

UnLost Territories, between norm and normative

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I think it could be useful to recall some fundamental aspects on the basis of Tirana Design Week 2019, and from that, we will move independently from the lecture that I delivered in Tirana on the 19th of September 2019.

The title of speech had been (1919-2019) *“FROM BAUHAUS TO A NEW PARADIGM IN ARCHITECTURE”*. My idea was to celebrate the centenary of the birth of the Bauhaus particularly to underline the paradigm shift from an architectural symbol of the mechanical and industrial world to a new one based on information, which is what portrays these times we are living in. Despite these celebrations usually have a historical-philological character, my lecture was based on the idea that history is always written from a today perspective and by the will to stimulate critical thinking. As many readers of this journal know, the presence of Bauhaus was essential in my book *Arkitektura dhe Moderniteti. Nga Bauhaus-i te Revolucioni informatik*, which was published by POLIS_Press at the end of 2015 and was translated by a team headed by professor Sotir Dhamo. Specifically, my contribution paused on the notion of ‘paradigm shift’ and was also the chance to publicly present our “charts”. The latter is an instrument we use with the students to conceptualize the differences between two completely notions of intending and making architecture. Anyway, I believe that it is pointless to resume now – in such a short space – the contents of a lecture that touched several topics and

would new a larger space to be explained. Moreover, for those who might be interested, the audio and pictures are available at the following link: <https://bit.ly/37OaOsi>.

From my perspective, I think it would more useful to briefly outline my last chair project, the urban project called ‘UnLost Territories : Ricostruire la periferia a Roma. Architettura e società nei territori abbandonati’ (Sapienza, Università di Roma 2016-2019), because it shows several contact points with the topics reflected during the Tirana Design Week 2019 - ‘Foreseeing Uncertainty. Design and non-normativity’. Particularly, the theme ‘The norm and the normative’ is stimulating because the whole UNLost Territories project doesn’t articulate itself from usual top-down planning practice, but opens up in a sort of oscillating balance between some normed aspects and others originated by peculiar “bottom-up” generated situations.

UnLost Territories, peripheries to bring back to life

Let us proceed to discover briefly what the project is about. We can start with the word UnLost. According to the Collins dictionary, the term means: **1.** not lost; retained and **2.** found or regained after having been lost. What we can now discuss is the title of the urban projects that indeed means “Not lost/not missed territories”. The latter we are talking about are areas in the extreme eastern periphery of Rome, within the 7th and 8th municipality, towards the Grande Raccordo Anulare.

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To a superficial knowledge, these territories might look definitely far from the chance to be recovered, especially if we based our practice on the traditional urban design categories. Nevertheless, they are anything but 'lost' if we learn to operate with new principles – as taught by several realities in South America, such as Medellín.

The project UnLost Territories would have never been born with the Museo dell'Altro e dell'Altrove di Metropoliz (Maam). The Maam is a former factory occupied by people with different ethnicities that, thanks to the work of sociologists and anthropologists such as Giorgio de Finis who transformed an entire wing of the old delicatessen Fiorucci factory in a museum, has become an extremely interesting reality. Indeed, the "Museo dell'Altro e dell'Altrove di Metropoliz".

With the nTro group, I was invited to realize an installation in one of the spaces of the museum. Our work, tree.it, consisted of a dynamic platform able to send vectors in the space and, at the same time, configured itself as a proper multitasking object. Surely, it was a plastic presence in the space but in the end, it was intended to be even more: a platform, a sitting for events, support for lights and multimedia effects and, mostly, a ramp for the 'wheeled' jaunts of the younger inhabitants of the occupied factory. All the experience of tree.it, and the developed knowledge regarding the experience of the Maam, spurred to reflect on the role that art could have had in derelict and peripheral urban sectors. The museum seemed to be a concrete possibility of redemption in which the moment of fantasy, metaphor, and narration, together with the presence of several site-specific pieces of art also by well-known artists that could start a reflection towards new interventions in the suburban areas trigger by art as a catalyst.

For these reasons, one of the main ideas of UnLost territories is the will to propagate art enzymes in the many abandoned and derelict areas of the neighborhood surrounding the Maam.

UnLost Strategy

But how do we concretely move? First of all, we mapped all the internal and external areas of the Maam that could host new design interventions. This map was created through several visits and photoshoots of two graduands, Michele Spano and Manuela Seu. 22 'red' spots had been identified within Metropoliz (indeed the whole area occupied by the museum, and the structure and external spaces in the big fenced area of the former Fiorucci factory). Those were places where it was possible to intervene with micro spatial actions that could 'transform crisis into value' as Bruno Zevi would say. In this logic, for example, we imagined that – sooner or later – we would have the strength to realize Reciprocal 3.0. The latter

is a light parametric structure that would have been built with hundreds of 1-meter length PVC bars and that would involve the inhabitants in a sort of big construction game. The outcome would take form in an organic shaped pavilion in which IT technologies would only be embedded to make the structure site-specific, but also statically optimizing the forces within the bars and superimposing other interactive systems able to interact with surroundings and transforming the installation in a big musical, performative, and ludic instrument.

We already did it successfully two times: in 2016 in Gioiosa Marea - Sicily - (goo.gl/Us1awF), and at CUBO Festival in Ronciglione, the northern part of the Lazio region.

In the UnLost Territories

The second chapter of the project happened in 2017 and started with an extension of the mapping process concerning the areas outside of Metropoliz. Thanks to the work of Silvia Primavera, together with the collaboration of several students, 44 new areas were added (today their number reaches 70 units). The mapping has been conducted through the identification of abandoned and underutilized areas belonging to the categories of the relicts or urban voids. As we precedently did in previous projects from my chair to this Google Map – which can be examined at the following link: goo.gl/znt2L6, we connected an online blog (unlostterritories.blogspot.it/) where each post, beside of a photographic/planimetric selection, contains projects that have been conducted in every area there during the years. Within these maps, lots of architecture students have been operating: they defined a specific functional program for every site, developed a negotiation with a client they identified in the community, and implemented a credible and realistic project, as much as innovative.

The areas 'ideally' mapped irradiates starting from Metropoliz that represent their symbolic, if not physical, center.

As we did in our precedent urban project – Urban Green Line - the sites are located in or in the premise of an infrastructural ring of approximately 4 kilometers diameter per 400 hectares. The ring, called "UnLost Line", hosts a tram line and it is organized through the principles of new generation infrastructures in the built city, that we already focused on Urban Green Line. The UnLost Line infrastructural ring is composed of a series of tracts that define the external perimeter, and others that rung along the diameter of the ring. It is about an '8' shaped path, its realization is programmed in two phases (firstly the northern one, then secondly the southern one), and it is designed to host a proper multitasking infrastructure (a tram, an ecological canal, pedestrian and cycle path). The ring crosses existing stations and nodes, creates a new pair of them and has been thought like an infrastructural flywheel to concretely motivate (either socially and economically) the projects in the single areas and the revitalization of the urban sector. Many projects

along the UnLost line have been developed starting from Information Technology and Architecture class (ITCAAD - at the 5th year of the MA in Architecture at Sapienza - University of Rome).

UnLost Principles

There are ten principles that lead our projects. We draw them up even better than the previous works. Five of them relate to the architectural design scale (mixité, driving force, rebuilding nature, infrastructuring, magic crisis), while the others are dedicated to the new generation infrastructural system. Our method aims for creating strong and sharable principles to free individual energies. We could talk at length about this basic concept, and most point out how in this dialectic lies the key aspect of the 'The norm and the normative' topic proposed by the International Scientific Conference. Strong and sharable principles to free individual energies is an assumption that is valid either at the scale of vital urban planning, and either in the context of a complex university chair proposal as in the case of UnLost Territories.

The basic concept behind the project, as we said, gives to the Maam a propagator effect to revitalize the urban sector around it. The propulsive factors we identified are the following

- the reuse of an abandoned structure and, progressively, of its external areas;
- the occupation from inhabitants of different ethnicities and arriving from various situations of marginality;
- a situation of dynamic and self-regulated social equilibrium;
- the presence of art as a 'defender' of the occupation;
- the presence of art as 're-centralization' of the periphery;
- the presence of the 'sight of the art' on the marginalization phenomena that open towards a new aesthetic which is, at the same, also a new substance.

Our idea is to engage the Maam as if the designers would have a sort of mirror neurons. It was fundamental to deeply analyze to further emulate and personalize at the same time. For example, all the UnLost projects have always worked on the concept of Mixité. In the case of Metropoliz this idea has been declined in a very specific way because that is a museum indeed, but also a social support center, an open lab concerning small didactic and educational modules, and of course strategies of dwelling. Other projects in the area of UnLost Territories propose a mixture of these and those uses. Still, others focus on particular aspects concerning some ethnic communities (regarding the culinary field, music handicraft, languages, literature, art itself). In some cases, the social or educative component prevails, or the temporary sheltering dedicated to

migrants, or the topic of sustainability, even economical, with the development of wine auto production.

The project can be investigated and the dedicated volume, edited by Gaetano De Francesco and Antonino Saggio, *UnLost Territories Ricostruire la periferia a Roma Architettura e società nei territori abbandonati*, Publisher: Lulu.com Raleigh, December 2019, can be purchased at the following link: <http://www.arcl.uniroma1.it/saggio/unlost/>.