

The ludic fruition of the coast

Cities are extreme environments. Especially if populous, southern and Mediterranean. On one hand mafia, and therefore violence, corruption and administrative inefficiency, indolence, waste of opportunities, lack of prospects, misery. On the other the millenary history, the crossing of races and cultures, their countless testimonies, the wonderful nature, the enchanted landscapes, the paradisiacal climate, to compensate for the ugliness.

The most important cities in southern Italy are on the sea. The absence of great rivers, and therefore the necessity of using the sea as communication route has conditioned the favored of these towns at the expense of inland settlements (as opposed, for instance, to Andalusia, where the river Guadalquivir has allowed cities like Sevilla and Cordoba to become important cities, despite being far from the sea).

The aptitude for the sea has not always been a habit in the big cities of the south. In fact, across the centuries, the frequentation of the coast and the sea was associated only with the hard work of sailors, dockers and fishermen. The dominant aristocratic classes did not include the frequentation of the sea among their amusements... the complexion of the ladies had to be as candid as possible, every sign of tan was a symptom of little nobility and elegance.

Since the end of the 19th century, assimilating the customs of the aristocratic and large entrepreneurial bourgeois families of northern Europe – with which contacts for mutual commercial interests were beginning to be frequent – the dominant classes acquire among their amusements the frequentation of the coast and the sea as a sign of modern distinction.

It was a period of great importance for Palermo which, now at the forefront of economic development and with solid international contacts, naturally suited to the enjoyment of life en plein air, discovers the sea and the activities connected to it, even the sports: swimming, canoeing, sailing, maximum expression of noble daring.

The coast of Palermo, which extends from Sferracavallo to Acqua dei Corsari and which has the commercial port of Palermo as its "center of gravity", alternates wild and unspoiled sites (the nature reserve of Capo Gallo), areas (too) densely frequented (the beach of the gulf of Mondello), long degraded stretches (from the mouth of the Oreto river to the municipal border).

All along the coast, public and private interventions aimed at the recreational/sporting enjoyment of the sea have been undertaken, although sometimes only tempted. Such as the private interventions, sometimes for the restoration of pre-existing structures, on the stretch of coast between Isola delle Femmine and Barcarello - which could among other things lead to the decongestion of the Mondello coast - quite respectful of the environment.

Continuing south-east and passing the beach of Mondello, but still in its gulf, we come across the first glaring example of waste: the immense Roosevelt establishment, located as it is in one of the most prestigious stretches of the gulf, could represent an enormous opportunity for recreational and sporting enjoyment, but it has always (and mysteriously) been left unused.

Continuing along the Addaura towards the city, the rocky coast up to Vergine Maria hosts various privately managed structures, which are also quite environmentally friendly.

Along the coast from Vergine Maria to Acquisanta, on the other hand, we find, in total disharmony, residential settlements accompanied by predictable abuses, wonderful traps (tuna fisheries, whose use is entrusted to the good will of private individuals), old industrial agglomerations, tourist ports.

In the city area, past the shipyards and the commercial port, the eastern side of the trapezoidal pier and especially the Cala (the historic Palermo port) are almost entirely dedicated to the mooring of sailing and motorboats, moorings managed by private companies and nautical clubs; inside the port area there is a training activity for competitive rowing.

Past the southern arm of the port (Molo Sud) the Foro Italico begins, a concrete demonstration (together with the recent restoration of the Sant'Erasmus harbor) of how a prudent urban intervention can bring citizens closer to the element that should be more available, but for many decades denied.

From here on the most painful notes.

Although the quality of the sea has been the object of recent scientific approval, this is the great opportunity, until now missed, for the healthy exploitation of a natural resource that should be made freely available to all citizens.

It is saddening to see the small wooden structure built in Romagnolo, vandalized and restored several times, but never assigned for use, the stretches of waterfront used as parking for cars and trucks, the degradation of the Bandita harbor...

The great challenge of Parco Libero is to restore dignity to the south-east coast of Palermo, creating on an area of eleven hectares the ecological amusement park, "fun" in the full sense of the term, deriving from the Latin *divertere*, which means "getting away", meaning something that allows the removal from worries. The creation of this serene area would also contribute to the redevelopment of the street Via Messina Marine that leads to it.

Sailing, for example, allows you to get away - even physically - from worries like few other sports do. What better discipline to make the coast and the sea become an example for the mainland? Unfortunately, however, unlike many activities for which sneakers - or at most a ball - are enough, water sports equipment requires space and maintenance, making it an accessible recreation for the privileged few. If to take a tour in the historic center of the city it is enough to rent a bicycle, to admire the coast you must almost necessarily be part of a club.

Just by looking at the aerial photos, you will have a clear idea of the size of the stretch of coast belonging to the Park. Perhaps influenced by the presence of sailors within the Association, we consider it an inadmissible waste. In a city it is essential that open spaces are usable for sport, especially if potentially aimed at social commitment, and a city like Palermo cannot fail to use the sea.

Being able to "take" the sea from such a barren and difficult site is a bet within a bet. In fact, there are many technical and technological solutions - floating piers, temporary slides, removable winches, structures for flexible use in general - to be put in place during the very long Palermo summer, and in any case when the weather conditions allow it, and to be removed to damage due to (rare) storm surges. All this without impacting on the environment and the landscape, essential values for the Park.

The logistics would require for the installation of a slide to be superimposed on the low cliff and a mobile jetty served by a walkway, also to be superimposed on the rocks, as well as a light beach structure, like a gazebo, for the custody of boats and maintenance material. The nautical equipment could include: a single and a double canoe, two windsurfs, two single dinghies (like Openskiff or similar), a "school" sailboat for six people and, also for safety reasons, a rubber dinghy equipped with outboard motor. It must also be considered that the management of the facility, including assistance on land and at sea, should be handled by three employees (all excellent swimmers, with good sailing, sea rescue and English-speaking knowledge, including nautical terms. and meteorological).

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