

Link as a plan strategy From architecture to landscape

EL ENLACE COMO ESTRATEGIA DE PLAN. DE LA
ARQUITECTURA AL PAISAJE

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Introduction

Today architecture is, more than ever, an architecture of relationships instead of being an architecture of objects, of dynamic relational spaces instead of static scenes. The environmental emergencies of our times and the vanishing of the traditional urban forms in Europe as much as in other continents, make the meaning of this assumption wider and more true in regard to both the ‘natural’ territory and the anthropized territory.

Architecture of relationships means the need to design the spatial and physical-perceptive connections between land and building, inside and outside, public and private uses, open and covered, natural and artificial, in an organic way and to give to these connection the value of primary meaning of the project itself.

“Contemporary architecture is always more often a project of geography, a topographic project that directly links with the orographic and hydrographical characteristics of the site; it is always more often an interstice project, an agreement and a link between different morphological (urban or territorial) contests, often it is a relational project between layers that are

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under or over imposed to the country level, able to create strong relationship with the land layers and sub-layers in a vertical section.’ (Bocchi, 2009)

Architecture as landscape

Art and contemporary architecture turn themselves towards the landscape: a living and experienced landscape, not only contemplated or viewed; a landscape to be interpreted in order to reveal its points of strength through a discovery movement, through the section design and the perspective view, through the modelling, the engraving the definition of scenes, through the assembling, through the positioning of elements according to topological instances, through the dynamic relationship between cartesian geometry and geometry of the informal.

Such considerations open the doors to a more active cooperation between architectonic and urban design and the modern architecture of landscape where this last one investigates, phenomenologically, the generating and evolutive processes of the forms. The extreme modernity of making landscapes stays, at the end, in this planning generative processes of evolving forms more than of defined forms. The modernity of creating landscapes connects to the never-ending movement of our time looking for evolution and change, looking for spaces of relationship and relationships among spaces more than looking for crystalized and defined spaces. Modernity, it is known, prefers the rites of passage, the running in space and time. From here comes the space to the process, to the never-ending change.

‘But the process does not imply to give up the form, better it means to investigate the dynamic form, the growth, the development, the maturing, the germinating, the dieing, the flowerishing again. To plan living forms and their development is clearly something within the mind of the landscape designer. The attention to how things signify, to the unavoidable issues of the ecosystem in a prolific immersion into the landscape is part of his approach and sensibility. These skills are increasingly more required to the architect that works on the city and on the landscape’ (Careri, 2002)

At the same time the landscape, considered organically as natural and/or anthropized territory, is a limited resource already massively exploited and transformed by mankind without being planned correctly. The challenge is then to trace forms of thought that allow a city-territory connection, giving

the possibility to reach the maximum density and flexibility of uses and the minimum consumption of territory.

The settling guideline should then be '*less is more*' (Van der Rohe, 1959) also for the urban and landscape planning. The less we bind the use of territory today, the greater the possibility of using it correctly in the future will be. This does not mean to retreat from planning, it means to use a critical approach in the planning activity. What the goal should be is to keep the possibility to modify the territory in the future, being able to re-plan it as many times as needed, exactly as it happens in nature. '*Nothing is created and nothing is destroyed in nature, everything changes*'¹. According to this theory the territory-landscape is then intended as material to plan and preserve following the idea of flexible interface, a multidimensional, multi-scale and equipotential scheme able to develop itself gradually through traces that are not fully binding but that host within themselves a possible change.

Connection as strategy

Connection intended as an architectural, urban and landscaping planning strategy imply the possibility of creating a flexible plan of natural and artificial spaces in order to guarantee that 'permeability of uses' to the territory that leaves it full of possible variations within the same strong idea.

Sustainability, conceived as relationship between means and purposes, as a limited use of the natural resources and as meaning reached with a few signs is the strong idea today behind architectural, urban and landscape planning. The creation of a network of meaning, an invisible net of connections based on the territory characteristics and then always different but able to give answers to the needs of economic, productive, social, cultural and environmental development that will raise in the future is necessary to plan the sustainability within natural or urban territories. Such connections are infrastructural-artificial, environmental-natural, urban-settling, functional-perceptive, architectural-localizing and temporal-experiential. They determine the possibility to create a net-structured territory, a territory aimed at orienteering and hosting visitors and citizens and suitable for a flexible use of the

1 Energy conservation principle of Lavoisier (middle of XIX century), interpreted and reformulated as the First principle of thermodynamic then made clearer by Einstein in the Theory of General relativity.

open and built spaces interconnected through the concept of multiple speed routes and multiple levels.

The concept of connection must be declined in different but contemporary levels of knowledge and planning if it has to be applied also to the landscape intended as natural and artificial territory; the level structure may be defined as follows:

1_site.	structure: <i>morphological systems</i>
2_mark.	identity: <i>urban marks</i>
3_scape.	movement: <i>fluxus systems</i>
4_link.	connection: <i>concealed fields and poles</i>
5_network.	net: <i>landscape and routes</i>
6_texture.	system: <i>new urban and natural landmarks</i>

The first three levels (layers) are at a greater analytic gradient and progressively turn themselves into the three final levels (layouts) at a greater synthetic gradient. The layers do highlight a net of meaning of the places, while the layouts are the plan synthesizing of a new meaning already concealed in the places but to be taken out and that has the aim to create urban or landscaping identity through the real crossing in movement of the places.

1 Site. structure

The deep and exact analysis of the natural context, both urban and architectural, reveals morphological and systemic traces that identify diversified meshes and spaces crossed by flows at different gradient of speed and density.

Every single part of the territory has specific values and characteristics that have to be explained and interrelated to the possible economical, cultural and social developments.

The plan must trace the structure of the places in order to transform them accordingly. The urban and geographical morphology, where clearly identified, has got into itself the warning signs of the possible sceneries of future development.



Figure 1: *Site. Structure - morfological systems - Sport City Masterplan. Reggio Emilia*

2. Mark. identity

The natural and urban morphological systems within the topological and topographic analysis of the place determine the structure of the city and of the landscape, but the urban marks are the verification sphere of the presence of a system identity. The natural and/or urban marks are considered as buildings or open spaces able to give shape and order to the systems; they are ‘orienting points’ not only in the historical and/or architectural meaning of the word, they are public spaces in a wider sense, places of sociality, attractive poles and social condensers, able to attract crowds of people and then to generate movement, able to become milestone of identification for the citizens. (Sennett, 1991)

The possibility to trace them in the city or in the natural landscape identify the existence of possible identity elements; this does not mean that they are perceived as representative of the urban identity by the citizens themselves but for sure they are potential knots of physical-perceptive net to be revealed, a hidden hardware to be given meaning again.

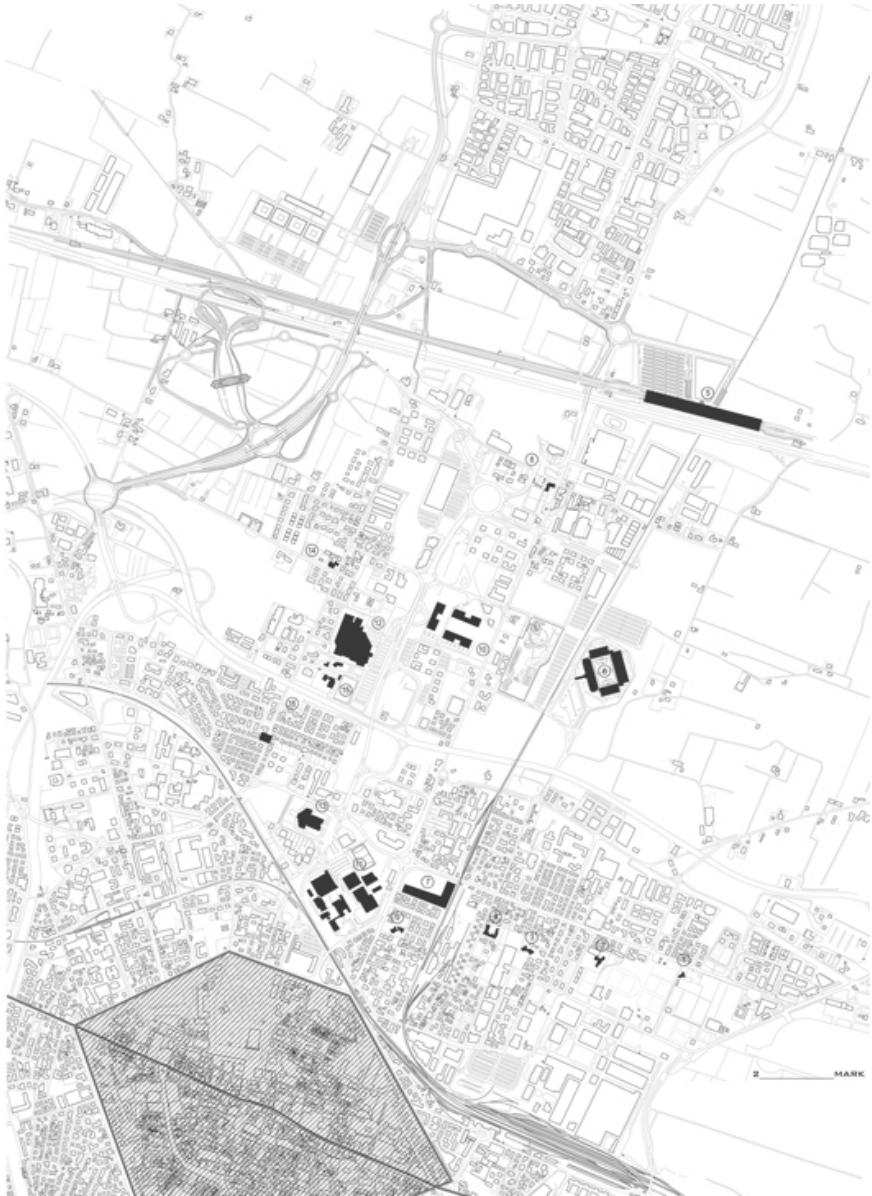


Figure 2: Mark. Identity – urban marks - Sport City Masterplan. Reggio Emilia

3 Scape. movement

The context, intended as the place of the plan, has got in itself all the urban flow systems, considerin with urban all the structural flows alternative to the infrastructural one, namely motor-veicular: they are represented by cycling systems, walking systems, water flow systems, green areas, urban woods and country. Such routes and places define an '*alternative city*', the ecological one of the free time, of sociality, of soft urbanity that aims at connecting with the landscape considered as overall territorial field and that includes the city and the natural or recreated green spaces. The routes and the green places of the open spaces represent a structure that is often weak and poorly attended, but they are the aggregation and attraction poles of the citizens as much as the open/closed built spaces both public and commercial are. They are by definition open and are becoming increasingly fundamental spaces for the organization of the citizens' time and for the enjoyment of the city thus strongly creating the feeling of a high or low standard of quality life.

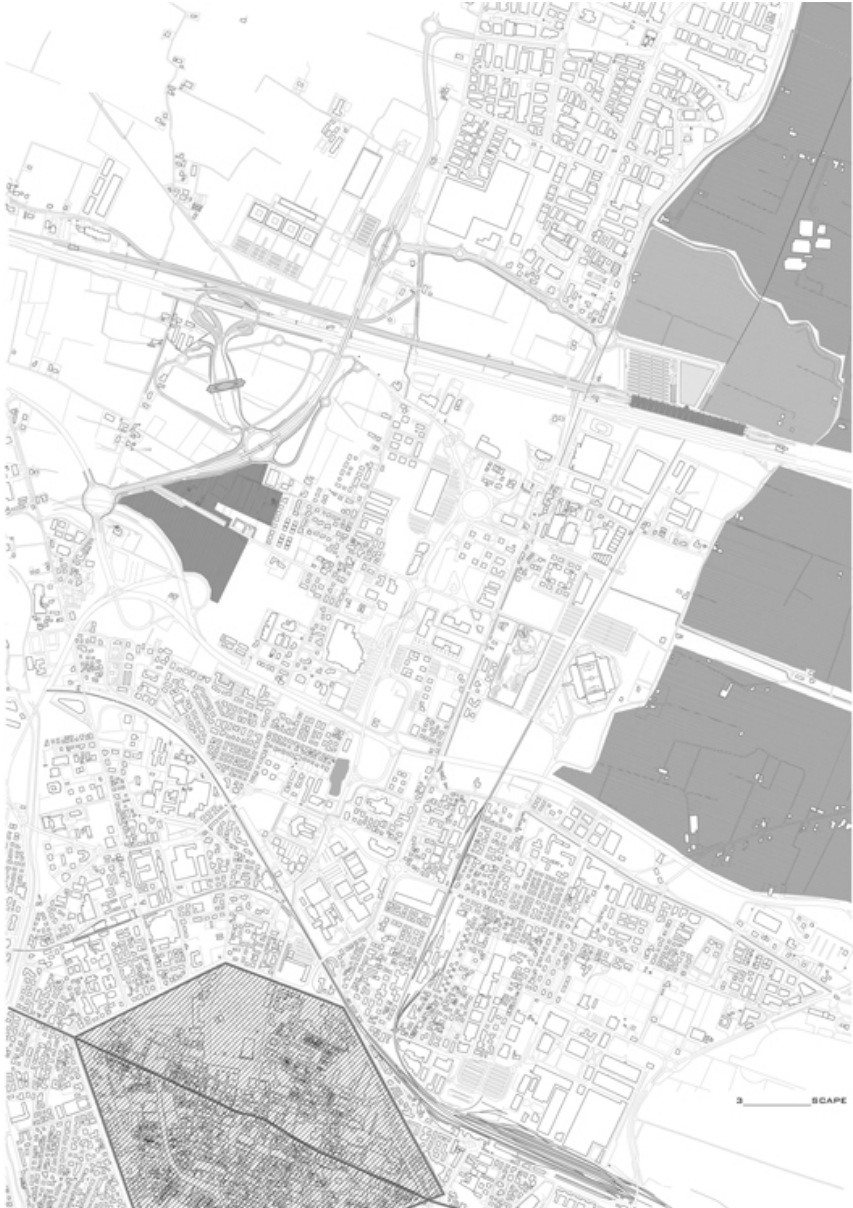


Figure 3: *Scape Movement – fluxus systems - Sport City Masterplan. Reggio Emilia*

4 Link. connection

The vision and the assembling of the different layers (1,2,3) found on the territory, allow the definition of concealed spheres and poles that can build, as limited, punctual, possible and realistic urban or landscape plans, centrality and polarity. These, placed into the net of both infrastructural dynamics (transport systems) and structural dynamics (morphological systems), change and transform the whole territory, thus granting the presence of signs, attractive poles and concealed condensers that structure whatever is already existing and the new key points of the project. According to this view we can trace connection spaces and elements able to interpolate and re-define the city. They are recognizable and definable according to a dimensional scale (territorial, urban, of neighbourhood) and according to the position related to the urban texture in which they are placed: they become concealed spheres and poles.



Figure 4: Link. Connection - concealed fields and pole - Sport City Masterplan. Reggio Emilia

5 Network. net

The plan does not only define the concealed poles and spheres of connection; it also re-define the net through landscaping elements such as the green and route systems. The net, then, rearranges and gives a hierarchy to the open and built spaces by spinning on the punctual elements of the systems, being them concealed or not, thus creating selected continuities and discontinuities according to an idea of landscape, to a urban idea of the city and of the suburbs as a whole of different and definable polarities able to project a clear image of themselves through the poles of the net and able to connect territory spaces with different values.

Connections and systems are always recorded according to an idea of territory that is crossable and usable by the citizens: this imply the possibility to identify in it and to build '*landscape*' intended as a system of perception of the territory in its values.

The net is planned according to the vehicular, cycling, pedestrian, natural and port connections; these are open spaces and landscapes that always interface with the scale of the territory, of the city and of the neighbourhood.



Figure 5: Network. Net: landscape and routes - Sport City Masterplan. Reggio Emilia

6 Texture. system

The aim of the plan is to define exactly, through the concept of connection, territorial, urban and neighbourhood polarities that, declined into the net and in coincidence with the positions defined by the concealed spheres and poles, re-structure the territory turning it into a experienceable landscape (crossable and perceptible) with architectural urban and natural emergencies, that give meaning and depth to the existing urban systems thus allowing the creation of 'texture'.

The texture, in this case, is not intended as a clean and definable system but rather as a net shaped territorial mesh, that builds a layer of meaning on the existing and concealed urban polarities through the dynamics of routing. The texture is such only in function of urban landmarks that establish centres of attraction or extension of the public space.

These urban landmarks (point of reference) are definable as topologic and typological figures that establish a priority use and character according to their scale (territorial, urban, neighbourhood) but at the same time, being connected in a net, change the overall perception of the urban system.

The connection, intended as a planning mode that defines landscape and not only architecture, creates the possibility to reconfigure the existing beginning from new assumptions. On the other side the very same concept of connection and relationship space is the backbone of a progressive thought on the tectonics and on the due capacity of the plan itself to create new fluxus and routes, new relationship through the spaces.



Figure 6: Texture. System: urban and natural landmarks – Sport City Masterplan. Reggio Emilia



Figure 7: Focus. Detail: mobility system and sport city complex masterplan



Figure 8: Views.Detail: Fluxus system, landscape and routes Sport City Masterplan. Reggio Emilia

Route as connection

The identity of a place is not made of the formal and architectural codes only, but is made of the quality and intensity of the connections (link) and of other experiences taken from other disciplines, with other thinking strategies and other identities. The art of connecting is nothing more than the strategy through which two or more elements placed in different spots are linked.

Merleau-Ponty, criticizing the gestalt couple of figure-background introduces the theme of the *horizon* and the theme of *movement* in the definition of a space increasingly less euclidean-cartesian and increasingly more topologic.

‘For what concerns spatiality the body is the third term, always implied,

of the background-figure structure, and each figure is outlined on the double horizon of outern and of body space. Whatever analysis of the body space that imply only figures and points has to be rejected as abstract since figures and points cannot be conceived nor can they exist without horizons...'(Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 154-156)

Richard Serra adfirms that the use of landscape has to be experienced by walking through the work-site:

'the site is redefined, not at all represented... the allocation of all the structural elements in the open field brings the observer attention to the topography of the landscape through the route within the landscape itself... the dialectic of walking and or watching at the landscape determine the experience of sculpture.' (Serra, 1982)

This assumption of Serra send us back to a notion of the landscape geometries built on topological and phenomenological concepts (*genius loci*, space of experience), of movement, of body space that send back to the phenomenology of perception.

But this attention to the topologic space and to the body space is present in some fundamental experiences of the modern architecture too: let's consider for example Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe.



Figure 9: Masterplan. *Link as a plan strategy from architecture to landscape*

Conclusion

Quoting Christian Norberg-Schulz (Norberg-Schulz, 1971) we might refer to ‘*centres of mass*’ internal to the space that builds proximity relationships, to ‘*routes, axes, directions*’ that cross the space, that build continuity relationships or spatial sequences and to ‘*domains, fences*’ that delimitate the space.

The spatial centre of the landscape, as much as the once of the architectural work, is not a geometrical centre anymore but the place most visited by citizens, the place where passage is higher. The architectural work is then built up through assembling and through sequence and lived in movement. The American architect Steven Holl is a key author in the outline of contemporary architecture in reason of his attention to an architecture of relationships. (Holl, 2000)

It is not by chance that his work continuously refers to the *Theory of the phenomenology of perception* by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and to the effort to realize them in the architectural work, thus placing himself in that research line that aims at unveil contents of spatial dynamics and of perception in movement in architecture, in close synthesis between the space and time categories. (Holl, 1991)

Both city and landscape increasingly develop themselves as architectural/urban events that have their principle in the route conceived as a real mode of appropriation of territory endured by man. The spatial-temporal concept that nurtures the figure of route is the one of the fourth dimension, of routing time and then of sequence.

The sequence connects, inside the experience of places, their characters and their differences, as much as a camera produces a space based on multiple fragments, the photograms, that constitutes a unity but live as well alone. The sequence of images produced by the route, as physical and mental experience, transforms the renaissance prospective fixity into a representation of the contemporary movement, whose single instants are the fragments of a united story that develops itself on a series of traces actually recoverable in the site and change them so to make them part of a urban or landscaping system that only a whole perception of the place might notice.

The sequence is also to enjoy a dynamic unity that twists, transforms and defines itself in each single moment. The urban architecture, as much as

the landscape, is conceived as a perceptive and full sensorial experience, as a physical dynamic of movement and route.

This concept and thinking modality enables to build an overall planning strategy that embraces landscape and city, linking them together through a physical-perceptive experience and not only through an aesthetic-imaginative one and that transforms the contemporary architecture self-reference of the 'griffe' in a real interpretation of the places, able to create an identification mechanism between citizens and nature and city space.

Key point of this consideration projected towards an hypothesis of connection and interrelation between an architectonic and a landscaping approach may be seen in the updating of the instruments proper of the architectural practice based on the biological-procedure aspects connected to the ecosystems on which the work is done.

'... there is an interesting window open on the possibilities of dialogue between architecture that moves toward kinematics and the process and a landscaping that hosts contributions of the built architecture' (Bocchi, 2009)

Another key point is traceable in the proposal to conceive the landscape – both in its ecological and aesthetic means – as the true and proper 'contemporary public space' and to make of it the subject of the transformation plan of the territory: a landscape-subject to listen to and not only to see and analyse, a landscape-subject that pretends its own life to be experienced through crossing and living.

An architecture of relationships that, through a close interaction with the architecture of landscape, recovers the possibility to build a meaningful architectural landscape (Holl, 1991)², using the mechanism of connection, where connection is intended as a planning tool able to interface all the dimensional and scale limits of territory, as a process of identification of the citizens in the places they live.

2 (Holl, 1991) 'Architecture is subjected to circumstances. Contrary to the other arts, a building lying on the ground is also the result of the experience of a place. The site of a building is not only a component of its plan; it is a physical and metaphysical foundation... Architecture is not an insertion in the landscape but it is more the instrument to explain it.'

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