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# Public spaces in the assembled city

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*ABSTRACT: Which are public spaces in the new urban territories, and which is their role in the construction of the contemporary city? Most of the actual character of these urban territories comes from the assembly of elements belonged to different systems, where everything is casually put together, all quickly change, and we fill all that. Now the aim of the architectural design for public spaces, as central spaces for the new city, become different: first we have to deeply understand the morphological structure of the urban territory we are investigating. Besides we must to make new sites where the centrality can get new relationships between existing elements and new interventions. In a scattered landscape we need a net of public poles (new and existing) to orient and transform these areas in an urban territory*

*KEYWORDS. New urban territories. Assembly. Central spaces. Public poles. Net.*

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Which are public spaces in the new urban territories, and which is their role in the construction of the contemporary city? Which is their nature? Which are today the places where people gather themselves and recognize them like a collective place? (Lucci 2006)

Most of the actual character of these urban territories comes from the assembly of elements belonged to different systems, where everything is casually put together, all quickly change, and we fill all that. This is a new kind of assembled urban landscape, a scattered order, very difficult to understand (Corboz 1998). It's a place where we think that is possible to lose themselves, to lose one's bearings, to mislay the local mind (La Cecla 200).

Now the aim of the architectural design for public spaces, as central spaces for the new city, become different: first we have to deeply understand the morphological structure of the urban territory we are investigating. Besides we must to make new sites where centrality is the research of exceptional territorial elements that can put in order those urban parts, and that can get new relationships between existing elements and new interventions. In a scattered landscape we need a net of public poles (new and existing) to orient and transform these areas in an urban territory.

So the definition of central public places, like poles for these areas, take up new value, linked to the different systems and to the environmental contexts. And their nature become different. Therefore a pole can be an exceptional place along roads and territorial traces, or on intersections of different systems, where also crossings and roundabouts become urban places, linking up those technical routes with crossed areas characters.

More open spaces can be poles when they play a precise role in the urban structure, or when they build another system of public spaces linked each other in scattered areas, making an urban plot of different scale. To obtain this aim we have to fix their extent, the measure and limits, the design of edges, the relationship with the environment.

Finally some clusters of public buildings, like a civil and social centrality, can be an exceptional place for the urban area. They could compose a net of interesting spaces within an assembled urban area, able to produce a clear and well-connected urban structure, achieving a bearing plan for the whole area.

This speech deals with the exhibited thesis showing several exempla of public spaces focused to **new urban territories in the Neapolitan area:**

- First some public places related to the urban spread on north side of Naples, located along the high speed free-way, called "**Road of Americans**", making a net of new urban places.

This territory is a great area over the northern borderline of hills of Napoli's bay, a great flat country, the Volturno plain: a part of this place is said Ager Campanus. (Lucci 2002)

Into this area, our area-studio is a strip around the "Road of Americans" highway, a road born in sixties to speedy link east-west the A1 Naples-Milan motorway with

the domitiana coast and the sea. But it never has had a coherent layout, and today it is divided in many different stretches.

So now this strip is a typical case of "urban territory" (Marti 2001), a land where we can see to alternate many different systems, like factory sheds, trading centres, agricultural fields, a lot of scattered settlements, abandoned areas becoming dumps. It is a chaotic site, typical of contemporary urban model.

However, besides this actual look, we can still find some features of the old settled culture. All the territory of the plain is crossed by the traces of the roman centuriatio, a regular partition of the land based on a squared grid with definite measures (usually 710 x 710 meters). This grid built the urban settlements, the field's shape, the layout of the rows of vine, the roads, the watering canals. This is the reason why these traces are important and distinctive for the shape of all territory.

Therefore some sites that transform emergent characters of the actual structure of the territory, linking it to the historic existing features, will become the new public poles of this area.

In this way the most important **roundabouts**, crossing historical territorial roads and marked in old cartographies, become landmarks, great public spaces designed like a central place for the urban territory, with different shapes. They are enlarged, the form of the plan changes and adjusts itself to the around territorial layouts, new duties are inside. The Arzano roundabout becomes a great ellipse with a central park and sport facilities; the roundabout on Secondigliano road (a historic *royal* road) is built as a circular building like a city gate, with bus station and parking inside. Crossing Villaricca the road goes underground, and over there is an urban square with gardens and trees, with measures and orientations of the old centuriatio.



Fig. 1

Besides, strengthening the role of these places, some areas are located along the road near the roundabouts, with new public poles insides (facilities and equipments). Also for these areas it is foreseen that the whole buildings will be

linked to the traces of the context: so the new needs born together with the ancient memory of the Ager campanus. And we maintain that they can become the principal elements on which we could rebuilt a territory's balance.

- The second case is the new **regional-railway stations** along the **Vesuvian coast** as primary elements of connection in the territory. (Lucci 2004)

The state railway that runs along the Vesuvian coastline close to the sea was the first Italian railway line to have been built (the first stretch of line between Naples and Torre del Greco was completed in 1840).

This dramatic segregating line was part of the transformation and development of these areas. It altered the natural relationship of the landscape with the coastline and the sea, triggering a powerful boundary effect which has definitely separated some parts and prevented other connections and relationships. It has had a highly detrimental effect upon the development of coastal urban settlements which would have otherwise undergone a more natural expansion towards the sea.

The whole area represents a large landscape influenced by Mt Vesuvius which has led to a well-defined, slightly sloping area between its base and the sea, creating a strip of easy accessibility and excellent exposure which also has the added advantage of superb views, a strip of land with a kind of organic structure that enables it to be delimited and considered as a study-area. This strip is also marked by a series of systems which run through it from the hill slopes to the sea: the river-bed system of the surface waterways has dented and hollowed out the land surface; the system of volcanic lava flows has accumulated their materials along their route to the sea.

A series of parallel systems of transport run through this fairly area: it begins with the state railway that forms a link with Calabria and Sicilia and runs along the coast; the "S.S. Tirrena inferior" immediately above, known as the old "Golden Mile"; the Circumvesuviana, local light railway and the section of the A3 Naples-Salerno motorway.

This is therefore an atypical case of landscape transformation which has enveloped a powerful and unique natural structure within a muddle of different systems and extensive urbanisation, an area crammed with complex memories and traces ranging from natural surroundings to archaeological sites – Herculaneum, Pompei, Castellammare, Oplontis... - and from monumental works of architecture – the system of eighteenth century Vesuvian villas with the royal palace in Portici – to agricultural sites.

Today, it constitutes a landscape made up of different elements which belong to different eras and layouts: we are therefore faced with an overlap of various systems, becoming increasingly complicated, becoming stratified and contradicting one another, and creating significant depths of unresolved ties. Although the view from a distance still preserves the highly distinctive character of one of the most famous panoramas in the world. The current state of the road network and the living conditions have been significantly impaired and are at a critical point.

This study explores the theme of a "critical crossing" for the infrastructure. In other words, it deals with the hypothesis that any infrastructural layout must address all the main elements of the landscape involved in the crossing, linking the need for technical solutions to local characteristics, in order to avoid an intervention totally divorced from the local situation and to create a distinctive and unique local character.

The study therefore focuses on the specific issues related to the local area because, through the explanation of their latent planning potential, they are linked to the fundamental questions of the intervention while some appropriate planning "actions".

With regard to the coastal railway line, it was therefore deemed necessary to address two closely connected issues: the distinctive features and elements of the current settlement structure of the coastline consisting of the strip of land between the 'Miglio d'Oro' and the sea; and the conformation of the coastline in relation to the railway line and its various sections.

These two themes are actually closely inter-linked because the distinctive eighteenth century settlement structure of the coastal Vesuvian villas initially proved to be a marvellous way of interpreting the typical features of the area. In architectural terms, the original typological structure brought together and reinterpreted all the elements of the local area, using the courtyard structure of the villas and the sequence of its spaces as a pivotal factor between Mt Vesuvius, the coastline and the sea, and become the distinctive feature of any type of buildings, public and private.

The actual phase (since 1960) of violent, rapid and extensive growth of peripheral and suburban areas ignored the nature of the landscape and invaded the countryside with residential parceling-out of variable quality. Bearings were lost, hierarchies were overturned, as were the relationships with the layout and landmarks of the local area; the firmly-established existing settlement structure became trivialized with buildings which, for the most part, were of mediocre and anonymous quality. This invasion of the landscape became intensified in the immediate vicinity of Naples until the modern town of Ercolano, leading to densification and a significant increase in the population which, however, was not matched by a similar extension to the layout of new recognisable urban systems and public spaces nets.

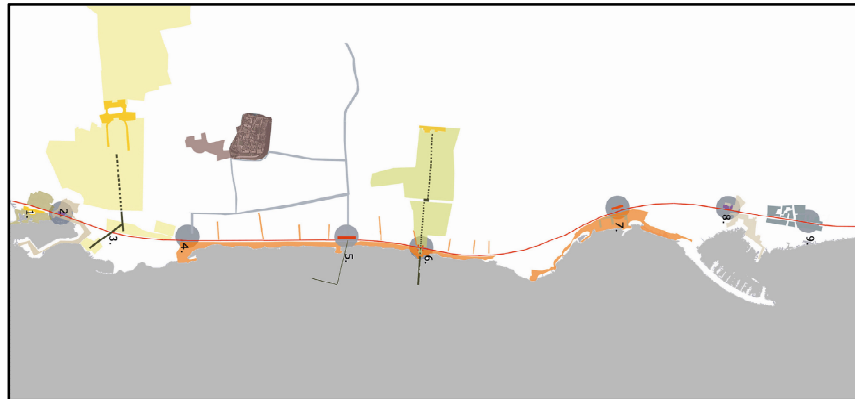


Fig. 2

At least, the study proposes an initial hypothesis for the thematic and interpretative description of the railway line layout through the identification of crossed emerging places and the issues raised by the layout. In practice, each **new crossing of the railway** line resolves a specific question and is simultaneously designed to be a "central place" by means of which crisis situations are transformed. The character of the areas examined in

relationship to each other is reinterpreted and a clearly defined role is assigned to places, points and stretches of land.

Following this approach, a series of experimental planning schemes was developed which mainly concerned the theme of the station as a new public place and a crossing way.

The transformation of the national railway in a regional railway needs a greater number of stations, at the right distance for a regional line. Therefore the "critical crossing" topic affects the places choice where to put the stations and decides their role in the surroundings. Every station becomes a new way to cross that solves a precise issue, and it's also a central place, a quality public pole that makes a new relationship between the crossed areas and their mean elements.

Linking these issues with the structure of the territory, some typical solutions are defined and called: the **rampart-station** is on a railway stretch between two different elevations, so the station is the place where these elevations link up. The **bridge-station** crosses the railway stepping over. The **wharf-station** links different type of freight by the sea, the railway, the roads. The **monument-station** is in a strategic point near monumental sites.



Fig. 3

In the case of the station of the Royal Palace Park of Portici (a.) the main issue is the terminal of the route from the Royal Palace towards the sea, getting over the drop between the Park and the coast and crossing the railway. In this way the bridge-station is the hinge between the central axis of the park, the gardens on the drop like a green extension till the sea, and the direction towards the harbor.

The station near the Ercolano excavations and the monumental Villa Favorita (b.) is located in the middle of a new ring road designed to link a new entry on the southern side of the excavations, the station and a new landingplace by the sea. So this wharf-station it is a interchange for the historic eminent places and the new territorial poles.

Near Torre del Greco, in La Scala beach (c.), the rampart-station allows passing under the railway platform, draws the seafront façade, and is the place of any kind of route. (Lucci)

So this way of design the stations becomes a solution for the unsolved problems of their areas, but also a new net of public spaces who links the ancient lonely poles and the new ones.

- The third case concern an **abandoned place in the eastern area of Naples**, where to build a **central public space**, a cluster of public buildings, summing up signs and layout of urban territory and creating new relationships and meanings for the whole urban area.

The eastern area of the city of Naples has always been regarded as a vast flat area lying on the edge of the city, but also as a vast hollow that collects all the rainwater from Mt Vesuvius and the surrounding hills, and therefore a marshy, alluvial zone. (Lucci 1998)

As a consequence, there was a long period when the city did not expand beyond the grey line of the turreted Aragonese walls, with the result that the distinctive features of this area have remained intact: the old access roads to the city and the gates (one of these is Via Poggioreale); a dense, branched structure of streams, small rivers and canals running across the area, channeling the runoff rainwater towards the coast and the sea. This was the layout of the landscape and these were the bases of a minute, fragmented landscape of agricultural plots, made viable by land reclamation, drainage and canalisation. In the past, there even used to be water mills and areas reserved for fishing.

It was during the rise of the industrial city in the early nineteenth century that new facilities, equipment and services began to be located in this part of Naples, which was more easily accessible than others. In this period was built the slaughterhouse, in a great rectangular plot perpendicular of via Poggioreale.

This was the moment that marked the beginning of the radical transformation of the city in terms of the typical forms of modern expansion: the various infrastructural systems began to appear; the location of the industrial plants and factories was based mainly on accessibility rather than the suitability of the area; the planning of the expansion of the city took place according to autonomous characteristics and layouts which were mechanically superimposed on the existing landscape; its traditions were abandoned and its distinctive features sank into oblivion although these features can still occasionally be made out in the remaining landlocked spaces.

This tale of deletion and eradication of memory has been the setting for the typical contemporary transformation of suburban areas and the peripheries of large metropolises.

It is a tale which contains within it all the typical and widespread terms used to describe these urban areas: closure, dismantling and abandonment (of industries and factories which have closed or have been moved to another marginal area), delapidation (of low and moderate income housing, road and street structures and

general facilities), disorientation (reference points and bearings are lost, also the layout of the main roads of the area, together with the lack of recognisable public spaces), uncontrolled development (of industrial sites, the covering of river-beds, the 'Centro Direzionale' with its skyscrapers and raised slab) and overlapping or inclusions (of systems, parts, different features such as railway lines that cross motorway junctions, which surround productive buildings, which in turn alternate with agricultural or residential spaces). It has led to a continuous accumulation of systems with different forms of logic underlying them, frequently merely juxtaposed, with random relationships in what may be defined as an "assembled landscape". In particular, what emerges today most clearly is the sense of a *vacuum or emptiness*.

The area, which lies between the railway and via Poggioreale to the north, bears the imprint of an urban redevelopment project which has been gradually implemented with enormous delays and indecision since the seventies: only half of Tange's original plan for the 'Centro Direzionale' has been built, and today, with its skyscrapers and their slab, the office district remains divorced from its surroundings. The remaining part of the area, situated between the 'Centro Direzionale' and the northern branch of the raised railway, is still waiting to become a mixed tertiary zone with services, residential accommodation and public facilities.

Meanwhile, in the long wait for future transformations, the defining features of the area are emptiness and large distances. There are large areas which have been abandoned due to the dismantling of buildings dating to various eras: one of these is the old slaughterhouse, of which the only remaining part is the wall enclosure with its long perimeter wall and little else. Now it is also crossed by the s.s.162 the flyover which links the 'Centro Direzionale' and the city centre to all the large eastern conurbations around Ponticelli and which is connected to the outlying motorway link roads and the city ring road.



Fig. 4

In the interpretation of the planning, the study of this section of the urban landscape has also raised a series of issues about its transformation, a thematic palimpsest which can bring it within a coherent and complete discourse regarding its transformation into suitable urban features.

In this project, the abandoned area of the old slaughterhouse will become a new central area, a public pole for the whole eastern area with all the missing facilities.



It will be a cluster of buildings with a plant shape that take again the ancient layout of via Poggioreale and connect it with the layout of the modern roads. The buildings will make a central place where to put together surrounding routes and plots, directions and perspectives. It will be the place of the relationships and the rotations. So the plant shape, the relationship with the land marks, the recognizability and clearness of buildings will make the character and the role of this type of settlement: a new public pole, with squares, open spaces, gardens and buildings where people can stay, meet themselves, find a lot of facilities that make livable and comfortable the whole city part.

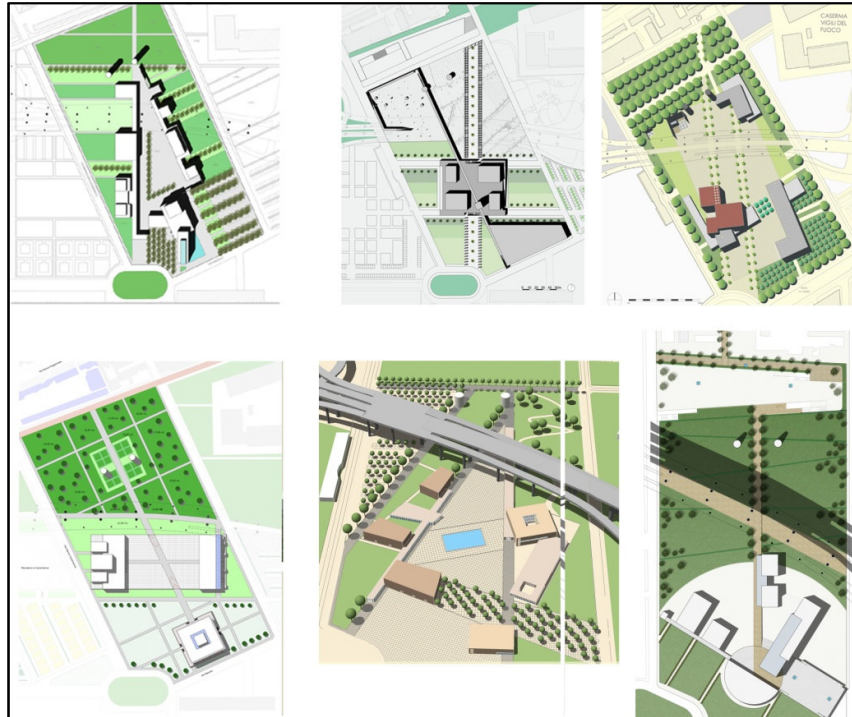


Fig. 5

### Legends

- Fig. 1 The roundabout on Secondigliano road
- Fig. 2 The thematic plan for the Mt Vesuvius coast
- Fig. 3 Three stations (degree tesis)
- Fig. 4 Thematic palimpsest for the eastern area
- Fig. 5 The public pole (scholar designs)

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### **Biography**

Rejana Lucci, Full Professor of Architectural and Urban Design, University of Naples "Federico II", Faculty of Architecture. Her scientific activity has focused on studies and experimental projects concerning the issues of urban architecture. In particular, she has taken her interest in current problems of urban transformation: as Professor at the Specialization School in Urban Design (1988 to 1995), and as leader of MURST Researches (1987 to 1997) she attended to urban housing, and to the analysis and design of the suburban areas, with their description and representation. Member of the Committee of Professors for the Doctorate in Urban Design of Naples (since 1992), she led several researches on the relationships between urban settlements, landscape and infrastructures, both in general terms and in experimental design about Neapolitan areas.

She was leader of Research Unit of Naples into a program of National University Research named "In.Fra," (settlement's shape, environment, infrastructures) 1999/2000 and 2001/200