

PERUGIA, IPOGEO DEI VOLUMNI

FROM *GENIUS DISLOCI*
TO *GENIUS LOCI*
OF A PERIPHERALIZED
MONUMENT

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PERUGIA
IPOGEO DEI VOLUMNI
PERIPHERALIZED MONUMENT
GENIUS LOCI
URBAN RENEWAL

Can an inhomogeneous, fragmented, and incoherent peripheral place, in which archaeological remains, industrial settlements and territorial infrastructures coexist chaotically, become a place of identity of the city of our time? This contribution aims at recognize the *genius disloci* of the suburbs, considered no man's land, places without identity, but which are, inevitably, the daily theater of most people's lives. On the heels of a deep and sensitive cognitive activity, the potential of marginalized places have been investigated through the case study of Ponte San

Giovanni, the most complex neighborhood of the city of Perugia. The disorganization of the urban fabric betrays a precise lexical heritage, characterized by the presence of the archaeological park of the Etruscan necropolis of Palazzone and the *Ipogeo dei Volumni*. In this framework, the urban architecture project *Hortus line* is inserted, with the purpose of physically and culturally sewing up the peripheral monument with the inhabited district. It traces an iconic sign in the intricate local morphology able to evoke that *genius loci* unrevealed so far.

Working in the negative space of the recent city, in order to modify the uncertain and undifferentiated void that lies between the buildings in the environment of collective paths, is akin to construct the narrative structure of a story, taking care to avoid uniformity and repetition, to scan episodes, to tie up the thread of partial and separate dialogues. While drawing the empty space in plots of eloquent forms and events, the project of urban architecture suggests the trace of possible dialogues between multiple and dispersed fragments and prefigures the new intrigues that the urban place tells those who walk through it, cross it, live in it. (Giammarco & Isola, 1993, p. 61)

THE *GENIUS DISLOCI*

Can an inhomogeneous, fragmented, and incoherent peripheral place, in which archaeological remains—one of the most evocative necropolis of the Etruscan world— industrial settlements —a collection of prefabricated sheds close to decay—and territorial infrastructures—a state road, a highway viaduct, and a railroad line— coexist chaotically, become a place of identity for the city of our time? Perhaps yes, but on condition that, in the wake of a deeper and sensitive cognitive activity, the urban architectural project is able to recognize and therefore evoke the *genius disloci* that hovers above an evidently unsolved place, but which still contains the enzymes to transform environmental degradation in environmental quality. In spite of the negative connotation conferred on the idea of suburbs by many stereotypes and many cultural prejudices which, moreover, on closer inspection, express a temporal rather than a material condition. Because, while it is true that urban suburbs are considered no man's land, in which the absence of memory and identity is added to the loss of forms and relationships, producing cities that have been removed from the cultural

point of view, it is equally true that urban peripheries are absolutely present from a social point of view, because it is in them that, every day, the real life of most people takes place.

THE REMOVED CITY

The city is now revealed as a target out of reach, solved into a contrasting and random phenomenology that sees the co-presence of a plurality of equivalent narratives. (Purini, 2002, p. 107)

The cities end neither with the city walls nor with the ring roads but extend to the most marginal and rarefied areas of the territorial hinterland. It is no coincidence that the concept of periphery inevitably relates to the city both morphologically, in its etymological meaning of 'circumference, perimeter' borrowed from the comparison with the historical center, and ideologically, in the non-autonomous social matrix which owes its identity to the consolidated urban fabric (Secchi, 1991). To the point that all suburbs have a strong tendency not to remain suburbs.

It happens in the exemplary case of Ponte San Giovanni, the most populous and complex district of the city of Perugia –both from the sociological point of view and from the morphological point of view– (Lattaioli et al., 1990) where, especially in the eastern side, the non-cohesive building fabric produced by the coexistence of abandoned industrial and craft sheds, illegal deposits and landfills, improvised outbuildings and fences, betrays a precise lexical heritage (Belardi, 2000), counterpointed by the presence, along the Assisana road, of the archaeological site of the Etruscan necropolis of the Palazzone. And, with it, the presence of the *Ipogeo dei Volumni*: the mysterious Etruscan tomb, dated around the second half of the II century B.C., which since 1840 –the year of its accidental discovery– presides over the valley of the Tiber River and that, also by virtue of the sophisticated eclectic style wall shrine that protects it –built in 1867 on a

project by Guglielmo Calderini— has risen over time to a place of identity (Cenciaioli, 2011).

A role that the *Ipogeo dei Volumni* still plays, despite the progressive peripheralization determined over the last one hundred and fifty years by the construction of the main infrastructures imposed by the city growth needs: from the adjacent Foligno-Terontola railroad line —which includes a grade crossing and a railway tollbooth— to the overlying viaduct of the highway junction Perugia-Bettolle —marked by grandiloquent prefabricated reinforced concrete pylons— up to the facing state road 75bis —which denies the possibility of even a minimum pedestrian entrance widening.

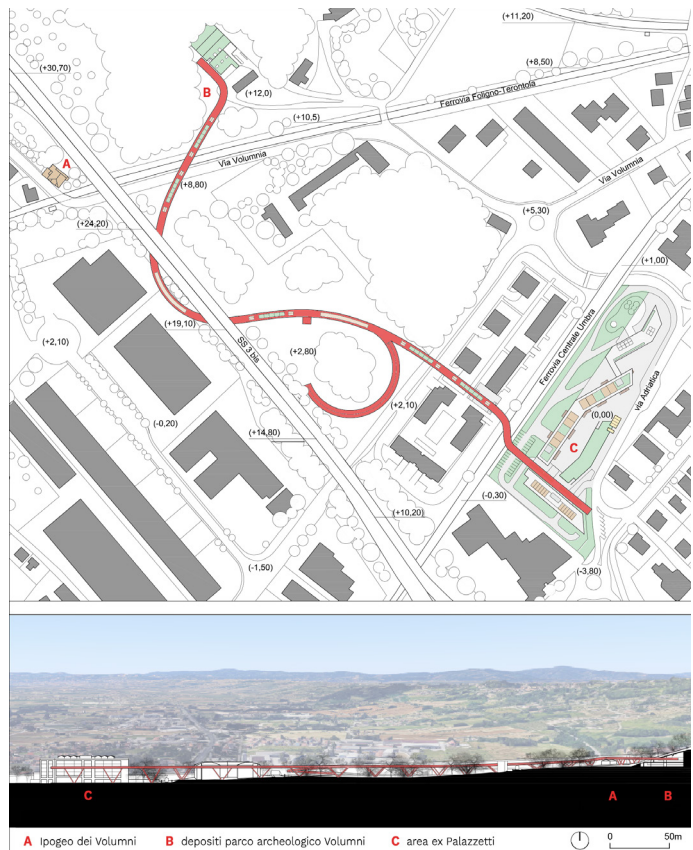
THE URBAN ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT *PS⁵G*

The complex and multiform nature of the place, where the *Ipogeo dei Volumni* looks suffocated, both from a functional and a figurative point of view, even if it underlies the seed of an intrinsic personality in the surrounding environment, is made up of a dusty fabric in which only a few mammoth industrial sheds emerge. It requires a ritual investigative process aimed not only at detecting its morphological characteristics, but also and, above all, at critically investigating the socio-cultural dimension underlying the concept of living the suburbs. Hence the reasons for the urban architectural project *PS⁵G*, promoted from the Municipality of Perugia in synergy with *ATER Umbria* and resulted winner of the national announcement *PINQuA* —National Innovative Housing Quality Program— aimed at reducing housing and settlement problems in peripheral contexts (Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei Trasporti, 2021). An urban project that recomposes the eastern side of Ponte San Giovanni district with a concerted series of specific qualifying interventions that are inserted into the existing fabric as regenerating stem cells belonging to the same genetic heritage. In this context, the restoration project of

the abandoned –and degraded– residential complex called *ex-Palazzetti* stands out: a melancholic building complex abandoned to decay, consisting of four unfinished buildings (Cao & Romagni, 2016) and marked by five vulnerabilities concerning sustainability, sociality, functionality, liveability, and healthiness.

In particular, to the vulnerability in terms of sustainability, the project responds through the implementation of diffuse partial demolitions: it provides a preliminary rarefaction aimed at improving the general sanitary conditions by drastically reducing both the building density and the density of housing units and increasing the energy class. To the vulnerability in terms of sociality, the project responds through the introduction of a variety of outdoor collective

Fig. 1 Belardi, P, Battistoni, M., & Sorignani, C., *Hortus line* project (Perugia), plan and section, 2021.



spaces: it provides enhanced condominium services, large pedestrian areas, bike-sharing stations, but, above all, it attributes to an entire building the role of social condenser capable of hosting a mix of cultural and recreational activities promoting social and generational integration. To the vulnerability in terms of functionality, the project responds through the equipment of multifunctional spaces: it provides the inclusion of both conventional activities – craft or commercial– and innovative activities related to the consequences of the pandemic –private or condominium areas for smart working, fitness, and multi-sensory gardens– as well as it strengthens neighborhood educational functions in the form of a nursery school. To the vulnerability in terms of liveability, the project responds through the insertion of autonomous grafts, both through the viral addition of light superfetations in wooden carpentry and through the use of modular elements of recovery, able to ensure a multifaceted and variable image. To the vulnerability in terms of healthiness, the project responds through the dissemination of green surfaces: it elects the vegetation component as building material and declines both horizontally –ensuring a widespread system of small gardens, both at ground level and at roof level– and vertically –giving a communicative role to the building condenser and improving the environmental conditions of social activities set out therein.

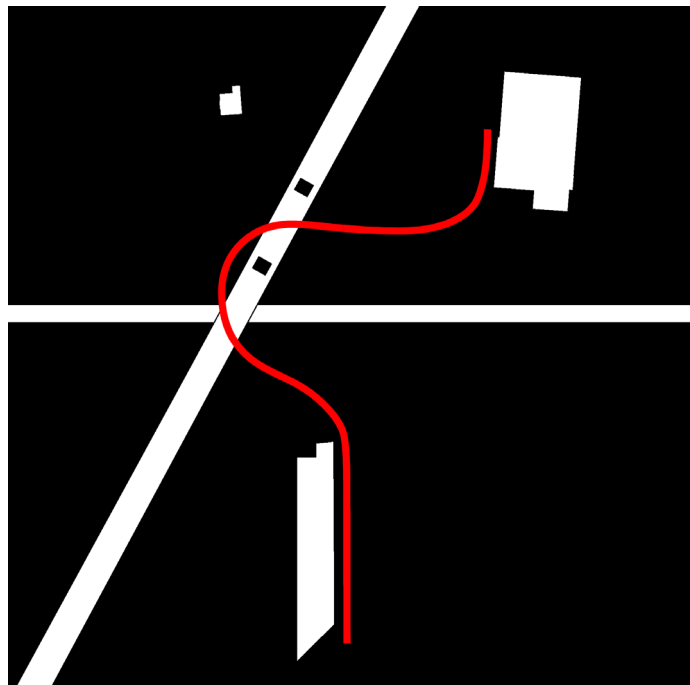
THE PROJECT OF THE *HORTUS LINE* INFRASTRUCTURE

It is precisely in the context of the urban architectural project *PS⁵G* where the architectural project of the hanging pedestrian route *Hortus line* is inserted (Figure 1). A new pedestrian infrastructure that, according with the most advanced contemporary trends (De Cesaris, 2004, 2012), aims at increasing the social impact induced by the project of recovery of the residential complex *ex-Palazzetti* reinforcing the identity relationship –now very labile–

between the district of Ponte San Giovanni and the Etruscan archaeological vestige (Figure 2). Furthermore, it is a pedestrian infrastructure that seeks to contaminate local tradition and global innovation, since, if on one side it takes up the scenography of some local historical urban features such as Via dell'Acquedotto in Perugia and Ponte delle Torri in Spoleto, on the other side it takes up the spectacularism of some contemporary international realizations such as the *High line* in New York and the *Camden highline* in London.

In fact, in architecture, the reinterpretation of pre-existing peripheral contexts has often been the ideological principle behind the requalification of marginal urban areas through contemporary projects that aim at regenerating the urban landscape while respecting the architectural heritage inherited from the past, regardless of its historical 'aura'. One of the main objectives of the project is the reconnection of public spaces and the network of bicycle and pedestrian paths and the creation of cultural and leisure centers. In

Fig. 2 Belardi, P., Battistoni, M., & Sorignani, C., *Hortus line* project (Perugia), concept, 2021.



this regard, it is enough to consider the *Polcevera Park and the Red Circle* designed by Stefano Boeri Architetti studio, which represents the testimony of a powerful tradition of port landmarks such as blast furnaces, cranes and overhead travelling cranes.

The intervention, declining from time to time in walkway, elevated square, ramp and corridor through the buildings, retraces the places closest to the tragedy consumed on August 14, 2018, reconnecting and enhancing the new system of botanical parks (Mussolini, 2019). Moreover, in the European panorama, the project *Tree Bridge* by Paul de Ruiter Architects is exemplary, a bridge conceived as a natural extension of the numerous green and wooded areas present in the Dutch city of Amstelveen. It arises above the existing freeway junction and allows the reconnection of the southern area with the historical center, guaranteeing pedestrian and bicycle permeability.

Taking up the threads of these precedents, the designed pedestrian viaduct –renamed *Hortus line* as it is marked by a row of vegetable gardens for the cultivation of typical agricultural ‘farm-to-table’ products– starts up from the

Fig. 3 Belardi, P., Battistoni, M., & Sorignani, C., junction between the social condenser building and the *Hortus line*, plan and section, 2021.

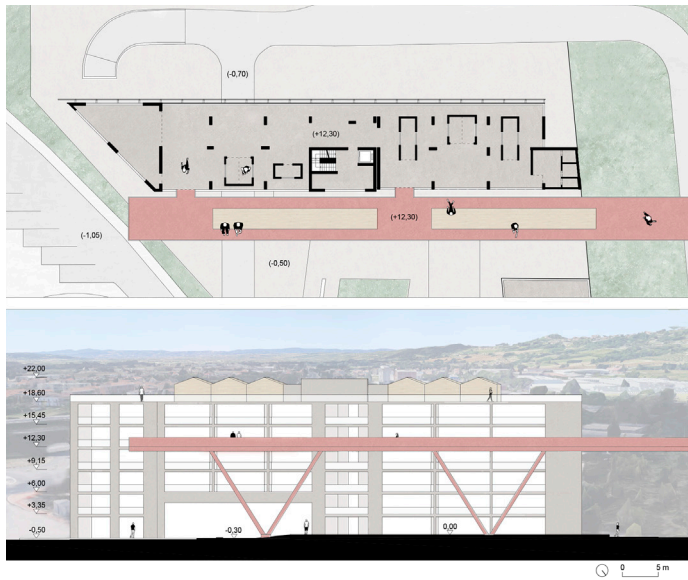
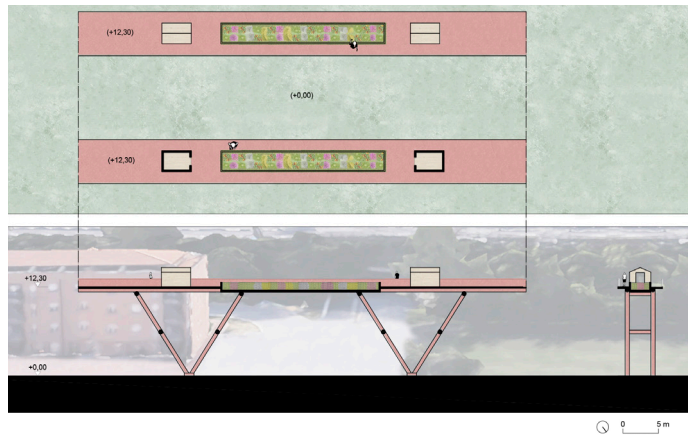


Fig. 4 Belardi, P., Battistoni, M., & Sorignani, C., detail of the *Hortus line* vegetables gardens, plan and section, 2021.



multi-storey building-square of the new residential complex of the former *Palazzetti* area (Figure 3).

In this site the headquarter of the laboratory branch of the *Ipogeo dei Volumni* is foreseen, that is dedicated to the experiential initiation in the archaeological disciplines of the students of the secondary schools of the territorial hinterland (Figure 4). Then the new viaduct overcomes the meanders of the existing road network, winds sinuously between the pylons of the highway viaduct and, after it has connected with the green area below (Bortolotti et al., 2013). Ultimately, sinking its roots into the new values of the landscape of

Fig. 5 Belardi, P., Battistoni, M., & Sorignani, C., junction between the *Ipogeo dei Volumni* deposits and the *Hortus line*, Plan and section, 2021.

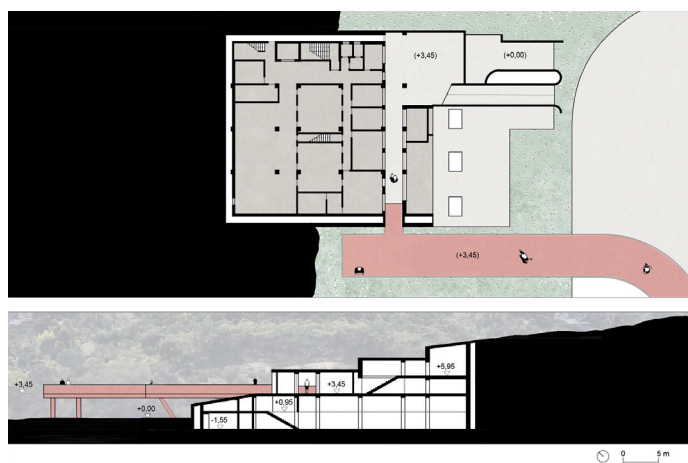
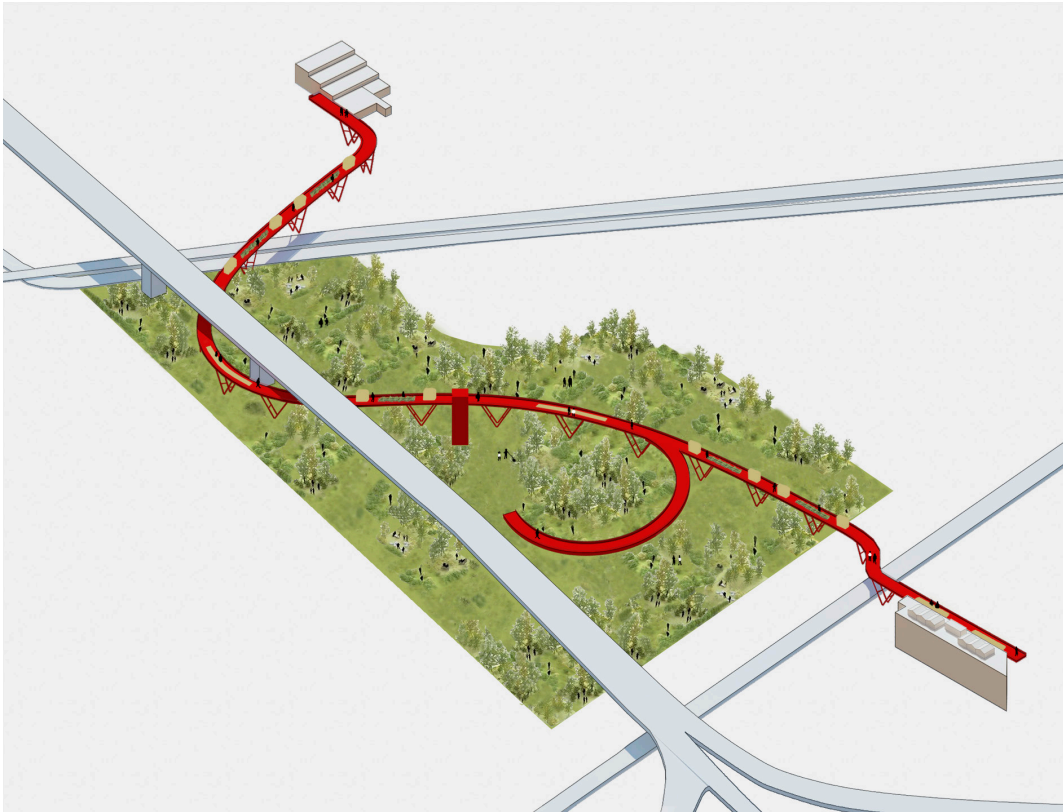


Fig. 6 Belardi, P., Battistoni, M., & Sorignani, C., *Hortus line* project (Perugia), axonometric projection, 2021.

infrastructure in Europe (Rocca, 2009) and inspired by François Signeur's project for the recovery of the space below the Frais-Vallon junction of the Marseille ring road, it wedges itself into the marginal residual void between the railway line and the viaduct of the freeway link and then lands inside the underground deposits of the archaeological park (Figure 5).



Combining cultivation and culture, the project mainly aims at punctually recomposing the chaotic accumulation of road infrastructures that peripheralizes the archaeological site organized around the *Ipogeo dei Volumni* through a zero-volume architecture capable of electing the *genius disloci* to *genius loci* (Figure 6).

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