

# THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT IN THE URBAN REGENERATION PROGRAMS

## Prospects and potentialities for smaller villages

Veronica Strippoli

section	typology	DOI
ARCHITECTURE	ESSAYS & VIEWPOINT	<a href="https://doi.org/10.19229/978-88-5509-232-6/542021">doi.org/10.19229/978-88-5509-232-6/542021</a>

### ABSTRACT

The paper develops the topic of urban regeneration starting from the peculiarities, both in terms of value and criticality of the smaller settlements and villages, supposing the size and shape as a term of comparison with the vision of a 'parcelled' city. Possible regeneration paradigms, processes that are scalable and adaptable to urban realities with different dimensions and qualitative characteristics, are therefore investigated. This assumption determines a model both for the re-appropriation of smaller settlements and villages, strong in a proclaimed and no-longer valued identity, and of the suburbs, centralizing problems and degradation. The current urban scenario is configured as a container of complexity in which the project loses its self-referentiality and assumes the role of coordinator in the urban regeneration programs, decreeing the importance of the interdisciplinary process.

### KEYWORDS

urban regeneration, smaller settlements, city, urban project, interdisciplinarity

**Veronica Strippoli**, Engineer-Architect and PhD Candidate at the Department of Civil Engineering of the 'Tor Vergata' University of Rome (Italy), she carries out her research activities about the urban regeneration and the role of the architectural and urban project toward a multidisciplinary vision. Mob. +39 388/34.40.591 | E-mail: [vero.strippoli@gmail.com](mailto:vero.strippoli@gmail.com)

Urban countryside or rural city? Two diverse viewpoints for two complementary but inseparable concepts either a city-countryside or a countryside-city: a countryside built with the city or a city shaped by the countryside (Donadieu, 2013, p. 77). The scenario to which we refer is a complex territory, the narrator of confused traces between rural and anthropic signs, in which the plots lose their sense of regulatory matrices, from uncontrolled urban expansion. Morphologies with fragmented margins, in which city and countryside permeate, towards the progressive loss of the clear identity distinction. The smaller villages (Fig. 1), as urbanized areas formed following the birth of agricultural, industrial or commercial centres, are generally located outside the city or on the edge of the hamlets. Inattentive functional systems, irreverent towards the rooted rural context, assailants of a rarely man-made landscape. The graft of these urban poles takes place in response to the growing condition of housing need, a settlement mechanism, however, orphan of qualifying design fundamentals, rather outlined by a process not yet concluded, that lives in expectation of fragments of urbanization aimed at providing services for inhabitants. A recurring paradigm that in many cases remains only a will that does not evolve in planned transformations, a limitation that turns into a constant condition of lack, a trait now considered characteristic of the smaller villages.

Their constituent characteristic makes them morphologies suspended between urban and rural devoid of contextual value and coherence, in which the reasons for their aggregation have found their own structure with a provisionally definitive flavour (Falzetti, 2014, p. 42) surviving in a marginal condition that has lost the sense of limit, understood as the division between two essences of different nature and matrices. Signs of a 'city in extension'<sup>1</sup> that emerges against the background of the rural landscape, an agricultural countryside that has gradually undergone the expansive action of urban micro-consistencies rooted in it. As background to this blind settlement growth, dissonant with respect to its original traces, the villages emerge, clusters with the soft lines of the pre-existing natural landscape. The hamlets (Fig. 2), although often associated with the smaller villages by a similar surrounding settlement condition, appear as characteristic signs in the natural landscapes, witnesses of anthropic pre-existence in rural contexts. A prerequisite made possible by their strong historical-cultural value, the effect of yesteryear events and subsequent ones throughout history. A property that favours them over more recent rural settlement contexts, less charged with feelings so clearly expressed. They play the role of narrators of a qualifying virtue capable of producing a substantial differentiation from the smaller centres, invested only by the fate of anonymity and by an occupation of land that took place without an evident generating and regulating fundamental, regardless of the marked lines of strength of the territory.

These realities scattered in the extra-urban territory, be they villages or minor settlements with recent origins not always rooted in a context of historical-cultural value, are characterized by a low population density, destined to decrease over time in favour of the migratory phenomenon towards metropolitan contexts. These local wounds affect villages and smaller settlements in equal measure, despite the explicit qualitative differ-

entiation, producing as inevitable consequence, the loss of quality of the landscape and territorial identities. From this double typology of urbanization of the territory, varying between value and heritage, diffusion and fragility, the search for a model of transformation emerges. We start from the two contingent realities: the village whose main problem is due to the partial lack of functions and services that leads to the progressive abandonment, and the smaller settlements with inadequate functions and services, insufficient to demand (Francini et alii, 2012).

United by the condition of lack, the two described realities lend themselves to the analysis of the criticalities that mark the territory and to the observation of how the urban regeneration program can operate on them. The reappropriation and reactivation of the territories become the objectives of this program, achievable through the mediation of the urban project, used as a formal and social tool of an integrated process. It investigates the role of the architectural project as a container of 'actions' aimed at revitalizing the local territorial context, allowing the integration of multiple levels of knowledge operating for the regeneration of compromised urban realities. The described investigation is aimed at identifying implementation paradigms of a design matrix, capable of working on the territory to obtain the about-turn, the result of the enhancement of smaller villages and the revaluation of hamlets. Therefore, a possible transposition of the urban regeneration model from cities to small-scale territorial contexts is hypothesized, a subject of great interest today for metropolitan contexts but also fitting for smaller settlements and villages. So, the study is developed both in formal terms, aimed as mentioned at the identification of paradigms measured to the dimension of the realities in question, and in social terms, to identify which is their connection and their action on the territory; an interdisciplinary program that aims at the regeneration of the measured urban system.

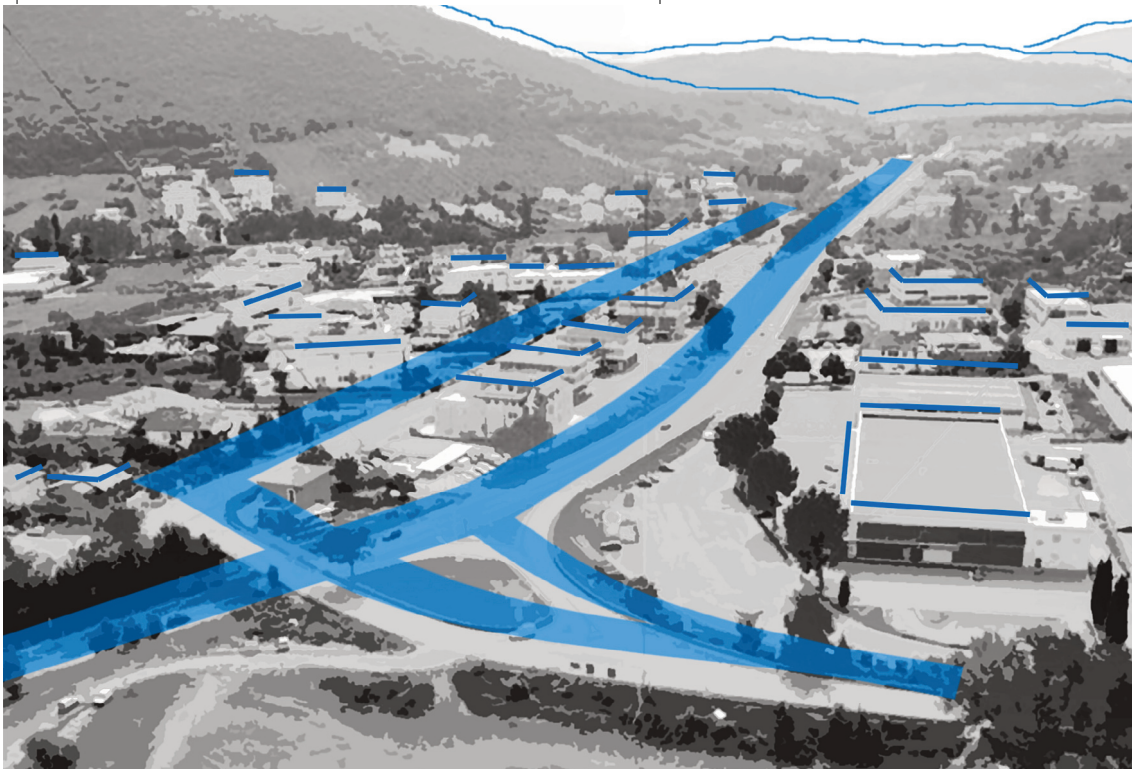
**Paradigms for the integrated regeneration** | Starting from the recurring condition of 'lack' that compares the two realities, the denied elements are assimilated as critical areas from which starting to plan the regenerative actions. The deprivation of functional hinges, identifiable in everything that becomes a service for the inhabitant, determines a condition of depletion articulated in form and substance, while the lack of physical systems results in an ineffective solution to the needs of the city user. According to Ramazzotti (2014b, p. 20), we read the criticalities of the territory: due to the settlement dispersion, or in the countryside, or the building densities of the two polarities; still due to the residential architecture and its relationship with the soil, the methods of agricultural production, urban planning rules, industrial dislocations generated by administrative fragmentation and the lack of an overall vision. In this context, the smaller settlements (and the villages) are a weak element to be reinserted in a delicate balance between protection and regeneration. In anticipating an action aimed at filling the shortcomings found, we rely on the process of enhancing local identity strengths, incisive for their historical-cultural-traditional character, distinguishable in urban micro-realities. The contained dimension that characterizes them is assumed as a condition that facilitates localized ac-

tion, proposing the resolution of critical issues through a process that can be identified in three types of implementation: punctiform, linear and superficial (Figg. 3-5).

The actions to be taken must necessarily be based on the 'deteriorated urban body', in response to the needs declared by the physical place and by those who use it. The condition of punctual criticality is attributable to the identification of urban voids and the presence of disused buildings in the settlement fabric. In this precise circumstance, the regeneration project can provide a punctual formal solution consisting of a set of localized interventions connected in a collaborative network. A network of serial interferences aimed at the redevelopment of limited areas, capable of extending the revitalizing action to the entire urban context through connections. A series of gauges identifiable in evident architectural signs, with a strong formal value, physical connections that give back a sign in the urban territory; or as context connections that relate interventions characterized by the same architectural language.

By maintaining the observation on the form of the criticalities, further cognitive actions are implemented, actions that work on the linear components of the urban structure: the edges. The design action tries to recompose the discontinuities between the built and the open space. Urban layouts that are configured as redevelopment paths aimed at reorganizing and reconfiguring the marginal identity, restoring the sign of a limit that is often missing in these cases. Project actions aimed at providing a continuous or discontinuous footprint, which materializes in plan and elevation, to rebalance the relationship between buildings and agriculture. In contexts where the urban criticality is configured on extended parts, for which punctual and linear intervention is not able to guarantee effective rehabilitation, the regenerative action must increase its boundaries of intervention. In this case, the project proposals must also include soil interventions, capable of re-forming a unit of language. An action of this type turns out to be the most invasive but also the most innovative since it proposes a radical transformation of the existing structure and at the same time respectful of the original traces.

The expressed critical issues are the manifest of binding wounds, which are formalized in the lack of support architectures, transferring the problem from function to form. The punctual, linear or superficial design solution should not be evaluated in a condition in its own right, but rather accepted in a propositional perspective of implementational suggestions capable of interacting and living together in the same urban context; a progressive process adaptable to realities with different qualitative characteristics. In these circumstances, the urban project proclaims itself as a regeneration activator to restore the qualifying identity, affected by the condition of abandonment and degradation in which the urban micro-dimensions live. Their spatial and functional reconfiguration is feasible through focused action, a process of re-appropriation of the territory aimed at making minor realities resilient. The first step towards the goal is certainly working on the signs of alteration to break the isolation in which the smaller settlement and villages are crystallized. In these terms, an operation of appropriation of the territory is therefore necessary, made possible through the multidisciplinary overlap of implementation levels. According



**Fig. 1** | The smaller settlement: the signs of a rural and man-made territory (credit: V. Strippoli, 2020).

**Fig. 2** | The villages: the historical tracks of the anthropic presence in the rural context (credit: V. Strippoli, 2020).

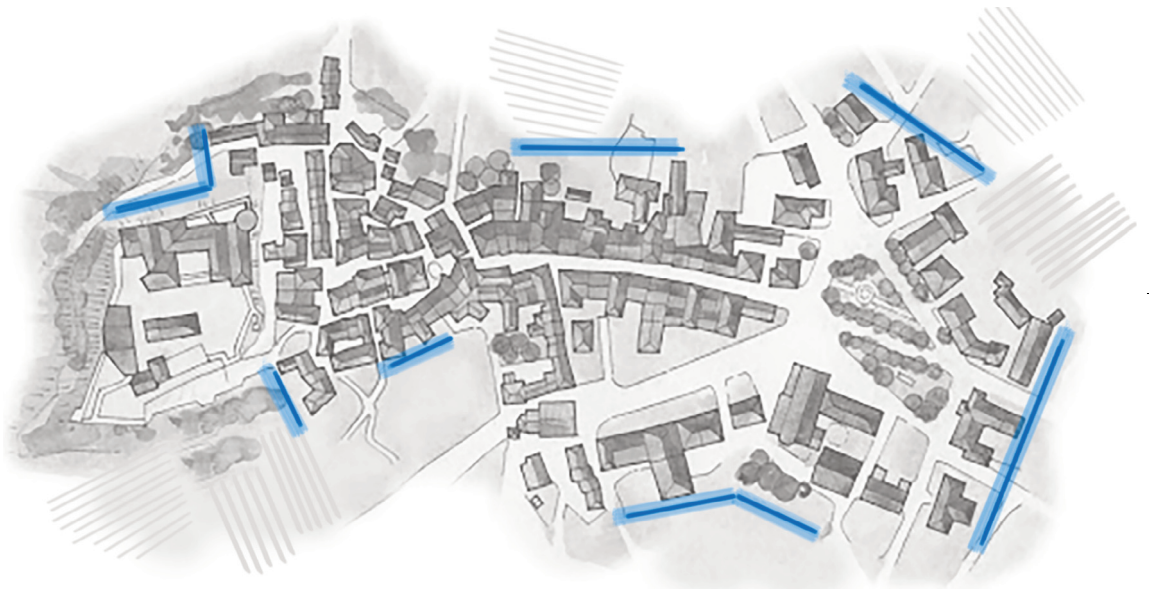
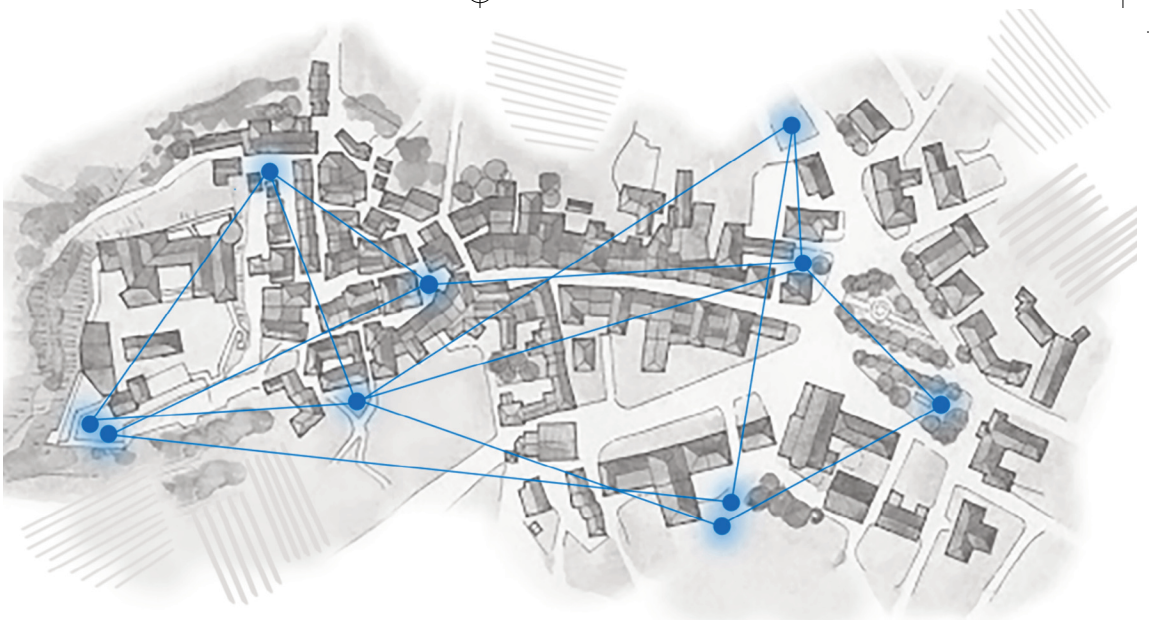
*Next Page*

**Fig. 3** | Punctual regeneration paradigm (credit: V. Strippoli, 2020).

**Fig. 4** | Linear regeneration paradigm (credit: V. Strippoli, 2020).

**Fig. 5** | Superficial regeneration paradigm (credit: V. Strippoli, 2020).





to Falzetti (2014, p. 45), starting from this representation of 'parallel levels', we can launch a 'landscape figure' that is compared with the compliant figures slowly installed based on the needs of the inhabitants, that reflect the rhythm and character of the place in which they are inserted, where the 'actors', who, in representing the scene perform the role assigned to them, are necessarily involved in a process of continuous cross-referencing, in the sign of what is essentially the time they come from has transmitted to them. For this reason, the meeting and the wedge between them can result, in the scalar relationship between the parties, the stronger the more incident will be the operation of re-involvement in the territory of the elements of contrast and fragmentation, such as the infrastructure, widespread urbanization, non-hierarchical connections, inadequate services.

Thus, appear territorial signs to act on, urban presences and absences of design derivation, whose formal attitude finds correspondence in different disciplinary applications. A relationship of coexistence between multidisciplinary issues, in which urban design represents the graft matrix of socio-economic and psychological-cultural processes typical of urban regeneration (Vicari Haddock, 2009). An analytical approach through which it is possible to highlight the potential of smaller settlements or villages, linked both to the enhancement of identity architectures and to the enhancement of services. The implementation of the potentialities is aimed at increasing the local economy and the offer of services for the inhabitant; solutions capable of converting the isolated smaller settlements into individualities of rural tourism; witnesses of a rediscovered will aimed at rediscovering the origins, places of relaxation following slow time and rehabilitated contact with the territory. The revitalization of the villages and minor settlements for tourism is one of the possible developments addressed by a declared will, that hopes to re-inhabit the rural areas and re-establish the interrupted contact with the original nature.

The strategy for reactivation is linked to hospitality, to a slow model to be contrasted with the fast paces of the metropolitan city. The conscious and sustainable use of local resources is the promoting factor, heir to a culture of enhancement and care of the surrounding area, curator of ancient artisan knowledge capable of promoting the use of local, organic and typical products of the host land, today renamed '0 km products', poles of attraction for a sought-after agri-food tourism. Therefore, new forms of slow tourism made possible by the presence of architectures that restore the ancient guesthouses. Domestic hospitality is preferred to luxurious but sterile accommodation systems, a way to taste the veracity and authenticity of the territory. In response to this need, a 'widespread' method is disclosed, which is grafted into the pre-existing, a type of accommodation that is present but hidden within traditional urban signs. A model that allows the reuse of existing buildings even in partial form, revealing itself as an example of connected and integrated punctual regeneration, capable of responding to precise architectural and economic needs. The implemented mechanisms are therefore innovative in the form but conservative in the content, becoming traditional receivers, declinable according to contingent tourist trends.

An unfinished debate in which characterizing disciplines carry out a contaminating action, coordinated by the skilful planning knowledge of the architectural project, which

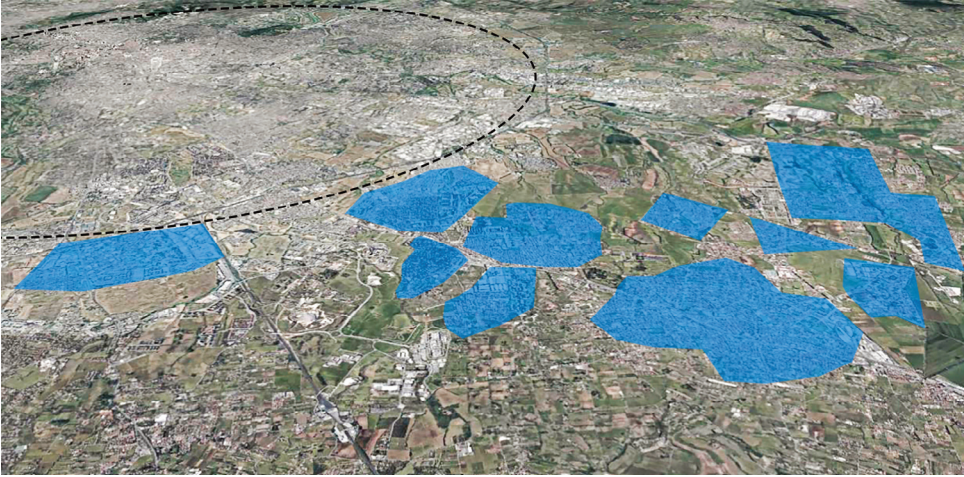


Fig. 6 | A hypothesis of splitting up on suburban metropolitan areas of Rome (credit: V. Strippoli, 2020).

can enclose in the intervention the answer to different requests. It is clear how fruitful connections are realized in a single design container, capable of generating a complete implementation program, that fulfils the needs of different nature expressed by the city user. The declared prospects can enhance the potentiality of the area through complex programs with defined prerequisites, through an integrated action for the redemption of smaller villages. The internal realities as faithful conservatives of traditional essences and custodians of ancient values, in evolving into a renewed urban organism have restored their original attitudes. A transfer process that starts from the promotion of ancient skills and crafts and reformulates them in a contemporary key, placing the technological and innovative means as a tool to achieve the goal (Berizzi and Rocchelli, 2019).

### **Regeneration strategies shifted from micro to macro: a hypothesis to be explored |**

The intervention paradigms presented are assumed to be scalable to dimensionally larger realities. This statement starts from the assumption that the metropolitan city is comparable to an organism, the result of the sum of smaller realities. To realize this regeneration strategy, it is necessary to define the intervention areas where to explore the response of the paradigms described above, grasping those reactivation mechanisms that have been qualifying for the villages and smaller settlements. Through a process of fragmentation (Fig. 6) of the urban fabric, we can determine the limited areas that can be assimilated in size to those of smaller urban contexts.

The smaller settlements become the reference system, as they are distinguished by the obvious possibility of being physically identifiable due to their small size, not comparable to the extension of the city. Examples with a morphology outlined and distilled by perceptible territorial signs, highlighted by a clear separation between built and non-



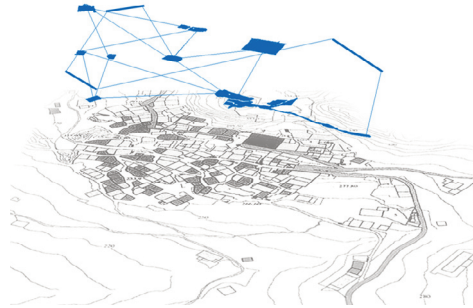
built. The line to follow, although conceivable, is not feasible to the metropolitan context with a single immediate step. The peripheries constitute the terrain in which to experiment this strategy, as they are identified as enclaves, marginal and fragmented areas, apparently born without a regulating fundamental, places of manifestations of the urban decay and social discomfort (Francini et alii, 2018). However, according to Falzetti (2017, p. 93), the suburbs are not just uncertain and vague territories, in which the apparent absence of rules reinforces 'a condition where everything is possible, therefore allowed, and every rule is doomed to failure'. Even these territories become the noble objects of a research that aims to know the training rules, to establish the project in procedural terms, placing itself in continuity with the verified training mechanisms. No longer 'fragments without quality' the suburbs, the city-countryside margins, the paths, the urban units of the small towns return as problem data.

A necessary prerequisite is, therefore, the reasoning on the urban morphology of neighbourhoods and suburbs, which constitute occasions for parallelism between the concept of margin, typical of the smaller settlements, and that of the limit between urban districts. An evident sign in some cases, distinguished by the presence of a physical limit in the ground and/or in elevation, an anthropic or natural track, recognizable in a road, in a row of trees, in a building, etc. A presence, however, is not always identifiable through a physical sign, as the city presents itself as an urban form with an identity that is not clearly marked, of which it is difficult to guess the beginning and the end of the entity to be defined. In this sense, the process to recognize the district, as a delimited area, must follow the recognition of focal points of identification: the civic and/or administrative place, the building for sacredness, for training and areas for primary commerce. Legitimate presences of a localized and distinct territory, which through their areas of influence limit and identify the neighbourhood identity. A clear process that is completed with the recognition of specific areas of intervention, in which problems actualize. Weakening signs of a progressive loss of quality, caused by the presence of disused buildings, squares that have lost their reason to be, parks in a state of neglect, which become manifestations of evident degradation and catalysts of social problems. These are the demanding opportunities for regeneration in the city, fertile ground for the implementation of paradigms already tested in smaller villages, in which the transition from micro regeneration to macro regeneration is finalized (Carta, 2013; Figg. 7, 8).

**A prospect of future development** | The observations made show the possible analogies of the application of regenerative processes to urban realities of different qualities and sizes. Therefore, it is possible to make a subsequent step, which puts in parallel places far from each other for morphological, dimensional and geographical characteristics. A new interpretation of urban regeneration programs is therefore provided, focused on the sociological perspective of the project. For this to happen, the project, in its entirety, must be able to listen to the needs and requirements expressed by the inhabitant with a fruitful discussion between the parties. Villages, smaller settlements and cities are

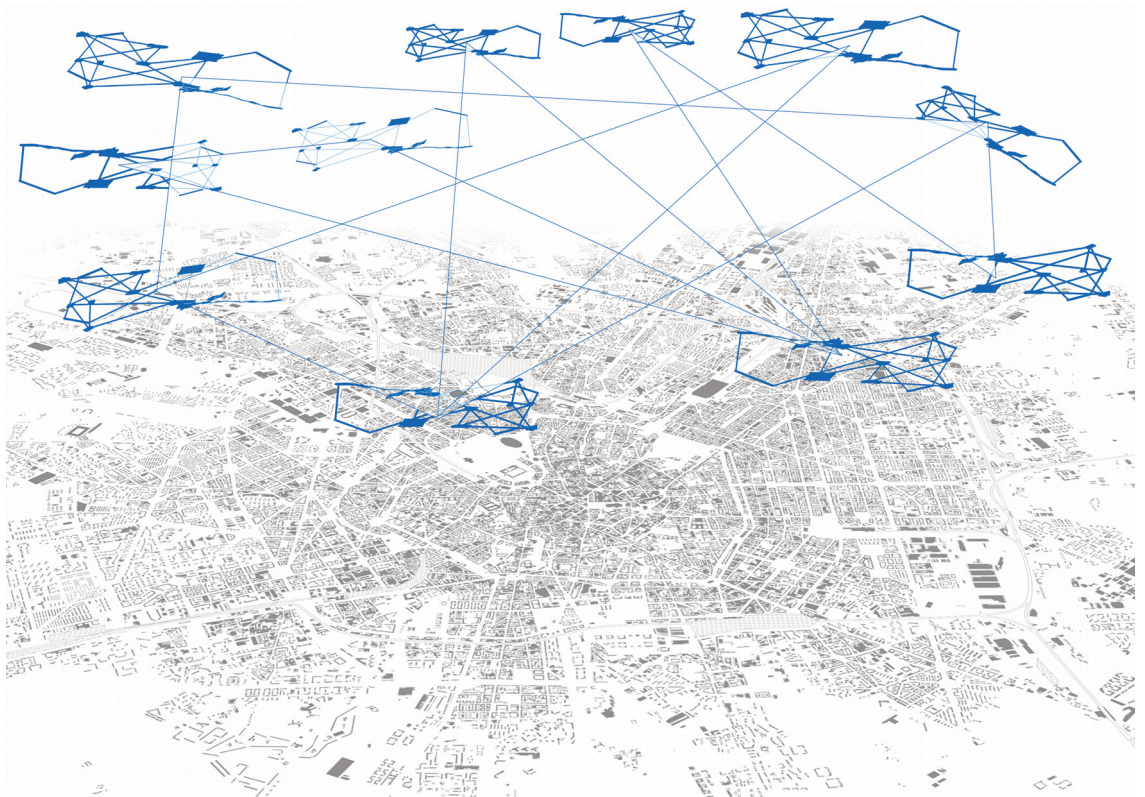
**Fig. 7 |** Regeneration paradigm on smaller settlements and villages (credit: V. Strippoli, 2020).

**Fig. 8 |** Regeneration paradigm in the metropolitan city (credit: V. Strippoli, 2020).

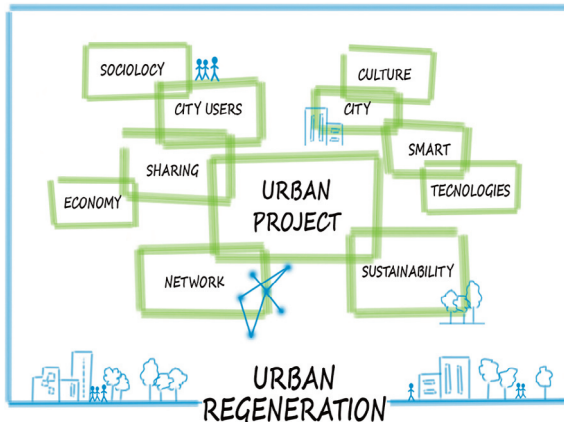


generally already equipped with spaces for socializing, with architectures designed to be the places of sharing that the city user enjoys. Too often, these widespread realities reach levels of absolute imbalance, involved in social depletion and low levels of security: the only characteristic is to belong to places without belonging to men.

In this reading, the participatory design is seen as a success factor for the redevelopment of territories inside and outside the city (Bertell and De Vita, 2013). A process that appears more accessible in the limited contexts of smaller settlements or villages, as the level of sociality, sharing and active participation is an element that naturally belongs to it. The measure becomes the key to conduct the research with. The repeatability of these processes is hoped in the neighbourhood dimension, although the level of genetically nuzzled sociality is much lower in metropolitan contexts. A two-way relationship is es-



The role of the architectural project in the urban regeneration programs. Prospects and potentialities for smaller villages by Strippoli V. | pp. 62-73



**Fig. 9** | Superficial regeneration paradigm (credit: V. Strippoli, 2020).

tablished between man and city, an ever-changing dialogue subject to the variable needs of the citizen. Thus, a new way of living, of experiencing the urban reality and interacting with it is manifested.

It is therefore evident how urban regeneration can also open to new paradigms of living, through the adoption of the policy of reuse and the sustainable transformation of the urban organism; implementation models aimed at improving the context and its social use. A double perspective of reuse is therefore expressed, materially linked to the functional aspect of the building, as regards the building recovery and ideally connected to the reinstatement of the use of the urban area for social sharing. Aspects of different nature match in the container of urban regeneration (Fig. 9), making it an effective means for the sustainable rehabilitation of cities and to improve the quality of life. It is equally evident how this requalifying step can be obtained through intervention systems valid for smaller villages and conceivable for cities, which provide design solutions of different extension applicable to different scales: interventions with a punctual, linear or extended character to a larger surface.

It is feasible to express a hypothesis of development of the model in metropolitan contexts, implemented in localized areas limited to the extension of the district. However, this application leads to different outcomes, determined by the different urban matrices and by the various objective characteristics, expression of the areas taken into consideration. A non-deterministic application method that should still be deepened and investigated, examining the possibility of new contaminations of different professional sectors. The complexity of the city, therefore, does not allow to respond to regeneration through a single study, it demonstrates the presence of a debate not yet concluded, open to future interactions aimed at improving the application process. The hypothesized outcome sees the application of possible solutions deriving from a fruitful interdisciplinary interaction, that can provide the answer to the problem, contributing to the drafting of the program for the regeneration of the territory. The urban re-

generation thus assumes the role of a multidisciplinary container, a place for the coexistence of sectoral issues of which the project has assumed the role of coordinator. A system of synthesis applicable to the different contexts of the variable historical-urban configurations of the territorial realities, which is defined through an organized and clear model, tracked by main guidelines but still open to future experimentation among different disciplinary fields.

## Notes

1) According to Ramazzotti (2014a, p. 7) the city in extension is a conjecture about a new form of city, as latent as possible. The term coined by G. Samonà constitutes a hub for the PRIN research entitled 'From the Urbanized Countryside to the City in Extension – The Planning Rules of the Territory Architecture of the Minor Settlements' carried out at the 'Tor Vergata' University of Rome (2011-2014). About forty years after Samonà's writings, the term refers to an urban condition that is still current and represents a possible hub for developing topics relating to the present critical issues of villages and smaller settlements.

## References

- Berizzi, C. and Rocchelli, L. (2019), *Borghi Rinati – Paesaggi abbandonati e interventi di rigenerazione*, Il Poligrafo, Padova.
- Bertell, L. and De Vita, A. (eds) (2013), *Una città da abitare – Rigenerazione urbana e processi partecipativi*, Carocci Editore, Roma.
- Carta, M. (2013), "Periferie, riserve di resilienza per le città in evoluzione", in Lino, B. (ed.), *Periferie in trasformazione – Riflessioni dai 'margini' delle città*, Alinea Editrice, Città di Castello, pp. 9-16.
- Donadieu, P. (2013), *Campagne urbane – Una nuova proposta di paesaggio della città*, Donzelli, Roma.
- Falzetti, A. (2017), "Metodo e Progetto", in Falzetti, A. (ed.), *La città in estensione | The extended city*, Gangemi Editore, Roma, pp. 91-99.
- Falzetti, A. (2014), "La Salaria Nuova – Un'architettura in bianco e nero", in Ramazzotti, L. (ed.), *Campagna urbana – La città in estensione nella bassa Sabina*, Gangemi Editore, Roma, pp. 41-55.
- Francini, M., Colucci, M., Palermo, A. and Viapiana, M. F. (2018), *La rigenerazione urbana dei tessuti periferici a valenza storica – Declinazioni, possibili scenari e strategie*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Francini, M., Colucci, M., Palermo, A. and Viapiana, M. F. (2012), *I centri storici minori – Strategie di rigenerazione funzionale*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Ramazzotti, L. (2014a), "La campagna e l'inconscio della città", in Ramazzotti, L. (ed.), *Campagna urbana – La città in estensione nella bassa Sabina*, Gangemi, Roma, pp. 7-13.
- Ramazzotti, L. (2014b), "Scritture in architettura per campagne urbane", in Ramazzotti, L. (ed.), *Campagna urbana – La città in estensione nella bassa Sabina*, Gangemi, Roma, pp. 15-27.
- Vicari Haddock, S. (2009), "La rigenerazione urbana: un concetto da rigenerare", in Vicari Haddock, S. and Moulaert, F. (eds), *Rigenerare le città – Pratiche di innovazione sociale nelle città europee*, Il Mulino, Bologna, pp. 19-50.