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«Progetto di Vita» and Universal Design for Persons with Disabilities

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Abstract. «Progetto di Vita» ("PdV" Life Project) represents the crucial element to design and build the Quality of Life of persons with disabilities, in coherence with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In Italy, Law no. 112/16 identifies in the PdV the principle around which to build a convergence of intents and interests for the realisation of the «Dopo di Noi» (After Us) that can take place «durante Noi» (during Us) through the construction of empowerment paths towards autonomy in a perspective of prevention, gradualness, emancipation and accompaniment to detachment. In order to experience autonomy «durante Noi», preparing for the «Dopo di Noi», the living space, the surrounding environment and the community of reference represent fundamental functional and/or spatial environments. The aim of this article is to map and analyse the good practices that have emerged from the concrete application of the Law through the activation of housing welfare projects that represent innovative forms of living built around the PdV approach.

Keywords. Disability, "Progetto di Vita" (PdV), Universal Design, Social housing, Housing welfare

1. Introduction

«Progetto di Vita» (Life Project, hereinafter "PdV") represents the crucial element to plan and build the Quality of Life of people with disabilities, applying appropriate tools and supports to ensure the overcoming of inequalities and discrimination, consistently with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The latter "urges society to remove those material, cultural and ideological barriers that, by interacting with a physical, mental or intellectual deficit, create disability" [1]. Writing a PdV implies a complexity of interactions between actors and actions such as to represent a real project based on the idea of a resilient community in which the person is placed at the centre, overcoming the medical or assistance approach: the person is no longer seen as the *object* of care but becomes the *subject* of her or his own life [2].

In Italy, Law no. 112/16 containing «Provisions on assistance for people with severe disabilities without family support» provides for measures enabling parents and caregivers to face the issue of the future of their sons with disabilities in the so-called «Dopo di Noi». In this direction the Law identifies in PdV the principle around which to build a convergence of intents and interests for the realisation of «Dopo di Noi» (After us) that can take place «durante Noi» (during us) through the construction of

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empowerment paths towards autonomy in a perspective of prevention, gradualness, emancipation and accompaniment to detachment. The definition of PdV and the creation of the collaborative network needed to implement it must begin as soon as possible, while at the same time PdV must be able to be modulated across the life span.

The Law refers to severe disability, but PdV is a foundational principle to be universally extended to all types and forms of disability because it represents a key principle for addressing the multidimensional character of disability through the adoption of a holistic approach that allows for a systemic vision with respect to all dimensions of a person's life (health, living, school, work) [3]. In this scenario, housing space, the surrounding environment and the reference community represent fundamental functional and/or spatial environments to experience autonomy «durante Noi» and prepare for «Dopo di Noi» through the human and social experience of "inhabiting a place" that allows to experience collective belonging for the creation of an inclusive welfare [4].

The aim of the paper is to represent the mapping and analysis of best practices emerged from the concrete implementation of the Law through the activation of projects of housing welfare intended in its full dimension of social inclusion that represent innovative housing forms built around the PdV approach.

2. Research objective and methodology

The research project is inserted within a doctorate activated by the ABC Department of Politecnico di Milano in co-financing with Comitato Officina Dopo di Noi (hereinafter "CODDN"). The latter was established in 2017 with the aim of monitoring and supporting the implementation of Law no. 112/16 and disseminating best practices².

In this context, the research aims to return a critical picture of the concrete implementation of Law no. 112/16, through a qualitative-quantitative analysis of projects funded by the Law, starting from the monitoring of the state of implementation of the Law promoted and conducted by CODDN. Research methodology adopts a multidisciplinary approach and it is based on Universal Design principles with the specific objective of elaborating a survey grid for the analysis of housing projects activated by the Law that touch various dimensions of PdV in a multidimensional perspective in order to define «Dopo di Noi» housing models that are able to lower each PdV in inclusive environments and spaces.

The research intends to experiment with a survey method that directly involves of Law beneficiaries³, to make the evaluation of the impact of the projects more reliable because it is able to incorporate into the methodology and evaluation tools final users' point of view (embedded assessment) and/or that of their caregivers. In this way case studies are analysed with respect to their ability to respond concretely to needs expressed by people with disabilities together with their families and caregivers. Involvement is

² CODDN, established on the initiative of Senator Annamaria Parente, Rapporteur of Law no. 112/16 to the Senate of the Italian Republic, is the promoter and responsible of «Officina.net – A Platform for dialogue and design», project financed by Cariplo and Compagnia di San Paolo Foundations and realised in partnership with the ABC Dept. of Politecnico di Milano, Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale (IRS), Fondazione FITS! per l'Innovazione del Terzo Settore and BES Cooperativa Sociale, which deals with formation and work integration of people with disabilities. To support Officina.net project a PhD has been activated, through the support of the abovementioned Foundations, in co-financing with the ABC Dept. of Politecnico di Milano.

³ The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities makes explicit how persons with disabilities should be actively involved in decision-making processes related to policies and programs, including those that directly affect them.

foreseen through specific interviews and questionnaires addressed to a selection of stakeholders involved in various ways in the realisation of «Dopo di Noi».

Research methodology is articulated into the following phases:

- mapping of all housing projects funded by Law no. 112/16 through the analysis
 and systematisation of data emerged from the monitoring of the implementation
 of the Law promoted and conducted by CODDN;
- benchmark analysis aimed at identifying a series of case studies (exhaustive sample) considered demonstrative and characteristic with respect to the research objectives;
- construction of a set of indicators functional to the definition of a survey grid for the creation of a taxonomy aimed at the qualitative-quantitative analysis of the sample of case studies selected through the benchmark analysis;
- realisation of targeted interviews and administration of questionnaires through the direct involvement of a selection of stakeholders;
- filing of the selected case studies through the compilation of a specific survey form built with respect to indicators of the previously elaborated survey grid;
- critical analysis of the case studies through the construction of a SWOT Analysis for each of them in order to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats;
- in-depth analysis of two or three case studies emerged from the research process considered to be particularly illustrative and from which to extract characteristics of the implemented model and possible scalability criteria.

3. Results

Results of the research, developed so far in the first three phases, are substantiated in the classification at meta-project level of possible housing typologies able to accommodate different types of disabilities and around which to build the network for the housing project sustainability in the time of «Dopo di Noi».

Results achieved so far by the research are reported below.

3.1. Mapping of housing welfare projects funded by Law no. 112/16

The analysis was based on an examination of 71 regional regulatory documents and 33 public notices from regional sources. In addition, 8 interviews were conducted with regional officials, 5 with regional «Dopo di Noi» project referents and 3 interviews with privileged witnesses. The conducted analysis through the monitoring of the implementation of Law no. 112/16 reveals a strong lack of homogeneity in projects actuation and in implementation processes on national territory, hence the need to "codify" best practices emerged.

To this end, the first research phase took the form of the mapping of all housing projects funded by Law no. 112/16 which led to the development of a database containing about seventy housing projects for «Dopo di Noi» codified in their main features by homogeneous categories.

3.2. Benchmark analysis of housing welfare projects funded by Law no. 112/16

The second research phase took the form of a benchmark analysis aimed at identifying a series of case studies deemed demonstrative and characteristic with respect to new housing models built around PdV. The collection of data for the case files was carried out through research and in-depth analysis with respect to specific keywords, e.g. Inclusive Housing, Possible Autonomies, Social Inclusion, Solidarity Housing, and through interviews with those involved in the experiences. A comprehensive sample of approximately forty case studies was analysed and synthesised into benchmark cards in which each project was analysed with respect to a set of common indicators summarised in six sections: (1) main information of the intervention; (2) project objectives; (3) stakeholders involved; (4) financial resources deployed; (5) project characteristics; (6) services for accompaniment to living. From the benchmark analysis, some significant elements emerge as key points of the analysed projects brought to the attention [2]:

- activation of co-design pathways involving from the beginning in a choral way
 a complete scenario of actors starting from beneficiaries together with families
 and caregivers, institutions, Third Sector, through the construction of
 public/private partnerships;
- construction of accompaniment to living pathways aimed at social inclusion, able to bring people from an individualistic conception to a collective and participatory approach to community life, developing that sense of belonging and "taking charge" of the other ("my neighbour as a resource"), which allows people to feel part of a group and therefore of a community;
- provision of shared spaces for the development of common activities and to
 promote moments of sharing among inhabitants, the neighborhood and the
 community with a view to social inclusion, designed with particular attention
 to usability and accessibility to allow a greater integration with the life of the
 community;
- possibility of combining different housing typologies for different forms of disability, for both short- and long-term accommodation, within the same project in a hybrid model to progressively experiment different paths for the reception of different types of fragility aimed at designing «Dopo di Noi»;
- design characterised by a particular attention to accessibility issues to overcome
 physical and sensory barriers to allow people with disabilities to live in a
 context that promotes housing autonomies of living in a structure appropriately
 sized and technologically equipped, also through the use of advanced home
 automation systems;
- design characterised by a high flexibility and transformative capacity of spaces and services to allow a progressive adaptation to inhabitants needs; it is essential that both housing and common spaces can be modified according to the evolution of needs and stories of people;
- accompaniment, supervision and support by operators and qualified staff who, in addition to playing the role of «facilitators» of relationships among inhabitants, work with individuals to build possible housing autonomy pathways and to achieve objectives set for each as part of their PdV;
- specific training pathways aimed at operators who have a significant role in implementing PdV and in the constant monitoring of its development;

- accompanying pathways related to the topic of «Dopo di Noi» (After us) in «durante Noi» (during us), aimed at parents who can face the issue of the future of their sons with disabilities in the so-called «Dopo di Noi»;
- possibility of starting structured experimentations in different phases for pathways of accompaniment to autonomy through a progressive reduction of the presence of operators (where possible) and the gradual reciprocal distancing from families; in this context it is also possible to consider the idea of experimenting with cohabitation with students or young workers (in cases where this project is considered feasible);
- construction of a «generative network» intended as a bond among
 institutions, Third Sector, volunteering, families and active citizenship, able
 to intercept and relate transversal skills through a holistic approach, which
 proves to be the real social infrastructure of compensation of fragility, with
 a view to generative and community welfare.

The conducted benchmark analysis made clear how the multidimensional character of disability can deeply impact on spaces design and management of processes taking charge and capacitation within the built environment, housing spaces and context.

For this reason, actions in this direction on the physical infrastructure cannot but be integrated to a social infrastructure through a synergy that finds concreteness in the adoption of the PdV holistic approach.

3.3. Housing models for «Dopo di Noi»

Analysis set out in the previous paragraph has led to the identification of projects considered benchmark with respect to the design of new housing forms built through the PdV holistic approach.

Starting from results analysis, a taxonomy has been elaborated to define a classification at a meta-project level of possible housing models for «Dopo di Noi» (see Table 1).

Table 1. Classification of Housing models for «Dopo di Noi» (After us) – Authors elaboration

Housing models for «Dopo di Noi»	Description	Benchmark projects	Types of disability
Accommodation for families coupled with accommodation for daughter/son with disabilities	Pairs of accommodations that can accommodate family in a larger apartment and daughter/son with disabilities in a smaller adjacent and connected apartment to experience a path of accompaniment to independent living for the construction of «Dopo di Noi» (After us) in «durante noi» (during us) [5].	Abitiamo il futuro SON Cascina San Carlo (2020 - in progress) It foresees the realisation of three pairs of apartments next to each other – three two-room apartments for daughter/son and three larger ones for parents – conceived so that the different residents can start a process of housing autonomy from each other [5].	Different types of disability

«Sollievo» accommodation	Apartment intended for short-term accommodation of people with severe disabilities [5].	Abitiamo il futuro SON Cascina San Carlo (2020 - in progress) It foresees the realisation of a «Sollievo» accommodation intended for temporary accommodation of people with severe disabilities [5].	Severe disability
«Palestra autonomia» accommodation	Apartment intended for short-term accommodation designed to experiment temporarily possible housing autonomy pathways [5].	Abitiamo il futuro SON Cascina San Carlo (2020 - in progress) It foresees the realisation of an apartment for autonomy that for 60 days a year will be destined to public use for guests identified by the Social Services of the Municipality of Milan [5].	People with disabilities who want to experience paths of "palestra autonomia"
Group apartment	Accommodation for groups of beneficiaries (from 5 to 10) with different types of disabilities. If more than 5 beneficiaries are accommodated, the structure must be divided into two modules that are part of the same building on the same floor or on two different levels, provided they are contiguous. If the Group apartment hosts people with severe disabilities for whom provision of high-intensity services is envisaged, it is necessary to arrange two housing modules, each with 5 beds [6].	Some benchmark projects: CASA MIA. Una casa accogliente per persone con disabilità (2020 - in progress) Una casa in San Donato Bologna (2020)	Different based on intensity range (from medium/light disability to medium/high severe disability) [6]
«Casa famiglia»	Accommodation characterised by a low intensity of care and low and medium organisational complexity, intended for the reception of beneficiaries with limited personal autonomy, without the necessary family support or for whom staying in the family unit is (temporarily or permanently) not compatible with the individualised care plan [7].	Casa Cenni Milano (2013)	Type of fragility requiring low intensity of care, low and medium organisational complexity [7]
«Support/mutual aid» accommodation	Apartment in which to experience living with other types of target users e.g. students that take care of neighbors with fragility that have already experienced paths of "palestra autonomia".	Residenza attiva Uroburo Monza (2020 - in progress), within the network of TikiTaka project	Mild disability (already experienced paths of "palestra autonomia")
«Peer-to-peer» accommodation	Apartment in which people with disabilities live with people with greater autonomy, guaranteeing in every case the supervision of qualified staff.	Casa Caldera Milano (2016 – 2019)	Severe disability alongside people with greater autonomy

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The multidimensional character of disability can deeply impact on spaces design and management of processes within the built environment, housing spaces and context in perspective of «Dopo di Noi».

The conducted research mapped and codified, in the form of housing models, experiences of co-design that have activated welfare practices «from below» with the aim of disincentivise institutionalisation and foster / train the community to social inclusion processes in implementation of Law. Through the qualitative-quantitative analysis of projects funded by the Law that have seen the implementation of inclusive living projects, research focused on the single project analysing it in its dual connotation of physical and social infrastructure. Research focused on the analysis of how projects were able to lower the PdV in all its dimensions within inclusive environments and spaces, focusing on how some social housing projects were already configured as real platforms of social infrastructure capable of responding to needs in an innovative way, activating paths of community engagement and accompaniment to living [8].

Law no. 112/16 promotes a cultural paradigm shift for the construction of a community welfare, stimulating to redesign the relationship between institutions and citizens for the construction of a welfare "bottom-up" aimed to disincentivise institutionalization and to realise, where possible, pathways of housing autonomy [9].

From the conducted analysis, in addition to a lack of homogeneity in projects actuation and in related implementation processes on national territory, a significant limitation in the number of projects activated emerges. This figure is attributable to several factors, two of which appear particularly critical: the first is the sustainability and the ability to hold over time the designed housing autonomy path; the second is the lack of involvement in co-design processes of subjects who specifically deal with housing welfare. For this reason, in the presented benchmark analysis, a number of significant housing experiences have been outlined, highlighting both the different types of housing that can be achieved, and the processes and actors through which they are realised.

In these experiences some characteristic present in the so-called new forms of "collaborative housing" emerge, in which it is first of all the design approach to change dramatically. In experiences of collaborative housing, in fact, there is a shift from a topdown to a bottom-up design of the housing offer, in which it is the community that pushes institutions and networks from below, forcing a dialogue to find design solutions that can meet needs expressed by the beneficiaries themselves, as well as enhance the skills present in the people who form and make up the reference community. All this reverses the orientation of a "welfarist" type of housing offer to a capacitive and inclusive approach. In this scenario, housing, services to person and service-spaces connected to housing function are strongly interrelated and able to design both functional spaces where people's lives (from house to neighborhood), and the relationships of the community. In the mentioned experiences, housing space, surrounding environment and reference community represent very important functional and/or spatial areas to experience autonomy «durante Noi» (during us) and prepare for «Dopo di Noi» (After us). Types of housing solutions that can be included in wider interventions of social housing are: Accommodation for families coupled with accommodation for daughter/son with disabilities; «Sollievo» accommodation; «Palestra autonomia» accommodation; Group apartment; Casa famiglia; «Support/mutual aid» accommodation; «Peer-to-peer» accommodation [9].

Work done so far opens to subsequent research phases with the aim of constituting an atlas of best practices of housing welfare emerged from Law implementation and to elaborate procedural guidelines according to the performance requirements approach to support spaces design and management of processes for the inclusion of people with disabilities in view of «Dopo di Noi» in the housing sphere.

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