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1831_9. CONCLUSION

AN INCESSANT RESEARCH EXERCISE ON THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF FIORENZUOLA D'ARDA CITY

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ABSTRACT

Designing means looking at and listening to what surrounds us, it means respect for the dense layers of signs sedimented by the time that, in their continuous change, become elements that enrich the existing heritage. Knowing the stratigraphy of a building or a context, not only in a physical sense, allows us to think about new uses, new needs and to set them up in a manner consistent with the pre-existence.

It is a matter of unveiling potential unexpressed identities to materialize them in reality and bring them out of their latent state.

When the project faces a historical built environment, the role assumption of the knowledge direction becomes particularly significant and necessary in the transforming process of a space in another way than the original one. The project interprets the role of unifying catalyst of the different disciplines necessary for the design of a new space.

Following this track, the case study of Fiorenzuola d'Arda city will be taken as a concrete laboratory in which the knowledge of history has become a guiding tool for the project.

The enhancement of the architectural context characterized by the presence of historic buildings with their internal spatiality and the open space with which they relate, also requires the inclusion of new architectural elements, both through internal interventions, and through new additions, opening a dialogue aware between what the building was, is now, and what is becoming. A process that is not closed in itself, but that

tries to investigate and value the continuous and changing relationship between the city, a part of it, and the single architectural episode with its system of relationships.

It is a profitable process that defines levels of complex relationships, enriches, presents, adds, removes, mediates, tells, briefly, plans the change, searching the appropriate form.

KEYWORDS

Architectural heritage; permanence and transformation; unveiling identity.

INTRODUCTION

The demonstrative occasion of the project methodology application to investigate and design in a systemic way, which primarily chooses to work on the existing heritage by promoting a line of sustainable development for the current city, was the collaboration program between a group of researchers from the Polytechnic of Milan and the Municipal Administration of Fiorenzuola d'Arda city.

The ambition to offer a concrete project theme and direct debate with institutional bodies and citizenship over the years has allowed us to verify new functions and activities to be included, test different structures of public spaces, highlight the possibility of connection urban alternatives, framing the focus of the investigation each time within the historical stratigraphy and re-reading the complex weave of signs and relationships that constitutes the urban fabric.

1. KNOWLEDGE AS A PREMISE TO RESPECT COMPLEXITY AND TO REKINDLE A TERRITORY TOWARDS THE PROJECT

1.1. The complexity of the territory: space and time

The territory can no longer be considered as the physical place where fragmentary monumental episodes are located, but as a complex system of architectural assets and open spaces that interact to form its structure. The widespread historical architecture is perhaps the essential component of the landscape resources that contributes to determining the historical substance of any territorial system. Recently, in addition to the interest in architectural monuments, all those tracks that constitute a concrete testimony to the material, social, political and religious life of a place and the community that inhabits it have become important: the effort result, both in terms of knowledge and design, is to consider them as part of a more complex and articulated system.

Within this ever-changing panorama, the architect interprets, builds and tells. Apparently in opposition, construction - linked to space, which uses stone to show itself - and storytelling - linked to time and word - are instead closely related to each other: in fact not all about the space is regarding to the form, and not all about time is related to the stopwatch.

Both are linked to the concept of human life (Riva 2008): that's why we can define the existing reality, be it an urban or landscape fragment, a place of living, with all the meanings and depth that derive from it. When the architect is called to know and to intervene on architectural heritage, in its several aspects, the effort has to be to interpret places not only from the physical point of view, in any case very rich of meanings and character, but also from an *anthropological* point of view: the built carries on itself the tracks of the ways of living.

Questioning ourselves also on this aspect is necessary to prefigure possible transformation scenarios able, on the one hand, of preserving the character of tradition and, at the same time, of welcoming new needs and new requests and trying to give an answer through an appropriate spatial configuration.

1.2. The knowledge between representation and vision

First of all, what do we mean by a *knowledge project*? A representation that is the language we use to describe a piece of the world. What is represented is not the reality itself, but a reconstruction chosen by the observer who, by returning it, interprets it. However, it cannot be limited to a description of the obviousness, linked to the perceptual approach, but has to become an explanation of the phenomenon investigated.

Through an inquiring gaze of complexity (material, architectural, spatial, relational...), capable of a *deep vision*, it aims to reveal the mechanisms and reasons that explain, as well as give meaning, to the evidence. It is not an almost obsessive accumulation of data and notions, although scientific, the use of these, in a conscious and transversal way, to be able to highlight the *underlying form* (Tagliagambe 1998, 20), or the system of relationships (physical but also temporal and social) between the parties.

Therefore bibliographic, documentary, and archival research become an opportunity to read and interpret the transformation processes, over time and in the matter.

Survey activity is no longer a mechanical action - taking measurements and returning them graphically - but it means investigating, researching, knowing, and understanding, to acquire awareness of the complex and articulated nature of architecture, over time and history.

Specialized investigations, which in recent decades have used increasingly advanced

equipment, are invaluable when they help to give specific answers, to validate some insights or not. The analytical data itself, the result of a specialist investigation, has a relative and limited value if not related to the complexity of the complete cognitive activity. The constructed reality remains unchanged; knowledge can be compared, therefore, to the set of linguistic tools that we use to explain the existing, capable of giving us back the most different aspects, which are located at levels of greater or lesser depth.

The knowledge of the built city is therefore an opening in a multiplicity of interpretations that have to be respected in their plurality and become the premise for the project. Different points of view and methods of investigation from ours help us to read and understand the forms of contemporary life: they are the result of an articulated framework of complicity and differences, of contradictory and complementary elements of continuous processes of direct and induced transformation.

1.3. The project between permanence and mutation

The territory cannot be described, analyzed, and even less designed, and therefore transformed, through simplifications and reductions, but requires an approach

that respects its inextricable complexity and the simultaneous presence of heterogeneous events and aspects, which they constitute a network of relationships that is gradually expanding to always include horizons larger and to compose a dust of possibilities that aggregate and disintegrate starting from portions the existing one (Tagliagambe 2005).

How can these design experiences, so specific in terms of context, architectural, material, spatial and temporal characteristics, become opportunities for research?

The question is once again related to the ability to "ask the right questions, choose the right tests and find the right conclusions" (Tagliagambe 1998, 18). The challenge consists in the ability to investigate a specific *object* (an urban or landscape fragment) through its peculiarities and, at the same time, be able to abstract its aspects capable of interpreting some more general questions. Following this, we can test, through the project, a response to conservation and transformation requests.

A project thought not as the only possible but as, "the possible alternatives seen from reality" (Tagliagambe 1998, 34): it's an active and dynamic balance between the rights of the *sense of reality* and the reasons for the *sense of possibility*. We can speak of *ontological planning* (Winograd, Flores 1987), which looks back on the tradition that has formed us, but also towards the transformations that have not yet taken place; it's can only grow on the existing, and starting from it to imagine possible scenarios.

So what is the challenge that increasingly becomes a necessity? Being able, through the project, to define a balance between the ability to innovate and build new meanings and, at the same time, the capability to subordinate these changes to the preservation of a specific identity, which we can define dynamic (Tagliagambe 1998, 5-6).

The essential condition of any authentic and effective design activity is therefore the *ability to feel* and see reality not as something complete and defined forever, but as a process in continuous evolution.

2. THE CATALYST AND UNIFYING ROLE OF THE ARCHITECTURE PROJECT

The assumption of direction role of knowledge and disciplines required in designing a space in a many and different ways from the original one, becomes particularly significant. The architectural project has the catalytic and

unifying role of this articulated process of knowledge.

Modification, belonging, context, identity, specificity, are a group of words that seem to presuppose a pre-existing reality to be preserved by transforming it, passing on its memory with the traces in turn founded on the basis of the previous traces, a reality that appears in the physical form of a geography whose cognitive cult and interpretation of which provide the backbone of the project (Gregotti 1991).

The project therefore, as a meaningful synthesis of knowledge and interpretation of the existing heritage, has the responsibility to convey the contributions of all the disciplines that, today more than ever, contribute to better define a space. Without this cultural direction in the project the technicalities, the norms, the laws, the functionality prevail and the space, with the load of meaning expectations, is lost.

2.1. A recent experience of territorial government policy in Emilia Romagna region

Promoting a culture that recognizes the complexity of the urban fabric in which it is called to operate, underlines the relational values between the parties and recognizes and confirms the importance of regeneration actions, discouraging new land use, therefore becomes the foundation of each territorial policy that wants to propose itself as sustainable. The city today should push appropriate development policies "to enhance the productive, cultural and relational potential within the growing levels of systemic interconnection" (Losasso 2015).

Based on the in-depth knowledge of the historical building at various scales, the territorial, the urban and the architectural one and defining a systemic framework of all potential that the existing carries with it, has certainly represented a constant with which

to measure oneself by those who work in the area, but also an essential challenge of not always easy promotion.

In this sense, the policies of the Emilia Romagna region, one of the most advanced regions of Italy together with Lombardy, are interesting to understand how administrative and political support is a necessary condition for extensive and shared action.

Since the early 1990s, the Urban Redevelopment Programs introduced by the Regional Law have been promoted and funded n. 19/98 "Rules on Urban Redevelopment". These planning actions have anticipated for a large part the contents contained in the "Urban Regeneration" call issued subsequently by the Emilia Romagna Region, without however putting into place a real systemic planning. On the other hand, they contributed to increasing the sensitivity and institutional development of a more structured and complex programming. It is in fact in 2018 that the aforementioned regional call for funding is being promoted which it intends to represent:

a policy in support of the reuse and adaptation of public and private heritage with targeted, long-lasting and sustainable planning, of obtaining a widespread urban, territorial, socio-economic and environmental quality that is a response to phenomena of spatial and environmental degradation combined with functional decline and poor social cohesion, divestments of activities and improper spatial uses, congestion and settlement disorder, as well as the safety and efficiency of the diffuse heritage, the requalification of marginal spaces with precise attention to the reduction of the consumption of soil.¹

It is clear the desire to attribute to the planning action the possibility and the ability to transform not only physically and functionally parts of cities. The goal is to finance a strategy for urban quality with a view to a "revitalization

¹ From the regional call Urban Regeneration, Regione Emilia Romagna, 2018.

of the cities of Emilia-Romagna”, as it is written in the call.

The *widespread* term with which the demand for regeneration is characterized by identifying the relationship between urban spaces, buildings and structures to be redeveloped, business plans and management programs as the foundation. In summary, it is an invitation to a systemic reading of the space, be it public or private, whether open or inside a building envelope in close relationship with the life of its inhabitants. In search of what De Carli called “primary space”, that complex of relationships that “above all and par excellence in architecture” constitutes “an act of qualification and an authentic attribution or donation of meaning” (De Carli 1982, 362).

Widespread also demonstrates the need to emphasize a cross-scale feature, from the municipal or supra-municipal dimension to the size of the neighborhood, square,

building, with the specific request to reason by systems, never in a reducing manner. The single intervention takes on value if inserted in a broad regeneration program that involves a complexity of factors and has positive and lasting effects over the years.²

2.2. Fiorenzuola d’Arda

Fiorenzuola d’Arda is a small town of just over 15,000 inhabitants, located along the historical roman Via Emilia, on one of the main motorway axes that connect Milan to Bologna, in the province of Piacenza.

The historic urban fabric of Fiorenzuola is characterized by an older nucleus enclosed within a contiguous quadrilateral of the Via Emilia in which Piazza Fratelli Molinari takes a place as the core of the city with the Collegiata, San Fiorenzo Church and the peculiar bell tower detached from the church.

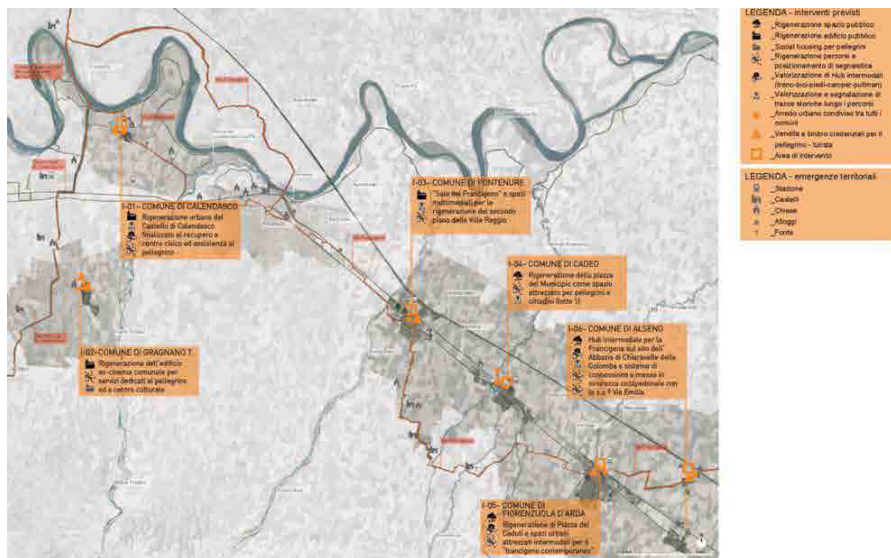
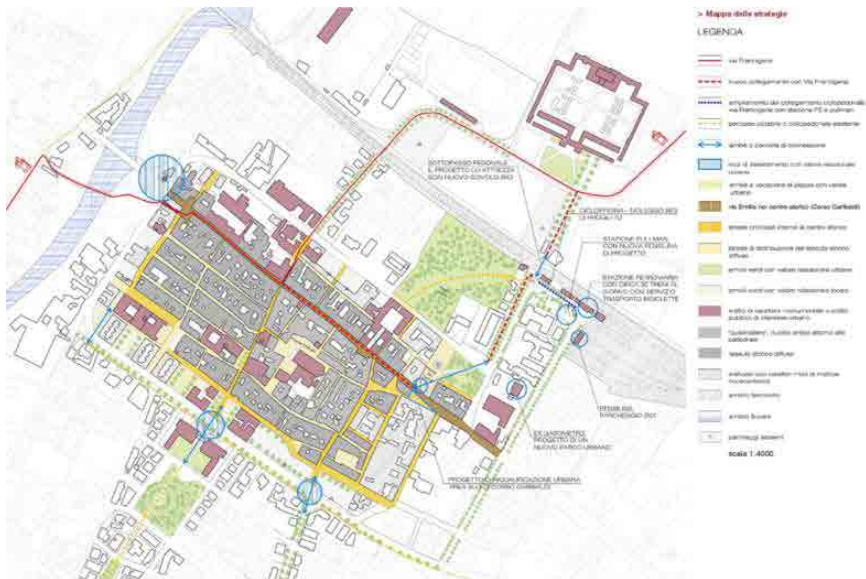


Figure 1. The Via Francigena as a territorial systemic project: the six municipalities involved whose single projects are included in a broad vision regeneration strategy are highlighted. Source: (Vito Redaelli 2018)

² The text of the call refers to the absence of a state-level strategy and explicitly adopts some of the principles introduced by the European Union through the Leipzig Charter of 2007 and the Toledo Declaration of 2010 (assuming the integration of policies and sustainability environment as fundamental factors for the attractiveness and competitiveness of cities) and the objectives of the European Agenda for sustainable development.

Instead, there are numerous spaces with a square vocation, urban value and green spaces with relational value. It is not interesting here to go into the specifics of each design solution but to illustrate the principles that generated the project experiences which are described below.

The case study of the city of Fiorenzuola d'Arda represents an example of good practice for having participated in the aforementioned regional tender and for taking part in a grouping of six municipalities that proposed the enhancement of a territorial system and historical connection such as the via Francigena (Fig. 1). Also called via Romea, it is the set of historical routes that in the Middle Ages brought pilgrims from Canterbury to the Holy Land passing through Rome, it has united and historically and physically unites the urban agglomerations intercepted by it and, in the specific case, it is assumed the significant connector role of all the projects that each municipality has identified. Starting from the planning policies developed after the publication of the 2000 European Landscape Convention, the landscape is



assumed among the programmatic aspects of the government of the territory.

The Via Francigena must be structured as one of the axes of the European slow mobility network, in the idea that the corridors are not only fast mobility, but also slow mobility green ways. (...) We agree with the fact that the landscape must, in turn, be considered as one of the values of sustainability (Bettini, Marotta, Tosi 2011).

The landscape of the Via Francigena near Fiorenzuola d'Arda is particularly interesting because it touches an alternation of spaces still open in the countryside and heavily urbanized and infrastructured spaces. There are numerous architectural beauties, among which we can find the Cistercian Abbey of Chiaravalle della Colomba, near the town of Fiorenzuola, which animate the horizontal landscape of the low Emilian plain.

A strategic map is thus outlined which aims to highlight the great potential in the areas directly or indirectly linked to the Via Francigena. Specifically, in relation to Fiorenzuola d'Arda, the railway underpass is redefined as the access point of the Francigena in Fiorenzuola and the bus station, the public space in front of the railway station are redeveloped, providing them with a cycle workshop, the boulevard connecting the station and the Via Emilia is also improved. The intervention aims to enhance intermodality, as an indispensable sustainable choice identified in the broader

project of strengthening and upgrading the Francigena route.

Specific occasions have been identified graphically in a dot, usually the expression of a need on the hand of the public administration, by means of a crosshatch it has been identified the area actually involved in the project actions.

It is then proposed, as it emerges from the strategic map (Fig. 2), the definition of a new urban park on the reclaimed area of the former gasometer and the redevelopment of a sequence of open spaces now disqualified and episodic, disconnected from each other, among which piazza dei Caduti takes a place. The project of the square is part of an urban design which, from via Emilia, involves the whole space in front of and behind the war memorial and leads, crossing the public garden, along the large tree-lined pedestrian and cycle path of Fratelli Cairoli boulevard, towards the railway station, the most important of the six municipalities participating in the call.

The nineteenth-century Lucca Park is also involved in this strategy, now in total abandonment, providing for its restoration and proposing it as an alternative connection between the station and the historic center.

The whole project presents via Francigena as a complex territorial system which, knots other systems at the scale of the single municipality which, in turn, strategically insert potential and critical issues to be solved. The necessary knowledge of history and its signs



Figure 3. Behind the actual town hall



Figure 4. Don Bosco school



Figure 5. Former town hall.

passes, therefore, through a dimension of cross-scale project, which, as can be seen from the actions put in place at Fiorenzuola, makes individual projects meaningful and collects the regional political invitation to structure long period topics.

2.4. Redefining the boundary between the historic center and the new expansion in Fiorenzuola d'Arda

Through the project, there have been some occasions to rethink the areas between the new urban expansion and the historic center. The request to qualify the open space behind the current town hall created the opportunity to identify and reconfigure the system of spaces overlooking the ring road that follows the Roman city walls (Fig. 3); the request for new public services within the Don Bosco school complex suggested the need to restore the city thistle to the south and to study the urban connection and the relationship between the built outside and inside the walls, pushing the sequence of spaces and urban park beyond the building (Fig. 4); the request to first place a library, then a health home inside the former town hall overlooking the axis of via Emilia has allowed us to redefine an entire urban quadrant, giving shape to the incongruous and residual open spaces, the result of planning sectorial and approximate past (Fig. 5).

The knowledge of the urban historical evolution (Fig. 6, 7, 8) together with a desire to record the complexity of the issues put in place by any changes in the status quo, has allowed us to identify spheres of influence extended to the single occasion of intervention and therefore to work on parts of the city, where open spaces take on a strategic relational role. The interpretative maps, not only historical but also investigating the architectural and urban form, the dimensions and the altimetry of the built and the ground, the green spaces, the ways of use, the critical points and, the strengths, are developed together to the

design suggestions in a relationship of mutual feed.

We try to record the opportunity not to respond to the specific need with an optimal design response, but with a response that makes a reflection and obliges us to a scale and multidisciplinary discussion.

CONCLUSION

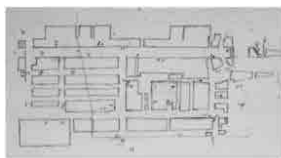
The awareness that *the urban project is structured as a dialogue with the existing, its modification and the constitution of an existing future* (Gregotti, 1993), brings with it the need to articulate that process of context historical knowledge and critical analysis that becomes a project. The analytical approach, already in the identification of the themes, structures the guidelines for a contextual reading from which the project originates. This is the teaching that comes from the work of Giancarlo De Carlo.

Considering the environment, the city, the neighborhoods, the house not only and solely as artifacts, but rather to consider them as phenomena that make up the human experience. (De Carlo, Sichirolo, 1992)

opposing functionalism with a reading of the use of space as *experience in all its meanings: practical, contemplative, symbolic (...)* and, proposing participation as an operational tool for drawing up plans for the city of Urbino.

Beginning to 'know' one realizes almost at first sight, how the landscape of Urbino is rich in events, variations, subtleties, which intersect and stratify to generate a multiplicity of situations that are already memorable or can become one (...) (De Carlo, 1994)

We welcome the invitation not to give up on the interpretation of the complex nature of the urban fabric and to take it as a value, to arrive at diversification of the project capable



Gli isolati si spingono al di là dei confini degli assi di costruzione principali, tra cui la storica via Emilia. La città si espande a nord dell'asse storico e viene completata l'edificazione dei lotti gotici, disposti parallelamente e perpendicolarmente al castrum romano. Sono ancora ben visibili i castelli, posti alle estremità della via Emilia.



1790

Figure 6. 1790, interpretative map: the city expands beyond the historical axis of the via Emilia (yellow line) and the construction of the Gothic lots is completed, the ancient toll booths at the ends of the via Emilia remain clearly visible. Source: (Ugolini, Gabaglio, Master degree studio Politecnico di Milano 2012-13)



Verso le fine del 1800 l'espansione della città si estende oltre il castrum ad est della via Emilia, andando a tangere e ad oltrepassare le mura del castrum romano. Compare il cimitero all'interno delle mura e viene interrotto un tratto del canale che attraversa la città parallelamente al fiume Arda.



1850

Figure 7. 1850, interpretative map: the expansion of the city extends beyond the walls of the Roman castrum, the cemetery appears within the walls and a section of the canal that crossed the city is buried, parallel to the Arda river. Source: (Ugolini, Gabaglio, Master degree studio Politecnico di Milano 2012-13)



A metà del 1900 si registra una forte espansione a macchia d'olio della città, che rimane però al di sotto del tracciato ferroviario, costruito intorno al 1870, che rappresenta tutt'ora un elemento di forte disconnessione urbana. L'espansione della zona industriale si concentra nella fascia compresa tra l'asse della via Emilia e l'asse ferroviario. Scompare le porte della città e l'antica sede delle mura romane lascia spazio alla nuova circoscrizione esterna della città.



1968

Figure 8. 1968, interpretative map: in the mid-1900s there was a strong expansion which remains in the south of the railway track built in 1870, which still represents an element of strong urban disconnection. The expansion of the industrial area is concentrated in the area between the via Emilia and the railway. The city gates disappear and the ancient site of the Roman walls leaves the floor for the city's new external traffic road. Source: (Ugolini, Gabaglio, Master degree studio Politecnico di Milano 2012-13)

of grasping the richness of the stratification of history understood as vital human experience. The design experiments that have been briefly described concerning the city of Fiorenzuola d'Arda tell of the importance of facing a project never in a closed way. Whether it is a building or whether it is an open space, a street or, a square, a project is needed that, in its functions and material form, chooses the open path of relationship, dialogue, and systemic thinking never partial. In this sense and even more so in historical construction, working on the ground assumes a strategic role because it can be entrusted to it the task of establishing significant relationships between the parties.

In recent past, that of the eighties, where the non-consumption of land was already widely promoted, at least in the cultural debate, and parts of the city recovery and regeneration were encouraged, Secchi invited to this reflection:

(...) shift our attention: from the building to the ground, to the surface between the buildings and which cannot be denied or reduced to pure technical space. The opportunity to deal with it, the moment in which to deal with it is certainly this when the pressure for the construction of a huge amount of houses in addition to the existing ones has become perhaps lesser and, instead the pressure for the modification of the existing is strong. I maintain that it is not a matter of thinking only of modifying the use of what already exists or of replacing it with new architectures, of filling the parts of unfinished cities, but today it is also the time, if not above all, of planning the soil in a way not trivial, reductive, technical and inarticulate (Secchi 1986).

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