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Paolo Avarello

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edited by **Biancamaria Rizzo**
Manuela Fornani
Tiziana Masuzzo, Luigi Iorio
Paola Altobelli, Giuseppe De Togni
Maria Valeria Erba, Mina Di Marino

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Ecological network in the urban design

*Maria Valeria Erba,
Mina Di Marino*

The ecological network map of the Province of Milan is a product of a specific discipline (the landscape ecology), it is applied on territory to point out the ecological criticalities and potentials and to increase the common sensitiveness of the users and the planners.

As planners we have experimented a specific urban design methodology to project some nodes of the ecological network of Milan.

The methodology introduces the ecological topics (corridors, hazards, nodes) in the territorial complexity that marks them out. The territorial complexity is originated by urban increase, by infrastructural and environmental characters of the area. The characters are evidenced through a specific lecture of planning tools, applied at different levels.

The first aim is advertising to preserve and to improve the contents and the quality of the ecological network of Milan, the second aim proposes to define specific interventions, aimed at resolving criticalities and potentials, to conserve the natural areas, to reshape the urban fringes, to exploit the territorial potentials. The experimentation in teaching methodology carried out through the architectural thesis at the Politecnico of Milan looks on areas of the north-west of the Province of Milan (towards the Ticino river) and areas of the north of the Province of Milan, along the Lambro river, towards the Monza town.

The areas are threatened by urbanizations, but there are natural elements, traces of traditional agricultural landscape and architectural identities.

The starting point of the planning and design experimentation is the Ecological network map of the Province of Milan, the professor Malcevski worked it out at the end of 1990, for the Territorial plan of the Province (1998).

The increase of the surface of urbanised land produces pressure on natural heritage, it threatens the structure of landscapes naturalness and it may compromise the ecosystem of the areas. The ecosystem based on environmental relations with own roles is able to maintain the water cycle, to absorb the pollution produced by human activities. Re-establishing roles means recovering environmental functions.

Recognizing, preserving and strengthening the ecological network of the Province of Milan

The ecological network project is an essential component of the territorial plan of Milan, focused on redrawing and enforcing the ecosystem and recognising the existing resources, preserving and improving the environmental quality. The ecological network concept clashes to the urban increase, in order to recreate the natural ecosystem, as well as reach of physical, chemical, biologic connections. Nowadays the increase of human activities on the territory brings about a subdivided and impoverished ecosystem. The relevance of the ecological network map is rebuilding the existing ecosystem, in order to point out elements of environmental value not compromised by urban development.

The ecological network takes into account corridors (green network and blue network) and zones linking protected sites and other areas of national and regional importance. The project of ecological

network points out rivers, strips, areas, routes, in order to preserve and to enhance the ecosystem and to enrich the biodiversity. The map of the Province of Milan identifies two principal rivers that define two important fluvial systems (the Ticino park and the Adda park), the areas protected by regional parks, the primary and secondary fluvial corridors, the existing areas to strength with ecological structures and European protected sites. The ecological network map is a relevant interpretative tool addressed at the large scale and at the local scale, as we will see in the interventions.

The environmental exploitation through the urban interventions

The ecological network map is a tool to evaluate the local sustainable development, the interventions represent the following step and a further development in order to answer to the ecological aim, as well as urban planning, social and economic aim.

The designs take into account existing and potential natural heritage, the ecosystems that they need to be redraw or to be transformed, the urban development, the infrastructural system. The case study areas are the natural fluvial system along the Lambro river and the artificial fluvial system along the Villoresi canal, where the experimentation show the environmental sustainable project and many disagreement between the planning policies at large and local scale.

Many agricultural elements (tree lines, hedges, historical farms) characterize the landscape, specifically where there isn't an increasing population density.

The first case study area regards the urban agglomerations between

Milan and Monza, that are Brugherio, Sesto San Giovanni and Cologno Monzese, the urban development along the infrastructures makes not visible the border between the municipalities.

The second case study area regards the ecological network and the villages between Pero and Castano Primo, where there are relevant protected area, the Rocolo Park and the Ticino Park.

The methodology is based on the analysis of planning and design tools, the identifying of natural existing heritage and the urbanization state of the context.