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Reflection

Revealing Rome's Water-Based Culture: a resilient, dynamic and interactive layer.

Reflections

This document aims to indicate the considerations, limitations and lessons learned throughout the process of the graduation project: Revealing Rome's Water-Based Culture: a resilient, dynamic and interactive layer.

The relation between graduation topic, studio topic and master track.

The presented project is part of the Flowscales graduation studio and the Circular Water Stories lab. Both studios are focused on the exploration of special, societal and environmental issues by the development of innovative spatial frameworks that can enhance the relationship between natural and human systems. In particular, in Circular Water Stories Lab the focus is on the understanding of the water system and its relationship with the site, the people and the landscape.

Concerning these topics, the project works mainly with the importance of the water as an original, authentic feature of the city of Rome, in search of its role in the new modern society.

The historical, cultural, social and technological relationship between water and the city and its citizens, have been widely studied and developed in order to understand it and exploit its potentials.

The research explores this ancient bond between water and the city of Rome, a link that begins with its foundation and that manifests itself over the centuries with incredible fountains, baths and aqueducts; the thesis then dwells on the more recent aspects and the problems that the city is experiencing today: due to a strong urbanization and social change the millennial relationship is now almost forgotten by the citizens themselves, and indeed now water is seen as a threat that destabilizes the city with strong storms, flooding it.

Therefore, it is necessary to re-establish the role of water in modern society and rediscover the water-based culture of the city. Focusing on the importance of wetlands, rivers, water bodies in combination with the characteristic of the site such as hills, valleys, parks and local vegetation, we can create a green and blue infrastructure that connect different scales, developing a resilient and dynamic system and meaningful design for the city, rethinking the functions and land uses of the territory. The final object is then to enhance the city from a naturalist and archaeological point of view, promoting the culture of water both for understanding and respecting this resource and for emphasizing the value of historical testimonies related to its use.

Social and environmental relevance

Contrary to what it may seem, Rome is a city that has a high number of parks and green areas. Unfortunately, the growth of the city has incorporated these green areas into its urban fabric, disconnecting them from each other and giving a general impression of a grey city. Working in the "Parco Archeologico del Colosseo" and "Parco della Caffarella" I became aware of the high level of biodiversity present in the parks, unusual for an urban area. In my thesis project, therefore, this percentage of greenery will be developed thanks to the green and blue principles, that generates a resilient and adaptive layer of the city, providing a safer and healthier structure for the metropolitan framework; on the other hand also the awareness of both citizens and tourists will be increased, they, walking along the path I designed, will be able to realize the importance of greenery inside the city and the different functions that water can have.

Not only then the proposed green and blue network provides space for nature within the city, enhancing biodiversity, creating leisure and recreational spaces but at the same time, it will demonstrate a new way of conceiving the city and its spaces, in which water is no longer seen as a threat but rather as a benefit, in which green, bioswales, porous pavements, wetlands, rivers will become protagonists of a homogeneous mechanism between the city, nature and people. Tourists and citizens will be involved in this process, thanks to brochures, signs, with which they will be guided along the route and areas dedicated to community gardens and greenhouses will create active participation of the neighbourhood.

Process of Data Collection

Unlike many of my colleagues who had difficulty in finding information on their site, in my case I had the opposite problem. About the city of Rome, one of the oldest cities in the world, a lot has been written, and when I started my research I had access to many sources and information from every point of view, initially finding many difficulties in understanding which one to choose. It was, therefore, very important the sorting process, going to thin out the aspects and topics that I was less interested in to deepen others.

Research Results

In order to bring people closer to the water-based identity of the city, the project aims to create two main routes that both lead visitors to the discovery of ancient ruins, such as aqueducts and baths, and also make them discover the modern layer of the green and blue system, that at the same time helps the city to become more resilient and cope with environmental changes.

This project is certainly applicable to the whole city of Rome, indeed this would be desirable: creating routes around all the city would facilitate the movement of tourists to lesser-known but equally fascinating places, going to ease the tension in the historic center. The city would then enjoy a larger and more efficient water management network, covering many places in Rome that suffer from flooding and at the same time giving green areas creating moments of sociality for the neighbourhoods.

Ethical issues and dilemmas

One of the main dilemmas I had to face was the historicity of the place.

The historic center of Rome is, in fact, one of the most famous places in the world, almost everyone knows the Colosseum and the Palatine area, so how to intervene in a decisive but equally delicate way in an area already full of its specificity? It was fundamental to understand its essence and try to define a project that somehow did not upset the pre-existing structures but still works on the needs that the city required. Some areas of the historic centre, once important places of culture or sociality, are now simple places of contemplation whose original function has been nullified over the centuries. One example is the Circus Maximus, next to the Palatine hill, once a chariot-racing stadium and mass entertainment venue, today is a place devoid of any function. Therefore in the thesis project, it has become a large urban wetland, so not only to retain the excess rainwater but at the same time to create a place alive and characteristic again, where the water became the new protagonist and can be admired along the designed path.

This type of intervention, however, must be accompanied by an awareness on the part of citizens and tourists. People must have a clear understanding of what they are experience and why, only then they will be able to understand the project as an integral part of a whole system.

Corona Crisis

The advent of the cov-19 pandemic at the beginning of March 2020 was an event had a significant impact on my thesis project. In addition to personal involvement, Italy was one of the countries most affected by the pandemic and this caused me distractions and some delays in completing my work, from a practical point of view several and unexepcted problems came up: my site visit was, in fact, delated, and with it the interviews I had planned and the visit to the library of the University of Rome were cancelled as well. I lacked the necessary photographic material and, above all, the direct experience of those places, in in order to better understand their nature and atmospheres.

I had to adapt to the new situation and with it also my project. Thanks to social media, I found new sources for the photographic material and wrote to many local people, in order to have a general impression of the chosen site. Many of the people I contacted were incredibly helpful, giving me their impressions, photographic material and opinions on my thesis work. Despite the unpleasant situation, the pandemic gave me the opportunity to knowing the site in an indirect way, through the eyes of others: in fact through the words and photos of other people, tourists but especially locals, the project took shape, created by the union of different people's perceptions.