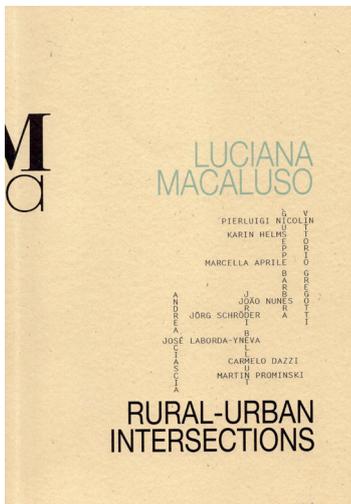


Umberto Minuta
When Urban and Rural Landscapes Meet

Author: *Luciana Macaluso*
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1. Structure of the book

The publication by Luciana Macaluso develops like an interview where her questions derive from researches about composition, she made in Palermo. According to the School of Palermo, the peculiar study method is based on design project experimentation as an instrument of knowledge, and it is the fundamental element of this research.

The project activity, as a point of the synthesis between the current condition of places and the needs of contemporary living, highlights the tools that have to be used to transform a territory.

In this survey, the author summarized and ordered the results of her interviews in order to encourage a comparison between different positions and to refine the vision of those topics dear to the interviewees.

The intersections, which make up the structure of the book, come from the themes of the researches themselves. They range from the study of the planned town (Gibellina Nuova) as a field of experimentation of Quaroni's urban design, to the relationship between architecture and geography and the interscalar value of the form, the main tool in a private settlement of the past. A second topic derives from a detailed study of public residential areas (Borgo Ulivia and Zen in Palermo), and especially the relationship between the suburbs and the contemporary city. A third theme concerns the relationship between the urban and rural landscapes through surveys conducted on different scales and dimensions in the territory between Isola delle Femmine and Partinico. A final topic regards city-countryside concepts, through the analysis of the area of Steingut, near Hamburg, Germany, following the ideas of the masters, among them Samonà above all, on the debated topic of the extended city.

In addition to the scientific authority of all those involved, the aim of this publication is to reveal the link between the professors interviewed and the research developed in the School of Palermo between 2007 and 2013. These include two projects of national interest (PRIN), a doctoral study and a study on Steinburg in Northern Germany, both by the author herself.

The interviews focus on the intersections of the study experiences and reveal some questions which architecture has to answer to: the project of open spaces, the connections between the principles of settlement and geography, the visions of landscape and the relationship with the territory.

The morphological and typological features of the Sicilian territory and the system of social relations require a different study approach than the rest of the country. The surveyed areas in Palermo are unbuilt and often inaccessible plots where projects of continuity overshadow the value of pre-existing buildings. On the contrary, the German study case has different environmental connotations: the agricultural territory and its landscape undergo a profound change stemming from social abandonment and the advent of new road infrastructures.

2. The themes

One of the most important topics is the definition of an intermediate space in the study case of Gibellina, where, according to Gregotti, a full urban structure was not possible to complete. The urban fabric, full of good-quality combined architectures, does not convey a persuasive and unitary idea of urban space. Therefore, he directs his attention to the intermediate spaces between the buildings, so that the project makes them usable and meaningful. In his interview, Pierluigi Nicolini writes about Magnet of the Open Space (Magnete dello spazio aperto). Here, in contrast to the polarizing thesis of Quaroni, the landscape must become today a dominant feature of the architecture itself. In this regard, the author highlights the studies made on urban hinges that help Pierluigi Nicolini assigning a new leading role to the urban distance between architectures.

According to the original debate of the Seventies, the project of the open space makes the primacy of architecture on the territory clear.

When talking about suburbs in Palermo (Zen and Borgo Uliviera), the knowledge of the architectural principles of the district and of areas free from buildings become the guidelines for the proposed transformations. The residual citrus groves have now a new leading role and the small country spot in the urban fabric reveals the old widespread condition of an altered landscape.

According to Joao Nunes, vegetation is a more permanent phenomenon rather than new buildings. When focusing on the relationship between urban area and geography, Jordi Bellmunt talks about a regulation in both the order of the countryside and of the buildings as in every architectural project. Sparsely populated areas, in comparison to highly populated urban centers, offer today a wider range of settlement principles for new projects.

Architects have often proved the inability to see any generating evidence of a work in geography. In France and Germany, the landscape designer has gained a foothold between architecture and territory, filling a vacuum that had helped to create the banlieues, spaces without memory and without identity in which social conflicts wiped everything clean. The large-scale drawing of the territory is the result of those agricultural measures carried out on it.

In another interview, Josè Laborda-Yneva states that the reading of the territory starts from the distribution of recognizable geometric shapes. This form depends on both orography and on functional factors. Agriculture has a lesser impact on the earth's crust than urbanization.

Because of that, states Joao Nunes, to know the forms and the forces acting on the territory allows the architect to imprint permanent signs on the space itself with the help of a project in relation with space and anthropologized territory. According to Vittorio Gregotti, lasting forms are those recognized by the community, while Pierluigi Nicolini supports the form as a mere truth. On the other hand, Jorg Schroder states that the stability of the form contrasts with the changeability of uses of the building, contributing to a plan-

ning process in which the project foresees temporary uses. The following intersection studies the landscape from the architects' point of view.

The author begins analyzing the experience of Giuseppe Samonà, a Sicilian professor in Venice. Through a type-morphological classification, his writing *La città in estensione* (The city in extension) codifies history reasoning as a lesson for the present time and a unity between architecture and urban planning. The author underlines how the master influenced her research in Palermo: general intervention hypotheses are pieces of an idea of general landscape.

The study of peri-urban areas and Samonà's thesis will verify the themes of continuity between the project and the standing architectures, making it urgent to establish a dialogue between the parts of a public area. Confirming the importance of Samonà's position to strengthen the identity between city and country, architects studied how to embed agricultural areas in the landscape, where the countryside is considered like an *ortus explosus*.

3. Operational reflection

The interviews carried out by the author have a common point: the need of interaction between disciplines and society in the current challenges.

The disciplinary approaches vary from country to country making hard a dialogue between the parts. Marcella Aprile talks of the architect's interceptor role to plan a substantial continuity between the landscape and the single project. Joao Nunes calls for a cross-disciplinary nature and laments the lack of it as a problem.

In her interviews, the author often refers to the concepts of the Modern Movement in which the modern city in contrast to the walled and compact city has imposed a new consciousness in the relationship between architecture and nature.

In the first half of the 20 century, new architectures arose in sparsely populated outskirts and in completely open territories. By nature, masters design responding to their own cultural and environmental background, but geographical exaltation and respect for nature remain and permeate the current debates of the Modern Movement. The project of contemporary landscape becomes a support to enhance the contemporary city, where open spaces open up in a modern way. The city, according to the settlement principles of the Modern Movement, opens towards geography in order to raise the contemporary awareness on the nature of the places even on a large scale.

In her book, the author wants to give some traces without a univocal reasoning, but being an interview, the experience of the meeting itself makes the survey very spontaneous.

The author considers her interviews means for an open debate on the discipline and give visibility to the new transdisciplinary interests that influence and determine the architectural project and the social role of architecture itself. The author's goal is to take the past and put it in perspective to the future, a fundamental and essential question on which the author herself drags us.

The search for identity between history and project, but also the balance between typology and urban morphology, appear essential and necessary in the contemporary context, to suggest new interpretations and new projects of new urban landscapes, in the face of social decay, dispersion and lack of identity.