

Learning from Polignano

A sequence of strips to link the inner agricultural landscape and the coastline

Most of the time, we are used to considering Polignano a Mare as a tourist spot, an entity strongly related only to seasonal tourism and the seaside. This is true of course, but it is much more than this: it is a complex system, characterized by an inner thickness, a landscape made of a rich agricultural palimpsest that characterizes the town's local economy, but also its culture.

The project moves from this assumption, and intends to reconnect the agricultural landscape – located beyond the railway and highway infrastructures, elements of caesura to be taken into account within the project – with the downtown area and the spaces along the sea. A hinge space that winds around the railway axis, capable of inverting the perception and livability of the urban system.

Learning from Polignano goes in two directions: on the one hand, it considers the agricultural backbone of the hinterland not as a backbone, but as an important element, which must be put back at the center with a view towards slow and sustainable tourism. On the other, it provides a series of axes transversal to the city – which intersect the intervention sites, public spaces and existing facilities, as well as some areas localized for future interventions envisaged by the “Piano Strategico” plan – to improve the quality of domestic urban spaces, creating connections with vegetation and cycle-pedestrian paths that connect to the coast. The axis along the railway becomes

an opportunity for mending, a *strip* on which a series of transversal axes of different sizes are grafted. An opportunity to re-imagine the existing streets and public spaces, by placing them in connection. This provides a chain of new and existing centralities that cross the city in a capillary way, creating a new hierarchy both for permanent residents and for tourists of various kinds.

The reference to the strip (Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour) can be misleading, but it was chosen to highlight this axiality that becomes the supporting element of the project, on which to graft a series of transversal axes and actions that can be implemented over time through *different phases of implementation*. A “spina” (Gregotti) around which the project for a city in transformation unfolds.



Commonizing the process

image on the left side: phases of implementation of the interventions, from tactical actions to permanent transformations

image on the right side: urban structure of the proposal



The project is not to be understood as a finished or as a static solution, but as a suggestion of possible paths that could be implemented involving co-design tables. It is not a point of arrival, but a starting point that, through the skills within the working group, intends to lead a participatory process to build future visions for this territory with the inhabitants themselves.

First of all, it focuses on these centralities to strengthen their public dimension, reasoning on possible declinations of “communitarian devices” to support a participatory process, involving not only the local administration, but also associations, cooperatives and citizens: it creates a device to gathering together, called *Agorà*, located first in Pinocchio park and then in the new school square. Here the local community will be invited to participate to co-design moment, to

elaborate a common vision for the city.

The proposal is based on the search for relational and transgenerational living, which breaks with residential individualism and experiments with new forms of coexistence. It designs a domestic dimension of living, where collective spaces and shared services – such as greenhouses, laboratories for associations, school squares, playgrounds – become devices for sociality, mutualism and care. The quality of public spaces is central: safe and accessible pedestrian paths connect homes to the main services, reducing car dependency and promoting daily well-being, connecting urban and territorial centralities. Finally, the project intends to face the critical issue of the seasonal touristic assault, reasoning on spaces that could create an intermediation between permanent residents and temporary ones.

The eco-logical turn

Moreover, the project intends to focus on ecological and environmental aspects, to propose a new way of living in between urban and rural, which can overcome agricultural monoculture and stress local traditions, creating new space for parks, pop-up markets and laboratories. Paradoxically, wild nature is rare in the countryside today: intensive monocultural cultivations reduce biodiversity and hinder the continuity of ecological corridors. Learning from Polignano intends to reverse this trend, regenerating the territory and promoting the coexistence between resilient agricultural activities, shared living spaces and natural habitats.

The intervention proposes a cooperative and regenerative model, capable of enhancing local resources and materials – architectural, energy, ecological – and activating solidarity and circular economies (in line with principles of studies proposed by ASSET - Agenzia

regionale Strategica per lo Sviluppo Ecosostenibile del Territorio). The site-specific design starts from a careful observation of the territory, highlighting its latent potential and integrating nature-based solutions such as bio-canals, phytoremediation tanks, plant rows mixed with orchards to create a polycultural variety. These solutions become central elements of an environmental strategy that aims at climate neutrality and the regeneration of resources, putting in value local products with two main objectives: creating an extension of the future agricultural park inside the city, using local varieties of productive vegetation to design economic and environmental sustainable spaces. Secondly, it wants to propose communitarian hubs, such as the municipal *frantoio* (oil mill) that hosts didactical spaces and rooms for local cooperatives and associations, and communitarian gardens.

images: new community housing area, and the didactical agricultural park along the railway



Maximizing the coexisting of humans and non-humans

A place that becomes shelter, where nature becomes a living infrastructure: a resource for water management, a regulator of the microclimate, a support for pollinators and wild fauna. A non-aestheticized nature, but an active one, where wild nature returns to coexist with productive nature, designed to produce oxygen, strengthen ecosystems and accompany the daily life of not only humans. An infrastructure on a large scale – with the restoration of ecological corridors and a greater variety of crops – but also made of small devices – such as totems for insects, hives, houses for birds and bats.

The approach is part of a logic of transitional adaptation, capable of addressing the climatic, demographic and social

transformations underway with a systemic and dynamic vision. It is not just about reducing the negative impact, but about building scenarios of ecological and cultural coexistence, where living becomes a situated, conscious and generative act.

In this sense, the project does not simply propose new buildings, but new relationships. It reconnects people, places and living species. It renews the city and the program that supports it starting from the inside, through the strengthening of current and future centralities, offering a more situated, open and durable model. An invitation to rethink the very meaning of living as a collective, rooted, transformative act.

