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for modern architecture"

**DESIGN EXPERIENCES
PALASPORT OLIMPICO**

Pier Paolo Maggiora, Director of the Works - "Palasport
Olimpico"

My participation to the architectural competition for the Hockey Arena gave me the opportunity to reflect on the meaning and the destiny of a building for an important event like the Olympic Games.

What struck me the most at that time, reading the competition brief, was noticing the lack of a general masterplan of reference for the aftermath of the Games relatively to which should have been defined, amongst the other, also the future uses for that venue, so relevant, at least for the investment it would have required: a geometrically rigid plan was required (30 x 60 mt. field, and stands for 12,500 people), to be adapted for the post-Olympic use to what the competitors would have generically suggested. This in a situation of urgency and of expectations of a city so problematic and torn as Turin.

Turin should have avoided the error, tragic and at the same time usual in similar situations, of building structures that would prove to be essentially useless and cumbersome once the special events themselves were over, and the danger of having to deal one day with pharaonic buildings, or, if you prefer, cathedrals in the desert.

It was obvious that if that goal was to be achieved, the designer had to take over and fill the gap, taking on a role that was not strictly his: precisely to indicate the building's use for the city once the Olympic Games were over.

In the same period, the institutions decided that the city's priority had to be the strengthening of the tourist industry as a driver for the economic growth and as a further opportunity for development. In particular, it was decided to encourage a type of tourism generated by large conventions, manifestations, and important musical and sporting events, that tie in well with the famous high quality of the Region's food and wines and with the equally high quality of its history and architecture (which is much less famous).

The Olympic Hockey Arena therefore became the opportunity to endow Turin of an excellence which could host important events in view of the improvement of tourism in the city. From this premise the project for the Hockey Arena, to be adaptable to future uses, radically changed course and became the project for an Events Factory, which would also briefly host the Olympic hockey tournament. But right from the beginning, its different potential configurations (physical, spatial, functional) and its proximity to the stadium could handle the rigid protocol of the

opening ceremony and the more informal closing celebration of the Games themselves.

From that moment on, and thanks to the extraordinary promotion by the media in view of the upcoming Olympics, the Factory would become a primary force behind the economic development of the city, able to host and exalt important events and manifestations (conventions, music, sports, circuses, etc.) for 5,000 to 15,000 participants, and offer consistently optimal functional, spatial, acoustic, visual, lighting and security conditions.

This would place Turin by right in the small circle of cities with structures capable of hosting big conventions with up to 15,000 participants (like Chicago and New Orleans) and large indoor manifestations in term of true flexibility. This would ensure to the city a leading role in the lucrative market of high-cost tourist flow.

This required a project that could create variable playing fields according to the event (in the case of hockey tournament the area was 30 x 60 meters) from the smallest (boxing rings: 11 x 11 meters) to the largest (indoor track and field: 60 x 120 meters, and for conventions and parades: 60 x 160 meters). This flexibility is defined within a variability of playing fields and visual optimization between 1 and 80!

But the entire organism had to be involved in this initial definition of flexibility, a system of flexibility had to be conceived a priori including mobile and retractable grandstands, acoustic and lighting systems that could be oriented according to the needs, and variable security systems that could function in different set-ups.

In order to satisfy the general goals, the economic results, and optimize the management of the complex, the Factory must be able to function in its various configurations at least for two hundred days a year.

In view of these brief considerations, it is easily deduced that if the project hadn't been planned with its final destination in mind (the great flexibility inherent to the concept of an Event Factory) and if it hadn't been designed immediately and precisely with these functions in mind, the arena would have ended up being just one more celebratory structure dedicated to a specific event, in this case the hockey tournament, with only apparent capabilities of adaptation to future generic uses.

In fact, a new cathedral in the desert would have been added to the long list of structures generated by the so-called great events.

If it is true, as it is, that there is an ethic in a project, it is also true that the buildings realized for great exceptional events – and this is the lesson learnt from

that experience – must be designed for the most useful use the city hopes and suggests to itself, thinking at the use for the exceptional event as a pure incident, simply as a specific setting adopted to respond with dignity to the requirements of the special event

Under the more specifically compositive point of view, both architectural and urbanistic, the new Hockey Arena creates first of all a problem with the redefinition of the urban space with the passage from the situation created by the Football World Cup of 1934 to the 2006 Olympic Games.

Actors in this transformation, together with the Hockey Arena, are the Marathon Tower, the Stadium, the Olympic Gardens, the new Environmental System consequent to the elimination of the spatial and functional division of corso Sebastopoli, and Piazza d'Armi.

If the protagonists of the scene imagined in 1934 were the volumes (the Tower straight on corso Sebastopoli's boundary and the Stadium) with clear perimeters and isolated in their hieraticity from the row of ticket booths pointing the boundary wall, in 2006 the protagonist becomes the space, that is the great urban space within which play their role of main actors the volumes of the Tower (which from peripheral that was now passes to the centre of the new open system, facing the Olympic Gardens and emphasizing this new continuity with the great renewed space in front of itself through the trail of water in which it mirrors), of the old Stadium (great testimony of the past, refurbished and modernized according to the needs of our times), of the new Hockey Arena (with its multifunctional connotation able to welcome and represent the lightness, the flexibility, the change typical of our contemporary society) and the vast open space of the Olympic Gardens (totally redesigned to organically accompany and to underline the exceptionality of the renewed urban metamorphosis).

The metric is determined starting from the existing: the most notable element remains the Tower in its undisputed aspiration to vertical protagonism, the old Stadium defines the limit to the skyline (15 meters) to which the volume of the Hockey Arena adapts itself: old and new actor play at the same height.

The rounded and deaf (the concrete) shape of the Stadium gains new vitality entering in dialogue with the sharp (stainless steel) and rigorous cartesian prism, a kind of, the latter, Events Factory really designed for an infinite potential of future use (ice, indoor sport, concerts, shows, conventions, congresses, demonstrations, great events, religious gatherings, etc.) of great ductility and cost effective

management with its tested technological equipment of easy maintenance (movable stands, pulling trolleys, movable floors and retractable stands) already perfectly organized inside the volume: a perfectly working engine. As inside a car only the engine hidden in the guts of the body is capable of rendering that object, through the movement, an aesthetically accomplished fact, so only the real integration – the contemporariness – of shape, function and technological equipment (the engine, perfectly, easily and cost effectively working) make the Hockey Arena capable of representing and of being in the reality a new incessant Event Factory, an instrument ever ready to contain the events that will be proposed to the community and that it will want to host.