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The competition for the Romanina Master plan. The challenge of the centrality

Bruno Gabrielli

The Romanina competition represents a new experience for two specific reasons: it was promoted by a private subject and it was the first testing ground for the 'new centralities' of the master plan. I will limit myself to making three 'flash' reflections.

The interpretation of the theme of the 'new centralities'

The theme is tied to a part of the periphery that is characterized by an urban fabric with no apparent logic, flanked by important elements (subway, new university campus, etc.) and voids, some of which have been selected by the new master plan as central areas, seen as catalysts of interest and functional diversification.

Notwithstanding the decay produced by illegal construction and the inertia of the administrations in these areas, there exists a sufficient force to deal with 'urban sprawl' through the definition of territorial realities that aim to become functioning organisms.

The competitors have responded to the design theme by creating a self-sufficient nucleus, proposing an ordered neighbourhood, with its own centre and periphery. The three projects selected distinguish themselves for having identified their lines of force within the context itself, of having given life to an organic system that is capable of assuming attractive functions, of having utilised a variety of languages, morphologies and organization: from a revisitation of geometric regularity (Salgado) to the desecration of the same using an experimental language (Avventura Urbana) or through the

exaltation of infrastructure (Andriani).

The relationship between architecture and urbanism within the 'urban project'

The competition proposed a reflection on the relationship between architecture/urbanism, the importance within urban design of participation over time of the various actors who are part of the process of change. The theme proposed was not fully understood, for example, in the project by F. Venezia, even if it was full of fascination as a result of its organic and absolute design, it negated the process of plurality requested because it was too similar to an architectural project. Architecture, within an 'urban project' must instead be subordinated to urbanism, defining the importance of management after role, hierarchy, functional organisation and the design of the overall scheme.

The complexity of evaluating design quality

Design quality cannot be estimated solely using the evaluations of technology, function and aesthetics. We must also consider socioeconomic factors, feasibility and their system of relationships. Within the urban project, the problems tied to quality must be dealt with using a protocol of self-evaluation that is useful to the jury as an instrument of comparison. The most interesting project from the first selection was that by Avventura urbana, which proposed a rich space, with a strong pattern of structural relationships, an optimum proposal that was less convincing during the second phase.

The project by Andriani, as part of an attempt to clarify the structure of the design from the first phase, presents an over-evaluation of the basic infrastructural system.

The project by Salgado, apparently more rigid and defined, demonstrated itself to me more flexible and structured in a clear and open manner and thus easy to characterise in architectural terms and adaptable over time to needs and functions, with a complexity and richness that is typical of central urban spaces.