

IL RIGO HOUSING QUARTER

1978 – 1982 Corciano, Italy

Il Rigo housing complex at Corciano, near Perugia, was the most significant completed work by the Atelier Piano & Rice, the architectural firm founded in 1977 by Renzo Piano with the Irish engineer Peter Rice (1935-92), and dissolved in 1981 with the creation of the Renzo Piano Building Workshop. The design of the housing merged the studies of prefabrication and flexibility developed by Piano as early as the sixties, and the participatory experiments of the coeval Laboratori di Quartiere (1979).

The housing estate, lying on a hillside, comprised seven rows of parallel buildings bound by finger-shaped roads and crosswalks. The project was developed in collaboration with the Vibrocemento Perugia prefabricated manufacturer. The goal was to develop the production of living modules characterized by low costs, flexible spaces and the possibility of expanding or reducing the habitable surface over time.

The anti-seismic envelope consisted of two C-shaped concrete elements, inverted and anchored to form the floor, walls and ceiling of a cube-shaped space six meters wide by six high, with its depth depending on the repetition of the modules. Natural lighting was secured by two walls made wholly of glass panels to close front and back, stepped back to form covered loggias. Laying an intermediate floor on light steel beams and adding rooms using prefabricated panels were possibilities left to the owners, who could customize the accommodation to meet their personal needs, from a minimum surface area of 50 square meters to a maximum of 120 square meters.

After 35 years the quarter retains its original structure: the rational layout of buildings that are compact and recognizable in the panorama of diffused construction in the suburbs of Perugia. The replacement of the glass screens with plastered brick walls and the elevation of some apartments with the same system of prefabricated elements falls within the margins of freedom and appropriation of the spaces granted to the inhabitants, demonstrating the validity of the designers' insights.