

The Architecture of Public Space

Labics The Architecture of Public Space



((Placeholder)) This new book by Labics, one of Italy's leading architectural firms, is devoted to the country's architecture of public space. Squares, galleries, loggias, porticoes, and courtyards, are the elements that characterize Italy's historic towns and cities—and that make these places so endlessly attractive to visitors. Yet the volume does not feature new designs by Labics themselves: rather, Maria Claudia Clemente, Francesco Isidori, and their collaborators set out to explore these enchanting spaces, analyze their history and typologies, and to document and describe them through newly taken as well as historical photographs, plans, and diagrams.

The Architecture of Public Space forms a captivating collection of visually explained characteristics of these core elements of Italian cities. It highlights the architectural solutions from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries behind the particular spatial quality of these urban structures, and sets out how they are being established for and used by the people. With an essay written by Marco Biraghi

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Maria Claudia Clemente and Francesco Isidori
with a text by Marco Biraghi

 PARK BOOKS

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Background

The opportunity to develop the thoughts from which this work has originated came in the form of an invitation to take part in a symposium titled “Common Luxury—Less private space, more collective space,” organized by Andreas Ruby, the director of the Swiss Architecture Museum, in Basel in 2016. The title implied the idea that collective space, in a global context of urban transformations driven by prevalently private interests, represents an added value—the true wealth—that can be pursued by architecture. Andreas Ruby, who had previously visited our recently completed projects in Rome and Bologna—Città del Sole and Fondazione MAST—had perceived in both cases a particular attitude regarding the construction of collective and shared spaces, partially attributable to the fact of being architects born and raised in Italy.

Preparing our contribution to the symposium, it seemed important to address the theme of public space from two different and complementary angles: on the one hand, the analysis of the role and meaning of public space in Italian cities, and on the other the role played by architecture in its formation.

These lines of reasoning, with their multiple nuances and interactions, have shaped the content of this book.

Objectives

While the first aspect constitutes the work’s scenario of reference, the background in which the research can take on meaning, the second constitutes its operative content and, in our view, the most original contribution with respect to what is by now extensive literature on public space, which unfortunately often winds up being reduced to a manual of good common sense.

Starting with observation of Italian historical cities, their fabric, the relationship that is gradually established between certain works of architecture and public space, we have attempted to identify—like biologists or anthropologists who observe real phenomena to discern general principles—certain specific and recurring characteristics that have made those works of architecture into devices capable of granting form and meaning to public space; in substance, research that investigates typology and morphology, in an attempt to understand how architecture can be capable of constructing the shared space of the city.

The objective of the work is not, then, to prepare a catalogue of historic works of architecture, but to identify a series of typo-morphological solutions extrapolated from the historical context that generated them, enabling them to take on the character of models that can be repeated, notwithstanding their time and specific language of origin. The works analyzed should thus not be considered in their historicized character, like dead works to observe with the detachment of a scholar. They should be seen as living architecture to be studied with the curiosity of the designer.

We’d like to express our gratitude to Marta Copetti, Alessandro Esposito, Giulio Marzullo and (in particular) Giovanni Fabbri who have patiently redrawn all the architectures presented in the book; to Giovanna Silva for the beautiful photos that have enriched the iconography; and finally, to Marco Biraghi for the precious critical contribution and for the constant encouragement.

Finally, the work sets out to build a strategy, which as such can outline the essential characteristics of a way of making architecture that acts prior to and independently from language: it is the idea of an architecture that through the construction of public space and urban relations arrives at the formation of the city.

The method: the meaning of a classification

Pursing these objectives, we have thought at length about the possibility of constructing a classification, aware of the risks that can be implied in such a process. As we know, there are no rules, in abstract terms, of a taxonomic process, other than the rigor the scholar is able to call into play in the process of knowledge of reality. Classification, in fact, is first of all a technique, i.e. a means pertaining to knowledge, capable of granting general value to particular cases.

Of course the construction of a classification necessarily implies reductive choices, which stem precisely from the formation of the criterion of that construction. A classification, in fact, can be evaluated in terms of the coherence with which the parameters assumed at the outset are respected, but the angle of observation and the criteria chosen, since they form the initial theoretical assumption, cannot be subjected to judgment.

The structure of the classification

The construction of the classification, in our case, has implied two consequent choices: the first has to do with the identification of categories; the second has to do with the selection of the case studies inside each category. It is worth specifying that the identification of the various categories or types, as well as the choice of the single cases inside each category, make no claim to completeness; often maximum clarity of assumptions has been sought, aside from the architectural language utilized or the historical period of the construction.

In the identification of the categories, which constitutes the structure of the classification, a method has been applied that is both deductive and inductive at the same time: after having defined the categories in an abstract way, it became necessary to compare and verify them with real cases; this could imply, in fact, that the study of certain particular cases would lead to the redefinition of certain categories, or even the introduction of new ones. This back and forth process has been decisive: had we stopped short at a merely abstract level, we would have run the risk of being ineffective in the knowledge of architecture which, as we know, is made of matter, space, real places; to instead substantiate it with cases that can be verified through direct experience, we felt the knowledge could also be enriched on a theoretical plane. Furthermore, by ordering the cognitive process through the filters of the classification, the individual cases were led back into a more general discourse, precisely thanks to the classification itself.

In the proposed taxonomy, some types are more widespread and already clearly encoded—including porticos, loggias or urban courtyards—while others are less widespread, such as inhabited bridges; some have been encoded for the first time—at least in the sense attributed in this research—such as steps, covered squares, frames and city rooms.

After defining the macro-categories, in the choice of the single cases we have not applied a chronological criterion, nor a merely qualitative standard, or one related to the historical importance of the artifact; the choice has gone to cases that from our perspective were able to best demonstrate the basic thesis of this work and the possible permutations or articulations inside each specific category. We are aware of the fact that there could be many other potentially interesting cases, including some that are much more famous than those selected—how could one fail to think, for example, on the subject of porticos, about the Fabbriche Nuove in Venice, or the portico of Piazza San Pietro? Or, considering loggias, that of the Capitaniato in Vicenza, or the Mercanzie in Bologna? But since this is not a manual of architectural history, the criterion of historical importance has not been utilized. The book thus contains certain acknowledged monuments alongside smaller or less famous specimens sharing in the same ability to narrate a point of view, and above all the bear it witness.

Finally, once the cases were selected, they have all been redrawn with the same technique, photographed in their present state and in the context where they stand, in the conviction that architecture is living matter that exists because it is space that can be utilized in the contemporary age. And since this is not a manual, as we have said, we have not lingered over the documentation of various historical phases—apart from brief remarks in the text—even when the buildings examined have undergone various alterations over time.

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According to the calculations of the Population Division of the United Nations, in 1950 for every 100 inhabitants of our planet only 29 lived in urban areas. In 1990 this quota had risen to 45%, while the urban population had more than tripled, reaching a level of 2.4 billion. Urban areas now contain about 3.5 billion people, and by roughly 2030, when the world population should reach 8 billion, it is estimated that 5 billion will live in cities, or 62% of the worldwide population. This incredible demographic thrust has caused rampant and extremely rapid growth in many cities. Just consider the fact that today (2021), 33 cities in the world already have a population greater than 10 million inhabitants.

The phenomenon of exceptional growth of cities, taking into account the differences regarding the historical-cultural and economic contexts of development, inevitably leads to the need to change our viewpoint regarding the way in which we can observe and interpret the city, or the ways in which we can study its evolutionary dynamics. This is a true paradigm shift¹ with respect to the tools—clearly obsolete, at this point—used in the past to understand urban phenomena and to govern urban growth.

The fact that large size could lead to a new way of thinking about architecture and the city was already clear from the early years of the 20th century, and became even clearer during the period of postwar reconstruction, when the logic of the *great number*² became inevitable.

Without delving too deeply into the cultural implications this paradigm shift can bring—reasoning that lies beyond the aims of this study—in this context we will simply observe that the problem of *large size*, or of the extraordinary expansion of cities, above all in this latest exponential phase, has had the *side effect* of a widespread loss of *quality* of urban space, seen as collective space: the obsessive repetition of buildings, aside from the specific quality of the individual episodes, is clearly not sufficient to generate a city. If we combine the phenomenon of urbanization with a parallel process of reduction of the role of public players in the growth and transformation of the city, the result is a progressive loss of quality of public space and a marginalization of the community as the main counterpart of urban actions.

All this may seem inevitable, but it is not: the logic that has guided the growth of cities over the last half century is not at all *inevitable*, but is the result of an impoverishment of collective awareness regarding themes of shared interest, accompanied by a weakening of government in response to these themes. Some see a clear *political project* in this phenomenon, based on a free-market worldview and its model of development; a project which, to be honest, has at times been cynically exploited by architects.³ Certainly this model, which today seems like the only one possible, is a system that by urging a smaller number of constraints translates into urban policies of *laissez-faire* and inevitably leads to the reduction of the role of public actors in the “top down” control of the city, and the loss of importance of urban design and planning as a tool for governance of the territory.

The outcome is there for all to see: entire urban agglomerations of new construction in which there is a clear lack of interest in the building of the *res publica* in its various forms and expressions, where the foremost shortcoming is undoubtedly the lack of public space seen not only as empty space, but also and above all as a place of collective identity, endowed with specific qualities.

Paradoxically, precisely in the historical moment of the supremacy of life in cities with respect to the countryside, when therefore maximum attention and participation are needed on the part of the designated subjects—designers, administrators, intellectuals—the design of the city has gradually lost its meaning, and the “human invention par excellence”⁴ is being progressively privatized.⁵

In this process in progress, the main loser is public space, which is increasingly split into two different, equally inadequate forms: on the one hand the leftover, undersigned void, which precisely by virtue of its lack of quality becomes *public*; on the other, the space of commerce, the shopping malls, outlets, privately owned places that artificially reproduce the idea-simulacrum of the Italian *piazza*.

The origin of a crisis

In cities of *large size*, as in many suburbs of the main European cities, an irreversible phenomenon can be observed that we might call the *pulverization* of the idea of the city itself: infinite episodes of construction are gathered in an incoherent blur, like the monads of a gravitational system, without form and structure. The public space around which the large European cities are built; the space of major community events, such as demonstrations or processions in squares; or simply the places of encounter with *others*—these places seem to vanish, yielding ground to a void without quality and without identity.

Beyond the inevitable paradigm shift required to describe the phenomenon, it is necessary to ask ourselves about the causes at the origin of all this, and the possible strategies for rethinking—if not of the very idea of the city—at least of its most representative element: public space.

To trace back to the origins of a crisis, then, it is necessary to take a step back and to analyze the relationship between the elements involved: city, architecture and public space. Taking the *urbs* as the physical place constituted of the set of buildings and infrastructures that form the city, i.e. the machine to be governed, and the *civitas* as the symbolic and political place of encounter of the *cives* and of collective exchange, we can define the public space of the city as the material and immaterial infrastructure that grants visible form to the *civitas*. If the *urbs* can theoretically exist in the absence of the *cives*, it is only through the *civitas* that the space of the *urbs* takes on its meaning. In this regard, we could assert that the forms assumed by public space over time substantially reflect the various forms of *civitas* in line with the different political and economic systems in a given context.

Putting aside the analysis of these forms, we can observe that one principle remains without alteration in the city until the early 20th century: open space is defined and granted quality by the presence of architecture, and vice versa; and the two form an inseparable pair. In this reading, open space has always been a *natural space*, to the extent that it *naturally* took form with the growth of the city, constituting one of its characteristic elements. The structure of the city was therefore an *unicum* that held together—in a unified design—buildings and open spaces, inside an uninterrupted sequence. The form of the city was conceived in its entirety: the empty space and the architecture were part of a single project.

The crisis originates with the breakdown of the architecture-public space pairing which happened during the Modern Movement, following the profound transformations in the form

of the city and its *system of values*; transformations that can be traced back to three main factors: the first lies in the idea of the city itself: with the Modern Movement the thought of the city as an *efficient* place definitively asserts itself, a place where it is necessary to optimize the main functions of habitation, expressed in terms of mobility, productivity, residence and free time, principles reiterated during the course of postwar reconstruction; cities are reconsidered on the basis of criteria that do not take the values of the *civitas* into account in any way, having the objective of making the *urbs* increasingly functional.⁶ After all, it will suffice to recall Ludwig Hilberseimer (1927) when he stated that the design of the city consists of two extremes: the overall map that systematically shapes the form of the city to the economic forces, and the definition of the individual inhabited rooms⁷; all else was marginal. While until the 1800s it was still possible to come across the expression of collective values in the tangible form of the public spaces of the city, with the Modern Movement the form of the city, abandoning the symbolic sphere, follows a logic of efficiency: the city—on a par with the house—becomes a *machine a habiter*. The second has to do with the relationship between architecture and the city; the idea that the city is designed in its *form* by architecture is put aside; for health reasons the house, in the midst of greenery if possible, is distanced from the street, giving rise to an idea of architecture that is independent of the urban fabric: “The house will no longer be fused to the street by a sidewalk. It will rise in its own surroundings, in which it will enjoy sunshine, clear air and silence”⁸. Finally, the third, a direct consequence of the first and second, has to do with public space and its loss of meaning. The claims of rationalization of the city advanced during the Modern Movement have led to the separation of functions of production, commerce, residence and service, compromising public space which, as we know, takes its vitality from a mixture of functions and the opportunities for encounter and relations generated by that mixture.

In short, during the Modern period we can see a split in which the logics of construction of the city and those of architecture become autonomous: to respond to the same requirements of *efficiency, functionality, economy* and *health* both lose any relationship of reciprocal necessity. The loser in this process is public space, which is impoverished, emptied of meaning, losing its central role as a catalyst of collective identity and a driver of urban dynamics.

While it is easy to assert that modernity “has destroyed the city as we know it,”⁹ paradoxically it is precisely this model that is the most fungible and *useful* to the present liberal culture, within growth dynamics where the necessities of the *urbs* prevail over the values of the *civitas*.

Architecture, city and public space

The break in the relationship between architecture and public space, or between architecture and the city—which is the same thing—is one of the most obvious effects, as we have seen, of the new urban planning concepts that date back to the start of the 20th century. At this point we can investigate the consequences or repercussions on architecture and public space.

Balanced between a technical plane at the service of the market and a purely communicative plane at the service of the image, the architecture of the end of the millennium has proven to be increasingly unable to address the community and to thus contribute to the improvement of the quality of urban space.

It is a process that began many years ago, at this point, since already in 1973 Manfredo Tafuri prophetically foresaw what was going to happen: “Arrived at an undeniable impasse, architectural ideology renounces its propelling role in regard to the city and the structures of production and hides behind a rediscovered disciplinary autonomy, or behind neurotic attitudes of self-destruction.”¹⁰

But if this is well-known by now, what has been examined less is the consequence of this break on the quality of urban space, namely the space of the *civitas*.

In the modernist conception the city expands into the territory, conquering a dimension of landscape: its field of action becomes an open, potentially infinite space in which to move freely, where the buildings seem to float in the absence of a structuring relationship with the void. The backdrop of the city becomes an extremely expanded neutral territory, lacking a figure, in which architecture is no longer capable of defining and granting form to the emptiness.

So, in the Modern city there is a great deal of open space—even too much—but there is no public space; a fascinating *tabula rasa*—just as Brasilia and Chandigarh are fascinating—but more often than not lacking identity, incapable of generating intensity; a clean slate that is the result of a mechanistic vision of reality that has put the idea of *civitas* between parentheses.

As Bernardo Secchi clarifies, “what leaves us astonished and disoriented in many European cities of the 20th century is above all the lack of a meaningful and systematic experience of open space, seen as a place set aside for the sharing of a collective identity and the enactment of the public life of the city, which expands enormously, seeming to be pulverized in an episodic set of fragments connected to each other by spaces deprived of any clear status.”¹¹ What is missing, then, is an overall project of public space, a holistic vision capable of expressing shared values that go beyond the single street and the single square. For this reason, the design of public space—to focus of this work—can in no way be treated as independent from the idea of the city and the relationship generated between architecture and public space inside the urban context.

Thus, *urban* architecture, with the aim of not become superstructure—to use Tafuri’s terms—must be capable of constructed the public space of the city, taking its founding principles and rules from the city and its history. We cannot think of urban architecture as a monad extraneous to the fabric, as an object or a sculpture that finds its reason for being in an autonomous way with respect to the context in which it is inserted.

In a historical moment in which the debate on architecture is feeble and the debate on the city has been reduced to numerical questions pertaining to the specific discipline of urbanism, it seems useful to reach back to the reasoning of Aldo Rossi on a *theory of the city from the viewpoint of architecture*. The concepts of place, urban factor, monument, fabric, suitably updated with respect to the contemporary condition, are still useful tools for a project on the city; not in an abstract or ideological way, but in a concrete, real way. For Rossi, architecture and the city are interdependent parts of one single system: architecture constructs the city which, in turn, is an artifact, a work of architecture: “By the architecture of the city we mean two different things; first, the city seen as a gigantic man-made object, a work of engineering and architecture that is large and complex and growing over time; second, certain more limited but still crucial aspects of the city, namely urban artifacts, which like the city itself are characterized by their own history and thus by their own form.”¹²

Public space as the core of democracy

Never before as in this moment in history, when the free-market policy shared by nearly all mature democracies is showing signs of difficulty, and is being challenged in both political and economic terms, has there been such interest in *public space*, seen in both literal and metaphorical perspective. This is due to two orders of reasons that are worth examining here.

First of all, because public space is the core of democracy, or the space in which to make different ideas coexist and be shared. In an essay for the *Festival della Mente* in Sarzana (Italy) a few years ago, Salvatore Veca stated: “I am convinced that one of the crucial earmarks of a political democracy is the dimension and variety of public space, in which to exercise the democratic freedom par excellence, that of sharing the ways of evaluating and proposing alternative or conflicting solutions to collective problems with other citizens. Public space, in this perspective, is a social, not an institutional space.”¹³

These words bring to mind the meaning of public space and its political role in the thinking of Hanna Arendt. For Arendt, politics can achieve authentic expression only when citizens gather in a public space to discuss and decide on issues that have an impact on the entire community. The public sphere, then, designates the sphere where freedom and equality prevail, where citizens interact by means of discussion and persuasion. Arendt sees public space as the place of interaction, discussion and—if necessary—civil disobedience.¹⁴

This is a scenario that seems to be increasingly remote today; to the contrary, today’s public space, full of limitations and barriers, packed with surveillance cameras, seems to be increasingly a space of control and fear; a space in which the liberty of the citizen is relegated to that of the consumer.

Second, because public space is the space of reception, the space of encounter with the *other*.

As Zygmunt Bauman reminds us, for the construction of a truly multiethnic society an important priority is “the propagation of open, inviting and hospitable public spaces which all categories of urban residents would be tempted to attend regularly and knowingly and willingly share,” because “the ‘fusion’ that mutual understanding requires can only be the outcome of *shared* experience; and sharing experience is inconceivable without shared space.”¹⁵

In short, public space is a *political space* that measures the democratic breadth of a given community; a physical and at the same time metaphorical space whose presence is a guarantee of freedom of expression of the individual and the community.

An inversion: the design of emptiness

In the light of these considerations, we believe it is necessary to reflect on the state of the discipline, the objectives and aims that can be addressed by an architectural project, as well as the themes of language, the design of the city, over and above quantitative data.

We do not share the position of those who now say “the city no longer exists”¹⁶ to justify the status quo as inevitable and unavoidable, making any discourse on the design of the city and the control of the territory become futile; to the contrary, precisely this boundless growth and expansion beyond normative boundaries make it necessary and urgent to rethink the tools we have available, first of all on a political level. This does not imply a naïve and utopian

rejection of the prevailing model based, as we have seen, on a strictly mercantile logic, but the awareness that alternative models do exist, or at least intermediate solutions. Beyond the two extreme possibilities of unhesitating acceptance or radical repudiation, there is a third possibility that calls for the construction, through design, of a form of resistance.

To this end, we propose rethinking architecture and the city starting from an inversion of the viewpoint: what would happen were we to start with the design of empty space to construct a different vision for architecture and the city? Starting over from what has been most neglected during the last century, namely public space?

This inversion would imply assigning open space a role as primary infrastructure to revitalize the city as a whole; an infrastructure organized on different planes and levels: to permit circulation, to encourage relationships, to allow exchange and trade, and the encounter with *otherness*; but also an infrastructure capable of bringing a different visual quality, of making the experience of outdoor space intense and meaningful, of bringing wealth to the common benefit, where wealth apparently pertains to no one.

Once the figures of open space have been defined, architecture would become the tool through which those very figures can take form; an architecture, then, that is at the service of empty space; an architecture not concerned with filling up all the available space—an utterly contemporary obsession—but willing to step aside.

In this way, the great misunderstanding of the modern could be overcome: that of architecture as an isolated figure that stands out against a neutral backdrop. At the same time, it would be possible to rediscover the urban fabric as a form of architecture in which void and full become cohorts, where the whole prevails over the individual objects. Works of architecture that arise to give form and quality to outdoor space, that generously open to a wider system; porous works of architecture that allow themselves to be crossed, to become part of the space that permeates the city, incorporating the civic values of the community to which they intrinsically belong.

But all this is nothing new: we can trace these attitudes back to the famous plan of Rome by Giovanni Battista Nolli in 1748, where the void of public space, represented in white, becomes the pervasive figure that surrounds the architecture, shaping it and in certain cases excavating it from the inside, to the point of absorbing it inside the urban fabric.

This plan, a faithful planimetric representation of Baroque Rome, has often been compared to the one made slightly later by the great architect and engraver Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Ichnographia Campi Martii antiquae urbis* of 1762, an imaginary reconstruction of imperial Rome. The comparison arises because the two plans, though unwittingly, propose two models of the city that in some ways are antithetical: on the one hand, the *archipelago city*¹⁷, represented in the *Campus Martius*, composed of monuments set one beside the next, without an urban structure that holds them together, and thus without a project of open space; on the other, the *city as fabric*, that of the *Nuova Pianta di Roma* by Nolli, where the form of the empty space shapes the constructed space and vice versa, in which architecture contributes to the construction of the public sphere of the city.

Nolli's plan could be juxtaposed with the many photographs of everyday life in many historic Italian urban centers, in which the open spaces of the city, in a process of inversion, become internal

spaces, theaters of social contact and civil coexistence: it is the image of an *open and hospitable city*, the only true antidote to fear of the other. In this sense, Nolli's plan is a political and, in some ways, visionary map, because by representing the total continuity of public space inside churches, courtyards, lobbies of the principal private buildings, it foreshadows and imagines a reality that goes beyond reality itself.

History therefore offers a different model, a model of integration between city and architecture, architecture and public space. It is not an escape into the past, but the comprehension of a way of operating, a way of thinking about the city that is different from that of the present.

Architecture of public space

The researches and theories in the field of architecture and urbanism over the last century have almost always been based on a single theme: disciplinary concerns have been traditionally divided between studies on the city, the architectural object or public space, examined separately as autonomous entities or topics. This separation, however, as we have seen, contains one of the problems of the current architectural and urban culture.

We have thus re-examined certain examples in Italian historical cities where this separation, in practice, does not exist, or at least is not explicit; examples where architecture, while asserting its autonomy, is nevertheless capable of taking part in the definition of public space; examples where public space is enriched and amplified by the possibilities offered by architecture; and, ultimately, portions of the city constructed through an uninterrupted sequence of works of architecture and public spaces.

We have thus begun to analyze certain particular cases where this readiness of architecture to construct public space is more outstanding, cases in which we can discover the existence of certain recurring typological and morphological elements that are normally seen as part of the architectural language, but could actually be included in an ideal catalogue of tools or elements for the construction of public space. Let's take the *portico*, for example. Whether it is the portico of an *agora* of antiquity, a Renaissance palace or a 19th-century street, is it an architectural or an urban device? Does it belong to the building which it helps to support, or to the public space it amplifies and protects?

The same discussion could apply to *loggias*, *steps* or other elements examined in this research: are they urban devices, architectural parts or structures of public space?

Architecture of Public Space is therefore a research project on the ways in which public space takes form, is structured and characterized, and the elements of which it is composed, through a process of selection and cataloguing of examples from the past.

Since in this research the accent, as we have extensively illustrated, is on empty space—negative space—and not on the figure-object of architecture, in the examples examined the internal space of buildings is never represented, except when it becomes public space, as in the case of galleries or arcades.

The selected works of architecture, as complementary figures of this mosaic, are those that have the ability to act at the service of the construction of public space, contributing to define its form and quality.

But how can architecture contribute to the quality of empty space? How can a single building amplify the public domain?

What characteristics should it have? It is hard to supply general definitions, though we can attempt to outline certain conditions: when architecture is capable of mediating between the private and public dimensions; when it is able to donate a part of its domain to free usage; when it contributes to a better definition of public space, increasing its quality and potential for aggregation.

We have thus attempted to identify categories and typomorphological solutions that apart from the language they utilize can be repeated, becoming a useful tool of design. It is important, however, to emphasize that these categories should not be seen as a mere catalogue of formal solutions to be applied at will. Each of them, due to its history, is the expression of a given civil society, a vehicle of its underlying values. The comprehension of these values is essential to grasp their meaning, over and above aspects of form.

In conclusion, we believe that architecture—to get back to Tafuri's warning—should continue to play a driving role in relation to the city. And we believe that architects cannot give up on the political role played by architecture in relation to the context, hiding behind claims of disciplinary independence. Finally, we believe that the design of public space, as a bearer of collective values, can be the key of interpretation through which to reconcile architecture and the city.

- 1 One of the leading scholars on the paradigm shift of the contemporary city over the last 30 years is undoubtedly Rem Koolhaas, who has written various texts regarding this phenomenon that are worth mentioning here: Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York. A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, Monicelli Press 1997; Rem Koolhaas, *Junkspace. Per un ripensamento radicale dello spazio urbano*, a cura di G. Mastrigli, Macerata, Quodlibet 2006; Rem Koolhaas, *Singapore Songlines. Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis... or Thirty Years of Tabula Rasa*, 1995; Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas and Sze Tsung Leong, *Harvard Design School Project on the City, 1 Great Leap Forward*, Taschen, Köln, 2001; and Rem Koolhaas, *Testi sulla (non più) città, a cura e con un saggio introduttivo di Manuel Orazi*, Quodlibet 2021;
- 2 The theme of the great number as recurring during the course of postwar reconstruction; in 1964 Aldo van Eyck, together with his colleagues of Team X, called it "l'habitat pour le plus grand nombre". The great number was also utilized by Giancarlo De Carlo as the title of the 14th Milan Triennale in 1968.
- 3 Piervittorio Aureli (edited by), *The city as a project*, PrefaceRuby Press, 2013, Berlin p. 15.
- 4 As Lévi-Strauss wrote: "The city may even be rated higher since it stands at the point where nature and artifice meet. A city is a congestion of animals whose biological history is enclosed within its boundaries, and yet every conscious and rational act on the part of these creatures helps to shape the city's eventual character. By its form as by the manner of its birth, the city has elements at once of biological procreation, organizations, evolutions, and esthetic creation. It is both a natural object and a thing to be cultivated; individual and group; something lived and something dreamed. It is the human invention par excellence." in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, Paris: Librairie Plon, 1955.
- 5 Rem Koolhaas, *Testi sulla (non più) città, a cura e con un saggio introduttivo di Manuel Orazi*, Quodlibet, 2021, p. 194.
- 6 The term urbanization was introduced by the Spanish urbanist Ildefonso Cerda (1867).
- 7 "The architecture of the large city depends essentially on the solution given to two factors: the elementary cell and the urban organism as a whole." In Hilberseimer, L. (1998). *Groszstadt Architektur*, Milano: Clean, p. 95, original version Hilberseimer, L. (1998). *Groszstadt Architektur*, Julius Hoffmann Verlag, Stuttgart 1927. It is interesting to read *Groszstadt Architektur* as a response to the growth of cities after World War I—the book is from 1927—and to the need to find new growth models: "The city stems mainly from real needs, it is decisively influenced by economics and practice, structures and materials, the economic and sociological moment," op. cit. p. 90. Manfredo Tafuri wrote about him as follows: "For Hilberseimer, the 'object' was not in crisis because it had already disappeared from his spectrum of considerations. The only emerging imperative was that dictated by the laws of organization, and therein lies what has been correctly seen as Hilberseimer's greatest contribution," in *Progetto e utopia*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1977, p. 99;
- 8 Le Corbusier, *La Carta di Atene*, Edizioni Ghibli, Milano 2014. *La Carta di Atene*, manifesto di urbanistica, was formulated during the 4th CIAM congress in 1933, and it had the theme of *The Functional City*. It was published anonymously in French in 1938 but not signed; only later was it attributed to its author. The first Italian version is: *La carta d'Atene / Le Corbusier*; con un discorso preliminare di Jean Giraudoux. Trad. it. di C. De Roberto; Milano, Edizioni di Comunità, 1960.
- 9 Rem Koolhaas, *Testi sulla (non più) città, a cura e con un saggio introduttivo di Manuel Orazi*, Quodlibet 2021, p. 125.
- 10 Manfredo Tafuri, *Progetto e utopia*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1977, p. 125–126.
- 11 Secchi, B. (2005). *La città del ventesimo secolo*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, p. 58;
- 12 Aldo Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, CittàStudi, Milano, 1987 p. 17;
- 13 Salvatore Veca, *Spazio pubblico per le idee*, text for the Festival in Sarzana, in *Sole 24 Ore*, 28 agosto 2016;
- 14 *The Human Condition*, published by University of Chicago Press in 1958, was published in Italy in 1964 with the title *Vita activa*. H. Arendt, *Vita activa*, Bompiani, Milano 1964, p. 54–104;
- 15 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modus Vivendi. Inferno e utopia del mondo liquido*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2008, p. 105.
- 16 "Pervasive urbanization has modified the urban condition beyond recognition. 'The' city no longer exists. As the concept of the city is distorted and stretched beyond precedent, each

insistence on its primordial condition—in terms of images, rules, fabrication—irrevocably leads via nostalgia to irrelevance." In Koolhaas, op. cit. p. 63. Regarding the urban archipelago, see: Oswald Mathias Ungers "The city in the city. Berlin: a green archipelago. A manifesto (1977) by Rem Koolhaas with Peter Riemann, Hans Kollhoff and Arthur Övaskam", Lars Muller Publishers, Zurich, 2013.

During the research on the categories and their definition, a strong relationship emerged between the categories themselves and the physical, economic and social context in which they have taken form. We will not attempt to sum up the thousands of years of history of this relationship in a few sentences, but we do feel the need to underline the bond—which has always existed—between architecture and the form of the society, politics and the territory.

Before delving into the narration, we can say that it is possible to identify two macro-families: that of the *known* categories, which in some cases coincide with already encoded elements or types such as loggias or porticos, for example; and that of the categories we can define as *new*, in the sense that they are types or architectures that exist in the city, but have never been analyzed in relation to public space; in other words, those that already exist but can be observed from a different standpoint through this work.

Covered squares, urban courtyards and *loggias* are three closely interconnected types. Their birth coincides for the most part with the rise of the Communes, a phenomenon that developed in central-northern Italy starting from the end of the 11th century, with the need to have places where the populace could gather to make political or administrative decisions, or more simply for trade. The relationship between these types and the form of the society is very strong, and in fact they are not found in southern Italy, because this part of the territory had a totally different history, mostly connected with the presence of great monarchies until the founding of the Kingdom of Italy in 1860.

The so-called *covered squares*, defined as such due to the public role implied in the use of these spaces, were conceived as places of gathering and trade, whether they coincided with the ground-level loggias of medieval public buildings of the so-called *a loggiato* type, in which the life of the city took place, as in the case of Palazzo della Ragione in Milan, or whether the type was borrowed, successively, in buildings like the Palazzo della Loggia in Brescia; only the Mercato del Pesce in Venice was made with a purely commercial purpose, but it is important to emphasize that in linguistic terms its substantially retraces the typology of the medieval palace with a loggia at ground level and a loggia and hall on the upper level.

The *urban courtyards* are similar in terms of use and conception, and they too are often part of medieval public buildings, in the so-called typology of the *broletti a corte*¹, built in the Communal era in northern Italy.² Besides that of Piacenza, included in the case studies, the term *broletti a corte* can apply, among others, to those of Brescia, Pavia and Novara. There is a slight difference, though only as a question of image and not in terms of the intended public use of the space, in the courtyard of the Palazzo Municipale of Ferrara; built for the house of Este, the lords of the city of Ferrara, it was initially intended to be the courtyard of the ducal palace.

Likewise, the *loggias*, arising in the passage from a feudal society to the Communes, were created to contain gatherings of townspeople. Those of the first generation, according to Alessandro Merlo, substantially coincide with the ground floor of medieval public buildings—defined in this work as *covered squares*—while those up against buildings or independent, indicated as the second or third generation³, begin to appear when the political-administrative function separates from the commercial function, namely at the end of the Communal era, with the advent of the seigneuries and the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, for a long period nearly all loggias

continued to have a hybrid function, not just for commerce but also as a place for public events, such as the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence, or that of Castiglione Fiorentino; only later did the loggias begin to specialize as pure places of trade, as in the cases of the Loggia del Mercato Nuovo and the Loggia Pesce in Florence, or for functions of representation, like the Loggia dei Lanzi that becomes an outdoor sculpture gallery, a tribute to the splendor and prestige of the Medici family.

The *porticos*, whose very ancient origins were consolidated in the form familiar to us with the stoas of the Greek *polis*, have had various connotations and roles over time, though always connected with the protection of a walkway at the ground level of a building: a space that although it ideally exists inside the profile of the building is offered as public. Porticos, unlike loggias, have always been places of transit, and have therefore never contained a specific function other than that of mediation between the internal and external space of buildings.

Nevertheless, starting from the Renaissance, with the spread of manuals, from Vitruvius to the treatises of Alberti and Filarete, the portico took on a new role that seems to stem precisely from its purpose in the context of the Roman forum or the Greek agora. This spread of knowledge of classical architecture coincided with the passage, in central and northern Italy, from the Communal era to the phase of the lordships—the Medici in Tuscany, the Manfredi in Faenza, the Gonzaga and Sforza in Lombardy, and similarly the Badoer in the Veneto—and the necessity of powerful families not only to assert their presence in the city, but also to actively contribute to boost its quality and prestige. Porticos thus took on a new and important urban role as a device capable of granting eminence and unity to the main public spaces of the city, whether they appeared together with a building, as in the case of the Palazzo delle Logge in Arezzo or at Badoere, or were added to existing buildings, as in Faenza, Vigevano, Pisa or many other Italian cities. The portico became a way to give a new guise to the medieval city, the expression of a renewed organization of the civil society.

The *galleries*, which can be seen as the natural evolution on a different scale of the Parisian *passages*⁴, emerge with the rise of large-scale industrial production and the need for new urban spaces devoted to trade and to the social activities of a new bourgeois class; somewhere between the square, the covered street and the urban salon, the galleries have the character of hybrid, porous spaces that can be crossed, inside which to house a very wide range of functions: cafés, restaurants, bar, spaces of trade, but also book-stores, exhibition spaces, offices, residences.

The *steps* in front of the city's most important civic or religious buildings were devised to raise the building above the urban fabric and to thus grant it a monumental aura, as recommended in the manuals on classical architecture. At times, however, the topography of the site obliges the use of steps of such size as to make them become true urban devices, which besides connecting different levels of the city can also be involved in other uses. We are thinking, for example, about the role of steps in the Baroque era, as protagonists of the magnificent urban settings that enhance many Italian cities: from Piazza di Spagna in Rome to the steps of the cathedral of Noto.

The *inhabited bridges* are a category that fits into this research, because like the steps they go beyond their original functional purpose—in this case the connection of two banks of a river—to become places endowed with their own formal autonomy, places

where time can be spent. Inhabited bridges can be seen as squares overlooking the river, as in the case of Comacchio, as protected promenades as in Bassano del Grappa, or as open-air commercial galleries, like Ponte Vecchio in Florence.

The *urban terraces* constitute a category for cases in which the roof of a building or part of it can be utilized as public space. They are usually connected with the existence of a level shift or an embankment. This category, clearly linked to the topographical necessities of the territory, becomes a way to amplify public space on different levels in pursuit of an idea of a continuous city.

Finally, *frame* and *city room* are two categories in which architecture shapes and qualifies public space in a more pronounced manner, explicitly producing an inversion between inside and outside; categories in which the architecture, becoming concave, looks towards outdoor space so as to wrap it and redefine it. In the case of the city room—for example, the street-square of the Uffizi—the exterior becomes a true urban interior; in the case of the *frame*—such as the Domus Nova in Verona—the architecture shifts beyond its boundary to contribute to define the form of the space in front of it, sometimes mediating between the scale of the monument and that of the urban fabric.

1 The term broletto comes from the Latin brolo, meaning an enclosed court or garden, and until the Middle Ages, in the area of Lombardy, it indicated the space of citizen assemblies. Later the term was used to indicate the town hall.

2 Besides broletto, "there are in any case multiple terms with which to indicate these buildings: others include arengo, palazzo della ragione, arengario, palazzo della credenza, basilica, palazzo del popolo" in Alessandro Merlo, *Logge italiane. Genesi e processi di trasformazione*, Ricerche 1 architettura, design, territorio, Firenze 2016, p. 42.

3 The loggias of the first generation are those located on the ground floor of municipal buildings. In Alessandro Merlo, *Logge italiane. Genesi e processi di trasformazione*, Ricerche 1 architettura, design, territorio, Firenze 2016.

4 Starting in the second half of the 1800s, the passage had to face the competition of a new place of consumption: the department store. The department store, exploiting the possibilities of industrial production on an increasingly large scale, could offer products at a lower price than those sold in a passage. Unable to compete with the innovations offered by the department stores (such as the fixed price), the passages built after 1860 converted their nature from a place of consumption to the status of a monument, becoming true urban galleries: "For the first time in history, with the establishment of department stores, consumers begin to consider themselves a mass (...) Hence, the circus-like and theatrical element of commerce is quite extraordinarily heightened." In Walter Benjamin, *I "passages" di Parigi*. Volume primo, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, 2000, p. 50, original version *Das Passagen-Werk*, hrsg. von Rolf Tiedemann, 2 Bände, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1983.