

# The Anticipatory Capacity of Housing Design in Situation of Exception.

## Adalberto Libera in Tuscolano III

La capacidad anticipatoria del proyecto de vivienda en situaciones de excepción.

### Adalberto Libera en Tuscolano III

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#### Abstract

Exceptional situations allow us to rethink sociocultural dynamics that were previously taken for granted. Architecture is often part of these processes, anticipating with its projects situations that would only occur decades later. This is the case of the Tuscolano III housing project (Rome, 1950), by Adalberto Libera, which introduces a concept of domesticity based on the dissolution between the public and the private. In this project, inhabiting is understood as a phenomenon that occurs on a neighborhood scale; and domesticity as something that expands beyond the walls of a house, and depends on a complex network of social, spatial and political relations. In Tuscolano III Libera proposes an inclusive model of the city, embracing lifestyles that were not widespread at the time, but are so in current times, such as living alone. Through this project, the article aims to investigate the anticipatory capacity of architectural design in periods of great change, as was the period of post-war reconstruction in Italy, and as is the contemporary era, with its continuing economic, political and health crises.

**Keywords:** Tuscolano; Adalberto Libera; Post-war; Expanded Domesticity; Living Alone; Living Solo.

#### Resumen

Las situaciones excepcionales permiten replantearse dinámicas socioculturales que anteriormente se daban por sentadas. La arquitectura suele ser parte de estos procesos, anticipando con sus proyectos situaciones que sólo se producirían décadas después. Es el caso del proyecto residencial Tuscolano III (Roma, 1950), de Adalberto Libera, que introduce un concepto de domesticidad basado en la disolución entre lo público y lo privado. En este proyecto, el habitar se entiende como un fenómeno que ocurre a escala de barrio; y la domesticidad como algo que se expande más allá de los muros de una casa, y depende de una compleja red de relaciones sociales, espaciales y políticas. En Tuscolano III Libera propone un modelo inclusivo de ciudad, que abarca estilos de vida que no estaban muy extendidos en la época, pero que lo son en los tiempos actuales, como vivir solo. A través de este proyecto, el artículo se propone investigar la capacidad anticipatoria del diseño arquitectónico en periodos de grandes cambios, como fue el periodo de reconstrucción de posguerra en Italia, y como es la época contemporánea, con sus continuas crisis económicas, políticas y sanitarias.

**Palabras clave:** Tuscolano; Adalberto Libera; Postguerra; Domesticidad expandida; Vivir solo; Vivienda unipersonal.

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## Introduction

Exceptional situations often highlight conflicts and the weakest points of a civilization. When prolonged over time, they might favour the emergence of new lifestyles, that subsequently consolidate and normalise.

Periods of exception are particularly fertile in the field of architecture, as they affect most basic needs of individual and social life, both at a domestic and urban scale. Sometimes, they can bring about radical changes in the very structure of a society. On some occasions, however, they also produce changes indirectly, by bringing to light existing situations that, until then, had not been sufficiently manifested. This is the case with Covid 19 pandemic. It is probably too early to recognize the main changes brought about by the pandemic in our societies. However, it is already possible to recognize some underlying social dynamics that it has made more visible. The omnipresent importance of the digital layer became even more evident precisely since the days of temporary halt of social life. During those days, the digital layer allowed people to transform their houses into schools, gyms, concert halls, movie theatres, friends or family gatherings; it also helped them to buy groceries and medicines, or seek medical assistance. As the pandemic has made abundantly clear, contemporary houses and cities are not predisposed to fostering a dignified life, especially for the most fragile. We live mostly dystopian lives in yesterday's homes.

The inadequacy of the current housing stock was also highlighted by another social phenomenon brought to light by the pandemic, although its emergence dates back to earlier years. This is the spread of single-person households, which were particularly exposed to the pandemic and its consequences, especially the elderly. In a way, it was the pandemic that made visible a situation in which, in most European countries, the number of people living alone is increasing. In Spain, one in four households is made up of a single person, corresponding to almost 4.9 million people: the 10.4% of the entire population<sup>1</sup>. In Italy, it is estimated that more than 9 million people live alone, one third of every household and approximately 15% of the entire population<sup>2</sup>. All of this is happening while the housing stock is still mostly designed for traditional families.

Domestic spaces need a profound rethinking. It is commonplace in architecture to look to the past for answers to today's problems. Sometimes this leads to discover projects that, in some respects, were far ahead of their times. This is the case of Adalberto Libera's Tuscolano III, a 1950 housing project, located in Rome, that provided apartments for people living alone. In this sense, Tuscolano III was a rare, but not unique, example in the European context of the time; others could be found in German housing<sup>3</sup> or in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union<sup>4</sup>. However, Tuscolano III was so anticipatory that, at least in this respect, it was not a complete success.

Tuscolano focuses on a social condition and lifestyle that would only acquire true relevance half a century later. The reason for this approach is to be found in the dynamics of the country's postwar reconstruction which, in some cases, went hand in hand with the desire to create a new architecture based on innovative principles.

Tuscolano III is a well-studied project, analysed by numerous researches. Some examples are "L'architettura tra le case, Abitare lo spazio aperto nei quartieri INA-CASA" by Carfagna<sup>5</sup>, which explores the design of interstitial spaces as a strategy to create a continuous experience of domestic space; "La tutela del patrimonio INA-CASA: alcune riflessioni sul Quartiere Tuscolano a Roma" by Mornati and Cerrini<sup>6</sup>, which undertakes a specific critical analysis of the interventions in Tuscolano in the context of INA-CASA; "Adalberto Libera: l'insula INA-CASA al Tuscolano" by Argenti<sup>7</sup>, which delves into the housing quality of both the interior and exterior spaces specific to Tuscolano III; "I 14 anni del piano INAcasa" by Beretta Anguisola<sup>8</sup>, which sets out in its entirety the motives and intentions of the INA-CASA Plan,

- 1 INE. "Encuesta continua de hogares. Año 2020". [https://www.ine.es/prensa/ech\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ine.es/prensa/ech_2020.pdf) (consulted on December 2022)
- 2 ISTAT. "Censimento permanente della popolazione: le famiglie in Italia, 2022". [https://www.istat.it/it/files//2022/03/Censimento-permanente-della-popolazione\\_le-famiglie-in-Italia.pdf](https://www.istat.it/it/files//2022/03/Censimento-permanente-della-popolazione_le-famiglie-in-Italia.pdf) (consulted on November 2022)
- 3 Erin Eckhold Sassin; Deborah Ascher Barnstone & Thomas Haakenson, *Single people and mass housing in Germany, 1850-1930* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021).
- 4 Daniel Movilla Vega, "Vivienda y revolución. El concurso entre camaradas de la OSA, la sección de tipificación del Stroykom y la Casa Experimental de transición Narkomfin (1926-1930)" (Doctoral dissertation, Madrid, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, 2015).
- 5 Daniele Carfagna, *L'architettura tra le case. Abitare lo spazio aperto nei quartieri INA-CASA* (Firenze: Alinea Editrice, 2012).
- 6 Stefania Mornati & Filippo Cerrini, "La tutela del patrimonio INA-CASA: alcune riflessioni sul Quartiere tuscolano a Roma", *L'industria delle Costruzioni*, ANCE (2006).
- 7 Maria Argenti, "Adalberto Libera, l'insula INA-Casa al Tuscolano", *Rassegna Di Architettura Ed Urbanistica* 117 (2005): 86–97.
- 8 Luigi Beretta Anguisola, *I 14 anni del piano INAcasa* (Roma: Staderini, 1963).

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listing precisely the interventions financed and implemented; also, the writings of Libera<sup>9</sup> are of primary importance, as they allow a more direct interpretation of his planning intentions, even if they are never explicit about the design of spaces for single people. However, although Tuscolano III is a much-analyzed project, researchers often focus on its formal and spatial qualities; less emphasis is placed on the revolutionary aspects of its architectural programme, which allows for non-traditional, non-state-protected, lifestyles. Libera's project was so anticipatory that it never came to function in the way it was designed.

This anticipatory aspect of Tuscolano III is the main interest of this research. To investigate it, we adopt a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology, to relate architectural, sociological, historical and political aspects involved in its design and construction.

## The Fanfani Plan in post-war Italy

After World War II, France had suffered damage to one-eighth of its total housing stock and fifteen of its seventeen major cities had been severely affected. A similar situation also occurred in Italy and other countries, such as the Netherlands and Poland. In particular, the situation in post-war Italy was very serious, presenting many different issues to resolve: from the extensive damage suffered by all transport and communication infrastructures; to the destruction of buildings of all kinds (figure 1); the impoverishment of agriculture; the industrial damage and the loss of the merchant navy; and so on. As a result, basic raw materials such as coal and oil were insufficient to supply the population with energy<sup>10</sup>.

Among the measures taken to remedy the most urgent problems, the newly born Republican Italian government led by De Gasperi, promulgated the Law No. 43 in 1949<sup>11</sup>, with the aim of increasing employment rates and at the same time rebuilding towns and cities, under the motto 'a home for all'. This law, later to be called the 'Fanfani Plan', named after its creator the then Minister of Labour and Social Security Amintore Fanfani, echoing the mythical Marshall Plan (1947) for its ambition to rebuild the country, was a radical gamble dictated in a critical emergency context.

The Fanfani Plan took advantage of the ongoing reconstruction process of the country to outline new concepts of modern housing for emerging Italy<sup>12</sup>. The best Italian architects lent their talents to the cause to experiment new solutions to the issue of social housing, as it was previously done by their international colleagues in France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Austria.

With this new intellectual and economic impetus, between 1949 and 1963, numerous new neighbourhoods were built in Italy; they were freely inspired by the principles of town planning of modern architecture, while, at the same time, moving away from those of the previous fascist period (1922-1943). The Fanfani Plan promoted the construction of two million rooms in 14 years, accommodating more than 350,000 families that previously survived in inadequate housing conditions, some even under bridges, in caves or huts<sup>13</sup>.

For purely logistical and functional reasons, these new neighbourhoods were springing up on the outskirts of the major Italian cities. In fact, it was easier to develop new architectural solutions there, as it was possible to start from scratch, without relying on existing layouts and elements. Through a rigorous process organised and managed by the 'Implementation Committee' and 'INA-Casa Management', two governing bodies that dealt with urban planning and the economic issue at the same time, the Italian urban peripheries were then consolidated: they were cities within cities, islands in the territory, lacking a unitary and inclusive implementation plan, clamoured for by architects but ignored by policy makers<sup>14</sup>.

9 Adalberto Libera, "La scala del quartiere residenziale", *Esperienze Urbanistiche in Italia*, INU (1952): 131.

10 Cornelio Galas, "Italia, dopoguerra e ricostruzione", <http://www.televignole.it/italia-dopoguerra-ricostruzione-1/> (consulted on December 2022)

11 Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana. "Legge 28 febbraio 1949, n. 43", <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1949/03/07/049U0043/sg> (consulted on December 2022)

12 Ana del Cid Mendoza, "El piano Fanfani en Roma: La torre de viviendas y la casa patio", *La casa. Espacios Domésticos Modos de Habitar* (2019): 497–509.

13 Maurizio Sebastiano Serra & Delia Pasella, "Dall'unità sociale dell'Ina-Casa alla città intelligente", *Vivienda que hace ciudad* (2014): 256–261.

14 Luigi Beretta Anguissola, *I 14 anni del piano INAcasa* (Roma: Staderini, 1963).



Figure 1. Post-war Rome. San Lorenzo neighbourhood next to Termini central station.



On the other hand, due to the destruction of agricultural fields and industries in the south of the country, the main cities were undergoing a strong process of immigration by all those people who were looking for better prospects for themselves and their families: it is estimated, for example, that between 1945 and 1975 about 1,755,000 immigrants arrived in Rome from all over Italy, which produced a deficit of about 107,000 housing units<sup>15</sup>. The more they built, the more the cities expanded into the suburbs, producing many isolated peripheral microcosms like so many satellite cities, which, however, at the same time were still dependent on the city centre for the basic services (cultural, health, recreational) of daily life<sup>16</sup>.

### **INA-casa in Rome: Design evolution of Adalberto Libera**

Although the INA-Casa plan covered many areas of the country, it was implemented intensively especially in Rome. During the seven years of the first phase of the plan (1949-1956), INA-Casa built the Stella Polare district in Ostia, and the Valco San Paolo, Tiburtino and Tuscolano districts in Rome. The latter was one of the largest INA Casa settlements in Italy and the largest in Rome. The entire Tuscolano district (figure 2) was built in the decade between 1950 and 1960 in the south-east quadrant of the city between the Via Tuscolana and the archaeological area of the Parco degli Acquadotti. The area had an extension of 35 hectares and was owned by the Marquis Senator of the Democrazia Cristiana Alessandro Gerini and his sister Isabella; the area was called 'cecafumo' for the presence of blinding smoke derived by fires of huts and workshops with no ventilation system<sup>17</sup>. The land seemed ideal to start the new building plan due to its flat topography, low population density and the presence of public infrastructure connecting the city centre with the Quadraro and the new Cinecittà film centre.

15 Ibidem.

16 Vittorio Emiliani, *Roma, capitale malamata* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018).

17 Clara Corsetti, *Ina casa tuscolano. Voci e storia* (Roma, L'incisiva, 2020).

18 Cornelio Galas, "Italia, dopoguerra e ricostruzione", <http://www.televignole.it/italia-dopoguerra-ricostruzione-1/> (consulted on December 2022).

The new Tuscolano, 1950-1960, was planned for a total of 112 residential buildings and consisted of three independent cores comprising 3,150 dwellings for a total of approximately 18,000 inhabitants<sup>18</sup>. The three interventions show significant differences between them: 'Tuscolano I', designed by Icolosi, Marconi, Paniconi, Pediconi, Marino, Ciarlino and Orestano, maintained a traditional layout and sought

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Figure 2. Aerial picture of the newborn Tuscolano neighbourhood.

urban variety through different architectural solutions for the same building volumes, while ‘Tuscolano II’, whose urban planning was coordinated by architects De Renzi and Muratori, and ‘Tuscolano III’, designed by Adalberto Libera, were born with a more experimental architectural condition and had the aspiration to reach an internal homogeneity of the new neighbourhood.

In Tuscolano III, Libera intended to propose a line of unitary and continuous development of the city, with a concreteness that moved away from the theoretical abstractness of sociologists and utopians<sup>19</sup>. He pursued the need to achieve a synergy between town planning and architecture through projects that would respect the inhabitants’ way of life, and especially that of the new citizens.

This approach highlights a great gap between the Libera of the INA-Casa, who was attentive to the complexity of the project in all its aspects without forgetting the inhabitants, and the pre-war Libera, the regime architect, who instead wanted to give a constructed form to symbolic abstraction<sup>20</sup>. The “new” Libera seemed to be aware that ‘the civil character of a country is not given by exceptional works, but by the many others that historical criticism classifies as minor architectures’<sup>21</sup>. Libera meticulously studied every detail to strive for a precise solution, not neglecting the minor architectures. Furthermore, “he developed research on the house that was formalised in a design manual, unfortunately not printed in a complete edition, which only considered the functional aspect of things, leaving out all the others”<sup>22</sup>. In this manual, the house was described as a living, unified organism, where walls and furnishings must be designed together. For Libera, the home for all had to be interpreted ‘for each one’<sup>23</sup> and the serialisation of elements and the process of standardisation did not necessarily have to erase diversity.

The core principle of the Tuscolano III project revolved around the self-sufficiency of a small community (figure 3). The horizontal housing unit was, or rather wanted to be, an autonomous organism. Walled, medina-like, it was intended to function operationally for the community that inhabited it. It was from the rigorous application of principles related to the functional and mechanical aspects of living, from the study of repeatable typologies and schemes that, according to Libera, a design could be developed that also encompassed the neighbourhood. For Libera, the dwelling had to be at the centre of Italian reconstruction and be more related to the city. In fact, for him, the Italian cities could be projected into the future only through a broader approach to the problem, incorporating and uniting variables between the domestic and urban environment while dissolving the separation

19 Maria Argenti, “Adalberto Libera, l’insula INA-Casa al Tuscolano”, 86–97.

20 David Escudero, “Roma, c. 1955: arquitectura y representación en los márgenes de la ciudad”, *ZARCH* 14, (2020): 160-175.

21 Irenio Diotallevi; Francesco Marescotti & Giuseppe Pagano, “Progetto di quartiere di città orizzontale.” *Costruzioni-Casabella* 148 (1940): 2–32.

22 Maria Argenti, “Adalberto Libera, l’insula INA-Casa al Tuscolano”, 86–97.

23 Alessandra Muntoni, “Adalberto Libera, due opere romane e un documento”. *Bollettino Della Biblioteca* (1991).



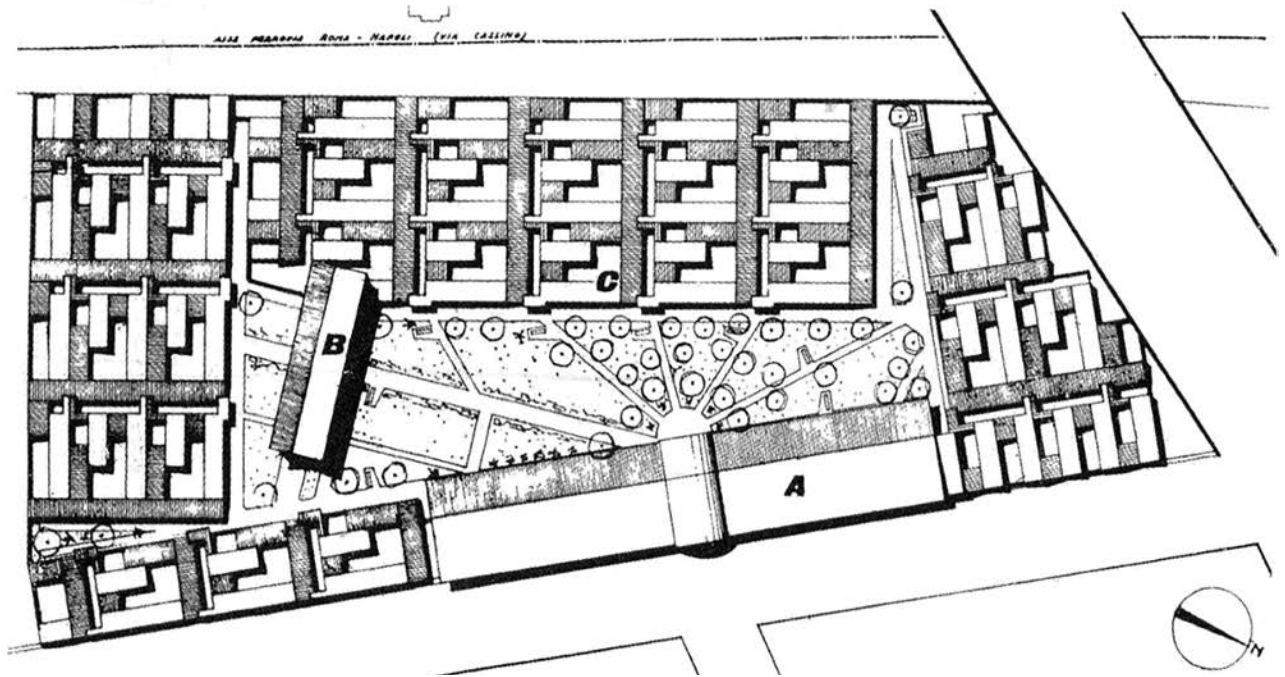


Figure 3. Tuscolano III, Rome, Adalberto Libera, 1950-1954. Masterplan. A) Access building. B) "Bachelor" building. C) Horizontal housing unit.

between home and city. As Libera argues, 'utilitas' is the nodal point that needs to be revised from scratch starting from the 'tension of the function-economy antinomy, that is, the tension between the urgency of needs and the limitation of economic possibilities. Hence, he hypothesised a functional approach based on a methodical re-examination of human, individual and family needs, but also on a social vision'<sup>24</sup>. Libera interpreted the sense of living as a practice that extended beyond the walls of the home, colonising the doorway, the car park, the bus stop, nearby shops, schools, places of recreation, parks, etc. Therefore, living must be understood as a phenomenon that occurs on a neighbourhood scale and is based on a complex network of social, spatial and political relations. Here he experimented with horizontal aggregation at a time when almost everyone in Italy, beyond the theoretical debate, was thinking vertically, as in the case of the nearby Tuscolano I, or Mario Ridolfi's towers in Viale Etiopia (1949-1955).

Libera, on the other hand, wanted to build for Tuscolano III a space on a human scale, an alternative to the city of flats or isolated houses, which would include both green and numerous outdoor spaces, multiple meeting places and numerous activities<sup>25</sup>. This project challenged the traditional dichotomy between indoors and outdoors by proposing interstitial spaces, both public and private, between the dwellings (figure 4); at the same time, the vehicular dimension is kept separate from the pedestrian one, thus favouring a diversity of rhythms and times<sup>26</sup>. The shops and services are therefore arranged longitudinally to the fourth side, acting as a perimeter and relating both to the city and to the new neighbourhood. This element integrates and completes, at least in the original idea, the houses with collective areas: shops, cafes, and social centres to allow "the necessary collective organisation of services"<sup>27</sup>. In the central garden, asymmetrically positioned and slightly rotated with respect to the general macro-order, was also located the only 'tall' building of the project that breaks the horizontality of Tuscolano III (figure 5). It was designed to host dwelling for 'singles'; they were distributed, on each floor, transversally with respect to a longitudinal external gallery (figures 6, 7 and 8). Libera highlighted in this building his intuition of the modern city as a city for all lifestyles, that could differ from the more traditional ones. As in the rest of the intervention, Libera perceived the importance of the encounter, of the dissolution between public and private, between outside and inside, and encourages the dialogue of its inhabitants through shared spaces such as the balcony and the terrace. However, he also sensed that it was possible to locate a building in Tuscolano III for people living alone because the project itself provided services, activities and care that could complement and make possible multiple lifestyles.

24 Vieri Quilici, Adalberto Libera. *L'architettura come ideale* (Roma: Officina Edizioni, 1981).

25 Stefania Mornati & Filippo Cerrini, "La tutela del patrimonio INA-CASA: alcune riflessioni sul Quartiere tuscolano a Roma", *L'industria delle Costruzioni*, ANCE (2006).

26 Maria Argenti, "Adalberto Libera, l'insula INA-Casa al Tuscolano", 86-97.

27 Adalberto Libera, "La scala del quartiere residenziale". *Esperienze Urbanistiche in Italia*, INU (1952): 131.

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Figure 4. Semi-aerial picture of Tuscolano III right after construction.

### The horizontal city as an anticipation of expanded domesticity

Among the different cues that the Tuscolano project offers, it is interesting to study how some of its programmatic peculiarities anticipated contemporary needs linked to a change in the concept of domesticity. Perhaps the most evident is the intention to question some of the classical dualities that, in modern architecture, were embodied in the polarity between external and internal spaces, public and private spheres, domestic and urban scales, the artificial and the natural. Influenced by the Moroccan casbah he visited in 1950, Libera sought to shape the sense of belonging to a community, facilitating the unfolding of certain aspects of everyday domestic life outside the homes themselves, in the public space of Tuscolano III<sup>28</sup>; a public space that plays the role of an intermediate place between urban reality and the privateness of the homes. This fact is not only important from a spatial point of view but can be also interpreted as a step forward (perhaps unintentional) on gender issues and urban inclusiveness. An architecture that promotes a sense of collectivity and shared spaces was in fact identified by the second feminist wave of the 1960s as one of the main and necessary elements for the emancipation of women<sup>29</sup>. The same collectivity allowed the possibility of continuous family support and ensured the security of the whole area<sup>30</sup>; at the same time, thinking about alternative ways of life, such as living alone, implies the possibility of lifestyles other than the traditional family, with new needs and new spaces.

In fact, it was not until the change of perspective brought about by feminism, ten years after Tuscolano III, that domesticity and its relationship with the urban structure began to be seen as a key element that shapes the social structure. The gender revolution significantly contributed to start a radical change in the way of thinking about dwellings and cities, starting from challenging gender roles and productive responsibilities. Domestic work was in fact here for the first time recognised as 'reproductive', that is, capable of regenerating the worker's productive capacity, and then related to productive dynamics<sup>31</sup>, instead of being seen as unproductive. This change of perspective brought to light the mechanisms of social reproduction, highlighting how domestic labour was a necessary component of capital, without which production would be impossible. The association of 'reproductive' labour with the productive one linked to the worker-man started to favour the emancipation of the figure of the housewife from the dwelling, and her entry into urban dynamics<sup>32</sup>.

The concept of domesticity then began to transcend the dwelling and the univocal figure of the woman, to expand into the city<sup>33</sup>. As it expanded, new urban relationships were created, forming a dense network of services and possibilities on a neighbourhood scale. The conscious need for a city for all that is also capable

28 Daniele Carfagna, *L'architettura tra le case. Abitare lo spazio aperto nei quartieri INA-CASA* (Firenze: Alinea Editrice, 2012).

29 Silvia Federici, *Revolution at point zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (New York: PM Press, 2012).

30 Izaskun Chinchilla, *La ciudad de los cuidados* (Madrid: La Catarata, 2021).

31 Timothy Brubaker, *Family relations: Challenges for the future* (London: SAGE Publications, 1993).

32 Silvia Federici, *Wages against housework* (London: Falling Wall Pr, 1975).

33 Atxu Amann Alcocer, "El espacio domestico: La mujer y la casa" (Doctoral dissertation, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Madrid, 2005).



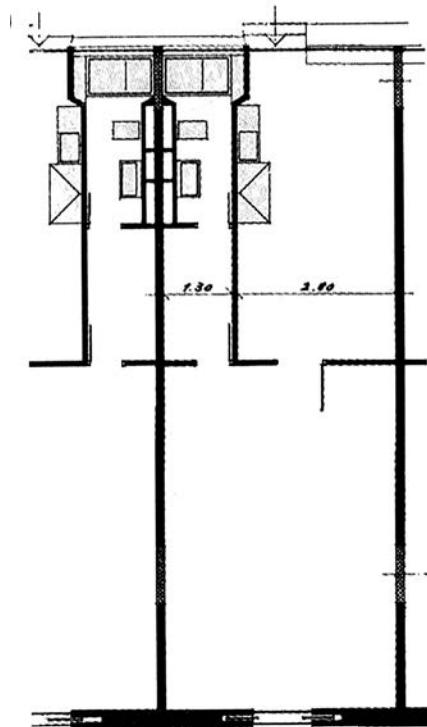
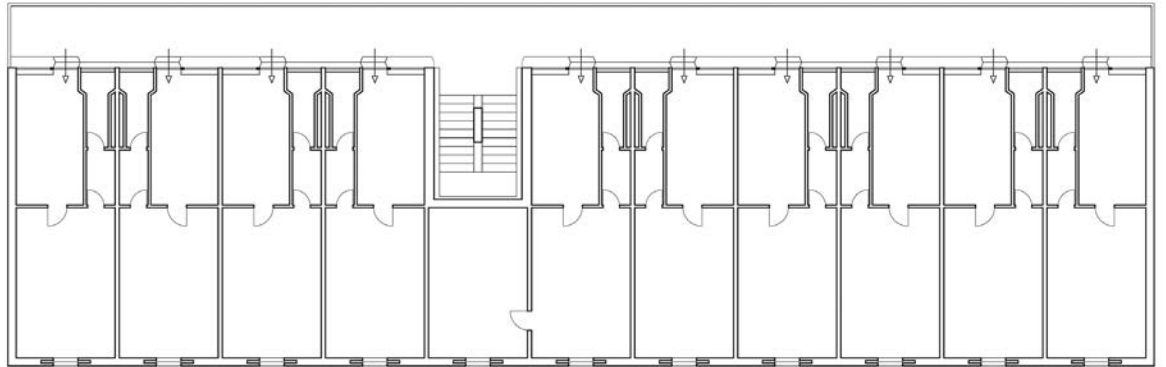


Figure 5. "Bachelors" building seen from the public plaza inside Tuscolano III.

Figure 6. Type-plan of the "bachelor" housing unit.

Figure 7. Type-plan of a single "bachelor" housing unit.

Figure 8. External gallery of the "bachelors" building.



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to respond to different needs and to adapt to continuous changes, as anticipated by Tuscolano III, began to take shape on a social scale.

As the process of dissolution of traditional dualities began, the possibilities of new lifestyles emerged, which did not fit into the binary vision of society. The emergence of new lifestyles is an evolving process, still in progress, to which today the market, not architecture, is largely responding: even though this process has been ongoing for more than half a century. In fact, architecture has rarely been able to concretely anticipate emerging forms of living. However, there are examples where, perhaps unconsciously, it managed to capture some of the future needs of the population. This may be the case of Tuscolano III, where Libera anticipates the need to reformulate the relationship between home and city, implicitly rethinking social and spatial hierarchies. The horizontal housing unit, in fact, anticipated some of the architectural issues that are today common, such as how to generate dynamism and variation in urban design; how to create ever-changing spaces that can best meet people's multiple needs; or how to provide many meeting places in a small radius from the dwelling, be they shops, social centres, squares, gardens, etc. But what is perhaps an even more radical anticipation, is the awareness of the need for an inclusive city, capable of responding to different needs, a city for everyone.

The most radical case examined by Libera for Tuscolano III is undoubtedly the building designed for 'single' people. Although, in fact, at that time the number of people living alone was probably lower than it is today<sup>34</sup>, it was still a way of life to be taken into account when planning a city from scratch according to Libera. The total destruction after the war, the economic boom and reconstruction made it possible to question traditional lifestyles, opening up new possibilities.

In fact, the demographic reality of Western countries shows an increase in living solo in recent decades. In Europe alone, there has been a sharp increase in the population living in single-person households, from 15% in 1960 to 34.6% in 2021 (figure 9), becoming the most common solution in large urban centres<sup>35</sup>. For the first time, the number of people living alone reached the number of families, which many countries is still considered the main social reference point. Moreover, according to "Trends in households in the European Union: 1995-2025"<sup>36</sup>, living alone is a common trend throughout Europe, although in rural contexts it does not have the same growth rates as in urban centres. In Italy, the percentage of people living alone is 15 % of the total, which correspond to 35% of households<sup>37</sup>. Living alone opens up numerous social challenges that may vary from the real understanding of this lifestyle and its nuances, to the urban and spatial demands of its architecture. The majority of people living alone behave like neo-nomads par excellence, who find adaptive responses to increasingly dynamic living situations<sup>38</sup>; they reflect the state of a population that is increasingly atomised, but at the same time more dependent on the synergy of all the urban elements that surround it<sup>39</sup>.

Nevertheless, Libera's anticipation in Tuscolano III was not limited to the inclusion of people living alone in the architectural programme; the project also took into account their way of experiencing the city. The horizontal housing unit was based on a dissolution of public-private boundaries and a generalised presence of different activities at a neighbourhood level, be they commercial, recreational, work or leisure. In this project, it is the city that provides the services and care necessary to complement emerging lifestyles; the house is just a place of this web of relationship. Libera's solution for Tuscolano III was therefore to design a microcosm where houses were an integral part of the general urban morphology and where these dwellings could be expanded through a network of services and intermediate spaces between the house and the city<sup>40</sup>. This project could be identified as a break with the traditional, zonified, modern city. The prototype of the horizontal housing unit allowed to experiment with an inclusive city, based on architectural

34 It was not possible to find detailed data on the composition of the population in the 1950s and 1960s, but from 1980 to 2020 there was a 120% increase in the population living alone in Italy according to ISTAT.

35 Eurostat, *Trends in households in the European Union: 1995-2025* (Bruxelles: Eurostat, 2003).

36 Ibidem.

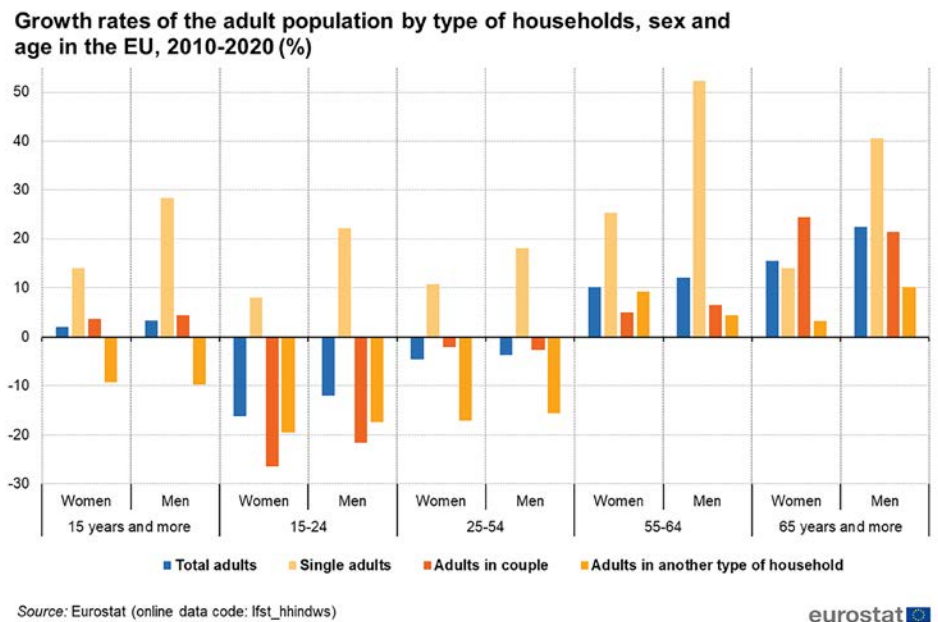
37 ISTAT, Censimento permanente della popolazione: le famiglie in Italia, 2022. [https://www.istat.it/it/files//2022/03/Censimento-permanente-della-popolazione\\_le-famiglie-in-Italia.pdf](https://www.istat.it/it/files//2022/03/Censimento-permanente-della-popolazione_le-famiglie-in-Italia.pdf)

38 Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Nomadology: the war machine* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986).

39 Eric Klinenberg, *Going solo: The extraordinary rise and surprising appeal of living alone* (London: Penguin, 2012).

40 Maria Argenti, "Adalberto Libera, l'insula INA-Casa al Tuscolano", 86-97.

Figure 9. Changings in the EU society composition in recent years.



principles of movement, natural lighting and greenery to favour the human scale, meeting places to encourage community and the exchange of needs, commerce and primary activities in the neighbourhood to avoid urban sectors; all this revolved around small housing units, which were complemented by all these services spread throughout an urban dimension.

Despite its potential, the horizontal housing unit was never considered a valid alternative to traditional design strategies. Tuscolano III was designed with rigour and a desire to find the exact architectural typologies to enable and improve urban living. However, the low-density flats were quickly modified by the inhabitants mainly to enlarge the houses, frequently by occupying the courtyards and thus changing the morphology of the intervention. The flats of the 'singles' building were instead merged to become family flats.

## Conclusions

Tuscolano III is a famous and well-studied project by Adalberto Libera. However, most research focuses on its formal values rather than on the innovation that the functional programme itself entailed. It was one of the first projects in Europe to offer housing for people living alone in an urban context. Tuscolano III was able to anticipate urban questions whose urgency will only become explicit decades later. Some aspects of its approach could still be useful today, in the search for spatial solutions for new urban needs; for example, the importance given to interstitial spaces as places of socialization and construction of public life.

In addition to specific architectural solutions, it is important to highlight Libera's ability to carefully observe the way the city is inhabited, and to recognise that domesticity occurs constantly and continuously even on an urban scale. All European cultures, in fact, have developed around a relationship between home and city; both have contributed to creating a more complex and complete environment<sup>41</sup>, even if modernity has turned their relationship into a dichotomy. This relationship has been rediscovered and amplified by the gender and technological revolutions, which have created a new set of urban dynamics that need new spatial responses. Some of these could also find inspiration in projects like Tuscolano III. The current challenge is to create a domestic design that can interact with the environment, one that is much more conducive to meeting and sharing, to engagement and collective presence. A design that is flexible and inclusive, and that encompasses different uses, on a urban but also on an architectural scale, combining productive activities with commerce and leisure; mixing families, the elderly, and people living alone.

41 Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A short history of an idea* (New York: Viking, 1986).

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The Anticipatory Capacity of Housing  
Design in Situation of Exception.  
Adalberto Libera in Tuscolano III

La capacidad anticipatoria del proyecto  
de vivienda en situaciones de excepción.  
Adalberto Libera en Tuscolano III

Above all, the study of Libera's experience shows how architecture can sometimes anticipate certain ongoing transformations, especially in historical periods of crisis and inflection. The anticipatory capacity of architecture is more difficult to find in built examples, since building is the result of a mediation between real needs and economic pressures that often prevent radical experimentation. It is more common to find such a capacity in critical or utopian projects, which by their very nature can take societal behaviours to extremes and translate them into extreme spatial solutions. Only at certain moments in history has it been possible to experiment with truly anticipatory solutions, and many times these moments coincide with great changes. One such moment was during Italy's post-war reconstruction, but it could also be the contemporary era, with its digital revolution and continuous crises. Nowadays, the incessant economic, political and social crises probably do not create a situation as serious as that of the reconstruction of Europe after World War II. However, they are radically changing many aspects of society and the general stability of many people, causing a state of perpetual crisis that forces to reinvent many aspects of daily life. The need for constant transformation, whether conscious or unconscious, is now part of Western societies.

Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown how, despite all the relational and communicative possibilities of the digital environment, material space continues to play a fundamental role in sociality and, above all, in caring for people. The absence of collective moments and physical human exchanges highlighted the need for communal meeting places, which must happen on a different scale from the city and the home. Intermediate places, thresholds, interstitial spaces, collective places, places of care, are part of a domesticity that is expanded in the city and augmented in the web. At the same time, they help to enrich this domesticity stemming the tendency towards physical individuality that the digital revolution and economic neoliberalism have provoked. The union of these places, with that of the traditional dwelling and the city, creates a kind of open house, a casbah 2.0, an horizontal city, often theorised but rarely designed, that enriches both the domestic and the urban condition. In this sense, a project like Tuscolano III can resonate with contemporary sensibilities. An open project, composed of interstitial common places for meeting and aggregation; a project that does not take into account only traditional families, but is open to different lifestyles, such as people living alone: this kind of project may be just what architecture should do more often nowadays.

### Authorship

All authors have contributed directly to the intellectual content of the work, having participated and having been responsible for the conceptualization, data processing, research, visualization and writing of the article, both the original draft and its review and editing. There is therefore no conflict of interest.

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Figure 2. Stefania Mornati & Filippo Cerrini, "Il Quartiere Tuscolano a Roma (1950-60)": 123-24.

Figure 3. Giorgio Di Giorgio, *L'alloggio ai tempi dell'edilizia sociale. Dall'INA Casa ai PEEP* (Roma, EdilStampa, 2011), 83.

Figure 4. Stefania Mornati & Filippo Cerrini, "Il Quartiere Tuscolano a Roma (1950-60)": 123-24.

Figure 5. Maria Argenti, "Adalberto Libera, l'insula INA-Casa al Tuscolano", 86–97

Figure 6. Drawing by the authors based on the original single unite house plan of the "Bachelor" building. 2023.



Figure 7. Giorgio Di Giorgio, *L'alloggio ai tempi dell'edilizia sociale*, 83.

Figure 8. Stefania Mornati & Filippo Cerrini, "Il Quartiere Tuscolano a Roma (1950-60)": 123.

Figure 9. Eurostat. "Household composition statistics, 2022". [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Household\\_composition\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Household_composition_statistics) (consulted on January 2023)

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