

Port-City habitat: multi-scalar architectural strategies for reconnecting coastal and city fragments of Ancona

Gaia Cicioli, Maddalena Ferretti

Università Politecnica delle Marche, Department of Construction, Civil Engineering and Architecture

Keywords

Port cities, Small-ports, Landscape, Architectural interventions, Multi-scalar strategies

Contemporary port cities are complex entities that embody the dichotomy between the urban and extra-urban reality. By its very nature, the port is part of the city, yet is separate from it in physical, spatial, administrative and governmental terms at the same time.

In small and medium-sized Mediterranean port cities, this condition is especially pronounced. On one hand ports are embedded within dense, fine-grained historic fabrics, where everyday urban life unfolds in proximity with large-scale infrastructures. On the other hand, ports maintain an extra-urban character rooted in their historical and administrative status as distinct spaces oriented toward global networks of trade and exchange. In this context, the port city of Ancona stands out as a paradigmatic example of a complex system that preserved its historical heritage, local culture, monumental port buildings, and environmental resources in proximity to each other, creating a unique and layered identity. Set within a broader landscape system, the port reflects the specificity of Ancona, whose topography is defined by a promontory that shelters the harbor and embrace the Adriatic Sea. This geographic configuration generates spatially and symbolically two seas, one where the sun rises and one where the sun sets. Despite being part of Ancona's identity, landscape, port and urban center fail to get in contact with each other, causing reciprocal marginality.

This paper focuses on recognising small and medium-sized Mediterranean ports as complex exurban areas and on Ancona as ideal laboratory to test architecture as a critical mediating device, capable of reconnecting fragmented systems and articulating relationships across multiple scales. Architectural interventions can act as an interface between the geographic, urban, and landscape dimensions, to transform the port-city boundary into a permeable and dynamic habitat, fostering new forms of interaction and re-establishing continuity between the built environment, the coastline, and the wider territorial landscape.