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Collana diretta da Luisa Ferro e Federica Pocaterra

The project presented here originates from a consultancy on the problem of large-scale enhancement of the historical landscape heritage Hakka in Huiyang (Huizhou prefecture, Guangdong Province, PRC) carried out by the School of Civil Architecture of the Politecnico di Milano based on a cooperation agreement with the Office of Rural and Urban Planning of Huizhou Prefecture stipulated in 2010 and lasted until 2013, with a queue in 2015. The project was elaborated by a multidisciplinary team from the Politecnico di Milano departments DASTU and ABC. After its partial presentation in 2011 to Huizhou authorities, and in two exhibitions in Milan in 2012 and 2013, we publish here now the complete research with all the detailed projects considering that its methodological approach resulted relevant for the feedback it had in the update of the Huiyang Master Plan published in 2021, that follows historical landscape and architectural heritage enhancement criteria suggested by the research.

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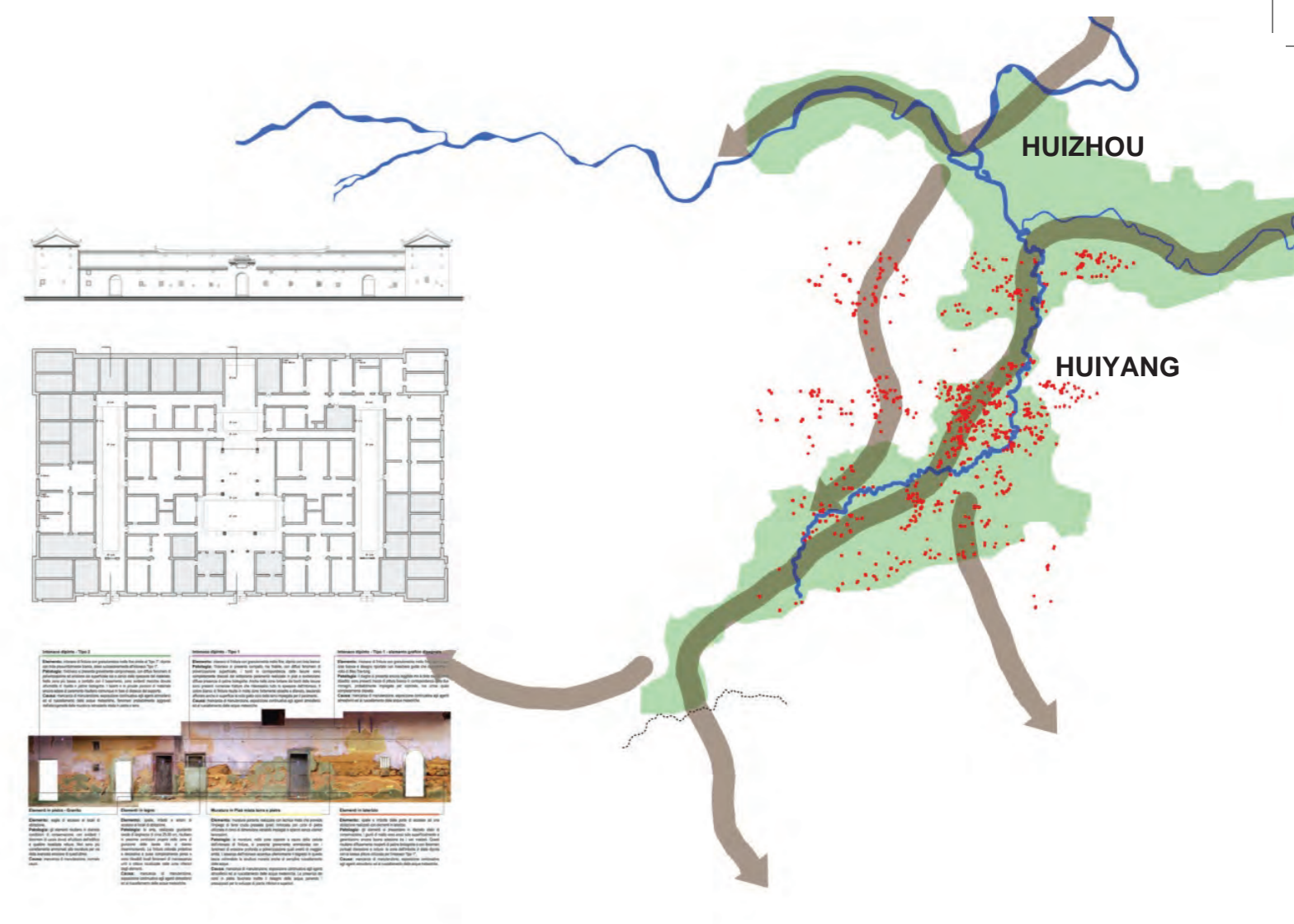
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Rebuilding from the countryside. Huiyang Hakka Heritage Conservation Project

Edited by
Zhen Chen, Maurizio Meriggi, Zhu Tan



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从农村开始重建。
惠阳客家古迹 保护项目

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The work presented in this book is originated from a consultancy report from the School of Civil Architecture of the Milan Polytechnic for the Office of Rural and Urban Planning of the Huizhou Prefecture (Guangdong Province). The work is part of the actions carried out by the Italy-Guangdong Committee on Territorial Partnerships following agreements stipulated between the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) and the Government of the Guangdong Province of the People's Republic of China (Resolution n. 99/2007 of 28 September 2007 of the Interministerial Committee for Economic Planning relating to the financing of the multi-regional program for the support of relations of the regional territories with China).

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Preservation project and urban restructuring. Hakka villages in the context of Huyang Master Plan.*

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Marialessandra Secchi

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1. E.N. Rogers, *Architettura, misura e grandezza dell'uomo [Architecture, measure and greatness of man]*, ed. by S. Maffioletti. Padova: il Poligrafo, 2010, p. 560.

2. The two different processes have been characterized from the point of view of land use transformation as follows: "Taken together, a city-centred urban sprawl at the top and a dispersed rural-based industrialisation at the bottom appear to be the two concurrent processes of urbanisation that have contributed to the recent expansion of non-agricultural land use in the context of a rapidly urbanising and globalising regional economy." in George C. S. Lin, 'Reproducing Spaces of Chinese Urbanisation: New City-based and Land-centred Urban Transformation', *Urban Studies*, August 2007 44: 1827-1855.

3. The administrative uncertainty relates to land propriety status. Whose the land? is the main question of conflictual and uncertain answer. This uncertainty is giving way to frequent protest. See 'China's farmland. This land is my land', *the Economist*, Feb 14th 2008 < <http://www.economist.com/node/10696084> > [accessed 03/06/2023.]

4. On the recent processes of China suburbanization confront the general overview given in Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008.

"...to destroy without a reason it is criminal, but to preserve without a reason is coward. To build and to destroy are meaningless words if they are depleted of the moral content of culture"¹.

The proposal for a tourism plan in the fast developing context of Huyang district considers as a main goal the preservation of the landscape and agricultural villages: a diffused heritage built during the centuries and marked by the presence of the Hakka population.

The preservation project is focused not on the fast pace of transformation processes but and on their diversity and disparity.

The bottom up chaotic development of the existing urban fabric, and the top-down planning of the regional-scale city are very different transformation phenomena equally leading to a radical erasure of past artefacts and landscapes: villages, canals, agricultural land, but also hills and woodlands are razed to make room for the new residential and industrial settlements.

Fragments of rural landscape remain as evidence of a past society and lifestyle. But will these remnants talk to anyone?

A large scale project perspective offers the opportunity for a reflection on the emergent characteristics of preservation issues in the construction of a Chinese "ordinary" metropolis.

The radicalism of the urban situation offered by the Chinese city explicates a different role which architecture and urban planning can play in dealing with conservation issues, bringing back, in a very different context, some of the ethical stances of the last century architecture culture.

1. Between permanence and change.

The city of Huyang, at the periphery of the Pearl River Delta region, is undergoing a very fast and intense transformation process.

At a first glance, what strikes the most in this quick construction of the city is the contrast between two different processes where two very different images of the city are confronted².

On one side we can find the Asiatic model of the rich and successful city (Shenzhen, Taipei, Seoul, etc.), characterized by an aggressive modernity, structured on a large scale grid of well cared roads,

lined with tall buildings and marked by the corporate skyscrapers.

The tall buildings on the front of the urban blocks act as real walled cities as they enclose the more exclusive (or future middle class) residential intervention on their inside.

The introverted character of these huge urban blocks is not simply the outcome of globalization as they can also be seen as a Chinese interpretation of the contemporary city which differs, from a morphological point of view, from its reference models in the western cities.

So if the residential enclaves are similar to some western residential enclaves, the overall structure of the city looks quite different.

This is the image of a city made of grandiloquent public spaces characterized by an abundant endowment of infrastructures: the high speed train line will connect Huyang to Shenzhen in just half an hour and will be ready in two years; the construction of 5 regional subway lines is foreseen in the next years connecting Huyang to Huizhou; the highway network is expanding day by day.

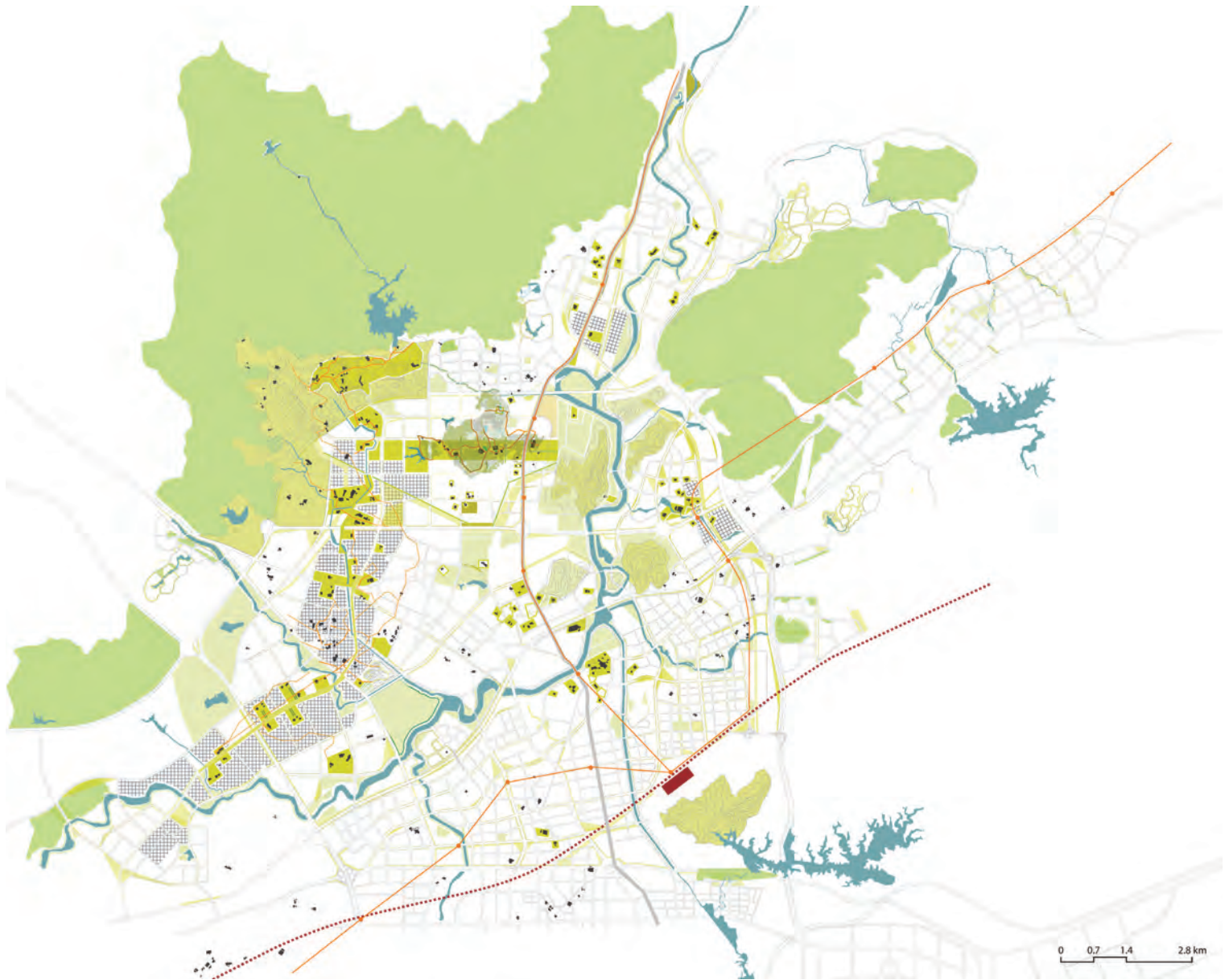
The careful design of large scale "public spaces" matched by the attention with which roads and side-walks, in their form and in the dimension, are designed as a tool to support an urban fabric of vast proportion and of a regional scale, is the result of a planning effort ordering the territory for a "multitude" still to come.

Opposite to it, the existing city has been recently built on a certain administrative uncertainty made of already decaying buildings piled up along a bare fabric of urban streets³.

This completely new urban environment is marked by the systematic construction of the space for production - building or more complex industrial settlements- within the land of old agricultural villages. It is an apparently chaotic and decentralized, "bottom up" model of urbanization, profiting of the relative autonomy of villages in disposing of their own territory.

As an immediate consequence the agricultural land and its structure, the landscape that is the outcome of a long voluntary construction process, pay for this transformation.

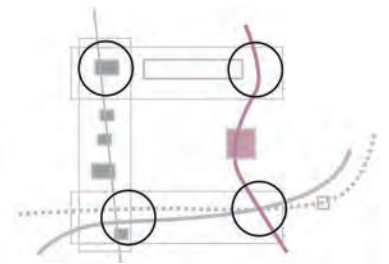
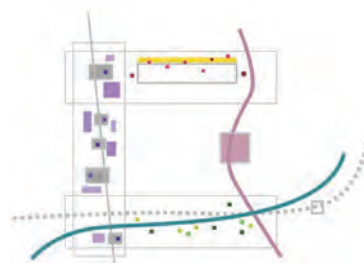
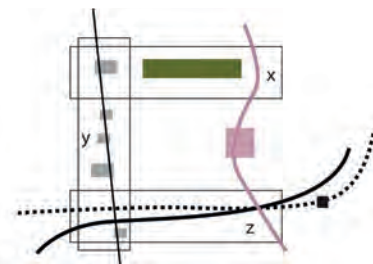
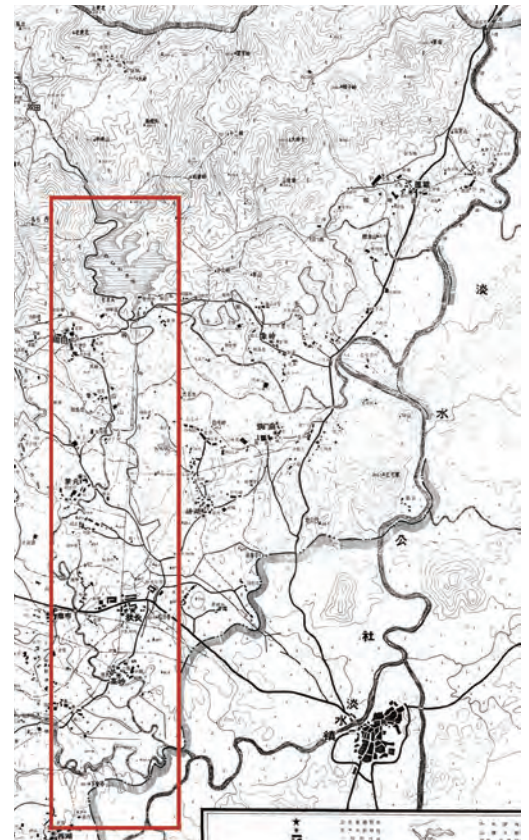
It is along the canals, or the visual axes of the feng shui that the conflict between the diverse models of



the city is the more evident. But urban agricultural villages are at the same time the cause and the victims of this form of “bottom up urbanization”, where industry workers, usually young people, coming from the northern countries, live their life in the dormitories that are part of the industry⁴. The villages, whose communities have been dispersed, have leased out their land to the industry entrepreneurs. The village officials (frequently part of the family clan who was the ancient owner of village) have gone to Hong Kong and live their lives on the revenues of the leased grounds. At the same time the “household- responsibility” policy intended to give the land to individual farmers is at the origin of the “bottom up” pervasive development of semi-detached, two or three storeys building on single plots of agricultural land. This particular use of the land of the former community, is destroying not just the villages, which presence seems more and more anachronistic every day, but the very possibility to recover the logic and

the meaning of a territorial system, which was defined by the villages. What remains, on these sites is the crude reality of a strong spatial injustice paired by the even stronger hope for an individual social improvement well represented by the dream of owning a flat being built on the opposite side of the road. The issue is well known to local architects and urban planners, that are in charge of the planning process and are frequently overwhelmed by the ineluctable fast pace transformation. Against the present scenario the demand for a tourism plan capable to face the issue of agricultural landscape preservation and namely the preservation of the Hakka villages sound paradoxical. Which public will this tourism plan be meant for? What to preserve? Which meaning to be given to what is preserved? How to deal with the “environmental pre-existence”? What appears more interesting is maybe just the radicalism with which we are confronted with some relevant questions on the use of the past in urban

Table 1
Preliminary Tourism Master Plan. A Comprehensive Image (Source: Politecnico di Milano, 2011).



a

b

c

d

Tables 2-3
Preliminary Tourism Master Plan. *Three Thematic Strips:* 1. The university settlement and the residential habitat; 2. The industrial strip; 3. the river and the recreational system.

The form of the industrial strip in Huiyang historical map of 1979 (Source: *Politecnico di Milano*, 2011).

Tables 4a-d
City Form and Strategic Invention.

a. An overall image of the master plan structure;
b. Considering the differences between the three thematic strip: x- the university settlement and the residential habitat, y- the industrial strip z- the river and the recreational system;
c. Different interventions and diverse functional programs within the three thematic strips;
d. Interchanges;
(Source: *Politecnico di Milano*, 2011).

and territorial project: first of all the responsibility of architecture and urban planning in giving answer to the “experience of modernity” that doesn’t appear to be overruled by the emergence of globalization processes, but seems to be radicalised instead.

2. Hakka landscape in the Huizhou region.

Landscapes and territorial imageries are the product of populations and groups which inhabit them. However groups and populations can’t be considered as fixed entities, and this is the more evident in the present case study, as society is probably more than ever in a process of fast transformation, with a massive migration of young population towards the city under construction.

Which is the Hakka traditional landscape? Which, if any, is the territorial imagery underlying the actual process of city construction, and what is the role of the new migrant population, can they be considered as “groups” in shaping the actual city and landscape?

In the Huizhou and Huyang region the agricultural landscape has been historically structured by the presence of the Hakka villages, whose localization and settlement criteria were rooted in the feng shui

design attitude.

The Hakka rural villages are here less monumental if compared to the ones in the province of Fujian and they can’t be considered as an international attraction for tourism: constructing a mythical “Hakka Homeland” to be offered on the international tourist market doesn’t sound very realistic nor appropriate. Nonetheless, the hypothesis of the tourism/leisure exploitation of the Hakka cultural heritage, should not be undervalued provided that we reconsider the role and the value of tourism and leisure in this context.

In a metropolitan region of potentially 40 million inhabitants at a fair distance, the Hakka villages don’t really need an international public to be considered as an attractive resource.

Rather they can be understood as a local resource addressed to a “local” resident population.

They will be the perfect destination for a Sunday trip and discovering, but also offer the base for the construction of a more general leisure system, where tourism and leisure time are mixed up with the discovering of a distant but recent past.

It is this unapparent cultural distance that could make these villages significant to the population

5. Ibidem.

6. On the issue of the detachment of the tourist gaze and its prerogative to worn out or to replace the pre-existing semantic values of places confront: J. Hurry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies* (London: Sage, 1990). However more recently a debate about the role "ordinary" tourism as a practice reconfiguring our experience of modernity has been raised, suggesting a more complex pattern of relations between tourism and everyday life - as, for example, in the practice of cottaging - when confronted with the issue of authenticity or identity. See: D. Williams, B.P. Kaltenborn, 'Leisure Places and Modernity. The use and meaning of recreational cottages in Norway and the USA' in D. Crouch (editor) *Leisure/tourism geographies. Practices and geographical knowledge*. London, Routledge, 1999, pp 214-230.

7. R. Koolhaas, 'The Generic City', in OMA, R. Koolhaas, B. Mao, *S,M,L,XL*. Rotterdam: 010 Publisher 1995, p. 1248.

8. The notion of "approximative identity" is conceived by Davide Sparti, as a continual call for social recognition: identity is thus always "in formation" and dependent from the context of social relations. See: D. Sparti, *Soggetti al tempo. Identità personale tra analisi filosofica e costruzione sociale [Subject to time. Personal identity between philosophical analysis and social construction]*. Milano Feltrinelli, 1996), cited in F. Remotti, *L'ossessione identitaria*, Bari: Laterza, 2010, p. XX.

9. Ibidem.

10. M. Berman, *All that is solid melts into air. The experience of modernity*. New York, Simon and Shuster, 1982.

of the enlarged metropolis, a distance which can prevent villages to be perceived through the lens of poverty alone, as the remains of a discarded way of life characterized by the "stigmata of poverty"⁵.

3. Landscape, identity and the right to the city.

The preservation of landscape and of the diverse strata of the land palimpsest are usually considered as the protection of the specificity of a territory and by extension the affirmation of its population cultural identity.

We are used to trace an immediate association between the call for an identity and the past that we share, which is made visible through monuments, artefacts and landscapes.

The relation between the man made land and a society who shaped it becomes evident in the range of semantic values which are attached to specific land form.

Artefacts but also spatial systems and settlements criteria are seen as embodying the very "essence" of a populations' identity. In this case it is the rural settlement logic and criteria derived from a feng shui attitude towards landscape to be at stake, but also the ancestor temples of every single buildings and their role in marking the land.

But which will be the value of an identity conceptualized this way for those who don't really share the same past history, as is the case of the young migrants of the Guangdong Province?

"Local" resident population, the new inhabitants of the region don't belong to this place, these temples are not their ancestors temples, they don't speak the same language as they have just arrived from the northern rural countryside.

They are not rooted in these places, they can't recognize their own identity in these villages. What can they recognize as their own place, how can they escape being an indistinct "multitude", offered as a bare tool to the fast growing industrial production? They live the life of the fast growing city with the feeling not really to belong to it, this kind of identity, focused on the past deposit, will become simple exclusion for them. And they will never have the privilege of a completely distant gaze as is the case of the international tourist⁶.

Their present aims and needs don't seem to be matched by a demand for landscape preservation.

If considered this way the identity issue seems to lead to a dead end.

As much as the demand for and identity coincides with a claim for the past we share, as much the tension of modernity becomes conflictual.

This tension has to face the construction of the new city with the affirmation of an "essence" historically given and thus unchanging, that can be appropriated by a part of the population excluding the rest and offering itself as an object of contemplation for the eventual tourist, an identity that can be exploited till its complete falsification.

The call for identity, through preservation becomes

a trap. The trap consist in the sheer opposition between the necessity of preservation and the values and needs of the present⁷.

Our hypothesis is that the identity issue could be set up on a different perspective, confronting with preservation demand and with the possibility to recover the presence of past within the construction of the new city in a way to enlarge the idea of citizenship. If we consider the presence of the new population in the city we can easily observe a demand for "recognition" as a living part of the city, a need which could maybe rely on the construction of a new and "approximative" and weak identity enabling people to be seen as part of society⁸.

Identity is usually a cultural construct tying an already solid group together allowing the call for rights or prerogatives, while what is in more need here is the possibility for a group recognition of a population which is a multitude of isolated young men and women⁹.

The hypothesis developed in the design proposal is that access to tourism, the rediscovery of the agricultural land heritage and leisure time, as well as, or even more than other collective activities, can perform an active role in the construction of new and diverse kind of group recognition and in affirming a new level of citizenship.

The presence of the past can play the role of a physical support whose use and discovery connect and create new groups of citizens out of a multitude of migrants.

Nostalgia is obviously here to be considered inherent to the tension of modernity¹⁰, but it is not necessarily leading to "falsification"; and its relation with present values and needs is one of the main topic the project is addressing.

4. The agency of the preservation project.

The design proposal for the "tourism" plan of the city of Huyang and its surrounding territory, is the opportunity to stress three points which appear to be crucial in landscape preservation.

The first remark concerns the discussion of the slippery nature of the concept of identity when considered in a strict sense.

The research for "identity" in the evidences of past actions and lifestyles is potentially a very conflictual one as it foster an understanding of identity as an "essence" that can be objectified and thus preserved, supporting a process of musealization which in the end, as has been frequently noted leads to falsification.

Moreover the emphasis on identity acts as a factor of exclusion, and frequently results in the difficulty to re-appropriate the deposit of the past in any viable way.

This means. in fact. exclusion of people from identity - as the exclusion of the migrants from the city - but also the exclusion of land and existing artefacts from the process of transformation, leading to ruins. In this context a different idea of the monument is

not needed, but a different attitude of the project. The question has to shift from what is worth preserving, to why and for who.

Or even better what will be the “utility” and the agency of preservation in the construction of the land confronting with present values and actions.

It is clear that while these all could be considered as implicit questions in any piecemeal transformation with scarcity of means - as historically was most of the pervasive construction of the agricultural territory - it becomes a matter of planning responsibility in a context of over-abundance of technological means, where any simple construction act can imply the disappearance of vast past landscapes at a very fast pace.

A second remark regards a reflection about the processes of construction of a more just urban space. The “bottom up” process of development of the existing Chinese city, which result in a fragmented and heterogeneous urban fabric, doesn’t produce any more opportunity to address the inhabitants right to city if confronted with the “top down” planning process articulating the regional scale grid.

A structure of pulviscolar private operations produces a chaotic but nonetheless highly unjust urban space.

While in the European context the presence of “bottom up” processes of urbanization has been too frequently considered solely as a signal of a more democratic society where individual aims and desires are maybe over-represented; here the focus is more clearly on the new social disparity which individual actions are producing at expense of collective appropriation of landscape, wearing out a common good: the land, its structure and semantic value.

The preservation project of old villages and landscapes can offer the opportunity for a better re-appropriation of collective space in the city; but it will only perform relevant effects if understood as a formal coherent space system, pervasive and nonetheless legible at larger scale.

Past artefacts and traces, considered not just as objects on the ground but as complex settlements, are frequently the background on which to articulate a discourse about the overall form and image of the city.

The reclaiming of a large extension of the contemporary city through a preservation project challenges architecture to re-address the project on the city in its overall dimension and in its physical form, a possibility frequently denied confronting with the large scale and the fragmentary but pervasive nature of city transformation processes.

Finally, the issue of preservation has to be seen in the perspective of a discussion on the space of the city as a common good.

This can be considered as a more general matter in the opposition between “development” and preservation.

The preservation of “environmental pre-existence”, has to be considered as a work which incrementally

redefines city space structure.

The possibility to reformulate an idea of welfare state, as an idea of public well-being, has to reconsider access to urban space and the enlargement of a notion of citizenship as a starting point.

The preservation project that we propose for the Hakka settlements in Huyang offers the palimpsest image as a way to deal with the construction of welfare through the continual reworking on the contested space of the city.

5.The role of tourism within the Huyang general master plan.

The project strategic proposal consist in a series of structural and organic actions allowing to increase the tourist industry in the territory of Huyang and to generate new employment opportunities for new citizens, through the implementation of a Tourism Development Plane.

The centroid of the world tourism is shifting towards emerging countries.

In China, the forecast annual growth in tourism is 16%, while in other countries the average is 5.8%.

As in all industries, the tourism development goals can be achieved only on the basis of a structural plan that allows growth not only in size but also in terms of competitiveness and attractiveness.

Globalization forces local systems to enhance their distinctive features in comparison to what is produced elsewhere, highlighting the need to define a role for the territories facing new forms of competition. In this scenario the focus on the cultural resources becomes all the more strategic, in order to keep alive and enhance the “territorial heritage”.

The city of Huyang has just developed a very ambitious and extensive General District Master Plan. However up till now this Master Plan does not take into account the preexisting Hakka settlements, that represent historical memory and also today a tourist potential.

Interest in the city’s urban events lies therefore in the forecast of being “refounded” by mean of the new plan and in the attractive potential represented by the Hakka settlements.

The planned redevelopment of Huyang’s urban system and its infrastructure system’s strengthening has revealed the need to start thinking about the relationship between the built environment and the rural areas.

Due to its important strategic position in the territorial framework, Huyang seems to claim high landscape sensitivity urban projects, in order to first strengthen the rural production and second, to modernize the infrastructural nodes connected to the highway-rail network, especially structuring its turistic potentiality.

For the first issue it should be noted that, in many parts of China, a rapid and often uncontrolled by the Plans building growth has reduced the country to enclaves between buildings, overturning the original relationship between solids and voids.

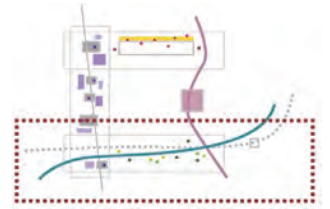


Table 5
 The Recreational Strip:
 a New System of Public
 Spaces. It integrates
 the Hakka Villages in a
 Recreational Environment,
 with Sports and Leisure
 Facilities is also fit to link
 different part of the City and
 Diverse Centers, including
 the New Center of High
 Speed Train Station (Source:
 Politecnico di Milano, 2011).

This new status, which must be dealt with without anti-urban nostalgia, looks at the Hakka's system as an exercise of great interest to test new settlements' hypotheses.

As for the second issue, Huiyang's massive infrastructure network tries to establish new hierarchies and new relationships.

The objective of refounding the city through the infrastructure network, should be taken into account together with the hypothesis of transformation along the river and with the input modes of the new equipments in the general redesign of urban green. A general regeneration of this area should most certainly strengthen the equipments' and services' system across the residential parts.

Their preservation will require some changes to the overall General Masterplan.

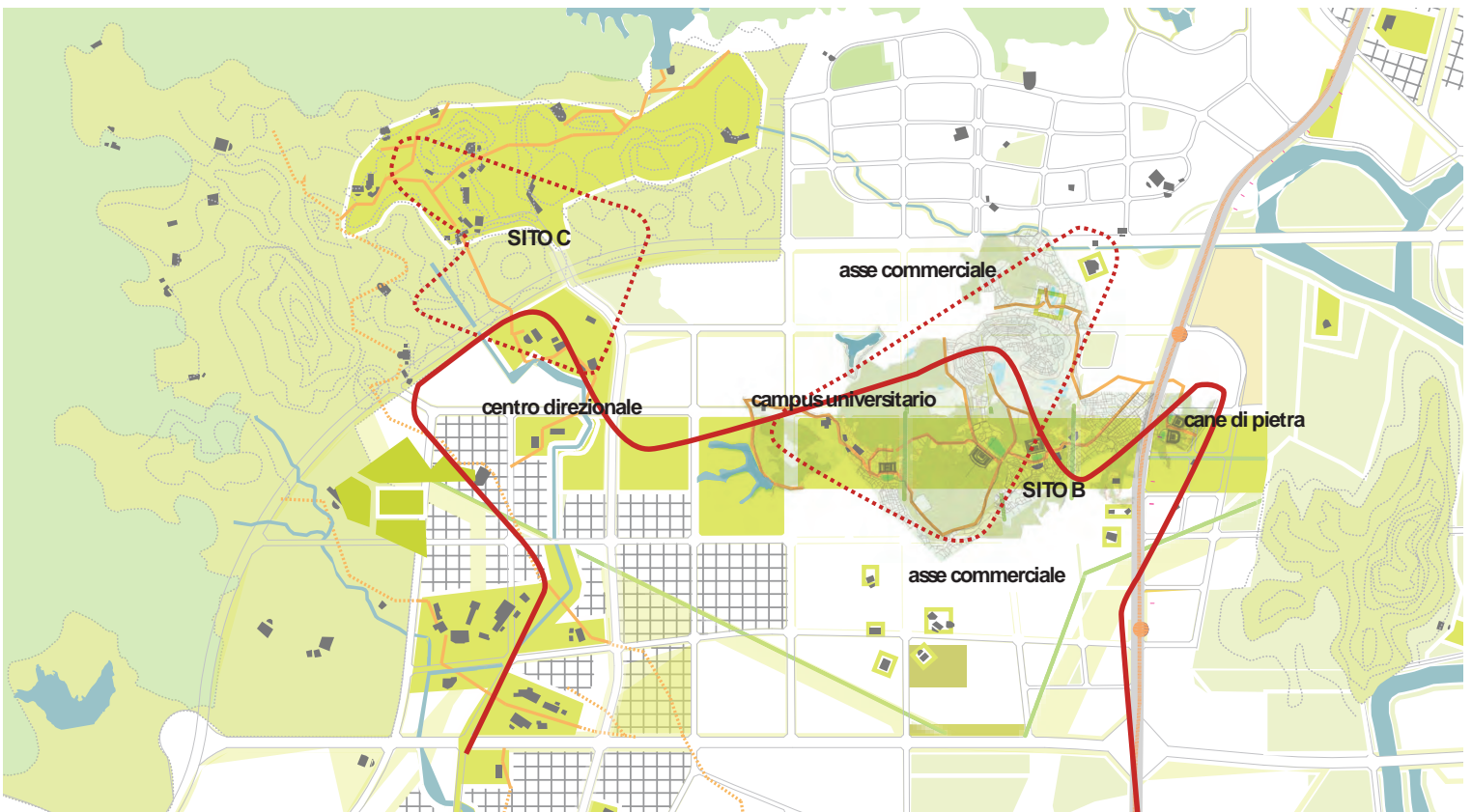
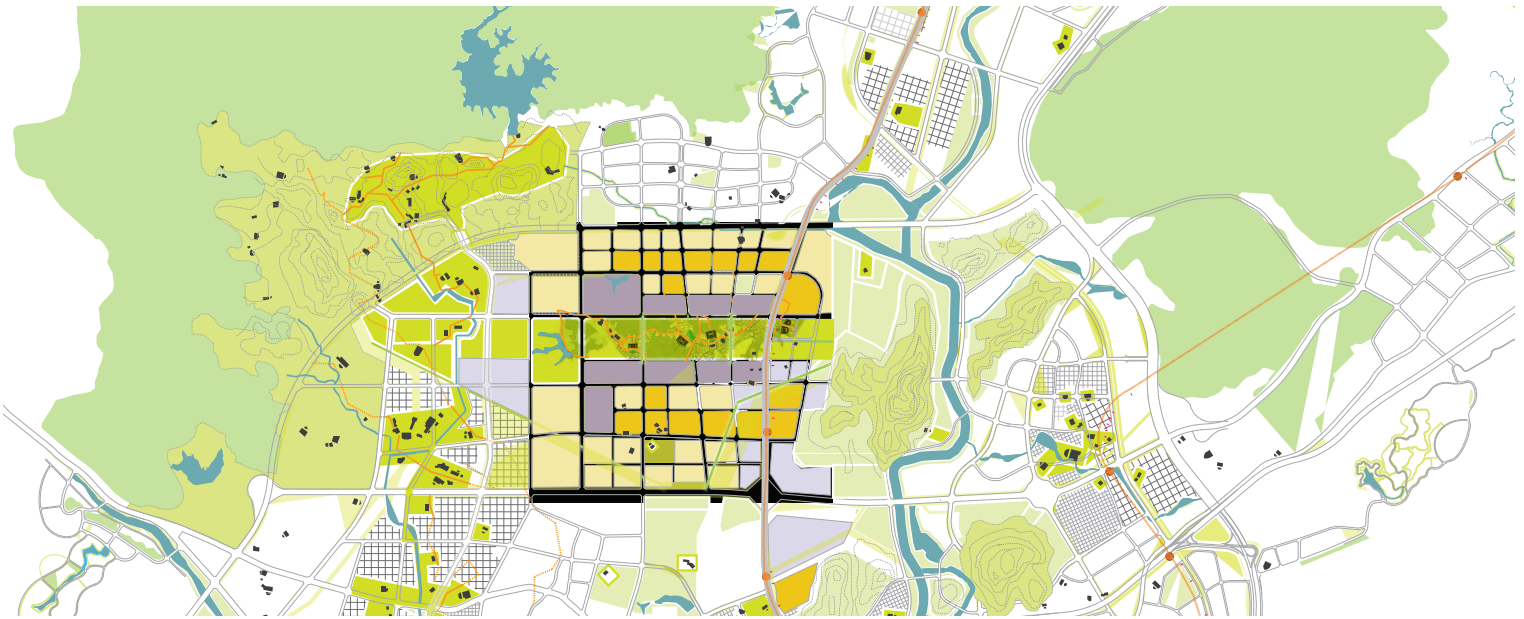
To what extent and for what purpose is what this project will attempt to show.

The proposed project strategy however does not intend to replace the new General Master Plan with a different scheme, it rather aims at overlaying a series of considerations about the role that the preservation of the historical and touristic assets of the Hakka sites may have in the construction of Huiyang's new public space.

The ideas put forward for the Hakka villages preservation and site development fit in the new General Master Plan's medium and long term's scenario that represents the district administration's intention to

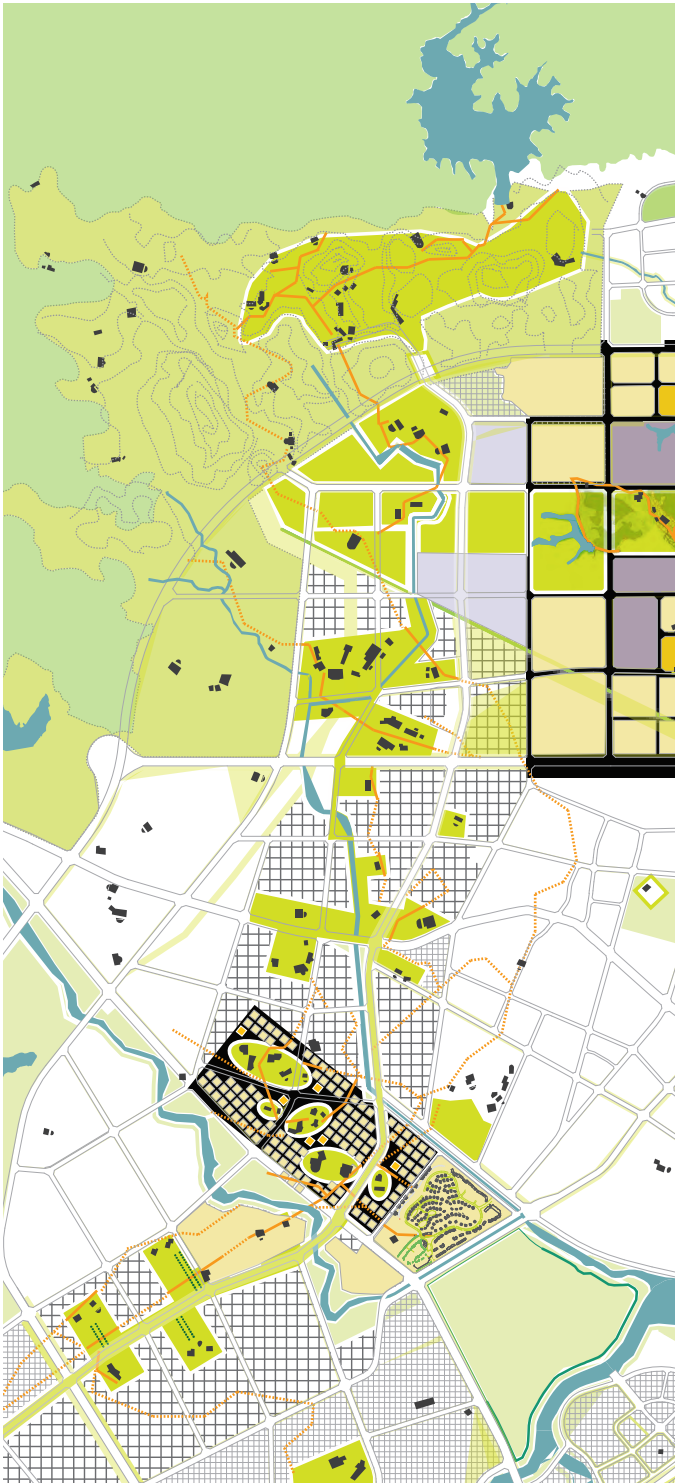
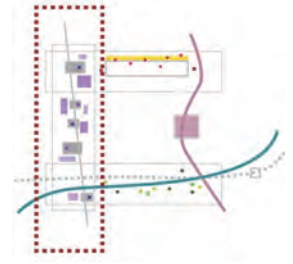
Tables 6-7

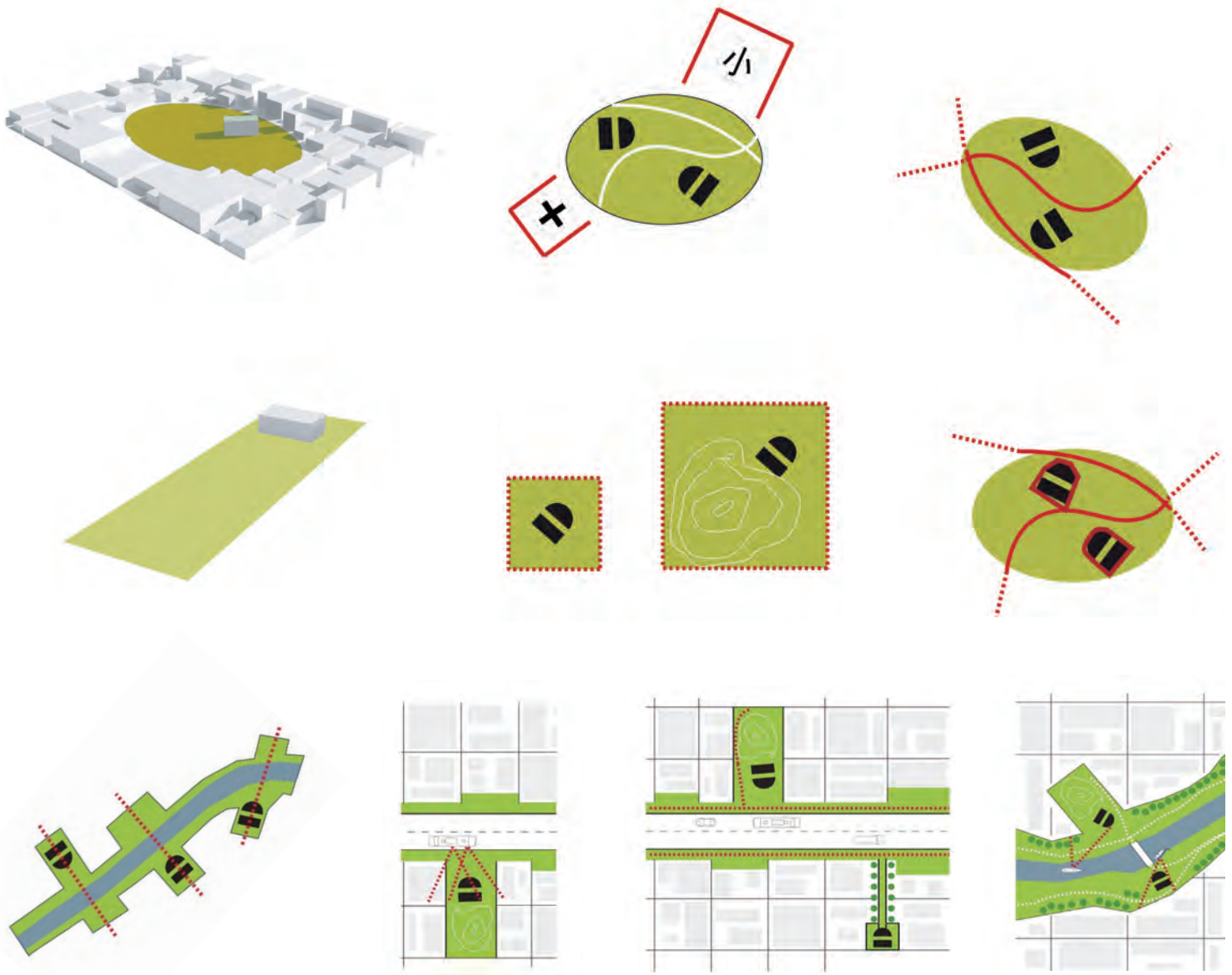
University Park and the Residential Habitat. One of the major Projects within the Actual Huiyang Master Plan can really be the Opportunity to foster a new attitude towards the Implementing of the Hakka Residences Preservation, and Pivot point for the Tourism Master Plan (Source: Politecnico di Milano, 2011).



Tables 8-9

The Industrial Strip
Mitigating the Impact of Fast
Development. *It preserves
the Systemic Value of
Hakka Residences* (Source:
Politecnico di Milano, 2011).





In this page:

Table 10

Strategies of Protection of the Hakka Sites according to the Thematic Strips.

- a. Hakka villages immersed in a dense urban fabric are protected by a buffer zone with highly recognizable geometric form.
- b. The basic buffer zone with a radius of 50 meters, can be manipulated and altered as to include an existing public path, or service or natural element on a case by case basis.
- c. Hakka sites and their buffer zones offer a concrete opportunity to connect existing services to new ones, through their buffer zones.
- d. Geomorphological features within the Hakka sites should be carefully protected, eventually modifying the buffer zone.
- e. Historic path running through the Hakka sites should be given specific attention and carefully

protected.

f. Hakka site can host a variety of functional programs, they can be differentiated according to their conservation status and to their belonging to the diverse thematic strips:

- in the industrial strip, Hakka sites can be recovered as service to the industry workers (cafeterias, clubs...);
- along the rivers they can become part of the recreational and sport facilities system;
- in the university strip park, they can host public services, a library and similar activities (Source: Politecnico di Milano, 2011).

On the opposite page at the top:

Table 11

Constructing a System of Recognizable Places.

Connecting a System of Recognizable Places: a basis for improving attention and care towards the Hakka Residences Heritage.

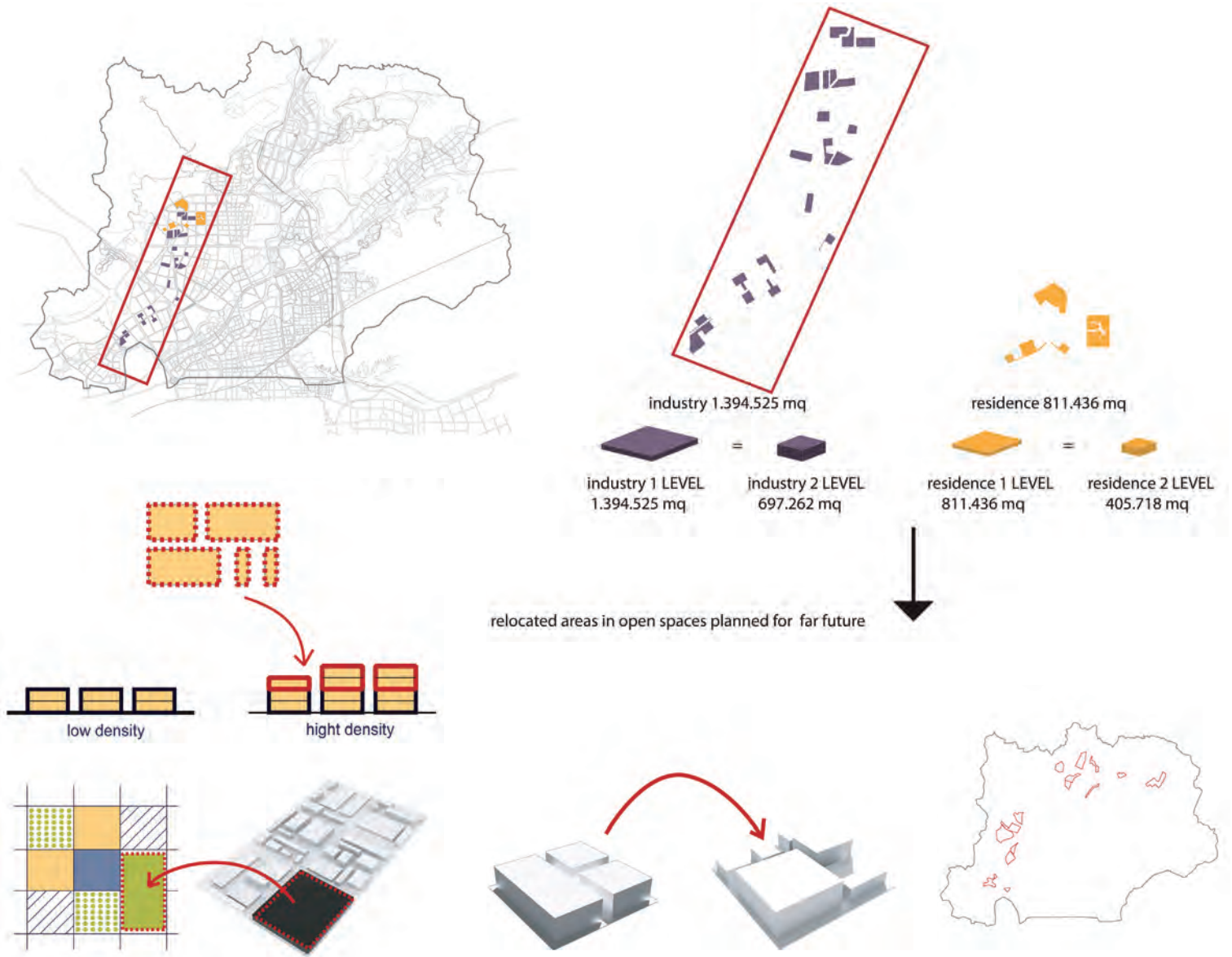
- a1. Connecting the Hakka villages to the river and to the green system.
- b1. Protecting the Hakka sites from a main thoroughfare while preserving the view of the building.
- c1. Creating a perceptive and functional link between the Hakka site and the distant main road and connecting the Hakka sites through a cycle and pedestrian path preserving the view from the road.
- d1. Connecting the Hakka sites through a cycle and pedestrian path preserving the view from the river (Source: Politecnico di Milano, 2011).

On the opposite page below:

Table 12

Dealing with Procedural Issues. A possible perequative Policy.

Industrial strips: data about industrial and residential surfaces and criteria for perequative policy (Source: Politecnico di Milano, 2011).



pursue a strong growth in the coming decade. The diverse projects in progress: the high-speed railway station able to connect the city with Shenzhen, the infrastructural backbone formed by six subway lines overlapping the road network of the Plan, show the dimensions of this growth that is already being implemented. Within this large scale scenario, we propose to include some reflections on the value of Hakka settlements and the opportunities they offer: their preservation will become the opportunity to built a rich and stratified city where historical memory of the agricultural landscape contributes to the consolidation of the new identity of both the old villagers and the new citizens attracted by the new work opportunities in the Guangdong Province. A Tourism Development Master Plan, in this regard, will not serve as much to attract an exogenous population, of international or national tourists, but rather to allow the construction of a specific “identity” of Huiyang’s city and territory usable by all citizens in everyday life.

6. Strategy and Method.

The proposed strategy aims at the recovery of individual Hakka sites but more than that it is directed at the reconstruction of their geographical “system” by seeking physical or thematical continuity: the physical continuity of the trails or the natural elements, and the thematical continuity linked to the “vocation” actual or planned, in the diverse contexts in which each site is located (residential vocation, production, service etc..). Our proposal searches for a pattern that proceeds by points (Hakka sites) and linearities (the path) aiming to implement the functional relationships between the historic buildings and the natural resources, between the existing services and the new and planned ones. The result is a design characterized by a sequence of open spaces and volume, seeking a possible evolution in their mutual relationship. The project works, at the landscape large scale, interacting with the various aspects that distinguish it: hills, depressions, vegetation, but also with the urban reality around it and the small villages inside, trying to enhance existing systems without imposing strong signs.



1

However when the project focuses on the three main identified areas it intensifies the physical and signposting consistency of the interventions, suggesting geometries that can speak with each other and with the landscape through a system of connections.

The Hakka sites, emptied of their original fuses, preserved for their architectural value, can become signs of identity and privileged places inside their context: single elements of recognition for the community at the urban scale and naturalistic reserves at the metropolitan scale.

With the aim of improving the quality of life and the built environment our proposal has the ambition to suggest a method that can be extended to many Huiyang areas in need for regeneration: giving new meaning to the space of the villages through the geometrically defined shape of their buffer zone, redistributing planned residential and productive densities and reconnecting the urban and social fabric, both historical and contemporary.

7. Framing the context.

The territory under study is bound, to the north, by the presence of the Dong River and the sprawling of urbanized areas of the Huizhou territory.

To the South, the urban system extends itself in a linear shape from the last offshoots of the city of Shenzhen to the petrochemical areas and touristic resorts of the Bay of Dayawan proceeding parallel to the coastline between the freeway and the new

high speed railway line.

This area is possibly one of the most interesting for the development of the whole Region.

Along these parallel lines a city is being built made of high density residential enclaves alternate to large industrial operations and their dormitories.

On the north/east – south/west axis the landscape system consists of a branch of the Dong River, Dan-shui, which runs along the historical center of Huiyang and of protected forest areas.

This territorial system is an important natural resource and a natural park at the regional scale, separates the region of Huizhou and Huiyang from the urbanized areas that fall under the direct influence of the city of Shenzhen and is therefore a strong element of recognition inside the territory.

8. Three main design topics for Huiyang master plan.

From the local resources diagnosis, we have identified three target areas in order to propose a landscape design in its broadest and most inclusive sense.

The project presented is thus subdivided into three areas and three work themes which depend on a comparison between the current territory situation, its agricultural structures and the new planning tools.

The three areas are:

1. University campus programming;
2. Industrial areas regeneration;

Figure 1
Workers' club in a Hakka Residence in the Industrial Strip (Source: Politecnico di Milano, 2011).



2

3. Danshui River.

These three areas define a “C” shape within the rigid structure of Huiyang Master Plan. The “C” represents the potential “tourist route” of the city. Along this shape are concentrated the majority of the Hakka sites within the municipal area. An overview of this sites helps to specify and strengthen the city’s public spaces.

Strategies for reuse of Hakka sites into the future campus (north axis).

One of the places most characterized by the new Huiyang’s Plan is a sort of “central park” in the north of the city which will form the backbone of the campus which can be connected with a series of greenways and with the two main protected areas in the west (Area C described above) and east of the city. Inside this park the Hakka settlements can be safeguarded and may be freely used to support university activities as provided by the Plan.

A careful consideration of the topography of the site suggests to deform the grid proposed in the Plan to adapt it to the topography preserving the delicate relationship between the Hakka settlements and the slope of the hills, highlighting the relationship between the new city and the agricultural landscape’s structure.

Strategies for the reuse of Hakka site inside the industrial context (north-south axis).

The project considers the productive sector, west of

the city, as a cultural and social (environment, context) to be reassessed, according to new visions. The recovery of Hakka villages in this context becomes an opportunity to reinvent their use.

At the same time, the planned expansion of the industrial zone acquires a content of social construction in relation to those who work for big companies or in relation to the community that assists to the rapid evolution and renewal of one of the social and productive realities on the planet.

The willingness to put on a “show”, along with the Hakka assets, the real city of the intensive production and of the dorm factories becomes a strategy to gain quality public spaces between the uneven and fragmentary gaps of this area.

In the industrial relation’s systems between the industrial artifacts we have identified two elements of continuity that structure the north-south axis; the road infrastructure established by the Plan; a sort of ring that will serve the entire west side of the town and a historical route that connected all sites in the Hakka assets.

The precise geometric shapes of the open spaces defined by the range of constraints imposed on each single Hakka settlement become bonding surfaces for the artifacts and the various element, acting as “background or repeating frame” and therefore giving rhythm to the new road, anchorage points for the future development of these parts of the city.

Within these ranges of constraint the historic route that linked together all the sites is always highlighted so as to enhance their sense of belonging to a wider territorial structure once constant.

In the same way the Hakka assets sites and their ranges of constraint’s presence on the street is always signaled by a large green space, where possible, or by a double row of trees that leads to the artifact.

In the area north of this axis, the study area (area B, protected by the new Plan) is characterized by a widespread system of small villages and valuable Hakka settlements around which still survives an authentic rural dimension.

Here we assume - besides the recovery of valuable sites - to create a network of paths in the landscape. Here, interventions are designed not only from the “material” point of view of the recovery of artifacts, but also from the “immaterial” point of view of the relationships between new and old residents-tourists and the landscape itself, through an approach that takes into account the multi scalar and temporal dimension of the landscape project.

Strategies for the Danshui River redevelopment (east-west axis).

The river that runs through the city of Huiyang has already been the subject of studies and rehabilitation projects by the district administration, at least in its most central parts.

Compared to the “natural endowments” of the context the river is the element that mostly characteriz-

Figure 2
Worker’s club in a Hakka Residence in the Industrial Strip (Source: Politecnico di Milano, 2011).



3

es this city and it represents an important environmental resource.

For this reason the Municipality should try to exploit its potential to the maximum.

Further South, along the line where the river flows tangent to the historical center, and the more recent urban fabric, the project strategy suggests, - in addition to remediation and renaturation of the river banks - to transform the historical deposit of the Hakka assets sites along the riverside in recreational services for the park and the city.

Some sites may be directly connected to the river, also their buffer zones may be useful to realize both downhill axis towards the water and “bridges” linking the river’s shores.

The Hakka buildings may be either points of departure or destination of the pedestrian or bicycle paths that run along the river or cross it, elite points for observation and enjoyment of the landscape, points of rest and refreshment, information aids, centers for sports, education and recreation.

9. Actions and opportunities.

The project proposal suggests different methods of action for villages recovery, taking into account the context situations in which the diverse villages are inserted and providing a set of general rules and use opportunities, clearly distinguishing between invariant rules and variables suggestions so as to leave to the project an open character.

So for example, where the larger expansion of in-

dustrial sites is planned – a large area which has already been affected by recent urbanization and where villages are in a state of disruption – the project aims at providing an “area of respect”, like a buffer zone with a well defined shape, around individual buildings to be preserved.

This strategy implies an effort in redefining the urban fabric of the village surroundings, always guaranteeing a very close relationship with the main road, so that the Hakka villages – where recreational the services are located – will always be visible from the city’s main street.

In thinking about the spaces for the production itself, the possibility (especially in those areas adjacent to the residence) to propose a redistribution of density for the productive sector is also considered. In some cases the project proposes to replace amounts removed from the the sensitive context in other areas more appropriate or in other cases its suggests an expansion in height so as to reduce the footprint on the ground and give back open spaces to the public.

In the case of the river park the project suggests to always group, where possible, one or more villages in a single and larger area of compliance with a looser boundary allowing to grasp the relationships between the diverse buildings and the morphology of the river.

The proposed uses are always about community services that can be merged with existing services already provided by the plan but do not exclude

Figure 3
School in a Hakka Residence
in the Educational Strip
(Source: Politecnico di
Milano, 2011).



4

that the system of the Hakka villages as a whole can be a resource partially available to an attentive real estate market an also available for a program of “albergo diffuso”(diffused hotel) .

An open-air museum, a museum diffuse, along with its reference accommodation exceeds the traditional concept of linear sequence, with a single entry point and a defined and hierarchical path.

The project makes the Hakka assets available with multiple access means.

Physical connections and information flows between the three main identified centers and will help to strengthen the network connection between the narrative parts.

Thus, if the single regeneration projects shall consider a number of specific constraints as the stability and maintenance conditions of the buildings, the ownership structure and their valorization’s economical opportunities, our proposal in this study is a logic and a method of operation that allows us to read the historical assets represented by the Hakka settlements as a great opportunity for the growth program’s enrichment .

The meaning of a tourism plan is to be found in the rediscovery of the daily value that Hakka pre-existences may have in the construction of the contemporary city.

The single buildings that we seek to preserve are different in quality and condition and are perhaps not so important for the international tourism development.

But their widespread presence and the logic of their location constitute an interest for the citizens and a possible element of identification that goes further back than the ancestors’ memory for the single families.

Figure 4
University library in a Hakka Residence in the Educational Strip (Source: Politecnico di Milano, 2011).

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