



Cities in transformation Research & Design

Ideas, Methods, Techniques,
Tools, Case Studies

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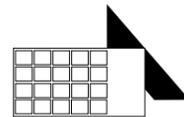
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The waterfront project for the historic centres: the case of the redevelopment of the historic port of Cala di Palermo

The urban renewal project of historic areas of port waterfront.

In recent years, with widespread coherence, the port authorities have demonstrated themselves inclined to cede areas included within the perimeters of their jurisdiction, and have designed them as areas of public use being nowadays difficult to adapt them to infrastructure functions. This process, now underway with growing popularity, represents an important emblem of the now established end of the war of position, which has seen in past years public administration and port authorities face each other, due to a sectorial system of planning rules. This new armistice season has caused, as a physical effect, a progressive increase of port areas in which they were introduced as new life blood, activities that are highly differentiated from those traditionally accepted by the ports, we think about the cases in Copenhagen, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Genoa, etc.

During the last years the issue of the requalification and transformation of the urban port and peri-port areas has become one of the principal declination of the complex universe of the urban regeneration. In the most large cities of water of the world from the relics, often dismissed, of large urban port systems, always more often new parts of city rise that exploit the endowment of this important reservoir of free soil introducing new functions compatible and coherent with the presence of the water.

This is what happened in England, in the United States, in Netherlands, in China, where the original urban ports, now became insufficient to contain the large spaces necessary for an international hub port have been transferred outside the urban perimeter, leaving to the cities areas ready for morphologic and functional reconversion. We call these ports the relic ports, meaning with this term those port infrastructures inside the urban perimeter that have ceased their infrastructural function and that offer themselves to total rewrites.

The Italian condition, as well as that of other countries overlooking the southern Mediterranean, appears deeply different and much more complex of that until now briefly described, consolidating only partially the useful paradigms and the good procedures used abroad to govern the processes of recuperation of urban waterfront areas.

In fact in the most cases the urban ports are still functioning and often they occupy the more central areas of the city. This condition makes further complex the reconnection between the port area and the urban area; in fact the ports continue to absolve their infrastructural function with the connected exigencies of security that in the reality entrench them behind barriers and boundaries excluding them from the urban continuum and limiting strongly the fruition of the community.

At the same time the Italian ports, even due to deep variations of the naval transport system, often host in their inland strongly underutilised areas, nowadays disconnected from functions and that well would apply for integration with the rest of the urban reality. In this sense a specific condition of the urban Italian ports (or of other similar contexts of the Mediterranean) is delineated, that we could define hybrid port, in which the pressures coming from the adjacent urban system that requires new space of fruition and the reattainment of a symbiotic relationship with its own waterfront must be added to the high complexity due to the persisting port activity.

The port cities that, born on the sea now see the space that justify their same foundation, monopolized by the underused mono functionality of the port area, identify in residues interstitial spaces between these and the port the ideal places of an implosion able to generate new spaces rewriting an identity often forgot.

According of this considerations is believed that that is possible to consider as already started a new phase of regeneration of the waterfront, that we will call Waterfront 2.0. The project of

waterfront 2.0 has to be intended as a process that is capable to transform the port cities in port-cities (Bruttomesso 2004), to say cities in which the interaction between those fields tends to assume boundaries more ephemeral than those assigned by the rigid logics of delimitation of infrastructural systems and in which the hybridisation of the functions enriches the range and the value of their traditional uses.

This process of reconversion, of rewriting, that invests various sectors of economy and society finds, as always it happens, in the project of Architecture its physical dimension more representative, to which, in many cases it is attributed the definitive responsibility for the success or failure of those initiatives. In this sense, to the urban project, is attributed a responsibility that is outside the pure formal result, having continuously to confront with a multitude of interdisciplinary problems and scalar interactions that impose a continuous revision of the traditional professional paradigms.

Therefore in these complex urban projects, the rule of the designer is always less that of creator of shapes and always more that of bricoleur, able to “keep together” the different disciplinary specificity of which these interventions are composed. In this logic the research unit intends to pursue a continuous hybridisation with the other disciplinary sectors represented in the ambit of the national coordination of the research (City Planning; Landscape; Technology).

The reservoir of urban soil, that the cities have seen donated them (or in many cases given back), due to the total or partial dismissal of their port areas or to the reconversion of areas of their waterfront, has represented an occasion of experimentation of the contemporary project, otherwise rare, and at the same time has offered the possibility to experiment different modalities of interpretation and new conceptions of the public space in terms of uses, and functions. This leads to consider the areas object of this peculiar modality of resemantisation as a significant occasion of intervention that solicits a debate updated on the qualities and role of public space in the contemporary city. In particular the port areas have provided to the contemporary city surfaces of unusual size, to rewrite and destine as collective places and in this no frequent occasion of offer of wide spaces, have allowed the exercise of new and unusual proposals of project for the public space. Following these considerations, it appears sustainable to affirm that in these areas are often offered opportunities that fit appropriate scenarios to make emerging with clarity new declinations of the public spaces.

The project of the public space of the waterfront areas has to assume prior two responsibilities on which the research will investigate in a specific manner: on the one hand representing an occasion of conversion of the urban process in a perspective grey to green, on the other one taking charge to multiply the utilities to be made available for the community. The public spaces of the waterfront of new generation have to be virtuous paradigms of a new sensibility referred to the resources of the urban soil and the natural resources, their project will prefer the use of recycled materials, will pursue the introduction of technologies capable to contribute to their energetic self sufficiency and will provide for the introduction of innovative functions but compatible with the landscape and environmental context. Further these new public spaces are candidate to be the field of preferential experimentation for intervention of architecture at zero volume.

The case of Palermo: The renewal of waterfront start from the Historical centre seaside.

The planning history of the city of Palermo is marked by a slow process of “removal from the sea”, as if to deny the etymological roots of his name, Pan-Ormus: all port. The development of the city in the '50s and '60s occurred in the absence of a far-sighted planning instrument able to connect the city to the sea. Along the urban coast from south to north, the sea, inaccessible, physically and visually, hidden by an uninterrupted series of limits. The coast of the city is configured as a paradigmatic representation of all the critical issues of unresolved relations between the coast and the city landscape and environmental degradation, inaccessibility and lack of services. A condition of severe degradation due, over time, by a careless

urban management and a general lack of social sensitivity towards the environment and their own city.

As a consequence of the bombing of the Second World War, which destroyed the historic city Centre, it was preferred, rather than restarting from an immediate recovery of intra moenia buildings, start an uncontrolled building speculation outside of the historic centre, leaving it in a state of deterioration during fifty years.

Nowadays, Palermo lives an important process of repossession of the relationship with its own sea through a renewed collective consciousness and a new planning season that has considered the sea as a main element of the city identity. This recovery process of waterfronts has started just from the historic centre, where the damages caused by half a century of neglect and abandonment of the waterfronts were greater and more evident.

The first intervention was represented by the project by Italo Rota for the Foro Italico, the historic sea-promenade. First example of requalification of a public space near the sea, this intervention integrated with the creation of a garden, has woken up in the community the dormant memory and awareness: Palermo is a seaside city.

Close to the historic city, in the history the Foro Italico has represented the sea-promenade of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy of Palermo, until World War II broke the union that bound this area to the sea. In 1944, stopped the massive bombing of the city, it was decided, in a not so much far-sighted way to deposit the debris removed from the city in this area. The coastal embankment thus formed moved away the coastline from facing urban constructions. In 1998, during the G8 summit, the area was, for the first time cleared and freed from improper uses, and destined to plant a uniform lawn. The intervention of Rota, conditioned by modest budget was extended to an area of approximately 10 hectares and is based on a few elements: a system of bollards that “protect” the lawn, a bike path and a series of pedestrian paths concluded in an equipped seating area placed in proximity of the sea. The few elements are enough to characterize a new place of the city, impressing themselves for their iconic force in the minds of Palermo's inhabitants. So Rota has defined a new environment full of meanings and references.

The project establishes unusual but dense relationships with tradition and identity of the place. The silhouette of the ceramic dissuasive elements which allow access to the lawn to pedestrians only - pottery made by craftsmen of the city - once again proposes the profile of the bust of Eleonora d'Aragona sculpted by Laurana, as a surface of rotation on a vertical axis enveloping the surface of the single bollard. The furnishings, the seats and the decorative elements are related, without concessions to the vernacular, to a widespread Mediterranean tradition.

The intervention of Italo Rota is populated with figures, the result of a successful hybridization between an abstract and syncretic vision of Mediterranean and Sicilian identities. They are figures that establish, without any expressionist drift, in a play of continuous references, a joyful relationship with public space defined thereby. They could be exchanged for items of street furniture, while they carry out this use but not giving up the desire of an artistic will. The lawn is occasionally interrupted by small depressions in the ground, almost a playground, where, between the textures of a more thick vegetation, it is possible to see the dissonant chromatisms of pigmented sands. Bike and pedestrian paths are marked out by bi-colour drawings that remember us the motives used by Burle Marx in the long beach of Copacabana. In this place the first thing that appears is not the function or the role, but the sense: giving back to Palermo's inhabitants a sense of belonging to a seaside city. Rota created a horizontal land mark, a surface project which has already established deep roots with the city.

The Cala renewal project. (Port Authority-Arch. Sebastiano Provenzano-Arch. Giulia Argiroffi)

This important regeneration process was started, as mentioned thanks to a series new tools of urban planning, among them, the most important is the new port master plan, drawn up by the

Port Authority of Palermo. A significant portion of the waterfront area of Palermo is part of the jurisdiction of the Port Authority, which in recent years drawing up the new Port Master Plan, has begun an important process of reconnection of the coast and the port with the city. The Plan provides a series of actions designed to hybridize to the port functions defining new public spaces open to the fruition of the community. The waterfront master plan was developed within a Project workshop specially created: The Architecture Workshop of the Port of Palermo.

The workshop, deeply wanted by Port Authority Chairman Prof. Anthony Bevilacqua, has been the driving of the design process of urban regeneration of the seafront and has represented a major confrontation with the entire citizenry. The workshop, composed by 12 young architects from Palermo, coordinated by Prof. Maurizio Carta and architect Flavio Albanese, was designed as a laboratory, an urban center, open to the city, in which to share the ongoing projects establishing a continuous dialogue with the city government and the citizenship. For the first time, the city has had a chance to reconsider its relationship with the sea with the ambition that, in keeping with its history, a new Palermo could born again only from its port. The workshop, in addition to treating the masterplan, produced a series of pilot projects, distributed throughout the area of jurisdiction of the Port Authority.

The redevelopment of Cala Old Port is the first of these projects have been realized as well as one of the most important urban regeneration projects carried out in Palermo in the last thirty years. The decision to start the process of rewriting its urban waterfront from the port of Cala plays an important symbolic value. The Cala is the historical port of the city, the first port of the Phoenician city. Generated naturally by the estuaries of the Rivers Keimonia and Papireto, which now flows underground and which, originally, was licking the peninsula on which developed the first urban settlements. Only the semi-circular shape, permanent part of the morphogenetic evolution of the city remains today of the original estuary. The first piers, protected on the east by the Sea Castle, of which today only the foundations remain, and some parts of the fortifications, were built between 1300 and 1445. The Cala was the main port city until the sixteenth century, although over the centuries, with the completion of the first piers of the new port, was gradually relegated to a role of fishing port.

Over the last seventy years the Cala, once a fulcrum of commercial activities and port facilities, has suffered, because of a bad post-war urban management of the historic center, a process of progressive deterioration that had led to a total perceptual, physical and functional fracture also compared to the nearest urban context.

The project covered an area of approximately 27,000 sqm characterized by the presence of the Sea Castle, whose ruins, now rehabilitated were returned to the use of the community. The area of the Sea Castle, which remained, as mentioned only portions of the ramparts and fortifications, has been rehabilitated, making a cleaning of its sedime. Today this area is an archaeological park open for the fruition and in which, during the summer, is organized a music festival.

The project involved the demolition of more than 2,000,000 cubic meters of illegal or illegitimate accretions stratified over the past fifty years that precluded the use and sea view. The project was set on a double need. Ensuring a new feature to the marina, equipping it with adequate services to boaters, and attribute to the Cala the role of large public urban space. By pursuing this dual purpose, diversified interventions were provided: the creation of a pedestrian park square, a new paving, the re-use of historic paving, a lighting system, new street furniture and the construction of three small buildings designed to host the headquarters of the club, coffee shops, gyms, a swimming pool with solarium and viewpoint.

The main building, named club house, positioned perpendicular to the edge of the dock is the background of the promenade. Along its linear development (about 40 m.) are placed, a stand, designed to accommodate operators and dealers of boat places at the most close to the sea, a cafe. The building is characterized by a large terrace, panoramic, accessible by stairs

and a ramp for disabled. The terrace, with a long seat supported by the parapet provides a space for relaxation and for the appreciation of sight of the whole Cala of the Archaeological Park, and in the background Mount Pilgrim, one of the main icons of the city. The terrace, characterized by a solid wood flooring planks and railings in steel and wood aims to revive the image of a bridge of a ship in port. The overall image of the building is strongly characterized by the coating of solid wood planks, with a modular rhythm define the façade, bris soleil systems placed at the windows, the external face of the railing and the sloped ceiling of the porch.

All the exposed structural elements (beams and pillars) are in steel colored white and all internal and external flooring is laid in planks of solid wood. The use of slatted wood gives a strong unity to the facade also contributes to saving energy during both the summer and in winter due to the effect induced by the air chamber created between the timber wall and the internal plasterboard .

At the opposite side to clubhouse building, is located the second small building. This small building houses a local site of a clubhouse, a cafe with adjoining space for pouring.

The functions are all gathered under one shelter light, made of a metal plate, supported by very slender white steel plates.

The fulcrum of project is the circular promenade that follows the development the quay, whose limestone paving arranged radially intends to highlight the relationship with the sea.

The different curvature between the circular dock and the adjacent street, was resolved with the creation of one green belt.

In this green belt has been planned the positioning of benches and seats, and lighting systems, in order to leave free the entire development the quay. The different curvature of the circular dock and the adjacent street, was resolved with the creation of two bands compensation by the geometry less regular and on which a plan has been designed grassed. In this green belt has been planned the positioning of benches and seats, and lighting systems, in order to leave free the entire development the quay.

The design of the platform new paving provides the repetition of a module constant consists of slabs of stone of a size of 30x80 cm, arranged in rows radial that refer to the geometrical centers of the entire plant. The walk includes a cycle track beyond which, towards the road, gives continuity to the new cycle routes provided by the Port Master Plan and Plan of urban mobility.

The aim of the project in line with the urban design of the waterfront, is to return to the dock of Cala the role of urban port, where port functions coexist and enrich the public use and where the city can discover again the etymological symbiotic relationship with its sea and its port.

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Legenda

Photo 1 Overview of the intervention (Photo by Sandro Scalia Archive Port Authority of Palermo)

Photo 2 The Quay towards the building clubhouse-cafe

Photo 3 common panoramic terrace (Photo by Sandro Scalia Archive Port Authority of Palermo)

Photo 4 The Square in front of the clubhouse building cafeteria

Photo 5 Club House with the d



