

From Unesco site to a comprehensive cultural landscape. The urban plan of Padula (South Italy)

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Abstract

The paper shows a strategic proposal for the Urban Plan of the Municipality of Padula, in the Vallo di Diano, in South Italy.

In the city there is a Unesco site, the religious complex Certosa di Padula, and a widespread system of archaeological emergencies. The large size of the Unesco site, combined with the morphological difficulties of the city, puts in second light the other sites of historical, cultural and naturalistic value.

The project, developed within an interdisciplinary team, deals with the need to build significant relationships between different parts of the city. The design strategy stems from an interpretation of the territory strongly linked to its geography, cultural forms and identity through an integrated approach that not only protects heritage but also promotes urban development without compromising the site's authenticity and value.

Keywords: Unesco, Urban plan, Green infrastructure, Cultural Landscape, Urban design.

Introduction

The paper describes a strategic design proposal for the Urban Plan of the Municipality of Padula, a city located in the Vallo di Diano, in the Campania Region, in Southern Italy.

The city is part of the Cilento and Vallo di Diano National Park UNESCO World Heritage Site due to the religious complex of the Charterhouse of Padula. (Commissione Nazionale Italiana per l'UNESCO, 2016 a). In the coming years, a new high-speed railway station will be built in Padula. The new railway line will connect southern Italy, from Salerno to Reggio Calabria. (Ministero delle infrastrutture e dei trasporti, 2025). On the one hand, this will be a great opportunity for the development of the city and its tourist identity, but on the other hand, it risks underlining the urban disconnections that currently characterise the city.

The project is carried out as part of the so-called Third Mission, in order to bridge the gap between the professional world, local authorities and academia. This allowed it to support the Municipal Urban Plan by combining traditional analyses with cultural and city management aspects, partly due to the special condition of hosting the UNESCO site.

While the conservation of sites often translates into restrictions for city development, the research is promoting an urban planning policy that focuses on enhancing the cultural, historical, and natural features of the city,

Cultural landscape: from protective restriction to city development device

In 1992, the World Heritage Committee defined cultural landscapes as places where the combined action of man and nature is recognisable. (Commissione Nazionale Italiana per l'UNESCO, 2016 b). Promoting their conservation and protection is considered a contribution to

modern techniques for sustainable city management and helps to preserve and enhance the natural values of the landscape.

Compared to UNESCO designation, which refers to specific sites, the European Landscape Convention signed by Member States in Florence in the year 2000 takes a step forward by broadening the concept of landscape. Its area of application includes not only sites of particular interest but also the entire territory, including terrestrial landscapes, inland and marine waters, everyday landscapes and degraded landscapes. Each Party also undertakes: "to recognise landscapes in law as an essential component of people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity" (European Treaty Series, 2000).

This broadening of the concept of landscape, which intrinsically includes recognising its value as cultural heritage, leads to a larger range of actions. The landscape is not only protected but also planned, renewed, and developed.

In Italy, the prescriptions of the European Landscape Convention are implemented in the Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape, the key law on national heritage (Legislative Decree 42/2004). The code requires regions to adopt a large-scale planning tool, the so-called Landscape Plan.

The landscape plan includes restrictions for the protection of heritage assets and transformation initiatives that mainly concern the renewal of compromised landscapes and the transformation of the degraded ones. The plan can, in fact, define, as a high priority, specific areas for transformation, further detailed in the masterplan scale. Despite this, it is difficult to overcome the narrative that links superordinate plans to restriction requirements merely. This is partly due to the gap in the dimensional scale of the urban programmes and to the difficulty of bringing together large-area strategies at city scale.

The urban design solution aims to invert the narrative bringing together the transformative aspirations of large-scale urban plans within the city. The superordinate programmes are interpreted as

layers that overlap the city. The intersection between these layers is where the strategic dimension of the urban design can be placed, bringing together the requirements of protection and conservation with the need to enhance the cultural landscape.

Multidisciplinary approach for the convergence of knowledge and urban analysis

The high complexity of the city required a multidisciplinary approach led by a team of experts in several disciplines.

Each area of expertise contributed by developing information and analysis combined into thematic layers managed through a geodatabase. These included analyses aimed at showing the hydrogeomorphological nature of the city, agronomic characteristics, the system of existing protective restrictions, the current land use, road networks and existing services. The analysis of the environmental and cultural system highlighted sites of naturalistic and historical-cultural interest.

This analysis involved Heritage Impact Assessment concerning both the historic centre and the UNESCO site of the Charterhouse. (Court et al., 2022). The analysis led to a study of the visibility of the main sites of historical and cultural interest, also observed in relation to its evolution over time, with the aim of orienting the city's transformability towards choices in line with the conservation and enhancement of existing sites and landscapes (Fig. 1).

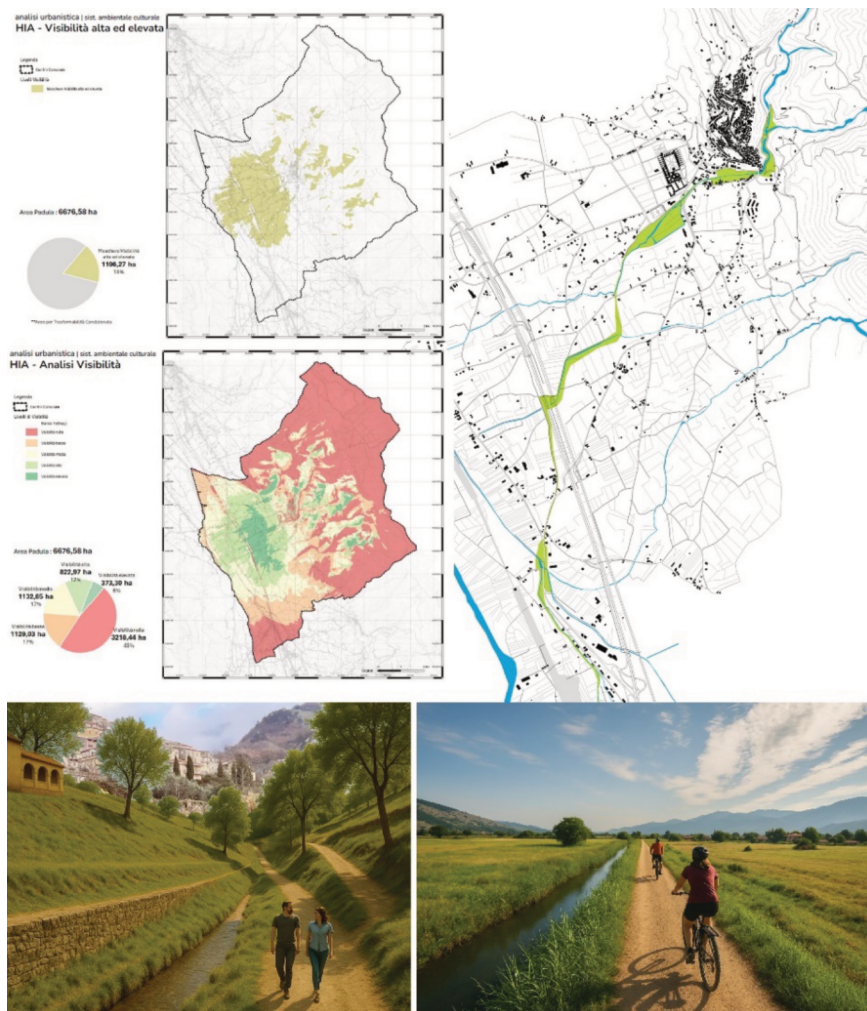


Fig. 1 Heritage Impact Assessment: visibility studies; Strategic urban design: plan; Imaginary scenarios with cycle and pedestrian paths in the Fabricato urban park and along canals and rivers

Ongoing projects involving the transformation of infrastructure networks and how they fit into existing mobility systems were also studied. The new railway line will be connected to the city via existing road networks, motorways and cycle paths. The high-speed station will become a gateway to Padula, Vallo di Diano and the wider Cilento region. The analysis then focused on informal itinerary. By consulting web platforms and apps, several paths used to explore the Vallo were identified (Faija, 2020). The Path of Silence, for example, is a cycle path of about 600 kilometres, which runs through landscapes and villages within the Cilento National Park (Fiorin, 2022). There are also several city trekking and naturalistic trails connecting the main points of interest in the city.

The proposed urban design strategy aims to strengthen and enhance existing urban networks, reinforcing Padula's role in the Vallo landscape. At the same time, the strategy builds new connection systems to improve accessibility to archaeological and historical importance sites with a strong connection to the existing landscape.

Green infrastructure as urban connection

The strategy focuses primarily on the urban disconnection between the upper and lower parts of the city. This gap is due to the Fabbicato Stream that from the hills flows along the east side of the city centre down to the valley. Around the stream and its riverbanks lies the Valley Mills Valley, a forgotten landscape characterised by the remains of hydraulic systems and ancient mills that remind us of its ancient use. In the past, the abundant water flow powered about nine mills, some of which belonged to the Carthusians, and today it is possible to admire some of their remains.

The strategy defines the Mills Valley as a new green infrastructure for the city, bridging the gap between the upper and lower parts of Padula and becoming a structuring urban element that connects the town's main points of interest, the new high-speed rail station, and the future Tanagro River Park (Fig. 1).

The green infrastructure is articulated through new open-air spaces linked by a network of slow mobility paths, alternative to existing roads. The paths are connected through unusual landscapes, allowing a truly different experience within the cultivated lands. The paths follow the canals and the hydrological networks that define the area's watershed, highlighting water as a key natural element linked to local identity. Through slow routes, the landscape could be experienced at different speeds, with a perception not possible from conventional roadways. The green infrastructure is also linked to nature-based solutions, such as sustainable urban drainage systems and mechanisms for reusing surface and subsurface water, it can help manage flood risks through floodable ditches and water storage basins for agricultural use (Smeragliuolo Perrotta, 2024). The pathway involves an underground technical infrastructure which, through the use of drainage trenches, collects overflow water and diverts into water collection facilities. Traditional water collection tanks, historically used for irrigation and water management, remain a visible feature of the designed landscape.

The urban design included an in-depth study on transforming the riverbed of the Fabbricato stream into an urban park. In this section, the river descends from the Valley and, skirting the town, continues its route approaching the Charterhouse and then turns towards the Tanagro to flow into its water. From the roads, the area is thus perceived as a void characterized by uncultivated greenery. The opportunity for its transformation may find funding opportunities linked to its hydrogeological risk mitigation, thus giving back a safe and green space to the city.

The park is crossed by pedestrian and cycle paths. Inside the park, a pre-existing wall obscures views of the nearby urban area while simultaneously framing the historic city center in the background. This condition creates a sort of natural theatre where the wall acts as a scenic backdrop highlighted by the position of seats along the terraced slopes on the opposite side. The wall includes a new space that in its proportions and layout is a citation of one of the most emblematic spaces of the Charterhouse. Specifically, this space

reinterprets the cells of the Carthusian monks, characterized by a repeating basic module consisted of two rooms and a covered loggia opening onto a private garden (D'Alessio, 2018). The privileged condition of the presence of a garden linked to the individual space of the cell is here proposed by inverting the meaning of this space, from individual to collective. The pre-existing wall becomes an anchor from the new loggia overlooking the park that assumes the dimension of a community and vegetable garden.

The landscape as a cultural and identity value

The proposal therefore recognizes the historical and cultural value of the landscape linked to energy production, then examining it through its contemporary potential as an opportunity to increase the presence of greenery in the city, promote sustainable mobility systems, and build relationships between sites of natural and cultural interest. Crossing the city is proposed as an immersive experience of the traditional landscape. The mixed-use farming within small plots, often located close to water lines, represents a distinctive sign of the traditional and agricultural landscape that characterizes the Cilento National Park. This landscape is also closely linked to the structure of the Cilentan family, with agricultural production largely aimed at self-sufficiency. It is within this cultural context that the Mediterranean Diet has its roots, a lifestyle and nutritional model officially recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Commissione Nazionale Italiana per l'UNESCO, 2024).

From a methodological perspective, the project underlines the importance of combining traditional planning with a strategic vision. The reinterpretation of the territory has highlighted the need for the strategic and urban design project to represent a critical tool towards reality, building gaps between concrete needs and visions that include cultural and identity issues.

Participatory processes, mandatory in urban planning, will be launched at a later stage. The project has in fact experimented with an early participatory approach involving technical experts, policy makers and a small group of stakeholders that led to the definition of the main lines of the strategic proposal, waiting to be discussed with the entire community within public events.

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De la sit UNESCO la un peisaj cultural cuprinzător. Planul urbanistic al orașului Padula (sudul Italiei)

(rezumat)

Acest articol prezintă o propunere strategică pentru Planul Urbanistic al Municipality Padula, situată în Vallo di Diano, în sudul Italiei. În oraș se află un sit UNESCO, complexul religios Certosa di Padula, și un sistem extins de situri arheologice. Dimensiunea mare a sitului UNESCO, combinată cu dificultățile morfologice ale orașului, pune în umbră alte situri de valoare istorică, culturală și naturală. Proiectul, dezvoltat în cadrul unei echipe interdisciplinare, abordează necesitatea de a construi relații semnificative între diferite părți ale orașului. Strategia de proiectare pornește de la o interpretare a teritoriului strâns legată de geografia, formele culturale și identitatea sa, printr-o abordare integrată care nu doar protejează patrimoniul, ci și promovează dezvoltarea urbană fără a compromite autenticitatea și valoarea sitului.