DEFINING THE ARCHITECTURAL SPACE
ARCHITECTURE AND THE CITY

DEFINIOWANIE PRZESTRZENI ARCHITEKTONICZNEJ

ARCHITEKTURA I MIASTO

VOL. 1

Contents

Spis treści

FRANCESCO SAVERIO FERA
ORCID: 0000-0001-9109-1005
University of Bologna, Italy

THE CITY AS ARCHITECTURE

MIASTO JAKO ARCHITEKTURA

A b s t r a c t

The first obvious question that must therefore be asked is how we can try to define what urban quality is. A consolidated urban planning literature places the quality of cities as dependent on various factors which, however, are not always precisely identifiable and which, in addition to this objective difficulty in describing them – always admitting that it is possible to decide what they should be – are almost never shared by majority or, worse, by those who have the political and therefore economic means to be able to intervene on reality.

In the first and summary list of characteristics to describe a generic quality of the urban whole, one could mention, for example, the quality of the air one breathes, the ease of mobility, the presence and quality of services available to citizens, such as schools, hospitals or places for recreation, free time and sport, or the always mentioned, but barely present in our conurbations, the right to greenery, to unbuilt and natural space. This partial list of urban quality indicators, apparently quantifiable in numerical terms, or transcribed into urban planning standards, is the first that can give quantitative indications on the quality of a city. However, practice has amply demonstrated that they cannot always guarantee quality. The architecture of the city cannot be restricted within a numerological scope or describable with an algorithm, but the axioms that should govern a complex architectural system are other and broader in scope. If we add beauty to the elements used to measure "quality", things become even more complicated.

Keywords: architectural composition, urban theory, neoliberalism

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Pierwszym oczywistym pytaniem, które należy postawić, jest to, w jaki sposób możemy spróbować zdefiniować, czym jest miejska jakość. Literatura dotycząca urbanistyki przedstawia jakość miast jako zależną od różnych czynników nie zawsze możliwych do precyzyjnego zidentyfikowania, które – poza tą obiektywną trudnością w ich opisie – prawie nigdy nie są powszechnie uznawane przez większość lub, co gorsza, przez tych, którzy dysponują środkami politycznymi, a tym samym ekonomicznymi, aby móc wpływać na rzeczywistość.

W pierwszej i sumarycznej liście cech opisujących ogólną jakość całej przestrzeni miejskiej można by wymienić na przykład jakość powietrza, którym oddychamy, łatwość przemieszczania się, obecność i jakość usług dostępnych dla mieszkańców, takich jak szkoły, szpitale czy miejsca rekreacji, spędzania wolnego czasu i uprawiania sportu, czy też zawsze przywoływane, ale ledwo obecne w naszych aglomeracjach, prawo do zieleni, do niezabudowanej i naturalnej przestrzeni. Ta cząstkowa lista miejskich wskaźników jakości, najwyraźniej dających się ująć w kategoriach liczbowych lub zapisać w standardach urbanistyki, jest pierwszą, która może dostarczyć ilościowych wskazówek na temat jakości miasta. Praktyka pokazuje jednak, że nie zawsze są one w stanie zagwarantować jakość. Architektury miasta nie można ograniczyć do zakresu liczbowego ani opisać algorytmem, a aksjomaty, które powinny rządzić złożonym systemem architektonicznym, są nieco inne i mają szerszy zakres. Jeśli dodamy piękno do elementów używanych do pomiaru „jakości", sprawy komplikują się jeszcze bardziej.

Słowa kluczowe: kompozycja architektoniczna, teoria urbanistyczna, neoliberalizm

Talking about the architecture of the city and therefore its urban and architectural quality is certainly a very difficult task, given the vastness of the literature and its complexity with the consequent slipperiness of the topic, its apparent elusiveness is there for all to see, which at first glance seems like a quality for the average citizen, it is not necessarily so for an architect, sociologist, entrepreneur, politician or other professional figures who operate on the body of the city. The first obvious question that must therefore be asked is how we can try to define what urban quality is. A consolidated urban planning literature places the quality of cities as dependent on various factors which, however, are not always precisely identifiable and which, in addition to this objective difficulty in describing them – always admitting that it is possible to decide what they should be – are almost never shared by majority or, worse, by those who have the political and therefore economic means to be able to intervene on reality. This state of affairs is aggravated by the objective structural difficulties of public affairs in which it does not appear, especially when there is no desire to get involved, except with a progressive dismantling of what little remains, in the name of an increasingly widespread liberalism.

These aspects of the issue have brought the architectural culture of our cities to a short circuit. On the one hand, a certain number of proposals put forward by private individuals, most of the time with counterproductive effects on urban dynamics, and on the other, the political unwillingness to find alternative solutions, under the pretext of not burdening the city budget, due to the chronic shortcomings of funds. Therefore, we generally proceed with the stipulation of agreements between public and private bodies for the sale of strategic urban areas or public buildings.

In the first and summary list of characteristics to describe a generic quality of the urban whole, one could mention, for example, the quality of the air one breathes, the ease of mobility, the presence and quality of services available to citizens, such as schools, hospitals or places for recreation, free time and sport, or the always mentioned, but barely present in our conurbations, the right to greenery, to unbuilt and natural space. This partial list of urban quality indicators, apparently quantifiable in numerical terms, or transcribed into urban planning standards, is the first that can give quantitative indications on the quality of a city. However, practice has amply demonstrated that they cannot always guarantee quality. The architecture of the city cannot be restricted within a numerological scope or describable with an algorithm, but the axioms that should govern a complex architectural system are other and broader in scope. If we add beauty to the elements used to measure "quality", things become even more complicated. The post-modern situation in which we live, with the end of single thought, has made multiple possible aesthetics plausible and vital, each with its own right of citizenship. As architects, we have a duty to find a path that is consistently carried forward and is measured against logical demands based on solid principles that are stable over time.

With a joke, Ferdinand Pouillon often repeated that he designed buildings and neighbourhoods for those who lived in them, not for airplanes. In this concise statement there is all of his architecture, all of his way of understanding the complexity of thinking and designing the phenomenon of urban construction in antithesis with certain avant-gardes who proposed to overturn the human relationship with the city in favour of machines[1]. The statement makes us understand how the main objective of the architect's profession is to give concrete answers to equally real needs, be they material or impalpable, such as beauty or amazement at new

---

[1] Cfr. M. Landsberger (ed.), *Fernand Pouillon. Maître d'oeuvre. Scritti e conversazioni di architettura*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2019.

and unexpected relationships between the things of the world. The sweat of the earth, or in a word, "care" for living, understood here in its Latin meaning of concern and attention for human activities, are for several architects an essential data of the problem. Predictable and possible activities, but they cannot be pre-ordered or arranged according to economic mechanisms of land exploitation that use subjective urban configurations to implement places solely according to a logic of increasingly alienating unconscious consumption, which is what we generally see carried out in our cities. In the current situation of a neoliberal economy, private initiative has generally replaced public initiative in governing the form of the city planned according to an orientation that should be directed towards the common good. This mechanism of intervention on the city has been able to exploit the natural human tension towards the progressiveness of its action but by smuggling illusory values as plausible ones. In the contemporary world, increasingly dictated by consumer needs with a consequent loss of sense of what is really necessary, urban figures have been formed that are just as alienating as the goods that are purchased or many of the actions that are performed. Douglas Spencer, who was able to fully describe the current situation, outlines how the situation of our neoliberal society has reached its peak in architectural practice since the 1990s, underlining how the supremacy of emotional and sensorial experience has replaced that cognitive[2]. This idea was consolidated starting from the avant-garde of the 1950s where, according to artists such as Richard Hamilton and his Independent Group, art should tend to immerse the viewer, bringing him to a condition of direct experience not mediated by "critical interpretation". The artist Allan Kaprow confirms this when he claims that Jackson Pollock's paintings gave viewers "an equally strong pleasure in participating in a delirium, a deadening of the reasoning faculties, a loss of 'self' in the Western sense of term"[3].

Thus, in different architecture a search for understandable meaning, a search for shareable content, has been replaced by the aesthetics of the "like" (as we experience it daily on social media), without necessarily having to ask the reasons. Thus, in much art and in certain architecture, it is no longer necessary for the public to question the why of things and their deepest essence. The important thing seems to be that such an object, action or building is "original" as the result of a pure "creative" act and what really matters is the emotional boost that a specific work induces, without necessarily asking ourselves about its introduction into the society and the city in which it takes place. By borrowing what belongs to contemporary art, a certain vision of architecture has deemed that it is no longer important to deal with its meaning in order to move within the territories of pure subjective emotion, far from any reference to a collective, shared memory. The aesthetics of emotion for emotion's sake, in architecture, does not require the construction of complex living spaces, such as those existing in ancient cities, where community spaces welcomed disparate human activities and architecture was the expression of this. In contemporary cities, the construction of specialized buildings and areas for work, commerce, entertainment or rest is progressively increasing, as it is a reflection of lifestyles that lead the individual, through an example, to divide the time of existence according to an increasingly compartmentalized scansion of one's daily life (time for work, leisure, sport, etc.).

---

[2] Cfr. D. Spencer, *The architecture of neoliberalism. How contemporary architecture became an instrument of control and compliance*, Bloomsbury, London 2016.

[3] A. Kaprow, *The legacy of Jackson Pollock*, in "Art News" 57, No. 6, October 1958, now in, P. Karmel, *Jackson Pollock. Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1999, p. 87.

This concept of living has given rise to urban places that are alienating and incomprehensible to most as they are generated by economic decisions governed by a minority, decisions that are expressed through formal choices where what counts is to arouse amazement at low cost, perhaps even justifying these choices on technical issues such as energy efficiency and environmental sustainability (the latter are absolutely fundamental aspects, but which often lead to the cause being confused with the effect). Having freed form from meaning, in architecture and urban design, means having made an exemplification that becomes a passe-partout for real estate transactions that are dubious more often than not. On the contrary, historical cities were built according to long processes of modification – not without conflicts or traumas – which were able to establish relationships between the parts, between public and private spaces, as a manifestation of a different social organisation.

Reflecting on the places of the city and its form therefore means thinking critically about providing new spatial possibilities of different social aggregation compared to the dominant imperatives and at the same time also operating a criticism of contemporary society. The relationship with the history of the city's architecture – understood here in its broadest sense, obviously not excluding the experience of the modern – which by unanimous opinion has been able to build places of living and relationships between the parts that still function today, must continue to be one of the privileged fields of research. And this architecture as a criticism of reality is more evident than ever in the work of several contemporary architects who have made a clear choice of field. In their projects the shared vocabulary of shapes and types is articulated, giving rise to new scenes that aim to build different and new urban identities full of meanings.

As mentioned above, the space of the city that surrounds us should correspond to the human needs of those who live there in that specific reality. The need for a refuge, for places for work, for leisure, for care, for education and much more, requires the provision of specifically designed spaces which are nevertheless able to adapt to the changing needs of the inhabitants.

The exponential growth of urban settlements in the last century has not always been able to fully respond to the needs of its citizens. In many situations there has been a lack of territorial governance, leaving the creation of new urban expansions to private initiative or, in the best cases, the city has grown through quantitative, but not qualitative, indications. The debate on the shape of the city, a question claimed by many, has undergone a general stagnation, almost a form of grievance after twenty years of dictatorship that ignored the sacrosanct right of the community to be able to intervene in public affairs. Even today in our country, Italy, decisions to modify built environments are not always the result of a debate between proposals advanced following reasoning on the future of the city and its form. There are few cases in which a new part of the city is created following an architectural consultation that outlines relationships and forms designed in a thoughtful and non-extemporaneous way.

Even rarer are the cases in which those who govern the city turn to the world of academic research to analyse and explore the possibilities of its form. In recent decades, the relationship between those who study the city and teach it in classrooms, and those who govern it, has become more intense. Research agreements between public bodies and the academic world of architecture that are reflected in reality are rare. This is not the case for other disciplines, where advice is sought in many fields of human knowledge. The academic world of architecture has the duty to question the reasons for this state of affairs which is evident to all, to try to change the state of things. One reason perhaps lies in the fact that, on the part of those

who govern the city, choices about its destiny and its shape have increasingly been delegated to private individuals according to the logic of profit and not the common good. This is not the place to analyse the certainly complex causes and dynamics, but it is an opportunity to underline the importance of a debate around an organic and disinterested thought in the design of the city that can provide coherent and commensurate responses to the needs of the case.

The project in the city of Naples for the Mostra d'Oltremare[4] exhibition centre, which is presented here, is the result of a recently promoted consultation between Italian architecture schools and tries to decline some themes that belong to many situations of our urban realities formed in the contemporary. The need for equipment for the community, the conservation and use of historical pre-existences, the provision of green areas, the connections between the parts and a mobility diversified from that of the "car civilisation", are the main themes that have provided the guidelines of the architectural and urban proposal advanced here.

The project areas, the subject of the consultation, were read as clearly identified elements, but strongly correlated as they belong to a complex system of stratifications rich in potential and memories partly evident and partly to be rediscovered and given new meaning. Firm in the belief that the complex urban palimpsest is necessarily the basis for building a fabric capable of responding to the needs of those who live or use these places, we worked on reading the many existing traces. The tangible urban data, despite the violence suffered, in this case study maintains various elements still capable of allowing them to be rewritten, their recomposition full of new meanings. What seems lost still lies before everyone's eyes and is waiting to be discovered again. Thus, the exedra staircase at the north entrance, the archaeologies, the remains of the San Giuseppe farm, the elements of the agricultural territory, with still existing vegetable gardens and the ascent paths are some of the data of the situation that need to be rediscovered. As in many cities of Roman foundation, which were mainly reached by trails – think for example of cities like Pavia or Turin – so the routes still legible on the site today became the structuring elements of the project.

Scope of Via Terracina

Via Terracina was intended as the backbone of the urban regeneration system capable of innervating the northern system of the Mostra d'Oltremare. This street was rethought as a long tree-lined avenue with wide sidewalks and paths for gentle mobility starting from its intersection with Via Vicinale Cupa Cintia up to its confluence with Via Nuova Agnano. Along this reduced-speed route, a new green wall was designed as a solution of continuity between the perimeter of the exhibition and the urban edge located to the north of the street. The green wall was therefore intended as a wall on which to place various green partitions in its southern edge, perpendicular to it and positioned to form environments which are in themselves complete but contiguous and open. Vegetal wall as a fragment of a lost city – apocryphal archaeological relic – but capable of giving rhythm and underlining privileged areas that meet along it. The baths, the mausoleum and the North gate of the Md'O are the main events that the green wall structures, but other rooms open up for leisure and rest or for environmental education. Along this "wall" holes and caesuras will open in specific situations to frame significant elements and facts existing along its route.

On the north side of Via Terracina other vegetal partitions frame areas intended for parking and minor access routes to the hill above reconfigured as a system of urban vegetable

---

[4] Cfr. A. Aveta, A. Castagnaro, F. Mangone (eds.), *La Mostra d'Oltremare nella Napoli occidentale. Ricerche storiche e restauro del moderno*, Editori Paparo, Napoli 2021.

gardens to preserve the landscape built in crags, but also to protect the front from other landslide risks.

Scope of the Roman Way

The Via Romana, in its ancient development, becomes the new path that holds together and connects the system of green rooms positioned perpendicularly on the green wall of the street above. These environments, through a morphological reconfiguration of the land, make it possible to connect the lower levels with those above on Via Terracina. The road, passable where evident and possible today, is evoked for those parts of the route, hypothesized or subjected to the modern plot. Also in this case – as with via Terracina – the Roman road takes on the new meaning of connecting a plug of the park system conceived in the northern edge of the exhibition district. The two infrastructures, modern (via Terracina) and ancient (via Neapolis-Puteolis), become paradigmatic elements, not only of their respective eras, but also of two parallel systems structuring the site with distinct and, at the time, similar characters. Via Terracina, designed for mobility dedicated to public and private transport, in which the pedestrian and cycle sections predominate, represents today's way of living, while the Roman road dedicated exclusively to walking and cycling represents the world of a slow walk, of another way of perceiving space. The two roads become interpreters of two different ways of experiencing the territory, the modern axis is punctuated by different urban events, from the Fuorigrotta Cemetery to the North gate, to mention the two most significant urban events, while the ancient route structures a sort of a linear park with a north-east / south-west trend and touches the main archaeological monuments found to date in the Md'O area.

The ancient street will be highlighted in parts that no longer exist, with a sign on the ground and a pavement that identifies it in the context. The ancient road, ending abruptly against the buildings recently built above its route, will highlight the modification of the city created by superimpositions. The street will cross with signs on the ground the new round-about proposed to clear the intersection north of the Maradona stadium and thus indicate its continuation to the north-east of Via Terracina. Ideally it will also cross the new tree-lined avenue showing its branch towards Via Cupa di Terracina and other streets currently existing in the exhibition centre.

*Scope of the Masseria di San Giuseppe and Maradona Park*

In this area of urban and road intersections, it was deemed important to reconfigure the confluence system of via Terracina with via Vicinale Cupa Cintia and the related underpass leading to via Claudio. Aware of the need for a study linked to city mobility, we nevertheless wanted to emphasize the need to rethink this unresolved area through a rationalization of the road network and the inclusion of an urban park area capable of improving the public greenery in the neighbourhood. All this also taking up the ancient route that led from the Masseria to the south and today could better connect the existing "children's park".

Regarding the actual farmhouse, a critical reconstruction is proposed, with restoration of the historic building, allocating the new complex to neighbourhood functions and for student use. Inside there will be a student residence, study rooms, spaces for associations and a cafeteria. The new volumes, built on the site of the pre-existing ones, differ in materials and height from the existing ones, but aspire to trigger a dialogue with what remains in their strong masonry nature. Thus, a new courtyard is formed for moments of conviviality, rest or leisure for its inhabitants, an open and sharing place.

Scope of the north entrance and Piazza Antiniano

Structured on the spine of Via Terracina, a new civic centre opens, a contemporary forum, to counterbalance the North entrance designed by Stefania Filo Speziale. Having lost the important intervention carried out in the 1930s as the northern entrance to the Exhibition, we worked with the aim of recalling its spatiality with the planting of a double row of cypresses, but creating openings with vegetal partitions that interrupt the green wall that runs along Via Terracina and which mark the restored northern entrance. To underline the importance of the place overlooking the exedra of the Filo Speziale, a new civic centre was thought of as an element of aggregation and meeting. The new slightly sloping forum to follow the topographic trend was designed with buildings for collective use, such as a moderately sized auditorium, a library and a lapidary. The latter could contain the finds discovered in the excavations carried out along the Roman road or be used for exhibition or collective events.

The tree-lined street, the farm, the civic forum, the archaeological finds and the various green areas could give a new meaning to this part of the city, today devoid of quality, but full of unexpressed potential. These are interventions that do not intend to impose themselves violently on the site, but silently aim to reveal areas rich in history and beauty, today largely invisible or fragmentary. The main objective is to build places where those who live there can reinvent their daily lives, not feeling like strangers, but actors of the infinite possibilities that living offers.
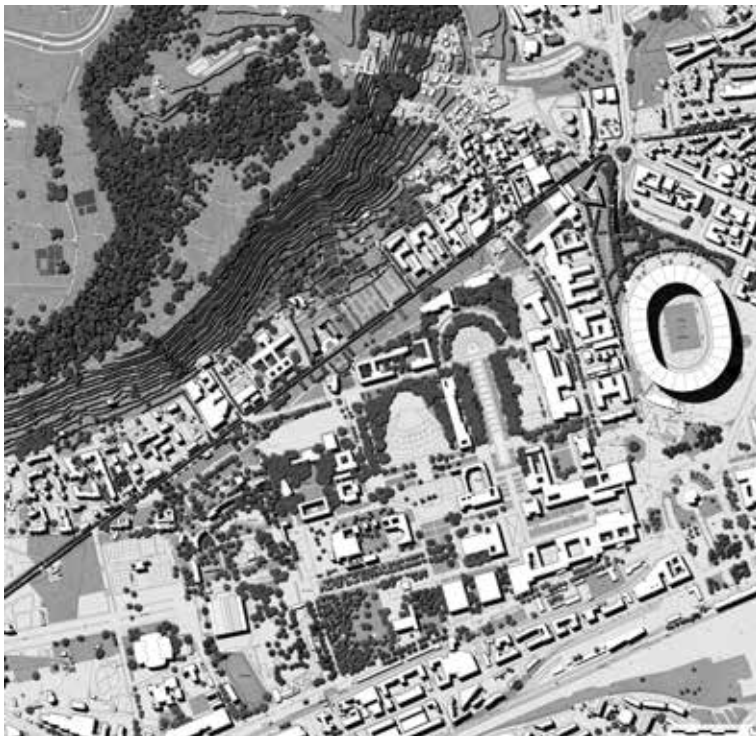
Ill. 1.   Mostra d'Oltremare, Masterplan, architectural project team: F.S. Fera, C. Tisselli, C. Piraccini, S. Baiardi, D. Boselli, F. Ingenito M. Spadoni.

Ill. 2. Mostra d'Oltremare, General view, architectural project team: F.S. Fera, C. Tisselli, C. Piraccini, S. Baiardi, D. Boselli, F. Ingenito M. Spadoni.
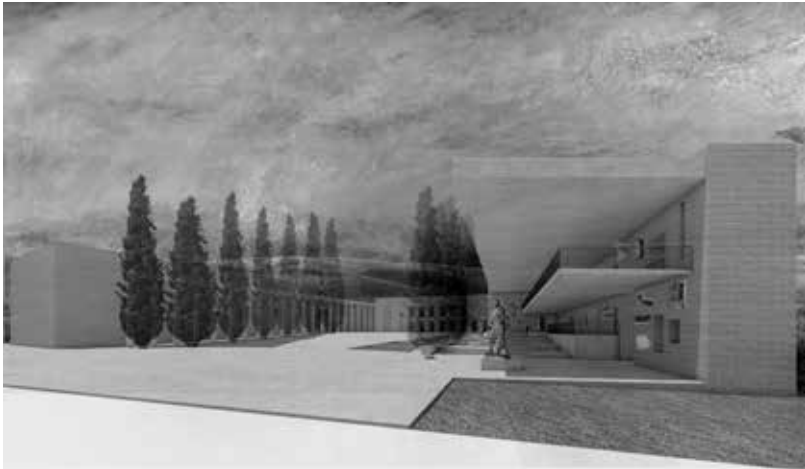
Ill. 3. Mostra d'Oltremare, New Civic Center and Lapidarium, architectural project team: F.S. Fera, C. Tisselli, C. Piraccini, S. Baiardi, D. Boselli, F. Ingenito M. Spadoni.

Ill. 4. Mostra d'Oltremare, View from South-West, architectural project team: F.S. Fera, C. Tisselli, C. Piraccini, S. Baiardi, D. Boselli, F. Ingenito M. Spadoni.

References

[1] Aveta A., Castagnaro A., Mangone F. (eds.), *La Mostra d'Oltremare nella Napoli occidentale. Ricerche storiche e restauro del moderno*, Editori Paparo, Napoli 2021.

[2] Kaprow A., *The legacy of Jackson Pollock*, in "Art News" 57, No. 6, October 1958, now in, Karmel P., *Jackson Pollock. Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1999.

[3] Landsberger M. (ed.), *Fernand Pouillon. Maître d'oeuvre. Scritti e conversazioni di architettura*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2019.

[4] Spencer D., *The architecture of neoliberalism. How contemporary architecture became an instrument of control and compliance*, Bloomsbury, London 2016.

Author's Note

Full Prof. Francesco Saverio Fera, PhD, Arch.

(Genoa 1962), Master Degree in Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano. As a student, worked in Ignazio Gardella's office at the architectural competition of the reconstruction of the Opera House Carlo Felice in Genoa (1st prize), project by I. Gardella, A. Rossi and F. Reinhart. From 1987 until 1991, worked in Aldo Rossi's office in Milano being involved in different projects. Adjunct Professor (2002–today) at the Charles E. Daniel Center in Genoa, Clemson University S.C. PhD (2000) at the Architectural School of the University of Genoa. Full professor (2020) in Architectural Composition at the School of Architecture of the University of Bologna – Cesena Campus. Former Coordinator of the Master Degree in Architecture (five years course) of the University of Bologna – Cesena Campus (2016–2021).

saverio.fera@unibo.it