

Rome, its region and the regeneration of the “light city”¹

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Keywords: Light City; Urban Regeneration; Sprawl Repair; Urban Design; Landscape Planning; Suburbia Retrofit.

Abstract

Despite a climate of broadly shared hostility towards low-density settlements, in recent years, several authoritative studies, projects and policies have dealt with different declensions of this model with a positive attitude.

For at least 100 years, an impressive number of derogatory campaigns have been thrown against one-family-house suburbs, the deriving sprawl and the supposed consequent negative effects. This article attempts at first a rough, operational classification relative to the aspects considered (economic, functional, environmental, social, aesthetic) and mentions the arguments used by critics as they appear in two overall studies on this topic.

Nevertheless, if one considers the settlement type rather than its negative products, none of these charges seems to withstand the test of an accurate scrutiny but one. In fact, a considerable amount of studies – here references, taken from the same overall studies and from some more recent contributions, and arguments adopted are mentioned as well, following the same classification – has argued that low-density settlements can produce better results than the high-density ones or, at least, comparable from a general sustainability point of view and produce many favourable effects. Thus, rather than on the parameter of density, positive products depend on good, context sensitive design.

However, low-density settlements in their making may replace – and cause an irreparable loss of – beautiful pristine natural or agricultural landscapes. This very fact might suggest that public policies should curb development or force it towards dense and compact settings, regardless to the considerable disadvantages deriving from this choice.

Nevertheless, in specific circumstances, a composition among conflicting goals may be found through design. Considering the actual condition of the “light city” – most of the settlements surrounding major centres, that is – as in Rome and its region, where large areas are already affected by a conspicuous amount of casual and disorderly building, a strategy of regeneration seems advisable and feasible. This would provide opportunities for new housing, well-designed landscape and investments within reach of a large quantity of households.

The ideal thing would be to have a good American suburb adjacent to a very concentrated Italian town, then you'd have the best of both worlds.

Colin Rowe²

1. The evolving fortunes of the garden city

1.1. Garbatella, Giovannoni, garden cities

A celebration of Garbatella, this inclusive, plural, welcoming

1. This is an update of the introduction to the final round table of: “La Garbatella, la città giardino di domani e la città leggera. La via pacifica della vera riforma” [Garbatella, the garden city of tomorrow and the light city. The peaceful path to real reform] which was held at the Casa dell’architettura in Rome, on 9 April 2015. Selected cases and related illustrations are taken from the materials used in the author’s contribution to the international conference: “Rowe Rome 2015. The Best of Both Worlds. Urban design and regeneration of the light city”, hosted by the Camera dei Deputati on 15 and 16 October 2015. Illustrations have been selected with Rachele Passerini and are based on studies and drawings made by: Manola Colabianchi, Rachele Passerini, Gabriele Tontini, and Giulia Vignaroli. The full text of the latter report, including a complete set of images, is in <https://colinroweconference2015.wordpress.com/materials/> where I propose a normative outline, as well, as an operational framework for a possible application of the ideas expressed in this text.

2. Ingersoll, Richard, “Interview”, *Design Book Review*, 1989, also in Rowe, Colin, *As I Was Saying. Recollections and Miscellaneous Essays*, Vol. 3 “Urbanistics”, edited by Caragonne, Alexander, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1996, 325 ff.

Roman suburb, which was designed according to the criteria of the garden city and which everyone seems to love, is a good opportunity to ask ourselves what is, or even whether there is, a plausible future for the garden city in our contemporary national culture, apparently dedicated as it is to stigmatize and curb the shortcomings of low-density settlements.

When I was a student, in the ‘70s, Giovannoni, who designed the original core of Garbatella, was not a positive reference: he was considered an academic, a reactionary.³ Only in the following years, his contribution to history, technology, architectural design and, above all, urbanistics, including both design and planning, has been fully appraised.⁴ His attitude was complex, multidisciplinary and inclusive, capable of dealing in synergy with both historic centres and, of course, garden cities. For many years, Giovannoni was the victim of an ideological – in the sense of pre-conceptual – ostracism.

3. See as an example: Zevi, Bruno, *Storia dell’architettura moderna*, Einaudi, Milano, 1975 (1950), 186.

4. See as mere examples: Del Bufalo, Alessandro, *Gustavo Giovannoni*, Edizioni Kappa, Roma, 1982; Zucconi, Guido, “Gustavo Giovannoni, la naissance de l’architecte intégral en Italie”, *Les annales de la recherche urbaine*, 44-45, Decembre 1989, 185-194; Choay, Françoise, *L’orizzonte del posturbano* (edited by d’Alfonso, Ernesto), Officina Edizioni, Roma, 1992; Id., *L’allégorie du patrimoine*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1992; Giovannoni, Gustavo, *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova*, edited by Ventura, Francesco, CittàStudiEdizioni, Milano, 1995 (1931).

Often in architecture and, especially, in urbanistics ideology does prevail.

1.2. Recent fortune of the garden city

The monumental volume *Paradise Planned*, by Robert AM Stern et al.,⁵ which, with its publication in 2013 marks an important historiography revival for the garden city, pays special attention to Italy and dedicates a broad description to Garbatella.

The book ends hoping for: "... a new kind of metropolitan community with plans broad enough to permit both the intensity of the inner city and the passivity of nature. Without both, cities as we know them will cease to exist. The garden suburb may well hold the key to the future of our cities".⁶

Similarly, in 2013, Jean Taricat, a French sociologist of the École d'architecture de la ville & des territoires à Marne-la-Vallée, published a book on low-density settlements which title seems evocative: *Suburbia. Une utopie libérale*;⁷ in 2014, *L'urbanisme de la vie privée*, by Olivier Piron, was put in print.⁸ Further, in 2011, Andrés Duany, founding father of the American New Urbanism, produced *Garden Cities* for the Prince of Wales Foundation.⁹

It is not just a theoretical revamp. In England, the prestigious Wolfson Economic Prize 2014 was awarded to David Rudlin for its proposal of a Garden Cities Act, a law for the construction of 40 new garden cities. In fact, with a substantial agreement of the three major British parties – the New Labour promotes the creation of sustainable new towns at least since the Gordon Brown days – two garden cities are already beginning their implementation process: Ebbsfleet, Kent and Bicester, Oxfordshire.

On April 14, 2014, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, issued a statement of support for "locally led" creation of garden cities.¹⁰ In parallel, in Almere, Netherlands, another country of pronounced liberal democracy, an experiment on the direct realization by the citizens of a garden city has just started.¹¹

The treatise by Stern et al., mentioned above, shows that the garden city or garden suburb is a settlement type with

5. Stern, Robert A. M; Fishman, David and Tilove, Jacob, *Paradise Planned. The Garden Suburb and the Modern City*, The Monacelli Press, New York, 2013.

6. Ibid. 961.

7. Taricat, Jean, *Suburbia. Une utopie libérale*, Éditions de la Villette, Paris, 2013.

8. Piron, Olivier, *L'urbanisme de la vie privée*, éditions de l'aube, 2014.

9. Duany, Andrés & DPZ, *Garden Cities. Theory & Practice of Agrarian Urbanism*, The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment, London, 2011.

10. Department for Communities and Local Government, *Locally-led garden cities: prospectus*, April 14, 2014.

11. Thorpe, David, "Why Can't England's Proposed Garden Cities be Like the Netherlands?", *Sustainable Cities Collective*. (August 4, 2014); Feary, Thomas, "Inside Almere: the Dutch city that's pioneering alternative housing", *The Guardian*, (December 15, 2015).

important and innumerable design and implementation applications in the Anglo-Saxon cultures. But important examples have been designed in other countries, including Italy, as reported in the same text, with many variations and the main characteristic of being low-density, low-coverage, flexible, mostly peripherally located and therefore sub-urban.

1.3. Merits of the garden city

The low-density suburbia, which seems appropriate to look at as the most common implementation and popularization of the garden city model, keeps enjoying a strong public sympathy. A house with a garden is the ambition of many. It is also "desire for the country", to quote the title of the book by sociologist Valerio Merlo,¹² and, therefore, contact with nature, freedom, open spaces, privacy, but there are other reasons as well.

A disciple of Franco Karrer, Maria Rita Schirru, a few years ago published *Il periurbano: crescere intorno alla città* [The suburban: growing around the city] that has, among many merits, clarified, through a "by-agent" cost-benefit analysis, the advantages (and disadvantages) of the low-density suburban expansion, specifying the effects on the different subjects involved.¹³ Among the advantages are the public and private savings related to congestion, the increase of job opportunities but, above all, a strong compression of the economic rent for both residents – especially those who recur to custom-build and self-build housing – and for economic activities, and therefore lower costs and a wide, evenly distributed attribution of land-development surplus values. With a kind of resort to crowd-sourcing financing, household savings can be used without excess intermediaries. Often the public or private choice of the garden city is the most formidable tool to make "inhabiting" more liberal.

1.4. Reaction to the garden city and to the low-density settlements

But many flaws are attributed to low-density settlements and the deriving sprawl, too. In Italy, charges against sprawl are often associated to its prevalent illegal and non-designed nature. "Villettopoli" – the one-family-house spread – as nicknamed by Pier Luigi Cervellati in many of his texts, has several different characters than the American suburbia¹⁴ and yet the many analogies allow for adopting similar considerations.

A review of these vices and a history of reactions to the spread of settlements are both in the essay by Schirru and in a key reference for the studies on sprawl: *Sprawl. A Compact*

12. Merlo, Valerio, *Voglia di campagna. Neoruralismo e città*, Città aperta edizioni, Troina, 2006.

13. Schirru, Maria Rita, *Il periurbano: crescere "intorno" alla città. Strumenti e metodi di governo per valorizzare i benefici e limitare gli effetti negativi del periurbano*, Gangemi Editore, 2012.

14. Cervellati, Pier Luigi, "I piani di Pier Luigi Cervellati per Palermo e Catania", *Urbanistica*, 108 (1997), 70-71.

History by Robert Bruegmann.¹⁵

Low-density settlement and the deriving sprawl are quite common in history but it is after its popularization, precisely with the introduction of the garden city idea, that it has provoked strong reactions. The first significant one was possibly in England in the '20s, when the British artistic and literary *élite* and the rural aristocracy attacked the mass possession of the country.¹⁶ In 1927, Clough Williams-Ellis published *England and the Octopus*. "A dull democracy" replaces an "enlightened autocratic control" writes Williams-Ellis. Sprawl is ugly, consumes farmland and generates traffic congestion.

After World War II, the anti-sprawl reaction revamps.¹⁷ *Fortune* magazine, editor William White, promotes the conference and the book *The Exploding Metropolis*, 1957, and highlights the flaws of this settlement pattern.

Since then, the literature against sprawl is immense and I refer to the two texts cited above for a thorough review. Here it seems suitable to attempt an expeditious classification on the claimed shortcomings of the low-density settlements and urban sprawl based on these two texts, which could be used as a reference for a systematization of the arguments, without any claim of completeness. Also in consideration of the recurring nature of the arguments used by criticism throughout the decades, a thematic rather than a chronological outline is adopted.

Following is a list of five areas of issues, often intertwined, used by the critics of the low-density, peri-urban settlements:

- Economic,
- Functional,
- Environmental,
- Social,
- Aesthetic.

The most common objection to low-density settlements has to do with the public cost of construction and maintenance: networks length, with equal population size, is greater in this urban type (and especially in spontaneous, not-designed arrangements). Moreover, the per-capita construction cost, including the cost for individuals, is greater than that of the dense city. Studies that promote this thesis are countless. To name a few: *Use of Land: A Citizen's Policy Guide to Urban Growth*, 1973, sponsored by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund;¹⁸ the monumental *Costs of Sprawl*, in three volumes, 1974;¹⁹ *Cost of Sprawl Revisited*, 1998, and *Cost of Sprawl - 2000*, 2002, by Robert Burchell of Rutgers University.²⁰ During the same

years 2000-2002, the research on "Le couts de la desurbanization", by the Ministère Région Wallonne, is carried out.²¹ In Italy, the research about the province of Milan, published in 2002 by Camagni, Gibelli and Rigamonti,²² and *No Sprawl*, 2006, by Gibelli and Salzano are well known.²³

All these studies, along with many others, highlight the high cost of use as well: in particular, the costs of mobility. Longer commuting imposes higher costs – there are greater distances from the centre and from services – and fewer opportunities for synergies since – the public transport needs concentration and low density requires an extensive use of the car that in turn creates congestion.

Between the late '50s and early '70s in particular but also during the following years, the production of studies against the car (and against the construction of new roads) is massive: for example, *Cities and Automobile Dependence*, 1989,²⁴ extended by *An International Sourcebook of Automobile Dependence in Cities, 1960 - 1990*, by Jeffrey Kenworthy and Felix Laube with Peter Newman in 1999.²⁵ In 1992, the European Commission – DGXI (Environment) produces a study for the city without cars.²⁶

The massive use of the automobile embodies a system of flaws: congestion, waste of time for commuting, pollution, waste of energy resources, and land consumption for the construction of new roads.

One could add the higher costs related to thermal control (winter heating and summer cooling) of single-family homes compared to multi-family residential buildings, due to the different ratios between external surfaces and volumes. Also in this case, they result in a worse energy balance and in a higher emission of polluting residues. All higher energy costs, also become factors of pollution and environmental degradation, as well as agents of the phenomena of global warming caused by the greenhouse gases. See, for example, *Once There Were Greenfields*, 1999, by F. Kaid Benfield.²⁷

Paradoxically, a way of life close to nature seems to be, in fact, one of the worst threats to nature. Low-density settlements are very harmful from an ecological point of view for the inefficient use of land in the sense that each potential resident produces a loss of natural landscape incomparably greater than a resident of the dense city.

Besides, large areas dedicated to agricultural cultivation are destroyed, resulting in a severe production cost for society.

21. Schirru, 60-66.

22. Ibid., 56-60.

23. Ibid., 66-69.

24. Bruegmann, 140.

25. Ibid., 279.

26. Commissione delle Comunità Europee, "Proposta per un programma di ricerca sulle città senza auto. Rapporto finale", gennaio 1992.

27. Ibid., 155.

15. Bruegmann, Robert, *Sprawl. A Compact History*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London, 2005.

16. Bruegmann, 117-18.

17. Ibid., 121-22.

18. Ibid., 135-36.

19. Ibid., 122-23 and Schirru, 45-47.

20. Bruegmann, 139-40.

The loss of agricultural land is a constant motivation in both the criticism by the British avant-garde in the '20s, in the American post-war protests and in today's reactions to land consumption.

It seems paradoxical, but the growth of the suburban city in the United States is seen responsible as much for the phenomena of obesity, for the strong drawing upon the need for a car, as for the threat of famine, derived from the reduction of agricultural land.²⁸ See for example: *The Squeeze*, by Edward Higbee, 1960²⁹ or *The Population Bomb*, by Paul Ehrlich, 1968.³⁰

The "garden city", then, designed or spontaneous, produces social imbalances, deriving from reduced interaction, alienation and dissatisfaction. The low-density neighbourhoods are often factors of social segregation both for the upper classes and for the weak and the marginalized, which choose them as a residual solution.

Finally, low density produces an unpleasant landscape. The aesthetic problems are always present among the charges: from Williams-Ellis, mentioned above, to the evocative rhetoric by Townscape, starting from *Town and Countryside*, by Thomas Sharp, 1932.³¹ Even the more recent texts of the New Urbanism – such as *Suburban Nation: The Rise and Decline of the American Dream*, by Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Speck, 2000 – criticize sprawl from the point of view of aesthetics.³² It's hard to blame them if one looks at the vast majority of low-density settlements: both most of the dull and repetitive American suburbs and the chaotic and uneven Italian sprawl, such as those around Rome.

All these reasons seem to confirm that the garden city is a model, even though loved by the people and useful to the economy, in fact unsustainable, particularly at this conjuncture.

1.5. Refutation of the arguments against low density

The criticism of the low-density settlements converges therefore from several fronts:

- from critics of the specific type of settlement, because inefficient and vicious,
- from critics contrary to urban expansion, with many facets, and in favour of an overall reduction of "land consumption",
- and, finally, from critics supporting a limitation of the total production of new buildings, in particular of residential ones, with various accents and motivations, most frequently linked to the so-called calculation of needs, that is to the comparison between optimal quantity of rooms available and number of inhabitants or between housing units and

28. Ibid., 256.

29. Ibid., 133.

30. Ibid., 128.

31. Ibid., 118.

32. Ibid., 151-53.

families.³³

The numerous reactions against the low-density settlements have highlighted the problems, have set them out and have exposed them to a more careful scrutiny, causing in turn confirmations or refutations. It is useful to refer to the texts already mentioned as well as to some recent research cited below.

Many authors have focused on the shortcomings of these criticisms, often including more concurring themes. Sometimes these "criticism of the criticism" have highlighted the weaknesses in their logical-scientific construction, sometimes have revealed their true or complementary motivations. Among the latter, for example, there is the early *Geography and Urban Evolution in the San Francisco Bay Area* by James Vance, 1964. The positions contrary to the dynamics of growth, despite the apparent altruism, seem actually to be promoted by an unprecedented partnership, for direct conveniences: the business *élite* of the inner city, intolerant of the competition coming from the outskirts, and the earlier suburban inhabitants, protective of their isolation. Though for different reasons, both parties are against any additional use of peri-urban areas. Besides, under the banner of democracy, lies an attempt to impose individual or small groups' aesthetic preferences to the entire population.³⁴

On several occasions, it is the logical, methodological and scientific theses contrary to low density that are subjected to scrutiny and refuted as in the case of the famous review of "The Costs of Sprawl", by Alan Altshuler, 1977,³⁵ or in the study *Demain l'espace* by the Mayoux Commission, 1980,³⁶ both examined in detail by Schirru.

The authors engaged in this work of refutation are many: among them, Duane Windsor, Richard Peiser,³⁷ Wendell Cox and Joshua Utt,³⁸ Anthony Downs³⁹ on the cost of urban sprawl; William Fischel⁴⁰ and Joel Kotkin on recessionary and inflationary effects of urban containment; Alain Bertaud, on the consequences of a strict top-down planning;⁴¹ Randall

33. The latter appears to be specific of the Italian milieu but it is becoming a common outcome of opposite and converging pressures on the one hand against suburban densification and, on the other, in favour of urban growth boundaries, in other countries such as the United States as the present debate testifies.

34. Ibid., 136, 254.

35. Schirru, 47-50, Bruegmann, 251.

36. Schirru, 50-56.

37. Bruegmann, 251.

38. Ibid., 254; Cox, Wendell; Utt, Joshua, "The Costs of Sprawl: Measured in Benefits?", *Demographia, The Public Purpose*, #83, 10 August 2004 (<http://www.demographia.com/pp83-sprbene.pdf>).

39. Bruegmann, 155, 263.

40. Fischel, William A., "Comment on Carl Abbot's The Portland Region: Where Cities and Suburbs Talk to Each Other and Often Agree", *Housing Policy Debate*, 8/1/1997 and Latini, Antonio Pietro, "Standard e limiti di crescita urbana", *Urbanistica informazioni*, 162 (1999).

41. Ling, Anthony, "Interview with Alain Bertaud", *Market Urbanism*,

O'Toole, Peter Gordon and Henry Richardson on the alleged functional disorders, especially those relating to mobility;⁴² the same Gordon and Richardson and Samuel Staley on the issue of the loss of agricultural land;⁴³ Anthony Downs for the refutation of the perverse effects of the expansion on the city centre;⁴⁴ Melvin Webber for the aesthetic issue.⁴⁵

I can only touch on some of the most important issues, trying to follow the outline that I used above. As for the economic aspects, firstly, low density appears more expensive only to a superficial exam. Much depends on the specific circumstances and, even in general terms, different performances are not as pronounced: indeed, often overturned. Single-family homes have, on average, higher construction costs (but not market costs, as is known) than apartments only because they are usually larger. From the point of view of public costs, nature, size and characteristics of urban networks are not comparable to suburban ones, which are much simpler and therefore with much lower parametric costs.

Also, it does not seem to hold even the thesis of higher costs of use, in particular for mobility issues. Many authors argue that congestion is caused, in fact, by a more intensive land use and, with it, energy consumption and therefore pollution. This assumption seems counterintuitive if one does not take into consideration the polycentric metropolitan configurations in which the spontaneous dynamics are permitted or encouraged and, therefore, the very fact that destinations seldom remain placed in the major city centre and often relocate following criteria of dispersal.

Most importantly, mainly within recent years, several arguments have emerged, showing a severe economic shortcoming of policies unduly limiting and concentrating development. In fact, evaluations of real estate dynamics, also recent ones, show that overly restrictive planning policies and a concentration of development rights in few areas and in favour of a limited number of operators – as it happens in dense-only planning choices and in situations where development opportunities are overly limited – significantly hold back the general economic development, widen the social gaps and drastically reduce the ability of the weakest subjects to afford a decent dwelling. See, for example, the study by the London School of Economics, *Links Between Planning and Economic Performance*⁴⁶ and a few recent concurring essays from different sources that I referred to in a short text, recently

(January 15, 2015).

42. Bruegmann, 274, 279 and 141, 157-58.

43. Ibid., 279.

44. Ibid., 261.

45. Ibid., 263.

46. Cheshire, Paul; Leunig, Tim; Nathan, Max; Overman, Henry, *Links Between Planning and Economic Performance: Evidence Note For LSE Growth Commission*, 2012.

published,⁴⁷ as well as a research, just disclosed, edited by Wendell Cox.⁴⁸ By the way, the late Sir Peter Hall had already written on this subject in a well-known report in the early '70s.⁴⁹

In addition, low-density settlements – in particular the self-built and custom-built ones, with a short production and distribution line, so to speak – allow for direct investments, in higher number, small size and greater flexibility.

The energy consumption and pollution per capita, deriving from the use of the car compared to public transport, is greater but the difference is in fact negligible in view of both the progress of engines and fuels efficiency and the low-intensity, low-efficiency, use of public transport for most of the day.

True, the public service is more easily organized in high-density settlements – although at considerable cost – and coverage optimization in low-density ones certainly requires a greater design attention. However, a recent study by Jeffrey Wilson, Dalhousie University,⁵⁰ shows a substantial equivalence in overall production per capita of greenhouse gases between the inner city and the suburbs and higher production only for outside areas with very low density. Clearly, the local effects of pollution in higher density settlements are concentrated and therefore more severe.

Another recent study, coordinated by Hugh Bird and elaborate by the University of Lincoln, England, by the New Zealand Energy Centre and by the University of Auckland, New Zealand,⁵¹ argues that, despite the stereotypes, the low-density city is much more energy efficient because the urban sprawl potential for renewable energy generation is much bigger than that of dense and compact settlements. Each house, while having large roof surfaces to install solar panels and/or ways to use wind turbines can cover all its needs of heating, and of running the house and of related (electric) vehicle mobility; also it can produce a surplus of energy to be entered in the network, therefore generating hardly contestable energy and environment benefits.

Many submissions have refuted the claims regarding the protection of agricultural areas because their reduction appears to be due, on the whole, to the fact that the area to be cultivated is a gradually less and less relevant factor of

47. Latini, Antonio Pietro, "Consumo di suolo e disuguaglianze", *Urbanistica informazioni*, 261-62, pp. 93-95 (2015).

48. Cox, Wendell, *Income Housing Affordability and Urban Containment Policy*, Frontier Center for Public Policy, 2015.

49. Hall, Peter; Thomas, Ray; Gracey, Harry; Drewett, Roy; *The Containment of Urban England*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1973.

50. Wilson, Jeffrey; Spinney, Jamie; Millward, Hugh; Scott, Darren; Hayden, Anders; Tyedmers, Peter, "Blame the exurbs, not the suburbs: Exploring the distribution of greenhouse gas emissions within a city region", *Energy Policy*, 62 (2013), 1329-35.

51. Byrd, Hugh; Ho, Anna; Sharp, Basil; Kumar-Nair, Nirmal, "Measuring the solar potential of a city and its implications for energy policy", *Energy Policy*, Vol. 61 (2013), 944-52.

production, rather than to the aggression of human settlements. So much so that most of the areas withdrawn from agriculture do not turn into settlements but into wooded or fallow areas.

Besides, observers concerned about international equilibriums suggests that the Western world should pay more attention to the fact that, with the massive forms of subsidy to domestic agriculture, it in fact sustains an unfair competition against poor countries that may have a real competitive edge only in the agricultural sector.

Here it should be added, with particular regard to Italy, that many of the "official" agricultural areas around city centres are, in fact, such only due to one of the greatest phenomena of collective hypocrisy, which prevents to recognize them for what they are actually: low-density – sometimes unreasonably low because of planning restrictions – residential areas. On the social issue, then, it is enough to mention Herbert Gans, well-known sociologist at Columbia University, author of *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Policy in a New Suburban Community*, who stated: "I have never seen any persuasive evidence that sprawl has significant bad effects, or high-density development significant virtues. Indeed, I doubt that the density itself has much impact on people, except at levels at which it produces overcrowding or isolation. I therefore believe that people should be able to choose the density levels they prefer".⁵²

On all these fronts, therefore, it is difficult to defend the thesis on an alleged primacy of the dense and compact city over the low-density suburbs or on greater connotations of progress in the model of growth containment.

Even a holistic assessment, produced by the ponderous study coordinated by Marcial Echenique of Cambridge University, with Leeds University and Newcastle University,⁵³ has demonstrated through an extraordinary wealth of apparatus, that the models of the implosive, centripetal city, the perimeter-growth city, the new-towns-growth city and the spontaneous, *laissez-faire* city are substantially equivalent from a point of view of overall sustainability.

Besides, from a social sustainability point of view, to quote Bruegmann once more: "... anti-sprawl policies have tended to be highly inequitable. Although they are often beneficial for an "incumbents' club" – families who already have many of the urban amenities they want and who benefit from the rise in land prices that have accompanied anti-sprawl regulations – these same policies can place a heavy burden on exactly that part of the population least able to protect itself".⁵⁴

52. Bruegmann, 126.

53. Echenique, Marcial H.; Hargreaves, Anthony J.; Mitchell, Gordon; Namdeo, Anil, "Growing Cities Sustainably: Does Urban Form Really matter?", *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 78:2 (2012), 121-37.

54. Bruegmann, 11.

To which conclusions should we arrive to? Should we say that – contrary to what we tend to do today – the garden-city model should be encouraged and that the dense city prevented? That urbanistics should shift from the imposition of a model to the imposition of the opposed one?

We should pursue none of this. In fact, as discussed, it is possible to list many studies, just as authoritative as the ones mentioned above, of opposite inclination. The truth seems to be that the issue is too complex to allow for all-encompassing certainties, applicable to all cases.

The – temporary – conclusion is therefore that there is no reasonable evidence against low-density settlements, good enough to justify the imposition of a model of life that could be considered superior, more sustainable, more progressive, etc. Therefore, the criterion to be possibly applied is that of the preferences, of the expectations and of the desires of citizens, to which the technical knowledge should give their best form, in a framework of greater freedom.

Perhaps all of us have to engage in a further effort to reconcile the love for our land that drives us to be prudent with the spirit of service that suggests listening and accompaniment, with good will, and without prevarication.

1.6. Landscape consumption

The reasoning attempted so far could be considered complete, were it not for the remaining uncovered questions relating to landscape quality. In this regard, it is worth two brief remarks. First, what discussed above authorizes considering the expression "land consumption", which today is often referred to, rather vague. It is – says Bruegmann – widely prejudicial and specious and therefore misleading. Planning and, in general, human activities can predispose land to different uses and functions, each one with advantages and disadvantages for public administrations, for specific groups, for individuals, including their owners.

I would argue that the parallel concept of "landscape consumption" is much more tangible and defensible, having to do with the visible transformation of natural (or agricultural) landscape – something our present culture assigns an increasing public value to – into something else. Then, the core of the question is the balance between the aesthetic qualities before and after transformation.

Secondly, the scarce quality of several low-density suburbs does not authorize us to attribute an overall negative judgement to this settlement type. Many authors – such as Melvin Webber and Robert Stern – have highlighted the aesthetic qualities of garden suburbs.

As an example of positive aesthetic judgements of suburban housing sprawl *ante litteram*, one could quote the statements by two authoritative witnesses of the Italian Grand Tour.⁵⁵

55. I am grateful to Marco Romano for these references.

According to Montaigne (1580) a low-density settlement surrounding a city centre – Florence in this specific case – can be seen as a beautiful landscape: “Firenze è in una piana circondata da infinite colline assai ben coltivate, bello è invero contemplare l’infinita moltitudine di case che riempiono i colli tutt’in giro per due o tre leghe almeno. E questa piana dove essa s’adagia e che si estende, a occhio e croce per due leghe in lunghezza, giacché par che si tocchino, tanto sono fittamente disseminate”.⁵⁶ A century and a half later, Montesquieu (1728) testified the beauty of the housing sprawl along the coast between Genoa and Portovenere: “Lungo quasi tutta la costa, specie verso Genova, si vedono le montagne coperte di casette, che fanno un bellissimo effetto”.⁵⁷ From the point of view of aesthetics, all models – high- and low-density, and all intermediate solutions – can be declined in the best and in the worst way, depending on the dedicated attention and on design expertise. However, low-density sprawl – but also the city made of tall and/or bulky buildings, which affects the form of the territory from afar – implies a significant transformation and therefore a potential depletion of landscape, in its making. Given the unsurpassed public value we attribute to undeveloped landscapes, and even though the transformation of the territory can produce formal results of the highest quality, these outcomes often cannot compensate the corresponding loss of agricultural or natural landscape.

It is, therefore, the concern for “landscape consumption” that might lead us to restrict the changes to those cases where the overall benefits are actually relevant and extraordinary. In order not to lose agricultural or natural landscape we may find ourselves having to drastically limit transformations and curb development, although this will continue to cause recessive and inflationary effects, especially to the detriment of the poorest and of the aspirations of the majority.

2. Regenerating the light city

2.1. Dealing with existing sprawl

The reasoning thus far seems to lead to some provisional conclusions. First of all, there are serious doubts on whether to restrict the production of new housing on the sole basis of

intrinsic motivations such as those that supply far exceeds supposed needs. In fact, building limitations fuel the phenomenon of economic rent, raise prices, and the resulting “affordability gap” and aggravate social inequalities, hitting the weakest.⁵⁸

Specific restrictions are appropriate where they are supported by exogenous reasons such as preservation of landscape values. So it is recommendable to strike a balance through virtuous planning and design practices that maintain high levels of competitiveness thanks to a large availability of opportunities for transformation.

Secondly, low-density settlements, heirs of the garden city, are not less sustainable than those in higher density per se. In this case, it seems appropriate to facilitate sustainability through forms of intelligent design, while guaranteeing an offer that is plural, in line with the variety of demand.

Finally, one could argue nevertheless, that the transformation of natural areas (or dedicated to agriculture) may constitute an impoverishment of the landscape that remains, particularly in certain cases such as the Italian, an especially valuable collective good to be protected. The goal is, therefore, to seek appropriate solutions that allow for a satisfaction of people’s desires, for a strong containment of affordability gaps as well as for a limitation of the waste of undeveloped landscape.

The latter goal deserves, however, a clarification. Practices of densification, infrastructuring, reduction of discontinui-

58. Since the first draft of this text and the publication of my text mentioned above (2015), a number of relevant contributions on this subject have come to light, at least partially converging from sources of different standings. They deserve a special attention not only for the heuristic but also for their implications in the practice. Here are some of the most relevant: Ikeda, Sanford; Washington, Emily, “How Land-Use Regulations Undermines Affordable Housing”, Mercatus Research, Mercatus Center. George Mason University, Arlington, VA, November 2015; Furman, Jason (Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers of the White House), “Barriers to Shared Growth: The Case of Land Use Regulation and Economic Rent”, The Urban Institute, November 20, 2015; Krugman, Paul, “Inequality and the City”, *The New York Times*, November 30, 2015 http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/30/opinion/inequality-and-the-city.html?_r=2; Cox, Wendell, “White House Economist Links Land Use Regulations, Housing Affordability and Inequality”, *newgeography*, 12/01/15: <http://www.newgeography.com/content/005111-white-house-economist-links-land-use-regulations-housing-affordability-and-inequality>.

This concurrence has led to propose a most welcomed cross-ideological consensus on the need to avoid unreasonable and overly restrictive zoning: Somin, Ilya, “The emerging cross-ideological consensus on zoning”, *The Washington Post*, December 5, 2015: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2015/12/05/the-emerging-cross-ideological-consensus-on-zoning/>; Cox, Wendell, “Land Regulations Making Us Poorer: Emerging Left-Right Consensus”, *newgeography*, 8 January 2016: <http://www.newgeography.com/content/005139-land-regulation-making-us-poorer-emerging-left-right-consensus>; Twyford, Phil; Hartwich, Oliver, “Planning rules the cause of housing crisis”, *New Zealand Herald*, 29 November, 2015: http://m.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=11553128 Even though it is clear that some authors use these arguments to support a free-market attitude towards urban expansion and others to back infill projects, this development of the debate seems promising and fosters fertile developments.

56. Montaigne, *Viaggio in Italia*, Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1991, 138: “Florence is in a plain surrounded by endless hills very well cultivated. Beautiful is indeed to contemplate the infinite multitude of houses that fill the hills all around for two or three leagues at least and this plain where it lays down and that extends, more or less for two leagues in length, so that it seems that they touch each other, so that so they are so densely disseminated”. (My translation).

57. Montesquieu, *Viaggio in Italia*, Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1990, 109: “Along almost the whole coast, particularly towards Genoa, the mountains are covered by little houses which perform beautifully”. (My translation).

ties, density homogenization, in short, urban regeneration in existing low-density settlements, are not forms of landscape consumption. Rather, they are suitable and evident efforts of virtuous redevelopment. For this reason, the arguments against sprawl repair, when considered as an activity of sprawl perpetuation, seem moved by ideological preconceptions rather than by a solid rationale.

2.2. Sprawl regeneration in the United States

For many years, research and professional practice in the United States – but also in other countries of the Western world – have dealt with the redevelopment of the low-density suburbs. This production can rely on a set of theoretical contributions and design experiments, reforming the discipline of the landscape, with two lines of development, which, again, I try to summarize.

A line derives from the interpretation of the territory by a continuity of type-morphological zones. The so-called urban-rural “transect”, proposed by the American New Urbanism, has taught us that the net opposition country-city is a misleading abstraction and that there are intermediate situations that need to be recognized, studied and designed.⁵⁹

The other line has developed a specific analytical⁶⁰ and design⁶¹ attention to the suburban realm with hypotheses and applications of regeneration, so-called “retrofit” or “repair”. One could suggest that the goal is analogous to the one pre-figured by Colin Rowe in the quote in the epigraph: have a compact centre surrounded by a suburb of good quality. Often in many countries, particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries, there are suburbs, heir to the tradition of the garden city, whereas the compact centre is missing. This is why redevelopment projects propose dense hubs, rich on services and community activities, easily accessible, pedestrian friendly. Moreover, suburban settlements, while designed, often are

59. <http://transect.org/transect.html>; Duany, Andrés, “Transect Planning”. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 68, 3, Summer 2002, 245-246; Duany, Andrés; Talen, Emily, “Making the Good Easy: The SmartCode Alternative”, *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 29, 4, 1445-68; Duany, Andrés et al., “The Transect” (special issue), *Journal of Urban Design*, 7, 3 (2002).

60. Among the most recent contributions: Keil, Roger (ed.), *Suburban Constellations. Governance, Land, and Infrastructure in the 21st Century*, Jovis Verlag GmbH, 2013; Mace, Alan, *City Suburb. Placing suburbia in a post-suburban world*, Routledge, Milton Park, 2013.

61. Calthorpe, Peter, *The Next American Metropolis. Ecology, Community, and the American Dream*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1993; Dunham-Jones, Ellen and Williamson, June, *Retrofitting Suburbia. Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs*, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., Hoboken, 2011 (2008); Tachieva, Galina, *Sprawl Repair Manual*, Island Press, Washington, 2010; Williamson, June, *Designing Suburban Futures. New Models from Build a Better Burb*, Island Press, Washington, 2013; Talen, Emily (ed.), *Retrofitting Sprawl. Addressing Seventy Years of Failed Urban Form*, University of Georgia Press, Athens, 2015. For a French example, see Guilpain, Laureline; Loyer, Simon Jean; Rapin, Aurore; Shaefer, Tiemo; Stablon, Jérôme (École nationale supérieure de la ville & des territoires à Marne-la-Vallée), *s(t) imulation pavillonnaire*, Archibooks + Sautereau Éditeur, Paris, 2014.

not of good quality: they are anonymous, repetitive, lacking from a landscape, functional, environmental and sustainability point of view. Therefore, many redevelopment projects also propose densification strategies as well as formal and functional improvement of public spaces.

2.3. Sprawl repair and regeneration in Italy

In Italy, despite the attention long paid by scholars for the phenomenon of diffusion, it does not seem to have been able to produce either an overall strategy, weighted on the size of the facets of the problem, nor a proactive engagement.

It is likely that the main conditions that have fostered this situation are in line with those mentioned above. First, the alleged excess of supply over demand plays a major role. The Italian disciplinary debate has shown a growing and now radical distrust of production of new residences whereas there is no doubt that any serious strategy for urban regeneration needs, alongside the recovery activities of existing building, the morphological and economic contribution of mainly private new buildings. The containment of production is, nevertheless, the common goal of many current or under discussion public policy acts.⁶²

Second, and consequently, the aversion for low-density settlements as inefficient is the common, widely shared, attitude.⁶³ Finally, an important role is assumed by the environmental impacts, hardly contestable in their landscape aspects, which are induced by the production of new low-density neighbourhoods – but of high-density ones, too. Regarding the latter argument, however, the distinction between undeveloped, natural or agricultural, landscape and already-developed landscape remains opaque.

The different attention to the problem of the redevelopment of the peri-urban settlements in Italy than in other countries would rest on the fact that, while the residential expansion on the model of the garden city is massive elsewhere – say in the English-speaking world – in Italy it would be a marginal phenomenon. To this assumption, however, it is worth dedicating a short reasoning.

2.4. The “light city” in Lazio and around Rome

Our Italian culture is fond of a model full of quality, symbolism, and rationality. As in the fresco by Lorenzetti, “Buon Governo”, our conceptual world is divided into dense and

62. See, as an example, the parliamentary debate on the proposed act: “Contenimento del consumo del suolo e riuso del suolo edificato” (Camera 2039), presented on 3 February, 2014, presently under discussion.

63. See for instance the position clearly against low density shown by the official proposal for the Italian Planning Act: “Principi in materia di politiche pubbliche territoriali e trasformazione urbana” as published for an on-line public consultation by the Working Group “Rinovo Urbano” of the Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei Trasporti, on 24 July, 2014.

compact cities and undeveloped agricultural and natural country. The border is clear, symbolically represented by the town walls. The Italian legal framework follows and supports this concept.⁶⁴

Therefore, in the representation of our cities they are solid and contained in comparison to others of similar impor-

natural land, with nothing in between. This applies even when – as in most cases – the green areas are in fact city: they are a declension of the *ville légère*, “light city”, to use this effective interpretive category, recently adopted in the studies devoted to the “Grand Paris” metropolitan area.⁶⁶ Not recognizing this evidence, however, we bar the possibility to

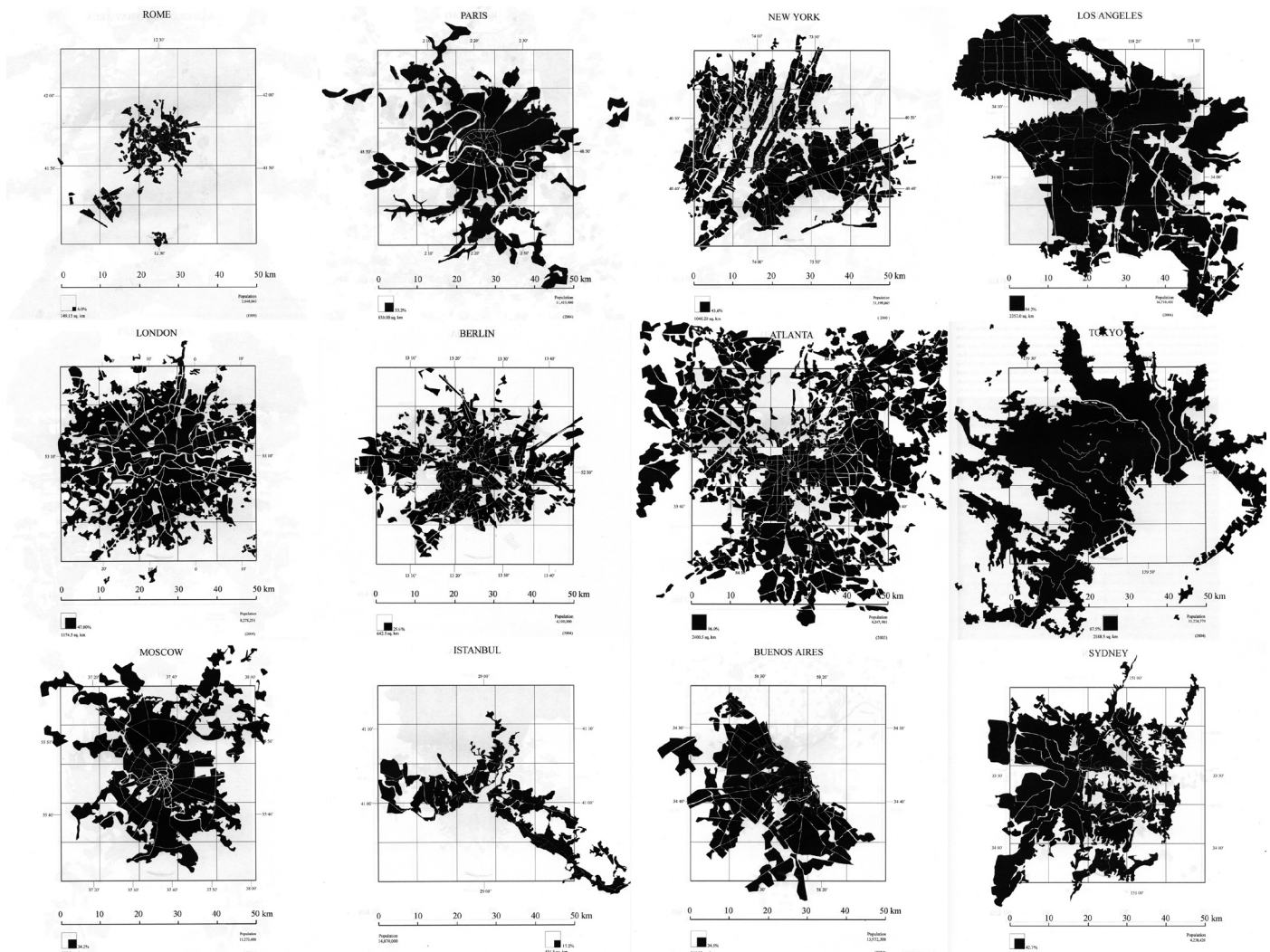


Figure 1 – Ground layout of Rome compared to analogous ranking cities [from Peter Bosselmann].

tance. Suffice it to compare, for example, the representations in figure-ground on a large scale of Rome and other similar ranking cities, as proposed by Bosselmann.⁶⁵ This representation, however, could be endorsed – not without some problems – half a century ago. In view of the dynamics of the last decades, it is impractical. To find evidence of this, it is sufficient to follow the settlement dynamics in the area of Rome since the beginning of the ‘60s.

We urbanists tend to adopt an idealized reality, as we would like it to be: the compact city surrounded by agricultural and

regenerate that city by design.

The abstract representation that we adopt also determines the urban tools by which territorial dynamics are governed. As shown in the illustrations below, there are, for example, some areas, undeveloped, that are officially “agricultural” and other areas, developed, albeit partially and low-density, which are officially ... “agricultural”, too. Classification and, therefore, planning regimes are similar for both types. Can the same rules be effectively applied to situations so clearly different?

The reality is much closer to the excellent operational representation of the so-called urban-rural transect, mentioned

64. Here I refer, in particular, to the zoning classification prescribed by the D.I. 2 April 1968, 1444, art. 2, which recently regional administrations have been allowed to modify but have not so far.

65. Bosselmann, Peter, *Representation of Places. Reality and Realism in City Design*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998.

66. LIN Finn Geipel + Giulia Andi et al., “Micro-centralités – Systèmes immanents de la ville légère. Systèmes métropolitains”, Berlin, Septembre 2013: http://www.ateliergrandparis.fr/aigp/conseil/lin/LIN_Systeme.pdf. I owe this reference to Rachele Passerini.

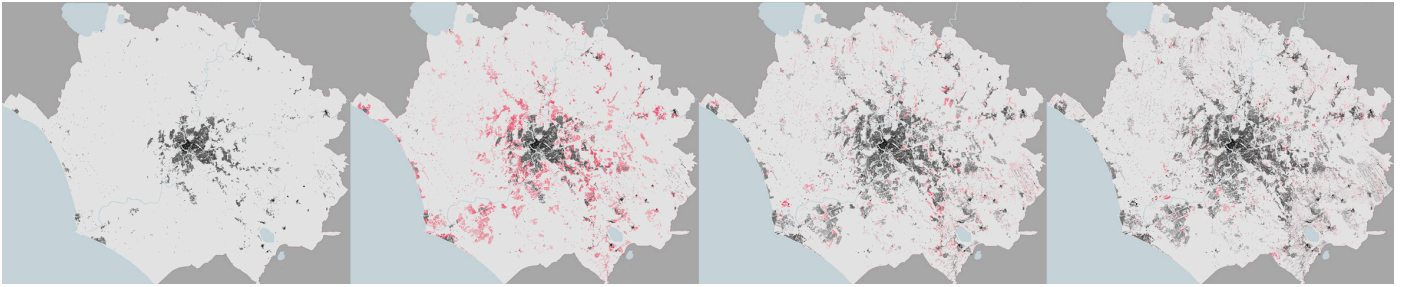


Figure 2 – Development dynamics in the Roman area (1961, 1991, 2001, 2008) [Rachele Passerini].

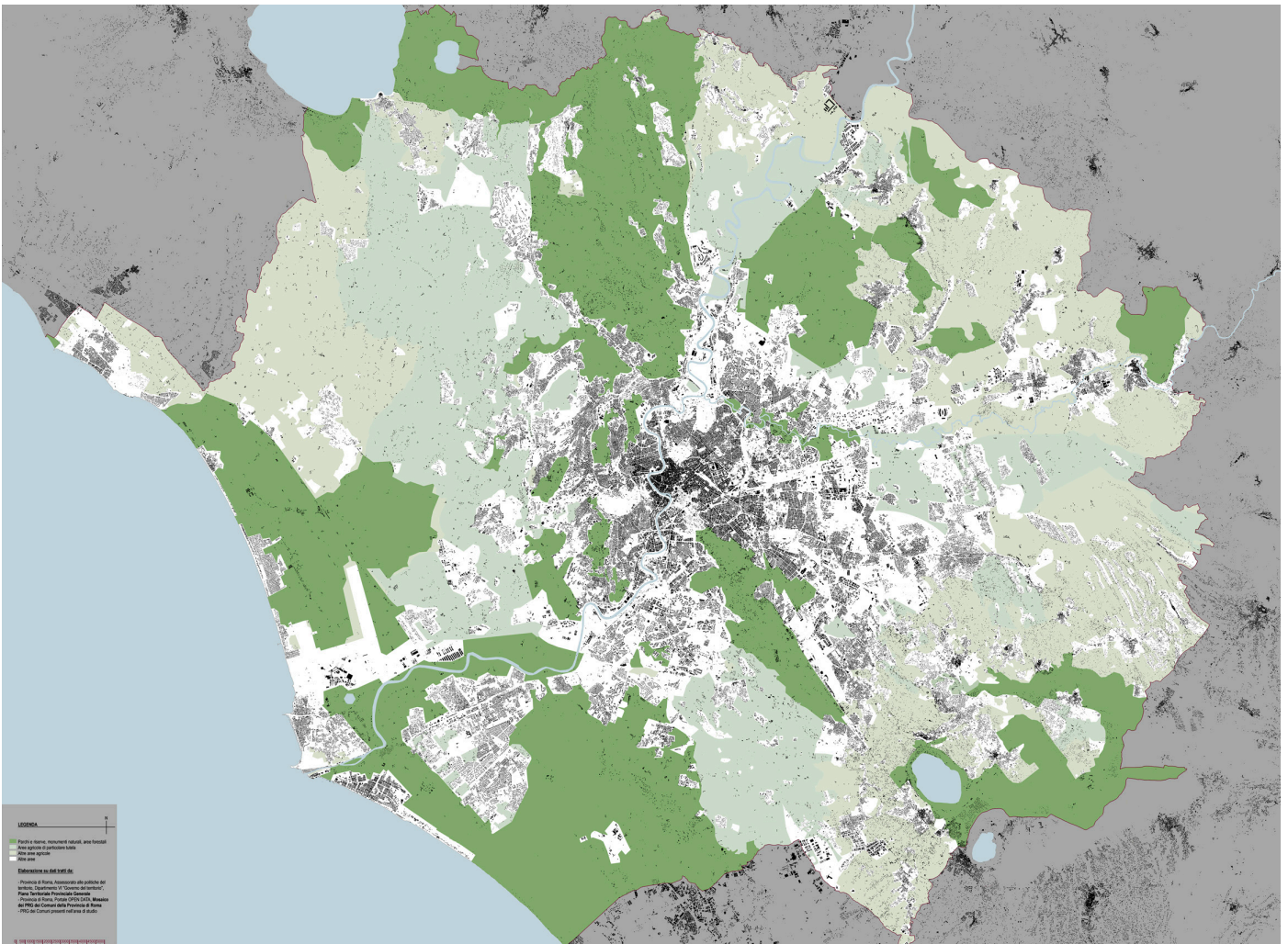


Figure 3 – Natural reserve (dark green) and “agricultural” zones (light green) superimposed to settlements (black) in the Roman area [Rachele Passerini].

above. Not recognizing the existence of type-morphological continuity, i.e. disregarding the intermediate zones, does preclude the possibility of adequately responding to the problems of those realities.

To further clarify the issue, let's consider two examples: one is a section of Sea Ranch, California: a high quality residential compound, designed by masters such as Lawrence Halprin, Joseph Esherick, Charles Moore, among others. Subjected to a set of strict but not punitive rules, it is a masterpiece of high

economic value, too. The other example is a part of the so-called Castelli, south of Rome.

The densities in these two cases are comparable but, officially, the second is made up of agricultural areas or agricultural landscapes, though it is unlikely to be inhabited by farmers and agricultural production is hardly more than marginal. As officially agricultural, however, these areas are subjected to regimes that follow the criteria of agricultural production and their development is based on the impertinence of those



Figure 4 – Bracciano: aerial views (left) and zoning (right) of different “agricultural” areas, cultivated (white) and wooded (green) [Rachele Passerini].

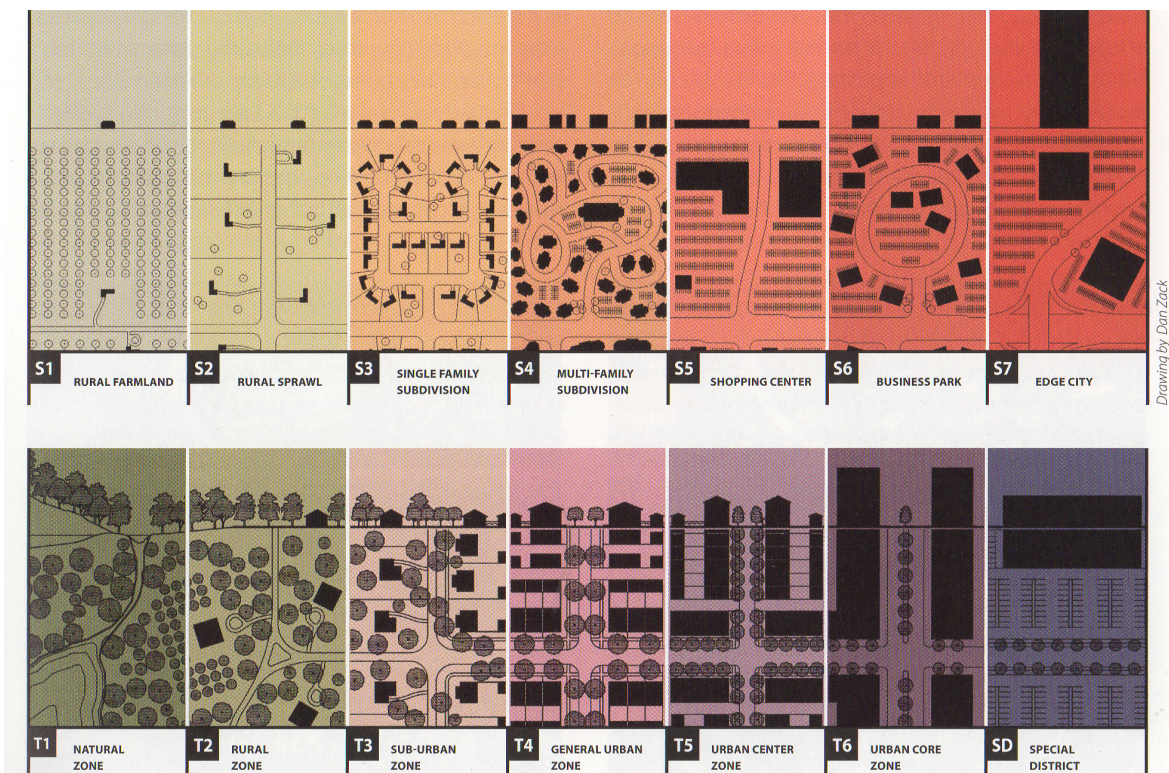


Figure 5 – Urban-rural transect in sprawl and traditional urbanism [Galina Tachieva].



Figure 6 – Two low-density settlements compared: resort in Sea Ranch, California (left) and “agricultural” settlements in Montecompatri, Lazio (right).

who aspire to build a single-family home and is not covered by detailed type-morphological rules but just to general prohibitionist rules, often broken, as an out-of-reach low density and inefficient minimum lot sizes.

This type of settlement is very frequent in the areas surrounding major centres, as the Roman area, and consists of spontaneous artefacts, chaotic and random settings, with no

urban design. Often it is the indolent and, frequently, vulgar response to the need to bypass economic rent and the desire to access a building type, and type of life, that official town planning is unable and/or unwilling to provide for.

If we consider a municipality near this area, Monte Porzio Catone, the representation used by the planning instruments is the ideal one, made of dense centres surrounded by country-

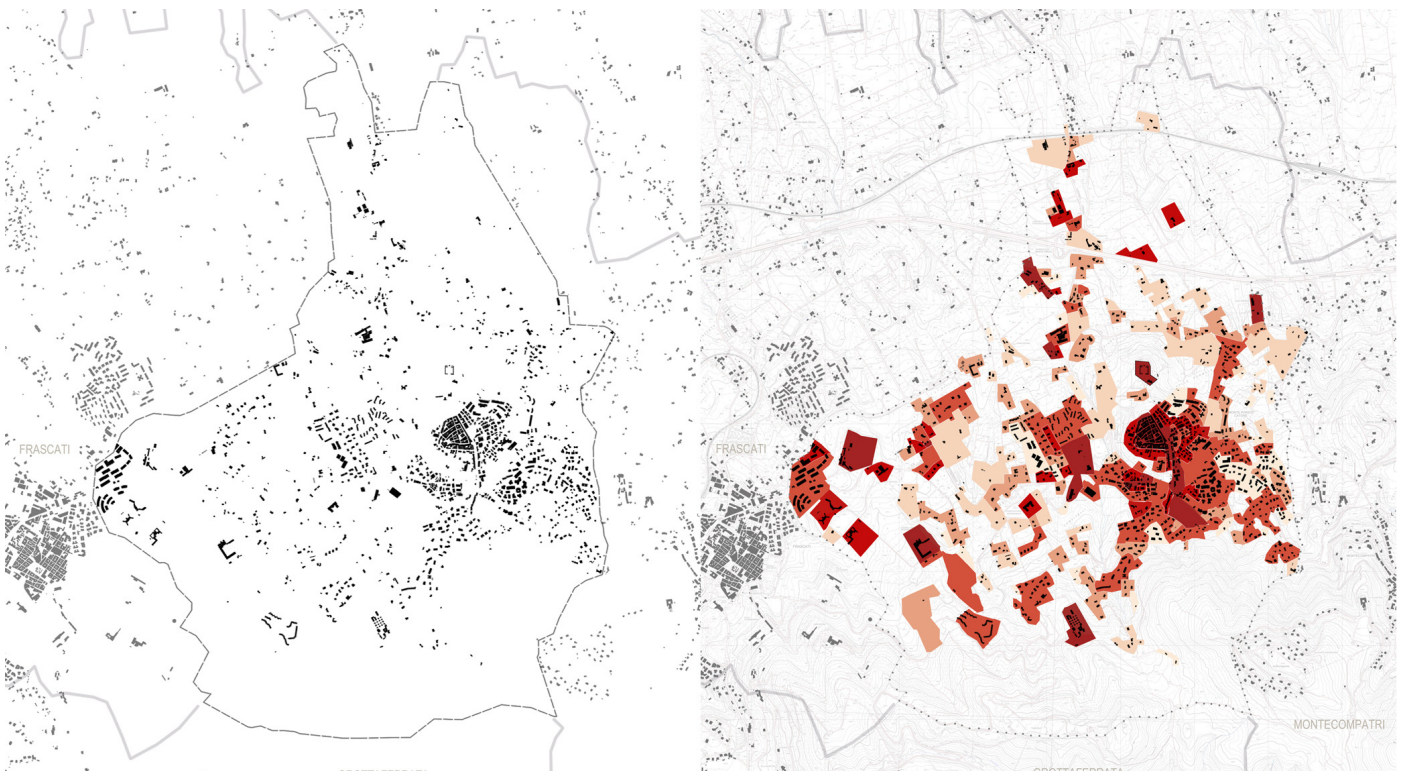


Figure 7 – Monte Porzio Catone, Lazio: settlement layout (left) and implementation dynamics (right. Dark red to pink sequence shows older to more recent plot developments) [Giulia Vignaroli].

side. In reality however, a large part of that country consists of diffused settlements that are formed over time, regardless of any design frame.

The overall quality of this landscape is generally disappointing although full of potential prospects. Official planning and, in truth, the disciplinary culture prevalent today insist that, despite the evidence, these are agricultural areas to be, in fact, frozen and substantially preserved in their current state. Often, given the criticality of these areas, they are, very suitably and yet paradoxically, subject to special building restrictions by the national office in charge of landscape protection. In fact, if the bonds do not translate into guidance towards conversion, they are doomed to remain an unfair theatre of stabilized unbalance.

Technical common sense seems to suggest that, through a process of rigorous design, they are regenerated as "good suburbs", dotted with centres of higher density, easily accessible, as in the image suggested by Colin Rowe's statement. Analogous situations are anything but episodic. In Viterbo, for example, a beautiful city north of Rome that Paolo Colarossi and I have recently studied, about 20% of the municipal area – about 8,000 hectares – consists of "light city", mostly residential, not of poor quality but largely spontaneous and not covered by any kind of urban design.

If we observe some specific cases, we find a few recurring circumstances worth noticing. In some "agricultural" areas, as in the area of Querciaiole, most likely resourceful and nonchalant citizens, who interpreted the planning rules in a rather flexible fashion, have developed many lots. Other landowners, strictly following the rules, abstained.

The result is a landscape uneven and of uncertain quality, both because there are no detailed type-morphological rules, guiding buildings or open spaces, and because undeveloped lots tend to be, understandably, less maintained than others. In other "agricultural" areas, as in the case of Ponte di Cetti, the settlement is even more accidental even though careful design could have ensured not only a broader and more uniform quality but also the possibility to best use the possibility of well serviced existing or potential centres, adjacent to infrastructure corridors, as the rail network.

In other "agricultural" areas yet, as Palomba, it seems that the planning demand for very large lots has transformed partly unused and undeveloped lots into a wasteland.

In all these cases, it seems desirable to access a program of urban densification and landscape regeneration, which is rigorous and well supported by solid rationales but free from rules that are laid down on the basis of agricultural production.

To conclude, it is helpful to evaluate, albeit roughly, the magnitude and, therefore, the relevance of low-density settlements in the area considered.

Rachele Passerini has studied the type-morphological charac-

teristics and the spread of the Roman settlement. A "natural" Roman metropolitan area, extending from the sea to the West, to the Tiburtini elevations to the East, from Lake Bracciano to the North, to Lake Albano to the South, consists of 29 municipalities, including Rome, to a total of about 230,000 hectares.⁶⁷ This is a very well infrastructured territory, potentially served by 100 kilometres of railway within and 450 kilometres outside the Grande Raccordo Anulare, the Roman beltway.

About half of this area is actually made up of agricultural land while a quarter is dense city, including the interstitial spaces. 5% is used for special purposes such as, for example, the airport. Just over 20% – more than 45,000 hectares – is, in reality, "light city" with all the features of lack of urban design, lack of homogeneity, small discontinuities, uncertain quality and legality, high fractionation in ownership and functions, high flexibility. Inhabitants are mostly families whose main income is not from farming.

From a strictly aesthetic or functional point of view, these are neither dense city areas nor actual farmland. They are definitely areas of other type, with high landscape potential, but very critical at present.

Also for this reason, many of these areas are very appropriately placed under protection. A significant portion of them – approximately 7,500 hectares – are in areas of natural protection. Of the remaining ones, including those affected by the phenomena of urban sprawl in a more intense form, a part, to some 6,500 hectares, has been, quite rightly, the subject of "declarative constraints" (*vincoli dichiarativi*). Another part, for about 4,000 hectares, is, as appropriate, identified as "identity areas of the Roman countryside" (*zone identitarie della campagna romana*) and equally restricted.

This has certainly restrained transformations, and probably, very commendably, avoided some disasters. However, it has not yet favoured rehabilitation processes, needing instead strategies. In fact, these may be more viable and effective if applied starting precisely from these areas.

2.5. Two ways ahead

We are facing a crossroads. There is a way very dear to many of us: it is the path along which the planning culture prevalent today gathers and that is inclined to "curb" – "arginare" to use the keyword of the recent Landscape Plan of Tuscany. This inclination is easy to understand if you think about how a few decades of unregulated building activity have managed to impoverish our territory, our landscapes. But it is also a paradoxical position if it results in the substantial confirmation *in aeternum* of the present critical conditions.⁶⁸

67. In order to provide a dimensional reference, the scale of the area - with a radius of 25-30 kilometres from the centre of Rome - is roughly comparable to the metropolitan area of Portland (Or.) included in the well-known "urban growth boundary" in its present state.

68. When this article was in a version close to the final, a brand new

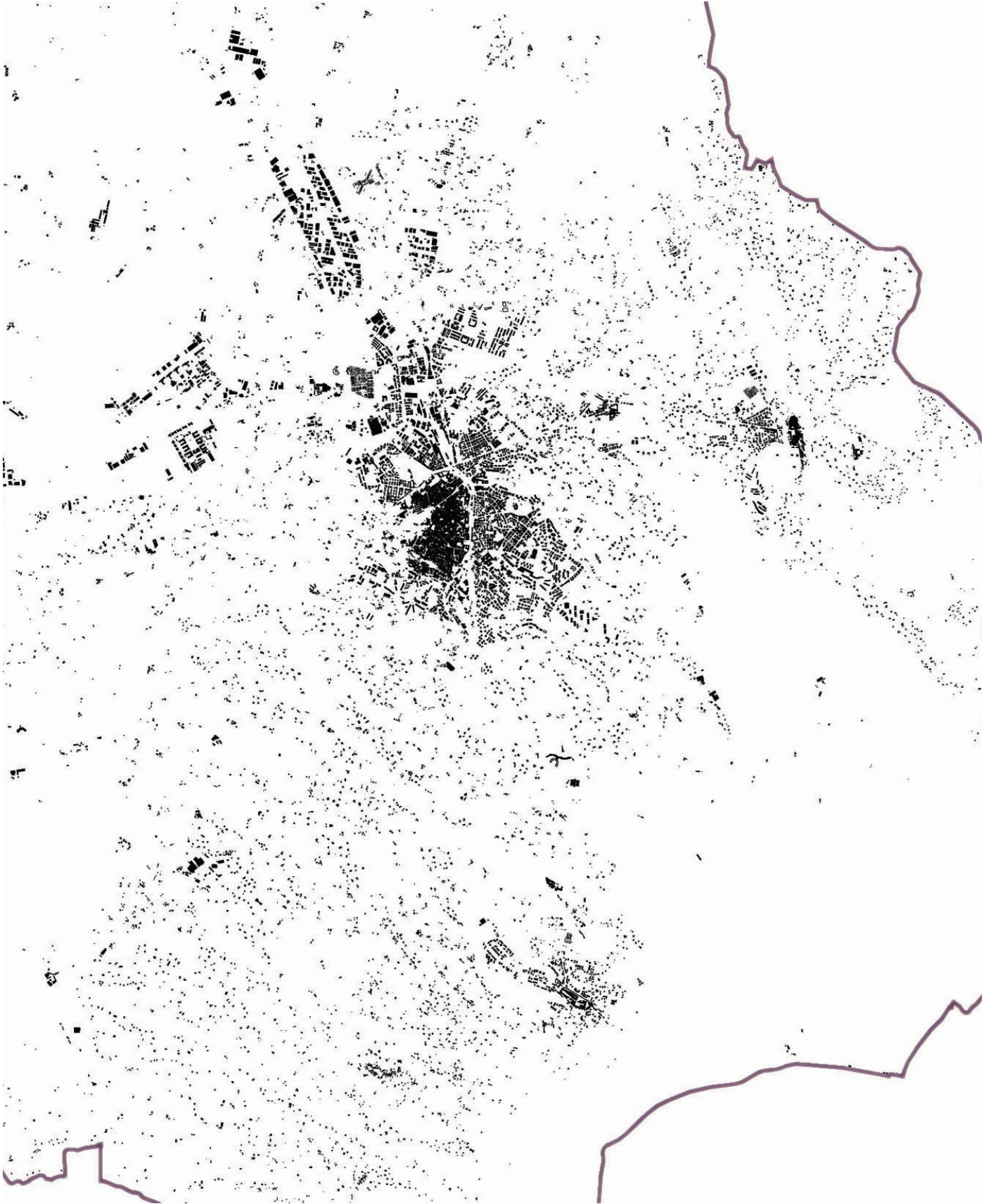


Figure 8 – Viterbo, Lazio: settlements layout around the centre city [Gabriele Tontini].

Regional Planning Law was proposed by the current administration of Lazio (Testo Unico delle Norme sul Governo del Territorio, December 14, 2015). Despite the overt, repeated reference by this proposal

to the need of making all possible efforts towards regeneration policies, an accurate reading of the articles suggests that these efforts are supposed to be limited to the dense city and exclude the part of



Figure 9 – Viterbo, Lazio: landscape context (left. Yellow areas show the zones that the Landscape Plan considers “Valuable agricultural landscapes”, orange areas are “Highly valuable agricultural landscapes”, green areas are “Natural landscapes” and gray areas are “Urban settlements”) and settlements (right. Gray and patterns show plots likely connected to a house) at Querciaiolo [Manola Colabianchi].

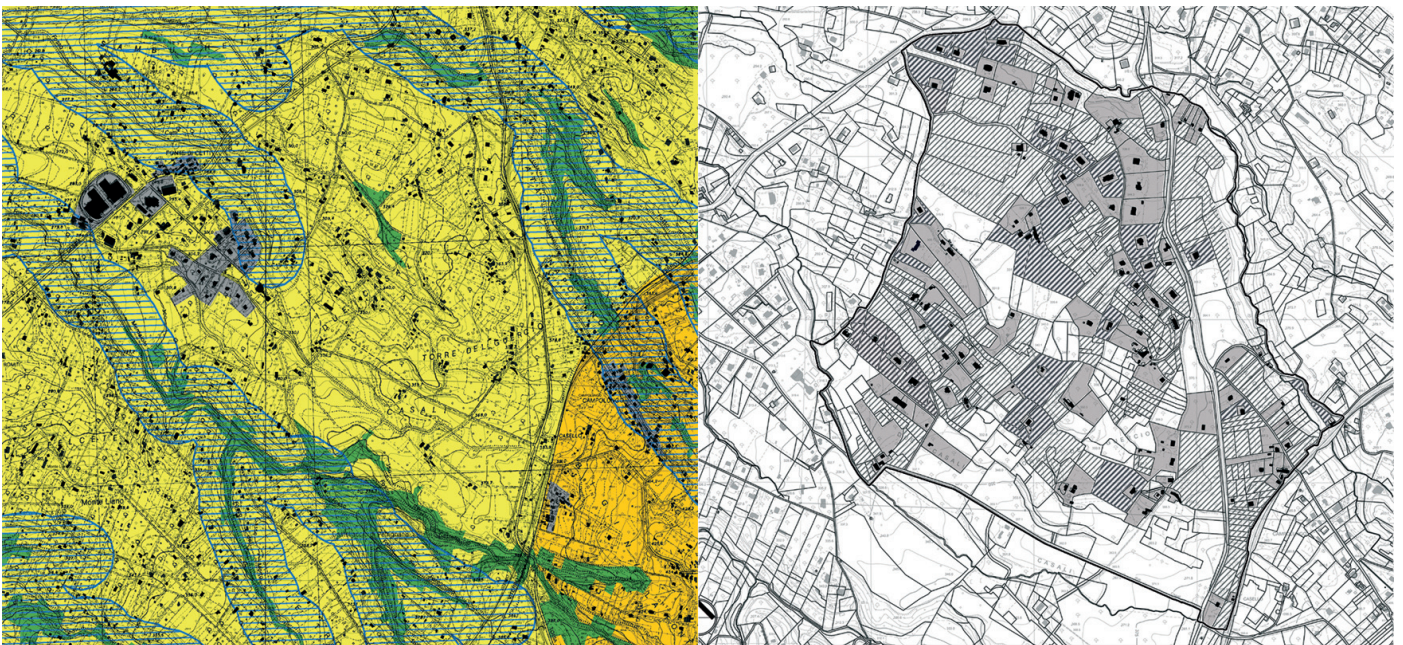


Figure 10 – Viterbo, Lazio: landscape context (left. Yellow areas show the zones that the Landscape Plan considers “Valuable agricultural landscapes”, orange areas are “Highly valuable agricultural landscapes”, green areas are “Natural landscapes” and gray areas are “Urban settlements”) and settlements (right. Gray and patterns show plots likely connected to a house) at Ponte di Cetti [Manola Colabianchi].

It is hard to impose on the local communities and to our fellow citizens that the landscape of urban sprawl – that we ourselves declare to be critical – should be “preserved” as

the region with the most pronounced need of regeneration and the highest strategic impact: the low-density suburban sprawl. Should this proposal be confirmed in the present form, it would very likely offset sine die any substantial effort of regenerating the Light City.

“agricultural” area or “agricultural” landscape – as, in fact, quite clearly is not – without this being seen as an unjust and despotic whim of planning.

The risks, anything but remote, are not only that unjust and irrational rules are defended, that healthy regeneration processes, positive economic dynamics and reductions of social

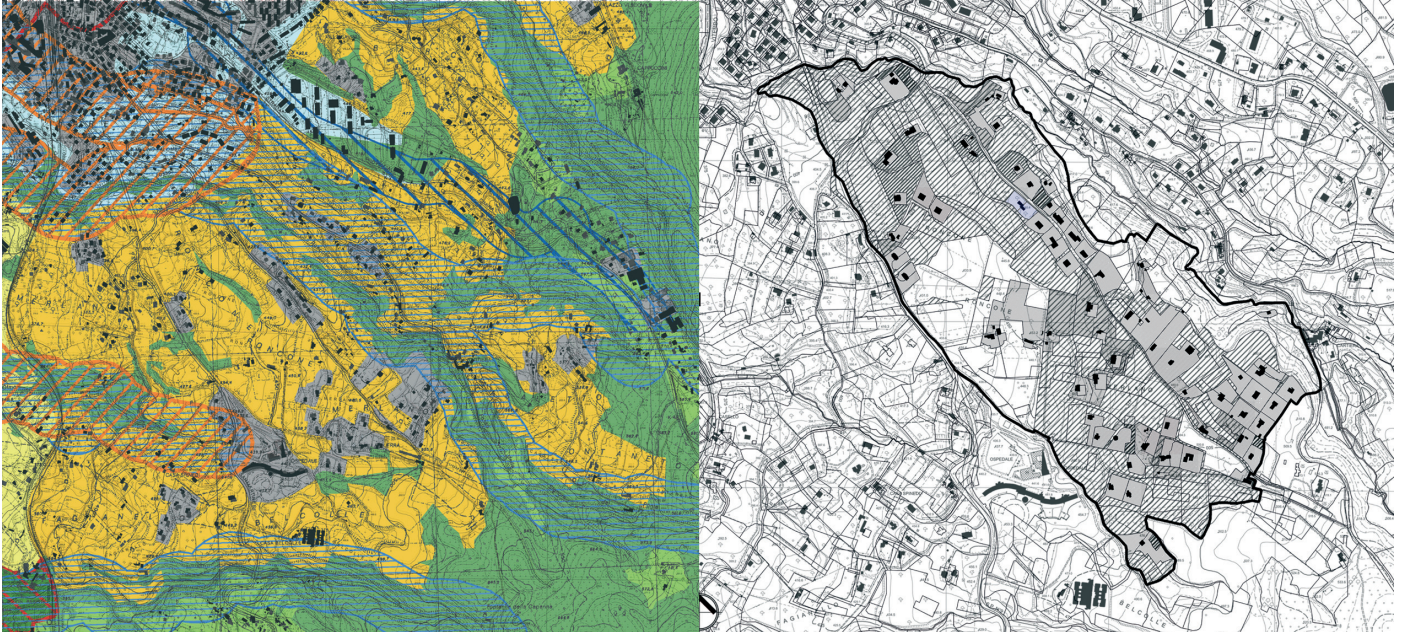


Figure 11 – Viterbo, Lazio: landscape context (left. Yellow areas show the zones that the Landscape Plan considers “Valuable agricultural landscapes”; orange areas are “Highly valuable agricultural landscapes”, green areas are “Natural landscapes” and gray areas are “Urban settlements”) and settlements (right. Gray and patterns show plots likely connected to a house) at Palomba [Manola Colabianchi].

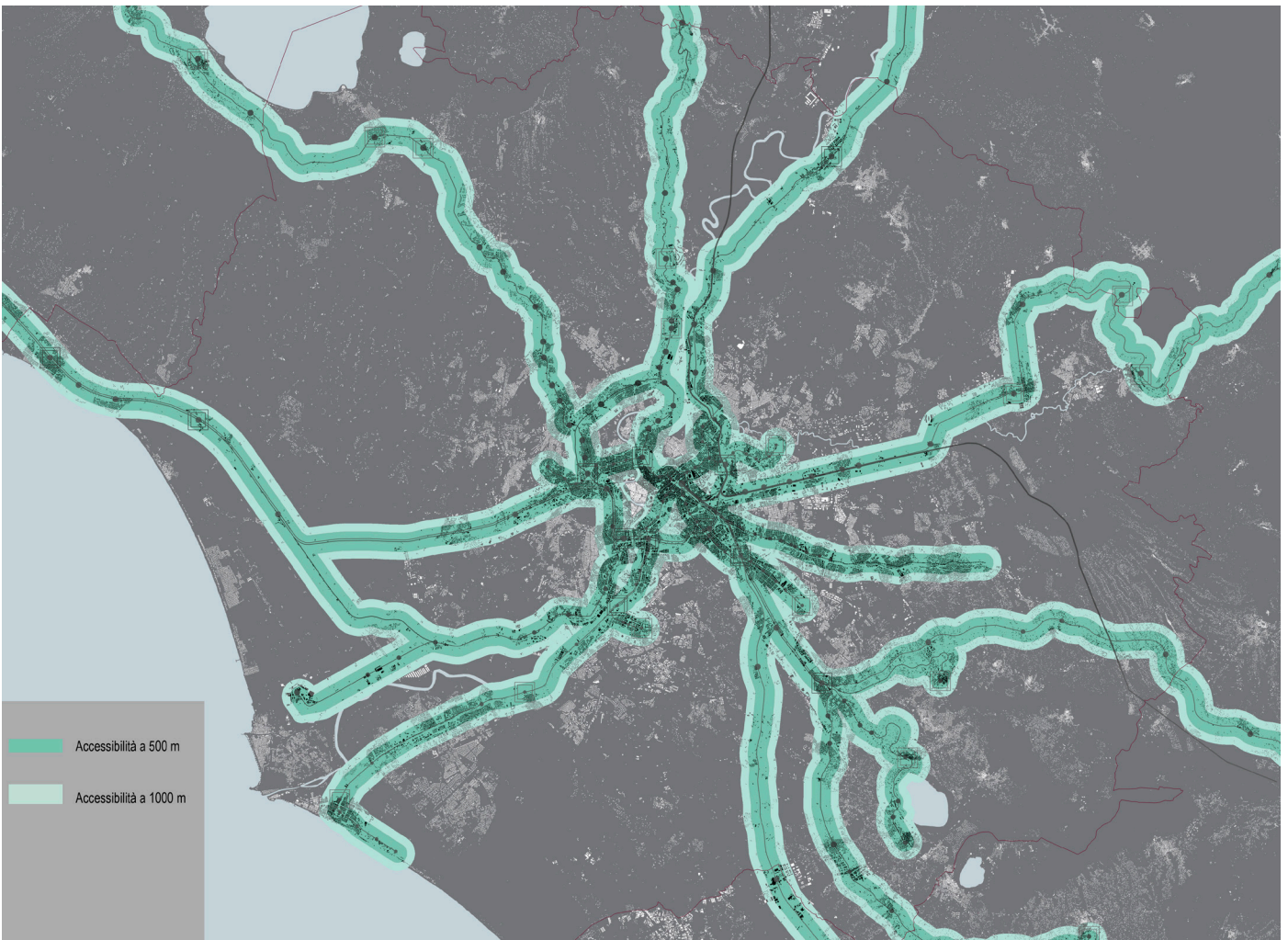


Figure 12 – Roman area: railroad and subway system (high-speed rail is not shown) [Rachele Passerini].

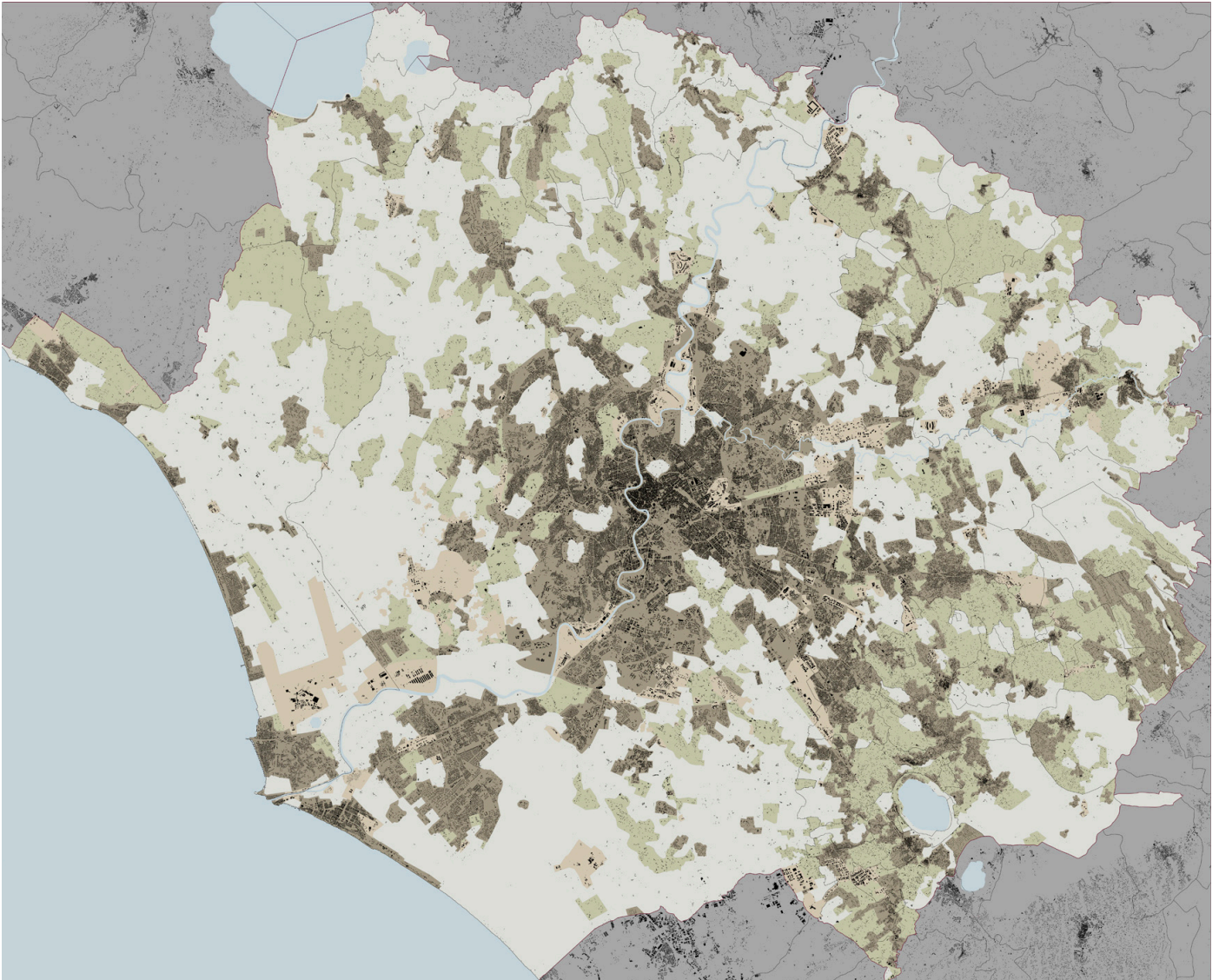


Figure 13 – Roman area. Approximate distribution of type-morphological zones: compact (dark brown), farmland (white), special-use (pink) and “light city” (light brown) [Rachele Passerini].

gaps are impeded, that the perception of planning – and of politics associated with it – by citizens further deteriorates but also that standards and planning tools are challenged in court and easily disassembled.

Is it appropriate to consider another way: that of the proactive project in the spirit of “building new coherent and integrated landscape values”, as required by the Italian Code for the Landscape (Codice del paesaggio, art. 131) and identifying compatible transformations with a conscious, measured and thrifty use of resources. This attitude could take care of the type-morphological and functional quality of buildings – both existing and new but in already partially developed landscapes – energy sustainability and well-designed public and private open spaces.

In the case of the light city around Rome, it would be to plan a slight densification, homogenization and a reduction of the small-size discontinuity, a slight infrastructural and small

service re-functioning, and a strong landscape and vegetation improvement. This action should begin exactly with the areas identified by the bonds. They are among the most affected by sprawl and those most in need of regeneration rather than the cage where the official planning seems determined to condemn them. The designed transformations could and should be driven by private resources, highly controlled in their morphological and functional aspects by a competent – and not sadistically punitive – public rationalization.

Such a proactive attitude seems to promise some considerable advantages. First of all, it would allow for the pursuit of landscape quality in those areas where the hand of man has threatened to definitively damage. This goal is, of course, tied to a competent and careful design but also to an appropriate regulatory basis.⁶⁹

69. An outline proposal (in Italian) for a norm in this direction is in <https://colinroweconference2015.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/latinirowerome2015text.pdf>

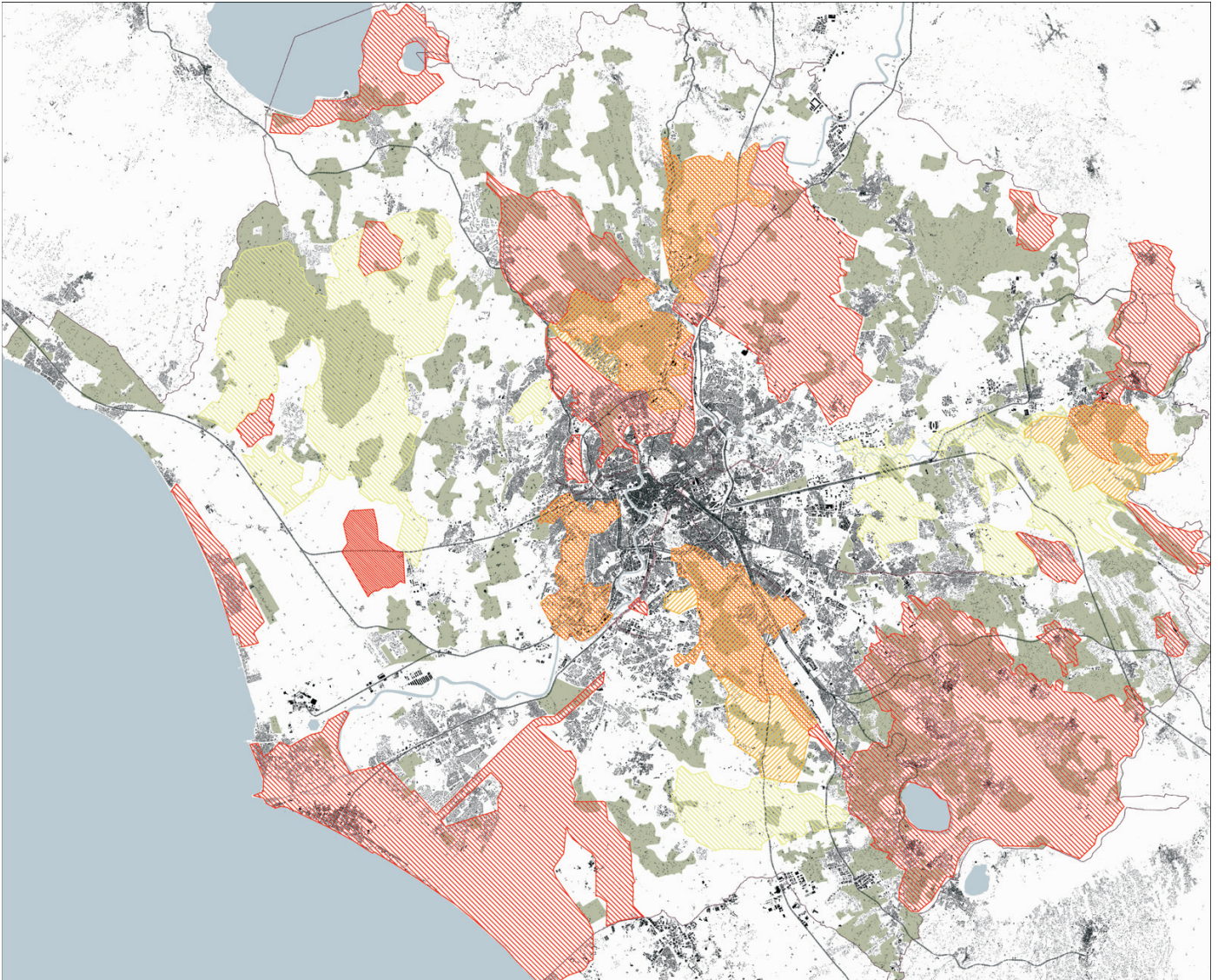


Figure 14 - Roman area. Preservation zones. Zones in red are restricted as "Areas with traditional aesthetic value and panoramic beauties"; in yellow are "Identity areas of the Roman countryside", in orange "Areas with archaeological value" [Rachele Passerini].

Secondly, there is the opportunity for a "smart" compliance to the desires of many citizens, of many families who aspire to the model of life offered by the garden city: that is, efficient, sustainable and without wasting true agricultural or undeveloped natural areas; at the same time, it would make it possible to promote a supply-side policy aimed at containing the increasing "affordability gaps" and to reduce inequality. Finally, we must fully consider the prospect of activating investments, major as a whole, generated by the convergence of many small-scale investments, within reach of families,

that can easily be activated, if it is true that the savings of Italians - some Italians - at this critical stage of the economy, are accumulating but are not available for perishable uses. Thus, it seems suitable to clear this middle landscape from its two-faced marginal position. It should be treated neither as an incomplete and peripheral city, nor as a corrupt country to be redeemed to its alleged - and imposed - agricultural vocations, but rather as a habitat with its own characteristics, to be completed and enhanced.

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