

P4 Reflection paper

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Architecture and Public Building

Studio: AR3AP131 'Re_Claiming Rome'

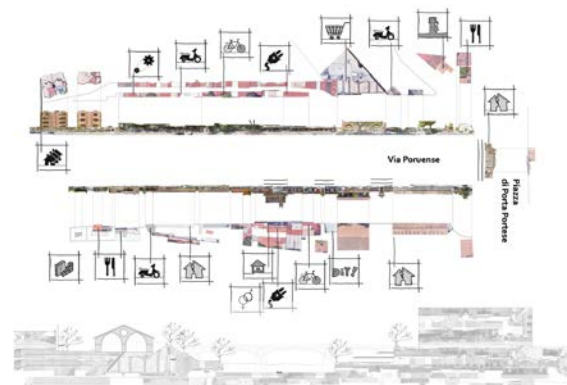
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This reflection paper focusses on my personal progress within the 'Re_Claiming Rome' graduation studio during the last year; including the process and present outcome.

Under the framework of the graduation studio I was to engage and intervene (with a design proposal) in the city of Rome, taking into consideration not only its history, but also its contemporary context/conditions; paying particular attention to the role of the river Tiber.

At the beginning of the research and design process I became fascinated with my chosen site – the abandoned former Papal Arsenal area, due to its unique character. The chosen site is located off the beaten track and unlike the well-known Campus Martius area in Rome, has a sense of informality with a much diminished scale of urban environment. The observed urban and social conditions of the site (which were discussed at length within my research document and Graduation Plan) have led me to explore the possibilities of informality within architecture, and architecture as infrastructure. Within the P2 time frame I intensely explored not only the perimeter of the former Arsenal, but also its immediate surroundings. My conceptual intention was to allow the site to continue as a location of production and productivity but with an emphasis on social bridging and creating a greater permanence and continuity to the structural fabric. My proposal at P2 stage I labelled 'The Productive market', and produced a comprehensive urban plan, however too many flaws existed within the program for a final design to be viable.

In the post P2 period the decision was made to focus on the perimeter of the former Arsenal. Which led me to the deeper exploration of the former role of the Tiber, and the current prevailing 'denial' of its existence within the city, due to its violent nature. This directed me to go beyond the limitations of the current conditions; the drastic height drop between street and river levels, and the massive impenetrable embankments on both sides of the river – features designed to cope with the unpredictable nature of the river itself. These limitations I came to view as possibilities and potential advantages.



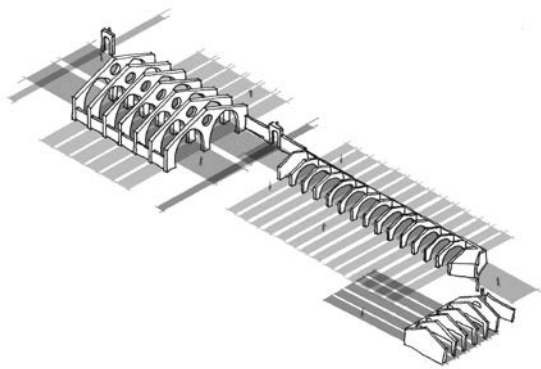
Img. 1 Initial analysis/interpretation of the site



Img. 2 Sketch of former Papal Arsenal

This conducted researching rivers as a source of water – what I shall call 'dirty water' which can be processed into portable water by

sustainable means. The site (the Arsenal) becomes a site of production, or in this case a site of purification. Thus I was able to maintain my original concept of 'The Productive Market', whilst directly meeting the expectations of the studio – the subversion of the past and present conditions, and addressing environmental sustainability concerns. The act of water filtration was an inception point for the final conceptual proposal for the site. Unfortunately, in the post P2 development of the proposal, the driving concept – architecture as infrastructure, had to be put aside, however, I believe, some of the original aspects may still be traced within the design proposal.



Img. 3 Initial research into informality and infrastructural qualities of the site

The final conceptual proposal is to make a 'dirty water' brewery, where the Tiber water undergoes a full cycle of transformation from polluted water to potable water and finally to become a consumable and a social lubricant. Further this water operates as the main driver of all activities at the site; due to its presence, the now stagnant site of Arsenal becomes a hub of activity. The site becomes a green public square, a tasting room, a promenade, an outdoor performance space, a place of work and of exploration – as comprehensive tours will be conducted. Microbreweries and craft beers have become a fascination for the world, also experiencing growth in wine countries like Italy – it shows no sign of slowing

in the near future. In recent years, due to a prolonged economic downturn in Italy, the municipalities in Italy are seeking the rejuvenation of cities through the industries related to consumables such as food and beverage.¹

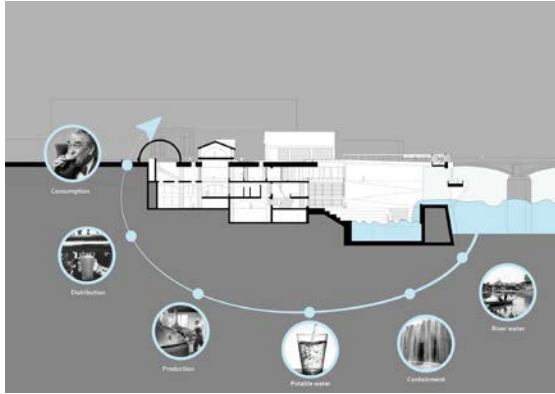
As a design proposal, it has undergone a number of transformations, but to underline the main aspects:

- The main building is submerged under the existing site, since the intention is to provide an open public square within the perimeter of the former Arsenal.
- The underground edifice reaches the level of the Tiber, but in order to protect the habitable spaces a slightly protruding 'dam' is constructed into the bank of the river. This dam has four functions:
 - An embankment.
 - A sluice that allows retrieving the water necessary for the functions of the site.
 - A 'skylight' for the underground facilities.
 - A public/performance space.
- The existing buildings on the street level become part of the same building complex, they are demolished and reconstructed after the new edifice is positioned underneath it.
- As a broader aspect of the proposal and as an agent of further rejuvenation for the city, it is possible to integrate these water dams city-wide, and not only in the chosen location.

To reflect, the process that I am undergoing has been challenging; due to the scale and the complexity of the chosen site I have not always been in control of the process and have had to take many steps back during the developmental process. Retrospectively, it is clear to me that I have made mistakes throughout this process; some of which are

¹ Rephrased from the observations of Nicola Marzot, based on situation in Bologna.

attributable to focussing too closely on some element of the design without considering the overall scope of the demands... others were due to my indecisiveness regarding the design solutions. I hope I will take these issues into account in my further explorations within the architectural discipline.



Img.4 Sectional diagram of the proposal and water transformation sequence within the edifice

In order to provide self-criticism and to understand the level to which the proposed intervention may be called a success it is important to reflect on my own interpretation of the of the studio assignment 'Re_Claiming Rome'.

- Reclamation and subversion of decaying historical monuments within the city.
- Reflect upon Roma's ability to reshape itself throughout the centuries, however be critical.
- If possible, consider possibilities of reclaiming not only historic traces of the built environment, but also the biggest 'scar' in the city – the River Tiber.
- Understand the site specific economic and social conditions. Attempt to create a tangible link between the past, present and future whilst not compromising any of these periods.

These interpretations have remained consistent throughout the period of working

on the design proposal, and have informed each stage of the design development. As the project nears completion, and in order to understand the extent to which I believe my design to have been successful it is important to reflect on how the requirements of the studio have been met. Considering the above parameters, I believe I have achieved all of the above to varying extents.

The redundant Papal Arsenal is proposed to become a place of production and activity. The choice to make the site into a brewery reflects the historic close link between the Tiber and the site. The Arsenal edifice was erected for the repair of barges and ships that were arriving/leaving the city, with the new function the river becomes an integral part of the site, the boundaries between water and the land are blurred.

Taking into consideration contemporary trends (and municipal encouraged initiatives) the program of the site offers a self-sustaining economic model; a cycle of 'production_consumption_distribution' and beyond. This program provides the basis of meeting both contemporary and future social/economic expectations & demands.

On the architectural level the proposal leaves the pre-existing built environment largely intact, allowing the intrinsic character of the site to be retained. It is not preserved as a museum space, instead the structures are appropriated as integral parts of the proposal. Most of the program is proposed to be located underneath the existing street level, allowing for the incorporation of urban green – a desirable addition in contemporary metropolitan cities².

² City of Rome has NDVI (Normalized Difference Vegetation Index) of 0.1669 in comparison to greenest capital cities in Europe such as Sarajevo (0.6778), Bern (0.5996) and (Vilnius 0.5137).

Source: <https://www.archdaily.com/883707/satellite-images-ranks-europes-greenest-and-not-so-green-cities>; Accessed: 11/11/17

*All images created by the author