Heiner Stengel and Sophie Wolfrum (Technische Universität München), four questions starting from the project for the 'vele' of Scampia
Interview by Marica Castigliano

Q1. *About the demolition and reconstruction*
The radical solution of the demolition of the 'vele' (sails) of Scampia, with the reclamation of a residual 'vela' destined for public functions, raises more general issues regarding the reclamation of public suburbs in critical conditions. Can this be considered an acceptable and generalizable solution?

No, surely not.

Scampia is a very peculiar but simultaneously typical case of a very complex set of overlapping factors. But architecture is never solely responsible for the failure of municipal politics. Therefore demolition would constitute a treatment of the symptom and not the cause. The *vele* are an exemplar of the debates around the destinies of architectural megastructures in the contemporary European city and thus at the core of the global discussion about other large-scale housing projects from the same era – the megastructuralism that produced highly renowned complexes, such as the Smithsons' *Robin Hood Gardens* in London, currently undergoing a comparable process.

In the Scampia area the present absence of public institutions and everyday amenities in the *vele* is without question one of the major contemporary problems. The monofunctionality of the single buildings within the area would only be marginally improved by demolition and subsequent transformation of the last remaining *vela*. We fundamentally agree with the implementation of a central institution for the metropolitan area in Scampia, possibly in one of the existing *vele* – but this does not per se justify the demolition of the others.

Preserving the iconic architecture of the *vele* would contribute to a much needed upgrade of the Scampia suburb. We argue for a city of radical mixture both in terms of functional and social considerations. In this respect, the ensemble of the *vele* would offer a fertile field for experimention.

Q2. *About the Scampia case*
Nowadays, Scampia has become -in negative and positive- an important symbol of the city, as paradoxically appears in the film "Ammore and Malavita" by the Manetti brothers. Taking into account its powerful symbolic role, could other less traumatic and more conservative solutions be adopted?

The *vele* are visually imposing sculptural architecture in their own right. Architectural history teaches us that emblematic significance is not independent of its social context. Consequently, the distinct character of the *vele* can be re-encoded in enlightened measures of careful urban renewal (*Behutsame Stadtsanierung*). The case of IBA Berlin in the 1980s (International Building Exhibition), developed positive examples of such measures.
The fragmented ensemble of the four remaining *vele* deserves to be recognized as a valuable part of the urban heritage.
Heritage protected architectural megastructures - the commons in Naples ("beni comuni") - like *Real Albergo dei Poveri* or [*Scugnizzo Liberato*](#) have the capacity to constantly reinvent themselves and to adapt to current demands. Despite the difficulties involved in such measures, the collective purpose is indispensable in achieving an understanding of these megastructures as part of the collective memory.

Q3. *Potentiality of the architecture*
Architects and planners often take the stand for the social responsibilities of their work. But in a less deterministic perspective of design projects and their effects, how much can architecture really contribute to the objective of social security and livability in particularly difficult contexts?

Even if in the case of the *vele* social frictions are a salient and unavoidable reality, the case simultaneously explicitly shows how the actual realization of architectural projects is directly connected to social outcomes: the public amenities envisioned in the original design project were never fully implemented. Essential repairs were never carried out (Broken Window Syndrome). The responsible authorities simply did not care. The neglect of the architectural object was synonymous with the disregard for its inhabitants. Simply replacing the *vele* with new conventional architecture will be entirely ineffectual if treated with the same degree of disregard.

Q4. *Urban regeneration policies*
The sustainable regeneration of housing complexes in which the control of legality has escaped in an apparently irremediable way can be delegated to the local convergence of social policies, personal, building and environmental safety, mobility, public works and collective services, with the invention of new participatory management models able to favor individual mobilization and positive management of inter-individual conflicts? Or is it a question to be addressed especially with social and security policies promoted and managed in partnership with the center, not being able to realistically rely on local individual availability?
In short, can it become a theme of an integrated urban project or is it a question to be mostly tackled with easily influenced social and public security policies?

We as architects and urban planners believe in integrated strategies. Problematic suburbs always require a raft of interlocked measures: refurbishment of buildings, maintenance of public spaces,

education and social welfare and above all work and income as well as the involvement of its inhabitants. The *vele* are such desirable pieces of urban architecture that refurbishment alone would very likely lead to the displacement of its current inhabitants.

The *vele* can, both in terms of location as well as the iconic quality of its architecture, become a positively gentrified urban location in the future, and at the same time accelerate reevaluation processes in Scampia. However, any urban regeneration must include a strong sociopolitical component. To avoid potentially rampant and socially-excluding gentrification, the municipality acknowledges its obligation at least to protect the rights of its legally entitled inhabitants. The issue of those not legally entitled to be there remains an open question.

The plan to locate a central administrative facility of the metropolitan region of Naples in the area will surely be of benefit to the renewal process; the urban and architectural uniqueness of the *vele* could greatly enhance this process. Here, in the Scampia, it is not simply a question of the lack of public facilities; rather, the existing architectural and urban heritage stands in urgent need of appreciation and preservation. To continue building on the *vele* would make a valuable contribution to this process if only urban planners have the vision to see this and eschew the temptation to demolish them merely in order to take advantage of funding structures. The *vele* belong both to the architectural heritage and the collective memory of Naples, and are worth the ongoing effort involved in their reevaluation and rehabilitation.