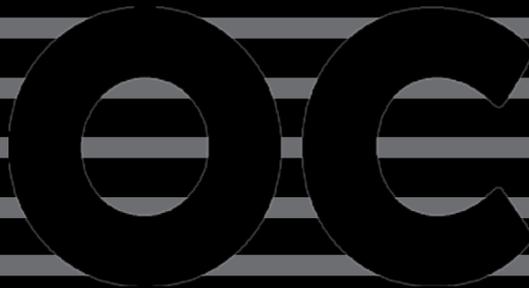


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from landscape to exterior design

NATURE IN THE CITY

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Carlos García Vázquez
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Si ringraziano il Comune di Piacenza e l'Ordine degli Architetti, Pianificatori, Paesaggisti e Conservatori per aver contribuito alla pubblicazione di questo volume

Nature in the city.

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ISBN 978-88-9160-435-4

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Azienda con sistema qualità certificato ISO 9001:2000

47822 Santarcangelo di Romagna (RN) • Via del Carpino, 8

Tel. 0541/628111 • Fax 0541/622020

www.maggioli.it/servizioclienti

e-mail: servizio.clienti@maggioli.it

Diritti di traduzione, di memorizzazione elettronica, di riproduzione

e di adattamento, totale o parziale con qualsiasi mezzo sono riservati per tutti i Paesi.

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Il catalogo completo è disponibile su www.maggioli.it area università

Graphic Design by arch. Ester Dedè

Finito di stampare nel mese di luglio 2014

da DigitalPrint Service s.r.l. – Segrate (Milano)

OC - Open City
INTERNATIONAL
SUMMER SCHOOL

Piacenza 2013

*from ecological landscape
to architectural design*

NATURE IN THE CITY

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FORM, FIGURE AND LANDSCAPE FOR NATURE IN THE CITY

Pasquale Mei



Agricultural field outside Piacenza City center

"The learning process, coming from the relationship between subject and object, has as its own result a process of synthesis that is capable to get elementary relationships, making them independent from other meanings. To formalize means to make visible a sequence of elements and the system which creates the relationships, according to singular specificities. The shape resulting is not a passive recording but a production of reality" [1]

Fabrizio Spirito

Strategies for "green cone" area are interpreting the topic of "Nature in the city" through a sequence of landscapes, defined by their cycle of agricultural production, from the territory to the historical center, through different urban thresholds able to make a structure for the southern area of Piacenza, stressing three "rooms", at three different scales:

- at the territorial scale, where farmhouses create a system of elements as hot points overlooking the agricultural surface, interpreted as a background;
- at the urban scale, the reconfiguration of the morphological tissue of the *Quartiere modello di INA Casa* permits to read the district itself as a specific "room" inside Piacenza urban fabric;
- at the architectural scale, gardens of interior courtyards of via Francigena buildings and a new urban design for public space of Piazza Duomo permit to insert a going-in-depth process to the details.

By-passing different types of tissue – from the agricultural one of cultivations in Piacenza farmland to the urban one in its own various morphological characters (for instance dense, rarefied, scattered tissues) - you can cross systems of connective infrastructures at different scales of mobility, from the faster one of the motorway road ring, to urban and district streets, to the slower mobility defined by the system of cycle-paths network, that is common in our study area, even though not yet involved in a system with other cycle-paths spread in the territory.

This topical condition of different forms of landscapes – from the agricultural one to the urban one, hybridized by the infrastructural landscape – is seen into a system through a project action, the by-passing, that - together with the action of building a boundary and of stressing of a centrality - is defining the figure object of interest and study[2].

The main route is characterized by a section which is not getting the role of tool for representing the reality, but it instead becomes tool for design *measure* and *relationship* among

green section

different thresholds stressed. The project action of by-passing, through a section/sequence, is composed by a plurality of directions able to define a series of "rooms - enclosures", with different levels of permeability, stressing their grade of opening and closing in relations with the city. The stressed directions are crossing different conditions of relationship among density and rarefaction, among figure and background, suggesting three different categories of void[3]:

- *void as background* of agricultural system where farmhouses are topical points dominating the background of agricultural landscape;
- *void as space defined* by morphological tissue of historical city, stressed by public spaces system of squares (Piazza Cavalli, Piazza Duomo, Piazza Sant'Antonino) and of roads (Via Francigena, Stradone Farnese), or courtyards urban spaces, but also private sites (Palazzo Farnese, Palazzo Gotico), of gardens and vegetable-gardens, more and more intended as a function not just private but also as a function with a public vocation, as, for instance, *urban vegetable-gardens*.
- *interior void*, both public and private, without a precise formal character, usually a transitional space between void as *background* (farmland) and *void as space defined* (in the city urban tissue). Waste space, scrap among infrastructural relics defining left-overs that are becoming abandoned spaces.

These three different categories of void coincide with three thresholds characterizing historical development of the European city[4], marking different ages (ancient, modern and contemporary) permitting a re-interpretation of Piacenza as an exemplar case-study.

Urban space is "*site of relationship and of event, the space for the public, the environment where a collective structure and the backdrop of urban events simultaneity is reflecting*" [5], but it's also the space "*diversified, open and collective. It's the public space intended as an urban void where movement and variation are happening, where process of time and of human action are explicated*" [6].

The void as space defined, interpreted as the space in the historical city tissue, is determined by the masses identified by palaces, buildings and



green section

every object of morphological tissue, which – as a mold – are determining the shape of the void. It has specific characters of public spaces, in the project culture of European city, as: agora, foro, square, of the Renaissance and of the Baroque, up to the Enlightenment Age, determining its own formal quality of a figure that is close and understandable inside the built-up density.

“Strong formalization of urban space can be read as the negative face of a large figure which is, at the end, the image of the city. Unity of its configuration and the variety of details of its space are complementary in a dialectic way. Concept of the city, looking for building discontinuity, is represented by Nolli in his plan for Roma in 1748, where urban space is shaped as an integrated and fluid system of specific sites. Its lowest common denominator is its being hybridized by events of public life, and where the void is a continuous, instant and multiple backdrop” [7].

Even if Farnesian walls limit (XVI century) is still today exemplifying the clear relationship of *intra moenia* and *extra moenia* of historical city with its own territory and between *inside* (built-up) and *outside* (void) is beginning to know, in the last years, a break moment, mainly caused by a phenomenon of decrease that European cities are living because of economic and financial crisis.

The supremacy role of the city on the farmland is meeting its own break point, and the unambiguous relationship between city and farmland is opening for new potential shapes of relationship. It's the crack void, catalogued as the residual one, that can become productive if you put it in a system, recovering it from its state of dereliction; that happens because it can become space of relationship among elements belonging to different systems: *city/farmland* and *nature/artifice*. The category of residual void is modifying into a relational shape, as fertile site for new potential relationships.

“In architecture, the “between” centers its interest on what mediates – the architecture of relations and tagency. It's the urbanism of open systems, architecture without limits, without clauses, open to phenomenology of landscapes, but also the architecture of conjunction of the mi-



green section



THEME

nimum and without interest. It is an architecture that strengthens itself on the most difficult situations; in fact, it has a predilection for it. T Agency is its favorite place. The "between" is a space permanently on the run; a place in itself, a limit made fringe, a border made country. Moreover, it is a conquering between two belligerent territories. Strange, infiltrated, camouflaged. It is the ideal response for a project contaminated by the environment around it. It originates there, where (or starting from) the conditions are not precise, but ambiguous, confused, misapplied, hybrid, uncertain. A project that originates in this grade on confusion, for example that of our peripheries, tries to tinge itself or imbibe this or that; it tries – this "in between" project – to attract everything towards itself that it can use to make its own space".[8]

Void between objects becomes material for urban design; in fact the topical condition characterized by a strong fragmentation of new urbanized areas is requiring, more and more, an overpass of traditional dichotomy between the consolidated city and suburbs, between *nature* and *artifice*, between *inside* and *outside*, in order to build a *middle landscape* of architectures belonging to different times but each simultaneously present and not more classified in a chronological way, from the elder one to the most modern one. The intermediate measure is becoming a tool that is proposing itself as necessary for a new reading of the contemporary city, able to focus on the void as space between the objects defining new forms and new distances in order to determinate potential relations. *"To investigate systems of connections incidental to what it remains in stratification of forms developed in times, means probing new possible identities up to get its limits. (...) What is interesting to stress is exactly the gap that seems to be between the measure of objects and the system of relations which they're able to build. (...) The main interest is moving towards getting that gap created by a comparison between measure of objects and system of relationships composing it"*[9]. Urban design today has to be able to look in an ordered way and *"to make order means to start with a work"*[10], through a strategy mainly oriented to re-cover and re-use abandoned places. And it's the measure itself of abandoned spaces involved, in the last 30 years, in a process of transformation; in fact, in the texts by Bernardo Secchi with the title *"The abandoned territory"*, published in Casabella, from the 80ies to the 90ies, the complex relationship of the issues of abandon is stressed as a question not so recent and with a development with a surely much more complex and articulated equation among abandon of the farmland and development of the city, valid up to the end of the 70ies. Meantime large voids of abandoned industrial areas were balanced by a strong urban

green section

sprawling mainly caused by a growing of touristic houses, new infrastructures and social services which provoked a condition of discontinuity, in the territory, of the building principle, that in the last years we faced not with a reduction of scale but with a proliferation of abandoned areas.

We could say that we over-pass from large industrial limited areas dereliction to abandon of sites smaller and smaller but more numerous, so determining new urban voids, areas that are fertile for a regeneration of the city. Transformation of these sites is causing a new potential scenario as a new possible contemporary landscape[11] where the balance among built-up and void is defining a different level of porosity that is the character of the future city and the nature is becoming material which permits to define exactly this character. *"This word, in the double meaning of the concept and of the metaphor, is seen by a great part of people today as a tool that is useful to describe and to design contemporary cities and territories".*[12]

The project-site, the program, the theme

"We don't know what is precisely "the better", because the concept itself is progressively changing. What once was kept outside the enclave – the wild, the weed – today penetrates in the garden. It could even become the main element. We would have to ask ourselves what radically changed in the history of humanity because a defamed value becomes an appreciated treasure. What's this grass that imposes us its law?"[13]

Gilles Clément

The sites selected for the design experience of the green path *"Farm in movement: enclaves, fenced areas and agricultural fields"*, set in the south of Piacenza city, are defining a sequence of spaces that could be interpreted in the following ways: the *marginal areas* of the urban fabric, the *agricultural field* and the *urban park* of the Galleana, the *enclaves* like the gardens in via Emilio Ottolenghi, bordered in the east limit by via



green section

Giulio Arata (3rd square).

An *urban enclave* is defined by the *Modello District* – designed by architect Francesco Vaccaro from 1950 to 1952 – and by *Sette Corti District* (designed some years later) set between via Genova and via Naselli Rocca, so called according to its particular plan defined by five in-line buildings and seven block-buildings, (some of them are designed by Vico Magistretti)[14]. Both the neighbourhoods are defined by via Negrotti Dioefebo, that makes them symmetrical in a sort of double urban enclave (2nd square).

The sequence runs then into the system of the urban boulevard of *Strada del Passeggio Pubblico*, of *Sant'Agostino Monastery's cloisters*, of the *courtyard* and of *gardens* of *Cavallerizza* building, of the close private vegetable garden, of green terraces, *roof gardens and didactic vegetable garden of via San Vincenzo* building that, in the past, was a school (1st square).

The sequence is closed by the urban spaces of *Duomo* square and *Piazza Cavalli*.

Two different categories of *void* innerve this sequence of spaces: the void as the *background* of the contemporary city and the void as the space *contained* inside the dense urban fabric of the historical city.

The project-site

Le Corbusier wrote: "*the site is the plate of the architectural composition*"[15]. In Le Corbusier statement it's possible to notice the existent connection between the architectural composition and its site of intervention as an important moment of the architectural design. A project which is not an insertion but a transformative action that works through the modification caused by the new architecture. The green path can be divided into different spatial categories: *marginal areas, interstitial spaces, urban enclaves, cloisters, courtyards, gardens*. In this way it's possible to identify a figure able to answer to the theme of the relationship between *Nature and City*, or rather to the dialectic between *Nature and Artifice*.

This figure can also become a possible metaphor, at the local scale, of the agricultural product's life cycle, that proceeds from the research, to the production and to its distribution, with a continuous action of "natural recycle" that – as defined by Gilles Clément – produces energy, in opposition to the "industrial recycle" which it's consuming it. *"By this time it's no more a matter of extend the city, the landscape, the planet. It's a matter of re-invent the life space, recycling the production considered useless that comes from all the consumption sources – what we can call waste – to transform it into construction and common use materials"* [16]. In this way the *figure* of the *site* becomes metaphor of the recovery action of some spaces of the city of Piacenza and of its territory, that can be regenerated in order to give life to a new life-cycle for new practices and uses of the public space of the city, more flexible, with different possible uses and with temporary durations.

The program

It's in this perspective and with this purpose that the program foresees the following points:

- settlement of a new agricultural firm as place of production, with vegetable gardens and greenhouses, in the area that finds place at south of the path, in the *agricultural field* close to *Verza Neighbourhood*;
- requalification of the *Galleana Park* and of the *Ottolenghi Garden*, and re-drawing of the infrastructural ring of the highway (south exit);
- design of a bioclimatic architecture by use of the dwellings of *"INA Casa Model District"* and of *"GESCAL Neighbourhood"*, and design for connective tissue of public space;
- design of a new "farm in the city", gardens and vegetable garden in Cavallerizza site, definition of a research centre in the cloisters of Sant'Agostino monastery;
- green terraces and didactic vegetable gardens will be the topic of the recovery of the building of primary school in via San Vincenzo;
- strengthening of the slow mobility system (bicycle path) through intermodal nodes (parking and sharing points).

The theme

The topic of Nature in the city expresses a new cultural condition in architecture that considers the nature no more as an antithesis with the architectural artifice but as a material for the architecture itself. *"We are passing from an idea of the architecture concerning different ways of thinking the artifice in relation to the nature, to conjectures and experimentations"*

green section

where the nature acts the role of fundamental "material" for the artifice.[...] The comparison with the nature, not as background but as material of the city, can limit the character of uncontrollable and chaotic changeability. In this way the total instability of the contemporary city is no more cancelled but immersed as a vibration in the relative stability of the territorial shape"[17]. Referring to the next Expo that will be held in Milan in 2015 "Feeding the planet. Energy for life", the topic of the recovery of some abandoned spaces of Piacenza could follow natural schemes and rhythms (slow actions), according to a strict relationship between nature, architecture and design of public spaces. The regeneration, in this case, proceeds according to a new idea of the agriculture and of the agro-industrial world as an integral part of the urban space life, in order to begin a virtuous process of synergy between Countryside and City. The theme of the regeneration is realized through three different actions: the recycle of the materials (not only physical), the recovery of abandoned spaces and their reuse, that organized into a sequence are defining a path through marginal areas, enclaves and interstitial spaces of the city, in order to redefine processes of smart re-activation in "dwelling the city". The process, even before the project, aims to the definition of new paradigms for future urban architecture, that will transform, evolve and modify itself without consuming new resources.

Notes

- [1] Fabrizio Spirito, *Saper Leggere. Dal Formale al figurale*, CUEN Napoli 2011, pp. 13-14.
- [2] Corrado Di Domenico (a cura di), *L'area-progetto*, Collana materiali di ricerca N 3, CUEN Napoli 2011, p.2.
- [3] Notes of the lectures given by Guya Bertelli, in the class Corso di Analisi della Morfologia Urbana e Tipologie Edilizie, Corso di Studio in Architettura Ambientale, academic years 2012/13 e 2013/14. Polo Territoriale di Piacenza, Politecnico di Milano.
- [4] Leonardo Benevolo, *La città nella storia d'Europa*, Laterza, Bari-Roma 2007.
- [5] Fernando Espuelas, *Il vuoto. Riflessioni sullo spazio in architettura*, Christian Marinotti Edizioni, Milano 2004, p. 13.
- [6] Fernando Espuelas, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
- [7] Fernando Espuelas, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
- [8] Manuel Gausa, in dictionary *The metapolis dictionary of advanced architecture*, word "in between", Actar, Barcellona 2003, p. 334.
- [9] Fabrizio Spirito, *Saper leggere. Dal formale al figurale*, CUEN Napoli 2011, pp. 112-113.
- [10] Le Corbusier, *Verso un'architettura*.
- [11] A contemporary landscape is intended as a landscape where it is the temporal dimension, and not only the spatial one, structuring its own character.
- [12] Paola Viganò, *I territori dell'urbanistica. Il progetto, come produttore di conoscenza*, Officina Edizioni, 2010, Roma, p. 191.
- [13] Gilles Clément, *Giardini, paesaggio e genio naturale*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2013, p.18.
- [14] Fabrizio Achilli, Daniele Fanzini, Valeria Poli, C. Raschiani, *Popolare la città. 100 anni di case popolari a Piacenza*, Maggioli Editore, Milano 2009.
- [15] Le Corbusier, *Entretien avec les étudiants des écoles d'architecture*, Parigi 1943.
- [16] Gilles Clément, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
- [17] Pepe Barbieri, *Metropoli piccole*, Meltemi, Roma 2003.

green section

1st thematic area
Agricultural fields:

Agricultural fields



Functional Program

Farms

- Project of Production-Places:
Agricultural-research Centre)
Green-houses
Gardens (Kitchen-Gardens)
- Development of a slow-mobility system:
Bicycle Path-ways
Intermodal hub (slow-fast mobility exchange)



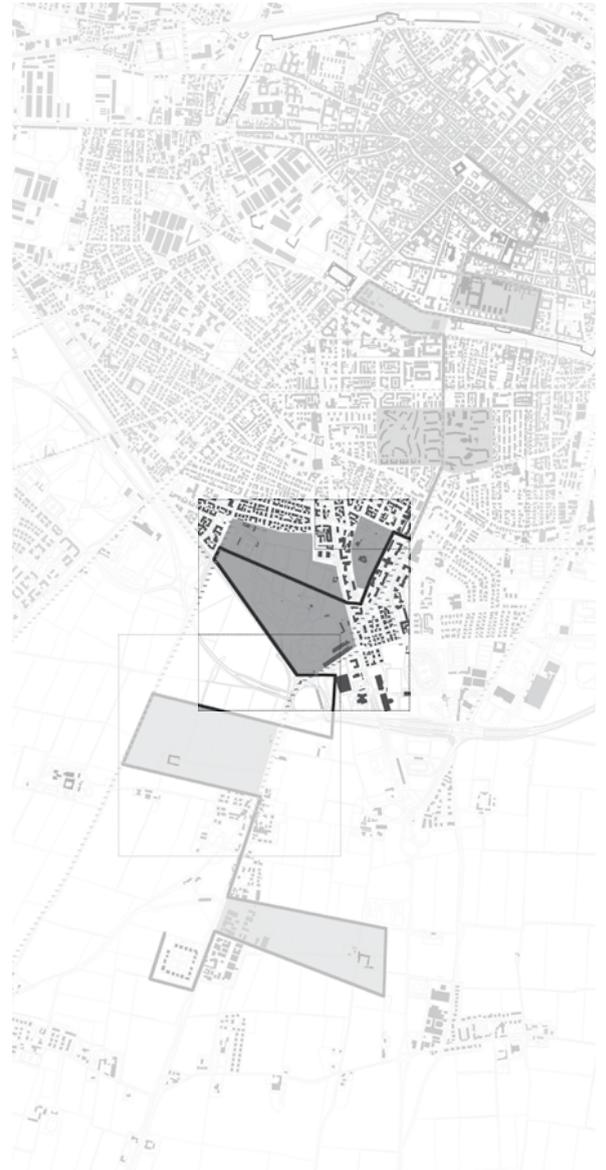
1st THEMATIC AREA

AGRICULTURAL FIELDS

green section

2nd thematic area
Galleana Park and Ottolenghi Garden:

Galleana Park
Ottolenghi Garden



Functional Program

- Requalification of the Galleana Park and of the Ottolenghi Garden, and re-drawing of the infrastructural ring of the highway (south exit)
- Project of production-places:
Green-houses and didactic Gardens
- Development of a slow-mobility system:
Bicycle Path-ways
Intermodal hub (slow-fast mobility exchange)



2nd THEMATIC AREA

GALLEANA PARK AND OTTOLENGHI GARDEN

green section

3rd thematic area
"INA Casa" Neighborhood:

"INA Casa" Neighborhood



Functional Program

- Project of bioclimatic architecture for a new use of the houses in the INA Casa Neighborhood
- Project of the open spaces as a connetive tissue
- Design of neighborhood greenhouse and gardens
- Development of a slow mobility system
 - Pedestrian Path
 - Bicycle Path-ways



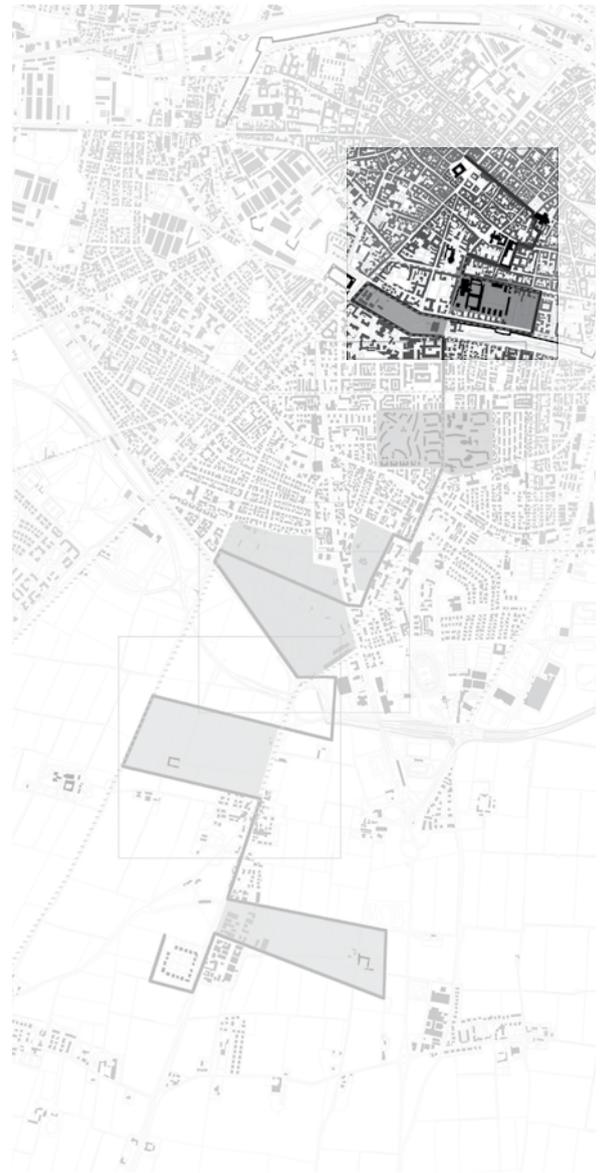
3rd THEMATIC AREA

"INA CASA" NEIGHBORHOOD

green section

4th thematic area
Cavallerizza:

Cavallerizza
Abandoned school of San Vincenzo



Functional Program

- Design of a new "farm in the city", gardens and vegetable garden in Cavallerizza site, definition of a research centre in the cloisters of Sant'Agostino monastery
- Recovering of places never used: houses in the Cavallerizza park
- Project of green terraces and didactic vegetable garden in the open spaces of the former elementary school of via San Vincenzo.
- Development of a slow-mobility system:
Bicycle Path-ways
Intermodal hub (slow-fast mobility exchange)



4th THEMATIC AREA

CAVALLERIZZA