

Rome's singular path to modernism: Innocenzo Sabbatini and the 'rooted' architecture of the *Istituto Case Popolari (ICP)*, 1925-1930

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Abstract

This article traces the extraordinary architectural production of the Roman branch of the *Istituto Case Popolari* (Institute of Public Housing, ICP) during the period between 1925 and 1930. This period was the most prolific and creative in the history of the Institute, delivering a rich repertoire of distinctive public housing projects in and around Rome with modest means and against the backdrop of a severe housing crisis. It was also the period when a single architect, Innocenzo Sabbatini, left his creative mark on the most significant of the Institute's executed projects. Under Sabbatini's creative lead, the ICP sought to advance a distinctive, coherent vision for public housing while also producing a singular architectural language that was both modern and unmistakeable 'situated' in the traditions and the ambience of Rome. I examine the three arguably most innovative ICP projects of this period bearing Sabbatini's signature (the *Albergo Rosso* in Garbatella; the so-called *Casa del Sole* in Tiburtino; and the unrealised *Trionfale Nuovo* project). Through these three projects, I seek to trace a fascinatingly singular Roman road to architectural modernism that predated the 'heroic' phase of *razionalismo* in Rome during the early 1930s but has been largely redacted from the narratives of modernist architecture.

Introduction

In 1928, the recently formed Italian Movement for Rationalist Architecture (*Movimento Italiano per l'Architettura Razionale*, MIAR) organised its first exhibition. The event offered an opportunity to showcase buildings and designs from a new group of architects determined to popularise the canon of modernist architecture in a country that still appeared resistant to its overarching principles, aesthetic values, and constructive sensibilities. The exhibition was held in Rome - a somewhat counter-intuitive choice given that the natural home of the Italian modernist movement (and of MIAR itself) was to be found in the northern metropolis of Milan.¹ It was in Milan that, only a few years earlier, Giovanni Muzio had shaken up the architectural scene with a range of buildings - including his debut with the emblematic *Ca'Brutta* (1921) - that imaginatively married regional tastes and classical traditions with a modern,

¹ A. Libera, G. Minnucci, *Catalogo alla 1a Esposizione Italiana di Architettura Razionale* (Rome, 1928); 'Prima mostra di architettura razionale', *Il Messaggero*, 29.3.1928.

internationally aware sensibility.² It was there that, in 1927, a group of young architecture graduates of Milan Polytechnic formed the *Gruppo 7* and published four articles that stirred controversy with their critique of the Italian architectural academic establishment and their passionate plea for a new Italian architecture derived from a rationally reinterpreted classical tradition.³ MIAR was the child of Gruppo 7, offering institutional and political gravitas to the enthusiasm of the Milanese graduates. Overwhelmingly 'northern' in its architectural roots and actual membership, MIAR thrived in the effervescent atmosphere of late-1920s Milan and Turin but continued to be viewed with scepticism or even hostility by the architectural establishment across the country. Therefore, holding the first official exhibition of the fledgling MIAR in Rome was both a deliberate and a risky decision.

The 1928 exhibition did succeed on numerous fronts. It helped transform a range of dissident discourses on the future direction of Italian architecture into a proto-manifesto for a new 'rational' architectural programme that became known as *razionalismo*. It also placed an essentially Milanese counter-cultural initiative on the national map, attracting the keen (though not always supportive) interest of experts from across the country and beyond. At a critical moment in the formation of a new cultural consciousness under the Fascist regime, when a sense of pluralism and open-ended opportunity for shaping the Fascist cultural field was increasingly evident to the various stakeholders⁴, MIAR's first exhibition launched its bid for architectural hegemony and took it to the far less welcoming environment of Rome. This was the beginning of the fascinating upward curve that, three years later, would embolden Pier Maria Bardi, the formidable publicist nous of the movement, to petition Mussolini with the proposition to transform rationalist architecture into the official 'art of the (Fascist) state'.⁵ Above all, as the renowned cultural critic Carlo Belli noted, the 1928 Mostra was no longer the collection of fanciful ideas on paper that had set the tone of the Gruppo 7 exhibition in Monza only a year earlier.⁶ Alongside a fascinating register of experimental designs, it now featured a subset of executed projects - small, admittedly, but significant in the sense of benchmarking tangible progress in comparison to the 1927 Gruppo 7 show. The exhibition's organisers made the most

² F. Irace, *Ca'brutta* (Rome, 1982); F. Irace, *Giovanni Muzio: 1893-1982: Opere* (Milan, 1994); and S. Boidi (ed) *L'architettura di Giovanni Muzio, exhibition catalogue* (Milan, 1994).

³ T. Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy: Visions of Utopia, 1900-Present* (New York, 2005), 74-83.

⁴ M. Stone, *The Patron State: Culture & Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton NJ, 1998); R. Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945*, (Berkeley CA, 2001), 65-79.

⁵ F. Tentori, *Pietro Maria Bardi: primo attore del razionalismo* (Turin, 2002), 27-36; C. de Seta, 'Introduzione', in C de Seta (ed), *Giuseppe Pagano: architettura e città durante il fascismo* (Milan, 2008), viii-x.

⁶ M. Lamonaca, 'Tradition as Transformation: Gio Ponti's Program for the Modern Italian Home, 1928-1933', *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, 5/1 (1997-98), 52-82.

of this modest shift from paper architecture to material building as a symbolic indication that the tide was indeed turning in the face of still significant 'academic' opposition to the canon of rationalist architecture. Still, Belli cautioned, the ratio of realised projects to those remaining firmly on paper remained depressingly low - only five out of the exhibited **five-hundred buildings featured in the exhibition**, a mere one percent, were constructed buildings at the time. Rationalist architecture, already on a rapidly ascending curve in many northern and central European countries by the late 1920s, remained evidently in its most fragile, uncertain infancy in Italy.⁷

Among this diminutive subset of featured realised projects, there were two exhibits from Rome. The first was a small private house, the *Casa Unifamiliare* designed in 1926 by the exhibition's co-organiser Gaetano Minnucci. This building, situated in the new residential quarter of Gianicolo in the western outskirts of the city, was praised for its imaginative integration of northern European functionalist elements - especially from the Dutch school that Minnucci was particularly acquainted with - into a modern and rational residential building type for Rome.⁸ While its inclusion in the MIAR catalogue was no surprise (it had been cited in the Gruppo 7 manifesto*), the second building from Rome exhibited at the show was an oddity. It was a **'sub-urban hostel' known as Albergo Rosso** (literally red hotel), designed by Innocenzo Sabbatini for the Roman branch of the Institute of Social Housing (*Istituto Case Popolari*, ICP) and built in the new suburb of Garbatella in the southern outskirts of Rome. It was a humble public housing project, designed and built to absorb the growing number of homeless inhabitants of Rome at a time when, on the one hand, the demolitions (*sventramenti*) in the historic centre and, on the other hand, the campaign against 'spontaneous settlements' (the so-called *baracche*) in the urban periphery of Rome were gathering pace. **Although public housing was already at the forefront of an alliance between progressive welfare reformist politics and modernist architecture/urban planning in countries of northern Europe** (especially those with social democratic national and/or municipal governments)⁹, **in Italy the very different political climate and the slow start of the modernist movement did not allow for a similar engagement with the subject of public housing** as part of a wider programme of positive social transformation.¹⁰ Instead Sabbatini's Albergo Rosso had emerged as an emergency practical solution to a real crisis of housing affordability

⁷ M. Cennamo, *Materiali per l'analisi dell'architettura moderna: la Prima Esposizione Italiana di Architettura Razionale* (Naples, 1973); V. Testa, 'La prima mostra nazionale dell'abitazione e dei piani regolatori', *Capitolium*, V/10 (1929), 489.

⁸ G. Minnucci et al, *Gaetano Minnucci, 1896-1980* (Rome, 1984), 30; G. Strappa et al., *Tradizione e innovazione nell'architettura di Roma Capitale, 1870-1930* (Rome, 1989), 79, 89.

⁹ M. Harloe, *The People's Home? Social Rented Housing in Europe and America* (Oxford, 2011), 75-208; E. Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919-1934* (Cambridge MA & London, 1999).

¹⁰ L. Molinari, 'Matteotti Village and Gallarate 2: Design Criticism of the Italian Welfare State', in M. Swenarton, T. Avermaete, and D. van den Heuvel (eds) *Architecture and the Welfare State* (Abingdon & New York, 2014), 259-76.

and homelessness in Rome. The building was designed and executed under severe pressure of time and resources within the highly rigid and restrictive commissioning and executive structures of state/municipal welfare policy. In design terms too, the Albergo Rosso was singular. It marked a significant departure from the earlier architectural (structural and stylistic) canons of the ICP, combining imaginatively the modern functional architectural ethos with classical tradition and a sensitivity to the uniquely rich register of local styles present in Rome. In a city supposedly hostile to modernist architecture, where the academic establishment continued to favour strongly a hybrid eclectic architectural style known as *barocchetto* (reworking and synthesis of diverse elements from the city's civic and vernacular architecture of the Renaissance and baroque periods¹¹), Sabbatini's building appeared to suggest, as early as 1927, a unique anti-historicist template for reconciling modernism with a profound sense of Roman singularity. .

Together, the projects by Sabbatini and Minnucci highlighted the modest inroads that a new modernist sensibility had made in Rome, albeit in innocuous locations away from the contested historic centre. Nevertheless, in almost every other respect the contrast between these two projects could not have been bigger: a relatively small residential unit for an affluent family versus a gargantuan complex consisting of 449 apartments for homeless families in need of emergency accommodation; a decidedly rational, Northern European in its design sources building versus a genuine hybrid experiment in fusion of local traditions and international influences; a private commission versus a public project executed by a state-funded body; a work of relative creative freedom by a single architect versus one emerging from a busy office team even when it bore the signature (actual and creative) of its chief architect.

The inclusion of the Albergo Rosso in the exhibition's programme proved rather controversial. With its abstracted classicising pediments, its Renaissance-inspired clock tower, and its stripped-down baroque porticos and decorative details inscribed on the sequence of its facades, the Albergo Rosso visibly diverged from MIAR's canon of clarity of form, structural simplicity, and transparency. In some respects, criticism against Sabbatini's project mirrored the earlier censure directed at Hendrik Petrus Berlage's perimeter-block social housing in Amsterdam by those who considered it the product of a dissonance between exterior and interior, an 'apron (façade)' archi-

¹¹ Strappa et al., *Tradizione*, 49-51; P. O. Rossi, 'Caratteri stilistici nell'architettura di Roma degli anni venti. Quale strada per uscire dall'eclettismo?', *ArQ: Architettura Quaderni della Sezione 'Sperimentazione Progettuale' del Dipartimento di Progettazione Architettonica e Ambientale dell'Università Federico II di Napoli*, 11(1993), 41-62; P. O. Rossi, 'Il villino e la palazzina nel panorama architettonico di Roma negli anni Venti', *Metamorfosi. Special Issue: Roma 1920/1940. Dal 'villino' alla 'palazzina'*, 8(1989), 14-24; B. Regni, Marina Sennato, 'L'architettura del Novecento e la 'Scuola Romana'', 40/41 (1978), 37-62; A. La Stella, 'La 'scuola romana' tra accademia e innovazione', in R. Barilli, F. Solmi (eds), *La Metafisica. Gli anni Venti* (Bologna, 1980), vol II, 81-93; M.S. Orsini, *Moderne Architetture Romane: architetture della Scuola Romana nel passaggio alla modernità, con particolare riferimento all'opera di Giovanni Battista Milani* (Rome, 2016), 89-105.

ture that obscured its underpinning constructive processes and disguised space organisation behind it.¹² Sabbatini himself, a relatively low-profile architectural practitioner, was a far cry from the flamboyant figures of 'heroic modernism' that sought rupture with the past. His professional competence was never in doubt, given the impressive - and at the time rapidly expanding - portfolio of projects executed on behalf of the ICP in the 1920s, at a time when he headed the Institute's Projects team (1926-29).¹³ His credentials, however, as a figure of the architectural avant garde were questioned by many of his modernist peers. The ICP's portfolio of executed projects up until that point may have been prolific and rich in aesthetic and distributive solutions; but none of the ICP designs up to that point could be identified as path-breaking. Meanwhile Sabbatini's own architectural vision had always favoured eclectic integration with a strong genuflection towards local and regional traditions - a genuflection that went against the grain of the far more radical and combative vision of the young Italian rationalists. His earlier experiments with neoclassicism and the ubiquitous *barocchetto* regional style appeared to place him, if only slightly, on the wrong side of the Italian architectural avant garde.

Still, the Albergo Rosso was a milestone - not only for Sabbatini and the ICP but also for the history of early modernism in Rome. It marked the beginning of the most confident, prolific, and fruitful phase in the Institute's history. Between 1926 and 1930, Sabbatini, together with his cousin Innocenzo Costantini (head of the ICP in Rome) and a talented team of nearly a hundred architects, designers, engineers, and administrators,¹⁴ ushered the ICP into a golden era of bold creativity that constantly re-contextualised tradition as a dynamic fount of sensitive, 'situated' innovation. Sabbatini was instrumental in pushing his team well beyond the canons of their mentors into the fascinatingly experimental territory of what Roger Griffin has called 'rooted' modernism - a modernism that refracted the new international sensibilities in structure, distribution, and design through uniquely local - cultural, ambiental, aesthetic, constructive - sources of reference.¹⁵

This article suggests a fundamental re-appreciation of the architectural production of the ICP in the second half of the 1920s, under the creative lead of Innocenzo Sabbati-

¹² J.R. Gold, *The Experience of Modernism: Modern Architects and the Future City*, 1928-53 (Abingdon & New York, 2013), 49; M. Bock et al., *Michel de Klerk. Architect and Artist of the Amsterdam School* (Rotterdam, 1997), 286-90.

¹³ *Historical Archive of the ICP, ATER/Aziende Territoriali per l'Edilizia Residenziale Pubblica del Comune di Roma* (henceforward ICP-ATER), Allegati, 1926/xiii: 'Ordinamento del Servizio Tecnico', Session of 29.1.1926.

¹⁴ ICP-ATER, Allegati, 1929/xviii: Costantini, 'Proposta per la riduzione del personale', 10.12.1929.

¹⁵ R. Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism* (Basingstoke, 2007), 233; cf. S. Goldhagen's notion of 'situated modernism' in *Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism* (New Haven & London, 2001), esp 199-214.

ni. I argue that there was a fascinatingly singular Roman road to modernist architecture long before the 'heroic' phase of *razionalismo* in Rome during the early 1930s. Sabbatini's ICP designs – not least the celebrated Albergo Rosso – broke taboos and ushered in a decidedly more modern architectural sensibility in Rome, one that was based on experimental synthesis and critical continuity, rather than polemical rupture, with the past. What makes this particular portfolio of architectural design and production so important relates to three qualities. First, unlike most other projects devised by rationalists at the time, the overwhelming majority of Sabbatini's designs in the 1920s were executed. Second, they offered patterns of negotiation between tradition and innovation that Italian rationalism – and international modernism as a whole – re-appreciated only after the Second World War.¹⁶ Third, this alternative architectural proposition came from within the field of public housing, masterminded by far less flamboyant (and largely unsung in the annals of Italian modernism) figures of the Italian architectural profession who operated in constant crisis-management mode under relentless pressure and with chronically limited resources.

This is why the Albergo Rosso matters so much in this discussion. I approach its inclusion in the catalogue of the 1928 First Rationalist Exhibition as a perhaps inadvertent but still symbolic early recognition of the possibility of a highly original idiom of 'rooted' modernism in Rome – a recognition that makes even more sense retrospectively than it did in the late 1920s. I consider the work of Sabbatini for the ICP as the significant missing link in the narratives of architectural modernism in Italy and Rome – an extensive episode of realised imaginative experimentation inscribed on the physical space of the city rather than exiled to its ever more distant periphery or doomed to remain on paper. More importantly, however, I explore the proposition that the best examples of Sabbatini's architecture for the ICP represent an alternative, fascinating yet unrealised, future for Italian modernist architecture. I begin with an overview of Sabbatini's work for the ICP in the 1920s before focusing on three seminal projects designed by him: the Albergo Rosso itself, followed by the *Casa del Sole* in the eastern quarter of Sant'Ippolito (Tiburtino II), and finally the *Trionfale Nuovo* complex that became Sabbatini's fascinating (and unrealised) swan song for the ICP before he severed his ties with the Institute.

¹⁶ It took the tempered intellect of a scarred Ernesto Rogers in the early 1950s, through the pages of *Casabella* that he was editing by then, to recast the relation between modernism and tradition as an eclectic, open-ended, rallying, and essentially forgiving pursuit into uncharted waters. See E.N. Rogers, 'La responsibilit  verso la tradizione', *Casabella Continuit *, 202 (1954), 2; C. Lenza, 'Il nodo della tradizione', in A. Giannetti, L. Molinari (eds), *Continuit  e crisi: Ernesto Nathan Rogers e la cultura architettonica italiana del secondo Dopoguerra* (Florence, 2010), 3-13; E. N. Rogers, *Esperienza dell'architettura* (Turin, 1958).

The *Istituto Case Popolari* (ICP) in the 1920s

The Institute of Public Housing was established at the turn of the twentieth century by the reformist government of Giovanni Giolitti. In 1903 the Minister of Education Luigi Luzzatti legislated a set of strict building and hygienic requirements for better social housing under the aegis of the state and local authorities. Luzzatti believed that such progressive interventions would benefit the living standards of the lower classes and aid the process of their social integration.¹⁷ As a result of the 1903 law, the ICP was entrusted with the role of providing public housing across the country, implementing new high-quality construction standards and shielding the population from the excesses of an unregulated private activity (speculation, high rent prices, poor quality of housing).¹⁸ The 1909 regulatory plan for the city of Rome (a plan that nominally stayed in force until 1931) identified a number of further areas for urban expansion to the west (Piazza d'Armi, Trionfale, Gianicolo/Monteverde), the south (Aventino, Testaccio), the east (Tiburtino, Appio), and the north (Flaminio, Parioli), stipulating which building type would be used as the norm for residential architecture in each case.¹⁹ Soon the ICP embarked on its first major project in the new San Saba neighbourhood of Rome, in the vicinity of the Aventino district. This large-scale project executed intermittently over a long period of time (1907–1923) captures the ongoing transformation of approaches to public housing in Rome before and after WW1.²⁰ While initial constructions retained a closer connection to the existing residential traditions of Rome with a variety of building types within the same block and preference for low-density solutions with individual courtyards, later projects moved towards more intensive and stylistically uniform perimeter-block designs with a single internally enclosed courtyard for the entire block.²¹ After WW1 and into the early-1920s, the construction activity of the ICP continued to expand, in both volume and geographic extent, in all directions envisaged by the 1909 plan. The areas identified by the ICP for intensive development during that period were overwhelmingly intended as organic extensions of the urban core and were situated in close proximity to existing residential areas, benefiting from existing infrastructure

¹⁷ Kirk, *Architecture of Modern Italy*, vol. 2, 26–8; Molinari, 'Matteotti Village and Gallarate 2', 259.

¹⁸ N. Quarenghi, *Un salotto popolare a Roma. Monteverde (1909–1945)* (Milan, 2014), 20.

¹⁹ W. Nakamura, 'Le tipologie abitative', in R. Lemme (ed), *La casa bene primario. L'evoluzione delle abitazioni popolari e borghesi* (Rome, 2010), 103–10.

²⁰ L. Toschi, 'L'Istituto per le Case Popolari di Roma: 1903–1914', *Studi Romani*, 27/2 (1979), 189–208; C. Cocchioni, M. de Grassi, A.M. Vittori, *La casa popolare a Roma : trent'anni di attività dell'I.C.P.* (Rome, 1984), 154.

²¹ M.G. Corsini, 'Building types and urban fabric of Rome's outer suburbs: from reading to planning', in K. Stanilov, B. Case Scheer (eds), *Suburban Form. An International Perspective* (Abingdon & New York, 2003), 154–5; M. Sanfilippo, *La costruzione di una capitale 1870 – 1911* (Cinisello Balsamo, 1993), 60–7.

and socio-economic networks. The only exceptions to this were two experimental housing projects undertaken by the Institute in relatively isolation from the existing metropolitan core, based on variations of the then popular 'garden city' type (in Italian *città-giardino*): first, Garbatella in the south-west, a hybrid of garden suburb and model workers' village (see below); and second, Aniene/Montesacro in the north-east, a more typical garden city destined for middle-class civil servants [Fig 1].²²



Nevertheless, the onset of the 1920s brought a series of dramatic changes in the structure, operation, and remit of the ICP. For a start, the Institute as a whole underwent a fundamental administrative reorganisation under the Fascist regime. The astute, politically-minded architect Alberto Calza Bini was appointed president and

²² S. Benedetti, 'Contaminazione di tradizione e modernità nei quartieri popolari a Roma: 1920-30', in M.G. Turco, M. Docci (eds), *L'Architettura dell'altra modernità: Atti del XXVI Congresso di Storia dell'Architettura* (Rome, 2010), 224-53; Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, 91-113; S. Cramer-Greenbaum, 'From Finance to Physical Plan: Construction of Garbatella from Garden City Principles', *Agora Journal of Urban Planning and Design*, 32-39 (2011), available at <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/120369>.

remained in his position until his resignation in 1942.²³ While there were few changes in either institutional structure or core personnel inside the Roman branch of the Institute, there were seismic developments in the political, economic, and financial context in which the ICP was forced to operate. Following the reorganisation of the city's administration in 1924-25, Rome's ICP found itself bound by the strategy and the funds of the new, directly appointed municipal administration (*Governatorato*) that replaced the institution of the elected *Comune*.²⁴ It also had to operate under the pressures generated, first, by the Fascist regime's extensive programme of demolitions in the historic centre (which resulted in an escalating number of evictions)²⁵ and, second, by the campaign against the city's slum settlements (*baracche*).²⁶ Meanwhile, the decision to phase out wartime state controls over rent prices in the second half of the 1920s added to an already difficult situation, increasing the need for affordable housing to cater for families with lower income who could no longer afford the higher rents asked in the private market.²⁷

These mounting pressures were met with reasonable success by the ICP in the 1920s. As a short-term relief measure, the Institute was able to improve and expand its provision of emergency and temporary accommodation in the form of shelters and hostels (*ricoveri* and *alberghi*).²⁸ But the intensifying shortage of affordable housing in and around the city also necessitated a significant expansion of housing provision through the construction of new homes in the immediate periphery of the metropolitan core. The pace of the ICP building programme increased throughout the

²³ A. Calza Bini, *Il Fascismo per le Case del Popolo* (Rome, 1927), 13-29; *Documentazione di un periodo. Storia dell'Istituto dal 1903 al 1953. Ristampa in facsimile del volume pubblicato nel 1954 in occasione del 50° anniversario della Fondazione* (Rome, 1986), 19-20.

²⁴ P.S. Salvatori, *Il Governatorato di Roma* (Milan, 2006), 29-42, 51-65; A. Caracciolo, *I sindaci di Roma*, (Rome, 1993), 33-42; V. Vanelli, *Roma Fascista - Architettura* (Rome, 1981), 97-114.

²⁵ A. Calza Bini, *Il Piano Regolatore e le Abitazioni in Roma* (Rome, 1940), esp. 13-18. For the classic acerbic account of Fascist-era demolitions in the historic centre see A. Caderna, *Mussolini urbanista: lo sventramento di Roma negli anni del consenso* (Rome & Bari, 1979). See also F. Salsano, *Il ventre di Roma: trasformazione monumentale dell'area dei fori e nascita delle borgate negli anni del governatorato fascista*, PhD thesis, Università degli studi di Roma Tor Vergata (Rome, 2007); and A. Kallis, 'The 'third Rome' of Fascism: Demolitions and the search for a new 'urban syntax'', *Journal of Modern History*, 84/1 (2012), 40-79.

²⁶ R. Ricci, 'Baracche e sbaraccamenti', *Capitolium*, V/3 (1930), 142-9; G. Zugna, 'Delenda Baracca', *Capitolium*, VII/1 (1931), 44-8; A. Kallis, *The Third Rome, 1922-43: the making of the fascist capital* (Basingstoke, 2014), 177-80, 185.

²⁷ Full liberalisation of rents was agreed with law 1155, 3.6.1928, with effect from 1.1.1929. See ICP-ATER, Allegati, 1928/ii/17: Calza Bini, 'Pro-memoria per la Sua Eccellenza il Capo del Governo', 14.6.1928 and Presidenza Consiglio Ministri to Calza Bini, 22.6.1928; ICP-ATER, Allegati, 1929/18: Costantini and Ragioniere Capo, 'Note al Bilancio Consuntivo per l'Esercizio 1928', 10.5.1929.

²⁸ ICP-ATER, Delibere Commissariali 1926/xiii-bis: Costantini, 'Gestione Ricoveri Comunali. Conto consuntivo al fine 1925', 30.5.1926.

1920s, with the number of rooms made available doubling from 1918 to 1922 and again by 1927.²⁹ The higher volume of housing units constructed by the Institute was achieved both through the geographic expansion of the building activities in areas beyond the limits of the city's 1909 regulatory plan and through efficiencies achieved through higher density and/or lower unit construction costs. In particular, the shift in the ICP's housing strategy from smaller self-contained family homes (as in San Saba, Aniene, and the first groups of Garbatella, 1920-23) to closed perimeter- and mega-blocks offered a number of distinct cost advantages for the Institute as the pressure to deliver many more houses faster and more economically per unit intensified.³⁰ In addition, as the population of Rome started to expand dramatically in the first decades of the twentieth century as a result of internal migration,³¹ the perimeter-block type ensured a more efficient use of the limited space for development, especially in areas close to the metropolitan core.³²

Nevertheless, the pressing need for more public housing could not be met solely through cost-cutting ventures; it required above all an ambitious programme of funded expansion and investment in the medium and longer term. As the ICP largely depended on funds from the state and the city's Governatorato, it was particularly vulnerable to (always volatile) political decisions made further up the regime's hierarchy. Calza Bini's persistent pleas for a more sustainable public funding structure for the ICP's programme of construction faced growing opposition from the Ministry of Finance and the new governor of Rome, Ludovico Boncompagni Ludovisi, who succeeded the more amenable Spada Potenziani in 1928.³³ Calza Bini appealed directly to Mussolini for help in the autumn of 1928, painting a bleak picture of the public housing situation in Rome and across the country, speaking of a 'painful phase of the [housing] crisis' and warning of potentially catastrophic consequences

²⁹ Figures published by the ICP in 1929 record an increase in the number of rooms from 17304 (1922) to 23353 (1925), 37874 (1927), and 49270 (1929). See *Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma* (henceforward ACS), *Segreteria Particolare del Duce, 1922-45 (SPD)*, *Carteggio Ordinario (CO)*, 509.813: ICP, 'Appunti sull'opera svolta dall'avvento del Regime', 1929.

³⁰ E.M. Mazzola, 'Contro storia' dell'architettura moderna: il caso di Roma (Florence, 2004), 41; Strappa, *Tradizione e innovazione*, 137-9; G. Samonà, *La casa popolare degli anni '30* (Venice, 1977).

³¹ Ufficio di Statistica e Censimento, Comune di Rome, *Rome. Popolazione e territorio dal 1860 al 1960* (Rome, 1960); Vanelli, *Storia*, 158-60. For an analysis of demographic trends in Rome see *Cinquant'anni di vita dell'Istituto Autonomo per le Case Popolari della Provincia di Roma* (Rome, 1953), 41-3.

³² On the perimeter block, see Blau, *Architecture of Red Vienna*, 252-72; Samonà, *Casa popolare*, 16-9.

³³ Salvatori, *Governatorato*, 45-9; V. Vanelli, *Economia dell'architettura in Roma fascista: il centro urbano* (Rome, 1981), 169-80.

for social cohesion and the public image of the Fascist regime.³⁴ Still, little more than public declarations of support came out of these appeals. A series of loan agreements concluded with state and private institutions provided temporary but insufficient relief, especially as the 'housing emergencies' for which they were earmarked soon spiralled out of control and left the ICP out of pocket.³⁵ Costantini complained that the lack of a sustainable funding structure had already caused a significant decline in the ICP's output at the worst possible moment.³⁶ Without a proportionate increase in public support, the ICP could either continue its building programme by sinking deeper and deeper into debt or stop fulfilling its core mission of supplying affordable houses to those who needed them most.³⁷ Already by 1929 there was growing talk of a new, even more severe 'housing crisis' in Rome, with an backlog of demand for public homes far outstripping the Institute's supply capacity.³⁸ Continuing inward migration from the south, pressure directly from Mussolini to demolish more and more *baracche*, and the rapid increase in evictions caused by the demolitions stipulated by the regulatory plan, created an explosive situation - with the global financial crisis looming in the horizon.³⁹

This was the context in which Innocenzo Sabbatini built his career as designer and architect in the ICP.⁴⁰ Born in Osimo, near Ancona, in 1891, he grew up in a family environment with strong ties to architecture. In addition to his cousin Innocenzo Costantini (1881-1962), a respected engineer who made his name working for the

³⁴ ACS, SPD, CO, 509.813: ICP to Mussolini, 23.10.1928.

³⁵ ICP-ATER, Verbali, Sessions of 15.6.1927 and 16.8.1927.

³⁶ ICP-ATER, Allegati, 1928/ii/xvii: Costantini, 'Appunti sull'opera svolta dall'avvento del regime, Anno VII', 20.12.1928.

³⁷ *Documentazione di un periodo. Storia dell'Istituto dal 1903 al 1953...*, 20-3; F. Salsano, 'Il Governatorato di Roma e l'Istituto case popolari. Gli sventramenti nell'area dei Fori imperiali', *Le Carte e La Storia*, 14/2 (2008), 182-4.

³⁸ A. Calza Bini, *L'Istituto per le Case Popolari di Roma per la crisi degli alloggi* (Rome, 1929), 1-8. The term 'housing crisis' (*crisi delle abitazioni / degli alloggi*) was already used by newspapers from the summer of 1928 - see for example 'L'Istituto per le Case Popolari: i suoi scopi e la crisi delle abitazioni. Risposta di Alberto Calza Bini', *Cronaca di Roma*, 28.7.1928, 5.

³⁹ Mussolini's intervention is clearly documented - see ACS, SPD, CO, 509.813: Mussolini to Calza Bini, 16.9.27; Calza Bini to SPD, 21.10 and 25.10.1927.

⁴⁰ There is little published research on Sabbatini - and the majority of what is available dates from the 1980s, when his early work was reappraised, both by architectural historians and in his hometown of Osimo. See the two publications by B. Regni and M. Sennato: *Innocenzo Sabbatini: architetture tra tradizione e rinnovamento* (Rome, 1982); and *Innocenzo Sabbatini: architettura per la città* (Rome, 1982), the latter prepared for an exhibition dedicated to the work of the architect held in Rome in the same year.

ICP since 1909 before becoming the head of the Roman branch in 1917⁴¹, his uncle Costantino Costantini (1854–1937) was an established architect in his home province of Le Marche.⁴² Sabbatini worked for the municipal office in Osimo before moving to Rome and becoming involved in the activities of the Institute. In 1919 he joined the Projects Office (*Ufficio Progetti*) and worked closely with Costantini and Massimo Piacentini, the Institute's chief engineer, on a series of popular housing projects in Rome. His brief comprised ongoing projects in the popular quarters of Trionfale, Testaccio, and Tiburtino; a partnership with Gustavo Giovannoni for the construction of the garden city of Aniene/Montesacro; and exciting opportunities in the workers' suburb of Garbatella.⁴³ Sabbatini's prolific, efficient, and imaginative work for the ICP in the 1920s was rewarded in 1926, when he became head of the Projects Office.⁴⁴ The period between 1925 and 1930 was the most productive of his entire career, juggling an almost impossible number of important housing projects across Rome that showed a progressive stylistic and structural refinement coupled with an increasingly confident experimentation with both modern and traditional regional forms.

Sabbatini was part of an often overlooked architectural scene in 1920s Rome – a scene largely overshadowed by Milan but one that was nevertheless rich, multifaceted, prolific, and resourceful. He was lucky to reach the apex of his creative curve while working for an organisation that was open-minded in design terms and actively seeking collaborations (whether through open competitions or through ad hoc assignments) on an impressive portfolio of housing projects across the city. In addition to the in-house team of architects inside the Projects Office of the ICP (**apart from Costantini and Piacentini**, Carlo Palmerini, Plinio Marconi, Felice Norri, and others), he worked with young guest architects such as Alessandro Limongelli, Pietro Aschieri, Giuseppe Wittinch, and Mario De Renzi, each of whom imbued the Institute's architectural production with their distinct design sensibility and adventurous flirtation with new sources of influence.⁴⁵ This was the time when the grip of the older generation of the Roman architectural establishment – primarily Gustavo Giovannoni, the patriarch of the *barocchetto* style and mentor of the entire ICP design

⁴¹ *Innocenzo Costantini Archive*, folder 'Istituto Case Popolari in Roma': Promemoria, 30.11.1945.

⁴² M.F. Panini, *Costantino Costantini: un architetto marchigiano e il cantiere dell'eclettismo (1854-1937)* (Rome, 2000).

⁴³ For the full list of Sabbatini's work (both for the ICP and his subsequent private practice) see Regni, Sennato, *Sabbatini: architetture tra tradizione e rinnovamento*, 91-126.

⁴⁴ ICP-ATER, *Allegati*, 1926/xiii, Session 29.1.1926: 'Ordinamento del Servizio Tecnico'.

⁴⁵ Benedetti, 'Contaminazione', 337-8; Strappa, *Tradizione*, 51-6. For the work of the other architects who collaborated with the ICP in the 1920s, see M.L. Neri, *Mario De Renzi: l'architettura come mestiere, 1897-1967* (Rome, 1992), esp. 90-100; G. Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo: architettura e città* (Turin, 1989), 86-7.

team - began to wane, with a more adventurous and confident spirit gradually taking hold inside the Project Office.⁴⁶ This resulted in a fascinating register of experimental hybrid styles, sometimes leaning towards boldly abstracted vernacular styles mined from the city's uniquely rich built environment (Roman, medieval, Renaissance, baroque) and on other occasions recontextualising international influences (British housing types, Viennese secessionist aesthetic values, Werkbund-inspired austere forms, Corbusian *unité d'habitation*).⁴⁷ As Costantini boldly stated, the ICP

had opened a new path, producing houses for the humble classes with more diverse and modern characteristics; expressions that, on the one hand, follow the new more recent trends in housing and, on the other hand, display special respect that befits the (architectural) ambience of Rome.⁴⁸

In this effervescent environment, the quest for a new, modern yet 'rooted' in Roman singularity, architectural language in 1920s Rome lacked obvious heroic figures and dominant aesthetic paradigms but excelled in ambition and wildly innovative adventures, many of which were actually executed, unlike most of the early production of Italian and indeed international architectural modernist avant gardes⁴⁹. Though divided in design sensibilities, the younger generation of architects, alongside established names of the Roman architectural scene such as Enrico Del Debbio and Marcello Piacentini, agreed on the need for a paradigm shift and a new beginning.⁵⁰ They vowed to leave behind the presumptuous eclecticism of the previous decades, recasting regional traditions as a force of a distinctly Roman *modern* inspiration and sensibility, negotiating and thus 'situating' international experiences in the demanding, supremely symbolic context of Rome. As Pietro Aschieri wrote at the time,

[w]e are still in an experimental phase [...]. We admit openly and honestly the possibility of making mistakes, although no one at this critical time can reach an authoritative judgement about this. Only one thing is certain: we sketch the first lines of the new straight road that lies ahead of us. [...] Let us make mistakes: no conquest has ever been achieved without mistakes; and, believe me, these mistakes are far less harmful than those that are committed on a daily basis to the detriment of our cities.⁵¹

⁴⁶ F. Lanfranchi, *Il linguaggio romano del disegno architettonico tra le due guerre* (Rome, 2006), 96-9.

⁴⁷ G. Remiddi, 'Incontro con Innocenzo Sabbatini del 26 Aprile 1982', *Bollettino della Biblioteca / Facoltà di Architettura dell'Università di Roma*, 29 (1982), 7-12; B. Regni, M. Sennato, 'Innocenzo Sabbatini, architetto', *Capitolium*, 51/5-6 (1976), 2-10.

⁴⁸ I. Costantini, 'Le nuove costruzioni dell'Istituto per le case popolari in Roma. La borgata giardino "Garbatella"', *Architettura e Arti Decorative*, 3 (1922), 132-4.

⁴⁹ Strappa, *Tradizione*, 78-9.

⁵⁰ MAXXI, *Archives of Architects, Enrico Del Debbio Archive*, f.38: excerpt from 'la Casa Littoria in costruzione nella zona del Foro Mussolini', *Il Piccolo*, 1.4.1938, 2, where Del Debbio underlines the need for a new architecture, 'Roman and Italian, classical, traditional, and modern ... not a new relative but a new absolute one'.

⁵¹ P. Aschieri, 'Discussioni sull'architettura 'razionale'', *Il Tevere*, 1931.

It is undoubtedly difficult to extract the individual creative agency of Sabbatini from the collective architectural subject that was the ICP's Projects Office team in the 1920s.⁵² When Sabbatini's signature did not appear solo under ICP projects, it featured alongside those of Costantini, Giovannoni or (Massimo) Piacentini. Even when projects were executed by other members of the team, however, his creative influence as head of the Projects team in the second half of the 1920s cannot be underestimated. His design mark can be found in so many sites in and around the city – in the northwestern quarters of Trionfale and Piazza d'Armi, in the area of Appio/Tuscolano in the south-east, on the edge of the old working-class neighbourhood of Testaccio, in the new residential core of Tiburtino to the east of the railway station, in the garden-city of Aniene, and in the affluent suburb of Monteverde.⁵³ Sabbatini's architecture for the ICP, covering a relatively short but remarkably prolific period of time, traces a very personal journey of voracious experimentation with, and creative assimilation of, a vast repertoire of stylistic references and distributive solutions. This journey led him from an early adherence to the barocchetto of his mentors and his experiments with medieval vernacular civic architecture (Trionfale II, Aniene), following a route of progressive simplification, to the increasingly bold, even irreverent experimental eclecticism of his mid-1920s (Trionfale III/IV/V, Testaccio, Garbatella, Tiburtino) that embraced and subsumed a wide repertoire of contradictory typological references into large-scale ensembles of deliberate diversity of forms and styles with the distinctive scenographic quality of a 'city effect'.⁵⁴

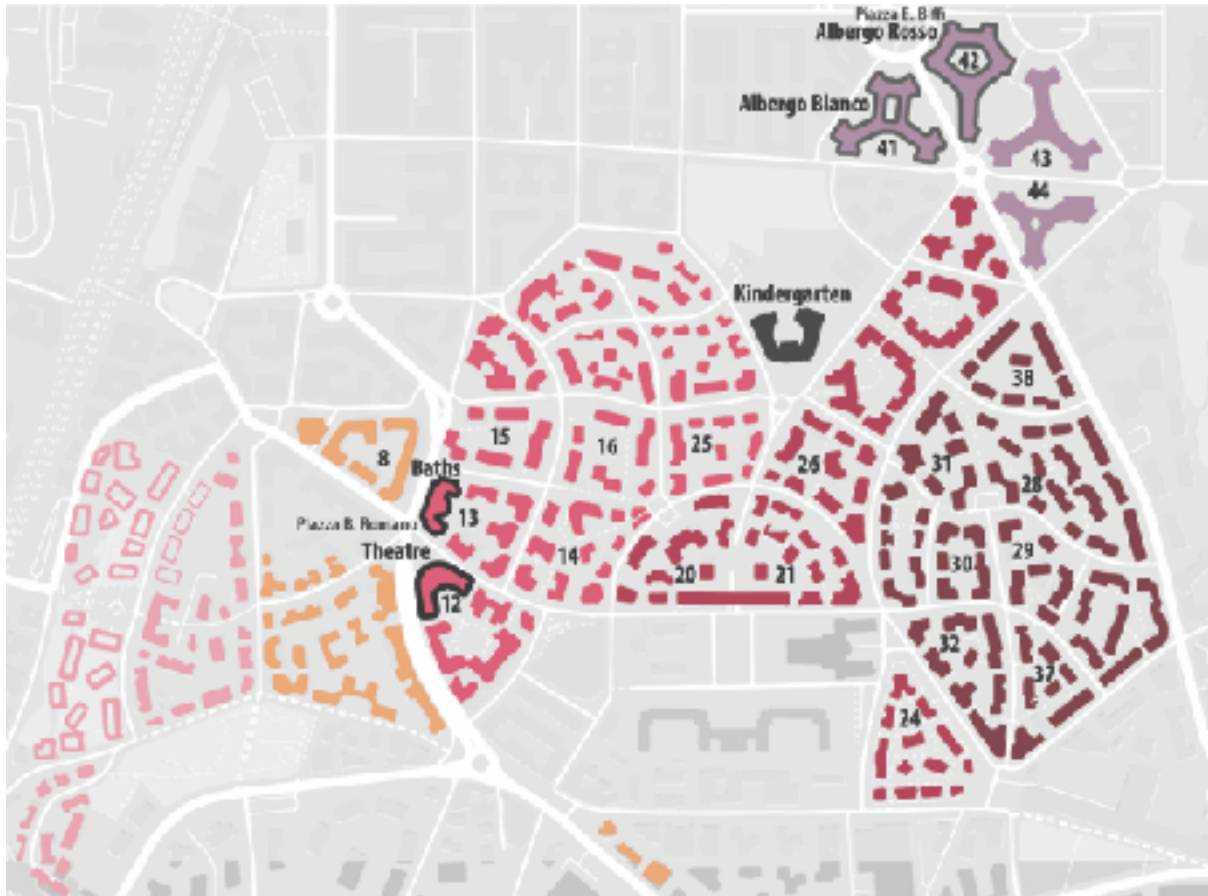
It was Garbatella in particular that provided Sabbatini with unique opportunities to shape the visual, spatial, and anthropological character of a sizeable new suburban quarter [Fig 2]. Unlike Trionfale, which was appended to a pre-existing residential core (Prati / Delle Vittorie) with a distinct architectural profile reflecting the tastes of late-nineteenth/early-twentieth centuries, Garbatella was conceived ab nihilo, on the tabula rasa that was meant to become Rome's new industrial zone from Testaccio and Ostiense all the way to the port of Ostia.⁵⁵ Like Aniene, Garbatella bore the imprint of Giovannoni's theoretical thinking on the type of 'garden city', adapted in both function and architectural style to fit the particular characteristics of the mod-

⁵² Lafranchi, *Linguaggio romano*, 91-105, 136-64.

⁵³ 'Le case per il popolo. L'opera dell'Istituto per Le Case Popolari in Roma', *Opere Pubbliche*, 10 (1932), 145-61; 'Per uno speciale tipo di costruzioni. L'attività dell'Istituto per le Case Popolari in Roma', *Capitolium*, II/7 (1926), 403-09.

⁵⁴ B. Regni, M. Sennato, 'L'architettura del Novecento e la "Scuola romana"', *Rassegna dell'Istituto di Architettura e Urbanistica*, 40/41 (1978), 51-62. On the 'city effect' architecture in Rome see Mazzola, 'Contra storia', 57-9

⁵⁵ Costantini, 'Le nuove costruzioni', 119-23; L. Piccinato, 'Il nuovo quartiere della Garbatella in Roma dell'Istituto delle case popolari di Roma', *Domus*, 3 (1930), 10-19. On the history of Garbatella see M. Sinatra, *La Garbatella a Roma, 1920-1940* (Milan, 2006), 13-26.



ern Italian and Roman experience.⁵⁶ By the time, however, that Sabbatini became heavily involved in the development of the project, so much of the quarter's original character and function had changed.⁵⁷ The new Fascist government and Rome's Governatorato had all but abandoned the idea of using Garbatella as a *model suburb for industrial workers*. This was partly a pragmatic decision, reflecting the failure of previous efforts to give Rome a strong productive industrial function; but it was largely a reaction to the dramatic demographic shifts inside the capital's metropolitan zone. A wave of demolitions in the densely inhabited historic core of the city and in the peripheral slums, coupled with an escalation of rental prices as a result of the removal of wartime controls, had produced a forced exodus of less well-off inhabitants of the centre towards the periphery, in desperate need of a home (that they could no longer afford in the private sector), a rented apartment (that had moved out of their financial capacity due to the rise in rents), some form of public housing (that was increasingly scarce) or temporary shelter at one of the *ricoveri* (that

⁵⁶ S. Benedetti, 'La Città Giardino Aniene: l'impianto di Gustavo Giovannoni e il contributo degli altri architetti', in S. Benedetti, L. Creti, F. di Marco, R. Giannantonio, T. Manfredi, M. Pisani, A. Sgueglia, C. Varagnoli (eds), *L'altra modernità nella cultura architettonica del XX secolo* (Rome, 2015), 101-9. For the original regulatory plan for Garbatella, see ICP-ATER, Verbali, Session of 21.3.1922.

⁵⁷ For the shifting regulatory framework for Garbatella see *Archivio Storico Capitolino* (henceforward *AStCap*), Commissione Edilizia (CE): Verbali 3288/1922, 3288/1923.

was simply no longer available).⁵⁸ Thus it is not surprising that, by 1926, Garbatella was rapidly morphing into an emergency valve used by state and municipal authorities to absorb, diffuse or simply conceal the deepening housing crisis.⁵⁹ Its population increased five-fold within four years - from just over 3000 in 1922 to more than 15,000 in 1926.⁶⁰ The ICP constructed two purpose-built groups of affordable houses in 1924-26 - one for those evicted from the demolished neighbourhoods around Piazza Venezia (Lots 14-16, 20-21, 25-26); the other for the growing stream of homeless people from the destruction of the slums in Portonaccio, Porta Latina, Ponte Milvio, and Ponte Lungo (Lots 28-32, 37-38).⁶¹ The original preference for low-density housing development (*villini* and row houses with small gardens) soon gave way to more and more intensive housing solutions, paving the way for the introduction of the large perimeter-block type, the earliest ones designed by one of the ICP's most prolific architects, Plinio Marconi (Lot 8).⁶²

The other important change that occurred from the mid-1920s onwards in Garbatella concerned the stronger programmatic emphasis on collective ways of living. The particular social profile of the new arrivals (especially the former residents of the slums or those too poor to afford private rents) favoured the provision of communal services over the self-contained family units that had dotted the suburb in preceding years. Garbatella offered the ICP an exciting blank canvas for the design of a wide range of social services as part of a much wider experiment in social engineering. Sabbatini was seen as the safest, most able pair of hands to design and execute this particular programme - en masse, on time, with imaginative design repertoire, and crucially within budget. In rapid succession, he oversaw the completion of discrete buildings for public baths and theatre/cinema entertainment, both flanking Piazza Romano, as well as a model kindergarten (*Asilo Infantile*) on Piazza Longobardi (1927-31).⁶³ Piazza Romano was intended as the communal social hub of the entire suburb, with further plans for a large covered market and athletic facilities that were not realised. In all these undertakings, Sabbatini displayed a striking resourcefulness and a bold experimental streak in devising ingenious aesthetic and spatial solutions.

⁵⁸ L. Villani, *Le borgate del Fascismo: storia urbana, politica e sociale della periferia romana* (Turin, 2012), 26-42; Ciucci, *Architetti*, 80-8.

⁵⁹ A. de Michelis. 'The garden suburb of the Garbatella, 1920-1929: defining community and identity through planning in post-war Rome.' *Planning Perspectives*, 24/4 (2009), 509-520

⁶⁰ 'I risultati del Censimento della città', *Capitolium*, VII (1931), 12, 610 (figures for Garbatella extrapolated from the detailed parish statistics).

⁶¹ Istituto per le Case Popolari in Roma, *La borgata-giardino Garbatella e il nuovo quartiere per i baraccati* (Rome, 1925); Calza Bini, *Fascismo per le case del popolo*, 70-5.

⁶² F. R. Stabile, *Regionalismo a Roma: tipi e linguaggi - il caso Garbatella* (Bari, 2001), 163-5; P. Marconi, *Il recupero della bellezza* (Milan, 2005), 24.

⁶³ G. Muratore, 'La città delle case', *Cassabella*, 459 (1980), 10-5.



His building for public baths (Lot 13) [Fig 3] addressed a fundamental problem of communal living in Garbatella while also accommodating dedicated apartments and studios for artists in the top floors. Directly opposite Marconi's earlier mega-block with distinct neo-medieval stenographic effects, he designed a significantly more austere brick façade that referenced ancient Roman architecture drawn from both public works (the Diocletian windows on the top) and vernacular elements from the insulae of Ostia Antica (the vaulted balcony of the first floor). Marconi's rambling neo-medieval decorations contrasted with Sabbatini's more austere structural integration of classically-inspired architectural elements. His capacity for producing imaginative architectural palimpsests from elements drawn from the wildest variety of regional traditional sources is also evident in the nearby (but very different programmatically) Cinema-Teatro (Lot 12) [Fig 4], constructed at roughly the same time with the public baths building.⁶⁴ For this entertainment space, Sabbatini opted for a more playful integration of shapes, styles, and functions. The edifice comprises a convex form for the theatre hall and a contrasting tri-partite concave volume for professional residences, recessed and vertical, crowned with a stripped-down classical tympanum. The arches of the ground floor are once again at variance with the simple rectangular windows of the recessed upper floors, the two ensembles mediated by a mezzanine floor that retained the circular shape of the hall but served as a tran-

⁶⁴ For the colourful history of the building until today see F. Bevilacqua, *Teatri di Roma, 1980-2008* (Rome, 2011), 92-4.

sitional visual statement of the simpler windows that dotted the façade of the two superimposed residential blocks.



Taken together, these two modest buildings at the heart of the civic centre of Garbatella revealed the fundamentals of Sabbatini's distinct personal vision of a 'rooted' modern and functional architecture: traditional forms deployed with a deliberately anti-historical licence and recontextualised as modern *and* singularly local; progressive toning-down of decoration along rational lines; use of modern materials and construction methods to update established regional building types; and awareness of the capacity of mega-block architecture for bold urban scenographic effects. It was this vision of a *critical continuity* with the city's architectural traditions and ambiental context while confidently embracing modern design and constructive solutions that would reach its fullest and most sophisticated expression shortly afterwards, on the northeastern edge of Garbatella, in the four large plots 41-44 where Sabbatini designed his signature 'suburban hostels'.

Designing for crisis: the 'suburban hostels' (*Alberghi Suburbani*) in Garbatella

The Albergo Rosso and the other three adjacent mega-hostels **took shape** in the midst of a severe, multifaceted crisis, both across the entire public housing sector in

Rome and inside the ICP. In 1927, the Institute had to devise a new five-year plan for its construction activities, since the previous one had expired at the end of 1926. During the preceding five years, the ICP had also become active in new fields, such as subsidised housing, rent-to-buy schemes, as well as supply of higher-quality apartments for professionals.⁶⁵ The new five-year plan (for the execution of which Calza Bini had penned down the figure of 250 million lire as the absolute minimum in terms of public financing⁶⁶) envisaged significantly increased outputs in almost all these fields *in addition to* shouldering a new significant commitment to provide emergency accommodation for the steadily increasing flow of the urban poor, homeless, and displaced. The city's administration expected the ICP to absorb, at least in the short term, these new pressures without a corresponding increase in its funding, even if this meant lowering the standards of construction in order to control costs or cut expenditure in other areas of the Institute's portfolio. Neither of these two propositions appealed to the ICP's ethos and ambition. Calza Bini appealed to the Governatorato and then directly to Mussolini for financial support, bemoaning the chronic problem of insufficient and precarious funding. He regarded the Institute as a pivotal instrument of Fascist consensus, charged with a moral mission to elevate the standards of the working classes by ensuring a stronger supply of good-quality housing for those who needed it in the short or long term.⁶⁷ This vision, however, depended on ensuring a viable funding structure from the state and the city budgets.

The pressure on the ICP to provide stop-gap solutions to the mounting problem of homelessness demanded a new allocation of resources that shifted the focus from long-term planning to short-term crisis management. An initial financial agreement - totalling 45m lire - reached in 1927 with the Ministry of Finance and governor Potenziari promised to kickstart the process of public housing construction. The agreed funding formula ensured that the ICP would continue to construct new housing units for rental and for the rent-to-buy scheme (supported by the central budget) while also making a significant investment in emergency accommodation for those affected by the demolitions in the city's historic districts (funded by the Governa-

⁶⁵ ICP-ATER, Allegati, 1927/xiv: Calza Bini, 'L'Istituto per le Case Popolari in Roma dal 1903 al 1926. Appunti riassuntivi', Session 1.3.1927.

⁶⁶ ICP-ATER, Allegati, 1927/xiv-bis: Calza Bini, 'Per la crisi degli alloggi', 2.1927.

⁶⁷ This was an integral belief to the ethos of the Institute even before the advent of Fascism (see Costantini's opinion piece, written in 1922, to that effect in 'Le nuove costruzioni dell'Istituto per le case popolari in Roma. La borgata giardino Garbatella', *Architettura e Arti Decorative*, 3 (1922), 134). The idea of a moral mission was enshrined in the ICP's new statutes published in the 1920s and 1930s. Calza Bini himself repeatedly used this argument in order to defend the ICP from criticisms about inefficiency, costly projects, and high running costs (AStCap, Ufficio Assistenza Sociale (UAS), Carteggio con Titolario (CcT), Classe 6 - Ricoveri, b79, sf6: Calza Bini to Boncompagni Ludovisi, 30.6.1930). See also Strappa, *Tradizione*, 79-83.

torato).⁶⁸ A sizeable chunk of the funds earmarked for the latter category, 15 out of a total of 45 million lire, would be used for the construction of a novel type of mega-block in Garbatella that would provide emergency accommodation in small, yet higher-quality apartments with communal facilities on a rotational basis. Four so-called 'suburban hostels' (*Alberghi Suburbani*) were planned in the north-eastern edge of Garbatella (Lots 41-44), three of which would cater for families with very low incomes while one would be destined for professionals. In order to discourage longer-term residences, the three hostels would ban the use of personal household items and the production/consumption of meals within the apartments.⁶⁹ Across all hostels, a strict disciplinary regime (involving segregation according to sex and class, supervision of public order, and evictions for bad behaviour or non-payment of rent⁷⁰) would be maintained and supervised by members of the Fascist militia.⁷¹



This was the chain of events that led to the construction of the Albergo Rosso, as well as three more mega-hostels around Piazza Brin and Piazza Carbonara in Garbatella. Sabbatini, by then in charge of the ICP's Projects Office, was personally entrusted with the overall responsibility for the hostels. His design for the Albergo Rosso (Lot 42) [Fig 5], the test case for the entire package of the Garbatella hostels, was ground-

⁶⁸ *AStCap*, Deliberazioni Governatore, n. 4041, 16.6.1928.

⁶⁹ *ICP-ATER*, Verbali, Session 2.8.1927, 282-3.

⁷⁰ *AStCap*, UAS, CcT, Classe 6 - Ricoveri, b79, f6: Calza Bini to Boncompagni Ludovisi, 30.6.1930. See also Mazzola, 'Contro Storia', 55-8.

⁷¹ Sinatra, *Garbatella*, 91-6; Villani, *Borgate*, 32-3.

breaking in every respect. Typologically, the building's fractal organisation departed from the perimeter-block norm, producing a complex building organism consisting of a hexagonal structure extending southwards through an elongated wing, with a mixture of enclosed and semi-open spaces in lieu of the more traditional single shared internal courtyard. In its emphasis on large-scale, intensive, self-contained communal housing, the hostel also referenced in functional terms the *unité d'habitation* type introduced in interwar France while tempering the austere rationality of volumes and construction methods with a more playful approach to colour (the striking red hue of all exterior surfaces being the reason for naming the hostel *Rosso*) and decorative programme.⁷² The complex perimeter design partly disguised a structure made up from three discrete wings organised in a symmetrical star shape and radiating from a central hub that hosted the large communal dining hall for all residents - an impressive rotunda-shaped space crowned with a semi-transparent vaulted dome that resembled the one of the Pantheon.⁷³ Other communal services, such as washrooms and ironing facilities, storage for personal effects, garage, various playgrounds and after-work leisure spaces, as well as a library, were distributed organically across six levels (four floors, basement, and terraces), creating a self-contained organism that could host and support up to 1212 residents in 449 rooms.⁷⁴ Each of the elongated facades running along the sides of the triangular plot provided Sabbatini with an opportunity to diversify the visual and sculptural elements, thereby creating a sequence of rolling 'city effects' running along the sides of the complex. The angular organisation of the facades and the strong articulation of volumes combined symmetry with individuality and experimental diversity - a trademark of Sabbatini's design approach since the perimeter-blocks of the Trionfale quarter from the early 1920s. Traditional regional influences permeated the building in surprisingly innovative variations: the trademark clock tower crowned the western elongated facade, embedded in an abstracted ensemble inspired by medieval civic architecture (with references to Sabbatini's *Palazzo Pubblico* in Aniene/Montesacro)⁷⁵, only to give way to more classically-inspired solutions for the other sides (with a predominance of stripped-down pediments) and a constant interplay of convex-concave volumes on both the elongated sides and the vertices. Unlike the 'rural' - and occasionally

⁷² M.I. Zacheo, *L'architettura del Ventennio a Roma* (Rome, 1990), 12-14; Segni, Rennato, 'Innocenzo Sabbatini', 5-8.

⁷³ The communal refectory is singled out for its architectural merit (and extortionate cost ...) in contemporary ICP documents - e.g. *ICP-ATER*, Allegati 1929/xviii: Costantini and Sabbatini: 'Relazione sommaria sul preventivo aggiornato del costo degli Alberghi Suburbani alla Borgata Giardino Garbatella', 30.1.1929 (approved 7.2.1929). See also G. Remiddi, A. Bonavita, 'L'albergo rosso di Innocenzo Sabbatini', *Edilizia Popolare*, 251 (1997), 16-43; A. Capuano, *Temi e figure nell'architettura romana, 1944-2004* (Rome, 2016), 43-53.

⁷⁴ *AStCap*, Ripartizione V, Lavori Pubblici (LP), Ispettorato Edilizio (IE), 15306/1927.

⁷⁵ Marsilio, *Montesacro 'città giardino Aniene'*; A. Galassi, B. Rizzo, *Città Giardino Aniene* (Bologna, 2013); Nakamura, 'Tipologie abitative', 90.

'picturesque' - flavour of much of the preceding architecture in Garbatella, the far higher density of the hostel complexes unashamedly paid tribute to a modern *urban* scenography.⁷⁶

Between July 1927 and January 1928, the designs for the Albergo Rosso travelled many times back and forth between the ICP's Project Office and the city's Housing Inspectorate, producing a series of subtle changes to the original design.⁷⁷ The municipal authorities rejected the first iteration of the design, asking for more access points to the wings of the complex and for a radical 'simplification' of the main facades. Between the original (rejected) and the approved design, the building shed some of the more intricate articulated volumes framing the main facade while gaining more functional features such as extra staircases and access corridors. But it is also important to note that Sabbatini and his team defended robustly the integrity of their vision vis-à-vis both these pressure from city authorities to revise the design and growing concerns within the ICP about design directions and overall costs.⁷⁸ This is because, for Sabbatini personally and for the ICP as a whole, the Albergo Rosso was conceived and executed as a 'signature' architectural piece - the **flagship and most complete expression of a vision for what a dignified and efficient system of public housing for Rome ought to look**, feel, and function like. With its bold experiments in scale and massing; its abstracted and toned-down decorative programme for the facades, with simple symmetrical windows and only the most judicious use of arches and columns, **Sabbatini's design for the Albergo Rosso marked a decisive departure from the visual language of the barocchetto** that had set the tone until that point in Garbatella. His architectural vision was traditional in inspiration but, to quote the words of one of the most renowned cultural critic of the time, Ugo Ojetti, in the sense of a 'tradition as the point of departure and not of destination; as a cabinet of experiments and not a dormitory'.⁷⁹ At the same time, it was internationally minded, open to sensitively repurposed constructive and distributive solutions from other parts of the world without proposing either tradition or futural innovation as a one-way exclusive path. It sought to 'fit' by abstraction, allusion, and hybrid synthesis - not by excessive eclecticism or by treating regional tradition as a de facto enemy of innovative, modern experimentation.

The other three constructed hostels in nearby Lots 41, 43, and 44 moved the design philosophy of the Albergo Rosso towards further abstraction and simplification. The so-called *Albergo Bianco* (Lot 41) **[Fig 6]**, immediately to the west of the Albergo

⁷⁶ T. Dore, A. Nocera, M.V. Rinaldi (eds), *ATER del Comune di Roma. L'archivio storico iconografico IACP* (Rome, 2010), 44.

⁷⁷ *AStCap*, Rip V, LP, IE: 22115/1927, 22117/1927.

⁷⁸ *ICP-ATER*, Allegati 1927/ii/xv: Costantini and Sabbatini, 'Progetto per un gruppo di Alberghi Suburbani presso il Viale della Circonvallazione Ostiense', 16.8.1927.

⁷⁹ In M. Pisani (ed), *Marcello Piacentini. Architettura Moderna* (Venice, 1996), 35.



Rosso, was the most rational in design and distribution, following a simplified three-wing formula arranged symmetrically around a central hub without any decorative landmarks and with a stronger tendency towards standardisation of the east-west facades. The vertical profile of the central hub contrasted with the four-floor horizontal organisation of each wing. Visual simplification, however, was evident in both cases, with simpler entrance doors and rhythmic rows of plain rectangular windows, interrupted only by two vertical rows of arched windows framing the abstracted pediment above the main entrance. The pediment was dropped in the process of construction, resulting in a mega-building with notably cleaner, strongly articulated volumes. In contrast to the Albergo Rosso, the Albergo Bianco followed a strict concave pattern along all its sides and apices, with a significantly smaller enclosed courtyard in the centre of the building and more spacious semi-open spaces along its three principal sides. The other two hostels to the east and south-east of the Albergo Rosso (Lots 43 and 44 respectively) were designed as hybrids between the two model variants discussed above. Their spatial organisation followed more closely the symmetrical pattern of the Albergo Bianco (three wings arranged around a central elevated hub) with reduced in size internal courtyards but with ampler semi-open spaces delineated by the concave shape of the facades. In a reference to the Albergo Rosso, however, they featured a porticoed main entrance (the fourth hostel on Lot 44 has two). A stepping-down technique allowed Sabbatini to mediate the difference in height between the central hub and the three wings - an effect that had been used only on the southern side of the Albergo Rosso. The fourth - slightly later - hostel

also departed from the pentagonal concave design of the other three edifices, opting for a deeper, nearly semi-circular curve along its southern side.

All in all, the four *Alberghi Suburbani* of Garbatella represented a triumph of rational and efficient but also sensitive, inclusive, and highly individual 'rooted' design. Together they would be able to accommodate about 4000 residents at any time on a strictly rotational basis - an unprecedented experiment in scale and capacity for the ICP, executed with exemplary efficiency and completed within less than two years, in spite of chronic funding shortages.⁸⁰ They belonged to the intensive and 'economical' type of public housing but were by no means low-cost (the actual construction cost of each room was significantly higher than in other types of ICP accommodation, rising to over L14000 per room). They were subjected to a highly repressive disciplinary regime but otherwise represented a decisive step up in terms of living conditions when compared to the slums or temporary accommodation, with an emphasis on providing the full range of good-quality communal services. For the ICP, the hostels represented a scalable model of temporary accommodation that promised to provide a sustainable solution to the escalating housing crisis in late-1920s Rome, winding down in the process the squalid and degrading *ricoveri*.⁸¹ They were designed by the same architect almost entirely in one sweep; and yet somehow each of them maintained a strong visual identity that set it apart from the other buildings of the same group. They were examples of mega-block architecture but they were designed precisely not to follow the street lines, offering instead a variety of articulations and stylistic effects along their facades, creating a dramatic sense of plural urban scenography.⁸²

Sabbatini's two swansongs for the ICP: 'Casa del Sole' and 'Nuovo Trionfale'

Shortly after the closure of the 1928 MIAR exhibition, Sabbatini resigned from the ICP. In his resignation letter, he cited health and family reasons, as well as a desire to explore new career opportunities through private practice.⁸³ 'Drowned in work' and constantly under pressure to deliver in an otherwise increasingly under-valued and

⁸⁰ ICP-ATER, Allegati 1928/ii/xvii: Costantini, 'Appunti sull'opera svolta dall'avvento del regime, Anno VII', 3.

⁸¹ ICP-ATER, Allegati, Session 5.9.1929: Calza Bini to Bastiani, 24.8.1929.

⁸² Strappa, *Tradizione*, 38.

⁸³ ICP-ATER, Verballi, Session of 6.4.1929, 'Dimissioni dell'architetto Sabbatini', 50-5.

under-funded organisation⁸⁴, he was also frustrated with the growing criticism of the ICP's work by the authorities of the Governatorato under Boncompagni Ludovisi. Nevertheless he retained his freelance collaboration with the Institute on a number of projects already in progress or under discussion.⁸⁵ He was now on the top of his design game and liberated from the pressures of heading an overstretched team with strong personalities and increasingly tense personal relationships. The final, as it turned out, chapter of his contribution to the portfolio of ICP housing projects involved two new designs that he had already been working on by 1929: one (*Casa Sant'Ippolito II* or '*Casa del Sole*') in the ICP quarter of Tiburtino, to the east of the Termini railway station; the other (internally referred to as *Trionfale Nuovo*) in a new planned extension of the Trionfale district. Of the two, only the former was ever realised, the latter remaining on paper by the time that he formally ceased his collaboration with the ICP in 1931. It was in these two, very different projects that one can witness the most fluent summation of the spectrum of innovative solutions, in terms of massing, articulation, and visual style, that he had been experimenting with while working for the ICP.



⁸⁴ Narration by Roberto Nicolini in 'Un padre architetto', *Archiwatch - Il Blog di Giorgio Muratore*, 19.12.2008, available at <https://archiwatch.it/2008/12/19/un-padre-architetto-2>.

⁸⁵ ICP-ATER, Verbali, Session of 6.4.1929, 50-5.

The so-called *Casa del Sole* [Fig 7] that Sabbatini designed and executed in the Sant'Ippolito area of the Tiburtino district (1929-30) was undoubtedly his mature and confident tour de force - a building as much linked to his personal legacy as the Albergo Rosso.⁸⁶ Part perimeter-block - though a highly irregularly shaped one - and part experimental *unité d'habitation*, this housing complex of 89 apartments broke aesthetic, spatial, and volumetric taboos with visionary defiance yet also intriguing subtlety. Sabbatini's design maximised the functional potential of the restricted trapezoid plot by deploying a programme of progressive terracing, moving in an orderly tiered fashion from the southern corner of the building upwards and inwards. This ingenious solution solved a number of problems, some of which were constructive (e.g. reducing the dimensions of the internal courtyard and thus allowing for a much higher degree of space coverage) while others related to viability (e.g. better circulation of light in the small internal courtyard, semi-privatisation of free space through the terraces, better orientation of apartments). Here, the trademark polygonal concave facades of the hostels in Garbatella were transformed into a convex shape for the north-western facade, again maximising the coverage of the plot but also adding an element of dramatic scenography to the tallest branch of the edifice crowning the main entrance. From there, the terracing effect proceeded symmetrically along the sides of the building, progressively reducing the height from nine floors to just two at the southernmost narrow side, where the two long wings met in a small concave effect.⁸⁷ This gave the building a fascinating volumetric complexity, with a quasi-*cour d'honneur* effect receding progressively into a row-house sequence.

In visual terms, the Casa del Sole delved deep into the treasure chest of Roman renaissance and baroque 'minor' architectures but then refracted these sources of inspiration through the principles of modern rational organisation and design. Here the sculpting of the facades was kept to a bare minimum of flat, rhythmic cladding in stone, without the horizontal ribbons that gave definition to the facades of the Garbatella hostels. The curved shape of the north-western facade contrasted with the strictly linear organisation of the other sides. The visual vocabulary too underwent a similar degree of simplification, eliminating the abstracted classical pediments, the entrance porticoes, and the faint decorative echoes of the barocchetto seen only two years earlier in the Albergo Rosso. It was through subtle gestures (the simple cornices, the shape of the window recesses, the occasional arch and small pediment) that Sabbatini alluded to classical prototypes - but only as part of an anti-historicist programme of simplification. With the Casa del Sole Sabbatini pushed traditional regional architectonic inspirations to a new, more ambitious and confident phase of maturity. The result was a building that summarised the creative pursuits of a single

⁸⁶ E. Massini, *Piazza Bologna: alle origini di un quartiere 'borghese'* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2009), 44-5.

⁸⁷ The most comprehensive account of the seminal St Ippolito II building is G.C. Cundari, *Elementi di analisi casa popolare ICP S. Ippolito II di Innocenzo Sabbatini a Roma* (Rome, 2014), 45-122.

architect; a building so singular that continues to confound stylistic and structural categorisations as much today as it did when it was unveiled.⁸⁸



With his *Trionfale Nuovo* project [Fig 8], destined for what was back then the westernmost edge of ICP's Trionfale housing quarter, Sabbatini attempted to imbue public housing practices within the metropolitan area of Rome with insights gained from the experiments in the peripheral suburb of Garbatella. The intensive character of his design for the complex - described in ICP documents as 'like skyscrapers'⁸⁹ - marked a departure from the previous, lower density perimeter-blocks and *case economiche* that he had previously overseen in the Trionfale II-V projects.⁹⁰ Trionfale Nuovo

⁸⁸ Remiddi, Greco, Bonavita, *Il moderno attraverso Roma*, 135-7.

⁸⁹ ICP-ATER, Verballi, Session of 7.2.1929, 438-45.

⁹⁰ F. Cellini, 'Le case ICP degli anni '20 e '30 a Roma: una tradizione di qualità', in M. Farina (ed), *Housing Conference: Ricerche emergenti sul tema dell'abitare* (Rome, 2009), 10-4.

would occupy an extensive triangular plot on the western side of the Piazzale degli Eroi, offering dignified accommodation for a large number of families with very modest means.⁹¹ The complexity of Sabbatini's distributive solution for the project absorbed lessons both from the experience of the branching designs for the hostels of Garbatella and from the ingenuous terracing technique perfected in the Casa del Sole. The imposing volume of the new development essentially fused the equivalent shapes of two hostels with a V-shaped building appended on one side. An internal courtyard with four access nodes would be complemented by four semi-open spaces distributed along the external sides of the triangular plot. The size of the complex necessitated a higher number of external access points, placed on both the corners and inside the courtyards that punctuated the sides. Each of the four exposed wings gave way to separate annexed blocks of varying proportions - another departure from the hostels of Garbatella that tended towards a kind of fractal symmetry. In decorative terms, the Trionfale Nuovo was closer to the judiciously used traditional repertoire of the suburban hostels in Garbatella than to the rational sensibility of the Casa del Sole. It featured a series of vaulted colonnades running along parts of the ground (and occasionally the first) floor, much more of that trademark Sabbatinian game of contrasting concave-convex shapes dotting different aspects of the facade, horizontal variations of rows of windows distinguished through different in size and rhythm patterns, as well as five symmetrically placed domed towers with columns crowning the external nodes of the complex. Even with these flourishes, however, the Trionfale Nuovo remained an austere, stripped-down and overwhelmingly functional new solution to the perennial problem of providing adequate popular housing *inside* the metropolitan area.⁹²

The very different fate of the two projects belied a deeper rupture in the history of the ICP itself. By 1930, when the Casa del Sole was completed and the designs for the Trionfale Nuovo were still under consideration, the Institute had been plunged into a severe crisis of identity and direction. Under Boncompagni Ludovisi, the Governatorato reneged on its earlier promise to supply adequate funding for the continuation of the ICP's programme of public housing in and around the capital. This was a devastating blow to the 1927 five-year plan drafted by Calza Bini and effectively put an abrupt end to the Institute's activities - a hiatus that lasted for at least four years, with only temporary and at best modest spikes in-between. In the archives of the ICP, currently administered by Rome's ATER (*Azienda territoriale per l'edilizia residenziale pubblica*), there are advanced and detailed designs for the Trionfale Nuovo complex. However, apart from an early information note submitted to the office for the regulatory plan of the Governatorato⁹³, there is no evidence of any formal planning

⁹¹ ICP-ATER, Verbali, Session of 13.12.1928, 347.

⁹² Benedetti, 'Contaminazione', 345-8.

⁹³ AStCap, Rip V, Piano Regolatore (PR), b53, f25: 'Progetto per un nuovo quartiere ICP Trionfale' (no date).

application submitted by the ICP to the city authorities regarding the project. It seems that, even before Sabbatini's departure from the Institute in 1931, the plan had been abandoned, not least because it represented a significant part of the investment in new housing stock that the Institute could no longer afford after Boncompagni Ludovisi's refusal to grant the necessary funds agreed by his predecessor.

The proverbial nail in the coffin of the ICP's five-year plan for social housing came in three ripples of bad news. First, the ICP funding stream for the programme of subsidised housing (*case convenzionate*) dried up completely after the Governatorato decided to entrust this programme directly to the private sector.⁹⁴ Then came a more severe symbolic blow - Boncompagni Ludovisi's ferocious criticism of the suburban hostel model pioneered by the ICP in Garbatella. Due to the high costs associated with the running of the rotational scheme and the (not unexpected) loss of income from residents who did not - or could not afford to - pay the modest rent⁹⁵, the hostels started running significant operational losses at a time when the Institute's public (state and municipal) funding stream was savagely curtailed or frozen altogether.⁹⁶ The governor forced the ICP to convert the hostels from temporary into permanent housing units for residents who would otherwise be unable to afford either private or public rented accommodation.⁹⁷ But it was a severe blow to the ICP, as well as to Calza Bini, Costantini, and Sabbatini personally, that the most celebrated experiment in public housing carried out under their stewardship, one in which he and his entire project team had invested so heavily in the previous three years, had been officially denigrated so quickly after its first experimental run in Garbatella.⁹⁸ Finally, the governor's deepening distrust of the ICP led him to bypass the Institute altogether and seek once again the involvement of private enterprises for a new plan that envisaged the construction of low-cost and -quality housing nuclei (*borgate*) in ever more distant parts of the capital's periphery.

⁹⁴ Villani, *Borgate*, 35-7.

⁹⁵ *AStCap*, UAS, CcT, Classe 6, b79, f6: Direttore Servizi Tecnici of Governatorato to UAS, 2.7.1930; Calza Bini to Boncompagni Ludovisi, 30.6.1930 (where Calza Bini, already under attack for the evictions from the Governor, explains the process that leads to such decisions by invoking its original mission of raising the moral standards of the people under its auspices and defending the system against instances of incurable financial irresponsibility by tenants).

⁹⁶ *AStCap*, UAS, CcT, Classe 6, b79, f6: ICP, Direttore Generale (Costantini), report on the Amministrazione Beni Patrimoniali, 29.6.1930.

⁹⁷ *ICP-ATER*, Allegati, 1929/xviii: 'Lavori di Trasformazione degli Alberghi Luigi Luzzatti alla borgata giardino Garbatella', 10.1929.

⁹⁸ Remiddi, 'Incontro', 12; Sinatra, *Garbatella*, 42-3.

The story of the *borgate* of the Governatorato has been documented in fascinating detail elsewhere.⁹⁹ Suffice to say, as Costantini observed with bittersweet self-satisfaction in 1938, that these poorly planned and executed settlements simply disguised a mounting housing crisis only to see it explode, in even more catastrophic terms, a few years later.¹⁰⁰ The ICP did survive the crisis - although Sabbatini had left, Calza Bini and Costantini remained firmly in charge and ensured a recovery in the Institute's activity from 1935 onwards. But survival came at a considerable cost to the overall ethos and practice of the Institute. Already in 1931-32, the repertoire of ICP projects shifted to more and more intensive units displaced in the distant periphery of the city, such as the ones constructed in Val Melaina (near Aniene to the east) and Donna Olimpia (in the outskirts of Monteverde to the west).¹⁰¹ Even if the *borgate* constructed by the ICP in the second half of the 1930s were in many ways an improvement compared to the disastrous earlier involvement of the Governatorato's in this field, they remained a far cry from the more ambitious, innovative, and higher-quality projects carried out by the Institute in the 1920s. With fewer resources and significantly more pressure to deliver housing in bulk, the ICP cut corners, sacrificed its earlier experimental streak, and delivered unexceptional in design and form low-cost housing solutions. The Trionfale Nuovo design had arrived just that bit too late, as the tide had already turned after the creative peak of the 1927-30 period.

Conclusions: revisiting modernism in 1920s Rome

Sabbatini's Albergo Rosso enjoyed two more laps of honour – first at the exhibition that was organised as part of the 1929 Congress of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning (IFHTP) held in Rome; and two years later at the international exhibition of modern architecture held in Budapest.¹⁰² The 1929 IFHTP Congress in particular came to represent a moment of international recognition for

⁹⁹ Apart from the excellent and comprehensive study by Villani (see note 58), see also G. Berlinguer, P. della Seta, *Borgate di Roma* (Rome, 1976); and various contributions to A. Clementi, F. Perego (eds), *La metropoli 'spontanea'. Il caso di Roma* (Bari, 1999) - especially A.M. Leone, 'Politiche dell'edilizia residenziale pubblica: le scelte', 366-73; and D. Colasante, '1925-81: la città legale', 249-89. There are also excellent studies in individual *borgate* or subsets thereof, such as G.-G. Fusco, *Ai margini di Roma capitale. Lo sviluppo storico delle periferie. San Basilio come caso di studio* (Rome, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ I. Costantini, 'Le borgate popolari', *V Congresso Nazionale di Studi Romani* (Rome, 1938), 16-8.

¹⁰¹ ICP-ATER, Verballi, Session 15.3.1930; Villani, *Borgate*, 83-118; Cocchioni et al, *Casa popolare*, 113-24.

¹⁰² F. Fichera, 'L'Esposizione Internazionale di Architettura Moderna in Budapest', *Architettura e Arti Decorative*, 5-6 (1931), 195; V. Testa, 'La prima mostra nazionale dell'abitazione e dei piani regolatori', *Capitolium*, 5/10 (1929): 489-97.

the work of the ICP in the field of good-quality affordable housing. To mark the occasion, the Institute commissioned a series of thirteen, low-cost (set at a maximum of 8000L per housing unit), sensitively designed low-density 'model houses' (*case modello*) that were constructed on Lot 24 of Garbatella by a mix of established and younger Roman architects (Marconi, Aschieri, De Renzi, Gino Cancellotti, Mario Marchi, Luigi Vietti).¹⁰³ Garbatella was heralded as a laboratory of cost-efficient, yet also dignified and distinctive, public housing. Beside the low-density single houses of Lot 24 that seemed to reference the original function of the quarter as a garden city, Sabbatini's hostels suggested a very different, high-density and decidedly 'urban' scenario for solving the housing crisis. And yet, taken together, these designs captured the essence of an emerging, increasingly confident and creative 'ICP vision' for a modern, scaleable system of public housing in Rome.

In hindsight of course, 1929 was to be the ephemeral peak and the beginning of the end for the ICP as an autonomous actor in the architectural scene of interwar Rome.¹⁰⁴ Even then, the inclusion of the Albergo Rosso in the first MIAR exhibition had divided critical opinion. The cultural journal *L'Ambrosiano* praised the hostel for its imaginative use spaces and its 'optimal constructive practicality'.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, Belli, a distinguished supporter of avant garde sensibility, referred to Sabbatini's building as 'waste', 'still not purified from architectural residues but ... distinguishing itself in its immense stylistic hodge-podge of the epoch'.¹⁰⁶ But for the majority of contemporary commentators, Sabbatini's Albergo Rosso was of limited interest, eclipsed by the more aggressive rupture with tradition proposed in the designs of other architects featured in the exhibition. By the time that the second, far more controversial Exhibition of Rationalist Architecture opened its gates in 1931, the ICP had been edited out of the heroic narrative of Italian architectural modernism. During the three years between the two MIAR exhibitions, the baton of radical innovation had been claimed by a new generation of architects, some of whom - like Adalberto Libera, De Renzi, Minnucci, and Mario Ridolfi - operated far more confidently on the Roman scene. Sabbatini's work, already seen as *sui generis* and lacking in polemical edge by many advocates of rationalism back in 1928, would have been a very odd and discordant presence inside the rooms of the second MIAR exhibition. As rationalists attempted to claim the abstract legacy of classical Graeco-Roman ar-

¹⁰³ ICP-ATER, Verballi, Session of 6.4.1929 and Allegati, 1929/xviii: 'Concorso per la costruzione di casette-tipo nel Lotto 24 della borgata-giardino Garbatella'; R. Riboldazzi, *Un'altra modernità. L'IFHTP e la cultura urbanistica tra le due guerre, 1923-1939* (Rome, 2009), 109-24; G. Allan, *A Hundred Years at the Global Spearhead. A Century of IFHP 1913-2013* (Copenhagen, 2013), 37-9; Stabile, *Regionalismo a Roma*, 197-201.

¹⁰⁴ Cocchioni et al, *Casa popolare*, 130-5.

¹⁰⁵ Cennamo, *Materiali*, 213.

¹⁰⁶ Cennamo, *Materiali*, 99; C. Belli, *Volto del secolo: la prima cellula dell'architettura razionalista italiana* (Bergamo, 1988), 59.

chitecture as their overarching 'tradition' and dissident modernists like Giuseppe Pagano appropriated the informal vernacular architecture as their weapon of choice against any form of historicism,¹⁰⁷ the kind of 'third way' architecture proposed by Sabbatini quickly fell out of favour in the increasingly polarised debate on architecture during the 1930s. Part-monumental and part-vernacular, part-traditional and part-futural, part-regional and part-universal, part-rational and part-lyrical, and yet stubbornly refusing to be tied down to one choice or the other in a programmatic sense, the production of Innocenzo Sabbatini for the ICP was consigned to the overlooked annals of what many have called, dismissively, 'pre-rationalism'.¹⁰⁸

This kind of narrative is both unfair and unconvincing, however. Eclipsed by the dazzling milestones of 1930s rationalism from Milan, Como, and Turin, the 'Roman road to modernism' has been effectively reduced to an implausible polarity between an allegedly 'lost' 1920s and an explosive - if short-lived - first half of the 1930s. There was no Herculean maverick in the annals of Roman modernist architecture between the wars, no flamboyant enfant terrible.¹⁰⁹ Instead Sabbatini with his ICP team and partners traversed the 1920s guided by their own brand of unostentatious experimentation, producing innovative architecture still critically rooted in tradition and the ambience that had shaped their practice. They dealt in the most progressive simplification of the eclectic vocabulary of previous decades and centuries, to the point that abstraction and recontextualisation themselves became the sources of an anti-historicist revision and the drivers of fascinating renewal.¹¹⁰ Sabbatini's embrace of diverse regional traditions alongside modern inspirations and techniques was critical and intended as a disruptive force. His very understanding of tradition had very little to do with the caricatured architectural *romanità* or the nostalgia of the Fascist ruralists that dominated the polemical debates of the 1930s.¹¹¹ It was far more akin to a dynamic tradition as an active, volatile ingredient of experimentation and innovation. More than two decades later, Ernesto Rogers used his editorial in *Casabella* to praise this very role of tradition in modern architecture as 'the concurrent presence of experiences – the validation of permanent emergent phenomena and the energies of mutations; these two work together to produce new effects that are infinitely ac-

¹⁰⁷ M. Sabatino, 'Back to the Drawing Board? Revisiting the Vernacular Tradition in Italian Modern Architecture', *Rivista del Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio di Vicenza*, 16 (2004), 169-85.

¹⁰⁸ See for example A. Piccolella, 'Case ICP S. Ippolito II', *ArchiDiAP*, 13.10.2014, <http://www.archidiap.com/opera/case-icp-s-ippolito-ii>.

¹⁰⁹ Strappa, *Tradizione*, 78.

¹¹⁰ L. Quaroni, 'Abitare a Roma', in P. Angeletti, L. Ciancarelli, M. Ricci, G. Vallifuoco (eds), *Case Romane: la periferia e le case popolari* (Rome, 1984), 10-3, who makes a direct comparison between Muzio and Sabbatini, noting about the latter that he 'developed a vocabulary that [can be called] 'autochthonous'' (p. 12).

¹¹¹ In general see Kallis, *The Third Rome*, 42-105.

tive'.¹¹² From this critical viewpoint, the 1920s was far from a timid or 'lost' decade, even on the most daunting architectural terrain of Rome. Just as the pioneers of the *Gruppo 7* and MIAR were preparing their assault on historicism and dreamt of a 'new architecture' based on rupture, people like Sabbatini, along with Aschieri, Giuseppe Capponi, Limongelli, and Wittinch actively embraced the challenge of anti-historicist renewal and plotted an exhilarating range of new destinations for a modern 'rooted' architecture through an impressive inventory of executed projects. Thus the inclusion of the Albergo Rosso in the 1928 MIAR exhibition was an acknowledgement of this very alternative future for Roman and Italian interwar architectural modernism, before the subtlety of this vision was drowned by the - often very crude - polarity of the *polemiche* on architecture and urbanism in the 1930s.¹¹³

¹¹² E. Rogers, 'La tradizione dell'architettura moderna italiana', *Casabella-Continuità*, 206 (1955), 2-6; E. Rogers, 'La responsabilità verso la tradizione', *Casabella-Continuità*, 202 (1954), 1-3.

¹¹³ See, in general, L. Patetta, *L'architettura in Italia, 1919-1943. Le polemiche* (Milan, 1972)

NOTE

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