



## Urbanistica n. 130

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*Paolo Avarello*

The plan is not enough

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*edited by Marco Cremaschi*

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*edited by Maurizio Marcelloni*

*Maurizio Marcelloni*

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## An approach to the urban project

Yannis Tsiomis

Establishing the innovative value of the urban project today is a problem. To understand if innovation is formal or urban we must investigate projects not only in terms of their image, but also in terms of their meaning, because the value of the project will be evaluated only when the spaces are built and inhabited. A principal problem is that of the time for reflection that is given to actors and decision-makers before providing the instruments of implementation. This is also tied to the problem of defining the precise conditions under which the project is chosen. During the decision-making process the jury's opinion does not guarantee urban quality (as in architectural design competitions) and the criteria of judgement are different. The procedure is lengthy and costly, but it guarantees the success of the results.

For the Romanina competition the decision was made to operate in phases before making the definitive decision. International experience teaches us that some criteria are more strategic than others (feasibility, the pragmatism of solutions and the consideration of phasing over time) in achieving urban innovation. The best project will be that which resists over time and adapts to programmatic changes and transformations, without altering the principles of its original conception. Urban projects, above all those that are part of competitions, have two sides: they are both the element of mediation (as terrain and instrument of negotiation) and precisely what is at stake for the actors involved (with whom it is evaluated for importance and meaning)

as a result of the negotiation of particular topics, such as centrality, fragmentation and edge. It is thus possible to discuss a series of principles: the centrality as a relationship between centre and periphery; fragmentation or points of sociopolitical reference interpreted exclusively through the relationship between past history and history in construction (this is also valid for the concept of fragmentation of the city); the concept of the edge in relationship to a cultural and social context.

Important is the concept of functional and social mixité as expressed by Bohigas, who defines the first as a differentiation of functions necessary for guaranteeing social cohesion without which political activity would be reduced and democracy would suffer. Architecture and urbanism for Bohigas work in the void, understood as the public space that defines the development of the city. Thus the urban form and the question of scale are not forms that are exempt from the culture and political vision of the actors involved, including architects. Through the urban project we thus raise the problem of political will and the distinction between the requalification of the city and the territory and a simple project of organisation.

The urban project thus describes a method for how to proceed with designing the territory, it is a process in which parameters (context, scale, time and actors) are interwoven and articulated through the design process. Nonetheless, the attitude expressed by architects differs as a result of their particular vision of the evolution of urban civilisation, and this explains the diversity of the solutions proposed for the Romanina project. The urban phenomenon, like all phenomena, is composed of

crises and instances of change, continuities and ruptures. The Romanina is the perfect example: periphery and new centrality in one.

The Romanina competition demonstrates that the key to success of the urban project lies in the rigorous management of the analytical elements and the quality of the project. There are many questions about its role with respect to the existing fabric, which is both chaotic and disorganised. The solution proposes the creation of a new centrality that guarantees the coherence of a new settlement and simultaneously structures the existing fabric.

The Romanina competition stands out as a result of the quality of the projects, each different from the next and representative of current trends in urban planning, a characteristic that allowed the jury to choose based on clear criteria. The three projects chosen during the second phase (Carmen Andriani, *Avventura urbana* and Manuel Salgado) represent completely different approaches, perhaps rendering the final decision more complex but also more interesting, as a result of their particular nature.

During the most recent phase, the projects have undergone substantial modifications, reinforcing the validity of the procedure adopted for the competition. The Romanina competition represented an opportunity for reformulating questions that any city asks itself about the relationship between the organization of its territory and the consolidated centre. Above all, the competition demonstrated that today style is the approach that we adopt in making the city.