

To Bring Closer. To Forge Bonds. To Integrate. The Urban Regeneration of the City of Bari

*Acercar. Forjar vínculos. Integrar.
La regeneración urbana de la ciudad de Bari*

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Abstract

Bari is a city of approximately 300,000 inhabitants located on the Adriatic coast, in the southeast of Italy and at the heart of Puglia. Until the mid-19th century, it was entirely enclosed within its ancient walls. The growth of the urban population, which affected this city like all European cities, led to significant urban development. Its limits were defined by the sea to the north and the railway to the south. The Rossani Barracks, built at the beginning of the 20th century, occupied an almost entirely rural area. With urban development in the 20th century, especially after World War II, the railway increasingly became a major urban divide, and the Rossani Barracks were completely incorporated into the city until their complete decommissioning. In the last twenty years, successive municipal administrations have shown a strong commitment to addressing various projects as part of their political programs: reconnecting the city to the sea, overcoming the urban divide created by the railway, and restoring and repurposing the Rossani Barracks as a cultural and artistic hub.

Keywords

Urban regeneration, Bari, urban plans.

Resumen

Bari es una ciudad de aproximadamente 300.000 habitantes ubicada en la costa del Adriático, en el sureste de Italia y en el centro de Apulia, que hasta mediados del siglo XIX estuvo completamente rodeada por las antiguas murallas. El crecimiento de la población urbanizada que afectó a esta ciudad, al igual que a todas las ciudades de Europa, condujo a un desarrollo urbano significativo, con el mar al norte y la vía férrea al sur como límites. El Cuartel Rossani, construido a principios del siglo XX, ocupaba un espacio casi completamente rural. Con el desarrollo urbano del siglo XX, especialmente después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, la vía férrea se convirtió cada vez más en una importante división urbana y el Cuartel Rossani fue completamente incorporado a la ciudad, hasta su completa desafectación. En los últimos veinte años, las administraciones municipales sucesivas han demostrado un fuerte compromiso en abordar varios proyectos como parte de sus programas políticos: la reconexión de la ciudad con el mar, superar la división urbana creada por la vía férrea y restaurar y reutilizar el Cuartel Rossani como centro cultural y artístico.

Palabras clave

Regeneración urbana, Bari, Planeamiento.

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Sumario: 1. Construction of the city and urban plans. 2. An urban design for Bari. 3. Art and Culture for urban regeneration. 4. Bibliography.

1. Construction of the city and urban plans.

Bari¹ is situated on the Adriatic coast in southeastern Italy and at the centre of Puglia, serving as that Region’s capital. Its geographic location has always made the city a boundary and crossroads between East and West. Lying as it

¹ Bari’s municipal territory has an area of 117.40 Km². With approximately 320,000 inhabitants, it is Italy’s ninth-largest city in terms of population.

does in the heart of a profoundly agricultural region even as it faces directly onto the sea, over the centuries it has blended agrarian and mercantile cultures (Petrignani, Porsia, 1982, p.1).

Historically, it was, like the entire region, a city subject to frequent invasions by peoples that colonized it for centuries and left conspicuous traces of their passage (Peucetians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines), until its destruction by the Normans in 1156 and the start of reconstruction some decades later. Remaining from this phase is the arrangement most visible in the ancient city, in which, however, the Arab presence left important marks in the urban morphology. Invasions and dominations came in succession over the centuries: Swabians, Angevins, Aragonese, Spaniards, and Habsburgs, with a city population that in the early eighteenth century numbered 18,000 inhabitants (Petrignani, Porsia, 1982, p. 73) dwelling within the city walls, in an area that in mid-century still contained many voids. (Fig.1). These voids filled as the population grew, and within a few decades the spaces available inside the walls were fully saturated.



Fig. 1. T. Salmon (1740 – '76), *Veduta della città di Bari, capitale della Terra di Bari nel Regno di Napoli*, in "Lo stato presente di tutti i paesi e popoli del mondo", Venezia, 1761 – '62

The Napoleonic domination of the early nineteenth century raised the urgent question of urban development outside the city walls, also because, as in all of Europe, the urbanization phenomenon continued to progress, with population growth becoming quite considerable and requiring responses in terms of housing.

After Napoleon named Joachim Murat King of Naples, numerous public works were carried out throughout the Kingdom of Naples that impacted the transformation of the cities involved. During those same years, the project for a new quarter outside Bari's city walls, approved in 1813, got underway. Designed by Giuseppe Gimma, the project involved a checkerboard development in accordance with the urban growth schemes of that period, facilitated in this case by the territory's flat contours. This checkerboard scheme without emerging elements, while in fact anticipating the city's growth *ad infinitum*, raised the question of the relationship between the ancient part and the new expansion. Giuseppe Gimma's design provided no response to this question, also because it involved no organic linkage between the old and new, even though the city walls, still a physical rift at that time, would soon be demolished – in fact, the works for the so-called “*borgo murattiano*” quarter began in 1815, while the demolition of the walls got underway in 1820. However, the separation of the two urban parts remained, and from many standpoints it grew because, in addition to the physical one, as the years went by and the neighbourhood's construction progressed, there was also the social one, given that the less well-off classes continued to live in the ancient part, while the new, bourgeois classes settled in the new one.

Following Murat's checkerboard, the city grew in all directions, with a provisional limit imposed in the 1860s by the railway on the southern side but leaving a broad margin for urban development. In a matter of a few decades, this space was completely saturated, also in consideration of the population's constant growth (Petrignani Porsia, 1982, pag.133), which proceeded hand in hand with the city of Bari's burgeoning role in the regional setting, thanks also to the development of major services and linking infrastructures.

When the Rossani barrack became active in 1908, the city was still developed entirely north of the railway (Fig.2), while the military complex was surrounded by countryside planted mainly with olive groves and dotted with

farmhouses (*masserie*)² and suburban residences, although some signs of future development began to be glimpsed with the first buildings rising by the roads radiating into the territory. From that moment on, the city developed mainly southward at a gradually faster pace, especially starting from the second postwar period, until the area of the part built beyond the railway exceeded that of the part built north of it. The bundle of tracks thus became the great urban rift that it remains to this day. (Fig.3)

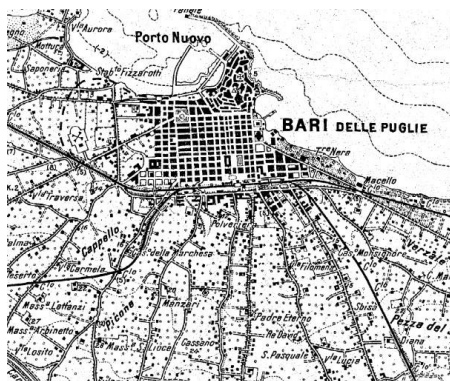


Fig. 2. Istituto Geografico Militare, F.177 della Carta d'Italia, *Bari delle Puglie*, Firenze 1912

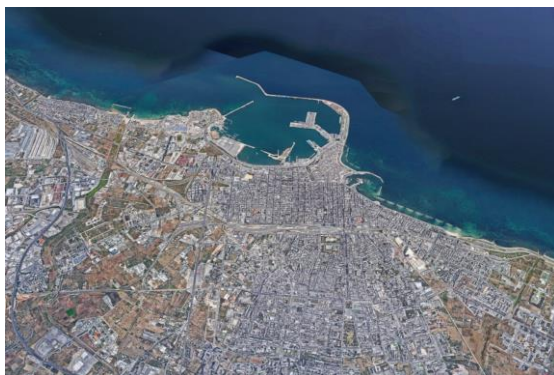


Fig. 3. The city of Bari seen from above.
Bari 2020

During the second postwar period, Bari adopted two General Regulatory Plans, the first drawn up by Alberto Calza Bini³ and Marcello Piacentini⁴; the

² *Masserie*, rural constructions widespread throughout the territory of Puglia, arose at the service of farms inhabited by landowners, but in the past also included peasant lodgings, feed and crop stores, and locations for processing the products. A great many of these buildings are used today for hospitality functions.

³ Alberto Calza Bini (Rome, 7 December 1881 – Rome, 25 December 1957). Architect, urban planner, president of Istituto fascista autonomo delle case popolari, President of Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica, Chair of the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Naples, and author of a number of general regulatory plans, including those of Salerno, Taranto, and Bari.

⁴ Marcello Piacentini (Rome, 8 December 1881 - 18 May 1960). Architect and urban planner, superintendent for parks and architecture at the 1942 Universal Exposition (EUR) with Piccinato, Pagano, Vietti, and Rossi; directed the works for the campus of the University of Rome (1935) and designed the university campus in Rio de Janeiro (1935); designed the opening of Via della Conciliazione in Rome, with the demolition of the Spina di Borgo neighbourhood (1936 – 1950)

second drawn up by a group of architects led by Ludovico Quaroni⁵. Both Regulatory Plans were aimed mainly at regulating urban growth and serving it with road infrastructures. In the case of the Calza Bini-Piacentini Plan, definitively approved in 1954, the question of growth took absolute priority, as Calza Bini himself asserted: "A regulatory plan's political value instead lies precisely in the city's expansion and in the creation of new neighbourhoods" (Petrignani, Porsia, 1982, p.166). Besides, this was not a prerogative of the city of Bari alone; since the start of the century, all European cities were pointing in this direction. The Calza Bini-Piacentini plan had a projected time frame extending to 1980 and envisaged a population of 500,000 inhabitants by that time, in comparison with a current population – seventy years after the plan – of approximately 325,000 inhabitants.

The tumultuous development during those years – which in Bari's case involved above all housing and the service industry – encouraged the city, in 1965, to initiate the process of adopting a new Regulatory Plan, entrusting the assignment to the group led by Ludovico Quaroni. Still in force, the Plan was adopted in 1973 and definitively approved in 1976. In this case as well, as in all cases during that period, it was a plan oriented essentially towards an urban growth deemed unlimited. The Quaroni Plan's projected time frame extended to the year 2000, for a forecast population of 600,000 inhabitants. This obviously gave considerable size to areas devoted to residential building and connected services. To structure the large quantity of areas intended for transformation for homes, services, apparatus, and green spaces, the plan called for repositioning the railway and for intensely enhancing the road system to be tasked with giving the city "architectural" shape. This idea was to remain an illusion because the perimeter of the development zone alone (which, moreover, greatly exceeded what was needed) and the quantity indices (lacking, for example, guidelines for the arrangement of what was built) could only result in the city's wholly random formal configuration. These were also some of the reasons that, just a few years later, were to lead to doubts raised

⁵ Ludovico Quaroni (Rome, 28 March 1911 – Rome, 22 July 1987). Architect and urban planner, highly active in Italy during the second postwar period; was a professor at the Faculty of Architecture at Sapienza University of Rome. Designed a number of religious buildings and authored various urban plans, including the reconstruction of Matera's La Martella neighbourhood with Adriano Olivetti and the General Regulatory Plan of Bari.

throughout Europe about urban plans based on zoning, and to the emergence of urban design as a way to transform the city.

2. An urban design⁶ for Bari.

In the second half of the 1970s, strong criticism was raised against the idea of the city outlined by the Modern Movement and set out by the Athens Charter, as well as against the urban plans inspired by the latter, aimed mainly at regulating urban growth. The main criticisms targeted the separation of functions; the use of public space and of green spaces to detach and distance buildings from one another; the loss of the relationship between building and road and between building and lot; the postponement to a later time of the definition of space; and other issues. But the second half of the 1970s also saw the idea of the unlimited growth of the European city come to an abrupt end, also in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis. For cities, other problems were raised, and there were new pathologies to be dealt with – pathologies that initially related on the one hand to the need to requalify existing structures due to portions of the city being emptied through processes of shrinking production activities and transferred functions; and on the other to the desire to give meaning and shape to decayed portions of territories already subject to enormous transformations that generated physical separation, exclusion, and social segregation.

But other issues also began to be seen on the horizon, including the interest of political administrators to make visible, at least in part, the results of their territory governance action, something an urban plan did not allow, starting already with the duration of the development and approval process.

In the mid-1980s, these issues contributed towards the affirmation in Europe, but above all in France, of urban design – an approach that assigns great importance to the necessity and ability to outline a strategy to improve the conditions in a given setting, accompanied by the definition of the process and actions that will lead to its implementation (Donvito, 2014, p.101).

⁶ The term "urban design" is used in this text in the sense of the French "projet urbain," which has developed over more than three decades of experiences conducted in France, many of which have a pioneering character (Devillers, 1994; Masbounji, 2003; Donvito, 2014).

Right from the initial trials, urban design made reference to the existing city, oscillating between the requalification of public spaces on the one hand, and the recovery of large spaces or abandoned or decayed complexes on the other, and at times returned sizeable, abandoned areas to the city. Although these were in many cases interventions relating to mobility infrastructures, they were –reversing the prevailing logic in the sector– used as a lever for broader regeneration operations.

In addition to the “reparative” interventions for which the traditional urban plan offered few possibilities for guidance, other situations led to privileging urban design as the most suitable approach.

In many cases, requalification or regeneration related to recovering a relationship between cities and the watercourses that traversed them (Bordeaux, Toulouse, Lisbon, etc.). The same may be said of many cities’ rediscovered relationship with the sea, in which interventions for the coastline space achieved a two-fold result in the best cases: high quality and interaction with the setting by the interested parties, and a space accessible to all citizens, which is also a way to help combat social segregation.

But the real pivot around which the urban design discourse revolves is public space, the underpinning urban structure and main invariable that translates many of its characteristic concepts: from the theme of connection to that of the city as a inhabitable space (Huet, 1984, p.6) –or transforming a void into a place– and to that of social integration.

The urban design approach can certainly be seen in the path that the city of Bari has been following over the past 15 years in parallel with the decision to prepare a new General Urban Plan. The choice of developing and carrying out designs on an urban scale albeit within a frame of reference that is still that of the 1976 Regulatory Plan, while at the same time proceeding with the development of a new Plan, shows a political will, pursued with determination, that over the past 18 years has developed along a certainly recognizable line of continuity⁷. But what is also clear is a more mature approach to “urban design”, whose first major theories provided a glimpse of opposition against the “urban plan” (Pinson, 2009, p.3); in the meanwhile, the experiments com-

⁷ This aspect is essential when referring to urban design. In this regard, see the text by P. Falini.

ing in succession in recent decades have, in the most advanced cases, demonstrated the need for a complementariness between the two approaches, with the urban plan serving as overall framework of reference.

The unmistakable sign of a changed course in urban policies for the city of Bari came in April 2006 when, at the end of a long administrative and judicial process, the administration led by Michele Emiliano⁸ definitively authorized the demolition of the Punta Perotti complex, an “eco-monster” designed for homes and offices occupying about 300,000 m³ just a few metres from the sea. Demolition was followed by the area’s transformation into an urban park. (Fig.4)



Fig.4 - The demolition of the Punta Perotti complex in Bari in 2006

During Mayor Emiliano’s ten-year administration, a number of other projects were initiated, and in part concluded. The most important of these include those that aimed to fortify and requalify the relationship between the city and the sea.

⁸ Michele Emiliano was mayor of the city of Bari from 2004 to 2014.

The first portion of waterfront done at the turn of the 2010s related to the San Girolamo – Fesca stretch of coastline, an area adjacent to the city’s working-class neighbourhoods, with interventions to organize the beach, build a break-water, create public and green spaces, and install a bike path, pedestrian paths, and a car park serving more than 1,000 vehicles. (Figs. 5-6)



Figs. 5-6.
Requalification of San
Girolamo Waterfront

To this stretch of shoreline, the last ten years have seen the addition of projects and interventions, carried out and in progress, involving Bari’s entire coast from north to south. The idea of bringing the city closer to its sea was adopted with the same political will by Mayor Decaro⁹, who succeeded Emiliano in governing the city. The puzzle of the long waterfront is being pieced together with the Torre a Mare interventions and projects awarded or at an

⁹ Antonio Decaro was elected mayor of Bari in 2014 and re-elected in 2019. His current term will expire in the spring of 2024.

advanced stage of progress, like Costasud; the park linking the Pane and Pomodoro beaches to Torre Quetta; the Old City waterfront; and the Lighthouse – Fiera del Levante waterfront. Particularly ambitious is the “Bari Costasud” Competition programme, through which the municipal administration intends not only to reorganize the waterfront, but to connect it to inland areas by including the surviving nature areas and the still-legible sections of the zone’s agrarian landscape. Of particular interest – and almost a manifesto for urban design (Masbounji, 2003, p.24) – is the desire to “assume process-orientedness as a foundational element of the project’s implementation; to guarantee the project will last over time; and to permit flexibility and adaptability of medium- and long-term forecasts”¹⁰.

The same approach is taken by two new “reparative” interventions, two great challenges that the city of Bari has undertaken over the past ten years: requalifying the Rossani barrack, and repairing the urban rift of the railway, which the Quaroni Plan already made a major objective in the early 1970s. The first challenge has to a large degree been met. As for the second one, already financed, the complex process leading to its execution is already at a rather advanced stage. Although the two operations were initiated separately, the physical proximity of the affected areas caused them to be frequently intertwined over the course of the years.

In 1998, the Rossani barrack, a complex covering about 80,000 m², was definitively abandoned after more than ninety years of activity. After about another ten years of administrative hardships and utter neglect of its structures, it was purchased by the Municipality of Bari in 2008. Since then, first the Emiliano administration then the one led by Decaro never stopped driving its requalification process, which had two salient moments: the inauguration of the Rossani urban park and the completion of the restoration of two of the buildings belonging to the complex.

Around the same years when the Rossani barrack restoration and reuse works were taking place, the urban project to repair the rift of the railway within the city was begun, the first step being an international ideas competition won in 2017 by the firm of the architect Massimiliano Fuksas.

¹⁰ Municipality of Bari, “Bari Costasud” Competition announcement, 2018.

This design involved building an artificial hill covering the tracks, along which a linear park and a building/bridge would be constructed. In recent years, the design has been modified a number of times to adjust it to the functional needs of the railway activities carried out by RFI (Rete ferroviaria italiana) and has been included among the works financed by the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (Piano nazionale di ripresa e resilienza – PNRR) for an amount of € 100 million, plus € 40 million financed by RFI. Access to PNRR funding will require completing the work by 2026, thus spurring all the involved parties to set aside any of their own prerogatives in order to achieve the final goal of finishing the project and thus putting an end to the 50-year-long controversy over healing the rift caused by the bundle of railway tracks.

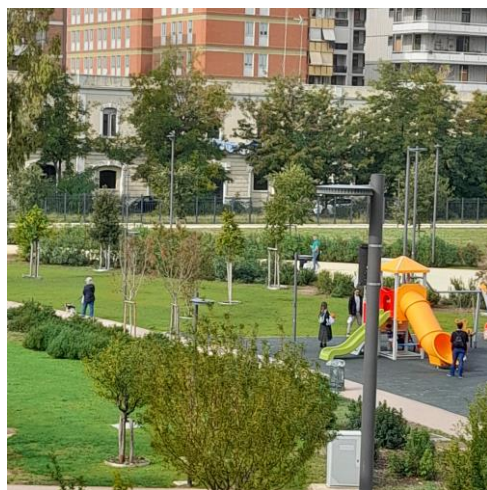
3. Art and culture for urban regeneration.

The other reparative intervention, begun prior to the operation relating to the railway and advanced in its progress, is that of urban regeneration implemented through the restoration and reuse of the buildings and open spaces of the Rossani barrack, to be destined for artistic and cultural activities. This orientation towards the complex's reuse may be said to have already had precedents with the installation of tensile structures within the former sports area to accommodate opera and theatre activities after Teatro Petruzzelli, Bari's historic temple of opera, ballet, and concerts, was partially destroyed by fire in 1991.

Also built in the barrack's former sports area, the urban park was the first intervention to be inaugurated, in the month of March, 2022. Designed by the Fuksas firm and covering an area of 30,000 m² just a few metres from the railway station, the park is based on the principle of reusing what already exists in terms of both artificial elements and vegetation. (Fig.7; Fig.8; Fig.9)

The forms prevailing in the space's design are dictated not only by the architect's linguistic choices, but also by the desire to provide coherent organization both to the trees that have grown in the decades of the barrack's substantial abandonment, and to the elements built within the park's area over the years. The space's fundamental structure is provided by the system of pedestrian and bike paths traversing the park and linking it to the various urban portions extending from its boundaries. This system of paths, the

buildings' cultural functions, and the availability of areas for urban vegetable gardens and dog agility parks are largely tasked with making the area of the former Rossani barrack an open, liveable, and interconnected space, contrary to what it was in over a century of the barrack's activity as a place separated from and isolated within the city.



Figs. 7, 8, 9
Rossani Park



The park's vegetation component is significant, given the dearth of green spaces (although they are increasing considerably) that still afflicts the city. Therefore, the planting of 192 new trees and of a considerable quantity of shrubs makes a major contribution in this sense.

Lastly, the skate park is an interesting idea for making the intervention as minimal as possible, by reusing what was the orchestra pit in the tensile theatre structure, thus preventing demolitions and the disposal of materials in large quantities, while recovering areas for other uses.

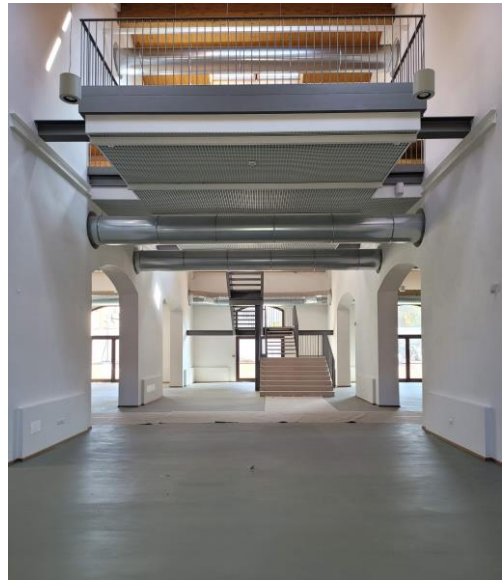


Fig. 10. Exterior of the restored building of the Rossani Barracks, designated as a library hub.

As regards the buildings of the Rossani barrack, two have already been renovated and destined for cultural activities, such as a regional media centre and library – functions absent throughout the region of Puglia and conceived also to give liveliness to the building complex, with the express purpose of making it an “urban space at the city’s service”¹¹. These are two buildings restricted by the Cultural Heritage and Landscape Code as important examples of military construction in Bari. For this reason, the transformation intervention was essentially restoration, conducted by the Technical Office of the Municipality of Bari, under the high surveillance of the superintendence of Ar-

¹¹ Municipality of Bari, *Lavori per la realizzazione del polo bibliotecario regionale della Puglia presso l'ex Caserma Rossani* (Works to construct the Puglia regional library hub at the former Caserma Rossani barrack). Final technical/scientific report. April 2022.

chaeology, Fine Arts, and Landscape of the Metropolitan City of Bari. The two restored buildings are functionally and physically separated and look out on the park on one side and on the former military plaza on the other. Due to the buildings' high degree of decay, the intervention addressed both architectural aspects and those relating to structure and plant. In the media centre, spaces are articulated for many activities in addition to those of conserving the heritage: workshops, courses of various kinds, drama, film, and music activities, exhibitions, conferences, and so on. The library, in addition to such usual functions as conserving books and providing reading spaces, will also accommodate cultural activities in the spirit of the maximum possible opening to the city. (Fig.10; Fig.11; Fig.12)



Figs. 11-12.
Interior of the restored building
of the Rossani Barracks, intended
for use as a library hub.

The other three buildings, whose restoration is already in the start-up phase, will house the Academy of Fine Arts. (Fig.13) The design by Studio Isola Architetti, the winner of the international competition, calls for conference rooms, laboratories, classrooms, and services in the first room; a main lesson hall/experimental theatre, foyer, and two set design classrooms in the second building; and classrooms for restoration, graphics, engraving, marble techniques, etc., in the third building. (Fig.14; Fig.15).



Fig. 13. The buildings undergoing restoration at the Rossani Barracks intended for use as Academy of Fine Arts.



Fig. 14. Spaces for the workshops of the Academy of Fine Arts.



Fig. 15. Common areas of the Academy of Fine Arts.

To the cultural and artistic emphasis on regenerating¹² the Rossani barrack area, the Academy of Fine Arts will add considerable heft – one certainly capable of orienting an important part of the city in this direction. In terms of urban planning, this hub, while counterbalancing the one referred to as “theatre mile” comprised by Teatro Petruzzelli (which has reopened after the fire and long restoration work), Teatro Margherita, Teatro Piccinni and the just-restored Teatro Kursaal, will also be a cultural and artistic reference for the entire region of Puglia.

¹² On the approach and ingredients of the urban regeneration projects, I. Colquhoun’s text is still of interest.

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