

Architecture and UNESCO Buffer Zones.

The architectural project as a tool for the UNESCO Buffer Zones of «fragile» archaeological sites. From safeguard planning to the development of design models for the enhancement of heritage.

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The object of this research is the relationship between the architectural project and two of the current UNESCO tools for the safeguard of heritage: the Management Plan and the Buffer Zone. Today these tools are mainly descriptive and programmatic; they are here given new meaning and use, as they should not only be seen as mere guidelines of protection, but also as a concrete design opportunity.

The architectural project is identified as the key element to convert what now is a binding regime into a development and valorization plan.

The research is focused on UNESCO archaeological sites and their «fragility»; in particular, on that condition of fragility which is rooted in these specific territories, and which can arise from both natural and artificial causes. There is a need to identify actual «design actions» that, along with the analysis and study of the sites, can build «design models». It is important that these models don't remain too theoretical, on one side, but neither too specific, on the other side: they must be able to interpret a specific area, but also be useful for many areas. In order to reduce what would be potentially infinite scenarios, three Buffer Zone profiles – corresponding to different types of fragility – are identified:

- low-density Buffer Zones (mainly unbuilt, rural and natural);
- medium-density Buffer Zones (partially unbuilt and partially covered by urban fabric);
- high-density Buffer Zones (saturated, fully covered by urban fabric).

Each profile is studied through a selection of case studies – one per category. The deep understanding of the areas is achieved thanks to reading the UNESCO and local regulations documentation, the observation of maps and satellite views, but especially with field surveys: visits, photographic reportages and direct contact with local institutions are fundamental to comprehend the true limits and possibilities of every site. For each profile, the identification of problems and conflicts will be turned into general objectives and into the definition of the appropriate design actions. Through architectural project, all these elements, all these open questions and possible solutions will be systematized in a design model – a written and drawn plan – tested on each case study and applicable to all sites that belong to the same profile.