

A DIVE IN THE NORDIC GREEN. *FORESTURBIA*: A MANUAL FOR A LANDSCAPED CITY

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Foresturbia is the outcome of a practice-based research, an unsolicited project developed in 2015 within the architectural practices of Ludovico Centis – The Empire – and Angela Gigliotti and Fabio Gigone – OFFICE U67 ApS†.

It was initiated responding to a specific urban challenge of Oslo municipality towards 2030 and aimed to be a precious support, a tool for encouraging and spreading collective shared knowledge about sustainable living.

As the name itself suggests, *Foresturbia* is an overt homage to *Surfurbia* and the other ecologies that Reyner Banham individuated in his book *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971).

The project had the same ambition to bring a fresh look to the Norwegian capital's booming urban development and possibly to other cities of the Nordic Countries, Russia and Canada that experienced and still experience a similar development pattern. The aim was to intertwine a sharp analysis and clear design proposal for a specific built environment – that of the Hovinbyen area of Oslo – with wider reflections on lifestyle and urban process.

This allowed the research and design team to articulate a potentially vague but tremendously timely topic, such as sustainability, into a series of precise investigations and statements that ranged from cutting-edge technological solutions to reflections on the “memory” of the ground, from carbon-neutral mobility solutions to inclusive communication in the frame of city redevelopment.

The project engaged with different scales – from the territorial to room interiors, time frames and urban rhythms.

The design proposal acted in the vast field defined by the two extremes of pragmatism and utopia, with the awareness that “the charting and visualization of deliberate, coordinated action over an extended territory” is the first and most powerful move to transform it.

This imagination was powered by and was grounded on a specific attention towards the territory itself, taking its strength from it. A fresh reading, a careful description, a precise proposal were equally important moves that all together were intended to form a shared, clear and powerful vision for the future of Oslo.

In this text, it will be framed first the research in the Norwegian context will be first framed, then they will be presented the urban strategies behind the applied project related to the Oslo municipality, and lastly it will be illustrated more in depth the outcome of the design proposal.

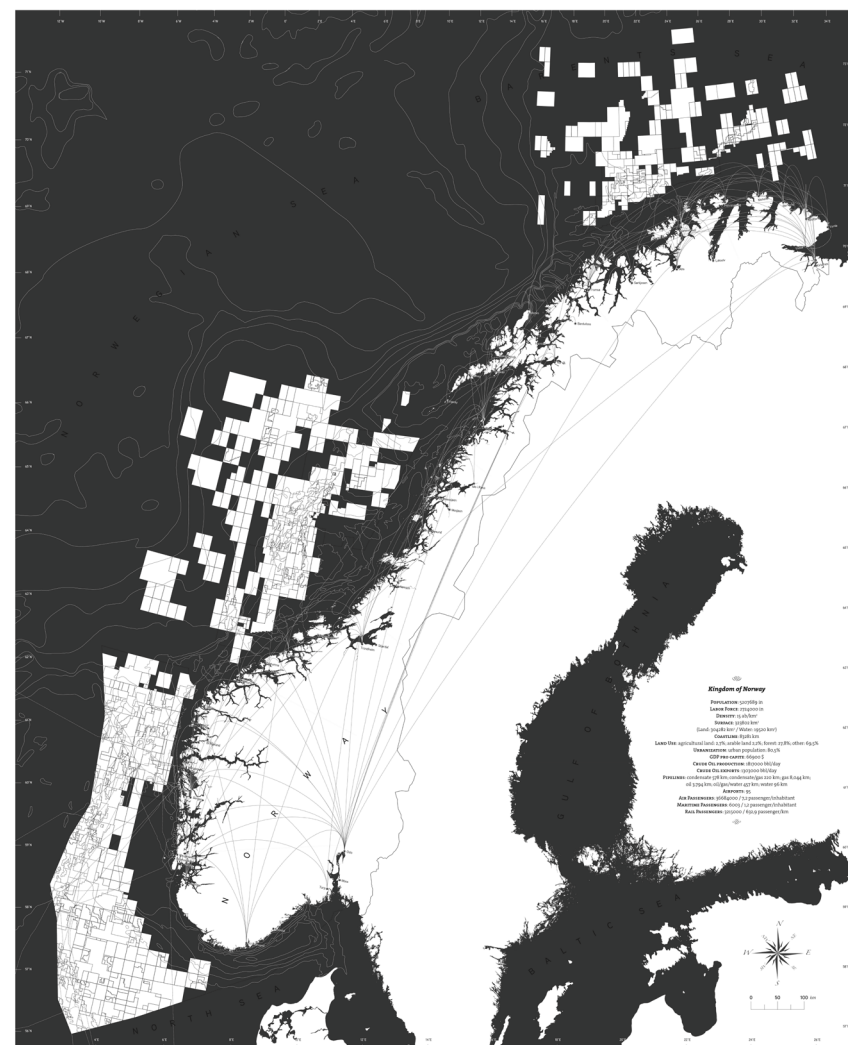
This coastline has become over the years a symbol in the collective unconscious and is well known for its fjords and indented appearance that reaches 83.281 km of total length – more than twice the length of the Equator.

Lastly, the Norwegian coastline is also the meeting of two dimensions, an onshore and an offshore one. The latter has historically been intended as the projection of the ambitions of discovery and adventure of the Scandinavian population, while it has recently become the contemporary place for a new economy. An economy based on energy management and innovation, which performs on a buffer condition where the oil exploitation reminds of the related problem of the definition of a supranational political agreement on the Arctic region; but also, echoes an internal controversy of profiting from the oil trading to other countries¹ while promoting at home severe policies to lowering carbon emissions.

RESEARCH

Norge. Inshore and offshore, 2015.

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for its quality of life, public service and policies. The challenge for the Oslo region is to encourage a future sustainable growth, understanding which are the best strategies to improve the quality of life in the city and answer at the same time to the growing speed of development and shift from an oil-based economy.

In 2014, with the introduction of the *Oslo 2030: Plan for the city*, the Municipality of Oslo estimated the growth of the city's population in the next years to 200.000 incomers – one third more of the current population. On the one side, the city plan – centered around three focus areas: smart policies, safe city and green approach – was very promising and in line with the contemporary policies of urban development. On the other, it was greatly challenging, as well as quite vague when coming to the definition of projects in these same areas. Together with the implementation of the plan, the Municipality of Oslo held both an Ideas Competition for the first city site to be transformed – Hovinbyen – and an International Conference on the topics of resilience, development and green sustainable approach, with the goal of learning by prominent European case studies.

The project had the ambition to raise the stakes set by the Municipality's call, aiming both to act as a precise answer to local needs as well as to connect with a wider audience living in the global Northern territories. The outcome of this effort resulted in a practice-based project developed with the collaboration of a wider team of researchers and experts for all citizens.¹

The main research questions were: How to ensure a better future for the new generations? How to guarantee the actual standards of welfare for all the citizens in the coming years? Is it possible to develop an urban growth scenario that has the ambition to become a model in terms of future sustainable development? Which are the best green strategies to develop cities and keep the pace at the same time with an ever-growing speed and pressure? How will the Oslo region evolve as a competitive and sustainable European region?

A VISION FOR HOVINBYEN

Hovinbyen, as part of the city of Oslo, needs no revolutions, but coordinated modifications. To host 27.000 new flats and 2,5 million sqm of commercial space, as foreseen by Oslo 2030, Hovinbyen should not be turned into a tabula rasa: this complex area, that shows rapid patterns of change in land-occupation, deserves effective interventions that will take into account both regional and local dynamics, while preserving the qualities that turn its diversity into an asset². Modification³, in opposition to

erasure, is also a form of care, of belonging, of recognition of the specific topography, climate, and history of Hovinbyen.

In this portion of the city of Oslo there are multiple souls. Bjerke, Sinsen, Loren, Lille Tøyen, Ensjø, Helsfyr, Etterstad, Bryn, Breivoll, Haraldrud, Vollebakk, Risløkka, Refstad, Økern, Hasle, Ulven, Teisen, Valle Hovin: the area of Hovinbyen is made of a multiplicity of neighborhoods, with different degrees of development, different histories and challenges to face. Its location, at the same time close to the historic center and gate towards two airports and main infrastructures, makes it desirable for a variety of potentially clashing programs, such as housing, shopping centers, logistics and large transportation hubs. This condition sets the regeneration of Hovinbyen as a fascinating yet complex goal that deserves careful consideration at the different territorial scales and administrative levels.

A balanced articulation is indeed fundamental for the quality of the urban space in Hovinbyen: public spaces should have a proper degree of qualification, an intrinsic legibility in order to compose a larger scale narrative. A subtle equilibrium should be reached between interaction and separation of urban programs. Contemporary peripheries often suffer from an excess of separation of programs and an excess of concentration that leads to out-of-scale dimensions, either of housing or of leisure districts. These factors should be carefully controlled during the regeneration of Hovinbyen, while guaranteeing and empowering infrastructural and immaterial connections both with the historic center and the wider region of Oslo.

The coexistence of a multitude of different programs in the same area might lead to the formation of internal peripheries, causing a mismatch between needs and desires of the citizens and the offer of private and public services. Potential incongruities between the location of social services and the location of their users should be addressed by precisely locating a series of facilities, both temporary and long-term ones, that will act either as “smoothers”, untangling problematic nodes, or as “magnets”, creating desired density of activities where needed.

The first crucial move has been defining a project of the ground:⁴ while buildings and programs are interested by rapidly changing conditions and plans for smaller or larger transformations that cannot always be easily controlled or foreseen given also the multiplicity of actors involved, ground represents a factor of positive inertia, an anchor in times of hectic development. This is in fact the space, the surface shared by people and vehicles, buildings and infrastructures, that cannot be considered just in terms of rules and standards. It should aspire to

Foresturbia. A new map of understanding: the ground project, 2015.

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become the representation, the embodiment of inclusive social policies, wise lifestyles and “home” to sustainable buildings and leisure facilities.

A PROJECT OF THE GROUND

A site-assessment showed how the infrastructural system of Hovinbyen represents its most problematic condition. It constitutes a physical, psychological, practical and informational barrier. The area is in fact crossed, on the one side, by major roads and railway lines, by strategic facilities as the Brobekk incinerator that generate considerably heavy traffic, and will be further innervated by new bus lines, by a subway Økern – Breivoll station in Haraldrud/Ulven and also by a train station in Breivoll.

On the other, the low-speed infrastructures (e.g. local roads, bike lanes and pedestrian routes) in the area have been fragmented by its uncontrolled growth. What is left then is a scattered pattern composed by housing blocks, industrial warehouses, townhouses, logistics hubs, shopping malls, the Vålerenga stadium, an ice skating facility, the Økern center, among others. When assessing the land-value of such a pattern, as in many contemporary cities, there are “soft” areas relatively economically accessible and “hard” areas, where the current economic interests are highly concentrated.

The project reclaims a set of actions in several intermediate areas as well as in the gaps of the current urban pattern, aiming to provide a larger frame in which the heterogeneous fragments can successfully coexist. In order to improve the quality of life in the area the system of highways that bisect in two directions Hovinbyen should be rethought.

While the almost west-east axis connecting the city center to the Oslo airport remains relatively untouched, the section of the Ring 3 – since it crosses from north to south Hovinbyen – needs to be remodeled. The proposal connected the section at stake to the Ring 3 tunnel just north of the area, thus extending an already existing infrastructure.

This move could remove the strongest barrier between the western and eastern parts, while liberating a considerable strip of land that would constitute the backbone for the soft (bike and pedestrian) mobility in the area. More than this, it would turn what are today small and disconnected forgotten leftovers of land and the park of Valle Hovin into elements of a responsive linear park¹, crossing from north to south Hovinbyen, connecting the tracks and the forests of the northern and southern hills.

Foresturbia. The new linear park: the connection with the forests, 2015.

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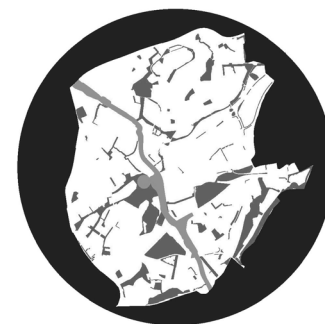
Forskjeller områder



Ring 3 som fysiske og utsikt barrierer



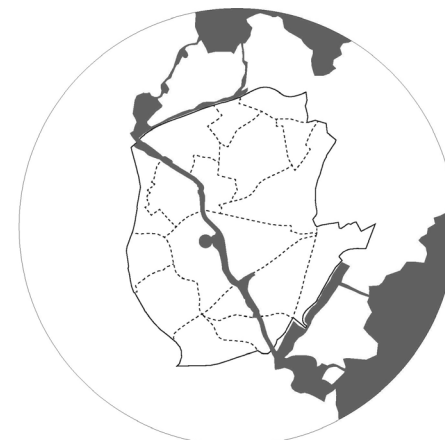
Grønn og sosial infrastruktur



Ny lineær park



Nye forbindelser mellom nabolag



Ny snarvei mellom Marka

This new responsive linear park would become an attractor for urban development, while guaranteeing continuity both in terms of ecological corridors and safety and efficiency of bike and walking paths. The effort in economic terms would be relevant, but the renowned trend and experience developed in Norway in the construction of tunnels, as well the many positive consequences for citizens would make it reasonable in the long run, allowing desirable qualities and opportunities for a life in a landscaped city.

About the responsiveness of the linear park, the intention was to design a continuous system able to adapt to the specific climatic, social and topographic conditions: each section would respond to its context, changing materials and sensorial qualities. The park would start in the northern section immediately south from Muselunden park, planting trees to redefine the spaces between the highway junction. In correspondence with the Sinsen section and its predominant housing pattern, it would become a refined system of circular flowerbeds. The following part would be paved with a harder surface that would let emerge irregular vegetation islands, while the section in relation with the new Økern Centre and the Hovinparken nearby would be strongly urban in character, with outdoor furniture loosely distributed to serve the users. This urban segment would be followed by a savage one, a kind of wild forest among rough warehouses. A dense birch (*Betula pubescens* and *Betula pendula*) forest providing alternative conditions of size, distance and time. A territory of the unconscious, of escapes and dreams, encouraging the visitor to look at the sky, while making him/her aware of the ground. This would be one of the wild reservoirs of Hovinbyen, breathing sanctuaries for ideas, spaces for physical and intellectual maneuver potentially providing an array of answers for unforeseen questions. In the subsequent Valle Hovin part, the park would expand in order to ideally and physically include the existing leisure area. Here the system of sports playgrounds would be redefined, in connection with the Valhall Arena and the Vålerenga stadium and ice-skating facility. The Hovinkollen, a new and unexpected artificial hill, would further enrich this central part of the linear park, reusing the excavation soils. The following section, in Teisen, just south of the E6 highway, would be dedicated to urban horticulture gardens, cultivated by the residents of the area, while the Bryn part would take the form of a tree-lined boulevard that would represent the counterpart to the planned park in Breivoll. The linear park would then pass over the last infrastructural barrier of the railway tracks in the form of a vegetated bridge, and

finally be concluded in the southern end in the same way as it started at the northern one, through a densification of the green mass by planting trees, connecting with the Østensjø park and the trails, lakes and forests just west from it.

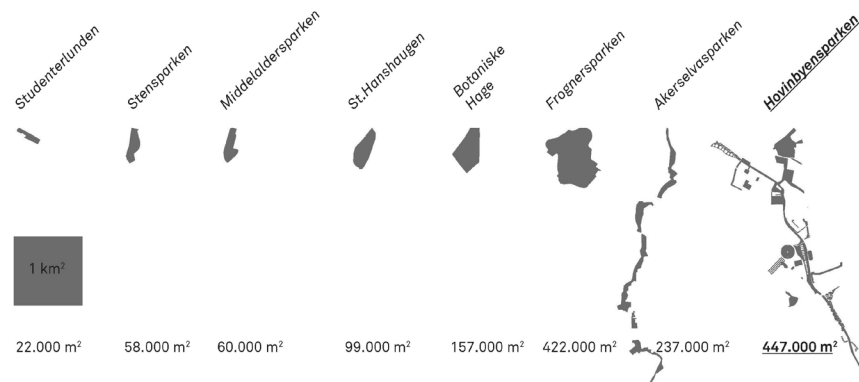
Hovinbyen has today a double face: on the one side, a calm residential neighborhood with fragmented green areas, related to a local dimension; on the other, a pervasive system of infrastructures that relate it to a wider context, to which all the warehouses and productive and commercial facilities are connected. These two faces undoubtedly create several problems and tensions, and a choice has already been made in the past years with a number of neighborhood transformations where warehouse districts are going to be replaced by new housing developments and parks. In coherence with this trend, it has been proposed to relocate warehouses profiting from the suggested underground section of the Ring 3. This move could, on the one side, transform the freed surface in a continuous linear park, while, on the other, it could host logistics and storage facilities as underground rooms, connected to the Ring 3 itself. This would allow Hovinbyen to improve the quality of life while not giving away the beneficial economic income coming from the storage activities. A double gain would be reached: keeping the goods in a strategic location close to the city center, while not consuming further land in the outskirts of Oslo to build new warehouses that would substitute the ones located in Hovinbyen today.

A plurality of rhythms: a successful and pleasant urban environment is largely dependent on a multiplicity of choices available in a relatively limited space and time. This is the goal that should be reached with the transformation and densification of Hovinbyen; to allow all the citizens, from children to the elderly people, to find their own comfortable rhythm in the city, related to different forms of mobility, different intensities of activities, various dwelling typologies and interests in leisure time. Several different interventions related to the built and open space should be coordinated and organized as an integrated system, of which the network of existing and planned parks, as the new linear park on the current site of the Ring 3, will constitute the backbone and most powerful element.

Urban tourism should be strongly supported, and there can be no tourism without attractive landmarks, landscapes or activities. The Hovinkollen, a new artificial hill built with the excavation materials coming from the realization of the new

Foresturbia. The new linear park: comparative scheme with the existing city parks, 2015.

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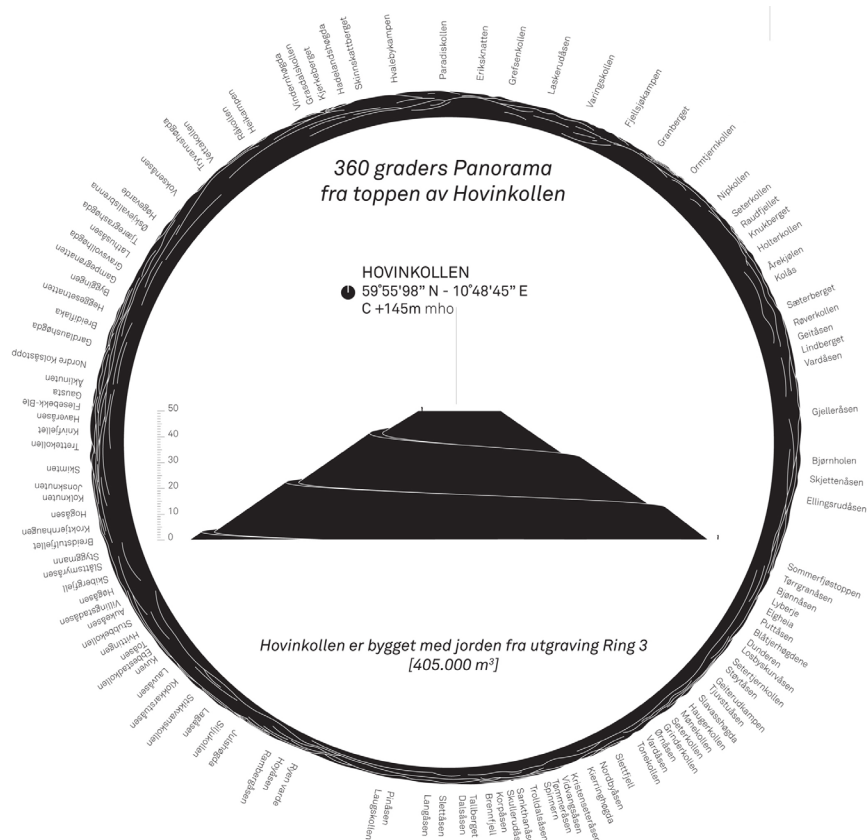


underground section of the Ring 3 in Hovinbyen, would at the same time satisfy all these demands. It would become a powerful landmark in the relatively flat topography of the district, establishing a dialogue with the surrounding landscape of the region, made mainly of vegetated hills innervated by a network of trails. A set of possible activities could be hosted by the Hovinkollen both in the summer and winter seasons, from sunbathing to going sledging, from climbing on foot or on bike on the spiral path to watching the panorama of Oslo and its bay from the top of the hill.

A MANUAL FOR A LANDSCAPED CITY

While the project is focused deliberately on the ground, a more comprehensive strategy has been adopted. In fact, a key outcome of *Foresturbia* is a publication meant as a tool complementary to the design proposal itself. Its form or appearance does not match with the one of an ordinary book, but it is closer in proportions and size to a guide-book, which must be consulted under very different conditions. Each page spread is defined as a cluster of instructions organized in correspondence with a detailed visual layout, in which both words and illustrations work together towards clarifying the complexity of the result. This publication is obviously not the first in its kind. On the contrary, its theoretical and methodological framework echo two other contemporary ones that engaged with a similar approach: *Urban Code: 100 Lessons for Understanding the City* (A. Mikoleit, M. Puerckhauer, 2001) and the *Manual of Decolonization* (Salottobuono, 2010). In particular, *Urban Code* proved to be a useful reference in breaking down intricate spatial behaviors and phenomena in immediately readable “lessons”, declined especially through textual means. The *Manual of Decolonization*, on the other side, showed a similar approach towards the deconstruction of complex conditions relying mainly on visual means. The *Foresturbia* publication contains a mixture of the two, with points and strategies explained through titles, short texts and a synthetic drawing.

Contents are split into sections, clustered, introduced one by one, in order to augment their readability and understanding. Drawings are the primary means of communication. In order to privilege the flow of information rather than its simultaneity, single drawings build narrative sequences. They are computable, their measures are properly scaled, while the use of axonometry gives crucial means of representation. Text, drafted both in Norwegian and English, constitutes a complementary layer to the graphic one, a necessary “second language” of the manual,



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acquiring a wide range of roles. Besides conventional columns, it works as a caption, as a subtitle, as a corollary or as an instrument for further analysis.

The position of the various elements within the page determines the hierarchical organization of the arguments. Regarding the contents, *Foresturbia* engages with the environment, introducing many considerations addressing sustainability through a collection of fifty strategies divided into five scales: territorial (morphology of the specific location); city (relations between neighborhoods); neighborhood (identity seeking, connections, ecologies); community (proximity); domestic (single citizens and private households).

CONCLUSIONS

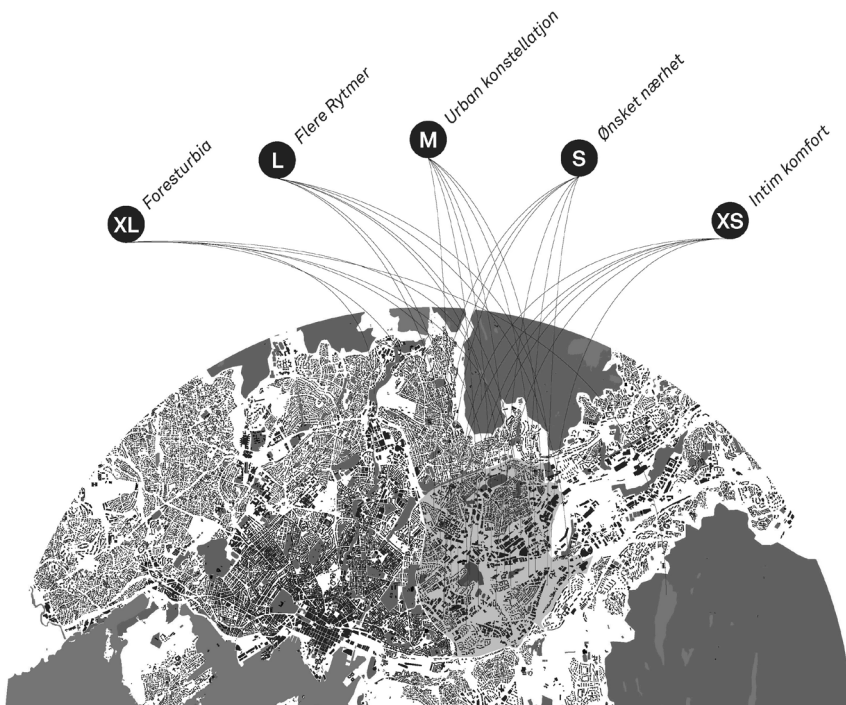
To conclude, *Foresturbia* borrowed the form of the manual as a tool of knowledge and dissemination from other fields, such as the ones of instructions and engineering. The idea of a manual is in fact commonly related to the notion of standardization, or better to the communication of a certain normative of standard rules. When a set of operations or practices acquires a reliability which causes its repeatability in time under the same terms, it can be codified into a standard. At this stage, the manual appears as the best tool for securing transmissibility and for spreading knowledge about sustainable moves in an urban and landscape setting. It has the aim of enabling the final user to have a complete and fulfilling experience of otherwise very sectoral knowledge. The whole community (i.e. citizens of all ages, private investors, municipalities and professionals) has been addressed, putting it at the center of the foreseen transformation process.

On the one hand, users have been involved in the design phase in order to build up a manual able to support them in what they care more about: their life, the future development led by new generations educated as citizens and part of a specific society. On the other hand, thanks to its easily understandable drawings and captions, the manual could be used in several contexts in order to define a shared knowledge. To be approached and understood, it requires neither customization nor any specific previous training. The drawings and texts make it easy to understand both to young people and adults, allowing several layers of comprehension with the aim of making a more inclusive society. It is thus a precious support, a tool for encouraging and spreading collectively shared knowledge about sustainable living.

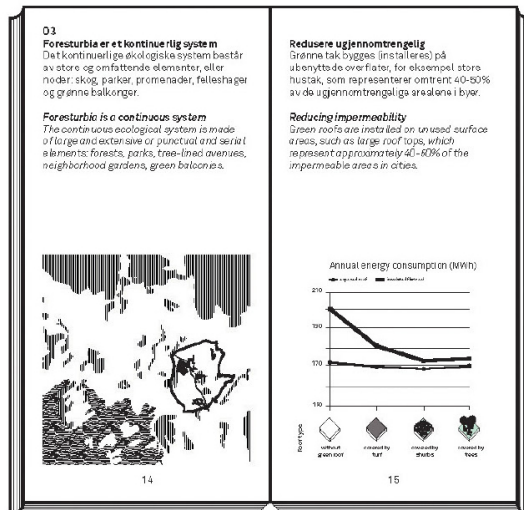
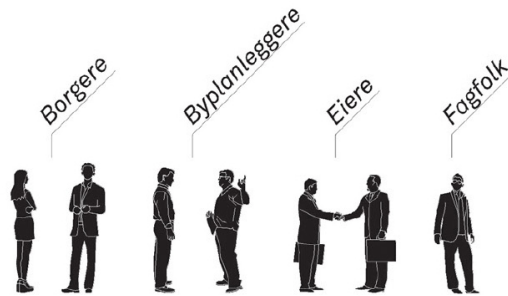
As previously mentioned, this is a project born from a collaboration with several researchers and experts where sustaina-

Foresturbia. A multi-scalar approach, 2015.
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bility is seen from a multidisciplinary point of view. The outcome
is not just a design proposal but also a manual that contains a
wide array of urban strategies combined with technological solu-
tions that should be considered by all decision makers, designers
and citizens that will face the development of Oslo and also of
other cities in the Nordic region.



Foresturbia. Concept for the manual, 2015.
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A DIVE IN THE NORDIC GREEN

✎ This essay is the result of the collaboration between the authors who share its contents and general approach. Specifically, the paragraphs "Introduction," "A vision for Hovinbyen" and "A plurality of rhythms and activities" were written by Ludovico Centis, based on the research developed in the frame of the PhD in Urbanism he obtained at Università IUAV di Venezia (2013-2017). The paragraphs "The context," "A project of the ground" and "A manual for a landscaped city" by Angela Gigliotti, based on the predoctoral research project grant "OAFs fellow for videreutdanning" (2015-2016) awarded by the Oslo Association of Architects, Norway. The paragraphs "Research," "A set of precise moves" and "Conclusion" by Fabio Gigone, based on the research project developed under his Associate Professorship at Norwegian University of Life Sciences NMBU, Ås, Norway (2015-2018).

✂ See for instance the experiences developed in the last decade in Swedish cities such as Kiruna and Stockholm: A. Malkawi et al. (eds.), *Sustainability in Scandinavia: Architectural Design and Planning*, Edition Axel Menges, Stuttgart; London 2018, pp. 154-173.

↓ B. MacKaye, *The New Exploration: A Philosophy of Regional Planning*, University of Illinois Press, Champaign, Illinois 1962, p. 153.

▲ In 2020, the European Union had an export surplus against Norway of 6 billion euro, but only a year later, in 2021, it was Norway that counted a surplus in export towards the European Union of 18 billion euro. <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/nor>, accessed December 2022.

└ We want to acknowledge the contribution of Eng. Ginevra Alessandra Perelli (Energy and Environmental Engineering); Eng. Stefano Bolettieri (Traffic and Transportation Engineering); Arch. Lisa Lavatelli and Dr. William Kempton (Norwegian History, Language and Society); Landscape Arch. Ylenia Arca (Photography); Martina Motta and Dr. Aleksa Korolija (Graphic Design).

└ An interesting precedent in this regard for the city of Oslo, which also included the area of Hovinbyen, can be found in the study titled "One Hundred Thousand" developed by the Japanese office SANAA in 2000. See SANAA, *Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa/SANAA: Works 1995-2003*, TOTO, Tokyo 2003, pp. 118-135.

* V. Gregotti, *Modificazione*, in "Casabella", 498-499, 1984, pp. 2-7.

└ B. Secchi, *Progetto di suolo*, in "Casabella", 520-521, 1986, pp. 9-23.

└ The reference is to those linear parks that have dramatically raised the appeal of large metropolitan areas, such as the Highline in New York City, the system of Green Streets in Portland and the Rose Fitzgerald Greenway in Boston.

UPSTATE ROME. A SUBURBAN ARCHIPELAGO

LINA MALFONA

Garden cities, campsites, temporary settlements, suburban communities, kibbutz. Today, suburban living can be seen as a nostalgic myth, a dystopia, or a realistic refuge from wars, climate change, and pandemics. From the rhetoric of the global village to the intrinsic values of neighborhood, suburban living fulfills the desire for a pristine environment in which to experience new alliances between human and sylvan realms. This essay tells about a built project for an archipelago of residences, designed by Malfona Petrini Architecture (MPA) long before the novel coronavirus appeared, when a number of families started to move away from Rome to the countryside of an unpredicted “upstate Rome”. Considering the large number of people involved in this process, this voluntary relocation can be viewed as a social and economic phenomenon. Begun in the late 2000s, it was an anti-urban and therefore unexpected phenomenon, which foreshadowed what would have happened in the future, in our present. Over time, this archipelago – of people, pets, plants, homes, and technological gizmos – has become a forest, where it is no longer so possible to clearly distinguish architecture from nature.

Many families prefer to move straight to the countryside bypassing the outskirts of Rome. This leap out of the city is becoming one of the main troubles of the capital city that, no longer capable of taking care of its peripheries, is losing its last urban ring. These families exchange long home-work commutes for a range of advantages, in the suburbs indeed they live a lifestyle that, while comfortable, is also devoted to concentration and a kind of enlightened isolation based on total immersion in the landscape. They can even experience a sylvan life, so to speak, losing themselves into the small, mazelike, and sometimes unpaved roads in Formello, the small town in the countryside north of Rome where this project has been developed. Benefits gained by this relocation are not mere compensations for the distance from the urban center but are viewed, rather, as an antidote to the urban disease.

In the last fifteen years, many families moved full-time to the countryside, where they reinvented their own structure and living space according to new ecological paradigms. Also, due to recent economic instability, ongoing trends of emigration, and a declining birth rate that result in smaller families, the new inhabitants have opened their homes to other guests and experimented with new forms of coexistence. But if isolation from the city is synonymous with a voluntary rejection of an overwhelming urban lifestyle it also reinforces a kind of elitist culture. This two-sided nature of suburban living was the starting point for the design process, which focused around some main topics: *upstate*

Rome; archipelago; ritual places; domestication; *ultra-residential*; ecological paradigms.

Upstate Rome is a state of mind. It is a condition, not just a physical place. It is the Rome of commuters, who accept inconvenient traveling in exchange for a range of benefits, such as a house surrounded by a pleasant landscape, away from the city's pollution. These characteristics cannot but call to mind those commuter towns surrounding other metropolitan areas, especially the North American ones, where many well-off families prefer to make their dream come true in nearby suburbs rather than in the cities themselves. With mild sarcasm, *upstate Rome* is the analogous to the Upstate New York, and shows the sameness of suburban conditions, where isolation is the main issue: "This residential silence – Gianni Celati wrote in his book *Verso la force* – is completely different from that of the open space."

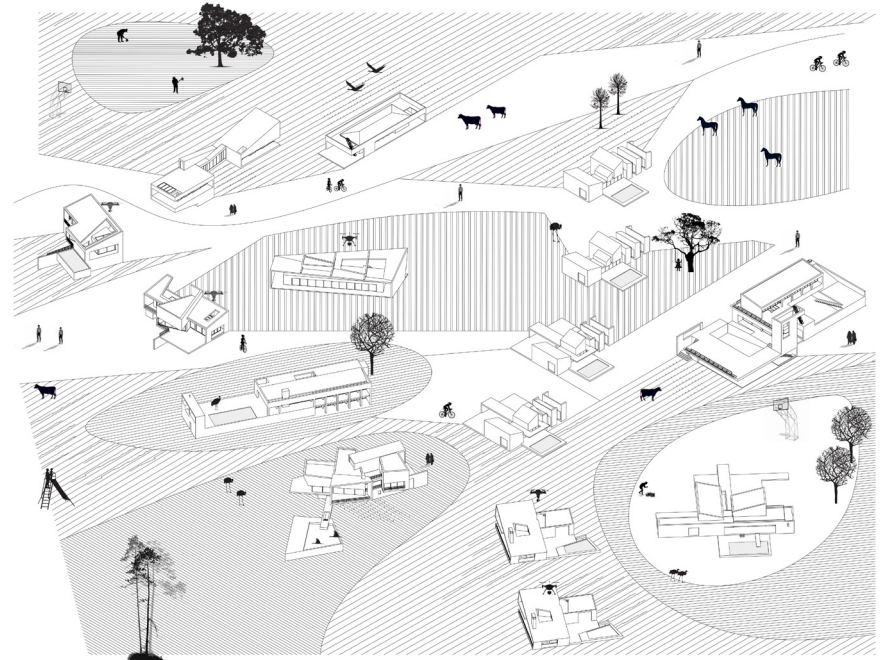
ARCHIPELAGO

The archipelago adds a landscape attribute to the concept of living and defines an insular mode of settlement. It is made up of finite entities, with a semi-autonomous organization. The archipelago is characterized by an open urban form, which can be found in isolated but connected housing models, in dialogue with nature. Over time this form has been used as an urban metaphor[¶], conveying the idyllic vision of a city whose neighborhoods are surrounded by greenery, as in Oswald Mathias Ungers' *The City in the City – Berlin: A Green Archipelago* (1977). The archipelago can be seen as a "system of solitudes" – as Nietzsche wrote about the islands of Venice – but it may also be explained as a collection, a "magic encyclopedia" which continually regenerates itself through the experimentation of new design typologies[⌘].

The term "collection" introduces an attribute of value, which is related to the piece selection and indirectly to the design process. In the process of building a constellation of houses in Formello, the archipelago emerged as one of the most appropriate design tools in order to overcome the separatist geography of the countryside. Over time, this archipelago has become a romantic and evocative "garden of wandering" for people who relocate fragments of their identity from one place to the other.

RITUAL PLACES

During the design process, historical traits of the Italian countryside have been hybridized with the new families' portable identities, made up of experiences, rituals, and social practic-



es, caused by migrations and exchanges. In addition, this territory shows a folkloristic vernacular, a sort of “*geometra* style”, which refers to the building anarchy of spontaneous and abusive homes. According to the moviemaker Giacomo Gili, the “*geometra* style” shows a *joie de vivre*, expressed by the use of color, liveliness, bricolage as a construction technique, and typically Italian fun. Although architecture culture has not generally been concerned with this whimsical anarchy, it is possible to look at this phenomenon from an anthropological perspective, taking into account the work of Ed Ruscha (*Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*, 1963), Hilla and Bernd Becher (*Industriebauten* 1830–1930), and especially Giuseppe Pagano (*Architettura Rurale Italiana*, 1936). These studies on vernacular landscape have shown how the construction of a language can take advantage of the specificity of places, with their distinctive figures, perhaps capturing their spontaneity and liveliness.

DOMESTICATION

In the suburbs home is ubiquitous. Shops and stores are located in buildings formerly designed to be homes. In order to create a domestic atmosphere, even those cafes and restaurants located in recycled warehouses are set up like homes. This “home style” which now prevails in shopping malls and collective facilities promotes the concept of “continuous interiors”, which means making anonymous places domestic. Floors covered with false parquet and walls covered with false stone are used to “domesticate” these places, which are frequently completed by artificial plants and the flame from a bioethanol fireplace. The current practice of incorporating one’s workplace into the home in addition to social life prompts reflections on the term “domestication”, which comes from the Latin *domesticus*, meaning “belonging to the house”. But domestication also means making tame what is wild, with a clear reference to the animal and vegetal world. Thus, the process of domestication started from the presumption of species superiority, from humans’ willingness to adapt nature to their way of thinking and living, a position that today is rightly under attack.

ULTRA-RESIDENTIAL

In the suburbs the home is the place where people prefer to gather, the privileged place where conversations with neighbors, dinners and Sunday meetings take place. But the residential program alone does not satisfy the aspirations of those families who

recently chose to move to the suburbs. For this reason, each of the houses that MPA built in the countryside hosts associated, connected, incorporated, or complementary programs into the home, in addition to the residential one. Thanks to the double program, this archipelago of homes triggers an environmental transformation process, which reactivates the sleepy suburbs. The result is an open and expanding project, an archipelago of residences that includes a kindergarten, a home studio, and a home restaurant. This typological hybridization still needs to be explored in the countryside, where *ultra-residential* programs could provide further opportunities for mending the existing built fabric and social relationships.

ECOLOGICAL PARADIGMS

Houses in Formello are equipped with passive systems, such as solar greenhouses and ventilation chimneys, as well as technological systems, like underfloor heating, water recovery and purification plants, photovoltaic panels and solar thermal as energy supply. They are also provided by green roofs, a construction technology used to ensure optimal thermic insulation, with the end result that such buildings disappear completely when viewed from above. But living according to new ecological paradigms does not only mean equipping houses with innovative and environmentally sustainable technologies, or creating visual continuity between interior and exterior, solutions that are certainly desirable in any case. It also means creating a landscape inside the house. Some of these homes, for example, have become containers – or better nurseries – for particular species of plants, easily movable because arranged in pots or boxes placed on wheels. One such house, named *La Villa*, has even a plant shower placed right in the middle of the living room. However, this does not mean wanting to domesticate nature or place it inside a museum display case. It means taking care of the Earth and incorporating nature as a living being within one’s life. The same can be said for animals, who are often the real recipients of architectural design, as very often the house not only provides a space for them but is rather designed with the integration of human and pet space in mind.

COUNTRYSIDE

The entire territory of Formello was originally agricultural land, parceled out and assigned by the Agency for the Colonization of the Tuscan-Latvian Maremma [Ente per la *Colonizzazione* del-



la Maremma Tosco-Laziale] to the land workers who submitted requests, as a consequence of the Agrarian Reform in 1950. This reform had profoundly changed the national property structure, extinguishing large estates [*latifondo*] and initiating *appoderation* practices. The epic construction of a series of rural buildings [*poderi*] began on the agricultural lots assigned by the Maremma Authority [Ente Maremma], with the migration of hundreds of workers coming to the capital city and its hinterland. But later on, these buildings came to be irregularly turned into residential buildings and legally remitted, following a long series of amnesties. Around 2000, rural land was converted into building land, so a ravenous race to build hundreds of isolated villas began, visibly altering the perception of the rural landscape, now largely lost. Today these new buildings – originated from speculative operations addressed by rapacious builders – have visibly altered the ancient landscape and the tradition of rural houses and *poderi*.

In order to carry out an updated, dynamic and transversal reading of this particular region of the Roman countryside, its spontaneous and largely abusive past cannot be overlooked.

However, the territory of Formello is also characterized by a large infrastructure project started in the Etruscan Age. This territory is crossed indeed by caves and tunnels, a complex system for the drainage and collection of water, linked to a set of wells for water supply. The Piranesian image of an underground world has been a design inspiration: burrowed through, vertically and horizontally, a land that is in large part made of tufa, and therefore spongy, malleable, and full of water. The wild imagery of the cave merges with that of the forest which the houses are embedded in, and peep out from. Finally, the house itself is thought of as a forest, broken by wells and clearings, where light filters in from above, as from the treetops.

FOREST(AND) ARCHITECTURE

The Roman suburban villa can be seen as both a space to enjoy country life and a place for intellectual pursuits. Pliny the Younger wrote of the villa as a place of quietness and intellectual well-being, extended into the landscape almost by germination, through its long arms, paths, pergolas and cryptoporticoes, somehow anticipating the typology of the house made up of pavilions. Pliny himself owned two suburban villas: the one located in the Apennines, *Villa in Tuscis*, and the other on the Tyrrhenian coast not far from Rome, the *Laurentinum*. Only Pliny's description and a few ruins of this latter villa remain, but many architects, including Karl Friedrich Schinkel, tried

Malfona Petrini Architettura, *Finestre sul fiume*. Model A. | Etruscan well.
Photos by Lina Malfona.



to make reconstruction drawings of this enigmatic residence, influenced by these descriptions.

The architect Léon Krier sketched out a very careful outline of this suburban villa, a residence intended as a “village” made up of a set of private and public buildings:

This villa [...] is an ensemble of buildings which serve very diverse functions; sometimes strictly private, sometimes very public. [...] Through his text, Pliny encouraged me to conceive his villa as a great number of separate buildings. This village does not have to ward off pirates.▲

Through these words, Krier highlighted the dual nature of the suburban villa, a protected world but also an open organism, a private and contemporary public residence, a control center as well as a hub to connect sprawling suburbs.

In 1804, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux published the first tome of his treaty, *L'architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des mœurs et de la législation*, in which he included his drawings for the ideal city of Chaux (1773-1806). Around the Royal Saltworks of Chaux, a productive complex built in 1778, Ledoux designed a network of prototype residences and workshops located in the forest. The aim of these “fabriques” was to reform the habits of this region’s “rude men”, by promoting group living and fostering corporatism.

As Antoine Picon noticed, “in the work of Ledoux, architectural production began to be polarized in terms of services and habitation, with the traditional opposition between the monumental and the vernacular being subsumed within the public/private dyad”^L. In this project, the home-workshops’ aim was to exploit the productive countryside, and the forest in particular, as a geography of energy sources. Thus, these houses can be read contemporarily as private-collective places, countryside control towers, and environmental sentinels. Antoine Picon wrote that Ledoux’s architecture “dominated the countryside, and surveyed it, as was borne out by the frequently repeated motif of the belvedere, the observatory or the mirador”^E.

These two *ultra-residential* projects highlight two opposite ways in which architecture relates to the natural landscape. In the first case, the landscape is a familiar, unthreatening environment that can be occupied by residential pavilions; in fact, Pliny’s house with its pergolas and porches stretches pleasantly into this landscape, becoming a forest itself. In the second case, the landscape is a dark forest, an ecosystem to be preserved but also to be protected from. In this case, Ledoux’s residences become domination devices, which while controlling the landscape also display their otherness.

Abbot Marc-Antoine Laugier, in his book *Essai sur l'Architecture* (1753) developed the theory of the city as a forest, derived not from the organic fluidity of nature but from the relational geometries of Le Nôtre’s parks, a model that contrasted sharply with Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s city by fragments. More recently, the curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud claims that today any artwork is a relational object, not only a product but essentially a process. It is intended as a cooperative system, as the place of negotiations, ties and coexistence with countless interlocutors.

The concept of “relational aesthetics”, understood in a social, landscape and urban sense, allowed me to conceive of the house as the place where users can live alone but at the same time feel part of a whole universe, the “residential pavilion” where “collective individuality” is formed. Since 2008, my colleagues and I have been designing and building a forest of homes, located a short distance from each other in Formello, a small town north of Rome. If it is true that the powers-that-be tolerate the presence of art only in the peripheral, marginal areas of the system, since it does not represent a direct threat here, then the peripheral can unexpectedly reveal itself as a privileged condition, one in which it is possible to enjoy a certain autonomy of thought▲.

The current state of this project is a collection of more than twenty architectures, which contribute to defining an adaptive, relational and multifaceted organism, one might say a resilient community without common roots and open to welcoming new components. It is an architectural as well as a social and landscape experiment, a continuous workshop open to students, manufacturers and users, which fosters unusual and creative ties.

Over time, it became clear that the use of a specific architectural language has made these homes similar and that the same style has played a decisive role in developing a feeling of belonging, in addition to simple coexistence. As an author, what appeared as an unexpected but considerable discovery to me was that an individual syntax may be able to shape a collective sense of community. But today authorship is inappropriately considered as authoritarian while, on the contrary, it implies civic responsibility and stimulates the creation of a strong synergy between author and users, a relationship in which the role of the architect cannot be secondary. By authorship I mean the crystallization of the designer’s political and social action in architectural form, an effort that allows the author’s hand to be glimpsed. The act of planting trees and designing buildings is similar to the act of creating a collection, and analogously to the collector and the curator’s eye, the architect’s hand needs to be read only in filigree.

The shift of creative tension from the production of objects to the making of communities – read as adaptive and resilient environments – made it possible to better understand how research on architectural form can induce new models of sociality and new forms of coexistence. These first considerations lead to a tentative definition of architecture as the art of creating innovative and useful forms which, on the one hand, create intimacy and on the other stimulate sociality.

ECOLOGY AS FORMATION

In the process of designing and building an archipelago, the concept of form has been absorbed by that of formation, which explains how this constellation of houses has grown over time in symbiosis with the landscape. The concept of formation allows us to understand the creative processes as subjected to continuous variations and evolutions. Therefore, we developed these houses as formations rather than complete forms, generators of space rather than containers. They are samples of a design practice that uses architecture to stimulate new settlement matrices and new forms of life.

Today, a Copernican-like revolution is undermining anthropocentrism, leading humanity to establish new alliances with the nonhuman, and to build new spaces common to different realms. According to philosopher Timothy Morton, there is a need to return to the enchanted world that preceded the disenchantment wrought by Galileo and Newton, and ecological thinking can become the engine of this change. Such thinking, supported by OOO (Object-Oriented Ontology), a kind of renewed animism, brings to the surface the mystery and magic of reality, attributes that the dominant, techno-scientific thinking had long suppressed or ignored. An ecological society is not a society of control but will rather be a society that is “a tad improvised, unhinged, limp, twisted, sardonic”¹¹, writes Morton, who in one of his recent books criticizes the Anthropocene by quoting Sophocles’ Antigone: “many things are terrible but nothing is more terrible than man”. For better or for worse, new artistic practices and creative processes are emerging today, animated by an ecological consciousness that induces thinking by phases, across multiple time scales, and elaborating projects with increasingly blurred and unfinished boundaries, in the direction of overcoming the fixity of dogma and prejudice. Ecological thinking and its correlationist vocation induces to overcome finitude and the fracture that divides different realms, in order to attenuate the centrality of the human species.

Malfona Petrini Architettura, *Finestre sul fiume* (foreground), *La casa sul bosco* (background). Photo by Fabio Bascetta.





Environmental issues formed the backbone of the design for a constellation of houses in the Roman countryside. These suburban houses – sometimes productive houses, more often residential pavilions – have embodied the theme of the forest, equipping their outdoor space with masking vegetation wings or areas inside the property left wild, as they are impossible to maintain, given their extension. Some of these residences developed connections with other conterminous houses, as in the case of the project for the three homes *Finestre sul fiume*, where the hedges that make up the fence have, by design, a zigzag pattern that makes possible secret passages, leading from one house to another; finally, the forest has become a metaphor for the whole process of formation of this archipelago. Designing a suburban house according to an ecological paradigm is not rhetorical, nor redundant, nor fanatical. Rather, it means that sooner or later nature will reclaim its space, that is, the space that was taken away during the excavation and construction of the house. In this sense, the house is understood as a portion of the forest that will be returned over time. As early as ten years after the construction of these houses, the image of the forest visually overlapped with that of the house, which originally was in a dominant position.

CONCLUSIONS

The suburban villa is the most complex form of individual living but also the one that typically is less regulated. After the construction of the first houses and as soon as the idea of an archipelago started to emerge, I found it necessary to combine the practice of taking roots with the experience of moving across, for this reason I have designed buildings that protect but allow you to look far ahead. Initially, houses were characterized by a central core and an envelope; the coexistence of both represents the relationship between intimacy and sociality. Thereafter, it followed a progression in the relationship between typology and topology, between artisan practices and necessary standardization, between local cultures and global expression. Between nature and artifice, this single-family house started to mirror the geography of suburbs: open to the landscape on the one hand, protected and self-sufficient like an island on the other.

If the archipelago is an expression of reciprocal relations, the villa, like the island, reveals a search for autonomy. Each of the villas that make up this suburban constellation, surrounded by a large green area, is inserted in a low-density fabric. These autonomous and self-sufficient slivers are intercalated in a fragmented and dispersed territory, to whom the new islands – which

Malfona Petrini Architettura, *La casa sul bosco*, detail.
Photo by Fabio Bascetta.



are instead rigorously designed – propose an alternative settlement strategy. As evidence to both their design rationale and sensibility, over time they became “pockets of optimal climatic and ecological conditions that allowed their inhabitants enough comfort to co-exist”¹⁸.

To summarize, this constellation of houses, which developed from a series of independent design opportunities, over time became an archipelago of residences. The archipelago as a landscape, territorial, and urban figure has emerged as one of the most appropriate design tools: an open, adaptive strategy to build suburban communities endowed with urban values, which is to say, urbanity without urbanism.

Malfona Petrini Architettura, *La casa sul bosco*.
Photo by Fabio Bascetta.





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FOREST, UTOPIA, MODERNISM

III