

# INFOLIO 40

RIVISTA DEL DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN ARCHITETTURA, ARTI E PIANIFICAZIONE  
DELL'UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PALERMO - DIPARTIMENTO DI ARCHITETTURA

## INNER AREAS

# INFOLIO

RIVISTA DEL DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN ARCHITETTURA, ARTI E PIANIFICAZIONE

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## In copertina

*Il borgo di Gangi, Luisa Lombardo*



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**DOTTORATO DI RICERCA  
IN ARCHITETTURA,  
ARTI E PIANIFICAZIONE**  
DIPARTIMENTO  
DI ARCHITETTURA DI PALERMO

## La Rivista

**In folio** è la rivista scientifica di Architettura, Design, Urbanistica, Storia e Tecnologia che dal 1994 viene pubblicata grazie all'impegno dei dottori e dei dottorandi di ricerca del Dipartimento di Architettura (D'ARCH) dell'Università di Palermo (UNIPA).

La rivista, che si propone come spazio di dialogo e di incontro rivolto soprattutto ai giovani ricercatori, è stata inserita dall'ANVUR all'interno dell'elenco delle riviste scientifiche dell'Area 08 con il codice ISSN 1828-2482. Ogni numero della rivista è organizzato in cinque sezioni di cui la prima è dedicata al tema selezionato dalla redazione della rivista, mentre le altre sezioni sono dedicate all'attività di ricerca in senso più ampio. Tutti i contributi della sezione tematica sono sottoposti a un processo di *double-blind peer review*.

Per questo numero il tema selezionato è:

### **"Inner Areas"**

Inner areas, as defined in the Italy's National Strategy (SNAI), are part of the territory that plays a central role in the cultural and social fabric of our communities, are an essential component of our society, economy, and environment. However, they are still often neglected and overlooked, resulting in deterioration, abandonment, and social exclusion. For this reason, it is crucial that the fields of architecture, restoration and architectural history and urban and territorial planning are committed to revitalizing and enhancing inner areas. These disciplines have the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to create sustainable and innovative solutions that can transform these territories into vibrant and liveable communities. Moreover, inner areas are an excellent laboratory for innovation in these disciplines. These areas provide a unique opportunity to experiment with new approaches and techniques that can then be applied to larger-scale urban and territorial planning projects. The challenges posed by inner areas require innovative thinking and creative solutions, making them an ideal testing ground for new ways. The papers presented in this special issue of *Infolio* are the result of the conference "Inner areas' cultural, architectural and landscape heritage: study, enhancement and fruition. Potential driver for sustainable territorial development?" held in July 2022 at the University of Palermo. The conference brought together experts in the fields of architecture, restoration, and urban planning to discuss the central role of inner areas in our society and the need for innovative and sustainable solutions to revitalize and preserve them, being sometimes critical and some other prepositive. The papers explore a range of topics, including the use of technology in restoration, the importance of architectural history in urban planning and the role of

community engagement in revitalization projects.

The reflections that emerged at the conference highlighted how inner areas are a crucial part of our territory and society, and their revitalization is essential for the well-being of our entire community and the preservation of our cultural heritage.

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# Inner Areas between theories and practices. An ongoing laboratory.

Postface

Gloria Lisi

## Abstract

*The contribution proposes a reflection on the laboratories that are being formed in inner areas, and in which universities and researchers play a central role both from a technical point of view and in the advancement of theoretical reflection. The article is structured in four parts: it starts with a framework on inner areas as a place of fragility and opportunity, it moves on to the laboratory dimension that is triggered in the relationship with institutions, such as the university. It concludes with a reflection on the rooting dimension that the laboratory engenders in a territory.*

*Keywords: Laboratory, Inner Areas, Communities, Rooting research experiences*

## Introduction

“Laboratory” is a word derived from the Latin “labor”, carrying with it the meaning of effort: associating the term laboratory with the concept of inner areas thus becomes more appropriate than ever. This contribution concludes the special issue of *Infolio 40* dedicated to the Inner Areas, born during the conference promoted by Professors Filippo Schilleci and Emanuela Garofalo held in July 2022 at the Department of Architecture of the University of Palermo. This text is an attempt made to grasp what has been brought by the contributions, the cross-references, the shared bibliographies and the reflections that emerged during the two days of study. In particular, this text takes a transversal look at the contributions proposed which, despite belonging to different disciplines of the spatial design, concur in defining common strategies and renewing increasingly important theoretical-cultural trends in the approach to territories and communities, so-called, internal. The text is structured in four main parts. The first focuses, on the one hand, on the critical dimension of being (at) the margin, and, on the other, on the opportunities brought and generated by inner communities and territories, such as to determine

their possibilities of self-definition and, in some terms, self-managed design. Following this framing and look through the abandonments and reconquests (as the subtitle of the monolithic «*Riabitare l'Italia*» states) [De Rossi, 2018], the text continues with a reflection on the importance of university research as a laboratory. Indeed, the encounter with communities and their territory is an increasingly important situated exercise to make the transition from the study of functions to the understanding of territorial uses, to the comprehension of practices as an independent apparatus to be intercepted and through which to operate. The topic of the laboratory thus becomes the common thread running through the various themes proposed by the contributions, building a dense network of cross-references between the several disciplines of the project: architecture, restoration, history of architecture, technologies and planning. The third part consists of an analysis of two key concept common to the contributions collected in this issue: sustainability and co-production. In conclusion, the text offers an insight into the laboratory attitude as a rooting research practice for universities, also referring to the practice of walking through territories as a particular possibility of temporarily “inhabiting” them.

## Inner areas. Places of/on the margin, places of opportunities

As Sargolini and Pierantoni observe in their reflections on the term “inner areas”, in order to understand the origin of this definition, it is necessary to confront research strands that attempt to frame processes of marginalisation, territorial (and cultural) isolation, heritage degradation (in its most complex and broadest conception) and, finally, that attempt to define processes of sustainable local development [Sargolini, Pierantoni, 2022].

### Abandonments

The marginality referred to in this context is not exclusively related to the geographical context, but rather to the deficit of citizenship rights, i.e. of all those services (socio-health, for schooling and related to mobility) that determine the habitability of a territory. This new conception, well expressed within the contributions in this issue, refers back to the concept of inner area developed by the national policy called “National Strategy for Inner Areas” (SNAI), settled ten years ago by Fabrizio Barca, when he was Minister for Territorial Cohesion, in Italy. Numbers, data and some implications are already presented in the preface of this special issue by Lombardo, not only in the Italian context, but at the international level: information necessary to highlight how the exercise of citizenship is more complex in the areas addressed, but also how possibilities often arise from place-based experimentation policies.

The territories, since the implementation of SNAI are, rightly, understood with respect to their fragilities, but in the proposed contributions they become subjects that implement a process of “shifting of gaze” and consequently of meaning [Montanari, 2020]: they begin to be observed and to observe themselves as an opportunity and not as a mere problem to be solved. It is possible, therefore, to identify a processuality in the researches on the topic. Initially, it was necessary to recognise and read criticalities. This started to occur when the margins began to “collapse” on the poles, unfortunately, not always figuratively speaking: the case of landslides in the Liguria region dictated by overbuilding and land abandonment is sadly well known. Moreover, the interest towards inner areas started when confidence in the city life style began to waver (a sentiment even more evident during the recent pandemic period). In this context, the external territory once again became central, despite the fact that the complexities on communities living the margins had been making themselves felt for decades, leading to depopulation, impoverishment and a crisis of

services, of political representation and, so, of identity. What were we missing while courting the city and metropolitanity? A very rich historical and architectural heritage (a list of it is impossible to be written; in this issue, an insight is given by Millàn, Campisi, Lo Piccolo, Germanà, Mei and Marsala and Garofalo and Antista); an artistic heritage at times silenced to invigorate the great urban exhibitions [Montanari & Trione, 2017] [Fig. 1]; a vast landscape heritage that was legitimised to be exploited (even impoverishing it) as much as possible. In particular, in this latter sense the risk is still valid, especially in relation to the renewable energy industry (particularly predatory in southern Italy) and the increasingly extractive tourism industry.

Thinking of inner areas as a reservoir for urban needs, such as, for example, the fever of tourism,



Fig. 1. *Madonna del Parto* (1455). Fresco by Piero della Francesca, preserved in Monterchi (AR) one of the municipalities in central Italy belonging to the “intermediate inner areas” that can be reached by crossing the Cerfone Valley. It attracts around 30,000 visitors every year to the small municipality (of 1,742 inhabitants).

transforms the fragile local productive economies into an increasingly single-sector direction (that of tourism, precisely), making them even more dependent on urban dynamics and trends. With regard to this tourist inclination, I propose the famous and complex case of Civita of Bagnoregio, the so-called “dying city”, which, in its dying process makes merchandise and a spectacle of itself [Attili, 2020], attracting hundreds of thousands of tourists from all over the world every year<sup>1</sup>. This shows a certain purely aesthetic and “instagrammable” fetishism in dealing with the loss/death of almost completely uninhabited villages. For this reason, the following consideration advanced by sociologist Filippo Barbera during an interview is even more meaningful:



Inhabiting is a complex function and it means making biographical investments, of meaning for oneself and one's children [...] linked to everyday inhabitance. Inhabiting is something that requires effort. [...] Moreover, the sad aspect of which we must take note is that not everything can be inhabited again: in the idea of village there is also death. Villages die! Depopulation has reached such levels that we will have to consider the idea that not everything can and will be saved<sup>2</sup>.

Based on this awareness of the fragility of inner areas and their endangered richness and starting from the provocations brought by Rem Koolhaas in his text «Preservation is overtaking us» [Koolhaas, 2014], it is essential to take note of the fact that it is necessary to go beyond the idea of inner areas as «mere patrimonial deposits to be preserved and enhanced» [De Rossi, 2018: 6]. This attitude, turning into projects, policies and plans, cannot be limited to being defensive [Gambino, 1997]. Inner areas, as identified by complex indicators that are constantly being updated, are such for structural reasons. Consequently, narratives, planning and management that propose and iterate a disenchanting vision of the effort that these territories embody can only be harmful: it is necessary to go against a postcard landscapeism, reductive with respect to both the complexities and the vitality of these places, as highlighted in Sbacchi's text in this collection.

#### Reconquests

Most of the contributions reported here highlight a phenomenon affecting many inner areas: the



Fig. 2. This photograph shows the road sign pointing towards Civita, a district of the municipality of Bagnoregio (VT) in the Tuscia region. The writing under the name of the locality specifies 'the dying city' due to its particular erosion problems. The locality has 11 inhabitants and attracted one million visitors in 2019. As of today, it is on the proposed list to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

understanding of them not as a problem or criticality, but as a space with positive potential. These are revitalisation and regeneration projects with new entrepreneurs that play a key role in rethinking the places themselves, generating the break that distinguishes geographical marginality from social-economic marginality.

Some practices and experiments are:

- community cooperatives in the Apennines of Emilia, with a great effort to pool collective goods, creating micro-economy initiatives at a local level that are very important for a process of re-territorialisation;
- creation of micro-entrepreneurship (as highlighted by the contribution of Bosch, in Spain);
- energy communities, for example the Sustainable Energy Action Plan of the Municipality of Sasso di Castalda, in Basilicata;
- experiences of culture-based innovation (as highlighted by the contribution of Prescia, in Sicily);
- resettlement phenomena in the Alps.

«[...] Without excessive reliance on self-organising processes alone» [Lanzani, 2020, 127], these are some of the examples that open up the second part of the text, where the agency of territories to transform themselves is highlighted, reacting with great effort to the complexities: interesting reflections to observe in a laboratory and experimental sense by research.

#### Research, experimentation and the conference as a laboratory on/with inner areas

[...] even this planning effervescence, which, against all expectations, animates many inner areas today, can be exhausted in a flash if it does not find adequate support and if it does not become the key to launching a new cycle of territorial policies, marked by a different philosophy, of which these experiences represent an experiment, or at least a premonition [Sacco, 2018, 541].

Starting from this lucid observation by Sacco who warns again to have a disenchanting gaze that understands the narrative and transformative power of practices, we understand how the university plays a central role. Indeed, with its leading position dictated by the privilege of being at the forefront of research, the university proposes increasingly place-based studies, determining innovative forms of interaction between communities and places. Furthermore, the reflections put forward by the researchers have a collective and genuinely political impact, an example is given in Lo Piccolo's contribution: the repercussions

on the territory are concrete and not always in line with the expectations or goals set by organizations and institutions. In other words, if the proposed projects and analyses are disciplinarily anchored, they inevitably have an important influence on the space and life of local communities. The most pursued methodology within the special issue includes the use of case studies. This approach is read through the theoretical structuring that Crosta makes in his volume «Pratiche. Il territorio “è l’uso che se ne fa”» [2010]. In one of his essays, Crosta tackles the issue of decision-making, which in the disciplines under consideration pertains to the project dimension in the broadest sense, highlighting the “interactive dimension of action”, and states:

The actual unfolding of this [action] brings into play “unintended consequences”: by interacting with each other, actors exchange unintended effects, influencing each other even without having the intention to do so. Now, these consequences, which are often important, can only be dealt with in the course of the interaction, when they manifest themselves, and are not, therefore, to be anticipated in the actors’ decisions; not because they are unforeseeable, but because it is only during the action — and because of the interaction — that they manifest [Crosta, 2010, 113].

In this way, it becomes clear how some of the researches reported in this issue were strongly influenced by the situated study of the experience described. Through case studies adopted as narrative, analytical or project expedient and through the observation, improvement or implementation of the self-determining capacities of inner areas, the university has power to promote resonance among rooted dynamics. Moreover, Crosta’s proposed quote describes the distinction between functions, uses and practices. Functions are a macro-category describing prevailing uses in a given space. Uses are a category that allows for a deeper understanding of the territory, observing more closely how spaces are routinely experienced and transformed, without, however, reaching the symbolic level of use itself. As Germanà affirms in her contribution in this issue: «referring in an abstract way to the persistence of the heritage is not enough for the rebirth of inner areas and generates unsustainable uses in various ways». Finally, practices, which are the deeper category and which «refer to and are inscribed in a system of social, cultural and symbolic relations» [Cellamare, 2021, 300]. In this context, the concept of the “laboratory” as an experience of “effort” becomes more vivid. Theoretical and practical research often shows how important territorialisation processes take place in inner areas, which, as such, are specific

and not re-applicable. However, it is in the coming together of analyses, visions, theories, practices and experiments that the complexity necessary for innovation is generated. The importance of the conference as a time for synthesising and sharing research is therefore part of the various laboratories already triggered in the relationship with communities (be it physical, or just on a study level).

### **Through common factors**

Following the underlining of the importance of the strong and difficult relationship that the scholar has maintained in most of the researches presented in this issue, we want to observe two key concepts that attempt to hold together several topics addressed by the contributions. These topics have a very wide meaning and a long-standing multidisciplinary scientific literature, namely “sustainability” and “co-production”. Through these two key words, this text goes over the most relevant aspects according to the statement proposed: laboratory as a space (material and immaterial) of effort.

### *Sustainability*

The concept of sustainability, which appeared in more abstract terms during the 19th century, among others in the contributions of Alexander Von Humboldt, became an object of great global interest in a first moment starting from the text «The limits to growth» [Meadows & Club of Rome, 1972], and in an even more concrete way starting from the Earth Summit, in 1992. Two centuries, fifty and thirty years have passed respectively since these fundamental moments in relation to the concept of sustainability. To date, the concept is understood beyond its tripartite division into economic, environmental and social dimensions, with respect to which a moment of synthesis and intersection must be found. Sustainability, today, has a multidimensional value linked to materiality (resources and their management), immateriality (society and its actions) components that break through the barrier of the present time. The diagram shown here [Fig. 3] displays how the economy, society and the environment do not intersect, but are part of a system of subsets in which the landscape is the major one. A dynamic and therefore variable landscape in visions, uses and interpretations. The concept of “caring use” advanced in Germanà’s contribution moves in this direction. The landscape projects proposed in the contribution by Mei and Marsala relate to the theme of scarcity and intend the landscape as the favorite place for the circularity of the island’s economy (system, in some ways, closed). The attention paid to traditional construction and self-

construction in Bosch's text brings the third university mission closer to the real construction of sustainability. Similarly, the search for an integrated project in the contributions of Millan (from an architectural point of view) and Prescia (from a restoration point of view). Finally, two specific nuances of sustainability can be observed in the contributions of Lo Piccolo and Vinci: in the first, the friction that is generated in the attempt to hold together performative tools with local tools that are still of a conformative nature; in the second, attention is paid to sustainability in the relationship between the parties, in particular between cities and rural areas.

### Co-production

Ostrom, in her essay titled «Crossing the great divide: Coproduction, synergy, and development» [1996], concludes by stating «No market can survive without extensive public goods provided by governmental agencies. No government can be efficient and equitable without considerable input from citizens. Synergetic outcomes can be fostered to a much greater extent than our academic barriers have let us contemplate». Technical skills are a fundamental component for development: it is necessary to put the realities of the internal areas in a position to be able to design. The technical preparation and the possibility of developing projects therefore belongs to the logic of competences, advanced in Campisi's text through the definition of a new technical figure, the Building Rehabilitation Expert (BRE). This logic of competences is contextualized

by Bosch's text, according to which the goal is not to expropriate the creative and planning capacity of the inhabitants, but to put the latter into a system with degrees of complexity (economic, technological and environmental) always greater thanks to the synergies referred to by Ostrom.

In the same essay, Ostrom states that «coproduction is not, of course, universally advantageous. Nor, is it a process that will occur spontaneously simply because substantial benefits could be achieved» [ivi]. In the research by Garofalo and Antista it is highlighted how often the community has an apparently hidden awareness of heritage. In fact, the resources produced by the local associations and the micro-management actions have allowed not only access to places and documents, but to be able to imagine fruition paths based on management systems that are in some way already rooted. This is why, there is a great attention that Prescia's contribution places on awareness, necessary so that the concept of "monument", extended to the urban or landscape environment, is truly integrated into local policies and planning.

Finally, with regard to the theme of co-production, two other approaches are interesting. The first, shown in Vinci's text, consists in the role played by the Local Action Groups defined as "cognitive infrastructures": as an attempt at a place-based approach to local development. The second relates to the contribution proposed by Marti, which offers an overview of information collection systems through geolocated data

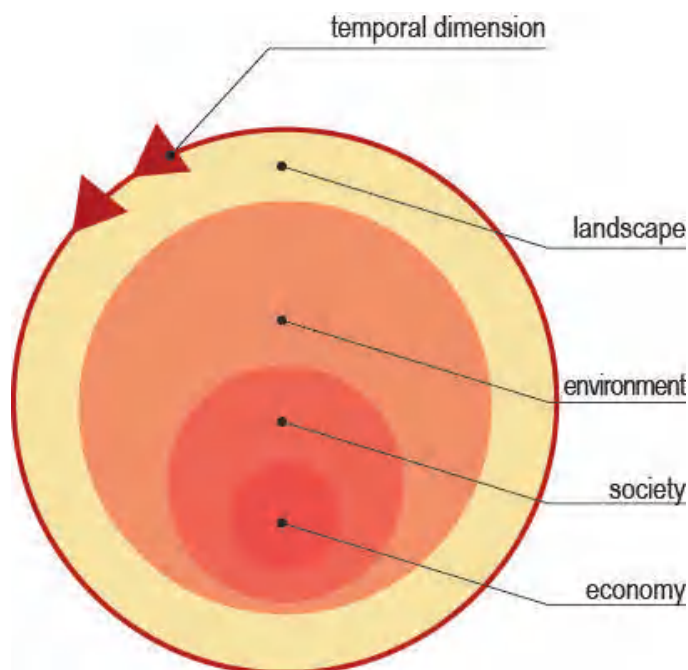


Fig. 3. This image proposes a development of the sustainability scheme presented in Butera [2021]. The sustainability of the economic system is such within that of the social system and, in turn, the environmental system. In this proposal, the sustainability of the landscape is the whole that encompasses all the others, in a dynamic and continuously updated definition.

from social networks. Previously, in this contribution, I used the neologism “instagrammable”: the possibility of being able to collect data from a large slice of the population such as the one that uses social networks can undoubtedly be a really interesting possibility for local communities to generate new strategies of promotion or of protection against phenomena, such as gentrification or touristification.

### **Conclusions: laboratories as a rooting act**

The studies and proposals of scientific research are grafted onto a broader cultural transformation with multiple forms: on the one hand, a general and generic trend of interest in inner areas and village lifestyles; on the other, a cultural transformation that showcases the embodied spaces of opportunity. Inner areas begin to be looked at and to look at themselves as the places where it is possible and, in some cases, convenient to develop new life and professional projects (as described in the conclusion of Bosch’s contribution). Despite the fact that the studies belong to different disciplines (although always in the field of space design), some points appear clear and shared in the proposed experiences. All the contributions do not act through pre-packaged recipes to be administered to “patients in need”: the attitude (in most cases, brought to light through case studies or field applications) is more “laboured”. In fact, in the place-based dimension that is often proposed, the need to deal with specificities and particular values is highlighted: this allows a sort of rooting of the researcher in a territory, which is not only analyzed as a motionless body, but as a co-producer in the progress of the research itself.

Two other factors arise. Firstly, the dynamism of inner areas is captured, far removed from the bulimic urban conception. These small transformations have the potential to become part of a more complex system of sustainability, which intercepts particular values in a broader and hopefully cyclical time frame. Secondly, the demiurgic attitude of the “omniscient planner/designer” is increasingly muted in a complexification of its role, i.e. as an actor part of a transformative process in which the project must be only a small part of the chain of changes, characterised by slowness, that are triggered in inner areas. The laboratory is therefore a privileged dimension for understanding and experimenting, taking many forms, like a working space for communities and researchers, a (theoretical) field of investigation, a network to be analysed or a medium, a posture. Regarding this last meaning, I would like to propose a concluding reflection: to intercept the ripples of territories and communities,

often not comprehensible just by maps, data and books, a privileged posture is that of the researcher who walks<sup>3</sup>. In fact, the slow temporariness to which the walking method obliges allows the researcher’s attentive and seeking gaze to reveal clearer nuances, relationships, forms and dynamics in the sensory sphere, transforming the act of walking into an instrument. One more tool to add to the toolbox to tackle the complex laboratory that the inner areas have opened up for us.

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## Notes

1. In this link it is explained a strategy to “spread” the wealth produced by Bagnoregio small historic centre’s international fame over the territory of Civita <https://civitadibagnoregio.cloud/ticket-a-civita/> (last access on 30.01.2023).
2. The quotation consists of the translation (by the author) of excerpts of an interview made with Filippo Barbera, titled “Vendere case a 1 euro è inutile?” (Is selling houses for 1 euro useless?). It is available (in Italian) at the following link <https://spreaker.page.link/Gos4h31tWtV56N9K6> (last access on 30.01.2023).
3. The Department of Architecture is part of the inter-university network of the Laboratorio del Cammino. It is a network in which professors, researchers and students walk as a practice, as understood by Crosta [2010], to achieve the “awareness” referred to by many of the contributions collected in this special issue in the reciprocal influence that is generated during the encounter between designing subjects: some because of their discipline (architects, designers, planners), others while the construction (of meaning) of their own territory.

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