Roghudi: Developing Knowledge of the Places in an Abandoned Inland Municipality

Rachele Gatto, Luigi Santopietro(✉), and Francesco Scorza

School of Engineering, Laboratory of Urban and Regional Systems Engineering (LISUT), University of Basilicata, Viale dell'Ateneo Lucano 10, 85100 Potenza, Italy
{luigi.santopietro,francesco.scorza}@unibas.it

Abstract. Inland rural regions are territories quite distant from the welfare of urban centers and are positioned far away from the established infrastructure network of the country. Demographic trends, despite the availability of natural resources, entail marginalization, abandonment, and depopulation mainly due to socio-economic changes. The considerable social cost of traditions that disappear also implies, for example, degradation of land use and hydrogeological instability. In recent years, different types of strategies aimed at reversing such demographic trend, mostly based on tourism economy, but sometimes they revealed cons as destructive as abandonment itself. The case study of Roghudi, gave us the opportunity to remark the importance of perceiving landscape as starting phase of the design process. Formal and informal knowledge of the places, are assumed as a key to read values of inland abandoned places, in order to structure a development scenario recovering the balance between man and nature.

Keywords: Landscape urbanism · Inland areas · Rural areas · Abandonment

1 Introduction

On an ever-increasing number of degraded and abandoned territories, connected with the implementation of national environmental programs, new territorial issues are opened. James Corner in landscape architecture, in order to engage policies and programs, tackle the notion of landscape shifting from being a manifestation of culture to an instrument of education [1].

For over two decades, mappings the ecosystems values [2–4] are the basic tools to open new frontiers in strategic local development [5–8] planning proposing new methodological approaches linking environmental, social-economic and temporal dynamics [9]. Considering the landscape as a set of elements and structures that change over time in close relation to each other, his vision changed. Along this perspective emerges the awareness of the landscape seen as a public space, where landscapers acquire an increasingly important role in urban planning [10]. The intertwining of ecology, landscape and urban planning moves research into a new field called Landscape Urbanism. Widespread thanks to the contribution of Charles Waldheim and James Corner since the late 1990s. Landscape urbanism describes a disciplinary realignment currently underway

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in which landscape replaces architecture as the basic building block of contemporary urbanism. For many, across a range of disciplines, landscape has become both the lens through which the contemporary city is represented and the medium through which is constructed [11].

The new paradigms are created by a first recognition of reality as a complex system of social dynamics, changes in space over time. The relationship is a constant that affects the interaction between human activities and the landscape where space is the background of social activities that can be foreseen but also not foreseen. The protagonist is therefore the landscape and the place understood as the place of the relationship. Is abandoned the idea of the *genius loci* understood as a static character and where the presumed identity of the place predominates in favor of a *genius itineris* [9]. Landscape urbanism therefore provides the tools, drawing from its interdisciplinary lexicon, to formulate a project in contemporary space. Promote an ecological approach to the project, first of all to understand the space and then to formulate a dynamic and non-static system. The protagonists are the places in a state of neglect and discomfort where there are no conditions for combining a future anthropic repopulation, but only a strategy to cure the landscape, which seemed inevitably marked by degradation. The symbiosis between architecture and landscape architecture is articulated by the network together with economy, between form and social, and provide an alternative to the crisis condition of the territories also marked by climate change that took the modern movement by surprise. Although the theory has not found much success due to a perspective anchored to the margins of growth and development, landscape urbanism is proposed as a realistic alternative to the future for a construction of healthier and more sustainable spaces [6].

Good intentions aside, the urban planning of the landscape presents some enigmatic points that do not favor the reading and the exact understanding of the method of action. The methodology used for urban planning up to the nineties, even if static and limiting that used tools such as zooning, provided a clear and ineluctable model. The contradictions and conjectures advanced in the 90s persist in the modern era even if the advanced questions no longer arise from the rigid scheme of traditional urbanism. In fact, in the project "*Parc de la Villette" by Rem Koolhaas* it is possible to notice a change in urban planning that is composed of dynamic and de-hierarchical flows.

This paper addresses a structural reading of the marginal territories [12, 13] through the elaboration of a conceptual knowledge structure, better described in Sect. 2. In Sect. 3 Roghudi Municipality is proposed as case study while in Sect. 4, open discussions remark the importance of perceiving landscape as starting phase of the design process.

2 Perception, Knowledge, Design

The purpose of an approach does not propose a model of action but a methodology that is inserted before the design itself. An interaction between more or less defined variables that propose a reading of the territory far from the objective of establishing a productive activity or creating obligatory urban lines for a specific type of user. Given the more or less common characteristics of the internal areas, the algorithm starts from assumptions related to the morphology of the territory and therefore a large-scale vision of the whole site. The goal is to provide a different interpretation that stands out from

the national strategy to imagine new developments in the territory. The interdependent variables between them do not follow a given flow in a hierarchical order but navigate together and take on different meanings in relation to the case study.

Starting from urban ecology, therefore, a type of approach oriented towards the care of the territory is formulated to improve the quality of the livability of the environment and mediate the problems caused by depopulation. Given its "address", this does not provide a static and unidirectional methodology and does not replace the designer's interpretation, which in this case is he who selects and defined better the processes. The open strategy considers an essential truth: time. The margin within which dynamics will certainly develop (Fig. 1).

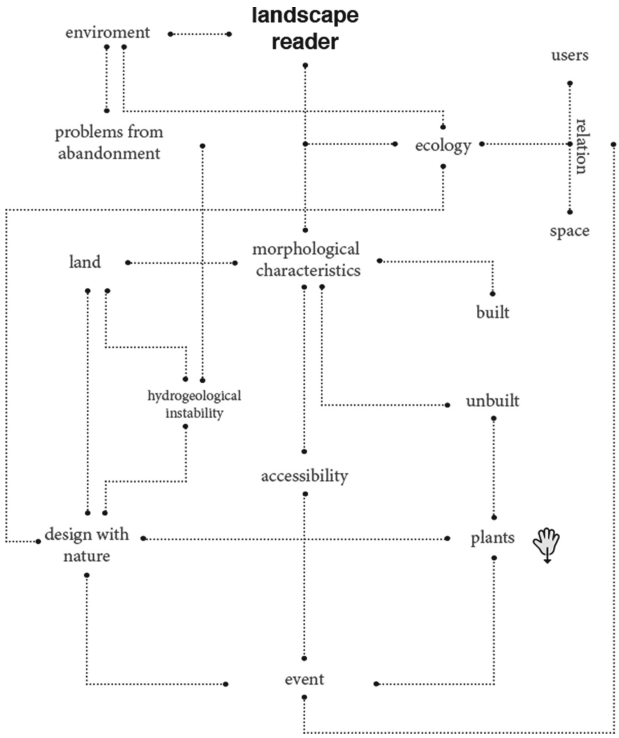

Fig. 1. Structural diagram of action made by variables and links

3 Landscape as Process

The maps and observations of the territory are part of a complex relationship network where the individual elements and themes develop according to an un-predictable and non-linear trend in a relationship of interdependence. This line of action is made by several variables such as: land form, landslides, accessibility, use, plants and design with nature.

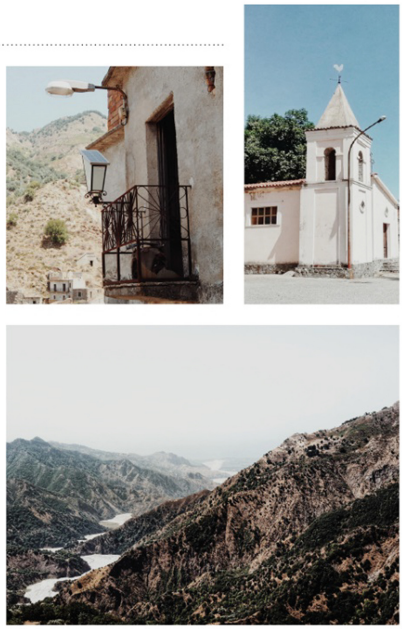

Fig. 2. Roghudi municipality landscape

In order to apply the theoretical notion exposed to a real case study, the municipality of Roghudi (see Fig. 2) is the appropriate example for this purpose. At the extreme southern border of the Italian boot, an archipelago of villages on the slopes of the Aspromonte witnesses a gradual and progressive depopulation. Roghudi, the ghost town of the surroundings, has some very peculiar characteristics for a land-scape intervention aimed above all at remedying the hydro-geological instability through the natural vocation redesign of the landscape that presents critical points. This case study represents an opportunity for reflection on the modality of intervention in the inland rural areas starting from the point of view of the landscape. The town is part of the "Grecanica region" mainly composed by Bova, Roghudi Vecchio, Gallicianò, Condofuri, Roccaforte del Greco in an infrastructure network.

In the process of building knowledge of the places, the network of relationships between material things and immaterial things structures the schedule. Material and immaterial are linked by a transversal reading at different scales of the place examined. Material, we can define, all that is visible and perceptible that materializes in a form. Immaterial is configured as the network between actors and actions in the space that can be identified and associated through elements on the territory, however they do not express and define the identifying characteristics.

The methodology that draws inspiration from the paradigms of landscape urbanism and the ecology of the landscape involves multiple scales, starting from the local one that interfaces with the ecosystem of the place. The knowledge phase consists of a part of direct observation of the space, gathering useful information on how public

places are lived. Four categories of uses can be defined around Roghudi. Although the Municipality is officially abandoned and so there is no permanent presence of the inhabitants, some elements suggest sporadic practices within the territory. These customs are not formalizable or recognizable through a plan, but it can be perceived only by observing the territory.

To distinguish the different practices that take place, it is appropriate to insert classification criteria such as the time spent during the day, the type in relation to the actions that take place and the agents provocateurs. The main street of Roccaforte del Greco delimited by private dwellings is the place where the collective and social dimension of the inhabited area is usually manifested.

Public space is the place where ordinary collective practices take place characterized by socially recognized, temporary and reversible actions. It can be perceived as a place of exchange, a place of passage, a scenario for exchanging ideas and knowledge but also a place for hosting community events such as public events or celebrations. The traffic, the elements of the private subjects drawn at the edge of the road (lying linen, planting, lighting, religious signs, near the entrance of the houses) indicate an active and continuous use.

4 Open Remarks

The methodology represented does not want to constitute a single and general reading to be applied to all peripheral areas. It constitutes a possible guideline for territorial analysis and understanding territories. Main while, the inland rural area presents common characteristics that reveals specific problems related depending on the environment and interactions between anthropic and natural components of the landscape,.one of these is the hydrogeological instability, also caused by the depopulation process. So, landslides and floods are often present and constitute a cost for the territory and the population that lives in the places, albeit sporadically. The morphology of the territory, in Italy, can be seen as influencing the isolation and marginality of places due to difficult access. Within the proposed strategy, there are keywords that we will call project variables:

- The morphology, understood as a form, can be examined according to two variables belonging to two different elements;
- The soil is a complex physical resource not only for the physical-chemical and biological processes that develop within it;
- the built environment as result of the transformations that man has operated.

McHarg in “Design with nature” recognizes the initial phase of observation of the territory as an important moment. Designing with nature consists of a series of controlled actions that start from the territory and incorporate a series of integrated disciplines that enrich the formal vocabulary and provide the necessary knowledge to design in a conscious manner considering the variables in the perspective of social sustainability, economic, environmental.

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