Giuseppe Samoná at the Palazzo del Montecitorio, Rome 1967

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Abstract
The national competition for the extension of the Camera dei Deputati, or Italian Lower Parliament, records a crucial moment in architectural debate in Italy after the Sixties. Samoná's entry is particularly important not only to understand his personal research in depth, but also to diagnose the status of architectural culture in general. Newly discovered materials helped to shed new light on some crucial issues of architectural debates, as well as to reconstruct different alternatives of the project. Arguments such as the destiny of the historic centers, the potential of architectural objects, and the relationship between city and architecture are seen in comparative studies with previous projects and in comparison to those of other architects in the Novecento. The crisis and continuity that characterize Samoná's and other architects' engagement are focused as a critical stance within the socio-political context. Lastly, the comprehensive significance of the open hand is analyzed by studying the personal and professional relationship that Samoná had with Le Corbusier.

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Keywords: Giuseppe Samoná; Camera dei Deputati; Palazzo del Montecitorio; open hand; Le Corbusier

1. Introduction
The project of Giuseppe Samoná for the Extension of the Camera dei Deputati, the Italian Lower Parliament, in 1967, is mostly known by its perspective in the major publications on Italian contemporary architecture. However, striking and powerful images of the perspective in certain ways prevented specific understanding of the project. Samoná's project had not been analyzed philologically in such a way as to shed light on the complex itinerary of the design process. Furthermore, except for the analysis by Manfredo Tafuri, few attempts were made to understand the significance of this competition and its historical contribution to the European architectural debates of the 20th century.1

After nearly forty years, Archivio Progetti (AP) Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia (IUAV) finally acquired the Archivio Samoná. A scientific inventory was published and an exhibition was held, after the conclusion of comprehensive archive works on the materials. Some of the unpublished drawings have been analyzed for the first time thanks to the Archivio Samoná, and drawing numbers correspond to those of the official inventory unless specified.2

Fig.1. Perspective of the Final Presentation, 48-36 (AP)

The main purposes of this dissertation are: 1) analysis of different alternatives in the light of newly discovered drawings, 2) examination of the relationship between this project and preceding works, 3) interpretation of the enigmatic homage of the Sicilian architect to Le Corbusier with the open hand, and 4) discussion of the historical significance of the project in the context of the post-war architectural debate in Italy.

2. Vicissitudes of Geopolitics in Context
The area designated for the new service buildings related to the Camera dei Deputati in Palazzo del Montecitorio represents one of the most delicate and problematic sites in the historic center of Rome.
The site indicated for the architectural competition was a result of disputes and compromises over a period of three hundred years. Two different façades explicitly record the long-disputed vicissitudes of the building and the site. Convex façades toward the Piazza Montecitorio are mostly by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and partly by Carlo Fontana. The rear façade is by Ernesto Basile (1857-1932), who was appointed to renovate and to extend the whole building when the decision was taken to house the Italian Lower Parliament at the Palazzo Montecitorio permanently. This palace was utilized temporarily as the congress when Rome became the capital of Italy a year after the Unification.

Basile was a prominent exponent of liberty italiano, the Italian version of Art Nouveau, while public opinion was that this tendency was not apt for Rome, a prominent city of classicism. In fact, many Romans expressed their hatred for the building when it was completed and even encouraged its immediate demolition. Basile was Samonà's thesis advisor in Palermo and Samonà often expressed dissent with his former professor's teaching method, architectural principles and cultural premises.

The competition assumed an enormous importance in terms of its cultural dimension in the period of miracolo italiano, a "miraculous" economic boom in Italy after the reconstruction; it served as a litmus test that illustrated the status of architectural culture and its role in post-Fascist civic society. In the Fifties, most of the representative architects devoted themselves to social housing and similar issues for ethical and professional reasons. Ethically, they were involved with fascism in direct or indirect ways, so this engagement was an act of paying their debts to society and discharging their guilty consciences.

years after the competition of the Palazzo del Littorio in Rome, many crucial issues such as the figure of the professional architect, the relationship between architecture and territory, the validity of contemporary architecture in an urban context, and the destiny of the historical center, among others, were still at stake.

In the Sixties, several important national competitions in urban and architectural planning were held, but none of them was realized – urban planning for the Barene San Giuliano at Mestre in Venice (1959), a project for the administrative center in Torino (1962), urban planning for the isola del Tronchetto in Venice (1964), a project for the reconstruction of Teatro Paganini in Parma (1965), and a project for the psychiatric hospital in Bolzano (1966).

After the failure of the Codice urbanistica, the urban code legislation proposed in 1942, the National Institute of Urbanism (INU) had re-proposed the issue in order to help organize urbanization and related activities systematically. This proposal, however, was vetoed by both Parliaments after immediate and organized resistance. Two years later, a congressman proposed the law plan that bears his name, legge Sullo, to control urbanization comprehensively and to prevent abusive land use. Again, this was halted by both Parliaments. As if on cue, a terrible landslide had devastated abusive housings in Agrigento in 1966. In the same year, a huge flood devastated Italy, and many cities including Florence and Venice were left impotent in the face of this natural disaster. People considered that all these incidents were caused by carelessness and negligence on the part of public administrations and institutions, and began to call the corrupt politicians and real estate tycoons i padroni delle città, the city mobs.

The failure of institutional efforts and the ultimate impotence of passionate engagement led architects to seriously consider the figure of the architect and their former modus operandi toward cities and architecture. This partly explains the rise of the Italian Radicals – cynical and self-critical camps such as arte povera, and related architectural groups such as Archizoom and Superstudio. This moment in Italy's history is significant because of the eventual development of the architects' belief in the possibility of urban renewal by extending their field of intervention, synthesized as la Nuova dimensione.

This competition was thus not just another professional occasion but more a diagnosis of actual architectural conditions that architects inevitably had to face. Most of the architects considered this competition as the chance of a lifetime. Samonà, however, knew that this was going to end up exactly as had previous illusory events. Samonà seized upon this architectural competition as an occasion to represent fully his conceptual ideas on architecture and the city in a critical sense.
3. Crisis and Continuity

After the failure to legalize the Codice dell'urbanistica in 1960, many architects became diffident about the idea of urban reform based on urban codes and building laws. Often, the majority of members of both Parliaments were against the Codice, since it could damage their personal interests or those of the lobbyists they represented.

Samonà went through a process of disillusionment on a personal level while working on the residential quarter of San Giuliano at Mestre in mainland Venice. On one hand, Samonà, like many other architects who were engaged in the INA-Casa housing project, was convinced that urban reform could be effective in the planning of residential quarters of large dimensions. On the other hand, he firmly believed in the validity of applying extrapolated historical elements that could create a sense of continuity in modern residential areas – il campiello in the case of San Giuliano. However, his project was totally distorted by bureaucratic policy that inserted a transversal road that divided the residential quarter in half, destroying the principle of organic integration of the original masterplan. This bitter experience led Samonà to revise the paradigm of his approach to architectural and urban planning. The outcome of this shift is published in Urbanistica e l'avvenire delle città negli stati europei by Laterza in 1959.3

Meanwhile, Samonà elaborated three projects for different occasions that reinforce his thought on three crucial themes manifested in his roman projects: the representation of institutional buildings, the relationship between historical texture and contemporary architecture, and the significance of the architecture of the city.

Fig.3. G. Samonà, National Competition Project for the Administrative Center in Turin. 1962

In 1962, Samonà submitted a polemical entry to the national competition for the administrative center in Turin (Fig.3.). Informality and indeterminacy characterized his project, as the whole building was presented as a pile of different-sized slabs without precise form. Abstraction of architectural elements is brought to its limit to represent the recurring idea of "anti-object" and that of dissolution of form. Dynamic dislocation of the superimposed blocks corresponded to the urban reality, where the sense of velocity became a crucial factor. The undetermined form of a superstructure capable of incorporating various exigencies flexibly implied his position against monofunctionalism.

Fig.4. Project for Urban Planning at Tronchetto, Venice 1964

Similar determination is represented in his project for the urban planning of Tronchetto in Venice in 1964. Bringing provocation to an extreme, he deliberately misinterpreted the program by removing not only the artificial island, the subject of the competition, but also all the urban additions made since the end of La Serenissima, the Venetian Republic. He even changed the site of intervention indicated and located two minimal bars at the mouth of the Canal Grande, after obliterating the bridge that connects Venice with the mainland, which had been built during the Austrian occupation.

Two abstract structures were supposed to contain a naval station and related facilities that would restore the historical perception of the city, from a time in which only sea transportation was allowed. Contrast instead of mimesis was adopted to make evident the complementary values of modern architecture and the historic city.

In 1965, Samonà elaborated the branch office of the public transportation company ANAS in Palermo,
a matter directly related to the entry for the Camera dei Deputati. A series of alternatives shows a constant theme of volumetric articulation. The main volume is detached from the ground and becomes either an agglomeration of repetitive parts or a whole composed of the heterogeneous elements. Instead of a sense of formal unity, the dynamic is emphasized, as a non-linear threshold seems to generate simultaneous movements within the observer’s perception. (Fig.5.)

4. Alternatives and Synthesis

A series of drawings that Samoná made for his entry was discovered at the Archivio Samoná. By analytical reading of the graphic documents, it is possible to detect four different alternatives that he had considered. Contrary to what had been detected solely from the perspective, these drawings record the complex itinerary of the design process.⁴

One of the strong motivations seen in this series of drawings for ‘alternative A’ is the suspension of volume. A simple box-shaped mass is sustained by a row of slender steel columns in a cruciform section. (Fig.6.)

Although visually similar to corbusian pilotis, the employment of a colonnade is the result of both detachment and suspension. And the contrast between mass and void is emphasized more acutely than continuity or correspondence of planes, as seen in the roof garden of Villa Savoye. On the other hand, Le Corbusier maintained the importance of classical proportion to regulate the interrelationship between planes and volumes throughout his career, while Samoná was resolute in choosing abnormal scale to treasure the historical and classical fragment, sacrificing the evident proportion of the classical canon.

The contrast between mass and void is evident, but the decision to fix the height at this level is intriguing. The proportional relationship between two vertical parts seems awkward compared to the traditional canon, and even to modern architecture. However, by examining the lower right part of the drawing, one can find a small Baroque fountain attached to the building to the right. Indeed, columns were intended to create a profile that does not suppress the presence of the historical fragment, and at the same time, to form a frame within which the plastic composition of architectural elements is displayed. In other drawings, Samoná studies how to locate two different types of vertical connection, a round stair and a linear ramp, considered as plastic and expressive elements. On the other hand, the rear part records extrusion of masses different from the frontal part. This distinction also reflects his intention to create a silhouette in accordance with the Palazzo del Montecitorio toward the rear piazza to create a sense of urban continuity.

Once the decision is made to suspend the frontal mass, Samoná elaborates different alternatives with a variation on three themes: the number of columns, the location of vertically connecting elements, and the articulation of the elevated mass. In terms of the number of columns, he is undecided whether to choose six or seven units. Regarding the location of the stairs, the emphasis on the plastic effect framed horizontally by blocks and vertically by columns is certain, but the specific placement is still undecided. He even

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Fig.5. Conceptual Sketch for ANAS, Palermo 1965. 687-1f(AP)
Fig.6. Sketches for the ‘Alternative A’, 678-2d. (AP)
Fig.7. Elevation Sketch for the ‘Alternative A’, 687-2d. (AP)
momentarily considers placing cylindrical volumes in front of the colonnade, echoing Le Corbusier's La Tourette explicitly. (Fig.7.) For the articulation of the suspended mass, two different alternatives were considered: the first was to decompose the monolithic mass into overlapped slabs resembling a classical molding sectional profile, and the second was to make the variation the vertical division of the windows reminiscent of Auguste Perret's precedents.

This contrast between mass and void remains in the successive alternatives, while the idea of articulated fenestrations was soon discarded.

Instead of defining more accurately 'alternative A', Samoná proceeds with another alternative. Although slender support from columns remains, the monolithic mass is replaced by a conglomeration of small pavilion-like cells. (Fig.8.) The largest volume is located in the uppermost part, while smaller masses are clustered along its perimeter. Each of seven masses has the same square plan. Evidently, the principal problem in this proposal is the resolution of the interconnection of the separate parts. A platform among the square-shaped volumes is proposed so that each subsidiary part is linked to the central part either by a deck or a bridge. Consequently, the core of each block, treated as an autonomous nucleus, is located at the threshold between the mass and the central deck.

Another noticeable aspect of 'Alternative B' is the shape of the surrounding volumes. Functional or practical considerations are not provided, but it is certain that his conceptual alternative intends to decentralize and articulate extremely well the formerly singular figure of the suspended mass, as well as to fulfill the vertical conclusion of the whole complex with modern interpretation of a classical element, the cornice. While sustaining this idea, the surface of each volume is further articulated, emphasizing its horizontality. This operation reminds one of Scarpa and his projects, such as the showroom of the Olivetti Corporation at Piazza San Marco (1957-58) and the renovation of the Querini Stampalia (1961-63), both in Venice. This articulation blurs the monolithic sense of the mass, and although not explained specifically, the conceptual modeling of each block resembles the artificial stratification of the topography.

As mentioned before, all the masses are supported by columns. However, since the number of parts is multiplied and the dimension of the mass is divided, the supports are reconsidered. The previous linear location of the columns is shifted to dissemination, with correspondence of each mass with the overlapped grids beneath. This feature will remain through to the final formulation. In contrast is the theme of the collocation of the round and linear stairs, which will be abandoned. Again, the use of columns and suspension of mass are retained, but further choices are still under revision.

Changes from monolithic mass to the overlapping clusters, with dislocation and shift of bodies, are emphasized in 'Alternative C'. The idea of the façade is totally abandoned as superimposition of different slab-like volumes echoes the characteristics of infome and the negation of the façade expressed by the exponents of De Stijl. (Fig.9.)

Regarding the intervals between the columns, at least three different types of bays are applied. This strategy is a partial continuity of 'Alternative B' in which the decision was made to divide a single mass into parts. Whilst employment of equal pavilions is abandoned, the idea of different bay intervals remains. On the highest part of the complex, a concave structure or dome seems to conclude the vertical movement of the masses. Dynamic composition of the building is visualized throughout its frontal appearance thanks to the analytical decomposition of the upper parts and the slitting of the lower structure system.

Samoná continues his architectural research of the project in two parts. The frontal part acquires a sense of protrusion and projection over that of suspension and detachment. Even the modules and grids of columns are considered secondary in relation to the dynamic

Fig.8. Sketches for the 'Alternative B', 687-2I. (AP, IUAV)

Fig.9. Sketches for the 'Alternative C', 687-2c. (AP)
projection of overlapped and dislocated blocks. In this way, the initial idea of framing the adjacent fountain acquires a more complex relationship with the urban context. This futuristic and violent protrusion of parts makes evident the architect’s desire to contrast this building with the rest of the historical context in dialectical terms. (Fig.1.) In other words, Samoná seems almost as if he wants to reach the philosophical essence of the classical notion of harmony: *Harmonia est discordia concurs*; the difference between the parts remains in a dialectical relationship to enhance the subliminal value as a whole. On the other hand, the rear part emphasizes the sense of substruction. This contrast between front and rear also reflects the notion of harmony mentioned above.

There are various designs related to this last phase of the design process. Different ideas from former alternatives are gathered and adjusted to allow for the precise elaboration of the rest of the parts.

Most drawings related to the definitive version, 'Alternative D', are focused on the longitudinal composition of the complex instead of the frontal studies executed previously. For the first time, there is a serious measurement of the constituent parts in sections and plans. The fundamental feature of the rear part is the presence of the courts. Three courts, conceptually closer to voids, sustain the parts not only longitudinally but horizontally as a whole.

The frontal columns and rear voids perform equally to stabilize the heterogeneous elements momentarily, and the components together form an integrative whole. Elements of classical typology, court and column, are interpreted as conceptual order, dispositifs that facilitate the constitution of the components rather than submitting to a norm.

The initial idea of suspended volume remains, but is modified by the dynamic composition. Formally different but conceptually close, Samoná’s design creates a public open space in a forest of columns, as Mies did for the Seagram building in New York. The concept of elevated mass is the result of his consideration of the relationship between new architecture and the old context.

This strategic choice reflects a long debate on modern architecture and the destiny of the historic city which has raged since the Risorgimento when the problem of national identity and architectural style was raised. This theme was considered in terms of style by Camillo Boito (1836-1914) and by Gustavo Giovannoni in its urban dimensions with the publication of *Vecchie citta’ ed edilizia nuova* (1931), concerning the destiny of historic cities undergoing the construction of new buildings. Samoná knew Giovannoni personally and even exchanged letters with him in the Thirties, asking opinions about his research on Sicilian medieval architecture. Although Samoná did not share the premise of Giovannoni’s theory, that coupled academic guidance with the notion of *architetto totale* for fascist urbanization, it was a serious theme that no professional architect could ignore, and Samoná was no exception. A similar approach of harmony in contrast was taken by Giuseppe Terragni for the Palazzo Vietti (1939-41); he had expressed his concern for the importance of the coexistence of old and new.

Samoná’s project for the Camera dei Deputati is a synthesis of different ideas that he had previously proposed for two national competitions with different alternatives for ANAS in 1965. Furthermore, the strategic principle of both the Camera and this project is that of complementary contrast. Samoná did consider the preexistence of these structures both visually and functionally, without any typological or mimetic preconceptions.

The result seems like a momentary fixation of different ideas gathered in a non-linear itinerary of design process. (Fig.10.-11.) A body made of heterogeneous elements seems to resist a univocal evaluation according to modernist criteria. The whole process shows patient, free research far from applying dogmatic or preconceived principles, and the procedure seems to echo the albertian concepts of *concinnitas* and *finitio*.

5. Giuseppe Samoná and Le Corbusier

One of the most striking elements of this project is the figure of the 'open hand' placed on the summit of the extruding part toward the rear piazza. Previously,
on the right upper corner of the drawing of 'Alternative C', there was just a single block suspended over a horizontal slab. Even in the final elaboration of the perspectives, open hand is not present. It is quite certain that his decision to echo the famous figure of the Swiss-French architect came at the very last moment of the final presentation. This intriguing and explicit homage leads the observer to interrogate the relationship that exists between Giuseppe Samoná and Le Corbusier.

There are two reasons for this homage of the main ouverte in the project. First, this explicit citation refers to the values expressed by Le Corbusier in the new Indian institutional architecture and his belief in the ethical role of contemporary architecture. The second reason is more intimate and personal. Le Corbusier's last work was the project for the Hospital of Venice, and Samoná was one of its faithful promoters as director of IUAV and as one of the exponents of the local authorities. Unfortunately, the project was interrupted due to the death of Le Corbusier in 1965, just a year after the layout of the whole plan. Samoná decided to turn his project into a cenotaph dedicated to his close friend. (Fig.12.)

Direct contact began with Samoná's decision to become a member of the Italian group CIAM and his participation in the VII CIAM held in Bergamo (1949) with a residential quarter project at Mestre in Venice. The relationship between the two architects strengthened as Samoná organized four editions of the CIAM summer school at IUAV between 1952 and 1958. Le Corbusier personally came in 1952 to inaugurate this event with a lecture on Chandigarh, Le Modulor, and the Venetian urban system entitled 'A Propose La Venise'.

Regarding the idea of the architectural object in a territorial context and in the urban tissue, Samoná was indebted to Le Corbusier with three projects in particular: Plan Obus for Algiers (1931-1942), buildings in Chandigarh (1951-) and the Venice Hospital (1964-65).

In Plan Obus, Le Corbusier had proposed a concept of urbanization quite different from his contemporary work Villa Radiuses. In this project for Algiers, a serpent-like superstructure was introduced in a conflicting relationship with the vernacular context, not with the area as tabula rasa as he had done in previous urban projects. Different urban layers or cultural strata coexist in their contrast in complementary ways. This dialectical method of incorporating historical fragments on a modern and technological level had impressed Samoná.

Samoná agreed with Le Corbusier's affirmation of the role of modern architecture and its representation of social and civic values and humanism, especially with institutional architecture as expressed at Chandigarh; in Samoná's case the project was the extension of the Camera dei Deputati annex in Rome. Furthermore, the idea of calibrated architectural objects in urban textures is also reflected in Samoná's project, the return of the object.

When Le Corbusier was appointed to design a new civil hospital in Venice, thanks to Mazzariol and Samoná among others, he considered Venice not just as a historical city for the tourist industry but mostly as a place governed by precise systems of circulation, infrastructure and public space. Le Corbusier chose to locate in the area of San Giobbe a series of pavilions in juxtaposition to fulfill the functional exigencies of a modern hospital and to make it a new portal to be seen from the mainland, as a new kind of Piazza San Marco. An abstract system of forms governed by precise geometry is chosen to interact with the intact organic morphology of Venice. Samoná's approach to the historic center of Rome is quite similar to Le Corbusier's method. As if to follow Freud's famous analysis of Rome, Samoná consciously locates a modern stratum over the preexisting ones.

The open hand located at the foremost part of the building thus represents Samoná's personal and professional gratitude to Le Corbusier, a colleague and a master.

6. Conclusion

The national competition for the extension of the Camera dei Deputati was held in a crucial moment of epochal transition, a year before the outbreak of '68 all over Europe. It was not a coincidence that students of faculties of architecture were on the front line of this social protest. Professional architects also had to face complex socio-cultural conditions, standing on the threshold of expectation and disillusion.

Giuseppe Samoná considered this competition not as an important professional opportunity, but rather as a critical moment in which to express his position. Within the discipline, he intended to measure
the capacity of architectural objects in a complex circumstance in which each of the social, cultural, political and economical factors accelerated the disintegration of the integrity of architecture.

He developed coherently in the Camera competition some of the architectural themes that he had been formulating since the end of the Fifties. The drawings for this project record the continuity between this entry and the previously elaborated elements that he had presented on other occasions. Also, philological reconstruction of the process reveals the non-linear and open approach that he had assumed.

This important shift from neo-realism to cultural criticism is also related to his research on and contact with Le Corbusier. Samoná's first important project after the Liberazione, the residential quarter San Giuliano, was presented at the VII CIAM Bergamo in 1949. Direct contact between these two continued over the course of the CIAM Summer Schools held at the IUAV from 1952 to 1958. Le Corbusier's contemporary projects, and especially his work for the Venetian hospital, provided important insights and confirmed Samoná's ideas on institutional architecture and the proper method of urban intervention.

After their disillusionment on the plausibility of urban reform with architecture as its vehicle, architects were left with few choices. In this extreme climate, many architects abandoned their compass for class struggle. Others took refuge in detached realms like Superstudio, and still others like exponents of arte povera expressed cynically their criticism of an overwhelming reality that was difficult to subvert.

Giuseppe Samoná made a different decision regarding this institutional architectural project. He was conscious of the significance of this event against a background where real estate abuse prevailed and architectural proposals were left ignored. Samoná's project represents an attempt to incorporate the contradictions of reality and of architectural languages and offers a valid example many of whose arguments are still effective today.

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Notes
1) Tafuri was one of the few historians who had interpreted the significance of this project in the cultural context. This is an important study to discover these aspects and to stress the significance of this project in the cultural context. This is a complementary study to discover these aspects and to stress the sphere of complexity in the design process and its socio-cultural significance.
2) Mostra Samoná held at IUAV was the first scientific exhibition based on the original drawings, after the celebratory event-exhibition held in 1975 at the Palazzo Grassi. This paper intends to provide critical readings of those materials omitted on both occasions.
3) This book had a strong impact on the architectural debate in Italy, especially among the new generation of architects. In fact, research publications such as Architettura della città by Aldo Rossi (1966), Territorio dell'architettura by Vittorio Gregotti (1966), and Il significato del piano by Carlo Aymonino (1975), as well as the important collective research published in La città di Padova (1971), were directly influenced by Giuseppe Samoná. All these younger authors were colleagues of Samoná at the IUAV.
4) There are no specific dates written on the drawings. Using the denomination of alphabetical alternatives, the author intends to indicate different alternatives that hypothetically correspond to the chronological elaboration.
5) Carlo Scarpa (1969-1978) never worked professionally with Samoná; however he had been a professor and a colleague at the same faculty of architecture as Samoná since the early Twenties. He remained a faithful interlocutor of Samoná when the latter was nominated as director of IUAV in 1945. Scarpa also intensified his formal research of the detail of the Tomba Brion project in the early Seventies.
6) The first written record of Le Corbusier in Samoná appears in 1929 in the analysis of Maison La Roche in Samoná's first important article, Tradizionalismo ed internazionalismo in architettura. However, Le Corbusier's direct influence becomes visible mostly in the first years of the postwar period projects such as the residential quarter at Lavinaio in Naples (1944) and the international competition project for the Crystal Palace in Sydenham near London (1945).