

Editorial

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**City vs. Countryside. For a revival of interest
 in rural settlements**

 Abstract

The editorial highlights the two main missions of the magazine: reaffirming the memory of past events that new generations may not be familiar with; making historical experience available for future projects. Considering the almost all-encompassing interest in urban regeneration and functional themes related to PNRR, this issue aims at refocusing the interest of architects and scholars on the territory, currently facing a real “agricultural revolution”. In so doing, city and countryside can thus resume their complementary relationship, in line with Henri Pirenne’s interpretation.

Keywords

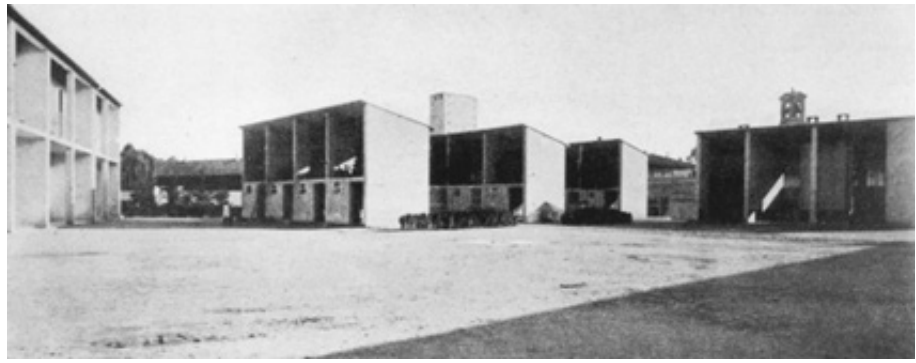
City Vs Countryside — Rural settlement — Agricultural renaissance

Reviving the memory of historical facts for the new generations is certainly one of the journal’s missions which comes along with a second task, just as important: turning historical experiences into triggers for design.

We might well ask what sense it makes today to dwell on settlement models alternative to the city. In fact, such question underpins the present issue edited by Cristina Pallini, dense with outstanding examples of urban and territorial schemes, building types, architectural and figurative conceptions from a broad international context. In reality, this issue stems from research undertaken (and experience gained) during the EU-funded MODSCAPES project (Modernist Reinventions of the Rural Landscape), addressing a special category of rural areas, those subject to large-scale agricultural modernization schemes implemented throughout the 20th century in various socio-political contexts in Europe.

Concentrated as we are on cities and related urban regeneration projects — also on account of the ongoing National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) — we are running the risk to overlook what happens *extramoenia*. Small-scale interventions have replaced the broader picture as if urban regeneration may suffice to face the overall challenge. Yet, a comprehensive idea of the city may still prove fundamental to overcome the fragmentation of single interventions, restoring the individual parts to the urban whole, in its architectural composition.

Currently, the periphery is prioritized as an area of intervention, particularly concerning the design of new schools (New Schools, Schools 4.0). As if trapped in the urban palimpsest, we are leaving aside the countryside, the actual space in-between cities, where small hamlets and villages, many of which abandoned, punctuate uncultivated areas; this in-between space

**Fig. 1**

Mario Asnago and Claudio Vender, Torrevecchia Pia farm-house complex, 1937.

appears somehow uncharted: *hic sunt leones* they used to say in Latin.

The policy on “Enhancement of Architecture and Rural Landscape” aims at preserving rural and historical landscapes through the protection of material and immaterial cultural assets, also by promoting sustainable tourism-related activities based on local traditions. This, however, does not serve much purpose. In fact, future challenges — such as migratory movements, demographic shifts, and climate change — concern both the urban and rural levels, as clarified by EU documents addressing the liveability and attractiveness of rural life as a mandatory field of action. Particularly so vis-à-vis the recent news about natural disasters threatening our territories, be it floods or inundations, landslides or landslips, earthquakes, or fires.

This is really the time to explore (and some are doing it already) difficult-to-reach Alpine and Apennine regions, now almost abandoned by the younger generations. Problems such as these call us into question — as architects, planners, scholars — urging us to move beyond self-referential attitudes and gestures, gaining instead a thorough understanding of the relationship between identity features, future scenarios, and desirable transformations. Such a global approach requires a full awareness, and a frame of knowledge ranging from engineering to social studies.

History teaches us that, after the year 1000, city and country competed for the supremacy of urbanism. In history, prosperity and crises on either side cyclically followed each other, with consequent migratory flows in both directions.

Although later than cities, whose evolution catalysed a massive concentration of studies, the rural landscape also underwent profound change, a transformation that deserves due consideration also by architects.

We should move beyond landscape conservation or enhancement, as if landscapes were to be considered mere tourism destinations as proposed by the authors of the PNRR. Just as we criticize the museumization of cities, we should equally stigmatise the crystallisation of rural landscapes, in full awareness that no evolution comes without transformation (possibly in line with environmental compatibility criteria).

Perhaps we cannot speak of a true ‘agricultural revolution’ (a concept of Marxist origin), nevertheless we must recognise that a return to the countryside could also benefit from technological developments applied to agricultural production, so much so that we commonly speak of Agriculture 4.0 or Precision Agriculture, regenerative agriculture, etc.

The Covid-19 pandemic triggered a renewed interest in rural life, closer to nature, along with a revival of settlements (hamlets, villages) unlocking the possibility of further reflection about life outside the city, as it has not happened for a long time.

Habitats and environments bearing witness to the life of past societies may become part of future collective projections, challenging architecture to meet functional, social and economic needs, as well as empowering the cultural dimension, hence a coherent spatial syntax and formal expression. In today's Europe, these same regions can offer us a clear source of inspiration for long-term strategies aimed at increasing the overall quality of the living environment.

Along this line of thoughts, the case studies included in this issue of FAM offer a shared cultural heritage, often largely underestimated, that today represents tangible evidence of recent European history where the role of architectural design became decisive in the definition of the “anthropic space”, in bringing into focus design problems often overlooked. Some examples represent crucial settlement experiments that, ever since, have constituted a common challenge for the ideas and tools of architects and engineers, agronomists and social scientists, planners and landscape architects. Here then, the example of an extraordinary season of modern architecture in dealing with agricultural land and its functional, architectural, and figurative needs appears as a valuable guide for the revival of a fundamental dualism onto which the evolution of the world has always been based.

Enrico Prandi (Mantua, 1969), architect, graduated with honors from the Faculty of Architecture in Milan with Guido Canella with whom he carried out teaching and research activities. He has a PhD in Architectural and Urban Composition at the IUAV of Venice, obtaining the title in 2003. He is currently Associate Professor in Architectural and Urban Composition at the Department of Engineering and Architecture of the University of Parma. He is director of the Parma Architecture Festival and founder-director of the international A-class scientific e-journal «FAMagazine. Research and projects on architecture and the city» (ISSN 2039-0491). He is scientific manager for the Parma unit of the *ArcheA. Architectural European Medium-Sized City Arrangement* project (published in volumes Routledge, Aión and LetteraVentidue). Among his publications: *Luigi Vietti, scritti di architettura e urbanistica* (with PV. Dell'Aira, Altralinea, Florence 2022), *The project of the Polo per l'Infanzia. Architectural experiments between teaching and research* (Aión, Florence 2018); *The architecture of the linear city* (FrancoAngeli, Milan 2016); *European City Architecture*, (with L. Amistadi, FAEdizioni, Parma 2012); *Mantua. Saggio sull'architettura* (FAEdizioni, Parma 2005).

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