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I siti produttivi come catalizzatori di simbiosi urbana | Productive Sites as Catalysts for Urban Symbiosis

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OFFICINA*

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Italo Calvino, lettera a Francesco Leonetti, 1953

Semestrale di architettura, tecnologia e ambiente
n. 53 luglio–dicembre 2026

Supernaturale

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Supernaturale
Supernatural

n. 53, luglio-dicembre 2026

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I siti produttivi come catalizzatori di simbiosi urbana *Il consenso scientifico indica che gli attuali approcci alla gestione dell'acqua non garantiscono più la disponibilità futura delle risorse né la resilienza alle perturbazioni climatiche. Questo articolo esplora come il concetto di "supernaturale" possa informare configurazioni spaziali socialmente, ambientalmente ed economicamente simbiotiche. L'attenzione si concentra sulle aree produttive che, storicamente, hanno guidato l'urbanizzazione fluviale di Torino, e discute come esse possano oggi fungere da catalizzatori per trasformare il paesaggio fluviale in realtà più simbiotiche. Il contributo sviluppa un modello che contestualizza il "supernaturale" nel paesaggio fluviale torinese, articolandolo attorno a tre pilastri della simbiosi: economico, sociale e ambientale; al fine di contribuire al dibattito sulle pratiche spaziali alternative legate all'acqua.*

Supernatural and Hydrosocial territories

Prevailing approaches to urban water management and planning remain harmful not only to the natural ecosystem of rivers but to the whole urban riverscape, understood as the part of the landscape that has (or had) a watercourse as its focus (Haslam, 2008). The marginalization of socio-environmental interests has led to the degradation of riverine habitats, the urbanization of natural assets, the unequal and depleting use of water as a scarce resource, and the erosion of communities' connection to rivers (Laborde and Jackson, 2022). Amid changing precipitation patterns, the increasing frequency of floods and droughts, and shifting social expectations for the management of water and water-related spaces, spatial practices within riverscapes need to be profoundly reconfigured (De Haan *et al.*, 2015).

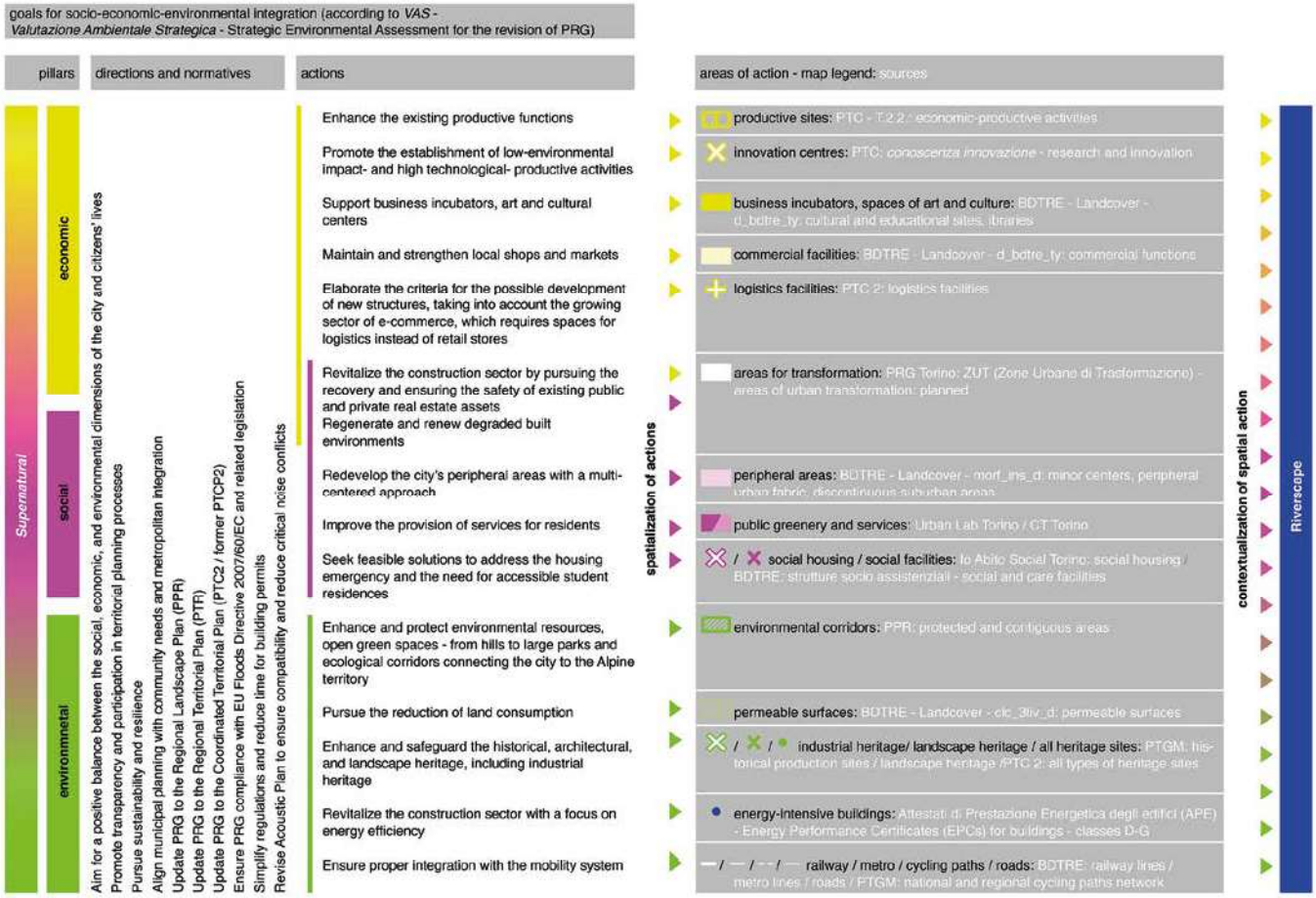
In "hydrosocial territories", such as riverscapes, "people, institutions, water flows, hydraulic technology and the biophysical environment" revolve around the control and competition of claims to water (Boelens *et al.*, 2016). By contrast, the concept of "supernatural" is grounded in the idea of symbiosis between human and natural elements, where no part is harmed and at least one benefits (Singer, 2016). Centered on coexistence rather than competition and claim, the "supernatural" thus provides an alternative epistemic perspective for riverscapes, which remain dominated by hydraulic-bureaucratic administrations and capitalist imaginaries (Boelens *et al.*, 2023). However, the concept is loosely defined (Huxham *et al.*, 2019), raising the question of how it can be contextualized within urban riverscape settings. While it offers an alternative theoretical positioning, it is necessary to explore how "supernatural riverscape" might operationally influence current spatial configurations.

Turin Riverscape

The riverscape of Turin, formed by the Po, Stura di Lanzo, Dora Riparia, and Sangone rivers, represents, in a nutshell, the spatial configuration shaped by competing claims to water. The development towards a Fordist city of production heavily dominated and transformed Turin's riverscape, leading to the functional appropriation of the area, neglect of socio-environmental concerns, and prioritization of economic growth (Barchetta, 2021). Especially the peripheral parts of riverscape host today major productive facilities, extraction fields, landfills, magazines, etc. Even after the decline in industrial activity from the 1980s, the productive sector still occupies 7.9% of Turin's total area, of which 25.5% lies within the riverscape. At the same time, the riverscape of Turin is an unprecedented environmental and socio-cultural asset, recognized by numerous projects such as ***Torino città d'acque*** or *Turin and its Rivers* (Servillo *et al.*, 2025) that sought to elevate the riverscape's significance to a central focus of the city's overall development.

Productive Sites as Catalysts for Urban Symbiosis

The Riverscape of Turin



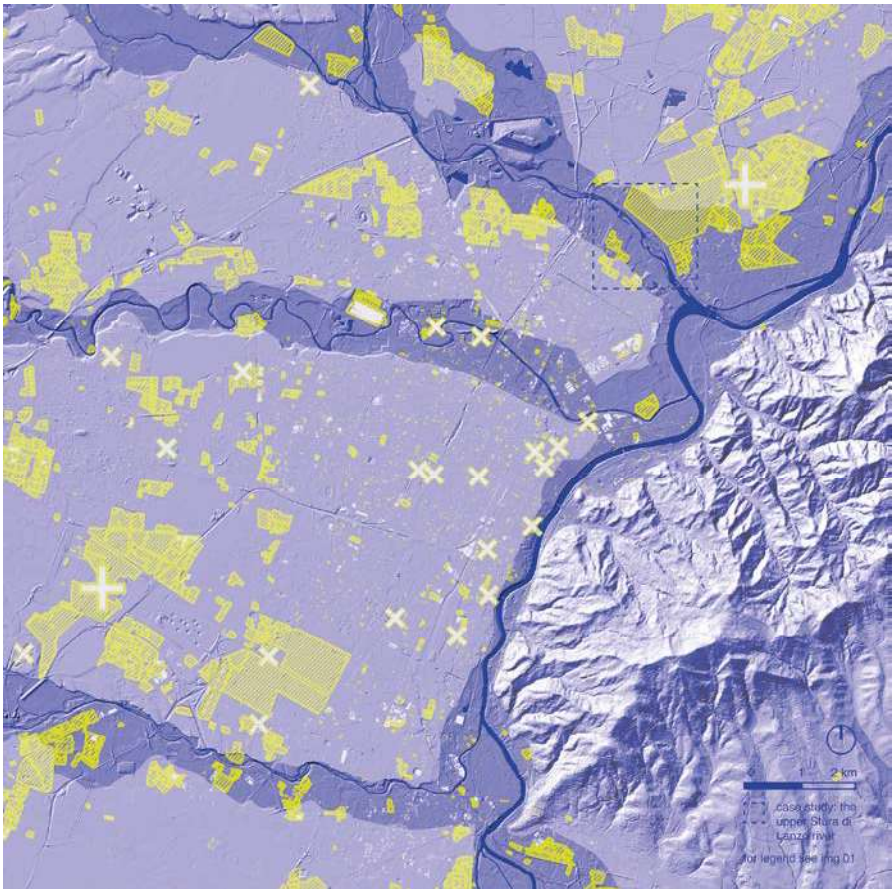
01. The contextualization model for "supernatural riverscape" | Il modello di contestualizzazione del "paesaggio fluviale supernaturale". *Elaborated by the authors*

Mind the dual characteristics of degradation and opportunity, the riverscape of Turin represents zones of possibility for "discovering new ways of living and being within urban nature, [...] the possibility to imagine and experiment with new modes of cosmopolitan coexistence" (Gandy, 2021). In Turin, productive sites are central to the deeper exploration of these possibilities, as production sector has dominated urban development since the late 18th century and, following industrial decline, has been progressively transformed. Rather than framing productive sights as a threat, the article acknowledges their economic importance and asks how less environmentally harmful, and socially and economically beneficial spatial configurations within the urban riverscape can be informed by the concept of "supernatural". These insights aim to support decision makers, planners, and designers in shaping future norms, transformation projects, and strategic frameworks. Additionally, they aim to provide a tangible proposal for interpreting "supernatural", from the theoretical concept to the empirical understanding in material urban space.

Approach and Methods

To connect the theoretical concept of "supernatural" with urban riverscapes, the article employed an analytical unpacking of the concept and its spatial contextualization in Turin. The approach is based on articulating the "supernatural riverscape" through a literature review, its interpretation through the city's institutional documents, and, finally, its representation through spatial data in Turin's riverscape.

Following the established link between "supernatural" in relation to "hydrosocial territories", summarized in the introduction, the analysis is struc-



02. Areas of action: economic pillar | Aree di intervento: pilastro economico. *Elaborated by the authors*

Spatial isolation of productive zones highlights a key challenge to multifunctional riverscape

tured around the balanced relationship between three pillars: economic, social, and environmental (Partidário and Clark, 2000). These three pillars align with the goals of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (VAS, Valutazione Ambientale Strategica; Città di Torino, 2020), the institutional framework underpinning the preparation of the new General Regulatory Plan (PRG, Piano Regolatore Generale) of Turin. A close reading of VAS indicates that specific actions, along with their corresponding directions and normative frameworks, are intended to achieve equilibrium among the three pillars.

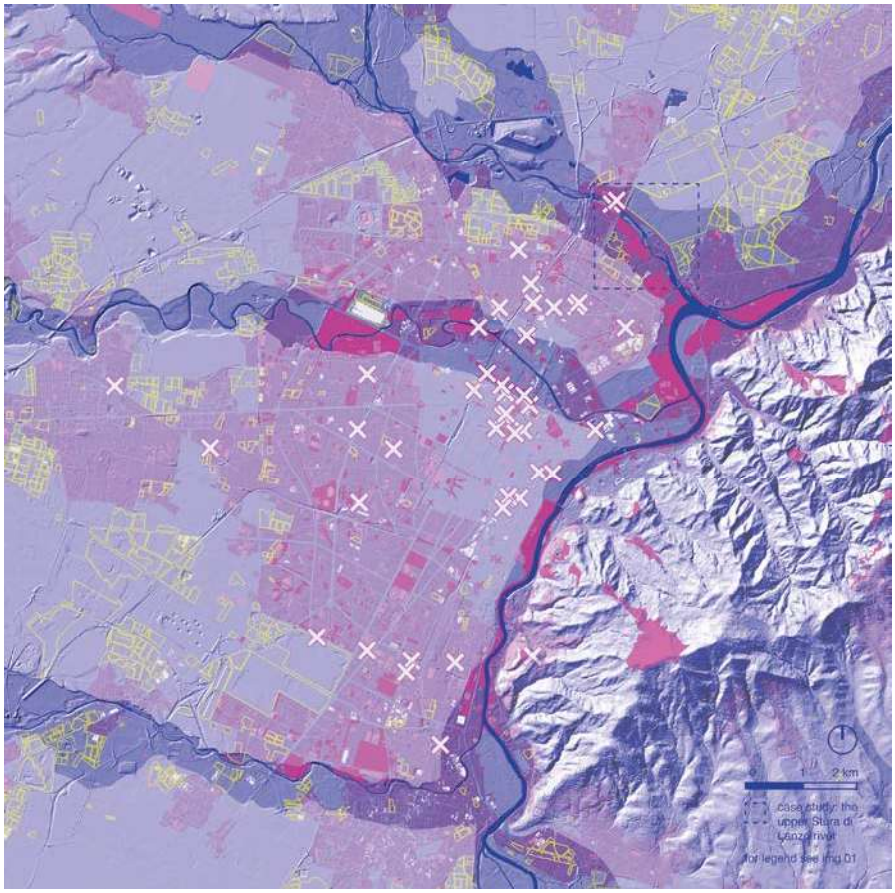
Mapping the spatial references of the VAS's actions is then understood as the material elements of concern while aspiring to balance between three pillars, and further "supernatural" condition. It is discussed within the limit of riverscape, delineated as the sum of river courses, flood protection zones (representing potential inundation areas), and territories under environmental protection, based on spatial data deriving from **Geoportale Piemonte**. The interrelations among the pillars of the "supernatural" condition, the directions and normative frameworks, the actions and their respective areas, and the data used, along with their sources, are presented in the contextualization model for the supernatural riverscape (img. 01).

At the macro scale, the article maps the areas designated for actions, qualitatively assessing the spatial configurations emerging among the three pillars. The analysis examines their distribution, extent, porosity, and interconnections. These dynamics are then deepened at the microscale through a representative case study of the upper Stura di Lanzo River, a riverine area dominated by productive facilities.

Surpassing Isolation of Productive Sites

The spatialization of the VAS's actions in Turin's riverscape revealed the significant strategic challenges for achieving the "supernatural" condition. They regard the various dimensions of isolation and detachment of productive sites from the social and environmental pillars, as expressed by the mapped elements.

The first map (img. 02) regarding the economic pillar shows that productive sites in Turin are typically grouped



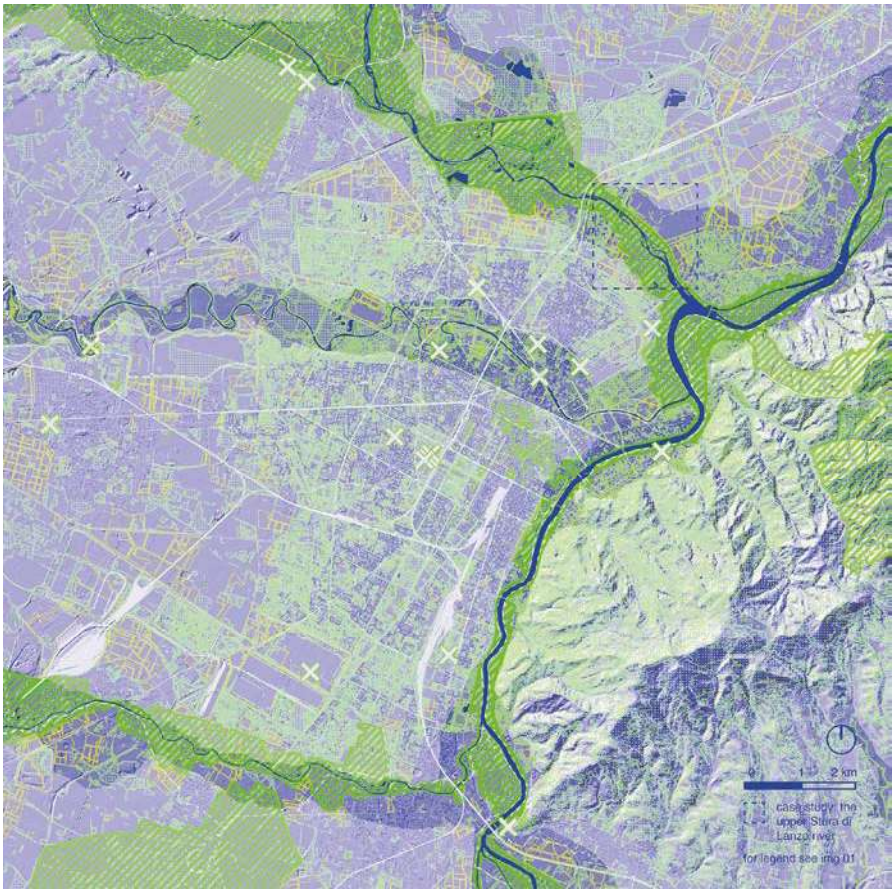
03. Areas of action: social pillar | Aree di intervento: pilastro sociale. *Elaborated by the authors*

into large areas that cover significant portions of the riverscape, with primary examples of northern and southwestern production-centered hubs. The second map (img. 03) enables the correlation of existing social pillar's elements with riverscape and juxtaposes the productive zones (yellow outlines), showing how these areas generate voids within the social system and disrupt its continuity. The third map (img. 04), corresponding to the environmental pillar, further illustrates how productive sites disrupt ecological corridors, while also highlighting concerns related to heritage preservation, energy efficiency, and urban mobility.

The characteristics described at the macro scale of a city become even more evident when focusing on one of the major productive sites in Turin, located in the upper part of the Stura di Lanzo riverscape. Overlying all the elements and areas referenced by the actions further confirms that those related to the economic pillar are consolidated into clusters that contain few socio-environmental elements. The productive facilities are deprived from public greenery, services, or permeable surfaces. Their size is visibly distinct from the rest of the urban fabric, and their consolidated form marks a solid, vast barrier, barely permeable to the spatial elements of the socio-environmental pillars.

This isolation of the economic pillar underscores the decisive role of productive sites in achieving a multifunctional, balanced riverscape. Social and environmental pillars alone are unlikely to induce substantial change, as these domains are already relatively well integrated within current spatial configurations. The priority is therefore not merely to reinforce individual pillars, but to look for cross-pillar actions that generate systemic effects.

VAS indicates possible directions that need to be further explored following the cross-pillar logic. For example, reducing energy consumption through architectural revitalization simultaneously lowers environmental impacts and operational costs. Limiting land consumption decreases ecological pressure while improving economic efficiency. Integrating ecological corridors with mobility networks, often fragmented by consolidated production sites, can enhance both ecosystem connectivity and employee well-being and productivi-



04. Areas of action: environmental pillar | Aree di intervento: pilastro ambientale. *Elaborated by the authors*

ty. On the other hand, strengthening economic functions, such as retail and supporting businesses, cultural, and high-technology, low-impact facilities within the riverscape can reconnect peripheral green areas to urban life and include private funding to support the restoration and maintenance of blue-green areas.

Conclusions

The applied method offered a way to draw on possible operationalization of the concept of "supernatural" within Turin's riverscape, through an attempt at spatial contextualizing this theoretical concept. With the interpretation of VAS guided by "supernatural", the article drew on the balance between three pillars within the riverscape. It examined which spatial elements within the riverscape would be addressed by actions aimed at achieving a "supernatural" condition, and how these elements are spatially interconnected. The persistent isolation of the elements related to the economic pillar highlighted the importance of cross-pillar logic in identifying actions that would benefit more than one, and preferably all three, pillars simultaneously. While "supernatural" does not directly translate into the specific actions that would ensure this premise, it indicates a general foundation that might inspire revisions of operational practices within riverscapes. The further detailing of "supernatural" through the applied method, therefore, suggests cross-pillar monitoring, innovation, and the inclusion of cross-pillar-relevant indicators within the practices of planning, design, and management.*

"Supernatural" provides a lens to reframe approaches to urban riverscapes



05. Areas of economic, social, enviromental actions in Stura di Lanzo productive site | Aree di azione economiche, sociali e ambientali nel sito produttivo della Stura di Lanzo. *Elaborated by the authors*

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