

FRIDAY, APRIL 12
SESSION 2
10:00 - 11:00

ROOM A - SALA DE PROYECCIONES

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**Re-thinking the liquid
common ground. A
regenerative project for the
water spaces in Roveto
Valley**

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Keywords:

regeneration, mountain, water spaces, territorial fragility, public space

With the term ‘liquidity’ the sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman coined a metaphor that describes the modern condition (Bauman 2011): an intermediate state with a dynamic and provisional nature, characterized by the dimension of uncertainty. Leaving aside the sociological application of the term, the idea of ‘liquidity’ can be attributed to space by identifying its provisional and unstable character: a state that belongs to every place but is particularly sensitive within the so-called fragile areas, often associated with marginal territories and mountain or rural settings, characterized by risk, depopulation, and precarious social and economic conditions (Carrosio, Faccini 2018). This state can also be linked to some distinctive elements of the territory: the complex river system represents an interesting field of investigation in this regard. Indeed, each watercourse has an intrinsic liquid and, therefore, dynamic and temporary nature: its characteristics largely depend on the morphology of the basin and soil features, other than on anthropic factors.

The present research, which began in June 2023, refers to the PhD scholarship *Theories and projects for a social and economic regeneration of rural architecture and landscape in mountain areas*, is funded by the Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale (INPS) and is developed in collaboration with Azienda Sviluppo Territorio in Roveto Valley, which thus becomes the experimental territory of the research.

The complexity of this Valley, and so of the possible themes through which to tackle a regenerative project, has required limiting the research to a specific field: the Liri system, defined by the Liri river, its source, and numerous tributaries, as well as the artifacts emerged for the water use and management, is an extremely actual and relevant topic when inscribed in a broader context of investigation. Indeed, if in the past the river system was an important source of sustenance for the territory, defining an essential part of its landscape, nowadays it represents just its “neglected area” (Clément 2004, p. 4) and, above all, a potential danger: the worsening of climatic conditions, together with the set of interventions that over the centuries have reduced the physical complexity, biological variety, and regeneration capacity

of the river ecosystem, has forced renewed questioning about its management and use, orienting processes aimed at its renaturalization, recovery, and revitalization (Oldani 2016, pp. 72-74).

On this basis, the theme of water is further declined according to its public and collective vocation: if the public space is the privileged scenario for the formation and preservation of the small rural communities identity, its design can be considered a qualitative and structural response to the challenges imposed by territorial marginality and climate change. In this regard, the concept of ‘common ground’ evokes the image not only of shared space and community (Chipperfield, 2012, p.13), but also of the antithetical pair of land and water, peculiar elements of mountain contexts around which architectural design can act as a dialectical tool.

Within this framework, the research reflects on the role of architecture as a condition able to systematize the features of fragile mountain contexts with the issues of our time, proposing a design-driven methodology based on the reformulation of the water spaces design in Roveto Valley, the testing ground through which to elaborate a regenerative project applicable to similar contexts.

The methodology employed can be divided into three different time phases: an exploratory one, a critical-interpretive one, and a transformative one.

Starting from the former, the exploratory phase involves understanding the place and the main issues to be addressed by the research, through site explorations and interviews with the local stakeholders.

The critical-interpretive phase, instead, is aimed at ensuring a reading of the place that is not purely analytical, but filtered through architectural sensitivity. In particular, an attempt will be made to identify and systematize, through a multi-scalar approach, the type of architectures developed with the river system: infrastructures for overcoming physical barriers, buildings for water control, and supply artifacts in smaller villages represent interesting typologies with a very different scale, essential parts of a single design system that needs to be faced in mountain areas.

Finally, the transformative phase involves an evaluation of how the above-mentioned typologies can be rethought or recovered through site-specific interventions creating new balances in the place, and it makes use of two different design approaches: spatial adaptation and spatial re-signification. On the one hand, adaptation means modifying space to face future contingencies and mitigate their risks, especially through the collaboration between architectural sensitivity and technical or engineering choices: this kind of approach provides a perfect union of form and function, promoting interdisciplinarity as a critical and balanced collaboration between the various disciplines involved (Shannon, Smets 2009, p.9). On the other hand, spatial re-signification implies the attribution of new meaning to forgotten or disused places, enhancing their features: it is not a mere re-functionalization of spaces, but the recomposition of the relationships between their components by design.

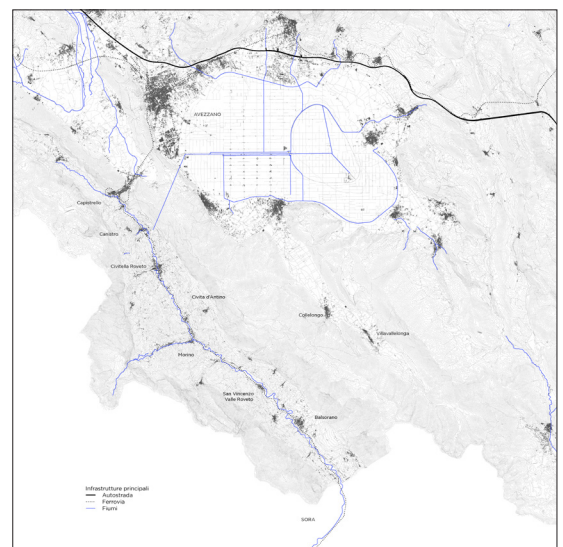


Fig. 1.

Through the methodology described above it will be possible to build a single waterscape, essential for the understanding and the regeneration of the Roveto Valley landscape and, more generally, for the definition of a methodological project with guidelines applicable in similar contexts.

Within this framework, the 'liquid' common ground represents, on the one hand, a place of adaptation to the variable conditions to which the water system is subject, and on the other hand, a place of re-signification of the structured relationship between the human landscape and the river ecosystem. In this context, architectural design can trigger virtuous dynamics for the regeneration of mountain areas, through a reading of the water spaces that simultaneously concerns the issues of sustainability, safety, and economic, environmental, and social regeneration; this allows intervention on the territory by employing the two approaches of adaptation and spatial re-signification, which address all the multiple issues illustrated, highlighting the role of the design as a dialectical tool.

The relevance of such research is evident in light of the depopulation processes affecting mountain areas and the worsening climatic conditions: the rediscovery of the margins, the valorization of the diversity, and the reevaluation of residual spaces allow for an effective response to the problems posed by contemporaneity and, ultimately, foster the enhancement of the fragmented and plural nature of the Italian territory (Lantieri, Simoni, Zucca 2021, p.40).

Experimentation in the research project.

If the Roveto Valley represents the testing ground for the development of regenerative strategies applicable to similar contexts, the river system constitutes an experimentation territory in the same Valley: indeed, this is still an unexplored field, although the recent stipulation of a river contract (2015) shows a first sign of interest and awareness by some local municipalities.

Thus, the centrality of experimentation in the present research project originates, on the one hand, from the lack of knowledge regarding this topic, and on the other hand, from the assumption that it can still acquire considerable value for the territory and for its inhabitants: experimentation is here conceived as a tool for the active and progressive knowledge of the river system on the different scales of the landscape and the village and, at the same time, of the possible ways of intervention through the architectural discipline in its multi-scalar declinations. Experimentation concerning this theme takes on even more relevance with the worsening climate crisis, which makes it urgent to critically reflect on the development of appropriate strategies to limit water and hydrogeological risk, which can further exacerbate the marginal condition of these territories.

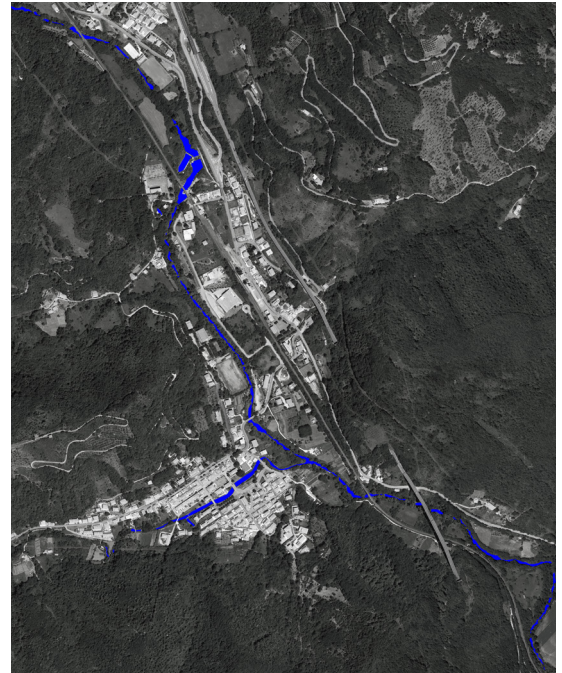


Fig. 2.

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Images

Fig. 1: The Liri system in the Roveto Valley. Graphic reworking by the author.

Fig. 2: The relationship between the Liri and Morino (AQ), one of the municipalities involved in the river contract stipulated in 2015 (Balsorano, Canistro, Capistrello, Cappadocia, Castellafume, Civita d'Antino, Civitella Roveto, Morino, San Vincenzo Valle Roveto). Graphic reworking by the author.