



*Book
of
Proceedings*



7th ISUFitaly International Conference | Naples, 19-21 February 2026

CITY RENEWAL AND URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY

The morphological values of city traces



ISUFitaly
International Seminar on Urban Form
Italian Network

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BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS



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Cover image

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ISUFitaly

International Seminar on Urban Form
Italian Network
<http://www.isufitaly.com/>

ISBN 9788894735611
U+D Editions

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Naples and 7th ISUFItaly International Conference

ISUF Italy decided to hold its 7th International Conference in Naples, hosted by the Department of Architecture at the University of Naples "Federico II". The topic, *City Renewal and Urban Archaeology. The Morphological Value of City Traces*, has prompted a wide-ranging reflection on the role that traces – material but perhaps also immaterial – accumulated over time can play in the processes of interpretation, conservation and transformation of the contemporary city, understood as a space in which the various layers of history coexist and overlap.

The choice of this topic originates from the awareness that the challenges posed by our times – in which cities and territories are undergoing rapid and profound transformations driven by environmental, economic and social dynamics that are often indifferent to the values of the urban form – cannot be addressed exclusively through approaches focused on technological innovation, functional efficiency and the speed of intervention processes. Rather, they require a renewed focus on the historical and morphological complexity of urban and territorial contexts, reaffirming the value of a tradition of study to which Italian research has made theoretical and methodological contributions of the highest importance throughout the 20th century, and which regards the city as a complex historical organism, whose significance also lies in the capacity of its forms to preserve, transmit and reinterpret over time the traces of the transformations that have shaped its structure.

In this sense, discussing the *Morphological Value of City Traces* has meant not only addressing material remains of the past to be protected for their 'documentary' value, but interpreting such evidences as active elements in the construction of urban forms, whose 'monumental' value – that is, their formal value – should often be revealed through the project. The notion of 'trace' has proved, in the richness and variety of the contributions presented, to be a particularly fruitful interpretative category within the different theoretical and methodological approaches that characterise the field of urban morphology studies today. Road alignments that survive functional changes, land divisions that continue to guide the organisation of the built environment, typological continuities, settlement systems that maintain recognisable structural relationships with geographical forms, spatial configurations and relationships between the built environment and open space that

help define the identity of places were just some of the themes addressed during the conference.

The relationship between *City Renewal and Urban Archaeology* played a central role in the debate that unfolded over the three days of the conference. Whilst, on the one hand, the reference to urban archaeology was not interpreted exclusively in a disciplinary sense but was adopted as a thinking paradigm capable of guiding a stratigraphic reading of the city – in which the various temporalities that accompanied its formation emerge as essential components of its current structure – on the other hand, particular attention was devoted to the role of architectural and urban design in engaging with such legacies.

As the archaeologist Andreina Ricci observed, when fragments of the past emerge within the contemporary city, they often produce a sort of 'wound', as their morphological structure conflicts with the systems of order of the city on the surface. Furthermore, it is not uncommon that these remains do not appear because they are 'sought' through excavation, but resurface suddenly during infrastructure works, natural disasters or urban regeneration processes. In this sense, urban archaeology poses a question to the project that is as complex as it is urgent, concerning the composition of spatial systems belonging to different temporalities that are sometimes mutually in conflict. Precisely from this perspective, one of the most original aspects to emerge from the conference concerns the role attributed to the architectural project as a tool for knowledge and interpretation, as well as for the transformation, of the stratified city. Far from being regarded as a subsequent and separate phase from morphological and archaeological analysis, design was frequently presented in the papers as a critical tool capable of revealing latent relationships, recognising hidden continuities and constructing new forms of dialogue between different temporalities. Urban traces, in fact, never present themselves as mere objective data to be recorded or preserved but require an interpretative process that grasps their meaning within the city's overall structure. In this process, the project plays an essential role: it not only protects or enhances what remains but re-situates it within new systems of spatial relations that represent shared values. In this sense, the project does not take the form of an act of superimposition upon the existing but proves to be a practice of critical interpretation of duration, capable of transforming urban memory into an active resource for the construction of the city of the future.

The choice of Naples as the venue for the conference has lent further significance to these reflections. Few European cities, in fact, demonstrate with equal clarity the depth of the stratifications that characterise the relationship between urban form and history. From the Greek-Roman city to the processes of modern and contemporary expansion, Naples offers an emblematic example of how the traces of the past continue to operate within current urban configurations, influencing their spatial organisation, settlement dynamics and possibilities for transformation. In this sense, the city represented not only the physical venue of the

conference, but also a significant cultural reference.

The response from the academic community has been particularly significant. The proceedings bring together 182 papers, organised into the conference's three main thematic areas – *Theory, Reading and Design* – and their respective sub-sections, offering a comprehensive overview of the current state of research on urban form and the relationships between urban archaeology, morphology and design. The conference also confirmed the international dimension of the academic community associated with ISUF. Although the event was organised as part of ISUFItaly's activities, alongside the participation of scholars from numerous Italian universities, the volume brings together contributions developed within European and non-European contexts, demonstrating the network's ability to connect different research experiences, cultural traditions and geographical contexts around a shared reflection on urban form.

We entrust these Proceedings to the academic community in the hope that the reflections gathered here may help to stimulate further research into the morphological value of urban traces and their role in urban renewal processes. At a time in history when the pressure for change appears ever more intense, recognising and interpreting the forms of permanence represents not merely an exercise in knowledge, but an essential condition for building transformations capable of combining memory, identity and a responsible vision of the future.

The Conference Chairs

Giuseppe Strappa

Renato Capozzi

Federica Visconti



Urban Archaeology and Design

In recent years, the relationship between urban archaeology, urban morphology and contemporary design has returned to the center of international architectural debate. At a stage where the project mainly engages with the existing city – with its layered structures, permanences, and discontinuities – the material traces of the past no longer appear merely as testimonies to be preserved, but as active components through which the transformative possibilities of the contemporary city may be critically interpreted.

It is within this framework that the seventh ISUFItaly Conference, *City Renewal and Urban Archaeology. The Morphological Value of City Traces*, takes place, focusing on the morphological value of urban traces and on the role that archaeology and design may assume within processes of urban renewal. The proceedings collect contributions from different disciplinary, geographical, and cultural fields, united by a shared attempt to interpret the city as a complex organism shaped by permanences, fractures, superimpositions, and rewritings.

As Aldo Rossi wrote, “the city is in its history”, and its form coincides with the sedimentation of urban facts capable of traversing time and constructing permanences within transformation. From this perspective, archaeological traces are not merely residual materials belonging to concluded historical epochs, but elements capable of orienting new interpretations of urban structure, revealing deep continuities between the ancient and the contemporary city.

In this sense, the reference to urban archaeology takes on a central meaning. Not as a practice aimed at the enhancement of the individual artifact or of one historical phase prevailing over another, but as a design-oriented gaze directed toward the urban phenomenon as a whole, understood through the continuity of its transformations and stratifications. The city is thus interpreted as a processual organism, in which different temporalities coexist within a single evolutionary process, making archaeology not a separate field, but a structural component of reflection on the design of the existing city.

Many of the contributions included in the volume emphasize on the layered and processual nature of the city, on the dialectic between void and built form, between surfacing and concealment, between fragment and urban order. What emerges are readings that interpret ruins, substructures, historical infrastructures, ancient traces, and typological permanences

as matrices capable of generating new spatial configurations and new social relationships. The archaeological city is therefore understood not as a specialist *enclave* detached from urban life, but as an integral part of an inhabited and continuously re-signified environment. The archaeological issue, approached in terms of continuity rather than as the mere enhancement of the isolated fragment, may thus become an opportunity to orient directions of urban development capable of working through relationships between parts, structural permanences, and connections among different temporalities of the city, opposing logics of isolation and separation of urban materials.

Within this framework, the morphological issue takes on a central role. It is not simply a matter of recognizing the persistence of forms over time, but of understanding the processes through which such forms are transformed, reinterpreted, and reactivated. The morphological approach, recalled transversally in many of the studies collected in the volume, does not coincide with a static description of the city; rather, it constitutes an interpretative method capable of reading the relationships between settlement structure, topography, use, temporality, and transformation. Urban morphology thus becomes both a critical and a design tool: it allows latent continuities, resistant geometries, structural permanences, and evolutionary possibilities within historical and contemporary fabrics to be identified.

Research developed within the Italian typomorphological school has shown, in this regard, how the city may be interpreted as an organism in continuous transformation, within which typological processes do not constitute static elements but structures capable of adaptation, mutation, and permanence. Urban form therefore appears as the outcome of multiple and overlapping layers, in which erosion and deposition, continuity and fracture, absence and recomposition coexist within the same transformative dynamic. The contemporary city thus emerges as a complex morphological structure in which different temporalities coexist in conditions of reciprocal interference. Michel Foucault recalled how history does not proceed through linear sequences, but through "series of discontinuous depths", while Michel Serres described time as a "lacunary and sporadic" matter, composed of returns, suspensions, and accelerations. Urban traces therefore do not appear as fixed or completed elements, but as unstable materials continuously exposed to processes of transformation, reuse, and re-signification. Many of the contributions in the volume move precisely within this tension: between memory and design, permanence and mutation, continuity and discontinuity. The notion of the "trace" is continuously redefined: no longer a simple material residue, but an ordering principle, a latent figure, an invisible infrastructure, threshold, margin, urban void. In some cases, the trace guides processes of urban recomposition; in others, it acts as an element of resistance or as an opportunity to redefine the relationship between the consolidated city, landscape, and public space.

Through this plurality of positions, the proceedings convey an image of the contemporary city as an intrinsically stratified and

relational reality, in which architectural and urban design are called upon to engage not with not isolated objects, but with complex systems of permanences and transformations. Urban archaeology is thus removed both from a purely specialist dimension, confined to archaeological expertise alone, and from an exclusively technical one, to be relocated within a broader reflection on the social and spatial meaning of design.

As Vittorio Gregotti recalled, conservation without design risks becoming a form of immobilization of reality; on the contrary, design may restore an operative dimension to archaeological traces by reinserting them into the living processes of the city. What emerges is therefore an idea of design as an interpretative and processual practice, capable of operating through relationships between different times, between surfaces and subsoil conditions, between memory and contemporary use, between lost fragments and new forms of urban continuity.

In this sense, urban archaeology is not interpreted as a practice aimed at the simple conservation of the past, but as an integral part of a design reflection on the existing city, on its processes of transformation and on the continuities that can still be built between different urban temporalities and strata.

Bruna Di Palma
Francesca Coppolino
Valeria Defilippis
Salvatore Daniele Lombardi



Call and organization

City Renewal and Urban Archaeology The Morphological Value of City Traces

ISUFitaly, International Seminar on Urban Form, Italian Network, organizes its seventh Conference in Naples on 19-21 February 2026. The theme of the conference is "City Renewal and Urban Archaeology. The Morphological Value of City Traces". Following the previous ISUFitaly conferences themes, dealing mainly with the relationships between urban morphology, history and architectural design, the seventh Conference aims to pose the problem of the relationship between the emergence of urban archaeological traces and the often conspicuous morphological value that this formal legacy can potentially generate through urban design as tool to establish links between contemporary city and artefacts from the past: through the creation of large-scale urban archaeological parks or the construction of archaeological roofs; through establishing unprecedented relationship with infrastructures related to underground level different from those of the city 'in surface'.

The theme of urban continuity/discontinuity in the contemporary city and the role of urban architecture as a necessary intermediary, or condition of possibilities, between the historical city, the public space and possible congruent transformations in the contemporary age, are thus re-proposed.

The Conference Chairs
Giuseppe Strappa
Renato Capozzi
Federica Visconti

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Forms of absence between urban layers and place's identity

The case of Civitaretenga Clock Tower

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Keywords: Antifragile architecture, Memory, Identity, Earthquake
Conference theme: Urban design for urban archaeology. Historical fabric and contemporary project

Abstract. The collapse of the medieval tower of Civitaretenga, a hamlet of the municipality of Navelli, in the province of L'Aquila, during the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake marked the loss of a morphological and identity reference point for the urban fabric and for the entire Navelli Valley. This article describes the rebuilding of the tower in the context of the complex post-earthquake reconstruction process, mapping out the research path that led to its implementation. The process aimed to restore to the community an architectural reference point capable of reactivating the spatial and symbolic relationships of the pre-existing structure in a contemporary reinterpretation of the icon. Research methodology relies on the identification of layers and procedures that can be copied in similar contexts, arranged into four layers: memory and territory; figures and traces; processes and limits; and architecture and fragment. Their expression reinstates a complex system of presences and absences, not rejecting the architectural plan, but acting as an active element in the definition of place identity and strategies of intervention on the built heritage. The design principle, understood as a form of "active urban archaeology", offers the opportunity to reflect on the role of architecture as a mediator between past and future, the historic settlement and the morphological possibilities of the present, and as an essential component of the identity of place and community by transforming the project and its process into a catalyst for memory and social interaction, to reintegrate Civitaretenga's urban and landscape system.



Figure 1. The reconstruction project of the Clock Tower in Civitaretenga (Aq).

Beyond absence

The concept shared by absence and identity of places can be used as a tool for critical examination, not seen as rigid opposition but rather as a field of tension within which cultural stratification processes develop and become legible. This approach allows architecture to be interpreted not only through its material presence, but also through absences, discontinuities, and gaps, which are an integral part of it. This paper develops this interpretation to suggest retroactive verification of the validity of the conceptual framework applied in a research-by-design process¹, addressing the principle of reconstructing an element of identity. A case in point is Civitaretenga (AQ) Clock Tower, destroyed during the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake, considered as a platform for constructing the argument and an immaterial layer that can impact the identity of places.

In places affected by various kinds of disasters, the loss of symbolic artifacts often leads to ruptures that influence collective memory and the recognizability of places. This transforms absence into a physical loss but also into an active factor in the lack of perception of urban space. Civitaretenga, a hamlet in the municipality of Navelli in the province of L'Aquila, is an excellent example for exploring these dynamics, since the destruction of the Clock Tower, which constituted an identity asset for its community (Choay, 1992), also impacted the perceptual continuity of the urban, territorial, and cultural system. Its absence thus leads to disorientation, representing a loss of memory, which cannot be perceived as simple absence or the passive outcome of material loss, but as an active condition, generated by historical, traumatic, or evolutionary events, that can have a profound impact on the perception, organization, and recognizability of places.

From this perspective, identity is not presented as a static or intrinsic fact, but as a dynamic process constructed over time through stratification of presences and absences, of material permanencies and symbolic gaps. It represents an albeit imperfect memory that is not a totally blank slate (Halbwachs, 1950) and the act of rebuilding a tower in turn represents the keystone upon which memory can be constructed and then communicated to future generations. In that future, urban layouts and cornerstones may be read as a complex palimpsest, in which traces of the past are visible not only in what survives, but also in what is transformed, removed, or lost.

By the same token, reflections on the genius loci define the identity of place as the power of built space to embrace and convey shared meanings, suggesting that absence can also contribute to shaping the character of places (Norberg-Schulz, 1890). Absences can be interpreted as outright immaterial layers of the urban fabric, which can render otherwise latent visual, symbolic, and social relationships legible.

The conceptual pairing of forms of absence and identity of places is not based therefore on an oppositional relationship, but rather on a procreative field of tension, within which absence becomes an interpretative and operational tool for understanding the construction processes of urban identity, orienting architectural design towards an act of mediation between memory, transformation, and cultural transmission.

Enters this theoretical framework, the present contribute exploring the various layers that determined the cornerstones of the research process. These cornerstones can be represented by memory and territory, figures and traces, processes and limits, architecture and fragment, reinstating a complex system of presences and absences, considering absence not as withdrawal from the architectural but as an active element in defining identity of place and action strategies for built heritage.

Layer 1 | Memory and territory

The methodological process for reconstituting the layers began with a reflection on the impor-

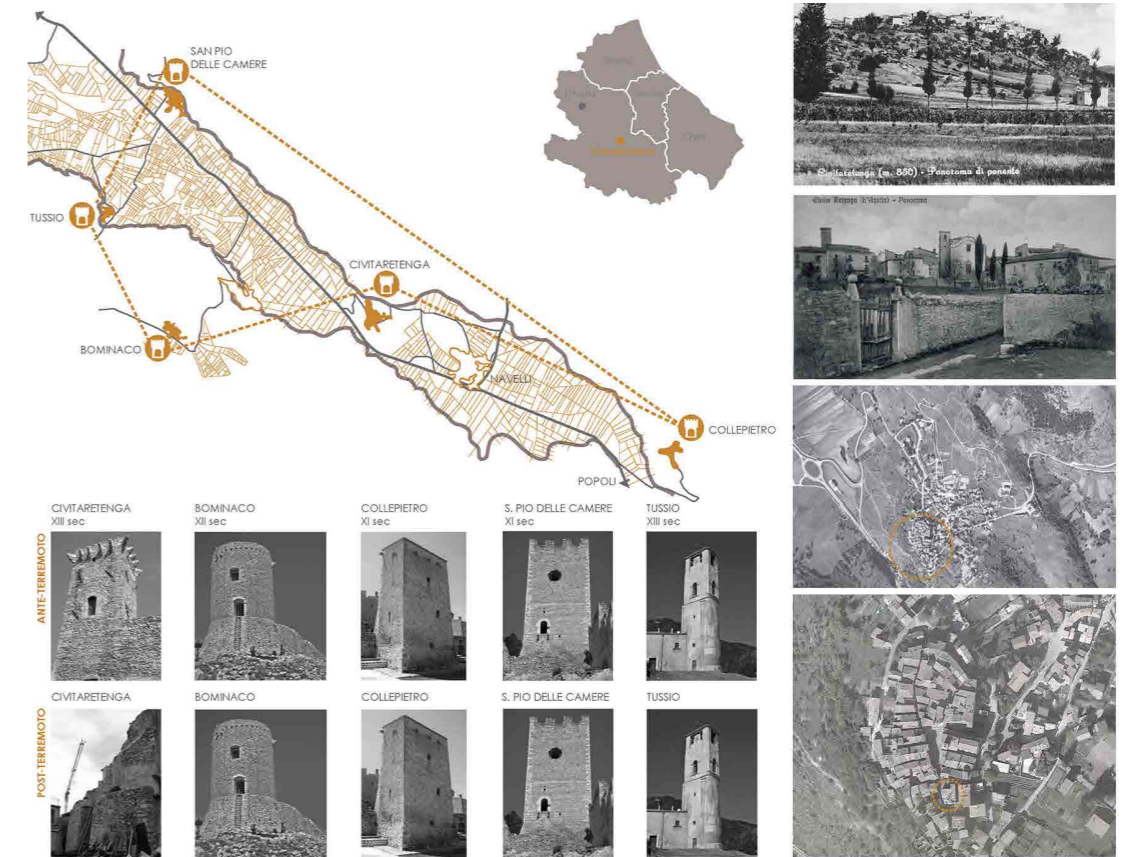


Figure 2. The system of watchtowers in the Navelli valley.

tance of memory. This is often identified in the solidity of the traces of sources. In smaller settings, it is difficult to conduct research by exploring archival documentation and data sources. Nevertheless, the significance of minor architectural heritage can be defined by its capacity to fix images in memory (Halbwachs, 1950), through that grey area of literature so often typical of the tenacious desire of local scholars to preserve it and pass on its testament.

The Civitaretenga Clock Tower belongs to this first layer, although it showed a very strong identity value over the centuries, there are no direct documents, surveys, sources, or records that testify to its history and heritage, just some thematic literature with scant information. When the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake brought about its collapse it also erased an element whose history and actual substance had never been thoroughly investigated². Thus, the memory cornerstone was the first layer that had to be addressed by research. In this case, absence is represented by the failure to recognize the tower's institutional value, while acknowledging its identity value for the community. The Clock Tower was always an essential element in the defence and control structures of the Navelli Valley's territorial system and because of its unique location it had to be pondered as part of the historical scenario of which it was a landmark.

The Clock Tower (12th-13th century) is part of the urban fabric of Civitaretenga, a hamlet in the municipality of Navelli, on the slopes of Mount San Nicola, at 817 metres in altitude.

Civitaretenga's position plays an important role in controlling the Navelli Valley, the route to the Tirino Valley, and the current SS17 once the Via Claudia Nova Roman road³. The hamlet's

strategic position within the ancient road grid is further underscored by its close connection to the Centurelle-Montesecco Tratturo sheep track, which skirts the built-up area then proceeds into the Tirino Valley, joining the dense network of sheep tracks that reach the Tavoliere delle Puglie highland. Civitaretenga's inclusion in the Tratturo system enabled it to enjoy the economic growth endowed on areas where the sheep track passed, bringing significant construction developments like the building of rural places of worship, intended to offer assistance to shepherds during their transhumance journey. These religious buildings developed primarily in the Dark and Middle Ages, with evidence of monastic complexes and/or individual churches, like the 16th-century Santa Maria delle Grazie (Moretti, 1972, 827), found at the meeting point of two sheep tracks. In addition to the better-known monastic complexes or places of worship, the area under consideration invested significantly in its defensive system from ancient times. Not only for functional and practical needs but also because fortifications were seen as a true art form, evident throughout the centuries in the architectural and artistic use with which these systems were implemented. In the Dark Ages, a process of entrenching the community in defensive works marked the transition from Roman villa to castra settlement, characterized by fortification systems that went from simple towers to outright castles, with curtain walls and keeps. This tradition confirms the medieval origins of Civitaretenga, which probably dated back to the 13th century. The plateau's defensive system was based on the presence of watchtowers interconnected by visual contact points⁴. Within this territorial system is the Tower of Civitaretenga «...paired with another mentioned above [...] to defend the orographic narrowing that separates the two sections of the Navelli Plateau: one towards San Pio delle Camere and the other towards Navelli itself» (Gizzi, Chiarizia, 1987, 541). The tower was originally part of Civitaretenga Castle and its fortification system, standing as one of the elements of visual system continuity connecting the fortifications that kept guard over the ancient road infrastructures in the central Abruzzo Apennines. There does not seem to be any certified dating of the system, however, and it is usually attributed to the 13th century, although Civitaretenga played a role of strategic importance from the Italic era⁵. In subsequent periods, the story of Civitaretenga was linked to the foundation of the city of L'Aquila, and was one of the settlements that contributed to its establishment. Subsequently it suffered the same fate as Navelli, besieged by Braccio da Montone in 1493 and again by Philibert of Chalon in 1528 (Bellotta, 2006, 97).

Over time, visual systems in the territorial layout shaped an initial perceptual landscape, a reference that could be said to identify with the settlement's morphological structure. This landscape still survives and has become a very distinctive visual element and testimony to a system of relationships and exchanges of importance to the context in question. The loss of even one of these elements is not a simple single subtraction, but rather a relational and sociocultural gap.

Layer 2 | Figures and traces

The hamlet of Civitaretenga has a typical medieval layout, «attributable to a closed settlement, surrounded by curtain walls and still strongly recognizable in the central ovoid plan of many local settlements» (Navelli Municipal Council Reconstruction Plan, 2013, 46). It is presumed that the hamlet developed between the 8th and 11th centuries AD⁶. Its current layout, enclosed by partly recognizable curtain walls, underwent further significant expansion during the Renaissance. A significant portion of this growth was due to the Jewish Ghetto, with its very dense, articulated settlement system, which became an integral part of the hamlet's layout and had a unique rapport with the built-up area. Expansion continued in subsequent periods until the hamlet was incorporated into the Municipality of Navelli in 1811 (Napoleone, 2000, 9). The urban layout typical of ridge systems is structured around a main axis, with blocks set dia-

gonally along the lines of maximum slope. A closeknit system of alleys intersects the blocks, developing a dense, cadenced structure crucial to improving the settlement's defences. There appears to be an original nucleus consisting of three cornerstones: the church of San Salvatore, the Santissimo Sacramento church, and the Palazzo Perelli and CS-CIV-11 complex, which includes the Clock Tower. This system could be the initial nucleus around which the extensions subsequently grew, defining an urban fabric so complex that it does not appear as an autonomous entity but rather a condensing, orienting figure in which the three cornerstones act as nodes of spatial intensity, making the implicit hierarchy of the settlement legible.

The Clock Tower is found along the ridge axis and beside the system of open spaces, affording it an important urban role, as shown by its prospect onto Piazzetta Castello, the pivotal element of the urban system comprising Civitaretenga's three main squares. Here the urban system reveals its own weighty configuration in the rapport between fabric and figure. The urban plan defined by this system is not merely a morphological feature, but a delineation of the primary settlement pattern, albeit on the surface. It distinguishes the built system from the surrounding agricultural fabric, separated by the partly discernible curtain walls. It acts as a structuring boundary that is a threshold between the agricultural fabric and the urban systems, separated by the configuration of vegetable plots and outline of paths, thus establishing a formal continuity between density of buildings and a lack thereof in the surrounding terrain. The Clock Tower, of which only the base survives, is located in the oldest part of the historic centre. Dated as 12th century, it was part of a more complex defensive system, of which it is now the most substantial residual evidence. There is no documentation regarding its construction and the only verifiable datum is the listing of the Civitaretenga tower as one of «the watchtowers of the Tirino Valley and Navelli Valley» (Chiarizia, Properzi, 1995, 190). The first four metres of the height of the square-plan tower form a truncated pyramid and the main section rose from this base. Period photographs suggest the tower was around ten metres in height. The top was finished with corbels that probably supported parapets that are now lost. The tower had squared masonry cornerstones set unevenly, and walls constructed of even, roughly hewn ashlar⁷. Mezzanine wooden floors were connected by ladders, also wood; the terraced roof was built after the 1915 Avezzano earthquake, with a reinforced concrete floor, the likely cause of the tower's collapse in the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake. Just below the corbels on the north side of the tower, a functioning clock and bells were clearly visible from the urban centre, hence the designation of 'Clock Tower'. The earthquake swallowed the entire structure. Even in its current state of dereliction, the base is still a figurative device. The absence of the upper section does not cancel out its urban presence; on the contrary, it renders it a trace, namely an element able to suggest a figure through subtraction. In this sense, the tower belongs to a category of permanencies that operate through sedimentation and memory, rather than through integrity of form and linchpin of figure. It is also a fragment able to link the monumental factor to that of the smaller building fabric, activating a dialectic between figure and background, between exceptional element and typological continuity. Reading of the layout has thus made it possible to see voids, squares, clearings, and openings not as residual spaces, but structural pauses in the system that intersect the compact density of the medieval grid. They render Civitaretenga's urban sequence distinguishable, representing a system in which the form of the settlement is not a sum of buildings but an interweaving of patterns and figures emerging in an organism that continues to structure the urban system along with traces, walls, and ruins, even when their material consistency is incomplete or compromised.

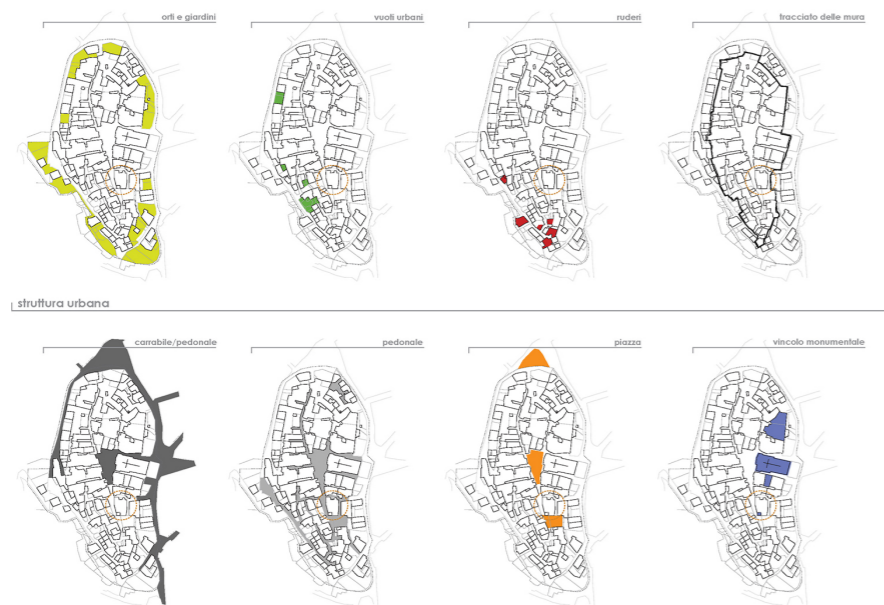


Figure 3. The urban system di Civitaretenga with thematic layers.

Layer 3 | Processes and limits

In the transition from the interpretative to the operational dimension, absence has emerged as a perceptual or symbolic condition and also as a critical procedural point regarding reconstruction projects. In smaller sites this often constitutes a cognitive and identity-building device and in the implementation process it shows itself through data fragmentation, inadequacy of regulatory instruments, and complexity of administrative procedures, especially in the case of post-earthquake reconstruction. Through confrontation with previously undetermined limits and constraints, it poses a challenge to the architectural design⁸ in its role as a “social device” (Emery, 2007, 22). The reconstruction progress of a building must comply with different demands; in contexts affected by traumatic events, the possibility of evaluating alternative propositions is drastically reduced when the object of the intervention is characterized by coexistence of historical importance, mixed ownership structures, unrecorded geological criticalities, and incomplete chronological and technical documentation. Consequently, the progress becomes an integral part of the project, shaping itself in an effort to fill a structural gap in knowledge through a critical process expressed as a “sequence of actions and experiences” (Ricoeur, 1986, 225), including administrative actions. The collapse of the Clock Tower turned the spotlight on a critical issue for the physical loss of the element, compounded by the lack of an adequate information framework, both in terms of surveys and of historical sources, leaving a legacy of ruins in which the “implicit logic” (Augé, 2004, 14) is still to be codified.

In this context, while acknowledging the unique nature of the complex and the Clock Tower, the Civitaretenga reconstruction plan was unsatisfactory in addressing the issues arising from the lack of information about conditions still to be confirmed and some inconsistencies in the definition of the constraints regarding the tower. The uncertainty and scantness of information were thus the basis for the competition announced by municipal administration for the tower's reconstruction. It was a way of introducing reflections on quality into an incomplete regulatory framework as part of the vision of the project as a critical process (Brusatin, 2000).



Figure 4. The system of urban strongholds: the San Salvatore church, the Santissimo Sacramento church, the Palazzo Perelli and CS-CIV-11 complex, which includes the Clock Tower.

The architectural competition was announced in 2016 and represented a fundamental transitional moment in which the project was required to move forward in the absence of consolidated certainties. The point of reference was not an extant model, but rather a system of relationships to be restructured within a logic of public responsibility for the project (Emery, 2007). This lack of knowledge was compounded by further administrative and regulatory issues. The definition of overall ownership of the complex – predominantly private but including public percentages – led to the application of the MIC parameter form (*Modello Integrato del Cratere*), a fundamental tool for assessing the State's financial contribution to reconstruction. This tool fails to distinguish the monumental value of elements like the tower, causing discontinuity between the importance of identity as recognized by the community and what is formally recognized by the process, highlighting the gap between experienced and normalized heritage (Choay, 1995). Another critical issue arose for calculation of the tower's reconstruction costs since there were no consolidated parametric criteria. The need to define action areas and the related economic parameters required direct consultation with the Special Reconstruction Office, initiating a consultation process to update MIC form guidelines (12/2019 version); this process was able to advance and gradually respond to complexities (Aymard, 1987/2017). The reconstruction plan thus developed within a complex framework, distinguished by the ongoing dialogue between planners, agencies, and institutions involved, in which the process did not act as a simple administrative framework, but rather as an active layer in the design process. The constraints were not merely limitations, but also mediating elements, capable of progressively guiding the project toward a shared definition in a decision-making process (Emery, 2007). This represented an experiment aiming to fill this gap, both through the restoration of an architectural structure and through the construction of a procedural path capable of integrating knowledge, design, and limitations, transforming the lack of data and knowledge into an opportunity for critical redefinition of the relationship between protection, architectural quality, and management of public resources.

Layer 4 | Architecture and fragment

In minor historical settings, where architecture is required to act on traces, fragments, and residues (Spirito, 2015), incomplete knowledge – taken as a structural datum in such planning – will serve as the central research theme. In post-disaster reconstruction processes, this incompleteness becomes a systemic condition: material loss is compounded by loss of documentation, norms, and identity, making the project an act of interpretation rather than construction (Ricoeur, 1986). In post-earthquake reconstruction processes like L'Aquila (2009), Emilia (2012), and Central Italy (2016), operational methods have predominantly favoured approaches that aim for typological and morphological restoration on the one hand, seeking continuity of the urban image, and on the other structural adaptation compliant with performance and regulatory parameters specific to each seismic event. In this situation, planning often tends to focus on building as autonomous units for intervention, while relational and symbolic dimensions are left in the background or are subordinated to safety and functional restoration needs (Corradi, 2020). Theoretical reflection on heritage, however, highlights that reconstruction cannot be limited to either philological reproduction or simple technical adaptation. Attention is drawn to the gap between experienced and regulated heritage (Choay 1995), demonstrating how the identity – building value of an artifact exceeds its material dimension. Reconstruction explored in the research was not approached as the giving back of a lost object, but rather as the reactivation of a relational system disrupted by the traumatic event. In this case, architecture accepts the fragment as a procreative matrix in a logic of critical continuity (Brandi, 1977). Here the material permanence of what remains guides the project without an inevitable definition of form: contemporary intervention is distinguishable and compatible, critical action that transcends imitative reproduction. In the case of Civitavecchia Clock Tower, the surviving fragment – the truncated pyramid base – was interpreted as a morphological element with the power to restore the visual relationships between the ridge axis and the Navelli Valley. In this sense, the project is an active archaeological operation in which the residual datum becomes a device for construction of meaning (Augé, 2004).

In this respect, the transition from replication of form to relational reconstruction became the assumption for the project. Unlike actions oriented towards the iconic recovery of the lost object, the project aims to reconstruct the tower's urban and territorial function, understood as a landmark and spatial pivot, a reinterpretative, dynamic, and non-nostalgic legacy of genius loci (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). In formalizing a replicable methodological protocol, research was structured as a transferable and traceable operational sequence: critical reconstruction of cognitive framework; mapping of surviving elements and gaps; analysis of morphological invariants; definition of a distinct contemporary volume; structural and regulatory assessment. The decision to rebuild tower stereometry in steel and expanded metal, allowing glimpses of layers and timescales of reconstruction, becomes a reversible device upon which new urban morphologies can be instituted over time, conceiving the project as an ethical and social device, capable of integrating public responsibility and architectural quality (Emery, 2007).

In turn, integration of a regulatory aspect with design quality engages with post-earthquake reconstruction parametric devices (parametric data sheets, state funding, spending restrictions), not as limitations, but rather as an opportunity for critical review of the relationship between importance of identity and administrative acknowledgement of institutionalized heritage (Choay, 1995). In the context of post-earthquake procedures, the project does not submit passively to regulations, but rather embraces them as an active layer of research, becoming an opportunity for procedural progress.

The structural autonomy, material compatibility, building reversibility, and load control of the new construction are verifiable criteria that guarantee safety and durability.

The principle of distinguishability is not, therefore, a theoretical statement but translates into a technical requirement coherent with current regulations and the principle of action recognizability (Brandi, 1977), in which technical validation is an integral part of the theoretical contribution. In this perspective, fragment is not limited to filling a physical gap, but aims to build a new layer of identity, transforming the loss caused by the traumatic event into a renegotiation between memory and transformation. Thus the gap does not represent a missing part of a whole, but becomes an autonomous figure that gives the project theoretical and technical legitimacy (Spirito, 2015).

Beyond the rule

The process developed across four layers made it possible to conceive absence not as a simple material loss, but rather as a critical device able to direct the project. In the case of Civitavecchia Clock Tower, reconstruction was not intended as a reproduction of the lost object, but rather as the reactivation of a relational system between public space, urban ridge, and territorial landscape, disrupted by the earthquake.

The method identified by research assumed the provisional axiom of design axis shift from object to relationship, from replication to interpretation, from regulatory compliance to integrated construction of significance, safety, and spatial quality, to identify a protocol that could transcend standard principles of post-disaster reconstruction. The objective was to prove that reconstruction can become not only an act of reparation, but also a procreative process, capable of producing a single layer of identity as the sum of memory, technique, and public responsibility, offering a methodological contribution to the contemporary debate on the quality of architecture in post-earthquake contexts. The research's methodological approach established the basis of reconstruction as a relational and sequential process.

By critical interpretation of the fragment, the regenerative process is supported, using absence as an operational tool, transforming it into a compositional principle. In post-disaster reconstruction, this aims to overcome approaches that often oscillate between philological replication and technical – regulatory adaptation.

By transcending action on form as the sole outcome of the architectural project, it was possible to identify a replicable protocol based on mapping of permanencies, analysis of morphological invariants, definition of a distinguishable contemporary construction, and technical-structural-procedural validation.

This sequence imagines project configuration as a model transferable to minor historical centres affected by material and immaterial losses.

If conducted following the sequence described above, the integration of architectural quality, public accountability, and technical verification would make it possible to overcome the contrast between preservation and innovation, in which structural autonomy, reversibility, and recognizability of an action translate theoretical principles of critical continuity into operational terms.

From this perspective, reconstruction is not limited to an act of restoration or compensation, but can also be a procreative practice that transforms a traumatic event into an opportunity for redefining identity. The fragment becomes a threshold between permanence and transformation, and architecture takes on the role of active agent between memory and future in vulnerable historical landscapes.

Notes

- ¹ This paper illustrates a research project developed as part of a scientific consultancy contract for the plans to “repair with seismic improvement the building complex known as Aggregato CS-CIV-11 RIF, located in the hamlet of Civitaretenga, in the municipality of Navelli (AQ), as part of the post-L'Aquila 2009 earthquake reconstruction program, at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, awarded by the ATP, group leader Arch. Grazia Manuela Dicembrino, scientific director, Professor Emilia Corradi.
- ² State Archives of L'Aquila and materials available for consultation in public libraries; historical documents deemed useful in reconstructing the historical-architectural past were kept in the municipal archives, which is not accessible.
- ³ Further information: Zenodocchio S. (2008), *Antica viabilità in Abruzzo*, Publish REA, L'Aquila.
- ⁴ Further information on fortification and watchtowers: Chiarizia G, Properzi P (1995), *Abruzzo dei castelli. Gli insediamenti fortificati abruzzesi dagli italici all'unità d'Italia*. Carsa, Pescara.
- ⁵ Further information: Napoleone M (2000), *Civitaretenga: notiziario storico*. Tipografia Brandolini, Pescara.
- ⁶ The origins of the village are rather uncertain. Available sources refer to it as Cingilia, a Vestina fortress. Further information: Napoleone M (2000), *op. cit.*: 9.
- ⁷ Further information on the construction techniques present in Civitaretenga: Report phase C pdr_finale Dec 2013 of the PdR of the Municipality of Navelli, *op. cit.*: 49-62.
- ⁸ Further information on the impact of post-earthquake reconstruction regulatory processes on the quality of architectural design: Corradi E (2020), *Progettare nel post-sisma, la sfida della qualità del progetto (Post-earthquake design: the challenge of design quality)*, in Galderisi A, di Venosa M, Fera G, Menoni S (eds), *Geografie del rischio*. Donzelli, Roma: 91-99.

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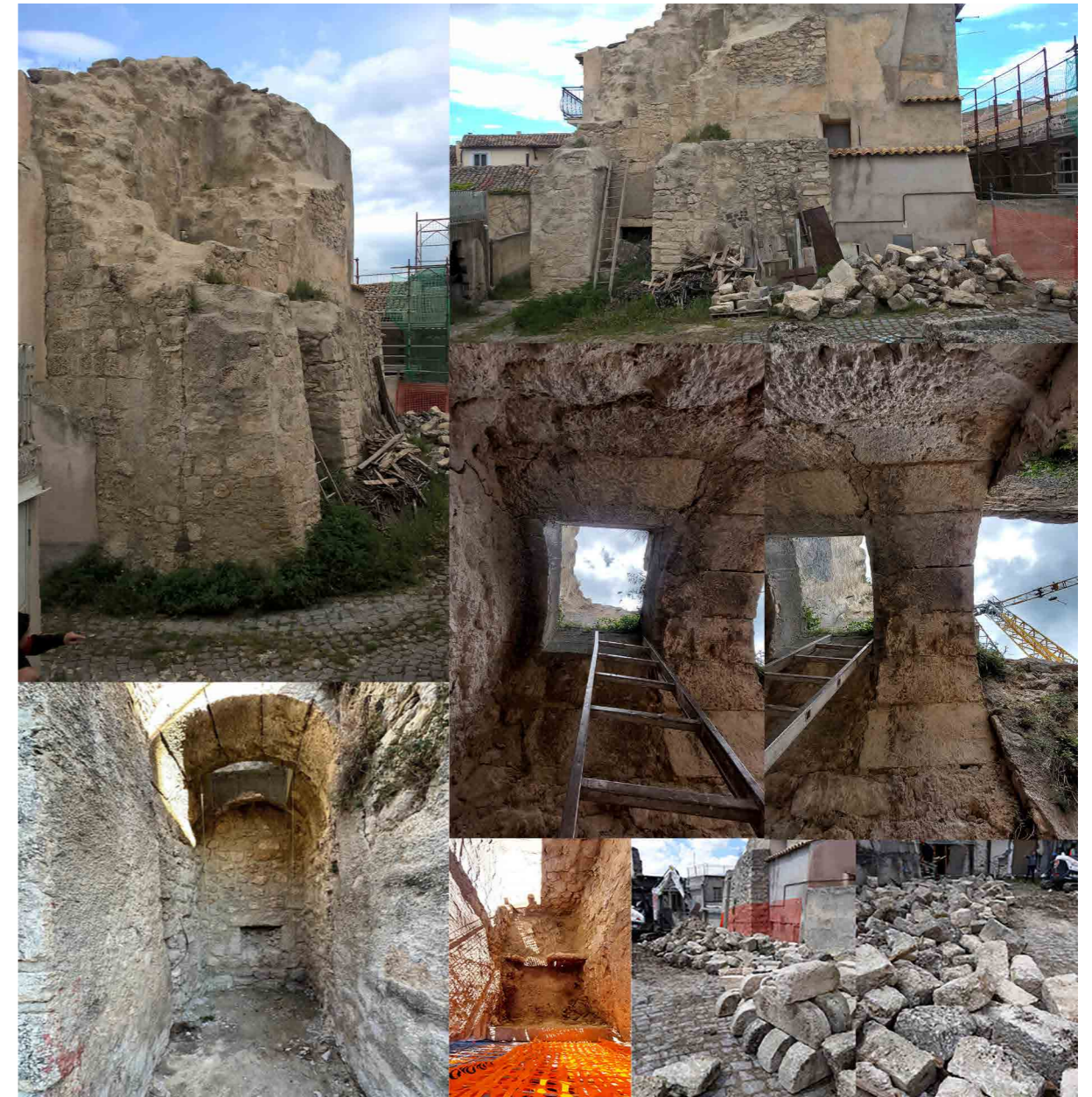


Figure 5. The Clock Tower after the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake, before the start of reconstruction work. Ph. Grazia Manuela Dicembrino.