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CISA

Architectural report

THE VALUE OF ABANDONMENT: THE GIACOMINI PARK IN ITALY

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INTRODUCTION

An abandoned disposal site for Municipal Solid Waste (Environmental Facility for Separate Collection - EFSC) located in a town of approx.10.000 inhabitants provided an opportunity for requalification of an open space and regeneration of a neglected woodland with restricted use, in accordance with EEC Regulations 2052/88. Both these elements were deemed strategic for different reasons. A juxtaposition of “natural”/artificial both requiring intervention. Two critical elements, two issues subject to ongoing debate by public administrations striving to identify an equilibrium in an attempt to proactively support this type of area. An open space, of value in its own right due to uninterrupted availability, multifunctional and readily organizable but burdened by a need for control and management, and the vegetation and its importance as an environmental vector, a symbol of strategic needs encumbered by maintenance and governance issues.

An obsolete area conveys a double value: it both contains and constitutes the neglected object, two separate conditions featuring an active subject in the first case and in the second the object of the action itself. The “non-use” may be referred either to a container and/or to the context of space, terrain vagues or volume. The term “to abandon” is linked to a negative concept corresponding to synonyms such as to give up or desist from doing something, to leave definitively forever implying a surrendering of control and responsibility, terms and concepts indicating varying degrees of awareness, time frames and modalities. Each is associated with an indisputable innate and deep-rooted hostility towards an interpretative vision according to which mankind is the ordinator architect of all things mundane, a maintenance technician and supervisor aware of all that goes on before his eyes. On losing control (by choice or necessity) and thus leaving something behind, this position however assumes a lesser role, being somehow ill-suited to cover an active role in a routine setting.

Within the context of this mechanism, time, humanly managed, is annulled and loses any form of link with reality, it is left hanging (definition included amongst the diverse meanings of abandon) in a sort of limbo surrounding the fate of the neglected object.

On relating abandon to a space, the mindset focuses on aspects of increasing ambiguity, giving rise to a visual and mental association which, taken together, generate a negative frame of mind. This summation produces an image in which the limits and confines of frequentation, vision, management and socialization have been lost, thus determining a kind of marginalization (situated externally, beyond the confines) in which the dynamics manifested are out of control, unlimited and lacking direction.

Recent research has focused on the ecologic and environmental qualities afforded by an obsolete space, furthering a complex scientific view aimed at examining the potentialities of the in-between and the terrain vagues occupying a less central position amongst the physical and aesthetic requirements of our presence in these locations (through an association once again linking an automatism new/cared for/beautiful).

The literature relating to derelict areas documents through renowned cases, architectural and industrial qualities that acted as a driver for new configurations, producing a determinant impact on the landscape and sociality.

The case illustrated turns its gaze towards a less courtly and in some ways anonymous "lesser place", one of many that punctuate our territories in various capacities (with a series of different former destinations) which may become virtuous in the context of recovery/recycling.

The project is comprised of two basic elements: a former collection centre and a woodland, both left to themselves. Two different entities, with gradients of naturalness and hybrid artificiality to be brought together in order to devise a renewed environmental, ecological and social functions.

THE REQUALIFICATION PROJECT: FROM A FACILITY FOR SEPARATE COLLECTION TO AN URBAN PARK

The area was comprised of a small facility for separate collection, a strictly organized structure with no remaining functionality. It was an anonymous place created according to a pre-established design with a view to performing specifically-identified functions. A situation of widespread anonymity defined by law in terms of size and characteristics (Figure 1).

The Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea issued a Decree dated April 8 2008 regulating centres for the separate collection of municipal solid wastes, in line with

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FIGURE 1: Orthophoto of the area of intervention.

art.183, comma 1, letter cc) of Legislative Decree n.152 dated April 3 2003, which defined the fields of application in municipal or inter-municipal collection centres for household and non-domestic users. Collection centres are made up of a series of removable containers for the conferment of non-hazardous household wastes featuring internal road networks, impermeable paving in the areas for unloading and deposition of wastes, fencing of a height no less than 2m, and an outer barrier of hedging and/or trees or mobile screens to minimize visibility of the facility. The centre includes an area for conferment and deposition on impermeabilized slabs featuring accessible ramps for the conferment of bulky or heavy materials (Figure 2).

Prior to intervention, the area was characterised by the presence of a series of abandoned undifferentiated wastes such as waste oils, plastic containers, inert and other materials deposited both throughout the paved and the green areas. The paving at ground level was comprised of concrete slabs delimited on all four sides by a runoff point and rainwater disposal system. One of the storm drains was placed inside the area for the disposal of special waste (batteries, exhausted oils, etc. ...), protected by a mobile aluminium cover with a PVC sheet. The fully asphalted raised level used for the unloading of various types of waste was accessible by means of two asphalted ramps. Wooden sheet piling had been embedded immediately prior to the north ramp to contain the soil, and a layer of gravel had been spread in the vicinity of the escarpment delimiting the southern raised area featuring a series of accumulations of inert material. The centre for separate waste collection was delimited along the perimeter by a series of fences of different heights interspersed with steel access doors and by two 6-metre high Leylandii cypress hedges to the sides of the main entrance to the west. In addition, in the vicinity of the latter, a prefabricated construction shed with a drinking water tap at the back had been erected on a concrete slab.

Nearby, the woodland consisted in a relatively young area planted along parallel mulched rows with plants of various sizes, including ash, walnuts, alders, hornbeams, elms and poplars, in addition to a dense undergrowth of mainly privet and hazel. A lack of maintenance had led to a dangerous degradation of the arboreal and shrub vegetation, with fallen plants and forked and chipped branches, making the area unpassable and close to collapse. These two areas are located close to the historic centre of the Municipality of Motta di Livenza (Italy), in an enclosed area lacking any road network devoted to a series of public uses: municipal swimming pools, sports field, care centre for the elderly, all frequented by different groups and remaining operational throughout the day.

Taken together, the waste area and the woodland portray a landscape of abandonment featuring a strong potential for regeneration based on the intrinsic qualities and po-

FIGURE 2: General layout of the area of intervention featuring the EFSC area and the section of woodland to the east.

sitional value, nestled amongst the numerous surrounding activities that constitute a dynamic context (Figure 3).

The project, initially intended to completely demolish the collection centre structure, has evolved with the aim of promoting a proactive link between the structures present on site, financial availability and the functional requests of the community.

The main works envisaged include (Figure 4):

- Realization of a road network and access system;
- Treatment and erection of masonry and flooring in the area dedicated to games and leisure activities (ex-ESFC);
- Potentiation of vegetation and realization of the woodland .

The first operation undertaken was to develop the road network to afford a simple, seamless system of access to the area: a series of intersecting continuous tracks providing access to the entire area distinguished in three separate zones:

- The woodland area to the east
- A fully equipped central plaza
- A polyfunctional grassed area to the west

As highlighted above, the waste conferment areas are codified spaces made up of a few functional elements: a concrete area housing the containers for storage of the various materials and a high altitude perimetric road providing easy user access to specific waste containers.

Thus, from the basic elements comprised in the equipped area, a park was born. A park in a few easy steps. Taking advantage of its barycentric position and elementary structure of concrete floors and walls, a series of simple operations of removal, salvaging, excavation, and cutting were undertaken to restore the area to an operational function. A restoration not linked merely to use of the space, but also featuring a regeneration of environmental principles.

Initial operations focused on the cleaning and remediation of surface materials in the area of the plaza, the grassed area and the fringes, with removal of the asphalted surface to facilitate access to the drain partially compensating the area concerned; the material removed was crushed and re-used by the contractor.

Cleaning was carried out on the long oil storage tank comprised of a curb raised above the height of the ecological area. The containers and plastic cover protecting the drums deposited during the operational phase of the EFSC area were removed This concrete paved space was then reconnected with the underlying soil by breaking the paving to allow resurfacing of the soil required to convert this box into a new organic container.

The paving slabs featured a series of diversified irregularities and abrasions, although the superficial characteristics of the latter did not hinder a routine presence of the

FIGURE 3: Obsolete EFSC.

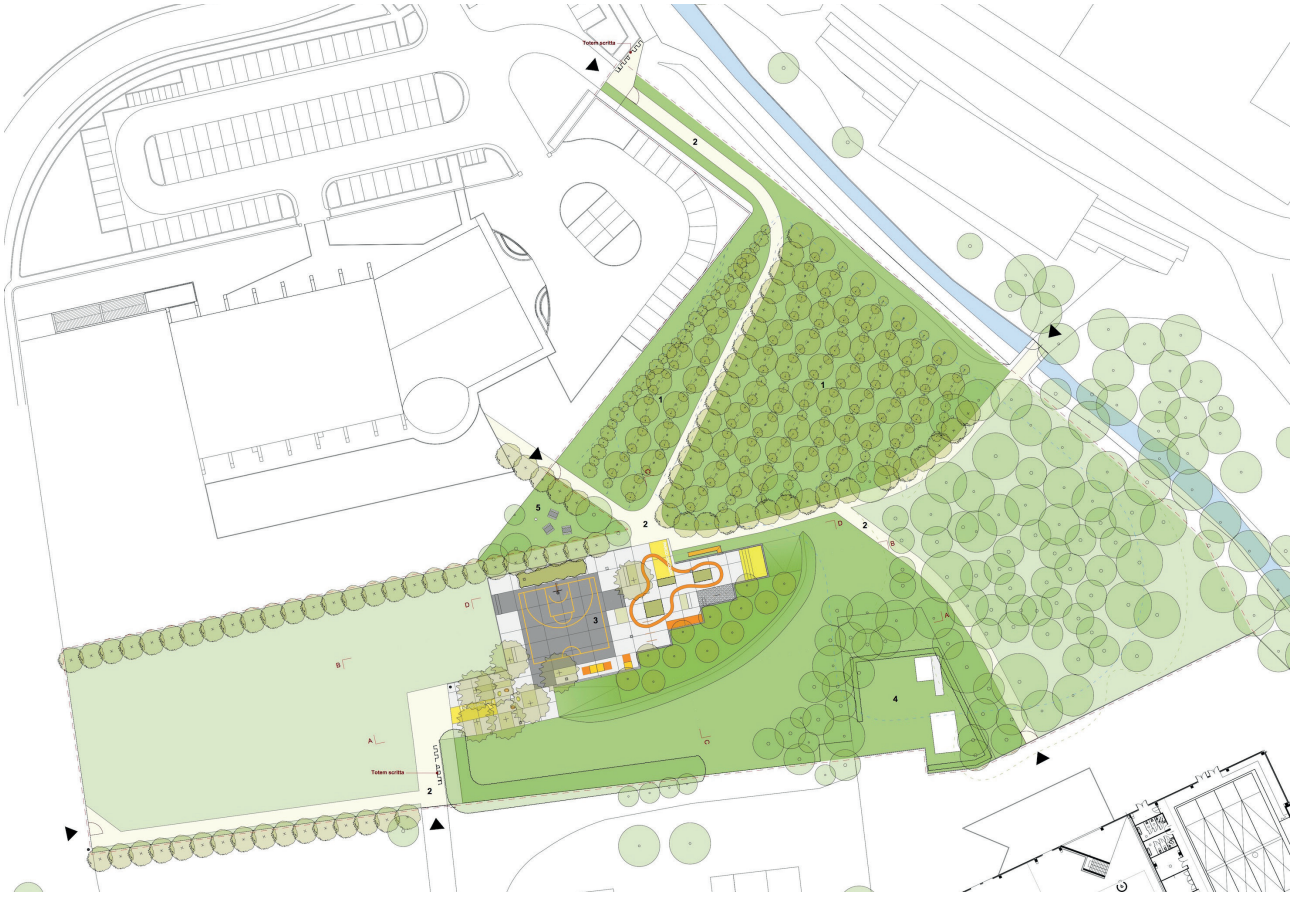

FIGURE 4: General project layout showing the extension of the woodland area, redesign of the road network linking the various areas, and the new function of the EFSC area.

public and were maintained. Each cut and each removal required a detailed operation aimed at adhering to the original lines / joints traced on the ground and promote the development of a geometric pattern deriving from the original form of the area and thus generate 'discarded' sections indicated for outplacing. The sections thus obtained proved to be of a particular qualitative and formal interest attesting to the granularity of their composition.

The elements present were ludically interpreted based on their capacity, their consistency, and presence of vertical walls and horizontal surfaces, and a series of diverse patterns hypothesized.

By manipulating the existing area, sections of concrete were removed to restore permeability to the soil to yield ground on which to plant new trees needed to mitigate the heat, provide shaded spots and constitute areas of collective appeal, design spaces in which to linger, whilst bearing in mind how the soil "is a vital organ to all effects" (Figures 5,6 and 7).

Basic, "circular" actions devised to avoid production of scraps or waste: digging, removing, operating through coring to deform the area, to build the playground, each concrete element cut with precision or deriving from diversified diameter coring was reallocated in the same area to form the basis for a new application - hard paving on which to locate picnic tables or route a brief itinerary.

The concrete blocks obtained from cutting of the paving and particularly from coring of the inclined wall, were positioned at varying heights perpendicular to the wall at a point where, due to the presence of surface water, a depression needed reinforcing to ensure stability of the intervention had formed. This particular arrangement was devised to guarantee leaching of surface waters into the concrete slab drainage.

Vertical concrete surfaces of an identical height featuring an original coarse finish maintained to act as a bond for the chromatic colours used to define the playrooms were used. A variety of tones of yellow were applied as the main colour, and the existing north-south facing walls were decorated using pictograms to portray the range of activities, whilst the remaining east-west facing walls depicted the range of games available.

A succession of rooms decorated with scenes of shooting, climbing, and street workouts constituted the play area; different colours were applied to mark out space for the specific activities. The floor paving was dyed to create a games itinerary for wheeled vehicles and/or skates, and a basketball court delineated (Figures 8, 9).

A room to the north was designed for use in the event of shows by creating between the existing walls a smooth concrete staircase comprising four steps created using painted disposable formwork similar to the existing walls.

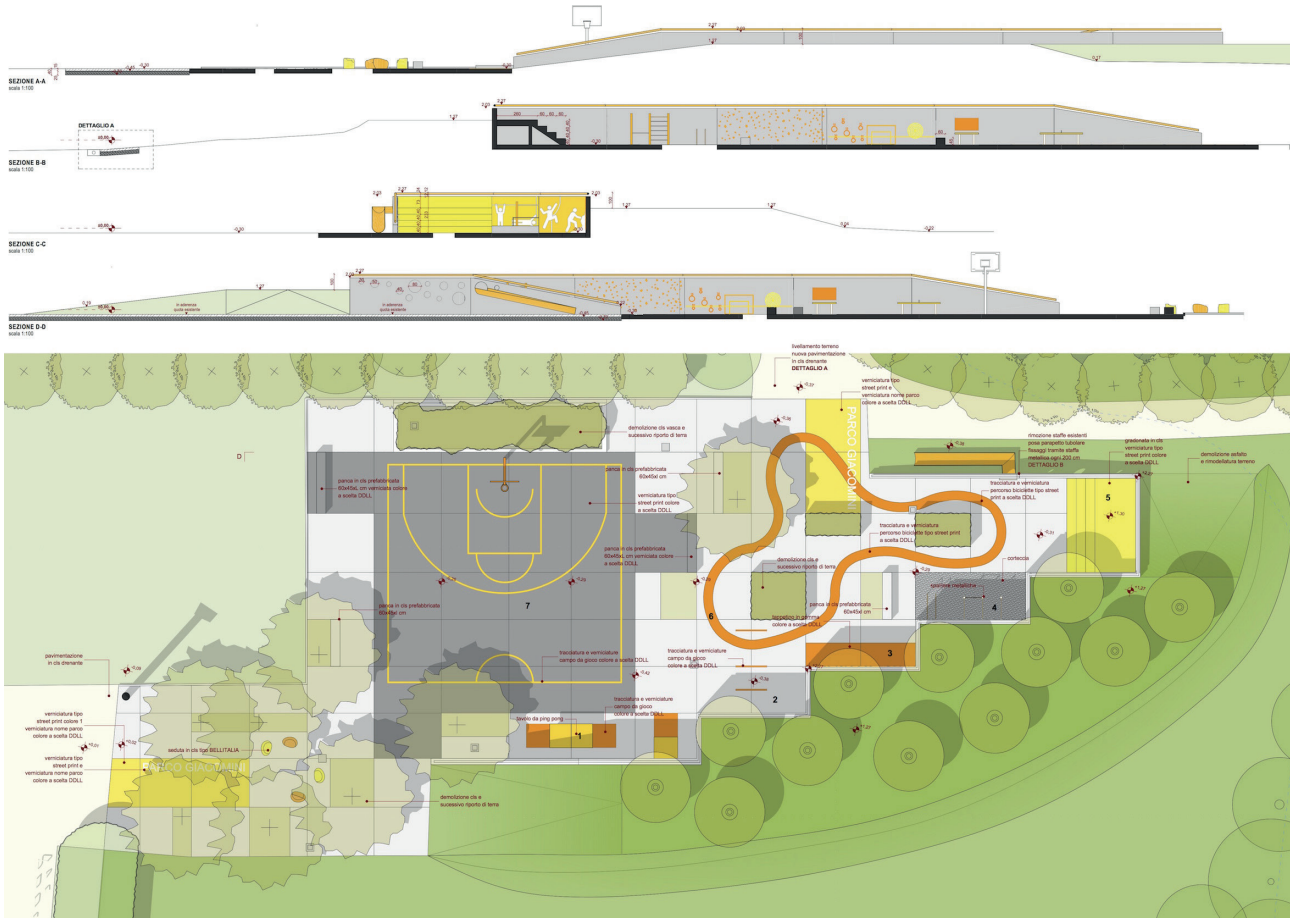

FIGURE 5: Detail of the project in the EFSC area indicating the range of activities.

FIGURE 6: Diversified core drilling on the vertical wall.

FIGURE 7: Incisions to the ground during recovery of permeable areas.

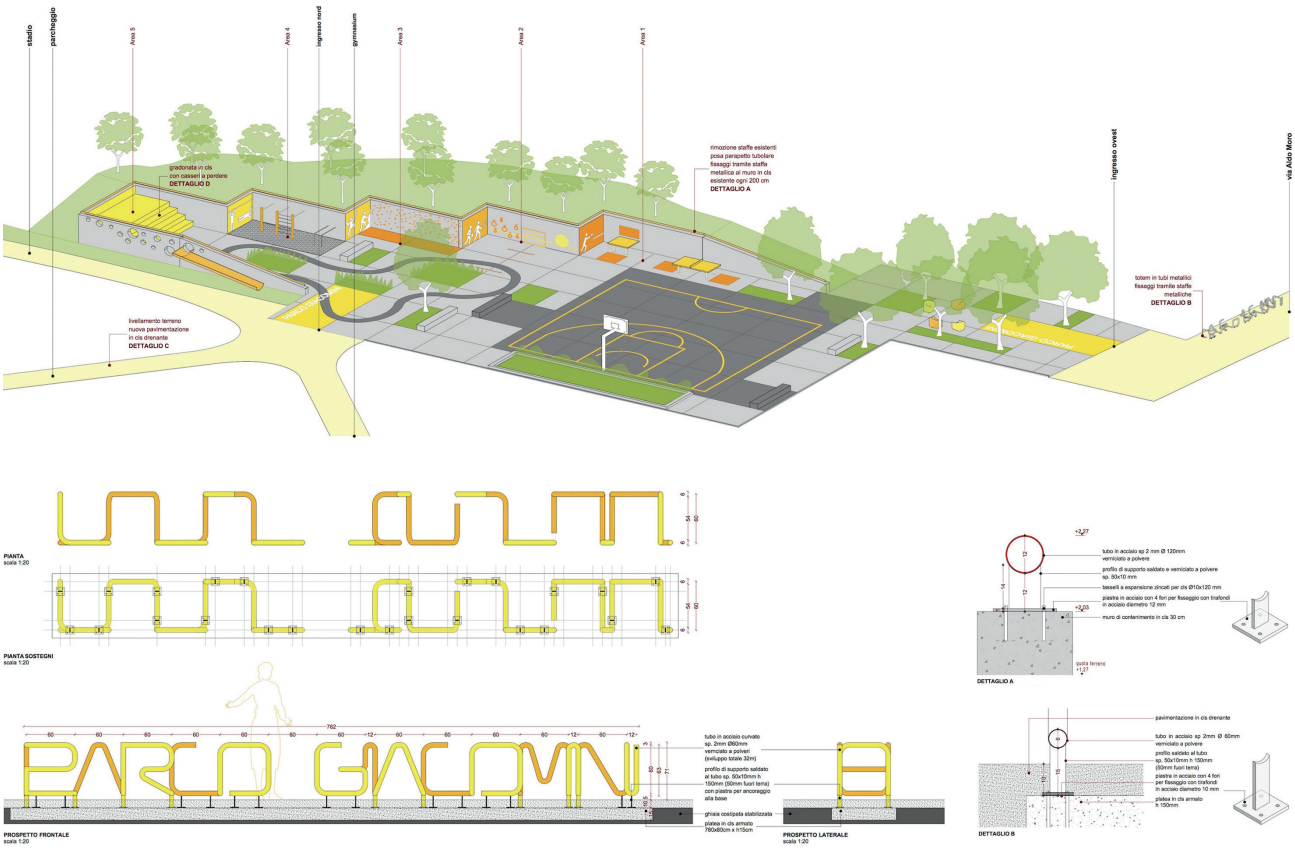

FIGURE 8: Axonometric detail of the area, tubular signage used at entrances to the park.

FIGURE 9: View of the intervention in the play area.

In the upper part previously occupied by the asphalt, a de-paving operation was carried out and a flowering meadow sown with no use of fertilizers and requiring very little water; Malus New York trees were planted to create a shaded area in this leisure space, a raised observation point providing a wide view over the new spatial structure (Figures 10, 11).

In this part of the embankment, a deviation with respect to expected footfall was found to lack compliance with safety regulations. Accordingly, a continuous tubular metallic handrail was superimposed on the walled edge with a zigzag pattern and the underlying concrete part left rough and uneven, thus designating the metal edging as a protective measure.

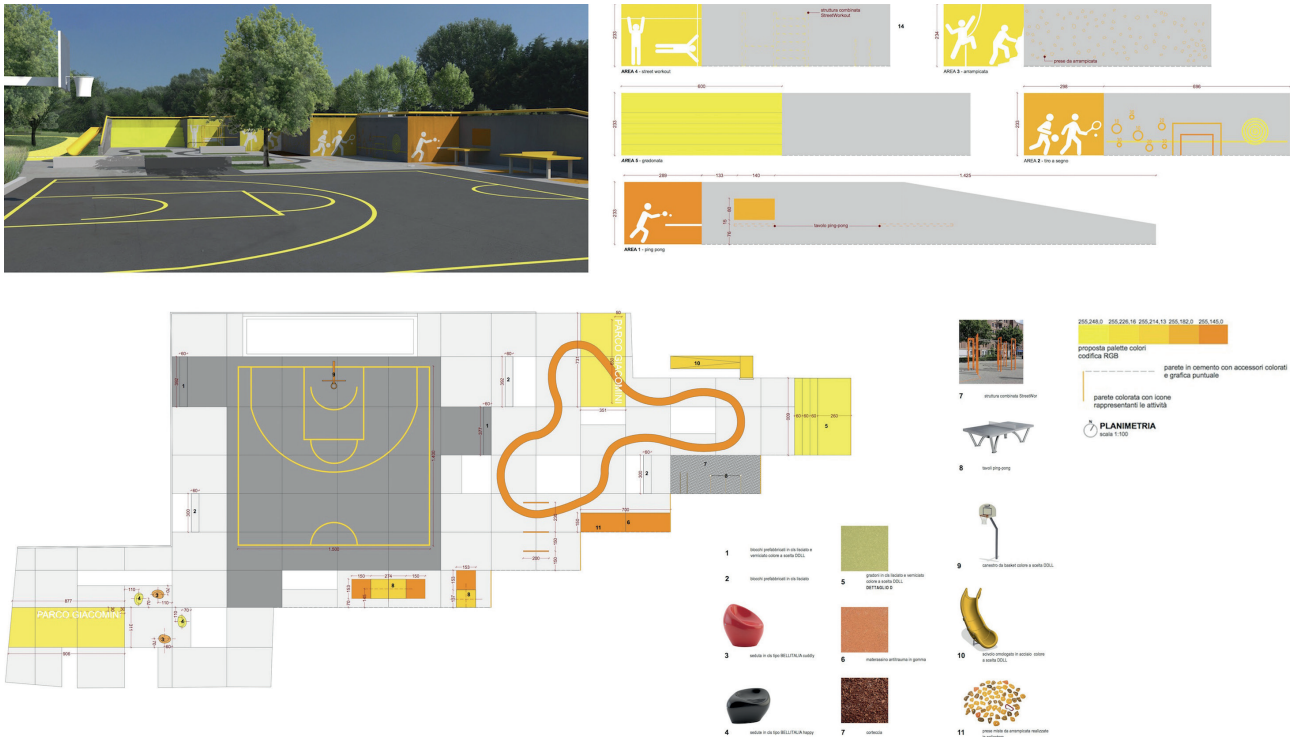

FIGURE 10: Detail of the décor and pictograms.

FIGURE 11: Children's climbing wall.

Not all spaces from which cement was removed have been re-vegetated, with sections of permeable soil being deliberately left devoid of formal planting to promote the spontaneous arrival of new seeds and establishment of free-growing vegetation. The ultimate composition of the flora will forge a self-imposed equilibrium.

A park in continual movement and evolution, free to flourish thanks to the additions freely provided over time by the visitors, a site capable of accommodating other activities and other potential uses - by all accounts a flexible and exploitable space.

Each plant was chosen based on its capacity of resistance in a harsh urban context and its ability of regeneration.

In the cemented plaza, the trees planted were mainly of the *Celtis australis* species, selected for their ability to establish in hard, difficult soils and survive in conditions of scarce water availability; likewise, flowerbeds were planted with gramineous plants including: *Gaura lindheimeri, Pennisetum orientale, Agastache Summer Glow, Agastache Firebird*.

Once freed from the concrete surface as described previously, the large tank that contained the oil drums was covered with cultivated soil and planted with a variety of very low maintenance grasses, including the purple coloured *Perovskia atriplicifolia, Verbena bonariensis, Echinacea purpurea Rubinglow*, and *Eryngium giganteum*, all highly attractive to butterflies and pollinating insects (Figure 12).

The surrounding existing woodland, planted more than twenty years ago, is populated by *Fraxinus excelsior, Juglans regia, Alnus glutinosa, Carpinus betulus, Ulmus minor* and *Populus alba* with a dense undergrowth, creating an impenetrable area suffocated by the remains of previous works. The operation of valorisation and enhancement has restored the woods to its role as an irreplaceable repository of environmental values, of benefit to the physical and mental wellbeing of mankind. Accordingly, in line with consolidated indications provided by EEC Reg. 2080/92 and former Measure of the Rural Development Programme of the Veneto Region, the arboreal shrub area has been extended through addition of new closely planted rows intended to guide visitors throughout the new itineraries created in the park using draining concrete.

The woodland plants were arranged in rows using a prevalently sinusoidal pattern with a combination of *Quercus robur, Fraxinus angustifolia, Acer campestre, Morus alba, Carpinus betulus* and interspersed shrubs such as *Cornus mas, Cornus sanguinea, Cercis siliquastrum, Crataegus oxyacantha, Viburnum opulus*, and *Prunus spinosa*. It should however be pointed out that the woodland will take time to flourish and slowly grow, providing a fundamental contribution to the development of an urban reforestation landscape destined to merge increasingly with the construction features in the public park.

CONCLUSIONS

The landscape illustrates the diverse capacity for regeneration of territories in their autonomous and unceasing adaptation to natural and human tension. Adhering to frequently remarkable times and methods, their free transformation re-naturalizes spaces and areas, constituting vital new resources to be employed in future amendments. Recovery, reuse, and regeneration represent key parameters in an urban context with a view to maintaining control over management of resources, avoiding waste, and particularly in exploiting the potential of what may at first sight appear to be of scarce utility or unserviceable (Figure 13).

FIGURE 12: View from the top of the embankment towards the regenerated woodlands.

FIGURE 13: Itinerary accessing the sports area.

In achieving valorisation of the commonplace for the purpose of reclamation and restoration of numerous "mundane" spaces by attempting to combine resource availability with the management and maintenance of open spaces, the Giacomini Park represents a conscious expression of the value of uncomplicated actions accomplished by carefully exploiting the potential for regeneration and interpretation potential that the area silently concealed.

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