

## THE OUTSIDE CITY PALIMPSEST Towards a new urban-rural continuity

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### Abstract

Increasingly, the rural landscape is the scene of the gradual mutation processes of its basic structures and of its image, especially when more and more critical, meets the city.

However, the landscape, much more than the city, is the great concept to rediscover the values of continuity, evolution and innovation. The new millennium and the European Convention led us to consider it no more as well as an unchanging position asset to be protected, but as a relational instrument of development, memorial but also active value (Durbiano, Robiglio, 2004).

The paper will try, through the analysis of contemporary projects on the urban fringes, to investigate what may be the new paradigms of change and reorganization of cities, no more based on 'internal rules' of the same city and, for example, on typical twentieth-century terms of block, density, position and boundaries, but much more on continuity, porosity, cyclicity and multifunctionality of agricultural land, structural and morphological evolution properties of the outside city landscapes.

In this process of settlement design renewal the study on urban block has been steadily replaced by the one on agricultural lot, on its ability to evolve over time according to its productive use, to accommodate fragments of urbanity and make them interact with the environmental dominants, to change itself independent of the ownership structures, even to transpose itself in space and time.

The polders pattern, the 'puzzle' of rural enclosures, the Lanières of cereals openfield, the geometric and equal land divisions of agricultural reforms, the landlocked residual state of periurban specialized crops, are historicized territorial structures that are able to influence and even to evolve the urban fabric.

In this progressive dismantling of the twentieth century dualism between city and countryside, building and outdoor, built and green, the same concept of 'empty urban area', up to now crystallized so much in dealing with buildings, is taken over by the agricultural lot, in which the relationship with the building is more complex and the role of the building changes according to increasingly evident multifunctionality and to its necessary re-approach to the ground.

Some morpho-typological hybridizations between rural and urban architecture, cannot be interpreted as a critical and dangerous mix of urban and agricultural areas, but as new opportunities for typological and eco systemic innovation prefiguring new and extended concepts of 'city'. The 'greenhouse-home', the 'home-shed', the 'agribusiness-house', the 'living room-kitchen garden', represent the new urban 'figures' of this extra-urban landscape and are surprisingly in accordance with ancient rural rules and traces, constituting a complex palimpsest.

**Keywords:** Rural Landscape, Urban forms, Hybridization, Agricultural forms.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: BACK TO ARCHAIC DIMENSION OF LANDSCAPE

The very interesting Italian geographer Farinelli's point of view about the nowadays conceptual switching between Territory and Landscape, poses countless questions on thinking the space of the city in the contemporary age. First of all, with the landscape we're forced to think about SPACE and STRUCTURE of our settlements, no more in their dimensional and measurable relationship with the land (cartographic approach), but far more in terms of continuity of forms, *habitus* and eco-systemic values (landscaping approach). Secondly, but very connected to the first one, the landscape forces us to back to a sort of archaic deep relation with the ground, with its material being, not only with its surface conformation. It includes symbolic shapes, light projections forms, particular three disposition, ancient water paths, social battle boundaries, agricultural residues and all those forms that make a very complex palimpsest that still escapes to the cartographic logics.

Due to the permanence of those meaning traces belonging to the deep history of the places, in continuous evolutionary process of their formation, the overcoming of modernity imposed by the landscape is therefore to rethink the city no more starting from its repeated and non-innovative internal logic but rather by the energies that have historically supplied it from the outside.

In recent years, the new "Ruralism" has represented a "safe-answer" to this overcoming process, but often a superficial and impressing cover answer. As recently indicated by Pierre Donadieu, however, it is the real outcome of a renewed need of contemporary men. Even if superficially, the *ruralist*, or the *rurban* is someone who no longer recognizes the city as the most suitable place to represent his values, his *status*, his lifestyles. And it makes us reconsider the traditional operating models to generate urbanity from the large-scale to the building scale; it probably forces us to change our Enlightenment vision of the city to a more-hybrid, inclusive and recycling one.

For this reason, the rural landscape of course leads back to a more dialectic relationship between city and ground but it is also a breeding ground for new habitats that regain a topological sense, a new strong adherence to places, a new culture of places, which is opposed to the now-obsolete culture of the generic.

## 2. THE AGRICULTURE AS A TOOL

Today the importance of renewing centrality to the rurality, lost during the totalizing urban culture of twentieth century, however, is mainly based not on a purely formal or structure recovery, but much more on its ability to regenerate and drive the creation of the urban fabric. Indeed, it is in agriculture, cyclic capacity to establish a balance with the ground, the widespread availability of necessary infrastructure in the territory, that we see the opportunity to create new urbanity from the dynamics of the historicized field working structures outside the city. The meticulousness to manage, organize and articulate with a precise plan the water and food resources within the rural landscape, is, even more than an order of human typology, a way to rebalance the relationship between man and environment in a cultural sense.

In this direction, present a short state of the art of recent but consolidated projects of new settlements models who design the landscape from a new colonization of the palimpsest outside the city. They must be seen in the experiences of European projects looking into the agricultural layers structural substrate for new urbanity that speak of this memory in a contemporary way.

**2.1 Sociopolis**, a new area of social housing in Valencia where the network of urbanization recovers the ancient canals of the Andalusian Huertas; This urban transformation project is guided by the desire to protect the maximum "garden" surface (which are traditional agricultural areas around the city of Valencia) irrigated with water from the River Turia through the "canals" that built Arabs over 800 years ago. This urban development, promotes the protection of the landscape and the environment, while a social function to provide housing for an assessed to a lot of people money. In the neighborhood are preserved four historic farmsteads and areas around them "urban gardens" care for the inhabitants of the neighborhood are raised. Also in the neighborhood social interaction and sense of community through sports facilities including a football field, athletic track, playgrounds and skating is encouraged.

**2.2 Agronica**, an agricultural landscape, the one on the urban fringes of Milan, which contains in its tracks (canals, routes, infrastructure) and in its reference points (farmsteads, yards, warehouses) an operational matrix which can regulate urban functions; Branzi's Agronica, of 1993-94, illustrates the relentlessly horizontal spread of capital across thinly settled territory, and the resulting "weak urbanization" that neo-liberal economics has enabled. Agronica explores the potential relationships among agricultural and energy production, but the agriculture is also a way of diffusing urbanity. Branzi often extended this work in many project (recently he has cured an interesting Biennale ManiPhesto named The new Athens card; here too he shows, with typical wit, a "territory for the new economy," in which agricultural production shapes urban form.

**2.3 Flat City**, in which the system of Polders and root canal treatment reveals an effective regulator of Dutch dispersed town. *Flat* is a folded ribbonville. A dike, made of dredged-up sand from the nearby construction of a lake (a part of the masterplan) allows easy access to 220 lots, all placed perpendicular to the dike. A field of housing evolves from this line of infrastructure, reintroducing the traditional Dutch ribbon development in a folded thus denser form

### **3. LANDSCAPE, MULTISCALE AND MULTIDISCIPLINARITY APPROACH.**

A research that has the landscape as its principal aim today, cannot ignore two fundamental approaches: the multidisciplinary nature of scientific contributions to the study of territory and settlement and the multi-scale observation of the mutations phenomena.

**3.1 The multidisciplinary**, as well as constitute a guarantee of wealth and completeness of the study, relates to the same nature of landscape studies and to the research concept of "Unite Landscape Area". The complexity ascribable to "landscape areas" and the dynamics of human loads down the environmental substratum, return spatial configurations that should be read in different disciplinary points of view to understand the scope.

**3.2 The multiscale** approach does not only require the overcoming of the traditional-typological one, based on strict and progressive (or regressive) passages between different scales, but also the simultaneous reading of different scales, and precisely the comparison of the same phenomena observed at multiple scales it often may be crucial for a more realistic and objective understanding of the historic structures, modifications and contemporary phenomenology. The other interesting method deriving from this approach is the so-called "Scaling Gap" (R.Gambino, 2000), meaning the constant scale steps in defining the incidence and intensity of the area mutations.

#### 4. OBSERVATION/APPLICATIONS

The study proposes an insight into three peri-urban areas of Sardinia, the sprawl city along the Quartu's coast, the specialized farming triangle between San Sperate, Assemini and Decimomannu and the Sassari's olive-grove fringes, paradigmatic places of hybridization between agricultural structures and urban fringes within the Sardinian context, region that still shows strong historic structures of the rural landscape.

The urban expansion in rural fringes, rich of historic agricultural production, generates new forms of rural landscape (Bauer, Roux, 1976) in which the rules of the urban fabric blend with the strong persistence of rural structures, resulting in atypical forms of settlement, new ecologies of living outside the city.

In Quartu's east rural fringe, the long-narrow fields, residual mesh of Roman times, but especially of modern and contemporary fieldworking divisions, once place of the largest and most productive wine-growing sector of Sardinia, now consists of an intricate mesh land that receives a widespread "second Quartu", denser and more structured towards the coast, more dispersed and discontinuous towards the hinterland in which we still find some agricultural capacity. This settlement fabric consisting of paths, housing blocks, public parks, gardens, service areas, squares, waterfront avenues, it has all the characteristics of an urban structure that spreads from coast to fragmented rural inland.

In the rural triangle between San Sperate, Assemini and Decimomannu, housing spaces, living here and with spaces of production, greenhouses, sheds, instrumental outbuildings, and with spaces of commerce, small markets, shop houses, kiosks, leading to a diversification of land uses, that sometimes involving to parking facility, field sports, garage, domestic and urban garden, the tree-lined street, interspersed with mixed crops, olive trees, citrus groves, vineyards and uncultivated fields of waste production (even for grazing).

The multi-functionality of this agricultural fringes determines completely atypical housing, given the extreme overlap of activities, which are expressed in unusual ways of aggregation. One of these, is well represented by the combination "greenhouse-home", a variation of the farm-house workshop, direct expression of the deep merging between domestic spaces, commercial and production, but above all, in a constant state of ambiguity between public and private spaces.

The "puzzle" of the olive monoculture on the rural fringe of Sassari, it is the breeding ground for the introduction of new agri-tourism activities. On the westside of this fringe, the long and thin olive lot is transformed into residential garden while maintaining its structure, on the north side, olive groves, with more square and larger plots, remain productive but activates many parallel activities, above all accommodations; in other cases, the rationalization of historical agricultural lots, led to the creation of residential subdivisions typical of urban expansion areas.

The analysis of the principles that guide the generation process of these "rurban" phenomena in these particular forms of sardinian rural fringes, is carried out through the reading of the structures and transformations on two fundamental scales of observation:

The scale of the rural landscape structures, through the highlight mapping of farm mesh and agricultural plots, the reading of extra-urban spread and relationship with the main environmental matrix, and highlighting the active agricultural areas;

The scale of "minimal rationalities" (Secchi, 1989), micro-polarity settlements found in the rural fringes that tend to organize the space according to their specific production skills, through the land

use reading, spatial location of factory buildings and infrastructures.

These two scales of spatial analysis, seemingly unrelated, return an image of a new landscape, an intermediate dimension between urban and rural that, although critical, offers interesting opportunity for a landscape development. The lines of greatest interest in the observation of these forms of rural settlement are:

- Research project on new forms of multifunctional housing in which rural space fragments, breaks, but also becomes the main connector of the constituent elements of the settlement;
- The presence of an agriculture that feeds new forms of public space and park and it is the primary creation factor of extra-urban places for the community;
- The multifunctionality of suburban agriculture and its daily use, has the capacity to organize the new forms of urban fringes.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The form of the buildings, their arrangement in the area and the space described by the new logic of spatial distribution of built, if on the one hand, they reflect on the meaning minimum components of the buildings in these contexts, for another, they expressed a strategy "Behavior" of the city on the peri-urban agricultural land.

This multi-scale morphological dichotomy led the testing of the new settlement models try to start with some established forms of rural landscape to build new urban forms according to some figures can be summarized in three fundamental concepts.

### *closes*

According to a rule urban approximate to that of the history block and enclosures of matrix rural centers of the crown of Cagliari, have interpreted the structures of the rural landscape as a "patchwork" in which the frame is built. This has generated macros aie group, according to different interpretations, which sometimes interpret the agro-locked as yet active and capable of activating processes of social gardens to collective management, sometimes the decline as large area of rural neighborhood, a predominantly semi-public, sometimes as true public space equipped.

The idea of historicized closed, the court or of the yard, a contemporary variation of the idea of hortus conclusus in short, is in the Sardinian landscape that first true principle of mutuality between space Rural and urban space: "if the fence hut-humanizes and somehow, the urbanization campaign, we can say that the fence-court, "ruralize" the town".

### *topography*

However, affect the ability of the historical transformations of rural confer new morphological qualities to the ground, acting on the overlap between the instrumental defense of the territory rural and the housing. In this logic prevails settlement reconstitution of an image prevailing vacuum, as it is or the same soil which "includes" the two main necessity settlement: the built environment, occupying a position "on board" with respect to the production lot, emerges as the solidification of a natural boundary that accommodates different activities and whose internal organization is alternate places of living and working in the countryside.

### *Lanières*

Trials cannot escape from the formal dominant morphology of long, narrow lot in the peri-urban rural fringe of Cagliari, residual vineyard or olive grove, called Corria, similar to the batch en Lanières dell'openfield mainland.

This structure mainly determines the shape of the settlement that was used for different approaches typological: the isolated house with attached workshop or rustic for the conduct of the fund

arranged along the bands old rural house on patio fences that stretched the lot through the walls of building which is unfold along the borders, small elongated housing that make windbreaks and mingle with the fences massive plants of agricultural perimeters.

The interesting multi scale approach, that the scale of the lot and the building has allowed to idealize aggregative settlement recognizable structures on a large scale, has resulted in a real landscape project through which, in a completely surprising, the models settlement for new forms of urbanity were transposed in devices for strengthening regional and the development of configurations historicized landscape and, in part, for their conservation.

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## 6. BIOGRAPHY

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He holds a Master's degree and PhD in architecture. His fields of research interest are focused on issues of landscape mutations between modernity and tradition. On these issues he is a research associate and author of numerous publications and scientific contributions. He joined the research group for the project on sustainable landscapes for MIBAC and his doctoral thesis on rural landscapes of Sardinia was presented at the VI Biennial of Landscape in Barcelona.

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Now, he is going to earn his second master's degree in landscape Architecture at the UPC Barcelona.