

# **BORGHI**

## AGAINST A RETHORIC OF 'EXCELLENCE'

**Iacopo Prinetti, Caterina Cameli**

Politecnico di Milano

School of Architecture, Urban Planning, Construction, Engineering

[caterina.cameli@mail.polimi.it](mailto:caterina.cameli@mail.polimi.it)

## ESSAY 93/05

COUNTRYSIDE

HISTORICAL CENTERS

ITALIAN INLAND AREAS

Can the countryside offer a real alternative to metropolitan life? Today, rural areas are often seen as places to 'save' through tourism and other discontinuous uses, but the era in which we live imposes a radical change of perspective: the pandemic has crumbled tourist economies and shown their fragility. The birth of a post-tourist society is particularly relevant in Italy, where entities such as the *borghi* are widespread: far and disconnected from the large urban centers, they are nevertheless the archetype to which metropolitan areas are now turning again. To put these reflections into practice, it is effective to study a representative case: the 'urban territory' around San Benedetto del Tronto (AP),

an ever-growing seaside tourist destination. The neighboring municipalities are nothing but dormitory districts, as evidenced by the new widespread urbanizations and the semi-abandoned historic centers of Acquaviva Picena, Monteprandone, and Monsampolo del Tronto. Among the still evident signs of the 2016 earthquake and houses for sale, the three medieval villages spend in hibernation the months that separate the tourist seasons, calling for alternative scenarios: in order not to remain crystallized as monuments to culture and traditions, it is necessary for them to aspire to be places of daily life, inserted in a network of biunivocal relations with other urban centers.

## INTRODUCTION

The last few years have marked the return of the countryside in the architectural debate, reversing the tendencies characteristic of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The multiplicity of essays, books, projects and theories recently published around this theme reveals how a dynamic and varied reflection is underway, whose extremes are exemplified by the book *Countryside: The Future* (2020) edited by Rem Koolhaas and the collection of essays *What About the Provinces* (June 2018) edited and curated by the *Canadian Center for Architecture* (CCA). In laying out their vision for the countryside, Koolhaas and the CCA diverge profoundly. *Countryside: the future* paints the countryside as the negative of the city, a desert environment to be colonized, as the texts *TRIC: Post Human Architecture and Great Plan for the Transformation of Nature* contained in the volume, clearly show.

On the contrary, the essays collected in the latter volume recognize the countryside's capacity to offer as well as to receive knowledge in a bidirectional exchange with the urban environment. In the essay *Post-urban phenomenon*, Kayoko Ota (2018) tells how in Japan the dialogue between countryside and city is increasingly useful to architects who combine their urban practice with participatory projects in rural environments. This duality allows designers to bring their knowledge to different environments while at the same time learning from these places ideas and concepts that can be translated into the densified environments of the city. The author of the essay identifies this mode of exchange as an equal dialogue between rural "smallness" and metropolitan "bigness" (Koolhaas, 1995), clarifying the meaning of the 'rediscovery' of the countryside in contemporary times: it is not a 'static' place of escape from the city, but an autonomous and dynamic reality.

This radical change of perspective towards the rural environment is highly necessary today: the pandemic has crumbled tourist economies and shown the fragility of being totally subjected to them. The birth of a post-tourist society is

**Fig. 1** Seiichi Ohsawa, SANAA, *F-Art House*, 2010, Inujima Island, Japan.



particularly relevant in Italy, where entities such as the *borghi* are widespread: far and disconnected from the large urban centers, they are nevertheless the archetype to which metropolitan areas are now turning again (Cucinella, 2018). If, therefore, we can speak of a *countryside turn* (Koolhaas, 2020), the latter cannot mean a romantic ideal of rural life, but rather a space in which to experiment with new models of contemporary life.

#### CENTER-PERIPHERY: ROUND TRIP

After World War II, Italian cities were the scene of profound transformations, which generated a rich disciplinary debate on the ancient urban fabric. Alongside the upheaval of the territory caused by industrial growth, there are ruins and the aftermath of the war: these are the years of the ‘reconstruction’, which sees architecture as the result of the urgent needs expressed by reality. The modernist response to these needs, made up of mass constructions of alienating neighborhoods, found a reaction in the *Neo-realist* current, a new rational way of building that looked to the past –to traditional architecture and ‘*borgo* life’– as models to be reinterpreted’.

But the roots of this attitude date back to before the war: at the *Triennale* exposition of 1936, Giuseppe Pagano had brought

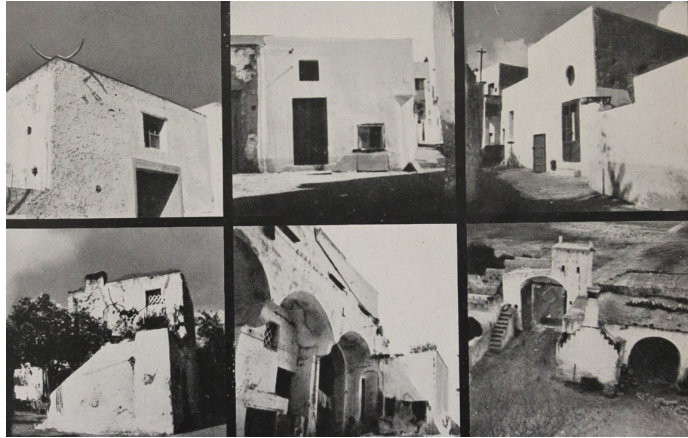
attention to *Rural Architecture*, praising its modesty and declaring it “formally very close to contemporary taste”. Speaking of “tradition of the new”, Pagano intended to exalt an architecture that, springing directly from the *situ*—that is, using the materials and techniques and responding to the specific needs and conditions that belong to it—always stays modern (Pagano & Daniel, 1936, p. 6).

With this unprecedented look at native tradition as ‘true modernity’, much of post-war Italian architectural culture chose not to follow imported movements, but to use principles rooted in local building modes. These instances are cardinal in the post-war debate on the rehabilitation of historic centers, which carries within itself all the complexity of the post-war reality. Between neorealism and residues of modernism, the forces move between two opposite poles: from the supporters of total preservation to the proponents of demolition. The problem of conservation arose from the questioning of the very role of the historical center in the modern city. The profound transformations that the industrial revolution brought to Italian cities inevitably upset many urban dynamics: the expansion of urbanization on a large scale, its diffusion throughout the territory (with the consequent downsizing of the cultivated countryside) and the new settlements became the main cause of the loss of inhabitants in the center of many Italian cities.

Rather eloquent in this sense is the case of Bologna, the object of studies and great transformations at the turn of the sixties and seventies. The photographs taken of the city by Paolo Monti<sup>2</sup> from 1968, show solitary and suspended urban spaces, “places waiting for transformations” (Emiliani, 1983, p. 35).

On an August morning, in the hours before the reopening of traffic, Monti notes the urban environments “restored to the silence and naturalness of their spaces, when the automobile did not exist”, as well as “the surprising rapidity with which people, and more than anyone else children and young people, took possession of those spaces, enjoying them immediately in the most varied ways” (Monti, 1970, p. 23). In this assignment,

**Fig. 2** Giuseppe Pagano, *Rapporti di Volumi Puri nelle Candide Case a Terrazzo nel Golfo di Napoli e in una Masseria della Campagna di Taranto nella Regione del Mar Piccolo*. Source: Giuseppe, G. Daniel, G. (1936). *L'architettura Rurale*. Milano: Hoepli.



the photographer sees the possibility of constructing “an exemplary diaphragm between a strongly intuited past and a future image” (Emiliani, 1983, p. 47): his photography wants to become a revelation of the profound nature of these settlements, allowing for a conscious debate on the reasons for settlement and the causes of abandonment, and denouncing the loss of interest in places that still preserve the signs of a profound civilization and high-level cultural expressions.

The historical center simply does not exist anymore: there are banks instead of cafes, offices instead of housing. The space to be protected in order not to lose our historical and cultural identity today goes beyond the walls (which have already been demolished) and also includes the suburbs and the countryside, according to a global idea of territory (Cervellati, 2000, p. 12).

Today, the recent expansions constitute new centralities, devoid of any relationship of necessity with the original center, since they are depositaries of identity and culture. In any case, the fact that the center-periphery scheme has been replaced by a polycentric one, does not in any way mean that the overtaking of the historical city model. On the contrary, the principles that govern it are the same ones that are sought in the new expansions<sup>3</sup>.

To stop the anonymous expansion of the metropolitan area, it is necessary to re-delimit the territory into sectors, by means

of infrastructures which facilitate the formation of small-medium communities (Cervellati, 2000). It is not by dilating it, therefore, that the sick suburbs would be healed, but by delimiting it qualitatively – to the point of rediscovering atmospheres of the province in the collective identity. This still is the prevailing attitude today: in order to remedy the desperate enormity of endless conurbations, a more contained dimension is sought for a more acceptable life.

In the panorama just described, everything leads directly back to the historical centers: we have returned –after the modernist blackout– to look at the parameters of sustainability, sociality, identity, environmental quality that are exactly the aspects that characterize and structure our heritage.

At this point, wouldn't it be paradoxical to think of 'centralized' suburbs as the only model of contemporary life and at the same time stigmatize their archetypal reference to an 'outdated' reality? It seems rather clear that, in the current debate on the future of cities, the *borghi* and historical centers necessarily assume a central role in our country, offering themselves as valid models, suitable to the requirements of contemporary society and resistant to its possible mutations.

The gradual failure of policies aimed at bringing productive life back into historic centers goes hand in hand with a depopulation of the same, which –although overpopulated by tourists and big brand stores– are increasingly conceived by city dwellers as 'non-places' (Augé, 1992, p. 16) detached from living and working urbanity (Settis, 2014). A similar transition is taking place in recent years in all the historic centers of large European cities, which from directional spaces increasingly resemble 'theme parks' (Tozzi, 2020), convinced and convincing sellers of a presumed local 'real life'. The uncritical and impotent look with which the cannibalistic action of tourism is accepted by European local administrations leads the city to surrender to an 'American-style consumerism' (Boeri, S., et al., 2000) uninterested in dialoguing with the place and purely aimed at profit.

The root of the erroneous relationship between tourism and the city lies in the creation of two different channels for



**Fig. 3** Paolo Monti, *Photographic Service*, 1970, Bologna, Italy.  
Source: Civico Archivio Fotografico di Milano.

visitors and inhabitants: in the absence of the former, the daily dimension is abandoned. The city emptied of its inhabitants and dedicated to the mere reception of external visitors loses its status as an inhabited center and therefore its identity.

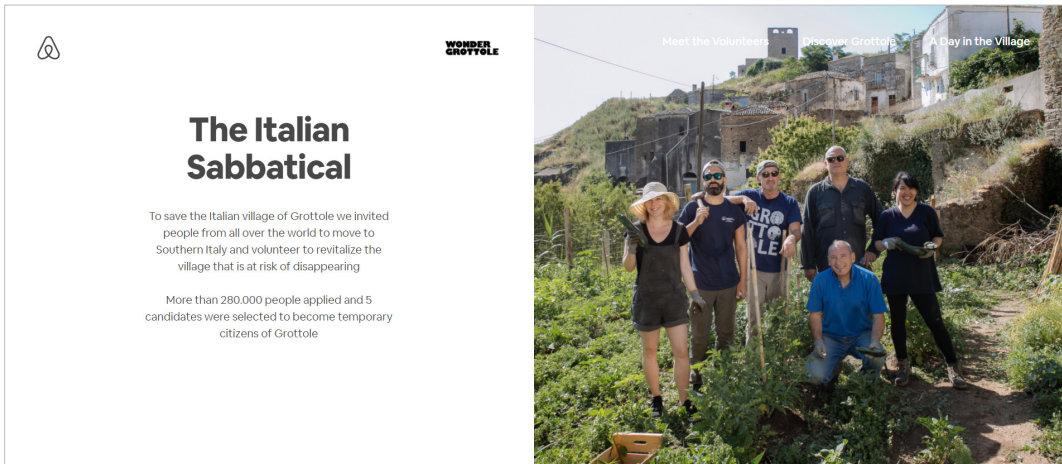
The city 'affected' by tourism is fragmented: center and periphery are divided not just physically, but by the different users they refer to. As the center becomes more and more inhospitable to the local inhabitants, they move to the periphery in search of the 'everyday dimension'. The removal of the inhabitants from the inland areas<sup>4</sup>, caused by the intensive capitalization of them, certainly produces an increase in wealth, but this cannot justify or compensate for their loss of identity.

The epicenter and manifestation of the exploitation of historical centers and the consequent loss of spirit is the city of Venice: By now, the city is dominated by a monoculture of tourism that exiles the natives and binds the survival of those who remain and of the city itself almost only to the desire to serve: nothing else does Venice seem capable of more than generating bed & breakfasts, restaurants and hotels, real estate agencies, selling "typical" products (from glass to masks), setting up fake Carnivals and giving itself, as a melancholic prettiest, an air of perpetual country party (Settis, 2014, p. 11).

The monoculture of tourism applied to Venice reveals its fallacy: a city conceived simply as a tourist destination and in this sense incapable of producing anything other than temporary attractions for visitors is not a place to live in, but simply to visit<sup>5</sup>.

This phenomenon shows in all the Italian *città d'arte*, in which tourist growth and depopulation reveal inversely proportional. This is the case of the *borghi*, where we observe the progressive replacement of houses with bed and breakfasts and seasonal businesses. The result of this tendency is a city intermittently switched, on and off according to the needs of external visitors. Small urban centers are devolved to tourism in return for renovations that crystallize their appearance—and make it sufficiently appealing—ignoring anything that goes beyond welcoming and entertaining.





**Fig. 4** Airbnb, *The Italian Sabbatical*, Grottole, Italy. Retrieved September, 13, 2021 from <<https://italiansabbatical.com/>>.

The architectural heritage alone, however, is not enough to make a city: productive, social and environmental identities must coexist. In the absence of any one of the three, a desertification occurs that the powerful means of tourism are unable to counteract. Resorts and 'diffused hotels', undoubtedly valid in their intention to maintain an architectural heritage otherwise destined to be lost, end up distorting the idea of the city. In fact, such strategies renounce one of the fundamental conditions for urban vitality, that is the diversity: traditionally conceived as land use mix, it is what ensures the city and its neighborhoods a vibrant economic and social life (Jacobs, 1961).

In the internal territories, the trap lies in convincing oneself that the future is already written and belongs to the large urban agglomerations; and that the rules, prepared by the ruling classes regardless of the places or made to measure for the urban areas, cannot be changed; that the maximum aspiration is subsidies and derogations. It lies in transforming one's own culture into a reservoir of nostalgia and stereotypes to entertain the "others". It lies in relying on local rentiers to ensure your survival. And then in feeling mortified by it (Barca, 2018, p. 272).

One falls into the trap<sup>6</sup> by accepting that the only future for inland areas lies in representing the perfect places for

**Fig. 5** Microclima, *Floating Cinema*, 2020, Venezia, Italy.  
Source: Microclima Venezia.



an ‘escape from reality’, a ‘weekend relaxation’ package, a week in the summer to live an all-Italian dream.

Looking at the selection of *borghi* made within the *Arcipelago Italiazo* exhibition, on the occasion of the *XVI Biennale of Architecture* in Venice, a common trend emerges strongly, expressed by a recurring keyword: ‘excellence’. Recognizing that our heritage is an “enviable product” (Prestinzenza Puglisi, 2018, p. 116), an authentic mine of traditions and cultures, we choose to exalt them to the point of almost exasperating them. According to this logic, the strategy for relaunching the abandoned—or neglected—inland areas focuses on their ‘specialties’. We see new specialized villages appearing in an almost advertising format: to be visited to taste the original recipe of a certain dish, to observe a specific artisan practice, to be able to buy the best version of a product, and so on. It’s a shame that, often, the anxiety to specialize and identify these territories ends up leading to very similar results: between craft markets, chopping boards and street art, the village experience that is sold in this or that part of Italy is nothing more than a standard.

One falls into the trap by accepting that a city is reduced to its specialty in order to sell it better, convinced that it could have never, in any case, functioned as a true city:



**Fig. 6** Smartbox, *I borghi più belli d'Italia*, 2018. Retrieved September, 13, 2021 from <<https://www.smartbox.com/it/nostri-smartbox/soggiorni/i-borghi-piu-belli-d-italia>>

dynamic, varied, complex and balanced. In this way, excellence becomes a rhetoric at the service of the same commercialization previously discussed: wanting to strongly open up the towns to outside visitors and consumers, it ends up enclosing them in a cage (that of the 'Italian experience'), reducing them to objects of consumption.

#### FROM ATTRACTION TO PERMANENCE

Countering this trend is possible, but to do so requires a radical change of perspective, capable of reordering priorities and restoring dignity to the place. Italian 'excellences' have the potential to be more than attractions, they can be conceived as services to the local community. Putting the local scale at the center of the discourse opens the door to new scenarios of life in the villages, scenarios in which they are chosen not only because they want to 'disconnect from the city', but because there are conditions, services and attractions to live and work there satisfactorily. The change would therefore start from conceiving these places not as negations of the city, but as representatives of an alternative model to the metropolitan one, equally functional and equally contemporary.

To the operation of 'embellishment' represented by the concept of excellence, the idea of 'specificity' can be opposed: a renewed look at the local scale, freed from the dominion of the tourist economy, rooted in and sensitive to the nature and uniqueness of the territory. The privileged dimension in this discourse becomes that of everyday life, the main recipients being the permanent inhabitants.

Far from being just a concept, the idea of 'specificity' also becomes a method, a way of designing, which can be applied at the different scales that this theme requires. In particular, it brings with it a specific urban planning approach that can be assimilated to that advocated by Giancarlo De Carlo and that offers, in opposition to the urban planning of norms, standards and axes, an original point of view:



**Fig. 7** Airbnb, *Di Borgo in Borgo*, 2020. Retrieved September, 13, 2021 from <<https://news.airbnb.com/it/borghi-italiani/>>

After all, who doesn't know that I am against 'numerical' urbanism, which believes it solves everything in terms of indexes, density, quantity of services, width of streets, height of buildings, etc., and loses sight of the overall and specific form of the city, as a whole and in its parts? But I am also against 'monumental' urban planning that discusses forms only in abstract terms and, in its abstraction, fails to go beyond the squalor of elementary geometries (De Carlo, 1976, p. 152).

For De Carlo it is necessary to do urban planning starting from a deep understanding of the complexity of the city and the relationships between its parts. Only in this process of knowledge, which is referred to the specific case, is it possible to structure the project. Rejecting any absolute or aprioristic method, the only rules his urban planning uses are the 'relational' ones, which leave room for appreciation and therefore interpretation as cornerstones of the project.

## URBAN TERRITORIES

In redesigning urban spaces through a new 'social' lens, we start to consider an expanded urbanity capable of encompassing highly heterogeneous environments, linked by socio-productive relationships that transcend traditional administrative boundaries. A new inclusive landscape emerges, or –as Mirko Zardini interpreted it in 1999– a 'hybrid landscape', in which urbanity, infrastructure and countryside are combined horizontally (Zardini, 1999).

Particularly in the Italian case, the increasingly strong polarization between the metropolis and inland areas makes it possible to introduce the polycentric model as an alternative to the large center, connecting small centers in a single system while respecting their specificity.

It is interesting to note that we are facing the opposite process to the one described by Cervellati in his strategy for the suburbs' healing: starting from a dramatically homologated territory, the author spoke of qualitatively delimiting, conferring identity and vocations in order to create polarities<sup>7</sup> (Cervellati, 2000, p. 27); in this case, on the other hand, we are starting from small centers with a strong identity and clearly delimited (if not actually fortified), which need to be put into relation with each other in order to actually function as cities.

The possibility of creating 'urban territories' is particularly valid in counteracting the continuous migration towards the larger centers, offering an interconnected environment on a social and productive level and, for this reason, attractive not only to the elderly and tourists, but to the entire population. The idea of "metapoli" (Ascher, 1995) –diffused cities as opposed to centralized metropolises– becomes even more relevant today given the unprecedented attention paid to rural landscapes and the interest in considering them in the same way as urban landscapes, which have always been investigated to a greater extent. Putting together these two areas, considered for a long time as opposites

and clearly distinct, finally allows an inclusive planning, able to deal with the heterogeneity of the territory without flattening it but adapting to its declinations.

### 'PART-TIME CITIES': A CASE-STUDY

In order to concretize and deepen these reflections, we will proceed with the selection of a case-study considered representative: the territory around the coastal city of San Benedetto del Tronto, in the southern Marche region, an ever-growing seaside tourist destination. The vitality of the whole Piceno area has been almost totally absorbed by its most populous urban center, reducing the surrounding smaller cities to dormitory-districts.

This case is eloquent because it contains within itself some characteristics and dynamics peculiar to Italian tourist cities (seasonality), and those peculiar to inland areas and small towns (abandonment and emptying), and in particular to urban centers on the central Apennines (visible effects of the 2016 earthquake). In fact, the project work ultimately focuses on the small historical centers, 'satellites' of the city of San Benedetto: Acquaviva Picena, Montepandone and Monsampolo del Tronto. Studying these realities, it becomes clear that a radical change of perspective is needed, which conceives them as participants in a polycentric territory and inserted in a network of bidirectional relationships between them and with the larger urban center.

Acquaviva Picena (3 723 inhabitants<sup>8</sup>) rises on a hill that dominates the landscape of the Tronto valley, 359 meters above sea level and 7.5 kilometers away from the coast of San Benedetto. The municipality has a medieval *borgo* which makes it an attractive tourist destination from a cultural, archaeological and traditional point of view.

The second *borgo* is Montepandone (12 811 inhabitants<sup>9</sup>), located on a hill 266 meters above sea level and only

5 kilometers from the coast. The most populous zone of the city is the hamlet of Centobuchi, which develops along the Tronto Valley and owes its expansion to the presence of important industrial sites, mainly in the agri-food, mechanical and manufacturing sectors.

Proceeding towards the hinterland, the third city is Monsampolo del Tronto (4,525 inhabitants<sup>10</sup>), which is – like the nearby Montepandone and many of the towns along the Tronto valley (Lazzarini, 2015)– composed of two distinct nuclei: the first is the borgo, at 184 meters above sea level; the second is the new industrial expansion of Stella di Monsampolo, in the Tronto Valley.

Observing the historical sequences of urbanization, an 'L-shaped' development of the territory is evident, that is, linearly along the coast and, perpendicularly, along the river and the valley of the Tronto: it is in the latter that the areas of new expansion, residential and industrial, as well as the main services of the municipal territories inside San Benedetto are located: along the valley of the Tronto and the contiguous via Salaria, the hamlets Centobuchi (Montepandone) and Stella di Monsampolo (Monsampolo del Tronto) are located. Therefore, it is possible to identify two linear cities, the one along the Tronto river and the one generated by San Benedetto del Tronto's urban area, whose growth in the last years has been a real 'urban explosion'<sup>11</sup>, until assuming the characteristics of diffuse cities, in which the settlements of population, activities and services are dispersed throughout the territory (Indovina et al., 2015).

This concentration of population towards the valley and the coast is concomitant with the emptying out of the more inland areas and their historic centers, in which very few of the services and functions necessary for city life remain. To date, most of the population residing within the three above-mentioned municipalities does not work in the same municipality in which they live and most of the jobs in the area are in San Benedetto del Tronto.



**Fig. 8** Regione Marche, *Orthophotographical map 1988-1989: San Benedetto del Tronto and its territory, 1988, San Benedetto del Tronto, Italy.* Source: Archivio Regione Marche.

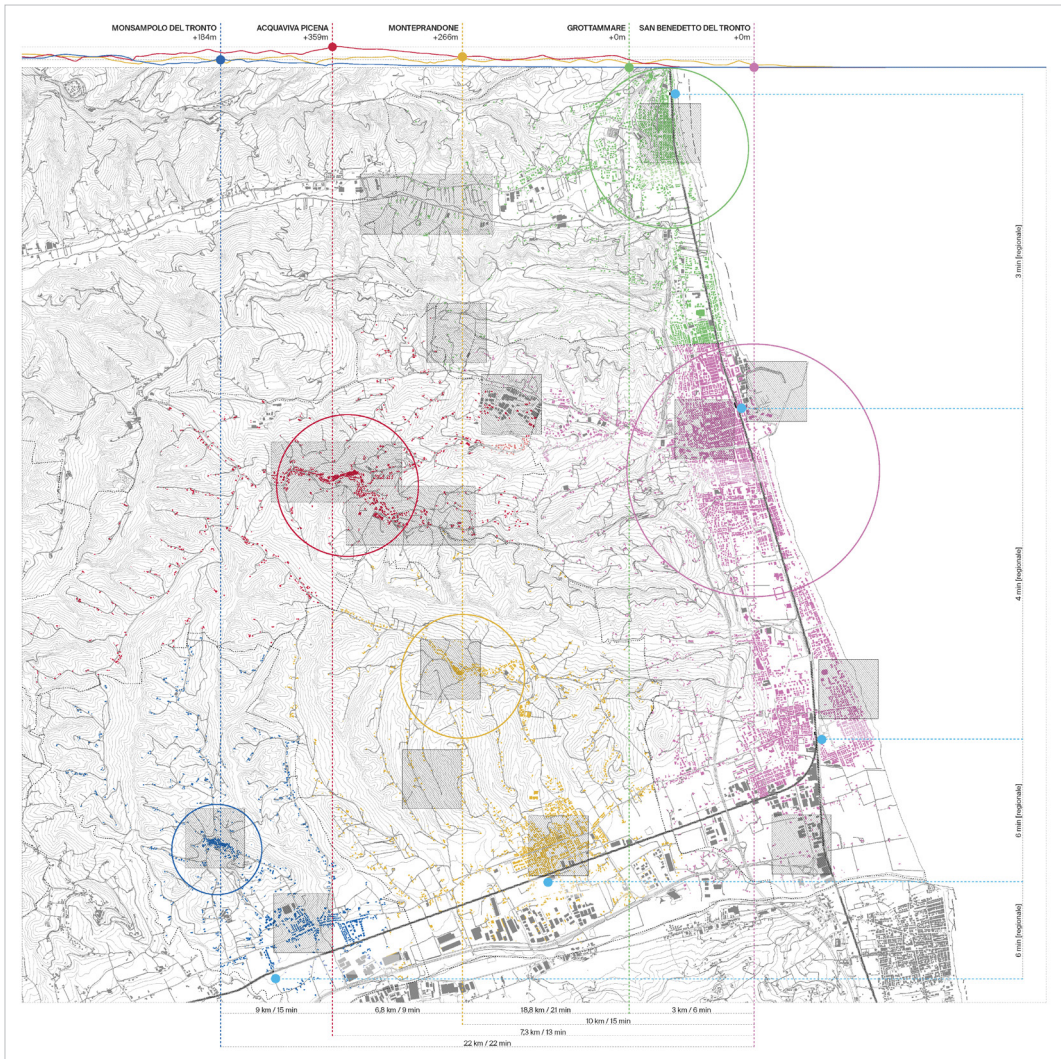
Although at different levels, all four municipalities considered in this analysis are “part-time cities” (Sordi & Dambrosio, 2019): in addition to being a determining factor in the intra-municipal movements of the local population (strongly tied to work and school calendars), seasonality allocates entire portions of the city to tourist reception, manifesting the totalizing role of this economy in this territory. Seasonal movements take place from the hinterland towards the Adriatic coast, finding in Porto d’Ascoli a true appendix of the nearby Ascoli Piceno, in the guise of a large district of second homes.



**Fig. 9** Caterina Cameli and Iacopo Prinetti, *Coastal Piceno: a Territorial Framework*, 2020, San Benedetto del Tronto, Italy. Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). Source: *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Politecnico di Milano).

EDUCATING THE TERRITORY

In developing a strategy on a territorial scale, education has been identified as a key sector for the revitalization of villages and historic centers: in other words, if the urgent need is to counteract the depopulation of inland areas and the consequent migration to larger urban centers,



**Fig.10** Caterina Cameli and Iacopo Prinetti, *Coastal Piceno: a Territorial Framework*, 2020, San Benedetto del Tronto, Italy. Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). Source: *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Politecnico di Milano).

the category to which one should immediately look is that of young people. In this sense, the relationship between school, university and territory is decisive.

The reflections developed up to now find concrete confirmation in many of the positions expressed by the Rector of the *Università Politecnica delle Marche* (UNIVPM), Prof. Gian Luca Gregori. Reference is made in particular to the themes



**Fig. 11** Caterina Cameli, *Acquaviva Picena from Monsampolo del Tronto*, 2020, Monsampolo del Tronto, Italy. Source: Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* [Unpublished Master Thesis]. Politecnico di Milano.



**Fig. 12** Iacopo Prinetti, *Acquaviva Picena*, 2020, Acquaviva Picena, Italy. Source: Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* [Unpublished Master Thesis]. Politecnico di Milano.



**Fig. 13** Caterina Cameli, *Monteprandone from Acquaviva Picena*, 2020, Acquaviva Picena, Italy. Source: Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* [Unpublished Master Thesis]. Politecnico di Milano.



**Fig. 14** Iacopo Prinetti, *Monteprandone*, 2020, Monteprandone, Italy. Source: Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* [Unpublished Master Thesis]. Politecnico di Milano.



**Fig. 15** Caterina Cameli,  
*Monsampolo del Tronto from  
 Acquaviva Picena*, 2020, Acquaviva  
 Picena, Italy. Source: Source:  
 Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020).  
*Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per  
 Sistemi Locali [Unpublished Master  
 Thesis]*. Politecnico di Milano.



**Fig. 16** Iacopo Prinetti,  
*Monsampolo del Tronto aerial view*,  
 2020, Monsampolo del Tronto,  
 Italy. Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I.  
 (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche  
 per Sistemi Locali [Unpublished  
 Master Thesis]*. Politecnico di Milano.



**Fig. 17** Iacopo Prinetti, *Acquaviva  
 Picena aerial view*, 2020, Acquaviva  
 Picena, Italy. Source: Source:  
 Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020).  
*Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per  
 Sistemi Locali [Unpublished Master  
 Thesis]*. Politecnico di Milano.



**Fig. 18** Iacopo Prinetti,  
*Monteprandone aerial view*, 2020,  
 Acquaviva Picena, Italy. Source:  
 Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020).  
*Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per  
 Sistemi Locali [Unpublished Master  
 Thesis]*. Politecnico di Milano.



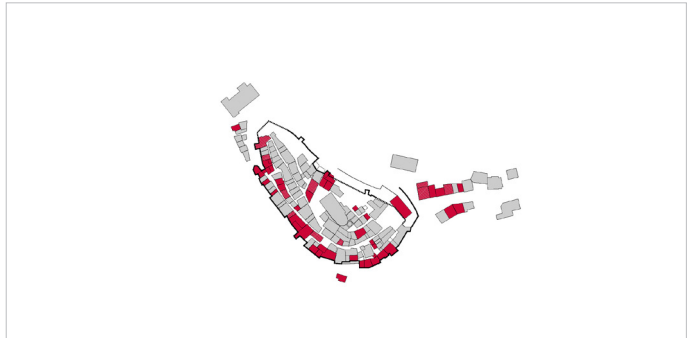
**Fig. 19** Caterina Cameli and Iacopo Prinetti, *Acquaviva Picena*, housing abandonment in the city center (in red the completely abandoned buildings, in striped red the semi-abandoned buildings), Acquaviva Picena, Italy. Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Politecnico di Milano).



**Fig. 20** Caterina Cameli and Iacopo Prinetti, *Monsampolo del Tronto*, housing abandonment in the city center (in red the completely abandoned buildings, in striped red the semi-abandoned buildings), Monsampolo del Tronto, Italy. Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Politecnico di Milano).



**Fig. 21** Caterina Cameli and Iacopo Prinetti, *Monteprandone*, housing abandonment in the city center (in red the completely abandoned buildings, in striped red the semi-abandoned buildings), Monteprandone, Italy. Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Politecnico di Milano).



of *Research, Teaching and Third Mission* which characterize the Strategic Mandate Program of the newly elected Rector<sup>12</sup> (Gregori, 2019, pp. 19-23), which contain fundamental points of reflection in the elaboration of a territorial strategy. First and foremost, of interest, among all of them, is the plan to offer new courses in the region (and, where possible, in collaboration with other Universities), which testifies to a vision of the university as an added value for the territory (UNIVPM, 2020).



**Fig. 22** Caterina Cameli, *Hibernation of the Borghi*, 2020, Montepreandone, Italy. Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Politecnico di Milano).



**Fig. 23** Caterina Cameli, *Hibernation of the Borghi*, 2020, Monsampolo del Tronto, Italy. Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Politecnico di Milano).

This intention has already taken hold with the opening of four new degree courses in the city of Fermo, capital of the province of the same name, with the aim of a progressive decentralization and diffusion of the institution, which has its central and historical headquarters in Ancona.

For this reason, *UNIVPM* is defined as one of the potential actors within the strategy of relaunching the area considered. For this reason, it was relevant to obtain a direct confrontation with the direction of the university, which was obtained with a short interview touching upon the most relevant topics defining the relationship between education and the territory: the role of the educational system towards the phenomena of abandonment and emptying of the internal areas, the relationship with local businesses and the dialogue with high schools.

A: The resident population of the Marche region has been characterized over time by a constant process of aging, due to a decrease in births and increased longevity. In relation to this trend, we should also consider the phenomenon of abandonment of the youngest, which should be looked at with greater concern given the high unemployment rate, the worsening of job prospects due to the continuing economic crisis, exacerbated moreover by the effects of the COVID-19. The abandonment of young people represents an even more serious issue if we refer to the internal territories, and in particular to small towns, which have become increasingly less attractive (Temperini, 2021, p. 90).

Finding support in the intentions of the region's major University pole, it has been possible to develop in greater detail the strategic program for the area. The insertion of new educational poles acts on the network of existing relationships between urban centers, articulating it and opening up new perspectives for the territory. For this to happen, it is necessary to keep in mind the importance of dialogue between universities, educational institutions and businesses: this is the area in which one can act on the phenomenon



**Fig. 24** Caterina Cameli, *Hibernation of the Borghi*, 2020, Monteprandone, Italy. Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* (Unpublished Master Thesis]. Politecnico di Milano).

of youth migration that emerged in the interview, with an intervention that addresses the local scale by inserting it into a wider network and with a long-term range of action.

The proposal of new educational centers derives not only from the importance of the functions and services present in the area, but also from an understanding of the specificity of the places in which it is inserted, that is, of the 'relational dynamics' that inhabit them, but also of their traditions. Starting from this last point, the proposal for the borough of Acquaviva Picena takes into consideration what is considered its culinary excellence: these are sweets that are exported to many supermarkets and grocery stores throughout the territory, known as *alchermess peaches* or *peschette di Acquaviva*. The original recipe for these sweets is a tradition that is being lost, it can be revived through a new educational pastry laboratory, affiliated with the Professional Hotelier Institute of San Benedetto del Tronto<sup>13</sup>. Inside this location are held training courses and school-to-work programs for the students of the institute, who are responsible for the management of an administration area. Acquaviva is also the village that is most easily reached from the historic center of San Benedetto del Tronto, and for this reason it is the most suitable for the insertion of a function that is lacking in the entire area: a new cinema, whose management, together with that of the food service activities attached to it, can be affiliated to the same program.

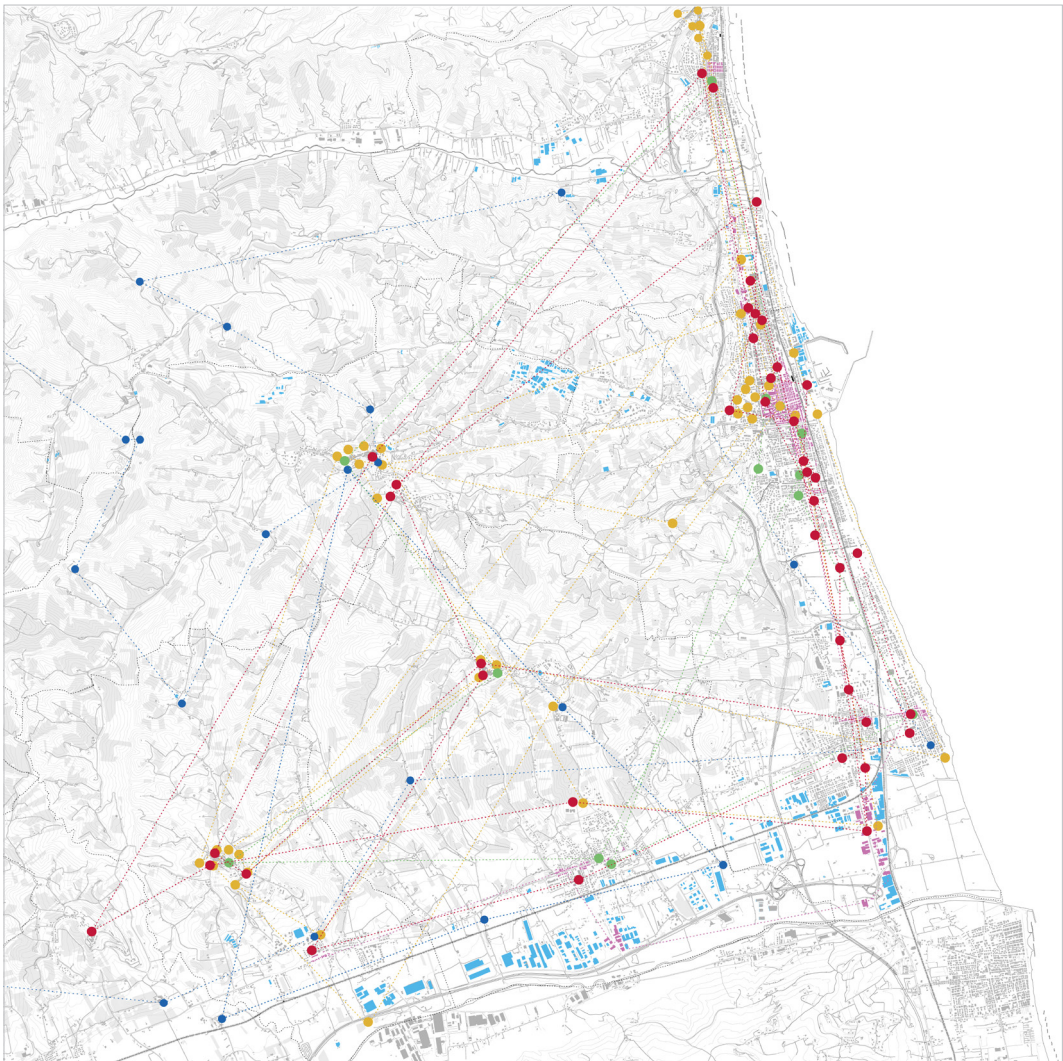
Part of the raw materials used in the laboratory of Acquaviva, come from farms in the vicinity, as well as from the third insertion: a new para-university agricultural school in Monsampolo del Tronto, supported by UNIVPM in collaboration with the *Agricultural Institute* of Ascoli Piceno, which is under the same presidency as the Hotelier Institute involved.

This function brings with it a new research center with an adjoining library center, which aspires to be the meeting point between the university institution and the high schools: in fact, the new study space, located in Monteprandone, can be used by all the students in the area.

**Fig. 25** Caterina Cameli and Iacopo Prinetti, *Territorial analysis*, 2020, San Benedetto del Tronto, Italy. Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Politecnico di Milano).

## CONCLUSIONS

The one proposed in this research wants to be a look of openness towards rural dimensions and small urbanity, interpreted as an opportunity for learning and experimentation rooted in the context. Rather than voids to be filled or negatives of the city, these are realities made up





**Fig. 26** Caterina Cameli and Iacopo Prinetti, *Territorial Strategy for a reconnection of borghi and cities*, 2020, San Benedetto del Tronto, Italy. Source: Cameli, C. Prinetti, I. (2020). *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Politecnico di Milano).

of specificities to be understood, admirable construction principles and particular dynamics, impossible to trace back to a single scheme or to solve with a theory.

The case of the Piceno coastal territory is one that includes dynamics and characteristics common to many areas of Italy, but this is not enough to elaborate a theory applicable to any similar case. The reflection on the role



of the educational system with which the strategy was developed, in fact, stemmed from a profound knowledge of the chosen territory, from a survey of its shortcomings and potential, as well as from the input received from the *UNI-VPM* university institution. In the light of these reflections, the work carried out intends to make visible the need to react consequently to the crisis of the tourist economy, drawing attention to the local, daily and 'stable' dimension of small towns and their territory, from which to learn sensibly and on which to intervene with a multi-scalar approach oriented towards the long term.

#### NOTES

**1** A testimony of this point of view is *Movimento Studi per l'Architettura* (MSA), which advocates a strategy of common orientation derived from a realist vision of the country and therefore of reconstruction.

**2** The photographic survey was carried out between 1968 and 1971, commissioned by the *Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici of the Province of Bologna* and directed by Andrea Emiliani.

**3** This thesis was already beginning to make its way into the world architectural and urban planning scene in the early 1960s, as evidenced by the revolutionary voice of Jane Jacobs on the other side of the Atlantic: in strong opposition to the development model of modern cities, the anthropologist called for the recovery of urban centers on a human scale, rediscovering the role of the street, the district, the block. With its characteristics of proximity, density, sociality, and heterogeneity of the built environment, the model of the European historical center is exactly what is re-affirmed, the only one capable of resisting the impact of time and cultural and social changes.

**4** When we talk about 'removal of the population' we refer to the middle class that is pushed more and more towards the edges of the city to make room for richer clients and consequently for hotels and luxury residences, as usual in the processes of gentrification.

**5** In this sense is emblematic the recent decision by the *Municipality of Venice* to keep closed, because of the pandemic, all museums until April 2021, considering the residents not interested in visiting them and declaring their use exclusively for tourism.

**6** This image is reaffirmed by Rem Koolhaas with the term 'countrysiding', which indicates the preconception that these places are incapable of creating innovation and culture because they are inhabited by an ignorant and crude population. This attitude turns out to be harmful not only for external investors –potential bearers of new productivity in inland areas– but above all for the local population itself.

Often, in fact, the children of the internal areas grow up with the idea that nothing can take root in these 'hopeless' places, giving in to a prejudice that pushes the accelerator of depopulation and migration towards the large urban centers.

**7** The author speaks of community polycentrism: "The historical center, in this context, is the archetypal reference of the territorial settlement, but it is not the only center –historical and/or ancient– of the urban area: by resonance, there are other centers, other places, which analogically express centrality, always referring to a history or to a 'structure' [...] able to facilitate the aggregation of the inhabitants and their sense of belonging to a community. This community polycentrism, based on places, becomes the antidote to the peripheral homologation, the city returns to be 'destroyer of the periphery', that is, of disorientation and alienation".

**8** ISTAT, Resident population as of November 30, 2019.

**9** ISTAT, Resident Population as of December 31, 2020.

**10** ISTAT, Resident Population as of December 31, 2020.

**11** Term used in reference to the research work, Indovina, F., Fregolent, L., & Savino, M. (2015). *L'esplosione della Città*, Bologna: Compositori.

**12** Gregori, 2019. // Research: "The path already undertaken to strengthen the role of Research University of our University will be sustained". Teaching: "The University intends to promote the quality of teaching and improve the school-university transition, continuing to develop actions regarding the training offer, teaching methodologies, digital learning opportunities, continuing to ensure students a high level of qualification of teaching and knowledge transmitted. In addition, efforts will be made to move towards an expansion of teaching laboratories, also increasing support for library resources." Third Mission: "In this perspective, the experiences related to the creation of university spin-offs are also to be found [...]. As far as the Faculties of Economics, Engineering and the Departments of Life and Environmental Sciences and Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences are concerned, [...] the establishment of synergic relationships with private operators and research organizations [...] is significant".

**13** As seen in the *territorial framework*.

## REFERENCES

- Asher, F. (1995). *Metapolis ou l'avenir des villes*. Paris, FR: Edition Odile Jacob.
- Augé, M. (1992). *Non-Lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*. Paris, FR: Editions du Seuil.
- Boeri, S., Koolhaas, R., & Kwinter, S. (2000). *Mutations*. Barcelona, ES: Actar.
- Canadian Center for Architecture (Ed.). (2018). *What About the Provinces*. Retrieved September 13, 2021 from <<https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/articles/issues/26/what-about-the-provinces>>
- Cervellati, P. (2000). *L'arte di Curare la Città*. Bologna, IT: Il Mulino.

- Cucinella, M. (Ed.). (2018). *Arcipelago Italia*. Macerata, IT: Quodlibet.
- De Carlo, G. (1976). Dalla Progettazione alla Partecipazione, 1970-75 e Intervento nel Dibattito. In G. De Carlo, C. Doglio, R. Mariani & G. Samonà (Eds.), *Le Radici Malate dell'Urbanistica Italiana*, Milano, IT: Moizzi.
- Emiliani, A. (1983). Un Maestro della Cultura Moderna. In *Paolo Monti fotografo e l'Età dei Piani Regolatori (1960-1980)*, Exhibition Catalogue. Bologna, IT: Edizioni Alfa.
- Indovina, F., Fregolent, L., & Savino, M. (2015). *L'Esplosione della Città*. Bologna, IT: Compositori.
- Jacobs, J. (1961). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1st edition)*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Koolhaas, R. (Ed.). (2020). *Countryside. The Future*. Colonia, DE: Taschen.
- Koolhaas, R. (1995). *Bigness (or the Problem of Large)*. Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large. New York, US: Monacelli Press.
- Lazarini, L. (1995). *Oltre la Longitudinalità. Prove di Ricomposizione per la Valle del tronto*. Milano, IT: Politecnico di Milano.
- Monti, P. (1970). La Scoperta della Città Vuota. In Comune di Bologna (Ed.), *Bologna. Centro Storico*, Exhibition Catalogue. Bologna, IT: Edizioni Alfa.
- Ota, K. (2018). What About the Provinces. In *Canadian Center for Architecture*. Retrieved September 13, 2021 from <<https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/articles/issues/26/what-about-the-provinces>>
- Pagano, G., & Daniel, G. (Eds.). (1936). *L'Architettura Rurale*. Milano, IT: Hoepli.
- Prestinenza Puglisi, L. (2018). Ipotesi soft per la rinascita. In M. Cucinella (Ed.), *Arcipelago Italia* (pp.116-117). Macerata, IT: Quodlibet.
- Temperini, V. (2021) Intervista con l'Università Politecnica delle Marche. In C. Cameli, I. Prinetti, *Borghi: Proposte Specifiche per Sistemi Locali* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Politecnico di Milano).
- Settis, S. (2014). *Se Venezia Muore*. Milano, IT: Einaudi.
- Sordi, J., & Dambrosio, S. (2019). *Ciudades Part-Time Cities*. Santiago de Chile, CL: Ediciones ARQ.
- Tozzi, L. (2020). *Dopo il Turismo*. Milano, IT: Nottetempo Edizioni.
- Zardini, M. (Ed.). (1999). *Paesaggi Ibridi*. Milano, IT: Electa.

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Albrecht, B., & Magrin, A. (2017). *Il Bel Paese: 1 progetto x 22.621 Centri Storici*. Milano, IT: Rubbettino.
- Architettura nella Città Storica (1978). *Lotus International*, n. 18.
- Bassoli, N., Garcia Sanchis, M., & Piccarolo, G. (Eds.). (2018). *De Carlo/Nicolin. Conversazione su Urbino*. Milano, IT: Editoriale Lotus.
- Benevolo, L. (1957). La conservazione dei centri antichi e del paesaggio come problema urbanistico. *Ulisse: Difendiamo il Patrimonio artistico*, 27.
- Boeri, S., Koolhaas, R., & Kwinter, S. (2000). *Mutations*. Barcelona, ES: Actar.
- Buncuga, F. (2000). *Conversazioni con Giancarlo De Carlo. Architettura e Libertà*. Milano, IT: Eleuthera.

- Calanca, C. (2004). *L'identità Ibrida: Modalità dell'Architettura nei Paesaggi Contemporanei*. Milano, IT: Politecnico di Milano.
- Cervellati, P. (2010). Centri Storici. In *Enciclopedia Treccani*. Retrieved September 13, 2021 from [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/centri-storici\\_%28XXI-Secolo%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/centri-storici_%28XXI-Secolo%29/)
- De Carlo, G. (1985). Due Battute per Genova. In G. De Carlo, *Nelle Città del Mondo* (pp. 116-117). Milano, IT: Marsilio.
- De Cunto, G., & Pasta, F. (2020). Italy's Countryside Does Not Need Saving. In *Failed Architecture*. Retrieved September 13, 2021 from <https://failedarchitecture.com/italys-countryside-does-not-need-saving/>
- Emiliani, A., & Foschi, M. (2018). Il Volto della Città nelle Fotografie di Paolo Monti. In Società di Studi Romagnoli (Ed.), *Studi Romagnoli*. Cesena, IT: Stilgraf.
- Ferrentino, T. (2008). *Attraverso Giancarlo De Carlo. Una Mappa di Materiali per Ripensare il Progetto della Città Contemporanea* [Published Doctoral Thesis]. Napoli, IT: Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II.
- Herzog, J. (2020). The Other 20%. Conversation between Jacques Herzog and Rem Koolhaas. In *Bye Default* (Vol. 57). Amsterdam, NL: Idea Books.
- Marini, S. (2008). *Architettura Parassita. Strategie di Riciclaggio della Città*. Macerata, IT: Quodlibet.
- Mioni, A., & Occhialini, E.C. (Eds.). (1995). *Giancarlo De Carlo. Immagini e Frammenti*. Milano, IT: Electa.
- Tozzi, L. (2020). *City Killers. Per una Critica del Turismo*. Melfi, IT: Libria.
- Viral Architecture (2008). *Lotus International*, n. 133.

**Article available at**

DOI: 10.6092/issn.2724-2463/12858

**How to cite**

**as article**

Prinetti, I., Cameli, C. (2021). Borghi. Against a rethoric of excellence. *img journal*, 5, 166-195.

**as contribution in book**

Prinetti, I., Cameli, C. (2021). Borghi. Against a rethoric of excellence. In T. Boos, D. Ietri, E. Mastropietro (Eds.), *img journal 05/2021 Imaging Peripheries* (pp. 166-195). Alghero, IT: Publica. ISBN 9788899586232



© 2021 The authors. The text of this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.