BEYOND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

Focus:
Six MENASA pavilions at Venice Biennale 2018
Bahrain
Egypt
Lebanon
Pakistan
Saudi Arabia
UAE

Mario Cucinella Architects, MAP studio, Modscape, Mileto&Vegas Arquitectos, Flores&Prats, Fabris&Partners, Pietro Del Vaglio, Lorenzo Marini
Spaces beyond cultural boundaries

Andrea Pane

VB 2018 | Lifescapes beyond bigness. The National Pavilion of UAE - Massimo Imparato

VB 2018 | The duality of in-between spaces. The National Pavilion of Saudi Arabia - Daria Verde

VB 2018 | Inside the subcontinent’s folds. The National Pavilion of Pakistan - Sami Chohan

VB 2018 | Rethinking free space. The National Pavilion of Egypt - Islam El Mashtooly, Mouaz Abouzaid, Cristiano Luchetti

VB 2018 |Freesspace/freeinterpretation - Maria Vittoria Capitanucci

Spaces beyond cultural boundaries - Andrea Pane
the challenges of their time? What relationship do you think should exist between education and professional practice, and how you propose to ensure that future professionals have the chance to influence the shaping of our future?

M.C.: The collective nature of this project is evident in the paradox because many people have contributed, both in our working team and in all consultants’ firms. It was forged thanks to the awareness that complex themes such as the future of human environments, even if they have the ability to crossover, can have a very broad vision although our working team and in all consultants’ firms. It was forged thanks to the awareness that complex themes such as the future of human environments, even if they have the ability to crossover, can have a very broad vision although our working team and in all consultants’ firms. It was forged thanks to the awareness that complex themes such as the future of human environments, even if they have the ability to crossover, can have a very broad vision although our working team and in all consultants’ firms. 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most important events put in place for the 15th International Architecture Exhibition of Venice Biennale. Would you like to tell us how it started?

For us the experience began at the end of the summer of 2011, with the invitation by Francesco Dal Co to collaborate. At that time, the project had already been in the general coordination of the realization of the first phase of the Holy See for Venice Architecture Biennale.

2. Behind the project, consorized by Francesco Dal Co, it has been set a very strong and evocative reference model Woodland Chapel by Erik Gunnar Asplund. The whole genesis of the other ten chapels has been generated and discussed with this reference in mind. Why was this evocative, architectural model chosen among so many examples of chapels created at the turn of the 20th century?

This question should be asked to the curator, according to which with the small but elegant masterpieces, Apolloni defined the chapel as a place of orientation, meditation within an ample wooded land, intended as a physical evocation of the many paths of life and of the man’s pilgrimage waiting for the meeting. Even the chapels that form the Holy See Pavilion are isolated and welcomed by a totally abstract natural environment, characterized only by its emergence from the lagoon and opening onto the water, an additional metaphor of the pilgrimage of life – the theme of the interpretation of the world – some of whom culturally and historically assign to ten architects from all over the world – some of whom culturally and historically derived from the demolitions carried out by Forlati on the military superstructures – the theme and to the spatiality of the Vatican Chapels. How did you seize this opportunity and what were the initial elements that influenced your project?

The idea of having to design a container for the drawings of the famous architect was wistfully by our studio with great enthusiasm and as a great challenge. The element, in its abstraction, means to allude both to the iconography of the supporting buildings (Bomontioggi) designed by Asplund and Loozenetz for the cemetery of Stiggeåbygd and to the theme and the spirituality of the “shelter” in nature. A sort of domestic, absolute, that harmonizes with the traditional Nordic wood manufacturing and in particular for the exterior of the building, producing a sort of game of mirrors, alluding – as already said – to the theme and to the spirituality of the “shelter” in nature like the Stiggeåbygd by Asplund, and is intended as a large roof that generates the “habitat space” in the woods, and at the same time, we were looking for other equally Asplund’s work and in this sense we identified the theme of natural light design that so frequently characterizes his work, not only in the Woodland Chapel. Therefore, we designed a device that allowed the amount of artificial light through a series of triangular skylights placed on both sides of the pitched roof of the emphasized vertical proportion. Natural light is then made even softer through the mediation of an apparently suspended shading.

5. From a constructive point of view, how did the Alpi company, one of the most important companies of the Scandinavian tradition, as well as a strong link to the themes concerning the woods and the provisional nature that is inherent in the general project of the Vatican Chapels? What role did the technological and constructive aspects play in your project and how much did the Alpi company – which realized it – contribute to your successful outcome?

The choice of wood is certainly both a tribute to the Scandinavian tradition and a material chosen to simply the dry technique of manufacturing and the time that characterized the operation as a whole. The constructive aspect and the integration between architecture and structure has always been a research theme in our projects. In the Alpi Pavilion it is crucial because the external portals in laminated timber are designed not only to support the entire building, but also to define the ten spaces in which Gunnar Asplund’s drawings were to be displayed. The Alpi company provided a great technical support with enormous enthusiasm and constructed the product with great expertise. In this case, in fact, the company – whose high-quality production is related to interior decorative surfaces – has developed in a few months an experimental material particularly resistant, meaning that, during the Biennale, it offered 2,000 waterproof proof shades.

6. Speaking of constructive aspects: your task included also the technical coordination of the construction of the entire Vatican Chapels project, to be done in a short term and with all the difficulties of building in a logistic city as Venice. Works started in winter – in March – and we concluded with great efficacy. Could you tell us something more about this?

Planning and coordinating with extreme precision the whole process was a very important aspect of it. The idea of constructing a pavilion for the Biennale not just through an exhibition of drawings and models, but rather constructing eleven interventions, even though of small dimensions, yet each having its own peculiar constructive characteristics, was a top challenges for all. The peculiar logistic situation hindering us was also taken into account: the pavilion of the Woodland Chapel by Erik Gunnar Asplund, entrusted to the founders and owners of MAP – including, among others, our studio, Francesco Magnani and Traudy Zaccari. The pavilion it is crucial because the eleven interventions have a whole. The constructive aspect and the integration between architecture and structure has always been a research theme in our projects. In the Alpi Pavilion it is crucial because the external portals in laminated timber are designed not only to support the entire building, but also to define the ten spaces in which Gunnar Asplund’s drawings were to be displayed. The Alpi company provided a great technical support with enormous enthusiasm and constructed the product with great expertise. In this case, in fact, the company – whose high-quality production is related to interior decorative surfaces – has developed in a few months an experimental material particularly resistant, meaning that, during the Biennale, it offered 2,000 waterproof proof shades.

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the park, in fact, though recently set up (this part of the San Giorgio island corresponds to an enlargement dating back to the 1950s), limited the use of specific on-track machines for the construction of the whole pavilion. Hence a very experienced and professional venetian construction company was hired to help in the general coordination of the works. This company constructed and managed the yard’s facilities and took care, apart from the transportation coordination, also of the preparation of the site for all the following execution phases regarding the assembly of every single chapel, each one of which was then constructed by its own contractors or “patrons”, in the words of H.E. the Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi. In order to achieve the chapel anchorage systems, technologies linked to venetian traditional constructive techniques were used for the most part, as for instance wooden boards and poles. Moreover, a topic all the process actors have thought about was to plan prefabrication constructive components which could allow very fast assembly operations, always keeping in mind the limit in the use of large heavy goods vehicles as to respect and to avoid damaging the paths and vegetation context hosting us.

7. Since you had to play a technical role in coordinating and interfacing the curator Francesco Dal Co and the ten designers which were in charge of the chapels, you certainly have attended to the genesis of all these ten projects, very different from one another. How was it to interact with so many architects having different cultures and backgrounds while trying to coordinate all their proposals?

It was quite simple in its complexity. The enthusiasm with which all the invited architects participated to the process following the evolution of the project was incredible. Of course while some of them, coming from far away, could not be continuously present, others came to Venice and to the construction yards quite frequently. Their experience, from that of the most famous architects to that of the youngest and less renowned ones, made it possible for a virtuous process to be generated so the necessity to face the commissioner, contractors and yard’s limits never felt as moments of negative compromise, but, instead – also thanks to the professionalism of the actors involved and to the creativity of each – they became moments of growth, refinement and enrichment for the projects themselves. Even though the final outcome is a quite clear expression of it, it is worth highlighting that the interventions have been conceived and realized in an extremely free way. The Pontifical Council of Culture and the curator only gave the following simple indications including an about seventy square meters dimensional reference and the request to design in every chapel an area for the Altar and a place for the Bible.

8. Andrew Berman, Francesco Cellini, Javier Corvalán, Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats, Norman Foster, Terunobu Fujimoto, Sean Godsell, Carla Juaçaba, Smiljan Radic, Eduardo Souto de Moura, are the names of the ten designers. With whom did you interact more frequently?

Almost all the architects visited the area for the exhibition between summer and autumn of 2017. Many of them have been invited in the choice of a place for their specific intervention, however within an overall picture which included almost a hectare of the park hosting the pavilion and which has been closely studied and continuously modified by the commissioner and us. There has been a very intense and continuous correspondence with all the architects characterized, in some cases, by full days of combined work when they came to Venice. Norman Foster and his team followed personally with enthusiasm and continuous support all the evolution of the project; Eduardo Souto de Moura
personally visited with us the quarries from which Vicenza’s stone blocks were to be selected to construct his San Giorgio pavilion, which was working in Europe, was able to daily dialogue with Sean Godsell, who also achieved a poetic space with simple squared approaches, that range from Souto de Moura’s, who designed a really successful spatiality of centrality and of sociocultural sustainability.

5. The fortune of the final outcome of this exhibition which was born to be temporary?

6. Would it be possible to imagine a permanent future for this exhibition?