



**Politecnico
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Honors Thesis

Master's degree Science in Architecture Construction City

Abstract

MODERNIZATION ATLAS

A research on transitions and spatial frictions in Sardinia

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The relationship between Sardinia and modernization, understood as a process of change that the island experienced between the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is a complex narrative, often conflictual and at times violent. The image of a rural and primitive Sardinia fueled numerous extraordinary interventions aimed at the productive and infrastructural development of the island: a largely exogenous modernization that sought to transform Sardinian economies and societies starting from a condition deemed backward and unproductive.

During the Fascist period, modernization efforts became more incisive. To cite some examples in the agricultural, livestock, or mining fields, one may consider the reclamation of the Piana di Terralba and the foundation of the city of Arborea (formerly Mussolinia di Sardegna), as well as the city of Carbonia, established to exploit the coal deposits of Sulcis. This type of state-promoted intervention intensified in the postwar years with the so-called “Piani di Rinascita Sardi” of 1962 and 1974, which encouraged the development of large chemical and petrochemical industrial hubs, such as those of Porto Torres, Portovesme, Sarroch, and Ottana. Other initiatives contributed to making the island a destination for the emerging mass tourism of the 1960s. Exemplary in this regard was the Costa Smeralda project, promoted by private investors led by the Aga Khan. Added to these were the numerous military servitudes that developed during the Cold War, given the island’s strategic position in the Mediterranean. The impression is that these attempts at modernization—often rapid, violent, heterocentric, and imposed from above—failed to take root in local contexts and were often perceived by resident populations as acts of cultural and economic colonialism. In recent years, other processes have progressively begun to affect Sardinian territory, adding to the long series of interventions already described. These include new parks for energy production, especially wind power, re-mining projects for rare minerals of which the island is rich—supported by the European Commission—as well as attempts at territorial patrimonialization aimed at consolidating the island’s touristic vocation, including still unexplored areas. Patrimonialization, in this sense, may also be read as a process of modernization in its own right, capable of transforming spatial structures, economies, and local imaginaries.

This thesis is conceived as an atlas of Sardinian modernizations. That is, as a critical interpretive tool of the territory, which observes Sardinia through the lens of its modernization processes. Through maps, photographs, diagrams, and documents, the atlas identifies and makes visible the frictions, contradictions, and conflicts that have shaped and continue to shape specific spaces of the island, placing them at the center of design reflection. Within the atlas, these territorial “nodes,” rather than problematic or critical spaces, are considered “generative” ones, capable of producing new forms and conditions of modernity, from which to consciously rethink the transformation of Sardinian territory and the role of transition. The atlas thus positions itself as a support for an urban and territorial design practice, capable of rereading places and of building, starting from the fractures that mark them, new possibilities of imagination and intervention.

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