

Proactive approaches to the Mediterranean AgroCities

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The evolution of the new urban-territorial city and of our own settlement environments has produced, in recent decades in Europe, a set of questions relating to the traditional relations City-Landscape, Landscape-Nature, Nature-City, a change of perspective between the urban, physical, cultural and social dimension and, in the broadest sense, on the environmental system in general - and agro-landscape in particular - in the context of which the city is located and develops, recycles and re-naturalizes. The growth of the informal/informational city corresponds, in an almost paradoxical way, to the production of settlement landscapes and the prediction of corrective landscapes, in which the role of agricultural and forestry spaces is interpreted as a fundamental element of a new form sustainable city dense (discontinuously dense, Guallart-Gausa 2003)¹.

In recent years, a change of perspective has been consolidated and expressed in the growing awareness of the need for agricultural and forest landscapes to play a structural and articulating role; role in relation to which different competences and disciplines intersect, as well as various forms and sectors of public policies: new paradigms (Ricci, 2013)².

The transfer of an oppositional reading between city and country to an integrated and interwoven reading, in which the periurban territory takes on a vital and active role, with a productive and creative function of complex value, raises the need for a new model of holistic approach to territorial policies and the geo-urban project, able to adequately represent the various questions that insist on the territory, its planning and the policies derived from inter-urban and neo-rural development through systems called to combine: primary activity and activity tertiary, agricultural production and technological production, environmental sensitivity and tourist attraction, private space and public space, etc.

The role of agriculture in this framework of interpretation is therefore fundamental, being one of the uses of the soil - bound to the concept of "landscape" - more decisive and transcendent, fundamental for the efficiency of a new urban-territorial dynamic, multi-weft and multi-matrix, integrated and woven³.

Future objectives must clearly identify the importance of the relationship between the current territories, focusing attention on the dynamics of future development and on the creation of new relationships between city and landscape, countryside and citizens.

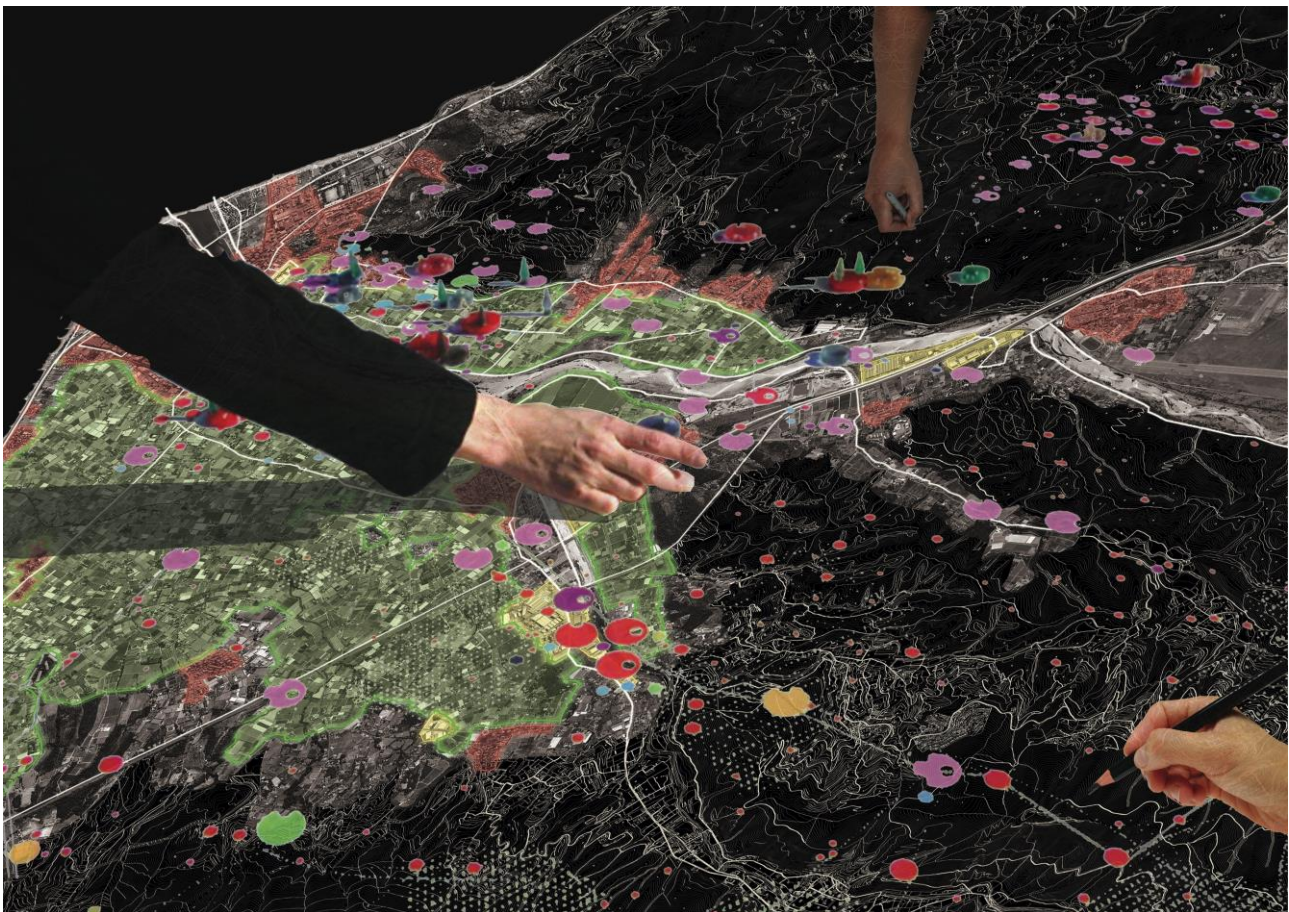
The importance of understanding agricultural spaces not only as productive landscapes but as multi-productive landscapes, triggers a new urban-rural vision of the contemporary mosaic city (natural and artificial) and of the possible multifunctional and multi-programmatic condition of agricultural spaces. more conceived solely as "primary" spaces but as "green infrastructures", "ecological

corridors”, “natural matrices”, “attracting environments”, etc., within a broader concept of the landscape understood as “eco-system systems, in interaction”⁴.

The agricultural-food component is, therefore, connected to social well-being, economic development, the environmental and resilient quality of the city and a (new) technological and operational dimension, that is, a consideration of agricultural spaces as possible smart-landscapes, responsive-landscapes or "advanced landscapes"⁵.

The broad conveying of the "Smart" concept - and even better, of the Intelligent City concept - alludes to a set of integrated systems and subsystems (safety, resilience, water, health, infrastructure, economy, environment, food, etc.) , called to guide and manage, in a coordinated manner, the development and sustainable growth of the new multi and inter-urban scenarios.

In this sense, urban, peri-urban and inter-urban agriculture can contribute to ensuring not only healthy and efficient food (starting from the optimization of environmental and economic parameters), but also dynamics related to energy and waste cycles , water and matter, as well as environmental resilience, play-social interaction and patrimonial identity, as an integral part of a new multi-level way to consider the city. City intended as part of a diversified strategy, oriented to the creation of a development not only agricultural, but also recreational, catering and agro-tourism and to a new projection of pre-existing environmental and socio-cultural values⁶.



Masterplan of strategy for the project “Albenga GlassCity, From the Glass City to the Green City”
– Tucci G. (2018)

The theme of the Agro.Cities research, published this year⁷, includes case studies presented to focus the current context of the new hyper-agricultural scenarios in metropolitan-coastal contexts and their different strategic repercussions (urban, cultural, economic, social, landscape), from the point of view of the high territorial and environmental value connected to the urban-tourist-productive dynamics currently underway. The sequence of a whole series of intermediate cities, with a mixed identity (agricultural, patrimonial, tourist-balneal, landscape-environmental), makes it possible to map a comparative abacus of recursive and singular, similar and differential urban geographies; but also, to synthesize different lines of action potential called to integrate systems and to optimize latencies and values, reality and potential.

In addition to the series of case studies, two research papers are presented that see the GIC-lab research unit involved in various ways, including didactic research within university courses and in-depth study of members of the research team:

▪ **Albenga GlassCity, From the Glass City to the Green City (Liguria, IT)⁸**

Located in the center of the Riviera di Ponente, Albenga is a city based on intensive agricultural production, which represents its economic cornerstone. Given the enormous presence of agricultural greenhouses, its appearance appears to be a pattern of glass and flowers, structures and cultures, a few full and many voids, inserted within a green context, an end only for production.

But despite its agricultural connotation, Albenga is a city that is divided between different and variegated fabrics: a residential fabric, concentrated mostly in the old historic center, a new and industrial one, built in the peripheral areas, a tourist and seaside one, which exploits the strategic position of the Ligurian Riviera, and an agricultural and productive one, which stands between the old and the new, preventing the city from developing and making the commercial suburbs more and more distant.

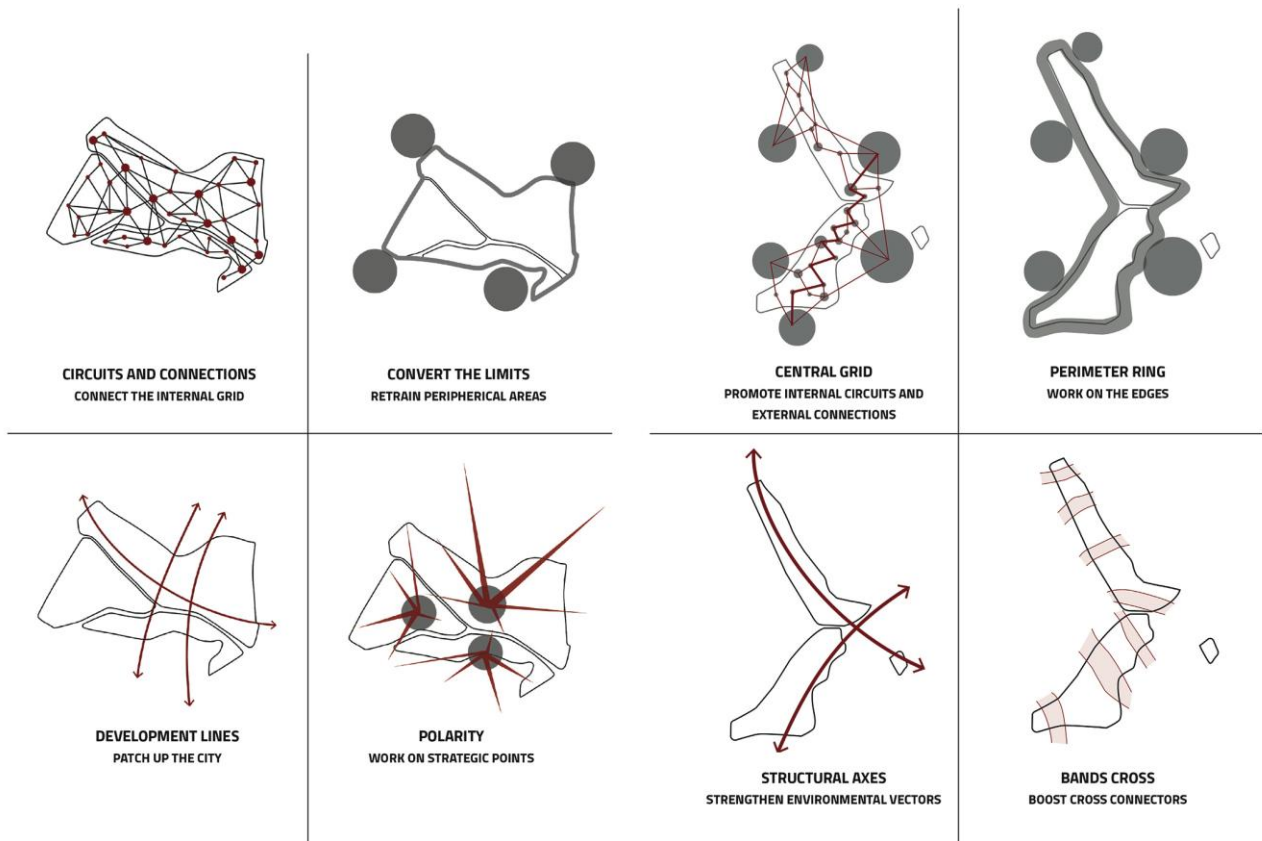
The study and the project "GlassCity" aims to integrate these different fabrics into a single system that can exploit the qualities of the agricultural territory within a tourist-productive process, in order to implement a strategy for the whole city of self-production (self-feeding strategy) that allows Albenga to self-feed itself both energetically and economically, producing, recycling, reusing to produce again, becoming an example of GreenCity, a sustainable city.

▪ **Agricultural Park: PABLL-BCN+, a park of parks. Llobregat (Barcelona, SP)⁹**

The Agricultural Park of Llobregat presents instead another aspect linked to the multidimensional, and in particular morphological and environmental, relations between the city and the urban agro-urban area of Barcelona that conditions urban form. The agricultural park Baix Llobregat (PABLL-BCN+) is part of a network of natural and semi-natural parks in the metropolitan area of Barcelona that draws a chain of protected green areas, connected by an urban frame, representing the heart of the new agglomeration multi-urban, organized in sequences parallel to the sea.

The common agricultural policy, which led to the creation of the Agricultural Park, was strongly oriented towards the search for a balance between agricultural production and conservation of the environmental and cultural aspects of the rural landscape. Preserving the Llobregat Park as a priority agricultural space invites to reinforce the initial primary definition of the landscape, completing it and combining it with new strategies, uses, practices and activities (traditional or

innovative) that, without damaging its character, allow to enrich and project the its economic, social and cultural dimension.



Diagrams of Albenga (left) and Llobregat (right), GicLab (2015)

Understanding the implications associated with a new active landscape and the social, economic, technological and cultural changes currently underway are fundamental to foster a more proactive and strategic-sustainable (bold sustainability) planning of urban-rural areas in our coastal territories: a planning model that must reflect the triple dimension of the "natural-artificial", "built-free" and "environmental-anthropic" dualisms.

Research on AgroCities has analyzed the essential steps for understanding new dynamic development strategies in coastal, urban and agricultural areas, through three sequences:

1. Recognize the interaction of the different agro-urban areas within the current global scenarios and their different strategic possibilities, of urban, cultural, economic, social and landscape development.
2. Build a state of the art updated on this context in order to make a critical and proactive analysis of the identified cases.
3. Define possible qualitative scenarios and implementation parameters at different scales also to that of communication for the dissemination and enhancement of territories.

The research aimed to establish a cognitive foundation for the interpretation of the entire territorial-landscape framework, for the development of strategic guidelines for the balance and the definition of the various actions associated with new integrated policies, both eco-systemic and inter-territorial.

Synthesis

The evolution of the urban-territorial city and of our occupied environments produced, during the last decades, in Europe in a general way and in Italy in a specific way, a combination of matters regarding the relations City-Nature, City-Nature-Landscape and a change of perspective between the urban, physical and social dimension and the largest agricultural-landscape and agricultural-environmental system in the context within which the city redefines and develops itself. This change of perspective stabilized and manifested itself with the increasing awareness of the need that agricultural and forestry spaces must develop a plural, structural, articulate and functional role; a role within which various knowledges and regulations, various norms and sections of public policies are combined.

Overcoming the opposition city-country, within which the suburban areas play a vital and active role - with its center within a productive and creator function of complex value - a new model of integrated approach towards territorial policies and the geo-urban project is needed, able to adequately represent the different applications within the territory.

This kind of approach focus on a matter that, from the planning point of view appears unavoidable and that refers to the need of integration between territorial and political planning and rural development plans that combine primary/tertiary activities and agricultural production.

Two study cases represent the heart of the research:

1. Albenga (Liguria), Agricultural Plan: the analysis of Albenga's agricultural plain case represents a chance to master the landscape; geographical and economic data are required in order to obtain a territorial system focused around the agricultural production. Albenga's territory offers an extraordinary set of environmental resources that made its economic spread possible developing the landscaping resources and exploring a new ludic-convivial definition.

2. Llobregat (Barcelona), Agricultural Park: the large agricultural area around the Llobregat delta offers another aspect connected to the multidimensional, morphological and environmental relations between city and agricultural/urban territory that, according to a variety of conditions and procedures, influences the urban aspect.

The agricultural community policy, which led to the making of the Agricultural Park, is strongly oriented towards the searching of a balance between agricultural productions and the preservation of the environmental and cultural aspects of the rural landscape.

The current predominant direction is a multifunctional agriculture model able to provide not only resources (food and whatnot), but also services such as tourism, technological research, recreation and others. In this perspective, the research aims to collect all the planning ideas and put together a framework of tools and public capitals for the promotion of a multifunctional agriculture. In this regard, the set of features, activities, design intentions and capital features of the territory is included in a unitary strategic territorial framework able to create a planning scenario, where all the different elements are stored, and to realize an integrate and multisectoral model of self-sustainable development and regeneration of the agricultural and peri-urban territory.

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