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# Multiannual Public Intervention Programs for Student Housing and Urban Regeneration

PEER REVIEWED

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## 1. Multi-annual Funding Plans for University Residences.

Since June 1999, when 29 European ministers of education signed the 'Bologna Declaration', which aimed to achieve a European higher education area, student mobility within the EU member states has increased significantly.

This mobility, coupled with the growing number of university enrolments, has led to a considerable increase in the demand for accommodation since the end of the 20th century. With the aim of meeting this demand with an adequate supply of housing, many countries have undertaken policies aimed at building university residences, through programs involving public and private actors. Of particular interest, also for a comparison with the Italian reality, are the French, German and Irish experiences. The first one through the Centre National des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires (CNOUS) and the Centres Régionaux des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires (CROUS), which implement funding programs for the creation of new university student accommodation places also through the renovation of the existing building stock, the second through the Deutsches StudentenWerk (DSW), a non-profit state agency, financed by the Lander and private individuals, which deals with the construction and management of student housing<sup>1</sup>. Of great interest in recent years is also the program implemented in Ireland, where the increase in university enrolment has forced the state Housing Finance Agency (HFA) to finance Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to build Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA), residences mainly for students without financial means. (CEB)<sup>2</sup>.

The recent Next Generation Europe program, for example, with Mission

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<sup>1</sup> Germany Visa 2021. Student Accommodation and Housing in Germany.

<https://www.germany-visa.org/student-accommodation-housing/>

<sup>2</sup> CEB, 2021. CEB to support construction of student housing in Ireland with a € 75 million loan. Available at: <https://coebank.org/en/news-and-publications/news/ceb-to-support-construction-of-student-housing-in-ireland-with-a-75-million-loan/>

4, Component 1, Reform 1.7 of the NRP - Student Housing and Reform of Student Housing Legislation, envisages an investment for Italy of no less than 960 million euro with the aim of tripling the current supply of university student housing (amounting to about 38,000 units) and making more than 100,000 accommodation places available by 2026. In Italy, it is since the beginning of the century, with the enactment of law 338/2000, that structured policies for the construction of accommodation and residences for university students have been put in place: the legislative provision constitutes a first example of an organic multi-year programme aimed at a specific type of user that provides state funding for measures to increase the number of accommodation places also for doctoral students, researchers, visiting professors, etc. The law has practical implications because it has allowed for an increase in the number of housing places available [Figure 1], cultural implications because it has sanctioned the transition from dormitory to incubator residence<sup>3</sup>, and socioeconomic implications because it has triggered a virtuous process by contributing to the redevelopment of disused buildings and the urban and social regeneration of degraded areas<sup>4</sup>.

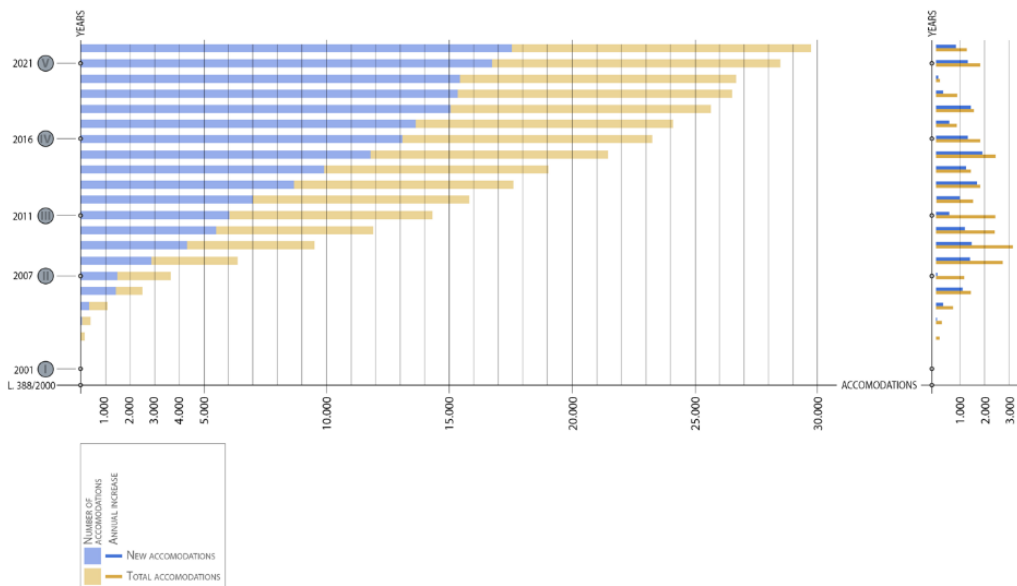


Figure 1| Accommodation places financed with L. 338. Situation in December 2022.

Credits: Andrea Sichi.

In addition to the definition of specific quali-quantitative standards, the law makes explicit reference to extremely topical issues, such as environmental compatibility, integration with the city and services, the

<sup>3</sup> Claudio Piferi, *La qualità dell'abitare a servizio del diritto allo studio* (Trento: Edizioni Opera Universitaria, 2021), 7-25.

<sup>4</sup> Adolfo F.L. Baratta, "La legge n. 338/2000 come strumento di recupero del patrimonio e rigenerazione delle periferie", *Vivere e abitare l'Università* (Milano: Politecnica, 2020), 47-54.

coexistence of individuality and sociality, and the integration of information and multimedia technologies<sup>5</sup>.

Specific Executive Decrees have the task of describing the technical and economic parameters to be met to obtain the state contribution and of defining the procedures and methods for the submission of projects and the payment of funding.

To date, five calls for proposals have been published, the latest of which<sup>6</sup> is currently in progress [Figure 2].

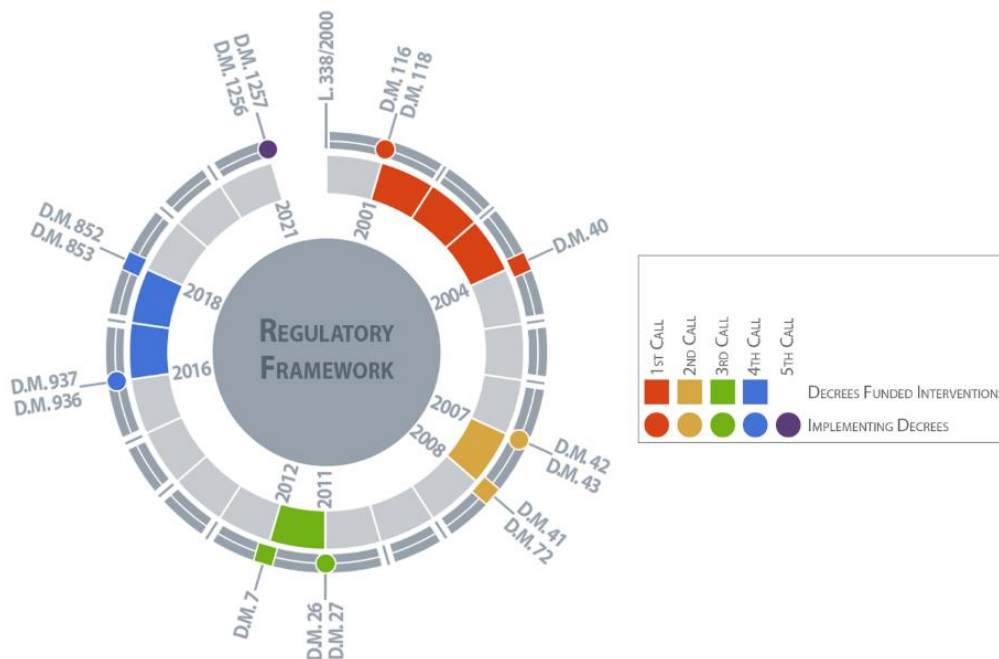


Figure 2| The regulatory framework.  
Credits: Andrea Sichi.

The procedures of the previous four calls<sup>7</sup> were very similar: from the publication of the Executives Decrees, subjects interested in funding had a defined time frame in which to submit a final or executive level project. At the end of the deadline, a specially Commission<sup>8</sup>, composed of 7 members appointed by the Ministry of University and Research and 7 by the State-Regions Conference, assessed the proposals submitted and submitted the ranking list to the Minister: this ranking list was included in the Three-Year Plans<sup>9</sup> that allocate the available economic resources

<sup>5</sup> Romano Del Nord, "L'innovazione di processo come strumento per promuovere la qualità delle opera", *Il processo attuativo del piano nazionale di interventi per la realizzazione di residenze universitarie*, (Firenze: Edifir, 2014), 19-27.

<sup>6</sup> DD.MM. nos. 1256-1257/2021.

<sup>7</sup> DD.MM. No. 116-118/2001 (I), No. 42-43/2007 (II), No. 26-27/2011 (III), No. 936-937/2016 (IV).

<sup>8</sup> DD.MM. No. 117/2001, No. 27/2005, No. 2/2009, No. 245/2012, No. 504/2015, No. 321/2019, No. 916/2022.

<sup>9</sup> DD.MM. n. 40/2004 (I), nn. 41-72/2008 (II), n. 246/2012 (III), nn. 852-853/2019 (IV).

between interventions admitted with the availability of funds, admitted but awaiting the necessary resources, and excluded.

From the publication of the Plans, the beneficiaries were given a defined time to submit any supplementary documentation (e.g. building permits and the executive project).

After examining the supplementary documentation, the Commission decided either to approve the signing of the agreement with the MUR, or to revoke the co-financing: from the notification of the registration of the agreement, which defines the duties of both parties, the deadlines for starting the work begin.

As for the financial aspects, each call provided for a total amount divided by year<sup>10</sup> and a maximum funding equal to 50% of the total cost of the intervention, which may include the value of the building, the cost of the works and part of the furnishings.

## **2. The Numbers of Law No. 338/2000.**

The research activity, carried out by the TESIS Inter-university Centre of the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence for more than 15 years through the preparation of special agreements with the MUR and Cassa Depositi e Prestiti S.p.A. (CDP), and focused on the collection, analysis, systematization and processing of data and information that are remarkable for their quantity, quality and originality, has made it possible, through the development of specific operational tools, to assess the efficiency of the standard.

The combination of operational research activities and the study of the process and its evolution makes it possible to compare the quality expected from the Program with that achieved.

Specifically, about 650 projects (over 150 of them concerning the fifth call of the law) were investigated, more than 200 economic frameworks were monitored and verified, 2,800 work progress reports, 380 variants and around 200 inspections were carried out.

The four calls for tenders saw the submission of 487 applications for a funding request of more than 1,890 million, and the standardization and construction of 60,000 housing places (35,000 from scratch). The applications were distributed throughout the country: 247 in the north, 144 in the center and 96 in the south.

A total of 395 projects were admitted into the three-year plans for a co-financing request of more than 1,300 million and 48,000 accommodation places concerned.

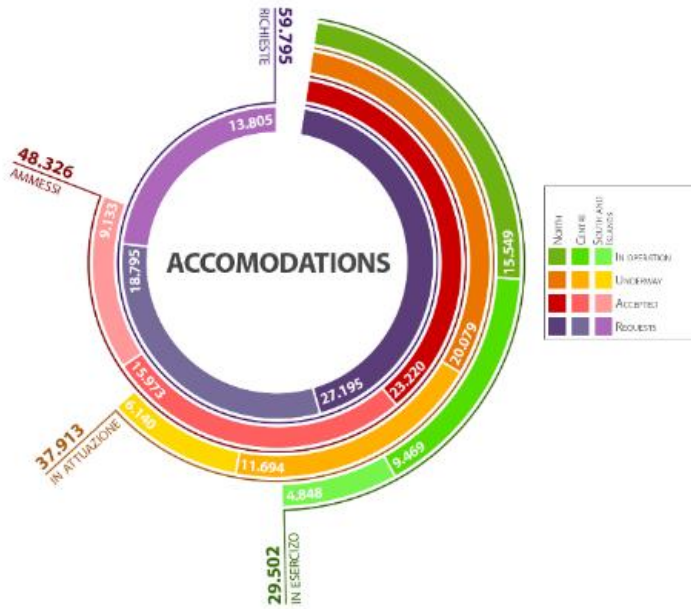
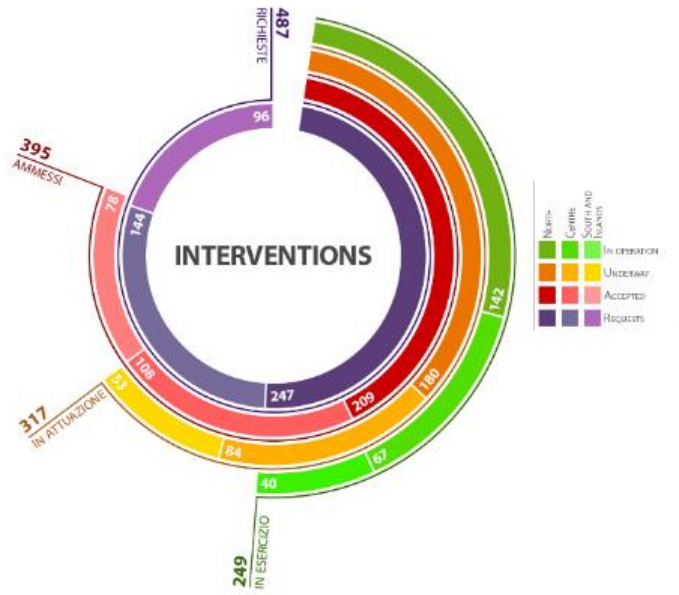
After exclusions and renuncements, there are 317 implemented interventions with co-financing of just under EUR 1,000 million and more than 38,000 accommodation places (about 24,000 ex-novo).

There are currently 249 university residences in operation (142 in the north, 67 in the center, 40 in the south), with a total of almost 30,000

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<sup>10</sup> 2002-2004 (I), 2006-2009 (II), 2011-2013 (III), 2016-2018 (IV), 2022-2024 (V).

accommodation places (more than 17,000 ex-novo) and a co-financing provided by the state of almost 700 million [Figure 3]. All the interventions financed by the first call (114) are in operation, while for the second there are 82 residences in operation and 2 missing interventions are expected to be completed in 2023.



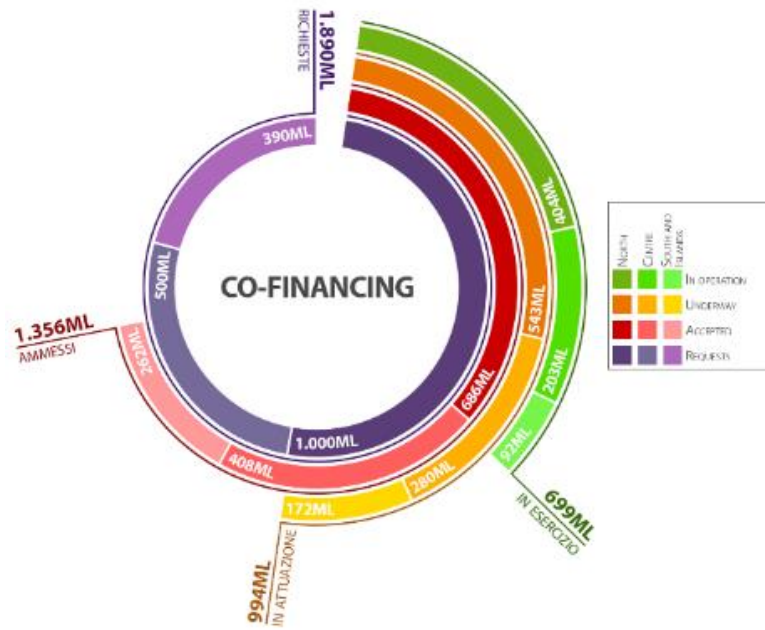


Figure 3| Requests, admitted interventions, in progress and in use, by geographical area. Situation in December 2022. Credits: Andrea Sichi.

For the third, 65 per cent of the planned interventions have been completed, while for the fourth, the number of residences in operation is over 30 per cent, with some interventions that have yet to submit supplementary documentation, others that have yet to conclude the agreement, with the ministry (20 per cent) [Figure 4].

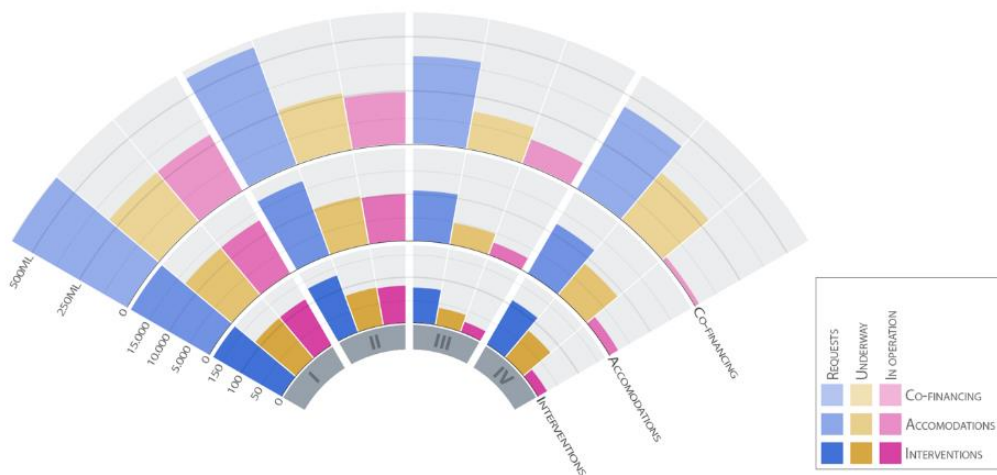


Figure 4| Requests, interventions in progress and in operation by call for applications. Situation in December 2022. Credits: Andrea Sichi.

### 3. Analysis and Structuring of Data Acquired during Research Activities.

In addition to the social and cultural implications already mentioned, it is worth emphasizing other consequences related to the structuring of the norm.

One of the positive aspects of the law is that the implementation of the program does not stop with the granting of the funding, but continues through the monitoring of the construction phases, from the publication of the call for tenders to the commissioning and is completed with the disbursement of the state funding following, the control of the actual expenditure incurred and any variants.

The state financing is therefore configured as a reimbursement, constituting a further guarantee of the use of public resources for the intended purposes, avoiding complications for the repayment of unused amounts, with considerable savings in economic and time terms: moreover, the disbursement of the financing in conjunction with the transmission of the work progress reports allows the subjects to quickly dispose of the money advanced.

The structuring of the program meant that the interventions did not suffer any slowdowns or drastic interruptions, guaranteeing that construction companies could work even during periods of severe crisis in the construction sector.

Finally, by means of the principle of sliding from one Plan to another of the unspent funds deriving from the tender rebates (about 160 million in total), and the allocation of a reserved annual fund, as provided for in paragraph 18, Art. 144 of Law 388/00, it was possible to guarantee the continuity of the procedure and the procurement of the necessary resources also for the interventions admitted with reserve.

### 4. Urban Regeneration.

Aware that new constructions imply a considerable use of energy, that Italian cities are characterized by the presence of abandoned buildings (it is estimated that there are over 10 million empty residential properties)<sup>11</sup>, and that the system of Universities spread throughout the territory, typical of the Italian reality, is mainly structured in the historical city centers<sup>12</sup>, the legislator, in art. 1, of 338, specifies that the law was created to allow the State to contribute to the realization of interventions necessary for [...] the extraordinary maintenance, recovery and renovation of already existing buildings, used or to be used as

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<sup>11</sup> Vincenzo Giofrè, "Riciclare l'urbano. Strategie rigenerative per la città orizzontale", *Technè*, 17 (2019): 167.

<sup>12</sup> Roberto Bologna, "Il progetto della residenza per studenti universitari", *Il processo attuativo del piano nazionale di interventi per la realizzazione di residenze universitarie*, (Firenze: Edifir, 2014), 122-123.



accommodation or residences for university students, as well as interventions of new construction and purchase of areas and buildings to be used for the same purpose: the priority, therefore, appears to be that of recovering, for this purpose, the existing building heritage, as opposed to interventions of new construction.

This has allowed not only the recovery of disused buildings but, in many cases, also the urban and social regeneration of depressed and degraded areas<sup>13</sup>.

The recovery of the existing building stock is, in fact, further incentivized by the possibility, offered by the law, to contribute the value of the building as part of the co-financing amount and consequently obtain state funding equal to the total amount of the works [Figure 5].

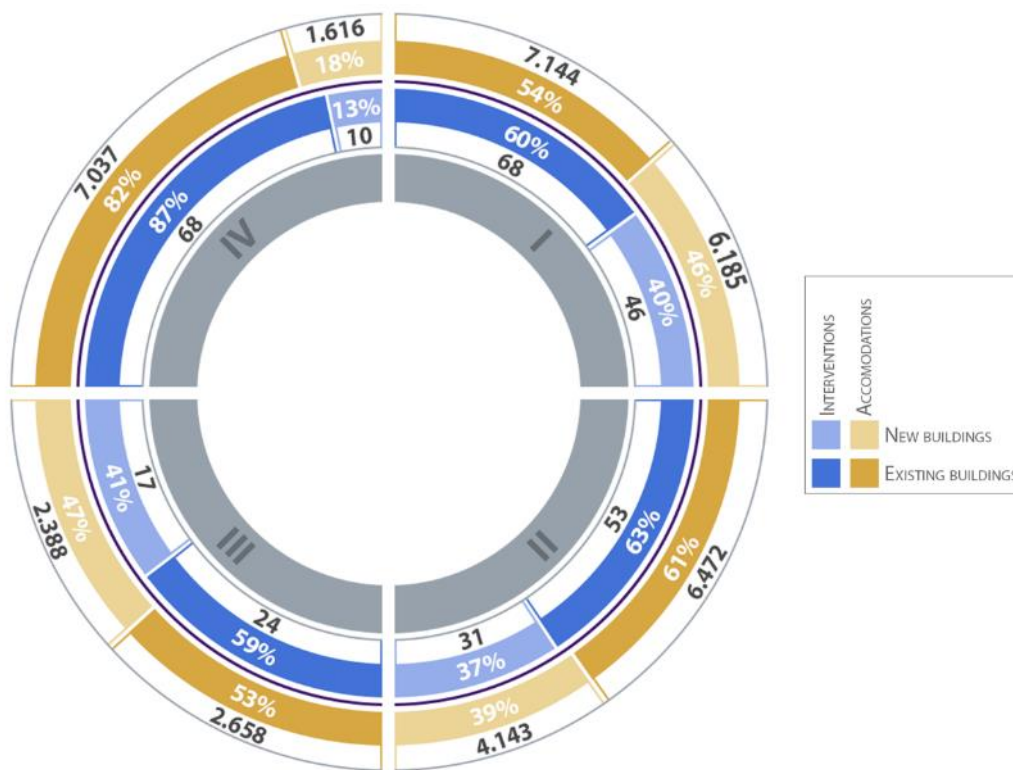


Figure 5| Existing building and new construction: interventions and accommodation.  
Situation in December 2022.  
Credits: Andrea Sichi.

In addition, interventions on the existing building stock of special value and listed buildings have considerable advantages regarding compliance

<sup>13</sup> Adolfo F. L. Baratta, and Claudio Piferi. "Le residenze universitarie come strumento di rigenerazione urbana. L'esperienza del programma 338/00", 3° edizione di *abitare il futuro. Giornate internazionali di studio*, edited by Antonella Falotico, Nicola Flora, Domenico Moccia, Maria Federica Palestino, Sergio Pone, Francesco Rispoli, Michelangelo Russo, Sergio Russo Ermolli, Paola Scala. (Napoli: Clean edizioni, 2015), 485-493.

with dimensional standards, as they provide for decreasing percentages on legal obligations.

Of the 317 projects in place, more than 70 per cent concern existing buildings: of the approximately 38,000 accommodation places concerned, more than 23,000 are in existing buildings and about 15,000 in new buildings.

There are many university residences realized with law no. 338/00 that can be taken as examples to understand the role that these structures have played and are playing in terms of urban, environmental and social regeneration: the recovery of the former convents of Crociferi in Venice [Figure 6] and Benedettini in Palermo are perhaps the best-known examples, but there are many others equally significant.



Figure 6| Crociferi University Residence, Venice.  
Credits: TESIS archive.

Briefly, 3 case studies are described that highlight some of the urban implications arising from the introduction of university residency through the redevelopment of the existing building stock. The San Giobbe university residence project constitutes the last stage in the completion of the new Ca' Foscari university campus in Venice. The project, which began in 1995, involved the restoration, rehabilitation, and urban redevelopment of disused industrial areas, including the former monumental slaughterhouse and other adjacent areas in a serious state of deterioration. The area for the student residence is located on the outskirts of the city, on the same site where the hospital designed by Le Corbusier in the 1960s

was to be built. The project envisaged, on an experimental basis and for the first time in Venice, through consultation with the Superintendency, the use of sustainable technologies to achieve energy class 'A'. The residence accommodates 229 students distributed in single and double rooms according to the hotel typology. Common areas are located both on the ground floor and on the different floors. Of particular interest is how the intervention fits into the established historical context of the city of Venice. The architecture and the use of materials, in fact, recall the classic stylistic features of lagoon architecture, recreating, within the complex, “calli” and “fondamenta”, and consequently allowing Venetians to regain possession of a contemporary and functional space that does not disrupt the pre-existing urban texture. This ensures that the new neighborhood that has been created is also experienced by non-residents. The realization of a new pedestrian bridge, which from platform 1 of the Santa Lucia railway station allows students and others to reach the complex, guarantees an uncommon level of accessibility for a complex city like Venice [Figures 7, 8].



Figure 7| San Giobbe University Residence, Venice.  
Credits: TESIS archive.



Figure 8 | San Giobbe University Residence, Venice.  
Credits: TESIS archive.

The complex where the Ca' Longa university residence is located dates to the end of the 19th century and housed a cotton mill: the entire complex is in an area heavily densified by former industrial buildings that have undergone restoration work in recent years. The Santa Marta Residence project serves as a complement to these interventions, offering the opportunity for the portion of the neighborhood to be lived in during all hours of the day. Externally, the structure retains the appearance of an industrial brick building with large windows in relation to the pertinent garden and a series of skylights in the roof that allow natural light to enter the first floor. The residence, which accommodates a total of 650 students, 136 of them thanks to this intervention, is spread over two floors according to a mini-apartment, single and double accommodation type, and guarantees a standard of approximately 25 square meters per accommodation space. The building also uses a photovoltaic system and solar panels to supply energy from renewable sources. In terms of urban regeneration, the entire complex is in an area heavily densified by former industrial buildings that in recent years have been recovered and transformed into educational centers for Ca' Foscari University. The Santa Marta Residence project serves as a complement to these interventions, offering the opportunity for the portion of the neighborhood to be lived in at all hours of the day [Figure 9].



Figure 9| Ca' Foscari University Residence, Venice.  
Credits: TESIS archive.

The Camplus university residence in Florence is the result of the redevelopment of a mid-twentieth century building owned by the State Railways Group. The residence is in a lot adjacent to the railway line, near the tramway and the central station and not far from the city center. The building has maintained its C-shaped conformation, preserving the strong stone perimeter wall on the main elevation: the original project planned the demolition and reconstruction of the entire building: subsequently, due to changes in the city of Florence's regulatory framework, it was changed to a building renovation and structural consolidation of the existing building. The building, which is on six above-ground levels, has a hotel-type living space and accommodates 213 students in single and double rooms, for a total of approximately 12.5 square meters per student of residential area. Almost all functional common areas including a conference room, a refreshment area and a gymnasium are located on the ground floor. Internally, the structure is clad with dark-colored wooden paneling, designed both to house the lighting system and to reduce maintenance work. The furnishings are characterized using flexible systems capable of dividing the rooms into

smaller environmental, residential and service units<sup>14</sup>. All systems are controlled by an automated system: electricity is produced by photovoltaic panels on the roof, hot water by heat pumps, and ventilation systems are of the primary air type [Figures 10-11].



Figure 10| Camplus University Residence in Florence.  
Credits: TESIS archive.

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<sup>14</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic period, this allowed the residence managers to manage emergencies in both the residential and service areas, preventing guest students from coming into contact.



Figure 11| Camplus University Residence in Florence.  
Credits: TESIS archive.

The focus on the recovery of the existing heritage was further strengthened in 2021 when the law was specially amended. Article 15, Legislative Decree No. 152/21, amends Article 1 of Law 338, adding paragraph 4-bis, which states: 'In order to pursue the objectives identified in the European Commission's communication of 11 December 2019 on the European Green Deal, transposed in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, the renovation, transformation, also through demolition and reconstruction, and purchase of existing structures and buildings with the aim of pursuing high environmental standards in the construction and management of the interventions are promoted as a priority'.

Ministerial Decree No. 1256/21, the fifth announcement of the law, sharpens this concept, specifying in paragraph 1, Art. 4, that in implementation of the provisions of the Annex relating to the approval of the 8 July 2021 NRP assessment, no new green-field building interventions are admissible, except for interventions included in existing campuses, or in areas bordering university settlements.

## 5. Developments in the Legal Apparatus.

The updates that have affected the law are due to different reasons: on the one hand, the evolution of the regulatory framework (e.g., in the field of public works contracts, accessibility and safety requirements, energy containment and environmental sustainability), on the other hand, the need to overcome some of the critical issues that have emerged during the process. Legislators have therefore sought to make procedures clearer and more streamlined with the aim of increasing the number of requests, sometimes even to the partial detriment of the final quality.

In addition to the changes already described, it is worth mentioning that with the Fifth Call for Proposals the percentage that can be financed by the State was increased from 50 per cent to 75 per cent, and further specific references to the themes of digital and ecological transition<sup>15</sup> were introduced.

The digitization of the process, the elimination of the paper apparatus, the compulsory use of Building Information Modeling (BIM), and compliance with Minimum Environmental Criteria (CAM)<sup>16</sup> and the principle of Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) represent some of the most interesting introductions.

The fifth call, in addition to setting 90 days as the deadline for submitting applications for co-financing, abolishes the obligations of submitting supplementary documentation and signing the agreement, delegating to the Three-Year Plans the role of regulating relations between the MUR and the beneficiaries: the date of its publication will set the deadline from which the 150 days for starting work will begin.

With the aim of further reducing the timing, applicants were also allowed to attach a Technical-Economic Feasibility Project to the application, while, to reduce the gap between the north and south of the country, 40 per cent of the total resources are allocated to interventions located in the southern regions.

In fact, if we analyze the data from the monitoring of applications and interventions in place in previous calls, we notice that most of the dropouts were concentrated in the southern regions where more than 45 percent of the applications were unsuccessful and out of 13,000 planned housing places, only 6,000 are in implementation.

With the goal of reaching target M4C1-28, due in Q4 2022 "At least 7,500 additional beds created and assigned thanks to Law 338/2000, as revised by 31 December 2022", the MUR, on 26 August 2022, published Ministerial Decree no. 1046, later updated on 19 September 2022 with Ministerial Decree no. 1089, which provides for the specific allocation of 300 million

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<sup>15</sup> Amendments introduced by Article 64(8) of Law No. 108/2021 and Article 15 of Legislative Decree No. 152/2021.

<sup>16</sup> Article 18, Law No. 221/2015 and Article 34, Legislative Decree 50/2016 (as amended by Legislative Decree 56/2017).



euro (to be found within the 960 provided for by Reform 1.7 of the PNRR)<sup>17</sup>.

This amount, previously included in Ministerial Decree 1257/2021, which had increased the availability of the Fifth Call for Law 338 to € 467 million, was removed from Ministerial Decree 1257/2021, bringing the availability of the decree back to € 167 million.

The call retraces the structure of Law No. 338 and the implementing decrees but, for the first time, introduces the possibility of financing leases as long as they are more than nine years old and opens up the possibility for private individuals to apply for financing following an agreement with the public or private entities envisaged by Law No. 338.

In fact, with the aim of making accommodation immediately available, the call is essentially aimed at purchases of existing facilities and leases. The financing of the works, which can be carried out until March 2024 (without compromising the functionality of the residences) to achieve the DNSH, as well as the necessary expenditure for the purchase of furniture and equipment, are only possible at the same time as the purchase of the property.

The call for funding also introduces significant reductions to the minimum quali-quantitative standards required, reducing the minimum surface areas of single and double rooms and toilet facilities by 20 per cent, and eliminating the mandatory minimum surface areas of the environmental units to be allocated to functional service areas.

Following the issuing of Ministerial Decree No. 1046/2022, 61 applications for funding were submitted. At the end of the work, the commission considered 44 interventions for a total financing amount of about 141 million euros and an involvement of more than 4,200 accommodation places as eligible for financing. Of these interventions, 27 relate to over-nine-year leases for more than 3,000 accommodation places involved. The results of the preliminary activity and the list of those admitted were published in Ministerial Decree no. 1246 of 28 November 2022.

Since the amount assigned with the first call for applications was less than 50% of the available resources, and thanks to the mediation with the European Community, which allowed for the postponement of the time for the commissioning of the accommodation places from 31 December 2022 to 28 February 2023, the MUR published a new call for applications, Ministerial Decree 1252/2022. For this second issuance, 44 applications were submitted and 37 were admitted for a state funding amount of more than 135 million euro and about 4,700 accommodation places concerned. 24 successful applications concerned long-term leases for about 3,500 accommodation places and 93 million in funding granted. The results of this second call were published in Ministerial Decree No. 77 of 14 February 2023.

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<sup>17</sup> To identify the interventions eligible for this tranche of funding, the MUR, with Ministerial Decree no. 1169 of 12 October 2022, appointed a special commission subsequently also confirmed for the processing of applications received under Ministerial Decree 1252/2022.

In total, therefore, around 278 million euro was co-financed for more than 8,900 accommodation places.

For the management of the remaining 670 million euros, the Ministry of Universities and Research, with the aim, among other things, of increasing the openness of participation in the financing to private investors and public-private partnerships, appointed, with Ministerial Decree no. 59/2022 of 13 January 2022, a specific working group to draw up proposals aimed at a more structural revision of the current law itself and, on 27 December, issued Ministerial Decree 1437/2022, which partially clarifies the way in which this amount is to be used.

Starting in 2023, the same Ministry has undertaken a series of meetings with public and private operators aimed at identifying appropriate strategies to be able to achieve, with the support of these funds, the target set for 2026, hypothesizing different ways of disbursing state funding that also include support for management costs.

On the other hand, about the fifth call of law no. 338/00, Parliament, with law no. 197 of 29 December 2022, The State Budget for the financial year 2023, approved the allocation of a further 300 million euros, offsetting the share of the PNRR funds that had been cancelled and bringing the overall availability, for the specific financing, to almost 500 million euros.

## **6. Conclusions.**

The reported data and elaborations attest to the effectiveness of a flexible apparatus, capable of progressing in accordance with regulatory developments and in line with a constantly evolving framework of demands, of students and stakeholders.

Parliament's increase of annual resources and the inclusion of a specific funding chapter within the NRP further contribute to certify the validity of Law 338.

Rapidly increasing the availability of accommodation, through the reduction of standards such as quantity, is, however, something to reflect on.

The identification of minimum standards such as quantitative standards, defined through research carried out by the inter-university Centre TESIS at the end of the last century, represented an extraordinary innovation for the sector: law 338/00 and the implementing decrees, in fact, although born with the objective of increasing the number of university accommodation and residences, were characterized by the importance given to student welfare.

However, the continuous and steady reduction in the areas and functional areas provided for, greatly accentuated by the decrees issued to reach the target of 7,500 beds by December 2022, is beginning to undermine the virtuosity of the law to the advantage of more properly economic and managerial logics.

One of the goals achieved in recent years by the regulatory apparatus, namely, to transform student housing from dormitories to full-fledged

social incubators, is clashing with a more pressing need, namely, to achieve the highest possible number of beds by 2026. The priority, therefore, shifted to quantitative, economic and managerial aspects, leaving out architectural and social ones. The reduction of space has been used, in fact, as a tool to justify the economic sustainability of financial operations and increase the number of beds, generating an inevitable lowering of the quality offered not only in terms of surfaces and environmental units but also in terms of integration with the context, space sharing, redevelopment of the existing building stock and urban regeneration.

The reduction and in some cases elimination of specific functional areas risks abruptly stopping an ongoing cultural process that puts the student, and his or her well-being, at the center of the educational process, also interrupting the urban and social regeneration processes undertaken so far.

### Thanks

Arch. Sandra Carlini, arch. PhD Mario Di Benedetto, arch. Andrea Sichi and arch. PhD student Valentina Spagnoli for their support in data collection.

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