

5<sup>th</sup> ISUFitaly International Conference  
Rome, 19-22 February 2020

# PROCEEDINGS

edited by  
G. Strappa, P. Carlotti, M. Ieva  
with the collaboration of  
F. D. De Rosa, A. Pusceddu



## URBAN SUBSTRATA & CITY REGENERATION

Morphological legacies and design tools

**ISUFitaly**  
International Seminar on Urban Form  
Italian Network



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Morphological    legacies    and    design    tools



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# Presentation

## **URBAN SUBSTRATA & CITY REGENERATION** **Morphological legacies and design tools**

The fifth Isufitaly Conference will focus on the notion of the substratum in its various aspects.

First, the typological one, as a set of rules inherited from the built landscape that allow reading and conscious transformation. We cannot reduce, of course, the complexity and richness of our ancient heritage to universal interpretational patterns that classify types and processes in a kind of taxonomy of the Ancient (that is true for any built environment). Instead, the identification of a few common criteria that allow us to interpret these phenomena through an architect's eyes, tracing the many outcomes back to the general rationales that produce them, can prove useful to morphological studies.

Then, the physical shape of the historical layer, which in many ancient cities has determined the structure of the current settlements. Substratum is, from this point of view, the part beneath the current built landscape that has no longer a function but still contribute to the form of new fabric. It is the prolific layer that gives rise to multiple organisms. We could then consider a 'substratum' as the composition of elements that once belonged to a built fabric or architectural organism. 'Substratum' despite having lost both their relationship of necessity that bound them together (their purpose and original organicity), and the continuity between the different phases of change and development, still transfer specific characters to the buildings originated by them.

Finally, the intangible aspect, the heritage of projects, experiences, and researches that constitute the working legacy on which current study can be based.

The notion of substratum could be, therefore, more than a specific issue, a way of seeing the built reality useful to the contemporary project.

The term not only includes the ideas of rooting and transmission; it also refers to the means, the tools we can use to reach the essence of the form, of its universal being. This universality, a quality that the actual building did not possess, constitutes a fertile abstraction: a reading as well as a project, how we give a new unity to the multiple and scattered forms of the remains we have inherited.

Furthermore, another theme, which is complementary to the substrata one, is that of urban regeneration. It is a topic extensively investigated by urban research which, in this context, could be reconsidered differently and innovatively.

In continuity with the previous Isufitaly meetings, the theme of the conference proposes a debate on the topics of the urban form transformation at different scales, in the light of our cultural heritage understood as a design tool.

The conference will take place at Palazzo Mattei di Giove, built on the ancient remains of the Teatrum Balbi, in one of the Rome areas where the relationship between the present city and the ancient substratum is more evident, even in its contradictions (the Porticus Octaviae, the Teatrum Marcelli, the archaeological area of Largo Argentina).

# Organization

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE CONFERENCE

### Giuseppe Strappa

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Thanks to the Sapienza University Vice Rector for his inspiring presentation of our Conference and thank to the Director of the Center for American Studies for hosting Isufitaly 2020 Conference in this magnificent venue.

Palazzo Mattei di Giove is an ideal place for our meeting devoted, as it has become tradition for our debates, to the transformation of the existing city.

This site is a perfect interpretation of the title of our Conference, a true explanation of the notions Substrata and Regeneration.

All this huge block, the so called Insula Mattei, was built on the site of the former *Teatrum Balbi*, not demolishing it, but transforming the ancient remains. It is a real text of Urban Morphology.

Today it is impossible to recognize the shape of the theatre, but if we take a look to the ground floor map of the block, we can realize that the theatre reappear buried in the basement structure as an underlying layer. It give form to the geometry of the new fabrics, even giving them their architectural character. Not by chance all this block, based on the consumption of an organic structure, is composed by special building, mostly palazzos, while the one just in front of it, based on the consumption of the serial structure of the *Crypta*, gave rise to base building composed mostly by merchant row houses. All the ancient structures are also a morphological lesson about the notion of a regeneration process. The whole area is an almost didactic evidence of the transformation phases of nature into architecture, where nature is however, we could say, artificial, made up of ancient remains.

Using Muratorian categories, the passage from matter to material is testified, a few meters from here, by the presence of a *calcaria*, a furnace intended to produce lime using the remains of ancient columns, floors, architraves. The reuse of entire structures or of whole organism, such as the Marcellus theatre transformed by Peruzzi in Palazzo Orsini, is also evident.

It is obvious that the ruins have always had a great fascination for architects. Also a risky fascination, in my opinion, as ruins (from the latin *ruere*) means something fallen down, dead.

I believe that it is much more useful for us, as Urban Morphology scholars and architects, the notion of substratum (from the Latin *sub sternere*), the still vital layer on which new organisms originate.

Substratum is the part lying below the present built landscape that no longer has any practical purpose but can still contribute to the life of the new fabric, creating up to date building types. It is the distant and fertile foundation that gives rise to modern organisms.

The question was raised by Saverio Muratori who enumerated the criteria to be used when examining the cultural characters that make up the built environment (rational-cultural, economic-technical, ethical-political, aesthetic-historic), identifying four different ages of change in the Rome urban organism, of which no less than two (Royal – Republican and Imperial) concern the development of the ancient city. Muratori was particularly referring to Rome, though it is well known that he believed that the method he proposed was generally valid (and studies concerning existing city substrata outside Europe, for that matter, have shown how an analysis of the historic layers proves to be an important resource even in areas culturally very different).

In the same years Gianfranco Caniggia used his influential study on the city of Como to build up a method of interpreting the change from a *domus* substrata to a modern

residential organism using type-based phases: 'tabernisation', infilling, development from single-family to multiple-family house. In the same years that

But the notion of substratum also includes a second, immaterial aspect: the legacy of ideas, design, research which constitute the deep layer to contemporary action. For this reason we decided to organize our meeting with an opening plenary session devoted to the first aspect: to the concrete, solid, historical and archaeological substrata.

It will be dedicated to the relation between the work of the architect and the one of the archaeologists. A problematic relationship, which in my opinion has recently produced some good results, but also several disasters.

From the architect's point of view, I must admit that often the archaeological area (and more generally the historical intervention site) is considered the backdrop for refined objects that testify the creativity of the author. The culture of the architect-archaeologist, which for a long time has oriented the interventions congruently with the needs of the excavations and of the urban spaces, has been unfortunately lost.

For a true interdisciplinary collaboration there are considerable problems, however, also for archaeologists, who often seems to tend, today, to consider the archaeological excavation site as a laboratory. On the contrary excavation is architecture, transform the urban space. I would say clearly that the results of the recent excavations of the Imperial Forums, for example, as they are displayed today, are an extraneous and incomprehensible part of the city.

The closing plenary sessions will be devoted to the second aspect: to the immaterial substrata, namely our tradition of studies and designs. The sessions will be dedicated to the "memory of the masters", on the occasion of the missing of two eminent urban morphology scholars

Tradition is also a project. it is not inherited passively; it is rather a choice. Also, master is not just the author of seminal studies: he is as well a figure in which a scientific community recognize common ideals and aspirations.

And in this sense, remembering together Gian Luigi Maffei and Antonio Monestiroli has a profound meaning for those who know the stories of long divisions of the Italian morphological schools.

Thank you for your attention and have a successful conference.

## SUBSTRATE AND REGENERATION

**Paolo Carlotti**

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Substrate and regeneration, two terms that express the beginning and end of the history of the city, appeared to us significantly useful to perimeter the scope of discussion in this conference, within the Italian section of the ISUF International in 2020.

Not new terms, but current and particularly felt by urban morphology researchers; always at the center of the debate and field of confrontation between historians, archaeologists and architects. Words that we wanted to emphasize, in the opening conference, inviting to discuss some exponents of historical culture and the design discipline. "Architectural Substrata and Archeological Design" was therefore the title of the opening conference, which was attended by Paolo Carafa and Alexander Schwarz.

Paolo Carafa in his opening plenary session speech "Archeology of Architecture and Landscape: History and Storitelling" urged us to reflect first of all on the value of the substrate in the flow of the city's history:

*"To study either an ancient city, or medieval, modern, or contemporary ones as well, means defining the flow of its changing landscapes. This means, to tell its story through the reconstruction of its urban "structure" and topographical lay-out in different phases."(Carafa, 2020);*

This is true for the entire history of the city as for every single element for that it means and for how much it is significant for the unitary and current understanding of the city. Paolo Carafa (editor with Carandini of the "Atlas of Ancient Rome"), one of the main exponents of Roman archaeological culture, addressing a plethora of architects and urban morphologies, in his lecture, explained exhaustively how every single archeological fragment is more important if reinserted within of its original context, inside of the urban organism framework and in the own flowing of time.

Beyond any doubt historical and documentary value, the archaeological fragment can prove particularly useful for re-imagining the overall scenario - which unfortunately many times lack the important and indispensable pieces to recompose the unitary framework of the architectural and urban image that made up every single phase relatively finished.

A part of the whole that can reveal it to us the profound meaning that it had at the origin of the transformations of the city, understandable only if you can restore the entirety of the finished image which from time to time constituted a phase of the inner transformation, from the moment in which the first rules have been defined up to the present, when the complexity and rapidity of the changments can make us appear the urban metamorphoses rather simple expressions of chance.

*"As the ancient landscape was an integrated physical reality composed by complete elements, that is "buildings" in the broadest sense, the log-ical core of the system is a construction or a clue of it. It doesn't matter how large or small, complex or simple, rich or poor it was. Any real ob-jects can be classified as constitutive elements of the landscape."(Carafa, 2020)*

It seemed that urban morphology can express all its operational potential right here, proving to be a useful tool to understand how much of the past is lost or reused and how much can still return to being contemporary. Starting from the breakthrough street footprints, and from the topological variants that represent the most recent and still perfectly recognizable elements we can, in fact, by regressive analysis, leafing through the different layers of history and urban form, Highlight what has remained or regenerated in the present and what is instead possibly attributable to a more or less remote past. Recovering the common thread that from time to time has guided the transformation of

the building fabric, but which can still be regenerated in building type, architecture and the city.

Alexander Schwarz urged discussion on the theme of the project by addressing the difficult relationship between inheritance and future. A relationship that has architecturally placed the center in the reinvention project of the center for Berlin. Just starting from the idea that the city is, as already claimed by C.O. Sauer in 1923, a complex and articulated body. A project, the one for Berlin, which has shown us how important are the forms and centralities of the past in order to reinvent the city of the present. Schwarz's Lecture "Museuminsel, Berlin. The invention of an ideal Historic city center" has been particularly effective in showing how the urban history, even that of a modern and global city like Berlin, can become active in the architectural project and helpful to define or regenerate a new or renewed urban centralities but also to help us elaborate complex architectures that go well beyond the simple definitions of a palace or special building.

# HIDDEN ΟΥΣΙΑ AND URBAN RIGENERATION

Brief summary of the 5<sup>th</sup> ISUItaly International Conference

## Matteo Ieva

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It is difficult to propose a complete balance of the proposed themes because the set of contributions, hosted in the proceedings, ranges over very different issues, concentrated - in most cases - on contemporary, often problematic, views in which it is possible to recognize the essence of what is meant by *sostrato*.

Giuseppe Strappa has already outlined the meaning of this term, combining it in different possible meanings especially in the field of urban morphology.

His article *substrata. morphology of the ancient city, beyond its ruins* published in n. 9-10 of *Urbanform and Design* explores the topic with scientific depth, without neglecting any meaning.

The proposed reflections can be considered possible themes to be developed, having already dealt with Strappa's definitions, principles, process.

If one goes beyond the concept of the only materiality referred to the *sostrato*, the potential interest to explain this phenomenon immediately emerges as something that is immanent in what is considered as "being below". Which means grasping a "sign" in the existing structure, a trace, which can be conceptual and / or conscious, which is the permanence of an antecedent that shows itself in the present and produces concrete effects on reality.

But since *sostrato* is ΟΥΣΙΑ, that is, substance, we must contemplate what is hidden within the sensitive thing as its ontological foundation.

For this reason, our task is to reveal it as pure truth, that is, as *alètheia* that offers itself (says Heidegger) precisely for its "non-hiding" if we are able to perceive it in its real material or incorporeal scope, considering it a potential resource precisely for a new forecast starting from the ancient.

Recognizing this assumption, which leads to affirming the existence of a flow that precedes the inversion of something that still exists only in potential, means asking oneself what effects it produces on a conceptual level even before 'becoming other' and, at the same time, how it can be an announcement of an *eidos* that comes to inform the real, that is to give shape to the project.

This operation should not be considered solely as an interpretation of an existing that is given to the operator interested in grasping the outcome of the construction... it is because, retracing the traces of its being the transmission of a past that emerges in tangible form, it is simultaneously the basis for a hypothesis of project, of idea launched into the future.

In parallel with the research on the urban substratum, the theme of regeneration has been proposed a theme which is very TOPICAL today!

Many contributions have crossed this topic and a wealth of opinions and solutions have emerged ....

Such opinions and solutions have welcomed the sessions we launched with the call with great sensitivity and interest.

Interpreting regeneration in the heredity dialectic project means understanding that our work must always deal with a legacy that is not only pure physicality but is testimony to the work of a culture whose essential traits must be re-read so that a re-generation can be proposed that starts from what has been generated. Imagining a morphology that is not built from scratch, from a blank slate that is not a specific attribute of the world of architecture but is a privilege of the visual arts.

The papers proposed in recent days have opened numerous focuses and I am sure

that the publication of the documents will be able to give well-founded answers - given the multiplicity of cases offered for common reflection - and open up further fields of critical reasoning.

Although the creative period of modernity has been recorded today, a frightening condition of disorientation and stagnation in which the productivity of thought seems to be found.

Many ideas were inevitably provided in the plenary sessions starting with the initial one coordinated by Paolo Carlotti with speakers Alessandra Capuano, Paolo Carafa and Alexander Schwarz. Rich dialectical comparison on the theme of Architectural Substrata and Archeological Design.

Always with the same scholars we attended the round table, coordinated by Carlos Dias Coelho on the theme Archaeological Reading / Architectural Design.

The presentation of the Urbanform and Design urban morphology magazine and the books was proposed by Vitor Oliveira, Fabio Di Carlo and Federica Visconti.

Finally, the memory of the Masters Gianluigi Maffei and Antonio Monestiroli proposed, respectively, by Marco Maretti, Giancarlo Cataldi, Paolo Vaccaro, Ivor Samuels and me and by Renato Capozzi, Tomaso Monestiroli, Raffaella Neri and Federica Visconti.



## The Vacant City as the contemporary substratum. Why and How the crisis enables regeneration processes.

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Keywords: *abandonment, claim, regeneration, convention, praxis*

### Abstract

The Vacant City is the heralded outcome of the crisis of former Urban Renewal processes and later global densification strategies. However, this was not, as many were- and are still- arguing, the effect of a conscious decision driven by financial capitalism. On the contrary, it was the unconscious result of its legacy progressive abandonment forced by the "people of the debt". Because of that process, they became increasingly aware of performing simultaneously as victim as well as accomplices of the former perverse mechanisms. Consequently, we have been witnessing the loss of the implicit conventional bond between the society's member behavior, their productivity and the city's spatial arrangement. Assuming this framework as its explicit premise, the paper first questions the nature *per se* of existing building abandonment condition, tracing it back to its historical precedents, and its functionality within the city's life cycle, analyzed it in the light of existing power-relation system criticism. Secondly, it reflects on the fact that the concept of substratum, prompted by the processual typology mainstream, is inextricably related to the emerging claim of vacancies and waiting lands as the immediate reaction to a declared crisis. Finally, to support those interpretations, the paper will present some contemporary emerging phenomena, by which the reclamation of abandoned areas is leading to unpredictable regeneration processes. To conclude, those actions will be described as unprecedented evidence of praxis, compared to the traditional ones. New form of conventionality will eventually flourishing from this scenario.

## Planning aporias

The continuing post-crisis international economic and financial situation has produced an alienating paradox in Italy, only partly attributable to the programmatic discrepancy between Plan and Process. The first - understood as the *instrumentum regni* of territorial transformation - expresses, in fact, an essence based on economic, social, and cultural relationships whose stability and duration are presumed in the period under consideration. It thus acts as interpreter and guarantor of requests from stakeholders who, within a structurally "organic" perspective of meaning, become the protagonists of these, legitimising them politically through specific role attributions firmly directed at implementing their predictions. The Process, by contrast, intervenes as an unpredictable destabilising factor to undermine the temporary certainties established by the Plan through temporally distinct, yet complementary, methods. One expresses itself surreptitiously, or in a capillary and pervasive way, during planning activity, exhibiting the unstable equilibrium of the conditions that underlie it and explain its conventional character. The other, however, erupts into an *interregnum* phase, i.e. it occurs suddenly, whenever a problematic phase of institutional vacancy occurs in which previously consolidated power relationships are lacking and new, creative energies are consequently released, demanding a degree of visibility on the urban scene and corresponding to a different interpretation of the public function.

This apparent conflict, which should not be seen as dialectical in nature, can be resolved in a desirable complementary relationship only if it is accepted that the two terms, Plan and Process, merely express the oscillating polarity from which mutual recognition derives the concept of civil history, seen as phenomenological epochè (from the Greek ἐποχή)<sup>1</sup>, and – with it – existentialist philosophy, at least in Western thinking (Marzot, 2017). However, in the type of case that we are experiencing, that healthy alternation is mortgaged by the very nature of the interests at stake, born of a recent period in which finance has changed from a necessary tool to support innovative forms of entrepreneurship into a perverse concern for profit, generating chain distortions with the complicity of the Plan itself, whose drive is unfortunately far from exhausted<sup>2</sup>.

These assumptions, material and immaterial, inevitably lead to a story that aspires to a responsible *redde rationem* of the many persisting barriers to effective regeneration policies for the city experiencing the crisis, generally expressed verbally but unable to stand up to the facts.

## Financial origins of the crisis

A spectre is haunting Europe: the Vacant City. This term effectively expresses the state of the contemporary city, suspended between the "no longer" of the Network City<sup>3</sup>, as a complete expression of the creative finance - and the related excesses - that has driven its development, and the "not yet" of the city to come, looked forward to as confirmation that the crisis can be overcome. The Latin etymology from which the English term derives can be traced to the verb *vacare*, conveying the idea of "moving away from", applicable to any form of operosity<sup>4</sup>. However, the factors that have triggered the progressive stagnation and implosion of the property market are already latent in the crucial transition from industrial to financial capitalism<sup>5</sup>, which paradoxically feeds on a persistent state of crisis as its own condition of existence. This "exceptional" vacancy situation, the expression of a programmatic "incompleteness", must be elucidated in advance, in order to reveal its unprecedented identification with a new, as well as perverse, condition of "normality". Historically, this event coincides with the production system's view of money no longer as a tool<sup>6</sup> for the promotion of growth, development and employment, but as the objective of its production strategies. Such a phase has begun, a sure indication of an entire economic cycle that has been steadily weakening since the subprime mortgage scandal of 2007, in which financial services based on minimal investments in research and development, and generating far greater profits than those produced by traditional manufacturing or personal services, are spreading throughout the world in a way never previously seen.

Over time, this changed perspective implies profound transformation of the nature

and dynamics of the construction industry. In the year 2000, coinciding with a collapse of the share prices of so-called Blue Chip companies in the information technology sector, apparently in irreversible growth up to that point, there was a progressive shift of investments from intangible to tangible assets. Leaving aside the commodities sector, which remains strategic, the construction sector immediately benefited from the favourable circumstances associated with Europe's use of the new euro currency.

It can now be seen as a false dawn. Financialisation of the economy translates, in fact, into a fanciful link to property development that purports to generate the multiple transactions that are the real guaranteeing of investment<sup>7</sup> profitability. In such circumstances, the apparently unlimited availability of financial resources at highly competitive interest rates, with minimal guarantees offered by the beneficiaries, encourages new operators to enter the property sector and induces existing ones to undertake business initiatives essentially driven by growing expectations of income and growth with distant prospects of success, having been developed in the absence of careful assessment of market needs.

In other words, the necessary premises for the financing projects, though desirable, do not currently exist, but are systematically deferred to a spatial and temporal "elsewhere", to be awaited with messianic faith<sup>8</sup>. The interpreters of this process, from promoters to end users, are thus virtual, not real, entities, simply taken for granted, like the bank securities of which they become a prerequisite in a manner fully consistent with the principles of financial mathematics and its algorithms.

### **Hybrid City and deterritorialisation**

The perverse effects of a constantly deferred realisation of the expectations of property development are amplified by the fact that the production of money, by its nature, programmatically disregards the existence of defined territorial entities, or of political, social, economic and cultural entities capable of governing their own affairs (Galimberti, 2018). Furthermore, the related flows are transversal and supranational in nature with respect to all forms of administrative limits, delegitimising their functions. In this way, excessive financialisation of the economy seems to escape the control of the institutions, unable to collaborate in a network context, and of the agents of transformation, unable to match their expectations to local specificities.

The scenario is made even more complex by the contextual alteration of the very concept of territory which, given current circumstances, coincides with the pervasive loss of significance of the notion of the metropolitan area in favour of the prevailing phenomenon of urban networks. The unprecedented increase in the mobility of financial resources, goods, services and people, fed by growing investments in the infrastructure sector, at least in the most virtuous cases, programmatically destabilises the maintenance of consolidated administrative boundaries, causing their identity characteristics to implode, and compelling a review of all the links between active forces and related systems of expectations based on relationships of geographical continuity. The consequences of this process are of epochal significance and, from the urbanistic point of view, widely underestimated even by latest-generation Plans.

Consequently, economic growth factors act selectively, favouring the most rewarding locations - with regard to multiplication of relational opportunities in the economic, social and cultural spheres, - in a highly logistical perspective. It follows that investments mainly benefit companies that already possess high infrastructure standards, thus exacerbating the discontinuity of economic rents. The apparently paradoxical effect of this process is the creation of new settlement configurations, the aforementioned Network Cities, no longer based on the hierarchical relationships of metropolitan cities, but on the predominantly horizontal relationships between urban systems of similar specialised levels, enabled to perform better in the international marketplace (Marzot, 2018).

The programmatic disorientation of settlement as a synergistic outcome to the multiplication of transactions, shrewdly fuelled by creative finance, mirrors that of local political forces, unable to manage interactions with interests that act on a global scale and losing all sense of identity. In fact, the latter would require full assumption of responsibility

among the various interpreters through the establishment of local roots, something the new production methods deliberately ignore.

### **The reaction of the property market**

The picture painted above - in which the prerequisite for growth is a paradoxical "state of permanent deficit" - explains why the effects of the 2007 debt crisis and the 2008 financial crisis have had a dramatic effect on the European property market. The traditional relationship between supply and demand in this sector has been completely altered by a system of expectations, both incoming (i.e. of specialised operators) and outgoing (of end users), totally independent of reality. The former have benefited from easier access to credit, their eligibility guaranteed by mere expectations of transformation, written into the balance sheet, rather than economic worth. The latter, likewise, have contracted mortgages for the purchase of properties in the belief that solvency can be delayed, based on an assessment of stable and lasting employment conditions, even if these are not improving as hoped for. Both have thus been complicit in a life project based on deliberately misleading assumptions, its feasibility programmatically postponed according to financial algorithms<sup>9</sup>.

The identification of money with new ways of production has quickly become an aggravating factor, transforming the financial crisis into an economic one, with immediate loss of employment and drastic falls in public and private spending; families, their saving capacity gradually eroded until dwindling to nothing in a few years, have been compelled to try to replace the networks of protection and social solidarity that the previously responsible institutions could no longer guarantee. This has proved to be particularly difficult for Italy because of its chronic infrastructure deficiencies and chaotic public expenditure out of control, allied to a programmatic inability and disinclination to attract international capital.

If the national picture raises legitimate concerns, the regional one is no less alarming. Recent research<sup>10</sup> covering the whole of Emilia-Romagna reveals that local government Structural Plans are still strongly characterised by expectations of growth that no longer correspond to the new reality, with increasing calls<sup>11</sup> for reduced land use and further policies based on regeneration of existing resources. If the data in itself is unsurprising, given the implicit inertia to modification of the Plan, with its programmatic mission of conserving existing power relationships rather than relative modification, which cannot be attributed to those conditions of stability that a shared project requires, it is interesting to analyse the different behaviours demonstrated by those who claim a role as protagonists, in various capacities, in the transformation process for the territory.

### **The Plan and its protagonists**

Operators in the property sector, especially builders, who play a unique role in Italy<sup>12</sup>, have a particular interest in the transformation process described above. In more innocent times, i.e. prior to the speculative subprime bubble, and consistent with the guarantees of expectations and territorial performance contained in the Plan, they have allocated enormous resources, only nominally their own, to greenfield sites of new settlement expansion, taking out mortgages in order to exercise onerous option rights in the best cases or to purchase of land in the worst. For guarantees they have relied mainly on expected, rather than real, transformation values either from the mortgaged properties or virtually cascaded from previous financial transactions, or, because of tax relief, on the underwriting of property shares. As a sign of the crisis, the high levels of credit granted to them have inevitably led to an exponential increase in requests for repayment - by the lenders, banks and financial institutions - of capital rendered unfruitful by the lack of demand for transformation, and property operators have found themselves in a corner. Despite the lesson of persistent stagnation and implosion of the property market created by their own actions, and with numbers of unsold or vacant properties rising incessantly, they have continued to seek further development of land merely to keep alive those very expectations of transformation value offered as guarantee of their investments.

The administrators, who have directly participated in promoting and defending these

same interests through the provisions of the Plan, have found themselves in an equally uncomfortable situation. Having benefited in recent election campaigns from programmes geared towards drastically-reduced land use, including densification of the existing city area, they have tried to redirect transformation towards brownfield sites. However, the attempt has failed miserably for the same reasons that have led private operators to demand compliance with forecasts that conflict with the new reality but are consistent with the expectations expressed in the Plan, exacerbated if anything by the impossibility of drawing on public funds. As if market stagnation and lack of demand, except in highly specialised niche sectors, were not enough, private capital is not available, having been locked up in areas of new expansion for reasons noted above.

As a corollary of the above, we may note the contribution, fortunately minimal, of a highly ideological and radical chic intellectual elite who, in the face of the persistent crisis and the apparent impossibility of reactivating the huge amount of unused properties awaiting transformation, cynically applaud the idea that they be abandoned to a condition of romantic ruin, as a warning and perennial monument both of the failure of the Plan, unable to adapt to changed boundary conditions with appropriate tools, and of the evident implosion of financial capitalism, which has remained hostage to its own perverse practices and equivocations.

While pursuing clearly biased objectives, they fail to realise that the intentional exclusion of an important part of existing cities from any form of transformative forecast and the deliberate refusal to acknowledge the widespread porosities produced by the crisis, which are creating a new "negative" urban reality, according to an automatic writing that acts outside any form of planning intentionality or agent legitimacy of the Plan, consciously deprives the existing community of an emerging plural subject that demands ever more visibility.

### **The new agents of transformation**

If the crisis has severely affected the traditional production of property value and protagonists of this process, it is equally true that it translates symmetrically into an unpredictable and potential resource for all those excluded from the market because they lack the minimum entry requirements or because they abruptly left it due to the crash that followed. These tend to be the young, who experience structural difficulty entering the world of work and face a chronic lack of social security (guaranteed only by what remains of the public services), and those who have lost their jobs and now seek a new career, i.e. the constellation of professionals and small businesses that has constituted Italy's proverbial backbone since the immediate post-war era. This composite group constitutes a new, heterogeneous and liquid "Third State" which, although still far from conscious self-recognition and incapable of acting collectively, acts as a silent interpreter of the rebirth of the territories from the landscape of ruins into which they have abruptly fallen. No longer able to operate within the framework of normality that the traditional Plan legitimizes and embodies, its protagonists therefore demand new forms of expression, outside the rules that applied previously. For them, realisation of the expected valorisation of vacant property assets cannot be postponed. They seek not the financialisation of construction, but work creation made possible by reinventing things in line with contemporary moods and methods.

In other words, the revolution now underway implies emancipation from the condition of structural suspension and deferral of the manufacturing moment in favour of the conceptual one (although based on false assumptions), pursued through a radical reversal of the very idea of planning, no longer intended as an intellectual forecast but as a material prototyping (Ferraris, 2017). The Vacant City then ceases to present itself as the intentional expression of a "destituent" process, pursued by the *hybris* of financial capitalism, with the implicit objective of freeing the creative energies constrained by the Plan and its system of rules and dissolving *de facto* its bonds established *ex-lege*. On the contrary, it presents itself as a simple substantial presupposition, or substratum, of the imaginable "city to come", called by the "provocation" of the former to represent its ultimate destiny, to be pursued through a silent transformation, experimental and unpredictable



in its possible outcomes, of the building heritage scandalously disposed of in the previous phase and constituting the means of its continuing evolution.

This emerging and widespread reality, now dictated by the scarcity of available financial resources and the urgency and non-deferrable nature of the measures needed to create new employment, interprets the theme of urban regeneration in terms of radical and innovative experimentation - outside the acquired patterns of a world that no longer exists - capable of building its own rules by its own efforts and becoming the expression of a rediscovered "formativity"<sup>13</sup>. In this regard it needs suitable spaces, deprived of original conventional value, with which to recreate the conditions of possibility so that a new form of collective planning takes shape and is actualised, through distinct and interconnected phases of transformation and self-recognition. It is the nature of such spaces, therefore, to require a Plan moratorium in the form of a suspension of those conditions of strict normativity, legitimated only by circumstances of stability and recognition of the subjects, of which the Plan is an operative instrument.

### **Beyond the Vacant City, the urban ephemeral**

The primary resources evoked already exist: they are the places of abandonment that the crisis has multiplied - dissolving the "resistant" bonds of extended urban networks - through the widespread porosity of the contemporary urban fabric; accidental wrecks of a project that has exhausted its drive and de-territorialising function, awaiting new interpretations; desirable promises of a possible city, as yet unrecognised by any instrument. As the time frame of the Vacant City suddenly contracts, an evolving architecture emerges at its edge through its very interstitial condition, formless, pervasive and capillary. It stands between the "no longer" legitimised by the existing Plan, the "passive" accomplice of urban networks, and the "not yet" of the Plan to come. In their bareness, its spaces evoke those anticipated from recolonisation of the territory by the "Third State" mentioned above, with minimum investment of financial capital and maximum return in terms of transformation work<sup>14</sup>. The new Ephemeral City, changing in its experimental transience, simply asks to be cultivated, recognised and interpreted, not as a marginal and shunned reality but as a new centrality of the political agenda, capable of promoting a network of new relationships based on claims of temporary use. Only time will tell which will be able to "migrate" to a new horizon of relatively stable meaning in order to legitimise their corresponding operating forces, giving them full public visibility and recognition.

Fortunately, successful experiences of this kind already exist<sup>15</sup>. However, they still constitute initiatives of mainly cultural interest, sometimes driven to the limits of legality by the lack of a regulatory framework that accepts them and legitimises their spontaneous multiplication; testimonies of the change taking place, yet to reach full awareness of their mission. In this regard, there seems to be something of value in the experience of European countries with more solid traditions in the property sector, such as Holland, England, Spain<sup>16</sup> and Germany, where such claims have always been instrumental to the generation of value, performing a fundamental trigger function. These cases involve organic experiences in the construction and transformation of the Plan, understood as a shared project despite its different local interpretations, whose social, economic and cultural purpose is to provide an indispensable gestation laboratory sustaining the discipline of urban planning in a pragmatic manner. This confirms the need for a systematic openness to the new in the forms and times in which it reveals itself.

In these situations, the temporary regeneration of unused spaces responds to multiple objectives and interests: it guarantees owners that properties suitable for transformation will be maintained and their associated costs reduced; it allows the authorities to increase public safety in areas otherwise exposed to illegal activity and vandalism, with no additional burdens on the community; and it acts as a source of minimum capital investments and a maximum in terms of generated labour and employment to offer emerging entrepreneurial forces the conditions for implementing forms of free interpretation of space and gaining awareness of their abilities, in the hope that they will be translated, at least in part, into new shared and communicable practices. It also allows the Plan itself to

test in advance new forms of economy, sociality and culture that it can come to encompass for a non-traumatic renewal of its own instruments, by means of a transitory “project in the absence of pre-established functions” (Agamben, 2017).

### **Bologna as a model of urban prototyping**

If the Vacant City is the result of the progressive dissolution of the European city<sup>17</sup>, harried by the forces of global financial capitalism from the start of the post-industrial phase<sup>18</sup>, it likewise constitutes the precondition of the processes of urban regeneration, which multiplied in the old continent after the financial and economic crises of 2007. A necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the inoperative building heritage to “pass the baton” is the self-suspension, for a defined period of time, of the deontic function of the Plan, which prescribes the fate of each area into which the territory is administratively divided, establishing its uses, methods of intervention and eligibility criteria in order to protect the collective interest. This seems to be the inspiration for the Emilia-Romagna Region’s new Urban Planning Law no. 24 of 2017, designed to curb land consumption, even in the face of a now evident contraction of the property market. In article 16, the approved text introduces, for the first time in the national urban planning discipline, the notion of “temporary uses”, intended as innovative action to counter degradation of the city and reactivate the abandoned and unused heritage by means of prior cataloguing on the basis of the “Register of properties made available for urban regeneration” established in article 15. In this sense, and reflecting a process still in progress, the Region’s legislation constitutes the partial precipitate of one of the most advanced experiments of planning culture at a European level in conditions of structural crisis. Its premises are traceable to work carried out in 2010 at the former Ravone rail yard in Bologna as part of an invitation-only competition, won by a combined team from PERFORMA A + U<sup>19</sup> Design Studio, Nomisma Srl, Unipol Merchant Bank and the Delli Santi & Partners law firm. The yard was decommissioned by Rete Ferroviaria Italiana at the end of 2011, no longer being used for its original purpose of rail freight, and transferred to its subsidiary FS Sistemi Urbani S.p.A., which was given responsibility for its redevelopment. Following installation of the new Council, in 2012 the Administration asked the client to draw up a new Master Plan for the entire area<sup>20</sup> to replace a previous Detailed Plan no longer considered adequate for the objectives of the new Structural Plan, which was delivered in 2013<sup>21</sup>. However, the continuing economic and financial crisis meant that the feasibility of the proposal as a whole could not be guaranteed. On 9 July 2014 the Municipality signed a memorandum of understanding with major stakeholders in the city’s transformation– the State Property Agency, the State Railways, Cassa Depositi e Prestiti and Invimit. Mindful of changed market conditions, it also began drafting a Municipal Operational Plan specifically dedicated to public assets, including the Master Plan proposal for the former Ravone freight yard mentioned above, the first such plan in Italy. From the outset, a need was seen for a drastic reduction by about two thirds of the quantitative forecasts, to be implemented in the five-year period of validity of the Municipal Operational Plan (POC) in order not to further jeopardise a market already under stress and to maintain the value, now considerably reduced, of unused assets. In concert with the technicians of the Public Administration, the timescale for the developments outlined in the Master Plan was modified in order to mitigate its likely impact<sup>22</sup>. However, the general opinion now was that the minimum conditions for action to increase values did not exist under the rules inherited from the previous stages of the urban plan. In this regard it is worth noting that by 2012 the planners had already suggested, both to the Administration and the client<sup>23</sup>, that the interregnum phase from then until the time when, it was hoped, the enhancement phase might begin, offered an opportunity to exploit the abandoned industrial buildings, which were no longer required for railway operation and were still standing, and the associated shunting yards. These assets were known to be in a good state of repair, were highly flexible and would be immediately available after modest improvement work, the cost of which would be compensated for by their intrinsic value, and which would prevent the inevitable deterioration that abandonment would cause. With hindsight of the dramatic economic-financial crisis indicating that any idea of urban planning was destined

to fail at that time, becoming no more than a rhetorical exercise of style, it is clear that intuition was the only possible approach given what was then known (Fig. 1). Through the construction of animated simulations, the possibility of rescuing existing properties from a condition of oblivion evolved progressively into a plausible prospect of enhancement<sup>24</sup>. Therefore in 2018 the Client decided to publish an initial "Invitation to tender" for the assignment of 9 properties with adjoining uncovered areas, for a total of 40,000 square metres of gross surface area, on the basis of a two-year interest-bearing loan, under the provisions of article 73, mentioned earlier, of Bologna's Urban Building Regulations (RUE). Only one tender, invalid because it proposed a timescale double the one specified, was received, but it persuaded the client to issue a new invitation for a 4-year project, which was successfully awarded in 2019<sup>25</sup>. At the same time, Studio PERFORMA A + U won a new invitation-only competition for the Urban Planning Implementation of the Ravone sector, under the provisions of the "Regeneration of Public Heritage" POC approved in 2016, becoming design consultants with responsibility for management of the area intended for "temporary use", which was officially announced to the press with the acronym Dum-BO (Multifunctional Urban District of Bologna) and inaugurated on May 10 at the JOINT outdoor event<sup>26</sup>.

Since then, the objective of the Ravone urban regeneration project, through the drafting of a "Temporary Uses Master Plan", has been to ensure, as had been foreshadowed from 2012 onwards, that procedures and effects resulting from ongoing experimentation described as "temporary uses", as per article 73 of the Building Regulations, may migrate within the drafting of the Urban Implementation Plan (PUA), constituting its trigger phase, to guarantee effective rooting in the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the consolidated city (Fig. 2). In this context, and through continuous interaction with the city's Urban Planning department, it has been established that the Master Plan, now operating *de facto* to ensure governance of the regenerative process and the corresponding system of rules, replace *de jure* the RUE starting from the approval of the implementation tool. In strictly disciplinary terms, this is an extraordinary result, unprecedented in Italy. The decision, which will be ratified by the remarks to the Preliminary Urban Implementation Plan, delivered on 12 February 2020, implies that, for the first time in Italian urban planning, through implementation of good practices put into operation in the temporary laboratory of Ravone, a regenerative project - by its nature incremental, collaborative and experimental- has been recognised as a legitimising process of the Plan, and that the corresponding "document", i.e. the "Master Plan for temporary use", defines its founding principle<sup>27</sup>, to which the whole implementation planning will be required to adhere, both in the articulation of spaces and in the temporal sequence of the implementation phases. Ephemeral transformation of the Vacant City, freed from the prescriptive cogency of old generation Plans, is thus confirmed as the tool with which to create a circular model for the resilient city of the future, basing its vision of it on present needs, taken in their competitive evolution (Fig. 3).

### Closing comments

The pioneering experience with the former Ravone rail yard in Bologna confirms, if it were needed, that the reaction to the crisis in the property market is already redesigning the city according to ideas anticipating establishment of the Plan. The temporary moratorium is, therefore, a necessary but insufficient condition that allows the forces emerging from the landscape of ruins left by the collapse of financial capitalism and the world around it to find expression, in the wait for what is to come (Fig. 4). In these circumstances politics has the task and responsibility of creating the suitable conditions that will allow this to start and develop, encouraging the promotion of a network of initiatives that aspire to colonise growing urban porosities, cultivating them and monitoring their quality and ability to stand the test of time. There are moments when one becomes aware that the plan is indistinguishable from existence as a life experience. The current one is one of these. It would be unforgivable not to seize its opportunities.





**Figure 1.** A decommissioned railway depot in the ex-freight yard Ravone is fictionally adapted for hosting co-working activities. This scenario was proposed in 2012 to trigger the imagination of the client and the local Administration in order to deactivate biases still resisting to “meanwhile uses”.

#### TAV 1 | CATALOGO DEGLI ELEMENTI SPAZI E TEMI

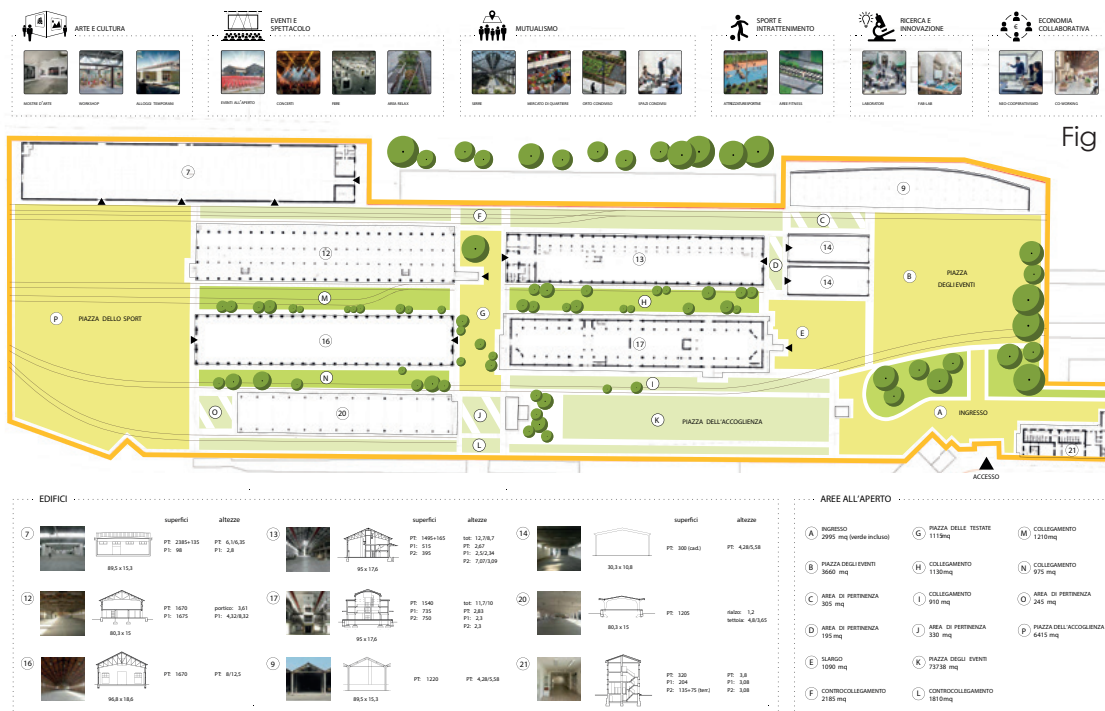
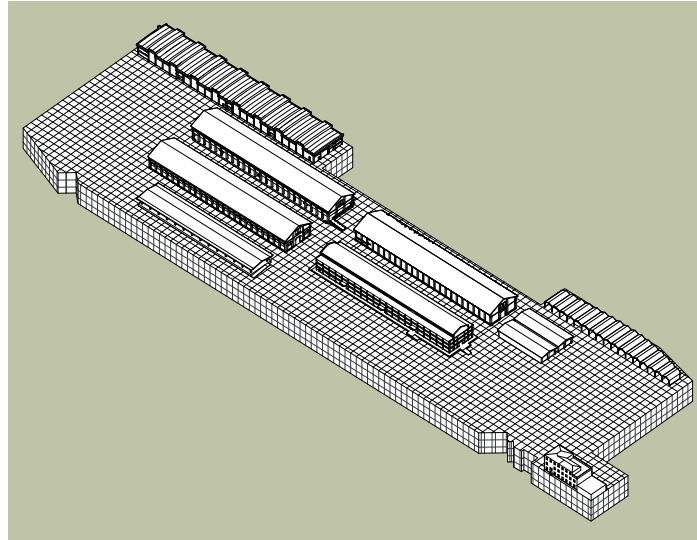
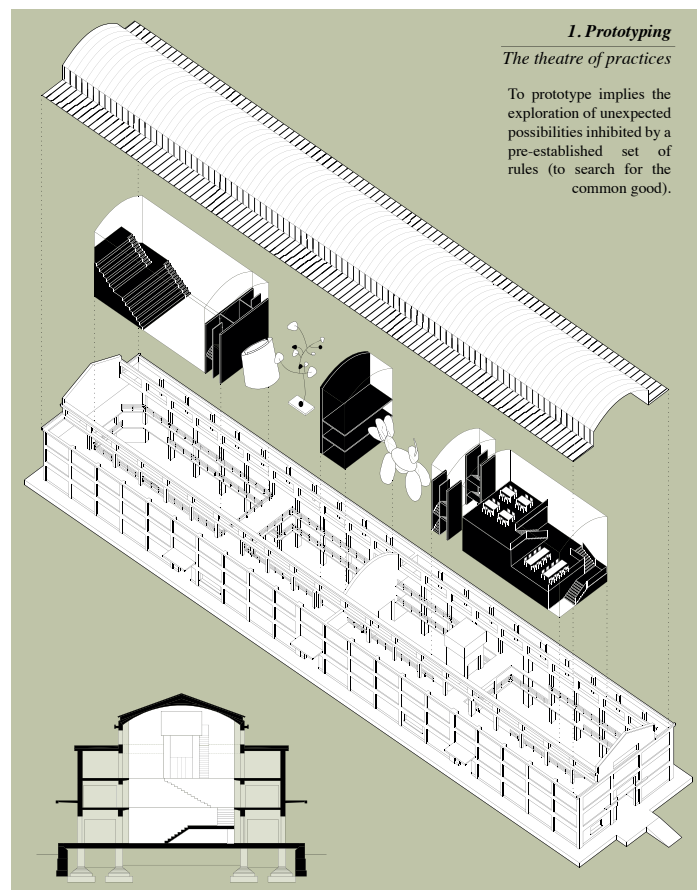


Fig 2

**Figure 2.** The “Temporary Uses Master Plan” was, since DumBO inception in 2019, is intended as a *in progress* “collage” to engage the members of the scientific committee, assumed as the most important stakeholders involved within the regeneration process. As such, it was enabling the interplay among the available vacancies (the context), the potential drivers of change (the actors) and the expected effects (the activities), presuming design actions.



**Figure 3.** The area hosting DumBO, interpreted as a sample of Vacant City. The axonometric view of the decommissioned warehouses, reciprocally isolated by an isotropic anonymous surface, explicit quotation of Radical Avant-garde, effectively depicts the atmosphere of incompleteness characterizing any brownfield.



**Figure 4.** The Ephemeral City. The “theatre of practices”, study case series. The *praxis* is here intended as a “prototypical doing”, based on a heuristic approach, finalized to the exploration of unpredictable crafts emerging from it, both material and immaterial. Since experience guides the design according to a “learning by doing” process, it deliberately excludes any productive instance, notwithstanding it generated its unavoidable premise.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>No matter how paradoxical it may seem, the term should be understood as the impossibility of expressing a historical judgment in that one finds oneself "on this side" of the same conditions of possibility that determine it.

<sup>2</sup>It is worth remembering that financing means completing something. In this sense, the concept expresses the instrumental value of a fulfilment that paradoxically remains pending, or unfinished, in the interpretation given by globalised capitalism.

<sup>3</sup>See Nicola Marzot, "The Hybrid, the Network City and the Territory elsewhere. The contemporary fringe condition in north European urban phenomena" in *Observations on Urban Growth*, Editor Giuseppe Strappa, Publisher Franco Angeli, Milan 2018, pp. 189-211.

<sup>4</sup>The term is understood here in the particular sense of its use by the philosopher Giorgio Agamben.

<sup>5</sup>This process is clearly described in *Cities in the Global Economy* by Saskia Sassen, published by Il Mulino, Bologna, 2003.

<sup>6</sup>To be understood both as tax revenue and loans to businesses.

<sup>7</sup>The securitization of CDOs (Collateral Debt Obligation) is relevant in this regard. These securities are based on the growing expectation of the property market and on the contextual reduction of variable interest rates on mortgages granted for the purchase of properties.

<sup>8</sup>The credit system, by its nature, implies a "trusting" attitude, or a willingness to "put oneself in the hands of" someone who makes the investment fruitful (not surprisingly, the Πίστις of the ancient Greeks becomes, for their contemporaries, synonym of "loan"). The unprecedented question, in the financialisation of the economy, is precisely that the object of the investment is presented sub-specie as a simulacrum (the mirage of home ownership within everyone's reach), whose function is to extend as much as possible the wait for a fulfilment that, not being founded on real expectations, risks not being able to be realized at all.

<sup>9</sup>In the face of a continuous expansion of the spatial/temporal dimension of expectations, based on the apparently unlimited availability of credit, the virtuality of the market has in fact translated into the assumption of its own collapse.

<sup>10</sup>This refers to an award-winning research project submitted to the Emilia-Romagna SPINNER programme in 2013. Entitled "Progettare il costruito: nuovi modelli a qualità integrata per la città compatta", it was presented by Prof. Carlo Quintelli of the Department of Civil, Land, Environmental and Architecture Engineering, University of Parma, Prof. Giovanni Pieretti of the Department of Sociology, University of Bologna, Prof. Vanni Codeluppi of the Department of Communication and Economics, University of Modena and Reggio, and Prof. Nicola Marzot, Laura Gabrielli and Pietromaria Davoli of the Department of Architecture, University of Ferrara.

<sup>11</sup>Subsequently recognised in the provisions of Regional Urban Law 24, 2017.

<sup>12</sup>The anomalous Italian situation, compared to the more mature European property sectors, arises from the coincidence of ownership and real estate development, which limits the degree of transformability of the investments and the ability to adapt them to changed conditions of use.

<sup>13</sup>This refers explicitly to the neologism first introduced by Luigi Pareyson in *Estetica. Teoria della Formatività*, first published in instalments in an aesthetics magazine between 1950 and 1954. In it, the Turin philosopher stigmatised the custom, widespread in the tradition of western thought, from Aristotle onwards, to reduce artistic and creative activity to a solely poietic dimension, assimilating it to mere production of objects, on the basis of rules already given. Deeply influenced by Existentialist philosophy, he instead declared the need to reflect critically on creation as a process constantly seeking its own *modus operandi*, which he defined as "formativity".

<sup>14</sup>Ontologically speaking, the nature of this "work" is still to be investigated. See Nicola Marzot, "Stato di eccezione, spazi in transizione e rigenerazione urbana. Note per una nuova cultura del lavoro", in *Paesaggio Urbano*, Issue 3, Rimini, Ed. Maggioli, pp. 5-9.

<sup>15</sup> In Emilia-Romagna, one remembers the activity of the Cultural Planimetry Associa-

tion, which has already promoted extremely interesting initiatives such as Spazio Senza Filtro in Bologna. See Werther Albertazzi, "Usi temporanei e rigenerazione urbana. Note per un'autobiografia scientifica", in *Urban Landscape*, Issue 3, Rimini 2019, Ed. Maggioli, pp. 95-103.

<sup>16</sup>In contemporary Spain, experiments in the temporary use of abandoned and unused spaces are now the principal means of urban regeneration, already recognised by local administrations for their social, economic and cultural aspects of public interest. The Estonesunsolar pilot project, promoted by the Grávalos & Di Monte Architects studio, in collaboration with the city of Zaragoza, is a significant example.

<sup>17</sup>The position expressed corresponds to the thesis proposed by Vittorio Gregotti in *Identità e crisi dell'architettura europea*, Einaudi, Turin 1999.

<sup>18</sup>This phase coincides with the decommissioning of manufacturing sites in Europe, which began in the second half of the 70s.

<sup>19</sup>In 2008, the Studio, with its CITTA 'SOSPESA project, had already been selected from twelve finalists in an international competition for the design of the new integrated complex of the Bologna Centrale station, to join a temporary grouping of companies with MVRDV (Team leader), Arcadis, Atelier 10 and Sota.

<sup>20</sup>The proposal incorporates the provisions contained in an agreement signed on 18 July 2006 by FERROVIE DELLO STATO ITALIANE SPA, RETE FERROVIARIA ITALIANA SPA, FS SISTEMI URBANI SRL and MUNICIPALITY OF BOLOGNA containing economic/financial guarantees for the construction of the new Bologna High Speed Station.

<sup>21</sup>In the period between task assignment and completion, Studio PERFORMA A + U, mandated by the then Province, carried out important work as coordinator of the "Urban revitalisation and temporary uses" technical discussion panel for the Metropolitan Strategic Plan of the City of Bologna (2011-2013). This panel was created in response to an initial call for interested parties to develop innovative ideas for the future development of the city, open to all individual stakeholders and opinion groups as a means of sharing Plan development. As a result of its work, involving multidisciplinary collaboration between local government and civil society, guidelines were drawn up following critical analysis of experience at the local and national level, including the Ravone project. Some of the results were subsequently incorporated in the modified Urban Building Regulations (RUE) of the Municipality of Bologna approved in 2015. This stated that within the Mixed Transformation Areas, regulated by Article 73, all uses were admissible in the interregnum between adoption and approval of the Municipal Operational Plan (POC), without this leading to changes in the standard.

<sup>22</sup>Under this compromise solution, the only alternatives are to pursue the minimum objective to which the stakeholders aspire through the legitimising action of the Plan, or to retain the nominal values entered in the financial statements (which, although completely dissociated from reality, justify the support of the financial gearing, in a game of mutual recognition that is completely self-referential).

<sup>23</sup>Registering understandable reservations and resistances on both sides, attributable to the relative inability to recognise temporary use strategies of vacant properties as a means of generating value.

<sup>24</sup>The experience acquired benefited from the valuable collaborative efforts of the "Urban revitalisation and temporary uses" technical panel, including the pilot project for the Evolved Popular District, presented in Sala Borsa in Bologna on 18 March 2016, and drawn up by the same Studio PERFORMA A + U in association with Planimetrie Culturali the Bologna Academy of Fine Arts and DCM. The same group was subsequently consulted for its expertise by the drafters of the new Urban Planning Law of the Emilia-Romagna Region, with the aim of defining innovative tools to support urban regeneration.

<sup>25</sup>The successful bidder was the Open Group social cooperative, in partnership with the private company Eventeria, already operating in the organisation of public entertainment events.

<sup>26</sup>Seventy events have been hosted within the DumBO area since its inauguration.

<sup>27</sup>It will be the first time, in the history of Italian town planning, that the "Master Plan for temporary use" document has officially been incorporated in the Plan.

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