



LINKING TERRITORIES

RURALITY, LANDSCAPE AND URBAN BORDERS

Edited by Antonella Bruzzese and Annarita Lapenna



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Linking Territories.

Rurality, landscape and urban borders

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POLITECNICO DI MILANO
DIPARTIMENTO DI
ARCHITETTURA E
STUDI URBANI



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Antonella Bruzzese and Annarita Lapenna

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THE WORKSHOP: AN APPARATUS FOR ARCHITECTURE DES MILIEUX

Annarita Lapenna

SPACES AND MILIEUX

If we understand space just through a mathematical meaning¹, it seems to be a dimension, a measurable entity. If, instead, we consider it as an inhabited area, a space becomes a milieu. In fact, a milieu is the relationship between a subject and a territorial area; this relationship produces experience². A field of corn, for instance, is a space with precise dimensions which are the length and the width. At the same time, the field is the milieu of the farmer that cultivates it, the milieu of the parasite that nests in the vegetation and the milieu of the buyers who purchase the corn from the farmer. The farmer, the parasite and the buyers are just three subjects out of many others by which this space can create a relationship. Recognizing this broad set of connections, as well as denying it, heavily influences the quality of living systems.

Over time, this multiplicity of milieus and the complexity that develops from it, has been the subject of a simplification process. In fact, in order to be able to clearly analyze the places and, therefore, to control them, the wealth of territorial practices has been simplified. The complex links of milieus have been interpreted through a functionalist reading. From the *Charte d'Athènes* (Le Corbusier, 1938), a fixed strategy of standardization has led to summarization of human practices in a few functions. In this way, the territory has clearly been analyzed to propose an effective territorial planning. This approach has triggered a process that has put, over time, a deep distance between the planning and the territorial practices. In fact, for decades, planning has tried to find in every place the same critical situations in order to propose "absolute" solutions, dissociated by the context. The application of generalized solutions in singular territories has produced a fragmentation of these places. The complexity of the relationships among humans and between humans and the environment has continued to impoverish itself.

Western society is experiencing an economic, social and environmental crisis. This raises the demand for new strategic forms of spatial planning (Oosterlynck et al., 2011). As a first move, this situation presupposes a new definition of territorial resources (D'Arienzo et al., 2016). From this perspective, the multiplicity of milieus becomes a fundamental resource. Together, the particular ecosystems of some species, the traditions and the cultures that express a synergy between humans and nature and the territorial practices able to activate new local and global environmental potentialities, woven together to create fluid connections over time between living beings and the environment.

Related to the concept of multiplicity, the concept of milieu assumes its deeper sense. The French

word *milieu* means "context", "environment", but it also means *the intermediate position*. It is interesting to observe the territory starting from this interpretation in order to identify *the intermediate position* among subjects in order to investigate the possible interfaces. These interfaces are the passages that allow communication between many subjects. Sometimes these passages are fleeting and unpredictable. That means the renunciation of obvious readings of the territory and of the predetermined analysis in favor of a permanent experimentation. Such an approach allows for a singular and unusual study of the territory.

From this perspective, *the architecture des milieux*³ comes as a working hypothesis based on the combination of theory and practice. It is an experimental process that doesn't propose dogmas and fixed recipes to design (Bonnet, 2010). Defining the interaction between disciplines, points of view and scales as its strong bases, *the architecture des milieux* supports the activation of ecological networks. Some conflicts and disagreements could emerge and sometimes they destabilize the process endangering the effectiveness of the strategic planning. In this sense, we are invited to provide ourselves with a particular apparatus – that supports exchange, openness and synergy among different milieus. Such an apparatus, that we could call inter-milieu, turn the conflicts and the disagreements into an occasion to redefine new concepts, new geographies and new possible alliances.

WHAT IS AN (INTER-MILIEU) APPARATUS?⁴

An apparatus activates a process of *desubjectification* that makes us lose our personal perception of things. However, it is not only an apparatus of violence; in fact, it could actually activate a process of *subjectification*. If it is understood as a way to create a virtuous cycle, an apparatus allows the reconstitution of a new subject. As Agamben (2009: 20) explains:

«The example of confession may elucidate the matter at hand: the formation of Western subjectivity that both split, is inseparable from this centuries-old activity of the apparatus of penitence – an apparatus in which a new I is constituted through the negation and, at the same time, the assumption of the old I.»

In the context of planning, Agamben's reflection about the apparatus could be a way to re-establish the processes of elaboration and experimentation of the territorial project. In other words, it calls the traditional planning process into question. In fact, it develops a desk analysis and then models a few type-strategies for many different territorial contexts. If we take *the architecture des milieux* as a working hypothesis, the inter-milieus apparatus could become a necessary passage to the interaction between disciplines, actors and also scales. Such interaction opens to different sensitivities and perceptions which put a strain on the traditional planning process based on predefined and certain models. The loss of certainty presents the possibility to experiment with new methods of theoretical research and creative work. Therefore, the territorial project doesn't impose himself as a form of control, but is compared with a vanished and uncertain reality (Balducci et al., 2011). In this perspective, the inter-milieu apparatus considers three worksites: the consultation between different actors, the creation of shared scenarios and the support of inter-milieu spaces. These worksites are connected through a network system without hierarchy: the cross processes create bridges from institutional consultation to existing inter-milieu spaces; territorial practices redraw geographies to modify the institutional planning; and inter-milieu spaces turn out to be special incubators of new territorial scenarios.

The consultation. The inter-milieu apparatus activates consultations in order that the different actors can expose their points of view to discuss the territorial transformations. That means sustaining an interdisciplinary approach, supported by the concept of trading zones (Galison, 1997; Balducci, 2011). Trading zones are able to produce a shared language for the interaction of knowledge and disciplines. Observing the innovation processes, Galison has noticed that trading zones result from the interactions between groups coming from different disciplinary fields. Beyond the different points of view and objectives, each actor has participated in creating an intermediary platform in order to communicate. The basic concept is that the need to exchange and to share encourages innovation. The paradigm shift occurs when a trading zone exists. According to the "science of muddling through" (Lindblom, 1959), such an approach takes advantage of diversity and otherness

in order to experiment with a sort of cooperation among different approaches which are often conflicting. The conflicts, as a legitimate expression of disagreement, play a decisive role in the workings of territorial governance. They enrich the local dynamics of democratic expression of opposing viewpoints (Torre, 2011) and contribute to both a redrawing of the preferences and points of view of the actors as well as to validate the common interests along the way.

The shared scenarios. Starting from a reading of the active and potential territorial resources, the imagination, as a creative force, plays a decisive role in creating scenarios. Making reference to the metaphor of the climber and the mountain by Hilary Putnam, Bernardo Secchi (Secchi, 1987) adds to the term "imagination" a sense of strong responsibility. To imagine, in fact, means to be highly critical compared to a particular and temporary situation in order to think about the future in terms of moves and repairable processes. To imagine a future vision requires reflection. In order to have a possible scenario of the territory, it is crucial to activate a participatory and sharing process. Even if the information is partial and imperfect, considering the pros and cons of everyone is the obligatory passage to create sustainable scenarios. From this sense, the strength of shared scenarios is to be supported, fed and accepted by a collective.

The inter-milieu spaces. Regarding the worksite of the consultation, different actors sit at the same table in order to bring out latent potentialities. The worksite of inter-milieu spaces physically turns the territory into places where some activities are shared. *The paradigm of sharing* guides many of the transformations in contemporary European cities (Bianchetti, 2014). This new paradigm produces an innovative city where the inter-milieu approach takes form and becomes a place of relationship. It is interesting to notice that such transformations are often produced by self-managed actions, in which the inhabitants are an active part of the territory. These actions aim to improve the habitability of the places. Some studies (see, for instance, Cottino, 2003) describe the Milanese city through the spontaneous actions and practices that transform the urban territory beyond the institutional planning. The spontaneous practices and actions can be understood as a particular system of territorial indicators able to gain the tendencies of the real city in order to structure the territorial project. In this perspective, institutions could learn from the transformations made by self-managed actions and propose a territorial project that understands the needs of those living in that place. It could be particularly interesting in the planning context, where information that cannot be known is often completely removed. This approach could encourage the cultural transition from a planning for the plan to a planning for the territory.



Figure 52 | © Adamo Maio

THE WORKSHOP, AN EXPERIMENTAL INTER-MILIEU APPARATUS

An inter-milieu apparatus initiates an open process. The top-down and the bottom-up processes can create rigid hierarchies and they often operate in one-way dynamics. We want to set the attention on an *à boucle* process. The creation of intermediary platforms, the interception of inter-milieu spaces and the creation of shared scenarios are three access points of an iterative and interactive process. By defining the inter-milieu apparatus, the workshop "Linking Territories" has been an experimentation of it. Refusing pre-established models of planning, the workshop has been an apparatus based on comparisons between debate disciplines, schools and cultures. The quantity and the heterogeneity of the participants involved in the project brought out different points of view, creating a few moments of disorientation! Starting from these difficulties and the process of de-subjectification, the apparatus-workshop has played an active and catalytic role in stimulating new thinking and new collaborations. During the months of work in Milan and in Paris, the researchers, the students, the local associations, and the professionals involved through local associations have formed one complex working group in order to experiment with an in-between approach. This experience tries to create a sort of new language among different methods. This workshop aims to show that this way of working could be strategic in order to debate contemporary urban transformations. In May, during the initial activities in Milan, some guests and public administrators were invited to reflect upon the workshop themes and to collect many points of view. In May, we also visited the site that we were studying and on which we were conducting research: the western region of Milan. This moment was very important to create a common ground. In July, the second session of the workshop was one intensive week for design activities. The students from the two universities worked together, in three groups, to develop some possible transformations for this territory. The mixed groups and the background of each student created a rich exchange. Some local actors took part in this activity to discuss the strategies and the feasibility of each project. During the final session, we discussed the workshop outcomes with guests and researchers.

Some Milanese western territories are very interesting in this study in order to investigate the peri-urban spaces between the compact city and the countryside. Starting from fragmented areas, we have identified some potential inter-milieu spaces. The rich districts of Boscoincittà-Parco delle Cave-Parco del Trenno, Muggiano village's countryside and the neighborhood of Piazza d'Armi and Parco Parri have served as the settings for the in-depth topics of the workshop⁵.

Boscoincittà - Parco delle Cave - Parco del Trenno: starting from the existing inter-milieu spaces, the table discussions developed some shared possible scenarios. Since the 1970s, ItaliaNostra⁶ has experimented with some territorial transformations in Milan. This experimentation has produced Boscoincittà, which has metabolized over time by the metropolitan system, and, today, is an essential part of the structure of the territory of Milan. Based on the sharing approach, such transformations have produced many co-managed spaces. Together with Parco delle Cave and Parco del Trenno, Boscoincittà has become a large precious green area of the west of Milan. These three macro milieus have kept many leftover spaces out of their boundaries that could be a resource for the territory. The discussions between the participants and the guests of the workshop have led to a redrawing of the new geographies identifying territorial fragments which are excluded from any project. The strength of the vision is that it is produced by a shared process of critical analysis. The process has proposed the transformation of such fragments in order to define interstitial elements that work in a territorial networked system. This shared vision could be a starting point for a possible project for the green area in the Milanese area vasta.

Muggiano: starting from discussions and consultations, a shared vision is produced in order to imagine inter-milieu spaces where different practices of the territory coexist.

In Muggiano territory, the rural areas and the urban residential areas are juxtaposed without any exchange between them. In fact, the intensive agriculture and urban practices seem to be incompatible. The deep transformations of this territory have, over time, cut the physical and social links between these vastly different worlds. Starting from this enclave situation, some discussions are opened in order to test the compatibility and the coexistence. For the conception of different scenarios, the consultation among different local actors and non-state actors has been decisive to carry out some multivariable analysis. One of the proposed scenarios is more relevant because it imagines hybrid forms of landscape where the multifunctionality is considered a way to innovate the local economy. The scenario tends, therefore, to support spaces of sharing.

Piazza d'Armi - Parco Parri: some discussions and exchanges have revealed that this area is rich of spaces of aggregation where the local associations discuss the future territorial transformations. Some possible scenarios are experimented with, while keeping in mind the pre-existing practices. Baggio is a "sensitive" suburban zone in the Milanese western area. Recently, virtuous initiatives of urban regeneration have animated this particular area. Many local associations act on the territory, transforming it through some small actions. In this way, some spaces of sharing are created. Starting from these existing territorial resources, the workshop group has developed some scenarios making connections with the creative actions of the territory. Piazza d'Armi and Parco Parri, are now empty and abandoned areas. They are imagined as polycentric spaces for a program rich in activity. The proposed vision stresses social integration, turning the hyper-fragmented context into an occasion for a project of linking.

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NOTES

- 1 Geometry, a branch of mathematics, studies the space and the spatial figures defining, in a first place, the extension.
- 2 The word experience derives from the Latin *experientia(m)* – *experiens*, present participle of the verb *experiri*, that means to test, to experiment. In turn, the Latin term seems to refer to the Indo-European root **per*, that means to try, to cross space (J. P. Mallory and Douglas Q. Adams, 1997)
- 3 Le Portique Architecture des milieux no. 25 (Editions du Portique, 2010) <https://leportique.revues.org/2469>
- 4 It is an explicit reference to the Giorgio Agamben's book "Che cos'è un dispositivo?" (Agamben G., 2006). The author tackled an issue discussed by Michael Foucault in the 70s.
- 5 See the chapter n.3: Proposals and Insights.
- 6 Italia Nostra is an Italian association for the safeguard and the maintenance of the Italian territory: see <http://www.italianostra.org/>

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Research by design Workshop_2015

LINKING TERRITORIES

Rurality, landscape and urban borders
Strategies for the western region of Milan

Rural areas close to the urban fabric no longer serve their adjacent towns: the relation between production of food and energy and their consumption at the base of the economy of the past has completely changed, likewise the balance between landscape and built environment. The relationship between urban and rural is at the centre of the debate which investigates how these two dimensions can be re-imagined in order to better share resources and to foster opportunities for sustainable development. Milanese territories are interesting cases to explore the implication of such a issue.

LINKING TERRITORIES is a joint workshop organized by the PhD in Urban Planning, Design and Policy (UPDP) of the Politecnico di Milano and the DES "Architecture des Milieux" of the Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture de Paris.

May 2015 | MILAN |

May 5th public conference

h. 10.30-13.00 :Workshop presentation + Lecture
Aula Gamma, Politecnico di Milano

- A. Bruzese - P. Pucci (UPDP) | A. Lapenna - C. Younes (ESA)
- P. Versteegh (Western Switzerland University, Fribourg)

h. 14.30-17.30: Focus on Milan + Round table
Spazio Aperto Nave, Politecnico di Milano

- A. Longo (Polimi) - M. Prusicki (Polimi)
- P. Versteegh, G. Scudo (Polimi), A. Calori (Poimi), N. Reverdini (Az. Agricola La Forestina)

May 6th workshop activities: Expo visit

May 7th workshop activities: Site visit with S. Anderloni (Bosco in Città)

June/July 2015 | MILAN |

June 29th - July 4th workshop activities:
work sessions with tutors and external guests

September 2015 | PARIS |

Sept 21st workshop activities

Sept 22nd workshop activities
+ public conference

h. 13.15-19.00 presentation workshop proposals, final presentation and discussion with Claire Shorter, architecte and urbanist; Pierre Donadieu, professor at the ENSP de Versailles; Didier Rebios, general secretary EUROPEAN EUROPE

Sept 23rd workshop activities:

Site visit of Montjean and Maiouines in Rungis and project presentation

Workshop curators and coordinators:
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Tutor: Giulia Fini (POLIMI)



This book collects the outcomes of the workshop “Linking territories. Rurality, landscape and urban borders” jointly organised by the PhD course in Urban Planning, Design and Policy (UPDP) at the Politecnico di Milano and the Post-Master “Architecture des Milieux” of the Ecole Spéciale d’Architecture de Paris. The workshop has had a double aim: to widen the view on the relationship between urban and rural areas, by involving different groups of research and practice, and to define experimental proposals able to imagine new spaces for the co-habitation of urban and rural ways of living, in the end redefining the concept of rurality and its relation with the urban condition.



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