Reconstructing Italy

The Ina-Casa Neighborhoods of the Postwar Era

Stephanie Zeier Pilat

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The Ina-Casa Neighborhoods of the Postwar Era

Stephanie Zeier Pilat
University of Oklahoma, USA

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5 INSIDE THE HOMES OF INA-CASA

EPILOGUE: AN ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY OF INA-CASA

APPENDIX A: GAZETTEER OF SELECTED INA-CASA NEIGHBORHOODS

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Foreword

Robert Fishman

The history of social housing is a strange field: the failures are renowned, and the successes forgotten. There is no more famous image in all of 20th century architecture than the 1972 demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, the event Charles Jencks immortalized as "the moment modern architecture died."[1] The twin peaks of American urban thought—Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and Robert Caro's *The Power Broker* (1974)—similarly center on the destructive consequences of American urban renewal and their dire implications for urbanism.

Nor have the failures of European social housing been neglected. The shortcomings of the Parisian *banlieue* have been extensively chronicled, from the inhuman scale and standardization of the 1950s high-rise *grands ensembles* to the current isolation and rebellions of the immigrants who now inhabit them. The melancholy declension of the Swedish New Towns, once the vanguard of progressive social housing, is the subject of Peter Hall's profound reflections in *Cities in Civilization* on how the bureaucratic imperative of quantity ultimately defeated design quality. And Rem Koolhaas has devoted an influential chapter in *S, M, L, XL* to the failures of Bijlmermeer, the massive Dutch social housing project outside Amsterdam that he descries as "boredom on a heroic scale."[2]

By contrast, this remarkable book is the first in English, and among a very small number in Italian, that analyzes at length what is arguably *the* great and lasting success of post-1945 social housing: the Italian Ina-Casa program. ["Ina" is the abbreviation for the Italian national insurance agency that financed the houses.] Between 1949 and 1963 this government agency built over 350,000 units in a nation struggling to overcome the terrible burdens of war, fascism, underdevelopment and poverty. More importantly, Ina-Casa built real communities based on a solid foundation of communitarian social policy and outstanding architecture and urban design. The design achievements analyzed in this book were truly a collective effort, in which social policy was sensitively interpreted by teams of architects responsive to local needs and context.

Yet Ina-Casa is virtually unknown even to specialists in social housing. I don't expect that, for example, the complex townscapes of such Ina-Casa projects discussed in this book as Tiburtino in Rome or Borgo Panigale in Bologna will ever displace in our architecture textbooks the images of the Pruitt-Igoe towers being dynamited. But this book should provoke some necessary re-thinking of conventional wisdom about postwar social housing.

Pilat leads us to reconsider not only the history of social housing, but also the history of another neglected success—the post-1945 Italian recovery. As Alexander Stille has recently observed, "After World War II Italy achieved a degree of shared prosperity that was unprecedented in its history, allowing the country to enjoy both a high material standard of living and a great deal of security (job protections, generous unemployment benefits, and free health care and education), while leaving intact many idiosyncratic yet often inefficient national habits and institutions …"[3]

Ina-Casa was, in a sense, one of these "idiosyncracies," a uniquely Italian response to the broader housing crisis that gripped all the Western nations after the Second World War. This crisis had been building since the First World War when systematic inflation undermined any incentive for capitalist developers to invest long-term in rental housing for the working- and lower-middle-classes. Any comprehensive solution required a new relationship between housing and the state, because only the state could provide, either directly or through mortgage guarantees, the long-term capital that a mass housing program requires. Weimar Germany in the 1920s and the American New Deal and Swedish "People's Home" movement in the 1930s took the first steps toward such a solution. But, overall, the housing crisis festered through the Great Depression and the outright destruction of the war years. Every nation, even the United States, entered the postwar world with massive housing deficiencies, made worse by the mass migrations from a depopulating countryside to overcrowded cities. A "revolution of rising expectations" meant that the terrible slum conditions inherited from the nineteenth century could no longer be tolerated.

As early as 1923, Le Corbusier had summed up this seemingly-permanent housing crisis under the slogan, "Architecture or Revolution," that is, only modern architecture with its efficient industrial methods could enable capitalist societies to meet the basic social needs of the masses and thus avoid violent revolution. In the post-1945 years the urgency of the housing problem did indeed galvanize elites to responses along the lines that Le Corbusier himself first suggested in the 1920s: the industrialization and standardization of housing design and production to yield quickly the necessary quantity of housing units. This flood of new post-1945 housing took a characteristic form in most countries, shaped by design, construction and bureaucratic imperatives. In Sweden, for example, the state borrowed long-term capital which it loaned at low interest rates to building cooperatives for large-scale rental tower blocks and garden apartments clustered close to rail lines—the formula for the Swedish New Towns and later the French grands ensembles.

As Peter Hall has shown for Sweden and Norma Evenson for France, the overriding need for speed, economy and quantity led to Koolhaas's "boredom on

a heroic scale:" the simplification of Le Corbusier's archetypal towers-in-the-park to massive, repetitive tower-blocks in placeless settlements built on cheap land at the edge of the metropolitan region. This social housing indeed responded "heroically" to an urgent need, but the settlements were unloved and unlovable; eventually they were deserted by the more prosperous Europeans and inherited by immigrants who could afford nothing better.

Only two Western democracies avoided this trajectory: the United States and Italy. In America "social housing" took two very different forms. The low-rent program known as "public housing" as provided in the 1949 Housing Act was built as European-style rental towers in the northern industrial cities. Pruitt-Igoe and similar projects were limited to the poor—and soon occupied overwhelmingly by poor black migrants from the rural South—and thus were located in the black ghettoes of the inner city. This extreme racial segregation within deindustrializing cities meant that American "public housing" managed to be an even worse failure than the worst European social housing. Meanwhile, the 1949 Housing Act also reinvigorated a New Deal innovation: federal mortgage guarantees that enabled the white working-class and lower-middle-class to afford mass-produced tract houses in the suburbs. Levittown, Long Island, and its many successors preserved the outward form of the single-family detached house and private ownership while allowing for the mass-production techniques and government-led financing that also characterized European social housing.

Italy took its own "idiosyncratic" path that, as Pilat shows, more closely resembles the communitarian emphasis of northern European social housing while somehow avoiding the brutal scale and monotony that ultimately undermined so many other social housing programs. How the Italians achieved this remarkable balance is the main theme of this remarkable book, and Pilat's close analysis repays careful reading. I will only mention briefly some factors that seem to me to be most significant.

Pilat rightly emphasizes the uniquely Italian political framework in which Ina-Casa flourished. For Ina-Casa was not a program that a militant Left imposed on the Center-Right Christian-Democratic coalition that governed Italy in the postwar years. Instead, it was very much a project of that conservative coalition, championed by Minister of Labor and later Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani. Fanfani and his party wanted to emphasize traditional values of home, community, and ownership, and were correspondingly suspicious of quick, cost-effective radical solutions that housing bureaucracies were able to impose in other countries. Residents, moreover, were expected to purchase their homes through state-guaranteed mortgages at favorable terms, thus combining social design with the kind of pride-of-ownership of the American tract suburbs. Finally, as Minister of Labor, Fanfani was able to define Ina-Casa as primarily a *jobs program*, thus turning its "inefficiencies" into virtues.

But if the politicians provided a promising context, this book is ultimately the story of a remarkable collective effort by a gifted set of postwar Italian architects who somehow found the right blend of organization and creative freedom. Pilat is at her best in presenting the complex organization of Ina-Casa that yielded a

high level of design in all the projects while allowing a wide variety of responses to local context and topography. As she shows, Italian Fascism had inoculated Italian architects against any temptation to worship top-down control and machine-inspired standardization. They were similarly suspicious of the inflated scale and stripped-down functionalism that characterized so much of the modern movement of their time. Long before Charles Jenck's supposed post-modern moment in the 1970s, the Ina-Casa architects were attentive to historic context, urbanity, and complexity in plan and elevation. So, alone among the postwar mass housing programs, Ina-Casa was able to incorporate such virtues as variety, public space, and craftsmanship into the very essence of the designs.

Today, as Pilat shows, the Ina-Casa projects have aged so successfully that they are not perceived by their residents as "social housing" at all. Nevertheless, Ina-Casa should have a vital place in our larger understanding of the history of modern housing, and this book is particularly timely now. The prevailing neo-liberalism in both Europe and the United States has managed very effectively to negate the ideal of housing as a social commitment and to substitute "the housing market" for "social housing." But the market itself, so beloved of the neo-liberals, has had its revenge. The attempt to make housing a global "profit-center" for massive flows of unregulated capital seeking maximum returns led first to a series of housing bubbles and then to the disastrous crash of 2008 that almost wrecked the world economy and still prevents recovery.

In this context, Ina-Casa emerges in this book as a vital alternative to the failed bureaucratization and standardization of most postwar government-built housing, as well as to the market failures of our own time. These designs emerge as important inspirations for a genuine *social* housing movement; they have proven their strength and resilience over half a century. This book is thus both a challenge to the received history of social housing and a vital resource for its future.

ENDNOTES

1 Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 9.

2 Rem Koolhaas, Bruce Mau, Jennifer Sigler, Hans Werlemann, *Office for Metropolitan Architecture, S, M, L, XL* (New York, NY: Monacelli Press, 1998), 871.

3 Alexander Stille, "Italy under a microscope" [review of John Thavis, *The Vatican Diaries* and Tim Parks, *Italian Ways: on and off the rails from Milan to Palermo*], New York Review of Books (December 5, 2013), vol. 60 #19.

Acknowledgments

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List of Abbreviations

APAO	*Associazione per l'architettura organica*
CIAM	*Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*
ERP	European Recovery Plan, also known as the Marshall Plan
IACP	*Istituto per le case popolare autonomo*
ICP	*Istituto per le case popolare*
ICPM	*Istituto per le case popolare a Milano*
IFCP	*Istituto Fascista per le Case Popolari*
INA	*Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni*
INCIS	*Istituto nazionale per le case degli impiegati dello Stato*
MIAR	*Movimento Italiano per l'Architettura Razionale*
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

Dedicated to my family

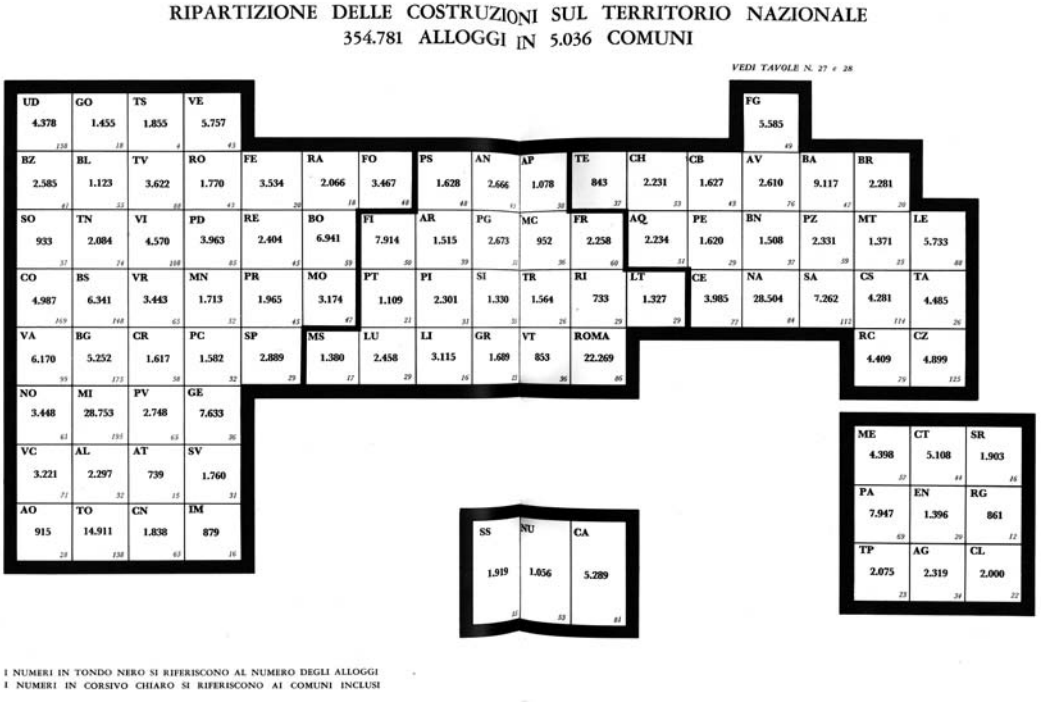
Introduction: Reconstructing Italy

A desolate and hazy shot of the Baths of Caracalla opens the 1952 documentary film *045 Ricostruzione Edilizia*. Ominous music plays in the background as we see, amidst the rubble, men building walls that divide one makeshift home from another. Here, in one of the hallowed archaeological sites of Rome, the narrator explains, families have been living for the last seven years. Our attention is drawn to the family in #045, a couple with two small children. The zero of #045 marks this family's home as an "abusive" or illegal dwelling. The camera pans out and we see neighborhoods around the city, Parioli and Monte Mario, full of temporary and dilapidated makeshift shelters. The narrator asks, "How did this happen in Italy?" The answer, we are told, is embodied in the fascist cry: "*Vincere vincere vincere*!" (Win, win, win!) The drive to win the Second World War had eroded the fabric of civil society in Italy, leaving millions homeless, desperate, hungry, and unemployed.[1]

Later in the film, the camera focuses on another crumbling structure. Now, however, the narrator explains that this is not an ancient ruin like the Baths of Caracalla. Instead, we are looking at remnants of present day Cassina, a city outside of Rome that was heavily bombed during the war. Italians measured housing in terms of habitable rooms, which could mean living rooms, dining rooms, or bedrooms and, by this measure, the war's destructive legacy was significant.[2] In all, two million habitable rooms were destroyed in Italy during the war, while another four million were damaged.[3] The wartime devastation exacerbated an already formidable housing shortage; under Fascism, housing construction had consistently failed to meet demand. After the war, internal migration from rural areas to urban ones further intensified the pressure on the inadequate housing stock. By 1945, five million new habitable rooms were needed in order to reach the government's goal of lowering density to one person per room, so that a family of four might have a four-room apartment with two bedrooms, a kitchen/dining area, and a living room. Between one and two people per room was considered overcrowded, while anything over two people per room was extremely overcrowded.[4] In response to this demand, as the narrator of the film explains,

the Ina-Casa plan was established to "ameliorate the housing deficit from North to South."[5] Designed to address both the housing and the unemployment crises, the Ina-Casa plan built working-class neighborhoods throughout the nation during its two seven-year phases (1949–56 and 1956–63). Towards the end of the film, the family from the Baths of Caracalla reappears and the audience learns that they were waiting for someone from the city administration to assign them a new home. As the film concludes, we watch the family from the Baths entering their new Ina-Casa home, #12—without a preceding zero.

The documentary *045 Ricostruzione Edilizia* was created by the Christian Democratic-led government in 1952 as a means to promote their successes in addressing the housing and jobs crises three years into the Ina-Casa plan. While it is certainly a work of political propaganda, the film does not over-dramatize the dire living conditions in Italy after the war. It did not have to—for audiences across the country the conditions spoke for themselves. In 1951, 37 percent of Italians were living in overcrowded conditions and an additional 22 percent were living in extremely overcrowded conditions. Thus, six years after the Second World War ended roughly 60 percent of Italians were living with more than one person per room. The problem was worse in the South, where the average density in Puglia, Basilicata, and Calabria was greater than two people per room in 1951. And, staggeringly, over 20 percent of southern Italians lived in dwellings with more than six people per room.[6]



I.1 Capillary distribution of Ina-Casa construction, 1963

Note: This chart illustrates the "capillary" distribution of Ina-Casa construction throughout the provinces of the nation in 1963. The numbers in the center of the squares refer to the dwellings constructed, while the number in the corner refers to the number of cities in which a project was built, Luigi Beretta Anguissola, *I 14 anni del piano Ina-Casa*.

Amintore Fanfani, the Minister of Labor and Social Security, drafted the legislation that ultimately created the Ina-Casa or "Fanfani plan" in 1948. But providing housing was only half of Fanfani's aim; the Ina-Casa program was, first and foremost, an employment plan. More than two million of the country's 45 million citizens were unemployed. Given the severe housing shortage, the residential construction industry was viewed as an ideal arena in which to rapidly create jobs for the many skilled and unskilled laborers who were out of work. At the same time, workers could create hundreds of thousands of dwellings for those living in desperate conditions. Half of the families assigned Ina-Casa homes were like the family in #045 in the Baths of Caracalla: living in shacks, refugee camps, caves, basements, or with other families.[7]

Named after the *Istituto Nazionale d'Assicurazione* (or INA, the National Insurance Agency), which provided the financing, the Ina-Casa plan distributed housing and jobs throughout the nation [Figure I.1]. The plan was not only geographically expansive, but the sheer number of new homes constructed in such a short span of time was also impressive. Between 1949 and 1963, Fanfani's plan to combat unemployment resulted in the construction of over 350,000 new homes. In the plan's first seven-year phase, or *settennio* (1949–56), 500 new homes were built per week. In the second *settennio* (1956–63) that number increased to 700 homes per week.[8] As such, Ina-Casa construction comprised a significant share of total new residential construction. During the building boom of the 1950s, Ina-Casa homes accounted for nine percent of all new homes built.[9] Even before the Ina-Casa plan ended in 1963, the housing situation had been significantly improved: in 1961 the average density in Italy had dropped to 1.08 people per room from 1.27 in 1951.[10] In the Basilicata and Calabria regions, density was 1.57 and 1.56 people per room by 1961, where it had been over 2 people per room just 10 years earlier.[11]

The administrators and architects of Ina-Casa did not, however, limit their aspirations to simply creating jobs and basic shelters as many earlier public housing programs had done. They recognized such massive reconstruction projects opened the way for, and even demanded, a rethinking of public housing. Instead of the austere and often rustic conditions created by earlier public housing projects, the architects of Ina-Casa were more ambitious. Luigi Berretta Anguissola, the plan's official biographer, extolled the virtues of the plan's aspirations, "to give workers a civilized home, studied in ways so that each can feel it his own and where each man can feel himself a citizen of a new community."[12] Quality housing was widely believed to have a direct bearing on citizenship and participation in the national community, particularly for the working-class. Thus it was not just its vast numerical goals, but also Ina-Casa's psychological and sociological aims that enabled designers to view their work as part of a much larger and potentially transformative national effort.

Ultimately, designers translated these aims into the design and construction of hundreds of distinctive new neighborhoods spread across the country. Over half of Italian cities have at least one Ina-Casa project, which sometimes consists of just a few buildings surrounding a small green as in Wolfgang Frankl and Mario Ridolfi's project in Cerignola [Figures I.2, A.3 and Plate 1].

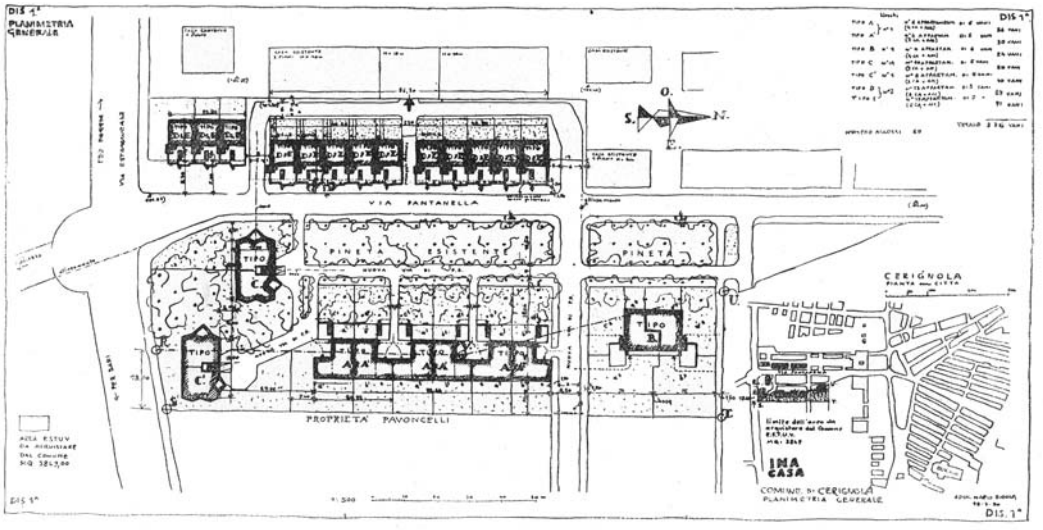


Fig. 21.

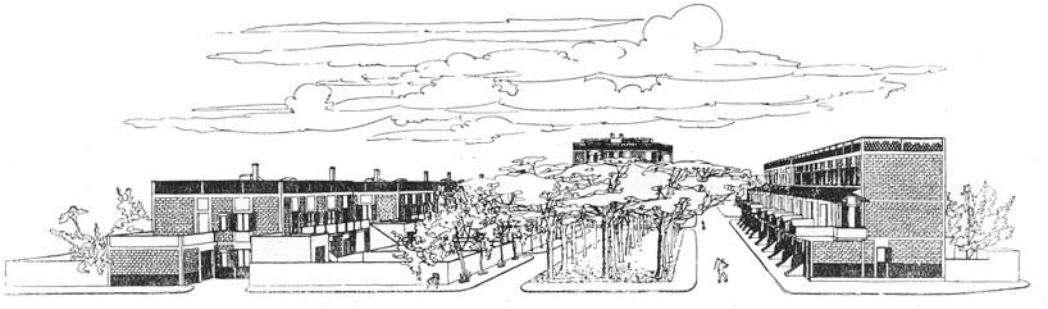


Fig. 22.

I.2 Drawings of an Ina-Casa project in Cerignola, Puglia designed by Mario Ridolfi and Wolfgang Frankl

In other instances, such as in Milan or Rome, Ina-Casa homes total in the tens of thousands and form quarters of the city complete with their own schools, shops, and churches. Ina-Casa Tuscolano, for example, houses 18,000 people in over 3,000 dwelling units on the southeast side of Rome [Plate 2].[13] In general, the neighborhoods of Ina-Casa are recognizable due to the use of picturesque planning principles, the inclusion of a mixture of building types ranging from duplexes to row houses to eight-story towers of flats, and the consistent incorporation of balconies and patios. Ina-Casa projects are also usually identifiable by the small tiles that brand the buildings, which were designed by artists commissioned by the Ina-Casa administration [Plate 3]. Despite these common traits, however, the outward appearance of the neighborhoods and homes varies widely due to diverse material palettes and the incorporation of local architectural traditions, which vary from region to region [See Plates 1–14]. In Cerignola, for example, the architects Mario Ridolfi and Wolfgang Frankl drew inspiration from a Mediterranean vernacular characterized by white plaster walls, flat roofs and a play of rectangular volumes.

In addition to such variation, there are key architectural differences between the two phases of the plan connected to an evolving relationship to historical traditions. Warm colored plaster walls, sloped tiled roofs, and shuttered windows distinguish many of the buildings constructed in the first *settennio*, particularly in the Center and North of the country. These references to traditional construction materials and methods in the early 1950s reflected an anxiety about the Fascist associations of Modernism and its Italian variant, Rationalism, which had been one of the styles favored by Mussolini's regime. By 1956, however, when the second phase of the plan began, designers were more free and willing to pursue more contemporary design strategies resulting in projects such as *il Biscione*, an enormous concrete housing block raised on pilotis in the hills overlooking the center of Genoa designed by a team of architects led by Luigi Carlo Danieri [Plate 11]. The designs of Ina-Casa both reflected and constructed evolving ideas about Italian identity, modernity, and community after Fascism.

ITALIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

The problem of re-defining Italian identity after the Second World War was complicated by the fact that the peninsula and islands had only been unified as a nation in 1861, less than a century earlier. Not only was the nation still relatively young in 1945, but for many Italians the previous two decades under Mussolini and Fascism (1922–44) were inextricably intertwined with what it meant to be Italian. Furthermore, as a consequence of the ways in which the Second World War played out across the country, Italians did not have a single shared experience of the war, a common ground upon which to move forward. In fact, their experiences varied enormously. Complicating matters further in 1946, the Italian people voted out the monarchy, sending the male members of the royal family into exile as punishment for King Victor Emmanuel III's cooperation with the Fascist regime. There were those afterwards who remained loyal to the Fascists, or to the royal family, while others considered the Italian resistance fighters, the partisans, to be the national saviors. Exacerbating this political and social fragmentation, Italy became a central front in the Cold War between capitalism and communism, as well as East and West, after the war.[14]

In addition to political divisions, Italians had to contend with the regional diversity that had long presented stumbling blocks to any shared sense of community. While no nation is ever as homogeneous and unified as its idealized state may suggest, those markers of common culture such as language, food, and daily practices, which bond a people together and form the fabric of any nation-building project, were simply not shared across the country. In 1945, there were still deep cultural divisions, particularly from North to South. The bonds of a single language, which Benedict Anderson argues are central to constructing the imagined community of the nation, were weak in postwar Italy.[15] Not only did Italians speak regional dialects, they often spoke different languages altogether—German, French and Slavic languages were commonly spoken in parts of the North. The many dialects were also mutually unintelligible with remnants of ancient Greek, for example,

persisting in parts of the South. Internal migration patterns in the postwar years brought these regional and cultural differences into sharp focus, forcing "Italians" of all different kinds into daily encounters. Although Italy was nearly a century old in 1945, the task of "making Italians"[16] remained largely incomplete and more pressing than ever in the postwar era.

By 1949, with Mussolini dead, the Fascists defeated, the royal family expelled, and persisting cultural differences, there was much to divide the nation and seemingly little to bring it together. Yet the fascist legacy did endow the fragmented nation with one powerful tool of unification: a common enemy. If the leaders of the left and right could not agree on international politics, economics, or social policy, the majority could generally agree on their desire to symbolically reject and distance themselves from the recent past, even if in practice they failed to make a real break. One of the easiest ways to define the character of the new nation was to define what it was not—that is, to define it through contrast or opposition to the foil of Fascist Italy. In fact, both Catholics and Communists claimed leading roles in the Resistance against the Fascists as their basis for legitimacy. They both argued that their opposition to the previous government gave them the right to lead the new Republic.

The sense of historical rupture created by the end of the war, combined with the reality that in some ways little had changed, resulted in a disconnect between cultural representations and political power. Although Mussolini was gone, much of his governmental infrastructure and the bureaucrats he had appointed remained in place long after 1945.[17] Few Fascists were prosecuted, imprisoned or exiled; many retained positions in the new government. In this context, cultural productions such as film, literature, art, and design became key vehicles through which the sense of and desire for change was expressed. In architecture, for example, both Classicism and Modernism were associated with Fascism and therefore shunned in the early postwar years. These cultural shifts added to the perception of a momentous break with the past after 1945 and, as a consequence, many histories have tended to reinforce this divide by focusing their attention on either pre- or post-1944 Italy, instead of illustrating their interconnectedness. It is possible, for example, to discern significant new developments as well as persistent tendencies by examining the work of Ina-Casa architects, many of whom played leading roles under Fascism. Ina-Casa projects illustrate how these designers sought to re-invent themselves and their practices after 1945. Moreover, comparisons between the Ina-Casa plan and earlier housing programs demonstrate how the plan built on its predecessors as well as highlight what was original.

Relating their designs to history was one of the key ways through which designers sought to distance themselves from the immediate past and to define the new Republic by contrast. In postwar Italy, the fact that both Modernism and Classicism were tainted by Fascism meant that Ina-Casa designers had to look to history, but could not re-appropriate much of antiquity. They consequently mined other periods and places for suitable references in order to produce something distinctly Italian, yet not overly nationalistic. This process of choosing and revising bits of historical fabric in the service of nation-building results in what Eric Hobsbawm has characterized as "invented traditions."[18]

By examining which aspects of Italian culture were selected and adapted through the designs of Ina-Casa, we can begin to understand how the designers reinforced the break with the recent past while maintaining faith in the Italian Republic's historic roots. At the same time, the disregarded, erased, or rejected pasts and customs illustrate another way that the nation was defined: through opposition. The fact that Ina-Casa designers often turned to the vernacular and rural building traditions of each particular region for inspiration reflects the larger postwar anxiety about nationalism and a vision of Italy as a collection of diverse and semi-autonomous cultures.

Although the homes of Ina-Casa were stylistically varied on the outside, inside they were all similarly outfitted with modern services. Every Ina-Casa home had running water, electricity and indoor plumbing, a trio of amenities that were found in just 7.4 percent of Italian homes in 1951.[19] The provision of such services combined with design guidelines that mandated minimum room sizes and the inclusion of natural lighting and ventilation meant that, inside the homes of Ina-Casa, the working-class way of life was being standardized and, ultimately, modernized. So while Ina-Casa residents might not have shared a uniform brand of architecture, which could have bonded them together, they did share something far more significant: a modern way of life. The disparity between the aesthetic variation of the exteriors and the consistency of the interiors of Ina-Casa homes raises questions about the conflicting desire to transform daily life while at the same time appearing to preserve or revive traditional patterns of life. An examination of the plan at scales ranging from the urban to the interior reveals some of the tensions inherent to government sponsored housing initiatives, which tend to straddle the line between assisting and controlling those in need. As Nancy Stieber argues, such housing projects express "the dual liberative and repressive character of the welfare state, a duality intrinsic to the engineered modernization that attempts to improve society."[20] In their quest to improve living conditions for Italy's working-class the administrators and designers of Ina-Casa transformed existing patterns of daily life, while at the same time cloaking new homes in a familiar dressing of vernacular and historical styles.

SOCIAL HOUSING IN CONTEXT

Despite the tangible and positive effects of Ina-Casa homes, architects and critics disparaged the plan at the time for its use of traditional construction methods and materials. Leading historians, such as Manfredo Tafuri and Leonardo Benevolo, saw Ina-Casa as regressive, anti-industrial and anti-urban.[21] Even some of the architects later looked back on their own projects with regret. The departure from a more avant-garde approach—in favor of a return to tradition—was the focus of the most criticism as Modernism re-surfaced and continued to evolve in the '60s and '70s. Although the Ina-Casa plan reflected an original and substantive postwar critique of the Modern movement, elsewhere the "International style," as it came to be known, gained wide popularity after the Second World War.

The wartime migration of Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and other architectural leaders to the United States, combined with their positions in leading schools of architecture, helped to disseminate their approach to design across the Atlantic. Moreover, historians, such as Sigfried Giedion, constructed powerful narratives of architectural progress that led towards the International style designs of Mies van der Rohe and others.[22] In the United States, the industry and technology of the war effort was re-dedicated to the mass production of homes in the postwar era, in stark contrast to the Ina-Casa preference for low-tech and traditional building methods. In the context of Levittown, the work of the Eames, and the Dymaxion homes of Buckminster Fuller, Ina-Casa did indeed seem technologically regressive. Yet today, the Ina-Casa administration's critical approach taken towards the dogma of functionalism can be understood as somewhat prescient. In many ways, the neorealist approach to design that characterized numerous Ina-Casa projects was a precursor to the reconsideration of the richness of architectural history and the embrace of the popular that defined postmodernism and critical regionalism.

More recently, Italian architects and historians have begun to reconsider the Ina-Casa plan in a positive light, most notably with the 1999 publication of *La Grande Ricostruzione*, edited by Paola di Biagi, which brought together dozens of scholars, archivists, and designers to revisit the aims and results of the plan.[23] Re-evaluating the Ina-Casa plan, scholars have come to appreciate the lasting cohesiveness of the communities created by it. Following *La Grande Ricostruzione*, a number of focused histories of the plan in cities such as Naples, Rome, and Florence have been published.[24] The study that follows has been greatly enriched by the recent work of these scholars, particularly di Biagi, Paolo Niccoloso, Giorgio Ciucci, Italo Insolera, Maristella Casciato, Patrizia Gabellini, Valerio Palmieri, Sergio Pace, and Leonardo Ciacci. In addition, oral histories by Italian scholars have begun to document popular understandings and memories of the great transformation of Italian society, which took place in the postwar decades on the peripheries of Italian cities, with particular attention to the quarters of Ina-Casa. The work of Alice Sotgia, Ulrike Viccaro, Alessandro Portelli, and Bruno Bonomo stands out in this regard and is invaluable for the ways in which it allows for an understanding of the reception of the neighborhoods as well as their development over time.[25]

A 1956 survey of Ina-Casa residents tells us that most Ina-Casa homes were well received by their residents when constructed and most of the neighborhoods have since developed into lively communities that remain to this day.[26] The broader legacy of postwar government-sponsored housing projects, however, has been colored by other types of housing projects, particularly those inspired by Le Corbusier's visionary works, such as the Voisin Plan in which he proposed housing the Parisian masses in elegant modern skyscrapers orderly arranged in park-like settings. In the mid-twentieth century designers took up such modernist strategies of design, not so much for their utopian promise, but as the most economically efficient means of housing low-income populations. Although the aims of such projects were admirable—to provide affordable housing for all—