

Since the beginning of the third millennium, the rapid changes that contemporary societies are facing are radically transforming the perception and the structures of our cities. New topics seem to dictate the political agenda, suggesting alternative options to manage the emerging urban mutations.

An increasingly "data driven society" is forcing the migration into an almost immaterial world, prompting Information and Communication Technology together with the Smart City.

The crisis of the traditional real estate industry, propelled by the global finance system, is contributing to re-evaluate the theme of Public Space as a "space of encounter, sharing, experience and inclusivity", mapping the everyday life to discover unexpected Urbanities, through the application of innovative strategies and tools.

As an immediate consequence, new "forms" of cities are strongly brought to our attention: the "city of sharing", the "city of temporariness", the "city of Life between buildings", giving an unexpected impulse to incremental Urbanism of evolving cities.

In such a way, the very idea of the city is radically under discussion. We are then required to answer these numerous questions in order to define the scientific coordinates for the City of the 21st century.

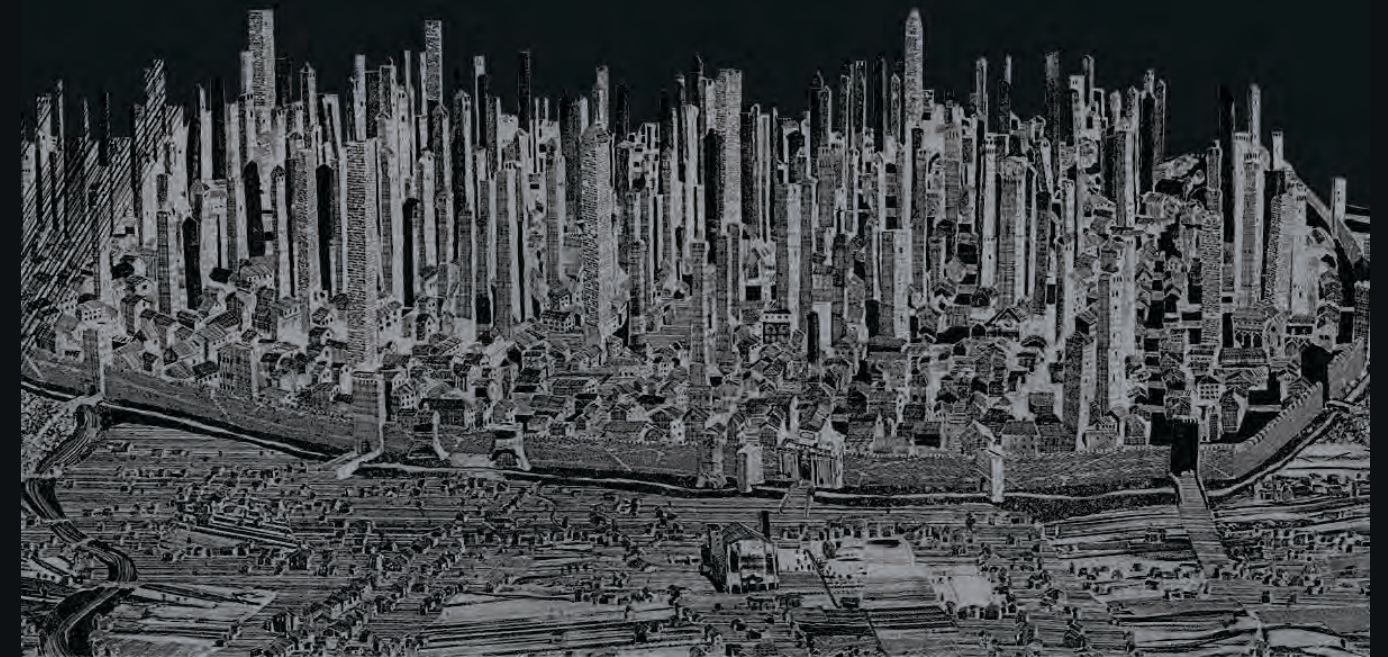
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# **MORPHOLOGY AND URBAN DESIGN**

new strategies for a changing society

# PROCEEDINGS

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## The new form of the old city. The case of Les Halles, urban reasons and project's choices

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Keywords: *Paris Les Halles, urban void, central places, compositional principle, Monestiroli Conference theme: New methods and Technologies for the urban analysis*

**Abstract.** *This essay aims to focus on the tied duality between the study of urban morphology and the project. Antonio Monestiroli's project for les Halles in Paris seems specifically appropriate in relation to this theme, proving how thinking of a new form for urban places can be a possibility also in stable contexts such as the historical ones. And how as well, starting from urban analysis, it can be possible to propose a new form for central places of the modern city, way differently concerning the elements of their definition and their dimension but fitting for the reference context. In this case, starting from urban reasons, the project appears in continuity with the existing, but it also proposes a transformation which tries to assume relevant places and elements from the historical city as parts of the project, in order to recompose them together with new elements in an original system of connections able to define the quality of the project for itself and to enhance the characters of the urban landscape. A project which seems still extremely current for its purpose, that is the capability to specify the urban places of the contemporary city, with its historic center, its next expansions and its peripheries as well, and to define their quality and their character through architecture, in such a way to shape its significant places within a complex system properly to a different idea of building the form of the city but appropriate to the entirety of the present urban phenomena.*

The project for Les Halles area in Paris is made for the occasion of the international competition in 1979, concerning the architectural definition of that part of the city which held the market pavilions designed by Victor Baltard. The area stands in the "belly of the city", according to Émile Zola, in the topographic centre of the city, near Place du Châtelet, where the north-south axis and the east-west one of the Grand Croisée by Haussmann intersect each other. In this system, les Halles area has historically had a central role within the urban form, not only for its geographical position (Figure 1). The years following the Revolution in 1848 represent the period of maximum transformation of the city of Paris, a process that engages into Les Halles as well. Indeed the area, since 1842 is in the main subject of many debates regarding its urban and functional role.

The construction of the twelve pavilions by Baltard, ended in 1936, sets off the area as the market place of the city and as the huge food centre in the world. In the following years the whole city changes radically. This is the period of Haussmann's intervention with the opening of wide boulevards, which with the aim to decongest and give an order to the urban structure, takes relevant modifications with inside the gothic pattern. Those modifications concern Les Halles' area as well, which had the same problems in terms of urban disorder. In 1965 the City Council established the transfer of the market from the city centre to Rungis and to the peripheral area of La Villette and, in the mean time, to make the regional underground transport, the RER, pass through the area. Those choices set off the downfall of this area, up to the demolition of the pavilions in 1971.

This way, the destiny of the area is completely overturned, from urban reference point with a clear identity to a simple intersection point of the public transport line which linked Paris with the suburban parts of the city. In any case, the demolition of the halles, despite criticism, brought the opportunity through the competition to think again of the architectural definition of this huge void in the inner part of the city. This was a matter related to the place itself and to the city in general, made fascinating and complex as well by the relationship with an exceptional monumental context just like the historical pattern of the centre of Paris.

The city of Paris, perhaps way evidently among the other european cities, displays an urban structure in its historic part organized on a system of monumental places built by huge voids which open up inside the compact city. This system, with a simplification, is composed of two ways to shape the open space, which coexist but which are different in term of measure, form, principles and elements of definition, meaning related to the city (Figure 2).

The first one follows the principle of the enclosure; it defines in a clear way the physical boundaries of the open space. The principal references in this case are the royal places of the XVII century. Instead the second one, based on a principle of linear composition, shapes the void towards the construction of long perspective axis which meet along their development some elements and exceptional parts of the urban structure, which measure and define at the same time, through their rhythm, the open space. This way takes its origin from the tradition of the french gardens of whom Versailles is the first reference.

To the first type belong the enclosures of Place des Vosges, Place Vendôme, Place Dauphine and the courtyard of Palais Royal. They stand as exceptions within the urban pattern and define a punctual system of relevant places. In these cases, the quality of the open space is represented by difference from the compact historic city that marks its boundaries. The inner void, completely defined by residential buildings, has a measure that is referred to the scale of the built environment comparable to the one of the plazas of the historic city. Indeed its form, in opposition compared to the context in which it stands, is defined by clear geometries - the square in Place des Vosges and Place Vendôme, the rectangle of the courtyard of Palais

Royal, the triangle in Place Dauphine.

Then, for being shaped with the only residence, following the principle of the forum, the open space become unitary thanks to an unifying element (the colonnade of the garden of Palais Royal, the internal facades of the buildings in Place des Vosges, the uniform built curtain of Place Dauphine and Place Vendôme). The result is the definition of a circumscribed and introverted place that keeps out any relationships with the outer space, in which the homogeneous facades of the surrounding buildings turn into the stage of the formal representation system of the city in those points.

On the contrary, to the second principle are referred the complex of Louvre-Tuileries-Champs Élysées, Champ de Mars and the Invalides' Esplanade. Concerning these places, one of the most evident difference from the previous ones is the relevant leap of scale of the open space defined this way. Its dimension takes the measure of the natural environment rather than the one of the built. For the same reason, the form of the place is no more tied to the precision of the fenced space to open itself up to the relationships with the surrounding landscape. The linear compositional principle, on which the construction of these places is set up, in fact dismantles the centrality and, consequentially, the homogenous form of the space, to organize a sequence of spaces which defines and measures these places in their whole extension.

The optical relationships, get with the definition of these long radius perspectives, bring the system back to unity despite its complex articulation. In this way, it is composed on the variety of its parts and of the elements which it is made of. This is a manner of definition of the relevant places of the city which is typical of the transition from the "closed city" to the "open one" which, referring to the design of garden, brings back in its construction the natural element and its compositional rules as well inside the urban structure. In these so built places, another crucial change, regarding both their shape and their character and role, concerns the singularity of their elements of definition. This happens because the spatial limits move from physical to visual ones. That is the quality of the open space is specified no more by its boundaries, but by the compositional tension generated between the elements placed along the perspective set up on the axis, which serves as the backbone of the entire composition, showing differences of course from place to place also internally of a unique system. In this sense the complex Louvre-Tuileries-Champs Élysées is the most emblematic example in the city, and complicated as well, of this way of shaping the open space based on a linear principle of composition. Indeed, along the development of the axis, different places but each one defined in itself follow one another in a series - the courtyard of the Louvre, the gardens of Tuileries, Place de la Concorde, the Champs Élysées, until they visually stop in the Étoile. The elements of definition are collective buildings, buildings of the Institutions or also punctual elements which give to these spaces a relevant urban propriety, such as the Triumph Arc or the obelisk in Place de la Concorde.

The quality of openness of the space, together with the character of the architectures, marks the variation of meaning of these voids which display themselves within the urban structure. They move from systems of simple formal representation such as the royal places, to collective places, relevant places defined as space of relationships, opening themselves toward the built environment and interjecting in their inside connections at a distance with the other exceptional elements and parts of the city (Figure 3). The complex Louvre-Tuileries-Champs Élysées is still the most relevant in this sense. It holds within it some other axial systems, hierarchically subordinate, which bring inside the structure of the main axis many relevant urban elements, getting back relationships at a distance with some parts over the river. This is the case of the direction which links the Orsay's Museum to Place Vendôme, as well as the one that links the Borbone's Palace



to the Madelein Church passing through Place de la Concorde and the axis that changes into the main one of the Invalides' Esplanade. In this way, the open space becomes the "breaking element" in the continuity of the built environment and, at the same time, the place of the points of view of the inner parts of the composition and of those parts of the city which overlook the place, with the possibility to return some renovated relationships in order to define a new urban topography.

Monestiroli's project makes a synthesis of these two spatial conditions and brings the attention on the principles and the rules of construction of the significant places of the modern city according to a double order of matters: on one hand the relationship with the compact city built of dense blocks and, on the other, the reference to the idea of the open city built in the nature (Monestiroli, 1997), already developed by the masters of Modern Architecture, as a possibility to give quality and recognizability to the collective places of the city. The case of Les Halles was in this sense an extraordinary occasion to try to give form with architecture to a crucial place of the city rethinking its urban meaning. Indeed the unclarity of the announcement opened up to a free interpretation concerning the problem of the definition of the new "central places" of the city, in its historical part in this case. But how to do it, by means of which elements and especially according to which principle of composition?

Monestiroli's proposal considers the open space as an element with its own quality worth to be preserved by defining architecturally its limits. In his project the theme, that is the definition of a modern plaza, has a complexity which is referred not only to the specific case but it concerns the scale of the city.

The project area specified in the announcement stands inside a rectangle defined by four streets - rue du Louvre, rue Rambuteau, rue Pierre Lescot and rue Berger -, while the one involved in Monestiroli's project considers the importance of this part of the city, both for its position and for the interpretation given to the theme. Indeed it is included between the four traffic ways of the Haussmann's track - rue Etienne Marcel, boulevard Sébastopol and rue de Rivoli - which define the four-sided area assumed as project area according to the urban relevance of this part of the city. The aim of the project is the definition of an urban island (Monestiroli, 1997) within the historic centre, that is a part of the city with an appropriate and clear formal identity. That is why the traffic is left out from the area that became exclusively pedestrian. For the same reason the project proposes the demolition of two blocks next to the building of the Bourse de Commerce and of four other blocks on the east side of the area, in order to define a place included between the two arterial roads of rue du Louvre and boulevard Sébastopol.

The disposition of the designed architectures, composed together with the objets trouvés of the historic city, follows the idea to build a place in which the open space becomes the principal element of the composition. How to give an architectural form to this huge free space, that is a recognizable quality to the place, this is the problem that the project tries to give an answer to.

The main idea is to place a large field in the inner centre of the city. This field, 600 meters long and 100 meters wide, takes on the character of a modern plaza, both for its measure and for its nature, within the historical pattern (Figure 4). As the first operation to define the place, a freestanding new Auditorium is placed in line with the Bourse de Commerce, freestanding as well. In this way, the two collective buildings, thanks to the relationships they establish each other, measure the huge void and specify the link between the whole open space and the border streets.

The place is so characterized by the large field which contains the two halls and defines the

quality of the place. Its rectangular shape marks with geometrical precision the hierarchically prevalent role of this central space. The long borders of this field, on the north and the south sides, are defined instead by some linear residential volumes which delimit, together with some existing elements, the central place of the project. Despite the clear delimitation of the field, these volumes are arranged so that they don't exclude any relationships with the next parts of the city. Indeed, their length, the points they interrupt and the measure of these interruptions depend on the surrounding built environment with the different characters of those parts overlooking the central void.

Then these buildings, in the composition with the elements of the monumental pattern, give form to other secondary places put in continuity with the principal one. The north part of the area is characterized by the presence of the church of Saint Eustache, overlooking the field with its most beautiful gothic facade. Thanks to its slight rotation compared to the limits of the central field, the direction of the rue Turbigo of the track by Haussmann merges into the central field. This direction intersects, exactly on the apse of the church, another important way, so the rue Montmartre of the ancient track. Next to this exceptional point of the urban structure, both arrival and departure point of these two ways, it stands a couple of towers, which brings back in the composition a system of relationships at a distance. The fact they are two and parallel to each other, in addition to mark a strong axuality that recalls the rue Montmartre bringing it back to the project, states the presence of a place in that particular point between the towers. The towers, built as twins of glass and iron, take on the character of a urban gate in that point, clarifying their leading role within the whole composition, as a reference point at the scale of the city which identifies the central field in different ways depending on the direction of approach to the area. Then, due to their disposition, the towers define together with the longitudinal facade of the church a secondary space in the figure of a trapezoid, different and with its own identity, in relation to the central field but in direct continuity with it.

On the south limit, instead, the area is characterized by the presence of a series of streets, parallel to the direction of Pont Neuf, which intercept one of the most beautiful historic streets of Paris, so that rue Saint Honoré that continues in rue de la Ferronnerie, where an important residential building for its architecture divides it from the Innocent's plaza. The six residential volumes of the project, put in correspondence of this part of the city, stand horizontally to the central field, in order to define its limit but keeping the quality of openness of the space. Their disposition and their shift from the line marked by the residential volumes parallel to the long borders of the field specify a minor space which assumes the role of a threshold over the central place of the project and that part of the city that, through the void between the volumes - as in the case of the twin towers -, overlooks the field and, in this way, becomes part of the main composition.

The large central field could be defined even without the residential buildings parallel to the long sides of the green rectangle, because according to Monestiroli the project could stop here, in the sense that the borders of the field could be defined by the existing residential blocks which overlook it with the rental houses and their standard height and their homogenous facades (Monestiroli, 1980). Their presence responds essentially to the requests written in the announcement, however their construction with the homogenous facades and the same height of the blocks they cover does so that the place becomes a modern forum, a wide free space, delimited but open at the same time, defined by the visual east-west axis identified by the compositional tension between the two collective halls and by these linear volumes on the opposite sides, which emphasize the extended figure of the central place while having the role of an unitarian element such as the portico in the ancient forum, even if they interrupt in some

specific points to hold within the composition both elements and relevant urban directions. Despite they are not directly tied to the central space, then, the architectures of the project and the elements of the historic city give form to some minor places, separated from the central field but defined in such a way that the open space results articulated in many places, different from each other in quality and measure as well, but without a break (Figure 5).

The residential building on the north-west side, for example, shapes together with the block behind and the entry facade of the church, a triangular space such as a parvis for the church, being interrupted in a specific point in order to built a secondary space for importance but so precisely defined in its form to have its own character. In a similar way, also the two towers define, by means of their architecture and their position, on one hand the reference point at the urban scale, on the other hand they give form to two minor places, one directly tied to the central field and specified by their shorter facades and the head board of the residential volume on the north-east side, and the other one which is measured by the north-east facade of the tower and the two bordering existing blocks. In this way, coming from rue Turbigo and gradually approaching the large field, it is possible to run into a series of different spaces which makes the project defined by a variety of places that specifies the worth of the composition. The last volume of the complex of the six residential building on the south border, delimits then the four-sided space of the Innocent's plaza, freed from the next block on the west side and brought back to its original measure, in memory of the ancient Innocent's Hospital. Also in this case, the residential volume that marks the limit of the field has a dimension such as the Innocent's plaza, so that even if formally defined, it's not separated from the system of the places of the project, getting back at the same time its previous condition before the construction of the halles and restoring the continuity of the rue Montmartre with the ancient Hospital.

Every direction, runout, slipping or interruption - referring to the disposition of the architectures - has a clear reason within the project. The main reason is to establish in the natural void a new system of relationships between the north and the south parts of the city, with the possibility to transfer in this void their particular characters. Thus, the field becomes the place of the points of view (Monestiroli, 1980) of the urban elements, both the ancient and the new ones, which are recomposed in an articulated space with a specific formal quality. So that the elements which give formal definition to the place face each other from the borders of the open space such as characters at a distance and, through their positioning, get back within this wide urban theatre the complexity of the parts which overlook the huge void.

According to this principle, the open space is no more defined, such as in the historic plazas, as needed from the specific function of each building but it contains them and does so that they can represent themselves in it as individual urban facts (Rossi, 1966) through whom recognize the quality of the entire place. The complex of the towers for example, as already said, marks a significant point of the urban structure on the north side of the project, where two relevant directions join up. These two towers though are not placed in the exact meeting point of the streets, but they stand, on one hand, horizontally to rue Turbigo keeping the line drawn by the blocks which define its limit and, on the other hand, they are in the midpoint of rue Montmartre in parallel to it, such as a urban gate for those who reach the place of Les Halles coming from that way, establishing the link with the Innocent's plaza beyond the central field. In this way the system of relevant directions and the characters of these different parts of the city are introjected in the centre of the composition. Still the towers then establish a relationship with another relevant direction insisting in the area on the south side - this time intercepting it - which is rue Pont Neuf. From this way the towers make them visible and always recognizable as a

double thank to their disposition slightly turned compared to the axis of the bridge. In this way they mark the presence of the place defined by the project for those who pass through the monumental bridge, which, crossing the Île de la Cité, ties the void of the project to the void of Place Dauphine in an unexpected system. Concerning the complex of the parallel residential buildings on the south side of the area, their way to overlook the central field is able to mark the limits without physically circumscribe the space. Their form and their disposition break the continuity of the blocks in order to open the space and to establish some relationships with the ancient street of rue Saint Honoré, bringing back into the project its specific characters. In an analogue way, the demolition of those blocks occupying the Innocent's plaza gets back the original measure of the Hospital establishing meanwhile the direct relationship between the field and the plaza, giving form to a spatial articulation which ties the two different ways of shaping the void, - the modern one of the project, which is a clearly defined space but open, and the enclosed one of Innocent's plaza referred to the historical plazas - however keeping their continuity. The interruptions of the residential volumes on the long borders of the field are referred to the aim to open the project to the relationships with the surroundings, acting like two scenes which let the monumental system of the city enter the stage represented by the natural void.

Through these choices the objective of the project is to define a place built as a perspectival place in analogy with the Renaissance scenic apparatus which transfers on the stage the architecture of the city (Figure 6). The city itself becomes a complex system of theatrical places specified according to the principle of the representation of the urban elements. However, in an inverted way as compared to Aldo Rossi's idea of the architecture as fixed scene, this time it is the void within the project to turn into the stage in which the architectures as characters represent themselves and make them recognizable.

In this void the contradictions of the existing city find the right synthesis and in it we can read the dramas of the city and of one part of it among the most beautiful of the monumental system of Paris, which becomes, in this way, taken in the project and, thanks to the project, enhanced at the same time.

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Illustration and tables

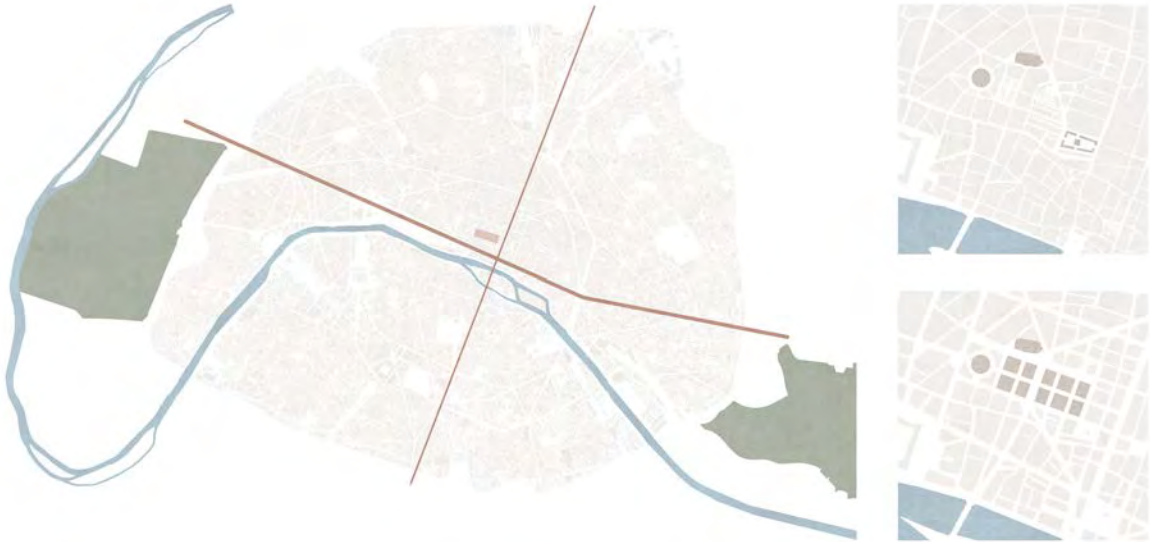


Figure 1. The area within the city pattern and its form before and after the building of Baltard's halles.



Figure 2. The system of the monumental voids of the city of Paris.

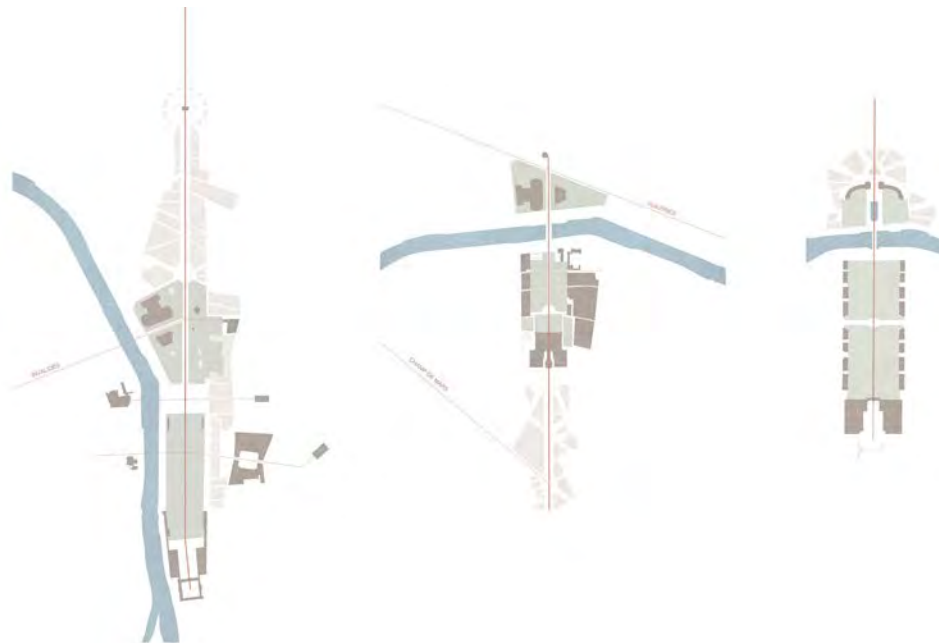


Figure 3. (The linear compositions, places and relationships)

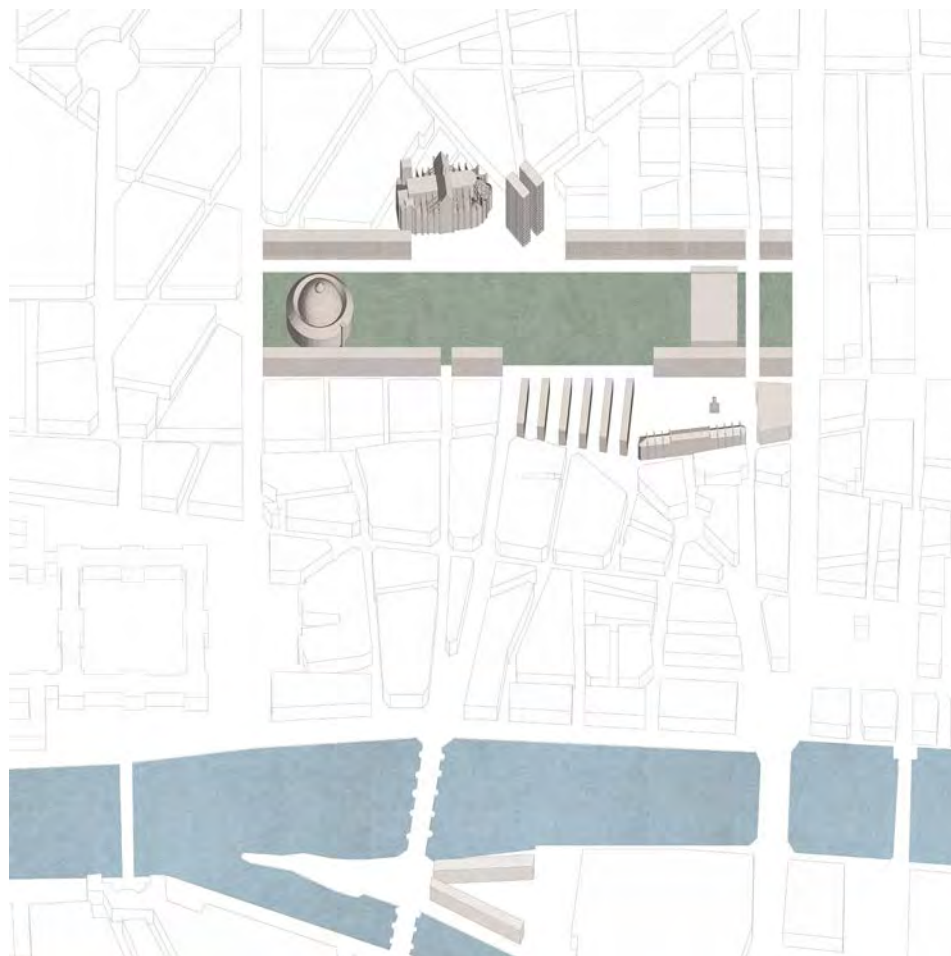


Figure 4. Monestirolli's project for Les Halles.

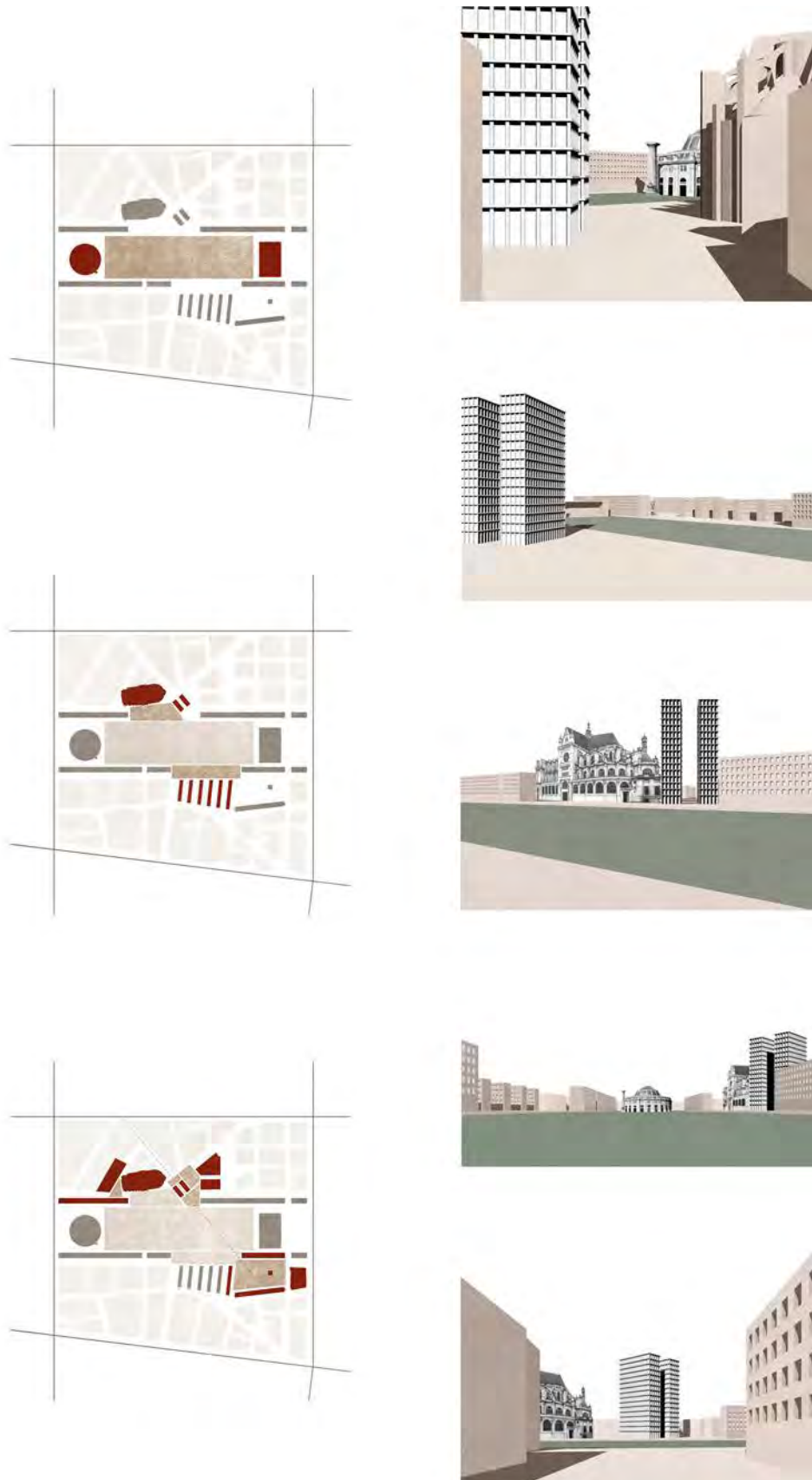
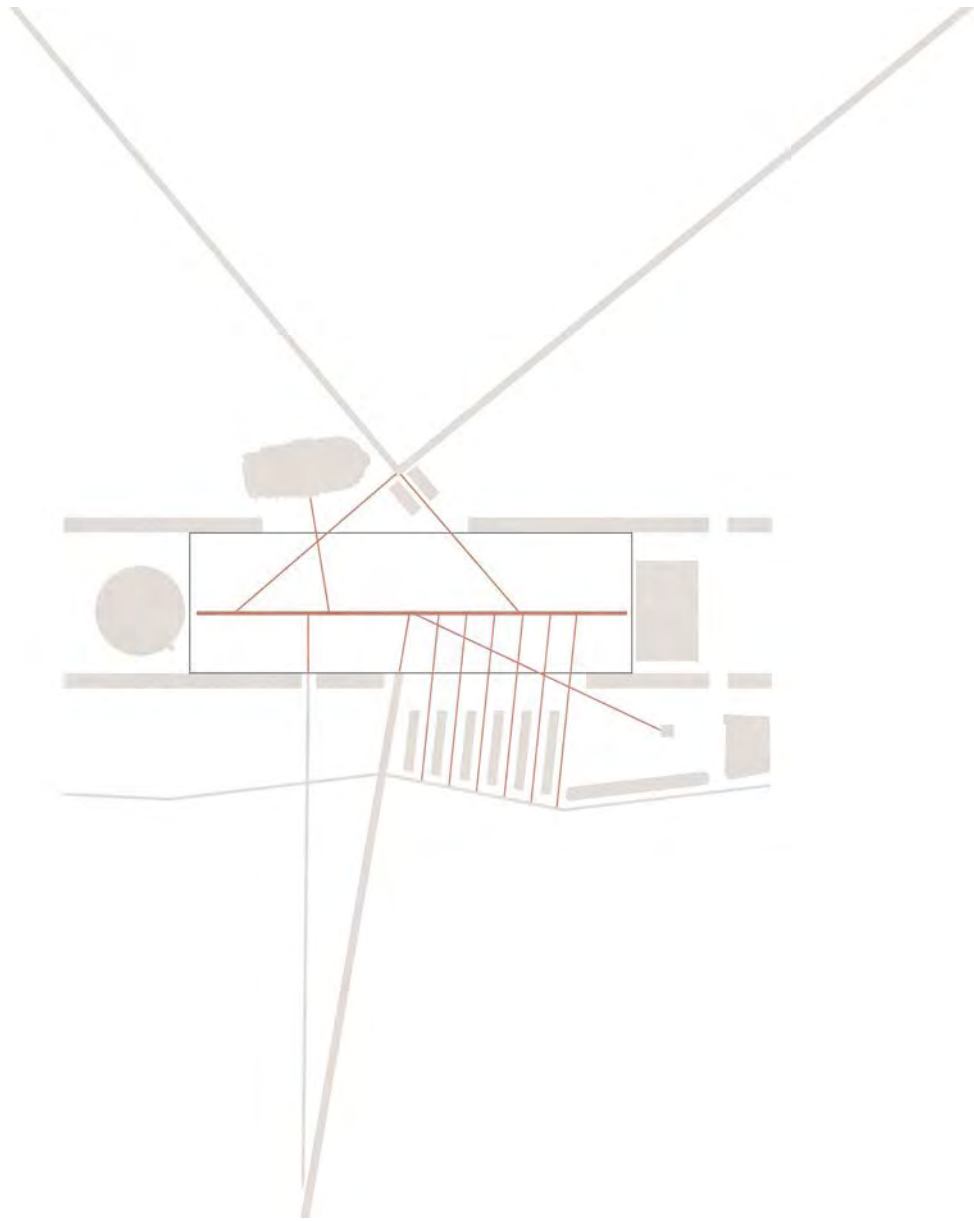


Figure 5. Articulation and hierarchy of the places defined by the disposition of the elements.



**Figure 6.** The field as place of the representation of the elements of the project and the city.