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From functionalist agrocities to regionalist approach

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Dazhai, modernity and self-sufficiency in the collectivised villages of Maoist China

Catastrophe, migration, and modernity: Farm Security Administration settlements in Arizona and California

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The Architecture of Gino Malacarne. Two exhibitions and two books  
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The other half of the sky: female architecture



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ricerche e progetti  
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## Rural modern. Themes and context

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Francesca Bonfante, Luca Monica  
**New towns and new countryside in Italy from corporatism to post-war reconstruction**

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Abstract

This contribution examines the relationship between architecture, town planning and rural landscape within the plan for construction of new towns in areas subject to large-scale reclamation and agricultural development before and after the Second World War. In the 1930s, these processes were largely based on theories about the Fascist corporate state. Corporatism purported a clear hierarchy between settlements, each bound for a given role, for which specific functions were to concentrate. Shifting from the territorial level to the urban space, the hierarchy between farm, village and city comes into focus, along with architectural expressions hovering between classicism, rationalism or picturesque. The concept of integral reclamation had a long-lasting impact, inspiring as it did the institution of Land Reclamation Authorities that were to outlive the regime. Taking into consideration the cases of Agro Pontino and Matera, this contribution purports to show the continuity between extensive land reclamation undertaken during the 1930s and rural redevelopment schemes of the 1950s.

Keywords

Integral reclamation — New towns — Reconstruction — Countryside architecture

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**Fig. 1**  
 Map of land reclamation in Italy, according to the Serpieri's law, between 1931 and 1935 (from Serpieri 1931-1935).

**Introduction**

The literature on the transformation of the Pontine Marshes and the construction of *new towns* is very broad and belongs to the different fields of knowledge directly involved in *integral reclamation*, from economy to politics, from agronomy to landscape history, from geology to hydrography, from urban planning to architecture. It is therefore difficult to untangle the complex interweaving of knowledge and the criticisms made at the time and after the project.

Many studies on Italian architecture and urban planning of interwar time (mostly published in the 1970s and 1980s) deal with the intricate political and cultural events of Fascist Italy, often criticising projects undertaken in the Pontine Marshes. These authors question the actual ability of the Fascist regime to organically plan economy, society and territory, while stigmatising Italian architects who embraced rationalism for compromising *form* and *ideology*, rather than finding real alternatives to regime architecture (Mariani 1976, Sica 1978, Nuti and Martinelli 1978, Ciucci 1989).

However, beyond propaganda, the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes is a key case study to question the relationship between the actual building sites and ideas behind them, between methods, results and contradictions of the fascist territorial management.

Many questions about the role played by the rural alternative in the strategy of a possible rebalancing between city and countryside are still open. Also, the historical judgement on the impact of actions linked to *integral reclamation* on the economic development has been complex and many-sided. On the one hand, reclamation produced an increase in ag-



**Fig. 2**  
Excavators at Casale Perazzotti, Acque Alte channel, near Latina, in 1929 (from Zucaro 2012).

ricultural production but, on the other, it was unable to carry through its promise: a genuine «renewal of production structures and the formation of small-scale active and enterprising holdings backed by public land credit system» (Castronovo 1975, p.281).

These effects did however form the instrumental promise for a revival which occurred starting from the 1950s, especially in the south of Italy, as mentioned by Manlio Rossi Doria:

Immediately after the war, the situation of southern reclamation was extremely confused and uncertain. [...] Those years saw the formulation of principles that later materialised in the institution of the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* [Fund for the South] programme for adequate multiannual appropriations, a long-term plan, an extraordinary institutional body to realize it, a differentiation between districts, a concentration of efforts on the most ready and promising among them, a systematic study and investigation of the countless reclamation issues, and ultimately, a close connection between public works and land transformation, to finally render Arrigo Serpieri's luminous conception concrete also in the south. (Rossi Doria 1961, p.82-83. (Transl. by authors).

At the same time though, the economic background changed radically. However, despite the new historical and ideological context, architectural projects implemented after the Second World War were as exemplary as those produced in the interwar period.

In fact, if the project for the Agro Pontino was the most clear experiment among the *integral reclamation* in the 1920s and 1930s, the same can be said for the district La Martella, one of the most significant interventions of the *ricostruzione* period, once again inconceivable outside the actions of the reclamation consortia by the Serpieri laws, established.

### The Italian question: corporatism and ruralisation

The ruralisation of the country through *integral reclamation* – starting on massive public works – found institutional support in Corporations that were supposed to resolve a fundamental contradiction of capitalism, i.e. the conflicting relationship between employer and workforce. Giuseppe Bottai, Minister of Corporations, tried in as dynamic a way as possible to interpret this institutional tool meant to uproot the causes of latent conflict<sup>1</sup>. According to Bottai, each social group was to have its own role in the corporate state, a role which the political power was to recognize and guarantee. Corporatism was therefore a tool for economic planning, since corporate bodies were setting the State free from the various economic sectors and related constraints.

«Quadrante» soon turned its attention to formulating concepts and pronouncements for the implementation of the *corporate city*, an urban translation of corporative principles whereby each city would grow within a regional and national plan, following a precise functional vocation. The national plan was to identify a specific role for each city and its countryside, thus fostering the balance between inner immigration, ruralisation, moral and hygienic rehabilitation. At the same time, every urban centre was to pursue its specific *productive* specialization – be it industrial, artistic, educational or agricultural – vis-à-vis the pre-existing *old city*.

The idea of *corporate city* came to the fore and, in this respect, global spatial planning was seen as tool to correct Italy's macroscopic economic imbalances. *Anti-urbanism* thus became the official ideology of fascism, although its implications were not such as to change the country's economic structure, founded on industrial development. In fact, while in 1935 some 50% of agricultural land was classified as reclamation land, investments were less than half of those allocated to industrial bailouts and fewer than 3% of the unemployed were deployed in reclamation work. The geographical area in which the regime did have some success was the Pontine Marshes.

The question of farmworkers, and more generally the development and adaptation of the agricultural economy, was part of a historical legacy which was frequently on the agenda of social and political analyses, without the ruling classes being able to develop and implement a coherent policy of interventions.

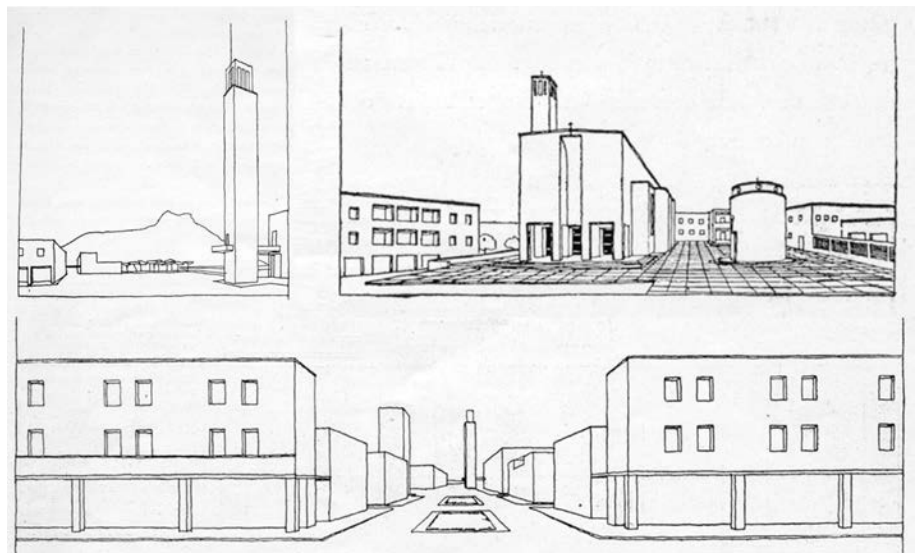
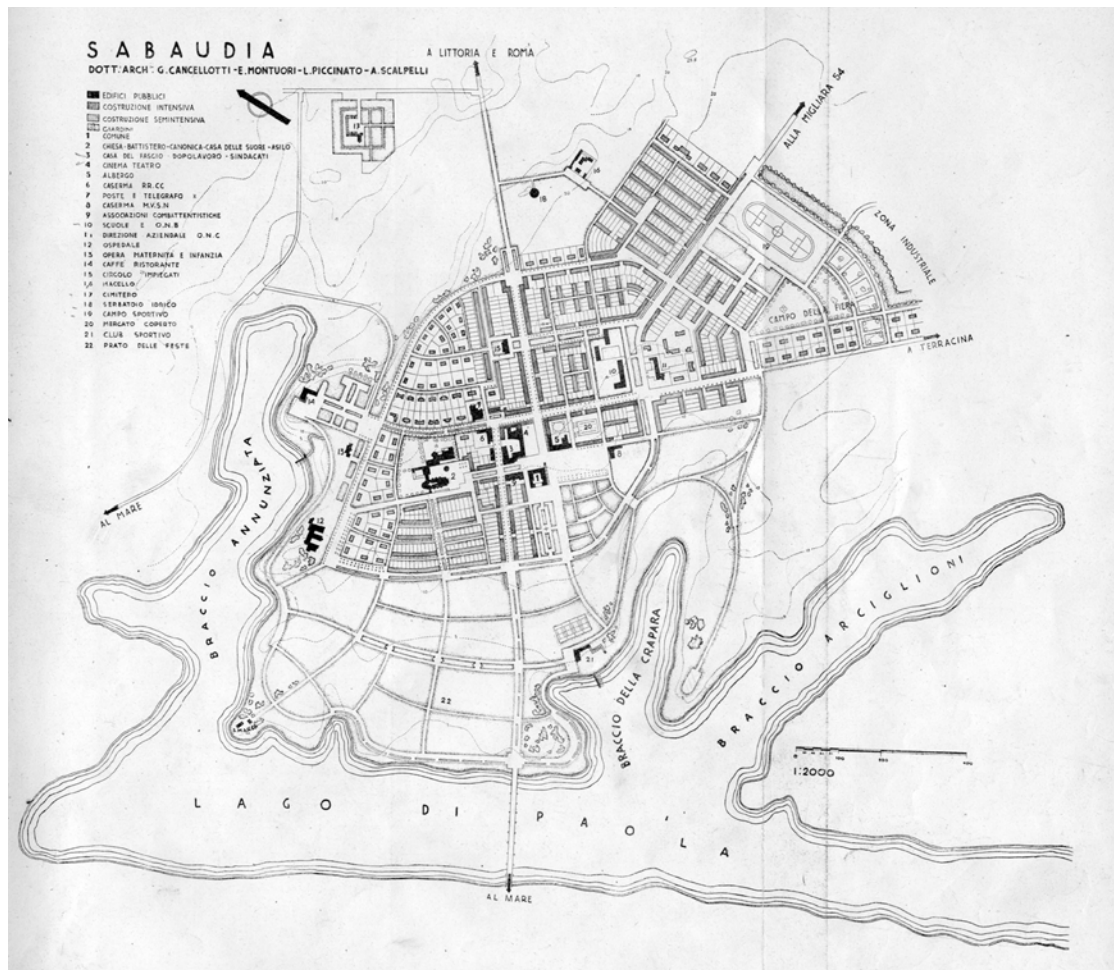
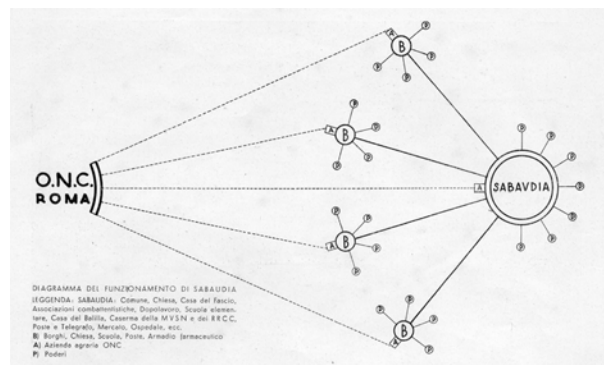
The problem of agrarian reform in Italy became more clear-cut in the late nineteenth century (Castronovo 1975), with the approach of Unification and recognition of the marked discrepancy between northern and southern Italy. Even the hypotheses of agrarian structures were different. In the north, Carlo Cattaneo anticipated the *construction* of a rural system in Lombardy, also through the idea of complex settlements that would define a new type of *agrarian institute* (Cattaneo 1847), conceived in adherence to the characteristic of the territory, wittily described in his studies on Lombardy.

In the south, instead, prevailed the conflict regarding the economic structure of the organization of land, between backward-looking *latifundia* and resources for new entrepreneurial development.

In this extended idea of *integral* action, the land reclamation consortia, would play a key role in the great hydraulic initiatives across the country, along with land reorganization, infrastructure development and the creation of new settlements that would characterize the new Fascist towns and villages of the Pontine Marshes, the Capitanata in Apulia, the marsh-

**Figg. 3-4-5**

G. Cancellotti, E. Montuori, L. Piccinato, A. Scalpelli, Town of Sabaudia, 1933-34. Functional diagram of the city, project plan and perspective drawings of the centre (from Piccinato 1934).





es around Ferrara, the Sulcis mining basin in Sardinia, but also mountain territories. The action of the land reclamation consortia would continue even after the Second World War with new incentives and would be a key part of the post-war *reconstruction* process in Italy, with a renewal of its approach to policy and agrarian economics.

With regards to population movements, since 1906-08 there had been measures and plans for immigration by families of settlers into Italy's southern provinces and islands. The *Opera Nazionale Combattenti* (ONC) was set up to this aim in 1917 to encourage productive employment for ex-combatants through financial and land allocation measures.

The first important legislative acts under fascism were the law of 1923, which brought together previous legislation regarding land reclamation, and the law abolishing use requirements of 1924, regulating thousands of acres of land and affecting thousands of people.

The period of *integral land reclamation* was inaugurated by the 1928 Mussolini Law, including a financial plan for the sector to extend over 14 years starting from 1930<sup>2</sup>.

Agricultural policy took a new direction; the concept of *integral reclamation* involved land drainage, but above all, prioritized the different distribution of agricultural land, regional organisation, settlement and resettlement. The theoretical, programmatic and legislative framework was the work of Arrigo Serpieri, who as Under-secretary for reclamation, together with others, drew up a general plan of areas to be reclaimed (Serpieri 1919, 1930, 1938).

Serpieri's roots date back to the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, first in the *Società Umanitaria* and *Società Agraria* in Milan, then in Florence's *Accademia dei Georgofili*. Milan was where he received his technical and vocational training through an intense period of teaching and research: here he made his first connections with the world of agriculture in the context of agrarian reform (Prampolini 1976).

For the *Società Agraria* Serpieri did important research into the Alpine meadows of Switzerland and Lombardy, highlighting the problems of collective ownership and forms of state intervention. In Tuscany, from 1912 to 1923, Serpieri set up and managed the *Istituto superiore forestale nazionale*, in contact with an agrarian situation very different from that of Lombardy, characterised by sharecropping rather than rent and a capitalist enterprise. Serpieri proposed a new way of looking at agriculture and began to develop his philosophy of agrarianism.

Serpieri, departing from previous ideas, with the concept of *integral reclamation*<sup>3</sup> initiated an interesting debate which sought to reconcile economic theory, Government practice and corporate opinions in a scientific and ideological *unicum*.

### **Pontine Marshes and the triade farm-borgo-town**

The reclamation of the Pontine Marshes brought together a variety of technical skills: hydro-geological, land economy, demographic, health etc. Such a territorial reinforcement, that within ten years would lead to the building from scratch of an entire province, was built up step by step in relation to the growing need to procure goods and services. A hierarchical pattern of settlements interconnected the isolated houses, villages and main cities; the latter were generally centrally located in relation to farms and villages, at the intersection of the main routes of regional communication and close to the railway. An organisation directly related to the traces

of previous reclamation attempts – from the earliest efforts to those carried out under the Papacy – and in fact in a continuum with the civil engineering interventions undertaken from 1918 and 1921.

During and after the work thousands of workers were encouraged to move from all parts of Italy, but particularly the North-east. They became the principal players both in the reclamation work but also in the overall territorial reorganisation.

The persistence over time of the results of the entire operation is mainly due to *centuriation* grid land-division, and which led to the definitive alteration of the existing landscape. The territorial transformation of most of the Pontine Marshes, entrusted to the *Opera Nazionale Combattenti* who turned over 54,000 hectares into farmland (plus a further 11,000 by *Università agrarie* and private individuals), provided 25,000 head of cattle, as well as modern equipment and machines.

The extension of the farm ranged from 5 to 30 hectares; the farm houses, complete with service buildings were constructed along the roads according to clear criteria of regularity. Each group of about 100 families came under a *borgo*, conceived as a business centre and located at the intersection of the new secondary road network, often corresponding to sites established in the earliest stages of reclamation.

The *triade* of farm-borgo-town, in a varied arrangement of different types of settlement, reflected the intention of creating a stable social and productive structure for farmers, tied to the land by share-cropping agreements, and to the institutional regime by a series of public places, which together served to neutralize the attraction of the big city.

Towns, designed for a population of between 3,000 and 5,000 inhabitants – except the provincial capital of Littoria – were the epicentres of settlement for the entire area and served the preeminent function of administrative, technical and representative hubs; Pomezia, Pontinia and Aprilia, Littoria were aligned at the centre of the area of reclamation while Sabaudia was more on the edge, beyond the Circeo National Park, by Lake Pola, in an area destined to become a major tourism attraction.

The organisation of the territory, which in this case would achieve a consistency unknown elsewhere, aspired to be an alternative to the urban life. The dimensions of the agrarian grid pattern and the relative distances between towns are the expression of the dual presence of the urban and rural, even more evident in the architectural precision of public buildings and communal space *par excellence*: the piazza, acting as counterbalance to the basic and economic housing types found on the farms.

The apparent contradiction of the term *rural urbanism*, invoked by Bottai at the opening of the 1<sup>st</sup> National Town Planning Congress in 1937, and clearly aimed at de-urbanisation, masked a search for new balances between city life and the role to be assigned to the countryside.

Lasting for almost a century, the colonization of the Pontine plain may be considered as a testing ground for national agricultural policies, well beyond of the regime's ideological concerns.

### **Urban composition and new figurations**

Competitions for the *new towns* (Sabaudia, Aprilia and Pomezia) and the implementations of projects were an important laboratory for both architectural and figurative experiments, as well as for the development of a *technical-scientific* know-how in urban design. These are places where the meeting of *old* and *new*, between *monumentalism* and rationalism, between

traditional and modern language, are manifest in all their complexity and interplay. Cancellotti, Frezzotti, Libera, Montuori, Muratori, Piccinato and many others researched the fundamentals of modern Italian architecture and town planning, contributing, through experimentation *on site*, to the passing of Italy's first planning legislation in 1942.

The first town, Littoria, designed by Oriolo Frezzotti for the Commissioner for Reclamation Orsolino Cencelli, went counter to the opinion of Mussolini, who was at pains to emphasize its character of *anti-urban* rural village; however, the growing attention to new towns, especially by the media, led to the competition for the designs for Sabaudia to attract significant nationwide interest.

The national competition launched by the charitable organisation *Opera Nazionale Combattenti* (ONC) in 1933, was won by a group of architects including Gino Cancellotti, Eugenio Montuori, Luigi Piccinato and Alfredo Scalpelli.

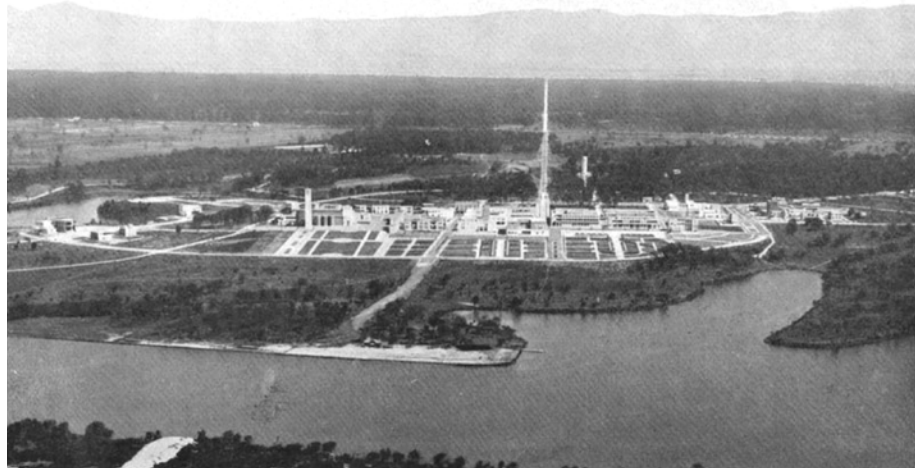
To understand the nature of Sabaudia it is necessary to conceive its role within the rural territory it depends on: in the diagram that Piccinato published together with the project (Piccinato 1934), it emerged as a political and administrative centre, which led to it being a key nerve centre of a series of radial relations between functions: farmstead – village – town of Sabaudia – ONC Rome.

Long straight access roads link it to the Appian Way and the neighbouring towns and villages, crossing the complex and evocative morphology of the surrounding territory: wooded hinterland, coastal line and lakes, reliefs, canals and reclamation roads. Around the intersection of these axes developed an orthogonal system of squares, skilfully disengaged within the perimeter, in which to represent the main political and civic institutions: the Town Hall, the *Casa del Fascio*, army barracks, associations, a cinema, a hotel and public offices.

The *Casa del Fascio* and the Town Hall are isolated volumes in the surrounding urban fabric: the former, positioned at the crossing of the four main roads, arises as an ideal link between the civic centre and the adjacent religious centre; the latter, featuring a tower with a balcony symbolically centred with respect to the axis towards the Appian Way. The shifting sight lines of the central nucleus strongly characterize the town, metaphysically suspended in an urban layout that has very little to do with the picturesque environment of medieval Italian villages – one of the supposed references<sup>4</sup> – but rather a homage to the ground plans of Ancient Roman tradition with their orthogonal grid and central square featuring porticoed buildings.

During the 4<sup>th</sup> CIAM Congress of 1933, the urban scheme of Sabaudia, deeply against the grain with respect to the European urban planning of those years, was presented as an example of a functionalist city and gained international admiration. However, Le Corbusier was somewhat sceptical when in reference to Sabaudia he spoke of this architectural project describing it as «un doux poème, quelque peu romantique, plein de goût, signe évident d'amour» (Le Corbusier 1935, p.329), in opposition to the idea that the «'Village Radieux' sont préparées pour s'offrir à l'industrialisation à grande échelle», speaking of his proposal for the future city of Pontinia (Le Corbusier 1935, p.330).

The architecture of Sabaudia therefore seems to encompass the conflict already expressed by Tafuri:



**Figg. 6-7**

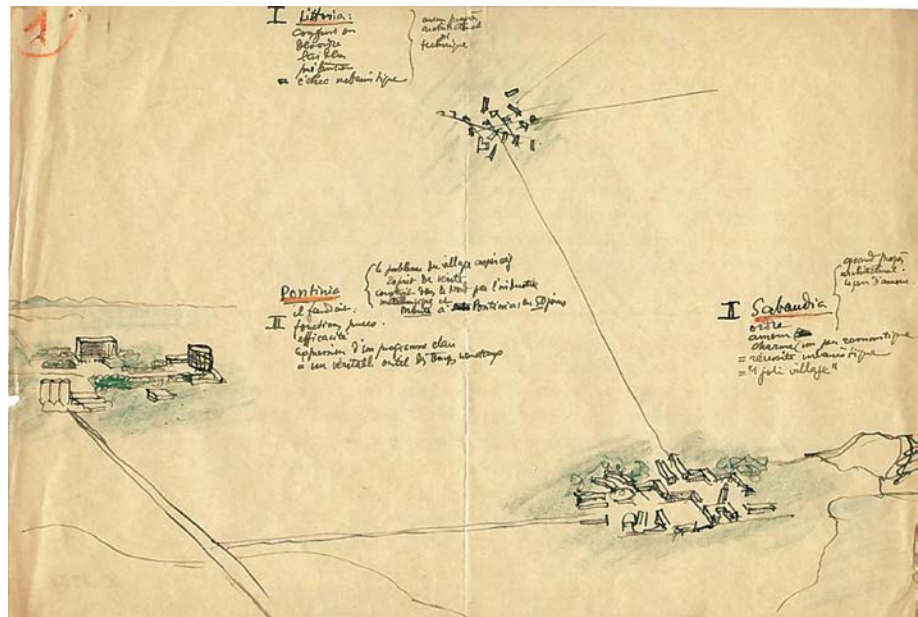
Aerial views of Sabaudia (from "Sabaudia dall'aeroplano" 1935).

[...] the one recognized as the only positive example of a "rationalist" city made in Italy, ultimately did not differ that much in its *cardo-decumanus* backdrop, in the rhetoric of its central or quasi-central perspective, in its categorization of buildings, in its academic compositional canons grafted onto an organism, on the contrary, that was new and intelligent in the organization of its various parts in relation with the territory (Tafuri 1964, pp.35-36. Transl. by authors).

How then should we regard the volumes and spaces of the Sabaudia project?

On the one hand, we must look at the perspectives sketched by Piccinato, for the stereometric volumes making up the civic core, whose buildings are represented cinematically in a succession of fluctuating spatial frames, following a futurist-suprematist aesthetic. On the other hand, the debate of those years invites us to shift our gaze to the spatial composition that characterizes Sabaudia with respect to its surroundings, borrowing the viewpoint from the famous aerial photographs published in "Sabaudia dall'aeroplano", in 1935<sup>5</sup> or from the representations of the Futurist painters who establish its most significant iconic images.

Analysing the hierarchical addition of the volumes of the civic centre brings out the compositional intentions of the architect, aimed underscoring the central elements with respect to the rest of the urban fabric detectable in the ground plan, whose lots are in a continuum with the countryside.



**Fig. 8**  
Le Corbusier, Study drawing for Pontinia, 1934 (from Ciucci 2012).

Overall, among the natural landscape of lakes, dunes, remains of woodland, and the technical landscape of canals, railways, pumping stations, the *new towns* reflected an idea of urban composition capable of conquering the new territorial space resulting from reclamation, give life to a rarefied anthropic environment and physical expression to the relationship between town and country.

What we want to emphasize is the persistence of a deeply rooted Italian urban culture, here interpreted as a settlement grafting on multiple points across the territory, where the *city effect* is not so much in the single civic centre as in the system of nuclei. There is an analogy here with Amos Edallo's analysis of the territory and rural settlements in the Po Valley after the Second World War, both over a broader area and in an urban context (Edallo 1946). The orographic structure, the system of roads and canals, the distribution and density of settlements combine in the modernization of agricultural production work, in accordance with a new design of *paese rurale*.

Thus in the case of the Pontine Marshes we see a combination of facts conducive to a lasting settlement based on a territorial dimensions (scale) and original integrated by rural hubs (urban sites).

### From Sabaudia to Matera

Between 1950 and 1959 one of the noblest experiences of post-war Italian architecture took place in Matera, which immediately gave rise to a wide range of historical-critical literature that revealed the key role and premise for a new commitment to the reconstruction and development of civic life. From its inception, this episode had in fact transformed the very concept of *ricostruzione*, seen as post-war repair, and by extension, a more *integral* commitment, delivering the physical form and substance of the landscape to the city and the territory in Italy's economic and social development. The Sassi, the ancient rock town forming the original nucleus of the city of Matera, began to represent a sociological study case to reflect upon, also abroad.

The first definition of an operational strategy was born on the inspiration of the US ECA mission (Economic Cooperation Administration) entrusting the task to the *Consorzio di Bonifica della valle del Bradano*, directed

by Nallo Mazzocchi Alemanni, who compiled a report published in 1950 that established the bases for the three kinds of construction for the population of the Sassi in Matera to be carried out at the same time: residential villages in rural areas; peripheral residential districts; direct action for the renewal of the Sassi.

In the case of rural villages outside the centre, new settlements were identified: La Martella, Borgo Venusio, Torre Spagnola, Salati and the service centres of Picciano and Timmari.

On this initial hypothesis, initiatives coordinated by Adriano Olivetti immediately converged as a part of the *Commissione di Studio della città e dell'agro di Matera*, formed by INU and UNRRA-Casas. This interdisciplinary working group would define the hypothesis of the rural village, La Martella, directly inspired by social concepts of *community* long theorized by Olivetti in studies, publications, and cultural and political actions.

The context of this agrarian landscape consisted of large *latifundia* and unquestionably represented a backward and absolutely static production structure, but on the other hand it could constitute the starting point for transformation towards a modern agro-business industry. It was therefore important in this context that the territorial unit of large agrarian resources and new rural settlements be preserved, all immersed in a landscape of rare beauty with rolling horizons and surprising small compact towns and villages.

This sensibility for an *aesthetics of the landscape* of the agricultural economy, did not escape Manlio Rossi Doria's notice:

When – leaving the villages crammed with the poverty of the farmworkers – I went on to consider the vast tracts of land without roads, without investments or technical means, it seems to me I was not wrong in evaluating those resources as susceptible to allowing, if not a prosperous life, at least a civil agricultural life for those populations for whom I saw no other alternative at the time (Rossi Doria 1961, p.81. Transl. by authors).

Among the actions of the two reclamation consortia involved at the time – the Bradano Valley Consortium directed by Mazzocchi Alemanni and that of Metaponto directed by Rossi Doria – continuing the role undertaken pre-war, there were hydraulic works intended for irrigation of the large estates for agriculture, with the realization of dams for the large artificial irrigation reservoirs, such as the one just south of Matera in the Bradano Valley, opened in 1952.

The 1953 *Piano Regolatore Generale* for Matera by Luigi Piccinato (Piccinato 1955), was born as a coordinative action of the various interventions under one single design, to provide rehabilitation (of the Sassi and the Agro di Matera) in the form of an urban planning and therefore architectural design.

In this elaborate system of poles outside the city, also the internal structure of Matera came apart, maintaining compact only the fabric of the administrative city that arose between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the winding edge that overlooks the steep slope of the Gravina with the city in the rocks, and behind it, on the plateau, other hills surround it, and beyond the neighbourhoods that would be realized in this second phase: Spine Bianche, Serra Venerdi (L. Piccinato, L. Anversa, 1955-1957), and Lanera (M. Coppa, M. Fabbri, 1955-59).

Piccinato's design for the *Piano regolatore* of Matera incorporated a

scheme developed with UNRRA-Casas and the Bradano Valley Consortium, almost as if to use the same diagram already designed in 1934 for the Agro of Sabaudia, but in a quite different context. On the one hand, a branched system in the countryside, formed by four rural villages and the two service centres. On the other hand, inside the city, the system of the new residential districts, as *parti di città formalmente compiute* (using Aymonino's words), in addition to an urban centre innovated by an ancient road system with a long territorial extension. The two emblematic examples of this architectural work would therefore be La Martella (L. Quaroni, L. Agati, F. Gorio, P.M. Lugli, and M. Valori, 1949-1954) and the Spine Bianche district (C. Aymonino, C. Chiarini, G. De Carlo, M. Fiorentino, M. Girelli, F. Gorio, S. Lenci, M. Ottolenghi, V. Sangirardi, H. Selem, and M. Valori, 1955-1959).

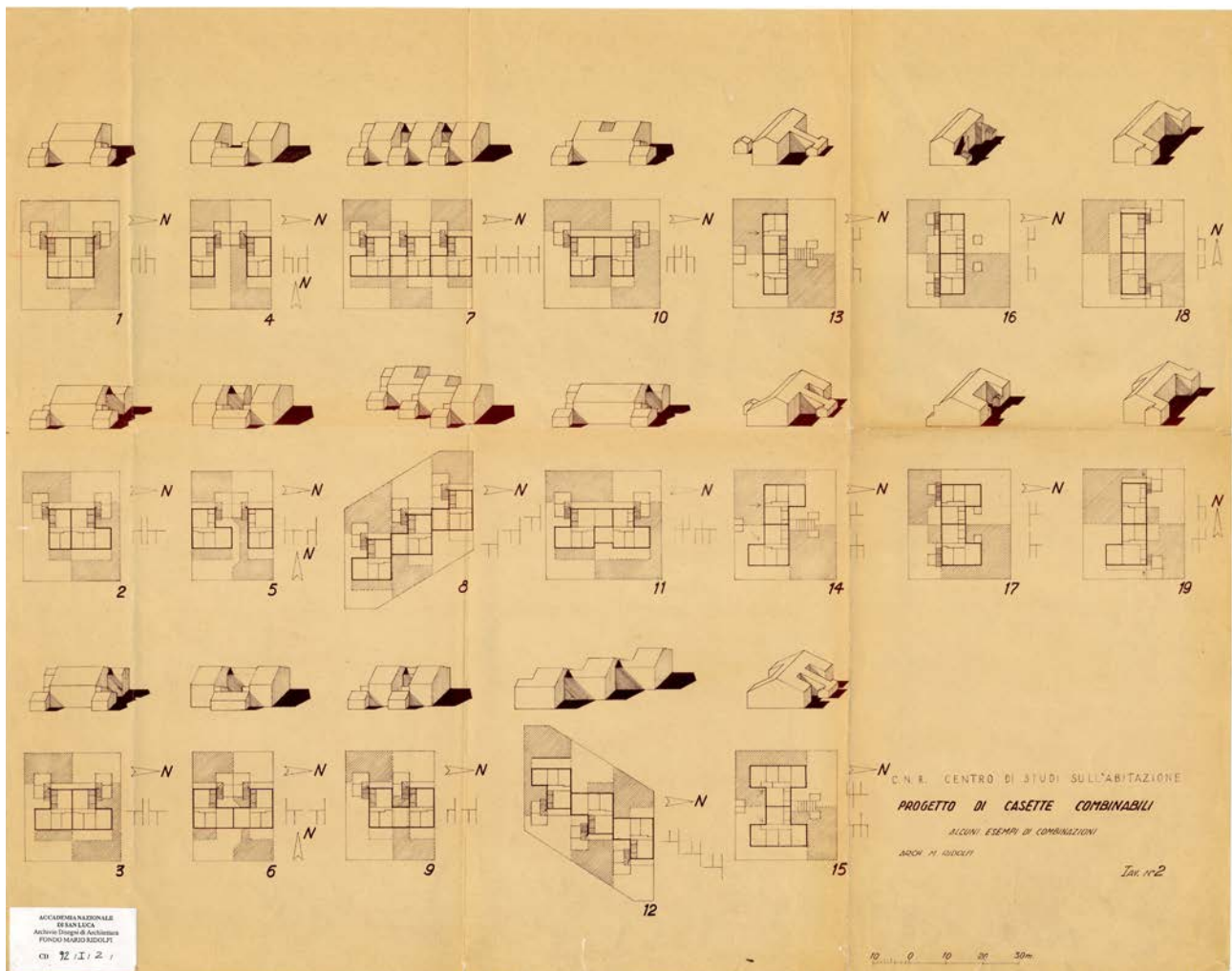
Two works of architecture to be looked at again today, beyond the more or less agonized transformations, still for a potential role (and a possible restoration in the built forms) to be found among the functions of today's agrarian economics. From the point of view of the architectural design, the relationship with the past experiences would appear to be less clear, and a comparison with the works of architecture at Sabaudia by Piccinato, for example, seem too stereometrically defined, too balanced and proportionate. The turning point between the experiences before and after the Second World War, inside the Italian Rationalism architectural debate is represented by the research of Pagano about rural architecture, presented at the Triennale in 1936 (Pagano and Daniel 1936, Bilò 2019). A sophisticated balance between rural tradition and rationalist morality, along essential lines of pure geometry and into the materiality of the construction, which stand out in new dimensions of the landscape.

The photos taken all over Italy in the small towns, villages and countryside constitute a wealth of documentation, hitherto practically unknown, that would give rise to a comparison between the various characteristics of regional architecture, with no vernacular nostalgia.

The experiences of the post-war period, indeed, proceeded by fragments and were even inspired by ideas of construction technique, also starting from Mario Ridolfi's 1946 *Manuale dell'architetto*, which was recognized as the expressive starting point of new Italian architecture (Ridolfi 1946, Muratore 1974). Other important fragments were the diagrams of the aggregation of rural houses which Ridolfi began to study for the CNR and UNRRA-Casas in 1949, and which had an important antecedent in a 1940 project for a rural settlement type in the Pontine Marshes.

In this case, the stereometric integrity of Piccinato's solid volumes begins to break up and dissolve in search of minimal, formal and functional units, corresponding to the fragmentation of the crofts that the agrarian economy still supported pre-war. In fact, La Martella would be the first of this aggregated type of settlement, and its architecture would continue to re-compose the fragments that little by little were being studied and analysed in a combinatory way and provided its premises.

Morphologically, La Martella was laid out starting from typological knowledge of the settlement tradition of the old villages of Lucania, like Grassano, formed by volumes under the light, a *white city*, brimming with life, just as the black and white photography of the most refined Italian cinematography was able to represent. The images published in *Casabella-Continuità* in 1959<sup>6</sup>, remained imprinted in our memories as a splendid and moving possibility, line by line, surface by surface, an image that to-



**Fig. 9**  
Mario Ridolfi, Project for modular rural houses for CNR and UNR-RA-Casas, 1949. (Archivio Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Roma).

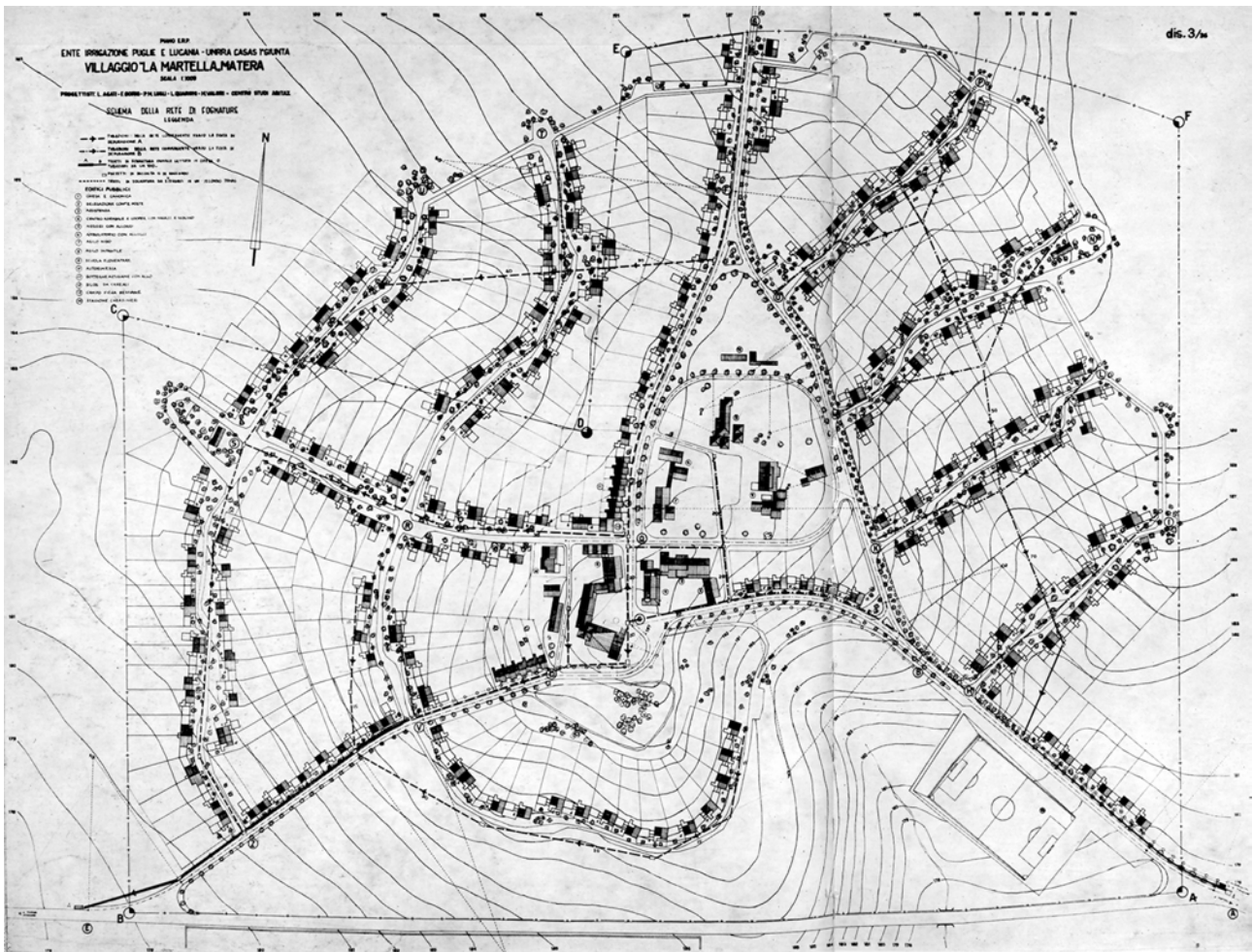
day no longer exists, almost as if they were on the brink of a lost ruin. From the point of view of architecture the real substance of the secret of La Martella is a sophisticated balance between rural tradition – mindful of the research of Pagano into rural architecture in 1936 – and morally traceable to its essential lines of pure geometry, which stand out in new dimensions of the landscape, waiting for a new agriculture. While from the point of view of urban design, the presupposed new relationships between farm and town, intended to accommodate the farmers living in the Sassi di Matera, remained substantially on paper because they could hardly *reproduce* the original settlement pattern of Apulia and Basilicata, real *agrocittà* where farm workers returned to after a day's work.

### Conclusion

When considering the relationship between town and country, it is useful to remember how over time attitudes to the landscape have changed. In recent years, the complex distinction between the rural and urban landscape in densely urbanized areas has led geographers to devise terms like «rurban», «rural-urban continuum», «peri-urban», «urbanised countryside». Terms sometimes with very different meanings, coined mainly in the context of sociological and geographical research.

From a theoretical point of view, the economic-political conceptions of *Economia corporativa* and *Bonifica integrale* had a strong impact on the renewal of architectural culture and town planning in Italy – in the best and most authentic sense – toward themes and functions that built new re-



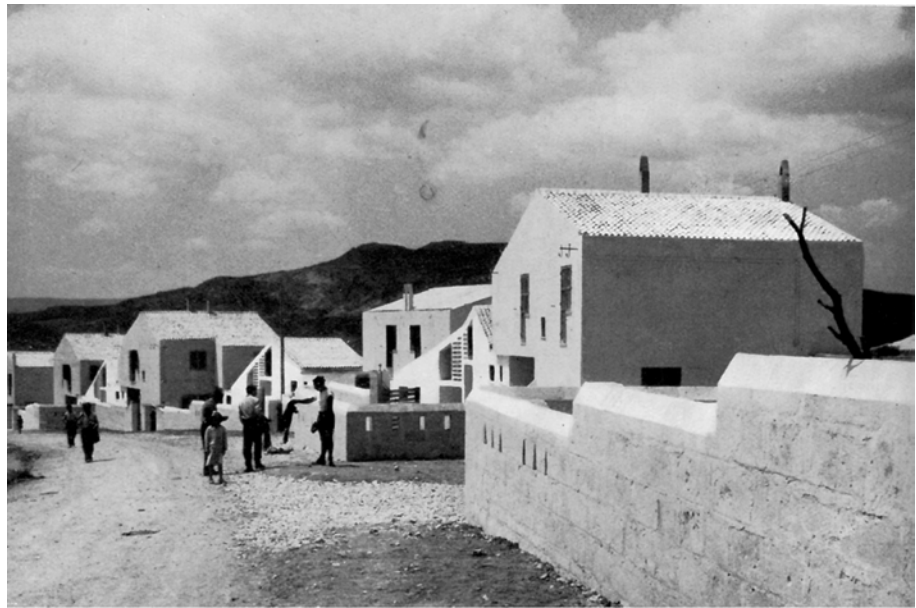


**Fig. 10**  
L. Quaroni, L. Agati, F. Gorio, P. M. Lugli, M. Valori, La Martella village, Matera, 1949-54. Project plan (from Olivetti 1952).

**Fig. 11**  
Aerial view of La Martella (from Tafuri 1964).



**Fig. 12**  
Houses of La Martella (from Go-  
rio 1954).



relationships between the city and the territory, outwith, and as an alternative to, the interventions on large and medium-sized cities.

The exemplary episodes of Sabaudia, the Pontine Marshes and Matera, testify to a strong continuity between these experiences which extend well beyond the various political-ideological conditions and difficulties of Italian architecture, being based on a continuity of the main institutions of support for the rural sector (both technical and economic), such as the *Consorti di bonifica*, still active and operating on more than 50% of Italy's territory.

These experiences were considered failures in some respects, due to the inability of these new settlements to correspond to a social and rural development that turned out to be flawed with respect to the initial premises. However, the architecture proved able to demonstrate important capacities for experimentation, in its application of different types and a unique modern design aesthetic to the rural landscape. Fixed points that remain and are still available for a renewed ruralism.

In the case of Sabaudia, which remained in its original foundation state until after Second World War, Luigi Piccinato himself took a long hard look at its virtues and failures when designing the new masterplan in 1971 (Piccinato 1971, pp. 369-378). According to Piccinato, in light of the recent situation, which had exploded into an uncontrolled urbanization of individual houses and small factories throughout the system of interventions in the Pontine Marshes, a greater degree of constraint in rural activities and the centres was required, gained for the reclamations with public funds, leaving the industry further inland and preserving a greater compatibility with the landscape and tourist aspects. In this sense, Sabaudia immediately represented an exception with respect to its neighbouring new towns. Even if the in-line compact residential fabric originally planned was realized only in a minimal part, today the town appears less compromised and more integrated with the territory.

The case of Matera is completely different. Immediately after the opening of Borgo La Martella in 1953, one of the most profound migration phases began (both internally and externally), which crossed Italy from south to north and other countries undergoing industrialization. The result was a sudden failure of all prospects to reconstruct an agrarian economy in

Southern Italy. A situation that remained up until the most recent stages of return immigration. Borgo La Martella, drained of its meaning and with its fabric strongly tampered with, has become a peripheral suburb alongside an expanding industrial context.

Recent research conducted on the various districts of the Olivetti season in Matera (Mininni 2017) have proposed hypotheses of urban redevelopment starting from micro interventions on open spaces and including hypotheses of restoration, but without interacting with the agricultural economics currently being revitalized in Southern Italy.

Indeed, the assignment of the title of “European Capital of Culture 2019” to the town of Matera only emphasizes its current growth in terms of historical awareness, economy and culture. However, the cave village of the Sassi, partially restored and habitable, has become a splendid monument to itself and no longer hints at a relationship between the town and a productive rural countryside.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In 1927 the «Charter of Labour» established the general principles of the legal system of the State and the guiding criteria for interpretation and enforcement of the law. In 1929 Bottai was appointed Minister of Corporations and completed the long and difficult iter of Law 206 of 20 March 1930 on the National Council of corporations. In 1930 Bottai founded the «Archivio di studi corporativi» review, in which many articles were devoted to Soviet planning and economy, mixed economy, collective law, State intervention in USA, Germany and Italy.

<sup>2</sup> In 1933 the Consolidated law 215 was a systematic ordering of all the relevant legislation relating to the integral reclamation of almost 5 million hectares, subdivided into regional districts.

<sup>3</sup> Arrigo Serpieri was undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture from 1929 to 1935. In this capacity, Serpieri passed the Consolidated Act on the complete remediation (Law No. 215 of 13 February 1933). This clarified the role of the State in reclamation works and established different financing rules, defining an integrated plan of works and complementary services.

<sup>4</sup> After Sabaudia, Piccinato published studies that can be referred to the early experiences, between the tradition of the Italic constructed landscape and villages and rationalist volumetric spatialism. Other studies connected the tradition of the medieval village and *piazza* in central Italy to the architecture of the Fascist new towns, as the important essay by Ghirardo and Forster (1985).

<sup>5</sup> “Sabaudia dall’aeroplano” (1935). *Architettura*, fasc. XI, pp.643-645.

<sup>6</sup> “Quartiere ‘C’ Lanera”, (1959). *Casabella-Continuità*, n.231, p.31-35.

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