

**UAH!**

Unconventional  
Affordable  
Housing!

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ATLAS

RETHINKING

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RECOMMENDATIONS

**BOOKLET / DESIGN STUDIOS  
SAN DONATO MILANESE**

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*Booklet / Design studios*

- 1. The project's framework*
- 2. The site: San Donato Milanese*
- 3. Stakeholders' perspectives*
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# 1. The project's framework

The profound socio-demographic transformations that have taken place in Europe over the past decades have led to major changes in household composition and what is typically referred to as the family. As a consequence, the ideal equivalence between “family” and “housing typology”, as promoted by the Modern Movement, collapsed highlighting the increasing distance existing between housing demand and housing supply. The above-mentioned transformations have resulted mainly in an increase in the number of households of single people, divorced couples with children, single parents and the elderly, as well as in the spread of the phenomenon of cohabitation among different population groups in search of affordable housing solutions. At the same time, changes in the labour market, namely a significant rise in temporary employment and delocalization, have forced people to organise their lives between more than one dwelling and led to the emergence of new lifestyles, such as couples living apart together in long-distance relationships. In addition, worsening employment and economic conditions have reduced housing affordability, increased precarious and informal housing conditions and set constraints on access to housing, even for middle-income groups and people whose housing demands appear to be increasingly changeable across their life trajectories.

While unconventional\* and affordable housing practices can take many shapes and emerge from a diversity of household situations, the lack of an adequate offer by social and public housing policies reflects the inadequacies, dissatisfaction with or inaccessibility of conventional housing offers. A key hypothesis underlying the research is therefore that unconventional solutions can be strategies to cope with such inadequacies and a lack of affordability, better responding to changing or intensifying demands. The intersection between the two levels, affordability and unconventionality, has yet to be explored in-depth and can provide valuable insights for a reflection on existing housing (design).

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## **1. The project's framework**

**The Research Project of National Relevance “UAH! Unconventional Affordable Housing” – guided by Politecnico di Milano with Università degli Studi di Trieste, Politecnico di Bari and Università di Bari – aims at identifying and analysing existing affordable and unconventional housing solutions, investigating practices, projects and policies - thus, gaining an understanding of the wide range of housing phenomena considered unconventional and affordable in Europe; analyse these housing solutions and evaluate their qualities, innovative features, shortcomings and criticalities; and at developing architectural design experiments & proposals (in each of the research units' geographical contexts) at the intersection of policy and design, in order to explore the feasibility of innovative solutions within a given context.**

**\* By “unconventional” we mean above all:**

- the non-equivalence between the idea(s) of family and the type of housing;**
- the presence - among households - of different (social and cultural) profiles and different age populations.**



## **2. The site: San Donato Milanese**

San Donato Milanese, a municipality with a population of 33.000, is bordering Milan at its southeast. It is well connected to Milan via subway (M2), which has its final stop in San Donato Milanese. The good accessibility, next to other qualities, such as a large presence of green spaces and good access to services, renders the municipality very attractive and livable, however, it at the same time contributes to increasing housing prices and difficulties in accessing housing. The history and development of the city is quite peculiar, closely linked to Enrico Mattei, who founded the Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI) - the National Hydrocarbon Corporation - in 1953, situating its structures and offices in San Donato Milanese, which at the time had a population of less than 3.000 persons (2.667 in 1951). Population numbers grew tenfold within two decades, to around 27.000 in 1971, which was accompanied by the construction of various structures, including offices for thousands of workers as well as housing for employees (both workers and management). Today, as a result of the structural change in economic structures and new modes of working (including increasing remote work), which have been accelerated by the pandemic, ENI - which has meanwhile been partly privatised - is still located in San Donato Milanese, but leaves behind a large-scale architectural heritage that is partially vacant and awaiting transformation and reuse.

One of these locations is situated between Via Cefalonia and Viale De Gasperi and includes the “Terzo” and “Quarto” Palazzo Uffici ENI (the “third” and “fourth” office buildings). These buildings and their surroundings (covering an area of around 12 hectares) have been chosen as the project sites for this research. The buildings are situated around a kilometre from the subway station and in direct vicinity to residential areas and various tertiary facilities (schools, churches, the townhall), as well as green spaces to the south and northeast.

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## **2. The site: San Donato Milanese**

In the Territorial Governance Plan (PGT), the site is designated as an “urban regeneration zone,” with several thematic guidelines outlined for its development. As the current office functions are phased out, the area is planned to be transformed into a mixed-use neighborhood featuring services, (eventually) a museum focussing on the topic of ecology, and different housing options. These include student housing, affordable (‘social’) housing, and market-rate housing.

Additionally, improvements in accessibility and mobility for pedestrians and cyclists have been defined as a priority, along with the creation of a new ‘urban park’ in the southern part of the area.

 Click [here](#) to access the folder with the digital documentation of ths site.



**2. The site: San Donato Milanese**



**2. The site: San  
Donato Milanese**

**Terzo Palazzo Uffici**



**2. The site: San Donato Milanese**

**Quarto Palazzo Uffici**



# 3. Stakeholders' perspectives

A key part of the UAH! project is the consultation of and cooperation with local stakeholders in order to be able to develop proposals that align with concrete needs and are firmly rooted in the local context. To achieve this, a series of encounters has been held between the project team and the city administration, involving multiple departments, city councillors, as well as third-sector actors.

Topics and questions that have emerged during these meetings are summarised as follows:

## ***Housing as a Generational Issue:***

The need for housing solutions concerns various segments of San Donato's population and reflects broader processes of generational and demographic shifts. A challenge - and potential - is the "typological crystallisation" of the existing housing stock, where many large homes are now occupied by only a few individuals. Autoorganization is being practiced, particularly by younger generations, who decide to cohabit in inherited family homes (a phenomenon referred to as "la casa della nonna" - grandmother's house).

Families are struggling to find suitable housing as recent construction efforts have been directed towards affluent residents, leaving many without access to adequate and affordable homes. There is consensus over the fact that housing policies must be integrated with strategies that address demographic transitions, including aging and youth, alongside the development of services that cater to diverse needs. In this context, a critical question that has emerged is: "What kind of city do we want to become? Do we agree to becoming a city primarily for the elderly, or do we want to retain young people and families?"

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### **3. Stakeholders' perspectives**

#### ***Housing as an Affordability Issue***

Housing costs in San Donato Milanese have become almost as high as in Milan, with limited success in attempts to curb the market. The proximity to Milan offers both opportunities and challenges, with negative spillover effects from the larger city. “We are a small city but we face the same problems as Milan”, as has been noted. The rise in short-term rentals, linked to major events in Milan (e.g., “the weeks”) and the hospital hub at San Donato Milanese, has further intensified problems in accessing housing and increases rents and prices. The potential future development of a new stadium and the extension of the subway will likely add on to this and influence the local housing market, raising concerns about additional pressures on affordability.

#### ***The Relationship between Public and Private***

A central issue is how to successfully create a balance between public and private interests, particularly between the public administration and (both small and commercial) landlords. Small landlords often lack sufficient incentives to offer subsidised housing, not only due to financial limitations but also a lack of trust in tenants and public administration. On the commercial side, there is little incentive for large property owners to provide housing at subsidised rates. The challenge lies in the absence of or lack of impact of instruments to encourage big players to contribute to affordable housing options.

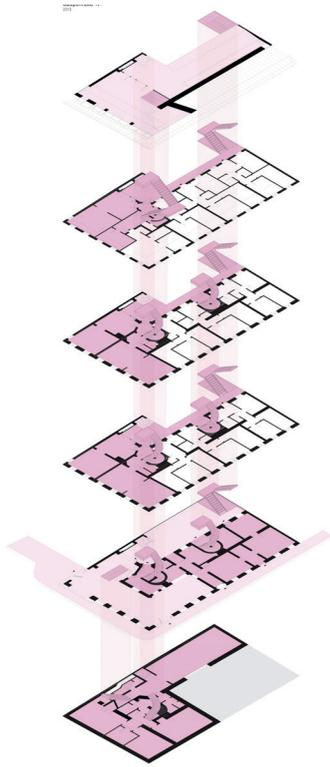
# 4. Design/Unpacking methodology

In building an “Atlas” of case studies, we have identified some filters, relevant in the context of the research, to study and develop the analysis of the projects. We have developed interpretative drawings able to highlight the potential with respect to those specific aspects. The same aspects have become criteria that we consider relevant also for the design research.

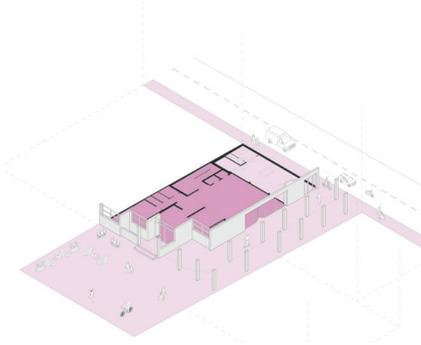
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## 4. Design/Unpacking methodology



VINZIRAST  
Gaupenraub +/-  
Vienna (AT)  
2013



LA BORDA  
LaCol Coop.  
Barcelona (ES)  
2018

### A. SYSTEMS OF RELATIONSHIPS

We want to emphasise how distribution spaces are relational spaces - also and above all on the ground floor in the relationship with the city - highlighting:

- the relationship between public and private: porosity of the façades and continuity with the street;
- the articulation of paths from public to collective, to shared, to private
- the continuity of distribution spaces as relational spaces
- form, quantity and location of public and collective spaces
- formal devices that allow the public and collective character of distribution spaces.

**Research hypothesis: distribution spaces are not only functional for the connection between parts, but also for the reception of a collective and public dimension; extending them in an integrated way to spaces of public and collective use allows to enlarge their dimensions and spatial qualities.**

DRAWINGS:

1. 'axonometric exploded view' highlighting vertical distribution bands, public and collective spaces.
2. zoom in on the ground floor plan, highlighting any continuity between street space and internal ground floor space and relationship with the context.

## 4. Design/Unpacking methodology

### B. LEVELS OF PRIVACY

We want to highlight the distribution and quantities of public, collective, shared and private spaces with the following definitions:

**PRIVATE SPACE FOR EXCLUSIVE USE** / intimate-exclusive space where no one has access except the inhabitant

**PRIVATE SPACE FOR SOCIAL USE** / private, but also used to host guests, to work, ...

**SHARED SPACE** / accessible to all people living in a 'cluster'.

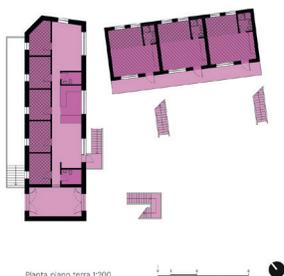
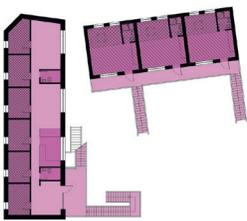
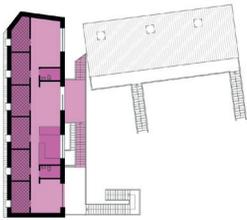
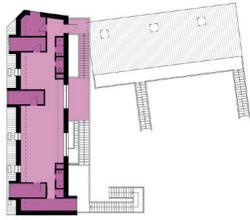
**COLLECTIVE SPACE** / accessible to all the people living in the building

**PUBLIC SPACE** / accessible to all

**Research hypothesis:** in Unconventional Housing, private space requires a double level. The individual units need to accommodate also a social dimension.

DRAWINGS:

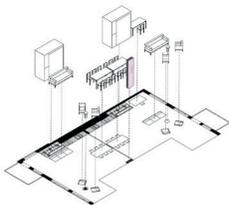
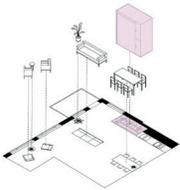
Floor plans of the ground floor and significant floors showing the different types of use of the space: from the most private (darkest) to the most public (lightest)



SVARTLAMOEN  
Bkark Architects  
Trondheim (NO)  
2003-2005



## 4. Design/Unpacking methodology



OBOS LIVING LAB  
LPO arkitekter & others,  
Oslo (NO)  
2021

### C. WAYS OF USE/TRANSFORMABILITY / ADAPTABILITY / UNCONVENTIONALITY

We look at the architectural devices functional to our research focus. We identify three different levels of interpretation of space:

- Ways of use by people
- Furniture or other spatial devices
- Architecture (walls)

Each of them corresponds to a level of representation.

**Research hypothesis: the shape of the space in relation to the furnishings allows different uses to be modified and stimulated.**

DRAWINGS: Axonometric visualisations and related floor plans of the relevant spaces in relation to the research focuses

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# 5. References

UAH! collects references, projects, readings, exhibitions in order to frame the broad background of the research topic. Here is a selection that we consider relevant to approach the topic. Some of these are the product of the Polimi research group.

 Click on the title to access the pdf (if available) or the research's website.

## > READINGS AND RESEARCHES

Briata P., Postiglione G., Wolfgring C. (2022): *From Unconventional Households to Unconventional Affordable Housing*. Re-Dwell Conference: Housing Co-creation for tomorrow's cities, Université Grenoble Alpes, 8-9 Dec 2022. 

Bricocoli M., Postiglione G., Sabatinelli S. (2019): *Re.Co.De. Reloading Contemporary Dwelling. The Revolution of Housing is Indoor / Zeitgenössisches Wohnen im Bestand. Die Revolution des Wohnens vollzieht sich im Inneren*. Politecnico di Milano. 

Czischke D., Peute M., Brysch S. (2023), *Together: Towards Collaborative Living*, nai010 publishers. 

a+t (2022-2024) *Generosity: Housing design strategies series*. a+t 56, 57, 58, 59.

Bond Society (2018), *HOMY. Coliving. Cohabiter*, avec le Pavillon de l'Arsenal et la Ville de Paris. 

Canadaian Center for Architecture - Borasi G. (2021), *Catching up with Life*. 

STAR Strategies + Architecture (2015-ongoing), *L'Intérieur de la Métropole*. 

## 5. References

### > PROJECTS AND PRACTICES

#### **Obos Living Lab**

Oslo/NO

#### **Svartlamoen**

Trondheim/NO

#### **Vinzirast Mittendrin**

Wien/AT

#### **La Borda**

Barcelona/ES

#### **Mehr als Wohnen**

Zurich/CH

#### **San Riemo**

München/D

#### **Coop Housing River Spreefeld**

Berlin/D

#### **Kraftwerk1 Zwicky**

Dübendorf/CH

#### **R50 cohousing**

Berlin/D

#### **Residence Jeanne**

#### **Leclerc Machu Picchu**

Lille/FR

#### **SCHLOR - Schöner Leben ohne Rendite**

Wien/AT

#### **dieHauswirtschaft**

Wien/AT

#### **Bajesdorp**

Amsterdam/NL

#### **Färdknäppen Kollektivhus**

Stockholm/SE

#### **Sällbo**

Helsingborg/SE

#### **Gemeinschaftlich Wohnen im Alter im Zollhaus**

Zurich/CH

#### **Tetterode**

Amsterdam/NL

#### **Hallenwohnen**

Zurich/CH

#### **Bellevue**

München/D

#### **La Cigue**

Geneve/CH

#### **Vivalia**

Sweden

#### **Y-Säätiö**

Finland

**UNCONVENTIONAL  
AFFORDABLE  
HOUSING** explores the  
new possibilities of  
contemporary living  
at the intersection  
of affordability and  
unconventionality,  
starting from a  
reflection on existing  
housing projects,  
practices and policies.

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