

INNOVATION IN THE REGENERATION OF THE HISTORIC CENTERS IN SICILY: BARCELLONA POZZO DI GOTTO (ME)

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SECTION: 1. TOWN IN HISTORY VERSUS POSSIBLE/FUTURE TOWN

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Abstract

The criteria for intervention on the existing building heritage in the historic centers cannot be pursued without taking into consideration the renovation of the whole relevant urban territory.

This does not imply an idea to postpone to future planning, rather to increase the topics in the General Urban Plan (PUG), by bringing into the PUG the elements of the traditional detailed plans for the historic areas with a methodology simplification.

The detailed planning has been characterized in the years as “exemplary”, possibly due to the complexity of its project contents and rules and regulations, particularly in the historic areas. Indeed in Italy detailed plans for historic areas are quite rarely introduced and even more rarely implemented.

In recent years there has been more awareness of the problem and commitment to change through practical actions. The regional regulations dedicated to the regeneration of the historic centers are an example of this change, and aim at the renovation of the historic areas through a direct intervention (not subordinate to the detailed plan) included in the General Urban Plan of the local administration.

The 2007 PUG of Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto in Sicily (Fig. 1), is based on a residential capacity of 47,000 people for the next twenty years, with an increase of around 5,000 people. These are distributed over 300 hectares of urbanized area, out of which 86 hectares are represented by historic area, with a residential capacity of 11,600 people and a density of 135 pp/Ha. Recently the local administration has decided to adapt the PUG to the regulations for the regeneration of the historic center.

The urban set up of the historic area is characterized by the alignment of the buildings on the old central axis of entrance and exit of the city, incorporating some of the historic rural boroughs. The urban set up is organized as a chessboard, more or less regular, originally over more generating centers, that have today disappeared (the old Dome and the Theater, the first demolished in 1936 and the second one destroyed after a fire in 1972).

The building blocks include non allocated spaces and empty areas, as residue of the primitive building set up that was incorporated in the new urban network from the beginning of 1900s. The building units of the historic areas have been touched, particularly in the facades, with interventions that have alternated their original image.

Nevertheless, the historic area preserves all its residential and commercial functions, even in the relationship with the new expansion areas and the productive areas.

The boundaries of the historic area have been defined by taking into consideration the urban history, the building heritage and its transformations, the functional aspects (accessibility, mobility, availability of services) so as to utilize again the historic building heritage itself.

The regeneration interventions have been classified in simplified categories, divided into ordinary and extra-ordinary maintenance, restoration, preservative restoration, regeneration, extensive regeneration, demolition and reconstruction, renovation with the same building typology/philology, demolition without reconstruction. The individual categories are accompanied by other technical detailed regulations to be applied “house-by-house” in the entire historic area.

Keywords: innovation, regeneration, historic centers, simplification.

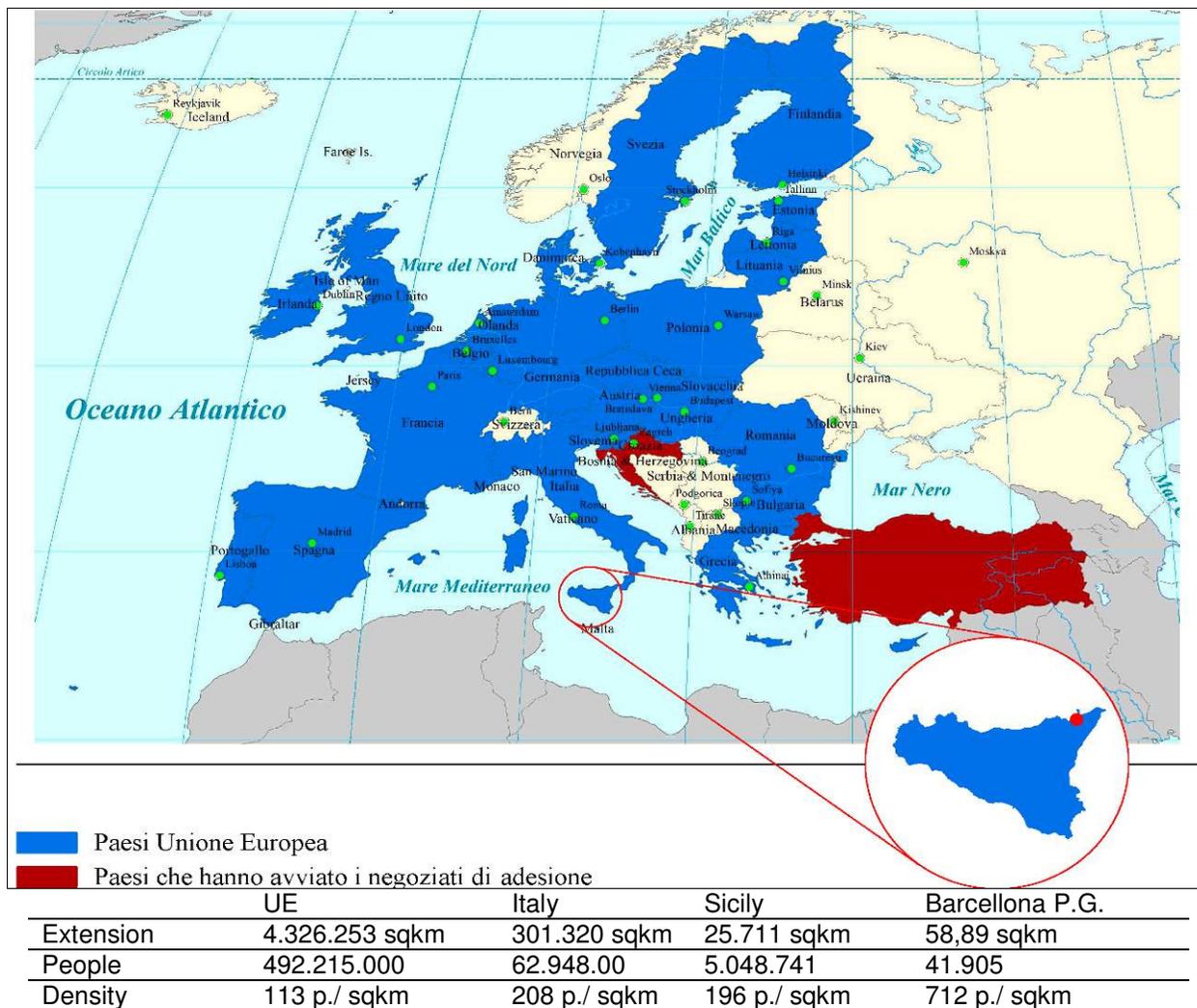


Fig. 1 Territorial and transnational schematic diagrams: dimensional data comparative

1 PREMISES RELATING TO THE DOCTRINE

The criteria for intervention on the existing building heritage in the historic centers cannot be pursued without taking into consideration the renovation of the whole relevant urban territory. This obvious consideration initiates of the observation that the existing building heritage, specifically the historic patrimony, that is the historic part of the existing urban tissue, cannot be studied, projected, and analyzed like a separate part of the today's city anymore. His complete extension includes the periphery, the productivity area, even the disused, the big shopping and distributing extra-urban areas, and seasonal residential areas; as well as the huge technological and service areas [1].

That affirmation doesn't prelude to a return for the requalification of the historic heritage of the city to new revolutionary forms for future planning - improbable or impractical - (because still waiting for the new law for land usage, the national reform in urban planning, the constitutional reform of property rights, etc.); but rather to enhance and expand the contents of general planning, reporting the normative and regulatory elements of the traditional representative detailed plans of historical centers within the general plan, with an adequate simplification of the design methodology, in both the cognitive and analysis in the means of intervention for regeneration. The detailed planning has been characterized in the years as "exemplary", possibly due to the complexity of its project contents and rules and regulations, particularly in the historic areas. Indeed in Italy detailed plans for historic areas are quite rarely introduced and even more rarely implemented.

1.1 The ambiguity of the city parts

The issue of city centers in Italy has been seen in the past, even in European comparison, exceptional testimonials (the case of Bologna or Ancona, for all). The issue did not produce those effects of methodological recurrence and especially those effects of concrete policy intervention in the historical centers that everyone expected in the late seventies. In the sense of "exemplary" of those town centers has never extended their positive effect in the field of "general", often even within the same urban system that was well equipped with its good general urban development plan [2].

The conceptual ambiguity of the "city parts", drawn out in our early days of the setting of rational planning of major European laws before the Second World War, it maintains both the temporal hierarchy of planning levels (before and after the general implementation) even in the thematic separation of the different planning fields (landscape, industrial, residential, tourist, commercial, environmental, etc.).

In this idea of "city in parts" the entire organism and also the entire urban area of the municipality was divided - in Italy - in homogeneous territorial zones, each one functionally determined, in which the building procedure finds its regulation. The center represents the privileged "block", called "A" homogeneous territorial area.

If the P.U.G. is based on the mosaic of different zones and the urban effect is determined by the mobility and accessibility across the various "parts" or territorial zones, the modes of action in Zone A (center) are usually referred to a detailed implementation plan (operational) that needs a long and difficult project activity.

Difficult, from a technical standpoint, because it requires assessments of historical and architectural qualities, and long, because it is economically pushed by the usual dynamics of the housing market.

Therefore, we need to base the methodological innovation in two ways: the first one concerns the ability of historical evaluation of extensive kind, referring to the urban fabric rather than the individual building [3], and the second one concerns the ways of intervention economically easier for owners. In fact, they turn more readily to small businesses with fewer workers, for jobs in their homes (housing units). So simple interventions are preferable ways, easy to apply shortly. No need for large projects, large enterprises, high skills and great designers or architects [4].

The urban debate today is focused towards procedural simplification of the plan, for which we feel a great need especially in the government of the territory in municipalities. Simplification is also in line with the objectives of local self-government reform and administrative decentralization already in place for several years, but not yet completed.

1.2 The issue of the historical centers in Sicily

In this framework, the Region of Sicily has its role in order of spatial and urban planning issues, for which has yet to finish serving an endemic delay (the last law for planning in Sicily is 1978's). But a peaceful ascertainment is that certainly to this date the largest number of municipalities of Sicily has a general urban development plan of at least twenty years old. Of these, the detailed plans of the historical centers can be counted on the fingers of one hand. It follows that the conditions of regeneration of the historical centers, in Sicily even more than elsewhere in Italy, are related to problems of general planning, rather than the almost absolute absence of the detailed plans. Many of the general urban plans developed prior to the nineties, identify historic centers, so called homogeneous territorial areas "A", definitely undersized compared to the real substance and existence of historic urban fabric, encourage tampering and the evisceration of this small part of the city with lax equivocally standards against an excessive increase in the new construction (despite the persistence of the population deficit). Thus the PUG contributes in their turn to the alteration of historical surviving values of this very important "part" of town. In such cases, regeneration is postponed to unlikely detailed plans of implementation, which almost never have been implemented or still accomplished with very modest, partly because of the contradictions and discrepancies with the general urban development plan certainly passed. The words "conservation", "protection" and "preservation" end up taking an incorrect meaning. To all that it has to be added the historical urban Sicilian problematic, derived by unauthorized construction, the lack of regional territorial plan, also a lack of political autonomy of the City and a correspondent and emphasized regional bureaucratic centralism.

The regional autonomy, which in the urban field even in Sicily, has provided in the past a legislative incidence of greater quality than the national one, was not capable - especially in the 60's and 70's speculation - to regulate the big urban transformations, which directly or indirectly have had a negative

effect on all town centers. In recent years there has been more awareness of the problem and commitment to change through practical actions. In this ambient will be implemented a regional regulation dedicated to update the contents of the general urban plans and detailed plans for the recovery of historic centers, which aims to implement the rehabilitation of historic centers through direct intervention (building permit without the requirement of urban preventive intervention, neither subject to detailed plan of the area A or of regeneration), but directly provided and regulated in the PUG. The regional regulations dedicated to the regeneration of the historic centers are an example of this change and aim at the renovation of the historic areas through a direct intervention (not subordinate to the detailed plan) included in the PUG of the local administration [5].

2 THE HISTORIC URBAN CENTER OF BARCELLONA POZZO DI GOTTO: DESCRIPTIVE ASPECTS.

Important urban node (home from 41,569 to 2,001) crossed by the highway No. 113 State Road to 45 km from Messina, the city is connected with from the 70's with Messina and Palermo (200 Km) also from the highway A20. It 'also served by railway since the late nineteenth century: the new railway line for high speed and the double track began operation in the nineties by shifting the railway line and the new station outside of town, toward the sea. The center, crossed by the stream Longano, located at the southwestern edge of the plain of Milazzo, near the foothills of Peloritani until reaching the top of the hill of the King (1,180 m asl), between the mouths of streams ("rivers ") Mela and Termini. The city center of Barcellona P.G. (*Fig. 2, Fig. 3, Fig. 4*), is located in a central position in the plain, while a series of historic urban cores of the oldest sources is distributed mainly in the hilly part of the territory, except the coastal Caldera, now an important seasonal center, once generated by the presence of a tuna fishery. One of the most important economic center of Sicily for trade and private households and businesses services, presents has specialized production, divided between the agro-livestock, handicrafts and agricultural products processing industry. The floral and biological agriculture are in fact the economic leading activities that together with the basic and traditional activities enabled considerable enhancement of the modern service industry.

The human presence in the territory of Longano is witnessed and documented since Neolithic times and continued until the time of history, but nevertheless characterized by agglomeration and village settlements located in residential structures arranged in a crown on the slopes of the hills surrounding the plain. In particular in Roman times the hills agglomerations were connected by the road Consolare Valeria and at the beginning of the "500 were resulting the following consolidated fractions with the typology of small medieval centers: Nasari and Acquaficara of Saracen origin; Portosalvo (greek-Eastern origin of the name of Trebizond) already feud of the Knights of Malta in the Middle Ages, destroyed by a flood in 1584 and rebuilt soon in the current site; Centineo, estate and village of greek-byzantine origin (eighth century); Protonotaro, Gurafi, already existing in the fourteenth century, Mortellito, St. Paul, Galagreek-byzantine origin with the famous Byzantine monastery of the Basilian monks (Anno 1103). In the eighteenth century are consolidating more settlements with hilly type of urban structure even of modest size, as Cannistrà (in 1720), Caldera (in 1747, already home to a tuna fishery and a coastal tower now disappeared) and Sant'Andrea, and later Femminamorta, Oreto, Saint Anthony Abbot (in 1731) and St. Anthony. The urban historical center is generated by the union of the two villages of Pozzo di Gotto and Barcellona, connected by the old provincial road Messina-Palermo (now Corso Garibaldi). The center, which takes the name of Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto in 1835, develops substantially in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Urban structure originated in two axes, upstream, from the two Torrents Idria and Longano, respectively for the two villages of Pozzo di Gotto and Barcelona, and cut crosswise by straight axis generated by the progress of SS 113 (Corso Garibaldi). Is articulated in quadrilateral large shaped compartments and irregular shape in the nucleus of Barcelona, and triangular and trapezoidal compartments in the nucleus of Pozzo di Gotto (*Fig. 5*), who regulate themselves in the expansions of the mesh along the straight axes linking the two nucleus.

The urban set up of the historic area is characterized by the alignment of the buildings on the old central axis of entrance and exit of the city, incorporating some of the historic rural boroughs. The urban set up is organized as a chessboard, more or less regular, originarily over more generating centers, that have today disappeared (the old Dome and the Theater, the first demolished in 1936 and the second one destroyed after a fire in 1972).



Fig. 2 Map from Borbonic Land Registry of 1853

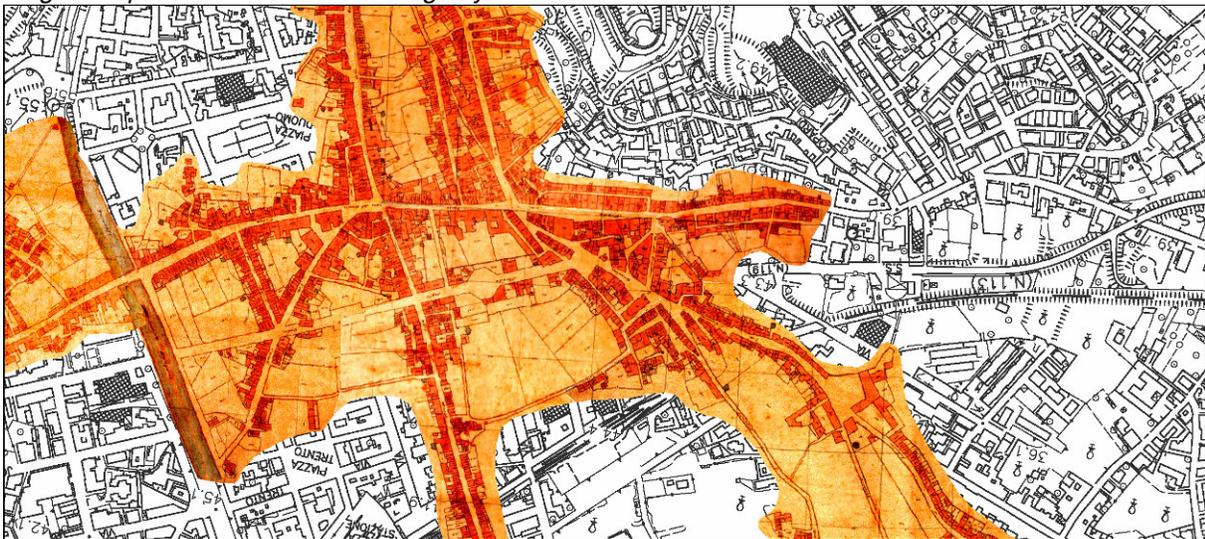


Fig. 3 Map Cadastral of 1853 georeferenced on actual map – original scale 1:2.000.

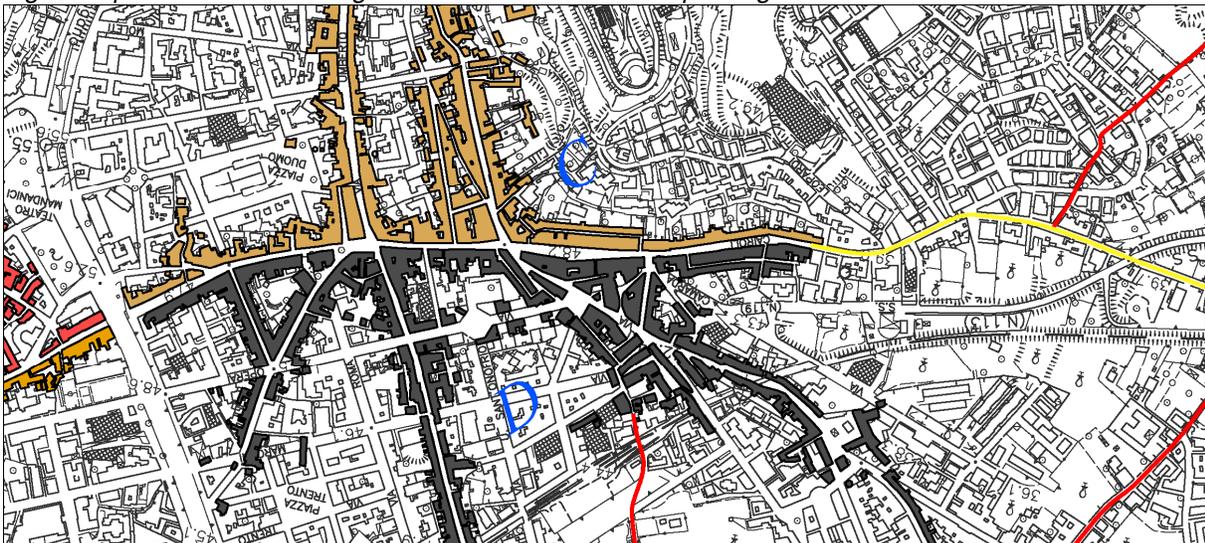


Fig. 4 Reconstruction of urban historic tissue by comparison and the actual map – original scale 1:2.000.



Fig.5 Principal building typologies in urban historic tissue (samples): plants and front view of the building units – original scale 1:200. It can be noted how the "building type" can aggregate multiple housing units: the property usually coincides with the unit, the "building type" can collect multiple properties. The modalities of action are addressed to the unit and the building owner normally acts on its own building unit.

The building blocks include non allocated spaces and empty areas, as residue of the primitive building set up that was incorporated in the new urban network from the beginning of 1900s. The building units of the historic areas have been touched, particularly in the facades, with interventions that have altered their original image.

Nevertheless, the historic area preserves all its residential and commercial functions, even in the relationship with the new expansion areas and the productive areas.

2.1 The P.U.G. of Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto in Sicily and the relationship with his historic urban center

The recent history of urban planning of the city of Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto, after a troubled gestation period that begins with a contest for PUG in 1963, begins with the approval of the General Urban Plan of 1979. The approved plan, after the disruption of the one presented by the designers from the City Council, provides a capacity of population of 88,000 inhabitants, with an increase of 53,000 in twenty years compared to 35,000 inhabitants previously existing.

The residential areas undertake a total of 530 hectares of land, of which 18 hectares of the historical center with 4,000 inhabitants, 312 hectares of area B (existing city, largely free of buildings) for 57,000 inhabitants and 200 hectares of areas of unnecessary building expansion for about 27,000 inhabitants.

The rules for the "Zone A" provide just "transformation". The title itself states very clearly the way in which historic buildings has to be "transformed" – nor protected neither restored: the "transformation" refers to the number of elevations, the maximum height, the minimum distance, the setback distance.

Here is nothing else; not even a word about the protection and preservation of historic urban fabric and artifacts, some of which has got an high architectural value.

The new P.U.G. of Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto in Sicily [6], made in 2007, it's based on a residential capacity of 47,000 people for the next twenty years, with an increase of around 5,000 people over the initial 42,000 (Barcellona is one of the few cities with a population balance also active in the last decade). The total of 47,000 inhabitants are spread over 300 hectares; then 230 hectares less than the PUG from the previous year. The provision of areas of building expansion has been to eliminate about 110 hectares from the previous one. Instead of the containment of building areas, there has greatly increased the public areas for equipment, services and parks (+ 179%), as well as production activities (+ 103%). The overall population density of the old territorial PUG was 15 inhabitants/ha, while in the new P.U.G. has a value of 8 ab / ha.

If the dimensional comparison between old and new town plan, although briefly, prefigures a scenario of urban and land use characterized by the containment and savings of the soil resource, the comparison between the extent and residential capacity in the historical center (zone A) between the two planning instruments, states with equal evidence the philosophy of rehabilitation and restoration of existing buildings: in the old PUG the historical center was extended 18 hectares with a population capacity of about 4,000 inhabitants; in the new PUG it extends 86 hectares and assumes a capacity of 11,600 inhabitants and a population density of 135 inhabitants / ha (Fig. 6)

Recently the local administration has decided to adapt the P.U.G. to the regulations for the regeneration of the historic center, giving the project to the same designer (G. Gangemi and his staff).

Therefore, the additional processing for the recovery of historic centers, which are exposed here in summary [7], seek to adapt the general urban development plan, the new PUG, without resorting to the traditional processing of the detailed plan.

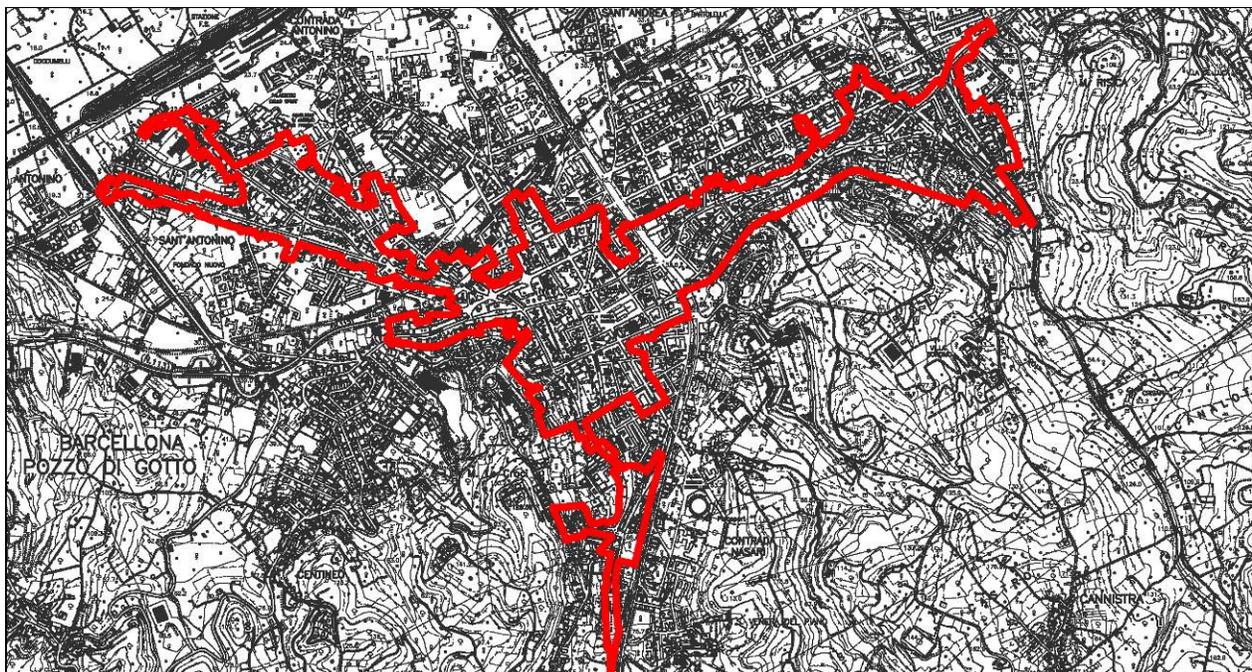


Fig. 6 Historic urban center boundary compared with actual city area – original scale 1:10.000.

It is believed that this Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto is one of the first applications in which a conclusion has been reached with the guidelines and directives contained in the regional regulation; hence the experimental nature of this project, which will allow the direct intervention in the historic center (building permit without the prior urban preventive intervention, or subject to executive detailed plan).

So the City Council intended to take the most innovative aspects regarding the regulation of territorial government for the recovery of the historical center, proposing an application that is still new and original, but offers all the prerequisites regulations, technical and spatial policy because his methodology is applicable to all general urban plans, and then to all town centers.

3 THE CLASSIFICATION OF BUILDING UNITS AND INTERVENTION MODE: A METHODOLOGY FOR THE REGENERATION

The boundaries of the historic area have been defined by taking into consideration the urban history, the building heritage and its transformations, the functional aspects (accessibility, mobility, availability of services) so as to utilize again the historic building heritage itself.

The restoration interventions has been classified by categories and for simple modality, and suggested by the situation of urban places. The results of the analysis allowed the identification of housing units as a unit of minimum intervention. The methodology of cross comparison with the state of preservation and alteration of each unit defines the way of action of the classification levels assigned to individual evaluation of the entire existing heritage building. The individual categories are accompanied by other technical detailed regulations to be applied “house-by-house” in the entire historic area (Fig. 7). The procedure can be summarized in the following tables:

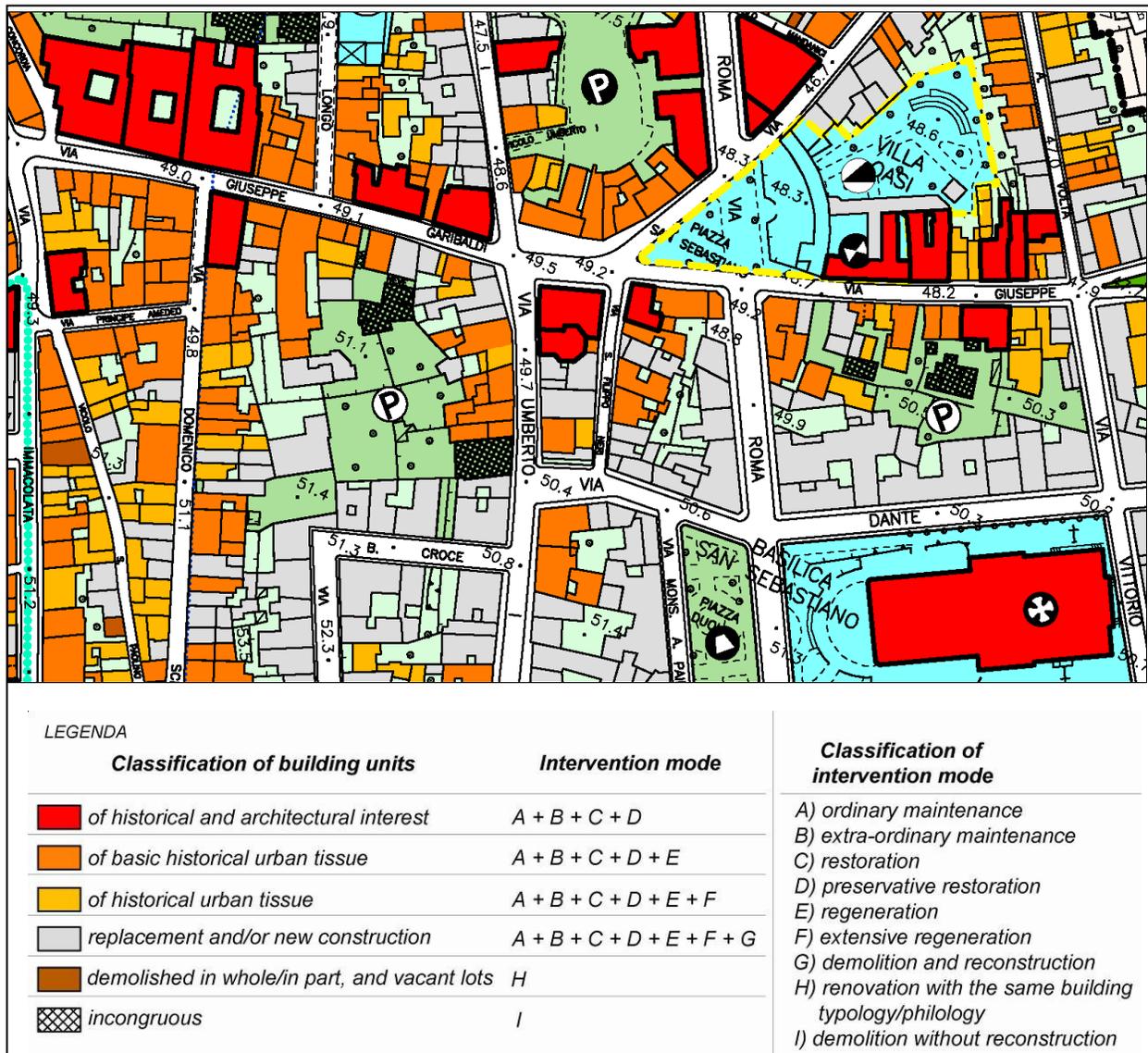


Fig.7 Intervention mode referred to the classification of the building units, divided for belonging tissue -original scale 1:2.000.

3.1 Conclusions

The distance between the P.U.G. and the ways of intervention in the historic center is the same of that one existing between the general objectives of the plan and its operational elements. In fact, the plan's rules system has its equivalent in the method used for its better and privileged "part", the historic urban center. The success of P.U.G. procedure is largely based on the success of intervention on its center, and this success is proportionally based on the methods for the maintenance, restoration and renovation of housing units that compose the center itself.

So, in terms of method, the first conclusion can be the need to pay priority attention to the building units. They also can be different compared to the buildings types that contain them (Fig. 5). In particular the attention is to the composition of the property that is now highly fractionated in the historic center, but it's a certain reference for single-action, small size, with a family economy and diversified over time.

In the logic of operational plan, the classification of housing units it's articulated between two points (Fig.7): on one side, the building units with **historical and architectural interest**, which are real emergencies of qualities, and on the other side, all the **recent buildings** (built since the war). For the first ones are reserved all the more specialized interventions and methods of restoration and conservation. For the last ones all type of interventions are allowed, except for the increase in volume and height, which has to be related to the adjacent and contiguous building units. Between the two extremes it's placed the **historic urban tissue** (more or less qualified), consisting of constructions of less quality and minor importance, repetitive type, called "list" or "procedural".

The ways of intervention are referred to this classification of the building units, and they are allowed specially for the intermediate and more widespread level - the one of the **historic urban tissue** - as well as maintenance and pure conservation, those of a moderate renovation. However the last one is limited to the preservation of the characteristics of the urban tissue (maintaining of horizontal and vertical division in buildig units, layout of the openings on the main streets or public spaces, facade colors, use of special materials on the external walls and on the windows, planimetric alignments and in height, etc.).

In terms of method, another not secondary conclusion is the **flexibility** of the classifications that can therefore be changed from time to time, decided by the owners - according to documents - when the category of their building units are in reality different from the ones assigned by the Plan. Consequently, it can reasonably change the mode of operation provided in the Plan and also improve the operational application of the single building unit, without disrupting the whole system of classification rules and the methods of intervention in the historic centers.

In terms of method, the last consideration concerns the level of the historic center's plan and the critic to the hierarchy of traditional planning. The proposed case of the historic center of Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto in Sicily is included in the P.U.G. of the entire municipal area and does not require a different detailed implementation plan, or a subordinate plan. The P.U.G. itself becomes an operational plan for the urban center and thus allows the direct and small sized action on each building unit.

It does not require huge urban projects, big promoters or new large economies, the project is targeted to the myriad of small owners who live in the historic center. It aims to facilitate the maintenance of usual residents in the historic center itself, also increasing the coming of new inhabitants mostly from the suburbs and from the metropolitan belt.

The project calls for a new colonization of the oldest and most degraded areas of the city, which are also the most gifted in terms of architectural quality. This without the need for macro-economic movements or ethnic and sociological traumas on whole urban community still firmly rooted in those urban places.

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