

Architecture Beyond Landscape.

The place's identity as a design tool

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ABSTRACT. Every public space, as a part of the urban space, may be a "fulcrum" for the development of a little town. The "Piazza" in the historical Italian cities may be considered one of the most important models of public place not only from a spatial and functional point of view, but also as an ideal space. The small hinterland towns, and the rural areas under their influence, just like the "Piazza", are characterized by morphological and topographical features as well as by memories, events and stories, but firstly by the connections between the work of the men and the characteristics of the territory. The Aemilian Apennines, and especially the provinces of Piacenza, Parma, Reggio Emilia and Modena, is a case studies to set up an argument about the recovery of small towns and their "horizons of landscape", through the insertion of a new architecture and a new public function for the reconstruction of a kind of citizenship.

KEYWORDS. identity/memory/citizenship/democracy/landscape/ public building

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1.The "Piazza" an ancient model of public space.



Fig.1

Every public space, as a part of the urban space, may be a "fulcrum" for the development of a city or a little town, especially when citizens perceive it as an identity space required for the social relationships, and where everyone may recognize itself as a part of a community. The public spaces of a town, such as streets and alleyways, squares or parks, and every space around and between buildings, not only cater to the movement of people and vehicles, but it can be considered the main focus of the life for the community. As well, a public space has the potential to become a collective place, when it has a strong and recognized identity. Maybe the most important property of a public space is its ability to create a network between its spatial relationships and its ideal analogies, and firstly between the men, the architectures, and the spaces beyond buildings.

The "Piazza" in the historical Italian cities may be considered one the most important models of public place not only from a spatial and functional point of view, but also as an ideal space. Here in the past took place the collective rite, such as the religious celebrations, the community meetings, the administration of justice, the trade and the market, but it was also the space for the private meetings and for the leisure. The market square, the Church square, and the Town hall square were three important spaces of encounter and exchange, but also they were the guardians of the social memories. We may consider the Piazza as an urban element, historically determined by its symbolic buildings, by the unfolding of history, by the extraordinary events that have occurred, and by the ordinary life of its community. As well, we can assume that the identity of a public space is led not only by its topography and geography, but, first of all by its memories, the history and the architectures around the public spaces, composing the background to the scene of the collective life.

In the historical Italian city we have the bell tower and the churchyard, symbols of the collective meetings; the town hall and also the building called "broletto" - a common type in the northern Italy - with the town hall upstairs, and the market at the lower level, covering a part of the square. We have the porch and the lodge, typological elements between the scale of the building and the scale of the city, but also between the concept of private and public. With this overlapping layers both physical and ideal, the Piazza may be considered nowadays a contemporary collective place where every citizen may develop a common sense of belonging. Every "Piazza", therefore, is not an empty space in the middle of a town, but firstly a cultural space for the representation of traditions and memories of a community. It is a space for public and private relationships, in other words it is the better place for the making of the citizenship.

Such as in the "Piazza", the identity of every public space is closely connected with its ability to be the private place of a community. Nan Ellin, an American theorist of architecture, has explained this concept by conceiving the notion of "Integral Urbanism", it's linked with some keywords such as "hybridity" and "connectivity" depending on a combination of urban functions; "porosity", depending on the physical integration between the historic and the contemporary, also the natural and the built environment and concerning the social, physical and cultural dimensions of a town. "Authenticity" is another keyword used by Ellin: depending on both large-scale and small-size intervention, that are responsive to the community needed, and may depend on the local climate, the topography, the history and the culture. One more quality for the integral urbanism is the "vulnerability": it depends on the capable of architects and planners to relinquish control, let things happen and allow for serendipity. An interesting interpretation of the public space and the architecture in a city, that seems to develop some Italian theories of the late 1960's, as well the famous book Aldo Rossi's *Architecture of the City*.

2. Rediscovering new public functions in the landscape.



Fig.2

The small hinterland towns, and the rural areas under their influence, just like the "Piazza" of the historical city, are characterized by morphological and topographical

features as well as by memories, events and stories, but firstly by the connections between the work of the men and the characteristics of the territory. A concept that many Italian theorists of the 70's, reiterated in some essays of the first issue of the *Encyclopedia Storia d'Italia Einaudi: The Original Characters*. Here many experts in different disciplines such as Carlo Ginzburg, Emilio Sereni, Giulio Bollati, Corrado Vivanti, were talking about the importance of reading the place's identity and the context, for the design of new possible destinies for the small towns and their landscapes. The identity of the territory may be defined by the relationships between the land, the climate, the history, the material culture and the development of the society, so we cannot define the Italian landscape as a "natural" environment, but we may consider it, almost always, as an "artificial" habitat.

The Italian territory is always composed by defined horizons of landscape, it's modified by men over the short term or the long time. You should point out that Italian territory can never be gathered in its totality, but often it may be understood in the uniqueness of the heterogeneous units-of-landscape, defined by specific identities and by a common sense of belonging. For this reason the small Italian towns spread in the rural areas and their landscape around, may be considered, just like a urban landscape, a human environment featured by a system of memories, where personal stories and collective events blend and overlap to any typological and morphological characteristic of the site.

It's important to add a premise to these considerations: while in the last sixty years the Italian cities have been developed and grown up in large metropolitan areas, the rural sites in the hinterland (over the 80% of the Italian territory), and especially the little centers of the Apennines, are depopulated, since the 50's of the last century, and they have lost parts of their specific identities. The delicate balance based on the close and symbiotic relationship between man and land has broken, and today many rural areas of the Apennines can be considered as "depressed areas", waiting for a recovery but also for a repopulation and a cultural regeneration. As well, it's important to rediscover the ancient cultural role of the "Piazza" for the historical city: a meeting point and a space for the citizenship, where the architecture may play a dual role, both a background and a palimpsest for the scene of the collective life. In other words it's necessary to start again from the ancient place's identity, so to build up, with the new architecture, also new vocations for the deprived areas. It's important to notice that the necessity of recovering the memories, techniques and productions from the past did not mean to get back to a feasible ancient "Arcadia", but it means to move towards new possible interpretations of the Apennines, engaging in issues related to cultural tourism, or new objectives of investment, new accommodation facilities, new offices or decentralized institutional areas, new public polarities, and finally in new residential goals.

Following this interpretive model, the new architecture may play an important role in the development of the deprived areas. The Building of new public centralities in the Apennines landscape, in its small towns or its rural areas, can help to build a new identity for these places. Sometimes the design process may help to retrieve an ancient lost identity still strong in the place memory, and the new architecture may use the memory as a starting point and an opportunity for the introduction of new collective functions creating a new identity. Sometimes, the new architectural design may read again an existing identity, linked perhaps to a material culture belonging to the recent past. In this case the architecture may be important for the development of new cultural opportunities for the sites and the buildings of the production, such as new settlements or accommodation facilities. Sometimes at last, the new architectural design process, may have the special skills to introduce a new identity through a feature designed for the territory, starting from the

architectural and environmental qualities of the site and their unique value in that specific part of landscape.

In all the three mentioned situations, the teaching of architecture, the scientific research and the actual design process are three different aspects of an only proceeding. For this reason, the construction of a research project, based on the teaching of architecture as an actual process, with a real-world context, with a client, according to meet the real needs of a rapidly changing society, can help not only the growth of young designers, but also the collective awareness for the rehabilitation of degraded or depressed sites. It may contribute to build new "better places" for the making of the citizenship.

3. Teaching researching and designing a new identity for the Apennine



Fig.3

The Emilian Apennines, and especially the provinces of Piacenza, Parma, Reggio Emilia and Modena, are the main context in which the School of Architecture of Parma is working. A interesting case studies to set up an argument about the recovery of small towns and their "horizons of landscape" now degraded or almost abandoned, through the insertion of a new architecture and a new function. A new centrality can be able to give a renewed interest for the place, setting unknown relationships and building new centers for the community life that, just like the ancient Piazza, can be actually places for the life of the community.

Since the 2005 the Research group AMR/APR (DICATeA, Faculty of Architecture of Parma), led by professor Aldo De Poli and composed by architects and researcher, beginning from a definition of identity as a medium-term between man and territory, focuses about the relationship between architectural design and citizenship.

The group follows different projects, and some degree thesis, about how the new architecture can assign new values to areas now depressed, but full of unexpressed potentials. So the new design process may exploit this potential, to produce new forms of identity. The process is to set up a new architectural design starting from the real needs expressed by the local community. The governments of small towns

are therefore the first interlocutors in establishing the role of the unexpressed potential of the areas and in understanding the new needs arose in the place.

Once establishing the relationships and any agreements between the parties, it is possible to proceed with the project, from a detailed studies of the area, its history, its memories and firstly its geography, topography and climate. So we may have a complete outline of the place, and a starting point for any further analysis. The second step is to introduce a new function to the areas, according to the analysis and to the contacts with the real needs of the local community. Often the architectural project aim at giving new values not only to a square or a alleyway or to a little part of a small town, but it aim at considering the whole landscape as a part of the project, a kind of "park" where the path, the connections to other centers and the focal points may give the right way to the design process. The last step is the the real project, which can be limited to the graduation design process, or move towards a feasibility study commissioned by a public institution or a private company. The reading of the territory with his characteristics, with its physical values and the ideal affinities, is expressed into a contemporary design where the soul of the place is captured by the use of materials and the techniques coming from the tradition, but also by the scale of the new architecture and its location and connection with existing infrastructure. The general idea is to build not only a new architecture, but also a network of places and signs in the area, for enhancing a small landscape system.

A degree thesis can be an important incentive to investigate some related issues to the identity of places. Designing the Emilian Apennines, a place exceptionally rich in identity although often forgotten, may have the special skills of considering the landscape as a palimpsest, and the new architectural project as an opportunity to enhance areas of high natural or historical values, but today little known and often left abandoned. Every thesis, aim at giving new value to a single place, starting from its memories and geographies, but also starting from the material culture of the historical buildings. An antropological process that consider every place as a natural, human, and architectural unit, where the contribute of the new architecture may redevelop the areas and also the society.

4. The taste and the landscape. A new identity from an ancient tradition.

One of the main topics of the research is the development of a latent identity through the recovery of small abandoned towns. The recovery of tiny centers in the municipalities of the Tuscan-aemilian Apennines, trough the project of a new receptive function, or a new centrality aims at giving new life to the anonymous architectures, typical of the zone.

The project of a Taste Museum and a center for the tasting of local food, is the object of the thesis by Elisa Curini Livierato. She intend promoting the so called Lands of Matilde of Canossa, near Reggio Emilia, today involved in a project for the enhancement of the places, for a possible inclusion in the Unesco World Heritage. The system of paths and castles of the Canossa's Lands, aims at redeveloping a the specific part of landscape. This lost identity can be enhanced by the inclusion of a new cultural center and museum within the landscape. A space dedicated to the taste, and intended specifically to promote local food to an international public.

The design of a wine museum in the tiny hills nearby Piacenza, in the small town of Castell'Arquato, may be a great opportunity for the enhancement of the area in terms of enogastronomic tourism, but also a way to close the circuit of the the so called Road of the Wine of Piacenza, a existing path connecting several small towns linked with the wine production. A museum and study center near Castell'Arquato

may strengthen a strong vocation in that part of landscape. The museum, the little library specialized on wine, as well as the laboratory and research center, are new places become necessary to enhance the small town.

5. The path and the landscape. A new walk through the Apennines.

Another research is involving the "Ente Parco dell'Appennino Tosco Emiliano", together with the University of Parma and some established local foundations. It aims at building a network through the Apennines. The system will be able to implement the "slow" natural tourism of the area, through the insertion of new accommodation facilities, new public functions, and the construction of new footpaths and cycling paths well served by timely exchange of information and areas along the landscape. This research could involve, finally, the whole Park system. Team manager of the research is Alessandro Massera. He has started, from the small town of Berceto, a mapping process of street and heritage, to build a network of small towns and territories linked by similar local identities.

A very different experience, connected with the idea of a new park, involves the design of the small archaeological park of Luceria, in the town of Canossa, near Reggio Emilia. The research is coordinated by Monica Bruzzone and the thesis by Rossella Musei titled: "A Tour to Luceria, between the built and the invisible heritage". The remains of Luceria, an ancient pre-Roman city have almost completely disappeared, due to the urban expansion of the 60's of the XXth century, which restricted the area bound by the archaeological excavations, by building a settlement of low quality. The research aims at recovering, through a few but significant signs on the landscape, the ancient ruins still visible of Luceria, but also to gather the many archaeological finds, scattered in various regional and state museums, and reconstructing a virtual collection. Primary recipients of the new cultural center will be the schools, so the museum and the park are designed firstly for a primary educational function.

6. From the extractive industry, to new cultural centers.

One of the main topics of the research is the transformation of a urban vocation, through the recovery, in a contemporary key, of a lost industrial identity. There are many industries in the area of the Apennines, closed between the 70's and 80's of the last century. These are large areas to reclaim, waiting for a new function and a new vocation. The hypothesis is to regain the ancient industrial vocation finding a link between the new function of the buildings, the sites, and the permanence of a productive memory as an effective planning tool.

The project of a Science Center in the area of the ex-glass factory Bormioli Rocco in the heart of Parma, starts from the recovery of the places and the lost memories of an industrial site to give a new urban vocation to a very central area for the city. The team manager of the research is the architect Luca Vacchelli, there is a degree thesis by Alessandro Gattara, but there is also an agreement between the Foundation and the University. It is currently studying a project to build a Science Center for the city of Parma as a center of public interest, necessary and still missing, but there is also the project to build, in a part of the listed buildings, a Glass Museum needed to preserve the productive memory of the glass factory Bormioli Rocco & Figli, born about one hundred years ago in the city of Parma.

The design of a Park of Gypsum, which can extend the existing Romagna's Park of Gypsum, to the province of Reggio Emilia, is explored by two dissertations that, after the creation of a common map of the new park, with routes and paths and possible connections between the two parks, and between the new park and the province of Reggio Emilia, have developed two new cultural centers to give value at former industrial areas. Team manager of the research is the architect Monica Bruzzone. The first research aimed at creating a study center for the high studies and a little museum of Gypsum in the municipality of Vezzano sul Crostolo. The thesis by Serena Pellicciari offers the possibility to insert a new decentralized pole of the University of Reggio Emilia in the remains of an ancient furnace to be reclaimed, giving the area a new mix of function between the cultural center and the cultural and natural tourism. A Museum of the Gypsum and the Material Culture of Scandiano is the specific topic she second thesis, developed by Anna Bonvicini, which recovered the ancient ruins located in the industrial center of Scandiano to build a small auditorium and cultural center, necessary for the growth of Scandiano, but also a museum dedicated to the material culture of the extraction of gypsum.

The recovery of the industrial heritage of the explosives factory now disused Sipe Nobel in Spilamberto, is a topic of great interest for the small local community. This is a large area between the small centers of Spilamberto and Vignola, near Modena. Here there is a strong memory of the industrial culture, but also a new identity also linked with crafts activities and the production of typical agrifood. The building of a new centrality, necessary to recover of a very wide area, is the topic of the thesis by Chiara Ferrari, which explores both a cultural theme, with the inclusion of a small museum of the Explosive, and a main theme linked to the production through the insertion of a new specialized craft center.

7. Fornovo di Taro and the New Petroleum Park Museum. An experience of teaching, research and designing.

The project of a Petroleum Museum Park in Fornovo di Taro, nearby Parma, is an important case-study where architectural design for a former industrial site becomes an important opportunity to recover a very interesting part of landscape. At the beginning of the 20th century, in the Fornovo valley, was discovered an important oilfield. It was one of the first oilfields in Italy and maybe in Europe, developing a local self made extractive system. The oilfield, exploited during the First and the Second World War, started becoming economically disadvantageous during the 60's, and in 70's it was already decommissioned. Even if the production no longer exists, the hilly landscape is nowadays still full of ruins in the woods, such as pumping stations, workshops, a miner village and some oil wells, which testify the productive past. An agreement among the research group AMR APR – University of Parma, the Municipality of Fornovo and the gas and oil company Gas Plus Italiana, signed in 2010, has permitted to start up a new educational opportunity, where a design workshop is finally connected with the real needs of a small center. In the miners village of Vallezza, the oilfield's memories are still alive for the small local community. Thus a new Petroleum Museum Park may really become a way to preserve and make known the tangible and intangible heritage of the petroleum production, and give an important touristic and cultural target for the Municipality too, through the organization of guided tour for students and nature enthusiasts.

The uniqueness of the place, situated in a barycentric position among the pathways on the region's ridge, is a key point for our Architecture Design Studio, where students are invited to propose a personal idea of a Petroleum Park Museum, able to give new values to the industrial remains and to figure out a complex and

realistic educational program. The project starts from the Design Studio "Laboratorio di Progettazione architettonica 2" led by the architect Monica Bruzzone with the architect Roberta Borghi, and continue with the degree thesis of Luca Conti and Andrea Ravanetti, focused on the design of the park and the building, and also with the thesis about the Petroleum Museum of Vallezza.

Actually there is also the design of a small multimedial pavilion that will be built in the next years and with the construction of a web site: the first step for the building of a Petroleum Museum Park.



Fig.3

9. Legend

Fig.1, The market square of an historical center in Italy. Piazza Grande, Arezzo (photo by Andrea Ciampolini).

Fig.2, An ancient little center in Italy nearby Siena, Tuscany (photo by Andrea Ciampolini).

Fig. 3, a collage of some project studied by the research group AMR APR.

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12. Biography

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