



ODENA'S MAIN SQUARE: SIMPLICITY AND FORMAL CLARITY

Posted on August 28, 2020 by martabuges



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The remodeling of the old city center of Òdena focuses on a new structure to organize and define the public space under the criteria of simplicity and formal clarity. The project extended a uniform stone paving material throughout the whole affected area, in which vehicles and people would coexist, giving priority to the latter.

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A Paradigm Shift. From an Intersection to a Meeting Point

Prior to its remodeling, Òdena's Plaça Major was not in fact a square but simply the point of intersection of the six main streets that cut across the old city center. This condition, added to the strong slope between the north and south ends, turned the place into a tangle of road crossings that left some small, scattered and isolated spaces. Citizen use in the center of the municipality was thus very divided, greatly hampering the development of community life.

To reverse the image of an intersection, centered on vehicles and leaving only the remaining urban spaces to pedestrians, the design extended a uniform stone pavement throughout the whole affected area. This mantle does not specialize or delimit but instead joins all the spaces of the square into one, where people can move around easily, safely and with priority over vehicles. To address significant changes in height, and to create areas with softer slopes for use as meeting places (mainly in front of the church and the City Hall), a common system using stands or stairs is deployed throughout the area. These new spaces become shared benches, playgrounds, and meeting points. The result is a continuous public space that is well connected and essentially empty,

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ready to become the setting for a renewed urban community life.

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Geology and Identity. A Legacy that Persists

The town of Òdena is located on the border between two geological formations: sandstone and marl. The conjunction favors the presence of chalk, a material that characterizes the geology of the site. There is a chalk quarry in Òdena, exploited since the 19th century and still active today. The castle and the walled enclosure of the municipality, dating back to the 10th century, are located on a mound of this stone, which is used as the predominant construction material. This mineral, with its typical grey-whitish hues, is a point of reference for the town and is closely linked to its landscape, its history and its social development.

The cracks made by the project to break down and unfold the uniform paving that spreads across the plaza allow the whiteness to emerge from within, symbolizing and enhancing a feature that has been meaningful in the town for generations, and that will now have its own representative memorial space in the Plaça Major.

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An Extendable System. Guidelines for Future Public Spaces

The economic situation of small towns such as Òdena does not allow them to devote many resources to the maintenance of public space. Therefore, once they obtain a subsidy or funding to carry out a project, they have to ensure that the intended functionality, the quality of the materials, the proposed technical solutions and their implementation are as successful as possible, in order to ensure good use, good durability and low maintenance costs.

The commission, therefore, was not only to provide a solution for the plaza as a central and symbolic element of the town, but also to develop a system for intervening in public space (pavements, furniture, lighting, trees, facilities, commissioning, etc.) that could be extended, in the future, into other streets in the urban core.

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