

Along the green river

INHABITING THE EXTENDED PRODUCTIVE PARK

The project for the renovation of the main squares of Bitonto, Palombaio and Mariotto requires a reflection on a wide spatial and temporal scale, which develops from a territorial vision.

The first reflection on the territory of the municipality of Bitonto is linked to the relationship between city and countryside - between the three urban centres and the agricultural fabric in which they are located.

The caesura between the urban and rural worlds, which has become increasingly present in the course of our century, generates discontinuity between built and unbuilt space, even in small and medium-sized towns. In the municipality of Bitonto, this relationship seems to be progressively lost: attributing to the open space of the territory the fundamental productive function, but forgetting the social and ecological dimension.

We believe that a new vision is needed for the territory of the municipality of Bitonto and with this project we propose to inhabit this territory as a big park - no longer a succession of urban areas along a main road, but a hybrid and interconnected territory.

In this sense, the project for three squares represents the starting point for conceiving this territory as a system of relations: production, social spaces, ecological continuities. In the context of the ecological transition we are facing, it becomes crucial to rethink the role of open space, of unbuilt space within cities. The design of public space today cannot be limited to a formal or aesthetic renewal of materials and street furniture, but must be built on the basis of the needs of its territory.

A natural element of continuity is already present in this territory: the Lama Balice, the ancient bed of a dried-up river, already at the center of a series of ecological, social and cultural projects. In the project for the three squares, the Lama is the element of continuity able to accommodate and connect spaces of biodiversity, rainwater harvesting facilities, cultural and productive activities, and sports areas. A bicycle and pedestrian spine connecting the sea and the mountains.

WATER RESILIENCE

Drought and the aridity of soil have always been at the heart of the problems of the Apulian territory, since Roman times. In the municipality of Bitonto, historically the Blade served as a wetland capable of supporting biodiversity, in particular the town of Palombaio, from the Latin "Palumbarium" - a water reservoir that quenched the thirst of birds and other animals.

Today the annual water deficit is 40%, a highly critical situation that requires a variety of solutions - from saving water in the households, to reusing grey water, purifying sewage, industrial sludge and desalinating sea water.

In this context, rainfall also plays a key role in the region's water supply. Today, we talk about long dry periods and concentrations of intense rainfall in short periods, so-called water bombs, which the soil is unable to absorb and stock - because it is too dry and not topographically predisposed. In this process large quantities of water are dispersed, flowing into the sea through rivers or risking problems of water accumulation and flooding.

The design of the three squares therefore incorporates the theme of stocking and channelling water, collected from the impermeable surfaces of the public spaces of the three "quartieri" - Bitonto, Palombaio and Mariotto. We propose two ways of reusing the water: 1) storage for water games in the squares (such

as water jets and “sprinkles” to reduce the heat island effect) and 2) channelling, through light channels, towards the green spaces of the Lama Balice.

The squares are therefore equipped with water storage basins and channelling systems, exploiting a) the micro-slope of the paving of the squares to collect the water in the channels and b) the macro-slope of the square-street-lama system that already directs the water towards the Lama Balice

SOCIAL AND PRODUCTIVE PRACTICES

We believe that in order to conceive the design of a public space, it is necessary to understand the social and productive practices of the territorial system in which it is inserted and to be able to interpret the potential not yet expressed. Starting from the founding traces of the territory - such as the Lama Balice, the mobility infrastructure and bicycle paths, the productive tissue - we can build a vision that allows us to imagine a new relationship between the built and unbuilt space.

The project therefore seeks a more direct relationship with the agricultural tissue in which the three settlements are located, but with which they do not communicate in terms of social practices and spatial conception of the city.

In the design of the squares we aim at finding contact points, elements of continuity that can guide the user towards the productive tissue and places of social practice in the territory - such as spaces for cultural associations, educational gardens linked to schools, permaculture associations, etc. - and intercept existing spaces such as schools, secondary public spaces, cemeteries, farms, etc

The squares become the starting point for imagining a sequence of public and collective spaces that extend into and occupy the agricultural land, reinforcing the vision of the municipality of Bitonto as an extended park.

ACTIONS

Connection - a) territorial scale: enhancement of the axes of soft mobility connecting the squares to the spaces of the Lama Balice and of the productive countryside and b) urban scale: connection with the network of public spaces of the city and with daily functions (e.g. schools)

Reappropriation - extension of pedestrian areas and reduction of roads and parking space

Reuse and heritage - reuse of existing resources (e.g. reuse of the stone - chianche - underneath the asphalt to be brought back to light for paving the public space), valorisation and care of existing public green areas

Resilience to climate change - enhancement and extension of green and shaded areas to counteract the heat island effect, rainwater collecting through the impermeable surfaces of public space

Reprogramming - providing open spaces for the functions of the buildings surrounding the squares, maintaining and delimiting large open spaces that can accommodate temporary functions

BITONTO

Bitonto's open space is a fragmented space; there is no spatial, material or flow continuity between the three squares. Today it is the result of a non-organic set of residual spaces. The project proposes to rethink it as a transversal space that regulates the transition between the historic city and the modern city, a vestibule that through a project of paving, planting, management of the flow of pedestrians, bicycles and water gives unity to today's fragmented spaces. The vestibule enhances the Porta Baresana, an element of access to the historic city, which in the project represents the pivot of the composition of the spaces.

The difficult relationship with the road system, which today delimits the public spaces as islands surrounded by traffic, is already addressed by the Mobility Plan (PUMS), which also provides bicycle paths along the radial axes of the city. The project integrates the principles of the PUMS, at the same time some slight modifications are necessary to optimise flows and strengthen spatial continuity.

One of the main actions of the project is to strengthen public green areas to reduce the heat island effect. In the area of Piazza Marconi, the project envisages a regular grid of sycamore trees which develops from the existing rows of trees of the same species. One of the new rows extends to reinforce the promenade towards the belvedere and directs access to new productive terraced gardens that develop on the slope of the Lama Balice. The grid enhances the existing circular public garden, called by residents the "giardinetto" in which different species will continue to coexist (the historic cedars, locust trees and pittosporum and polygala shrubs) and which can be enriched to make this circular space more dense and varied, breaking the regularity of the grid.

The topography descends towards the Lama Balice, and the project takes advantage of this slope by using a light channeling system to convey the rainwater collected by the large impermeable surfaces of the public space. The channelling can be constructed by means of slightly inclined stone elements which differ from the paving of the historical one in lighter colour shades - graphic elements of the large open space.

The water collected, stored in a reservoir underneath the square, is used to feed the new water features and then fed back into the channels that direct it towards the Lama (see graphic).

Piazza Aldo Moro maintains its character as a large and flexible space that can accommodate temporary events such as the market and concerts. The square can become the meeting point between the production that takes place in the area and city life, through a market and other culinary events.

The continuity between the two squares and the long, narrow Piazza Sant'Agostino is provided by the cycle path, the water channels and the paving.

PALOMBAIO

The Piazza Milite ignoto looks like a podium, raised by a few steps from the road that surrounds it. The intervention on the Palombaio square is a light intervention which aims at enhancing the podium square by taking care of the public space surrounding it and regulating access to it. It is a paving project which suggests the traffic along the main road to slow down as it encounters the square and extends the public space towards the axes leading to the Lama Balice.

As in the project for the squares of Bitonto, these axes are supported by the cycle-pedestrian mobility that intercepts for example the open space of the primary school.

Also here, the canalisation directs the water towards the Lama Balice, supporting the fertile areas.

MARIOTTO

Because of its scenic setting, bordered by rows of holm oaks, Piazza Roma has already been the focus of cultural events, music and theatre. In everyday life it is now used as a large playground.

The project aims first of all to establish a connection with the Lama Balice and the countryside, through bicycle and pedestrian connections and through the element of water - light channels which, following the natural slope of the land, direct the water collected from the impermeable surfaces of the public space towards the fertile areas.

As in the project for the Palombaio square, the aim is to intervene on the borders of the square which regulate its accessibility, reducing the road in favour of the pedestrian and bicycle space, as well as the space belonging to the shops and laboratories which overlook the street.

A further light intervention consists in a rationalisation of the space and its elements, such as street furniture. In particular, an intervention consists of removing a part of the pavements, creating a step between the outer belt and the inner square - which can serve as a continuous seat along the edge and at the same time creates a safer play space separated from the street.

CONCLUSIONS

The project for the renovation of the main squares of Bitonto, Palombaio and Mariotto represents an opportunity to propose a new vision for the territory. The project investigates a more direct relationship with the agricultural tissue in which the three settlements are located, but with which they do not communicate in terms of social practices and spatial conception of the city.

The squares become therefore the starting point for imagining a sequence of public spaces that extend into the agricultural land, reinforcing the vision of the territory of Bitonto as an extended park.