

# *CREATIVITY* and REALITY

THE ART OF BUILDING FUTURE CITIES

P R O C E E D I N G S



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Dottorato di Ricerca in Architettura e Costruzione  
Dipartimento di Architettura e Progetto  
Sapienza Università di Roma



# 1<sup>st</sup> ICONA

International Conference on Architecture

December 18-19 2019 | Rome

## *CREATIVITY* and REALITY The art of building *future* cities

*edited by*

Orazio Carpenzano | Alessandra Capanna  
Anna Irene Del Monaco | Francesco Menegatti  
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# CONFERENCE PROGRAM

## DAY ONE | 18 december

### PLENARY SESSION CREATIVITY AND REALITY

*Opening Ceremony* **Anna Maria Giovenale**  
*Dean of Faculty of Architecture, Sapienza University of Rome*

*Opening Speech* **Orazio Carpenzano**  
*Director of Department of Architecture and Design, Sapienza University of Rome*

*Lectures* **GIORGIO DE RITA** *Secretary General of CENSIS*

**MARC AUGÉ** *Ethnologist and anthropologist*

*Interlude* *speaker* **Anna Irene Del Monaco** *IConA Curator*

*Lectures* **RUBEN OTERO** *Drucker Arquitetos Asociados | Brazil*

**JOSHUA BOLCHOVER** *Rufwork Architects | China*

*Discussant* **Alessandra Capanna** *IConA Curator*

*1st PARALLEL TABLES* *PT 1.1 | PT 1.2 | PT 1.3*

# DAY TWO | 19 december

*2nd PARALLEL TABLES* PT 2.1 | PT 2.2 | PT 2.3 | PT 2.4

## **PLENARY SESSION THE ART OF BUILDING FUTURE CITIES**

**Renato Masiani**  
*Senior Deputy Rector, Sapienza University of Rome*

*Lecture* **LUCIANO VIOLANTE** *Judge, Politician and Academic*

*Round Table* speaker **Dina Nencini** *ICoNA Curator*

**Giovanni Maria Flick** *Jurist, Politician and Academic*  
**Orazio Carpenzano** *Director of DIAP*  
**Margherita Petranzan** *Director of Anfione e Zeto*  
**Franco Purini** *Emeritus Professor Sapienza*  
**Lucio Valerio Barbera** *Full Professor Sapienza*  
**Alessandra Capuano** *Director of PhD School*  
**Antonino Saggio** *Full Professor Sapienza*

## **PLENARY SESSION CREATIVITY AND REALITY**

speaker **Francesco Menegatti** *ICoNA Curator*

*Lectures* **PIER VITTORIO AURELI** *(Dogma: Aureli + Tattara)*

**RAFFAELLA NERI** *Full Professor Politecnico of Milan*

*Final Round Table* speakers **Alessandra Capanna** and **Dina Nencini** + *All Chairs of Parallel Tables*

*Closing Speech* **Orazio Carpenzano** *Director of DIAP, Sapienza University of Rome*

*Abstract Selected:*  
**158 Authors**  
**121 Contributions**  
**51 Institutions**

*Abstract Received:*  
**252 Authors**  
**196 Contributions**  
**73 Institutions**

*drawing by*  
*Luigi Savio*  
*Margagliotta*



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# Between monuments rediscovering and urban values, the creativity as a design tool

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monument | street | porosity | gate | surprise

## ABSTRACT

*Creativity can work as a great operational tool to improve the quality of the existing city in terms of porosity (as suggested by Richard Sennett, in “Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City”, Allen Lane, 2018). Creativity can spring from different urban and architectural strategies and actions, inserting unexpected components and factors within the field, transforming buildings, hybridizing public spaces and collective facilities. But creativity – this is the paper’s goal – can spring also from a process of giving new roles to architectural and artistic monuments. It’s the paradigmatic case of Santa Maria di Campagna (a Renaissance church designed by Alessio Tramello and built in Piacenza in the first half of the XVI century). The most precious part of the church is the frescoed dome, a masterpiece by the Italian painter Giovanni Antonio de’ Sacchis, known as Il Pordenone. Through recent works (financially supported by Banca di Piacenza) the so-called “Camminamento degli Artisti” was re-opened, establishing new and fascinating points of view from the dome’s base. It’s an operation which includes topics of identity and attraction and it becomes creative in its ability to get the maximum result with a low-impact action.*

*Together with the focus on the church itself and on its own renewed flows, we need also to discuss about the possibility of such an architectural and low-budget action to redefine urban hierarchies. Santa Maria di Campagna is on the western edge of Piacenza historical city center. The religious complex traditionally marked the transition between the city and the open lands (and its name confirm this special condition). With the walls’ break (they remain in their aesthetical and historical value), the role of the church changed radically, loosing its identity of gate and threshold. But, unexpectedly, the new accessibility to the dome and its attractive strenght are transforming the conditions, re-balacing the urban role of the different components in the field. Along this line, it’s also possible to find a new sense to the words Marco Filoni (in “Anatomia di un assedio. La paura nella città”, Skira, 2019) is dedicating to urban thresholds: “La porta è una possibilità per la città. È il suo limite. È la soglia – e in quanto tale cancella il limite fra dentro e fuori, quando è aperta, così come lo rimarca, quando è chiusa. La porta è il confine dell’uomo”. The paper wants to go in depth with these topics, starting from the case-study.*

The paper – within the 1st ICONA conference – is a great occasion to discuss about interactions among creativity and urban design, on the line of a research in progress that focuses on an historical monument in the city of Piacenza, interpreted as a factor able to push a contemporary large-impact transformation of its own surrounding. The case-study supports an interpretation of creativity as a field of potential architectural actions strongly involved, in a dialectic relationship, with reality, in a process where creativity itself can add: new meanings and values to existing conditions; renovated vocations, uses and functions to be integrated in urban situations; unexpected opportunities, opening wide fields of possibilities, in consolidated urban conditions and using monumental fragments. We need to think “out of the box”, accepting also hybrid actions, where architectural and urban design becomes one of the numerous components, if possible the driving one, of physical and spatial transformations. The well-known drawings of “Mobile Architecture”<sup>1</sup> by Yona Friedman are emblematic and they’re suggesting our image, with the unexpected and aerial metallic forms able to become part of a new horizon. But, shifting our gaze and focusing the ground floor, creativity can become a factor also in its own capacity to improve the porosity, which can be seen as one of the key-element of contemporary cities, synonymous of urban quality<sup>2</sup>.

*A topical case-study: Santa Maria di Campagna, Piacenza*

The case-study of Santa Maria di Campagna in Piacenza is an emblematic and topical reference about the subject. Here a particular process is in progress: it integrates the enhancement of the historical monument itself with building innovative identities and vocations. New possibilities of usage are strongly modifying the impacts the monument can generate in the west corner of Farnesian Walls and of the city historical core, along the axis of Via Francigena. It’s a manifold urban sector within which the church is acting as piece of a complex palimpsest. The occasion for an examination comes from the research<sup>3</sup> the author is working on within Piacenza Campus of Politecnico di Milano. There are three aspects that make this place a significant testimony of a historical-artistic nature<sup>4</sup> but also – and above all – a place that, in its recent and probably involuntary valorisation actions, is discovering a possibility of projecting its own centrality as a capable factor, even in the contemporary world, to create form and space: the urban role that the sixteenth-century building played and which still plays (the relationship with the street is interesting; suggestive are the relationships that its Greek cross plan generates with the fabric built around it, in particular in relation to the system of open spaces not fully resolved between the street, the fortifications, the parking, the collective buildings); the architectural form – Bramante-style in some ways, severe and rigorous in the brick exterior and the overlapping of the lanterns – which builds a sort of civic temple, halfway between the religious destination and that of a secular monument; the exceptional quality of the cycle of internal frescoes, which place the building in a position of absolute pre-eminence and international appeal.

It is exactly this third point that the research investigates, especially as a consequence of a recent light architectural intervention and enhancement, which in fact has contributed to radically modify some conditions and interpretations that allow to approach the theme itself. Santa Maria di Campagna is a Renaissance church designed by Alessio Tramello and built in the first half of the XVI century. It is an almost out of scale, harsh and severe building, which is placed in an interesting way within a quadrant, the ancient eastern gate of the city, composed of discontinuous sections of the city walls, from the path of the ancient Via Francigena that pierces the center historical and numerous collective functions. It is a place of threshold, passage, entry and exit from the city that the renewed demands of modernity have, at least in part, debased as a place of car traffic in which the large mass of the church (which turns the apse towards the exterior and the main facade, to the east, towards the heart of the city) builds an imposing, real and symbolic presence together. But it is not so much the architectural quality of the building that interests us here. If anything, we need to introduce the most precious part of the church: the frescoed dome, a masterpiece by the Italian painter Giovanni Antonio de ‘Sacchis, known as Il Pordenone. Through recent works (financially supported by Banca di Piacenza<sup>5</sup>) the so-called ‘Camminamento degli

*Fig.1*  
*Santa Maria di*  
*Campagna,*  
*Piacenza,*  
*Tramello's*  
*frescoes in the*  
*"new" path*



*Fig. 2*

*Urban sign for the*  
*new trip to the*  
*frescoes, via*  
*Campagna*



Artisti' was re-opened, establishing new and fascinating points of view from the dome's base. It's an operation which includes topics of identity and attraction and it becomes creative in its ability to get the maximum result with a low-impact action. The ascent to the base of the tambour has a growing success, proposing itself as a path of ascent, through previously inaccessible places, which allows an absolutely unexpected dimension. The creative aspect lies in having solicited – through a multi-layer operation (based on a cultural marketing approach, one might say) – alternative methods of use, capable of modifying not so much (and not only) the physical-spatial spheres as instead the idea and concept of the place and monument. Together with the focus on the church itself and on its own renewed flows, it's also possible to discuss about the possibility of such an architectural and low-budget action to redefine urban hierarchies. The religious complex traditionally marked the transition between the city and the open lands (and its name confirm this special condition). With the walls' break (they remain in their aesthetical and historical value, not more as a border and a system of control), the role of the church changed radically, loosing its identity of gate and threshold. But, unexpectedly, the new accessibility to the dome and its attractive strenght are transforming the conditions, re-balacing the urban localization of the different components in the field. Working on the concept of limit and border that sound – more and more – as a key concept of the contemporary city. Along this line, it's also possible to find a new meaning to the words Marco Filoni <sup>6</sup> dedicates to urban thresholds: “La porta è una possibilità per la città. È il suo limite. È la soglia – e in quanto tale cancella il limite fra dentro e fuori, quando è aperta, così come lo rimarca, quando è chiusa. La porta è il confine dell'uomo”. Thus, unexpectedly – and in some ways surprisingly – what happens tens of meters above the city level, and faintly marked at ground level with a small and insignificant advertising sign, can contribute to transforming urban settings and territorial dynamics consolidated by decades. A 'simple', not to say 'banal' operation, that is located among the urban marketing and the recreational-cultural tourism seems capable of triggering a reaction of enormous importance, in line with the logic of 'small scale big change' <sup>7</sup>. From a mainly passive space – to be observed – the dome becomes a hospitable, active one, to discover and to live. In this renewed relationship in section between above and below, the urban knot church-around is transformed – from a mere and static monument with public square and street – into a sort of mobile and dynamic membrane. In this case too, we're facing a key concept of the contemporary city, such as the membrane itself.

*The case-study lets us to reply to some general questions:*

*- Can creativity work as an operational tool within the existing environments?*

Usually the word and the concept of creativity is linked with new projects, innovative systems and buildings. But creativity is also – and mainly – a deeper condition of the transformativity our projects can use and adopt. Vittorio Gregotti wrote a lot about these points and his idea of creative modification sounds as an unavoidable stone. Creativity can act – in the field of design – within consolidated conditions, transforming historical monuments, changing their own character and identity, impacting – in this way – on urban layouts and dynamics. The creativity itself can become a 'medium' factor able to see and to interpret the monuments – and urban sectors surrounding them – hybridizing the categories: the triad 'morphology/typology/technology' can be creatively re-proposed in 'porosity/identity/resilience'.

*- Can the creative action be a driver for architectural and urban transformations and a factor able to redeem a trivial urban condition?*

Focusing physical and spatial tissues and systems, the creative action seems today the most suitable – in an era of 'weak' cultures and scarce resources available – to realize latent potential in a place. Opening ICONA conference (Wednesday,



*Fig.3*

*Urban/Suburban  
transition, aerial  
view from the  
church's roof*



*Fig. 4*

*The church in the  
complex urban  
and landscape  
system*

December 18th) Giorgio De Rita said: “If we have to think in creative terms, we have to look at reality to bring out those elements that already exist, that are already ‘in nuce’”. The case study expresses this condition and this situation paradigmatically. Creativity, also understood in the sense of light and immediate, reversible and temporary action, is capable of extracting latent and hidden elements from cities and places which, in a given historical period, can become essential references. Cities – today more than ever – are made of certainties but also of many uncertainties. The monuments (symbol and emblem of certainty) also express variable and changing conditions and – like other solid parts of the urban condition – are subject to changing interpretations. The churches even, together with the rituality of the cult, express their role as complex public spaces becoming first of all (also in their availability for change and manipulation) “common goods”, as said in the intense speech – always within the ICONA program (Thursday , December, 19th) – by Giovanni Maria Flick <sup>8</sup>.

*- Can creativity manifest its own transformative potential through not-physical or light actions (architectural or not)?*

The creativity can be seen and used as the opportunity of revealing unexpected views and usability options in a 500-years-old building which condensates history, stories and memory. The unique way and tool to transform so radically the condition is exactly working with light inserts (software instead of hardware). During the time the monument found itself involved in a complex urban sector with interrupted elements and components. This means it lost the role of urban gate. It can be restored not moving materials and masses but adapting connections and links, inputs and plugs. Creativity helps us also in this action: to switch on and to switch off. Is it enough for the design? Is it enough for the project? For sure, the creativity is the condition to conceive a story. Besides the design level, and maybe independently from it, the tale is the condition of the project, as Orazio Carpenzano told in the final speech of ICONA: “We need a poetical dimension, we need to build a plot and a tale”.

### *Conclusions*

Creativity can spring from different urban and architectural strategies and actions, inserting unexpected components and factors within the field, transforming buildings, hybridizing public spaces and collective facilities. But creativity can spring also from a process of giving new roles to architectural and artistic monuments.

The selection of the case study, in order to support these topics, seems particularly significant for at least three reasons:

1. first of all because it finds itself interacting with an ‘Italian’ city, in the deepest sense: Piacenza is in the center of the country, has an average city size, both in terms of population and surface. It means that it is an absolutely ordinary situation. If these kinds of operations, which involve creativity as a factor in the project, work here they can work anywhere;
2. the quality of the monument object of the intervention is also ordinary. Churches like Santa Maria di Campagna are widespread in Italy, as well as – extending the look – in Europe. They express historical memory values, with an average artistic quality. However, they express a singular character and vocation, because they are unique in the relationship they generate with the place in which they are located. In this sense, the creative intervention is strongly local;
3. the third element is the location along an axis of the road system that the contemporary world, with its discoveries and rediscoveries, proposes as the historical route of the Via Francigena. Being on an identity street and passing through a potentially interested public obviously becomes a factor that makes creative modification attractive.

These conditions, in Santa Maria di Campagna in Piacenza, demonstrate that a software and creative project is capable of: re-inventing the past, re-inventing the memory, re-inventing the monument, re-connecting it with a renovated society. In this capacity for renewal – which now, given the conditions, could potentially extend, in a virtuous circle, to the urban surroundings with traditional architectural actions – creativity has played and plays an important and impossible

to replace role, in its ability to to be ‘between the lines’, to build diversified relationships with different components and fields of knowledge. And to tell a story.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The experience, started in the Fifties of the Hungarian-born French architect, urban planner and designer is here reported in its ability of transforming real and existing conditions through actions impacting in different modalities and with different weights, mainly working modifying the section.
- <sup>2</sup> Porosity is presented and discussed as one of the main topic of the contemporary city in many works. Between them it’s possible to quote Richard Sennett in his recent book *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*.
- <sup>3</sup> Research title is *Complex stratigraphies and renewed identity. The Church of Santa Maria di Campagna in the Piacenza urban fabric* and is developed in the Polo Territoriale di Piacenza of Politecnico di Milano, with the scientific supervision of Guya Bertelli.
- <sup>4</sup> There are not many sources that document the quality and characteristics of the Church of Santa Maria di Campagna. Among these, the following deserve to be mentioned: Corna A. (1983), *Guida storico-artistica di S. Maria di Campagna Piacenza*, Piacenza and Adorni B., *Il tempio civico di Santa Maria in Campagna*, in *Storia di Piacenza. Dalla Signoria Viscontea al Principato Farnesiano*, Volume III, 1313-1545, TIP.LE.CO. Editore, 1997, pp. 641-646.
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.salitaalpordenone.it/index.php/en/> is the web-site dedicated to the experience and powered by Banca di Piacenza. Valeria Poli, a local history scholar, describes the renovated attraction with these words: “The Salita al Pordenone is a cultural initiative whose main objective is to valorize the Basilica of Santa Maria di Campagna as a “crossroads of artists”. (...) The frescoes by Pordenone on the dome of the Basilica of Santa Maria di Campagna can be admired closely, as never before. An event (from March 4 to June 10, 2018) that rediscovers the “Walkway of artists”, a route that – as often remembered by Ferdinando Arisi – was used by the students of the Art Institute Gazzola to see the frescoes by Pordenone “in altitude” and to study the perspective (some even wrote their surnames, with still visible graffiti). A circular gallery opens on to the city on the outside and it is where the frescoes of the dome can be admired in altitude. The Salita – restored by the Banca di Piacenza following the directions of the Superintendent – has been equipped with a waiting area (the walkway is unique and should therefore be used for both the ascent and descent) where visitors can stop to receive information from illustrated panels and from guides recruited among students and new graduates. Studies on Pordenone, but also on the history of the Basilica, show that the church was built where once a little church dedicated to Our Lady was located, situated on a large open space where, shortly after the year 1000 AD, a Council took place during which Urban II announced the first Crusade”.
- <sup>6</sup> The recent book “Anatomia di un assedio. La paura nella città”, Skira, 2019, is a deep work about components of the city. The English translation of the extract is: “The gate is a possibility for the city. It is its limit. It is the threshold – and as such it cancels the boundary between inside and outside, when it is open, just as it emphasizes it, when it is closed. The gate is the boundary of man”.
- <sup>7</sup> As the title of the topical exhibition of New York Moma “Small Scale, Big Change: New Architectures of Social Engagement” (October 3, 2010-January 3, 2011), curated by Andres Lepik.
- <sup>8</sup> Program and biographies of the ICONA lecturers at <https://www.iconaconference.com/>.

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*The field of knowledge defined by the terms “creativity” and “reality” may be considered the permanent framework for a reflection on innovation and the transformation of architecture and cities. However, it should be noted that in current decades, creativity as the engine of human invention and reality as a response to human needs have had, as their dominant field of application, technological innovation rather than the development of new city images. In recent times architecture and world cities have been especially “designed” by neoliberal, global and urban policies following the realization of mega-events, shopping malls, gated communities, large scale facilities, urban villages, spectacular architectural objects, territorial infrastructure and immaterial networks.*

*Moreover, while the urban transformations of the European cities are still designed according to the tradition of the last two-centuries, the challenge to design within informal contexts emerged as an inevitable need to match and support the cultural and social identities of the enormous “informal” and “illegal” communities, to deal with inequalities and “expulsions”, to improve living conditions and make urban space more democratic, technological and dialogic. Within this framework of “Plural Urbanism” rethinking the concepts of Creativity and Reality can be an important contribution to the construction of an “open city” in which sympathetic imagination, realistic and bold innovation will still be considered the architect’s principal means and can still feed the art of building the future city and architecture according to its actual realities, needs, emergencies, for pursuing a widespread human wellbeing and tackling the forces hidden in the global changes.*



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