

Territorial variety as an antifragile resource: the Italian case

*Original*

Territorial variety as an antifragile resource: the Italian case / DE ROSSI, Antonio; Lanzani, Arturo - In: Fragility and Antifragility in Cities and Regions. Space, Uncertainty and Inequality / Curci F., Chiffi D. (edited by). - ELETTRONICO. - Cheltenham, UK - Northampton, MA, USA : Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024. - ISBN 9781035312542. - pp. 168-183 [10.4337/9781035312559.00019]

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2985997 since: 2024-02-16T10:03:45Z

*Publisher:*

Edward Elgar Publishing

*Published*

DOI:10.4337/9781035312559.00019

*Terms of use:*

This article is made available under terms and conditions as specified in the corresponding bibliographic description in the repository

*Publisher copyright*

(Article begins on next page)

# 10. Territorial variety as an antifragile resource: the Italian case

**Antonio De Rossi and Arturo Lanzani**

---

## 10.1 A HISTORIC TERRITORIAL ARTICULATION

The extreme variety of the Italian territory, of its 100 cities and 1000 settlements and agricultural contexts, has long been known to the curious traveller, as well as to those who have studied this country from a political, social, economic, landscape, cultural, artistic, natural and ecological point of view. This variety stems from the multiple forms of relationship that have been established throughout history between economy, society and environment, and is expressed in different settlement-infrastructure and agro-ecological arrangements.

Not all the pieces in this mosaic – the subject of attention since Carlo Cattaneo's studies in the mid-19th century, and to which a large part of *Storia d'Italia Einaudi* (Romano and Vivanti 1972–76) and works by scholars such as Emilio Sereni (1997) and Piero Bevilacqua (1996) are dedicated – are equally well known, however.

The contexts that have emerged over the long term of high hills and mountains with mixed agri-sylvo-pastoral and also commercial craft economies are less well known. Knowledge of them has often been obscured by mountain landscape imagery linked to a univocal cultural image that anchors its forms to the late 19th century (at a time of maximum anthropic strain and incipient crisis), or to a certain, wholly inappropriate idea of a wild natural space, which erases the complex construction of its ecologies, removing its inhabitants and their material and productive cultures, originating in a 20th-century urban outlook aimed entirely at transforming other spaces into recreational landscapes (De Rossi 2014, 2016).

Equally little known are those extended urbanisations located along valley floors, on rural plains and coastlines, built during the radical economic, social, settlement and infrastructural metamorphoses of the 1900s, particularly in the second half of the century. These contexts cannot be reduced to the image of the widespread city and sprawl because they are only partly the result of the

dynamics of urban decentralisation, and are based on original endogenous models of urbanisation of the rural territory or on the reorganisation of settlements that were once located elsewhere (on a hill, inland, and so on). These contexts, which experienced the development of specific manufacturing, trade, service economies – and sometimes, along part of the country's coastline, also forms of mass tourism – were essentially read in terms of their original socio-economic patterns, their morphologies and settlement situations during the years of growth between the early 1990s and early 2000s (Clementi et al. 1996; Lanzani 2003). Only a few scholars have interpreted them in their indissoluble intertwining of settlement and socio-economic aspects over the subsequent 20 years of selective development – with contexts in crisis and contraction, and contexts in dynamic and radical transformation – and even more rarely have they been thought of as a structured and specific 'field' of integrated and contextual political practices and projects, as a 'world' within which to elaborate their own distinctive images of the future (among the few attempts: Viganò 2001; Lanzani et al. 2013; Lanzani et al. 2016; Viganò et al. 2016).

This mosaic of territorial contexts and situations is held together – and this is a central node – by a complex and changing system of trans-scalar relations. Undoubtedly better known in their all too schematic juxtaposition are the varying historic relationships between the 100 medium-sized cities of central-northern Italy and their respective rural districts, and those between some of the big cities of the south and the surrounding boundless countryside. Equally well known are those that developed in some regions in the second half of the 20th century, which are fully traceable to the model of the metropolitan area embedded within the geographies of international networks and global cities.

Much less well-known and studied, on the other hand, are the long-standing relational patterns between the mountains, the nearby foothills and valley floors, and the distant plains with their respective towns and cities, redefined in original ways during the industrial revolution; or those equally changeable but persistent relationships between urban areas and the inhabited and manufacturing countryside throughout much of the country, especially in the north; or again, the relationships between inland areas and the coastal system of peninsular Italy; and last but not least, those still to be investigated between networks of businesses in the territory, widespread urbanisations and the reinforcement of medium-sized and metropolitan cities. In short, this variegated territorial settlement mosaic has never been characterised by localist closure, but has always been organised and defined starting from a context of wide-ranging trans-scalar relations. This relational system can only partly be traced back to interpretative categories more widely used in the international sphere, but often within very general interpretations.

So, a multiple device of territorial significance, which vertically constructs specific settlement structures in the interplay between environment, economies and society, and is horizontally based on metro–rural and metro–montane interdependencies (Barbera and De Rossi 2021). A relational dimension that seems to have been increasingly denied over the last 30 years, in favour of the return of traditional forms of dichotomous and oppositional representation (city versus countryside and mountains, metropolitan versus inland areas) that definitely do not correspond to the country’s historical reality.

This condition of great variety and plural forms of integration-interdependence – which offers a more radical and extreme expression of a specific character of the European territory – seems to have always been one of the main elements that has enabled Italy to respond to quite unexpected events, be they epidemics, natural disasters, upheavals in the systems of international relations, changes in production paradigms and in the different forms undertaken by the capitalist model.

Historically given up for dead or permanently in crisis, Italy seems to have repeatedly reacted by ‘putting different parts of the territory to work’. Even if focusing exclusively on the interval between the end of modern history and the present day, there are numerous and continuous cases: the previously uninhabited valley floors and rural territories which, between the late 18th and late 19th centuries, became the site of new infrastructures and proto-industry, agriculture and widespread industrialisation which absorbed the crisis of the highlands; then the medium-sized and large settlements which, in the middle phase, became typical industrial metropolises or towns for 60 years, but also local urbanisations which redefined the strength and specificity of manufacturing Italy during the post-Fordist industrial development crisis; the coasts that take on urban port, urban service or even tourist configurations, changing as necessary; through to today’s networks of medium-sized internationalised enterprises established in widespread urbanisation which, on one hand, are directly connected to transnational networks, and on the other hand, are capable of assigning a specific role to quite a few large cities and their metropolises.

In this incessant recommissioning of parts of the territory there is also more specifically a form of reuse, recycling and continuous rethinking of its settlement structure, its complex and articulate territorial infrastructure. In the multiple organisational models and the action of their frequent reuse lies, in our opinion, historically the antifragility of this nation, which can be seen as a real case study in this sense. It is a country that has certainly lacked ‘robustness’ to date, prone to ‘metamorphosis’ rather than ‘resilience’, lacking the ability to manage predictable risks, but unexpectedly reactive to radical uncertainties (Chiffi and Curci 2020); a country that has succeeded in emerging from crisis many times and has often reinvented itself, thanks to its ability to draw on this variety.

## 10.2 A VARIETY UNDER ATTACK IN THE LATEST DEVELOPMENT DYNAMICS AND POLICIES

This antifragility is not only under-recognised by all the one-sided narratives about the country's socio-economic and urban development, but also today, in our opinion, it is heavily under attack from both 'internal' and 'external' dynamics. The risks related to the internal dynamics seem to us to be quite evident: the scarce maturation in Italy of a political, technical and administrative culture capable of acting consciously with respect to these characteristics of variety and interdependence, favouring their valorisation, reform and intentional modification. All too often this variety has been tapped into with the parasitic and extractive approach of the 'miner', which has led to the consumption and dissolution of enormous deposits of socio-territorial fixed capital, regional cultures, and minor construction and infrastructure, favouring the juxtaposition of improper new construction and infrastructure incapable of establishing a relationship, even in contrast, with the existing palimpsest; all this within an imagery that is linked more and more superficially to a consumerist idea and practice of growth without development. In this absence of care, in this inability to manage change (in the territories put to work) and to initiate radical reform (in the territories thrown momentarily into crisis), this element of constituent antifragility risks being consumed (Secchi 2014).

The external dynamics are those related to the forms and policies of development that were imposed in the second half of the 20th century. These are the dynamics of a globalised economy, but also policy orientations that led to the concentration of resources, strategies and development imagery in few contexts: the big metropolises that were assigned the exclusive task of incubating innovation and research; some major artistic and scenic sites (art cities and postcard landscapes) to be included in the global tourism circuit; highly infrastructural production 'platforms' to host clusters of internationalised companies and major logistics facilities; but also the concentration of social and health services of excellence – as seen during the pandemic – in just a few central locations. In short, an idea of development that proposes unilateral and uniform spatial and organisational models, which focuses on the triad of concentration (of excellence), specialisation (of functions) and separation (from the territory), reproposing *ad libitum* an image of the territory as a *tabula rasa*, devoid of roughness, thickness, variety (of which the 'compensatory' investments in the remaining territories are a negative part). These are imageries, visions and concepts that we find abundantly present both in national and regional planning documents, in the last programming seasons of the European structural funds, and in the most recent National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP).

That limited ability of the ruling classes and technicians to recognise the territorial variety and interdependencies that have created adaptability, combined with extractive exploitation, characterises more than a little of the politics of contemporary projects on the historical materiality of the country, from the land-use interventions which emerged at different times, to infrastructural development on a territorial scale and its punctual construction within it. It is on these that we are now going to focus.

### 10.3 REDISCOVERING A HISTORY (REMOTE AND RECENT) OF PLURAL TERRITORIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

From our point of view, based on the initial considerations on the plural nature of the country, it becomes decisive to pick up the threads of another ‘history’, of long duration, centred on the infrastructure of the country. Interest in this history resurfaces today in the face of the crisis faced by cities and territories, climate and environmental change, the need for adaptable, resilient, plural but integrated socio-physical models, in the face of the demand for antifragile planning and design. It is the history that unravelled between the 6th and 13th centuries, from the ruins of the ancient world to the great settlement cycle of the first centuries after 1000, expressed, as we know, in the local stones of its towns and villages, in skilful adaptations of buildings and agricultural soils to the complex geomorphology and local environmental conditions. It is the history of widespread and varied urban–rural infrastructures, which are its fundamental support. In this sense, a series of contributions by Middle Ages historians and, above all, modern historians who devoted important pages to territorial infrastructures between the beginning of the 16th century and the middle of the 19th century, can be reread, analysed and observed with new planning intentions.

It is less usual to recognise an at least partial persistence of this other history within modernity and in the first 100 years of the Unification of Italy. It is, nevertheless, a significant theme for us, which we can only evoke with a few examples.

At a time when the country was basing its mobility on a number of major railways on the plains and along the coastline, overturning historical balances, a no less interesting history of minor railways and tramways – many of which were decommissioned in the second half of the 20th century – was beginning to unfold, adapting to a tormented orography, which nevertheless succeeded in connecting and networking a complex geography of locations and rural and industrial economies, reactivating important deposits of fixed social capital. This was achieved with technical solutions, capital, original and sometimes specific management models (Maggi 2003). Similarly, the laborious con-

struction of a basic infrastructure in the educational and health fields, while certainly following homologous national service and building models, nevertheless shows a considerable capacity to adapt to the Italian territory, with the construction of original spaces and models, as in the case of small schools or service centres articulated across the territory. In some specific territories, such as the valleys of the north-west inhabited by the only long-standing Protestant community in Italy, the Waldensians, this led from the early 19th century onwards to the construction of a dense network of hospitals and schools in the mountains, guaranteeing levels of care and education comparable to those in urban areas.

The very long history of land reclamation in Italy not only still retains in modernity the ability to adapt to very diverse natural conditions with original technical solutions, but also launches cognitive operations (Comitato per la Geografia del Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche – Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria 1932–38; Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria 1931–39; Giusti 1943) on demographic, social, economic and cultural issues of considerable scope, which will be at the origin of a particular territorial knowledge of the country, anticipating the developments of some social sciences in an original way. On the design front, it is true that a political-cultural matrix in favour of small property and dispersed settlement predominates, revealing its limits in the face of new market dynamics. However, it is also worth mentioning the capacity on the part of those reclaiming land to build original cooperative management and service models in the reclaimed areas and to establish technical bodies – for example, rural engineers and mobile agricultural professorships – capable of reforming the multiple balances between society, the economy and the environment, paying special attention to contextual specificities.

In this sense, reference must be made to the highly original experience of integral mountain reclamation, with the creation of reservoirs that respond in different forms to the needs of hydroelectric production and the accumulation of water for irrigation in the north and south of the country, and that combine – thanks to the work of the Forestry Corps and Civil Engineers – interventions on the hydraulic network with important operations of management or planting of forests, and the construction of road networks to modernise historical settlements.

Lastly, after the Second World War and until the early 1970s, the commissioning of many densely inhabited countryside areas, their urbanisation and widespread industrialisation, seems to be intertwined with an original territorial infrastructure. It implies a certain capacity of national sector policies, whether those of Ina-Casa or school building programmes, to engage and interact with the articulated geography of the country. At the same time, an original incrementalist municipal policy of infrastructural adjustment in territories subject to widespread urbanisation and industrialisation was initiated.

In its initial phase, this seemed to express some form of minimalist rationality. Not only that, in more original forms, it is also worth mentioning the cooperative promotion of some more innovative infrastructural interventions of a supra-municipal nature (network management, the promotion of business services), and some not sector-specific, but decidedly multisectoral and multi-functional infrastructural action and planning strategies (Di Biagi 2010; Secchi 1996; Lanzani et al. 2015).

In the promotion of these projects, the action of municipal public enterprises and cooperative enterprises plays a decisive role. These enterprises have long been capable of promoting innovation and are linked to important political cultures in the country (be they Catholic–socialist or social–communist). Of course, all of this accompanied by a notable lack of ecological and environmental awareness that cannot fail to strike us today, but also with sensitivity to issues of socio-spatial justice that are now much reduced in government practices.

#### 10.4 FROM THE IDEA OF SPATIAL INFRASTRUCTURES TO A PANORAMA OF UNIFORM AND/OR SOLITARY INFRASTRUCTURES IN SPACE

Everything changed, we believe, over a period of time ranging from the 1960s – when the first glimpses were recorded – to the 1990s. At the same time as the full awareness of this variety of contexts is asserted in some territorial knowledge and a policy attentive to differences is being drafted, it seems to us that an increasingly one-sided idea of development is actually asserting itself, and with much more force. The complex conception of territorial infrastructuring that still coexisted with sector-specific action to some extent is being definitively replaced by a crowd of small and increasingly uniform infrastructural works (and also management models) on one hand, and by the push towards large works and the concentration of interventions in a few limited centres on the other. The result is not only an increasing mono-functionality, sectoriality and acontextuality of the infrastructures built, but also the abandonment of historical infrastructures that responded in a different and contextual way to general demands for soil care in the face of hydrological instability and seismic risks, for accessibility and mobility, and for fundamental infrastructures in the field of educational, health and socio-cultural services.

The reorganisation of the railway network and the hospital network are good examples of this turnaround. Not only because of the enormous drive towards concentration and polarisation (not always justified, given the polycentric matrix of the country), but especially because the construction of the high-speed rail network has not been accompanied by concomitant plans to

reorganise local public transport and regional railways. Similarly, the building of large hospitals of excellence has not been followed by the construction of local territorial health centres capable of extending the services offered by the central centres to the various territorial realities. Between large, specialised works and the territorial dimension there is a kind of fracture and separation that no policy has so far succeeded in redefining in terms of reconstructing trans-scalarity and spatial continuity. At the same time, the large-scale works associated with this idea of modernising the territory fell like spaceships onto a territory made a *tabula rasa*, without establishing any dialogue with the context in its most varied forms.

At the other extreme, we could talk about the ways in which the road network of widespread urbanisation has been reformed, with a mishmash of ring roads, by-passes, roundabouts, pavements, cycle paths and car parks, built in forms not infrequently improper with respect to the specific mobility needs and arrangements of the various territories, physically alien to the physical contexts and their landscape characteristics. Entirely self-referential, mechanically reproduced and replicated imagery and technical protocols won.

Even the recent themes of ecological transition and adaptation to climate change are often posed with equal indifference to different contexts, both in the literature that refers to international smart city models, and within a debate that is more specifically Italian in some respects, focused around a hypothetical 'return to the villages'. In both cases, urban ecological conversion and the search to escape from the cities remove both the extensive urbanised regions within which those large cities are embedded, and the integrated territories within which those suburbs can continue to be inhabited from the visual horizon and from any intervention strategy. They concentrate on virtuous methods of sustainable mobility of proximity and vertical forests (suitable, at best, for very dense and compact cities), not questioning how to promote mobility to the territorial dimension, forestation in peri-urban and widespread urbanisation contexts, or the specificity with which energy-saving issues can and should be dealt with in those mountain territories that are beginning to be reinhabited. Or they imagine outlying islands for the more privileged classes, without realising that their questionable promotion still requires a renewal of the infrastructure of the surrounding areas. All this shows – as dramatically highlighted by the pandemic – how long ago the territorial dimension was expelled from Italy's policies, to be reduced to a mere diagrammatic and abstract space; a non-physicality of things that also runs through the philosophies of the smart or best practices that can be replicated, based on the notion that it is enough to stick to a procedure to solve the complexities of contemporaneity (De Rossi and Mascino 2021). One wonders how this has been possible. It is not easy to answer, although we believe that there are at least three elements at the root of this evolution.

The first, as we have already mentioned, is a combination of an idea of the future, of the economy and society, of environments typical of the ‘good life’, increasingly widespread and powerfully shared by the segment of the population with high cultural and relational (and only sometimes economic) capital, and capable of colonising the imagination of more and more people (Florida 2005; Glaeser 2011). It is based on a literary and artistic culture of images and a ‘post-modern’ communicative knowledge focused on scenarios that are both metropolitan and tourism-oriented, and also characterised by ‘objective’ drives towards greater uniformity of socio-cultural imagery and handling of differences (which are only ‘valorised’ within that unitary model).

The second element seems to be related in a complementary form to the previous one and resides in the role played by two factors: on one hand, in development policies, the neo-classical urban–regional economy and, above all, the practices of territorial marketing and strategic business planning applied to territories and cities (Begg 2002; Caroli 2006); on the other hand, within the physical transformations of space, technical-engineering cultures, increasingly sector-specific and self-referential in the definition of the criteria of their technical-economic optimisation, and based on a parametric and procedural vision that ends up invalidating the environmental assessment proceedings, responding essentially to the canons of the technical-solutionist paradigm. After all, even sophisticated place-based design approaches to development policies and those connected to a territorialist vision of works fail to break away from restricted niches and from experiences that, while interesting, are incapable of influencing widespread practices (Barca 2019; Magnaghi 2003), not least because the innovative policies within which they have had the opportunity to experiment – such as the National Strategy for Inland Areas – have had severe limitations precisely in the implementation and realisation phases.

Lastly – and this is the third element – it seems that this evolution is linked to the methods of production of infrastructural projects, and in part also of urban planning; to the increasing presence of promoters who are totally extraneous to the territories of intervention; to the methods of financing the works and to the procedures for verifying their appropriateness and feasibility. To be clear, the municipalised companies and cooperatives mentioned above, but also the private construction companies rooted in the contexts, used to have a certain ability to consider the specificity of the territories, as well as a tendency to accept a certain multifunctionality of the operations suggested by the territorial authorities. All this seems to be coming to an end, in a context of changed relationships of power between investors and local players.

Obviously, if these are the reasons, the question remains as to why this universe of small, uniform and non-contextual works, or of major operations that draw a *tabula rasa*, is more radical and has a more devastating impact in Italy than in other European nations. Of course the impact seems to be more devas-

tating because it takes place in a territory, a nexus between society, economy and environment, that is more diverse and differentiated, as we have explained, than any other European country.

However, there is more: the radical nature of this dynamic has other reasons too. It stems, in our opinion, from the extreme weakness of territorial governance in our country, a weakness that, in turn, stems from certain specifically Italian dynamics.

This is primarily due to a state system where regional institutions have become so many centralised and bureaucratised half-states operating in a hypersectoral manner (instead of being the place where plural development models and paths and integration between sector-specific policies are built), and where the municipal structures – which have remained unchanged and never been reformed, something which is almost unique in Europe – are unable to cope with the forms and demands of everyday territoriality and are structurally incapable of drawing up integrated infrastructural policies and projects. But above all, the crisis point is determined by the disappearance – due to a series of unfinished institutional reforms – of those intermediate bodies (provinces, in some regions the mountain communities, those districts that were the result of a season of experimentation in the 1970s and 1980s, and so on) that represented the point of synthesis between the growing centralism of the state and regions on one hand, and the nebulous multitude of small Italian municipalities on the other. In this intermediate dimension and scale, which remains unresolved, there is the possibility of recomposing policies and projects for the territory.

The second reason lies in the systematic contraction of local technical-administrative structures, which, as a result of repeated recruitment restrictions and spending cuts, are in a permanent state of crisis. The problem is not only one of quantity and expenditure, but also one of personnel selection and role definition. These structures have been increasingly deprived of people with territorial and organisational skills capable of collaborating on integrated projects, and have witnessed the penalisation of officials capable of building projects and taking responsibility. Above all, these structures have undergone the exponential growth of a bureaucratic procedural-legal verification of documents, of passive compliance with national and international procedures, which has led to the expulsion of any generative action (also due to a questionable approach to fighting corruption that fallaciously aims to remove all discretionary power, instead of enhancing and publicising the assumption of responsibility by staff).

The third reason lies in a formal continuation of traditional planning methods that have never been updated, but are constantly circumvented by emergency intervention procedures and ‘by way of exception’ – be they sector-specific works defined by central government and the regions, or local

initiatives selected through calls for public or private intervention – which are not required to be defined within an overall scenario built through forms of public debate and explicit participation by the general public, and not even to be included in an integrated strategy, at least in the medium term. Exceptional procedures and projects or ad hoc variants, which are never induced to account for and make the most of what already exists in the area and what will be called upon to remain, to link new inserts with renewed maintenance of elements already present, to think of grafts as multifunctional projects as much as possible, to activate effective forms of collaboration between local knowledge and subjects and external knowledge and technical subjects in the preparation of projects. The figure of a juxtaposition or overlapping of the new indifferent to what already exists prevails.

In short, in other European nations, those equally present general forces that we described earlier seem to find a counterbalance in a practice of planning and design of the territory that has not disappeared entirely and, if anything, has been updated, in an elaboration of projects which, although laborious, is more interdisciplinary and cohesive. In Italy, however, these general forces seem to be asserting themselves more radically.

## 10.5 FEW MARKETING SCENARIOS, A LOT OF JUNKSPACE AROUND NEW WORKS, AND A LOT OF WASTE DISPERSED THROUGHOUT THE TERRITORY

What are the effects of this change in the materiality of the country? If we had to use a synthetic image, we could say that, instead of enhancing the antifragile potential of its territorial variety, which is not disappearing, contemporary Italy is marked by different impulses that trivialise, threaten and not infrequently destroy it.

In a few, limited contexts, this variety is not denied, but loses its meaning within an active construction of territorial model scenarios centred on territorial marketing. On one hand, there is that of the global city assumed with particular economic and social radicalism, as well as architectural-infrastructure radicalism, in cities such as Milan and in the many towns and cities inspired by the same model. On the other hand, there are those more or less intertwined with global tourism, such as art cities or ‘quality landscapes’, whose constituent processes (and with them the matter of their potential care and reform), which tend towards a strong hypostatisation of their image, have often been removed. This is a device that obviously finds its first expression in Venice, and then spreads and strengthens with the recognition of World Heritage Sites, emphasising the distance between form and generative processes, an absolute idea of landscape scenery, as opposed to that of a territory to be inhabited.

Apart from these specific cases, two different dynamics clash with different weights in most of the territory. First of all, the production of a series of infrastructural interventions and works, but also buildings, which in their totally self-referential and non-contextual forms make evident and tangible – here more than elsewhere – the image of an invasive generic city full of junkspace, which asserts itself in the name of a ‘fuck context’, never made explicit, but actually widely practised, and perhaps even become a sort of common feeling, of which an ironic photographic documentation is contained in the ‘Padania Classics’ project (D’Abbraccio et al. 2015).

The second is the tendency to overproduce an infinite amount of waste, residue, leftovers, rubble; whether it be land painstakingly qualified in the face of degenerative dynamics, minute infrastructures or public and private buildings. We usually find them in peripheral and not only urban areas in Italy – perhaps much more than in France, Germany, Spain or the United Kingdom – and particularly in perhaps more original forms in two contexts that are typical and in some ways specific to this nation. First, in the ‘high lands’, in the form of countless ‘leftovers’ generated by an age-old and radical phenomenon of demographic contraction that has emptied once densely populated territories; a contraction that has been escaped by a few portions invested by the tourist dynamics mentioned above. And then in the contexts marked by the widespread urbanisation of the last third of the 20th century, in heavily industrialised high plain and valley floor contexts and, at the same time, in different forms along the Italian coastline: more rarely in the form of ‘surplus’ due to some very recent dynamics of contraction, almost always in the form of ‘waste’ of an urbanisation lacking in value gradients, where, unlike the consolidated city, where replacement prevails, relocation dynamics prevail, generating continuous abundance of existing and new buildings (and therefore major land consumption).

To make the picture more complicated, one cannot fail to point out the intrusive crossovers between junkspace and (early) abandonment space in a large collection of unfinished works particularly widespread in southern Italy (once again the subject of an ironic photographic documentation of the ‘Sicilian unfinished’).

It is not easy to assess the long-term consequences of all this. As authors of this chapter, we oscillate, to a certain extent, between two considerations. The first is that, in many ways, this approach seems to be destructive of that lively territorial variety which, much more than other ‘moves’ suggested by the literature on antifragility and preparedness, seems to us to be the main resource for the future. In this sense, we believe we should speak of the progressive fragilisation of many Italian living and working contexts, of numerous local collapses in the face of disruptive global dynamics (economic and environ-

mental), which generate new socio-territorial inequalities and a more general loss of complexity and plasticity of the national territory.

In other respects, a doubt (or a hope?) remains: that, once again, this ‘excess’, this fractal and decomposed diversity, may constitute the ‘grip’ for dynamics of reinvention of forms of reinhabitation and socio-territorial redefinition (De Rossi 2018). It remains doubtful whether, in the long term of the country that we mentioned, history can still resurface today in the face of the crisis experienced by cities, of environmental change, and the need for adaptable, resilient and plural but integrated socio-physical models. In fact, we believe that today we can read a possible growing conflict between a historical bloc made up of particular and parasitic revenues, bureaucratic-technocratic modes, and economies built on that non-territorial and sector-specific thinking mentioned above, valorisers and capitalisers who transform residual symbolic and usage values into exchange values; and on the other hand, drives – which we recognise in quite a few micro-histories and experiences in the field – towards the production of new economies and cultures, bottom-up and diffuse, within the framework of the stagnation of cities and climate change, which can perhaps find their starting points and leverage precisely in those rejects and leftovers. One thing is certain: that historical bloc, understood in Gramscian terms, is today no longer able to produce visions and projects for the future of Italy.

## 10.6 BETWEEN IMMERSION IN PROCESSES AND CRITICAL THINKING, BETWEEN VISIONS OF THE FUTURE AND SPECIFIC ACTIONS, STARTING FROM WHAT IS THERE

How, then, can we fit into these dynamics? What is our possible work as scholars of the territory and, at the same time, as lovers and practitioners of design knowledge? How do we work to make the Italian territory less fragile, enabling it to prepare for unforeseeable events and radical risks?

Obviously, we have no answer to such questions. We can only propose a dual oscillatory movement, which perhaps seems inevitable and in which we are in fact involved, and an indispensable starting point.

The first oscillatory movement is that in which we participate in the elaboration of local projects by groups of citizens and communities of intent, more often than not by weak territorial institutions in geographical contexts on the margins of major national policies and projects. It is a task that consciously accepts the structural limits of this action and also its stringent constraints, which often prevent working on a correct territorial scale, to elaborate strategies for a deeper recomposition and reform of infrastructural and territorial frameworks (envying many colleagues abroad who find themselves involved

in more complex processes). At the same time, however, in the face of the stagnation and paralysis of many cities, we are aware that marginal spaces now represent a place of potential innovation, a real possibility for reorganising society, the environment, economies and the materiality of things in a different way, as demonstrated by the 101 cases of regeneration practised from the bottom up that are currently taking place in Italy's inland areas and urban fringes. This work is accompanied by a critical exercise with respect to the development ideas and policies widely implemented in the country (and the resulting generative processes and interventions); a critical exercise that does not, however, lead us to the inaction of the 'observer's' perspective.

This pendulum that interweaves action within things and critical observation, and which seems to have characterised much of the most interesting culture of the Italian territory in the 20th century, now seems to be much less practised in professional and academic spheres, where the logics of the designer who conforms to the demands of the promoters (whether public or private), or of the critical observer who detaches himself from the practices of the project, are espoused more unilaterally. Of course it has to be assessed each time to see whether it is useful or not to operate under severely limiting conditions and with partial margins of action, and this assessment can be incorrect each time. At the same time, it forces critical thinking to come up with counterproposals for radical reform of the processes at work, taking risks that the critical observer usually refuses to take (Coppola et al. 2021; Barbera et al. 2022).

The second oscillatory movement is between the attempt to redesign broad and plural territories as a whole, to reimagine the articulation of their everyday capital, their infrastructural, environmental and economic assets, and at the same time the co-definition of partial, punctual, feasible, implementable actions. This oscillatory trend also seems to go against the flow. A practice predominates in orthodoxy today that involves the construction of scenarios and non-spatial strategic frameworks drawn up by various policy experts, followed by the involvement of specific technical operators working on the materiality of the world. It is a trend which, in schools of architecture for example, has expressed itself in the hegemony of the figure of the planner and the technological architect and/or artist, and in the emptying of the intermediate space between architecture and town planner. This trend can also be found in different forms and intensities in other study paths, be they those of the engineer, economist, agri-forestry expert or geologist, where the research on the ground, the focus on territorial and spatial aspects, is equally downplayed if not removed. The movement proposed here is lateral and partially offset in relation to the opposition (or complementarity) often referred to today between strategic planning and tactical action (Lanzani 2021).

The indispensable starting point is the one that always leads us to move from the complex palimpsest that we recognise in each territorial context, to adapt or propose innovations in the processes of material construction of the territory (De Rossi and Magnani 2017); moving in particular from the possible encounter between waste, leftovers and new practices of working, living, relationships, partly emerging and partly activated from that world of things charged with the potential of living and of life (Lanzani 2015; Fontanari and Piperata 2017; Fabian and Munarin 2017; Rusci 2021; Viale 2009; Bodei 2009).

## REFERENCES

- Barbera, F., Cersosimo, D., De Rossi, A. (eds) (2022), *Contro i borghi. Il Belpaese che dimentica i paesi*, Donzelli, Rome.
- Barbera, F., De Rossi, A. (eds) (2021), *Metromontagna. Un progetto per riabitare l'Italia*, Donzelli, Rome.
- Barca, F. (2019), Place-based policy and politics, *Renewal: A Journal of Social Democracy*, 27(1), pp. 84–95.
- Begg, I. (2002), *Urban Competitiveness: Policies for Dynamic Cities*, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Bevilacqua P. (1996), *Tra natura e storia. Ambiente, economie, risorse in Italia*, Donzelli, Rome.
- Bodei, R. (2009), *La vita delle cose*, Laterza, Rome-Bari.
- Caroli, M. (2006), *Il marketing territoriale. Strategie per la competitività sostenibile del territorio*, FrancoAngeli, Milan.
- Chiffi, D., Curci, F. (2020), Fragility: concept and related notions, *Territorio*, 91, 55–59.
- Clementi, A., Dematteis, G., Palermo, P. (eds) (1996), *Le forme del territorio italiano*, 2 vols, Laterza, Rome-Bari.
- Comitato per la Geografia del Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche – Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria (ed.) (1932–38), *Lo spopolamento montano in Italia. Indagine geografico-economico-agraria*, 11 vols, Tip. Failli, Rome.
- Coppola, A., Del Fabbro, M., Lanzani, A., Pessina, G., Zanfi, F. (eds) (2021), *Ricomporre i divari. Politiche e progetti territoriali contro le disuguaglianze e per la transizione ecologica*, Il Mulino, Bologna.
- D'Abbraccio, F., Facchetti, A., Galesi, E., Minelli, F. (2015), *Atlante dei Classici Padani*, Krisis Publishing, Brescia.
- De Rossi, A. (2014, 2016), *La costruzione delle Alpi*, 2 vols, Donzelli, Rome.
- De Rossi, A. (ed.) (2018), *Riabitare l'Italia. Le aree interne tra abbandoni e riconquiste*, Donzelli, Rome.
- De Rossi, A., Magnani, C. (2017), Infrastrutturazione e progetto di ricostruzione, in Fabian, L., Munarin, S. (eds), *Re-Cycle Italy*, Atlante, LetteraVentidue, Syracuse.
- De Rossi, A., Mascino, L. (2021), Sulla necessità di uno sguardo progettuale rigenerativo, in Lanteri, S., Simoni, D., Zucca, V.R. (eds), *Territori marginali. Oscillazioni tra interno e costa*, LetteraVentidue, Syracuse.
- Di Biagi, P. (ed.) (2010), *La grande ricostruzione: il piano Ina-casa e l'Italia degli anni cinquanta*, Donzelli, Rome.
- Fabian, L., Munarin, S. (eds) (2017), *Re-Cycle Italy*. Atlante, LetteraVentidue, Syracuse.

- Florida, R. (2005), *Cities and the Creative Class*, Routledge, New York.
- Fontanari, E., Piperata, G. (eds) (2017), *Agenda Re-Cycle, Proposte per reinventare la città*, Il Mulino, Bologna.
- Giusti, U. (1943), *Caratteristiche ambientali italiane. Agrarie, sociali, demografiche 1815–1942*, Tip. Failli, Rome.
- Glaeser, E. (2011), *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier*, Penguin Press, New York.
- Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria (ed.) (1931–39), *Monografie di famiglie agricole*, 16 vols, Treves Treccani Tuminelli, Milan, Rome.
- Lanzani, A. (2003), *I paesaggi italiani*, Meltemi, Rome.
- Lanzani, A. (2015), *Città, territorio, urbanistica tra crisi e contrazione*, FrancoAngeli, Milan.
- Lanzani, A. (2021), Postfazione, in Dematteis, G., *Geografia come immaginazione. Tra piacere della scoperta e ricerca di futuri*, Donzelli, Rome.
- Lanzani, A., Ali, A., Gambino, D., Longo, A., Moro, A., Novak, C., Zanfi, F. (2013), *Quando l'autostrada non basta. Infrastrutture, paesaggio e urbanistica nel territorio pedemontano lombardo*, Quodlibet, Macerata.
- Lanzani A., Bolocan Goldstein M., Zanfi F. (2015), Della grande trasformazione del paesaggio. Territori, culture, regioni. In: Salvati M., Sciolla L. (eds.), *L'Italia e le sue regioni. Cultura, materiali e saperi tecnici*. Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani (vol. 2), Rome, pp. 291–312.
- Lanzani, A., Merlini, C., Zanfi, F. (2016), *Riciclare distretti industriali / Recycling Industrial Districts*, Aprilia, Aracne.
- Maggi, S. (2003), *Le ferrovie*, Il Mulino, Bologna.
- Magnaghi, A. (2003), *Le projet local. Manuel d'aménagement territorial*, Editions Mardaga, Bruxelles.
- Rusci, S. (2021), *La città senza valore. Dall'urbanistica dell'espansione all'urbanistica della demolizione*, FrancoAngeli, Milan.
- Secchi, B. (1996), Un'interpretazione delle fasi più recenti dello sviluppo economico italiano: la formazione della città diffusa e il ruolo delle infrastrutture, in Clementi, A. (ed.), *Infrastrutture e piani urbanistici*, Palombi, Rome.
- Secchi, B. (2014), Per una agenda urbana e territoriale, in Calafati, A. (ed.), *Città tra sviluppo e declino. Un'agenda urbana per l'Italia*, Donzelli, Rome.
- Sereni, E. (1997), *History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Romano, R., and Vivanti, C. (eds.) (1972–76), *Storia d'Italia Einaudi*, 6 vols, Einaudi, Turin.
- Viale, G. (2010), *La civiltà del riuso. Riparare, riutilizzare, ridurre*, Laterza, Rome-Bari.
- Viganò, P. (ed.) (2001), *Territori della nuova modernità*, Electa, Milan.
- Viganò, P., Secchi, B., Fabian, L. (eds) (2016), *Water and Asphalt: The Project of Isotropy*, Park Books, Zürich.