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'Creating a centre' in the Romanina area: interview with Manuel Salgado

What was the most involving element in the competition for the new centrality?
The Romanina competition was not a normal architectural competition within which to present an architectural proposal with a precise form and a recognisable image. The objective was that of constructing the base for an urban project that was not a macroobject of architecture, but rather a programmatic and strategic process that makes use of diverse instruments to promote a proposal for urban transformation. The Urban project is a hybrid product that utilises the logic of planning; playing with uncertainty, more than the formal design of the territory.

What do we mean then by urban project?
Within the millenary history of the urban form there are multiple testimonials of portions of cities that were built according to an overall project. The new difficulty resides in conserving, over time, the design of the city within the complex game of relationships and the pulverisation of centres within the decision-making processes that characterise their management.
We, unlike the others, do not consider the order of the city to be a preconceived notion of European architects who have gone beyond reality. We saw the Romanina project as an attempt to reconcile planning and design and strategy and design.

In your opinion what distinguishes an urban project from a large-scale architectural project?
The challenge is the variable of time. The uncertainty of the future obliges us to think of the urban project as an 'open work' that allows for the emergence of new opportunities, that integrates programmes from different users and different designers with its own idiosyncrasies and which does not generate a formless and incoherent organism. We feel that, for this work, the following are essential: the pattern as the matrix upon which to build; the design of open spaces and public space in particular: accessible, symbolic, social and representational; infrastructures as vital elements for the city and contributions to the new form of the urban landscape; the location of activities with strong symbolic value.
Within this concept of the 'open work', drawings are simulations on top of the matrix that establish the frontier between public and private space, which is what designs the city. For this reason we feel that with the urban project there must exist various levels of rigidity: the maximum level of open spaces and the minimum level of building, with rules for the overall design.
This is to demonstrate that we are not in the realm of utopia, but that we wish to provide cities with the seal of quality upon that with is for everyone: public space; the rest may continue to be designed to respond to the solicitations of time.