

# Newly founded Italian Cities of the Thirties

## Ideologies, Theories and Technical achievements\*

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**Abstract:** Although the new cities are to be considered a course against the current in modern culture in the twentieth century, they delineate an original significance that, in fact, belongs to the contemporary, because it deals with an unresolved problem: the methodological continuity between town planning and architecture. The new cities founded in Italy in the thirties, and in particular those of the Agro Pontino, make this antithesis emerge, and therefore they have often returned, in these last decades, to the center of the debate. And this not only for a historical research that studied an experimental sample not yet well investigated, but above all for a question related to the way of building the city. Here, this is precisely the problem: how do you build a city? In Italy there are, in those years, many ways of responding to this question. However, two are the most obvious poles. On one side are the planners, on the other, the architects. In between there is a keyword launched from Mussolini, taken by Giuseppe Bottai, taken over by many urban planners and many architects: 'disurbanamento'. Town planners are trying to find an autonomous discipline that moves town design (edilizia cittadina) – close to Gustavo Giovannoni's ideas – from an intuitive discipline to a real scientific subject, with procedures, methods, especially with a scalar of intervention, proportionate to the different geographical entities.

**Key words:** Agro Pontino, disurbanamento, Alberto Calza Bini, Gustavo Giovannoni, Virgilio Testa.

### *The 'disurbanamento' (disurbanism) theory, a minority culture*

«The stone colossus 'Cosmopolis' stands at the end of the life's course of every great culture. The Culture-man whom the land has spiritually formed is seized and possessed by his own creation, the City, and is made into its creature, its executive organ, and finally its victim. [...] the country bore the country-town and nourished it with her best blood. Now the giant city sucks the country dry, insatiably, and incessantly

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demanding and devouring fresh streams of men, till it wearies and dies in the midst of an almost uninhabited waste of country».<sup>2</sup> These are two sentences from chapter *The Soul and the City* in *The Decline of the West* by Oswald Spengler, written in 1918 in which many caught the tragic prophecy of an epochal crisis destined to influence many strands of the culture of the right, and which Mussolini considered a key text. In it, in fact, a thesis was outlined that offered a profound critique of the hated bourgeois city, but that – without using the categories of class struggle that belong to socialist thought, rather reconstructing the development of the modern world by turning to a kind of ‘cosmic culture’ based on racial categories – became a congenial tool for fascist ideology, understood as a criticism to capitalism from the right. In line with these theories, fascism wanted to attribute a highly political value to city planning and envisaging<sup>3</sup> that this discipline would be able to overturn the causes of that epochal decline, if only it set itself the goal of fighting the same phenomenon of urbanization, or ‘metropolism’, as it was called then. The ‘totalitarian urbanism’ could have even become the instrument of a national plan to station around the country settlements and productive facilities according to a model that replaced concentration, ‘inflation of the city’.

Mussolini was also convinced that the basis of a policy of power – such as the one that the regime intended – should rest on a significant population growth, while also Italy was then heading toward the European model of a substantial stasis in population size, particularly observable in large cities.<sup>4</sup> The antidote had to be, therefore, to ‘ruralize Italy’, because, while the urbanization due to the industrial revolution was seen as the main cause of the progressive sterility of the population, the return to earth would favor its increase once more. The national settlement plan, return to the land, population growth, thus became the reference points of urban planning as a politico-technical discipline useful in the implementation of programs of ‘totalitarian national farm’.

2. Cfr. SPENGLER 1981 (1918), pp. 793-796. Regarding the influence of Spengler’s theories on the foundation of the new city, cf. MARIANI 1976, pp. 73-86.

3. The importance attributed by Mussolini to a plan for land occupation, administration and control, summarized in the slogan ‘sfollare le città’ (evacuate the cities) was highlighted by Giorgio Ciucci with reference to the so-called ‘Discorso del Ascensione’ (Ascension Speech) of 1926 as the basic text for fascist reorganization policy, including urbanism, for the country. Cfr. CIUCCI 1982, pp. 278-285, or CIUCCI 1989, pp. 24-29; see also SICA 1978, pp. 323-520.

4. Cfr. MUSSOLINI 1928, also in SICA 1980, pp. 512-515.

This hypothesis, however, would never become the dominant cultural tendency. Others were, then, the main applications of urban planners: urban planning of large and medium cities, as well as the modernization and restructuring of their business centers. Themes which European urban planning, especially the Austrian-German tendency, provided already proven theoretical and planning tools and to which both the older as well as the younger generation were devoting their energies. There was, finally, an exception, this time confessed, indeed emphasized by the regime itself: Rome. If, in fact, the urban problems were always defined at the political level, then the power policy was to be translated – ever since 1925, but especially after the declaration of the Empire in 1936 – in the project of a Rome great capital of Italy and of the world. Rome, therefore, had to grow and not decrement, it had to rely on the strength of numbers.<sup>5</sup> Hence the projects and realization of the new *Forma Urbis* of Imperial Rome, almost all located along the Flaminia-Appia North-South axis and implemented a total recovery of the archaeological image.

It could even be argued that, in the thirties, various urban cultures coexisted, aligned with the various models delineated within Fascist Italy: the restructuring of heavy industry and autarky; the enhancement of the emerging middle classes, and the revival of the rural population; modern technocracy and rooting the new desire to conquer in the mythology of history. Giuseppe Bottai himself recognizes, at the opening of the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of Urban Planning in 1937 – that is, when for almost a decade the reclamation of the Pontine plains and the founding of the first ‘new cities’ had been underway – that the ‘ruralistic’ hypothesis had not had the general acceptance by planners. Bottai attributed this diffused sense of distrust to a “lack of doctrinal-political clarification”. City planning, in his view, had been elaborated disproportionate in excess, because the planners had been working with ‘catchy etymologies’, resulting in “an incorrect relationship between urban construction and rural life of the regime”. The words urban planning, in final analysis, were derived from *urbs* and planning was understood as “the science of city enlargement”. Urbanistics, however, had to function as a real ‘antidote’ to urbanization.

5. Cfr. MUSSOLINI, 1926, anticipating the themes of future demolitions, of the “new city that will arise in the ring around the ancient one”, as well as the direction of development towards the sea in accordance a path “to be the longest and widest in the world”.

It had, rather, the task of building an entirely new relationship between city and country. More than *urbs*, one had to refer to *civitas*, the community, so that urbanistics became “population science, its forms of aggregation, taking into account environmental conditions, the climate and the economy”. With that, urban planning ended up coinciding strictly with politics; only in this sense were *urbs* and *polis* the etymological roots of the one and the other. Both urban planning that politics, therefore, had to tend toward regulating and governing the city. But the general direction of fascism, concluded Bottai, was against urbanism, of course, with the one exception of Rome.<sup>6</sup>

With all that, the ‘disurbamento’ (disurbanism) theory was, without a doubt, the most original contribution of Italian culture in that period. Although for contradictory reasons – ruralism<sup>7</sup> and vanguard industry, experimentalism and tradition, the peace of agricultural villages and the war of colonial cities – albeit with fragmentary interventions – at the outbreak of World War II many projects remained unimplemented and many projects were interrupted – it managed to create a regional planning model that, in some respects, would continue to foster urban and architectural research even after the war. The meanings of this theory, however, are many. We may here indicate only the most interesting ones.

A first version is the ‘piano territoriale’ (territorial plan) formulated in 1933 by Virgilio Testa, an urban planner with technical training, legislation expert on the subject in the major European and American nations. After studying the project of a linear city between Rome and Ostia in 1928, Testa writes an interesting article on regional plans, the urgency of which is for him linked to as the many questions raised by modern urban planning: the link between the zoning plans and land affected by them, the regime of land use and the laws of eminent domain,

6. BOTTAI 1940.

7. The ‘ruralism’ strand also follows, parallel to urban planning, a consistent architectural research, which can in turn be considered a version of an interest in minor architecture and popular recurrence in many critical Italian contributions of the 20s and 30s. The problem is to find the historical roots of the ‘modern’ or ‘rational’ architecture. Roots that Guido Calza and Italo Gismondi identified in the archaeological remains of the houses in Ostia, which Giuseppe Capponi and Plinio Marconi identified in Mediterranean and Capri constructions and, lastly, Giuseppe Pagano theorise as transitional from functional elements of proper rural construction to a ‘rational’ architecture. It will be up to Dagoberto Ortensi to give a final systematic view of the question, which takes into account the ideological principles of the regime and of the planning impact of this research. Cfr. CALZA 1923, pp. 3-18; I. GISMONDI 19923, pp. 49-63; MAIURI 1924, pp. 392-409; GRIFFINI 1925, pp. 291-298; CAPPONI, CIPRIANI 1927, pp. 481-494; PANE 1928, pp. 529-543; CAPPONI 1929, pp. 177-188; MARCONI 1929, pp. 27-44; PAGANO 1935 (2); PAGANO-DANIEL 1936; OTENSI 1943.

protection of the landscape, the improvement of traffic, installation and operation of public utilities and zoning. He too, moreover, shares the ‘totalitarian urbanistics’ theorized in political settings, when he writes: «The township development plans must constitute the chain mail of the regional plan and, in turn, regional plans represent the fabric of the plan, even ideal, embracing the entire territory of the State».<sup>8</sup> This conception of the state, all-pervading and in which collective responsibility and individual autonomy meld, coincides perfectly with the key statements in the philosophy of Giovanni Gentile. Alberto Calza-Bini takes up these themes and define the “territorial plan as the real instrument of the Fascist politics of disurbanism”,<sup>9</sup> linking this strategy to the issue of land reclamation, the demographic question, to unemployment and to autarky. Once affirmed, the concept of territorial plans, argued Calza-Bini, would finally render available “a tool of harmonious discipline, with which the aims the Regime has set itself may be achieved: removal of unemployed from the major city centers, the equitable distribution of productive work throughout the national territory, the enhancement and strengthening of natural land resources.”<sup>10</sup> Evidently, the “return to the land” was confirmed as the underlying ideology of the entire reasoning.

A second version of the theory of ‘disurbanism’ is related to the establishment of new centers, especially in areas of total land reclamation. This is an important chapter because, although it applies to a regressive scope such as that of ‘totalitarian ruralization’, it became an experimental terrain for some of the most beautiful achievements of young Italian architects and urban planners. We have always spoken of these new centers as the ‘new cities’. But Luigi Piccinato, presenting the plan of Sabaudia in 1934, calls them ‘non-city’, as a tribute to the theories of the ‘disurbanism’. ‘Non-city’ in as much as mere centers of services for the agricultural reclamation area. In fact, they now constituted a new model, which, from a simple trend in *urban decentralization* – as, according to Piccinato, prearranged in Ebenezer Howard’s projects, in Arturo Soria Y Mata’s linear city, in British regional and agricultural plans, in the German Siedlungen, as well as in industrial cities like Autostroy in the Soviet Union – became “the first milestone of a new urban life.” The new

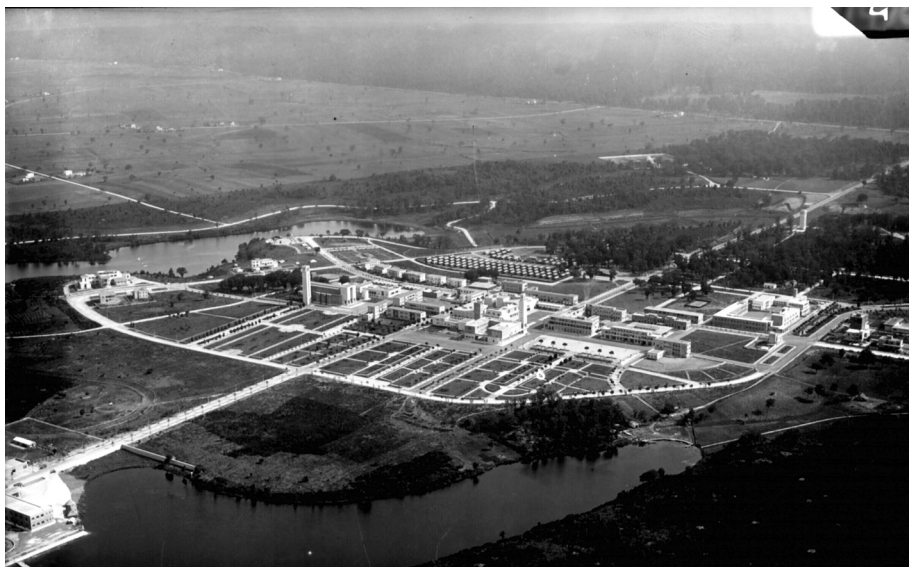
8. Cfr. TESTA 1933, pp. 445-457.

9. CALZA-BINI 1941 (1), p. 3.

10. *Ibidem*.



1. Oriolo Frezzotti, Littoria, Bonifica Agro Pontino, 1932, veduta aerea, Foto Agenzia Vitullo, 58/35-76 Roma.



2. Gino Cancellotti, Eugenio Montuori, Luigi Piccinato, Alfredo Scalpelli, Sabaudia, Bonifica Agro Pontino, 1934, foto aerea, s.d., Stato Maggiore Aeronautica, n. cat. 21790.





3. Borgo Montello, Littoria, Bonifica Agro Pontino, 1935, I.C.C.D., concessione n. 172, del 17-2-1964, negativo n. 17174.



4. Oriolo Frezzotti, Pontinia, Bonifica Agro Pontino, 1935, Stato Maggiore Aeronautica, ripresa del novembre 1939, n. cat. 45948.

model for the Pontine plan, completely original, overturned the nineteenth-century economic mechanism, where the country had always produced for the city (of the bourgeois city). “The new non-cities of Littoria and Sabaudia,” he in fact asserted “are absolutely not imaginable outside the agricultural organization [...] which they serve”.<sup>11</sup> This broad dimension is articulated, by Piccinato, in an operating diagram that affects the entire Pontine plain up to Rome. Four different scales may be identified: that of the capital, with the ONC headquarters, that of the rural town – in this case Sabaudia – that of the network of villages with the Azienda Agraria, which the homesteads refer to. The village, with services for farm work, the pharmacy, the company store, the post office and a church, is thus an ‘elementary urban cell’, while trade, exchange, political and administrative life take place in the municipal center. This, Piccinato specifies, «explains the apparent disproportion between the number of public buildings and the number of homes that, along with them, make up the true urban aggregate: since, we can never repeat enough, Sabaudia, as a whole, must be looked upon as strongly decentralized building complex system which depends on a large central district».

A reasoning that adheres to the statements of ‘disurbanism’ is also that of the young Milanese architects also published in 1934 in “Quadrante.” In *La Città Corporativa* (The Corporate City) by Gianluigi Banfi and Ludovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, in fact, we read that “the corporate State will assign each city a precise location and a specific task”. The urban plans for the individual cities emanate from a national plan, “so it is the State which assigns tasks to the city and to the country”.<sup>12</sup> What is unique is that this thesis wants to bring together vanguard elaborations, the tradition of romanitas and fascist thought. The act of founding a city, therefore, is understood as the formulation of an abstract, regular, diagram which does depend on the nature of the land, for it can always be adapted, according to the Hippodamian or Roman castrum urban planning model. And this regular scheme becomes, in

11. Cfr. PICCINATO 1934, pp. 87-102. It is interesting to note that Luigi Piccinato, in this text, aligns the model of Italian ‘disurbanism’ to Wright’s criticism of the big city. It is not surprising, then, to note that – almost 25 years apart –, Broadacre City, described by Wright as “the real city for man,” was also proposed by its author with the slogan: “the city is transformed into a nation”. Albeit with tones with which authoritarianism replaces democracy, even our urban planners spoke of the city as the articulation of the national territory, reflecting the fact that the discipline conserves its autonomy from politics to which refers.

12. BANFI-BARBIANO BELGIOJOSO 1934.



its urbanistic application, the expression of a hierarchically organized collectivity. This is a theoretical choice which, unlike the interests of Piccinato, goes against any medievalism – cities with tortuous lanes – and against nineteenth-century romanticism – Camillo Sitte’s aesthetic theories revaluating ancient centers – because it argued that the ‘medieval disorder’ means absence of the State, while the strong policy of the corporate State organizes order by the regularity of the plan, as the Roman state had done with its *cardo-decumanus* grid city. Edoardo Persico will brand ‘corporate planning’ harshly. He will say that it was nothing but a “improvisation empty ideologies” not resting on any concrete experience nor on social and cultural maturity of a people building the nation and organizing the State.<sup>13</sup> Even he, however, uses fascist keywords.

The antimedievalism would lead Banfi, Peressutti and Rogers to develop – for the direction of Adriano Olivetti as part of the Planning for Val d’Aosta – an extremely elegant plan for the city of Aosta, which razes the medieval grid center, bring to light the regular Roman traces: one way to rebuild the city according to the criteria of ‘corporate planning’.<sup>14</sup>

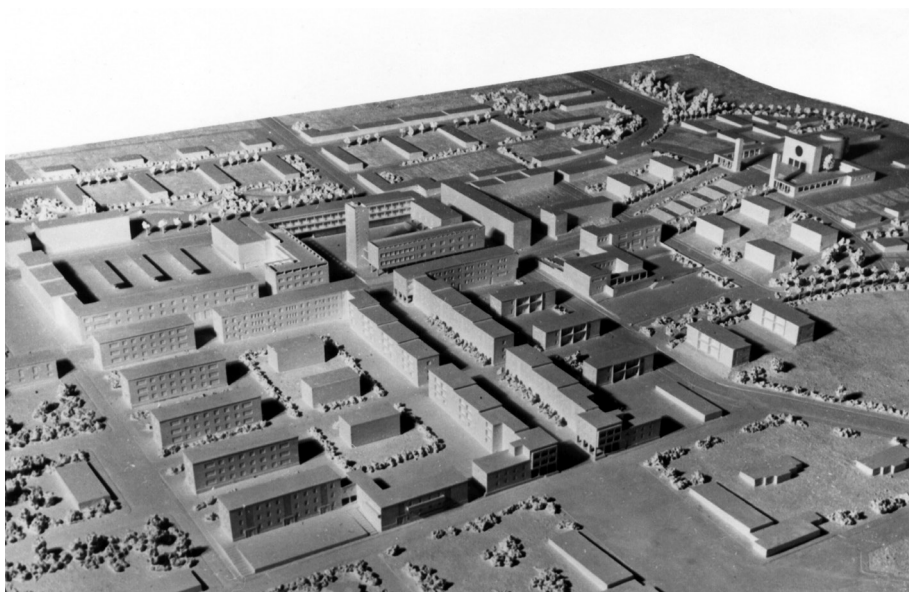
In any case, resistance to the ‘disurbanism’ theories is very strong. Gustavo Giovannoni himself – who will often deal with the question and come to support those theories<sup>15</sup> when he feels they are in harmony with his idea of the ‘diradamento’ (thinning). He will speak of “a provident disurbanization program by the regime” – but he harbors more than a few reservations with respect to those who want to see the program as the only strategy. In his evaluation of the Italian city planning of 1934, in fact, the theme of the big city re-emerges. That is, he comes to define urban planning as the discipline, the technique, the art that leads to the «great theme of rational arrangement and suitable expansion in newness of life of our cities».<sup>16</sup> Actually, he clarifies his thinking when he claims «it is well true that among its firmest postulates Fascism has the gradual return of the people to the land and so to the disurbanization of the big centers,

13. Cfr. PERSICO 1934.

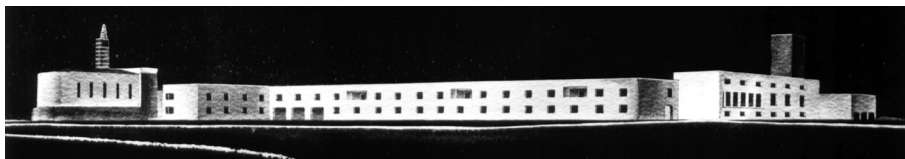
14. Belgiojoso, at the end of the 70s, will say that the plan was dictated by a kind of ‘iconoclastic radicalism’ and explain so sincerely and convincingly how the consent granted to fascism by young modernist architects was not only due to naivety or opportunism, but due to the fact that, for example, the reclamation plans, with respect to other initiatives considered more ‘rhetorical’ like “the urban renewal interventions or the construction of enormous courtroom buildings [...] appeared at that time manifestly positive”. Cfr. DE SETA 1979, pp. 18-28/50-51.

15. Cfr. GIOVANNONI 1936.

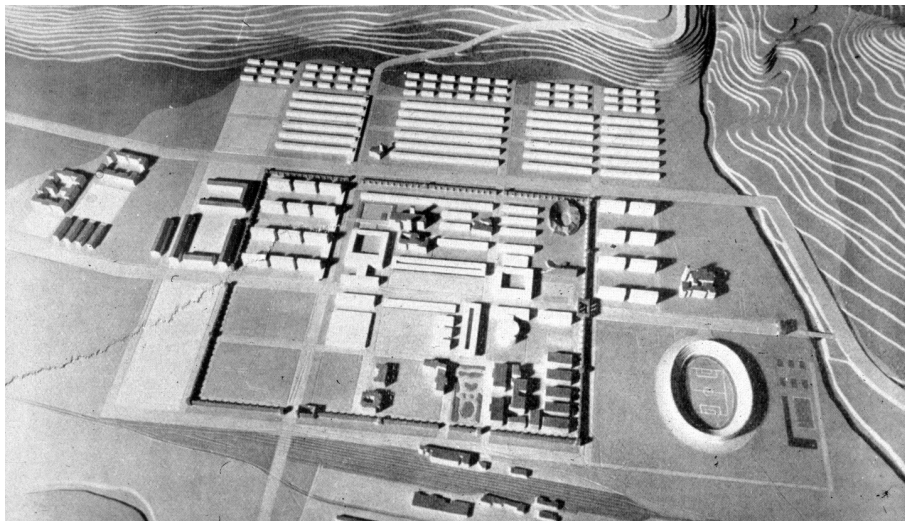
16. Cfr. GIOVANNONI 1934, pp. 3-9.



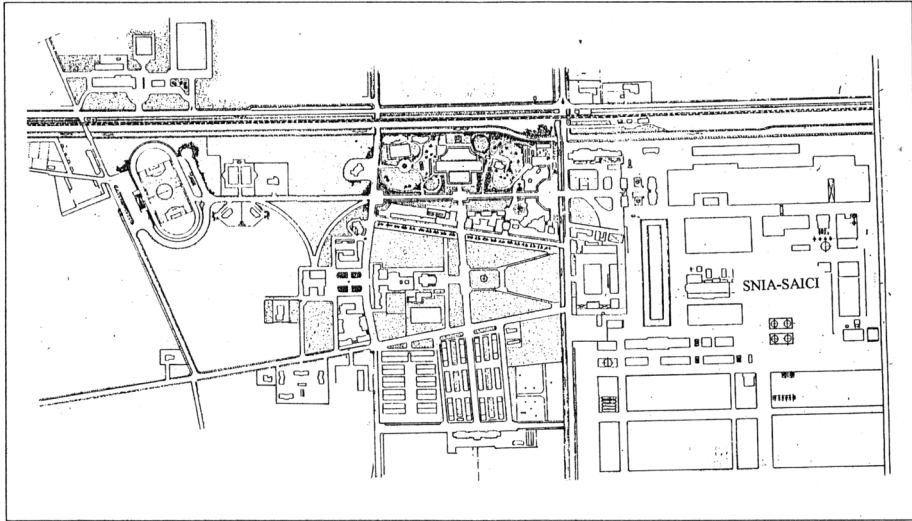
5. Giorgio Calza Bini, Gino Cancellotti, Giuseppe Nicolosi, *Model of Guidonia, Roma, 1935-1937*, Archivio Giorgio Calza Bini.



6. Giorgio Calza Bini, *Competition drawing for Aprilia, 1937*, Archivio Giorgio Calza Bini



7. Gian Luigi Banfi, Enrico Peressutti, Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *Plan of Aosta, 1937*, published in «Architettura», November 1937.



Torviscosa - 1937 (arch. G. De Min)

8. Giuseppe De Min, Torviscosa (Veneto), 1937-1938.



9. Giuseppe De Min, Torviscosa (Veneto), 1937-1938, the cellulose factory.

but it is also true that it does not subordinate to the remote aspirations contingent reality, represented for now by cities».<sup>17</sup> Marcello Piacentini seems to share similar concern who offers some fundamental criticisms of the projects submitted in the competition for Aprilia, where he points out how the drafting of a 'regional plan' could have implied a different distribution of urban centers. He then underlines, if anything, the importance of strengthening Littoria as a 'true city', while instead he thinks that it would have been better to avoid the 'centers of secondary importance' – such as Sabaudia and Aprilia – to move directly from the city to the farm.<sup>18</sup> Sabaudia, Guidonia and other 'new cities' will, if anything, for Piacentini, valid studies in architecture rather than urban planning. Another face of Italian city planning, interested in the relationship with modern culture rather than in theories of 'disurbanism', is supported by representatives from the Fourth CIAM, where the criteria of the 'functional city' would be formulated. Gino Pollini, in fact, explains how this approach will help deal in the real case of cities, considered in the light of "the fundamental postulates of contemporary urbanism", and hopes that things will pass as soon as possible from the theoretical level to legislation, with programs that will permit full implementation. But if it is true that the CIAM analysis begins with the study of existing cities, it is also true that on that occasion the link between the city and the territory is evidenced, so much so that one can glimpse the premises of the definition, even geographical, that Le Corbusier will later give of the 'three human settlements'; a model, the latter, which incorporates within itself, albeit in a background of radical technical and industrial progress, many 'deurbanists' motifs developed in Europe in the 20s. So, in that CIAM assembly Italy was present with the study of two cities, one of which, a new foundation: Como and Littoria.<sup>19</sup>

Lastly, it is necessary to point out how the journal "Urbanistica" does not feel the need to publish in 1937, while reporting the Exhibition of Urban Plans, along with the plans of large and medium cities, even the images of 'new cities'. Vincenzo Civico even maintains that, since at the Roman Exhibition – at the same time as the 1st Congress of Urban Planning to which was in fact dedicated an entire section on 'rural urbanism' – the 'new cities' had been fully presented, they had become "too familiar

17. *Ibidem*.

18. Cfr. PIACENTINI 1936, pp. 193-212.

19. POLLINI 1934, pp. 116-183.



to require broad display". The newly founded cities, therefore, are considered a separate chapter in Italian city planning; a chapter that is difficult to consider together with the planning of large cities and at times even with the idea of the territorial plan itself.<sup>20</sup> The Planning Law of 1942, which will lead to this debate fully reflects this contradiction.<sup>21</sup>

*The techniques of founding the 'new city'*

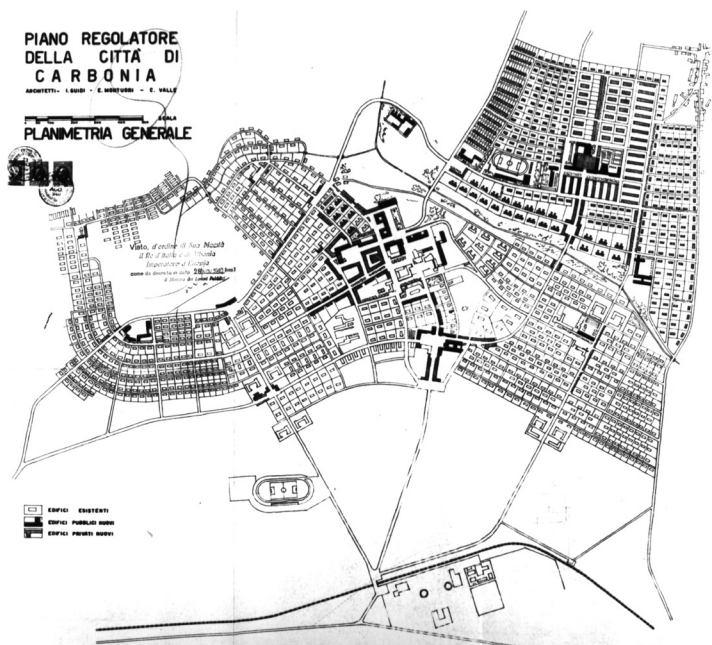
If the theories of 'disurbanism' and the foundation of the 'new cities' remain a marginal chapter of Italian urban planning and architecture between the two wars, it may be interesting to reconstruct – in an imaginary map – the fragments achieved from that strategy. Not so much to demonstrate the clarity and uniformity, but rather because the comparison of the 'fragments' produced explains the complexities and the internal structure of that hypothesis; and also explains that its implementation was only in exceptional situations and out of the ordinary.

First and foremost they are always acts of transformations in circumscribed areas with already advanced criteria in the debate on territorial plans and their legal constraints. According to Alberto Calza-Bini, for example, territorial plans were to coordinate, within a national framework, the development of the territory according to 'delimited areas'. He added that the delimitation should disregard administrative districts, or the "region, of which fascism, for a superior concept of rational unity, has long since rendered justice"; it should instead be

20. The marginality of the issue of the newly founded cities with respect to the urban debate is reiterated, in the early 40s, by Giovanni Michelucci who dedicates to the theme of the city a series of interesting articles in the magazine "Stile". "We believe," he writes in the first of these articles, "that we should not look at the old city and the plans of adaptation which refer to them, nor indeed are the new small rural and mining towns important to us that, at least for now, have only the role of big villages and being inhabited almost entirely by a single class of workers, do not require the immediate measures we are dealing with. Relevant to the discussion, however, are the urban plans that have arranged and have available large suburban nuclei, which in size and importance may be considered real cities." Cf. MICHELUCCI 1942 (1), pp. 6-7; MICHELUCCI 1942 (2), pp. 3-5; MICHELUCCI 1943 (1), pp. 2-3; MICHELUCCI 1943 (2), pp. 2-5; MICHELUCCI 1943 (3), pp. 3-4.

21. "To oblige by law almost every city to compile an urban Master Plan - which is equivalent to conceiving the progressive enlargement of the cities - could have given me doubt that this was done in open contrast with the social need to evacuate the city. If a city must not grow, but rather be less populated what need has it for an expansion plan?" And again "the greatest conquest is the creation of territorial plans [...], limitation of property, what then? Substituting the public law for private law? Precisely, and I think no law can be more just, more sacred than this". But, "this law presupposes an urban maturity of the entire Italian population and especially among town leaders: a maturity that is still - one must admit, is far off. Its application will therefore be difficult, hampered and painful because it involves many and high private interests." PIACENTINI 1942, pp. 272-273.

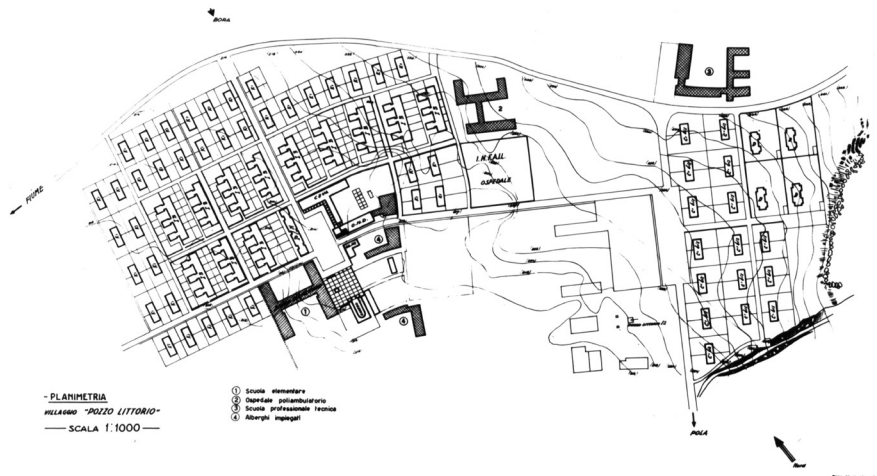




10. Ignazio Guidi, Cesare Valle, Carbonia Plan, mining zone of Iglesiasiente, Sardegna, 1938, A.C.S., ONC-Progetti.



11. Ignazio Guidi, Eugenio Montuori, Cesare Valle, The urban center of Carbonia, 1938, I.C.C.D., concessione n. 172, del 5-9-58.



*Ostia - villaggio di Pozzo Littorio - Planimetria.*

12. Eugenio Montuori, Planimetric view of Pozzo Littorio (Istria), 1939, Archivio Montuori.



13. Eugenio Montuori, Model of Pozzo Littorio (Istria), 1939, Archivio Montuori.

based on the “natural boundaries of a given area”: homogeneous and characterized by specific activities, be they industrial, geographical, landscape, tourist or other.<sup>22</sup> Well, the areas in those years in areas of radical transformation with the foundation of new centers have in fact features of this type: they are areas subject to reclamation,<sup>23</sup> areas of large estates subject to parcelization<sup>24</sup>, industrial or mining areas, with search is conducted for raw materials especially for the needs of the policy of autarky<sup>25</sup>. Reclaimed areas were actually distributed somewhat in all Italian regions<sup>26</sup>, but those in which the new law for

22. Cfr. CALZA-BINI 1941 (2), pp. 3-10.

23. It was a very succinct law which set the contribution of the State for “irrigation projects as well as land reclamation to be performed under contract, including projects of ‘sistemazione montana (mountain risk management) and of ‘trasformazione fondiaria’ (land transformation) in the public interest”, including roads and construction of aqueducts. It also provided for “the construction of rural boroughs”: not the city though, as that came only later - Official Gazette January 15, 1929, n. 12, pp. 325-330. A second decree, entitled New rules for land reclamation and signed by Vittorio Emanuele III, Mussolini, Acerbo, De Francis, Jung, Di Crollanza, was passed February 13, 1933, and contained a full 121 articles, the first of which defined the concept of ‘reclamation’: “land reclamation is carried out for purposes of public interest, by means of reclamation and land improvement. The reclamation projects are those carried out the basis of a general plan and coordinate activities with relevant hygienic, demographic, economic or social advantages, in areas containing lakes, ponds, marshes and wetlands, or consisting of mountainous terrain with hydrogeological risks, and forest, or by land extensively overused for serious physical or social reasons, and susceptible, once removed, to a radical transformation of the productive order. The land improvement is that are done for the benefit of one or more tracts regardless of general reclamation” [...]. The law also regards the quality of projects for the State, the classification of the territories in the reclamation areas of the first and second category, the obligation for reclamation, costs, subsidies, the relationship between state and consortia, property transfers, the migration of farm families, the expropriation procedures, the “construction and renovations of buildings or rural boroughs”, the draining systems, anti-malarial measures, relations with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, with the Office of Civil Engineers and the Ministry of Finance, the exemption for twenty years from property tax, and projects of land improvement. Even in this law, therefore, there is no mention of the construction of ‘new cities’ G.U. April 4, 1933, n. 79, pp. 889-932.

24. “With the law of January 2, 1940, the State constituted the Institute for the colonization of the Sicilian estates, assigning the task of technical and financial assistance to the owners in the project of transformation of the productive order and proceed directly to the colonization of the lands which had been acquired or in temporary possession. At the same time authorizing the expenditure of one billion lire, of which 400 million were for execution and maintenance, and delivery to the interested institutions, of public works in the reclaimed areas and 600 million for the granting of subsidies in projects of private competence or improvement land. The funds for public works were also meant to provide for the construction of rural centers that are an essential, if not predominant, aspect of reclamation”. CARBONARA 1941, p. 180.

25. Extensive search for minerals was initiated by the Direzione Generale del Industria del Ministero delle Corporazioni in the areas of Massa, Carrara and Lucca. Some for iron ore and manganese in the territories of Fivizzano and Apuania were carried out by FIAT, in February 1940. A.C.S., MIN. IND. COMM., *D.G. Miniere*, Serv. AMM.VI, B.6, f. 70.

26. In addition to the Pontine plains, reclamations were carried out from Alberese, near Ombrone; Coltano, in the Tombolo area; the Livorno-Pisa channel; to Isola Sacra, near Rome-Fiumicino; to Licola, north of the ancient Cuma along the Tyrrhenian coast; Sanluri between the Campidano of Cagliari and Oristano; the plains in Puglia in the province of Foggia and Lecce, in the Lower Volturno, in Trentino. To these we can add the reclamation carried out by other organizations in many Italian regions. Some we may recall are Maccarese, Lazio, Maremma Tuscany and the Veneto Cfr. *36 anni dell'Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti*

the 'complete reclamation' intertwined strictly with a broad program of founding new cities and rural towns are essentially three: the Agro pontino<sup>27</sup>, the Tavoliere delle Puglie (Table of the Apulias)<sup>28</sup> and Basso Volturno.<sup>29</sup> The large estate subject to reform was Sicilian, while the mining areas subject to similar initiatives were the Iglesiente in Sardinia,<sup>30</sup> the Massa Carrara<sup>31</sup> area and Istria.<sup>32</sup> The Veneto, near Udine, was, lastly, the territory chosen for the foundation of the only industrial city: Tor Viscosa.<sup>33</sup> It should be stressed that rural background was present in all these events; if this is obvious for the reclamation and areas parceled into farms, it is also found in the Sardinian coal-mining areas and Istria. Together with the work of extraction, for example, the miners of the Iglesiente could cultivate a small vegetable garden, while those involved in the industrial production of synthetic textile fibers of Torviscosa could count on integrating activities of agriculture-industry-cattle breeding. These are, therefore, extraordinary events, that entail specific activities: draining the marshes and the cultivation of reclaimed

1919/1955.

27. The Pontine marshes were altered by the foundation of a provincial capital, Littoria (1932-33) with 110 boroughs: Podgora (1927), Sabotino (1929), Grappa (1929), S. Michele (1929-31), Piave (1932), Isonzo (1932), Littoria Scalo (1933), Carso (1934-35), Borgo Montello (1935), Bainsizza (1935-36), Faiti (1935-36); 4 townships: Sabaudia (1933-34) with two boroughs: S. Donato (1929-33) and Borgo Vodice (1934); Pontina (1935); Aprilia (1937); Pomezia (1938). To these we can add Borgo Montenero (1938) in S. Felice Circeo municipal territory.

28. The Tavoliere delle Puglie affected by the foundation of Segezia (1939), Cervaro (1940), Daunilia (1942), Borgo Incoronata (1943), con le borgate di: Giardinetto (1939), Posta Vara (1940), Masseria Nuova (1940) and Masseria Cantone (1940) in the province of Foggia; and Borgata Piave in Lecce Province.

29. Basso Volturno was affected by the foundation of Borgo Appio (1939-44) and Borgo Domizio (1939-40).

30. The Iglesiente area was affected by the foundation of the towns Carbonia (1937) and Cortoghiana (1940-43), by the projects in Portoscuso (1940), and the boroughs of Baccu-Abu. Further north, near Alghero, Sardinia was affected by the reclamation project of the town of Mussolinia (1930) and Borghi di S. Ugroni, Linnas, Ponpongias e Torrevecchia, as well as the rural centers of Fertilia and Villaggio Giuriati.

31. The city of Apuania, which should have been located between Massa and Carrara, was never realized.

32. The company Società Anonima Carbonifera di Trieste had already shown interest in the coal basin that extended from Albona to eastern Istria. The mines supplied the coal ports, including that of Arsa, 1933, which became the second in Italy, after Genoa and just before Naples. In this basin Pozzo Littorio was founded (1939). Cfr. *ARSA* 1935, pp. 22-23.

33. In Torviscosa, built in ten months between 1937 and 1938, a book was recently dedicated that comprehensively explains the reasons for the founding of the city for the first time. Contrary to Olivetti model of the plane of the Val d'Aosta and anti-autarchic ideas of Riccardo Gualino who led the SNIA Viscosa until 1929, the city follows a program in which autarky becomes a precise reference point. In it, however, they confuse the ideas of rationalization of the production system through a capital reduction policy, low wages and low running costs with a technologically advanced industrial processes program. Equally original is the point of contact between residential housing, representative of the new center, deeply indebted to conventional types and the ideology of the borough, while highly suggestive is the towering size and somewhat futuristic pulp mill. Cfr. M. BORTOLOTTI, *Torviscosa, nascita di una città*, Udine 1988. Cfr. BORTOLOTTI 1988.



land; the fight against large estates, the production of cellulose autarkic using avant-garde techniques, the incentive for domestic production of coal. Activities which require substantial funding, exceptional managerial capacity and utilization of high-tech machinery. It may seem surprising that this situation, all the more predisposed to experimenting the manner of so-called 'totalitarian urbanism', was instead tackled using the institutions outside the State. To manage the reclamation Opera Nazionale dei Combattenti (National Veteran's Association);<sup>34</sup> for the estates a special institute of Ente di Colonizzazione del Latifondo Siciliano<sup>35</sup> was created; for coal towns the Azienda Carboni Italiani, in collaboration with IACP; while the case of Torviscosa was tackled by an agreement between the SNIA Viscosa directed by Franco Marinotti, who replaced Riccardo Gualino, and Società Anonima Agricola Industriale per la Produzione Italiana della Cellulosa. Evidently, this option contrasts with the totalitarian ideology of the state. But the creation of new institutions created for a specific purpose is pursued by the regime because it gave considerable advantages: ease of movement, in some cases avoiding the institutional controls and ensuring greater flexibility in the various financial, agricultural and industrial sectors; allowing easier experimenting with mixed production-management, public-private; and, finally, creating a network of loyal cadres to the regime itself.<sup>36</sup> This dualism between State and Authority would eventually cause many disagreements: between Mussolini and the Secretary of State, Enrico Serpieri; between

34. The Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti (ONC) was established in 1917 with large amounts of capital and the objective of establishing a large landholding domain from which the veterans through agricultural activity, would, as farmers, created the means to live. In 1922 the regime proceeded to expel all of the 'liberal' staff of the institute, modifying tasks and technical structures. Directed first by Valentino Orsolini Cencelli and then by Araldo di Crollanza, the ONC conducted extensive activities until 1955, focusing mainly on the urbanization of areas subject to reclamation. Cfr. 36 anni del Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti cit.; MARIANI, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-39; RIVA 1983.

35. The so-called 'assault on the latifundia' proclaimed by Mussolini in 1939 and formalized by the law cited, had as its aims: the division and reorganization of the land, the fight to an owner class accustomed to raking in the financial and agricultural resources of the farmers, resolving the problem of water, the expansion of communications and the protection of social life. The real transformation of large estates, however, was very restricted and open confrontation with the owners was carefully avoided. Until 1941, the institution Ente di Colonizzazione del Latifondo Siciliano had built the aqueduct at Lupo, near Catania, some roads and bridges, as well as eight villages: named after: 'A. Fazio', 'G. Gattuso', 'A. Cascino', 'A. Rizza', 'S. Giuliano', 'P. Lupo', 'G. Scirò', 'A. Bonsignore'. Cfr. ACCASCINA 1941, pp. 185-198; TOSCANO 1984, pp. 229-230.

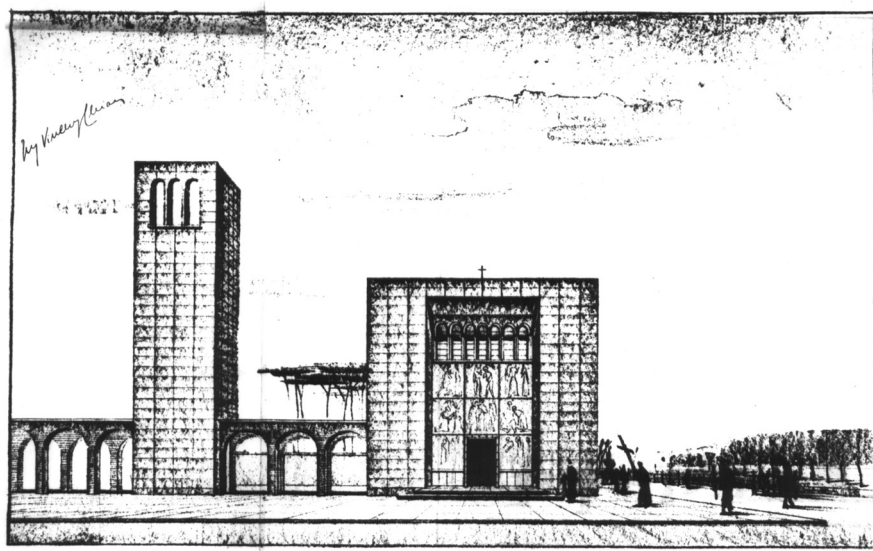
36. Cfr. CASSESE 1984, pp. 17-18.



Valentino Orsolini Cancelli, Government Commissioner for the ONC, and Luigi Razza, President of the Commissariat for Internal Migration; between Mussolini and Cancelli himself would soon create a very tense situation. But, despite being criticized even then, the special institute – a sort of full cycle agency – adopted for the transformation of entire territories and the foundation of the ‘new cities’, it turned out to be an appropriate tool to deal with the assigned tasks. It, in fact, guaranteed to manage the entire operation: from the acquiring land to its reclamation or division into farms; from identifying the beneficiaries of the farms and farmhouses to the concrete transfer and settlement of immigrants from other Italian regions; from the drafting of the plans to the design of roads and buildings; from procurement procedures, the supervision of works and inspection. If, however, this type of organization allowed for a notable acceleration in the execution of the projects – particularly important for the propaganda aspects cleverly exploited by the regime – it had only been possible thanks to the dedication of technicians and designers, the backbreaking work rate of the workers, as well as a certain approximation in the implementing techniques.

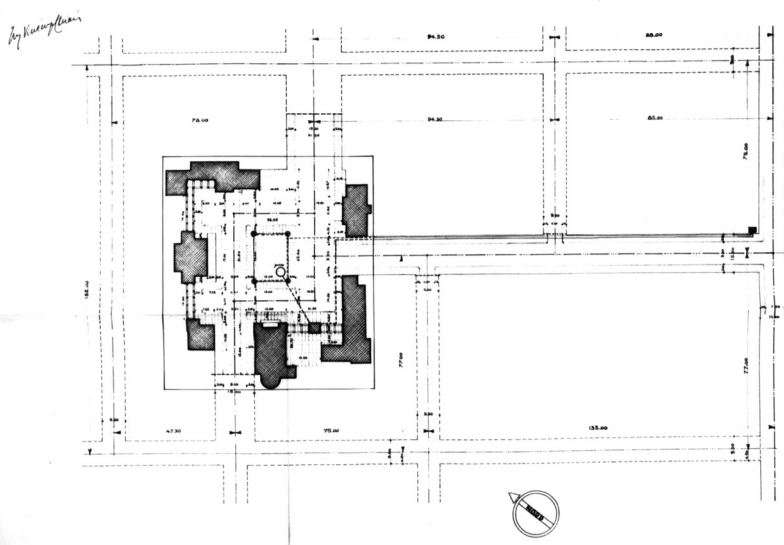
It furthermore had the cultural limitations of a finite activity. In the long run, after the first experience at a remarkable level, there came a lack of fruitful exchange of ideas; but above all, by not insisting on the modernist vein and the contribution of the best Italian architects, there emerge the less convincing aspects of ‘ruralism’, understood as mimetic reproduction of traditional agricultural communities in a purely retrospective sense. Within this full cycle process, the expropriation procedure plays a vital role. And here too one detects an oddity a singularity. The need to expropriate the territory subject to urbanization was theorized all during the thirties, until the enactment of the urban planning law of 1942. However, if this need was evidenced above all to solve the problems of the big cities, only special institutes designated to establish the ‘new cities’ practiced expropriation for the acquisition land necessary to start reclamation and urbanization. Once again, therefore, a matter that should have affected the entire country ends up becoming experimental in limited centers and areas.

Virgilio Testa, in 1933, had already shown how the Commission established in 1926 to study the legal reform of expropriation for public

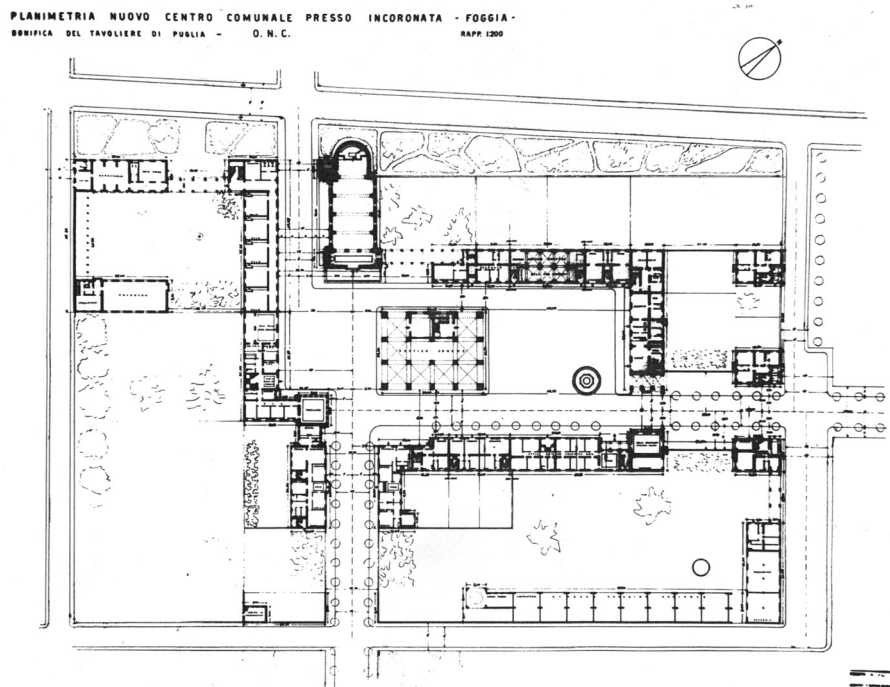


Borgata Cervaro - la chiesa -

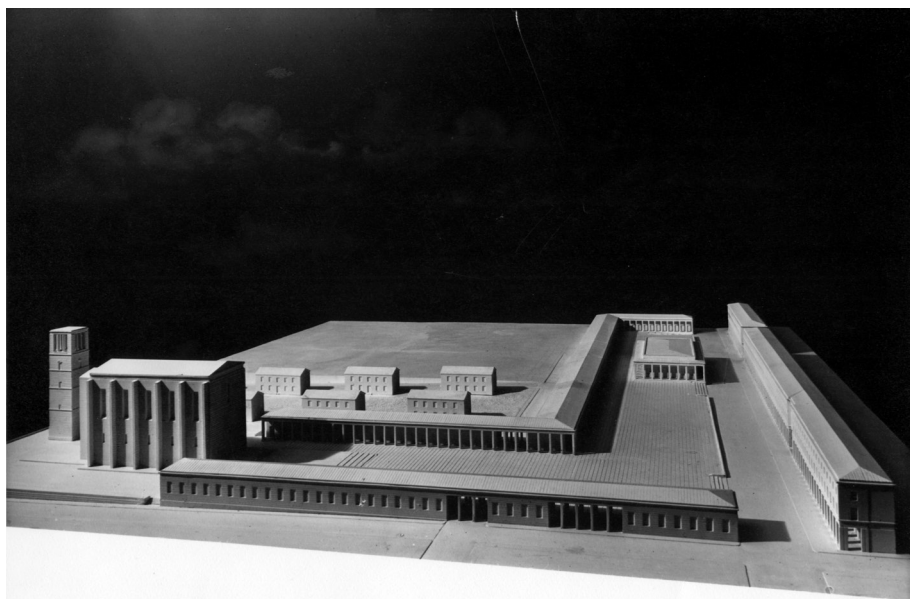
O. N. C. BORGATA "CERVARO"  
SISTEMAZIONE RETE PER L'ILLUMINAZIONE ELETTRICA E FORZA MOTRICE  
PLANIMETRIA AL R.A.M. 1:500.



14. Ing. Vincenzo Chiaia, Borgata Cervaro, Bonifica del Tavoliere delle Puglie, 1939-1943, general plan and elevation of the church, A.C.S., ONC-Progetti.



15. Giorgio Calza Bini, Planimetric view of Borgo Incoronata (Foggia), 1940, A.C.S., ONC-Progetti.



16. Saverio Muratori, Cortoghiana, mining zone of Iglesiente, Sardegna, 1940, Private Archive.





## BONIFICHE AGRO PONTINO



18. ONC, Pontine reclamation, since 36 years of the Opera Nazionale Combattenti 1919-1955, Roma, 1955.

utility had not seen fit to mention in any way the issue of territorial plans, while it considered urgent, precisely, the revision of the legal regulation on matter was addressed.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore Giuseppe Pagano, in 1935, had formulated an organic growth model of the city based on the ‘elimination’ to the extent possible, of private property in the urban periphery and of the creation, around the already built-up areas, of «municipal property zones obtained either by purchase or expropriation».<sup>38</sup> Pagano, however, did not intend thereby to prefigure to put under state ownership all peripheral land or propose a generalized expropriation, but rather form a strip around the city where the Administration could prearrange an ordered and ‘artistically valid’ process for its development.

Alberto Calza-Bini, instead, when presenting INU’s proposals for the planning law he referred explicitly to the ‘libro delle proprietà’

37. TESTA, *op. cit.*, pp. 448-449.

38. PAGANO 1935 (1).



(Book of the properties) as the section of the Civil Code to be reformed. The new legal regime he proposed for the urban areas arose from a different conception of the same right of ownership of the residential zoning or even not for construction. He suggested, to this end, not to speak of 'building areas', but only to 'urban areas'. «The urban property», he says, «becomes a juridical figure to whom are inextricably bound duty and responsibility. Not *passive property*, therefore, which simply enjoy the fruits, but *active property* that develops, increases and multiplies these fruits». In short, there would be a kind of 'social function' for land ownership which can not be reconciled in any way with property intended as pure instrument of speculation, 'lacking either labor or merit'. Since, therefore, "the consideration of public interest is inherent in the allocation of land for urban use", it should follow that all parcels of land included within the Master Plan and in any case in the expected expansion of the city, are theoretically subject to expropriation for public utility. «It follows that all the areas that fall within this perimeter can be expropriated at any time for the execution of urban planning projects or other public works».<sup>39</sup> The advantage would, of course, be that of the implementation of a rational policy for the sites that can be built on by public administration rendering private speculation impossible, but avoiding the creation of "unwieldy and costly communal domains". Such a radical hypothesis could not possibly be incorporated directly into the planning law, which sure enough mitigated the expropriation procedures for public utility; neither the big cities, nor the medium towns, would have been able, in those years, to implement a policy of progressive acquisition of peripheral areas as suggested by Pagano. A large acquisition of land and the direct use of eminent domain would be carried out by special Institutes appointed designated for reclamation and the establishment of 'new cities', used later as a model for initiatives on a larger scale, such as E42 the Exhibit of Italian Lands Overseas which, with good reason, may be considered a 'newly founded city'.<sup>40</sup>

The ONC land patrimony, obtained nearly all between the two wars through acquisitions, donations and expropriation, are evaluated in the 1955 financial statement to be 181,420 hectares, of which 129,690

39. CALZA-BINI 1941, pp. 6-7.

40. For the planning aspects of E42, see GUIDONI 1987, pp. 17-83.

obtained by expropriation, 26,456 by acquisition and 25,274 from donations. The areas included in the scope of the master plan of the new city became, from 1935 onwards, property of the newly established townships, based on an indemnity of 10,000 lire per hectare, adopted in the case of Littoria and Sabaudia. Green urban areas are, however, gradually given for free to their respective new municipalities by the ONC which maintains ownership of agricultural land, sold only much later to settlers.<sup>41</sup> Another type of property transfer was implemented, as proposed by the Ministry of the Interior, among the neighboring municipalities and the newly established City: as in the case of Mussolinia, Pomezia, Aprilia and Carbonia. For Carbonia in particular, in the decree of the City's establishment, a special article is expressed that grants ACAI permission to expropriate the necessary land for the new center, according to boundaries determined by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Agriculture. The eminent domain will then be explicitly recognized in the Commission for the E42 and for the Overseas Exhibition.<sup>42</sup>

One last important aspect of these events is that the 'new cities' will have very precise planning and regulatory instruments regarding the formation or development of the city center. Building regulations of these centers are densely formulated, considered an essential completion of the master plan and projects of the various buildings. They take into account all necessary aspects for the implementation of the new city, including protection regulation of the dwellings as if they were true works of art.

Missing is a territorial vision, and there lies the paradox, of these development plans, especially for the vast areas of reclaimed land, that yet were designed within a network of regional infrastructures. Nothing was proposed for the future development of the 'new cities'. This is due to the fact that the planning law was passed in 1942, when almost all the cities of the new foundation had already been constructed. They were often forced to adopt contradictory provisions as opposed to a harmonious expansion of residential and industrial sites, such as considering the entire area bounded by the zoning plan suitable to be built upon. This is the case of Sabaudia, for example, denounced in

41. A.C.S., ONC, *Concessionari Agro Pontino*.

42. A.C.S., *Raccolta Ufficiale Leggi e decreti*, Sabaudia, Littoria, Mussolinia, Pomezia, Aprilia, Carbonia, E42, Mostra delle terre italiane d'Oltremare.

1971 by Piccinato<sup>43</sup> or the case of Guidonia, overrun and overwhelmed, after the war, by the immediate proximity to Rome. As a whole, then, it can be argued that the mesh of small centers planned in the areas of land reclamation outlines an open form of territorial planning that, unlike projections systematically identified by a complete and precise plan, admits internal variants, completions and transformations. The location and size of individual settlements will gradually be determined as the system is carried out, affected by, precisely due to its political significance, the continuous change of events. This is the case with Littoria, whose plan is just about imposed by Cencelli on Mussolini, who initially did not want to hear talk of the 'city' in the reclaimed territories;<sup>44</sup> already in 1935, from a simple rural centre became a province. This is the case with Sabaudia, whose imminent foundation is announced by Mussolini when the site it will be built upon has not yet been identified. The site will then be adventurously 'found' by the same Cencelli during a reconnaissance in the thick Terracina forest, where, on the horse saddle finding his way, the beautiful view of Lake Paola suddenly opens up with dunes, the plain colored by the heather slightly sloping towards the sea, the mysterious profile of the Circeo promontory.<sup>45</sup> This is the case with Borgo Vodice, initially to go by the name of Borgo Faiti – then built further north – at the intersection between the Mediana and the 53rd milestone, and then moved further west to avoid being too close to the portion of the Selva di Terracina spared from the deforestation.<sup>46</sup> Or again, in the case of central Daunilia, in the province of Foggia, which in 1942 would be postponed indefinitely, or of Apuania center that never got off the ground.<sup>47</sup>

43. Cfr. PICCINATO 1977. Cfr. also MALUSARDI 1993, pp. 369-378.

44. "When Mussolini on April 5, 1932, wanted to visit for the first time the work that the Opera Nazionale Combattenti was completing, I brought him to the roof of an already existing old building which was demolished during the construction of the new city. From up there one had a wide panorama of the area already deforested and the roads and houses under construction. As he observed this impressive view I showed him a schematic plan of a future center I had christened Littoria [...] the idea appealed to Mussolini who told me to prepare plans for the construction of Littoria as soon as. When it was time to celebrate the 'laying of the foundation stone' of the 'new city', Mussolini will let it be known, however, that he opposed it, because 'Littoria' was a rural town and not a city, there was to be no talk of a first stone, but only of completed works, all invitations had to be revoked [...] journalists were invited to give no further news of the laying of the first stone." ORSOLINI CENCELLI 1977.

45. Cfr. IANNELLA 1975, pp. 67-68.

46. A.C.S., ONC, *Progetti*, Borgo Vodice.

47. A.C.S., ONC, *Progetti*, Daunilia.

Considerations of functionality will instead drive the localization of coal centers and of Torviscosa. For the latter, when, after the sanctions, it was time to find a suitable area for the cultivation of the ‘canna gentile’ (‘giant cane’) considered by SNIA a raw material in the manufacture of synthetic textile fibers, two alternatives had been proposed: the Grosseto and Venetian coast, in the end the location of Torre di Zuino was selected, since it formed an interesting triangle with the planned industrial estates in Marghera, Rovigo and Udine.

Lastly, the question of the contribution by architects.<sup>48</sup> The professionals who collaborated with the construction of new cities constituted a fairly restricted circle, mainly belonging to the Roman culture and in any case around the magazine “Architettura”. Exceptions were Gian Battista Ceas, author of the Mussolinia modernist buildings, Giuseppe De Min, author of Torviscosa and Angiolo Mazzoni, author of the Littoria station and the post offices in Littoria and Sabaudia; the latter, moreover, was not working for the ONC, but for the Ministry of Posts and Communications, for which he designed many other projects with a singular emphasis resulting from the second Florentine futurism together with a stronger plastic sensibility suitable for the language of the regime.<sup>49</sup> Belonging to the Roman school are Luigi Piccinato, author with Gino Cancellotti, Eugenio Montuori and Alfredo Scalpelli of the plan and the main buildings in Sabaudia; Cancellotti himself, who also worked in Guidonia with Giuseppe Nicolosi and Giorgio Calza-Bini; the latter is the author of the plan and church in Guidonia, the plan for Incoronata and of projects for Aprilia and Pomezia; Oriolo Frezzotti who designs the plan and many buildings in Littoria, Pontinia and Sabaudia with his own characteristic language indeed ‘littorio’ (fascist); Nicolosi collaborates on the plan for Guidonia and builds the IACP district in Littoria with simple and austere lines; Angelo Vicario, author of many ‘rationalist’ buildings in Sabaudia; Ignazio Guidi and

48. There is now a vast bibliography on the newly founded cities. Articles and essays have been dedicated to almost all of the most important ones. In addition to the texts already indicated in these notes, and others that it would be impossible to list here, we point out three recent volumes with a large photo and documentary repertoire on Italian and colonial centers built in this period: GRESLERI, MASSARETTI, ZAGNONI 1993; BESANA, CARLI, DEVOTI, PRISCO 2003.

49. To this architect, to whom Carlo Severati has dedicated the first major historical essays on «L'architettura, cronache e storia» in the seventies, was dedicated a conference held in Florence in 2001 and whose acts are collected in the book edited by COZZI, GODOLI, PETTENELLA 2003.



Cesare Valle, authors of the plan and many buildings of Carbonia; Eugenio Montuori, who designs the plan of Pozzo Littorio and builds the Carbonia hotel; Vincenzo Civico, Dagoberto Ortensi and Giulio Roisecco design Daunilia; Enzo Fedi for Borgo Appio and Tufaroli-Luciano with Paolini for Borgo Domizio; Mario Paniconi and Giulio Pediconi construct the buildings of Piazza Roma in Littoria and design a plan for Aprilia; Saverio Muratori is the author of Cortoghiana. Next to them, we find Concezio Petrucci, author, with Mosè Tufaroli-Luciano, Emanuele Filiberto Paolini and Riccardo Silenzi of Aprilia and Pomezia, as well as Segezia in Tavoliere delle Puglie; Pasquale Carbonara, who designed the Apulian towns of Masseria Cantore, while Vincenzo Chiaia worked for Borgo Cervaro and Masseria Nuova, also in Puglia. As we can see, therefore, there is still a wide range of cultures. We must highlight, however, the absence of the Milanese who, except for the plan by Pagano for Portoscuso, Sardinia, do not seem to believe much in this chapter of Italian urban planning and architecture. The institute for the Competition, moreover, which could have benefited in the long run, this tendency as well, was rarely involved: for Sabaudia, Aprilia, Pomezia. In other cases, for reasons of urgency, it was preferable to rely on local technicians or professionals related to the promoters of the initiative: this was the case with De Min who had already worked for Marinotti. Even this choice, therefore, tended to circumscribe the newly founded cities within somewhat closed boundaries.

To conclude these synthetic notes on the history of the Italian cities of new foundation, planned and built in the thirties, we can say that within this experience – albeit dramatically interrupted by the Second World War, but later resumed under different dominant ideologies – some of the most interesting issues of urban planning and Italian architecture may be identified, designed to blend architectural and urban planning projects, at the same time renewing the legislative instruments and the technical realization of the settlements in the national territory.

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