Historical centres

"Infrastructures" for a contemporary urbanity

Bertrando Bonfantini

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A summary

1. Historical centers as infrastructures of the contemporary city

2. What is a "historical centre"? Towards a definition

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5. From the rules of planning to a program of action. Urban planning & design tools among urban policies

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1.

Historical centres as infrastructures of the contemporary city

I centri storici come infrastrutture della città contemporanea

There is nothing more (potentially) "contemporary" than the historical centres within today's urban regions.

→ F. Evangelisti, P. Orlandi, M. Piccinini (eds.), *La città storica contemporanea*, Urban Center Bologna, 2008

The challenge for urban planning is to recognize the potentials of the historical centres not (only) as a contemplative reserve of values but as a unique and high performing part of the city: **a determinant factor of urbanity**.

Historical centers as urban parts with an implicit potential of high performances for the contemporary city

How to combine old and new centralities? How to compose historical centres and superplaces?

→ S. Storchi, O. Armanni (eds.), *Centri storici e nuove centralità urbane*, Alinea, Firenze, 2010.

Using the term **urbanity** according to its positive meaning:

(*urbano* → urban; civil, polite, urbane)

a good urban condition, **a meaningful, rich and dense form of the urban condition**

To give "urbanity" to new urban forms is a challenge for contemporary planning, currently facing large urban areas' phenomena:

to do this historical centres continue to represent an opportunity in the contemporary urban palimpsest to be reinvented with new roles

This lecture deals with **some essentials about the planning problems involving historical settlements** in a contemporary perspective.

The Italian experience will be used as a reference in exploring this.

The presence of the past is a typical character of the European and, especially, of the Italian settled palimpsest.

Cultural heritage is not properly the same as urban heritage.

However:

some surveys – according to an UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) assessment, for example – evaluate that **more than 50%** (some say 70-80%) **of world cultural heritage is in Italy**.

More particularly, it is possible to note that in Italy:

- there are about 8 thousand municipalities (comuni);

- about 90% of these have less than 15,000 inhabitants;

- **almost all of them** (large and small, regardless of size) **have a historical centre (core)**.

2.

What is a "historical centre"? Towards a definition

Che cos'è un "centro storico"? Per una definizione

Historical centres are urban sectors defined by their historicity
I centri storici come parte urbana storicamente definita

"Per centro storico si intende … quella porzione di tessuto urbano risalente all'epoca preindustriale e precedente al traffico meccanizzato … Si potrebbe dire con G.C. Argan (1990) ["Il concetto di centro storico", in Raspi Serra J., a cura di, *Il concetto di centro storico. Ricerca archeologica, recupero, conservazione, riuso, protezione dei beni culturali*, Guerini Studio, Milano] che il centro storico coincide *tout court* con la città preindustriale … ma a tutt'oggi ancora non esiste una definizione univoca".

→ Historical center as the part of the urban fabric which existed before the industrial age and mechanised traffic.

Antonino Longo, Teresa Graziano, *Geografie contemporanee del centro storico. Spazi (ir)reali, nuovi funzioni e city-users in una metropoli mediterranea*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2009, p. 45.

Historical centres as perceptual units
I centri storici come unità percettiva

"[…] si è ritenuto di considerare 'centri storici' […] gli ambiti insediativi che il buon senso comune […] riconosce quasi istintivamente come porzione 'antica' o comunque 'vecchia' dell'abitato attuale […] questi nuclei sono tuttora individuati (e non solo da chi vi abita e/o lavora) come luoghi visivamente e percettivamente diversi dal resto dell'insediamento (di cui spesso, ma non sempre, rimangono il fulcro principale), ai quali sono attribuiti particolari valori emblematici […] Anche gli estranei e i forestieri […] sono in grado di capire dove comincino e dove finiscano questi ambienti non-moderni […] perché si tratta di una fenomenologia urbana evidente di per sé e facilmente si manifesta a tutti. In questo senso potremmo dire che in molti casi i centri storici sono dei veri e propri 'stati d'animo'".

→ Historical centres are places visually and perceptually different from the rest of the settlement. They are perceptual units which are clearly recognised by the use of common sense: people (inhabitants, workers, but strangers too) distinguish these old urban "environments" as evident and meaningful ones. The historical centres are a mood, a feeling, *an emotional state*.

Alberto Mioni, Luisa Pedrazzini, a cura di, *Valorizzazione dei centri storici. Criteri e indirizzi per i piccoli e medi comuni lombardi*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2005, p. 13, 23.

Historical centres as perceptual units: as a *Lynchian district*
I centri storici come unità percettiva: come *district* lynchiano

"Districts are the medium-to-large sections of the city, conceived of as having two-dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters 'inside of', and which are recognizable as having some common, indentifying character. Always identifiable from the inside, they are also used for exterior reference if visible from the outside".

Kevin Lynch, The Image of the City, Mit Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts), 1960, p. 47.

Historical centres as settlement pattern

I centri storici come pattern insediativo

"Dall'alto, da una distanza intermedia (variabile tra i 3.000 e i 6.000 metri circa), si possono osservare nel palinsesto europeo … alcuni insediamenti che potremmo indicare come "morfologicamente definiti", in quanto composizioni di materiali urbani che danno origine a forme distinguibili le une dalle altre … I centri storici costituiscono lo strato distintivo del territorio territorio europeo e di quello italiano in particolare".

→ Historical centres are morphologically defined patterns in the contemporary city; they are a distinctive layer of the European territory, and, more particularly, of the Italian territory.

Patrizia Gabellini, *Fare urbanistica. Esperienze, comunicazione, memoria*, Carocci, Roma 2010, p. 31.

Historical centres as a historically defined urban part

The historical centre is the urban part that coincides with the pre-industrial city.

Historical centres as perceptual units

The historical centres are the "ancient" or "old" settlement ambits which are recognised as such in a common sense, and to which special symbolic values are attributed.

Historical centres as a specific set of patterns

The historical centres are morphologically defined settlements and compositions of urban materials that shape distinguishable urban forms.

I centri storici come parte urbana storicamente determinata

Il centro storico è la parte urbana che coincide con la città preindustriale

I centri storici come unità percettiva

Sono gli ambiti insediativi antichi o, comunque, "vecchi", riconosciuti nel senso comune come tali, ai quali si attribuiscono valori emblematici particolari.

I centri storici come pattern insediativo (o, meglio, come specifico insieme di pattern insediativi)

Sono insediamenti morfologicamente definiti, in quanto composizioni di materiali urbani che danno origine a formazioni distinguibili.

What a historical centre is

(Summarizing and adding) the historical centre:

- is a part of the historical city (the historical centre is **the *core* of the historical city**)

- is recognised and **clearly defined in a common sense** (the historical centre is a *district* of the historical city, to use a Kevin Lynch's term)

- tends to coincide with the **pre-modern** (pre-industrial) **city**

- is distinctly identifiable by form (it reveals **a typical set of patterns**).

How to define the pattern of historical centres?

They are **"urban concretions"** characterised by a **strong spatial cohesion and integration**: in the buildings, the buildings and the open spaces, as well as in a holistic complex; they often reveal a typical, organic "regular irregularity", as a peculiar feature.

Che cos'è un centro storico

Il centro storico è:

- una parte della città storica (è il suo *core*)

- riconosciuta nel senso comune (è un *district* della città storica, secondo l'uso lynchiano del termine)

- tendente a coincidere con la città premoderna

- chiaramente identificabile per configurazione (ossia, per *pattern* insediativo)

I centri storici rivelano pattern difficilmente equivocabili, che si danno con evidenza, secondo un'immagine che è vivida: definirli "concrezioni urbane" è un modo con cui sottolinearne i caratteri di forte coesione spaziale (tra gli spazi edificati, e tra spazi edificati e spazi aperti) e integrazione (in un tutt'uno), e di peculiare, organica "regolare irregolarità" che tipicamente li contraddistinguono.

patterns of historical centres

Historical centers: Bologna

Copenaghen, Danimarca

Image © 2009 COWI A/S, DDO
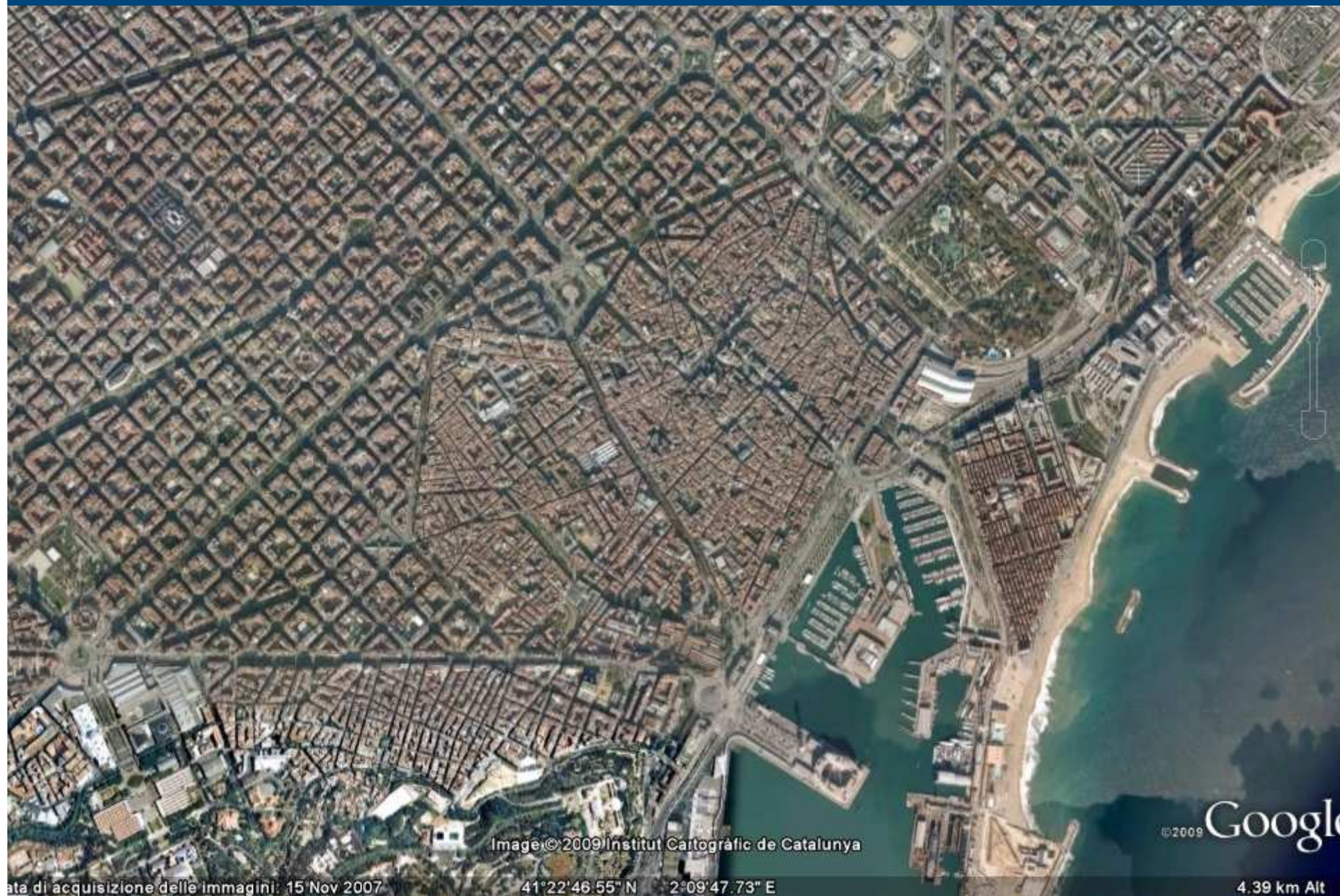
ata di acquisizione delle immagini: 25 Apr 2005   55°40'40.97" N   12°34'27.82" E   851 m Alt

Historical centers: Lucca

Historical centers: Lucca

Historical centers: Lucca

Historical centers: Roma

Historical centers: Siena

shapes of historical centres

Bologna

0　　　400　　　800
metri

Faenza

0   125   250
metri

Genova

Napoli

Palermo

Reggio Emilia

recognizing the historical centre

BAGNACAVALLO.

At the beginning
of XIX century

In 1935

Today

3.

Historical center and historical city. What does "historical" mean?

Centro storico e città storica. Che cosa si intende per "storico"?

Historical city is different from *historical centre*: it is a broader concept.

We could say that "historical city" is the sum of the historical parts of the settlement, within which we can also recognize the historical centre.

But recognizing historical parts of settlements is not a simple or straightforward operation.

When in an urban plan we define a part of the pre-existing settlement "historical", it is generally **to fix and preserve** (in an explicit or more implicit way) **some particular features** or **appreciated qualities**, which are identified in that part.

Identifying some pre-existing settled parts as "historical" is a way **to orientate the re-designing of these parts towards a profile of permanence and persistence**, rather than transformation.

This is to say that those settlement parts are not just old but they **have a value and constitute a heritage** for the community: a "dowry" to be actively mobilized in the project

Recognizing historical parts of the city is not predetermined. Doing this operation requires an argued **assessment** of **value**. In planning "historical" is not an absolute concept, but a **relative** and **critical** one.

So: "To preserve effectively, we must know for what the past is being retained and for whom. The management of change and the active use of remains for present and future purpose are preferable to an inflexible reverence for a sacrosanct past. **The past must be chosen and changed, made in the present. Choosing a past helps us to construct a future**"
(Kevin Lynch, 1972, "The presence of the past", in *What time is this place?*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass.)

4.

Designing the historical city: three dimensions

Il progetto della città storica: tre dimensioni

From a design perspective, the historical city assumes three different dimensions: "molecular", "by parts" and "structural".

We can recognize a ***molecular*** dimension in the planning operation of **identifying the single elements** that make the historical city, devoted – because we recognise them as such – to the permanence and persistence in the contemporary urban palimpsest.

→ This provides **rules** to manage the permanence and persistence profile of the historical "molecules"

A **by parts** dimension of the historical city is related to the geography of its different ambits identified according to the diverse patterns and features that qualify each one of them.

→ This provides **specific programs** – in a contextual project – for each part of the historical city, according to the particular characters of the single ambits

We can recognize a *structural* dimension in the planning operation of **interpreting a renewed role** of the historical parts of the settlement within the composition (re-composition) of the contemporary city.

→ This provides **figures** to interpret historical materials as composition elements in the structure of the new city

Today historical urban materials, i.e. pre-existing parts of the settlement to which we attribute values and qualities, become **resources for the re-composition and re-structure of the contemporary territorial design**.

According to Lynch's passage quoted before, we could say that historical materials are one of the tools to shape a contemporary structural scheme for our settlements, for today's urban regions.

A recent plan, to look at these aspects: Bologna Municipal Structural Plan (Piano strutturale comunale – Psc) and Town Planning Building Regulations (Regolamento urbanistico edilizio – Rue)

Parlare di città storica significa, da un lato, interpretarne e proporne una geografia, esplicitando il sistema di valori insediativi che si riconoscono nei diversi contesti spaziali in cui essa si articola e dando corpo ad un regime di regole che siano in grado di promuovere questo sistema di valori (nella modulazione della permanenza e persistenza); ma, dall'altro, significa anche e soprattutto chiarire il ruolo progettuale che le diverse parti della città storica (e gli interventi che la investono) possono giocare nella proposta di assetto complessivo, contribuendo in maniera determinante alla "composizione" del progetto urbanistico per la città e il territorio nel loro insieme.

the "molecules" of the historical city

(in the Structural plan and in the Planning Building Regulations of the Municipality of Bologna)

Disciplina dei materiali urbani
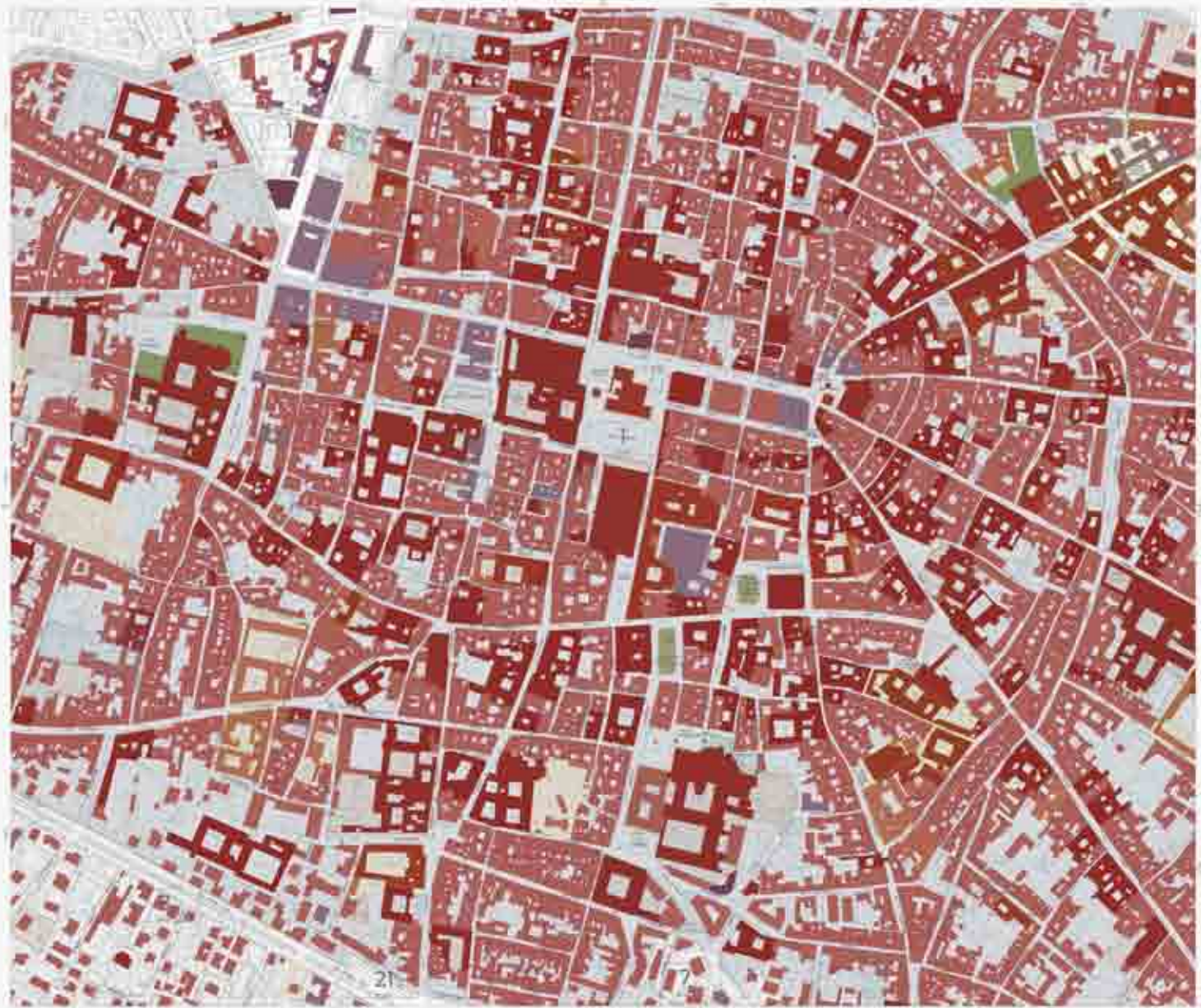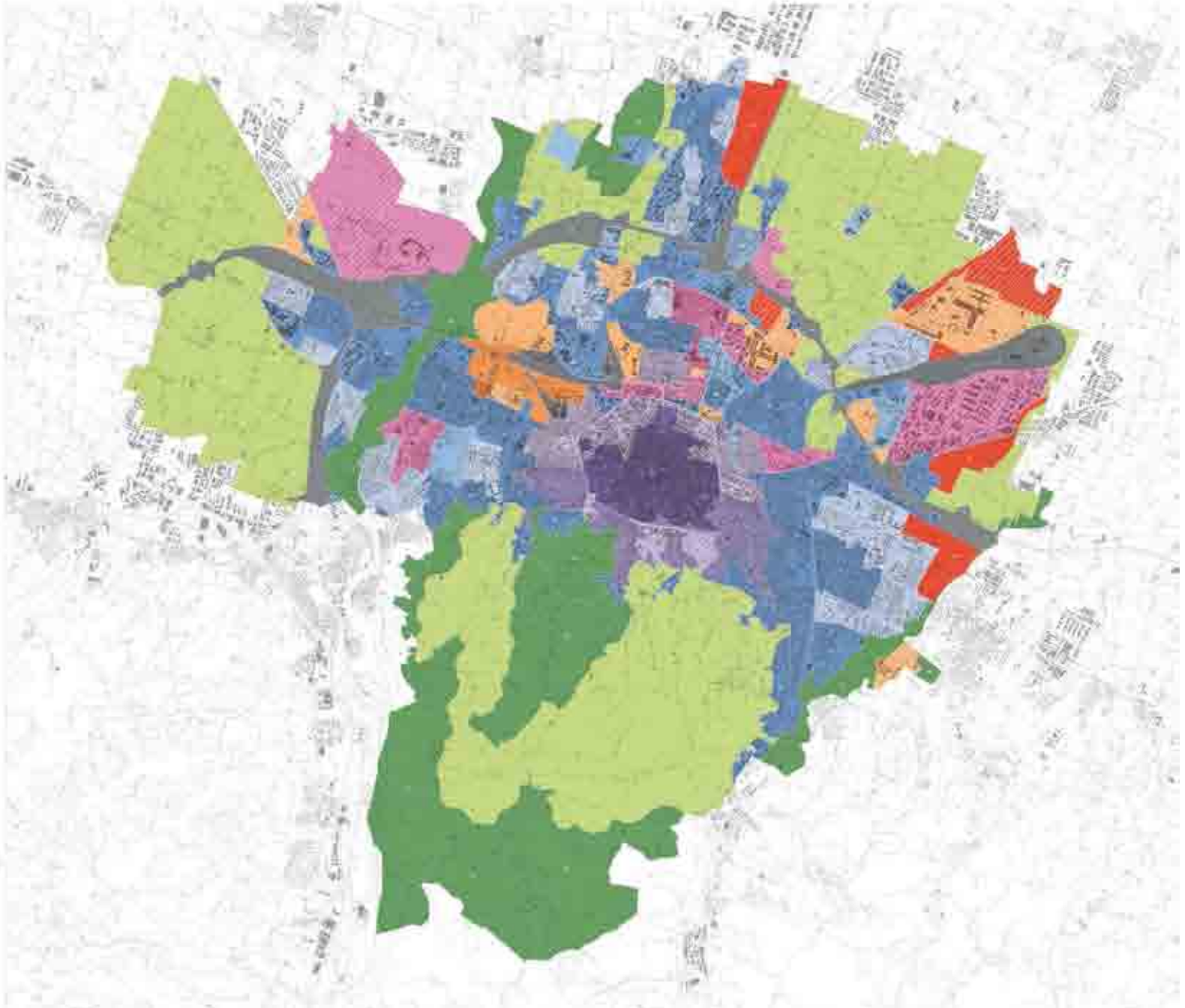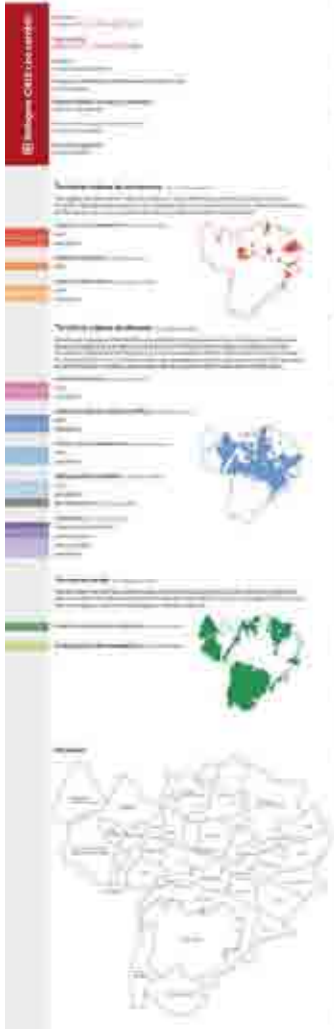e classificazione del territorio
Tavola II – scala 1:2000

URBANISTICO
RUE

the geography of the historical city by parts
(in the Structural plan and in the Planning Building Regulations of the Municipality of Bologna)

Violet (dark to light): Ambits of the historical city

the structural dimension of the historical city

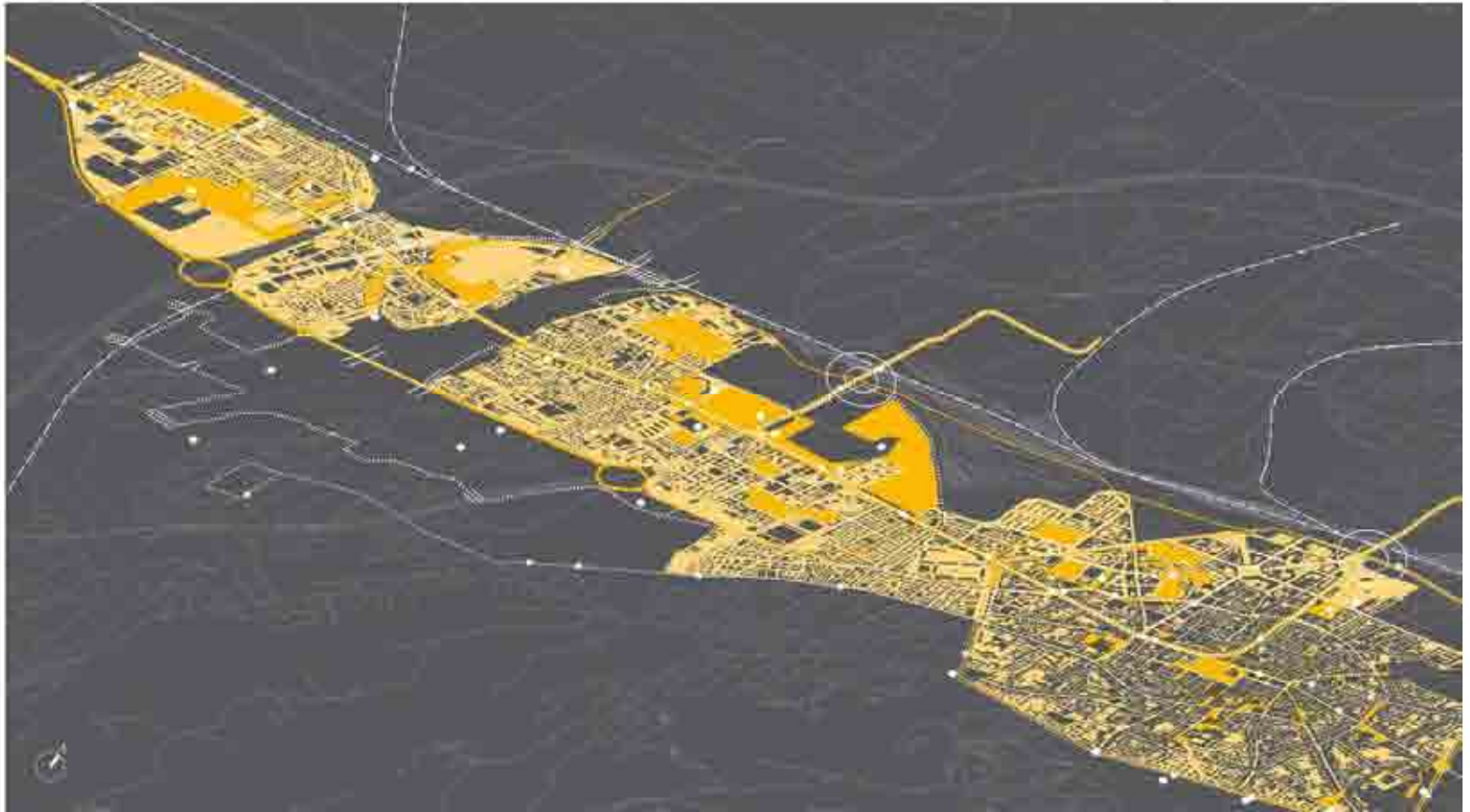*(in the Structural plan and in the Planning Building Regulations of the Municipality of Bologna)*

Re-structuring figure of the City of Western Emilia Road

Re-structuring figure of the City of Railway

5.

From the rules of planning to a program of action.

Urban planning & design tools among urban policies

Dal piano di regole al programma di azioni.

Il progetto urbanistico tra le politiche urbane

Today historical centres' issues mix physical, social and economic questions. To face these issues we have to consider that traditional planning tools of an urban design approach are not sufficient

→ Towards a broader set of urban policies

Some typical problems of historical centers:

- abandonment (of inhabitants and activities) and decay

- concentration of poverty, old people, immigrant population

- gentrification

- functional substitution and specialization (tertiary and commercial spread)

In general: polarization and radicalization of out-of-control inertial dynamics or trends

To face such a kind of questions:

- from a passive to an operative approach: from (passive) rules to (operative) actions

- from a partial (just physical) approach to an integrated perspective

Dealing with such problems, urban planning & design tools are only a part of the urban practices which are useful to re-qualify and regenerate historical settlements.

Consistent and effective interventions mean coordinating various actions and tools, according to a coherent program of targets: proper urban planning tools, sectorial plans, special programs and actions, social and economic measures and policies.

→a "strategical" and integrated approach

The experience of "Urban" EU Program and, above all, the recent case of Genoa's historical center regeneration are useful references to exemplify a complex approach of integrated urban policies on a historical settlements.

(Genoa: financing sources' integration; leading function of the action on open spaces; not just cumulative but synergy and multiplication effects)

6.

Minor historical centres

Centri storici minori

Some **reasons for considering small historical centres**:

1. A topic that represents a recent focus of interest in the debate and literature;

2. They are an heritage of material culture and landscapes;

3. A particular condition: they are often "pure" historical settlements; they are "units" of historical urban landscape (in Rome and Florence historical centres are wide but they are small in comparison to the extent of the modern city's parts);

4. Their valorization involves a particular set of planning issues and policies.

Some **crisis factors** of small historical centres (related to the following specific cases) to profile the issues and to define **specific measures** for the action.

1. People leave small historical centres, searching for **better standards of life** and **more comfort**.

2. People leave small historical centres due to **accessibility problems**; more definitely: for lack of accessibility to amenities, facilities and job opportunities.

3. Small historical centres are undermined by micro & macro **stability problems** (stability of the buildings and of the soils; hydrogeological factors).

4. **Competition** from the bigger historical centres is hard to sustain.

Some cases:

1. Nuova Schio (Vicenza, Veneto): a project of **active conservation**.

2. Colletta di Castelbianco (Savona, Liguria): web technology used to **re-create lost accessibility**, primarily, to job opportunities (remote work and tourism).
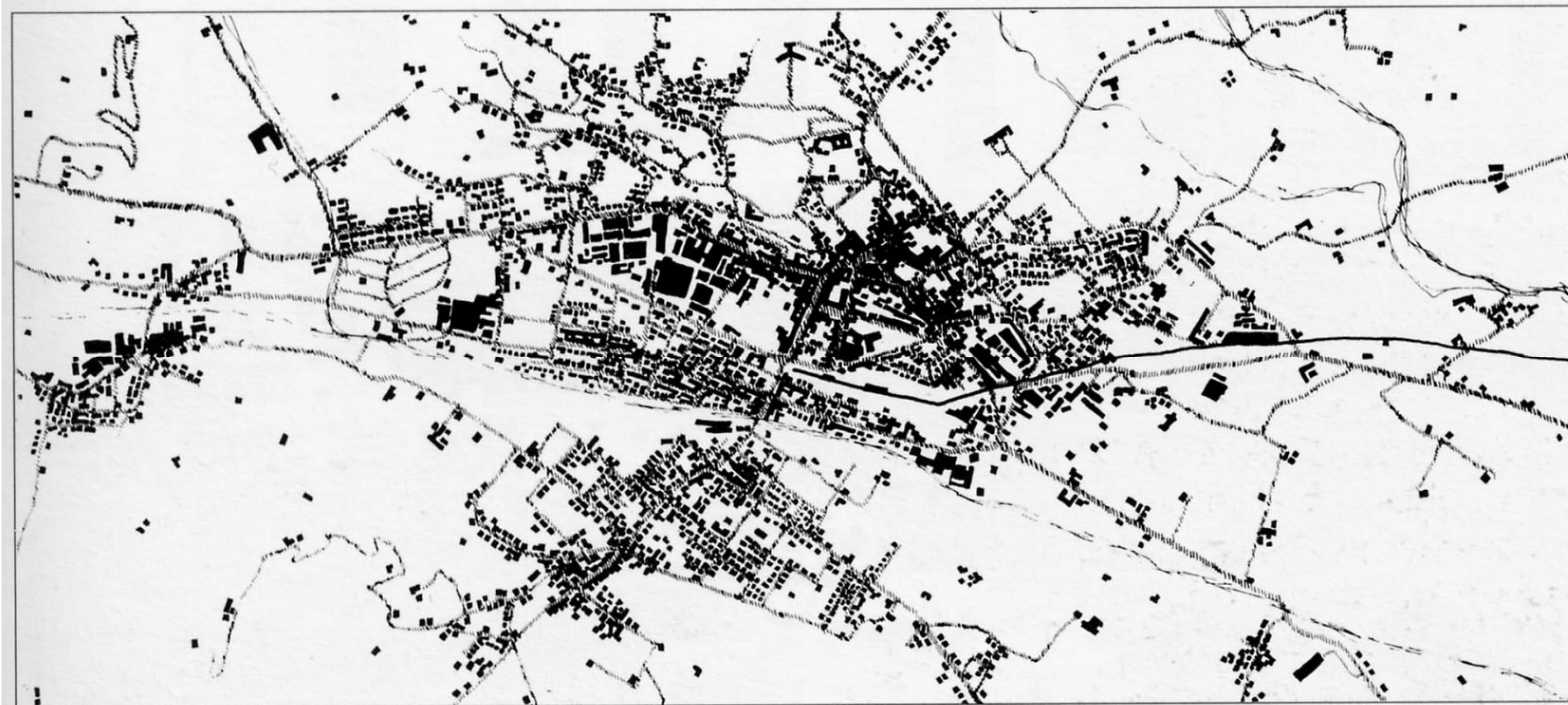
3. Santo Stefano di Sessanio: "diffuse hotel" as **quality tourism** model (material culture and ethnographic approach) to re-create attractiveness and regenerate local economy

4. Craco (Matera, Basilicata): settlements as scenes (film set) and museum; **landscape contemplation** as a value (tourism) (see: Civita di Bagnoregio, Viterbo, Lazio).

Gibellina (Trapani, Sicilia): the town destroyed by an earthquake in 1968 became a **land art site** → Cretto Burri (Burri cracks)

5. Colle Val d'Elsa (Siena, Toscana): urban renewal, open public spaces restyling and commercial places valorization in a policy of **territorial marketing** ("archistar policy": new architectures and projects "signed" by Jean Nouvel).
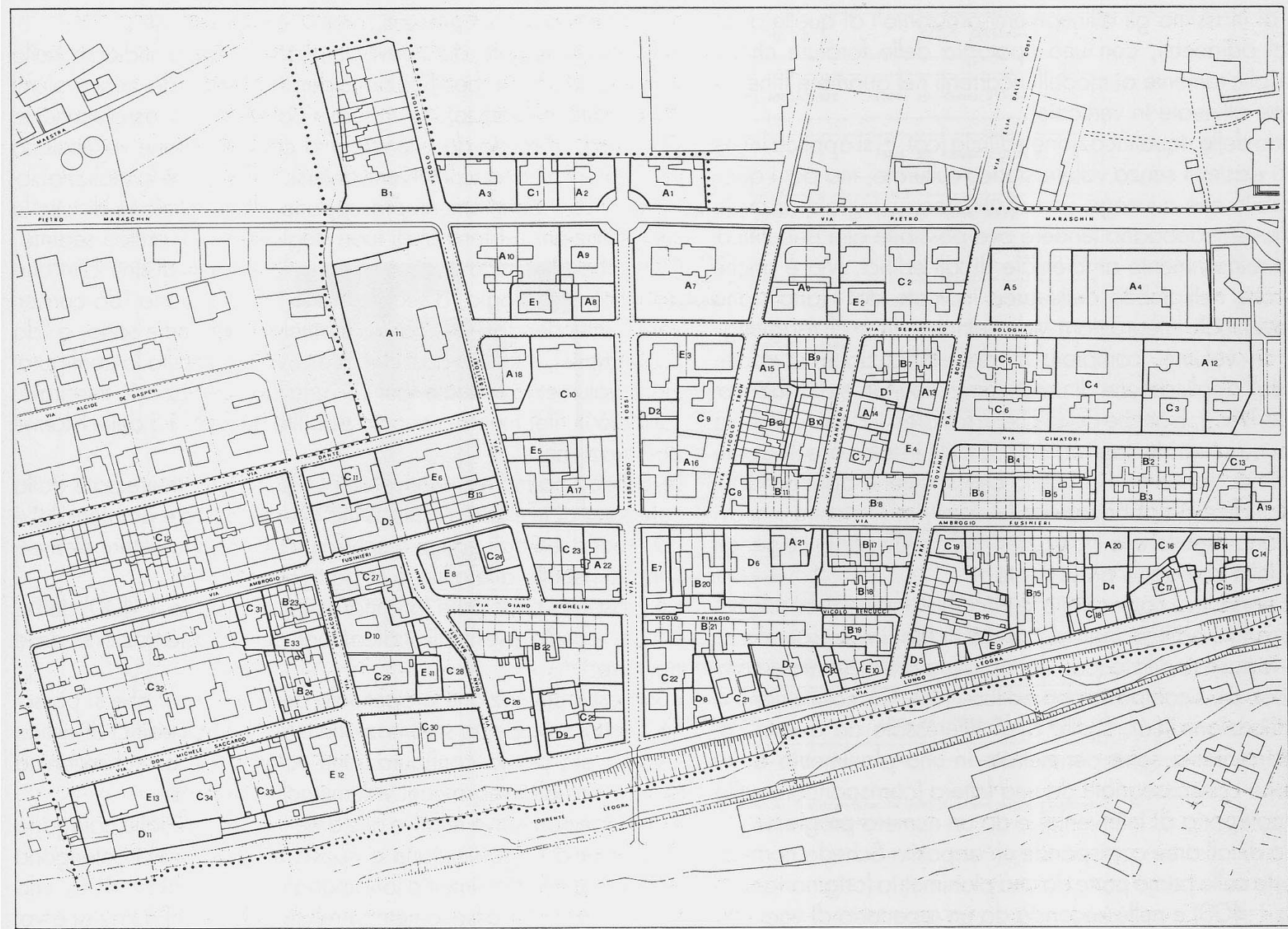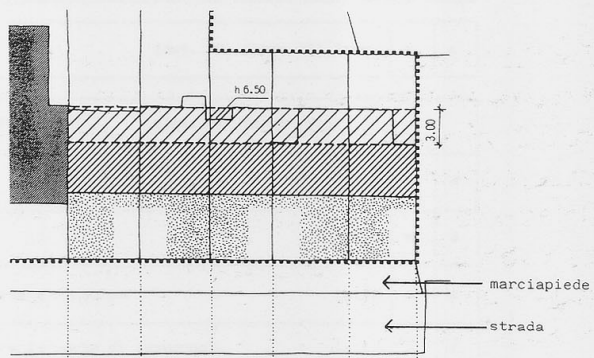
Schio, A. Rossi company neighbourhood
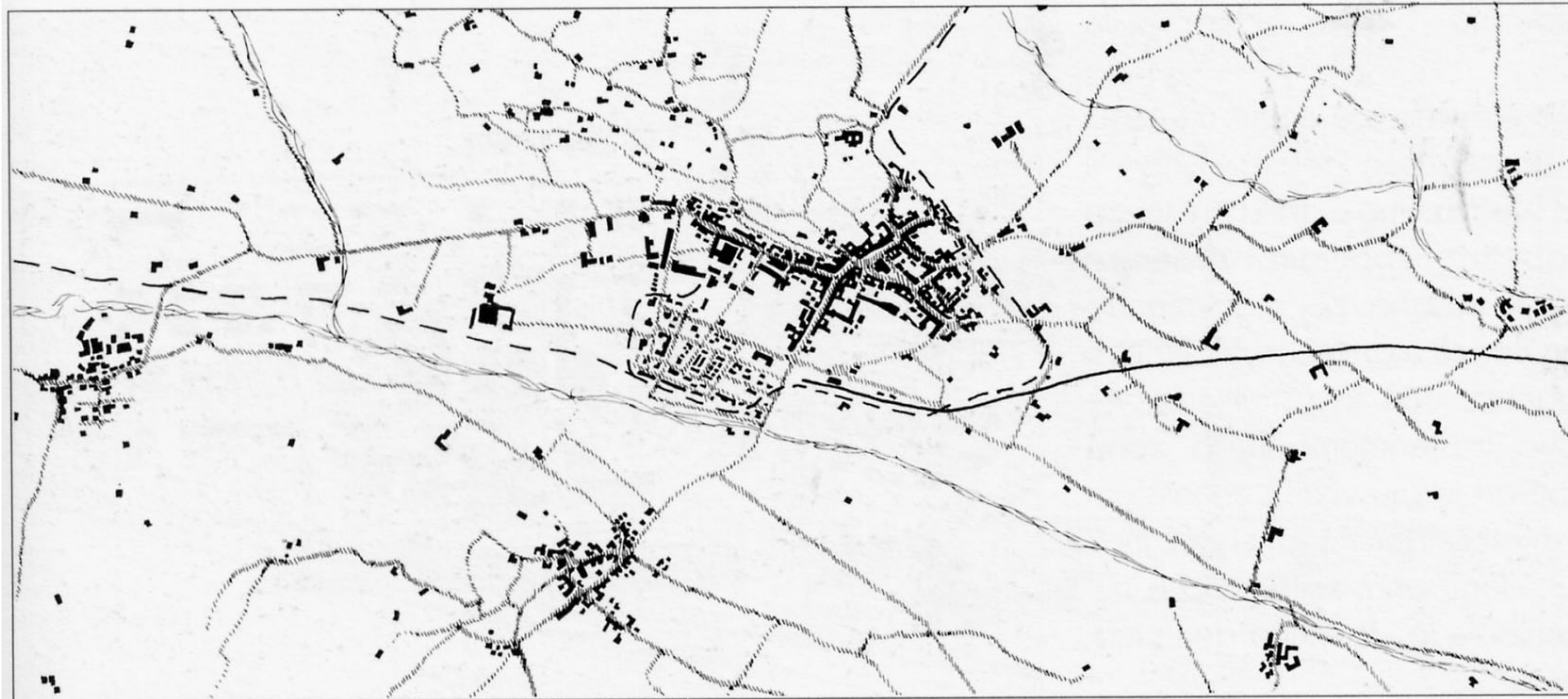
1889

1954

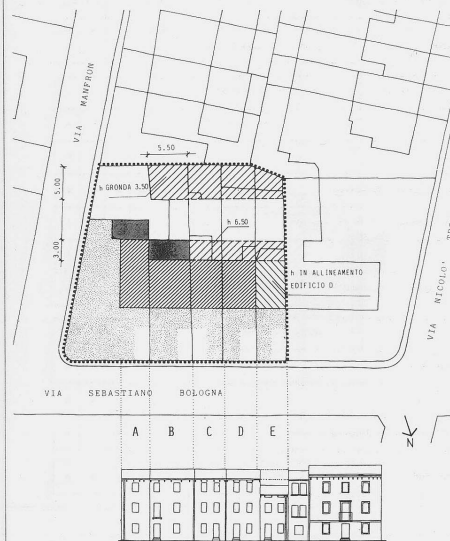black: the historical centre
red: "A.Rossi" company neighbourhood

edificio di antico sistemi
ampliamenti successivi
edifici recenti

LEGENDA

h 6.50

3.00

← marciapiede

← strada

 edifici di antico sedime da conservare

 edifici di antico sedime da confermare

 nuove integrazioni volumetriche

 spazi scoperti antistanti gli edifici

- - - - perimetro delle aree interessate dalle Schede Normative

N.G. intervento definito dalle norme generali del fascicolo 2
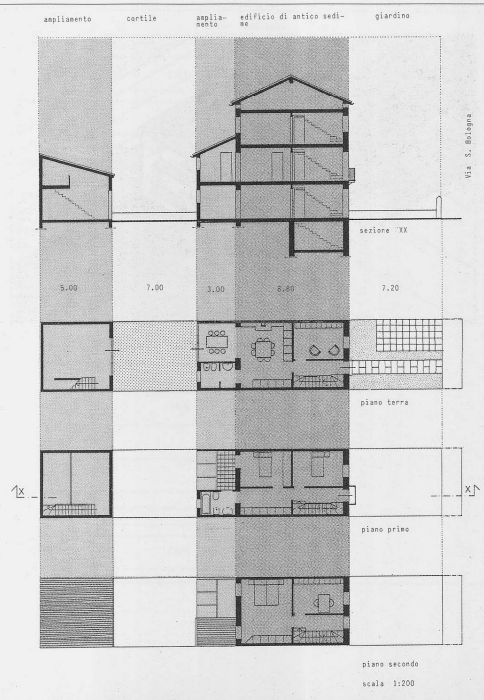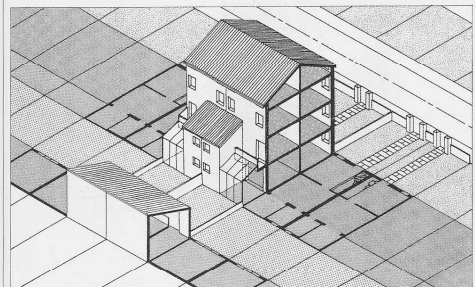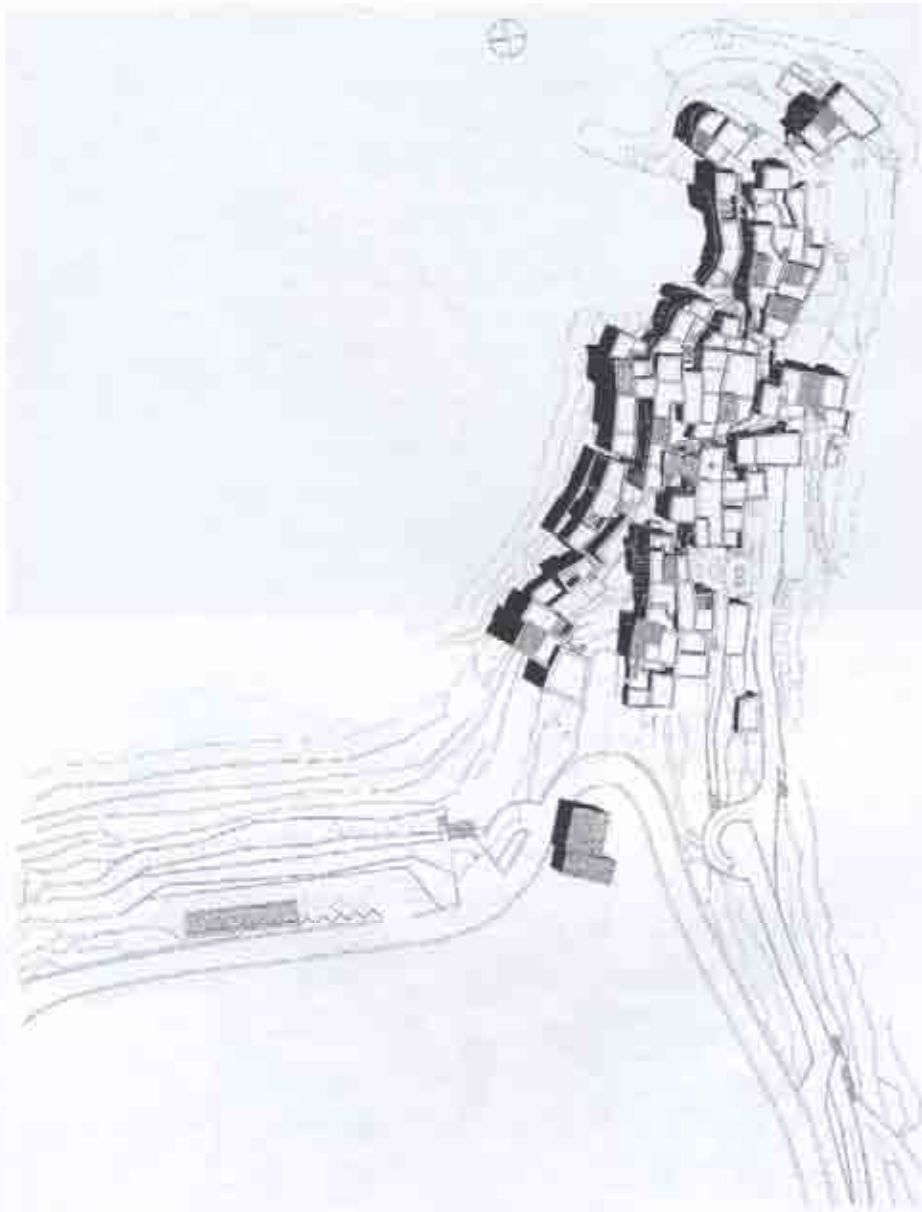
/ intervento non ammesso o non realizzabile

VIA MANFRON

VIA NICOLO' TRON

5.50

5.00

3.00

GRONDA 3.50

h 6.50

h IN ALLINEAMENTO EDIFICIO D

VIA SEBASTIANO BOLOGNA

A B C D E

N

SCHEDA B N. 9	Unità Edilizia	A	B	C	D	E
SPAZI SCOPERTI ANTISTANTI (Art. 19, Comma 2°),lett.:		c	c	c	c	c
RECINZIONI (Art. 20, Comma 2°),lett.:		a	b	f	d	d
ELEMENTI DEL PROSPETTO (Art. 21, Comma 2°),						
Cornicioni	lett.:	a	a	a	a	c
Davanzali	lett.:	c	c	c	c	c
Cornici di porte e finestre	lett.:	a	a	a	a	a
Pensiline sopra le porte di ingresso	lett.:	/	/	c	/	c
Poggioli	lett.:	a	a	c	a	c
Aperture (porte e finestre)	lett.:	a	a	a	a	a
INFISSI (Art. 22, Comma 2°),						
Porte di ingresso	lett.:	c	c	c	c	c
Scuri esterni	lett.:	a	a	a	a	a
Controfinestre e controporte esterne	lett.:	c	c	c	c	a
TINTEGGIATURE (Art. 23, Comma 2°),lett.:		c	b	b	b	b

NOTE:
Unità Edilizia A: la recinzione su via S.Bologna è modificabile.
Unità Edilizia E: è consentita la soprelevazione, in allineamento al fabbricato
dell'Unità Edilizia D.

ampliamento   cortile   amplia-   edificio di antico sedi-   giardino
                          mento   me

Via S. Bologna

sezione XX

5.00   7.00   3.00   8.80   7.20

piano terra

piano primo

piano secondo

scala 1:200

Colletta di Castelbianco

Giancarlo De Carlo, *Borgo medioevale telematico di Colletta di Castelbianco, Italia, 1999.*
Planimetria generale del borgo di Colletta di Castelbianco dopo il recupero
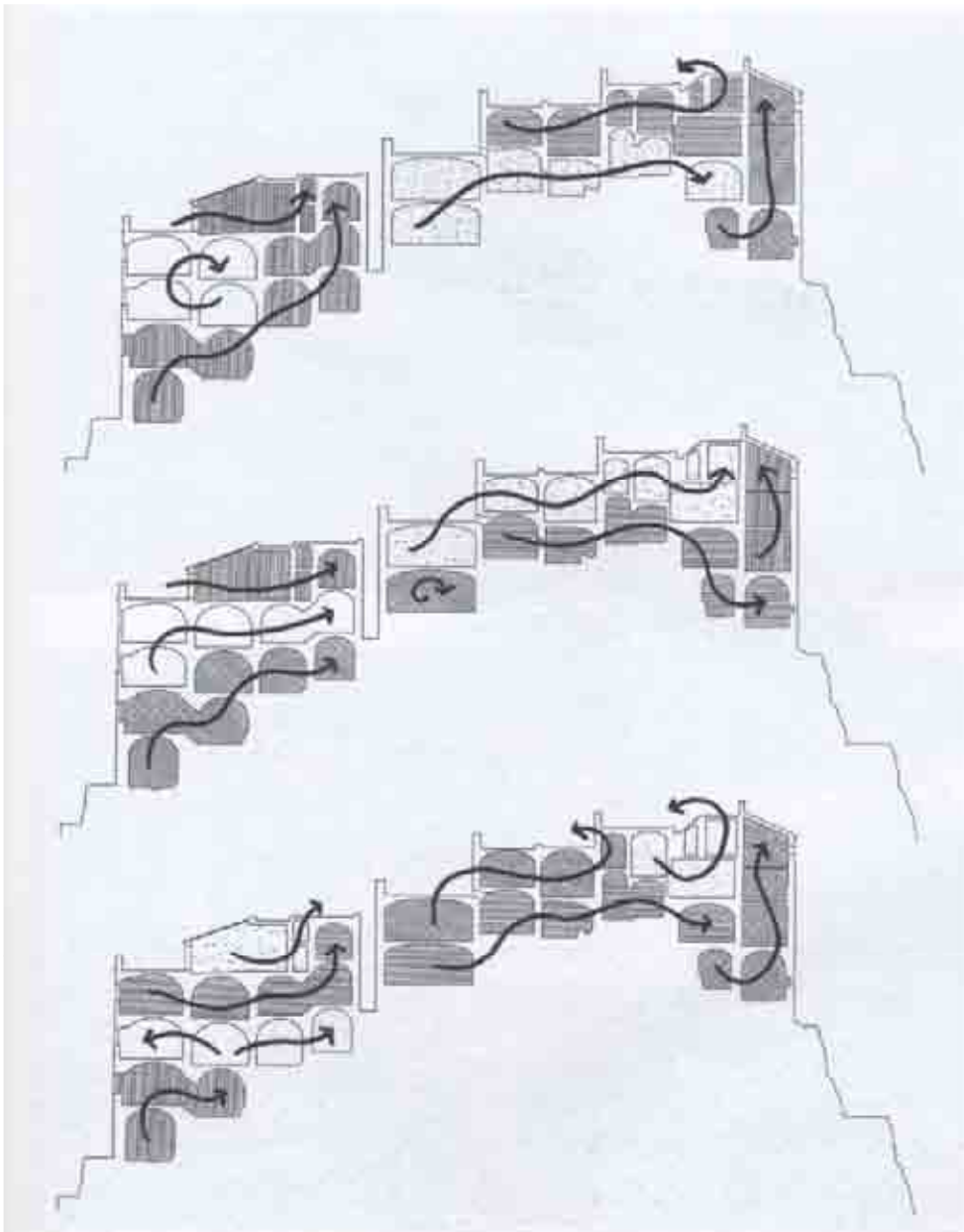
Giancarlo De Carlo, *Borgo medioevale telematico di Colletta di Castelbianco, Italia, 1999.*
Sezione di studio: le abitazioni possono essere formate seguendo direzioni verticali, oblique e orizzontali
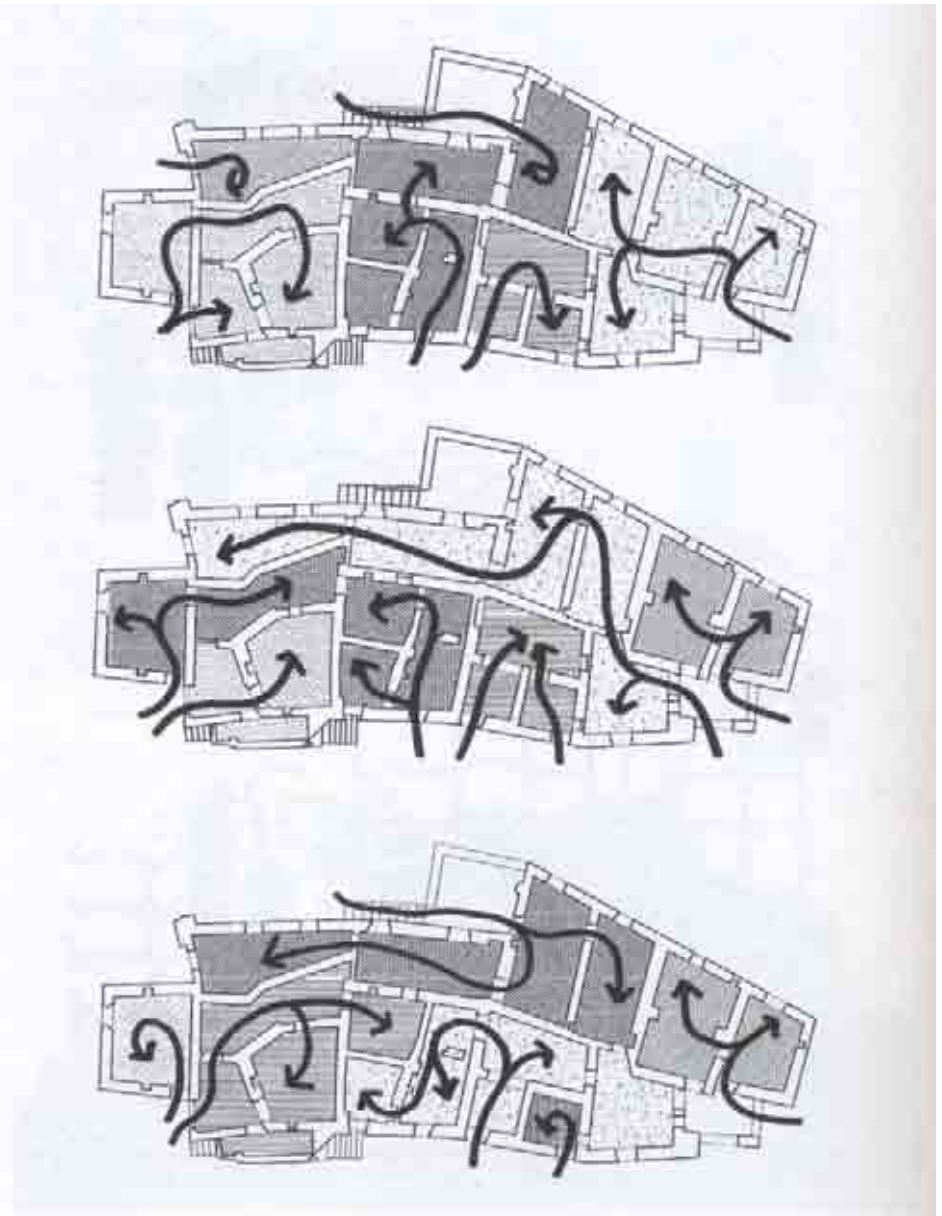
Giancarlo De Carlo, *Borgo medioevale telematico di Colletta di Castelbianco, Italia, 1999.*
Piante di studio: le abitazioni possono essere formate seguendo diverse direzioni spaziali

Giancarlo De Carlo, Borgo medioevale telematico di Colletta di Castelbianco, Italia, 1999.
Vista del borgo prima e dopo il recupero (foto di Andrea Martiradonna)

Giancarlo De Carlo, Borgo medioevale telematico di Colletta di Castelbianco, Italia, 1999.
Particolare del villaggio dopo il recupero e viste degli interni
(foto di Andrea Martiradonna)

S. Stefano di Sessanio (pages from a promotional booklet)

SANTO STEFANO
REVIVING HISTORY AND RESTORING HERITAGE.

OUR FOUNDING PHILOSOPHY

The medieval hill town of Santo Stefano has a noble and well-defined heritage - its architecture is extraordinary. Our main goal in conserving the town is to retain its soul; at every opportunity we have sought to preserve the historic character of the buildings. And where a modern lifestyle demands changes, we have chosen solutions that are sympathetic to the building's design and structure.

The signature style of our conservation work is the use of reclaimed architectural materials.   We find period pieces that substitute for originals, or we use recycled historic resources to restructure the fixtures and fittings.   Whenever we adapt the function of furniture or use reclaimed materials, we integrate them into the fabric of the restoration to reflect the building and its style.

The medieval hill towns of the mountains of Abruzzo have an intangible, poetic quality. The interiors of the buildings, with their peasant origins, were built with a poverty of materials, but a wealth of soul. They offer a dignified welcome - typical of rural cultures where the hearth and home are full of life.

In conserving Santo Stefano, we have made sure that the building retains its essence - the welcoming simplicity which characterises the region and its landscape. And by conserving the simple furnishings - alongside 21st century comforts - we have avoided the "rustification" of the interiors, so often found in countryside restorations.

We don't want Santo Stefano to be a museum, an exhibition, or a medieval film set. But we do want to retain the identity of the town, with its expressive and seductive meaning. We want to recall its deep ancestral roots and the spirit of the people of the mountains.

The most complex aspect of this type of work is protecting the landscape. It is vital to prohibit the construction of new buildings in and around the village. This is the only way we can secure the relationship between the ancient hamlet and its surrounding countryside.
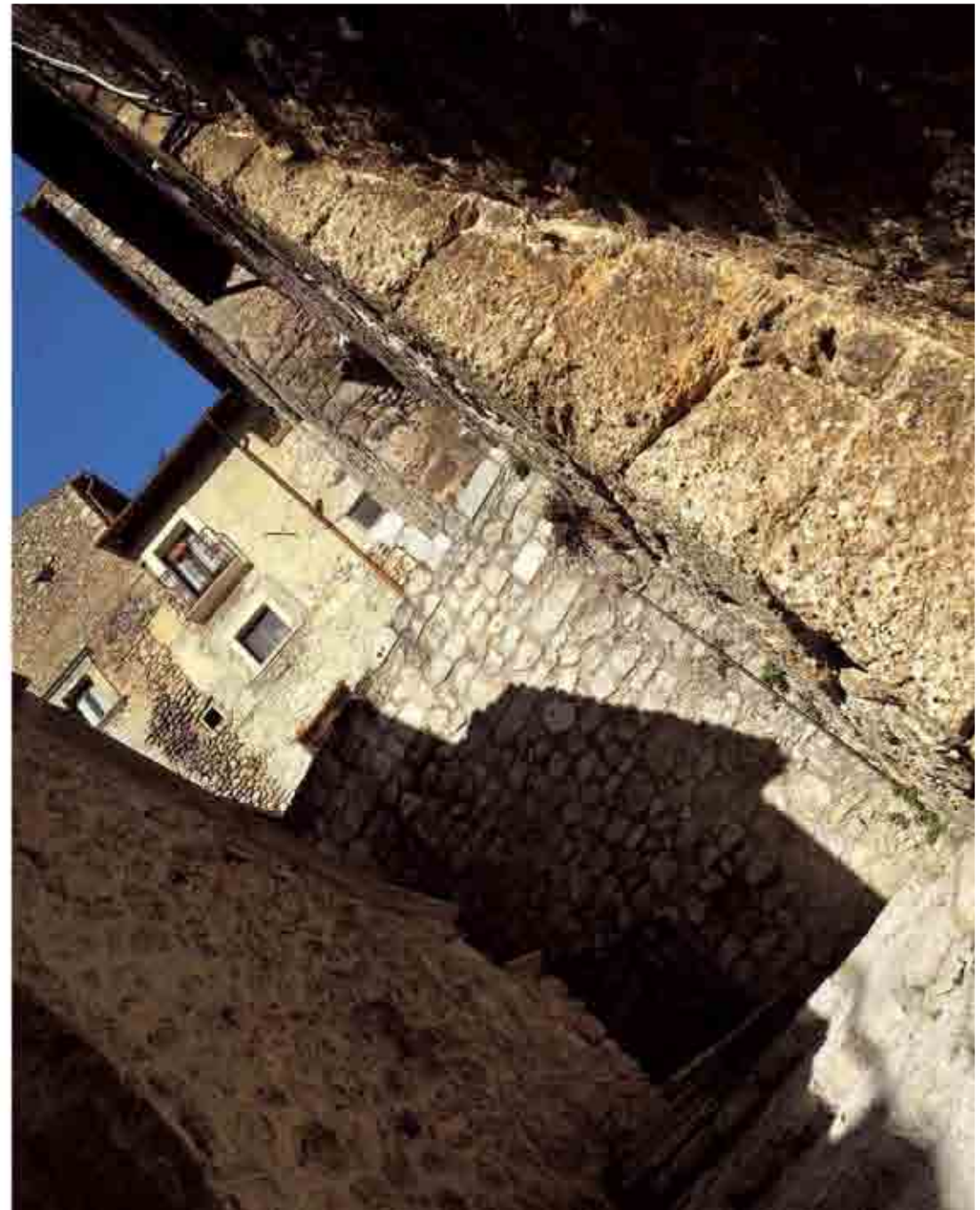
We believe that by protecting the landscape, we promote both the economic and historic value of these areas.

But there is no legislation in Italy to preserve the world-famous hill towns and villages. Sadly, in southern Italy, most historical hill towns that have been transformed into tourist facilities have been blighted by intrusive and inappropriate cement buildings, sometimes dressed up as Swiss style chalets.

Santo Stefano offers a different vision. A cultural project with a viable economic plan for the town, and a unique and comprehensive conservation programme for its buildings. It is the first example in the post war period of a classic hill town in this part of Italy finding a new and sustainable identity.

Our plan offers far more scope for renewal than tourist developments made up of buildings that pay no heed to the age-old relationship between the urban and rural landscape. Our mission is the protection of the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean mountains.

LIVING IN
SANTO STEFANO DI SESSANIO

The company's main objective is to preserve the heritage of the Apennine Mountains. Much of our work takes place inside the national parks, and focuses on historic hamlets that were built during the middle ages. Paradoxically the poverty of Southern Italy has been the villages' saviour - leaving the rural habitations untouched by urbanisation - though they were frequently abandoned to the elements.

Our goal is the preservation and revitalisation of these villages. We strive to maintain the original dimensions, style and context of the villages, using reclaimed architectural materials and traditional fixtures and fittings. We rely on the local authorities to impose a total ban on new construction.
Unfortunately, during the last half century, the landscape of southern Europe has been marred by unsympathetic and shoddy architectural development around some historic villages. We believe that the agenda for the hill town needs to move away from this cement-block development to a high quality conservation plan for the territory.

Our main inspiration comes from the conviction that the value of these remote hill top villages in the Apennines comes from their setting against the outstanding surrounding countryside.

Some of the buildings in Santo Stefano form part of a renowned Albergo Diffuso. (A hotel where rooms are spread throughout the medieval village). Other properties have been restored to be sold as private homes.

We pride ourselves on a professional and friendly style of management. In accordance with the Realitalia business model, people who buy our homes can take advantage of the hotel facilities such as the restaurant and bar, as well as activities organized by the Albergo Diffuso.

The Albergo Diffuso offers facilities to people who buy our homes in Santo Stefano. Options include concierge assistance such as secretarial services, internet connection, fax and scanners. We can take care of repairs and building works to the properties, and provide a daily housekeeping services such as cleaning and laundry, provision of a welcome basket, shopping delivery and dinner served in your home.

Should owners wish, your private home can be let as part of the Albergo Diffuso.

Craco "ghost village"

Gibellina, Cretto Burri

Colle Val d'Elsa

Atelier
Jean
Nouvel

Barberino V.E.   FIRENZE

Castellina in
Chianti

Poggibonsi

Staggia

San Gimignano

Colle V.E. sud

Colle Val
d'Elsa   SIENA

Monteriggioni

Lucciana

Volterra

Follonica

1. Ex area industriale della **Fabbrichina**

2. Impianto risalita **Il Baluardo**, inaugurato nel 2006, per facilitare il collegamento pedonale tra Colle Alta e Colle Bassa

3. **Piazza Arnolfo**, progetto di riqualificazione che vede il contributo di architetti e artisti di fama internazionale

4. **Ex scalo merci**, con un nuovo edificio a destinazione direzionale e residenziale, caratterizzato da spazi vetrati e terrazzi/giardino

5. **Area industriale Stivercoop**, oggetto del programma integrato di intervento "Riqualificare Colle Bassa", con destinazione residenziale e commerciale

6. **Ex Ospedale San Lorenzo** in Colle Alta, destinato ad un uso residenziale, commerciale, direzionale e turistico

7. La rinascimentale **Porta Nuova**, restaurata per ospitare attività di ristorazione e un parcheggio

——— Perimetro centro commerciale naturale

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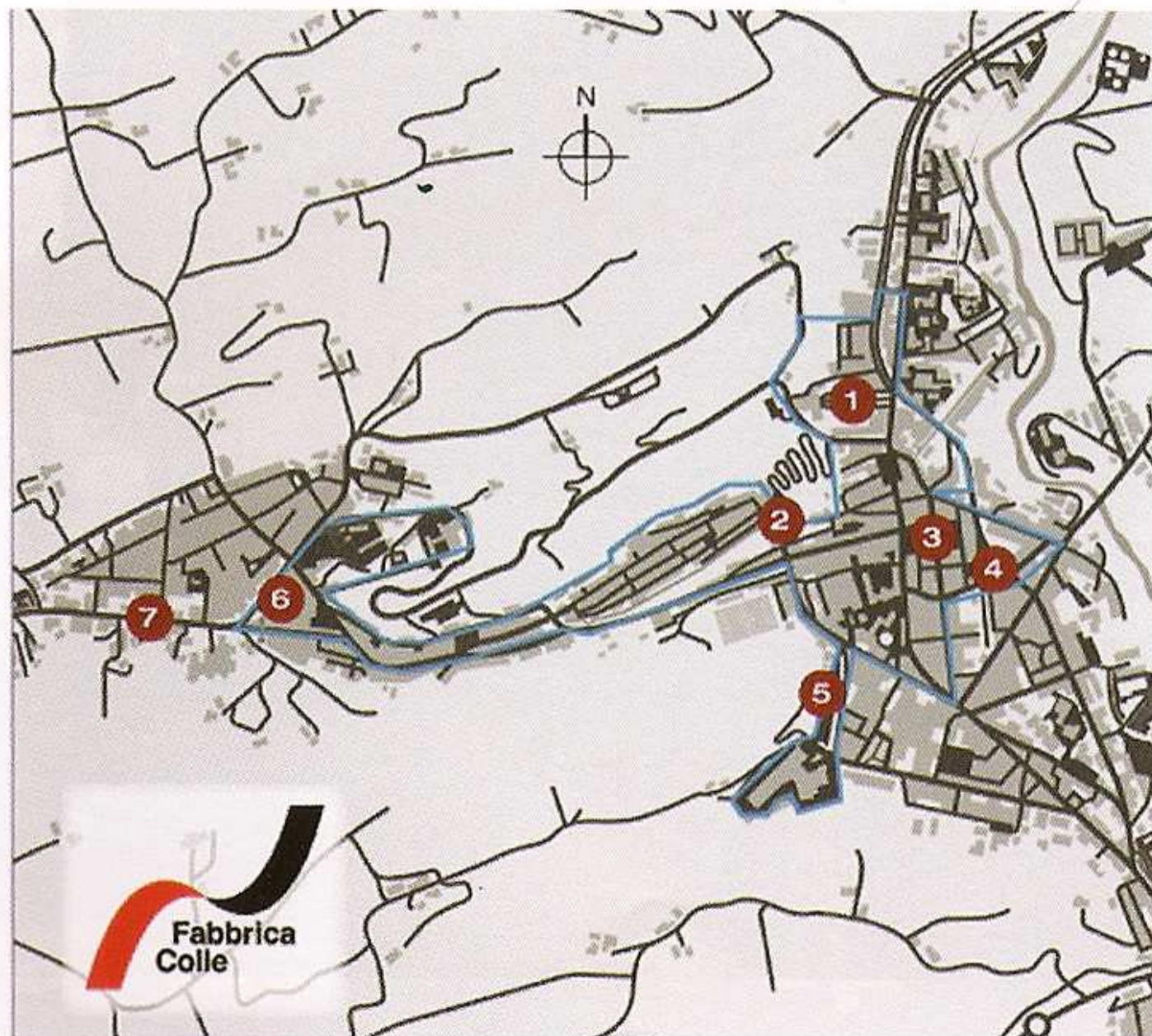
Fabbrica Colle

Colle Alta

Il fiume Elsa tra l'abitato

Via delle Romite, Colle Alta

Le viuzze nella parte alta del colle
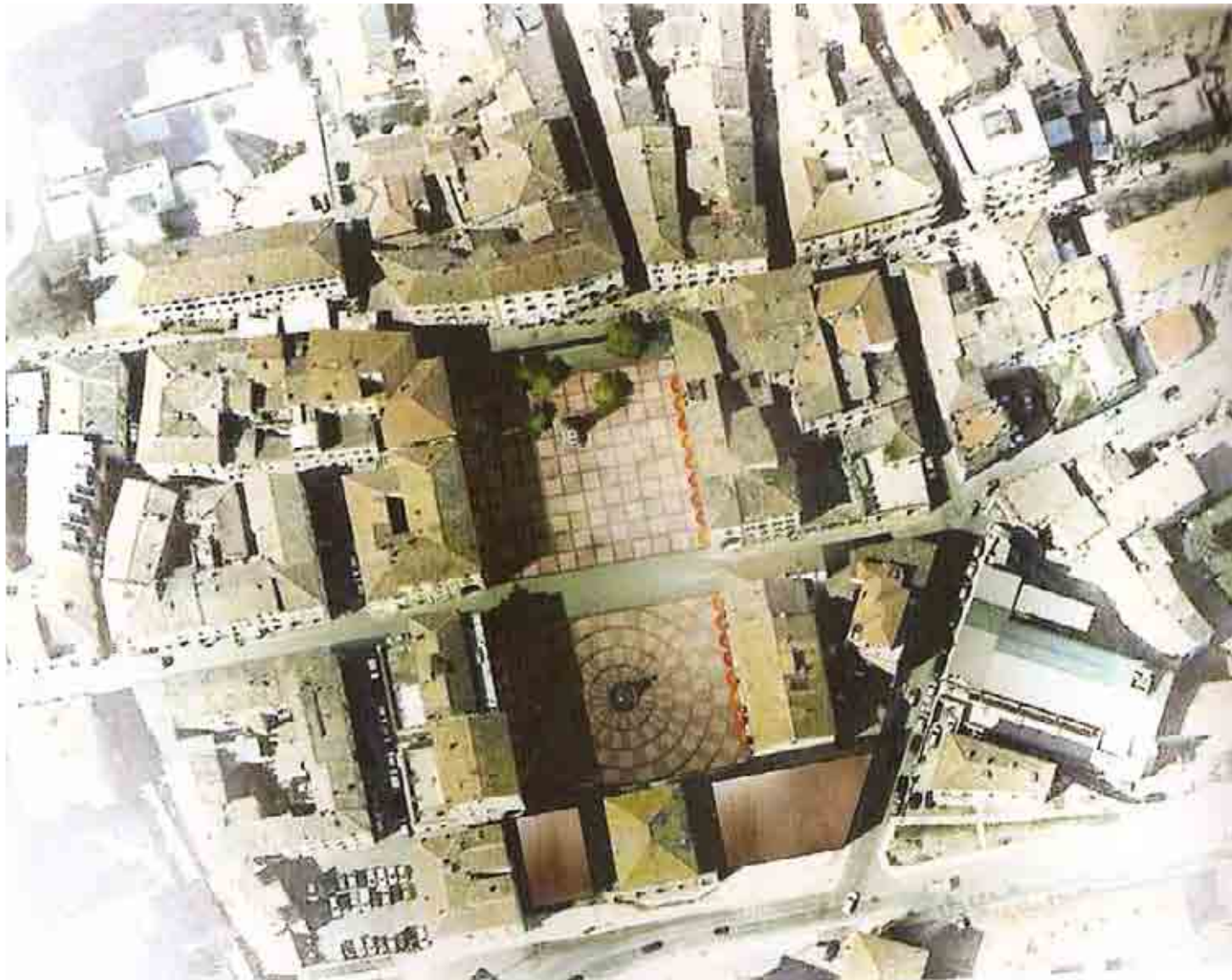
La piazza è divisa in tre parti: una con riquadri in marmo bianco e nero, una con pavimentazione radiale e un attraversamento carrabile centrale

Le tende di protezione solare proposte nei portici dall'artista francese Bertrand Lavier in 33 gradazioni del colore arancione; di notte ogni tenda darà l'idea di una grande lanterna