

Palermo, Italy

Palermo, metropolitan main-streams with a twist

«In-between New tendencies and Ancient Drifts»

Palermo, administrative capital of Sicily, with its metropolitan region, hosts around one million people. A city with long history which has been, for long periods, one of the richest cities in Europe. At the end of the first millennium, during the Arab domination, Palermo was described as the most beautiful and happy city in the world. An history of multifaceted dominations the one following the other. In XXth century, the worst days had come. After the the world wars, Palermo was one of the cities in Italy which couldn't - or wouldn't - step out of post-war era. The city grew, but who decided how wasn't the public interest: from the country the Mafiosi had come, willing to take their place in the city. And it was them, with the complicity of the leading political class, to draw the city to come.

Remember Vito Ciancimino, member of Democrazia Cristiana, major in the seventies, the one who signed - in just one night - for the demolition of numbers of liberty villas, to be substituted by condominiums. Another paradigmatic story regards the airport, built during the 50s. The technicians had suggested to build it on the east of the metropolitan area, but mysterious powers moved it to the other side, shifting the growth of the city to lands bought at low prices by the Mafia. Who paid the bill? In 1972, when technologi-

cal aids for flight were not developed, the Alitalia 112 flight collided with Montagna Longa, a mountain near the airport. 115 victims of the Mafia, not even acknowledged as that.

And the city? The historical centre, one of the biggest and richest in Europe, remained abandoned, restructuring being less profitable than building new neighbourhoods.

In the 90s, with the first left-wing administrations of its history, the city had its 'spring'. In consequence of 1992 Mafia slaughters, the city reacted, a new season had begun. Buildings destroyed since second world war started to be restructured, the focus moved to the historical centre, a detailed plan was designed, local development was launched with partial results.

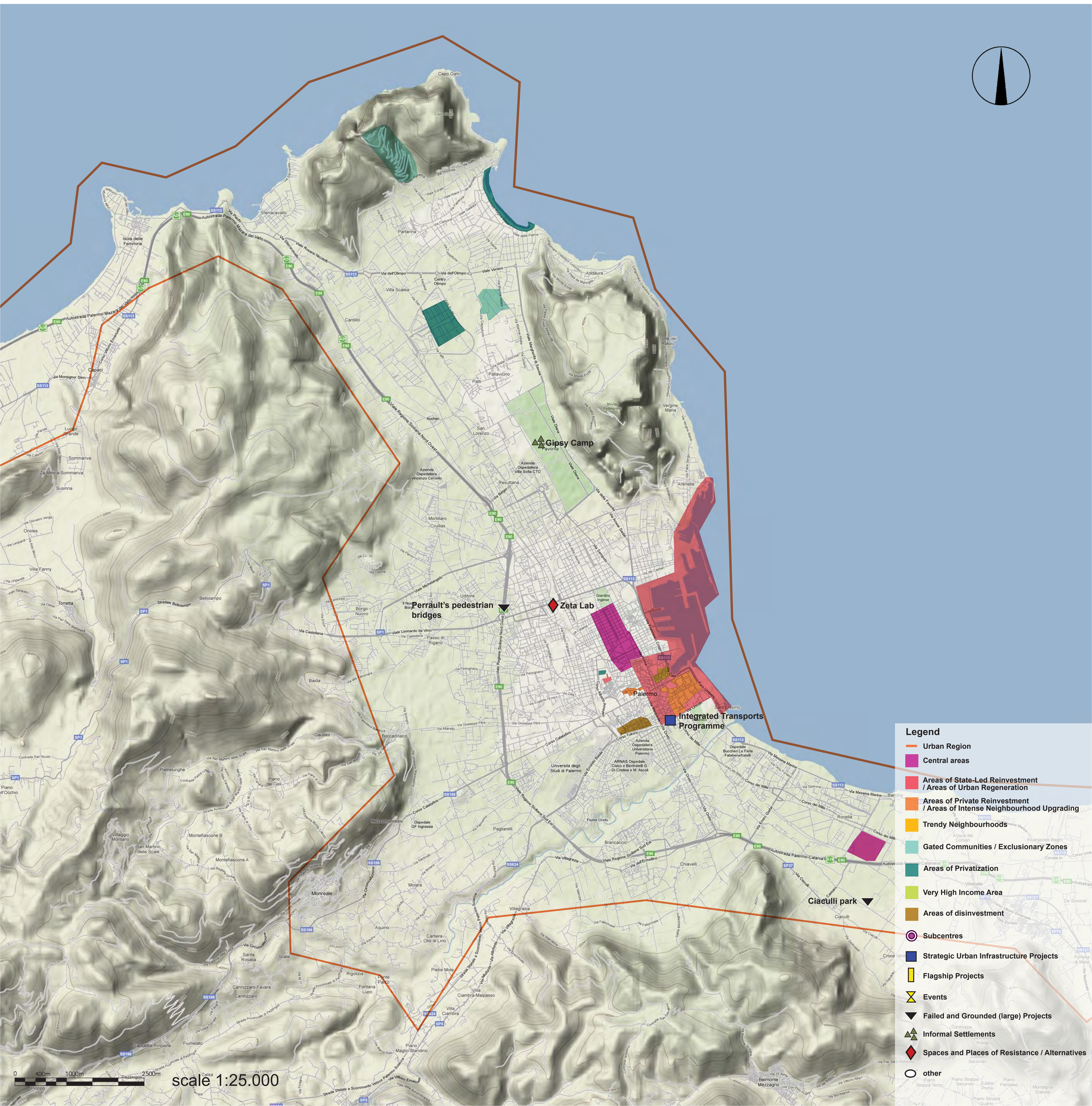
With the new millennium the spring has shifted to a new autumn. A new administration, right-wing sided, promoted the building - more often the design - of infrastructures and flag projects. But suddenly something happened. A major known just for his wild nights - made of alcohols and young ladies -, dozens of scandals - for instance those regarding the management of waste -, fiscal crisis, a second mandate coming from debated elections - pre-empted ballot-papers were found, judicial enquiries are questioning the validity of the process - have undermined the credibility of the administration. Thus, everything seems blocked, the city is stuck, main-stream pressures are slowed by a viscous atmosphere. What has

not stopped is private led neighbourhoods upgrading.

Palermo's metropolitan mainstream are going on, but ancient drifts deviate them. Everything reveals backsides, contradiction is normality. Resistance appears where you may not imagine. We've tried to show it in the map, where some stories are strangely mixed, some narratives pertaining to different categories than usual.

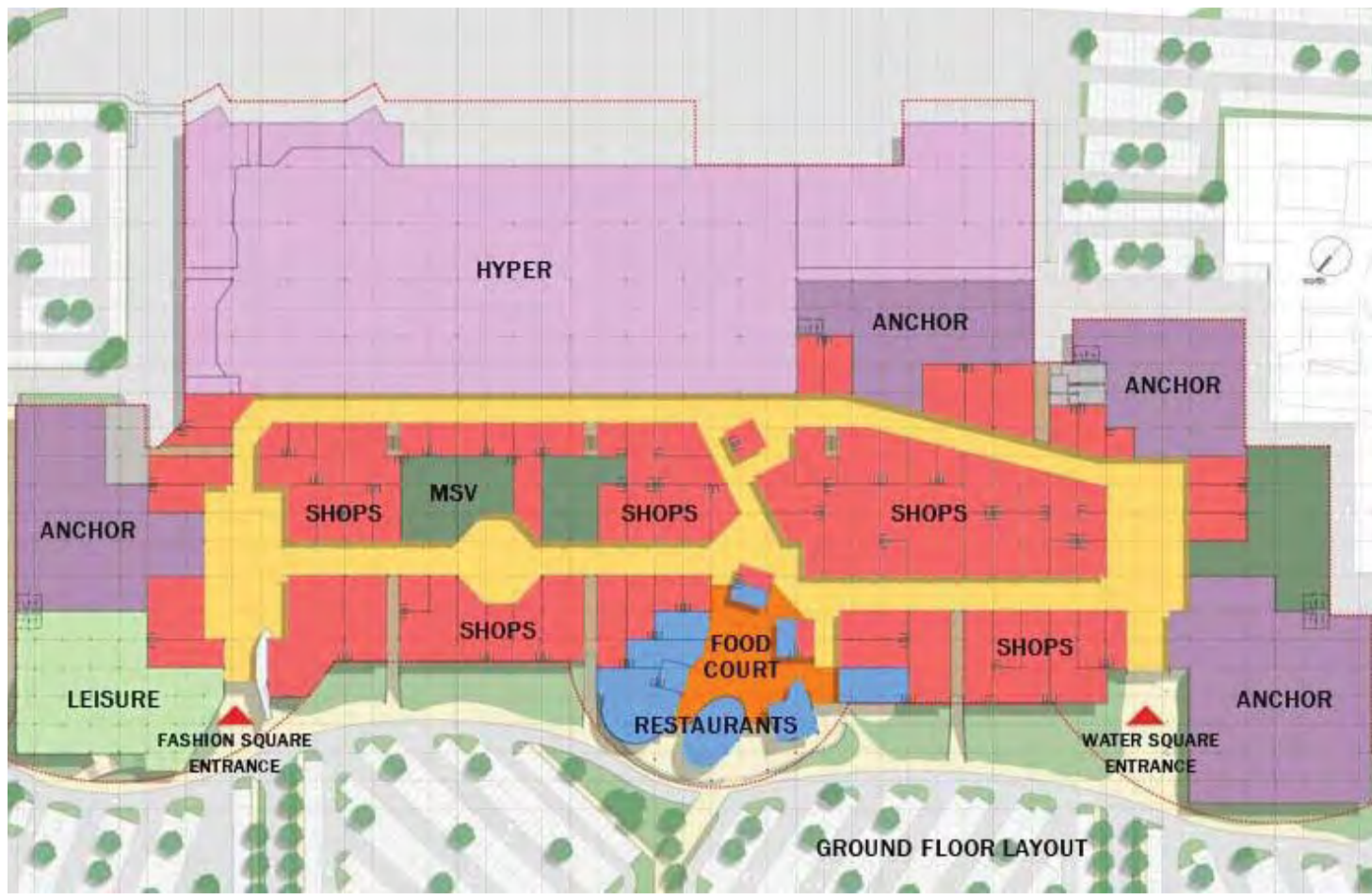
Palermo, Southern Europe, Metropolitan Mainstream with a twist.

Italy 301'338Km2 * Inhabitants 60'325'805
Urban Region 1'200Km2 * Inhabitants 1'000'000



Central Business District: Forum Palermo

Purpose	First Retail & Leisure Center in Palermo
Dimensions	Shopping Centre of 65.000 m ² + 2400 open air parking lots.
Projets costs	225 millions €
Investors	Multi Development-C Italia
Architects	T + T Design, Project CMR, Lombardini 22



Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

Forum Palermo is the first major retail project in Palermo, realized in 2009, with a river basin of users of about a million potential customers. Located in the east periphery of the city, in the locality Brancaccio Roccella, near to the scheduled new exit of the Palermo-Messina motorway and in correspondence of a future new station of the Palermo Metropolitan Railway Service. Furthermore, a tram station and a bus terminal will connect Forum Palermo to the city centre.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

"Forum Palermo combines Multi's values and extraordinary capability to operate in the local framework. It will be the place where to be, to unveil new goods, to taste local and ethnic gastronomy, to enjoy shopping in a peaceful and warm atmosphere. With its impressive catchment area, it will support the growth of the economy of the region". This is the foundation idea declared to the base of the project. A huge shopping mall, canonical but anachronistic.

Stakeholders and their interests

Multi Development-C Italia, the Municipality, the traders and all citizens are engaged in order to carry to term a work, born already old.

Deals

In a few months the city of Palermo has seen the evolution of such an history which, in other Europe and world's metropolis is the consequence of decades of suburbanization. As it is a common deal in Southern Italy, everything comes true helter-skelter, the commercial centre opens before the works are finished, the public administration generously gives a tram line of doubtful usefulness for the whole transport system, the municipal police awakes from decades of sluggishness, supported by sites activists and right-minded people whom immediately gives the hunting to "vucumprà" (the term, borrowed from the Sicilian dialect, literally means "do you want to buy?"; it is commonly used to define immigrant street peddlars in the "sitting-room of the city" (see next paragraph). To our ears, it sounds so much of the history of many cities and their privatistic reaction to the competition of the mall. We have called it a "late, fast metropolitan mainstream".

Impacts

To the canonical negative impacts of suburban malls (traffic, pollution, unfair competition with the small downtown shops, absence of any relations with the surrounding urban fabrics), the Forum Palermo reveals further impacts if analysed in its spatial and temporal context. It is evident that its retail surface, superior to the one of Via Ruggiero VII, the greatest commercial street in the city has induced strange urban reactions. For the first time in decades, the traders of the urbanized area declare themselves being favourable to a pedonalization (up to now once a week) of Via Ruggiero Settimo. This pedestrian zone has been immediately garrisoned by massive police that, for the first time, is engaged in the hunting of unlicensed traders. Is this the result needed by the east periphery of the city of Palermo and the whole metropolis in the 2010?



Central Business District: New Courthouse and Vittorio Emanuele Orlando Square

Purpose	Creation a new Courthouse + building of an underground car park.
Dimensions	15000 + 5.000 m ² .
Projets costs	(no infos are provided about the courthouse costs) + 16 millions € (Private Investment capital)
Architects	Sebastiano Monaco (Monaco Architetti As-sociati) + Franco Bernardini



Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

The Courthouse is a complex of new buildings- New structures are located in an area which was destroyed by war and by decades of negligence. The Courthouse is articulated in a series of structures that recall the morphology of the old district, told to be open to the use of citizens. In front of the old Palace of Justice there is a new square, built with the first project-financing realised in Palermo: on the surface a public square, a pedestrian and 'waterproofed' space. Below the square, more than 800 underground parking spaces and boxes have been created, mainly to be sold, a new centre for private mobility.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

The new Courthouse complex is a focal point of Sicily, historically tormented by criminality. The project is realized into the central district and, in its designers' words, it would like to create a new dialogue with the city: a place of social construction. This purpose, however, has not been satisfied by the project: public spaces are built areas controlled 24 hours on 24; the entries and exits are under the watchful eyes of armed forces. The area responds uniquely to the judicial function. The project of the square and parking can be considered as an example of a late modernity. In the era of sustainable mobility Palermo still promotes and finances private mobility.

Stakeholders and their interests

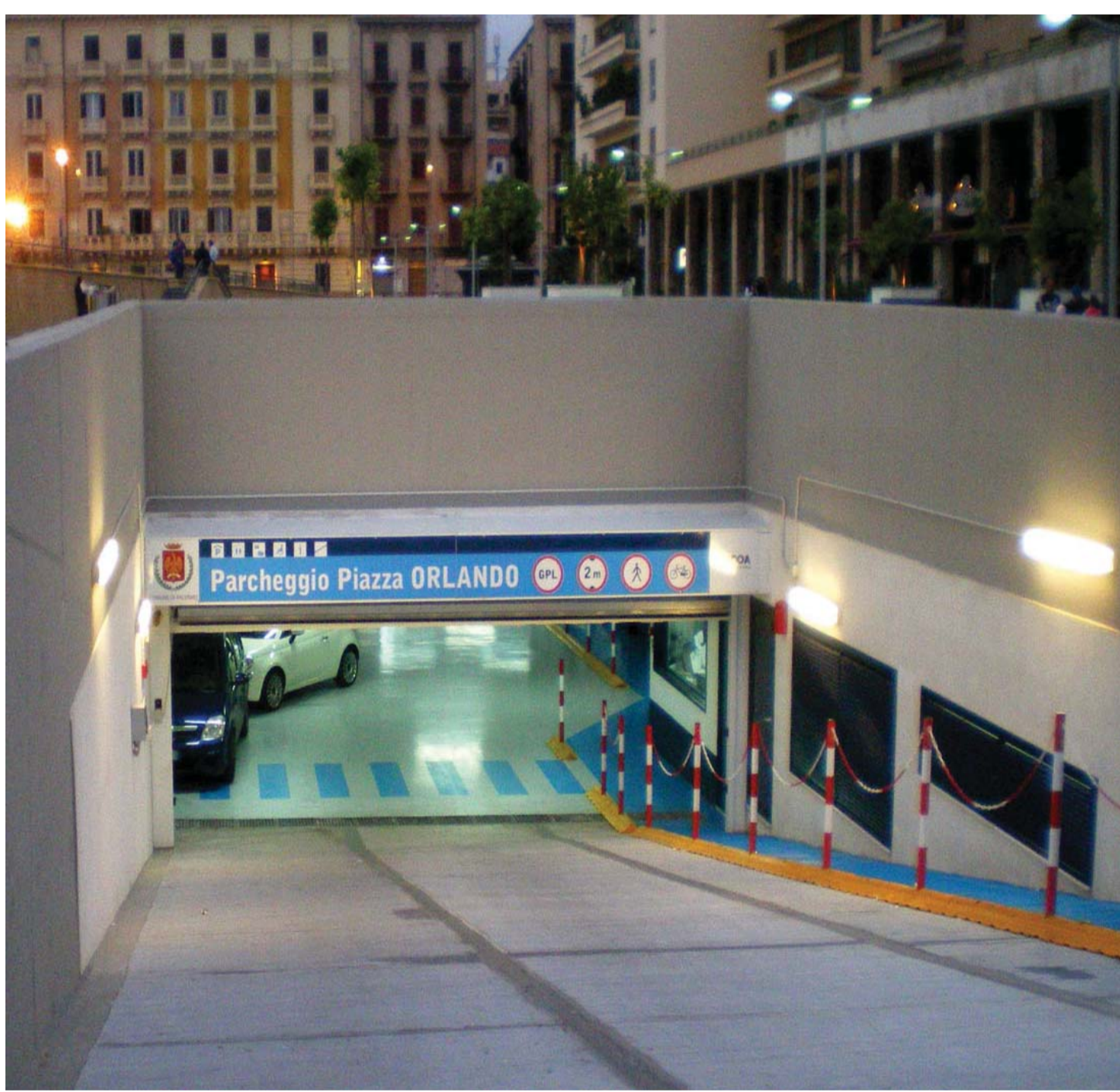
The municipality of Palermo. It would like to satisfy the demand of car parking, because Palermo haven't very much (the Mayor thinks that this project can bring general consensus by those working and living in this area). The APCOA, the company already managing street car parking in the district and now going to control the underground car park. It just wants to maximize profits. The National Department of Justice, who decided for the building of the new Courthouse. No other actors (such as citizens, workers, local entrepreneurs) have been involved in any of the project phases for both interventions.

Deals

This project has represented one of the first cases for the private and public sector to meet their interests (just economical issues and consensus building) within the city of Palermo.

Impacts

Two paradoxical projects are on stake. The first represents a space told to be a new vital part of the city which is definitely a place without opportunities to be lived and freely use (how can a space be of public use when gates are ready to enclose it in a few seconds?). The other is a cemented square which poor and melancholic design reveals the very interest of its promoters: the speculative interests of managers about parking. Furthermore, most of the parking realised have been appointed to be sold, so the parking, finally, couldn't help solve parking lack for workers in the neighbourhood. In our contention, it is what usually happens when the political power delegates its own tasks to private entrepreneurs without verifying the effects. Within the very centre of the city, somehow losing its urban qualities.



Area of State-led Reinvestment: Urban I Programme in Palermo

Purpose	Urban redevelopment of a portion of the Old Town: 'Tribunali' and 'Castellammare' districts.
Dimensions	112 Ha. About 11.000 people.
Projets costs	20,7 millions €
Investors	34% EU funds, 42% National funds, 18% municipal funds, 6% private resources.
Architects	-



Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

The area identified for the implementation of the Urban program in Palermo lies inside two of the four districts of the old town, the "Castellammare" and "Tribunali" districts. This area is characterized by an extensive palatial tissue with an high historical value, and from different urban centralities and crafts. Nonetheless, one encounters situations of great physical and social degradation within it, with high rates of unemployment, a decline in resident population, low housing conditions and a very poor availability of equipment and services for the neighbourhood. Within this physical and social environment, the Urban programme has proposed the restructuring of the urban history, the integration between the old town and other urban centralities, the connection of policy and local actions.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

The Urban programme can be considered a typical "mainstream" policy. As for many European policies, it has produced very different deals and impacts within the communitarian context. In our case, we're going to see how the funding coming from this programme has been a tool both for a real regeneration for parts of the city centre and for the development of pure gentrification processes. We're going to define it a "gentrification with a twist", filtered by the very typical aspects of Sicilian context.

Stakeholders and their interests

The Urban Program has been mainly promoted by the City Council who, taking advantage of European communitarian funding, has used it as an element of experimentation and promotion of policy options and planning expressed in the detailed plan for the city centre in 1993.

Deals

The Urban programme has been proposed as an implementation of already started general planning policies. The selection of interventions already planned, in fact, follows a political pattern for using the Urban funds to complete the redevelopment process initiated by the executive detailed plan. The programme is proposed as a catalyst of interests, policies and specific actions.

Impacts

Started in 1995 and ended in 2001, the programme is recognised to be accomplished with satisfactory results. Indeed, even if the concentration of efforts has started some upgrading processes, it has accentuated the separation with the rest of the urban tissue, contrasting some interesting redevelopments to abandoned areas. Procedures for the disbursement of grants to artisans and entrepreneurs, designed to provide an immediate start of implementation, has often assisted who already had a budget available to run activities. We should note, then, that, even if the programme has been an efficient tool for the arising of some (mainly economical) initiatives, its development has seen the lack of the support from long-term housing and social policies. Interventions on the housing have been implemented uniquely by the private sector and the programme couldn't become complementary to the ordinary political regeneration of the historic centre taken by the local administration.



One of the most evident effects, then, is an increment of contradictions (often within contiguous blocks) between gentrified neighbourhoods and abandoned dwellings. Furthermore, the economical activities which have taken advantage of the Urban programme are addressed quite exclusively to the tourists. So, a lack of basic services for inhabitants is still to be noted. Once again, within an extraordinary context, huge contradictions are to be noted, spaces of resistance (still nowadays, most of the immigrants live within the most beautiful urban context) and violent gentrification. Gentrification with a twist, we have said.

Alternative: Zeta Lab

Purpose	born as a squat is nowadays a community centre giving hospitality to asylum seekers.
Dimensions	Nearly 500 m ² .
Projets costs	Some hundreds Euro per year for bills.
Investors	Initially the squatters, nowadays it's supported by the Municipality of Palermo and private donors.
Architects	-



Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

The Laboratorio Zeta (Zetalab) was born as a squat in 2001 in a abandoned structure, formerly a kindergarten. Since the March of 2003, 53 Sudanese asylum seekers have been hosted in the squat. They had abandoned the centre they were previously hosted in, because three of them were driven out because of their political concern for the diffusion of the knowledge of the condition of Darfur region. It was supposed to be a temporary solution, but some of those asylum seekers still lives there, and others has come. As years went by, the municipality of Palermo acknowledged the centre giving it the water and energy supply and, finally, listing it among the cultural associations with humanitarian merit in Palermo. Meanwhile, in 2002, the owner of the immobile (a public board committed in the building of council houses) had assigned the kindergarten to the Aspasia cooperative - led by an 80 years-old woman previously put in trial for corruption - with the purpose to run a private kindergarten. In the January of 2010, the police has cleared the squat, leaving the immigrants hosted without a shelter. Immediate have arisen the reaction of citizens and associations. After a 5 days long garrison and a huge demonstration with thousands of people, the Zetalab has been, once again, taken in possession by the former squatters and the immigrants. Nowadays, nearly 20 people, most of them asylum seekers, live in it.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

The story of the Zetalab presents a typical mainstream (the creation of a space of alternative opposed by institutions) filtered by the very features of the Palermo context.

Stakeholders and their interests

The squatters who has committed themselves to some responsibilities neglected by the Municipality. The Municipality which had to acknowledge a squat because of its incapability to work on a task of its competence. The Aspasia association, willing to make profits by the use of the building. Somewhere behind the curtains, the political pressures for the Aspasia association to make profits.

Deals

The story of the Zetalab reveals a number of hidden issues. The most evident one is an institution (the Municipality) obligated to acknowledge a squat because it accomplishes a very important task the institution is incapable to work on. Meanwhile, there's a private association which history and references are quite unknown (Aspasia) winning a competition to realise a private kindergarten. It's not clear why the association doesn't open the kindergarten in another building it owns: a building confiscated to a boss of the Mafia, assigned to Aspasia and nowadays unused. Somebody says because the Zetalab is located in a more affluent area, somebody else says the very reason is a conflict of power between different parties within the same political area (the party of the major of Palermo and the party of the Governor of Sicily).



Impacts

What is on stake is a right recognized by all the international conventions, the right for asylum seeker to be hosted until they know their demand has been accepted or not. More generally, the Zetalab give evidence to some contradictions of the policies about immigration within the Italian context. There's no end to this story. Nobody knows when another police command will try to write the end word over the former squat. For the moment Zetalab is still offering an alternative to people abandoned by institutions and to former squatters who ended up being a replacement for institutions.

Synthesis over all four projects and outlook

As we've suggested in the introductory text, a very complex - and complicated - story is to be told. It is very difficult to give all the informations one would need to have an all-rounded idea of what is going on. In the map, not to overcrowd it, we've decided to mark just some of the interesting narratives which could be told, the most paradigmatic ones.

The selection of the focus projects has been made with the same purpose of giving a transversal look. We have public, private and submerged interests and conflicts, we have ambiguous deals and unexpected impacts. While the scenario is mostly dark, we've decided to remark on some resistance space, which existence is everyday precarious.

We haven't given so much numbers, we think narratives can better represent Palermo's new millennium essence. We hope you can trace the various commonality between

them. Let's try to sum up.

- 1) The consequences of the referred 1990s 'spring' are contradictory. The historical centre, centre of this 'spring', is moving towards its upgrading but the programmes involving it had partial results. As consequence, the process is slow. Private led reinvestment is, nowadays, going on, faster in some areas and slower in others, while public interventions have mostly regarded private investment support - no much public services and housing is provided. But the referred slowness represents, unsuspectingly, a good news, because it is not a massive gentrification going on, most of the ancient social tissue could resist - at least at the present day -, and new inhabitants are both affluent classes and immigrant people.
- 2) The new tendency is the lack of general planning. A number of areas are interested by punctual interventions - most of them based on local modifications of existing

plans - which main character is an ambiguous mix between public and private interests. As 'public interest' is driven by the search for electoral support - and as elections are heavily influenced by nepotism in a mostly public driven work market -, local administrations push mostly to flag interventions which effects are not evaluated. And huge help - often favours - is given to private investors - often with corruptive or quasi-corruptive processes -, without verifying the real effects on the city.

3) The incapability of administrations to manage most of their tasks leads to a number of contradictory consequences: public driven projects often fail or reveal their uselessness for the purposes they had, empty spaces - both physical and social - are left, often filled by both private interests or spaces of alternatives.

4) In this multifaceted, incoherent, contradictory environment, there's space for instances which are not expected.

A number of stories could be told, some of them reveals contradictions themselves, a lot of them are destined to failure, some of them brings alternatives, precarious spaces resisting day-by-day.

And what about tomorrow? As the city seems to be stuck, tensioned by different powers and tendencies, it's hard to say which instances will prevail, Palermo has taught us the expected is to be upset.