Notorious Naples Slum to be Demolished

Kayla Pantano (March 06, 2017)

The Sails of Scampia—a crime-ridden housing project in Campania's capital—will be bulldozed this summer as part of government plans to improve deprived areas on the outskirts of Italian cities.

The four housing blocks known as the Vele di Scampìa (Sails of Scampia) for their triangular shape have blemished Naples' northern skyline since the early 1960s. However, plans to demolish the crime-ridden slums are finally being put into action.

Naples Mayor Luigi De Magistris [2] announced that the first block of the infamous urban housing project will be bulldozed at the start of summer this year. According to Magistris, the one block to remain will be renovated and turned into the Naples metropolitan authority headquarters.

This comes as part of Premier Paolo Gentiloni's proposal to improve deprived areas on the outskirts of Italian cities. At a press conference on Monday, he presented his plan to invest 3.9 billion euros, including 500 million euros right away.

"Today a 500-million-euro commitment was made for the best 24 projects in the periphery areas." He continued, "The commitment regards 120 interventions in total, so 95 more than those for today. The money is there."

"The CIPE (Inter-ministerial Economic Planning Committee [3]) has set aside another 800 million of the 1.6 billion needed and the other 800 million are part of the fund for infrastructure. In addition to the 2.1 billion, public and private funding will be added for a total of 3.9 billion."

The Sails of Scampia and the Troubled South

Designed and built by Italian architect Franz di Salvo between 1962 and 1975, the Sails were part of a more extensive housing project, which also included the development of Ponticelli, a neighborhood in eastern Naples. Next to affordable housing, di Salvo also wanted to provide social centers, playing fields, and other community facilities, but they never materialized.

After completion living conditions began to deteriorate and the Sails quickly became the perfect illustration of crime and corruption. Originally, the complex consisted of seven massive apartment blocks and housed anywhere from 40,000 to 70,000 people—no one was ever willing to conduct a real headcount. Since then, three of the blocks have been destroyed with thousands of tenants still living in the badly damaged structures.

Decline really set in an after the 1980 Irpinia earthquake [4], which left many people homeless, who subsequently started to squat where they could, including at the Sails. Tolerated and ignored by the government, virtually all maintenance was put on hold. Problems only worsened with the Camorra controlling the Scampia area matched with the total lack of police presence.

The first police station did not open until 1987, but the Sails remain a major center for drug trafficking and illegal activities today. This inspired director Matteo Garrone [5] to shoot his film "Gomorrah [6]" inside and around the estate. In part due to the movie and the subsequent TV series, the Sails have come to be known worldwide as a hotbed for drugs, prostitution, and the mafia. However, many disadvantaged families are forced to live there because they can't afford decent housing. Therefore, the Sails are not only a symbol of the Camorra but of the government's failure to provide meaningful development in the area.

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