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The port as a park

Rosario Pavia

The demand from coastal cities to regenerate their relationship with port areas and the sea, and the difficult process of recuperation of the waterfront (but also some experiences of success, like those in Barcelona and Genoa) induce and introduce into the complex discussion on the modes of interaction between ports and cities, a new operative notion: the port as a park. Not a homogenous theme park where the international style of the marina and waterfront transform the local reality into no-place on the global circuit, but rather a park that is public property, a resource which is open for the community to appreciate, for the 'pleasure of the people'.

A denied landscape

The European convention on landscapes (Florence, 2000) has expanded the idea of landscape within the territorial system.

The way in which the European convention has been interpreted by our Code of cultural treasures and recent regional legislative measures doesn't reflect a full understanding of the cultural and operative course of Europe's choice in making landscape a pivotal issue in the politics of development and cohesion. Land becomes 'landscape' when it is identified as part of the cultural and economic life of the local population and of the workers who are involved in the use of such areas. Many attempts to transform production and industrial areas into 'landscapes' have come from the common belief that it refers to disused and environmentally degraded areas available for optimization programmes. Up until now, models of intervention have promoted the creation of archaeological industry

parks. New green areas integrate the existing parks, compensating for the urban outskirts and connecting parts of the city to the surrounding territory. It still needs to be highlighted that these interventions have produced new landscapes which haven't reached into operative industrial and production zones.

So too with the ports: up until now, redevelopment programmes in port areas, have invested in disused areas, creating parks (e.g. Baltimore, San Francisco, Barcelona, Genoa); the Port-side park of Yokoama or South Cove in Manhattan are gardens and places for leisure. In some large ports (e.g. Hamburg, Rotterdam) there are ferry information systems and services for visitors to the harbour. However, it is still not enough. In its operative reality, the port remains impenetrable, an estranged body and its space isn't a 'landscape'. In the port 'landscape' is denied: its separation from the city and land impedes its recognition and use.

Parks as a strategy

A great question regarding 'landscape' is posed by the situation of territorial disorder, lack of identity and homogeneity.

'Landscape' means increasing reconnection and reintegration of the separate parts of dispersed areas. It means re-entering the greater geographical and environmental systems of territorial and urban politics. Park landscapes have the responsibility of spreading a network of natural components into dense cities, or into the sparser urban areas. Parks increase, not only the environmental component, but also the cultural one, thus making the heritage which they represent more accessible. In this way, landscape becomes an important parameter in the evaluation of plans and projects.

Guidelines

for the port park

A park is intended to transform a port space into a landscape, making it recognisable by form, functional elements, infrastructure and operative processes.

Françoise Choy, during a lecture on traditional urban parks, highlighted their important role in 'consciousnesses'. From the heart of the city, the park communicates the temporal dimension of natural processes. This function is at the base of the notion of parks, and that of port parks.

The port's identity exists and finds its roots in this exchange and location. And, at the same time, it becomes a part of a global circuit. Understanding this double identity means entering into a complex system, made of both natural and artificial elements. The port is also linked to the city's cultural heritage and the environmental renewal of the coast. The understanding of intertwined economic, transportation, cultural and environmental facets is needed to transform an anonymous, separate territory into a park, a landscape. In moving in this direction, the port is no longer just a nexus of transportation and urban centrality, but also an environmental and cultural network.

Something of the sort is beginning to develop: it is evident in the new proposals made for waterfront re-development. Port planning could also be orientated in this direction - for example, in the perspective given in the Guidelines for port planning: a specific subsphere of intervention in interactive city-port areas is indicated as an area where port activities could be made more compatible with urban areas, and the city could reunite with its port. And in cases where it is impossible

to distinguish interacting and overlapping areas, the urban centres themselves could open towards the port.

The point is to not interfere with port operations. There is a correspondence between protected natural park areas and port park: the former is an integrated reserve, so too, the port park needs to be individuated and delineated into operative areas of the port and separate 'park' areas.

However, the port park refuses to be organized into physical zones; rather it is a network system: an infrastructural and environmental network to be included in ordinary urban planning or even at a more operative level in the political arena of public works. At the base of the ideas presented herein about 'parks', is the proposal of 'port' as a public resource. It is to be valued and developed both economically and functionally, but also to be paid back in full.