

Building = Town: the urban project as the place of the architectural inter-scales.

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ABSTRACT

To consider the Architecture as an inter-scale field and so the relationship between Building and Town as an architectural unique and inseparable system corresponds to a hypothesis of education aimed to be a sole process structured on the basis of the different scales. This discourse aims to question the themes, the methodical techniques and the pedagogical process as well as to reflect this thesis. The specific sample is the didactical approach developed in the courses of Architectural and Urban Project of the Department of Architecture of the Polytechnic in Bari (Italy), directed by the undersigned. It is an approach aimed to spread a Project Culture based on a consideration of the Architecture as “inter-scale procedure”, intended to understand the general urban phenomena referring to the architectural form.

This discourse will provide for a complete framework of this thesis, trying to insert the findings in the large international critical framework.

The aim is to contribute to update the project culture in relationship with the transformation dynamic of the town; to make more and more coherent the relationship between the urban and the building scale; to set on the didactical-instructive processes, that are able to give the student a method of critical analysis of the different scales. The main instruction fields are: the understanding of the processes binding Landscape / Town / Building; the study of the building types and of the tissues that validate them, their urban characteristics and architectural languages.

The explanation will be based on the analysis of the didactical research carried on in Italian urban situations and in some cities of the Mediterranean Europe.

KEYWORDS: urban project, architectural project, inter-scale architecture, organic town

1 INTRODUCTION

Considering the Architecture as an inter-scale field –thus the relationship between Building and Town represents an inseparable architectural system – coincides with a hypothesis of education aimed to become a coherent process based on the different scales. More than reflecting on this thesis, the discussion aims to investigate its themes, the technical methods and the pedagogical processes, developed through the teaching. The sample of this investigation is the didactical approach of the courses of architectural and urban Planning in the Architecture Department at the Polytechnics in Bari (Italy), conducted by the undersigned. It is an approach intended to spread a Culture of the Project, based on a consideration of the Architecture as an “inter-scale process”, i.e. aimed to understand the general urban phenomena, that can be related to the architectural form.

The workshop is interested specifically into the study of the settlement and typological processes of the Mediterranean Town. It is a theme very much developed in Italy that has in Apulia its own distinctiveness, represented by the masonry-plastic vocation. This discussion aims to propose an analytical framework of the principles and methods, aiming to update the culture of the contemporary project, according to a vision intended to make more and more coherent and organized the relationship between the territory, the urban and the building scales.

2 THE PEDAGOGICAL PROJECT

Thus, the pedagogical objective is to educate the students to an idea of the Architecture considered as an inter-scale system, (Quaroni, 1981) i.e. based on the critical and inseparable relationship between Building and Town, so to carry out didactical processes able to give the student an analytical method and a planning ability, that can be related to the different scales.

The main training fields are: the learning of the process binding Territory/ Town/ Building/; the study of the building types and of the urban fabrics, specifying them; their urban characters and their architectural languages.

The theoretical – practical field is the entire Town, considered as the general architectural phenomenon, i.e. as the place of the dialectics and the consequent critical relationships between the buildings at different scales (territorial, settlement, typological – constructive), considered in their multiple declinations and aggregations.

Specifically, the areas taken into account are in the Mediterranean zone, with reference to the spatial and type-morphological-building characteristics of the masonry-plastic area. These areas are in Apulia and in Athens. These are real, medium/little areas, that can offer a different framework of the main characteristics and problems of the contemporary town, such as the inside characteristics of the ancient centers and the areas characterized by important archeological heritages and their more and more prolific and fragmentary suburbs.

The adopted method is the reconstruction of the building processes and their critical evaluation/ evolution through the project; a method that can identify the settlement and typological – building “invariants”, necessary to set a logical update plan, by having again as the core of the project – and of the future of the town – the confrontation between tradition and innovation, between historical document and renewal action, in other words, the field that, since ‘900, stigmatizes the Italian architecture.

3 THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CRITICAL REFERENCE

In fact, during the last century, the relationship between Architecture and Town accounted for one of the most critical phenomena that arose in Europe at the end of the 19th century. In Italy, according Franco Purini, this phenomenon will account for that “crisis of identities that had found the main elements of its problematic framework in the vocation to the critical assimilation, in the cultural “hybridization” and in the constructive reticence to set free from its own traditions”. (Purini, 2011)

The specter of this condition is the “stagnation” of the languages, shaping the different cultural areas as well as their necessary renewal, that cannot be postponed after the First World War.

In fact, during the following years, different cultural demands arise, derived by the confrontation between the strong historical tradition and the problems regarding the first forms of conurbation and urban transformation, as well as the themes of the areas INA- Home and the Foundation City. From these latter themes, together with the complex “versatility” of the results and with a different way to interpret the modern language, a new approach to the urban project will arise. The main currents of the new “architectural thought” are, on one hand, the “Metaphysics”, intended to understand on the basis of different significances the huge past tradition and, on the other hand, the “Futurism”, devoted

to experiment the expressive abilities of the new urban-technological framework, through a comprehensive and apodictical vision. (Ciucci, Dal Co, 1990) The nerve centers of the two main currents are: Rome (with all the center-south area) and Milan and Como, grouping all the north area. In the centers of the north area, the scholars tried to carry the modernity to the traditional themes and to an idea of the city based on the 19th century model (idea supported by the roman school) by opposing an incisive “modernization” action, based on the critical adaptation of the modern language and on the trial of new building technics.

However, the common element of the “cultural areas” is the inherited tendency to consider the Town as a general architectural phenomenon, thus the tendency to consider the building and the urban scales as an inseparable unicum, i.e. as an indissoluble bond. During the second half of the 20th century, this result in a renewed architectural culture, based on the narrow relationship between History and Project. Its main authors of this tendency are: Saverio Muratori, theorist of the “analysis method and of the reconstruction of the transformation processes”, (G. Caniggia, 1983-84) and Giuseppe Samonà and Ludovico Quaroni, devoted to consider the city as a framework of historicized and neo-transformational phenomena. (Quaroni, 1996) Their theories and methods will have their climax in the generation of the new architects between '60s and '70s, i.e. Aldo Rossi, Vittorio Gregotti and Franco Purini. Rossi aimed to propose an idea of the Town as “analogical structure”, derived by the “objective and mnemonic entities”. (Rossi, 1966) Gregotti is devoted to “an architecture that defends and preserves the present”, able to renew the town according a differently modern vision, such as the vision reinterpreted in the forms of the critical Regionalism. (Gregotti, 2008, 2011) Purini, making a synthesis of the Muratori’s “historical- analytical” with the “cognitive-phenomenological” method, supported by the new structuralist currents, aimed to identify constituent processes, able to change the potential urban-architectural “invariants” in new possible linguistic and spatial frameworks. (Purini, 1981, 2011)

4 THE TOWN AS “FRAMEWORK” OF THE PHYSICAL PHENOMENA

Generally, the Town is considered as a set of a general in-becoming process, a stratified, dynamic, asymmetrical set, caused by the dialectics between the historicized phenomena, “resistant” to the modifications, and the phenomena caused by the proliferation of new cultures (productive and cultural), resulted from the “conurbation”. This threw into a crisis of the old conception of Organic Town, conception that has been replaced by the consideration of the town as a phenomenon in-fieri to the contradictions. In opposition with the “functionalist” vision, this town considers the architecture as subject to an unavoidable confrontation with the “multiple” – an inevitable characteristic of our time -, considering it by a differently “modern” point of view and referring only to the historical and neo-generative palimpsest.

This results in the problem of the renewal of instruments and methods; a problem that can be found also in the following years, so that nowadays the architecture is considered from new points of view, such as the dialectics, maybe one of the most verified fields.

The funding of our didactics is to give the student a method able to read, decode and relate the elements of the urban-architectural palimpsest, so that the combination history/ analysis/ project, carried out according the different scales, can become the funding of solutions based on other scale, typological and lexical combinations. Thus, a relational and never “aprioristic” approach, intended to change in an inter-scale system. This latter is investigated beginning from the training process and then it is mixed with the “transformational” vocations, derived by the modern expectations. So, the core problem of the project (according to us, crucial for the contemporary town) is to how translate the unavoidable conflicts in new perspectives of a cohabitation between present and future, between the ancient document and the “new” forms caused by this confrontation.

In the didactical exercises, this problem finds a possible answer in the tendency to find their coherence through the set-up of their main type-morphological-building “invariants”, gathered from the urban parts and referable to their forma-Urbis. (Purini, 1981)

Thus, the best scale is the “partial” one, i.e. “verifiable”, proposed during ’70s by the scholars of the “anti-town-planning” currents, referring to Ludovico Quaroni and Aldo Rossi. A scale that can be compared to that of the neighborhood, able to consistently relate the settlement and the architectural projects, checking its minimum spatial effects. A scale that allows, from time to time, to experiment a possible “semiotic system”, able to make “united” the forms taken into account; to find “syntactic structures”, able to transmit the sign essence of its urban-architectural system; to find the most genuine thought of the town, i.e. “a set of figurative relations”, (Quaroni, 1981) witnesses of the anthropological identity of the place.

Thus, the project is intended as an instrument for the phenomenological knowledge: an exercise aimed to the understanding the spatial phenomena occurring in its real documents. A place where analysis/ diagnosis/ critical interpretation of the transformational dynamics/ technical-expressive synthesis can become an inextricable system. In this way, also the investigation can be “working”.

Beginning from M. Merleau Souty’s “Perception phenomenology” theory, the object of the study becomes the “place of the visual communications”, by carrying the research towards the individuation of sensible figures (i.e. figures able to trigger iconic phenomena) aimed to transmit the “incomprehensible” significance of the place. (Lynch, 1965)

The chosen places allow to continue this relationship, places that, most times, are caused by morphological imbalance inside the tissue or by incoherent relationships between urban parts and/or buildings and their settlement system. These relationships are re-triggered beginning by the acceptance of some formative principles in their own ancient centers. These principles are now re-elaborated through the language of a new and different “Modernity”, derived by the forms of their own critical Regionalism.

5 A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF TWO SAMPLE PROJECTS

5.1 Barletta. The project of a residential-productive settlement in the southern suburbs.

The city of Barletta is on the Adriatic sea, in the north of Bari. The aim was to plan a real village, able, through its clear morphologic design, to “re-weave” and organically arrange the several parts composing its suburbs. In order to do that, it has been fundamental the analysis of the type-morphological process, that makes natural the whole town and overall the near ancient center (a village of Middle-Age origins with adjustments of the XIX century). From this analysis, genetic (type- morphological) principles have been derived, that are fundamental for a process, i.e. “critical-continuous” approach. In fact, the system is the result of the relationships caused by the orographic characteristics and the settlement-typological ones, characterizing the cultural koinè of the town and of its territory. This latter is arranged according to the light natural slope towards the sea, resulting in some terracings employed to trigger perceptive relations with the town, and overall with the Middle-Age Castle, that is its direct urban polarity. Generally, the territory is organized on a tissue, determined by the continuance with the ancient ways, and in this tissue there are the housing and specialized-public functions, most of which are on the hedge that, regularly closed, allows to clearly define its reference to the concept of castrum (used as analogical reference to the first structure of the ancient center). In its inside, along the ways, there are building types such as the terraced or semi-terraced houses, i.e. the typological “invariants”, being the most coherent and well-established settlement process of the city of Barletta.

The whole system is full of the residential building type with a terraced house with a patio, that is, as we have seen, a declination of the “base-type” of the city of Barletta. In the project, this type is formed by an out-of-the-ground level and a semi-hypogea (that is always retaining to the terraced slope). These houses are fixed perpendicularly to the ways, showing, in each case or condition, a distribution variation, able to give them a visual point of view towards the center of the city and overall towards the sea.

In the intersection between the two main ways – where the tissue is mostly reduced – there is the Square. Organized according to a very regular system, the Square is a sort of urban Forum, useful to all

the neighborhood, as it is the place where, more than the housing system, there are the Church, the shops and the market. The foreseen materials for the realization of the village are the reinforced, plastered tuff, for the vertical structures (the main constructive element characterizing the expression of the traditional building), and the reinforced concrete, for the horizontal structures. In the project, these materials, and the lexical characters, are returned in technologically advanced terms through update criteria, intended to improve the structure resistance as well as the environmental well-being (thanks also to the introduction of energetic and eco-friendly systems). In fact, another goal of our research is the integration of technologic systems employing the renewable energies and installations fed by energy source at zero cost, in architectural-urban terms, i.e. able to change in urban phenomena. This result in the choice to shape the flat-roof in “garden-roofs”, changing the tops of the buildings in real urban places, more than places where there is a co-optation of the natural energy sources.

5.2 Athens. Urban renewal project of the area between the slopes of the Agora and the Ceramic.

The project for the city of Athens has been conceived beginning from the theoretical-methodological premises of the urban palimpsest of the city and overall from the transformational issues occurred in its most important archeological area during the last century.

The plan aimed to create a narrow relationship among the building tissue of the Monastiraki area, its ways and its monuments, in order to “re-weave” the most representative parts of the ancient center (the same parts that have been uprooted from any organic relationship).

Thus, the centers of the project have become the excavations of the Agora and those of the Ceramic (today divided by the metro railway passing near the Stoa of Attalos), together with the pedestrian “smashed” of the Ermou street. The project has followed two intervention plans: the first one aimed to revise the infrastructural system; the second to relate its parts. The double goal has been to set free the area from what is in opposition with its historical characteristics, providing it with new architectural components, able to firmly relate its parts. The first action implied the burial of the railway system with the displacement of the metro station “Theseion” toward the slope taking to the area realized in the last decades; the second action implied the realization of a new building system (Ceramic Museum-Library) and its shaping as the anti-pole of the Parliament building, along the Ermou street. Their “distance” relationship is given by a sort of podium (i.e. a one-flat building) along the whole slope, in which there are an auditorium and a gallery of plaster casts, useful to illustrate the findings that cannot be moved from their original places. The project of the metro has involved the burial of the surface tract and the linkage of its hypogeum to the Ceramic, transforming it in an “open-work” museum. In order to do that, the new metro station has been conceived as a sort of a museum-gallery, that can knot again the different archeological sites as well as offer a functional and cultural opportunity to the city, where its historical characteristics are mostly expressed. Instead, the Ceramic library is organized through a system of podiums, that, from the archeological park, allows to get over the area differences of level. The last level consists in the big open courtyard on the excavation of the ancient Byzantine Basilica; whereas, the semi-hypogeal dimension allows to enter directly in the archeological area, so that this latter becomes an integral part of the new urban-architectural system. Instead, the intervention of the housing tissue has regarded the completion of the pre-existing tissue. The aim has been to make re-weavings, relationships and expressive adjustments, able to regenerate it, conforming it to the specific architectural characteristics of the area. In detail, the new building type is the two-floors courtyard house (i.e. the differ from of what has been the settlement nature of the city of Athens). The “L” system has been from time to time conformed with its analogous, in order to compose a two-family semi-closed courtyard.

An exterior profferlo (external staircase) in the courtyard permits the enter in the raised ground-floor. Also in this case, the used material meet the update of the materials referring to the building tradition, that has its basis in the white plastered sandstone, that, in our case, has been reinterpreted through the “ventilated” system. Instead, the floors are made of reinforced concrete, so that they are more resistant and their cavity is more technologically advanced, in order to house plant design components referring to the eco-friendly function of the building.

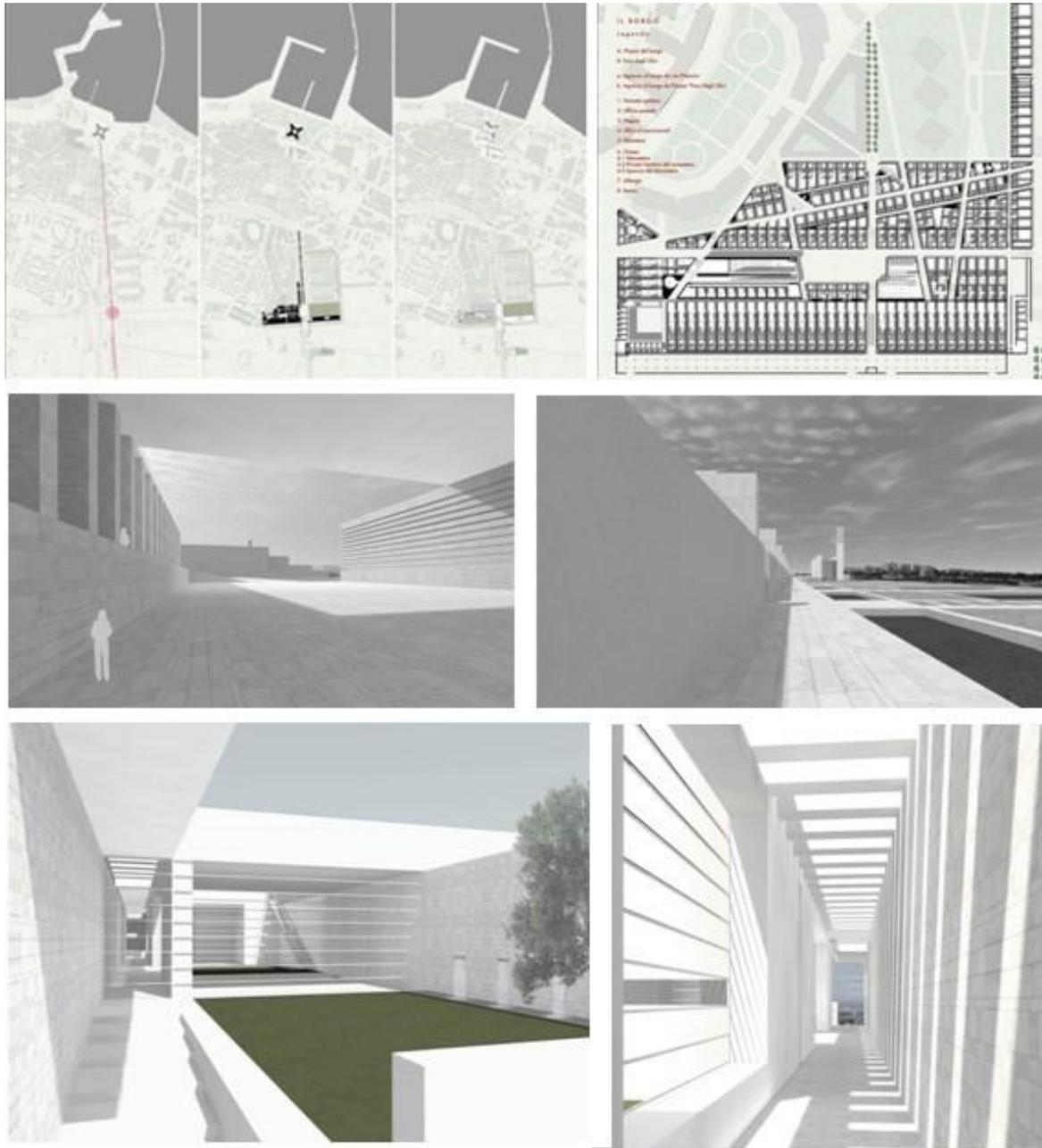


Figure 1: general view in the three scales of urban relationships; general plan; perspective views showing the relationship between the new urban fabric and the existing urban fabric; perspective views of the entrance courtyard and the interior of a patio row-house. Images from final thesis (A.A. 2009-10): Barletta. Design of a residential settlement and production in the southern suburbs. Advisor: prof. A. Riondino. Students: P. Lonardelli, D. Merra, V. Misino, N. Papalino, A. Verna L. Spinelli.

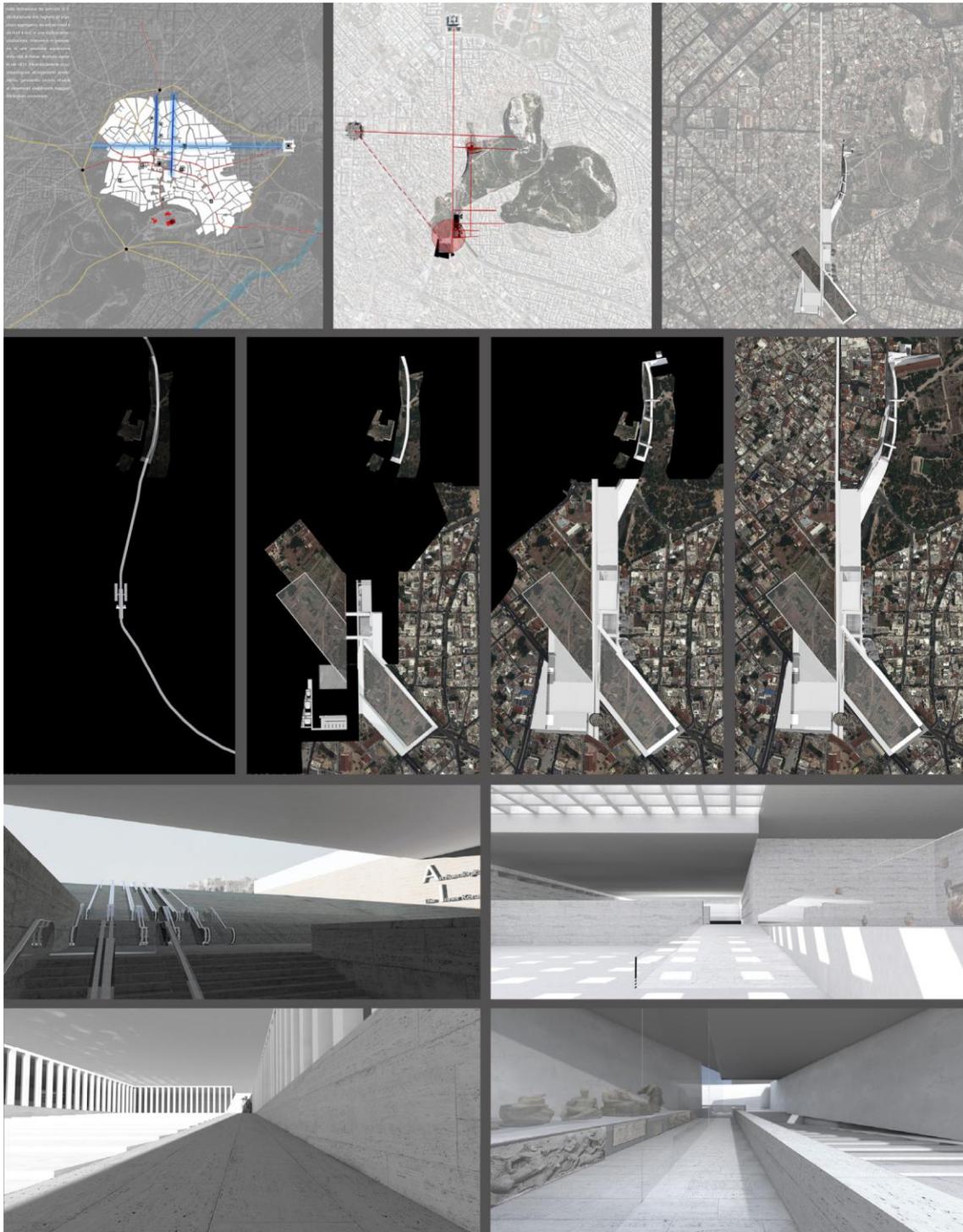


Figure 2: urban analysis, general view, plants at different levels, perspective views showing the relationship between the new underground and Acropolis, new Museum of Ceramics and excavations in front. Images from final thesis (A.A. 2010-11): Athens. Redevelopment of the area between the Agora and the Kerameikos. Advisor: prof. A. Riondino. Students: A. Capodivento, S. Carlone, C. Del Core, A. Fortunato, F. Lamonaca, E. Scarangella.

6 CONCLUSION

Perhaps summarize this dissertation could to reduce the problems and methodological issues related to an educational experiment still open to continuous updates. In fact, the choice was to confront, constantly, not only with disciplinary history, but also with the general phenomena related to the rapid transformations of the contemporary city.

Several issues are at the heart of the follow reflections. They are: the role of the architectural discipline in the urban transformation processes; their location within the increasingly wide palimpsest and understandable ; the attempt to make the urban palimpsest operating again, to make it interact with the operating scenarios opened up by the new scales. These three elements are, on the whole, the real matter of speculation aimed to widen the traditional “boundaries” of architecture, projecting it toward an inevitable - in our opinion - integrated action at different scales and different phenomena. According to this it is necessary to adopt an approach programmatically “provisional”, but at the same time, stable in its methodological structure. A structure that has the ability to make organic and supportive the relationship between the established shapes and ones, still indecipherable, related to its transformative processes, namely : the contents of the City itself. This led to conceive the architectural design field as an ongoing action (in fieri) that wants to be at the same time, “defense of the present” (Gregotti 2008, 2011) and openness to new anthropological scenarios: this is perhaps the most problematic field, but certainly “logical”, in our view, of a cultural activity that wants to be dedicated to the perpetual attempt to characterize the space of existence to its historical present.

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