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The Area Of The Strait Reading Theories And Strategies For A Metropolitan Dimension

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Abstract

Extending across a peninsular strip going from Gioia Tauro to Melito Porto Salvo on the Calabrian side, and from Milazzo to Giardini Naxos on the Sicilian side, the Strait of Sicily sees the *Aspromonte* massif and the *Peloritani* mountain range as two facing stage sets of land sketching in the gulf a water *piazza* of a *landscaping room*. Described in the proposal by Giuseppe and Alberto Samonà, Ludovico Quaroni, Antonio Quistelli, Sergio Musmeci, Paolo D'Orsi Villani and Leonardo Urbani, it outlines, in the county seats of Reggio Calabria and Messina, the prevalence of a Euclidean space, identifiable in the exact metrics given by the recurrence of the measuring *step* of the blocks drawn in the *reconstruction plans*. The geographical dimension and the human nature of the district identify into the longitudinal extension the characterizing element of a territory and with it the main issue of its own logistics coverage. In this scenario the *water piazza* of the Strait is cut through on a daily basis by the network linking the two sides, like strings of commuter traffic between two strips of land whose distance has always been too small to make out their separate destinies yet too broad to facilitate their joining. It follows the need to reflect upon the infrastructure of the entire surrounding area which, while proposing a study on the themes of accessibility and crossing, also outlines a strategy running on harbours and airports as gateways to the entire area to scale with nature and the size of its traffic.

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1. Foreword

The terms *area*, *conurbation*, *city*, *metropolis*, *region*, *territory* indicate only some of the nouns, with similar meaning, which identifies the tiny part of the world between Calabria and Sicily which, although narrow in its geographical extent, identifies with the global unconscious with a fate separate from the very lands that enclose it. Described by Lucio Gambi as a "region between two regions" (Gambi, 1965), the *Area of the Strait* is a portion of territory featuring unpredictable boundaries identifiable in the catchment area of influence product of the *magnetic* charge of the *water piazza* of the *Strait* and of the by programmatic interpretation of a possible scenario of the lands that look out on it. Joint, two-edged, encompassing the literary-iconographic dimension of the bottomless gorges of *myth*, the geographical dispersion of the area in the southern Italian landscape reiterates the presence of legendary energy encapsulating disaster, specific orographic and anthropic natures, but also testimony of extraordinary itineraries, archetypical practices, ancestral traditions, reoccurring customs as components of a framework that can be described and turned into space that is alive, active in the thinking processes of its people, true script in the memory of the travellers who visit it, and becomes a word, a *place*. As in *Michelangelo's* void found between that critical distance between the finger of God and that of Adam in the Sistine Chapel, the absence of land between Sicily and Calabria together with the presence of the body of water known as *Straight* measures in its longitudinal extension, a unique *landscape unit*.

2. Empty space, the shape of the Earth and the focus of vision

Extending across a peninsular strip that goes from Gioia Tauro to Melito Porto Salvo on the Calabrian side, and from Milazzo to Giardini Naxos on the Sicilian side, the *Area of the Strait* sees the *Aspromonte* massif and the *Peloritani* mountain range as two facing stage sets of land, sketching in the verticality of the void of the Strait a *water piazza* of a *landscaping room* - evoking Franco Purini's (1991) effective theoretical argument that speaks of the *internal nature* of the Italian landscape - reinforced and enclosed by the Etna (Sicily) and Rocca di Scilla (Calabria) massifs. Described in the images of Grand Tour travellers that fashionably sketched its profile in an image of the landscape that is still very much contemporary, revisited in Wolfgang Goethe's travel memoirs (1965), as well as those of Norman Douglas (1962), in the historical rendering of Piero Bevilacqua and Augusto Placanica (1985), in the literary rendition by Stefano D'Arrigo (1975), Franco Costabile (1961), Matteo Collura (2007), Bartolo Cattafi (1961) and in the research by scholars who every day make of this scenery their centre of interest, the deep abyss of the Strait, as it places itself at the centre of the scene, retells *emptiness* as the crucial point of any place that thus wishes to call itself. When viewing it from the above, from the front and as a whole, the *shape* of the land, the orography of the *land* above sea level, restores the *piazza* of the *Strait* a Cartesian basin marked by a longitudinal development of the *lands* that define it. At the same time, from a reading of the vertical perspective, this reveals as a repository of acropolis memories that, as in Greek space, see the meanders of the coast line as a series of punctuated outposts that characterize the core of the vision. Within the basin, a *two-faced* onlooker, as it constantly remodulates its perspective on the double land *focus*, it outlines a sequential reading of multiple perspectives, partial views, independent spaces where one can see collection points, significant values and crucial emergencies for a possible, as well as necessary, supposition of union. The orographic development of the mountain "backstage" is marked on both sides by the valleys of the rivers that sit vertical on the coast arranged as bars as if with an imaginary metric ruler, measure the longitudinal extension of the basin of the *Strait*. The depressions of the bed prove to be repositories of stand-alone space figurativeness that are on occasion exceptional and unexpected and that are often forgotten and reviled by the lack of aesthetic acknowledgement. Memorable, for every guest, is visiting the basin of the Amendolea, on the Calabrian coast, or the Nisi on the Sicilian side, which in the sudden dilation of their spatiality, restore an alienating dimension, traceable even today to the iconography of *the horrible* and the fantastic.

3. Settlement information

Described in the proposal by Giuseppe and Alberto Samona, Ludovico Quaroni, Antonio Quistelli, Sergio Musmeci, Paolo D'Orsi Villani, Leonardo Urbani, the *Area of the Strait* is witness of the capitals Reggio Calabria and Messina's predominance of Cartesian vertical spatiality, found again in the serial metric of the *pace* measuring the *block*, designed in the *reconstruction* plans of the early decades of the Twentieth century. The conflict between the regular grid with the curving soils, perceives the sporadic relief of the fabric as the crossroads of unexpected rotations that often go unresolved during the settlement. Away from residential areas, the *hardening* of the narrow strip between the reliefs and the sea, is in contrast with the important presence of nature, often sparse and unspoiled, just above the urbanised area, carries important aesthetic values linked to a rural dimension that is still intact, last remnant of stretches of Italian agricultural landscape. Viewing the entire system from above sees the infrastructural dimension as the creation of a series of *topographical features*, arranged according to the parallel development of railway and highway, which define, with their strands, the settlement barriers of the towns between the coastline and the high reliefs with human development features on both sides.

Whereas the human component interpreted with a view from above of the plan, restores the immediacy of the geometric constitution of urban facilities of the capitals and a predominance of *lines* in the creation of the settlement of the whole area, a prospective interpretation of the settlement dimension of both sides, leads to a new reading to view key points with the immediate perception of a visual route network such as the military architectures of the *Forti*, built in the late Nineteenth century aiming to blend into the landscape and see danger from far, as well as the great 20th-century urban containers placed at the intersection of longitudinal infrastructure systems and auctions of the rivers. Made to be spotted from the distance, as far as the other side of the strait, these macro-marks denote the point-necklace of emergencies that characterizes the recent territory anthropisation on both coasts by defining, with the suspended ribbons of the motorway viaduct, the outposts of modernity in scale with a brief reading of the landscape.

4. A cognitive framework

Set aside the idea of a single *Metropolis of the Strait*, recognizable in the big spatial perspective that encompassed the shores of Calabria and Sicily in an interpretative and visionary logo of a theory to scale with the landscape, the arrangements applied in a different manner on the shore of Calabria, due to the lack of interest for a metropolitan setting of the Tekne Plan for Messina in the 1970s, ignoring, for the city itself, the infrastructural implications of a *looped collector* outlined by the Urban Plan of the 1990s, the gruelling debate that has characterized the various hypotheses of a stable connection between the two sides has viewed, over the last two decades, the *Area of the Strait* as some sort of *waiting* area where the programming on both sides resulted in a diluted chase of two capitals to overcome each other. If, in fact, in its entirety, it configures the indivisible dimension of a homogeneous territory, at the same time, the same structural information such as the orographic formation of the lands, the human dimension of urban settlements, while preparing, recognising a homologous settling nature, the usefulness of a *tuning system* of their resources-seem to register in the very liquidity of the *Strait*, in the crucial abyss of the water depths, the distinctive characteristics of a counterforce to unity, a repulsive energy comparable to the distributed resistance by the approach of two polar entities of the same sign warning the risk of a possible exclusion of a possible hypothesis of unification (Thermes, 2008). In this context, the definition of a common strategy can only revive the needs of harmonic coherence of a territory through a preliminary reading of its physical and human characters to recognize and follow the inclination and direct every choice to the synergistic use of soils for modern services with the aim of providing an array of modern services. This leads to an evolution of the concept of *proximity* of the two coasts, virtuously *distant* from each other, of scenarios and objectives, as needs of diversity of functions, roles, institutional apparatuses in order to call for a complementary and equal dialogue between the building blocks necessary for a new representation of a coherent image of landscape in line with the recent history of its lands. It follows the possibility of directing a cognitive reflection on the integral, evolutionary, urban and human dynamics of human

settlements, designed to suggest a plausible intervention connected to a hierarchy of priority areas on which to concentrate research and resources to create a *different* dimension to form a single element that can preserve the identities of individual parts.

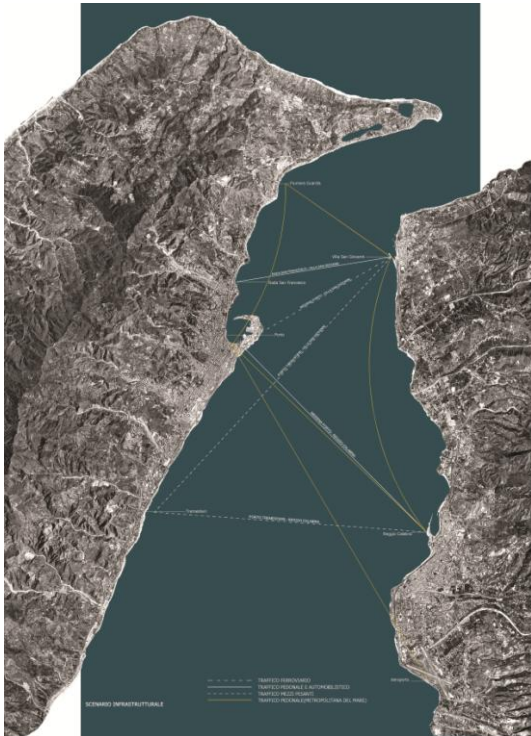


Fig.1 Infrastructural connection between Sicily and Calabria

Alessia Scimone, *Reconfiguration of the port of Messina between the rivers Giostra and Annunziata* - Thesis
 University *Mediterranea* of Reggio Calabria - Faculty of Architecture - AA 2008/09
 Tutor: Laura Thermes – Co Tutor: Antonello Russo

5. Urgent needs and mobility strategies between the two sides

The drawing debate on the prospect of building a *bridge* between the two cities on either side of the Strait, involving an organizational element projected toward the creation of a single entity, has been intermittently undertaken by institutional bodies whenever a new fact, of political or logistic nature, outlines the basis for a new revival of the opportunity to join the sides only to subsequently dismiss all declamatory intentions pending new argumentative variables. Set aside for the time being, any dialogue to achieve a built crossing, that *bridge* that would, in fact, force the two sides to a joint planning of infrastructural works, if only because of the infrastructure rearrangement of the two coasts, the new centrality of argument prepared by the institution of the *metropolitan cities* rekindles the issue by raising new cohesion opportunities. Despite proving to be necessary, the urgency of capillary work of *environmental restoration* of both sides, connected to a virtuous process of consolidation of the areas, restoring the natural regime of the rivers, to the reconstruction of the tree cover of the sloped parts, to including formerly abusive housing, it seems essential to *put in place* a broader strategy oriented to have a unified and plausible scenario that is once again connected to redefining mobility between the two coasts, a solution for which has not been found in forty

years of legislative proposals, plans, studies, debates and conferences, showing an obvious lack of a strategic direction able to plan works and ensure regular crossing conditions of an area which, in its metropolitan nature, sits at the top of conglomerates on a national scale. The territorial dimension and the geographical and human nature of the area around the *Strait* in its longitudinal extension identify the details characterizing a territory and with it the main issue of its own logistics coverage. In that scenario the *water piazza* of the Strait is crossed daily by fast railways, vehicles and commuter traffic between the two sides outlining the thread of a connection characterized by a *continuous intermittence* between two strips of land whose distance has always been too small to make out their destinies and too broad to facilitate their union. A reflection on the whole infrastructural dimension makes port and airport hubs the access doors to the entire surrounding area to scale with the nature and size of its trades. The reach of the boundaries of a metropolitan entity to the towns of Gioia Tauro in Calabria and Milazzo in Sicily, outlines on the Tyrrhenian side the establishment of a natural interface between the existing inter-modal node of the great port on the plain in Calabria, for which new features are desirable to complement the container traffic, and the port on the Tyrrhenian coast of Messina, already set to accept travellers by sea between Sicily and the rest of the peninsula. On the Ionian coast of Calabria the landing of Reggio Calabria, specially adapted and/or possibly supported by that of Ionic Salt Mines, restored to a logistical use, lends itself to the natural use the port of Tremestieri on the southern coast of Messina. The latter possibly gathered in a virtuous complementarity with the port infrastructure of Giarre/Riposto defines on the Ionic Sicilian coast, the key to a strategy able to connect logistics nodes with an metropolitan stretch of the local Strait designed to bypass urban centres from heavy lorries crossing and, at the same time, provide an alternative and complementary options for lightweight vehicles. In urban settings, a plan to cross on both sides aimed at the needs of fast commuter and vehicle traffic requires in Messina, in the Annunziata/Rada San Francesco area, maintaining a direct interface to the port of Villa San Giovanni with a consequent specialization of the *maritime theatre* of the scythe of the port of Messina for commuter traffic on fast vehicles and cruise landing of the entire area. This framework outlines on both sides a parallel infrastructure scenario connected to establishment of a double line light rail destined to fulfil the needs of rapid mobility of pedestrian commuters between the two coasts for which a substantial expansion is hoped. From Villa San Giovanni, Ravagnese, in Calabria, and Punta Faro in Tremestieri, in Sicily, two metropolitan threads arranged, in part, on the current site of the railway line, would design the real infrastructure to urban scale so it can absorb the normal requirements of crossing between the two regions with the creation of a terminal station in Calabria for high speed rail to and from the peninsula, on the Villa san Giovanni hub. As far as the Strait is concerned, that choice would entail the restructuring of urban historic centres along the coast with a comb-like network of the same with fast-track stations of the sea metropolis to the shores of Sicily. Despite the need for synergy in order to optimize the direct connections between the hubs arranged in parallel on both sides, the ongoing settlement choices continue to show the effects of a transatlantic *split* planning schedule that records, on the Calabrian side, the current expansion of Villa San Giovanni, both of the port infrastructure that are being completed and the highway systems on the Sicilian shore with the extension of the port of Tremestieri, with the significant expansion of its capacity already out for tender. In the absence of a logistical adjustment of the ports of Reggio Calabria and Rada San Francesco in Messina, in a medium-term forecast, one expects that using a *cross* route for vehicles will obviously increase travel time and transport costs. The logistics infrastructure theme also concerns inter-modal mobility policies in relation with the making of a high speed line for southern Italy able to improve the airport capacity of an area which, as well as its metropolitan dimension, connects more than six hundred thousand residents. Currently entrusted only to the airport of Reggio Calabria, accessibility and departure by air to the whole country records the continued indecision over the hypothesis of expansion of the port of Ravagnese, with the increasingly pervasive insistence over new instances connected to the creation of a new interface for air traffic on the Tyrrhenian coast of Sicily. In this decision-making nothingness, the recent upgrades of Lamezia Airport and Crotona hubs in Calabria and Trapani Birgi and Comiso in Sicily that, as they attract the trade of *low cost* trans-European companies, shift large numbers of passengers away from the metropolitan area of the *Strait*. In the light of this examination it is necessary to specify how any planning has not itself the task to imagine new

scenarios. There is no doubt that, given the timing of the debate, any hypothesis would naturally be supported by a significant amount of research which would infer a natural legitimacy and an immediate trial. The lack of a strategy geared to support mobility between the two sides, in the long-standing maintenance of a substandard and inefficient situation of inertia, outlines the edges of a rushed interpretation of the dynamics of change and growth of an area that continues to perpetuate on its landscape the only resource in scale with the expectations of its inhabitants. Such *delay* and tendency to naturally distrust a possible, sudden and swift *change of course*, defines as *myth* characters are being revisited, the key information of a story that, on the destructive waves pushed by the monsters of *Scylla* and *Charybdis*, seems to register the shipwreck of unitary legitimization hypothesis of its lands.

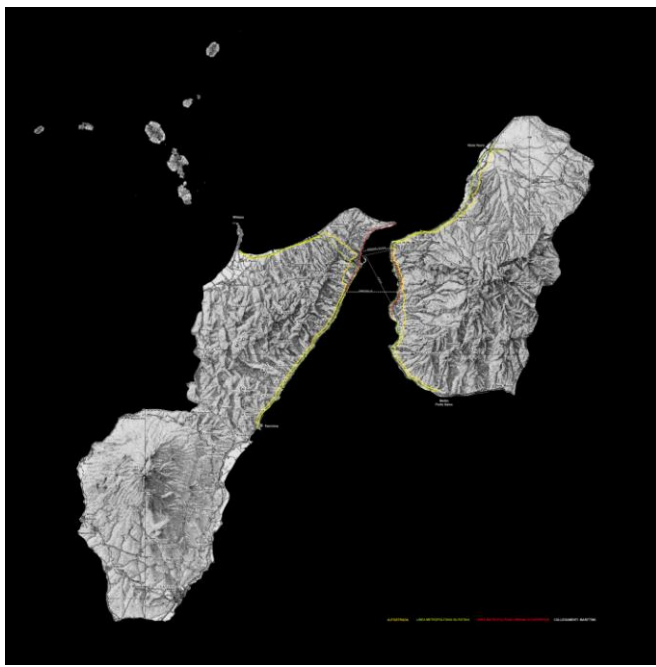


Fig.2 The "room" of the Strait . Delimitation and assumptions of infrastructural Strait Area
 Elaborated realized in the Laboratory Messina between the stride area and the landing of Tremestieri
 Coordinators: Laura Thermes, Gianfranco Neri, Ottavio Amaro.
 Tutor: Fabrizio Ciappina, Antonello Russo, Gaetano Scarcella
 LId³A7 International Architecture Laboratory

The project of the existing and restoration of the landscape . Reggio Calabria and Messina : the Strait Area
 Scientific manager and General Coordinator: Laura Thermes - Reggio Calabria September 19 / October 4, 2008

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