

The eccentric outsider: Or, why Reyner Banham dismissed Giuseppe Samonà's mega-project for the University of Cagliari

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ABSTRACT

In 1976, Reyner Banham summarised megastructure as a mixture of pragmatism and lack of ideology, and he attributed the origin of such qualities to British architects – from Cedric Price to Archigram and their celebration of technology for a nomadic *homo ludens*. On this point, he contrasted the Italian mega-architecture of the same period, dismissing it for its political collusions and figurative anxiety. While it is a truism that postwar Italian architectural discourse was imbued with political ideology, Banham's dismissal purposely ignores the intricacies of a period still awaiting thorough international reconsideration, besides a few widely recognised seminal texts by the likes of Manfredo Tafuri, Aldo Rossi and Leonardo Benevolo. By reviewing a neglected project – Giuseppe Samonà's University of Cagliari – whose gigantism compares to any of Banham's examples, this essay digs into a chapter of postwar architecture that ultimately escapes an easy classification in the history of megastructure as narrated by the British historian.

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KEYWORDS

Reyner Banham; Giuseppe Samonà; Città Territorio; Tertiary Society; Italian Postwar Architecture

Introduction: Banham’s hasty dismissal

Running through the history of 1960s architectural megalomania is an Anglo-American-Japanese axis that bears the label of pragmatism as a counter to the collusion of architecture with political ideology. More than Fumihiko Maki’s first elaborations on the topic in 1964,¹ it was Reyner Banham’s book, *Megastructure: urban futures of the recent past* (1976), that essentially contributed to such codification.² After opening his narrative with Le Corbusier’s scheme for Fort l’Empereur in Algiers (1931) – ‘a true ancestor of megastructure because of its seemingly unlimited length and the clear distinction between the main permanent structure and the infill housing adapted to individual needs’³ – and reviewing some older antecedents – from Florence’s Ponte Vecchio to the George Washington Bridge in New York – Banham adopted a decisively celebratory tone towards the contribution of 1960s British architectural culture to the ultimate definition of megastructure.

According to Banham, it was in Britain that three fundamental aspects came together to define a climax for the concept, after which the road could only descend towards sterile, scholastic repetition. The first was of a technological nature, which he supported by the claim that Cedric Price’s Fun Palace was, first and foremost, an adventure in structural detailing. Notwithstanding its contrast to the first aspect, the second was related to the *enfants terribles* of British megastructuralism, namely Archigram and their apparent ‘sheer manic pleasure in proliferating drawings’⁴ regardless of their feasibility in the real world. Finally, and most importantly for Banham, the British confirmed that megastructure needed an ideal inhabitant and that, as first formulated by Constant Nieuwenhuys, this would be *homo ludens* – the subject of a leisure-based society.⁵

Banham summarised the climax of megastructure as the celebration of ‘the absence of any explicit ideology [that] was found disturbing, or at least baffling, outside Britain’.⁶ It was on this point that he could contrast what he considered to be proper megastructure to the megalomania of much Italian architectural production of the same period. Banham’s argument characterised some of the Italian production as mere academic mimicry of the likes of Archigram (with particular reference to the teaching of Leonardo Savioli in Florence), while also emphasising the collusions with politics that, in Banham’s view, deprived the Italian

1. Fumihiko Maki, *Investigations in collective form* (St Louis: Washington University, 1964).

2. Reyner Banham, *Megastructure: urban futures of the recent past* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

3. *Ibid.*, 8.

4. *Ibid.*, 84.

5. *Ibid.*, 81.

6. *Ibid.*, 84.



FIG. 1 Vittorio Gregotti et al. Competition project for the University of Florence (1970–71). Preparatory sketch of general plan. (Archivio Gregotti)

architectural responses of any value other than that of political ideology.

The latter argument was most clearly stated in the comments to the competition scheme for the University of Florence designed by Vittorio Gregotti, one of the Italian projects selected for 'Megastructure in Academe' [Fig. 1], the seventh chapter of Banham's book and one devoted to mega-projects for university spaces:

It became clear that, behind an overt intention to unify the town-planning futures of the entire territory between Florence and Pistoia, there was a less clearly articulated one to give left-wing municipalities along this line dominion over the pockets of Christian Democratic territory in between.

[...] Without knowing of this background of radical quasi-political intentions, one might easily suspect that projects such as these were merely expressions of a desire to impose a regular formal order, above all a monumental order of heroic scale, on the unruly countryside and the sprawling town. Even allowing that these political ambitions are there, however, the dominance of formal interests seems overwhelmingly strong, arousing the suspicion [...] that for these Italian megastructuralists the main function of social revolution would be to enable them to realize purely aesthetic ambitions that were thwarted under existing regimes.⁷

As a baseline, Banham's diagnosis makes perfect sense. If anything, it is largely a truism that postwar Italian architectural discourse was imbued with political ideology from across the leftist spectrum. Moreover, little sympathy for Italian architectural culture could be expected from someone who accused it of a retreat from modernism, igniting a notorious architectural dispute between the UK and Italy in the late 1950s.⁸ In fact, the generous number of pages that Banham devoted to Italian mega-architecture fully intended to contrast it to pragmatism – a pragmatism understood by Banham as one that affirmed appreciation of the opportunities that would enable a technological society to be finally free from adherence to one place and to enjoy the pleasures of nomadism.

Regardless of the correctness of Banham's argument, his hasty dismissal of Italian mega-production as located on the ambiguous dividing line of form and politics ignores a considerable amount of complexity. And in general, architectural historiography still awaits the full reconsideration of a fertile period in Italian architectural theorisation of which only a few products are internationally known – products, moreover, that provide a very partial reading of a much wider discourse that developed between the late 1950s and the early 1970s.⁹

This essay aims to start filling the gap by elaborating more deeply on a chapter of mega-architectural thinking that was left outside Banham's reading and that constitutes a blank spot in the international reception of the work and debate developed by the Italian city-territorialists, as Banham called them in his book.¹⁰

7. *Ibid.*, 148.

8. Reyner Banham, 'Neoliberty: The Italian retreat from modern architecture', *The Architectural Review* 125 (1959): 230–35; Ernesto Nathan Rogers, 'L'evoluzione dell'architettura: risposta al custode dei frigidaires', *Casabella-Continuità*, no. 228 (1959): 2–4.

9. Among the most popular written products were, for example: Leonardo Benevolo, *Le origini dell'urbanistica moderna* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1963), English translation *The origins of modern town planning* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967); Aldo Rossi, *L'architettura della città* (Padua: Marsilio, 1966), English translation *The architecture of the city* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982); Manfredo Tafuri, *Progetto e utopia: architettura e sviluppo capitalistico* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1973), English translation *Architecture and utopia: design and capitalist development* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976).

10. An exception that offers a good way into the Italian postwar architectural debate on city-territories that centred on the work of Aldo Rossi is Mary Louise Lobsinger, 'The new urban scale in Italy: On Aldo Rossi's *L'architettura della città*', *Journal of Architectural Education* 59, no. 3 (February 2006), 28–38.

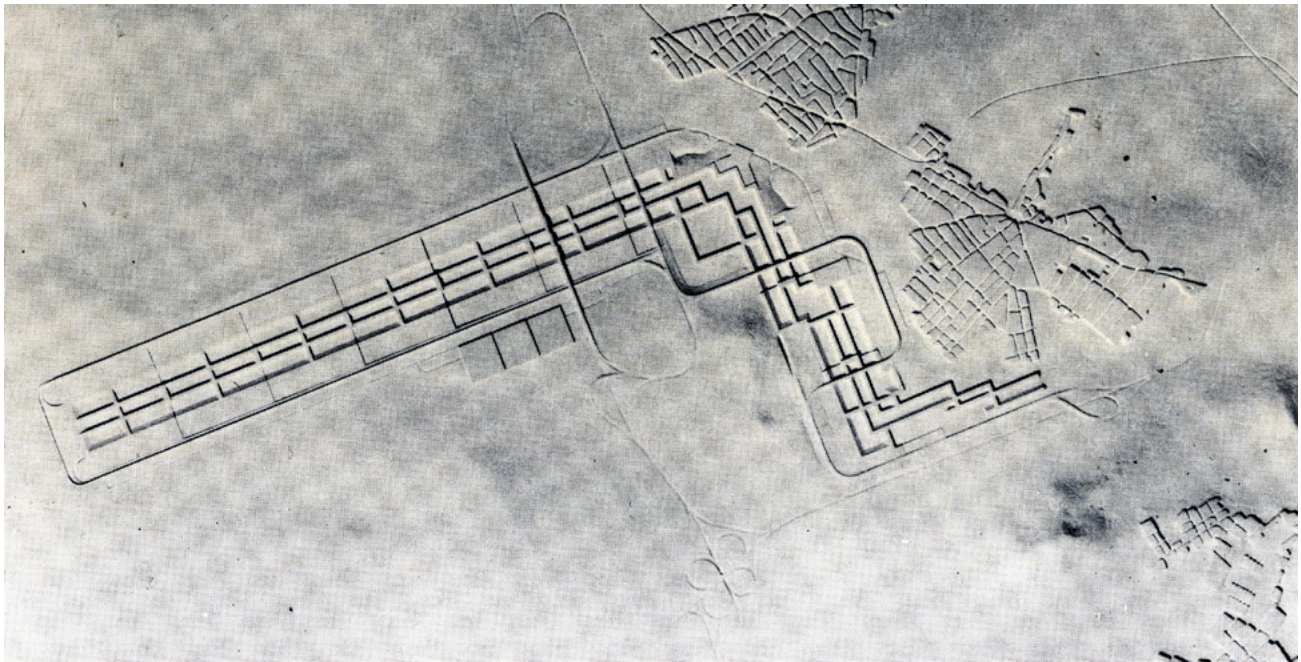


FIG. 2 Giuseppe Samonà et al. Competition project for the University of Cagliari (1971–72). General model. (CSAC Parma, Archivio Samonà)

An inverted monument. Giuseppe Samonà’s competition project for the University of Cagliari

Rescuing a project from oblivion offers a useful way into grasping some of the complexities and contradictions of the Italian approach to mega-architecture. If there is a single project that is notably absent in Banham’s Italian selection – and, more generally, in the mentioned ‘Megastructure in Academe’ chapter – it is indubitably the 1971–72 competition scheme for the University of Cagliari designed by Giuseppe Samonà and his associates [Fig. 2].¹¹

In terms of gigantism Samonà’s project is largely unsurpassed among its peers. Compared to it, even the heroism of Erikson and Massey’s 1963 Simon Fraser University, or, to stay within the Italian selection, of Gregotti’s three-kilometre-long bridge-like University of Calabria,¹² appear almost timid gestures [Fig. 3].

In response to a brief that asked for the university to be relocated from being a scattered presence inside the city fabric to a dense complex on a peripheral 400-hectare area, Samonà proposed to fill up the entire site with an ‘inverted monument’ – as described by Carlo Doglio, the sociologist-urbanist who collaborated on the project.¹³

The university was designed as an excavation in the ground, with roofs

11. The team included comprised Giuseppe Samonà (team leader), Cesare Airoldi, Cristiana Bedoni, Mariella Di Falco, Gheta Farfaglio, Reiana Lucci, Alberto Samonà, Livia Toccafondi, Egle Tricatanò, M. Alberto Chiolino, Carlo Doglio, and Francesco Frattini. The project received the second prize in the competition and was published alongside other entries in *Controspazio* 3 (1973), 20–29.

12. Francesco Zuddas, ‘The idea of the università’, *AA Files*, no. 75 (2017): 119–131.

13. Carlo Doglio, ‘L’essenza sarda e l’università come fenomeno’, in Giuseppe Samonà et al, ‘Concorso nazionale per il piano urbanistico di sistemazione della sede dell’Università di Cagliari: relazione illustrativa dei concetti informatori della proposta, con le fasi e i metodi di realizzazione e il piano finanziario di massima’, 1972, Samonà 1 pro/1/069, Università IUAV – Archivio Progetti, Fondo Giuseppe e Alberto Samonà.

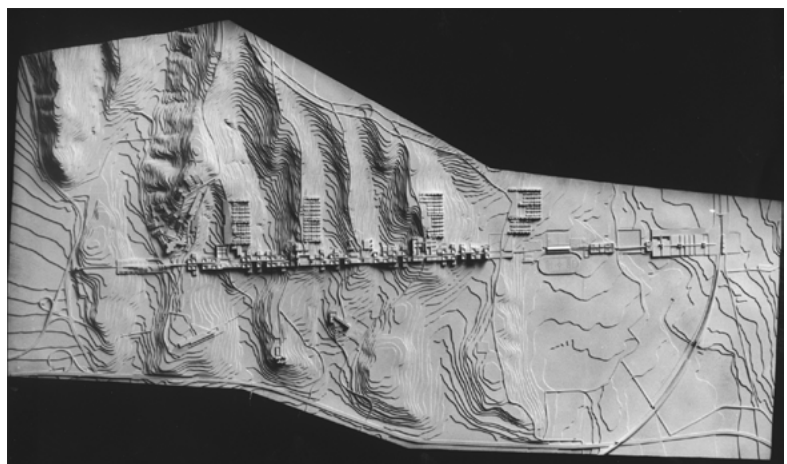


FIG. 3 Vittorio Gregotti et al. Competition project for the University of Calabria (1972–74). Model. (Archivio Gregotti)

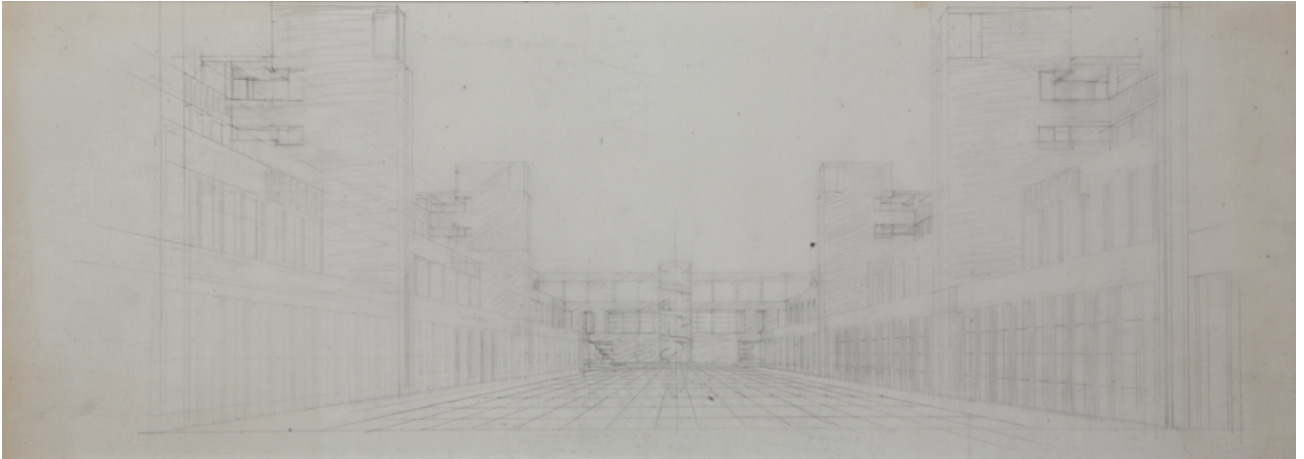


FIG. 4 Giuseppe Samonà et al. Competition project for the University of Cagliari (1971–72). Preparatory sketch of interior courtyard. (CSAC Parma, Archivio Samonà)

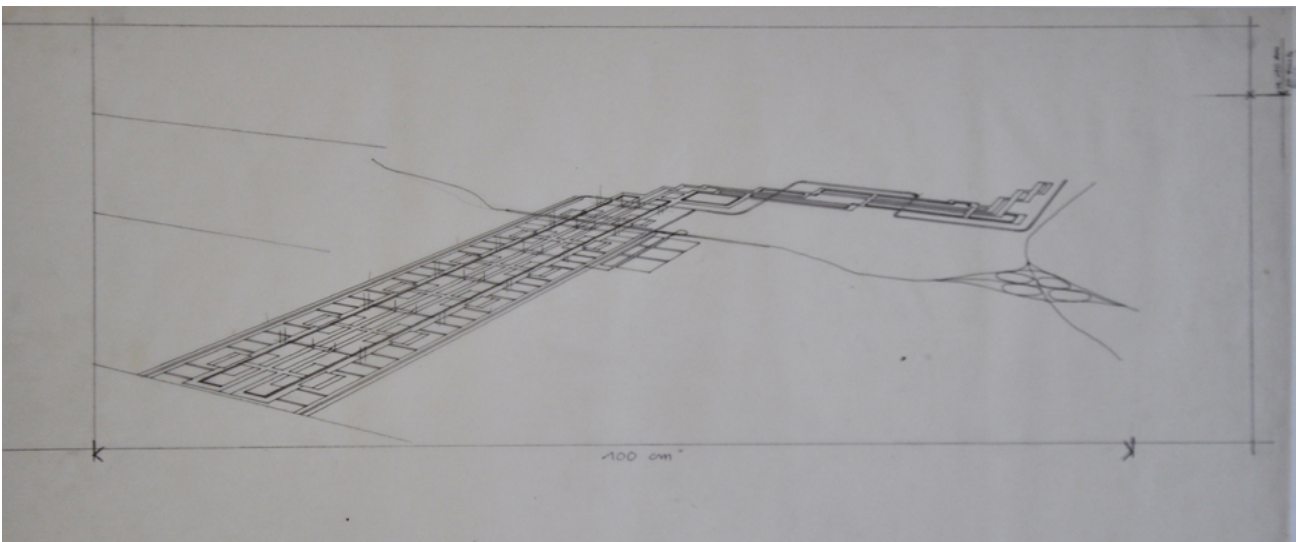


FIG. 5 Giuseppe Samonà et al. Competition project for the University of Cagliari (1971–72). Preparatory sketch of bird's eye view. (CSAC Parma, Archivio Samonà)

being a continuation of the surrounding rural landscape. It defined an unmistakable pocket of formal order extending over five kilometres in length and kept within a fixed, staggered section of 300 metres in width. A repetitive sequence of courtyards disrupted the monotony of this linear settlement, breaking down a figure that was clearly intended to be seen from the air into a sequencing of spaces to be experienced at eye level – or humanistically, so to speak [Figg. 4-5]. The dialogue of views from above and from eye level characterised the competition drawings, rendering a piece of perfect order that apparently responded to Banham's diagnosis of an Italian fixation with formal interests which aimed to 'realize purely aesthetic ambitions that were thwarted under existing regimes'.¹⁴

Yet, of the three cornerstones of megastructure listed by Banham, Samonà's project at most aligned with the second – the sheer pleasure of drawing as an autonomous reality – although the charge of enjoyment lying behind a Plug-in City is hardly comparable to the black-and-white, more traditional drawings for Cagliari. What is certain is that the project did not respond to either of the other two points indicated by the British historian, for neither was it an essay in technological detailing nor did it

14. Banham, *Megastructure*, 148.

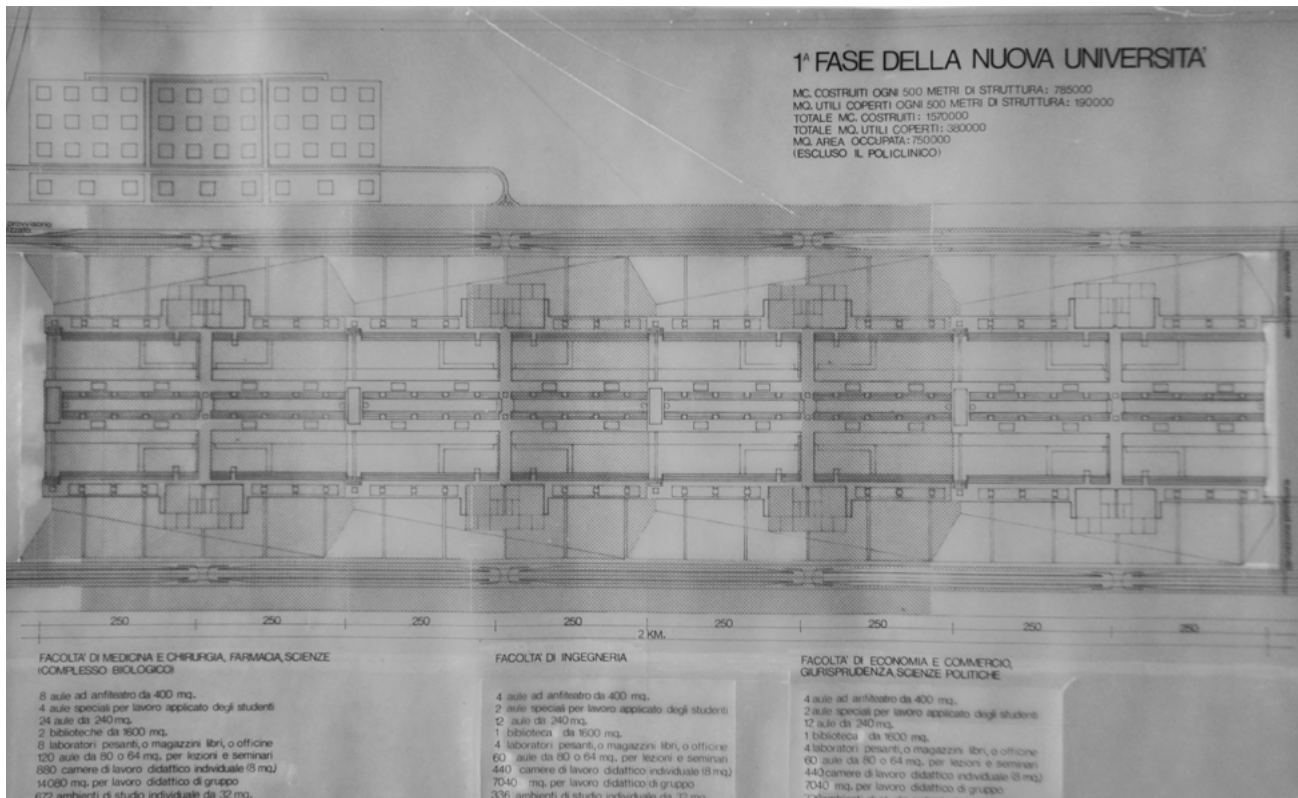


FIG. 6 Giuseppe Samonà et al. Competition project for the University of Cagliari (1971–72). Plan of first phase of development. (CSAC Parma, Archivio Samonà)

aim to produce a city for ‘man at play’. In relation to the latter, Archigram’s dream of a walking city was an ultimate declaration of willingness to escape from the city as it existed. Samonà’s response could not be more different, and his decision to dig a new piece of city from its ground was a metaphorical statement about not aiming to go anywhere. Moreover, his ideal inhabitant was a much less playful one: not *homo ludens*, but tertiary man – a prototypical office worker likely to be subsumed under a daily routine.

This last point emerges from the written pages submitted by Samonà alongside the competition panels, where he described a settlement only temporarily associated with educational functions.¹⁵ The long-term intention of the project was, in fact, to give new orderly premises to a whole range of tertiary activities that would be relocated over time from the city centre into a large service complex. The linear logic of the scheme tied into this objective, with stretches of varying length associated with different activities – from specific academic disciplines to regional offices, banks, and other administrative functions. In Samonà’s vision, this linear organisation would eventually see the university ‘disappear, absorbing and being absorbed by renovated services within which it will play a propulsive, enlivening role’.¹⁶ University students would thus find themselves as workers among other workers, their learning depending as much on traditional taught curricula as on the professional and professionalising environment in which they operated each day [Fig. 6].

15. Giuseppe Samonà et al., ‘Concorso nazionale per il piano urbanistico di sistemazione della sede dell’Università di Cagliari. Relazione illustrativa dei concetti informativi della proposta, con le fasi e i metodi di realizzazione e il piano finanziario di massima’, 1972. Samonà 1.pro/1/069, Università luav – Archivio Progetti, Fondo Giuseppe e Alberto Samonà.

16. Samonà et al., ‘Concorso nazionale per il piano urbanistico di sistemazione della sede dell’Università di Cagliari’, 16.

To understand the project as an argument about tertiary society, it is necessary to take an excursus into the context from which it emerged as a different take on megastructure. Before focusing on Samonà's own theses on urbanism, I will first review some key ideas about a tertiary society from the 1960s Italian postwar debate on the city, since they revolved around a few central notions of which Samonà himself was a fundamental initiator: *nuova dimensione urbana*, *città regione*, and *città territorio*. These linked to some important applicative test beds – *quartieri*, *centri direzionali*, and *centri universitari*¹⁷ – that succeeded one another between the early 1950s and early 1970s. These test beds were the spatial products through which the Italian architectural community aimed to prove a thesis that can be summarised thus: the expanding urban condition of the postwar years required the cultivation of a critical conscience, and this could be reached by means of exemplary, public, large-scale architectural interventions set against the prospect of private-led urban growth. Postulates to the thesis were that architects could play a central role and, relatedly, that architecture and urbanism had to be considered as one and the same thing.

Italy, 1960s: A new urban dimension

The story of the Italian postwar architectural debate has been narrated many times, mostly for an exclusively Italian audience.¹⁸ Almost all historical accounts agree that pivotal for the formulation of an Italian architectural approach to urban growth were three events in 1959: a congress, a competition, and a book. Covering the whole spectrum of the architectural profession, from diagnosis and theorisation to proposal, the seventh Congress of the Italian Institute of Urbanism (INU), the competition for the neighbourhood Barene di San Giuliano, and Giuseppe Samonà's book *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città negli stati europei* concurred to solidify the figure of the architect as a critical antagonist to a growing cohort of technocratic planners. Already in an essay of 1964, Manfredo Tafuri signalled these three events as emblems of the crucial intellectual switch within Italian architectural discourse on the city during the passage from the 1950s to the 1960s.¹⁹

Resisting an urbanistic approach based on numbers, codes and protocols became, in fact, a key concern for many Italian architects in the early 1960s who advocated continuity with early modernist architecture's capacity to move across scales from the building to the city – a capacity they believed had been lost after the war. The urgency of reconstruction, coupled with demographic changes and increasing migrations from the countryside to the urban areas,²⁰ made multi-scalar thinking in the postwar period an imperative to cope with the exhausted ideas of the 'city'.

17. Mario Ferrari, *Il progetto urbano in Italia: 1940–1990* (Florence: Alinea, 2005).

18. Among the numerous references, three useful titles are: Manfredo Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana, 1944–1985* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986); Cina Conforto et al., *Il dibattito architettonico in Italia, 1945–1975* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1977); Mario Ferrari, *Il progetto urbano in Italia: 1940–1990* (Florence: Alinea, 2005).

19. Manfredo Tafuri, 'Teoria e critica nella cultura urbanistica italiana del dopoguerra', in *La città territorio: un esperimento didattico sul centro direzionale di Centocelle in Roma*, ed. Carlo Aymonino (Bari: Leonardo da Vinci editrice, 1964), 39–45.

20. Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989).

This urgency was first highlighted at a roundtable discussion held during the seventh urbanists congress in Lecce,²¹ at which Ludovico Quaroni and Giancarlo De Carlo conversed about a 'changed scale of human life and of the urban scene'²² and declared the inappropriateness of the dichotomist thinking that traditionally opposed city and countryside. Unlike other advanced industrial economies, Italy was still at an early stage in its path towards massive urbanisation. Therefore, while a posteriori remedial practices were necessary elsewhere – such as in the megalopolis of the 'northeastern seaboard of the United States' that had been famously observed by Jean Gottman in 1961,²³ or in the large European metropolises of London and Paris – Italy could count on the benefit of time to develop solutions ahead of catastrophe. Quaroni and De Carlo were among the first to claim that architecture was capable of directing a process of urbanisation in which city and countryside merged in an orderly way through the guidance of public authorities.

The congress was also an important occasion for self-criticism, which particularly involved Quaroni on a personal level. A leading figure in Italian architecture since the 1940s, and around whom many younger architects clustered in the postwar years,²⁴ Quaroni had been among the designers of new housing complexes that proliferated in the 1950s across the urban peripheries widely depicted in Italian neo-realist movies and novels from the period. His own Quartiere Tiburtino in Rome, designed with Mario Ridolfi in 1949, became the urbanistic equivalent of neo-realism and demonstrated a willingness to apply the rationalising power of modernism to a renovation of popular and vernacular architecture and its associated traditional social bond. Among the most publicised products of what came to be baptised the 'politics of the neighbourhood' (*politica del quartiere*), the philosophy that grounded Tiburtino and many other satellite neighbourhoods built throughout Italian cities under the auspices of a national housing programme (INA Casa²⁵) came under attack from its own creator by the late 1950s. In 1957, Quaroni criticised the ideology behind the new complexes, which handled the city through finite elements that pretentiously promoted social self-sufficiency.²⁶ 'On the way to the city, we stopped in the village',²⁷ he claimed, providing a written description of the desolate images of new housing complexes that constituted the background for much of the *oeuvre* of Pier Paolo Pasolini, Vittorio De Sica, and Federico Fellini. A major factor triggering Quaroni's critique was that the isolation of the new complexes was not neutral; rather, acting as magnets of private development they destructively impacted on the processes of urbanisation. Reassessing the ideology of these *quartieri* thus implied a more general reconsideration of the role of public authority planning in the face of rampant private speculation.

At the 1959 roundtable, Quaroni reiterated this criticism and sketched the main outlines of a different approach to urbanisation. In the new urban dimension, he maintained, architecture was called on to develop

21. The proceedings of the congress were published in *Urbanistica*, no. 32 (1960).

22. Ludovico Quaroni et al., 'Tavola rotonda', *Urbanistica*, no. 32 (1960): 7. Translated by the author.

23. Jean Gottman, *Megalopolis: the urbanized northeastern seaboard of the United States* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1961).

24. **Manfredo Tafuri, Ludovico Quaroni e lo sviluppo dell'architettura moderna in Italia** (Milan: Edizioni di Comunita, 1946); **Ludovico Quaroni: architettura per cinquant'anni** (Rome: Gangemi, 1985).

25. Pier Giovanni Bardelli, Rinaldo Capomolla, and Rosalia Vittorini, eds., *L'architettura INA Casa (1949–1963): aspetti e problemi di conservazione e recupero* (Rome: Gangemi, 2003). For a recent reading of the Italian postwar housing projects, see Carlo Melograni, *Architetture nell'Italia della ricostruzione: modernità versus modernizzazione 1945–1960* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2015).

26. Ludovico Quaroni, 'Politica del quartiere', *La Casa* 4 (1957).

27. Ludovico Quaroni, 'Il paese dei barocchi', *Casabella*, no. 215 (1957): 24. Translated by the author.

a cultural project still grounded in a humanistic approach but not one that should intend anachronistic ideal communities. The reason for this was that the main subject of planning had changed from the village peasant – part of a tight community network – to an urban human being who had been ‘left alone’.²⁸ This change required the creation of environments capable of guaranteeing ‘maximum sociability, solitude, freedom, and individual responsibility’,²⁹ giving reason to file away the self-contained *quartiere* and switch instead towards novel ideas. Quaroni thus started talking of *piano processo* (plan-process) and *opera aperta* (open work) as more vaguely defined formal statements that could interpret the ultimate instability of a new urban society.³⁰

Not surprisingly, Quaroni himself authored the project that first envisaged the switch from the formal stability of the earlier *quartieri* to an ‘aesthetics of indeterminism’ – as Manfredo Tafuri described his competition winning entry for the new neighbourhood at Barene di San Giuliano, on the mainland facing Venice.³¹ The project depicted large crescent structures between which a thinner fabric was sketched with an intentional lack of peculiarity and definition. With Quaroni’s project, Tafuri observed, urban design switched from the demarcation of definitive spatial configurations to the design of relations. The normative role of the architectural drawing was relatedly changed from one of complete formal definition to one of specification of selected relations between main components within an overall system that was ultimately left open to successive ad hoc detailing [Fig. 7].

Inherent to Quaroni’s drawings was the intention of smoothing the edges between humanism and visionary modernism. Therefore, the door was potentially still open for the vernacular to dwell between the monuments of a new urban dimension that elected as its main cultural reference the famous geographical visions imagined by Le Corbusier for North Africa and South America in the late 1920s and early 1930s – the very images that Banham selected to open his book on megastructure. Yet, Banham’s emphasis on the dyad of permanent structure and temporary infill was not the main preoccupation of the Italian architects who looked at that specific stage of Le Corbusier’s *oeuvre* and made it a

28. Ludovico Quaroni et al., ‘Tavola rotonda’, 7. Translated by the author.

29. Ibid. Translated by the author.

30. Tafuri, *Storia dell’architettura Italiana*, 96.



FIG. 7

Ludovico Quaroni et al. Competition project for Barene di San Giuliano (1959). Bird's eye view. (From Casabella 242 [1960])

31. Ibid. My translation. The competition projects were published in *Casabella*, no. 242 (1960) and *Urbanistica*, no. 31 (1960).

constant presence in the Italian debate on the new urban condition. Either in words or drawings, the geographical visions of Le Corbusier populated the pages of early 1960s issues of *Casabella*, as well as the writings of Carlo Aymonino, Manfredo Tafuri, Vittorio Gregotti and Giuseppe Samonà, among others. Samonà, in particular, used them as the counter images to the mainstream attitude of coping with urban growth by dreaming of harmonious communities set in peaceful continuity with the countryside, which constituted the main target of attack in his book *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città negli stati europei* – the third and final milestone of 1959.³²

From Carlo Doglio to Giuseppe Samonà: Setting the Italy/UK divide

The director of the Institute of Architecture in Venice (IUAV) since 1945, Samonà might be credited with inventing the term 'new urban dimension', which he used in the title of one of his articles – also written in 1959³³ – and became the general topic of his book, hailed by Quaroni as 'the first Italian book on urbanism'.³⁴ Centred on a critique of the idea of the garden city, Samonà's book owed an important debt to the work of Carlo Doglio, a sociologist with anarchist tendencies whom Samonà had appointed professor at IUAV. In 1953, Doglio had published the essay 'L'equivoco della città giardino'³⁵ (The garden city's misunderstanding), in which he criticised the garden city movement as a technocratic act that merely 'worked' but was not fired by the socialist charge that had moved the likes of William Morris, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen – notwithstanding the enthusiastic appraisal of the movement by his fellow sociologist Lewis Mumford. Doglio's essay thus played an important role in setting the intellectual distance between an Anglo-American way of coping with the nexus of industrialisation and urbanisation and what eventually emerged as a reclaimed original Italian position on the same topic.

In Ebenezer Howard's idea of the garden city and its American application – the work of Clarence Stein and Henry Wright – Mumford, hailing Howard as 'the first modern thinker about cities who has a sound sociological conception of the dynamics of rational urban growth',³⁶ had found the antidote to the uncontrolled megalopolis. Conversely, Doglio claimed that the garden city merely remained at the level of a financial scheme with no real social ideology.³⁷ Its success was because it was a perfect technical formula, but societally it could only reinforce an affluent middle class rather than propose a more equitable society.³⁸ The 'misunderstanding' that Doglio pointed out in the reception of the garden city idea had long-lasting consequences, for its impact was not limited to the work of Stein and Wright or its British predecessors Parker and Unwin, but went on to become the core of mid-twentieth-century planning ideology, finding in the British new towns its main formulation. Following Doglio, Samonà similarly condemned the garden city/new towns ideology

32. Giuseppe Samonà, *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città negli stati europei* (Bari: Laterza, 1959).

33. Giuseppe Samonà, 'La nuova dimensione della città', *Urbanistica Conversazioni*, (1959).

34. Ludovico Quaroni, review of Giuseppe Samonà, *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città negli stati europei*, in *Casabella*, no. 236 (1960). Translated by the author.

35. Carlo Doglio, *L'equivoco della città giardino* (Naples: RL, 1953). Doglio's essay was published in part in *Urbanistica*, no. 13 (1953). It was republished as Carlo Doglio, *La città giardino* (Rome: Gangemi, 1985).

36. Lewis Mumford, *The culture of cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966; c.1938), 397–98.

37. Doglio, *L'equivoco della città giardino*, 32.

38. *Ibid.*, 34.

as technocracy hidden under a cloak of socialism. He reworded Doglio by claiming that this ideology approached the city from the outside rather than from within the urban problematic. As such, it promoted only an exile from the city as the logical response to the problems of congestion and falling living standards that were afflicting metropolises under the pressures of industrialisation. Samonà condemned Howard's proposal as an expression of bourgeois culture that found a way of adapting to the exploding processes of urbanisation by defining an ideal form of settlement that deceitfully promised the harmonious balancing of dwelling and workplace.³⁹ A middle class of professional workers thus started shaping a new city that merely resulted in the delocalisation of residential and industrial areas to outlying sites.

Samonà went on to discuss how this process had accelerated during the postwar years when an 'exceeding population' and 'non-homogeneous activities' became the basic tropes of an urbanistic discourse that revealed itself as trapped within an overall inability to deal with a pervasive urban condition. This inability was demonstrated by the decentralisation that continued to be conceived as a remedial practice for urban congestion based on the anachronistic distinction between the interior of what was traditionally called the city and its exterior, the countryside. Claiming that 'the urbanistic problems of the city cannot be solved within its walls', Samonà warned that a different understanding of decentralisation was needed, and that the urban had to be discussed in terms of 'relationships between large structures'.⁴⁰ It was on this claim that the alternative ideas of *città regione* and *città territorio* were elaborated in the early 1960s as the intellectual categories to design Italy's urban future.

Città regione or città territorio?

Initially used synonymously, *città regione* and *città territorio* were gradually absorbed within two opposing forces that increasingly became distanced from one another in a common search for approaches to the new urban dimension. Whereas the former remained the flag of Italian planners, the latter became associated with a response to the new urban dimension sustained by architects who emphasised physical form over regulations and codes.

Città regione tied into the wider ideas of regional planning that were internationally debated in the 1950s and had, again, a main proponent in Lewis Mumford. Since the 1940s, Mumford had been claiming that 'what the clotted metropolis did in the past, the region will have to do in the future', defining the regional city as 'a congeries of cities, big and small, including hamlets, villages, and townships'.⁴¹ Mumford's ideas were popularised in Italy via Adriano Olivetti's magazine *Comunità* that, in 1957, published Mumford's article 'La nascita della città regionale'.⁴² They were echoed in the work of a group of planners who constituted the Centro di Studi e

39. Samonà, *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire*, 12.

40. *Ibid.*, 91. Translated by the author.

41. Lewis Mumford, 'A new regional plan to arrest megalopolis', *Architectural Record* 137, no. 3 (1965), 153.

42. Mumford's ideas were popularised in articles published in *Comunità*: 'L'unità di quartiere' (*Comunità* 24 [1954]), 'La nascita della città regionale' (*Comunità* 55 [1957]), and 'La via d'uscita umana' (*Comunità* 83 [1960]).

Piani Economici (from here on abbreviated as Centro Piani), a research centre based in Rome. In the 1960s, Centro Piani produced the first and second National Economic Plans, early instances of strategic planning that sketched a large-scale restructuring of the Italian territory according to a scenario of linear cities set within vast expanses of parkland that was as ambitious as it was generic.⁴³ Centro Piani aligned with Samonà's claim that the problems of cities could no longer be resolved from their interior. Yet, they ignored the possibility of formal experimentation, which was an inextricable part of Samonà's argument in defence of a unity between architecture and urbanism. Against it, they borrowed from the French to categorically state that 'Le style viendra par sucroit'⁴⁴ – style will come later.

This assumption created a wall that divided the technocrats – as the members of Centro Piani came to be regarded with scorn – and the architect–urbanists who argued for the centrality of architectural form in the definition of a new urban dimension. Among the latter was Aldo Rossi, whose article 'Nuovi problemi' (New problems), published in *Casabella* in 1962, clearly opposed the views of Centro Piani and reclaimed for the architect the role of 'defining spatial order for a changing reality, and creating forms capable of interpreting the new condition'.⁴⁵ Diagnosing the city as an entity made of parts – an idea that would be central to his most famous theoretical contribution, *The architecture of the city* (1966) – Rossi joined Quaroni's criticism against the 1950s practice of dislocating and dispersing discreet residential compounds. He argued instead for a massive scalar leap:

Shopping centres, universities, cultural centres and public buildings will all regain their formal importance: they will be the monuments of a vast metropolitan territory marked by an impressive public transport network capable of augmenting and multiplying movement, contacts, and participation of every man according to the spirit of the new city.⁴⁶

Rossi's list of new monuments hinted at the growing importance of service infrastructure for an urban civilisation. His article preceded by a few months the launch of a competition in Turin in 1963, when Italian architects (Rossi included) first confronted one another on the possible architectural formats for a

43. Centro Piani was a not-for-profit association comprising planners, engineers, economists, sociologists, geographers and other professional figures whose aim was to develop an 'integrated approach' to planning. See Franco Archibugi, ed., *La città regione in Italia* (Turin: Boringhieri, 1966); and Cristina Renzoni, *Il Progetto '80: un'idea di paese nell'Italia degli anni sessanta* (Florence: Alinea, 2012).

44. A. Massé, *Prevision et prospective*, quoted in Francesco Sirugo, 'Città e regione nello sviluppo storico della città industriale', in *La città regione in Italia*, ed. Franco Archibugi (Turin: Boringhieri, 1966), 113.

45. Aldo Rossi, 'Nuovi problemi', *Casabella*, no. 264 (1962), 4. Translated by the author.

46. *Ibid.*, 6. Translated by the author.

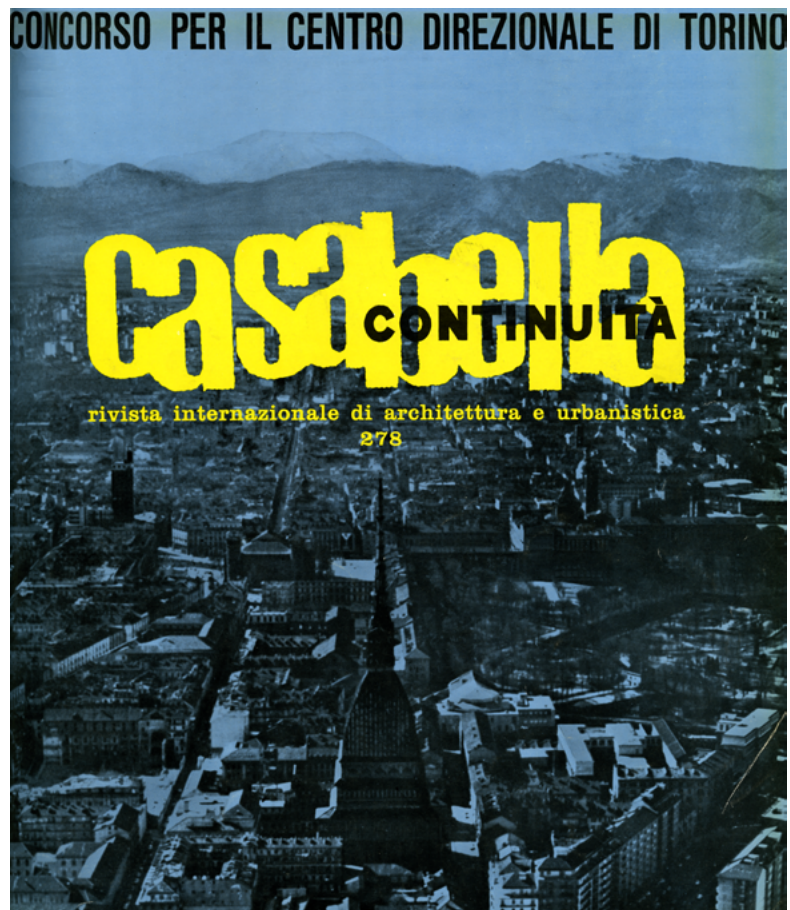


FIG. 8

Competition for a Centro Direzionale in Turin, 1963. Cover page and inner pages of the projects by Ludovico Quaroni, Giuseppe Samonà, Carlo Aymonino, AUA. (From *Casabella* 278 [1963])

service infrastructure catered to an expanded urban territory [Fig. 8].

Such infrastructure took the name of *centro direzionale*, which came to be conceived as the hinge between the space of dwelling and reproduction – the traditional city – and the space of production – the countryside – with the objective of abolishing this dichotomy. In turn, it was the apparatus that allowed an architectural definition of city territory opposed to the one proposed by planners – ‘the starting node of *città territorio*’ as Carlo Aymonino summarised it.⁴⁷ In other words, the architects’ idea of a city territory posited a physical condition that could be enabled through the initial rational reorganisation and concentration of all service activities necessary to serve both city and countryside, to eventually abolish their opposition by the creation of a vast urbanised territory.

The programmatic brief of the Turin competition required mixing on a 70-hectare site on the periphery of the city the headquarters of banks and corporations, the administration offices of national institutes, commercial and leisure activities, hotels and other complexes for collective living. The leading Italian architects confronted one another with operative solutions for this starting node of a possible city territory. Projects encompassed the towers-on-a-plinth presented in Quaroni’s winning entry to give a new ‘acropolis’ to Turin; Samonà’s indeterminate layering of horizontal slabs; Aymonino’s silos-like monuments, discussed by their author as a ‘living organism’;⁴⁸ Guido Canella’s earliest formulation of *fuori scala* that interpreted the *centro direzionale* as a continuation of the metropolitan infrastructural system;⁴⁹ the proposal by Architetti e Urbanisti Associati (AUA, which included a young Manfredo Tafuri) that more faithfully adhered to the 1960s international ideology of megastructure, as evidenced by the use of the A-section typical of many large-scale architectural visions of the time (something that did not elude Banham’s radar, since the project was included in his 1976 book⁵⁰); and the abstract gigantic cube of Aldo Rossi, Gianugo Polesello, and Luca Meda, ‘a project of architecture on a metropolitan scale, a radically urbanised architecture’⁵¹ that refused the complex articulations of the other entries and proposed instead an elementary form as a clear counterforce to the disorder of the urban periphery [Figg. 9-12].⁵²

In an article published alongside Rossi’s ‘Nuovi problemi’, and later reproduced in the book *La città territorio* (1964),⁵³ Aymonino elaborated on the term *centro direzionale*. Focusing on the adjective *direzionale*, he hinted at the existence of an objective wider than a mere functional mix in one location or under one roof. A *centro direzionale*, he argued, was a way of giving a new direction to a large-scale arrangement of the city, ‘an urban landscape that is different, freer, and more complex than the one produced by the brutal indifference of real estate speculation’.⁵⁴ In order to achieve this goal, it had to be placed within the realm of architectural

47. Carlo Aymonino, ‘Il sistema dei centri direzionali nella capitale’, *Casabella*, no. 264 (1962), 24. My translation. See also Carlo Aymonino, *I centri direzionali* (Bari: De Donato, 1967).

48. *Casabella*, no. 278 (1963), 28. Translated by the author.

49. Giorgio Ciucci, ‘L’architettura del fuoriscaia in Canella e Rossi’, in *Guido Canella, 1931–2009*, ed. Enrico Bordogna, Gentucca Canella, and Elvio Mangano (Milano: Angeli, 2014), 69–73.

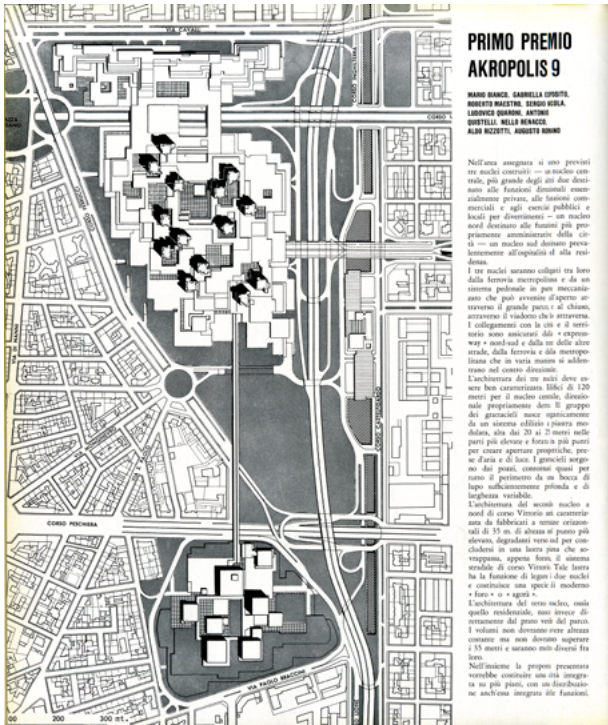
50. Banham, *Megastructure*, 68.

51. *Casabella*, no. 278 (1963): 48. Translated by the author.

52. Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The project of autonomy: politics and architecture within and against capitalism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 66–69.

53. Carlo Aymonino et al., eds., *La città territorio: un esperimento didattico sul centro direzionale di Centocelle in Roma* (Bari: Leonardo da Vinci editrice, 1964).

54. Aymonino, ‘Il sistema dei centri direzionali nella capitale’, 24. Translated by the author.



PRIMO PREMIO AKROPOLIS 9

MARIO BRUNCI, GABRIELLA SPINOLA,
ROBERTO BRUNETTI, ENZO BONA,
LUIGIO QUARINI, ANTONIO
QUINTELLI, NELLO RENARDI,
ALEX RICCIOTTI, ROBERTO RONCHI

Nell'area assegnata si sono previsti tre nuclei centrali — un nucleo centrale, più grande degli altri due destinati alle funzioni funzionali consentite — e altri tre nuclei per funzioni amministrative, scolastiche, culturali e sportive. I tre nuclei saranno collegati tra loro dalla famosa metropolitana e da un sistema pedonale in perenne movimento, il grande parco di chiese, attraverso il viale che attraversa. Il collegamento con la città e il territorio sono assicurati dalla « espressionista » metropoli e dalla rete stradale, dalla ferrovia e dalla metropolitana che va in continuo movimento nel centro direzionale.

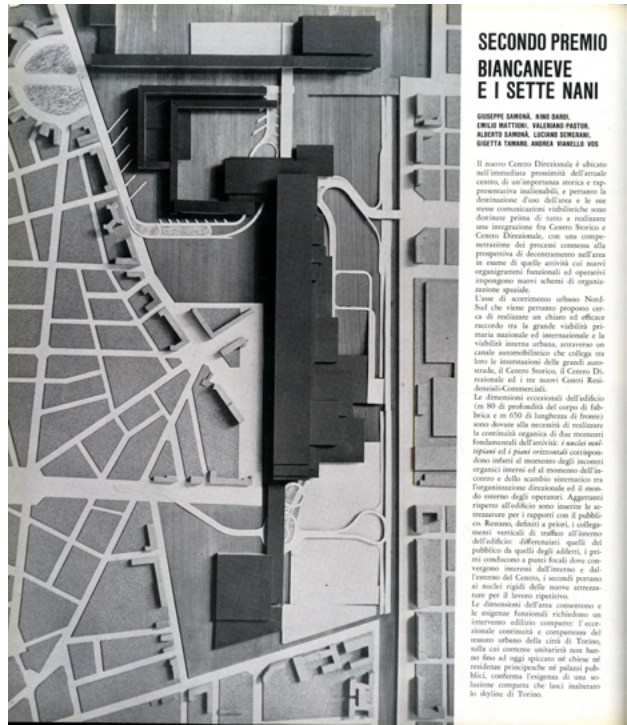
L'insediamento dei tre nuclei deve essere ben caratterizzato da una folla di 120 metri per il nucleo centrale, dall'altro, per il nucleo periferico. Il gruppo di grattacieli deve essere organizzato da un sistema edilizio a scala modulata, alta dai 20 ai 70 metri nelle parti più elevate e finita in più parti per creare aperture prospettiche, prese d'aria e di luce. I grattacieli saranno dei ponti, connessi quasi per tutto il perimetro da un braccio di legno difficilmente primario e di lunghezza variabile.

L'insediamento dei nuclei sarà a nord di corso Vittorio un carattere ad adibibili a centro commerciale di 55 m, di altezza al punto più elevata, degradati verso sud per concludersi in una linea più alta e sottile, appena fuori, al sistema stradale di corso Vittorio. Tale linea ha la funzione di legare i due nuclei e costituisce una specie di mediana « foro » o « agugli ».

L'insediamento del resto delle parti, quello residenziale, sarà invece rettilineo dal punto di vista del piano. I volumi non dovranno superare i 10 metri e saranno molto distesi fra loro.

Nell'edilizia la propria presenza dovrebbe costituire una città integrata su più piani, con un fondazione architettonica delle funzioni.

FIG. 9



SECONDO PREMIO BIANCANEVE E I SETTE NANI

GIUSEPPE SANNA, NIRO SAKI,
CIRILO MATTIONI, VALERIANO PASTORI,
ALESSANDRO CARONDI, GIACOMO
GIUSETTA TORRARI, ANTONIA RIBELLI VIG

Il nuovo Centro Direzionale è ubicato nell'area prossima all'attuale centro di un'importante arteria e rappresentativa insalubri, e pertanto la destinazione è stata dell'area e le sue nuove comunicazioni viabilistiche sono destinate prima di tutto a realizzare una integrazione tra il Centro Storico e il Centro Direzionale, con una contemporanea prospettiva di decentramento nell'area in esame di quelle attività cui nuovi organismi funzionali ed operativi organizzano nuove schemi di organizzazione spaziale.

L'area di intervento urbano Nord-Sud che viene proposta è stata scelta per realizzare un chiaro ed efficace raccordo tra la grande viabilità primaria nazionale ed internazionale e la viabilità urbana, consentendo di questo modo un collegamento che collega tra loro le infrastrutture e le grandi arterie, il Centro Storico, il Centro Direzionale ed i tre nuovi Centri Residenziali-Centri.

Le dimensioni orizzontali dell'edificio sono di 80 di profondità del corpo di fabbrica e m (50 di lunghezza di fronte) sono dovute ai requisiti di realizzare la continuità spaziale di due momenti fondamentali dell'attività: l'analisi dell'attività e il punto di incontro corrispondono ed al momento dell'incontro e dello scambio sistemico tra organizzazione interna ed esterna del centro degli operanti. Aggiunti rispetto all'edificio sono indicati le strutture per i rapporti con il pubblico. Restano, definiti a priori, i collegamenti verticali di traffico all'interno dell'edificio, differenziati quelli del pubblico da quelli degli operanti. I primi conducono a punti focali dove vengono indicati i momenti di incontro e del Centro del Centro, il Centro Direzionale ed i tre nuovi Centri Residenziali-Centri.

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FIG. 10



QUARTO PREMIO BAUDEBA

CARLO AYRIMINO, MAURIZIO AYRIMINO
BALDO DEL BOSCH, FRANCESCO BELANDI
FRANCO BATTIHELLI

La destinazione d'uso del CD sono prevalentemente le seguenti: a) durata (burecratica, commerciale, direzionale, di scambio e concentrazione, di svago e d'acquisto), b) sicurezza (sicurezza e d'acquisto).

La densità massima edilizia da autorizzare è di 300 mq/mq in 300 mq/mq considerati sfruttabili.

La viabilità dovrebbe essere diretta in: a) area attrezzata nell'area a funzione residenziale e regionale b) area secondaria estranea con attraversamento semi-automato del centro direzionale c) viabilità sul bordo della zona in collegamento con il traffico cittadino di viabilità all'interno del centro direzionale stesso. Devono inoltre essere mantenuti ed essere ad esso la viabilità pedonale.

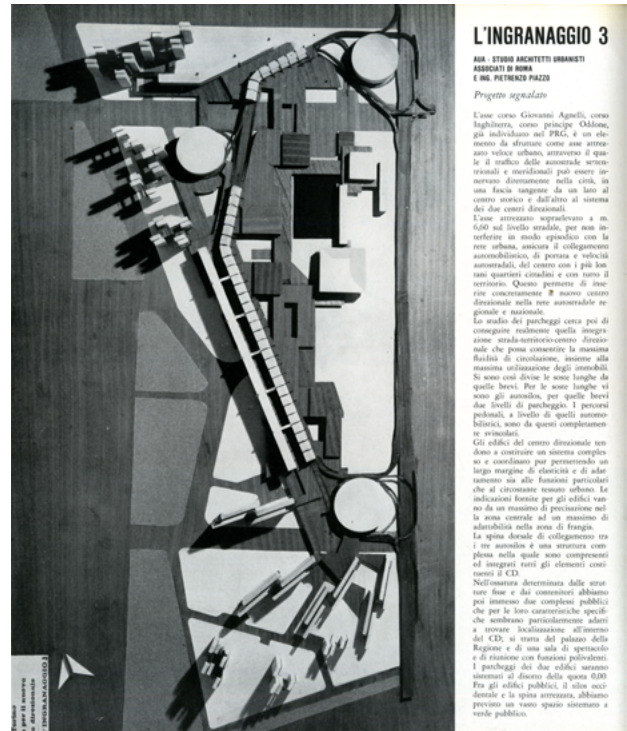
L'uso autorizzato è la rete lineare di ferrovia metropolitana permissiva di raggiungere il CD da distanza massima (50 km) in tempi brevi (10 minuti). È prevista il passaggio dalla velocità ferroviaria a quella pedonale. A tale scopo è previsto un solo modo nell'area assegnata che consiste di: rettilineo via nell'asfalto che nel percorso viene cittadino di carattere e l'incremento dell'asfalto ne fanno il modo principe del CD.

L'intera edilizia che può prevedersi in maniera più definita è con maggiori possibilità di espressione architettonica è la futura sede dell'Amministrazione Regionale. I costruttori a serie e quelli lineari hanno solo la funzione di spazi di organizzazione e distribuzione di funzioni diverse (enti, uffici, istituti, studi, ecc.) sempre più tendenti ad essere centralizzati e un modello funzionale ormai noto che è un organismo distributivo tipico.

Gli elementi dello svago e del tempo libero hanno una loro logica precisa: un parco pubblico, nel quale sono previste altre zone come di ricreazione naturale.

Il CD è un organismo complesso vivente nel tempo e quindi sviluppatore. Non è immaginabile che possa essere risolto con un unico « disegno » o con un unico linguaggio formale.

FIG. 11



L'INGRANAGGIO 3

AIA - STUDIO ARCHITETTI URBANISTI
ASSOCIATI DI ROMA
E ING. PIETREZZI PAZZI

Progetto segnalato

L'area corso Giovanni Agnelli, corso Inghilterra, corso principe Orazio, è individuata nel PRG, è un elemento da struttura come una arteria viaria urbana, attraverso il quale il traffico delle automobili verso i nuclei centrali può essere liberamente movimentato nella città, in una fascia tangente a un lato al centro storico e dall'altro al sistema dei due centri direzionali.

L'area attrezzata superedra a m. 6,00 sul livello stradale, per non interferire in modo epitetico con la rete urbana, assicura il collegamento automobilistico, di pedoni e di biciclette, dal centro con i più lontani quartieri cittadini e con tutto il territorio. Questo permette di inserire convenientemente il nuovo centro direzionale nella rete autorizzata regionale e nazionale.

Lo studio del parcheggio cerca poi di conseguire mediante quella integrazione strada-terreno-centro direzionale che possa consentire la massima fluidità di circolazione, insieme alla massima utilizzazione degli immobili. Si sono così divise le zone lungo da quelle brevi. Per le zone lunghe vi sono gli autobus, per quelle brevi gli autobus, a livello di questi automobilistici, sono da questi completamente assenti.

Gli edifici del centro direzionale tendono a costituire un sistema complesso e articolato per permettere un largo margine di elasticità e di adattamento alle funzioni particolari che al cittadino tempo urbano. Le indicazioni fornite per gli edifici vanno da un massimo di precisione nella zona centrale ad un massimo di elasticità nella zona di fringe.

La spina dorsale di collegamento tra i tre nuclei è una struttura complessa nella quale sono compresi ed integrati tutti gli elementi costituenti il CD.

Nell'area determinata dalle strutture lineari e dai costruttori abbiamo poi inteso due complessi pubblici che per le loro caratteristiche specifiche sembrano particolarmente adatti a trovare localizzazione all'interno del CD: si tratta del palazzo della Regione e di una sala di spettacolo e di riunione con funzioni polivalenti. I parcheggi dei due edifici saranno sistemati al di sotto della quota 0,00. Per gli edifici pubblici, il sito occidentale e la spina dorsale, abbiamo previsto un vano spazio sistema a verde pubblico.

FIG. 12

experimentation, because what was needed were, as Rossi put it in clearly modernist tones, new forms that suited the new condition.⁵⁵ As such, a *centro direzionale* was a physical entity that could be comprehensively handled only by the architect and not by the urban strategist, the city administrator, the planner, or any of the other professional figures who competed for authorship in urban planning.⁵⁶

Another exposition of the idea of a city territory saw Tafuri speak of a 'need of deploying completeness for a society that is increasingly incapable of carving its own space [while at the same time] offering

55. Rossi, 'Nuovi problemi'.

56. Ibid.

possibilities for freedom within such completeness'.⁵⁷ In yet another text – 'La città territorio: verso una nuova dimensione', authored with his office associates Giorgio Piccinato and Vieri Quilici – Tafuri elaborated on the idea of a possible dialogue between freedom and formal completeness. Illustrated with images of the components of a new urban dimension taken from around the Italian landscape – highways, airports, housing and industrial complexes – the article diagnosed the urban territory as the interplay of large 'containers' and communication infrastructures [Fig. 13-16].⁵⁸

A contradictory entity located between determinacy and indeterminacy, this città territorio required the type of thinking that Quaroni had anticipated in his scheme for Barene di San Giuliano. But whereas Quaroni's project still focused on the theme of housing, città territorio required widening the gaze and considering the multiple dimensions of an affluent society and the processes of tertiarisation that were the motive force behind much of the new international architectural production popularised in magazines in the early 1960s.

Tertiary city: Structure-and-infill or territorial dykes?

The definition of a form for a city whose population was increasingly composed of an expanded middle class of tertiary workers was at the core of some large-scale proposals that became popular in Italy in the early 1960s and which Banham later enlisted among the precursors of megastructure. Two in particular, Kenzo Tange's Tokyo Bay Plan, and Louis Kahn's Plan for the Centre of Philadelphia, found wide circulation in the pages of *Casabella* and other magazines.⁵⁹ Despite equal celebration of the two architects in Italy, which was marked by honorary degrees granted to both by the Politecnico di Milano in 1964, Tange's influence ultimately remained limited, as the organic metaphors associated with its metabolist follow-ups did not find as many supporters in Italy as Kahn's more abstract new monumentality. The gigantic park-and-ride silos structures that he drew around the edge of central Philadelphia



FIG. 13 Cover page and inner pages from *Casabella* 270 (1972), 'City and Region'.

57. Manfredo Tafuri, 'Studi e ipotesi di lavoro per il sistema direzionale di Roma', *Casabella*, no. 264 (1962): 32. Translated by the author.

58. Luigi Piccinato, Vieri Quilici and Manfredo Tafuri, 'La città-territorio: verso una nuova dimensione', *Casabella*, no. 270 (1962): 16–25.

59. Marcello Pazzagli, 'Il dibattito sulla città e sul territorio', in *Il dibattito architettonico in Italia, 1945–1975*, ed. Cina Conforto (Rome: Bulzoni, 1977), 59–62.



FIG. 14

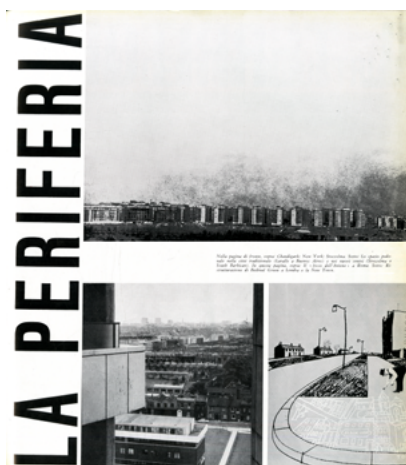


FIG. 15



FIG. 16

to mediate between the compact city and the city territory were more in tune with the theses of Rossi, Aymonino and Tafuri than was Tange's insistence on plug-in logics.

More generally, the victory of Kahn over Tange locates the Italian large-scale architectural proposals of the 1960s in a different intellectual zone to that of much megastructural production of that time – at least, as far as Banham's codification of megastructure is concerned. The augmented construction technologies and fixation with technical detailing, which resulted in the principle of a permanent structure with more temporary attachments that were manifest in the follow-ups to Tange by the Japanese metabolists, did not find fertile ground within an Italian architectural community that was already struggling to maintain a role in the face of a growing cohort of technocratic planners. Their retreat to formal investigation thus acted as a twofold antidote both to generic planning made of codes and schematic diagrams and to a mere celebration of the technological society. Focus was therefore put on the exemplary character of large-scale interventions – in particular public ones – in relation to a general reordering of territories and on their role as contrasting forces to private speculation. A gigantic *centro direzionale* was thus legitimised for its action as a territorial dyke capable both of controlling the chaotic spilling out of the city into the countryside and of reclaiming a directional role for the public authority (perhaps also for its capacity to allow for partnerships with private urban actors, but always in such a way as to subordinate the private to the public).

Given this widely shared objective, whether formal finiteness was to be the final answer remained an issue of debate among Italian architects. One of the initiators of the debate, Giuseppe Samonà, opposed the prospect of universal formal recipes. Speaking at a roundtable in Rome in 1962, he insisted that no model solutions existed and that the worst possible choice would be a reduction of a *centro direzionale* to a codified building type.⁶⁰ His son, Alberto, elaborated on the related risk of importing solutions from abroad. In another *Casabella* article – 'Alla ricerca di un metodo per la nuova dimensione' – he distanced himself from the expositions of *città territorio* provided by Tafuri and Aymonino, warning that it was too early to verify them because they excessively relied on the definition of some fixed cardinal elements. What such elements could be still needed wide discussion, and Samonà insisted that simply importing some from other contexts – such as the shopping centres and corporate office complexes of North America – was risky.⁶¹ Pure formal experimentation was, therefore, required.

However, the inconsequential fate of the Turin competition, whose projects remained on paper, contributed to a growing sense of disillusionment about public authorities' actual ability to implement such heroic visions, and the euphoria with *città territorio* was put on hold only

60. Giuseppe Samonà, 'Relazione e conclusione al seminario su città-territorio', in *La città territorio*, ed. Carlo Aymonino et al., 91.

61. Alberto Samonà, 'Alla ricerca di un metodo per la nuova dimensione', *Casabella*, no. 277 (1963): 53. Translated by the author.

a few years after its first formulations. Alberto Samonà's article in 1963 was the last piece of writing that still positively framed the new urban dimension as a possible object of design. Importantly, his article played the role of a hinge between a first phase of discussion that had centred on the reordering of tertiary activities and an upcoming new stage that would focus on education and the design of universities. It embedded an argument that *città territorio* meant more than mere tertiary functions and, instead, also required rethinking the country's educational infrastructure. In a crucial passage he lamented the inadequacy with which the growing masses of tertiary workers were being handled as the subjects of education. While the industrial worker had been shaped through the creation of specific schooling – secondary technical schools in particular – similar educational pathways for the creation of a service worker were still to be defined. Alberto Samonà thus charged *centri direzionali* with an educational role, as the possible environments for the cultivation of tertiary man – a professional figure who was not so much a highly specialised worker but an individual capable of more general problem-solving. Temporarily pausing the first phase of the city territory discussion, his article hinted at a following chapter in the Italian architectural debate.

This new chapter was opened around 1967, when Italian architects joined the political debate to reform the national higher education system.⁶² The implicit pedagogical charge of *centri direzionali* was thus unleashed in what became their heirs: *centri universitari*, as Giancarlo De Carlo named them in 1968.⁶³ Among the latter, the project for the University of Cagliari by father and son Samonà became the most paradigmatic example, one that summarised over ten years of reflections on the new urban dimension and, in turn, on the Italian approach to mega-architecture.

The Apollonian and the Dionysian

In an introductory essay to *L'unità architettura urbanistica* – a collection of his main writings published in 1971 – Samonà summarised his lifetime's intellectual mission.⁶⁴ Together with the coeval text that accompanied the competition entry for the University of Cagliari, it offers the key to reading the project's megastructural rationale as an ideal conclusion of a research trajectory whose first comprehensive formulation had been his 1959 book *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città negli stati europei*. Rhetorical as the title of the 1971 book was, the unity of architectural urbanism reflected Samonà's central concern: how to find a new synthesis between two disciplines that had increasingly pulled apart to become separate galaxies throughout the twentieth century – or, to put it in another way, how to resist technocratic planning based on parameters and numbers and to claim the fundamental role of architectural form as an agent of urban transformation.

62. Zuddas, 'The idea of the università'; and Zuddas, 'L'università come principio insediativo', in Sabrina Puddu, Martino Tattara and Francesco Zuddas, *Territori della conoscenza: un progetto per Cagliari e la sua università* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2017), 10–49.

63. Giancarlo De Carlo, ed., *Pianificazione e disegno delle università* (Rome: Edizioni universitarie italiane, 1968).

64. Giuseppe Samonà, 'Introduzione', in *L'unità architettura urbanistica* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1975), 9–50.

In the 1971 essay, Samonà explained how, until the 1930s, architecture and urbanism still formed an indissoluble equation kept together by the modernist architect-urbanist. The two still participated in the dialectical relationship summarised by Le Corbusier's notion that 'architecture proceeds from the inside to the outside and is resolved into urbanism, as a figurative solution'.⁶⁵ These latter words were uttered by Samonà on the occasion of a retrospective exhibition on Le Corbusier held in 1963 at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, which offered him the occasion to look back at the mastermind of modernism while others were directing most of their attention to a newer generation of late modernists (as reflected by honorary degrees awarded to Kahn and Tange a year later). It has been noted that both in his writing and his projects Samonà engaged in a discussion in *absentia* with Le Corbusier,⁶⁶ one that aimed to reclaim the 'idea of extending to the city the same reasons that justify a new architecture',⁶⁷ as opposed to the Swiss architect's approach to the delocalising practices of a garden city model that Samonà had attacked in his 1959 book.⁶⁸

In 1971, Samonà further clarified that a temporal disjunction in the project of the city had been promoted since the early postwar years, according to which architectural specification was meant to follow – and only to follow – a preliminary moment of urbanistic decision-making. He went on to link this disjunction to the taking of command of scientific thought in modernity, which led to a fundamental switch from a direct and experiential relationship between humans and reality to the *in vitro* study of reality guided by science.⁶⁹ Samonà was observing the demise of a sensorial relationship between humans and the material world of objects, and the shift to a 'super-historical reality grounded on the super-experiences of a world oriented to the future of scientific development'.⁷⁰ Two different conceptions of history had thus been separated: an atemporal history – the history of the scientific fact whose validity is irrespective of time – and a history of the present – the only possible history of the built environment that, while grounded on the past and oriented to survive in the future, can exist solely in the present.

In the same years as Samonà, other thinkers attempted a critique and theorisation of advanced scientific and technological societies and followed similar arguments to those of the Italian architect. Among them, Henri Lefebvre initiated an influential line of urbanistic thinking that re-evaluated the relationship between humans and the built environment.⁷¹ His approach favoured a bottom-up reappropriation and indeed later lent itself to the development of arguments about participatory planning and self-managed urbanism. Conversely, although claiming that the architect could (and should) sympathise with the social demands of the poorer strata of society, Samonà viewed participatory planning as the wrong answer because it put further pressure on the less privileged classes to define the means of their own social redemption.⁷² He firmly believed

65. Giuseppe Samonà, 'Relazione ufficiale in occasione della inaugurazione della mostra dell'opera di Le Corbusier', in *L'unità architettura urbanistica*, 100. First published in *Casabella*, no. 274 (1963).

66. Pasquale Lovero, 'La disseminazione didattica', in Giuseppe Samonà, *L'unità Architettura Urbanistica*, 580.

67. Samonà, 'Relazione ufficiale', 99.

68. Samonà, 'Introduzione', 103.

69. *Ibid.*, 27.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968); English translation: 'The right to the city' in Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on cities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

72. Samonà, 'Introduzione', 39.

in the possibilities of turning the modern scientific mentality – and the top-down practice of a scientific/rationalising project – to an advantageous role in the direction of urbanisation. However, his interest in the scientific is not to be misunderstood as an alternative version of the celebration of technology by canonical megastructuralists. For Samonà, the scientific was a necessary contrasting force to the sensorial – it was *the* force that guaranteed the actual survival of the sensorial. So, whereas Lefebvre would have welcomed, *tout court*, a stop to top-down social engineering as it took form in welfare state planning – from housing estates to university campuses – Samonà believed these to be the last hope for society to retain some direct relationship with the built environment.

Samonà envisaged, therefore, urban territory as a coexistence of opposites. On the one side was the city grown through bottom-up, private forces, which included speculative construction as well as all the forms of more or less legal individual interventions. On the other was the public authority, whose delicate role was to oversee this situation in such a way as to allow for its survival within reasonable limits. He located himself, as an architect, on the latter side, acting on behalf of public authority and pursuing the role of providing exemplary – formal – rational spaces capable of countering – but not eradicating – the continuing growth of the city via private intervention. Manfredo Tafuri linked Samonà's search for a difficult territorial balance to the influence of Nietzsche's *The birth of tragedy*, noting that:

A totalising relationship between the being of things and their collective experience was, for him, the essence of the Apollonian. Thus, the real tragedy becomes the impossible retrieval of that relationship; the conscience of an impossible return to that synthesis. [...] Therefore, Samonà opts to live a state of suspension between the contemplation of a totality rejected by history and being in the present; he acknowledges the relativity (and misery) of such present.⁷³

A new synthesis between the scientific and the empirical/sensorial could not be achieved from within a single intervention, no matter how big, as it would only reproduce the anachronistic myth of the harmonious community falsely promoted by the garden city ideology, as well as by the

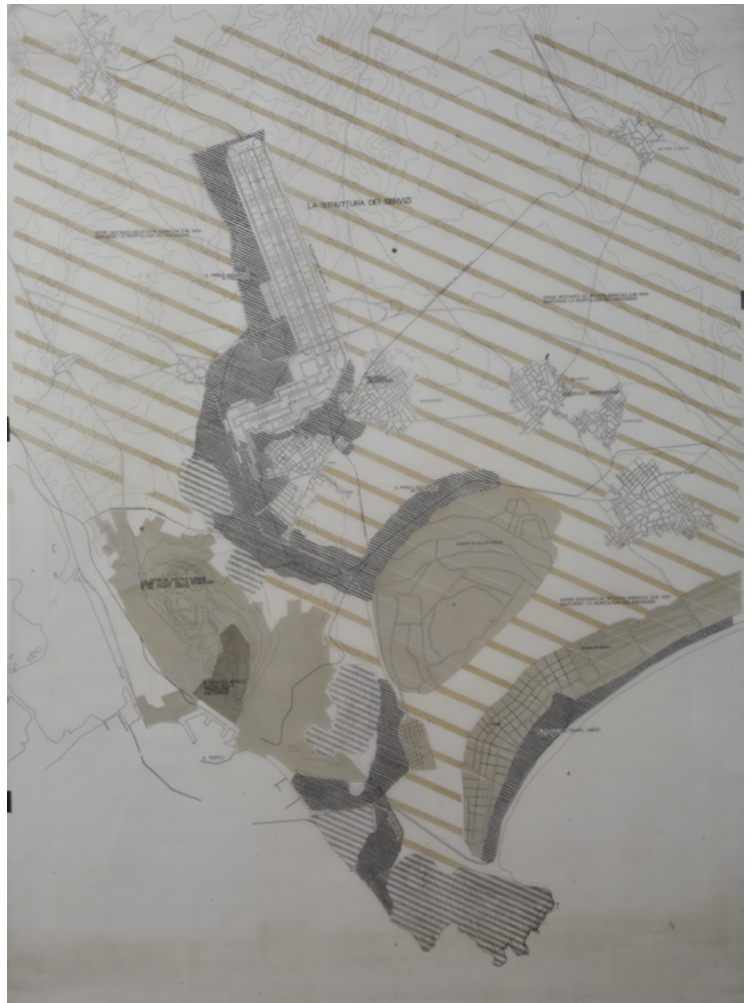


FIG. 17 Giuseppe Samonà et al. Competition project for the University of Cagliari (1971–72). General plan. (CSAC Parma, Archivio Samonà)

73. Manfredo Tafuri, 'Gli anni dell'attesa: 1922–1945', in *Giuseppe Samonà 1923–1975: cinquant'anni di architetture* (Rome: Officina, 1975), 14. Translated by the author.

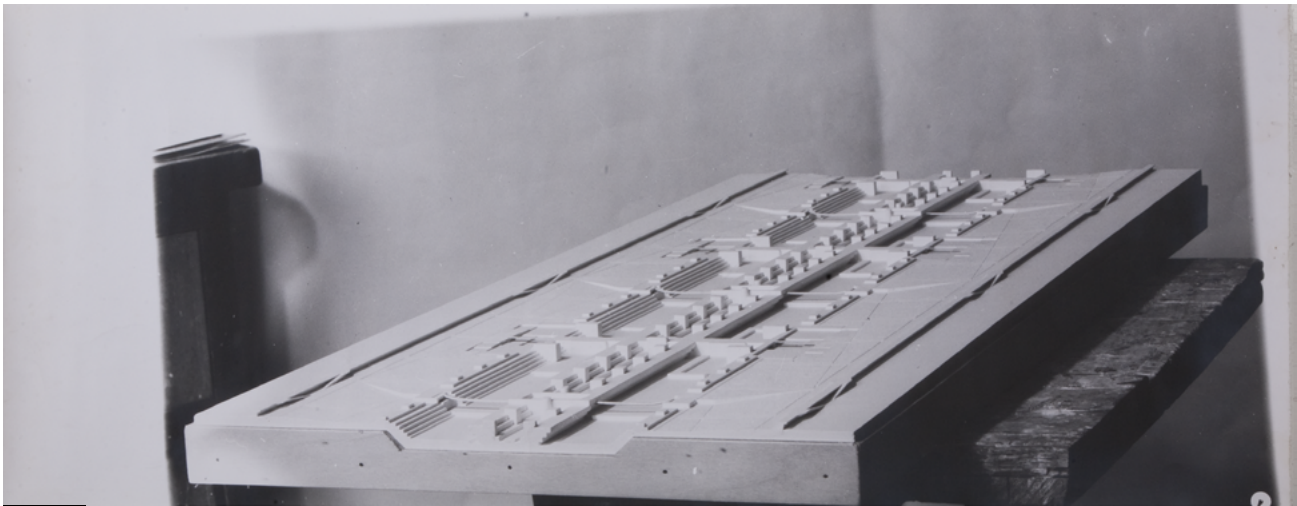


FIG. 18 Giuseppe Samonà et al. Competition project for the University of Cagliari (1971–72). Photo of model. (CSAC Parma, Archivio Samonà)

walking city of Archigram. Synthesis could only be found on a wider scale, its image being that of a vast territory shaped by the abrupt juxtaposition of exemplary, ‘scientific’ (Apollonian) pockets of order within a field of disparate (Dionysian) forces of private development. This territory of opposites is what Samonà’s gigantic bas-relief sculpted on the valleys outside Cagliari aimed to achieve: a scientifically defined, totally rational exemplar of order contrasting – but also accepting – the continuing growth of the city through forces that could not be stopped [Fig. 17-18].

Conclusion

Since the 1959 competition for Barene di San Giuliano, Italian architecture had taken on a new dimension that placed it in the forefront of megalomania for the following two decades. A strong figurative objective in the monumental crescent structures drawn by Quaroni for that competition overshadowed those other conflicts between ‘design and spontaneity, the large and the small, the permanent and the transient’⁷⁴ that Banham would indicate as haunting the dreams of the international megastructuralists.

Figurative anxiety permeated Italian architectural discourse, and it was perhaps most clearly expressed by Vittorio Gregotti in his book *Il territorio dell’architettura* – the other fundamental marker of the Italian contribution to a theory of architecture and the city published in 1966, although less internationally celebrated than Aldo Rossi’s *The architecture of the city*. Gregotti discussed the goal of an architect as being the ‘invention of landscape as a whole’, arguing that the built world could only be interpreted as ‘matter operated upon by architecture’.⁷⁵ A fundamental corollary to this posited that, while large-size architectural interventions can reveal this definition of the built environment in a clearer way – hence Gregotti’s own predilection for mega-projects as test beds of theory in the 1970s⁷⁶ – size ultimately did not matter too much because any formal

74. Banham, *Megastructure*, 10.

75. Vittorio Gregotti, *Il territorio dell’architettura* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1966), 82–83.

76. Manfredo Tafuri, *Vittorio Gregotti: progetti e architetture* (Milan: Electa, 1982); Joseph Rykwert, *Gregotti Associati* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1995).

articulation had an impact on the *ambiente totale* (total environment). The result, Gregotti claimed, was very different 'from those practices that for a long time have characterised urbanism as mere enlargement of architecture'.⁷⁷

Gregotti's words help prune the confusion that necessarily arises when one considers the project by Giuseppe Samonà for the University of Cagliari, together with the following statement, also by Samonà, from ten years earlier: 'I believe any idea of gigantic spatial parameters to be absolutely out of question'.⁷⁸ Had Samonà, when approaching the Cagliari brief, suddenly accepted the need for large architectural size? The answer is more complex than a simple yes or no; rather, it is located in the amalgam of ideology and figurative anxiety that had as its background the formulation of an idea of tertiary society for which architects could still play a relevant role and not be sidelined as mere detailers of decisions taken by planners.

Samonà's project was defensive in a twofold sense: urbanistically, it aimed at avoiding uncontrolled urbanisation of the megalopolitan type for an Italian landscape that was still not as excessively compromised as elsewhere; on a more personal level, it was a stronghold against planners taking command of architects that tried to disempower the former by blurring their field of action through – as Samonà put it – a new model that 'could no longer be divided into traditional typologies distinguishing a domain composed by the general schemes of the individual buildings from that composed by schemes for the urbanistic configuration'.⁷⁹

Samonà's project for Cagliari is the locus where a general Italian approach to the architecture of the city in the 1960s encounters the personal drama of its author entering the 1970s. The project should be connected to a series of realised or unrealised proposals by him and his collaborators, which argued for the fundamental dialectic between architecture and urbanism. These projects span four decades and Italy from north to south, from Turin's *centro direzionale* of 1962 to the competition for a *metropoli sullo stretto* (1969) that aimed to reconfigure the geography of the Calabria–Sicily strait as a service territory, all the way back to Samonà's first important professional success at the 1930 competition for the reconfiguration of Messina's *palazzata*. The latter, a large formal redefinition of the edge of the city along the waterfront, already established the relation and unity between architectural form and urbanistic plan as a central concern for its author. Perhaps as a coincidence, forty years later Samonà might have found an echo of this concern in a similar but much older *palazzata* in Cagliari that had resulted from a general urbanistic reconfiguration of the city following the demolition of its fortifications in the second half of the nineteenth century. The *palazzata* in Cagliari shows the coexistence of differentiation within repetition, with the buildings along the linear complex differing from

77. Gregotti, *Il territorio dell'architettura*, 83.

78. Samonà, 'Relazione e conclusione', 91.

79. Samonà, 'Introduzione', 43.

one another yet clearly belonging to a family sharing a common DNA⁸⁰. It was the latter quality – the interplay of totality and variety – that the many megastructuralists of the 1960s aimed to replicate. A fundamental postulate for successfully achieving this replication was the existence of a single client, either public or private, with enough political and economic power to ensure the correct implementation of the project. The spectre of the interrupted project – of a tragic *incompiuto* – thus haunted megastructure from the outset.

In Cagliari, Samonà could not avoid also being haunted by the same ghost. His project remains problematically suspended between being an exemplar that necessitates the completeness of its object in order to be exemplary, and a large settlement that can be implemented over time while still retaining coherence at each stage of its development, yet it remains the case that it should be considered both the epilogue of his lifelong career and the signal of a pivotal moment in recent Italian architectural and urbanistic history. The competition for Cagliari came at the end of Samonà's three-decade reign over IUAV (he died two years later, in 1973) and it marks the definitive schism between a group of architect–urbanists still arguing for Samonà's unity of the two realms (the Gruppo Architettura enlisting Carlo Aymonino, Aldo Rossi, Luciano Semerani and others)⁸¹ and a new, independent degree programme in planning (*Urbanistica*) created in 1970 and directed by Giovanni Astengo.⁸² The expanding role played in the late 1960s by Manfredo Tafuri in promoting a conception of non-operative history – that is, history not instrumentally subsumed within design prerogatives – further added to the separation of different realms of the project, which eventually resulted in a tripartite split of Samonà's unity into architecture, urban planning and history.

Seen against the mounting shadow of this schism, the project for the University of Cagliari is charged with immense symbolism as the last bastion of a period of Italian architectural thinking about the city that refused both the technological euphoria of canonical megastructuralism and the paralysing action of an upcoming spreadsheet urbanism. Dwelling inside its defensive fortress against technocracy and technology, Samonà's university, although not the last piece of large-scale architectural heroism to be produced in Italy, somehow sealed the experience of Italian mega-architecture as it had evolved over a decade, stamping it with the label of an eccentric outsider willing to confuse and destabilise the official historiography of megastructure.

80. Francesco Tentori, *I Samonà: fusioni tra architettura e urbanistica* (Turin: Testo & immagine, 1996).

81. Claudio Aldegheri and Maurizio Sabini, eds., *Per un'idea di città: la ricerca del Gruppo Architettura a Venezia (1968–1974)* (Venice: Cluva, 1985).

82. For a series of readings of Samonà's role at IUAV, see Giovanni Marras and Marco Pogačnik, eds., *Giuseppe Samonà e la scuola di architettura* (Venice and Padua: Il poligrafo, 2006).