

Extended summary

Landscape and architecture. A new design paradigm

Curriculum: Architecture, Construction and Structure

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Abstract.

Within the complex scenario of architectural research in recent decades, this study identifies and investigates the common thread that links, transversally compared to different linguistic styles, the theories and proposals around an idea of landscape as a theoretical paradigm through which design experimentation has opened up to new configurations that more effectively reflect the changeable, dynamic and contradictory reality of our era.

Seen in this way, the landscape, with its intrinsically interdisciplinary nature, is treated as a research tool and a model of thought which is used insofar, compared to other consolidated models, as it manages more efficiently to represent and synthesize the ever more multiform and articulated nature of the project. By means of this new alliance, architecture has seen the creation of new research paths, new possibilities of expression, new formal categories and new contextual relations that have determined profound changes starting from its fundamental concepts of space, form and material.

The research was subdivided into four different sections: the first presents the theoretical matrices at the base of this new paradigm, in the second three recurrent themes are identified in the context under scrutiny, the third sees an analysis of the design paths of three different – by geographical and design culture – internationally renowned contemporary architects that more or less consciously draw on this model of thinking, and in the fourth some design experiments are presented which were carried out at the University of Ancona. Together, this material demonstrates how architecture, through the landscape, opens up to dialogue, to comparison, to contamination, to hybridization with other contexts, crossing new thresholds that make it able to update its statute vis-à-vis the new themes and new applications of society and the contemporary world.



Keywords. Contemporary architecture, landscape

1 Problem statement and objectives

In an era in which we can see the fragmentation and the multiplication of erudition and knowledge that converge and contribute to the definition of architectural design, more and more often we are confronted with a methodological disorientation that appears hinder our ability to identify any unitary horizon of sense. As a reaction to this confusion the only way out for designers appears to be to align with one of the two currents of thought that within architecture have been historically opposed: on the one hand we find a study current that, closed up in defence of a presumed superiority and autonomy of formal research, develops architectural proposals that are self-celebratory and solipsistic and that appear ever more distant from the themes of society, culture and contemporary man, on the other we encounter a line of research that, fortified behind ever more ideological academic and normative positions, proposes theories that set out to ensure that the design path is determined by rational principles and confined within dogmatic normative boundaries.

In apposition to these tendencies, this research seeks to identify a possible and not univocal alternative to these opposed and irreconcilable conceptions; to this end this work identifies in the landscape, taken in the sense of a model of thinking, a new design paradigm through which new applications and new expectations can be condensed and linked in a horizon of sense that society and contemporary culture places at the feet of architectural design.

2 Research planning and activities

The research was developed at four different levels of profundity.

The first dealt with identifying the theoretical matrices that are at the base of using the landscape as a reference paradigm for architecture. Through the analysis and study of numerous texts on theory, architectural criticism, town planning and landscape architecture, a cultural and scientific substratum was identified from which this new concept emerged. We are in fact seeing more and more national and international studies and research projects that refer to the landscape as a possible model of thought that can be referred to in order to propose experiments and theories.

The second level of research identifies and investigates three different design themes that are fundamental in the landscape disciplines, but which historically used to be seen as marginal or outside the ambit of architectural composition, but which have become central in the context of the contemporary architecture that is analyzed here. The themes that are identified and described represent a possible selection and criticism tool for numerous projects that, more or less consciously, use the landscape as a reference model; to this end research gathers and presents some of the most significant national and international design experiences.

The third level of research addresses the critical analysis of the theories and work of three different internationally renowned contemporary designers who used and continue to use, in some of their proposals, the landscape as a theoretical model of reference. The three architects were selected for their different geographical and cultural origins with the purpose of demonstrating how the landscape affects architecture transversally, beyond and above the different “languages” or different “styles” through which individual proposals are manifested.

Finally, the fourth level of research looks at experimenting and verifying the design paradigm directly in the field of architectural design. In the ambit of the tutoring activities conducted in the Architecture section in the Department of Civil and Construction Engineering and Architecture at the University of Ancona, some degree theses use the landscape as a theoretical model of reference which provided the basis for their respective proposals.

3 Analysis and discussion of main results

The research identifies in the landscape, as a model of thought, a new possible paradigm for contemporary architecture through which new research trajectories can be explored. Within the real oppositions of the modern architecture debate, such as those between nature and culture, subject and object, the architectural theory that refers to the landscape reveals a truth that is more interrelated, more articulated and richer, by borrowing from the complex sciences the concept of “system”, in the sense of a combination of intrinsically dynamic relationships between subject and environment. We are witness, therefore, through this new paradigm, to a redefinition of the idea of architecture that, as a replacement for artifacts that are certain, concluded and autonomous, proposes buildings that are open to different uses and multiple interpretations, that are linked to local and global contexts, that are sensitive and changeable according to the environment and that are disposed to accepting the subject as an unstable factor of disturbance. These types of architecture are a reflection of this new idea of the world and its functioning, more in the sense of a dynamic system of interconnected events, that, by substituting the logic of relations for identity deriving from functions, in a constant exchange, brings together the different levels of what is natural and what is artificial, of the subject and the object, of the “I” and the world. This research identifies how the landscape paradigm represents an effective tool by which architecture manages to attract the many issues that it is obliged to face. Through the landscape, for example, architecture has opened up to a different idea of artifact which is an expression of research aimed at multiplicity and complexity, at the intensification of contradiction and conflict, at connection as the prevalent action in a relationship between parties, at a reconsideration of man as an entity that experiences and perceives space also through his own emotions and not only through his functions, at the temporalization of spatial experience that promotes the dynamicity of forms and at a re-evaluation of contextual and environmental factors with which a concrete and effective relationship can be established.

4 Conclusions

This research has highlighted how the landscape, taken as a thought model, can represent for contemporary architecture a new effective design paradigm through which it can update its statute. Indeed, the landscape has been seen to be a tool that is particularly suited to linking and orienting to a new line of research the ever more numerous and contradictory cases that arise together in architectural design, first and foremost that of establishing effective bonds and relations with the new and ever changing character of towns and of contemporary territories. By means of this new paradigm architecture appears to be capable of transcending its own boundaries and open up to dialogue, to comparison, to contamina-

tion, to hybridization with the other “worlds” that converge in the universe of design. By freeing themselves both of the chains of empty formal experimentation and from the slavery of illusory rational certainties, the growing number of fields of knowledge that are involved in the design process, thanks to the intrinsically interdisciplinary nature of the landscape, now participate actively in the shaping of architecture, bringing it effectively and successfully closer to the themes of man, culture and contemporary society.

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