

El distrito de Sant'Elia revisado: una breve historia del plan urbanístico de OMA.

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RESUMEN*

El artículo recorre la experiencia del *workshop* internacional SEW07 y el consiguiente plan urbanístico para el distrito de Sant'Elia en Cagliari, redactado por OMA, y reflexiona sobre las venturas y desventajas del acontecimiento. La primera parte describe el distrito y sus recientes vicisitudes resaltando su aparente inmutabilidad. La segunda parte describe el proceso de su concepción, basado en una "condición ideal de tabula rasa" e inspirado en la corriente del mega-estructuralismo. La tercera parte describe el proceso que dará lugar a la redacción del plan maestro, que pese a haberse iniciado "de la mejor manera", permaneció sin implementarse y abandonado, sobre todo debido a problemas relacionados con su financiación. En la conclusión, el artículo rastrea los momentos concluyentes del asunto, argumentando que el proyecto ha despertado un nuevo interés en el cuidado del paisaje y de la arquitectura. Se afirma que, a pesar de que se perdiera la oportunidad de revalorizar uno de los distritos con peor reputación en la ciudad, las huellas que el proceso —que involucró la participación de políticos, profesionales, académicos y los mismos residentes— ha dejado atrás, siguen vivas; y las referencias de ese importante periodo son todavía visibles en la escuela local de arquitectura y en la nueva generación de arquitectos que han crecido en ella. Todos ellos, a su vez, están cultivando el paisaje, la arquitectura y la cultura del proyecto en Cerdeña.

Palabras clave: OMA Rem Koolhaas, vivienda pública, renovación urbana, paisaje contemporáneo.

Sant'Elia urban island

ON a blurry autumnal Saturday afternoon, near the small, botched and spontaneous "fishermen's wharf" in Sant'Elia, one could imagine the entire district has emerged from the mists of time, unaffected by the changes that happened all around, susceptible only to its internal laws, as neglected by the city as an island far offshore [1].

The breakwaters of the wharf, built on a remote day that none of the oldest inhabitants of *Santuzza* remember, were once the estuary of a branch of an urban channel that was filled during the construction of the first lot of the district, the *Del Favero*, in the early 1970s. This concrete pedicle has caused a small beach to appear, made of the white, dust-like silica sand that once was predominant in the city's main beach, the *Poetto*, but is now replaced with grey, coarse sand from the seabed as a result of an unfortunate replenishment [2].

Here, despite the cloudy weather, every morning someone lays a towel on the beach and dives into the waters of the Mediterranean, facing on one side the grey walls of the district and on the other the gulf of Cagliari, with its uncanny, dystopian vision of the *Saras* oil refinery.

The city of Cagliari has undergone many changes in recent years due to urban regeneration and, above all, *care* for a range of once neglected urban areas. In particular, this care has concentrated a fair share of its efforts on the coastlines and waterfronts that surround the city on three sides out of four.

* Véanse los resúmenes en italiano e inglés en la página 142.



This regeneration has successfully redesigned and refurbished Cagliari's main beach, the *Poetto*, and its adjacent urban spaces, now turned into a sort of *promenade des sports* for runners, skaters and cyclists. It has snatched 200 meters of coastline from the navy to connect the city's two largest urban harbours in an uninterrupted line. It has built an urban shoreline promenade near Sant'Elia, extending both before and after the district [3].

Only this little area hosting the wharf —and few other portions of the coast of Cagliari— remain, at the moment, untouched. For maybe the first time since its construction, Sant'Elia sees a long-awaited change, experiencing the unusual feeling of consideration, which had been lacking for a long time. In 2019 the "third landscape" around the district had been redesigned by the famous Portuguese landscape architect Joao Nunes, and the brand new *parco degli anelli* had almost been completed. The little dock, a spontaneous appropriation of the place, its form and features deposited during the last four decades, has been destined for a redesign, a new marina planned to the south as a simple protrusion from the coastline [4].

[1] BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE DISTRICT FROM NORTH.

1. P.F. Cherchi "L'architettura del quartiere Sant'Elia: propositi e fallimenti di un programma architettonico per una nuova città sociale" in *Architettura, Città e Paesaggio, il progetto Urbano per il quartiere di Sant'Elia a Cagliari* eds. P.F. Cherchi and G.B. Cocco, (Milano: Gangemi Editore, 2009), p. 46.

2. From the museum's website http://www.betile.it/museo_ita.html. Reported in L. Gallinari, "Il museo Bètile di Cagliari e un fallito tentativo di costruzione dell'identità sarda". Memoria y Milenio, III Congreso Internacional, 19-20 July 2010, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

3. In F. Mulas, "La scomparsa di Zaha Hadid e la ferita del Bètile" 1 April 2020, Sardinia Post, last visited 08/01/2020. <https://www.sardiniapost.it/cronaca/la-scomparsa-di-zaha-hadid-e-la-ferita-del-betile/>



[2] VIEW OF THE SMALL BEACH NEAR THE WHARF AND, IN THE BACKGROUND, OF THE DEL FAVERO BUILDING.



[3] THE NEW PROMENADE IN THE WATERFRONT NEAR THE DISTRICT.

4. Initially promoted by the law 865/71 followed by n°166/75, n°513/77 and n°457/78.

5. Implementation plan.

6. 'Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari', the local autonomous institute for social housing.

7. Italian for *The Blades*.

8. The buildings were informally named after the general contractor in charge of its construction.

From this privileged point of view, the district resides in apparent idleness. Although buzzing with a rich inner life, it has remained virtually unchanged since its conception in an «ideal condition of *tabula rasa*»⁴, and its realisation, which extended from the mid-70s to the mid-90s, has allegedly lacked care for the common spaces that are essential for the creation of a 'piece of city': services, green areas, roads and walkways, markets and workplaces, to name but a few.

Yet the size of the district, 73 hectares for a population of about 7500 people, makes Sant'Elia a town of its own, isolated from the rest of the city, both from a geographic point of view —as widely evidenced in project briefs— and for its social attitude: Sant'Elia residents have their own way of living the city, *their city*, and mostly do not interact with other parts of Cagliari.

These considerations notwithstanding, there was a moment in which the district became the focus of international consideration. In 2005 an international competition to design a museum was launched by the Autonomous Region of Sardinia in collaboration with the Polytechnic of Milan and the architectural magazine *Domus*, at the time directed by the Milanese Architect Stefano Boeri. The *Betile* Museum was to highlight the Nuragic culture, especially to Sardinians, to instil «awareness on the value of their history and culture, allowing them to interact with contemporary artistic and cultural milieu»⁵ and to thus project Nuragic art and architecture into the present day.

The competition was attended by a wide range of prominent international practices. The competition shortlist included Massimiliano Fuksas, Zaha Hadid, Herzog & De Meuron, Jean Nouvel, Kengo Kuma and Archea Associati among others, and featured a rich bouquet of design strategies.

In 2006, the competition victory was finally assigned to Zaha Hadid Architects, probably enjoying its moment of maximum popularity due to the completion of the BMW central building, the Phaeno Science Centre and the Puerta America Hotel.

The building was never realised, and the ghost of this political and bureaucratic failure periodically reemerges through articles, papers and interviews. The last occurrence was the sad occasion of the passing of the British-Iraqi Architect: for the local press, «the open wound of a vanished dream is still burning for Cagliari and for the whole Island»⁶.

In 2006, in the wake of the attention drawn by the competition, the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, led by renowned architect and scholar Rem Koolhaas, was involved in a consultation along with the University of Cagliari's newborn Faculty of Architecture and the Polytechnic of Milan under the supervision of Stefano Boeri.

Compared with the competition for the *Betile* Museum, OMA's engagement was radically different. It involved a dialogue with institutions such as the Autonomous Region, the AREA (*Azienda Regionale per l'Edilizia Abitativa*), the local social housing authority and the two universities. It also comprised different phases, with eight specific design foci: i. demolitions, relocations and recovery of buildings; ii. docks and coastlines; iii. infrastructure layout; iv. functional and productive integration; v. typological and residential *mixité*; vi. environmentally friendly el-



[4] THE DISTRICT SEEN FROM THE NEW *PARCO DEGLI ANELLI*.

ements for building and urban sustainability; vii. monitoring of ongoing projects; viii. participatory agenda.

Far from wanting to impose a design “descended from above”, the designers sought local participation, desiring the project to be rooted in the local community and the local architectural milieu. Despite these efforts, little, if anything, of the ideas developed in those years was actually implemented. The participative processes between the new school of architecture and residents was abandoned to pursue short-term benefits and capital gains from the reconstruction of the district’s arena. However, these events impacted the city’s cultural debate, creating awareness of the value of local architecture and its civic role, and had crucial effects on the city’s subsequent transformative processes [5-6].

From this point of view, the involvement of OMA, Boeri and local architecture faculty on Sant’Elia’s urban regeneration process was both the climax of a long story started in the early 1970s and a sort of turning point for the Sardinian architectural debate, which gained a new awareness of its place in the global architectural discourse.

The tabula rasa of Sant’Elia

The history of the district began in the 1970s. Following the resurgence of building laws and programs for social housing⁴, a vast piece of public land South East of Cagliari was made available for a local experimentation of the megastructural utopias that were crossing the history of European late rationalism. The area was an old saline, then infilled in the 1920’s and 30’s [7].

In 1973, a project by Deplano & Sgualdini, vaguely inspired by coeval functionalist schemes, laid out the general massing through a *Piano Attuativo*⁵. This first proposal was based on a central marina with facilities for fishermen in the center, and a radial arrangement for the housing all around, facing the sea. Commissioned by IACP⁶, architects Zuddas (1977) and Malgarise & Casciu (1979) refined the scheme, setting out a series of radial slabs which would later be referred to as *Le Lame*⁷ and the complex *Del Favero*⁸. This consists of a multi storey complex of about 260 apartments. While *Le Lame* —a superficial reference to Le Corbusier’s *Unité d’Habitation*— are of scarce architectural relevance, the typological inventions of the *Del Favero* complex, with their inherent contra-

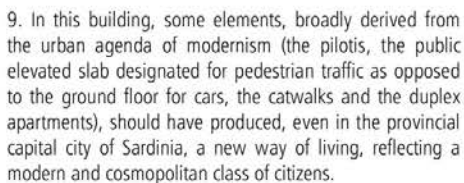
[5] PLANNING SCHEME FOR THE DISTRICT, FROM THE CURRENT PLAN.

[6] VARIATION TO SANT’ELIA PLANNING SCHEME, 2019.





[8] THE 2001 PLAN FOR THE DISTRICT.



11. Urban regeneration programs enacted by the Italian Ministry of infrastructures.

12. E.A. Corti "Prefazione" in *Architettura, Città e Paesaggio, il progetto Urbano per il quartiere di Sant'Elia a Cagliari*, cit., p.8.

choices on welfare policies carried out concerning urban peripheries started an inexorable social degradation. These phenomena deeply affected the quality of living in such areas. However, in an ironic yet perverse metaphor of the original intentions, this condition of decadence only served to legitimize the pressure of financial speculations on one of the potentially most precious areas in town: only minutes away from the city centre and right on the sea [8].

In an attempt to keep the inhabitants quiet, two distinct "district contracts"¹¹, enacted respectively in 1989 and in 2003 were set in place, but failed to come up with realistic solutions to address the issues of the neighbourhood. On the contrary, due to a twisted interpretation of the participation process in urban design, they produced disillusion in the inhabitants, exacerbating oppositions and reinforcing mistrust in design as a tool to resolve people's problems. In the early 2000s the public debate tended to find a consensus on the demolition of the iconic *Del Favero*. On the other hand, *Le Lame* were excluded from the discussion, despite their being the principal catalyser of criminal activities [9].

The SEW07 and OMA's project

As Enrico Corti notes¹² "Everything started in the best way", with the allocation of 30 million euros for the regeneration of the IACP buildings of the city of which about 800.000 euros destined to design the district's future. In November 2006, the Faculty of Architecture of Cagliari, the Polytechnic of Milan and Rem Koolhaas' Office for Metropolitan Architecture were charged to investigate opportunities for change and to draft a feasibility study through a 3-week long workshop on site. The main task of the SEW07 (Sant'Elia Workshop 2007) was to address the complexity of scales, the relationships of existing and planned elements (*Betile* museum, soccer stadium, old and new infrastructures, coastal promenade, new harbour) with their surroundings, and the issues related to the residences, both from a typological and a social stand. The goal was to define design venues towards a harmonious development for the whole area, building scenarios, providing social strategies and urban solutions [10].

The workshop was dominated by dual emotions: on one hand, the great excitement for the unprecedented opportunity to explore innovative solutions, on the other one the great apprehension for the rumors about the probable demolition of *Del Favero*, which local media considered already condemned by public administrators¹³: politicians of different parties were trying to predetermine and outcome, regardless of the work of the designers, in the attempt to catalyse consensus¹⁴. The public was being prepared and oriented to a radical transformation through bold design moves¹⁵. Disclosing the involvement of OMA for the redesign of the district seemed to confirm the strategy of the *tabula rasa*, a topic for which Koolhaas was renowned. He could have not been further away from that cliché.

When Rem Koolhaas and Cristina Murphy¹⁶ first visited Sant'Elia, they just found it beautiful. «Why would anyone want to change anything here? Why would such a place need a redesign?» Answers to these questions were of course found in the increasing pressure that the real estate market had started applying since the late 1990's. The big hous-

13. This news provoked a deep concern in inhabitants. Despite their awareness of the deterioration of the building, they feared a disaggregation of the community and of the neighbourhood relationships and informal adaptations they had produced over the years.

14. Besides, it should not come as a surprise, and similar processes are not uncommon in the history of architecture. Koolhaas himself, in 'Delirious New York', describes how Le Corbusier, in an effort to affirm his ideas on the modern

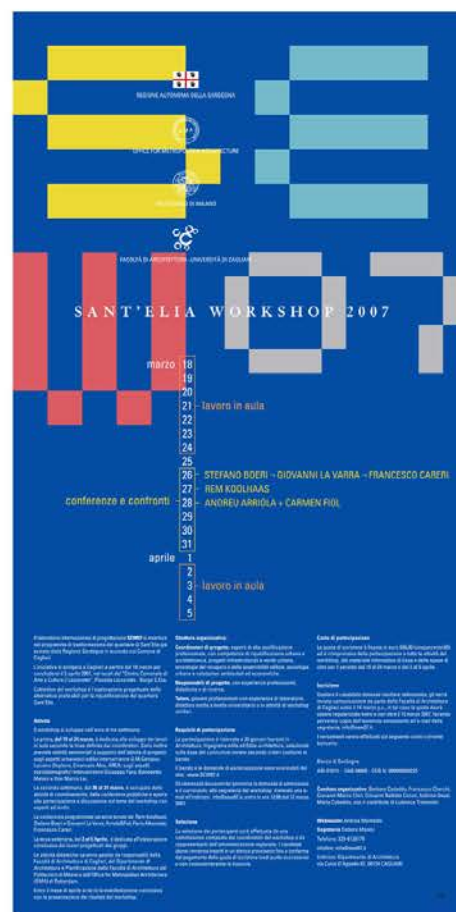
15. The same operation was carried out on in the project for the 'Museum of Contemporary and Nuragic Art', and for several other unrealised designs scattered throughout the region. Architecture, expressed as an iconic fetish and skillfully addressed by the media reinforces this idea regardless of its realisation and the measurement of its material effects on the body of the city.

16. Project Manager at OMA.

17. For instance, the effect on the rest of the city, the role of the slabs and *pilotis* as a scenario for public social and economic relations, the exterior spaces and the services for the community.

18. See *Le Vele* in Scampia (Naples), Bijlmeester in Amsterdam, and many others.

[10] THE WORKSHOP PROGRAMME.





[9] THE *DEL FAVERO* FROM THE *PARCO DEGLI ANELLI*.

ing blocks may have benefitted from an uplifting, but the place did not necessarily need a change [11].

All of a sudden, a recognition for the value of radical and heroic utopianism expressed by the architectural character of the building, by its unconditioned brutalism, by its quasi classical relationship with the landscape and by the overwhelming effect of the light and Mediterranean sea swiftly subverted the debate, shifting it on a more reformist agenda. Some of the elements that were debated during the three weeks workshop¹⁷ became central, and the design process acquired a new soul. This was rather surprisingly more oriented to 'healing' the relationship with the context. The action of the workshop, and of the succeeding OMA project, were oriented thus to the mending of spatial relations starting from the processes underway, rather than mechanically replacing them [12].

Instead of the forecasted *tabula rasa* for which OMA had been hired, the team proposed a much more subtle strategy, limiting any transformation between 0 and 4 meters off the ground. The challenge sounded like fitting a tablecloth under perfectly arranged crockery and cutlery.

Probably too sophisticated to be fully understood, the work of OMA was widely criticized locally. Yet, it had some significant merits: while it shifted the paradigm of the urban regeneration of social housing neighborhoods from the cynicism of the demolition (the *tabula rasa*, so popular at that time)¹⁸ to the sensitivity of acknowledging the value and qualities of existing patterns and cultures. Koolhaas pushed his team to simply complete what was initiated 35 years earlier by connecting the dots, providing the missing services, and uplifting the commons. Fundamentally, the design focused on celebrating the lives of people in Sant'Elia, aiming at positively adjusting their perspective rather than accommodating opportunities for big private investments. Paradoxically, the star who had been called to transform old concrete into gold, pushed the intense social agenda of a post-capitalist vision.

Superficial generalizations over OMA's work, which put the urban plan on the same level of the design of the *Betile* Museum, are

[11] THE *DEL FAVERO* BUILDING.





[13] ZAHA HADID'S WINNING PROPOSAL FOR THE BETILE.

largely unjustified: although both Hadid and Koolhaas might have been approached in the attempt to spark a late —and rather pathetic— *Bilbao effect*, the two projects followed very distinct paths. The museum was conceived as an icon, a centrepiece to be admired. The urban strategy was quite the opposite: a set of tools geared to emphasize the qualities of what was already there [13].

OMA operates on domains that cross architecture, urban planning and design, engaging with social sciences, often trespassing into the political realm. For this reason, the design process, started from the SEW07 workshop and developed in the feasibility plan goes beyond mere urban planning and «investigates questions of social, infrastructural, typological nature, of environmental sustainability, economy and the implementation of new programs»¹⁹. The masterplan for Sant'Elia is bifold: on one hand the actions addressed to restore the relationship between the district and the city, the coast and the landscape of the *Golfo degli Angeli* in its entirety. On the other hand, a series of tactical actions, conceived to reinstate the relations between architecture and the social and economic processes, both formal and informal, of the district. The first issue is deeply connected with the relationship between Sant'Elia and the city [14].

In the 1970's projects, by Deplano & Sgualdini first, and by Zuddas and Malgarise & Casciu then, Sant'Elia was conceived as an in-

19. Cristina Cassandra Murphy "Architettura città e paesaggio. Il Concept Masterplan Study per il quartiere Sant'Elia" in *Architettura, Città e Paesaggio, il progetto Urbano per il quartiere di Sant'Elia a Cagliari*, cit., p. 24.

20. The urban beach of Cagliari, located in the eastern part of the city, spanning 8 km from north to south.

21. Sant'Elia stadium was designed by Antonio Sulprizio and built in 1964. It was expanded in 1970 to reach its maximum capacity of 60.000 spectators.

22. Comprising a vast military complex.

[14] AN IMAGE FROM THE WORKSHOP, REPRESENTING SOME OF THE COMMONPLACES ABOUT SANT'ELIA.



dependent cluster outside of the compact fabric of the city. The 1965 general plan for the city of Cagliari extended to the hill of *Bonaria*, more than 1 km away from the district, and did not consider Sant'Elia as a part of the urban area at all. The same plan set the construction of a ring road to connect the northern part of the city with the *Poetto*²⁰, on one side, and with the city centre on the other, along the western coast and the docks, northward of Sant'Elia. This infrastructure will have proven crucially beneficial for urban mobility, reflecting its aspiration for modernity. As a side effect, it condemned the neighbourhood to a complete isolation. The effects of this marginalisation, combined with the total dependency of the district from the city centre in terms of services, escalated and crystallized, determining its physical and social decline. Another element of separation between Sant'Elia and the city is the cumbersome soccer stadium, and even more its vast parking lot²¹. Until recently it has been active for only a few days a year, constituting a missed opportunity for urban valorisation [15].

[12] THE *DEL FAVERO* BUILDING.



Still during the 2000s the city was growing at a steady pace, due to the many urban developments at its margins. The demand for new building sites was only partially absorbed by the minor centres of the metropolitan belt and Sant'Elia, with its prime location right along the seaside, was regarded as an appealing opportunity for commercial real estate development. This pressure manifested first in the mid-1960s and is continuing with varied intensity to the present day [16].

The last issue regarded the necessity to promote and improve the urban waterfront on the gulf. Cagliari's metropolitan area is developed on a coastline interrupted by Sant'Elia promontory. Its western side is characterised by the historical settlement and its 20th century expansion. The other, comprising the salterns and the marshes of Molentargius, connects the *Poetto* to the city of Quartu. The western front, however, because of the presence of a series of infrastructures²², could not develop the much-needed continuity to grant a solid public space outside the centre. The construction of the *Betile* Museum, a park and the new marina, would have provided a significant momentum to this effort [17].



On such premises, the Masterplan addressed the continuity between the district and the city, acting primarily on the infrastructures, reimagined as boulevards rather than highways, easily traversable. Then, it envisaged the demolition of the old arena, in favour of a more contemporary one, closer to the sea and open towards the museum. As third action, it placed a piece of the compact 19th century city on a regular grid to controversially contrast the built utopia of *Del Favero*, anchoring the system back to a more conventional, sound asset. Lastly, the design focused on the public space and on the parks that, departing from the inner one²³ extend to include the saline channel system and the fairground and sports facilities to the North. The general strategy of the masterplan was to slightly adjust the urban context to provide opportunities of interaction and collaboration among the individual architectural components. Its actions were oriented to the management of urban relations even at the microscale. A series of tactics, aimed at subverting the negative fame of the district, were injected in the architectural design as well as the social, political and economic strategies. In other words, the precondition for the feasibility of the project was strictly tied to the metabolization of the stigma of marginalisation and decay. A series of small-scale transformations were planned in order to ensure the creation of new employment, the reorganisation of informally occupied and colonised spaces and adjustments to the buildings' typological and aesthetic configurations. A possible involvement of the inhabitants, leveraging on their strong sense of belonging and identity, was imagined. The corrective actions on the *Del Favero* regarded mainly its public elevated slab, namely the element that, in the intentions of the designers, should have accommodated the social life of the building. The modern idea of a pub-

[15] THE NEW STADIUM OF THE CAGLIARI CALCIO DESIGNED BY SPORTIUM.

23. The so called 'Parco degli Anelli'.

24. A proposal by Paulo Mendes da Rocha, who was recently awarded the Pritzker Prize, for the new University Campus and City Entrance, and another project by Herzog & De Meuron for the Monteponi mine in Iglesias. Finally, the unfortunate G8 event, initially organised for the island of La Maddalena and then moved to L'Aquila, to partially 'compensate' the city after a disastrous earthquake that almost entirely destroyed it.

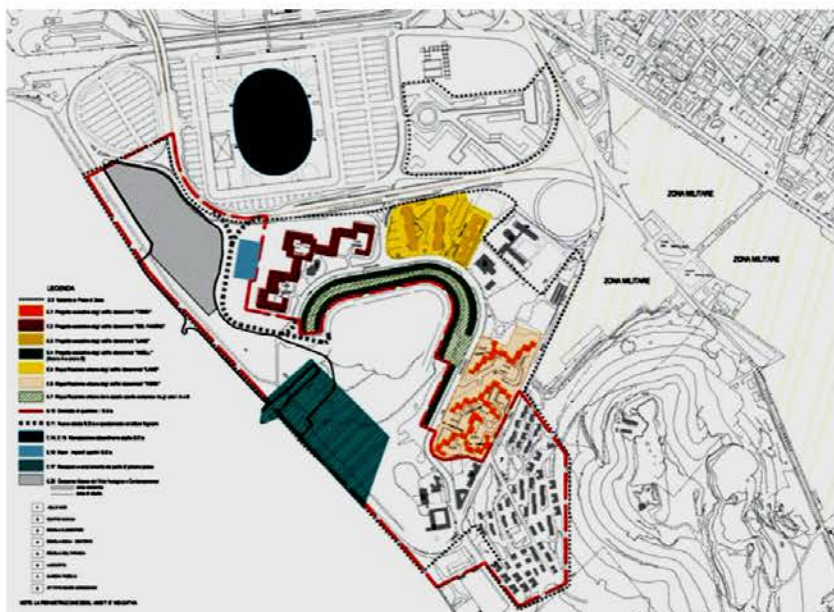


[16] BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE DISTRICT FROM SOUTH.

lic plaza detached from the street, which had crossed the history of urban design during the 20th century, was discarded, opting instead to connect directly the building to the public space on ground. The demolition of the elevated slab allowed for the relocation of more retail along the public streets, rendering a more conventional and obliterating the *pilotis*, perceived as a receptacle of criminality [18].

Regrets and heritage of the SEW07 experience

A few months after the workshop, it was clearly noticeable that the enthusiastic thrust that had started with the competition for the *Betile* and had accompanied the initial phases of the process was mostly lost due to the political actors. Politicians could not find a compromise between the intrinsic fragility of the methodological approach and the deeper structural weakness of the operation. Even in the case of a momentary agreement, the whole operation was too ephemerally tied to a top-down approach allowed by a strategic concentration of economic and material resources —such as a great event— that was destined to a swift decline. The *Betile* Museum's estimated cost was initially between 40 and 70 million euros. Zaha Hadid's final proposal was deemed to cost not

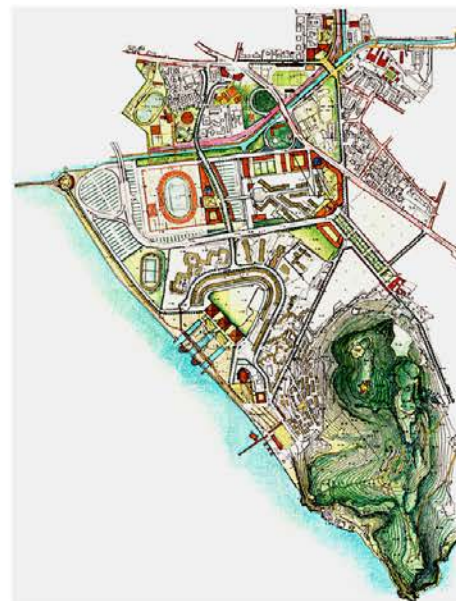


[17] PLAN FROM THE BETILE COMPETITION, 2006.

less than 140 million. Similarly, the fund required from the district were far more than the 30 million initially designated by the administration. For this reason, without the involvement of private funds the projects were simply unfeasible. Other projects of the same period²⁴ were never built or ended up as useless containers, unable to economically revitalise the areas in which were built. The overall plan lacked the necessary pragmatism in terms of economic sustainability in the medium- and long-term, or maybe was too dependent—in a burst of naive optimism—on the regenerative effects of the authorial “masterpiece” on the region’s economy and society. In this context, OMA’s reformist project for Sant’Elia appears, if possible, even more disarming and destabilises Koolhaas’ image and theories. When the first, provoking pictures of the tabula rasa were replaced by concrete and sound design proposals, it became evident that the Dutch architect and his team, careful observers of trends, had somehow sensed a change of the tide in the processes, a shift of the paradigm that their programmatic manifestos had contributed to building. They had palpably revealed, as only pure genius can do, that every monolithic theory contains in itself the seeds of its own crisis. One can imagine that even in this case, as Bruno Zevi theorised in a famous essay in 1971, external models dogmatically imported to Sardinia had suffered some form of metamorphosis due to the pressures of the context. This interpretation is certainly justified by the analysis of local architectural phenomena and can be aptly endorsed. But it is fed by a common and pervasive attitude to the vindication of an alterity of Sardinian identity in the Mediterranean context that has deep historical roots and affects every part of society, establishing a tendency to distort a genuine scrutiny of facts.

In this case, more simply, the Sant’Elia Masterplan is a pragmatic operation, soundly connected to the identification of real problems, intelligently articulated on diverse scales and on the communicating planes of architectural and social action, which does not exclude the agency of local stakeholders. It is especially far-sighted in its rejection of the autho-

[19] ENRICO CORTI'S PLAN THROUGH PROJECTS, 2002.





[18] OMA'S MASTERPLAN, FINAL IMAGE.

rial approach to focus on the general rules of the transformation. In this sense, OMA's work —and the work of all those that participated— is more similar to the urban transformations of the 1990s than it is to the exuberant revelations of the 2000s. However, while the *Villa Olimpica* and *Bohigas'* plan could be soundly grounded on Joan Antoni Solans' plan and the exemplary financial management of the operation —which would have multiplied the value of the investments in the 1992 Olympic Games— this couldn't have happened in the case of Cagliari for two main reasons.

First the plan of Enrico Corti —which nonetheless was largely in debt to the so-called reformist urbanism— was based on an approach which sought to translate projects into norms, a principle that remained largely unapplied. This left the city in the vacuum of a shared urban-administrative framework on which the project could have been grafted [19].

Second, the enterprise's financial sustainability was essentially based on the hypothetical involvement of private and public capital from the regional administration in the absence of a "great event" that could justify such a concentration of resources. Although today the rehabilitation of the district is being gradually implemented, through commendable actions that contribute to enhancing the general quality of the public

space, the district has missed its opportunity for a museum and, above all, to reconnect with the city. These losses are still deeply felt, but the experience of designing the Masterplan, and the activities that accompanied it, were not completely useless. A large portion of the public was involved in the debate about the quality of urban public space and architecture, as well as debates about protecting the landscape and cultural heritage in general, which is uncommon in Italian cultural debates. A new generation of architects, trained in the new school of architecture, has started to operate on the island, enhancing the quality of projects but also, and more importantly, spreading a positive idea of the project as an instrument to enhance society. Finally, these phenomena have started to redeem, at least partially, the undeserved cultural marginalisation of the peninsula, casting the debate from the local scale to the global scenario. ■

Sant'Elia Reloaded: Una breve storia del Masterplan di OMA.

L'articolo ripercorre l'esperienza del workshop internazionale SEW07 e il successivo masterplan per il quartiere Sant'Elia a Cagliari, redatto da OMA, riflettendo sulle fortune e sui rovesci dell'evento. La prima parte descrive il quartiere e le sue recenti vicissitudini, evidenziando la sua apparente immutabilità. La seconda parte descrive il processo della sua fondazione in una "condizione ideale di tabula rasa", ispirata alla corrente del megastrutturalismo. La terza parte descrive il processo che condurrà alla redazione del masterplan: pur iniziato "nel migliore dei modi", è rimasto inattuato e abbandonato, soprattutto per problemi legati al suo finanziamento. In conclusione, l'articolo ritraccia i momenti conclusivi della vicenda, sostenendo che il progetto ha acceso un rinnovato interesse nella cura per il paesaggio e per l'architettura. Si sostiene che, nonostante l'opportunità di riqualificare uno dei quartieri più malfamati della città sia andata persa, le tracce che il processo — che ha coinvolto la partecipazione di politici, professionisti, accademici e i residenti stessi — si è lasciato dietro, sono ancora vive, e i segni di quella importante stagione sono ancora visibili nella locale scuola di architettura e nella nuova generazione di architetti che vi sono cresciuti. Loro stanno, in cambio, coltivando il paesaggio, l'architettura e la cultura del progetto in Sardegna.

Parole Chiave: OMA Rem Koolhaas, edilizia residenziale pubblica, riqualificazione urbana, paesaggio contemporaneo.

Sant'Elia Reloaded: A brief history of OMA's Masterplan.

The Article Outlines the experience of the international workshop SEW07 and the following master plan for the district of Sant'Elia in Cagliari, reflecting on the fortunes and misfortunes of the event. The first part describes the district and its recent vicissitudes, highlighting its apparent stillness. The second part describes its foundation in an "ideal condition of tabula rasa", inspired by the vague of megastructuralism. The third part describes the process that will lead to the drafting of the masterplan: although started "in the best of ways", it will finally end up unbuilt and discarded, mainly for a lack of funding. As a conclusion, the article retraces the last moments of the story, claiming that the project ignited a renewed interest in the care for landscape and architecture. It is argued that, despite the lost opportunity for an exemplary renovation of one of the most notorious districts of the city, the traces left behind by the process — which involved the participation of policy makers, professionals, academics and residents — are still vivid and that the signs of that important season are still visible in the local school of architecture and in the new generation of architects it nurtured. These are, in exchange, nurturing Sardinian landscape, architecture and design culture.

Keyword: OMA Rem Koolhaas, public housing, urban regeneration, contemporary landscape.



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