

A New Idea of Revitalization for Urbicide Crisis

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Abstract

«A manifest and violent opposition to the highest values of civilization», this is the definition that the Serbian Bogdan Bogdanovic gave to the term urbicide, which he coined to describe the atrocities of the War in the Balkans. Bogdanovic was mayor of Belgrade from 1982 to 1986 and has crystallized through his books the devastation that the territory suffered in those years. In his 1993 article for *Lettera Internazionale* he underlined how «it seems that there was less room for tenderness and love towards the city than there was space and stimulus for completely contrasting feelings: discomfort, revulsion, contempt and above all fear» and this can be found not only in the history of our civilization but also in the contemporary world. What remains of the cities are mostly skeletal, dormant and suffering elements, mirrors of abandonment and neglect. There are, however, further conditions of urbicide that sneakily creep into the contemporary panorama. This work proposes a reinterpretation of the phenomenon of urbicide by trying to describe good practices that seek to interpret destructive actions as a positive and alternative reality to the phenomenon. **Keywords:** reuse; upcycling; reconstruction; identity; peace.

1. Introduction

The definition of Urbicide is traced back to Bogdan Bogdanovic, mayor of Belgrade from 1982 to 1986 who, during his mandate, experienced the devastation of the War in his territories. Bogdanovic was not only a mayor but above all an architect who based his project idea on the identity of places, evident in his famous memorials. Bogdanovic's case is important as his experience relating to the former Yugoslavia made us face the devastation of the war which, after the end of the Second World War, was now far from the concerns of the old continent.

It is also true that, beyond the literal aspect of the word, we can find an interesting material transfiguration of the term Urbicide in the beautiful drawings of Lebbeus Woods (WOODS, 1993). Lebbeus Wood's research work is fundamental as it provocatively presents a new point of view on the rubble and ruins caused by the War. In his book *War and Architecture* he wrote: «So They are the ideas for new ways of thinking, living and shaping space, deriving from the individuality and inventions of each one. It is from these ideas that a heterarchic community can originate, which excludes the hierarchical basis of organized violence» (WOODS, 1993, p. 34).

The element from which Bogdanovic's words and Woods' writings and drawings derive is unique and can be traced back to the destruction of war, a Manifesto event of loss of places but also, and perhaps above all, of an idea of civilization. The expressive power of the "remains" also becomes a source of interest for Franco Purini who, in observing the rubble of Beirut and Baghdad, highlights how a phenomenon that was only apparently new was taking place: the observation of the "new ruins" became increasingly similar to the observation of the remains of antiquity. In his book *"Composing architecture"*, he writes: « These images have suddenly aged modern architecture which has always wanted to be the vehicle, in its reforming naivety, of an alleged, eternal youth» (Purini , 2000, p. X) and this phrase makes us understand the parallelism between "new ruin" and ancient ruin. Everything, in the end, is shown in its construction essence.

Two main questions therefore emerge.

The remains of what is destroyed but also elements that can be reactivated.

The research *Building on the built* (TAVOLETTA, 2023) analyzed the second case, choosing to "reactivate" abandoned architecture that manifests a second possibility of silent urbicide. «At the end of the last century, Auguste Rodin and his unfinished sculptures represented the idea that the image that appears incomplete can activate new elements of curiosity in the observer. One of the works that holds Rodin's secret is the sculpture *The Thought* dated around 1895 that interprets the completeness of a face immersed in a marble block; what reaches the observer is the relationship between the origin of the work and the work itself where the unfinishedness is itself part of the artist's poetics» (Tavoletta, 2023).

2. Hebron and its Urbicide

Unfortunately, recent news is confronting us with new wars and new scenarios described by Woods and Purini but the design research proposed below wants to try to describe a mode of compositional approach that is found (or rather, is found) as a bridge between the war scene and abandoned architecture. Benno Albrecht in his 2017 essay *Peace and Architecture*, writes «one of the most pressing topics in the field of civil commitment (and in the operational field of architecture) is how to deal with the consequences of urbicides, with the deliberate violence against cities,



Figure 1. Collage from <https://cargocollective.com/mortalcitiesforgottenmonuments/Bogdan-Bogdanovic>

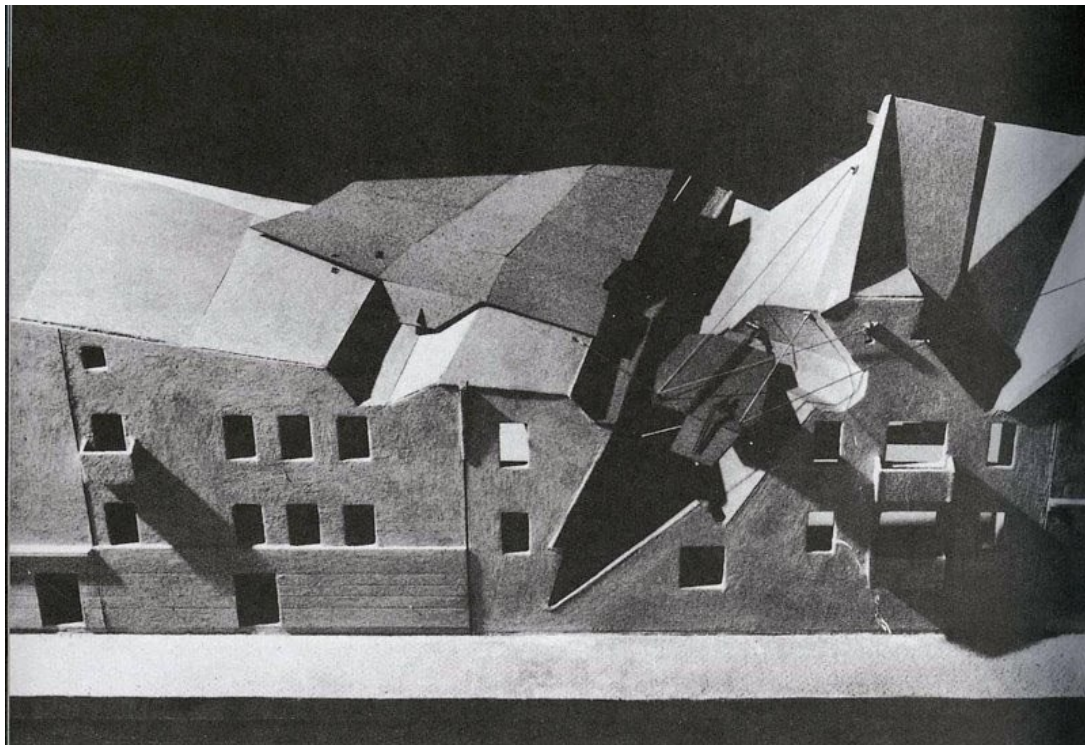


Figure 2. Lebbeus Woods, Study model

with their destruction, and with the intentional elimination of collective memory made of stone» (ALBRECHT, p. 7, 2017). The case of the city of Hebron is the plastic representation of this condition.

Hebron is the second largest city in the West Bank and is located south of Jerusalem and is divided into two parts, one under Palestinian control and one under Israeli control and is completely surrounded by a wall that follows the dividing line between the two territories. For this reason it is not possible to access it from anywhere, but only from two points and to enter and exit it is necessary to undergo checks at the checkpoints.

For security reasons, some roads have been completely closed to Palestinians, especially those leading to Israeli settlements or places of prayer. Others, however, can be used but only on foot. The whole area is then dotted with barriers, such as nets and gates, closures, such as walls and concrete blocks and checkpoints, which lead to a further limitation of movement. All these restrictions have also led to the economic death of the historic center. Shuhada Street, the main street of the city, which was the central market of the Hebron region and the historic city is now completely inaccessible to Palestinians. This led to the closure of its shops and deprived the city of its commercial

front. The closure of Shuhada Street also led to the interruption of many streets that connect to it through a series of walls that were placed to block the route.

A project aimed at reviving Shuhada Street and the shops that were located here is one of the contributions that architecture can make to this place. However, it was not possible to access it from the main front. For this reason, a system was designed that allows you to reach the spaces from the back, from the other side of the building and the project thus develops on the back of Shuhada Street.

SMALL FRAGMENTS OF RESISTANCE

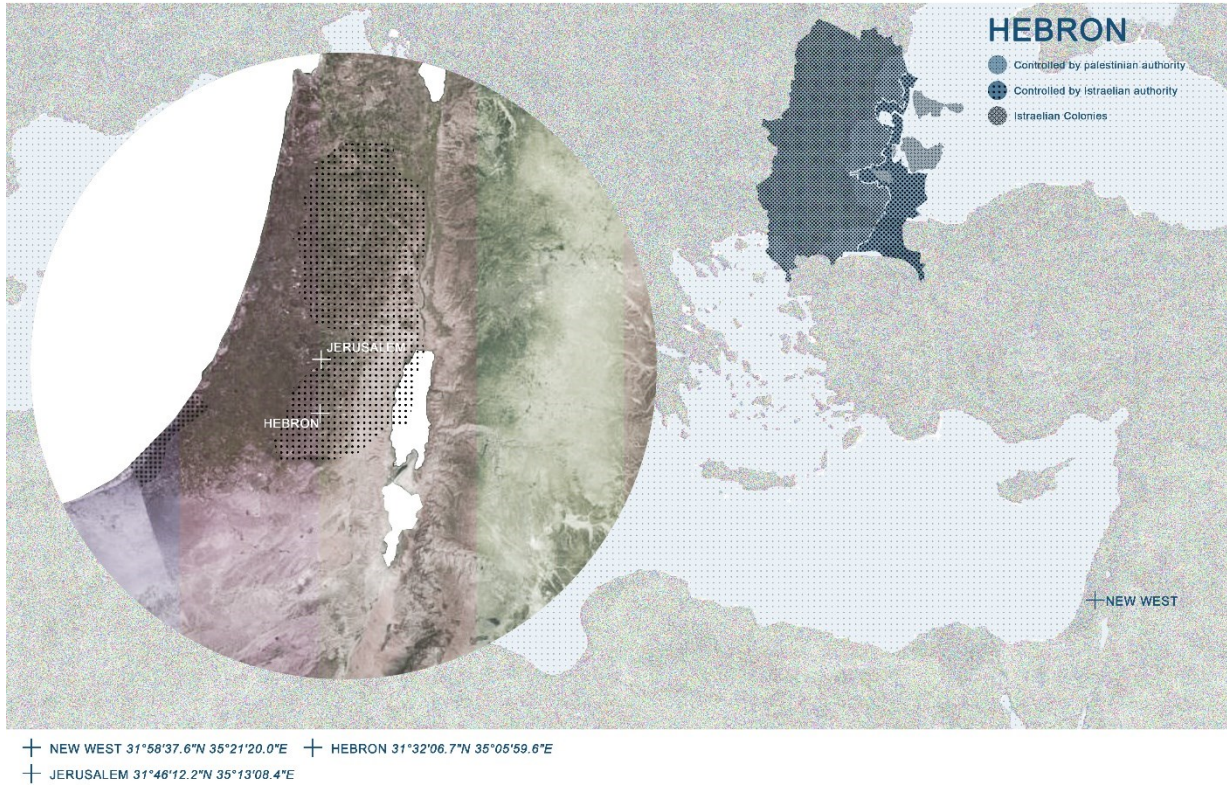


Figure 3. Digital Collage, C. Tavoletta (2020)

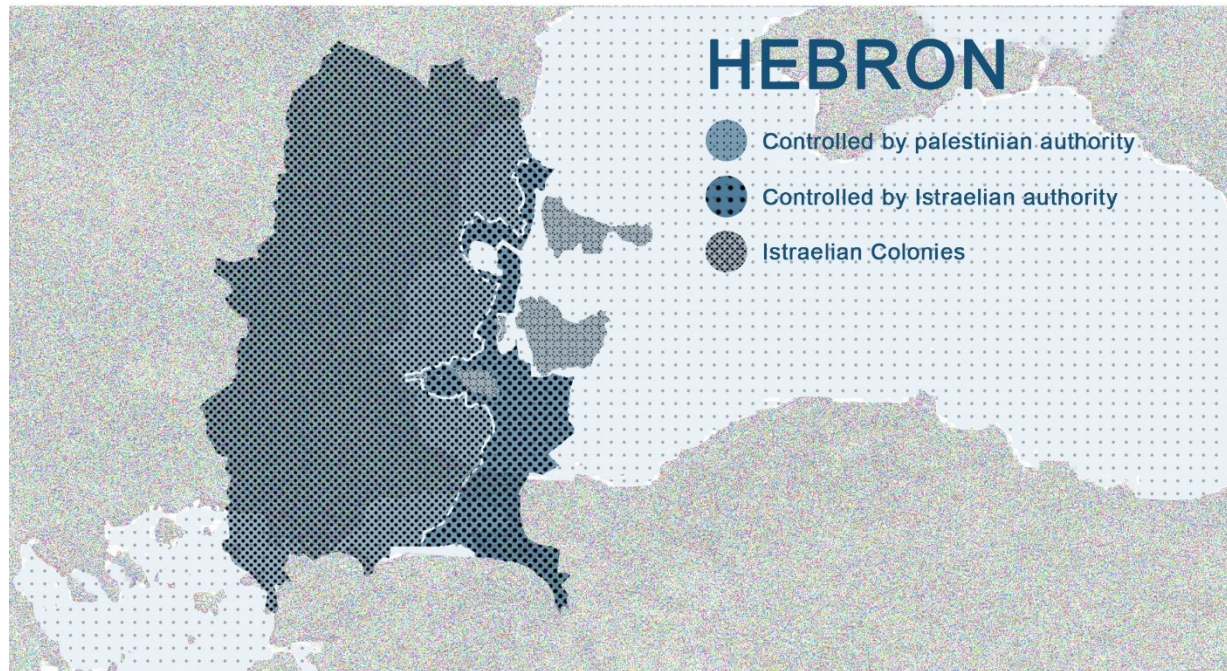


Figure 4. Digital Collage, C. Tavoletta (2020)

3. References

The objective of the project is to build a peaceful alternative to abandonment and the design references chosen mainly refer to the poetic approach of Vito Acconci, American designer, landscape architect and performance artist. Beyond his performance art, Acconci was a designer and through some of his works he systematized his theories in relation to urban space and internal space. In 1993, Vito Acconci and Steven Hall were invited to redesign the facade of the Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York and this project still remains one of the most fascinating interventions from the point of view of the relationship between facade and urban space. «Seeking to introduce improbability and to puncture the facade,» scribe Hall, «Acconci and Holl challenged this symbolic border which underlines the exclusivity of the art world, where only those on the inside belong. Using a hybrid material comprised of concrete mixed with recycled fibers, Holl and Acconci inserted a series of hinged panels arranged in a puzzle-like configuration. When the panels are locked in their open position, the facade dissolves and the interior space of the gallery expands out on to the sidewalk. If the function of a facade is to create a division separating the inside from the outside space, this new facade, in the words of director Kyong Park, is “NO WALL, NO BARRIER, NO INSIDE, NO OUTSIDE, NO SPACE, NO BUILDING, NO PLACE, NO INSTITUTION, NO ART, NO ARCHITECTURE, NO ACCONCI, NO HOLL, NO STOREFRONT». A further project that inspired this work was Park up a Building also by Vito Acconci, the transportable park installed on the external wall of Alvaro Siza's Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporáneo in Santiago de Compostela. The principle underlying Acconci's interventions was the idea of a space of freedom and, also for this reason, they became central in the design approach for Shuhada Street.



Figure 5. Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York, Steven Hall and Vito Acconci (1993)



Figure 6. Park up a Building - external wall of the Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporáneo by Álvaro Siza, in Santiago de Compostela-, Vito Acconci (1996)

4. Results

If Shudada Street was a place that was not possible to use on the main side, the system formed by tubes made it possible to create a frame that like a parasite anchors itself to the facade and scales in various directions. A walkway is attached to the structure that the tubes form, which allows you to walk along the entire length of the facade and access the spaces that are now unused.

Where possible, i.e. on the permitted stretch of road, the structure rests on the ground. However, in the sections where it is prohibited, the structure rises so as not to touch the ground, anchoring itself only to the facade. The structure allows you to walk along the facade on various levels and is not limited to the outside, but also invades the inside of the building, the now abandoned spaces.

Not only the structure, but also the flooring of the suspended walk continues inside, overlapping the existing floor and defining a new space that can be used.

It is a space clandestinely recreated in the existing environment, an intruder who confronts the house he occupies without touching it, leaving traces of an abandoned and distorted domesticity.

This is how an emergency shop was born, self-sufficient and ready to be dismantled. The shops acquire an unusual location, suspended and accessible at a different level than usual.

The system allows you to create a new commercial front without breaking the curfew placed on the main front and on the forbidden stretch of road. The entire system represents something more than a simple passage/path: it is a climb, an open space, a meeting and resting place.

The project is an attempt to rediscover the ancient prosperity of this area, proposing alternative methods aimed at countering the enclavization, recreating, as far as possible, a new commercial front with shops and workshops. A peaceful reappropriation, without conflicts, without violating the ban on passing on the prohibited road, an insinuation from above and from within to defuse the current situation is the tactic employed.



Figure 7. Shudada Street, Hebron



Figure 8. Shudada Street, Hebron

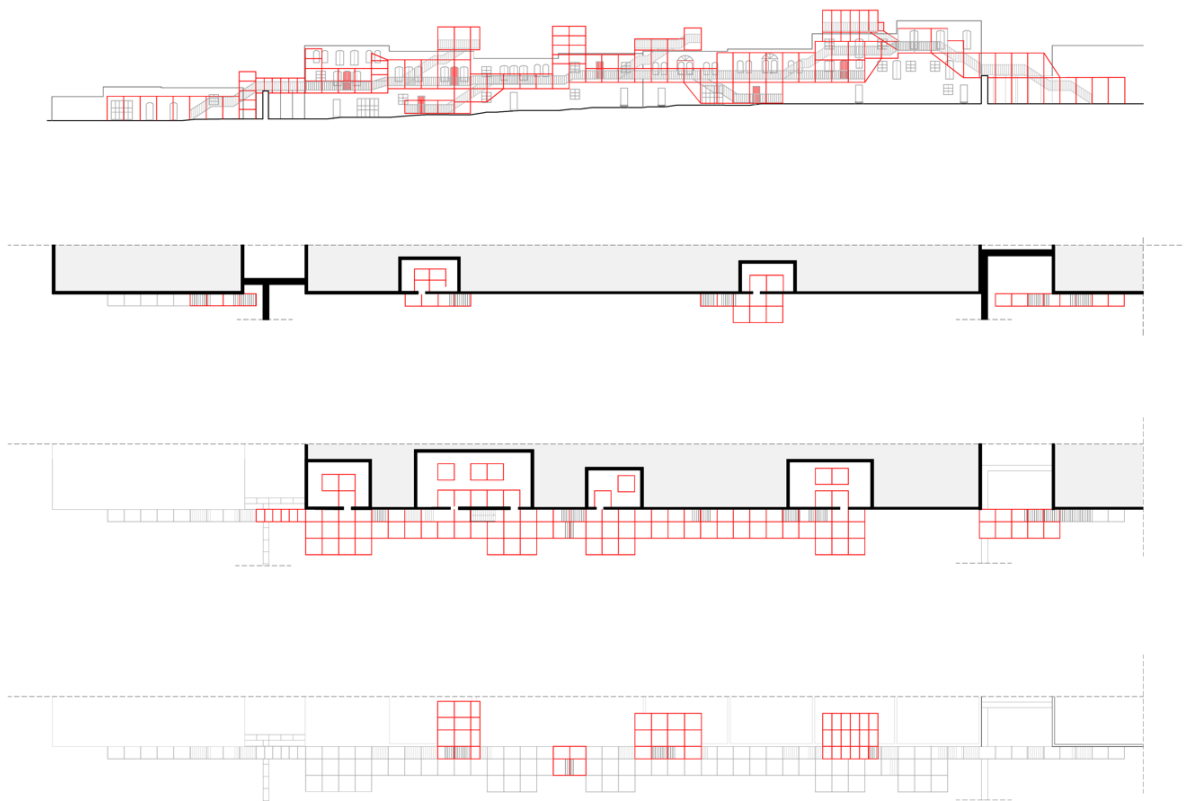


Figure 9. Project system with tubes on the façade, A. Masiero, C. Tavoletta

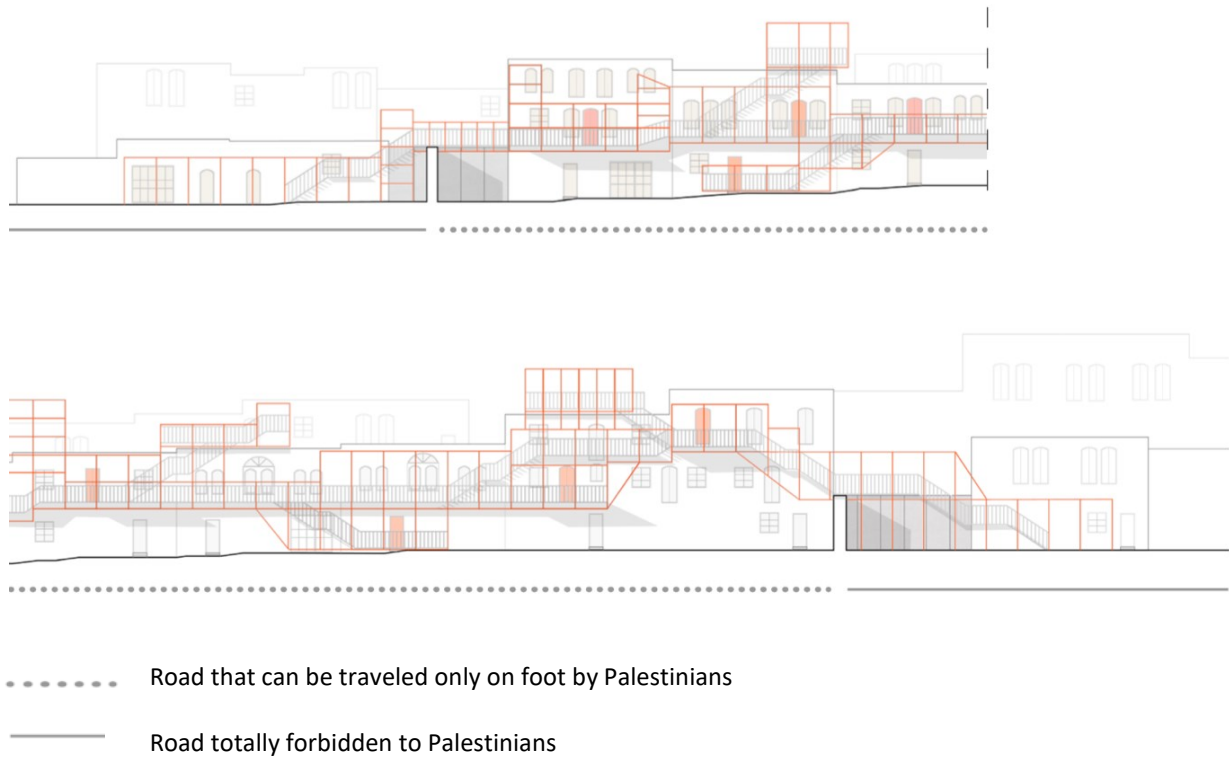


Figure 10. Façade with shadows, A. Masiero, C. Tavoletta

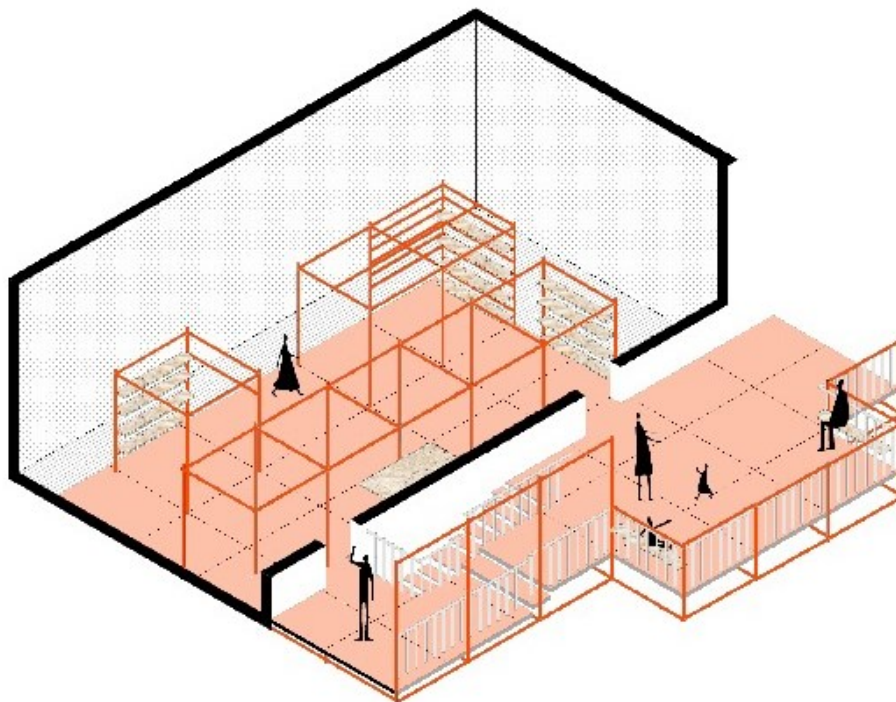


Figure 11. The system of metal pipes and walkway enters the pre-existing spaces to create new uses without modifying the existing, A. Masiero, C. Tavoletta



Figure 12. Façade's detail, A. Masiero, C. Tavoletta

5. Conclusions

The proposed research work had as its objective the creation of an architectural condition which, in relation to the problems of the place, was able to provide an alternative to an abandoned place.

The article does not go into the merits of political conditions but rather tries to overcome this element and find solutions that respect space. But, as we know, the word politics derives from the Greek adjective πολιτικός, in turn derived from πόλις, city. It was the term used to designate what belongs to the dimension of common life, therefore to the State (πόλις) and to the citizen (πολίτης). The center and object of politics is πόλις, life in the city and of the city. It is therefore intended to consider this aspect in this work in which architecture plays the role of facilitator of common life.

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Conflict of Interests

The Author declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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