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## **Mezzogiorno. Prove di sostenibilità**

a cura di Maria Valeria Mininni, Ester Zazzero

### **Baricentrale. Clients, architects and projects**

*Francesco Garofalo*

Before writing this contribution, I went back and re-read two analogous texts I published in catalogues for competitions organized at the end of the 90s: the one for the Centre for Contemporary Arts (today the Maxxi) in 1998-99, and the one for the extension of the National Gallery of Modern Art in 1999-2000. What struck me most as I compared the situation today with that of the past, was not the difference in the projects and the architects, but rather the difference in the atmosphere that surrounds the three competitions.

*The way we were: the timid spring of the nineties*

Notwithstanding the caution, the tone of the discussion at the end of the 90s was, all things considered, positive. There was some concern about the backwardness of Italian architecture as it confronted in competitions the protagonists of international culture. However, even this preoccupation was mitigated by the hope that the emerging generalized practice of competitions could create the training ground in which our architecture could overcome its creative and productive frailty. To measure the distance between then and now is useful and perhaps necessary, to understand that the residual hopes held out by the architecture community and by the professional association in their ritual invocation of competitions, depend essentially from the context in which they are held. And the context is made up of at least three components: rules, clients and organizers. Obviously there is also a fourth component - the architects, but it will be easier to speak about them in reference to the outcome of this competition for Bari. What was it that justified the optimism at the end of the 90s? The novelties emerged on the three fronts which I just mentioned, and in their relations: the rules did not exist or were rather vague. The Merloni law, with all its defects, opened up possibilities, though it left the distinction between a competition of ideas and one of design unclear and this lack of clarity lingers. More generally the government and local administrations, still riding the waves of the Mayors elected by the people, which had only started a few years earlier, seemed to insist on the symbolic and non-conflictual role of architecture in the urban transformation. The construction of museums, public spaces and some infrastructure seemed to make the design contest the foundation of a double legitimization – political in the case of administrators, and cultural in that of architects. Competition became a sort of “direct election” of the designer overcoming direct appointment. That this process represented a media laboratory to create the so-called “star-architects”, depends above all from the fact that, as we shall see, instead of becoming a wide spread and systematic practice, it became reserved for a few symbolic occasions.

*In search of a national model for competitions*

At that particular moment, to go back to the rules, it seemed that Italy, essentially without its own tradition for competitions, would have to make a choice from among the other established European models. The German one, Spartan and objective, was discussed for a while, entrusted to specialized consultants, or perhaps the Spanish one which saw a big role played, and a guarantee offered by the professional organizations. Or finally the French one, dominated by transalpine bureaucratic efficiency and based on legislation that recognizes the public value of the architecture design, tending to include this theme in its entirety in the cultural sphere, a choice which had even removed the architectural schools from the universities and had them depending from the Ministry of Culture.

Italy seemed about to head down this last road (In my opinion it was an error). This is why the ghost of a Direction for Architecture and Contemporary Art of the Ministry of Culture lingers still today, and an exonerative draft of the “law on architecture” gathers dust in some drawer. However, experimentation was undertaken: the competition for Maxxi with its more than 300 candidates and the competition office of the Municipality of Rome launched the trial run during the second half of the 90s.

### *The curtain comes down: the new procurement law*

From a regulatory point of view, the icy wind of the so-called “Codice degli Appalti” (Procurement law) blew in to freeze this brief spring. The paradox is that its monstrous effects are produced in the name of two principles: guarantees for the public administration and the transposition of European norms. I have already mentioned the fact that architecture competitions, strange as it might seem, had and have each in its country a history and a physiognomy. The European norms on procurement conditioned some aspects, had not cancelled their differences. Only in Italy has this transposition yielded the effect of strangling competition among projects. Entrusted to some incompetent magistrate and the lobbyists of the general contractors and engineering companies, equating a design competition to a bid for building a project, distort the sense of the procedure. Only thus can one explain convoluted norms, like the one that requires that the jury be named after the submission of the designs rather than before. On another level, as the interest for the publicity dimension of the competition announcement has abated, public administrations have preferred to use “small and smaller proposal calls”, which, without the cumbersome presence of designs, were easier to guide through internal juries which have been lifted from responsibility by largely discretionary methods, such as the Italian wicked version of the “value for money” principle. The end result of the introduction of these mistaken rules has been to make real competitions an endangered species. The presentation of more than one hundred candidates for the competition whose results are presented here can be explained in part by this, aside from the importance of the theme. The few opportunities which have survived almost never contain a second level or a reimbursement of the competitor’s expenses, loading architects with high costs and thus reducing the potential number of participants already destroyed by the mandatory technical-financial requirement mechanism which favors a well-identified oligopoly. But it would still be possible to hold “normal” competitions, and Baricentrale is a demonstration, thanks to the City Government and, in particular, to the Assessor for Urban Planning. One has to work intelligently at the margins of the rules which will sooner or later have to be changed. And here I make a few other considerations on the other two elements of the context: the clients and the organizers. The framework that I tried to reconstruct suggests the reasons why the clients pulled out of the competition practice. The culture of transparency in these years has been invoked more often than it has been practiced. A single change in legislation would no longer be sufficient.

### *Change the rules, work on the basis programs*

Someone has to take a systematic initiative. This will mean launching big work programs in which “what” to do is not disconnected from “how” it is done. There is an historical precedent, INA-Casa, though it would be difficult today to restart from housing. And now for the last player: the organizers. Whether one chooses to favor the growth of specific expertise or not, at the point where we are now, the first step to at least get back up to where we were is to avoid that the so-called RUP (the sole figure responsible for the procedure), is the one who is personally the organizer of the competitions. There can be functionaries and professionals of great capacity in the administration, as there are in Bari, but it is easier and the guarantees will be more effective if, using the formula “support activity”, it is an architect, a designer running the competition, i.e. someone who knows the physiologies (and pathologies) of competitions because he/she has lived them. With a “how to” manual which would not be difficult to write, one could establish the few indispensable elements. Moreover there is a province in Italy where things already function this way, in Bolzano, which for well-known reasons seems to belong to central Europe for many aspects of its social and economic life. Unique but at the same time a demonstration that the laws can be interpreted and their defects can be limited.

### *The three design dimensions of Baricentrale*

So Baricentrale represents an example of the fact that it is still possible to organize an architecture competition if the administration has the political will. But this is only the necessary – though slightly too long – premise. From here on it will be useful to consider the not insignificant peculiarities of this competition whose object is a vast urban transformation. It was clear that there was a triple dimension entwined within Baricentrale, which for strategic reasons is articulated in seven distinct sites. The first dimension is that of the ex-Rossani Army Barracks. It could have been the object of a single competition all by itself, but being very close to the Bari Centrale Train Station it shares the attraction and influence of its problems. Its secluded condition to be overcome would have made it possible to confront it separately. However the debate in city about the possible uses, and perhaps even before that of its character, made it difficult to identify a program which was not simply a list of good intentions and fragmentary claims classified under a generic “artistic and

cultural uses". Making things more difficult was an order from the preservation authority that, in my opinion, reveals a sort of Pavlovian reflex in the presumed protection of cultural sites. So Rossani Army Barracks became part of the competition with the same explorative dimensions, in search of a sense and a vision, of areas that only in the very long-term will become manageable. And this is one contradiction that the competition, and a serious debate starting from its results, might contribute to resolve. The second dimension is that of the railway hub itself. The winning project, though schematic, appears to be egg of Columbus: it buries without having to dig first. In the preparatory work carried out with engineer Vito Labarile, we looked at the technical and economic constraints that hinder Bari from building a railway throughway like the one in Turin. The solution provided as a base for the competition was interpreted by the winning design with a strong simplification, and it is not necessarily the best possible one, notwithstanding the enormous capabilities of engineer Stefano Ciurnelli. It is rather a compromise reached in 2011 among the interested parties with the ratification of a protocol of agreement. Also this aspect has made the competition a catalyzer of opinions. But if this debate is to bring development, we need continuity of action sustained by a strategic vision that the Planning Department will have to continue showing in the future. Finally there is in the competition a dimension that concerns those sites and those areas, above all in the western part, that form the interface between the railway zone and the existing city; in other words the internal borders fringed with productive and agricultural areas. Some competitors took a position contrary to that of urbanization, and implicitly contrary to the message of the competition that considered them as areas of significant potential volume increase for "controlled overflow", whose role was going to be necessary to cover the costs of the reorganization of the railway sites – the pre-condition for re-connecting the two sides of the city.

### *The development leverage of a long-term feasibility*

We cannot escape the contradiction, not so much of the competition, but rather of the urban policies that will depend on the evolution of public and private transportation systems. The reorganization of the rail hub, north and south of its central section, can count on big public investments but limps slowly forward with the drafting of infrastructure projects, while the urban ones will remain largely only hypotheses. In the heart of the city, instead, one has to imagine a delicate operation of balance between public and private that draws on the centrality of the areas and the functions which are compatible as real estate development "levers" to relocate the tracks. The synthetic images of the competition propose the discovery of the future dimension that is hidden in the timelines of reports on technical and economic feasibility. The municipal government and the other stakeholders should first of all sink in these documents with a thorough reading. The first, and probably correct impression, is that the jury has chosen the most radical design, the one in which a clear and unequivocal solution was identifiable in the role assigned to the natural (but artificial) landscape, to rejoin the two parts of the city and to offer a new amenity to the population of the center of Bari. Before a brief but detailed description of Massimiliano Fuksas' project, I shall use it for these characteristics, as the main parameter against which to rank the proposals of the ten finalists. These readings, more than any other, coincide with those used by the jury, as one based on the authors' names, rigorously anonymous, was impossible given the scale of the project.

### *Three different approaches: the green band*

A first group of projects could include those treating the strip of tracks as a landscape not characterized by an urban structure. The coming in second of Vazquez Consuegra's proposal was not pure chance. The idea in the one by Metrogamma of screening the corridor of train tracks with two massive embankments appeared interesting, and now it reads but a step toward the solution of the winning project. The latter will have to be carefully considered in its future developments. It is evident that the necessary breadth of the tracks as well as their geometry was sacrificed for the sake of the continuity of the park. Not to mention that the elimination of the tracks of the Appulo-Lucane Railways or their survival in a tunnel has various implications. At this point it is useful to consider the proposal as a real rail throughway with, at its center, a below-ground station, and this also in relation to the possible decision to build a new inhabited bridge for travellers. As regards the degree of indeterminacy in the design of the large urban blocks to the west, this could be an advantage for the development of the project, as the continuity of the green belt can be guaranteed. Based on this hypothesis, Vazquez Consuegra's project produces an artificial/natural system to pass over the railway tracks. It is located in the technically most favorable point, but it is less significant from an urban point of view. With this we are already entering into the logic of adapting to the tracks design constraints which the competitors had to face. Differently from Metrogamma, however, with its urban fronts presenting building elevations placed below the covering layer of green, characterized by a careful and well-defined design with suggestive views, the urban layout of the two western segments is already clearly defined. The Metrogamma project makes up for its not exploiting the built-up area along the tracks by inserting two landmarks, one in the east and one in Piazza Aldo Moro. This latter, in particular, a tower with floors increasing in size as it goes up, adds the risk of a looming and threatening image planted in the center of the city. The rejoining here is in part entrusted to thin pedestrian-bicycle footbridges, like red threads

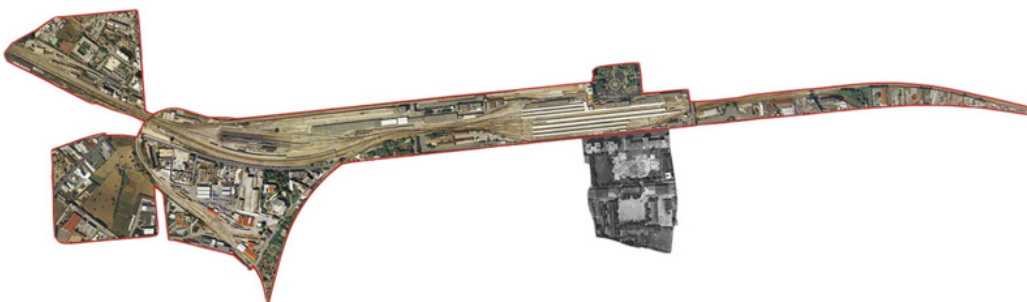
thrown diagonally over the broad empty spaces that are really too wide to be spanned without intermediate supports.

### *Three different approaches: build up the borders*

A second group of projects completely or almost completely renounced to attempting to build overpasses across the tracks, accepting the structural difficulties and the asymmetrical position of the tracks unrelated to the urban hierarchy. These projects tended to concentrate on the design of the fabric, to make the patterns of the blocks more precise and intensify the integration between public and private functions, according to the most recent urban planning formulae used in Europe. This is what Allies and Morrison propose, though they do insert an “urban bridge” with the proportions of a vast piazza that spans and overlooks the tracks. The project by the Danish COBE is among this group as well. It stands out, rather than for its two pedestrian walkways, for its attempt to link Rossani and Piazza Aldo Moro with a single design and two converging amphitheatres facing the underpass of the tracks. The project of Bolles+Wilson also has four pedestrian bridges though they present a different hierarchy: the former Appulo-Lucano Railway site is delineated by the creation of blocks oriented along the axes of the Libertà-Murat area, marking the boundaries of the compact city as respects the different morphology of the other sites, designed as wide enclosures whose perimeter may contain groups of tower buildings. Finally, the Carlos Ferrater project also falls within this group with a further interesting variation on the theme of the hierarchy of the blocks that seems to evoke an implementation over time and entrusted to a multiplicity of authors. In this case too, a lower density of buildings is compensated for by a landmark to “anchor” the project.

### *Three different approaches: building over the tracks*

The last cluster of projects, which includes those of groups led by Cruz y Ortiz, Francesco Cellini and Scape with the French LAN and the Belgian UAPs, intended to build an urban condition bridging the railway tracks. The solution of the first team is an addition to Murat’s city in which the artificial land is monumentalized by two monumental symmetric mouth-like entrances for the rail lines. What leaves one perplexed is the fifteen blocks with central courts that occupy the western segment like a small newly founded city surrounded by green. Here we see the urban ideogram contrasting with its nature as a fragment. It is right to conclude with the project by Francesco Cellini and Insula because, aside from belonging to this group of proposals, it represents a complementary vision to the solution that won the competition. Like that one it is characterized by a radical position that would be put to the test by the real circumstances of the program and the context. Not so much the “gate” to the west developed coherently with the hypotheses of the Preliminary Draft of the city new masterplan, which was prepared by Cellini himself together with Gianni Nigro and Mauro Sàito. The elegant composition of the large central “courtyard” cannot offset worries about the unfortunate precedents of directional office districts with which this project is in some way related in scale and that perhaps it is even trying to evoke. The system of inhabited bridges over the railway, on the one hand gives us the fascinating possibility of being able to cross Bari “as if” the railway were not there, but on the other it poses the questions about the large rail yards under it and toward which the suspended bridges would face. But the clearest solution and position is the proposal for Rossani in which the constraints are ignored and the potential of a large empty green space in the center of Bari is explored. Here it offers a contribution to the public debate which goes beyond the results of the competition but should be confronted without prejudice and biased assumptions. As for some other choices that are so banally conservative, like the indiscriminately extension of restrictions to new buildings beyond the city laid out by Murat, or even the imposition to preserve the reinforced concrete viaduct for the Appulo-Lucano Railway, makes you wonder not so much about preserving the quality, as rather on the quality of the preservation. The competition fulfilled its task, which was specified in the brief: supply a medium-long term vision for the transformation of the central areas of the city. Its implementation is now in the hands of government and citizens of Bari.



1 - Concorso internazionale di idee Baricentrale per la riorganizzazione delle aree ferroviarie in via di dismissione



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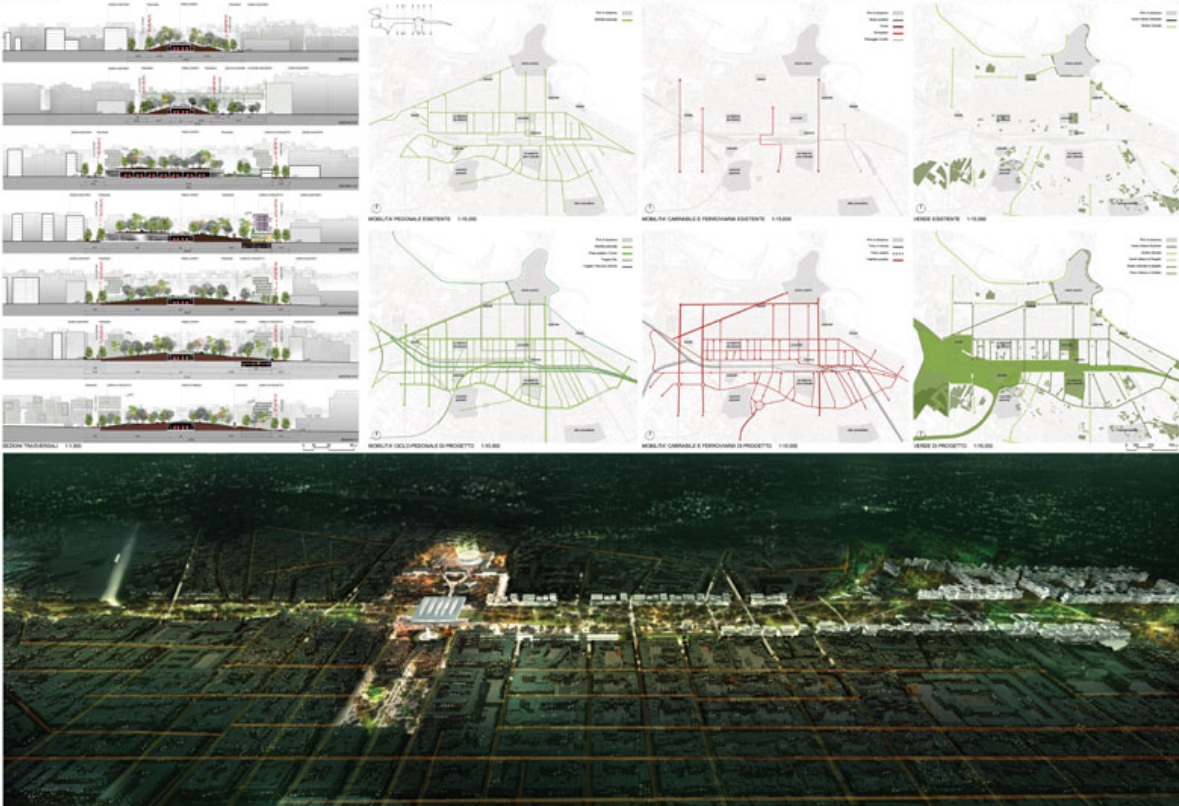
BARICENTRALE - CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE DI IDEE PER LE AREE FERROVIARIE 01



2 - Progetto vincitore M. Fuksas, tavola 1. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013

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BARICENTRALE - CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE DI IDEE PER LE AREE FERROVIARIE 03



3 - Progetto vincitore M. Fuksas, tavola 2. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013



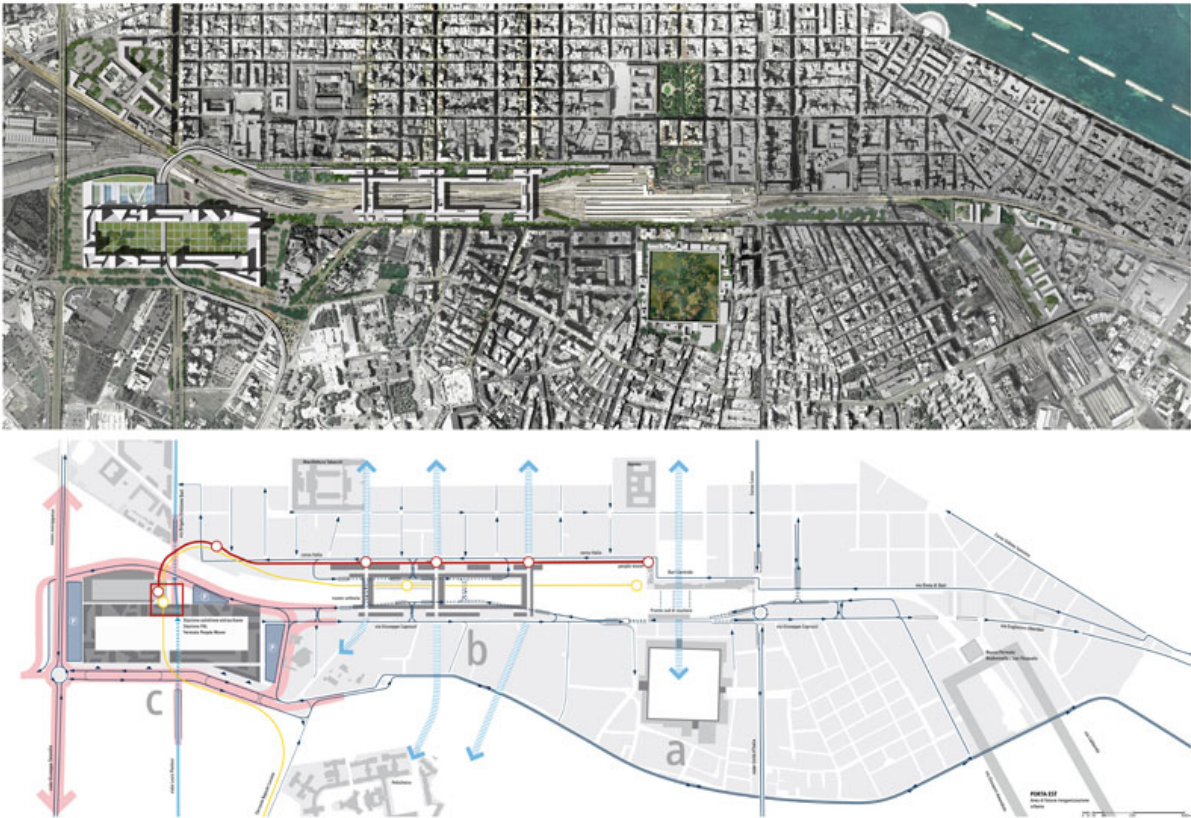


4 - Progetto vincitore M. Fuksas, tavola 3. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013



5 - Progetto vincitore M. Fuksas, tavola 4. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013





6 - Progetto finalista Francesco Cellini, tavola 1. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013



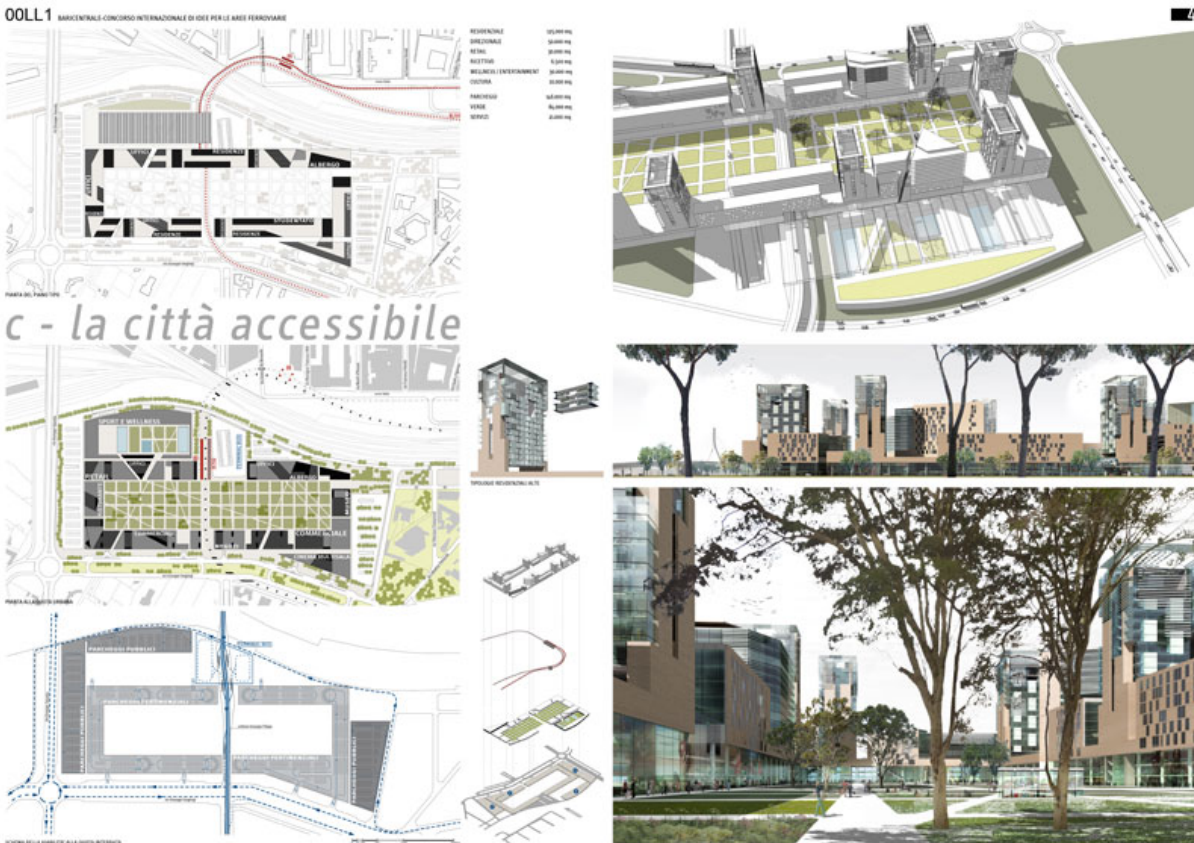
*a - un parco subito, superando i vincoli*

7 - Progetto finalista Francesco Cellini, tavola 2. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013





8 - Progetto finalista Francesco Cellini, tavola 3. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013

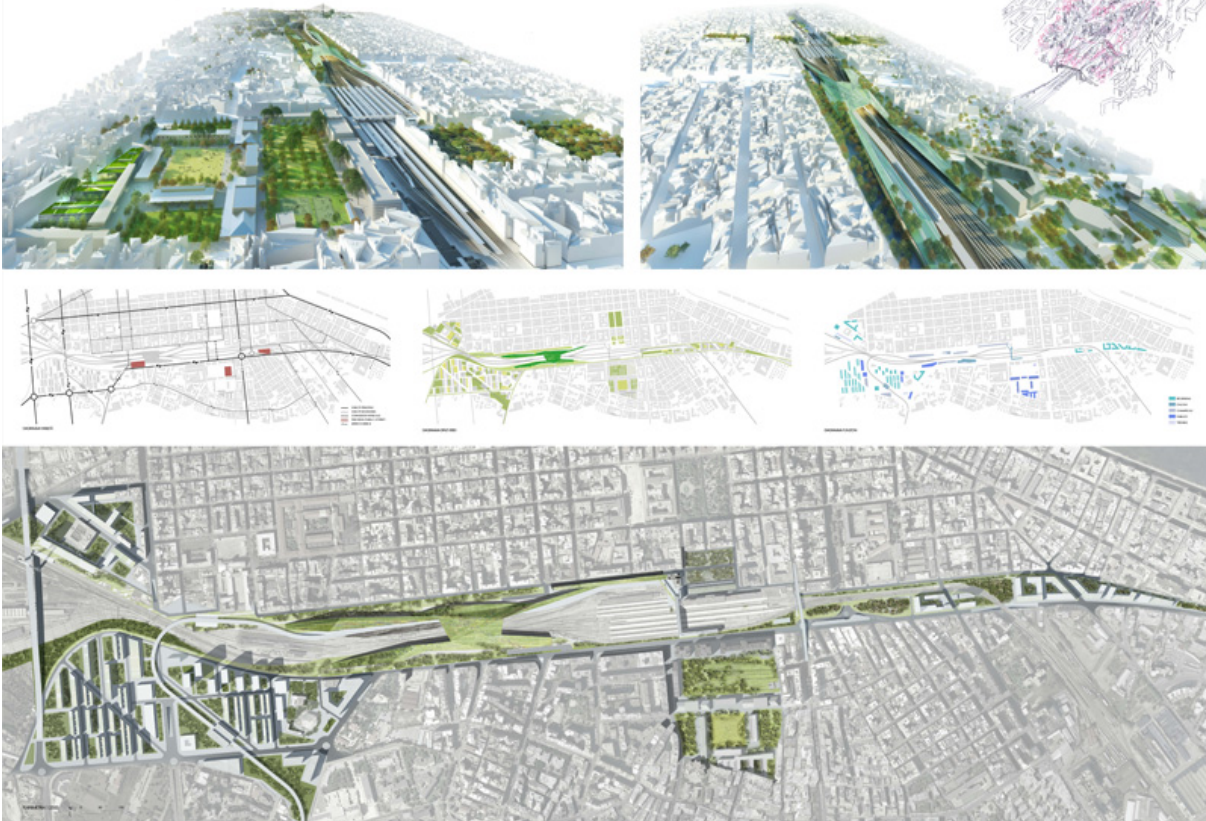


9 - Progetto finalista Francesco Cellini, tavola 4. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013



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BARICENTRALE - CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE DI IDEE PER LE AREE FERROVIARIE / 1/4



10 - Progetto finalista Guillermo Vazquez Consuegra, tavola 1. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013

75VB3

BARICENTRALE - CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE DI IDEE PER LE AREE FERROVIARIE / 2/4



11 - Progetto finalista Guillermo Vazquez Consuegra, tavola 2. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013



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BARICENTRALE - CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE DI IDEE PER LE AREE FERROVIARIE 3/4



12 - Progetto finalista Guillermo Vazquez Consuegra, tavola 3. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013

75VB3

BARICENTRALE - CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE DI IDEE PER LE AREE FERROVIARIE 4/4



13 - Progetto finalista Guillermo Vazquez Consuegra, tavola 4. Baricentrale - Concorso internazionale di idee per le aree ferroviarie, Bari 2013

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