
Public spaces, meanings and quality in a transcalar integrated project

EURAU'12

ABSTRACT.

Public space design is a central topic in the definition of urban areas of the city and needs to be developed through a complex, transdisciplinary and integrated project that includes: buildings, infrastructure, open spaces, networks.

The paper will present a design methodology based on the integration between the disciplines of architectural and urban design and urban planning, tested in different teaching experiences (workshops, ateliers, ASP project, research and Master's degree thesis both in and outside Italy). The methodology aimed to interpret, understand, and communicate "all" places, thus opening new paths for the project. Our methodological proposal currently being tested, the integrated multiscale project, can be applied both for the architecture and design project and in an extensive area - large and local -.

KEYWORDS: transcalar integrated project, smart security and accessibility for public spaces

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1. Introduction

Public spaces are a central feature in urban social life, in town planning and architectural design. Starting with the Habermas's most relevant work (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1991), public spaces are the visible and accessible venue wherein the public could live and use it free (including institutions and citizens acting in concert).

Public spaces are those where the city expresses itself: without public spaces neither the city nor the territory exists. The quality of public spaces is primary component of quality of the city and its territory, as Giancarlo De Carlo says.

Public space is not defined *a priori* (Bianchetti, 2011), it has been created by practices referring to physical, morphological and normative conditions and rules.

In the actual context it is not possible to distinguish radically public and private spheres as the traditional Habermas vision (such as "squatterisation" and/or definition of semi-private spaces like community gardens and places). Public spaces are directly influenced by social needs and uses.

As Bianchetti writes public spaces are liquid, open and continuous, dissolved by aesthetic emphasis to visuals, atmospheres, colours, shapes, major architectural images. This feature is underlined by the metaphor of flows (such as traffic or inhabitants flows) to interpret the city and the use of public spaces (Purini, 2008).

Public spaces are defined by two integrated processes (Carr, Francis, Rivlin, Stone, 1992):

- natural development – without a deliberate planning - through appropriation by repeated uses, way the concentration of people over time for specific purposes or attraction (such as meeting, relaxing, protesting or marketing);
- planned transformation, designed in shapes and functions by city planners, architects and landscape architects, that serve functions similar to unplanned or evolving site.

Literature in planning and urban design suggests that good public space is responsive, democratic and meaningful (Carr, Francis, Rivlin, Stone, 1992), while to respond to contemporary needs it is important to generate, enhance, and sustain a sense of community (Boyer, 1994; Hayden, 1995).

The strategy for public space design in the European regeneration and transformation of large cityscape has been developed using models and repetitive solutions, referring to history, accessibility, identity of places. This approach tried to interpret the community identity related to the environmental and social-economic history of a place (as in Sauer theories).

This design approach had produced very similar places in all different contexts without specific quality referred to a cultural identity of globalisation. Actually planned or designed public spaces are the most ordinary part of the contemporary European cities (Bianchetti, 2011).

Mass society is expanding everywhere but people don't seem to realize it and also there is no clear awareness of real needs and therefore a powerful tendency develops to let oneself be manipulated. For these purposes it could be interesting Giancarlo De Carlo's position that years ago declared: it could be better to oppose to massification a large society of small groups forming and reforming according to

the circumstances because their cement is the problem they experience and face together, which is always different.

In order to overcome the actual crisis of public spaces, it is important to redefine their role in social living, city planning and urban design, especially for the quality of ordinary and degraded landscapes. In fact these areas play a much more central role in the shaping of peri-urban, marginal and disused areas, where building design needs to be related to spaces for social living and cultural identity.

Often public buildings facing public spaces are pompous and lack content, because they were not erected to be used, but to celebrate some symbol, memory or abstraction, in relation to the public spaces where they stand. They are distinctive signs to which social life continues to refer in order to recognize itself (Giancarlo De Carlo 2005).

Public spaces should be the primary element of new projects. It is important in the design to start from squares, parks, system of gardens, infrastructures. Each part of the public structure is permanent in time and should contribute to the long term quality of the city and/or of each part.

The first step of an urban design strategy should start from the design of public spaces as in the rationalist model. The elimination of the rational model, followed by the new exaltation of the sustainability and the leisure of places, is changing the design approach and the role of public spaces (Bianchetti, 2011) especially for the enhancement of the community identity.

In this view important is the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities (2007) developed to achieve the objective of sustainable cities, starting to integral approach to urban issues. In addition, the European structural funds should be made available for local projects that embrace this integral approach. The objectives set out in the Leipzig Charter are making greater use of integrated urban development policy approaches by creating and ensuring high-quality public spaces, modernising infrastructure networks and improving energy efficiency. The Charter promotes proactive innovation and educational policies and – particularly in marginal areas – sustainable, efficient and affordable urban transport. These strategies needs upgrading the physical environment, strengthening the local economy and local labour market policy.

The result should be the quality of public space and of the natural, cultural and architectural environment. They play an important role in the quality of people living in urban and rural areas and are a crucial "soft" location factors. They stress the importance of partnership and of the sharing of functions between urban and rural areas for the balanced and sustainable development. They call on urban and rural authorities in cooperation with all public and private stakeholders to identify their common assets and produce joint regional and sub-regional development strategies in order to secure better living conditions and quality life, launching a territorial dialogue to boost public participation in planning and projects.

A new vision of the relation among public and private should be promoted, linking such spaces in a continuous and/or fluid territorial dimension without conceptual and material oppositions.

This vision considers the semi-private and semi-public spaces as spaces of mediation and occasion for innovative design approaches, social uses and management models. It should help to overcome this economic crisis.

Elinor Ostrom (Nobel Prize in 2009) remembers that if we can overcome the opposition among public and private management models, the management and the duration in time of common goods could be more effective and sustainable. It is

more suitable a third model (Ostrom, 19990): the final users are responsible for management of common goods, establishing rules and control methods. This model is important for the design of public, semi-public, semi-private and private spaces, as different features of common goods.

In recent times, much more than in the past, smart security and accessibility issues are becoming fundamental in the design of public spaces. A good concept is not enough. A place to be lived in must communicate a social perception of security that can only be created working on the project in an innovative way, in an ICT based way and involving different disciplines.

The involvement of population and users in the project and management of this spaces is interesting to meet and contribute to solve security topic of public and semi public and private spaces without physical barriers. Design of such spaces should not oppose private and public spheres, contributing to social enhancement expanding the traditional consideration of common goods.

In this view the design approach for the identity and quality of public spaces should consider this dynamic physical and management organisation of spaces (private, semi-private, semi-public). It should consider also the integration among different landscapes such as rural, green and public service areas, residential, commercial, productive settlements, social gardens and hortus activities.

All these activities constitute a functional mixité of social and typological designs that need an innovative shape for public and semi-public spaces. Public space design is a central topic in the definition of urban areas of the city and needs to be developed through a complex, transdisciplinary and integrated project that includes: buildings, infrastructure, open spaces, networks.

2. A design methodology

We tried to develop a design methodology based on the integration between the disciplines of architectural and urban design and urban planning, tested in different teaching and professional experiences (River Sangone Masterplan Province of Turin, International Design Competitions, Thesis, Design Ateliers). This attempt can be traced to a series of project experiences that have shown the difficulties when dealing with complex issues such as the reorganization of the territory, landscape and architectural forms.

The methodology aimed to interpret, understand, and communicate "all" places, thus opening new paths for the project, integrating architectural and planning researches. Our research, which considers the building as one of the elements of a more fully-articulated complex whole, attempts to place buildings and voids, rural areas, public and green spaces and private open spaces (building-void-nature) on the same hierarchical level. Public spaces design is the connecting element among built and environmental structures.

Our methodological proposal currently being tested, the *integrated multiscale project*, can be applied both for the architecture and design project and in an extensive area - large and local - participatory based.

The need to rediscover participation, reviewing methods used in the sixties and seventies, from the theories of John Habraken to the projects of Herman Hertzberg, for modern day, is evident in the widespread consensus on the hypothesis of transformation, which authorities must now implement and promote.

Starting from a participatory experience for the Action Plan of The Sangone River Agreement (RA), we organized an interdisciplinary Workshop and a design competition for students of the II Level Degree Courses of University 2 of

Architecture at Politecnico di Torino and Mathematics, Physics and Natural Sciences. This occasion has been an interesting experience of integration of different disciplines in design approach in the RA participatory process.

We have been tutors of the students involved in the competition, working with them on the project at different scales. We have analysed the results of the student activities, trying to formulate large-scale and local plans and projects, design guidelines and regulatory norms, according to a bottom-up approach, based on the direct involvement of institutions, social stakeholders and the local population. In these projects the integration of disciplines, scales of action and actors needs are the main design input.

Within the different design visions and specific projects or solutions, Purini's theory: "Italian architecture can find its aim in the landscape" is clear. In fact Italian landscape, due to its physical structure and for visual reasons, can be assimilated to a structure made of "territorial rooms" that can be re-defined, if architecture in relation to public space is willing to take responsibility for landscape enhancement and requalification.

The attempt to provide project assessment tools, also *in itinere*, is proof of the need to support decision-making processes, also at a project level, with scientifically acknowledged and shared methodologies, which may provide a partial guarantee of long-term quality of public and private spaces and buildings.

In fact, also in Italy, in decision-making processes the focus has recently shifted from the project design to its "sustainability", repercussions, effects and real benefits for the environment, landscape and city, in terms of quality of life that the project can bring.

Therefore, projects can no longer be limited to solely architectural and technological consideration or exclusively town planning, but should meet people needs, through public and private participation, reconstructing complex and often compromised realities.

The concept of sustainability should therefore become an integral part of a project process which, identifying priorities for action, creates scenarios for the possible requalification of more or less extensive areas.

Methodological approaches are required to create a process of territorial, landscape and architectural planning, based on a different vision of the project and supported by appropriate instruments.

Our methodological proposal currently being tested, the integrated multiscale project (Ingaramo and Voghera, 2010 Amman, Jordan), with no scale limits, can be applied to an extensive area - regional, provincial and local - as in the architecture and design project.

It uses an instrument to provide decision-making support and an operational technique:

1) the Action Contract, a participatory planning instrument, useful for supporting the public and private decision-making consultation process (Ingaramo and Voghera, 2009);

2) transecting sections, an operational technique used to correlate the various elements of the project at different scales, to redesign territorial systems and complex landscapes (Ingaramo and Voghera, 2010, Rome SIU).

The integrated multiscale project can help in decision-making with a continuous process that links the various scales of action. It is also an attempt to overcome hierarchical vision of urban and architectural planning, immediately correlating structural and strategic visions with local projects, integrating scales and thematic areas, traditionally managed separately in the planning process.

In the integrated multiscale project natural, agricultural and urban areas play an equally important role in the layout of our territories. In local projects, an attempt was made to identify a new settlement model not restricted to definition of a building typology. It should be extremely flexible, but applicable to vast sections of the territory, placing building and voids, rural areas, public green spaces, private open spaces and buildings on the same hierarchical level.

The entire planning process must be renewed, from its conceptual phase to construction, putting the architectural project and technological solutions back in touch with the problems of the whole surrounding, as Giancarlo De Carlo indicated back in the sixties, in his essays and projects.

The integrated multiscale project as the project for the valorisation of the landscape in accordance with the Cultural Heritage and Landscape Code (2004, s.m.i.), should be initiated by landscape planning, and in fact requires not only competence but also relevant responsibilities.

The Action Contract is an instrument that can be used to support decisions for the valorisation of the territory and landscape, resolve local conflicts and interests through the negotiating process, with reference to territorial vocations, linking social-economic planning instruments with those for territorial government. In fact, the Action Contract makes it possible to define project choices, balancing public and private, economic and proprietary interests, helping to: define guidelines and common standards, integrating project decisions with local resources, starting new projects and guaranteeing the operational capacity of the same. It could have a central role also in shaping and management of public spaces, defining agreement between public and private spheres for shared use and maintenance in time. Especially in today economic crisis this approach could be interesting to integrate public and private resources, as in the project financing system, to overcome the administration limited capacities. It can contribute to make legal some illicit activities such as urban hortus in public spaces, that can be used to manage and produce green and rural public spaces.

3. The Techniques

The method uses the transecting sections technique, three-dimensional sections useful for planning complex territorial and landscape systems, integrating various scales of action, creating visions and projects for the enhancement.

The concept of the transect, which is based on landscape ecology describing the changes along gradients of biodiversity, can now be applied to town planning. The first experiments can be traced back to Patrick Geddes' "Valley Sections" (projects for the old town of Edinburgh and for the Edinburgh Zoo masterplan), which considered the relationship between the city and external space natural and rural.

This methodology is then used in New Urbanism transect planning experimentation (The Ahwahnee Principles - first congress in Chicago, 1993). Transect planning defines a series of longitudinal portions of the territory, from the city to the country. Each section is a fractal that "contains transitional spaces between the urban perimeter and each functional node of the rural system" (...) (1993). The potential of the transect as a town planning instrument includes: 1) ease of interpretation, 2) definition of relational systems, interpretational and regulatory criteria that can be translated into zones and processed with Euclidean geometry, 3) generation of immersive environments based on relations between biophysical and social characteristics, 4) creation of systems for interpretation and control that help promote growth in some sectors, encouraging pedestrian and bicycle transfers, improving local security, enhancing the identity of the community and providing instruments to protect and restore natural environments (Ingaramo and Voghera, 2010, Naples).

The method we propose re-examines the concept of transects, reworking it as a technique for the land and landscape projects.

The transecting sections, the operational field for testing the project, let us define "transecting 3-dimensional" strategies for the valorisation of significant nodes (assets, values, resources, public spaces, symbols, core zones of ecological corridors) and problematic nodes (degraded areas or disused industrial areas, under-utilized service areas, quarries, peripheral construction fringes, and landscapes devoid of any specific connotations) of the system landscape. These planning strategies are based on the equal consideration of the various elements of the system, with the focus on the relationship between built-up and open spaces.

It works with the scale of the entire system to define general actions for the organization of the territory and land uses and on the local scale for enhancement and innovation project of specific sites.

There are interesting implications for town planning and architecture as we can operate simultaneously in the three-dimensional and two-dimensional mode, revisiting the role of the project rendering system, offering an instrument of support and verification for the hypothesis of the project, without limiting the function to the publication of the image. This operational method enables discussion, also open to non-experts, to establish new organizational models on a town planning scale and new forms of living on an architectural scale, buildings, non-built spaces, detailed elements such as fencing, and furniture for public, semi-private and even private spaces. It works as well as correlating urban, natural and agricultural areas, valorising identity and diversity.



Figure 1. SPONTANEUS PUBLIC SPACES. Up Left: Nadav Kander-Chonquing IV, Sunday Picnic. Up Right: Argentina. Down: Pop-up open space in San Francisco, 1970.



Figure 2. PLANNED PUBLIC SPACE. Parco Dora, Spina 3, 1998, Torino. Programma di riqualificazione urbana (Priu). International Competition 2004.

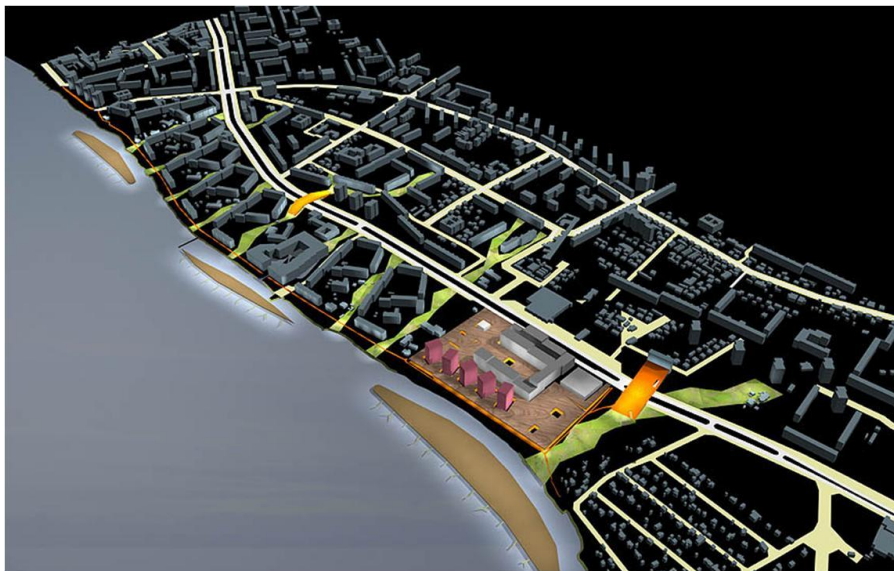


Figure 3. Monolab, KENGARAGS VALLEYS - RIGA 3-day international workshop in Riga : 1st prize in category landscape and ecological environment of Kengarags development area and 2nd prize in category redevelopment of the Sarkanijs Kvadrats Factory.



Figure 4. Regeneration Battersea Power Station, London. Master's degree thesis 2010. Tutors Roberta Ingaramo and Angioletta Voghera.

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