



**Living Landscapes - Landscapes for living
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The mechanic of the new landscape

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The Italian villages are presenting changes which make easier the observation of some characteristics of “widespread living” allowing to develop new quality criteria and tools for its transformation. It has been identified among them the spread of production processes outside their geographical situation and a progressive reduction of the pre-industrial cycles constituting the economy of the areas from immemorial time. The unusual condition of proximity of the “means” of production abandoned to the new economy facilities, the uncertainty of the modern economic systems, their inability to regenerate the work and the city in the immediate surroundings, and the weakness of disciplinary tools able to rule and improve the existing circumstances, confirmed us that the “work” has to be the main principle for the regeneration projects of the contemporary city. If the landscape could be conceived as a “description of production passages”, the analysis on the passages of the pre-industrial economy cycles could represent new “extension and duration maps” of the production processes in the time.

Minor centres in the widespread living

One of the causes of the of “widespread living” phenomenon has to be probably searched in the transition from a “fantastic” utilization of the world, promised by industrial civilization (Koolhaas, 1978), to a “touristic” use of the space, typical of post-modern culture and probably due to a progressive decline of the positivist certainties that gave life to the culture of the machine (Bauman, 1999).

The previous paragraph shows that it is preferable to understand the expression “widespread living” as a main feature of the contemporary living rather than several territorial expressions of urban settlements more or less dense or concentrated.

In the widespread living, the causal links between economy, society and physical city become weak, vague and variable. The cause-effect relationships arise with a variable geometry and suffer the rigid spatial conformation of the architectural concept. However, for obvious synthesis and expressive immediacy requirements, this living context needs distinguishable images, maybe real iconographies, that are almost always entrusted to the expert hands of the architects. In order to search for new interpretative tools and new reading plans to intervene in such a living condition, aiming to improve it in its complex sense, we stand up in front of several questions around the problem of the work in the widespread living¹.

In our opinion, the production subject is one of the most ignored principles in the design of quality scenarios to be achieved through the project in the widespread living as manifestation of a mass-consumption society and of the individual self-affirmation.

A number of important recent occasions of researching and meeting about the centrality of the work for the territorial planning transformation and for the architectural project, however have mainly shown only its morphological and typological potential². A potential as visions that had not skipped to the pioneers of modern architecture and is now being systematically and rather trivially connected to the conceptual and figurative rhetoric of the Green New Deal. This last one has been interpreted, in our opinion, increasingly as a consumer model rather than a production one. We are quite certain that the production subject exceeds the rediscovered importance of spaces, settlements or territories, addressed to house the work or potentially available to do so. In fact, we believe that especially in times of global economic instability, when the financial revenue system staggers, it is preferable and useful to consider the patterns of production as a strategic criterion to set and coordinate the design choices rather than an end and a target of a planning methodology. In order to check the analytical, descriptive and representative potential of this subject, and based in reasons that will be here explained, our research has focused on the Italian urbanized countryside, especially of the central regions and the small towns dotting it. Smaller towns that have been subjected to studies and proposals to their regeneration but with not always satisfactory results (Figure 1).



Figure 1 | Bazzano Industrial Centre (AQ), authors' picture

1 Regarding it, see the conception of the work place as a living environment in Heidegger Martin, (1976). *Saggi e discorsi*, Milan, Mursia.

2 A recent conference held at the University IUAV of Venice, entitled “Architecture of work spaces. New tasks and new places of the project” (curated by Sara Marini, Alberto Bertagna, Francesco Gastaldi) discussed the renewed centrality of the work as a new essential subject of the project.

These contexts have been hit by the modern economic transformations later than the big cities, although in some cases they have had a speed and intensity even higher. The spread of settlement and the concentration of flows are quite a recent territorial events inside them.

With our contribution, we will try to describe the economic and territorial recent changes suffered by these contexts and then identify the effects generated in the surroundings and highlight eventual problems. We will itemize and check the main project trends, tools and available elements for the intervention of regeneration and transformation in similar territorial realities, identifying some limitations. Finally, we will try to trace the coordinates for a new reading and project method and a new project proposal that could overcome cultural and operative barriers highlighted by our research.

The origin of uncertainty in the economic and territorial post-modern transformations

The aspect that mainly motivated us in the choice of small Italian towns as field of research must be found in the possibility that similar situations offer in order to gaze the link between new production models and contemporary territorial dynamics .

In addition, the social and economic degeneration faced by the smaller towns and their territories, especially in the areas affected by the earthquake of L'Aquila in 2009, provided immediately a test bench for our research regarding the work as a project principle.

In these actual settlements, the recent change of the economic models affecting Western countries, as well as the large European cities, activated processes of desertion of the physical production of materials and objects in favor of a network system for the immaterial production of ideas and services, typical of the post-industrial economies.

We observed in the small towns how the new dynamic has not found the same materials of the big city to pursue their objective and has been progressively characterized by breaking up into two parallel and distinct phenomena.

On the one hand, we have identified a first event consisting in the extension of the production processes within the territories, mostly beyond their geographical and urban circumstances.

On the other hand, we found a second process of progressive reduction of the pre-industrial production cycles³ with agricultural and handicraft nature, which had represented the local economy of the smaller towns for centuries, allowing in some cases their “smooth industrialization” (Fuà, Zacchia, 1983).

If the first phenomenon seemed to be related, in the best cases, to the innovation of the production cycles, aiming to ride over the restricted areas of the traditional production and find new markets, the second phenomenon should be linked to a new business dimension, finding its target in tourism and in a systematic exploitation of the cultural heritage.

Beyond the above-mentioned differences, both phenomena share a common trend: the contraction of the territorial field of action of the production, together with a simultaneous search for a firm size matching with the biggest cultural or territorial space that can be reached.

This concept, apparently having antithetical connotations, is not particularly unexpected because it is fairly typical of the post-modern economy and in our opinion it is inevitable even in small towns. However, we were impressed by the extreme and unusual effects that the mentioned events produced in their territory.

In fact, checking the relevant contexts due to the speed and strength of the transformations suffered in the space of a few years, we immediately noticed that the new situations of neglect and disuse of the smaller

3 “The adjective *pre-industrial* appears into the economic historiography since the fifties. Obviously it does not indicate the economic systems before the birth of the industry. It would be inaccurate, since the industry has always existed, even in different forms, because there was always the need to transform the materials (the means of industry). The term usually refers to contemporary economies preexisting to the contemporary industrialization started by the industrial revolution. Chronologically, the adjective *pre-industrial* literally taken, should embrace every period before industrialization, and therefore include even the earliest economies” (Malanima, 1995, p.246).

towns and their territory present clear differences compared to similar traceable cases in their territorial and urban history.

Specifically, taking as a basis of comparison the progressive emptying of the smaller towns and their countryside during the postwar period and the economic boom, we noticed that, in the current situation, the disused means of production are not isolated, being frequently situated near to other production facilities becoming stable. This mentioned current status presents several dissimilarities with the situations of productive disuse in the medium or big towns.

In the smaller centres, in fact, the potential intensive uses of the areas where the means of production are abandoned are not the same. The mechanism of urban income cannot develop into them quickly enough, unless there will be special conditions of spatial proximity to larger urban centres equipped with solid, diversified and tempting economies. This proximity is often due to a progressive approach to the small centres of major cities by expansion or territorial diffusion of settlements and their accesses.

The proximity between facilities related to different production cycles with no obvious morphological synergies led us to take a deeper look into the effects of the recent economic transformations in their environment. The objective consisted in test their quality and range in terms of production in order to figure out if there is any margin to improvement and what are the ways.

The analysis revealed a substantial inability of the recent transformations to activate new productive and urban uses in their territorial surroundings.

Basically, in the considered context of the smaller towns, the exchange of new production phenomena and the environment is almost always unilateral. The new dynamics do not produce urban economies and exceptionally the new firm size becomes a factor of collective development. The economy as a whole is a territorial economy, it is true, but exclusively as scale, when it has not an urban dimension. The work can no longer be generated in this isolated status and it consumes itself, expanding dramatically in the territory without communicate with it. As we have already said, the trend is to create dot links with the area. This relationships make certainly flexible the economic mechanism, but also unstable and unreliable, setting a production model extremely uncertain, especially in small towns and their territories.

Size and duration of the pre-industrial for the stability and the reliability of the productive landscape

This unstable and not reliable condition is clearly exacerbated by an objective difficulty that the urban and architectural discipline suffers when planning in similar contexts.

As a matter of fact, the transformation projects of the territory in minor centres cannot find the typical coordinates of urban references. They are therefore unable to “make city” and generate urban economies in order to support and integrate of business processes that are gradually being settled.

The density problems and the lack of “mixité” between activities and consolidated public spaces, have to be identified as causes that make uncertain the design process and the definition of its objectives.

The public space that is hardly identified and proposed in the effective interventions shows obvious limitations in terms of role. In fact, almost always, only the inhabitants leisure or the tourism uses are intercepted and connected with the other territorial components. In this way, the public space is no longer the necessary nexus between dwelling and manufacturing practices and its historic role as link in smaller cities is being permanently lost.

Ultimately, we found in the landscape an additional factor of anxiety for the project in the mentioned contexts.

This last one, considered the characteristics of the new post-industrial economies and their uncertainty, despite being initially an economic resource for the smaller towns, it became a barrier to their productive regeneration⁴.

4 A recent meeting held at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Florence titled “Landscapes in change. The landscape approach to the transformation of the European city” (coordinators: Annick Magnier, Maurizio



In these contexts, its socially significant features combined with its new productive dimension in cultural and ecological terms could make it become an useful tool for the transformation of the mutable spaces in the city and the multiplication of interactions between the existing ways of production aiming to anchor them.

This did not happen because, despite the premises, the landscape project has been reduced to the inclusion of geometries depleting all the potential of transformation and adaptation of the context exclusively with the typical schemes of the architectural composition.

The protection and mimesis requirements oppressed the project intentions and prevented the unblocking of new landscape dynamics which could allow the achievement of new and better economic and social dynamics.

So in this way the project of landscape became a project on the landscape.

It means a project that is based only on the inclusion of an object in a immovable settlement making this action necessarily subjected to mitigation and compensation measures.

In fact, any change of the status taking place in a static settlement is subjected to an external perception of its relationship with the context and so it is always and inevitably internally inconsistent, mainly in terms of probability, duration and extension of the effects.

A similar project modality, linked to a distorted conception of the landscape and fully based on the care of the outside, does not seem the best idea for the purpose of identification and definition of the stability and reliability conditions for the post-modern economies that hit small towns.

However, the last opportunity that they have to avoid a definitive failure into the ruins of modernity (Augé, 2003) can be only exploited by means of the strengthening and improvement of the ongoing production processes through a renewed landscape project.

Some guidelines for its different conception and interpretation came from the analysis that we carry out on the facilities of abandoned economies, belonging in most cases to pre-industrial production models. These inner workings, in spite of their fragmentary condition and dispersion and different to similar findings occurred in of large cities areas, have enabled the reconstruction, even partial, of the historical evolution of the productive dynamic that lighted them up (Figure 2).



Figure 2 | The surroundings of an industrial unit at Bazzano (AQ), authors' picture

From the stratification of different processes and their changes in the course of time it is born a description of the landscape that differs from the usual morphological representations, based on a fixed and external point of view, or with a perceptive nature, made through an external but shifting point of view .

Morandi) has helped to highlight how the landscape is an analytical tool able to transform the mutable spaces in accordance with socially significant characteristics.

Our description has indeed followed the flows of the object in transformation and the final representation of territories that we got refers exclusively to the inner mechanisms of the landscape.

In contrast to our common vision, such a description of the landscape redefines it as a production line in continuous action rather than as a progressive and dynamic accumulation of tools and manufacturing waste more or less operating and usable. *Id est*, they are not the means of production of the territory to structure and set the landscape but the production processes of which they were a mechanism or waste-products.

In our opinion the importance of these conceptual changes must not be underestimated. In effect the description of the landscape through the deep knowledge of the production processes which settled it give us a tool that is able to guide the design choices for the consolidation of the economy cycles taking place in the considered context.

In fact, the abandoned facilities allow the reconstruction of the sequence and duration of the agricultural and manufacturing production cycle to which they belonged, as well as they may offer other strategic information such as the level of stability of the process in question and its territorial extension in the time. These are interesting data that play a main role in identifying what must be the new processes to enable or engage in the territory. Actually, these information could base the project choices on the degree of reliability of production or on the geographical widespread of processes activated by lost dynamics.

In this way, the reconstruction of the pre-industrial production cycles and the analysis of their spatial and temporal potentialities may then contribute to establish the post-industrial economies in the small towns and their territory.

It will then necessary to develop the ability to intercept the best and most profitable opportunities in order to link and stratify different production processes enabling them to bring out stronger and more balanced forms of economic exchanges.

Following this method, the expectations of reconstruction of the spatial relationship will always be new and bearers of a urban concept of the economy able to generate links of reciprocity and one-to-one relationships between the production model and the territory where it operates.

A new link between territory and post-modern economy that will be able to generate new models of contemporary landscape restoring the existing ones (Figure 3).



Figure 3 | Set of gears for the mechanics of the new landscape, authors' drawing



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