

Minimum Documentation Fiche

composed by national/regional working party of: Docomomo, Italy

0.1 Picture of building



Depicted item: General view of the neighbourhood

source: Gregotti Associated Archive

date:

1 Identity of building

1.1 current name of building	ZEN 2
1.2 variant or former name	Northern Zone Expansion
1.3 number & name of street	via P.V.46
1.4 town	Palermo
1.5 province/state	Sicily
1.6 zip code	90146
1.7 country	Italy
1.8 national grid reference	38°10'53N 13°19'8E
1.9 classification/typology	Neighbourhood
1.10 protection status & date	None

2 History of building

2.1 original brief/purpose	Neighbourhood
2.2 dates: commission/completion	1969/1973
2.3 architectural and other designers	Vittorio Gregotti, Franco Amoroso, Salvatore Bisogni, Hiromichi Matsui, Franco Purini
2.4 others associated with building	Spartaco Azzola, Graziella Clerici, Raffaello Cecchi, Giambruno Ruggeri, Federico Lazzaro
2.5 significant alterations with dates	Alterations during and after execution
2.6 current use	Neighbourhood
2.7 current condition	poor

3 Description

3.1 General description

The project for the ZEN 2 is the winner of a national competition advertised in 1969 by the Palermo IACP (Institute of Autonomous Popular Houses) with the purpose to integrate a first nucleus of dwellings – ZEN 1 – designed by engineers Salvatore Biondo and Mario Inzerillo. The project should have integrated, with the construction of 20.000 new dwellings and attached facilities, the creation of a larger residential neighbourhood in the Northern zone of Palermo. The planimetric layout proposed by the winning group is structured by an orthogonal grid on which full and void find place in a rigorous volumetric composition, that consists of eighteen insulae lengthwise oriented on North-South axis and disposed on three parallel arrays. In the same orthogonal direction take place the main crossing fluxes corresponding to the three facilities strips which were never built, but should have flanked the two external insulae and marked the central axis. These should have contained sports facilities, school buildings (preschool, primary and secondary school), small productive activities and common service facilities, around an elevated big square.

3.2 Construction

The insula is the typological constitutive unit of the whole neighbourhood; each one, with different lengths but equal widths, is composed by four parallel multi-storey buildings of four floors decreasingly recessing to the top with the extremities towering with other three levels. In 1976 the city council entrusts the construction to the IACP. The designers are assigned to collaborate only for the executive project of a prototype-insula without any other responsibility on the construction and, after the elaboration of two new versions, they are finally expelled from the project. The realization of the ZEN 2 therefore proceeds without the designers' direction, slowly and through many alterations. The neighbourhood has never been completed, and above all none of the facilities has been realized, to this day, depriving the project of an essential part of it.

3.3 Context

The neighbourhood occupies a very big area in the northern zone of Palermo, in a beautiful landscape context, characterized by the presence of historical villas and gardens between the mountains and the sea. The ZEN urban settlement represents an unique scenery for its dimension and shape in a territorial scale.

In the end of 60's it represented a border position for the urban expansion, a new centrality out of the historic centre but placed on the ideal continuation of the Seventeenth century axis of Maqueda street. With the later urban sprawl the neighbourhood, born in a rural and unbuilt context, is now totally surrounded by different buildings types.

4 Evaluation

4.1 Technical

As we can read from the technical relation of the winner group, the project, on the basis of the European neighbourhood experiences, contemplated all the technical features connected with the housing needs (heating, water and sanitary, electrical). The executive process however, with the designers' expulsion and the following alterations, failed all the original project's values, to the point that the IACP Technical Director presented his resignation. Any technical evaluation depended only on the IACP construction management, accountable for the poor quality of materials, works, and final result.

4.2 Social

The project faces one of the most important theme of the '900 – neighbourhood - with a strong ideological identity combining the main features of the *Siedlung* with the traditional characteristics of Sicilian rural settlements. The attention is focused on the collective spaces conceived as open areas in service of the residents. Every insula includes two longs pedestrian courtyards between the blocks, raised one meter over to the street level with different green and play areas, in continuity with the ground floor public functions (playroom, shops, small productive activities) creating a permeability condition that recalls the traditional sicilian historic centres.

All the social intents and values of the project never came to light because of the progressive illegal squatting of the buildings and the very difficult management of economic and social relationship marked by a heavy mafia atmosphere. The complete lack of facilities, furthermore, aggravated the social conditions of the neighbourhood increasing its cultural, physical and social distance from the rest of the city.

4.3 Cultural & aesthetic

It is difficult to express an univocal aesthetic value for this opera because of the massive discrepancy between the project and its realization. The failing result of the realization, with the consequent negative connotation of the whole neighbourhood, has been wrongly considered, in the public opinion, as an unavoidable consequence of the project and therefore imputable to the designers' choices. The project for the ZEN 2 on the contrary, unlike many other European examples, is based on local specificities' interpretation and express its cultural and aesthetic values in its urban design, at a large scale as much as at a small scale.

4.4 Historical

The importance and the influence of the ZEN 2 were very relevant in the European debate of those years and this project by Gregotti and his team immediately became a case-study in the investigation concerning the concept of neighbourhood, up until now. In spite of the disastrous sequence of events, and the worsening conditions of the neighbourhood until today, the project reveals its resistance and its ability to adapt and to be transformed preserving some of its principles, qualities and historical values.

4.5 General assessment

The incapable city administration for the absurd project development turned the realization of the ZEN 2 into one of the most unsuccessful architecture episode of the late twentieth century. The degrading image of the neighbourhood, its poor condition together with the disastrous social consequences, all these reasons imply, for this opera's future, the application of a specific and daring restoration intervention able to understand and reinterpret the original intents and values of the project.

5 Documentation

5.1 Principal references

Concorso per il quartiere Zen a Palermo località Cardillo, in «Controspazio», n. 3, marzo 1971, pp. 12-19.

Palermo: finisce nel nulla? In forse la realizzazione dello ZEN, in «Casabella», n. 364, aprile 1972, pp. 8-9

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SCIASCIA, A., *Tra le modernità dell'architettura, la questione del quartiere Zen 2 di Palermo*, Palermo; L'Epos; 2003

5.2 visual material attached

- fig. 1 General view of the neighbourhood (Gregotti Associated Archive, photo Giuseppe Magazzù)
- fig. 2 Overhead view of the model (Gregotti Associated Archive, photo Aldo Ballo)
- fig. 3 Prospective of the neighbourhood from Mount Pellegrino (Gregotti Associated Archive)
- fig. 4 Prospective views (Gregotti Associated Archive)
- fig. 5 General view of the neighbourhood (Gregotti Associated Archive, photo Giuseppe Magazzù)
- fig. 6 Axonometric view of the insula (Gregotti Associated Archive)
- fig. 7 Current view of the neighbourhood (photo Matteo Iannello, 2008)
- fig. 8 Current view of the pedestrian courtyard raised from the street (photo Matteo Iannello, 2008)
- fig. 9 The pedestrian courtyard inside the insula (photo Matteo Iannello, 2008)
- fig. 10 Public spaces between the insula (photo Matteo Iannello, 2008)
- fig. 11 Public spaces with the residential accesses (photo Matteo Iannello, 2008)

5.3 Rapporteur/date

Glenda Scolaro, February 2015

6 Fiche report examination by ISC/R

name of examining ISC member:

date of examination:

approval:

working party/ref. n°: NAI ref. n°:

comments:

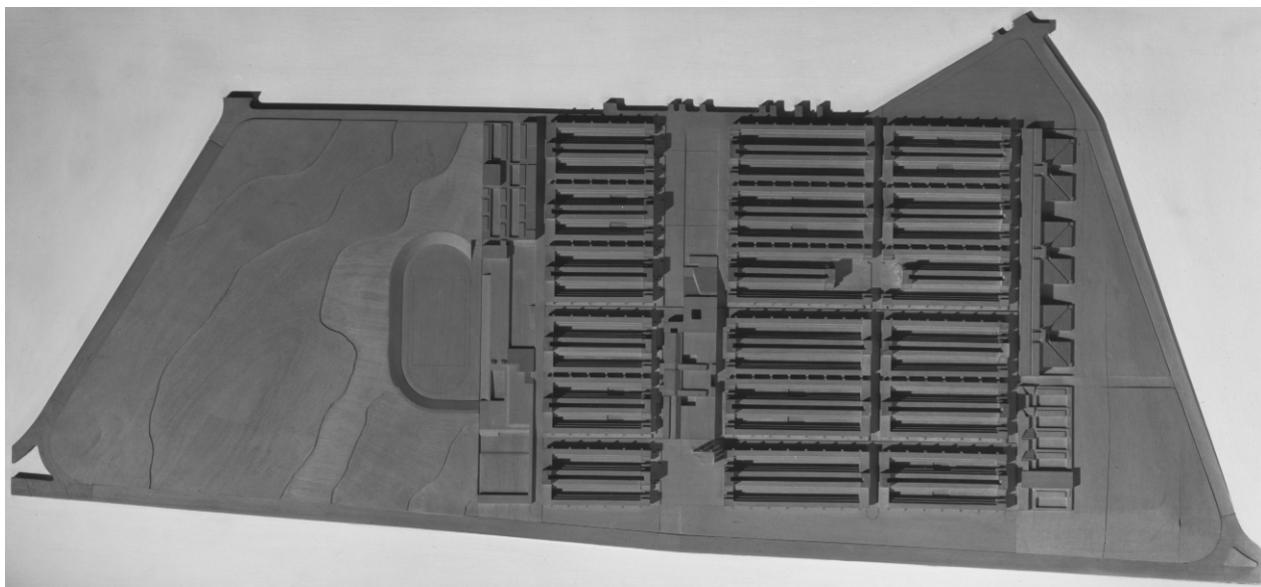


Fig. 2 Overhead view of the model

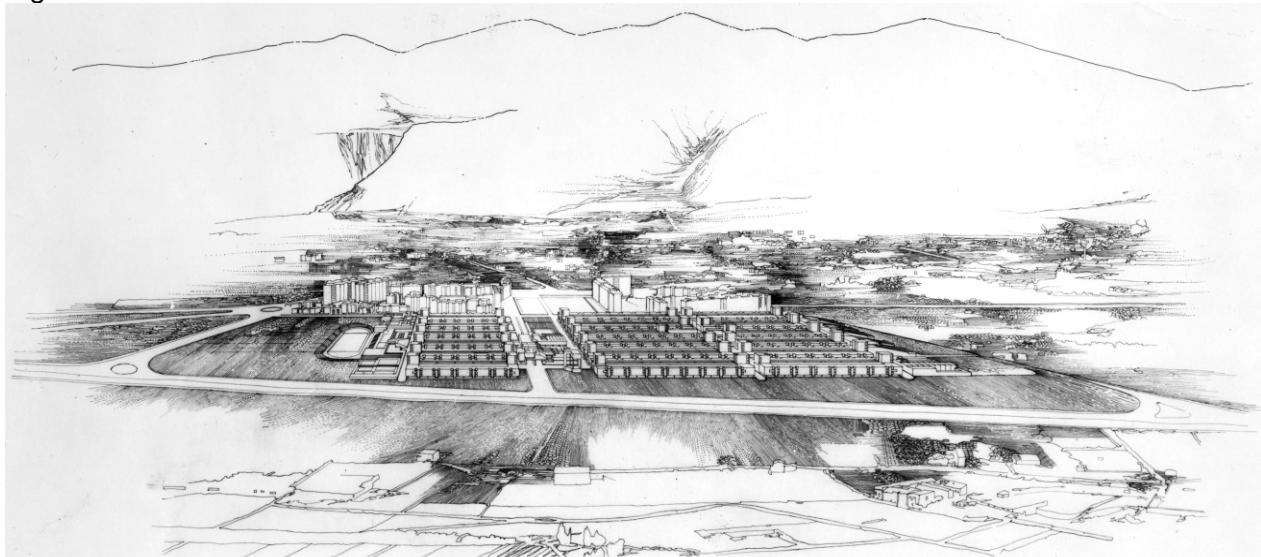


Fig. 3 Prospective view of the neighbourhood from Mount Pellegrino

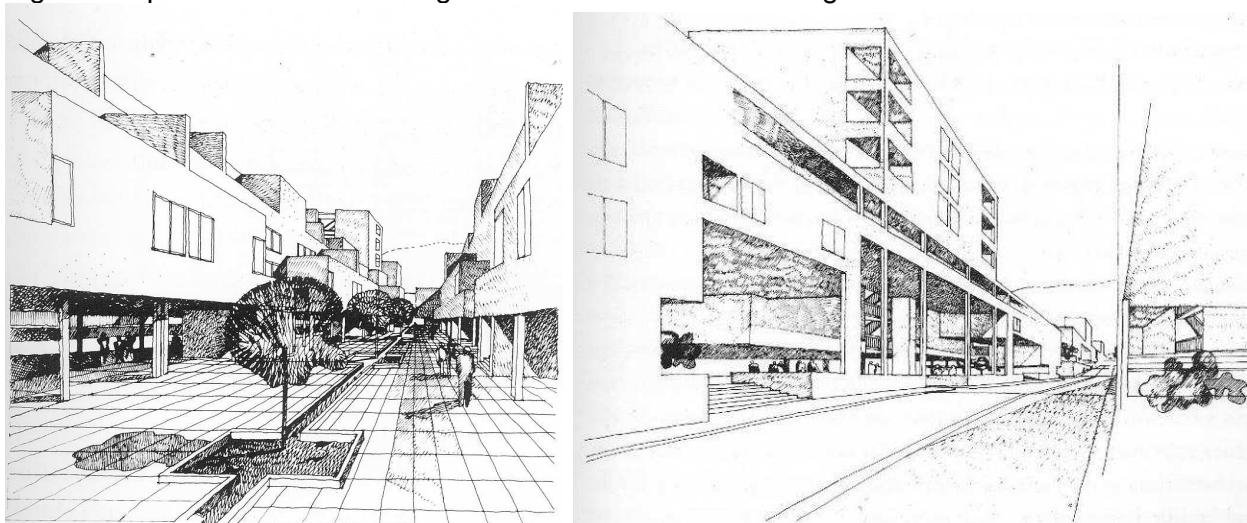


Fig. 4 Prospective views of pedestrian courtyard inside each insula and orthogonal street between two parallel blocks of insula



Fig. 5 General view of the neighbourhood

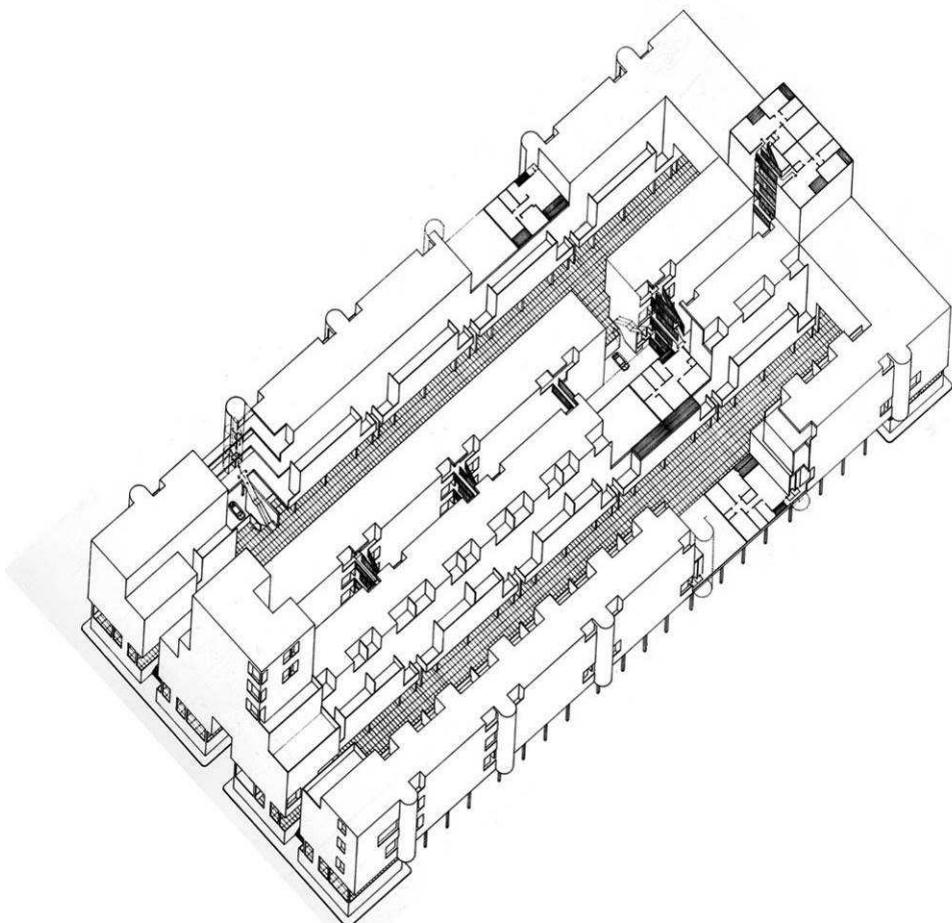


Fig. 6 Axonometric view of the insula



Fig. 7 Current view of the neighbourhood

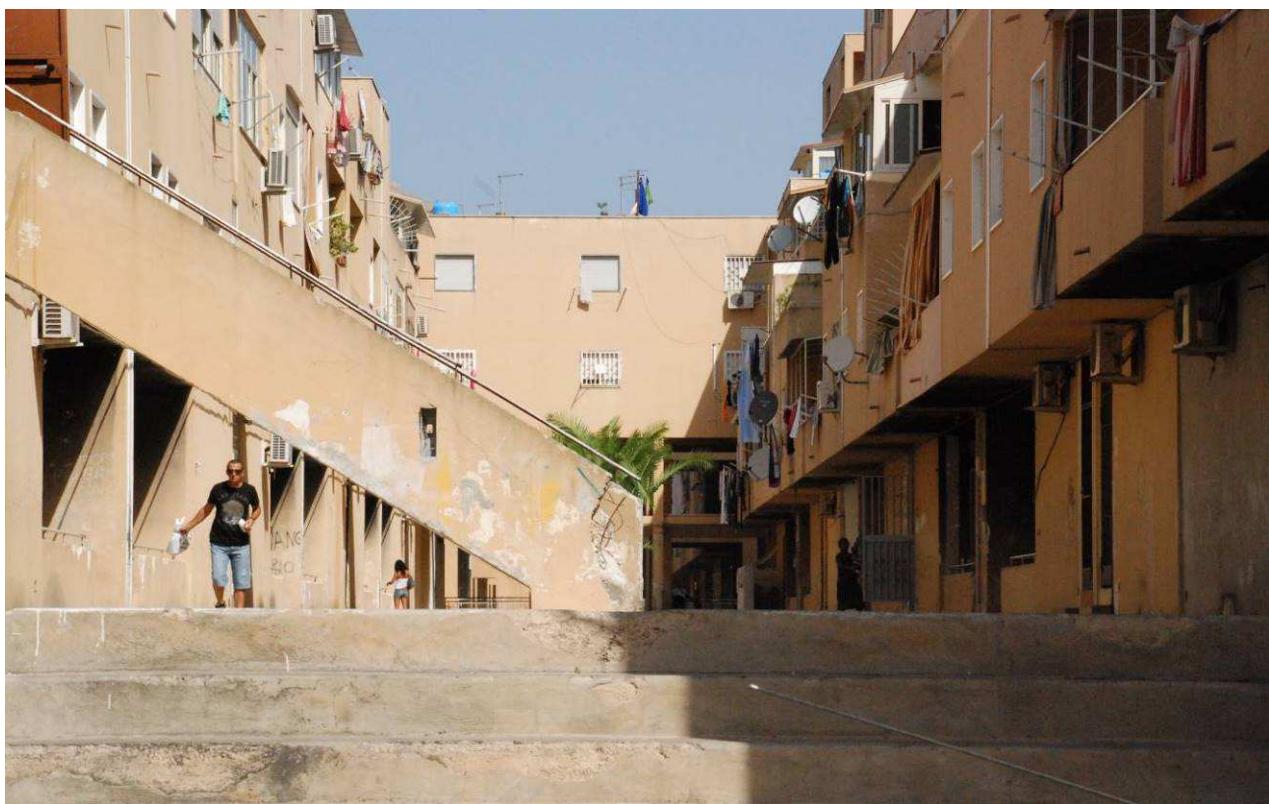


Fig. 8 Current view of the pedestrian courtyard raised from the street



Fig. 9 The pedestrian courtyard inside the insula



Fig. 10 Public spaces between the insula



Fig. 11 Public spaces with the residential accesses