

Bari Discovering Dioguardi. Possible Strategies for Reading the Built Work of Saverio Dioguardi



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Abstract Drawing the urban space and the system of architectures represents a peculiar way of questioning and getting to know things. Drawing leads to reflect upon the very essence of built architecture, the landscape and the world where ideas, considerations and desires are made of visual material. In 2008, began the research on the Bari city image starting from the systematic road section surveys along the fronts of the architectures built between the 19th and early 20th centuries in Bari, with the aim of creating the visual archive called BDA Bari Drawing Architecture. In Bari there are examples of good modern architecture, scattered throughout the city, isolated in a middle ground, compressed between an anonymous, disengaged and timeless building and that which, instead, one's time ignores, as it is committed to the adoption of signs and languages that can camouflage it in the identity heritage of the city, already acquired and internalized by its inhabitants. Saverio Dioguardi's works mark this time emerging, monumental and solemn in the urban scenario, describing a "new order", and connoting the urban image for fifty years. The figure of Dioguardi, the practice of his work, the "fantastic tension of the expressive traces" of the decorative apparatus, the "synthesis between elements of tradition and rationalist elements", the "rhythmic concentration of the facades", inspired the present research work.

Keywords Drawing · Survey · Image · Displaying · Digital heritage

1 Saverio Dioguardi Work in the BDA Project

«In the field of architecture, what most characterises modernity is the attempt to idealise one's own doing to the point that the drawing is placed in the state of a real "holy epiphany" aimed at emphasising a desired distance between the formal

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outcomes and their daily destiny, both as regards the more “existential” approach, directed towards dissolving the form, the “*cupio dissolvi*”, and as regards the way directed towards achieving form in its most complete idea and totality» [1]. These are words that Francesco Moschini uses to introduce a way to read the works of a great figure of the Apulian architectural scene, through his design drawings. The architect Saverio Dioguardi worked in Bari, an important regional capital in southern Italy, from about 1911 to 1960, making himself an «interpreter of the increasingly pressing city ambitions of growth in a modern sense» [2]. He was an architect, a builder, and anything but provincial: although firmly linked to regional building traditions, he was always up to date and ready to welcome and elaborate on the ideas that were coming from Central European modernism [1]. A rich repertoire of archival drawings—completed buildings, projects that have remained on paper, including those for international architectural competitions—and the substantial amount of works built in the city of Bari, outline the personality of a modernist designer placed in the contemporary architecture debate and who was ready to adapt to the «changing seasons of taste and different cultural circumstances» [2] over the course of fifty years.

Architectural drawing is therefore considered by Moschini and the curators of an exhibition dedicated to the works of Dioguardi, held in Bari in 2011 [1], to be the fundamental aid for the study of the works of modern architects: «it is the drawings that become the way to recognise and preserve the concerns of the authors. The drawings often give an account of a personal semantic set and, at the same time, they are evidence of an analytical and study activity» [1], because architectural drawing is the place of experimentation, cognitive investigation, communication. This statement is true for the designer architect, who draws to elaborate and manifest his design idea. It is equally true for the architectural scholar who, through drawing—and when he approaches the concreteness of constructed material, through survey—elaborates and expresses the speculative outcome of his investigations into constructed reality. In fact, «by its very nature, survey work is committed to translating the *continuum* of reality into a system of traits, traces, signs, within a linguistic code that is widely shared and, therefore, transmissible» [3].

These assumptions are the starting point of the investigation into Bari works of Saverio Dioguardi, studied through the survey of some of the most significant buildings and the parallel reading of the project drawings. The research path investigates his history as an established designer who measures himself against «new architecture», as he himself declares [4]. The research also analyses the constantly updated language of his works, the transformation of style over time, the link with the local construction tradition, and, at the same time, the relationship with national and international culture. The method used is the gnoseological-interpretative one of drawing and survey, considered as the set of procedures which aim is to understand the works built: survey and graphic restoration of the object, analysis of archive material, research and synthesis of preceding studies—historical, archival and typological-comparative analyses. However, these procedures do not stop at considering only the buildings, palaces or monuments, analysed one by one, individually. Each object is considered part of a complex system of spatial, cultural, geographical, historical relationships, etc., which is the city. Therefore, the analysis includes the places and

the time in which the single architectures appeared, the link with the surrounding space and with the surrounding buildings—those present at the time of construction and those that today, which have often replaced pre-existing historical buildings, constitute the new environmental context.

The place, the city, Bari is the starting point of the research, or rather its representation. «Representing and designing a city means weaving a dense texture of relationships between the parts that make it up and between the elements that make the reality of the individual parts true, without giving their recognisable characteristics in the pressing progression of reduction» [3].

For some years now, the city of Bari has been the subject of the BDA (Bari Drawing Architectures) research project that investigates the modern nucleus, the so-called “Murattiano”, founded in 1813 beyond the walls of the ancient city, and the adjacent expansion districts that were gradually built in the following decades, namely the Libertà district to the west and the Umbertino and Madonnella districts to the east (Fig. 1). In the city, there are architectures of the most disparate languages, from the neoclassical buildings of the first foundation to the *extra-moenia* Borgo; from the eclectic, historicist, liberty ones to the architecture of the fascist regime, which had adopted Rationalism as an aesthetic direction for public buildings and services; to those of the second postwar period and, finally, to the contemporary ones that still often replace the oldest buildings today.

The representation of the city is the aim of the research, which starts from the façade of architectures survey. In a timely manner, the authors survey and analyse the buildings this urban section, descending the scale of architectural and decorative detail. As already mentioned, architectures are not the only aim of the investigation; they constitute the minimum unit, because they are framed in a broader context, they are studied to reach the other aim of the research on representation: the city image. «The city presents itself as a field of infinite information that follows one another in an apparently chaotic order. Shunning the paradox of the *Map of the Empire*, the desire to immerse oneself in this dense and layered material, which presupposes an obligatory recognition of its compositions and its training strategies, imposes an activity of selective discernment that leads to an interpretative synthesis in which one measures the quality of the representation» [3].

The selection is carried out through survey/topographic localisation/cataloguing operations. That is, the survey passes from the architectural element scale to the city scale and acquiring information is considered valid and useful for different types of reading at different scales. The set of information relating to each single building make up the corpus of knowledge relating to the entire city.

The starting data are those cited, i.e. the façade survey, the analysis—historical, typological, linguistic, etc., the search for iconographic material—from archival drawing to historical and current photography—the study of the personality and thought of the creator of the work.

Identifying the digital location where this information set relating to each minimum unit is located, i.e. their mapping, allows an abstract digital representation to be constructed. It is no longer a topographical map, but a «non-projective representation» [5], because it contains diagrams, lists, symbols, included in an ordered

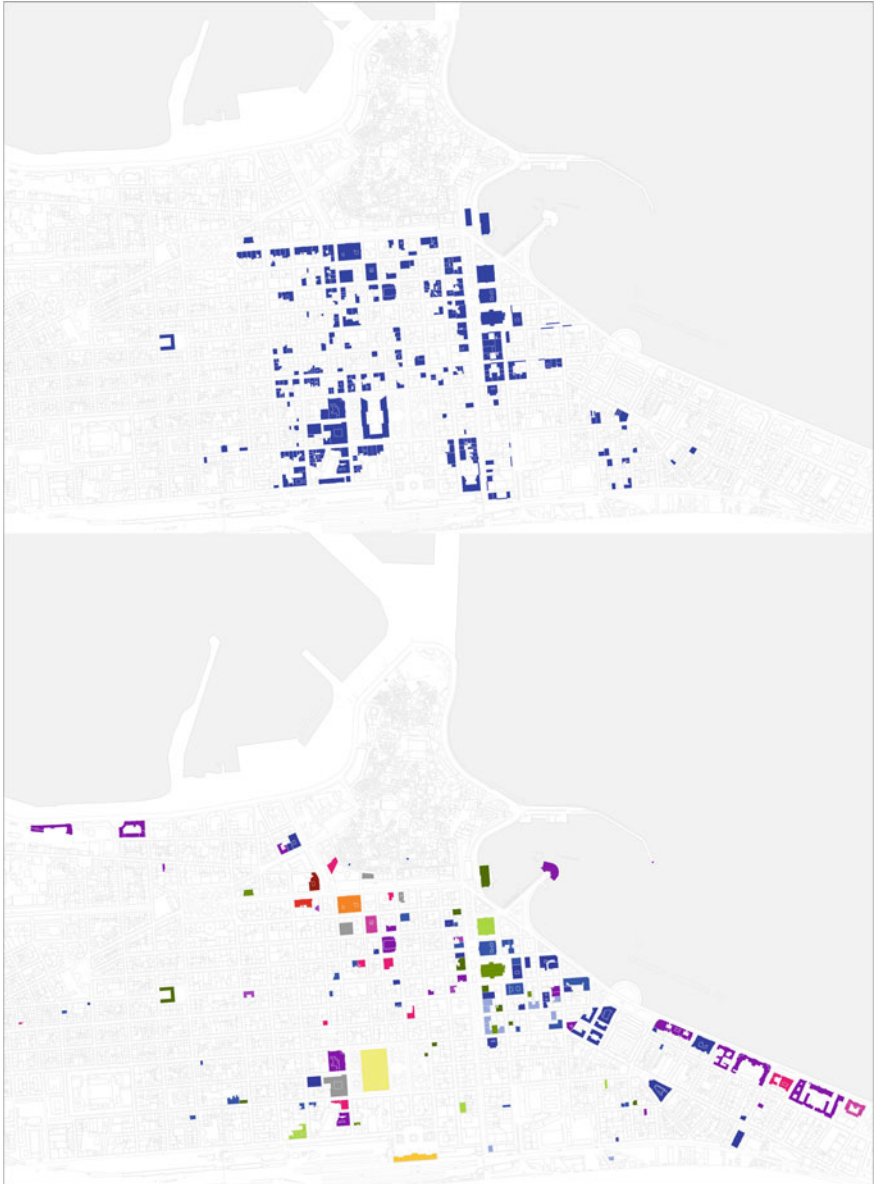


Fig. 1 The BDA_Bari Drawing Architectures archive: Buildings surveyed from 2008 to 2020; Mapping of building chronological succession in the city of Bari

network of connections where the minimum units are the nodes. The topographical sense of the concept of mapping is thus linked to the mathematical meaning of the word, which is that of «association of elements» (Fig. 2).

The BDA map is a «synoptic configuration», in which the elements are not combined «summarily», but «constitutively», because «they appear in a reciprocal relationship of total formal, structural, and functional dependence» [6]. Representation the location by means of an abstract digital configuration is a system of cataloguing, a taxonomy—from the Greek *táxis* which means order and *nómos* which means norm [5]—which arranges the elements according to a rule, establishing the norms for reading and extracting data. To create this system, therefore, it is necessary to «isolate, group, make relevant, link, and build together the mass of elements that architecture offers for its analysis» [5]. By extrapolating some of these “sets of elements”, it is possible to compose knowledge paths [7], extracting information

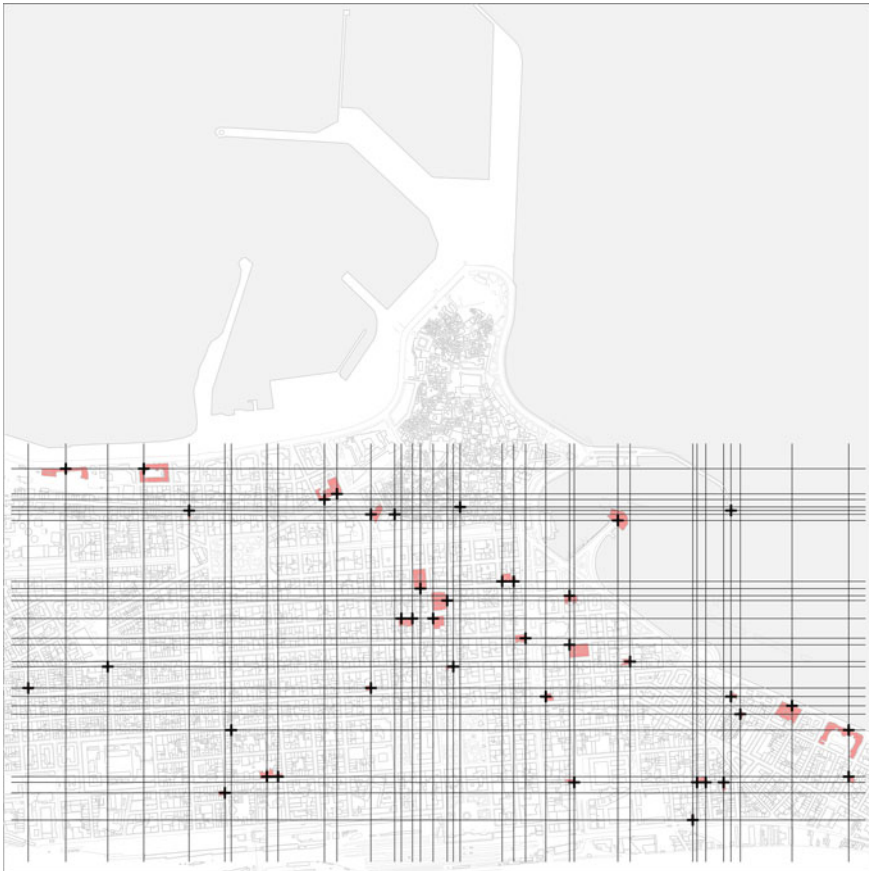


Fig. 2 Mapping of the buildings by the architect Saverio Dioguardi: network of nodes and connections

and links for thematic areas. The methodological approach in itself might not be innovative, if we take into account only the research that is currently being conducted on the themes of city representation, data mapping, and interactive cartographic representation [8, 9]. However, it should be taken into account that the studies conducted so far on the representation of the city of Bari and its architecture are quite recent [10]. Prior to this study, the extensive research on the city had focused on issues that could be confined to specific disciplinary areas: history [11], urban planning [12–14], with some insights into the architects who worked most in the urban environment [2, 4, 15, 16], the most significant architectures [17–19], language and style [20, 21]. The BDA project, which is still in progress given the complexity and vastness of the topic, aims to address a general reading, a study that tries to connect the different areas of knowledge, allowing a transversal reading of information and a rapid extrapolation of the research topics. For example, in the information system, the simultaneous reading of historical data, together with geographic data, allows us to reconstruct the chronological context relating to the architecture in a dynamic way (Fig. 3).

History is not a story deriving from the mere temporal succession of constructive facts. The temporal data, associated with all the others, is displayed on the map and simultaneously compared with the survey—which also provides information on the type, language, etc.—. The history of the building, the name of the owner, the

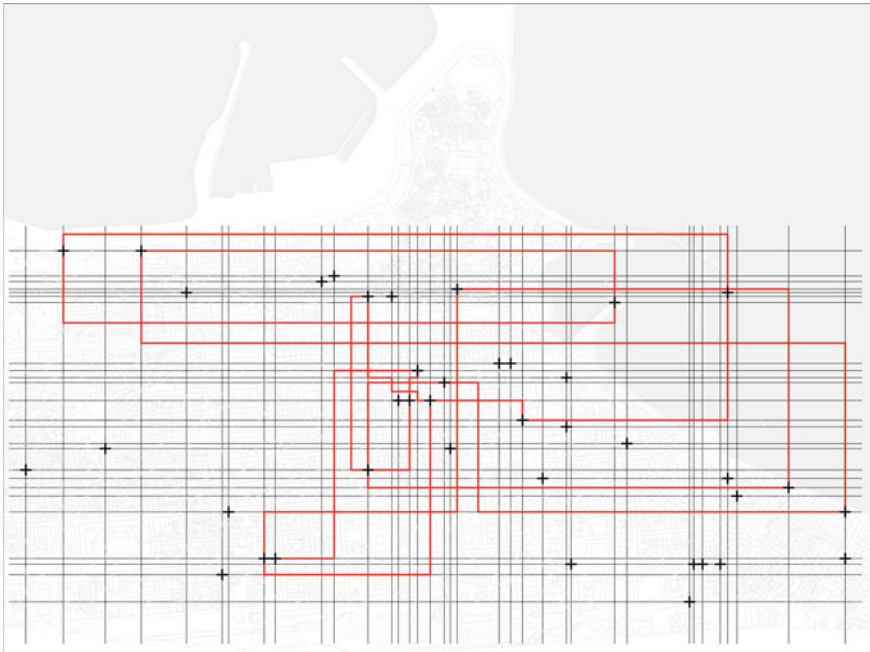


Fig. 3 Paths of knowledge: the public architectures by the architect Saverio Dioguardi arranged in chronological order

designer, the type of intervention—that is, the data from the archive research—are accompanied by the visual data, the drawing.

The system is the place where such data is collected, but, at the same time, it is a device to display them. In this approach, historical and constructive facts can be visualised as paths on a map, or as elements placed inside the grid and connected by the links between the nodes; they become visual facts (Fig. 4).

In the same way, various themes can be extrapolated, such as the reading of all architectures language in a given period; the comparison between façades with different languages in a well-defined portion of the city—e.g. along a road axis [10]; or it is possible to isolate the works designed by important architects.

The investigation into one of the figures who had the greatest impact on architectural research in Bari, Saverio Dioguardi, falls into this area, becoming a pretext for experimenting with the method (Fig. 5).

Among all the buildings in the city that the present paper authors have catalogued and implemented in the system, Dioguardi's have been selected because they are considered the most significant for research. From reading the map and all the data already present in the archive, including various surveys, it became clear that it was possible to study all the architect's works with the new approach. The potential of the system is to pave the way for investigation paths that start from organising the data according to a different arrangement from time to time:

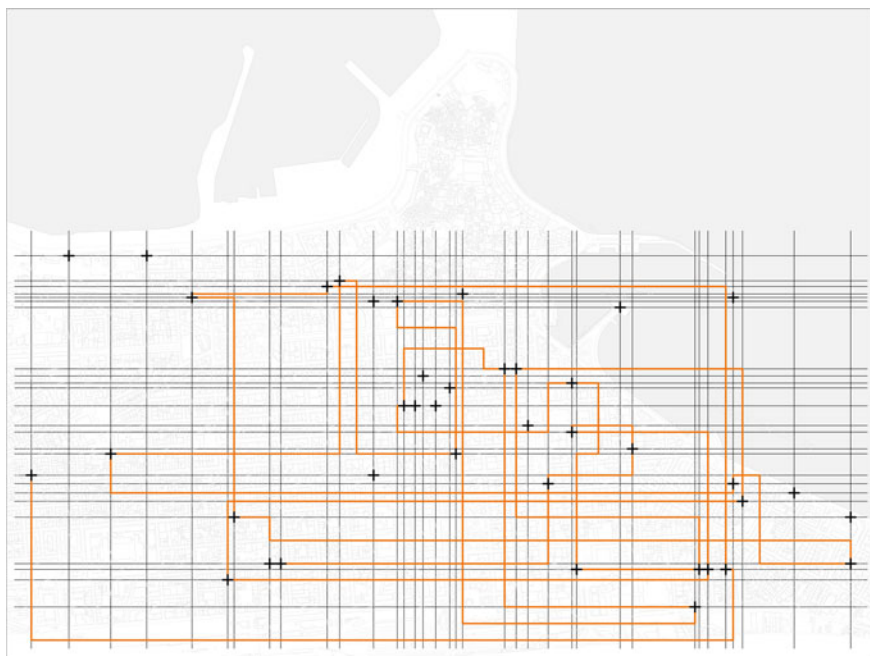


Fig. 4 Paths of knowledge: the private architectures by the architect Saverio Dioguardi arranged in chronological order

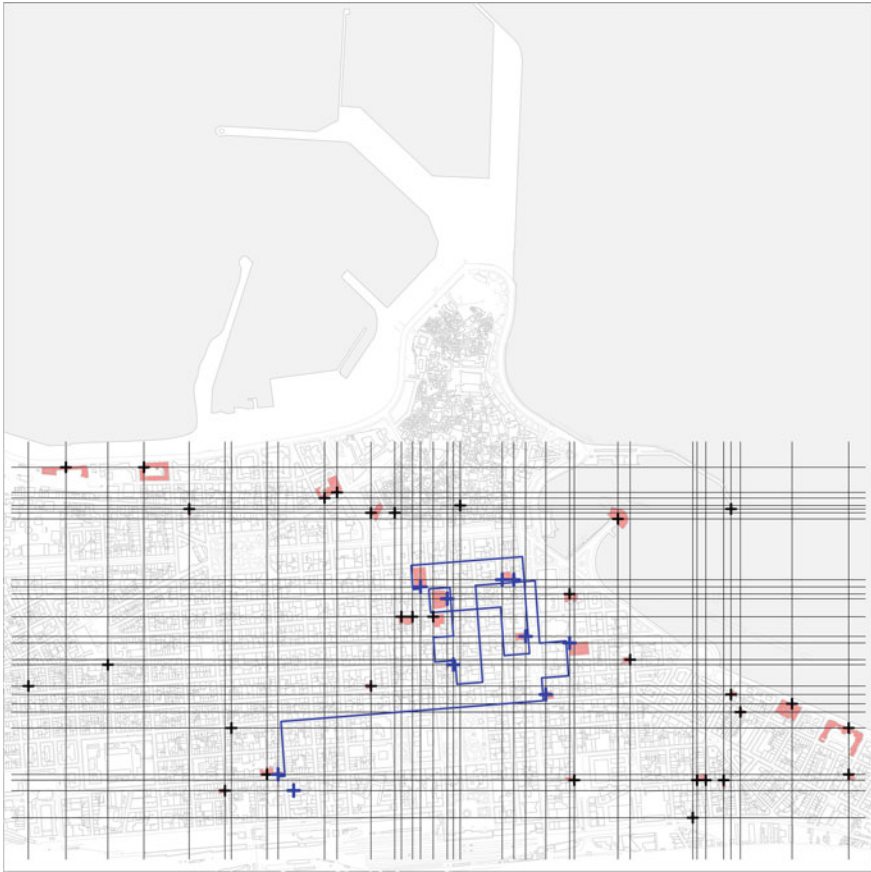


Fig. 5 Paths of knowledge: the architectures surveyed by the architect Saverio Dioguardi arranged in chronological order. The reading criterion is “Dioguardi/Chronology/Architectures surveyed/Visiting path”

the minimum units in the system (in this case, the works of Dioguardi) can be arranged according to a chronological order—Dioguardi/Chronology, but they could also be arranged according to a different criterion, for example, typological—Dioguardi/Public building/Chronology—and others—Dioguardi/Urban location/Private building, Dioguardi/Typology/Language, and so on—(Fig. 6).

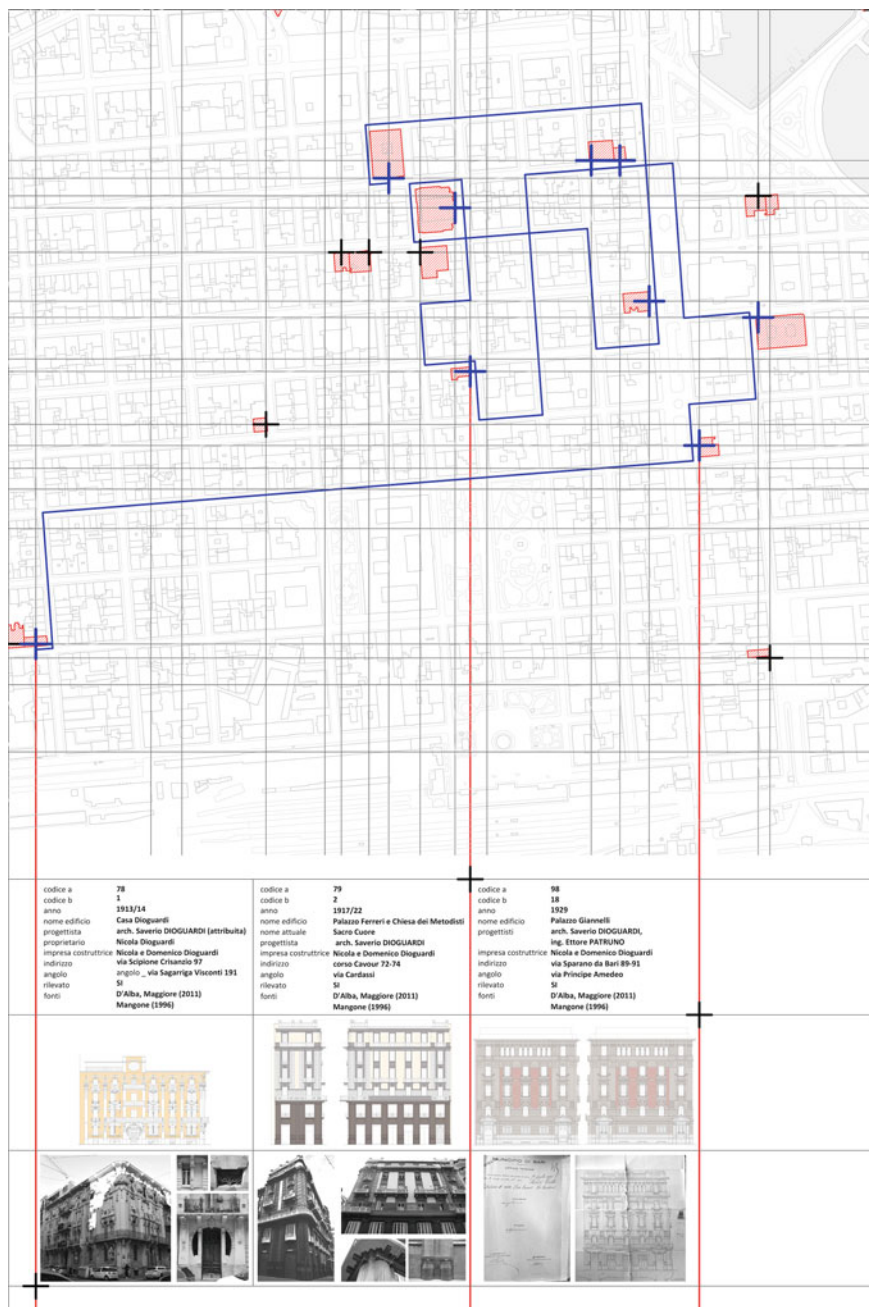


Fig. 6 Saverio Dioguardi in the BDA_Bari Drawing Architectures archive. The reading criterion is “Dioguardi/Chronology/Architectures surveyed/Visiting path/Collected data”

2 The Drawing of the Saverio Dioguardi Built Works and the Place of the Image

The visual project on Saverio Dioguardi's works starts from some considerations on the drawing. Re-presenting the physical reality of the object and the outcome of the construction work of the work places the person who carries out the drawing in a special condition aimed at identifying with the project's author. The dialogue between the two figures is derived from images, measurements, and signs, while the work is de-constructed, its structure reduced to a series of fragments [22].

Experience and direct knowledge of the object represented allow and prepare the elaboration of a narrative that passes from the architectural work to its author and vice versa. In a continuous flow of data and information, the physical reality of the object is transferred from one space to another, symbolic space, of the drawing, that «strongly concurs to transform with its stimuli: the architectural drawings are certainly able to express more than the built architecture. The technique, the style of representation, the size, the format, the graphical sign, the ductus, everything shows the author's intellectual intention. Therefore, the architectural drawings become as clear as convincing statements of cultural belief; acquiring they own artistic value, they can rightly propose themselves as independent works» [22].

To access that narrative dimension of the drawing, one passes through the operations of relief and graphic restoration of all the identified elements, virtually disassembled in the foundational phase and reassembled in the linguistic reconstruction phase of the object, through the drawing. In particular, the façade, that is the external shell of the building, gives itself to this type of action, since it is a «contact surface between architecture and urban space», «the main vehicle for the diffusion of extravagances and beliefs», a «privileged element through which the recognisability of the architectural image is exercised» [23].

Saverio Dioguardi, obviously, does not work only on surfaces, but on lots that have been entrusted to him by both public and private clients; he draws and builds a body of the building that is sometimes placed between adjacent buildings; others occupy the corner space of the regular islands of the Murattiano district where the plastic walls develop into an eccentric corner decoration. Still, with others, the building occupies an entire block, clearly showing all the linguistic structure chosen by the author, without jumps, without gaps or censure, without shadows due to mutual contact with other architectures (Fig. 7). But it is precisely the façade, «a place of public manifestation of the architectural object, the element of mediation with the collective space, the interpreter of a relationship aimed at restoring urban dignity to the place it lives» [23], to establish, with the observer, a dialogue, a relationship, albeit one that is exclusively visual, destined to last over time. The body of the building with its internal space is only for a few: access to the heart of the building is possible only by crossing a certain threshold, beyond which the contact with the identity of the architectural material becomes more intimate and complex. For the purposes of the ongoing research, whose objective is to investigate the image of the city through the



Fig. 7 The Public buildings and the work of “deconstruction and reconstruction of urban logics”

reconstruction of the urban fronts that define its face, the analysis of SD’s work is established on this side of that threshold.

In particular, the façade as a theme of investigation on the city, continues and implements the study on the image of the urban face of Bari [10]. The visual narrative of his works, of which a particular portion is proposed, has SD as its narrative voice. The relief, the (graphic) representation and the «imaging» [24] of the architecture of the façades of the buildings built between 1910 and 1960, represent the object of the present research, while the subject of the images produced that corroborate the investigation is the city of Bari, the constructed urban environment, the single buildings, or the constituent elements of the regular blocks.

The act of surveying takes place in a precise moment in the life of an architectural work, of a building placed in the consolidated urban environment, among other buildings and other stories. The survey drawing is offered after the one created to represent the project, marked by a time of gestation, and after its construction and the realisation of all the works that define it. Representing means re-presenting the work, an act that carries with it the signs of time that continues to flow [25]. The act of detecting is also the final act of knowledge, «the point of arrival of a complex event; this event springs from a change of the reality which is observed and projected in a parallel spatiality, where the cultural experience and quality of the re-representation process is grafted by means of a sign transliteration, which simultaneously suggests

a synthesis and produces a new figurative model. So, the interpretation evaluates the essence of the things and becomes a generative operation, which is based on the perennial interaction among acquired knowledge, imagination, cultural memory and creative ability» [22].

Drawing Saverio Dioguardi's built works meant removing the object from the oblivion of time and bringing it back to collective memory by sharing the results of the research; it meant taking it from the ordinary, from the everyday, and placing it in an unconventional environment, a meaningful image, dialoguing, asking questions about its current state, its past, its future. It encouraged reflection on the autonomy of drawing and on the most suitable representation device for showing the modernist language of Dioguardi, what the author thought, what he aspired to, and finally achieved. Finally, it meant seeking a graphic expressiveness of architectural drawing capable of solving problems, answering the doubts and questions posed at the basis of the research, and provoking emotions.

The essay by Francesco Moschini, already cited in this paper, in which the visual power of words and the use of a language capable of generating meaningful images, helped to inspire some important aspects of the research, favoured the development of the visual story of the works built by the architect in the city of Bari.

There is tenseness in the story's narrative pace in rediscovering what Francesco Moschini calls «fantastic tension», capable of mending «the distance between the infinite parts, between the fragments of surviving civilization, between the expressive traces of which his architectures are composed. An attraction capable of containing and reconciling the linear refinement of Otto Wagner's forms and the indispensable reference to classical culture, even if with exhibited and sought-after "disharmony"» [1].

In the works belonging to the first "chapter" [26] of Dioguardi's production, we wondered where we find what Moschini defines «mechanical stridency», which declares the «artificiality of the composition of the parts, poised between the opposite need to claim their expressive autonomy and a more conciliated abandonment to merge into the whole». And what are what Moschini calls «objects serially repeated or divided in more complex combinations»? (Figs. 8 and 9) and the «changes of direction, of inversion of coexistence and stylistic trends»? And what would happen to the acquired and consolidated image of his architecture in the city if the façades were «deprived of the decorative elements in their vivid formal presence»? Would the "drama" that characterises all Dioguardi's architectures survive together with the «chiaroscuro vibrations caused by subtle and continuous staggering, by unexpected and sensitive duplications» [1]?

The drawing of the Palazzo Dioguardi façade, one of the works belonging to the first chapter of the production, tries to answer the questions that the research raises, through an elaboration that sees it isolated from the context that houses it and that, through the power of the graphic sign highlights its being a «coherent example that proposes a coherent example of global from the general background of the masses and surfaces to the most minute detail: while referring back to the ornamental repertoires (phytomorphic stylisations, medallions, and so on) to the usual modernist repertoires



Fig. 8 Elements of the architectural language and compositional tension of objects (from 1917 at 1931)



Fig. 9 Elements of the architectural language and compositional tension of objects (1934–1949)

(of the late National Liberty rather than European art nouveau) the architect reveals a remarkable degree of originality and coherence» [2] (Fig. 10).

The line drawing describes the dry profile of the elements making up the façade, facilitates their reading, and entrusts the understanding to the device for displaying the orthogonal projections. Eliminating that «background noise» [27] that invades every real visual space, we are once again able to distinguish and decipher what the author was able to think, represent, and then build.

The second chapter includes those architectures where «the graphic, symbolic, and monumental dimensions have reached a synthesis in these years, based on an eclectic conception of history. The years of the regime are recognisable from a constant research suspended between the continuous references to metaphysical and avant-garde research and a Roman material peremptoriness that simultaneously represents both the limits and the greatness of this historical period» [1].

In this context, the new church of San Ferdinando [28] (Fig. 11) was born, its drawing developed, taking into account the urban context. It is an operation that shows the “compression” to which the entire body of the building is subjected in aggregating the volumes with difficulty contained in the size of the lot «intended as an insurmountable limit within which objects are driven to a violent fusion» [1]. The image defined by the drawing of the urban fronts and facades of the new church suggests, through the overturning of the side facades, the importance of the building

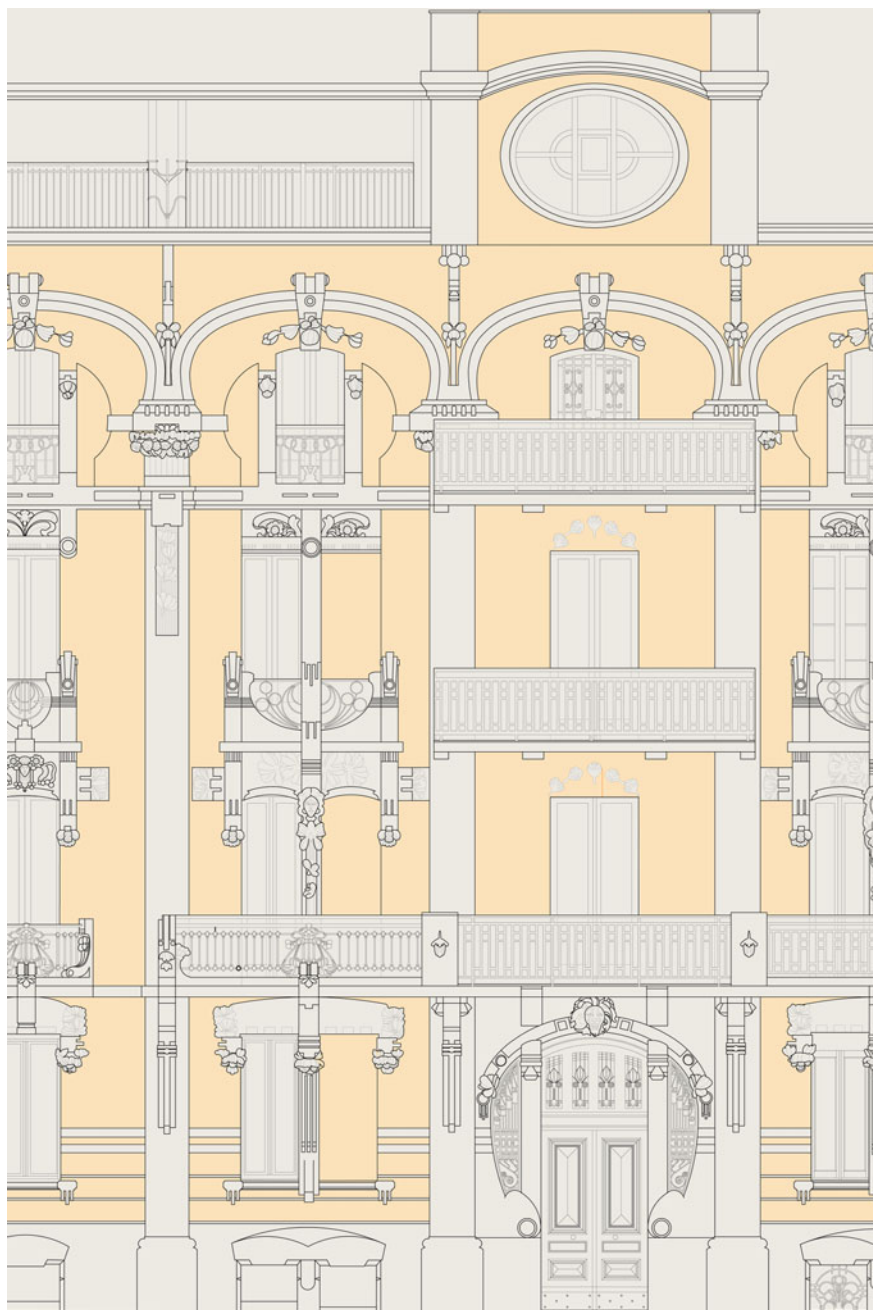


Fig. 10 Dioguardi palace, 1913–1914. Bari, Crisanzio st.



Fig. 11 The new church of San Ferdinando, 1932–1933; Volume aggregation. Bari, Sparano st.

which occupies not only an entire block, but a strategic and central position in the nineteenth-century orthogonal grid.

Witnesses of a «work of deconstruction and reconstruction of urban logics» [1] are the Palace of Government employees in Cognetti st., the Giannelli palace in Sparano st., the palace of the “Terza Regione Aerea”, and the “Caserma Macchi” on the Vittorio Veneto seafront. «The system of counterpoints and references produced by the different drive towards identity on one side towards the same on the other, finds in the heads of the buildings, in the corner decorations of the buildings, the chosen moment to describe the complexity of a conflictual coexistence» [1]. In Saverio Dioguardi, elements of tradition and rationalist elements coexist in a need for synthesis that characterizes all his work (Figs. 12 and 13).

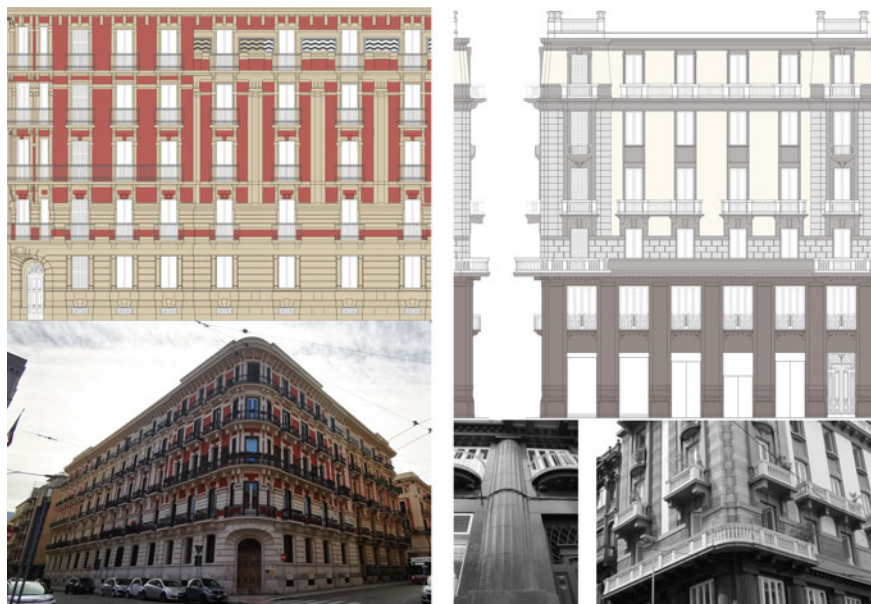


Fig. 12 Palace of Government employees, 1922–1923. Bari, Cognetti st./De Giosa st.; Giannelli palace, 1929–1931. Bari, Sparano st./Putignani st.



Fig. 13 “Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà” palace, 1934–1935. Bari, Cavour avenue/Putignani st.; “Banca Commerciale”, 1947–1949. Bari, Abate Gimma st./Piccinni st.

The research thus carried out proposes different scenarios in which the drawn architectures are placed in the digital landscape built starting from the map. Each single architecture is extrapolated from its real context and relocated in a virtual space. The composition of the façades, already suggested by the theming shown on the map by means of connections (for example, Dioguardi/Public building/Chronology), recover their visual dimension by flanking each other according to that investigation criterion.

In the “city of Dioguardi” (Fig. 14) thus built, the selected buildings are compared. The comparison, says Vittorio Ugo, «is not abstract or ideological; it is a method that is concretely implemented in the measure, in the images, in the representations produced at the same scale. It is therefore directly comparable, potentially superimposable, in order to verify differences and congruences» [5].

The meanings attributed to the single architectures by the drawing are visualised virtually and, fixed in that image, they provide new narratives, new interpretations, and new research ideas to go beyond those contents [29].



Fig. 14 Dioguardi's city. Chronological composition of the works built in Bari

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25. «The incessant mutability of the observable reality furthermore means a choice that conditions the representative act when a temporal determination is established. The representation of reality blocks continuous flow in a particular condition of neutral equilibrium (locally constant potential): there is an impending heap of shape which precedes and will follow; but the achieved condition becomes expression on an explorative consciousness and taking note of the observed complexity, even if this condition is irremediably changeable» Florio 2012, p 83
26. «One can, therefore, divide the work of S. Dioguardi into three major chapters that do not so much have the function of confining his work experiences in a didactic form but to testify, above all, to changes and thematic persistence within their own architectural language. If the first chapter can be identified with the eclectic tradition in its most decorative and representative forms, the second can only coincide with the "twenty years" where the works are almost always the product of the ambivalence between rhetorical art and futurist instinct; the third chapter, albeit in a nutshell, is evidence of a liberating culture that is recognisable in the rise of neorealism

and in the most modern manifestations produced by Italian culture since the 1960s» D'Alba, Maggiore 2011, p 52

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28. «The urban planning here is combined with the usual, strong celebratory instance, already proposed to transform the Church into a Pantheon dedicated to the fallen. The remarkable ease with which it is planned to radically transform the nineteenth-century structure ed by Fausto Nicolini is explained by the fierce contempt with which, in the city debate of the first decades of the new century, one looks at the local neoclassical architecture, too poor in decoration, too modest and provincial, as was the nineteenth-century town planning, which had sacrificed the identification of the central and representative places of the city to the ideal of regularity and uniformity». Mangone 1996, pp 53–54
29. The paragraph “Saverio Dioguardi work in the BDA project” is by Valentina Catagnolo, “The drawing of the Saverio Dioguardi built works and the place of the image” is by Anna Christiana Maiorano