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The potential of unbuilt ground: green ways in the south area of Palermo as a drive of urban transformation.

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Abstract

Due to its urban and geographical conditions, the south district of Palermo is focus of this study. Observations are based on the direct experience of the area and on the mapping of the unbuilt ground. Some relevant issues have then arisen, including the hard accessibility of the area, the crisis of agriculture and the depletion of water sources.

Topics of change find a common intersection in the proposal of green ways. The green ways are shaped by the connection of fields, squares and gardens already existing between the buildings, and they become continuous paths from the mountain to the seacoast.

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1. Introduction

The focus of the study is the south district of Palermo. Geographical boundaries are Monte Grifone and the seacoast. The area includes two ancient neighbourhoods (Brancaccio and Corso dei Mille), residential districts (Romagnolo and Sperone), an industrial area and cultivated fields. The geographical wealth of the place contrasts with its social and urban decay. This work aims to analyse and understand the area, in order to find the principle of a transformation based mainly on its physical and perceptual aspects. To achieve the purpose, the choice is to observe the area, going through it, and drawing maps of the observed elements.

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2. Mapping

Experiences of crossing the area have been made with three different means of transport: by bicycle, by car and by train, observing and drawing the maps shown in the figure 1. From city centre toward the south, the elements of the city come in succession: ancient low buildings, high residential buildings, walls hiding gardens, industrial buildings. Often the necessity to get oriented forces a pause. The bicycle way finds the possibility to venture into the ancient neighbourhoods with small buildings and narrow streets. The car way goes along the main streets, in the same coast direction. The three ways proceed in north-south direction to the south boundary of the city.

Railway and orbital road are very stark edges. The separation of the places is physical, because the edges are difficult to cross, but also perceptual: it is difficult to identify a place on the other side of the edge, even if the place is already known.



Fig. 1. going through the area.

The direction of the main streets, the railway, the orbital road and the tramway define as main crossing direction the north-south one, from city centre towards surrounding districts. The road network works to lead out of the city or in the opposite direction to the city centre.

Kevin Lynch's studies about the city¹ are a methodological reference in the analysis phase of the study. The work begins looking for ways, edges, nodes and landmarks and identifying them. Immediately arises a great quantity of edges and a lack of landmarks (fig. 2). These traits make the orientation difficult.

Due to the complexity of the area, the act of mapping is here used as an instrument to know the area through its most relevant elements. Each element is a different layer to read separately. The possibility to look at every single layer separately make the reading of the city clearer. Knowing that the act of mapping is never neutral², to focus the attention on specific aspects of the area is already a choice: it is an act of observation and selection of the elements, which both show the peculiarity of the area and introduce a prospect of change.

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