



Architectures and urban transformations “under” the Messina Bridge

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Abstract: The Strait of Messina area is at the center of the political debate because of the issue related to the stable crossing, this being the most important work destined to play a central role on a global scale. This ignites the debate about an area characterized by infinite potential. The bridge, in addition to becoming the real link between Sicily and Calabria will connect the country with the rest of the south of the world. It is necessary to promote the identity of the overseas dialogue and indicate the direction of the development induced by the stable crossing, forming territorial coalitions, fostering the integration of resources for the development of some projects of common interest reconnecting to some strategic projects that are already started and thinking about new ways of participation with the actors involved on a voluntary basis. We need to look at what is and will be “under the bridge,” metaphorically, everything that seems to be in the background, but is not.

Keywords: Bridge; territorial regeneration; architectural and urban design; Strait of Messina; Italy

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1. Introduction.

The research explores everything that seems divorced from the work or that is considered as a topic in its own right, eventual or alongside the major work. New works planned in the land attack, new sea fronts, new infrastructure and new spatial strategies. With the bridge, the territorial warps, urban meshes and architectures of the sea fronts will change. It will be necessary to prepare the territories, including inland areas, with particular regard, the center of Sicily destined to become an essential crossroads of nascent territorial and infrastructural configurations such as the Palermo/Enna-CL/Catania high capacity up to the Strait City and the Villa-Salerno high speed train on the Calabrian front. It has been analyzed the system of major architectural works and urban transformation interventions in progress or planned on the two sides, Calabria and Sicily, thinking about: how the territories, with the bridge, will strengthen the centralities with respect to the role of the Strait in the Mediterranean; the need to reorganize the movements and manage the flows given that currently in the area move 10.000.000 passengers a year and 8.000 per day.

2. The spatial context

The bridge is a link that reinforces the role of the Strait as the Gateway of the Mediterranean, particularly with Africa, which is incredibly close, in the mutual contamination of resources, economy and countless energies. And Italy must play a leading role in the Mediterranean, a key element of a Euro-African corridor that would pass through the Messina Bridge [1]. The Strait is therefore the densest point of contact for flows. Millions of goods and people move through the Strait area every year by different modes of

transportation and with various destinations, including extra-regional ones. These values are destined for exponential growth as a result of the upgrading and reorganization of state-of-the-art infrastructure offerings. This is an opportunity to be seized. The two metropolitan cities, including municipalities in the province, covering a total land area of almost 6,500 mq, having about 1,150 inhabitants. Overall, Sicily, with a resident population of less than 5 million, and Calabria, with just over 1.8 million, will stage variable-geometry city systems in relation to Euro-Mediterranean nodes and networks, with some elements of transcalarity that will affect, from Sicily and Calabria, the entire country. *"Building bridges ... means connecting, getting to know each other, uniting, progressing"* [2]. It is a matter of seizing and exploiting all the opportunities related to the "bridge" system, nowadays, increasingly solicited by multiple contexts and at different territorial scales. Inland areas, which cannot remain excluded from such scenarios, are destined to play an irreplaceable bridging role, wrongly silenced. It is necessary to be open to new ideas: what will happen with the bridge, what will be the arrangement of territories and what can be the programmatic one with a "stable crossing," with the related infrastructural works. The Strait of Messina represents an environmental and territorial peculiarity [3] and it is good to reflect how the scenarios will change in a context marked by fragilities and compromised social conditions, and what will be the multiplier effects of flows and what will be the effects on architectural and urban systems. It is necessary to rethink the Strait Area, as a single territory to be reorganized in the light of the opportunities offered by the construction of the Bridge. The bridge will not only connect two locations but will also change urban landscapes and enhance regional cooperation between Sicily and Calabria. It is essential to explore new ideas about the future of the area and how the territory can evolve with the bridge's development, considering its social and environmental aspects. The Strait Area is not just about crossing and the bridge will connect, not only two points but everything that surrounds it [4].

3. Sea fronts. Calabrian and Sicilian sides.

In order to rethink the areas of sea fronts, coastal and inland areas, in relation to the construction of the Bridge, the point of view must be reversed: to observe the land from the sea and to interpret the change-considering the stable connection-in that heterogeneous and permeable strip that intercepts different landscapes and identities. The Bridge allow us to approach and get closer to the architectural project on the Strait seafront and now there is an opportunity to rethink architectural and urban planning projects, to study and put into practice with design the unique relationships that are established along the boundary between architecture and sea [5]. Coastal strip and inland areas will have to be an active part of the processes of regeneration and territorial development, without neglecting defense against hydrogeological risk and the long-term effects of climate change. With the bridge, infrastructural arrangements and the perception and enjoyment of coastal areas will certainly undergo changes. It will be up to the territories to seize the opportunities offered by redesigning coastal facades, understood as spaces of relationships and interfaces of complex systems; it is precisely here that artificial welding will generate greatest effects soliciting interesting challenges for the organization of the new territorial "dimension". Through the spatial reorganization of the two metropolitan realities and their sea fronts, the requirements will have to be met to make the Straits cities resilient in the historical phase of major "transitions". There are two metropolitan-port cities on the Strait which, with a system of ports so interconnected that a few years ago they determined the birth of the Strait Port System. Observing the sea "straits" such as Dardanelles, Gibraltar, Bosphorus and Messina, one realizes that the strength of their peculiarities lies not only in their function as a natural link between two land shores, but also in the role that the flows assume in a context of economic, social and cultural exchanges. The cities of Reggio and Messina stretch along a seemingly endless coastline interrupted by ribs of waterways. The construction of the stable crossing involves a series

of compensatory works required by the municipalities whose territories will be affected by the works, the location of the works and construction sites. In the Calabrian side, analyzing the coastal area near Cannitello, where the Calabrian pylon of the future bridge is to be built, the coastal stretch has already been affected by major interventions for several decades, some almost completed, others in the process of being executed. Attention to the coastal façade, to the organization or reorganization of port and infrastructure activities, to the redevelopment of urban waterfront, is increasingly evident. From the port of Villa San Giovanni to that of Reggio Calabria many waterfront modernization works have begun. One of the most important is the Port of Reggio Calabria, serving, in addition to passenger and commercial service, also a boating function. The first concept of the overall masterplan envisages the introduction of additional cruise activity to integrate, within the port, a new tourism function and the inclusion of technical volumes, cold ironing and docks. Mending the relationship with the Strait is the Masterplan of the Reggio Waterfront and Zaha Hadid's *Museum of the Mediterranean* (Fig. 1), currently under construction, located on the state-owned area of the Port of R.C.



Figure 1. Zaha Hadid waterfront and Zaha Hadid's *Museum of the Mediterranean*. Credit: Comune di Reggio Calabria. Project presented at Urbanpromo 2007.

On the Sicilian side facing the Strait, where there is the city of Messina stretches longitudinally, squeezed between the mountains and the two seas of the Strait, the bridge provides an additional opportunity to rethink a waterfront that is approximately 50 km long and almost entirely man-made, potentially enviable but too often neglected or undervalued. The coastal façade seems to increasingly favour orderly development and today looks proudly towards the sea, aspiring to a new waterfront that has already opened its first stretch of urban beach, for which even the author has fought hard [6]. The redevelopment of the waterfront is one of the most significant objectives leading to the revitalisation of the Strait area, which is finally being recognised. Several measures taken by the municipal administration also give cause for optimism, such as the approval of technical instruments for the modernisation of the sea route in the southern area and the construction of the new port of Tremestieri for the relocation of heavy road traffic from the centre of Messina. The bridge is an opportunity to remember that there are many large terraces overlooking the sea in the city. Among other projects planned or underway on the Messina seafloor, it is worth mentioning the restoration of the *Real Cittadella* in the city's natural harbour, the recent design competition for the "Urban, architectural and functional redevelopment of the state-owned maritime area between the Bocchetta and Annunziata streams", won by a group led by Guendalina Salimei [7], and the recently planned construction of the *MAXXI Med* museum complex, a museum for Mediterranean arts and research centre, "tangible proof of how the construction of the Bridge over the Strait can act as a major attraction for public and private investment" [8]. And, last but not least, many interesting works are planned around where the Sicilian pylon of the bridge is to be built, proposing a long-awaited and radical urban regeneration (Figure 2) [9].



Figure 2. a) The Strait of Messina Bridge. (Credit: Webuild- Stretto di Messina –Studio Libeskind) and b) Some works related to the bridge planned on the Sicilian side. (Credit: Gazzetta del Sud.)

5. Conclusions

The stable crossing is recognized as a crucial opportunity. It involves discussing issues related to the Strait, drawing on various international studies on urban and territorial design and planning. There is a need to promote new ideas for redeveloping the Strait and its surroundings; promote solutions to improve the accessibility and usability of inland areas and minor centers gravitating or distant from the coastal strips; foster inclusive territorial logics and support for businesses and productive activities, provide a strategic vision on the potential of the territories by enhancing the cultural heritage, landscape and environment, minor centers and inland areas; lay the foundations for the “participatory” definition of shared policies on some assets that look at urban resilience, social inclusion, energy and digital issues for the management of the city in the era of ecological transition; define the visions for a smart infrastructure system in terms of efficiency and to facilitate the definition of strategies for territorial cohesion and improved accessibility of territories. The reorganization of the networks must be rethought in a systemic logic in which the Strait Sea is not only a “discontinuity element” interposed between the two still lands. The bridge is not just a piece of infrastructure. The cities overlooking the Strait have a disfigured seafront and the bridge represents an urban regeneration and territorial transformation project comparable to those in Bilbao or Barcelona. An opportunity along two stretches of coastline, each about 20 km long, should prompt us to create a think tank of architects, urban planners, economists and sociologists capable of creating a model of conurbation between the cities of the Strait [10]. It is necessary to propose solutions to improve the environmental performance of the territory, resilience, quality of life, adaptation to climate change, promote actions of territorial animation [11], activating paths of knowledge and awareness related to the new forms of the territory and urban armor, create and strengthen the network between institutions, organize a knowledge system through virtual mapping and analysis of assets [12], disseminating good architectural and urban good practices and ensuring that they go viral.

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