An overview on contemporary issues in housing projects and development

Massimo Bricocoli - DiAP





Quartiere *Pruitt*-Igoe, 1955, St. Louis, Usa

Quartiere *Pruitt*-Igoe, St. Louis, Usa, demolizione 1972

© 2007 Europa Technologies
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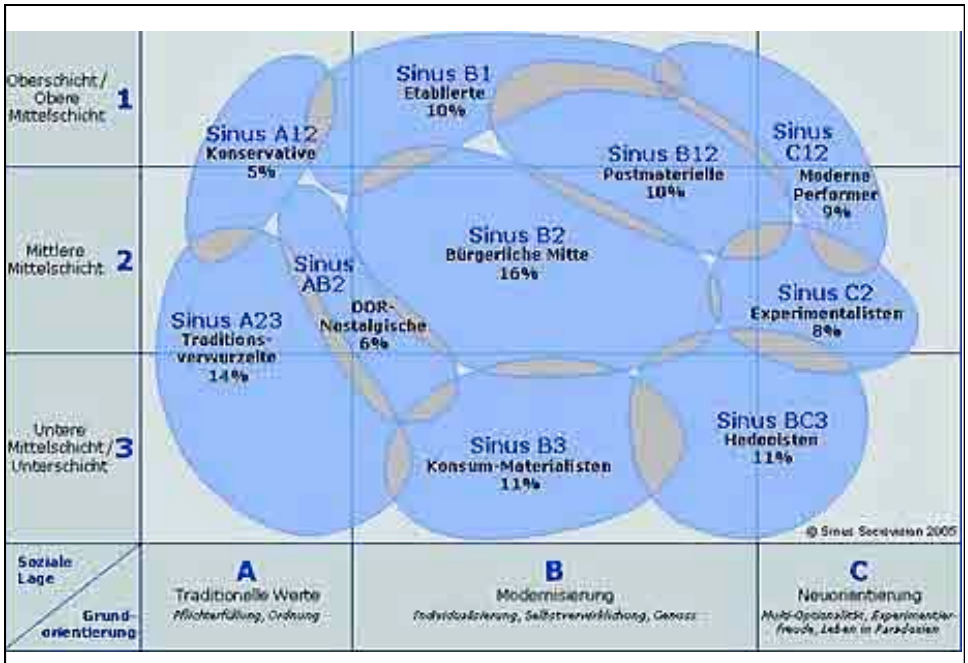


Source: Sociovison [Hrsg.] (2005): Die Sinus-Milieus 2006. Heidelberg / www.sinus-milieus.de

Current challenges and themes for housing policies in European Cities

While the role of the state is changed, from provider to enabler, these seem to be major focuses at stake:

1. Regeneration of the existing stock
2. Climate change and ecological/energy concerns
3. Demographic change (ageing, migration, singles)
4. Severe deprivation: from social welfare to public order?
5. → **Maintaining / Attracting new inhabitants in cities: promoting new urban qualities, renewed interest in collective housing, new urban developments and housing projects**

Main research question

"At which conditions & with which expectations are the people deciding for settling in the central city? What sort of space (of city) is being designed and produced?"

- *new conditions and forms of social and spatial re-organization*
- *A main controversial node is that of the search of "separation" versus the aspiration to "urbanity"*

→ *A focus on Milano, Hamburg and Vienna*

Milano Downtown as an emblem of the 'return to the city'

- Strong focus on the valorization and growth of the core metropolitan area. Urban and population growth is assumed as a strategic task by several European cities.
- Milan (1,3 millions inhabitants) as the downtown of a vast metropolitan region (4 millions)
- The ambition, which is often explicit, is to regain to the central city those who left it for a suburban location in search of happiness, quiet, safety, lower housing costs (Minton, 2009; Menzl, 2010).
- While the reference to social and functional mix is extensively used in the argumentative register of public action, the explicit reference to the downtown suggests a selective profile which is relocating somewhere else people and activities which are not valuable or functional to the renaissance of the central city.

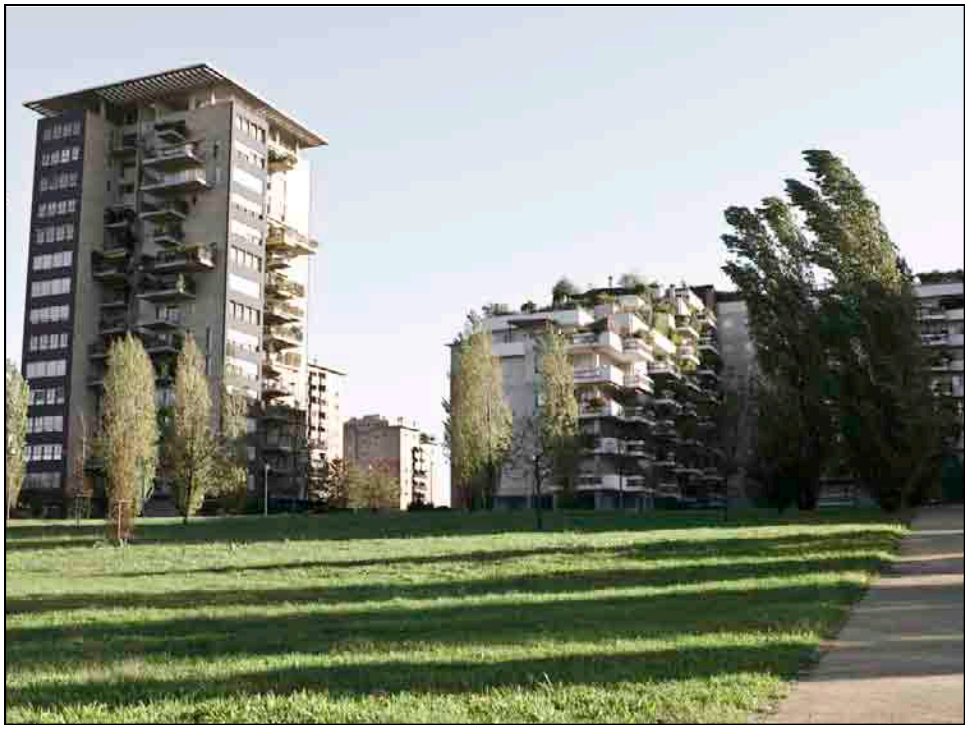
MILANO DOWNTWON

Geometries of separation 1.

Pompeo Leoni

"So close, so far: the happiness of the suburbia in the city?"

- The design and the redevelopment of aformer industrial site results from a negotiation within a public and private partnership in which the public actor mainly accepted as compensation the development of green open areas.
- The only provision of service consists in a large supermarket. In fact, the spatial organization and asset of the buildings separated from the street-line is preventing itself the opening of any sort of commercial activities.
- The design of the open spaces is threefold: a central boulevard or promenade and two parks on the two external areas of the development. The two parks are clearly remarking the separated character of this development from the surrounding existing urban pattern.



(Pompeo Leoni)

In the words of the inhabitants:

The interviews reveal the paradox of the whole imaginary of the suburbs transported into a semi-central area of the city. Conflicts are rising in the area, any sort of unplanned and unforeseen use of the open spaces by unknown people is producing upheaval:

"*the distance from the disorder and chaotic environment was the main drive to move out of the city core. Pompeo Leoni was a perfect solution, being so close to the city centre and still offering a vision on green open spaces and large balconies or terraces for private use and gardening"*.

"Open spaces, as we often declared and shouted at the city administration are expected to be designed as flat and with less vegetation as possible in order to have high visibility on whatever occurs", confirms an inhabitant (a woman in her forties)

(Pompeo Leoni)

Some remarks

- The whole imaginary of the suburbs is here transported into a semi-central area of the city.
- No different degrees of publicness are existing, no mediation: everything that is built is private, everything that is unbuilt & open is publicly owned but conceived by the inhabitants and expected to perform as an “empty green surface”.
- These open spaces which were gained from the city as a compensation of market led development seem to correspond more the valorization of the surrounding housing then to any sort of shared use.
- Radical questions on whether the production of these public green areas responds to any criteria of public interest and common good

Geometries of separation 2.

Santa Giulia
A planning disaster: the “just” distance: separation and its counter-effects.

Geometries of separation 2.

Santa Giulia*: the "just" distance: separation and its counter-effects.*

- A large scale urban, upmarket, development which was conceived to be a new detached part of the city and at the same time a new way of living in the central area.
- The master plan was promising an alternative to the disorder of the central city, allowing a higher and distinguished quality of life (quality open spaces and variety within the borders).
- The design and organization of functional and social mix was mainly developed by disaggregating and distinguishing spaces, borders and buildings. Housing is mainly displayed considering building units as sorts of different containers which correspond to different status and typologies of housing profiles

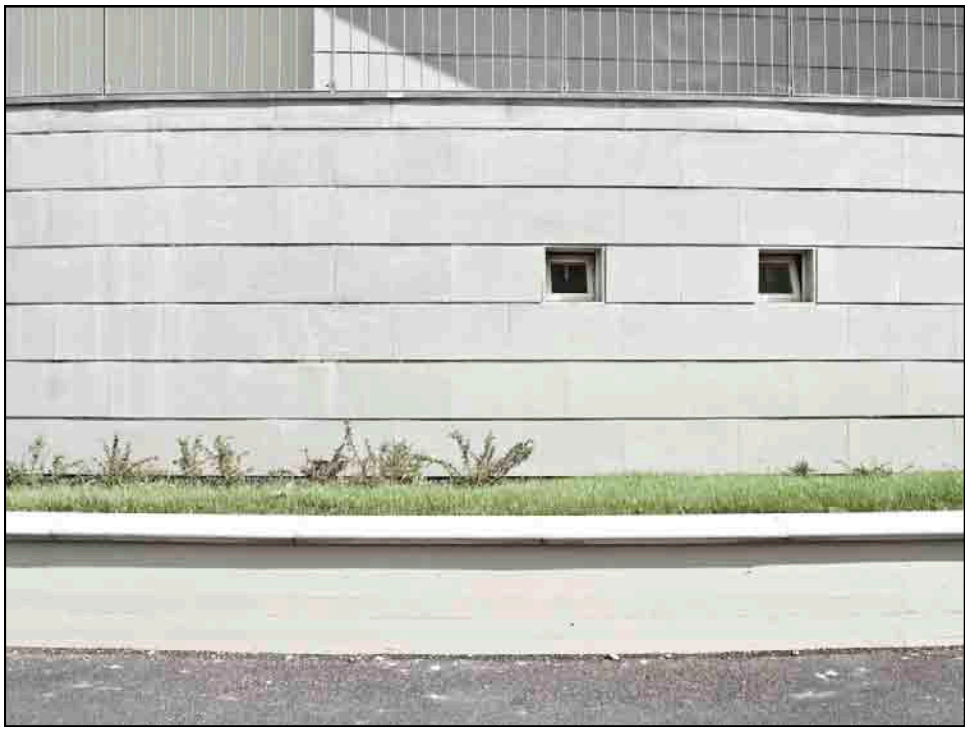
Geometries of separation 2.

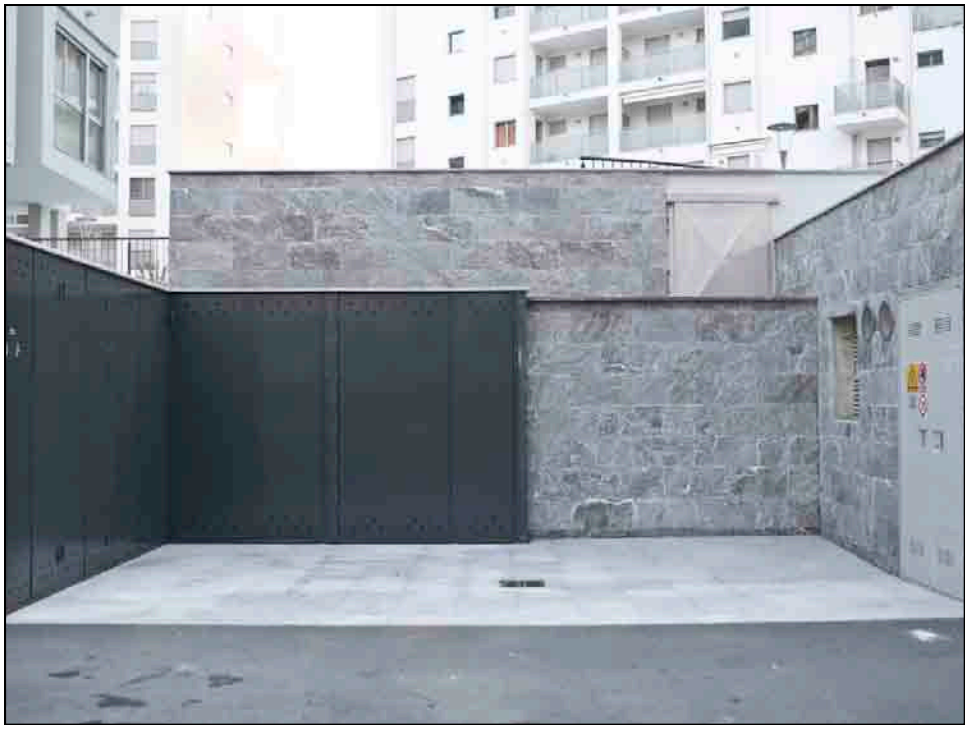
Santa Giulia*: a planning disaster*

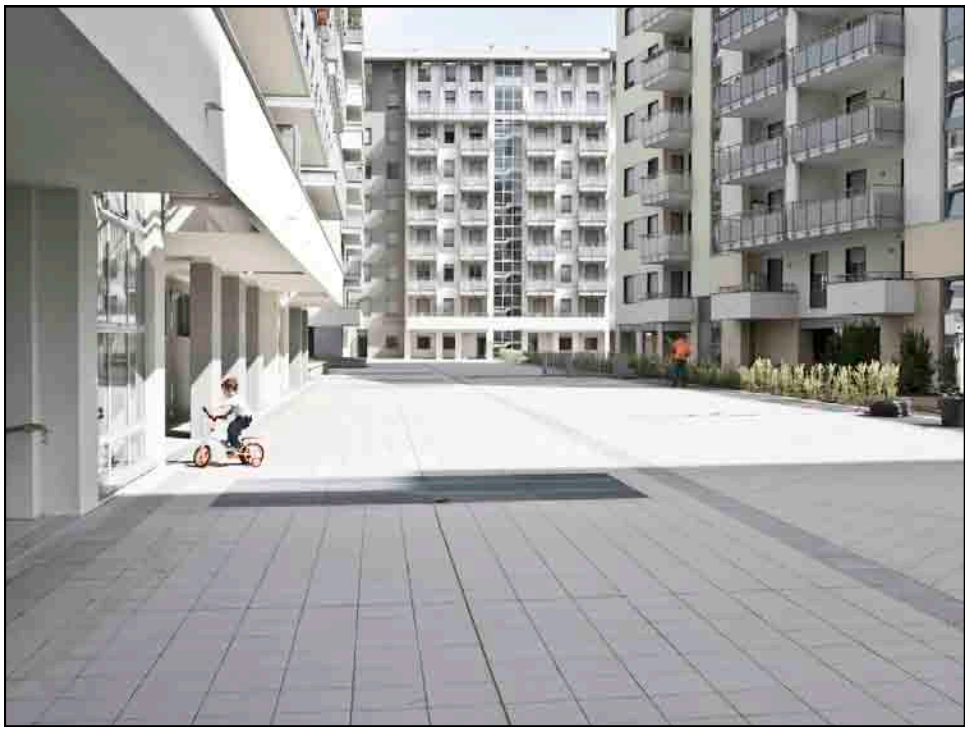
- The real estate disaster: a project has been undergoing a major crisis: in the midth of the implementation phase, the developer was affected by the real estate and finance crisis and fell bankrupt.
- The planning disaster: the project is only partially developed. The new inhabitants are literally trapped:

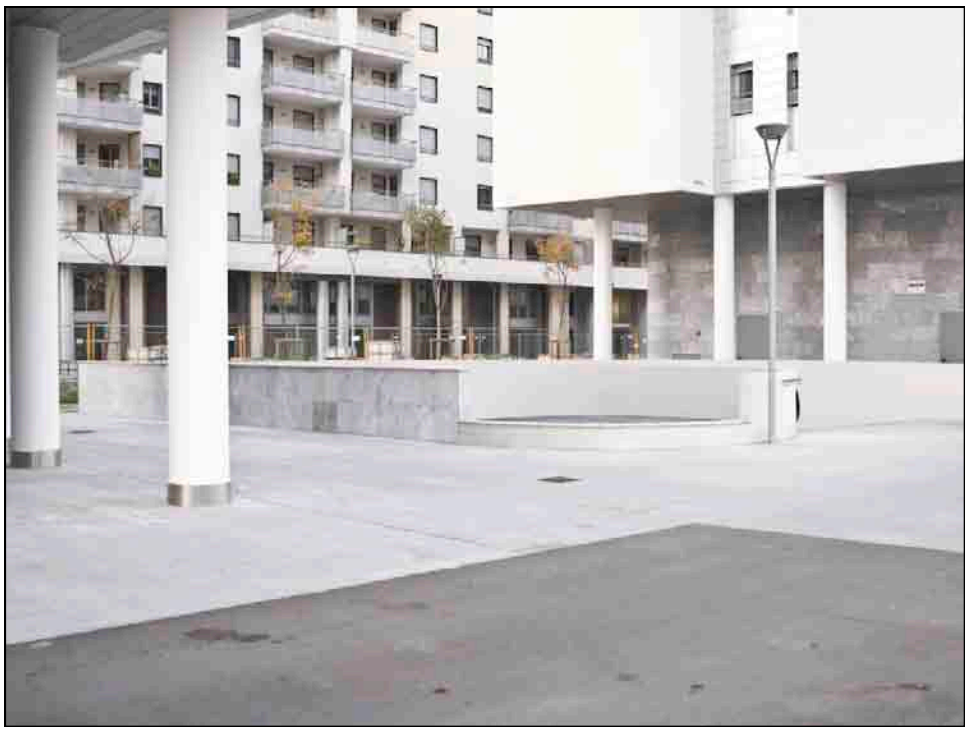
  - trapped by the value they have invested in their flat which they can't even dare to sell as it has dramatically lost value and

  - trapped in a living environment in which the separation which was meant to preserve the new development turns out to be a distance to overcome to reach any kind of service and facility.









(Santa Giulia)

In the words of the inhabitants:

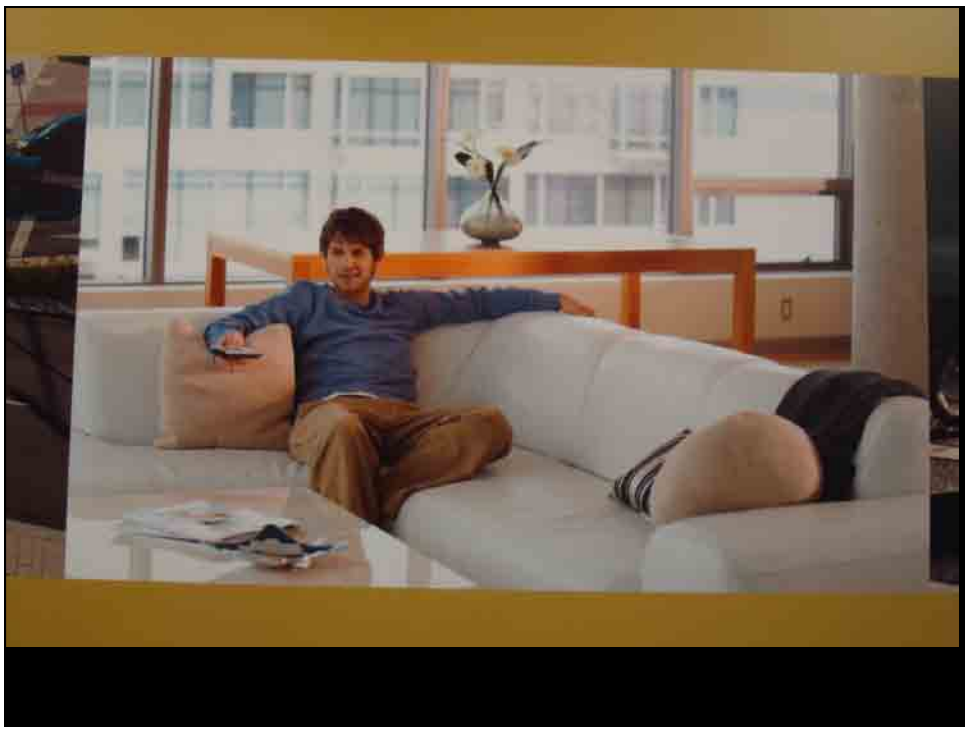
”My obsession was to end up living in a dormitory neighborhood, where during the day everybody is at work, in the evening at home watching tv and the next morning back to work again. Actually many are not to be seen around, but my overall impression is good. When I reconsidered my choice and decided to go for an apartment in the private developer area rather than in the cooperative homeownership, I thought that in this way I could better guarantee myself that I would deal with better off neighborhood and to avoid any tramp kind of person I would dislike.”

(Santa Giulia)

Some remarks

- While the stress on separation and on “giving up” any connection with the surrounding urban texture was considered to be a strategic asset and a main rationale in the masterplan, the inhabitants are now trapped in a living environment in which the separation which was meant to preserve the new development turns out to be a distance to overcome to reach any kind of service and facility.
- What has been implemented in terms of public space is literally deserted and it explicitly reveals its being a simple surface organizing what was assumed by the project to be “the distance from the city”.

HafenCity, Hamburg (Germany)



Seestadt Aspern, Vienna (Austria)

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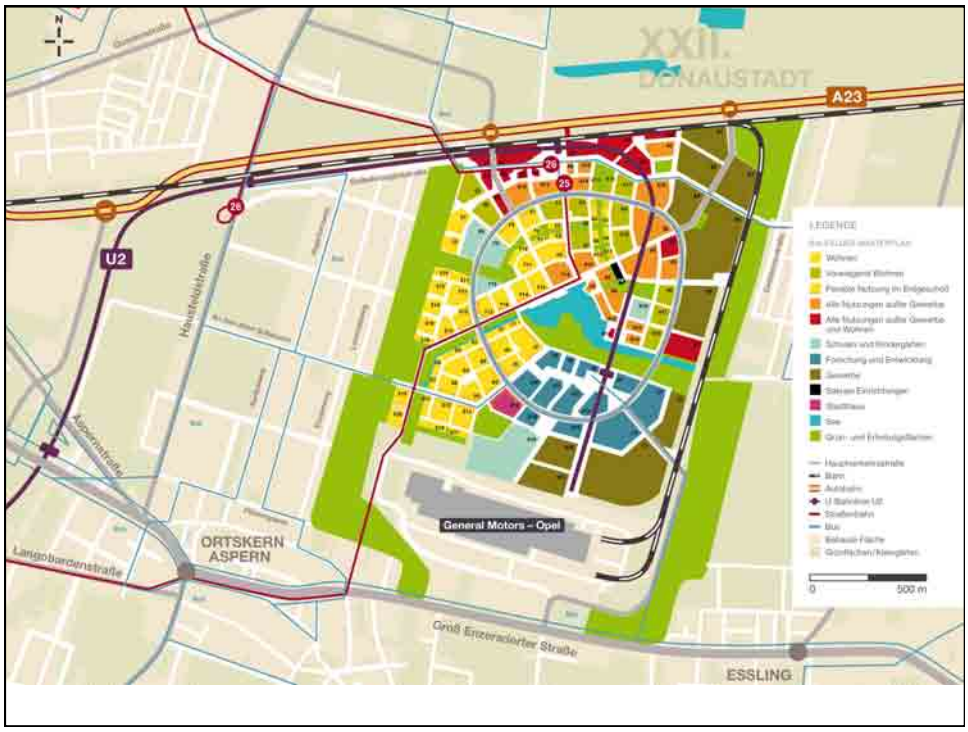
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Some final remarks

- On mix: "**A collection of differences does not produce mix by itself**" What is relevant to be put under observation and evaluation is not the collection and setting aside of different land uses, but rather the effective and concrete degree of connection, overlapping and blend (and even of conflict) that is eventually being produced among different populations and uses in a same urban space.
- Beside the recurrent reference to urbanity in the planning debate, **many of the features which are supposed to be urban qualities are in fact considered by the city inhabitants as negative externalities**: a consistent works is required in order to guarantee conditions of positive cohexistence between different uses and populations
- A **raising desire of remarking a distance from social change in the city is to be dealt with** (the dangerous group): the youngsters, the foreigners, the homeless.
- In the lack of strong guidance, the **geometry of separation is enforced by the overall design which tends to preserve real estate values in the short term rather than ensuring complexity in the long term**