

CORVIALE 2018, TAKE CARE OF IT

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In the 70s of the 20th century, Mario Fiorentino built a very huge cultural and political building: Corviale. This experimental architecture proposed a new living spaces and a new relationship with the territory. It had positive and negative impacts on the social and cultural component of the place.

The international competition "Rigenerare Corviale" asks to define a new image of Corviale starting from the common spaces that have been neglected.

Since the beginning of the project, Corviale has been considered as a *common* good, which goes beyond the state-owned propriety and connects to the social and cultural meanings. The project tried to understand but also discuss the irremovable principles of this abstract architecture trying to contaminate with elements that define urban spaces.

This design experience becomes a pretext to underline the value that some architectures of the 20th century imparted to the contemporary ones, but also the necessity to modify them to ensure the continuity of urban life.

Keywords: Urban regeneration, common good, urban infrastructure, urbanity, architecture and suburbs.

The second half of the 20th century is a period of an intense change for Italy that manifests itself in social and cultural behaviors as well as in constructed forms that in different measures and forms propose a rethinking of the architectural culture. Corviale, built in 1972 in the Roman suburbs, identifies a protest and severance architecture, in which it has been experimented a new idea of city space in opposition to the new cities lined to the dormitory towns. Mario Fiorentino designs and builds a huge formal complex that has a clear political, architectural and social impact. The dimension of this new urban system (one continued kilometre building) becomes its strength: a new territorial measure that marks the Roman landscape.

The formal components recall the compositive and morphological structure of other buildings that even before started similar reflections – from Unitè d’Habitation by Le Corbusier, Gallarate quarter by Aldo Rossi and Carlo Aymonino, until the design research formalized in the Robin Hood Gardens in London by Alison and Peter Smithson. To these components, Corviale has the necessity to define a new urban infrastructure, an articulated system of different uses and services for the man of the time.

For its formal and structural abstraction, Corviale had a remarkable impact on the architectural, landscape and territorial context and it tried to define an architecture as a city.

From its construction until today, the structure and the impact of this building have provoked many fervent discussions. It has been considered as ‘machine for living’: Corviale hosts 8500 inhabitants that share, use but mainly inhabit a same space, a shared space.

In 2014, the Territorial Company for Residential Construction of the Municipality of Rome banned an international contest "Rigenerare Corviale", funded by the Lazio Region, which becomes a stimulus to deepen a complex and delicate subject. The approach and the knowledge of this urban piece, full of history and meaning, focused on the sociological component that in the last years described it as a social and housing degeneration, and on the values that give meaning to Corviale considered as an architectural and *common* good. This goes beyond its state-owned propriety and connects to the social and cultural meanings.

The "culture" concept was born in the half of the 18th century to express the way of management the human behaviour and thought. It belongs to the same words 'to cultivate, to raise...', connected to an improvement and prevention idea (Bauman, 2008). This concept evolved into a different way to conceive the human condition in the society. Hannah Arendt wrote: «an object can be considered a cultural one when it resists to the time; its duration is in directly inverse proportion to the functionality» (Arendt, 1970).

The modification of the concept of culture clarifies the impossibility to make immutable forms during the time, but identifies the capability to adapt and recognize itself in new environmental and social conditions. This concept can be translated into the resistant architecture that through its forms can carry on with values that are recognizable in the way of living.

Without doubts, Corviale is an experimentation, an alternative to the canonical way of inhabiting the house and the city. It represents a choice that had positive and negative results on the social and architectural impact, but it resisted and adapted to the urban life. A city-building that can be defined cultural building which resists despite the mere functional aspects.

In 1913, Gertrude Stein wrote a *Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose* (Stein, 1922), how many meanings are contained in a *rose*? Which are the meanings that are referred to the object itself and those that derive from the observation of the same object? Which are the meanings that belong to inhabiting the object? From these questions, we started the knowledge of Corviale that *is a building, a building and still a building*. First, we tried to understand the different aspects that this kind of architecture continues and should continue to have in the contemporary condition.

The announcement was clear and well documented: defining a new image of Corviale and intervening in the common spaces that have been forgotten, in particular the ground floor, the roof, the external spaces and the other services buildings that belong to the entire complex.

The project tries to emphasize the importance of 'stratifying' in opposition to the idea of 'requalifying', just to underlay the necessity of an integrated approach with the social context and not banal fashion urban actions.

"*Writing with Corviale; building to discover a new urbanity*" tries to understand but at the same time discuss the irremovable principles of a so abstract architecture contaminating with elements that define urban spaces. The impressive spatial and formal structure represents its strength and its fragility. The project wants to induce a sort of "necessary disorder" to the structure that appears too deterministic and overdesigned in the definition of uses and actions.

The design strategy defines a new urban infrastructure overlapped to the rigidity of the building. Florian Beigel writes: «we are interested in design infrastructural space when designing artificial topography. Sometimes we say 'to design the carpet and not necessary the picnic'.

The infrastructure is the carpet in the landscape, and the inhabitation is the picnic» (Beigel e Christou, 2013).

In this specific case, *the carpet* is represented by two main elements that define new rules and forms: the urban street and the covered one. While Via Poggioverde becomes the eternal structure that marks the landscape and regulates the plan actions of the Corviale that lines up parallel to the street, the internal street evokes the concept of urbanity typical of urban street. It hosts possible *picnic* defined by widening for collective uses and modular small buildings that can assume different dimensions depending on the needs. These could house activities for the management and maintenance of all complex, or for collective spaces. The five monumental entrances underline a new hierarchy of the ground floor, characterized by important variations and orientation points of the path, connected to the external space and the smaller building to the west, “Corvialino”.

The architectural actions define the spaces between the built things, represented as new urban squares; underline the value of Via Poggioverde transformed into an external keystone that connects the building to the park: these actions give more quality to the urban spaces through appropriation and identification forms that involved the citizens. In fact, the participative and programmatic actions have supported the architectural ones.

The aim of the participative phase is to activate democratic processes involving residents during all the phases of the project and to find tools that can help future processes. Through the involvement and the sharing in all the project phases, the inhabitants feel more integrated and aware with their spaces. The result of this phase is a masterplan that becomes a programmatic guide for the future transformations of the area, which could become an effective resource for the management, transformation and care of the space.

So, the project underlines the intrinsic principles of this architecture working with contrapositions: to the formal and structural rigidity we have opposed a widespread informality that tries, through small gestures, to take care of the daily routine and to sensitize the use and the life of some spaces actually forgotten.

The answer to “Rigenerare Corviale” has been to overlap a new layer of uses and spaces in the waiting places that will be re-meaning through visual graphic interventions and new architectural structures: horizontal planes that define spaces to identify and host the inhabitants.

This design experience becomes a pretext to explore, through the project, complex and unexplored subjects. The value and the meaning that some architecture of the 20th century imparted to the contemporary architecture are undeniable but not unanimously recognized. Often intervening in these contexts decreases to banal or wrong choices. At the 16th Architectural Biennale in Venice a span of the Robin Hood Gardens by Smithson, preserved by demolition, has been showed as a memento, a piece of art. Maybe it represents one of the first cases and it will not be the last one if in London, so complex and avant-gardist context, these choices prevail on the architecture and its care. It is necessary to observe, intervene and take care of the fractured spaces that have released and reduced some meanings, and to make choices that re-establish the role of the architecture for the territory, city but mainly for the man.

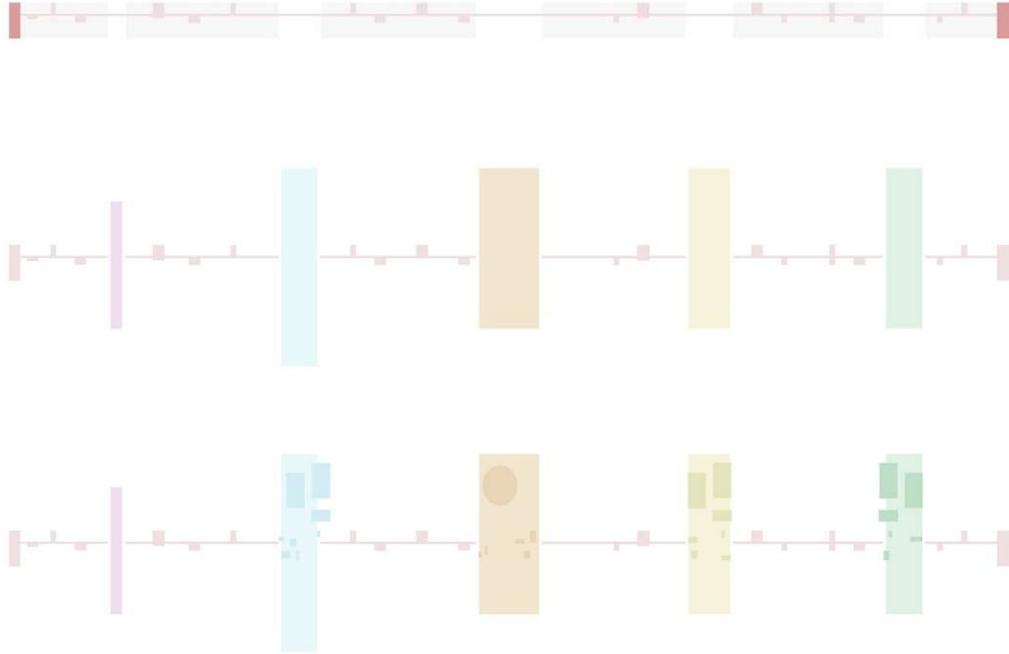


Fig.1. The urban infrastructure and the covered street; the new urban square; the uses container

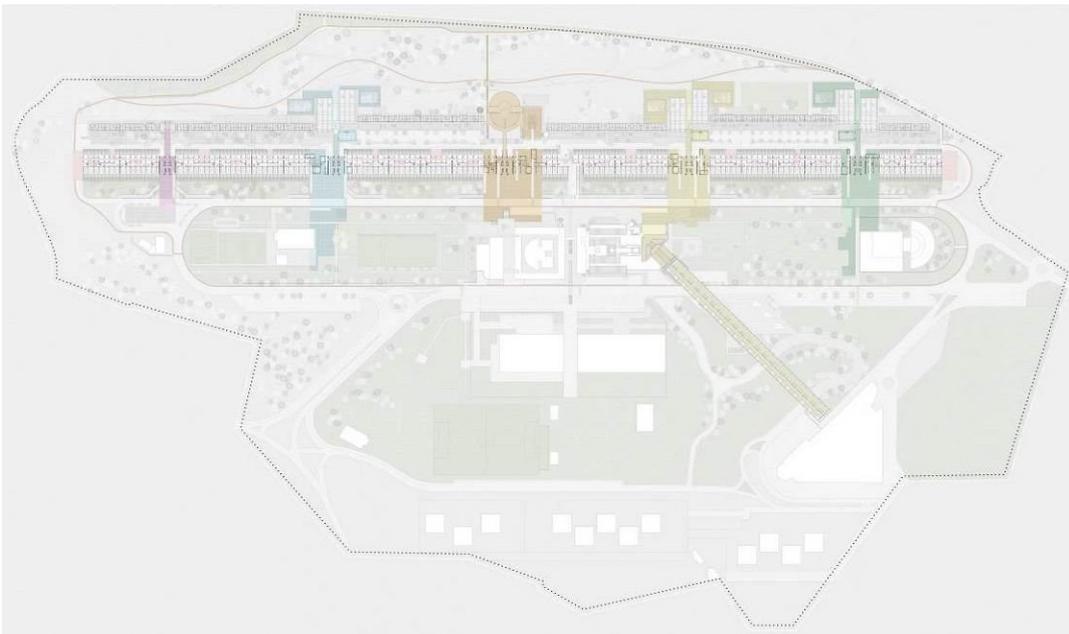


Fig. 2. Masterplan



Fig. 3. Axonometric view of the theatre square



Fig.4. Ground floor detail

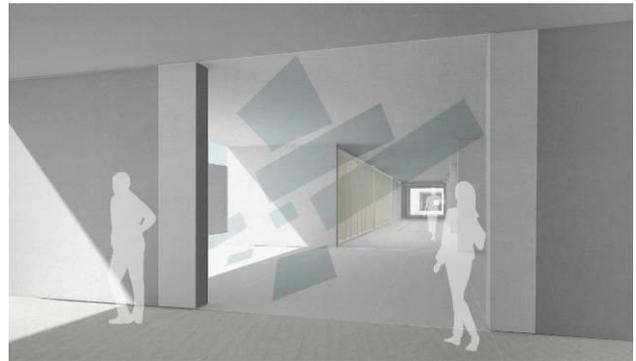


Fig.5. Interior view of the visual graphic intervention



Fig. 6. Prospective section



Fig. 7. View of the urban street



Fig. 8. View of the entrance space

CREDITS

International competition "Rigenerare Corviale"

Architectural project "*Writing with Corviale; building to discover a new urbanity*": Alberto Calderoni (leader), Marianna Ascolese, Vanna Cestarello

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MARIANNA ASCOLESE is an architect. She graduated in Architecture at the University of Naples "Federico II" in 2013. She is a Ph.D. in Architecture since 2018. She carried out a research period at ARU (Architectural Research Unit) directed by Florian Beigel and Philip Christou at the St. John Cass School of Architecture - London Metropolitan University. Since 2013 she is honorary fellow at Architecture Department of University of Naples "Federico II". She is tutor at Architectural and Urban Design courses and at the post-graduate Master course "Design for the historic city" at the University of Naples "Federico II". She took part in several academic researches, international exhibitions, design workshops and conferences.