

HISTORY THESIS AR2A011 TU Delft

From the fireplace to the “cucinino”

A comparative analysis of the kitchen space in the INA-Casa complex in Parma
and the rural workers' houses

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the architectural evolution of domestic space in Parma, Italy, specifically focusing on the kitchen, during the post-war period. It analyses how the kitchen and gender roles in the house have transformed since the introduction of modern appliances.

By studying archival documents, magazines and conducting oral history interviews this thesis analyses and compares two contrasting situations: the standardized urban housing of the city and the traditional dwelling in the countryside.

5 KEYWORDS

Kitchen; gender studies; domesticity; rural Emilian context; INA-Casa plan

INTRODUCTION

In the collective imagination, as presented in homeware magazines and advertisements, the kitchen of post-war Italy's houses is a colourful and vibrant room. Characterised by pastel-tone cabinets and innovative electric appliances that promised to revolutionise the labour inside of the home (Fig 1). This typology of pictures always included the "modern housewife", depicted while cooking or taking care of the family.¹

However, these curated images were more than mere advertisements; they were tools designed to strengthen values rooted in Italy's recent past, with the goal of extending them to the general population.



Figure 1: Advertisement from CGE Electricity company, 1954

Source: Redazione Cultura



Figure 2: Cover "La Cucina Italiana" May 1956

Source: La Cucina Italiana

This idealised domesticity emerged after the end of the second world war, while Italy was recovering from the physical and economical damages, these kinds of images were largely spread in advertisements, magazines and journals. They helped to strengthen ideologies and values already imposed by fascism: during Italy's fascist period the regime's propaganda focused on the importance of the institution of family. Women were not considered as individuals but as producers of healthy soldiers. Women's labour was restricted inside the house with the goal of growing healthy children

¹ Imma Forino, 'Fra Gender e Design: La Cucina Italiana', *Palinsesti* 8, no. 8 (2019): 1-40.

who could later become members of the party.² These ideals were not limited to Italy, they were spread around Europe, especially in Germany, where Nazis ideology similarly enforced the concept of “sexual polarity”, confining women to the domestic sphere and glorifying them as “mother of the Volk”. Their duty to the country was to bear children for the Aryan population.³

The images that circulated in the 1950s consolidated these ideas while advocating for more freedom for women: new appliances, such as washing machines and fridges, promised to liberate housewives from part of their domestic labour. The appliances, widespread in advertisements and magazines, became a decisive element in the representation of a modern kitchen, and became the symbol of the wealth of a family.⁴

This paper aims to analyse how the emergence of new appliances reconfigured the traditional spatial organisation of the kitchen and how that impacted gender roles and their representation; the research is grounded in the context of Parma, Italy in the period following the Second World War. Before delving into the research, I introduce the ground study used for the thesis.

From an interior architecture perspective Imma Forino, professor in Politecnico di Milano and researcher on the theme of domesticity, addresses the evolution of kitchens spaces and practices in western countries.⁵ Forino studies kitchen spaces through time and history, applying to them a gendered lens and interpretation. Her work is fundamental to understand the hierarchical structures of western society and how they reflect in the relation of women with their work and home spaces. She also delves into the relationship between gender, objects and consumption.

This subject has strong implications with sociology and the role and interconnection of architecture and social practices. Maria Novas, architect, researcher and educator at ETH, and Beatriz Colomina, architectural historian, in her book “*Sexuality and Space*” (1992), explore how architecture is not a neutral practice, it can reinforce social hierarchies.⁶ They pose the bases for gender history research connected to architecture.

To ground the research in feminist theory, Silvia Federici, Marxist-feminist theorist, highlights how the feminist revolution needs to start from recognising the monetary value of housework. Federici emphasises how patriarchy and capitalism defined the role of the housewife as born from a natural instinct of women. By making housework a work of love, an unwaged work, it is easier to hide and devalue it. Federici states that the revolution needs to start from asking a salary and recognising it as waged, and thus, real work.⁷

While this issue has been extensively explored over the years, most research focused on higher social classes rather than on the reality of the working class and poor families. To expand on this topic, this thesis aims to examine and compare the spatial and social situation of urban and rural domestic

² Alexander De Grand, ‘Women under Italian Fascism’, *The Historical Journal* (Cambridge) 19, no. 4 (1976): 947–68.

³ Leila Rupp, ‘Mother of the “Volk”: The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology’, *Signs* 3 (December 1977).

⁴ Forino, ‘Fra Gender e Design: La Cucina Italiana’.

⁵ Imma Forino, *La Cucina: Storia Culturale Di Un Luogo Domestico* (Einaudi, 2019).

⁶ María Novas, ‘ARQUITECTURA Y GÉNERO Una Reflexión Teórica.’ (Universitat Jaume I – 2014, 2014).

⁷ Silvia Federici, *Wages against Housework* (Falling Wall Press, 1975).

spaces. The analysis concentrates on the kitchen space through the lens of female subjectivity and gender history. I was motivated initially by the oral testimonies of my grandmother; my goal is to investigate how these hidden realities were affected by the spread of modern design.

The conceptual framework defined allows me to analyse, using a gender lens, two opposite situations: the open kitchen used by the whole family in the countryside and the closed and small kitchen introduced by the INA-Casa regulations. I analyse them not as neutral spaces but as active boundaries that define behaviours and roles in the family.

To ground this investigation the thesis uses the area of Parma, considering both the city and the surrounding countryside as case studies. The research is based on a comparative methodology that crosses archival research and oral histories, juxtaposing the INA-Casa case study in the Trieste neighbourhood of Parma with the rural houses in the surrounding countryside. The thesis relies on different sources, approaches and methods as one type of source only would not provide a complete understanding of how the transition of domestic space happened.

The main methods used for the study are archival research, interviews and visual analysis. To study and comprehend the INA Casa framework archival research is the most effective method to analyse the design of the space. Primary sources, such as original drawings of the project and the official guidelines defined by the plan are necessary to understand the spatial standards imposed by the state.

To investigate the resilient tradition of the countryside I rely on oral history and mental mapping. Oral history is a methodology of historical research based on the production and use of oral sources; in the Italian context AISO (Associazione Italiana di Storia Orale) provides researcher with structures and methods to conduct oral history research.

Since the habits and houses of rural workers are not kept in archives, the research is based on interviews with people that lived in the countryside of Parma in the period between 1950 and 1970. These interviews include the creation of mental maps of the home's layouts. The rural domestic spaces are rarely preserved in archives or pictures, for this reason mental maps and interviews are the best method to reconstruct their lifestyle and their houses and compare it with the first case study. In this context oral sources become fundamental to introduce new aspects of a topic that has not been studied as much. The interviews have highlighted the relationship between individual history and collective history; between individual memory, collective memory and public memory.

Additionally, an important role is played by magazines and advertisement of the period to better understand how women were portrayed in relation to the kitchen space and how the representation of the space and objects or appliances changed over the years.

Combining three specific methods allows me to effectively juxtapose the physical boundaries designed by architects with the spatial memories of the inhabitants and the values shared by advertisements, providing a comprehensive analysis of how domestic space was constructed and defined.

Following this introduction the thesis is structured as a comparative analysis; this approach highlights the differences and similarities between the two domestic spaces. In chapter 1 the urban case study will be analysed, together with the regulations that were at the base of it. Chapter 2 delves into the

role of objects and advertisements in the transition to a modern and technological kitchen. Chapter 3 reconstructs the rural situation through oral histories. Finally, chapter 4 analyses and compares the two case studies to understand how different spatial organisations can influence gender roles.

1. CASE STUDY: INA-CASA COMPLEX IN PARMA

On February 28, 1949, law number 43 was approved by the Chamber of Deputies. The law introduced a committee with the goal of increasing workers' employment, while facilitating the construction of workers' houses (Provvedimenti per incrementare l'occupazione operaia, agevolando la costruzione di case per lavoratori).⁸

Amintore Fanfani (1908-1999), minister for work and social welfare since 1946, supported law n. 43 together with Annetto Puggioni, director of INA (National Institute of Insurance) since 1947. With this law they allowed Italy to face the scarcity of houses for the working class and at the same time decrease unemployment, thanks to a government intervention in the building market.⁹

The law defined an initial organisation, the objectives of the plans and the means with which obtain them, while the strategies to face the building phase were established later by a specific authority. The plan wanted to be a quick and agile system, for this reason a period of seven years was defined for its activity. To speed up the process, instead of creating new authorities and administrations, existing institutions were designated. The Committee of actualization (Comitato di attuazione) directed the funding of the plan and coordinated all the administrations involved. The Ina-Casa Management (Gestione Ina-Casa) drafted the guidelines and regulations; the head of this institution was Arnaldo Foschini (1884-1968). Around the main institutions there were many smaller entities: the Contracting Authorities (Stazioni Appaltanti): local administrations that took care of the building's sites and realization of the projects in their area.¹⁰

During the first seven years of realization of the plan more than 50.000 workers were employed in the building sector. Since the labour was not specialised, this had an impact on the technology used for the projects. Many Italian architects were experimenting with new materials and technologies together with industrialised techniques but the necessity of creating many work positions for non-specialised labour put a pause to the technological progress. The technical solutions used by the plan were more traditional and had an artisan quality, as they needed to be easily constructed by non-specialised workers.¹¹

The second objective of the plan was to provide housing. The problem of lack of housing was already widespread before the war and became worse after the bombing of World War Two. The INA-Casa plan not only gave houses but also the possibility for many Italians to live for the first time in a dwelling

⁸ Provvedimenti per Incrementare l'occupazione Operaia, Agevolando La Costruzione Di Case per Lavoratori, No. 43 (1949).

⁹ Luigi Beretta Anguissola, *14 Anni Del Piano INACASA* (Staderini Editore, 1963).

¹⁰ Beretta Anguissola, *14 Anni Del Piano INACASA*.

¹¹ Sergio Poretti, 'Le Tecniche Edilizie: Modelli per La Ricostruzione', in *La Grande Ricostruzione: Il Piano INA-Casa e l'Italia Degli Anni Cinquanta* (Donzelli, 2001).

with all the necessary services and spaces for a better living condition. Half of the houses were given on rent while the other half was sold.

The plan, after its end in 1956, was renewed and had a second period of activity between 1956 and 1963.

1.1 INA-Casa regulations

During the first seven years of actualization of the plan two books of regulations were published. The first one "*Suggerimenti, norme e schemi per la elaborazione e presentazione dei progetti. Bandi di concorsi*" [Suggestions, regulations and diagrams for the elaboration and presentation of projects. Competition announcement] (1949) and "*Suggerimenti, esempi e norme per la progettazione urbanistica. Progetti tipo*" [Suggestions, examples and regulations for urban design. Type projects] (1950) both curated by Adalberto Libera e Giulio Roisecco.¹²

In the second seven years of actualization of the plan other two manuals were published to convey changes and introduce more services for the neighbourhoods, as kindergartens and social centers.

Today the manuals help us understand which values the government wanted to convey and propagate through the plan.

The first manual was published in the form of a national competition to select the architects and professionals that would have worked at the design of the neighbourhoods. Its main field of action was to delineate the relationship between the built environment and the social problems that the plan was tackling. It also established guidelines to define the residential units' layout and its interiors. Abacus were used to define different possibilities of planimetric schemes with the goal of showing different possible solutions while starting from the same concept and while keeping the same relationships between spaces and functions of the house. Since the plan was for the whole nation, it had to cover very different necessities and different climates and locations. For this reason, the manuals were outlining guiding principles but then each architect had to actualize those principles and ground them in the local context.

The main typologies were four: continuous multi-floor house with two dwellings for each stair, isolated multi-floor house with two dwellings for each floor, row house on one floor and row houses on two floors. Minimum surfaces for each space were defined: 30 m² for dwellings of one room, 45 m² for two rooms and going coherently until 90 m² for five rooms. The standards were based on dimensions that were economic but not uncomfortable.¹³

It was suggested that every dwelling had a double orientation together with balconies and logge, to facilitate air flow and guarantee a healthy environment inside of the house. Long corridors and

¹² Stephanie Pilat, *Ricostruire l'Italia : I Quartieri INA-Casa Del Dopoguerra* (Castelvecchi, 2019).

¹³ Pilat, *Ricostruire l'Italia : I Quartieri INA-Casa Del Dopoguerra*.

hallways were not encouraged as the size of each dwelling was kept at a minimum and hallways would have taken too much space.

As for the spatial organisation of the dwellings, it was suggested that the sleeping areas needed to be separated from the living and eating spaces by a small hallway. For the kitchen space there were three options given by the manuals: kitchen and living room together, semi-open kitchen and separated kitchen (cucinino) (Fig. 3). Many of the architects decided to separate the kitchen completely from the living room and eating room, as it can be seen in many projects built by the plan.

CASA MULTIPIANA-CONTINUA; 2 ALLOGGI/SCALA

CASO C 6 (Cucina a sè stante e capacità 6 letti).

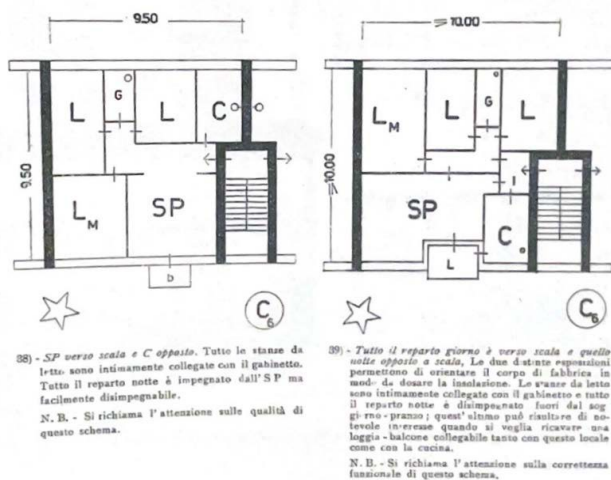


Figure 3: Planimetric scheme from the first design manual.

Source: Pilat, (2019)

At first the interventions were on a small scale, single houses and neighbourhoods with a reduced number of homes. Going on with the plan, the authorities realised that building bigger complexes would have been more economic; for this reason they started building neighbourhoods on a bigger scale.

In 1950 the INA-Casa management published a new regulation manual focused on urban design principles, as the authors believe that a well-designed neighbourhood led to a healthy community, both physically and psychologically. The design principle to follow to guarantee a good quality of the neighbourhoods were: avoid closed and small courtyards and buildings too close to each other; as these elements lead to the lack of air and sunlight, which would have brought unhealthy conditions to the neighbourhoods.

A very important consideration for the design was the location and the context in which each project took place. The study of the climate, altitude of the region but also social and cultural habits needed to be at the base of the design. The existing buildings were not considered as an obstacle but as a positive element that could add a value to the new neighbourhood. Every building and every house had to take into consideration the cultural history of the place and the different habits of every region.

It was important to differentiate the buildings from each other's and create new angles and visuals in every street.

The manuals published in the second period of activity of the plan were based on the experience of the first inhabitants of the already built neighbourhoods. Interviews and surveys were conducted, the idea was to target even better the houses to the resident's needs.¹⁴

The plan and the regulations had both architectural and social aims. For many Italians the INA-Casa houses were the first to have a bathroom and toilet inside of the house. It is undeniable that the plan elevated the quality of life of many families, but at the same time it was used as a chance to spread values and ideologies. As Manfredo Tafuri claimed, the INA-Casa plan had the goal of reducing unemployment with the greater goal of avoiding that the working class organised with the left wing parties.¹⁵

The plan also propagated values and a new definition of family. If in the higher income families it was expected for the husband to be the "breadwinner" and to sustain economically the whole family while the wife did housework, in lower class families, specifically in the families that worked in agriculture, often both husband and wife were working.¹⁶ The INA-Casa plan, with its spatial organisation of the dwellings, pushed forward specific ideas and tried to extend the ideal of housewife that existed between wealthy families to the working class. The kitchen, in most cases a closed space, was the place where the woman's labour was hidden from the rest of the house. The kitchen wasn't a space to gather; due to the small size of it, it allowed only one person at a time to be in the room to prepare food.¹⁷

1.2 Via Trieste complex

The INA-Casa regulations were applied in the whole Italian territory. In the province of Parma there are two main neighbourhoods constructed by the plan: via Trento neighbourhood and via Trieste neighbourhood.

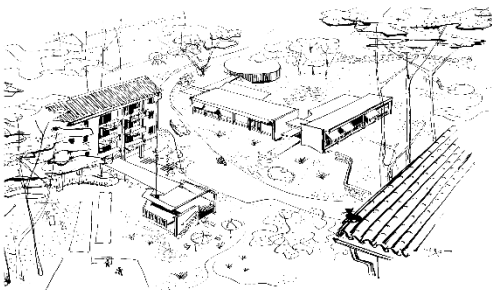


Figure 4: View of Via Trieste neighbourhood, 1953

Source: Archivio IACP/ACEP/Pr, Fascicolo 103

The via Trieste complex is part of the San Leonardo neighbourhood, an area that developed north of the station since 1860. It's a historical neighbourhood that developed after the station was constructed, it attracted industrial settlements and workers' houses. Since the 1950s the neighbourhood grew rapidly becoming an integral part of the city. It attracted rural workers from the region and from the

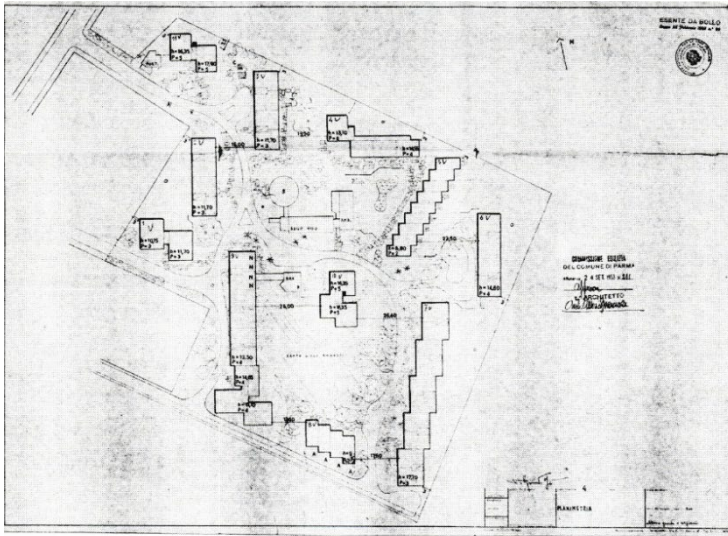
¹⁴ Beretta Anguissola, *14 Anni Del Piano INACASA*.

¹⁵ Pilat, *Ricostruire l'Italia: I Quartieri INA-Casa Del Dopoguerra*.

¹⁶ Imma Forino and Michela Bassanelli, *Gli Spazi Delle Donne: Casa, Lavoro e Società* (DeriveApprodi, 2024).

¹⁷ 'Cambia La Casa, o Cambia La Donna?', *NoiDonne*, no. 41 (1977): 40-43.

South of Italy. This immigration became an integral part in the development of the neighbourhood.¹⁸



The neighbourhood in via Trieste was designed in 1953 by Vittorio Gandolfi and built in 1955.¹⁹

It consists of 800 dwellings, divided in 11 residential buildings situated around a central nurse school, social center and shops. The urban layout defines an external area, where the residential buildings are collocated, and an internal one, where the kindergarten is. This allows the neighbourhood to be a pedestrian and safe area, with many parks and green spaces while the houses shield this core from the main roads.

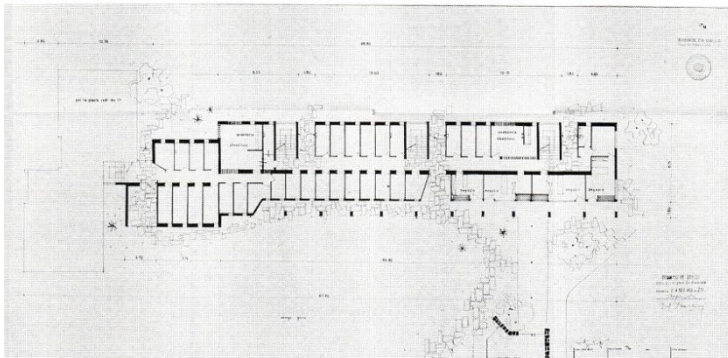


Figure 5: Plan of the Trieste neighbourhood and groundfloor plan of a residential building

Source: Cabassi, (1999)

The technical solutions used for the construction are bricks and reinforced concrete. In all the INA-Casa buildings the construction techniques were traditional and of easy manufacturing, to be able to be built by non-specialised workers. One of the main goals of the plan was to reduce unemployment and the building sector offered a solution for this problem.

After the end of the second world war, Ignazio Gardella started to design prefabricated elements together with the Fergan industry. He believed it could help with rebuilding the country after the destruction of the war. The start of the INA-Casa plan and its traditional constructions put a stop to the experimentation of innovative solutions.

While the urban layout of the Trieste neighbourhood is well documented, drawings of the internal layout of the buildings and dwellings are not available in the archives and have not been published in books or architectural magazines. However, since the INA-Casa plan worked with standardised solutions and with strict regulations it is possible to reconstruct the principles of the internal spatial organisation through typological research and similar projects.

Vittorio Gandolfi, architect of the via Trieste neighbourhood, was bounded by the design guidelines of the manuals that were analysed in the previous section. To better identify the regional characteristic

¹⁸ Federica Pasqualetti, 'Storia Del San Leonardo', *Parma Quartieri*, *Gazzetta Di Parma*, September 2006.

¹⁹ Antonella Cabassi, *La Casa Popolare a Parma in 8 Itinerari : (1850-1970)* (Grafiche STEP, 1999).

of the dwellings we can study contemporary projects of INA-Casa in the region of Parma, such as the via Trento neighbourhood, and close by provinces, like Modena.

This comparative approach allows to reconstruct the standardised kitchen of the INA-Casa plan. The via Trento complex, designed by Giovanni Michelucci in the same years provides the most direct architectural evidence of how the regulations were implemented in the projects.

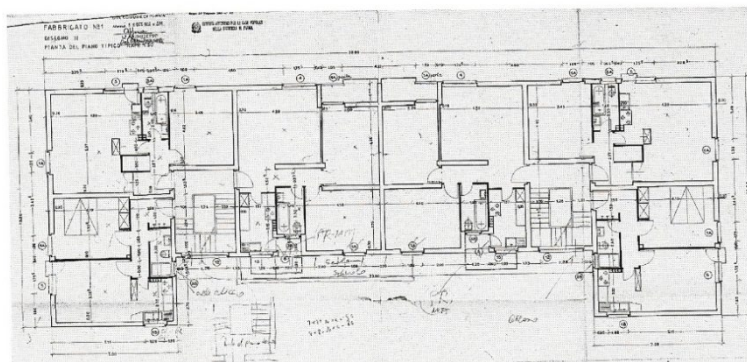
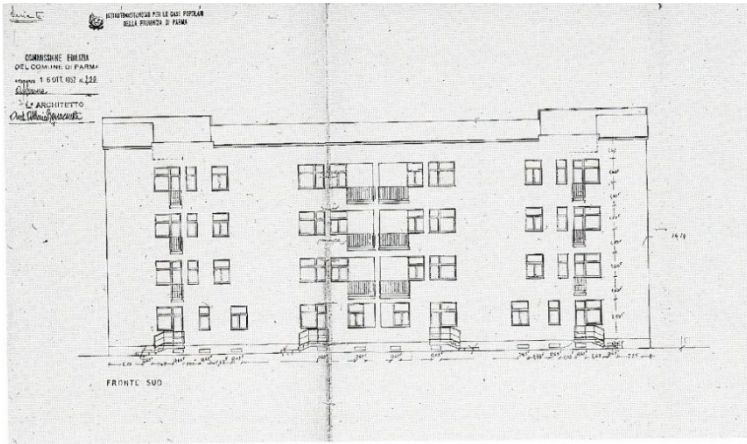


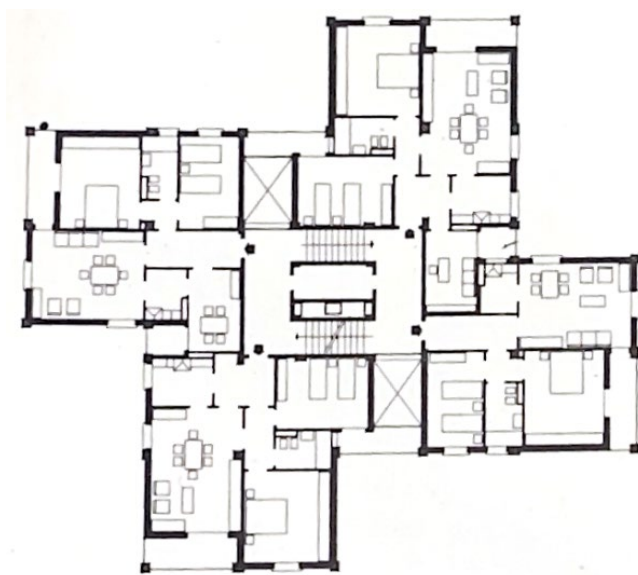
Figure 6: Plan and elevation of a residential building in Via Fratelli Rosselli 8, Parma

Source: Antonella Cabassi, (1999).

The via Trento complex, designed by Giovanni Michelucci in 1952 and completed in 1954, is composed of five residential buildings, the structure is made of brickwork and reinforced concrete. In fig 5 are represented the plan and south elevation of one of the apartment buildings in via Fratelli Rosselli 8, Parma.²⁰ The building has 2 stairs that distribute 3 apartments each. The two central apartments follow the main lead of the INA-Casa regulations: the kitchen is located near the entrance, separated by a hallway from the living room. The apartments on the edge have a different layout. The bottom ones have the kitchen semi-separated from the living room, by a wardrobe. While the upper apartments have an open space that hosts both kitchen and living room together in the same room.

²⁰ Cabassi, *La Casa Popolare a Parma in 8 Itinerari : (1850-1970)*.

During the first seven years of actualisation of the plan, Unità d'abitazione sant'Agnesa was built in



Modena. In figure 7 a typical floorplan of a tower building of the neighbourhood is represented.²¹ The building has a central staircase, each landing distributes two dwellings. The dwellings have a similar floorplan area and organisation. The segregation of the space of the kitchen is confirmed in all the units. The kitchen is designed with a rigid layout and minimal space, only able to fit one person.

Figure 7: typical floorplan of a tower building

Source: Luigi Beretta Anguissola, *14 Anni Del Piano INACASA* (Staderini Editore, 1963).

The via Trieste complex was designed in the same period and the architects had to follow the same regulations. We can deduce that its internal layout follows the same principles and replicated this model of spatial segregation.

The INA Casa architecture elevated the quality of living of many working class families, it brought hygiene, electricity and heating to most houses. At the same time, it imposed a model of family, domesticity and division of labour that confined women in the rationalised walls of the *cucinino*.

2. THE ROLE OF OBJECTS

The introduction of modern appliances directly reconfigured the space and organisations of Italian kitchens. As demonstrated in chapter 1, the INA-Casa architectural solution for the kitchen standardised the space to allow furnishing and basic appliances to fit in it. In the post war period appliances like fridges, washing machines and the tv, which were already used by wealthy families, were diffused to all social classes. Italy, influenced by the American example, started to move towards a more modern and consumerist society. In this context women had a leading role, as they became the primary buyers. In the US already since the 1920s women were seen as "general purchasing agents". Mirroring what was happening overseas Italian women became the main target of publicities and advertisements.²²

The images of these advertisements should not be seen as a neutral depiction of reality but rather as an active, ideological construct. By introducing every day in the Italian household highly curated representation of houses, appliances, families, the publicity worked as a manual. It influenced the

²¹ Beretta Anguissola, *14 Anni Del Piano INACASA*.

²² Maria Liguori, 'Donne e Consumi Nell'Italia Degli Anni Cinquanta', *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 205 (December 1996): 665–89.

observer, often female, and shaped its desires and thoughts about how a modern woman should be and introduced them to the role of the housewife.

2.1 Advertisement

Advertisement had a strong social impact, the study of what it represented and how is crucial to understand how it influenced the readers of magazines and journals. After considering the magazines that were published at the time, I decided to analyse *La Cucina Italiana* as it is focused on the theme of the kitchen and it is addressed to the whole population.

The first edition of *La cucina italiana* was published 15 december 1929 in Milan, the original name was "*Giornale di gastronomia per le famiglie e per i buongusta*" [Journal of gastronomy for families and gastronomes]. It was published monthly until July 1943, when the Second World War started. The publication started again in January 1952, with the subtitle of "*Rivista di gastronomia e convivialismo*" [Magazine of gastronomy and conviviality].

For the purpose of this research the magazine has been browsed and analysed from 1952, the first publication after the second world war, to 1965, as the date when the fridge became standard fixture in most Italian homes. The analysis concentrates specifically on the advertisement published, using them as primary tool to understand how the kitchen space was represented and which gender roles were promoted. This visual analysis is crucial to understand what role was assigned to women and what social and spatial ideals were represented.

Through the systematic browse of *La Cucina Italiana*, kept in the archives of Barilla in Parma, many recurring themes regarding domestic space emerged. The following analysis categorizes the advertisements based on the theme or idea that are brought up in the images. Starting from the campaigns that focused on the liberation from hard labour thanks to the appliances, the construction of the perfect hostess and mother, and the promotion of a standardised kitchen layout.

Liberation from hard labour thanks to modern appliances

In the post-war period the advertising industry focused heavily on new appliances. In wealthy families and higher social classes they were already used, but the main population, specifically workers, did not have them in the house. Many examples can be found in *La cucina italiana* magazine.

The publicity is trying to sell mainly electric washing machines and fridges. The images have different compositions but have recurring themes: with every appliance shown there is a woman standing beside it or using it. She's often with a child that is playing or even standing beside the fridge (Fig. 8).



Figure 8: Advertisement for CGE, La Cucina Italiana 1952

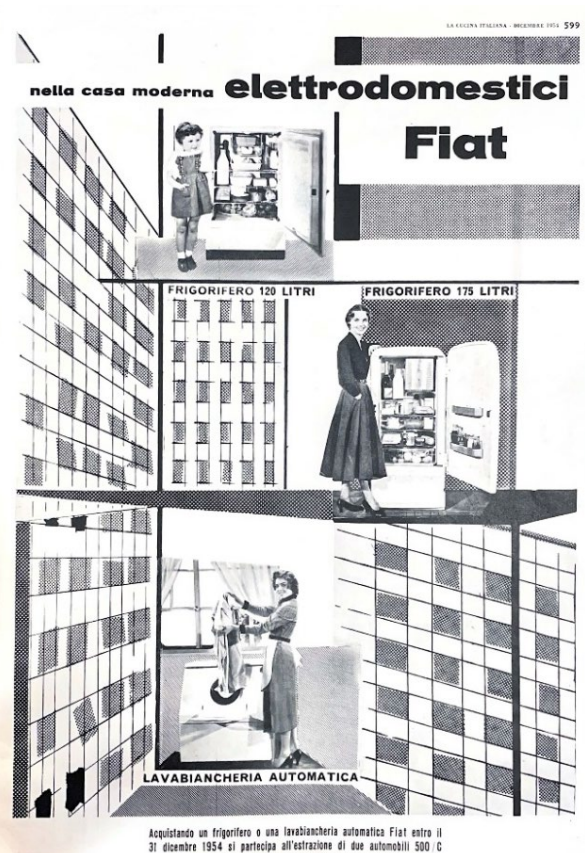


Figure 9: Advertisement for Fiat, la cucina italiana 1954

The drawings or pictures are accompanied by short but bold text. The texts highlight how easy is it to use these machines and how it does not take effort and does not ruin the sheets. In Fiat's advertisements it is highlighted how these appliances are part of the modern household and bring more hygiene and economy.

In the rural setting hand washing clothes and sheets was a physically hard and time-consuming job, by selling the washing machine as a servant of the household and showing a perfectly dressed woman playing with a kid beside it, the woman seems immediately liberated from any kind of work. Specifically, in CGE advertisements it is emphasised how the use of these appliances can grant the woman leisure time with her child.

LA CUCINA ITALIANA - DICEMBRE 1954 593

**la lavatrice
che
non
logora !**



La nuova lavatrice elettrica CGE impiega uno speciale sistema di agitazione dell'acqua, un sistema esclusivo, che elimina il logoramento della biancheria, sia pure la più delicata, anche se il tempo di lavatura venga prolungato molto più del necessario.

Nessuna scrupolosa massaia può trascurare un così decisivo vantaggio!

LAVATRICE ELETTRICA

CGE

Funzionamento semiautomatico
Riscaldatore da 1600 watt
Centrifuga per asciugare
Lava da mezzo chilo a 4 chili di biancheria

Prezzo L. 136 000


COMPAGNIA GENERALE DI ELETTRICITÀ - MILANO

Dimostrazioni presso tutti i concessionari di vendita della C.G.E.

Figure 10: Advertisement for CGE, La cucina italiana 1954

Fiat

Elettrodomestici



Frigorifero 120 litri
L. 99.000
compresa I.G.E.

Lavabiancheria automatica L. 210.000
compresa I.G.E.

Frigorifero 210 litri L. 150.000
compresa I.G.E.

Pagabili anche a rate

Incremento all'economia e all'igiene della casa

Figure 11: Advertisement for Fiat, La cucina italiana 1956

Perfect hostess, mother and wife

In the following advertisements the main recurring theme is the woman seen as the perfect hostess, mother and wife, that takes care of the family and the house. This typology of advertisement is one of the most common in the magazine *La cucina italiana*.



Figure 12: Advertisement for Arrigoni, *La Cucina Italiana* 1952



Figure 13: Advertisement for CGE, *La Cucina Italiana* 1952

In all the advertisements the woman is depicted as caring wife and mother. In fig 12, 14 and 16 she is drawn while serving food to the table where her children and her husband are waiting. These advertisements are either promoting specific foods (like mustard and broth stock) or electricity and electric appliances, (Fig. 14).

In fig 15 she is drawn while doing all types of housework, from cooking to cleaning the house, cleaning clothes. To do every chore she uses an electric appliance, in particular there are shown a vacuum cleaner, a blender, a gas stove, a fridge and a washing machine. Also in fig 13, another advertisement for CGE (General company of electricity- Milan) we can see a bride, with in the foreground a picture of a washing machine, and a big bold text that states "20 tons of dirty clothes are waiting for you" and then states that laundry day can be a day as the others if you use an electric washing machine instead of washing them by hand. This advertisement does not depict the space of the kitchen but has strong relevance to the research because it shows the expectations and the duties of a woman when getting married.



Figure 14: Advertisement for Senape ORCO, *La Cucina Italiana* 1952

The advertisement for Moka express (fig 17) reinforces the idea of the woman as mother and wife that works for the family. Three images compose the publicity, one depicts the dining table where two children and their father are sitting, one depicts the wife in the kitchen while making coffee, and the third one is a moka. The bold text that first captures the viewer's eye is stating "where is mom? She's in the kitchen with moka-express".

These types of images express an ideal of mother and wife as housewife. It is clear from these that her job is taking care of the family and the house while making her family happy. Most of them are characterised by bright colours, happy environments, perfectly organised and clean kitchens. By actively erasing evidence of physical burden, the advertisements do not value domestic chores as "real" work. Showing it as an effortless activity they create the expectation that the wife not only should be a housewife but also perform her duties with joy and enthusiasm. As Silvia Federici argues, the devaluation of labour transforms it in a naturalised duty, a labour of love that masks the unpaid exploitation of the housewife.²³



Figure 15: Advertisement for CGE, *La Cucina Italiana* 1953

²³ Federici, *Wages against Housework*.



L'elettricità è al vostro servizio con la più bella e completa serie di elettrodomestici:

gli elettrodomestici CGE!

COMPAGNIA GENERALE DI ELETTRICITÀ - MILANO

Figure 16: Advertisement for CGE, La Cucina Italiana 1954

dov'è la mamma?



è in cucina con la moka-express

3-4 minuti... ed è pronto!



la Moka Express sfrutta tutto il caffè grazie al suo superfiltro: a fuoco lento, la Moka vi dà ogni giorno una perfetta "crema di caffè"

è già in sala da pranzo. C'è qualcuno con l'acquolina in bocca: gli è bastato sentire il profumo del caffè. Nulla eguaglia l'aroma del caffè che si sente nelle nostre case. Al bar il caffè lo si beve e basta. In casa è un rito: il profumo, l'attesa, la sigaretta da accendere subito dopo.....

caffettiera

MOKA EXPRESS

un espresso meglio che al bar



Figure 17: Advertisement for Moka, La cucina italiana 1957

Standardised and modern kitchen layout

LA CUCINA ITALIANA - MONDO 1955 113

...si realizza un vostro "sogno,"

I mobili metallici componibili CGE, nella varietà degli elementi più adatti per la cucina moderna, danno la possibilità di comporre bellissime ed eterne cucine con criteri pratici e con buon gusto.

Tutti i mobili metallici CGE sono costruiti in lamiera lucida di forte spessore, smaltata a fuoco. I mobili da pavimento hanno il piano in "laminato plastico" color persinca, e lo zoccolo laccato in nero lucido.

COMPAGNIA GENERALE DI ELETTRICITÀ - MILANO

Figure 18: Advertisement for CGE, La Cucina Italiana 1955

The third category of advertisements is related to the idea of a modern kitchen, inspired by the American models. The kitchen is conceived as composable elements that assembled together can adapt to different needs and households.

One of the things often pushed forward in these publicities is how easy they are to clean thanks to the linear surfaces made of aluminium and how the housework is facilitated in this environment.

These typologies of advertisements are not the most common in the magazine, even though the idea of the modern kitchen is also shown in a series of articles titled "The kitchen you would want to have", published in 1952 and 1953 on La cucina italiana. These articles show different types of kitchens and how they are smartly and efficiently arranged to facilitate the work of the housewife.

The visual analysis of advertisements published between 1952 and 1965 demonstrates the power these commercial images held in shaping societal norms. They actively constructed the role of the modern housewife and defined the duties of a woman inside of the household. These images had a key role in sharing new values to consumers.

The spatial organisation of kitchens, houses and urban settlements has a strong influence on how people use and live these spaces, but, as this chapter has shown, mass media reinforced the same ideologies. The advertisement and the articles on magazines conditioned viewers and women to accept a defined role.

3. THE RURAL SITUATION

While the INA-Casa guidelines strictly dictated measurements, positioning and hygienic standards of the modern kitchen, the domestic reality outside of the city was very different and harder to capture and study as it has not been preserved in archives. For this reason, the best way to understand the rural house and its domestic space is through oral history. Interviews provide primary sources that allow to investigate new aspects of the topic. Semi-structure interviews have been conducted with four people, three women and one man, that lived in the province of Parma between 1950 and 1970. The participant group consists of women currently aged between 73 and 78. They were born between 1948 and 1953, they experienced the period in analysis transitioning from childhood to early adulthood. Three interviewees inhabited rural farmhouses while one lived closer to the city. They observed the spatial practices of their mothers and grandmothers, and then later started actively participating in the collective labour.

The demographic of rural farmer families was highly significant in the area, according to the 1951 census, the population of Parma in that year was 391.299 inhabitants. In the municipality, made of the urban area and a surrounding territory divided into four delegations, agriculture resulted to be the predominant activity in the province.²⁴ The evolution of the agricultural systems is strictly related to the history of rural houses. In the 1950s the traditional rural house of the province represented the center of the sharecropping system, the architecture would reflect the social and hierarchical structure of work. These buildings, functional to the agriculture life, were living their last phase of diffusion before the transition outside of the countryside and into the cities. This shift into the city and into the industries was pushed by the INA-Casa plan, together with other ideologies and values, aimed to modernize the Italian working class.

What emerges from the testimonies differs very much from the portrait of domesticity of the INA-Casa plan. The family model and organisation were one of the main differences, this element also strongly influenced the spatial practice inside of the house. Rural households were large and multigenerational; often, there were parents with their children together with grandparents and aunts or uncles that hadn't married yet. All the women interviewed specified that the kitchen work was mainly taken up by their grandmother, while both parents were working, either in the fields or with the animals. There was still a division between jobs done by men and those by women; men were mainly caring for the animals,

²⁴ Piano Regolatore Generale Del Comune Di Parma: Relazione (1957).

often cows, and taking up most of the more laborious jobs such as cutting hay by hand. While women were working in the fields and harvesting vegetables during the summer and otherwise cleaning the house or knitting. The domestic work was divided between the women of the family, harder jobs like hand washing clothes and sheets were done by the younger women, while the older ones, who couldn't do those anymore, were mainly cooking and taking up the kitchen jobs.

In the rural farmhouses the kitchen was the living heart of the house, as it was the only room of the house that had heating, which was provided by a wood stove that also served as cooking device.



Figure 19: The economic kitchen

Source: <https://curiosando708090.altervista.org/cucina-economica-elettrodomestico/>

This stove is named "cucina economica" (economic kitchen), as it served as heating device and as main kitchen appliance, used every day to cook meals and prepare food. The name "economic" derives from the multiple purposes it had. Other than cooking and heating up the house it was also used to dry clothes and to heat up the water that was then used for the shower. Most houses in the countryside didn't have

running water so the water was collected from the well and then heated up before use.



Figure 20: Interno friulano, © Italo Zannier, 1962

The cucina economica originated from the fireplace. It had multiple compartments: an area where the wood was burned, one where the ashes were collected, a small oven, and an opening to keep food warm. On the top there was a cast iron slab made of many concentric circles that could be removed based on the size of the pot used. The pipe of the stove collected the smoke to bring it externally and doing so it could also heat the room on the floor above the kitchen.

For many rural families the food prepared often consisted of ingredients like potatoes and meat scraps. The food was always seasonal, based on what they could keep from the harvest of the day.²⁵

²⁵ Enrichetta Lambertini, (Parma), interview by author, 30 December 2025.

The kitchen in the rural house was the most used room, as the living room and the bedrooms didn't have any heating. Families would gather in the kitchen to do all activities, the other place where they would gather after dinner during winter was the stable, the heat from the animals would keep the space warm and families would gather, women were knitting while children were playing.²⁶

The kitchen room was central in the house, there was a big cupboard where dishes, glasses and cooking ware were stored. The cucina economica was predominant in the room and beside it there was a credenza with a gas stove on top of it, it was used only during summer, when temperatures were high and the cucina economica wouldn't have been used. The other main element was a big wooden table in the center of the room, where the family would gather to eat. The table had compartments for kitchen utensils, an extractable cutting board, a rolling pin and an extension used to make pasta.²⁷



Figure 21: Typical table of the kitchen

Source: Pamono

Pictures of that time usually portray families eating at the kitchen table, it can be noted that all the people sitting at the table are men (Fig. 22). In pictures where women are portrayed, they are in the kitchen space, near the cucina economica (Fig. 23). Gendered spatial hierarchies are embedded in the rural kitchen: as men occupy the central table to eat, women are relegated to the periphery. These pictures support the oral testimonies: even in the unpartitioned rural kitchen leisure and domestic work are divided and gendered.



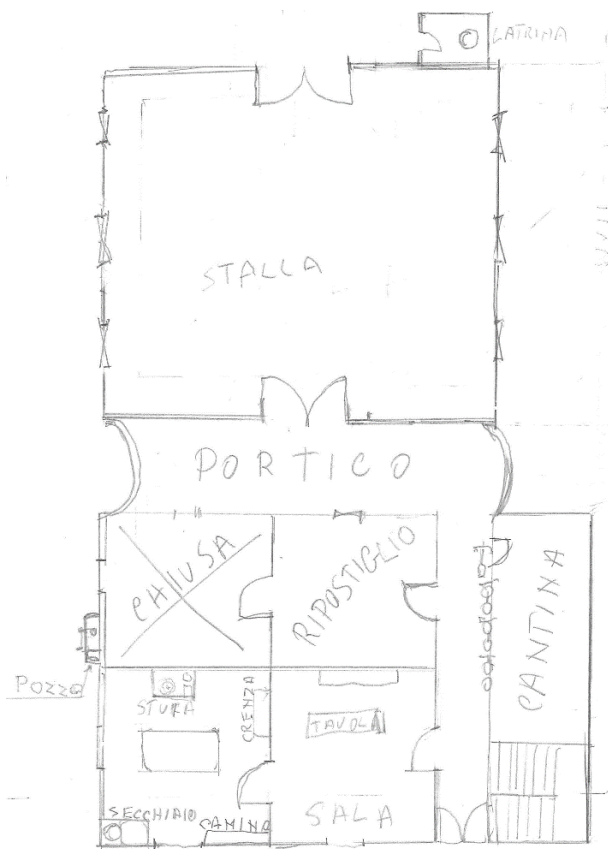
Figure 22: Gente dell'Emilia, 1957, © Nino Migliori



Figure 23: Dentro le case, © Italo Zannier

²⁶ Nuccia Viotti, (Parma), interview by author, 29 December 2025.

²⁷ Marina Nella Truant, (Parma), interview by author, 5 March 2026.



As illustrated in the mental map, the kitchen space, in the corner left, is a big open space with no delimited boundaries. At the center of the room there is the table where the family would eat while on the wall there are a fireplace near a sink, on top of the sink there was a hanged bucket that contained the water taken from the well. On the north wall of the kitchen there was the cucina economica, and beside it a credenza for plates and kitchen ware. The mental map confirms the concept of spatial promiscuity. The space guarantees visual permeability; the work is never hidden from the family and can be shared with multiple people. The other rooms of the house are located on the first floor. On the ground floor there is the kitchen, a storage room, a living room, that didn't have heating and was used mainly for guests. These rooms are directly connected to the stable, the bathroom is outside, on the other side of the stable.²⁸

Figure 24: Mental map made by Nuccia Viotti

The women interviewed recall seeing advertisements and publicity showing a new type of kitchen, with many electric appliances. They affirmed that they had seen these images mainly on the tv but also on food containers, like biscuits boxes.²⁹

They said that the first electric device bought was the tv, at the end of the 50s, and between 1960 and 1965 all the families bought a fridge. The fridge was the first and main appliance they had, they later bought a washing machine, but they never bought other kitchen appliances like dishwasher or blenders.³⁰

4. DISCUSSION

The transition from the rural farmhouse of the countryside of Parma to the modern house designed by the INA-Casa plan represents more than only a geographical migration from the rural areas to the city. As analysed in the above chapters, the traditional fireplace and the modern cucinino define two different layouts with a direct impact on the way of living the spaces of the house. To better understand

²⁸ Viotti, interview.

²⁹ Viotti, interview.

³⁰ Sergio Alfieri, (Parma), interview by author, 29 December 2025.

this change it is necessary to develop a comparative analysis of both spatial organisations, followed by a study of the social implications that they brought.

This analysis reveals how the modernisation of the kitchen in the post war period has brought new hygienic standards; while attempting to help women in the housework it also confined them in the kitchen room, making it a separated space from the rest of the house and isolating her from the other family members. The kitchen went from being the center of the house to being a small attachment to the living room.

To understand the social impact of these changes it is necessary to analyse space as a political force and not as a neutral container. Space can determine segregation of activities and people. Feminist spatial theory poses a fundamental dichotomy between public and private spaces. These two spheres of action can be brought back to the cultural construction of man and woman and their own sphere of activity. Public space is associated with production and work, and is traditionally assigned to men, while private space is associated with reproduction and domestic labour, usually identified with women.³¹ Architecture and the built environment have reproduced this dichotomy and perpetuated this segregation of spaces.³²

This division of space has a second layer of segregation within the house itself. Spaces like living room or study room are associated with men and with the public sphere, while other spaces are seen as more private and therefore associated with women.³³ The main space associated with women in the house is the kitchen. This idea is reinforced by the division of labour between men and women.³⁴ Since antiquity women that worked outside were seen as prostitutes and the idea of preserving the male honour is one of the elements that legitimated women into the private sphere of the house. This led, in the fourteenth century, to the duty of husbands to sustain economically their wife.³⁵ This evolution of segregation of space and work is at the base of the model of male as breadwinner of the family.

This ideology was particularly spread between aristocratic families. While in the rural and poorer classes the situation was opposite. Work was seen as universal duty, and since women were considered weaker they had to prove themselves as equally strong and useful to the family. In farmer families work was a central value, this translated into marriage rituals. When a marriage took place, the wife had to bring to her new family her will to work hard and continuously as that was the symbol of her honesty. In the 19th century in many rural areas there were rituals to represent this exchange of roles and duties between women.³⁶

This situation, delineated by Alessandra Pescarolo, is coherent with the interviews conducted for this research. Older women were the ones doing most of the kitchen work and food preparation, as they

³¹ Forino, *La Cucina: Storia Culturale Di Un Luogo Domestico*.

³² Novas, 'ARQUITECTURA Y GÉNERO Una Reflexión Teórica.'

³³ Beatriz Colomina, 'The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism', in *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

³⁴ Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man Made Environment* (Pluto Press Limited, 1984).

³⁵ Alessandra Pescarolo, 'Lavorare, Stare in Casa. La Stratificazione Storica e Sociale Delle Norme Di Genere', in *Gli Spazi Delle Donne: Casa, Lavoro e Società* (DeriveApprodi, 2024).

³⁶ Pescarolo, 'Lavorare, Stare in Casa. La Stratificazione Storica e Sociale Delle Norme Di Genere'.

could not sustain hard labour anymore. Since families were living together, when older women could not work anymore the younger one, either the daughters or the wives of male sons, would take over the fields work.

The kitchen space in rural areas was open and promiscuous. It didn't have clear boundaries and functions. The whole family made use of it, and they would eat together in the space or spend time together while someone was cooking.³⁷ This brought closeness to the family and even if the house labour was always taken up by women, they were doing it openly and under the eyes of everyone.

The INA-Casa plan, together with industrialisation and modernisation, led farmers to move to cities and adapt to new jobs and houses. The plan imposed a new spatial organisation that changed the rural organisation of both work and family. The modern kitchen, thought to be functional to its main and only user, the woman, has been divided from the living room for hygienic purposes. Its spatial layout closes the woman inside of the room: the wall that divides the kitchen from the rest of the house is blocking sociality and interaction with the rest of the family and the labour that happens in the kitchen remains invisible and hidden.

The layout of the house also changes the composition of families: the space is organised for a family that consists of parents and children, other relatives like grandparents or aunts and uncles are excluded.

This new form of the family brings more loneliness to the woman that is doing housework. Before the work was divided between two or three people, now it all bears on the shoulder of one.

³⁷ Alex Banali, 'Interni Immaginati. La Casa Italiana Degli Anni Cinquanta e Sessanta Nelle Riviste Femminili Dell'epoca' (Università degli Studi di Padova, 2015).

The modern kitchen is isolating women both from the help of other women and from their family. The kitchen becomes a room with a clear function, in opposition to the rural kitchen that was promiscuous. The wall that divides the kitchen from the house is blocking the gaze from and towards the kitchen.³⁸ The space dictates who can see and who is seen, which determines the power dynamic of the household. Boundaries between rooms act as a mechanism of social control.³⁹

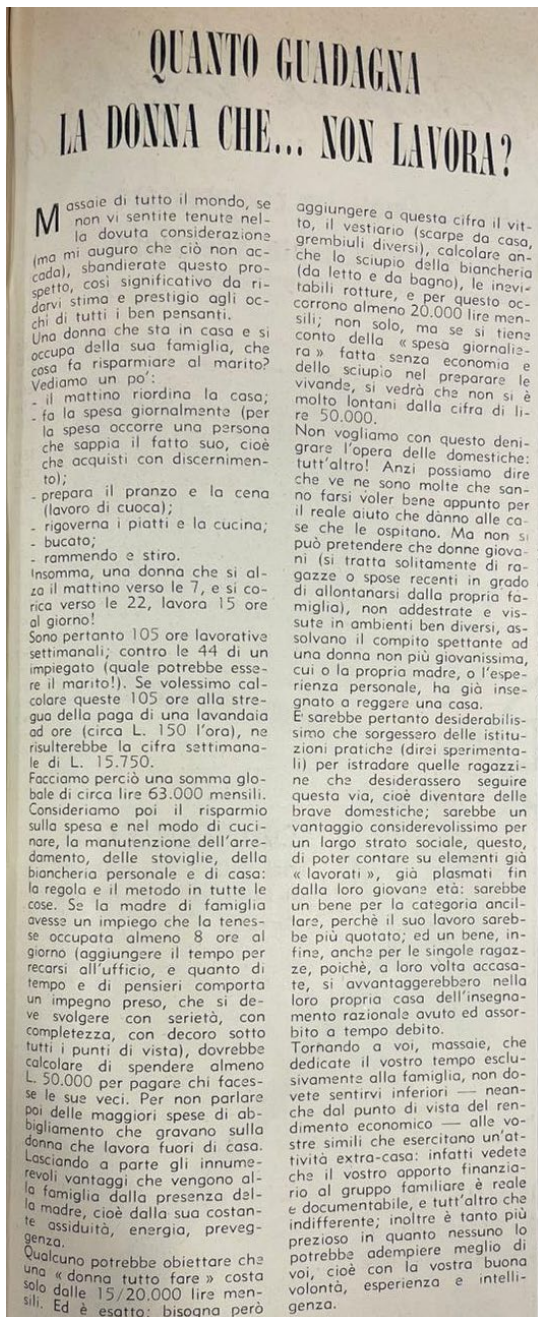


Figure 25: Article from *La cucina italiana* 1953

Source: Archivio Storico Barilla

The modern appliances contained within that small room of the kitchen may have promised liberation from physical labour, but the architecture itself enforced a new kind of confinement and isolation.

Spatiality suggests a specific model of family, one that is more similar to the one of wealthier social classes. A family where the husband works and sustains with its income the whole family, and the wife is a housewife, that takes care of the house and the kids. This change has been encouraged by space, advertisements and magazines. In the article "How much does the woman that doesn't work earn?", published in 1953 in *La Cucina Italiana*, the writer of the article evaluates the importance of housework and invites women to be housewives. It advertises how much housewives are valuable to their family even if they are not actively making money. They bring irreplaceable help to the family doing a job that no one could do better than them.⁴⁰

As feminist theorist Silvia Federici argues, denying housework a wage and transforming it into an act of love makes the work become a natural attribute of women and it made sure that women would seek that work as the best thing in life while keeping them economically dependent on their husbands.⁴¹ The free and unpaid labour of an housewife becomes a natural, unavoidable and fulfilling activity. The unwaged condition of housework has reinforced the already common assumption that it does not classify as real work and therefore escaping from it is harder.⁴²

³⁸ 'Cambia La Casa, o Cambia La Donna?'

³⁹ Colomina, 'The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism'.

⁴⁰ 'Quanto Guadagna La Donna Che... Non Lavora?', *La Cucina Italiana*, 1953.

⁴¹ Federici, *Wages against Housework*.

⁴² Federici, *Wages against Housework*.

CONCLUSION

The modernisation of Italian domestic spaces during the post war economic boom brought spatial and social isolation to women and changed their role in the family. The INA-Casa plan introduced a standardised kitchen space, the “cucinino”, with the promise of it being a modernised and hygienic solution, fundamentally opposite to the undefined kitchen space of the rural farmer households. This research has demonstrated how this spatial change shifted the organisation of both homes and families, pushing forwards new ideologies and roles, such as the one of the housewife.

To understand how this transition happened this thesis synthesised lived spatial memories, architectural drawings from the archives and post war magazines. Oral interviews established how the kitchen in rural houses was not a defined space, where the housework was shared between the women of the family. The family was broader and often many family units were living together. In contrast, the analysis of the INA-Casa regulations and plans showed how the architects favoured compositions where the kitchen was separated from the living room and had minimum measurements, so that only one person could fit in the space. The urban apartment hid the work of women in the kitchen and isolated them from the rest of the family. It also defined a new type of family, a nuclear and smaller family; this left the burden of housework on only one woman. Finally, the visual analysis of magazines and journals highlighted how advertisement helped to concretize this transition. The advertising industry naturalised a new role for women by selling the illusion of liberation from housework thanks to new appliances and technologies, while underlying the message of subordination of women to the space of the house, and specially of the kitchen.

By connecting architectural analysis and feminist theory this thesis offers a theoretical background to understand architectural and cultural shifts that happened in a crucial period for the development of Italy after the Second World War. Feminist theorists have long argued that patriarchy relies on the social and spatial segregation of women to make their work invisible and unwaged. This study proves that this isolation was not only a social construct but a designed architectural condition, the physical evidence of this exploitation. Architecture had a leading role in actively enforcing the model of the unwaged and solitary housewife.

This study focuses on the city of Parma and its surroundings, it establishes a methodological framework that can be applied to broader contexts. Future research could use this methodology to expand on the topic and study or compare it to other areas of Italy or other countries.

Ultimately, the history of the evolution of post-war Italian kitchens reveals how the domestic space is never a neutral background to everyday life, it's an active agent that shapes practices, models and

behaviour. The modernisation of the home did not liberate women, it redesigned their confinement and role.

By analysing and understanding the spatial mechanisms that isolated women in the past, we expose the power of the built environment to shape human behaviour and are able to actively think about our practice today.

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