

POLITECNICO DI TORINO  
Master of Science in Architecture Construction City  
**Honors theses**

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**Beyond Crisis | Biella**

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**Oltre la crisi | Biella** (Beyond crisis |Biella) focuses on crisis implications on space and planning. The case study is the Wool Industrial District of Biella, which is best known for its high quality wool production as well as it is the cradle of Italian Industrial Revolution. Biella is also actually the cell of the Economic Model based on Industrial Districts which was the most relevant development model in '80s and '90s in Italy. These are the reasons why Biella could be the chance of studying contemporary Italian situation. The working hypothesis is that crisis would have changed the relations between society, economy and territory, which used to constitute a real paradigm since a decade ago. We suppose that this change is visible and could be described from the point of view of space, which is the one pertaining architecture and urbanism.

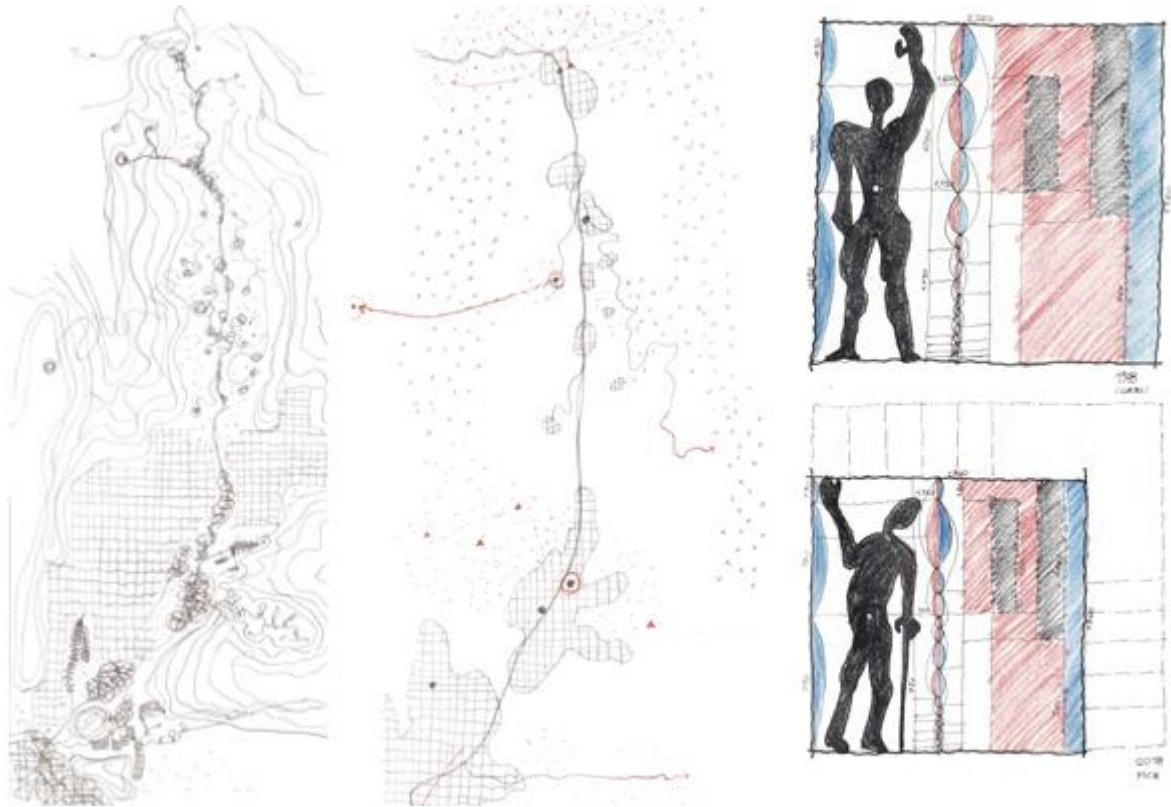
Adopting an ab-ductive/pragmatist approach we describe Biella looking for change symptoms and we suppose that the most relevant transformation of space lies in a radical new territorial complexity (actors, relations, hierarchies, overlapping, dynamics). Hereafter we reflect on planning and design practice as it is supposed to be the main architects tool for coping with issues and we hypothesize flexibility as answer to complexity since flexibility is defined as enabling the future. The Hippodamus horizontality grid seems to grant flexibility more in terms of metaphor than of morphology and we try to adopt it as a guide for planning dealing with the main Biella issues. The ambition is not yet a full plan but a metanarrative survey which reflects on planning horizontal territories.

Le conclusioni, oltre a mettere in luce la nuova complessità territoriale nei suoi caratteri di radicalizzazione delle condizioni, di estremizzazione delle diversità e di effervescente emergere di vivacità minori, fornisce delle risposte ad alcune vexatae questiones del territorio biellese. Più oltre, si concentra sulle questioni aperte che la ricerca ci pare offrire:

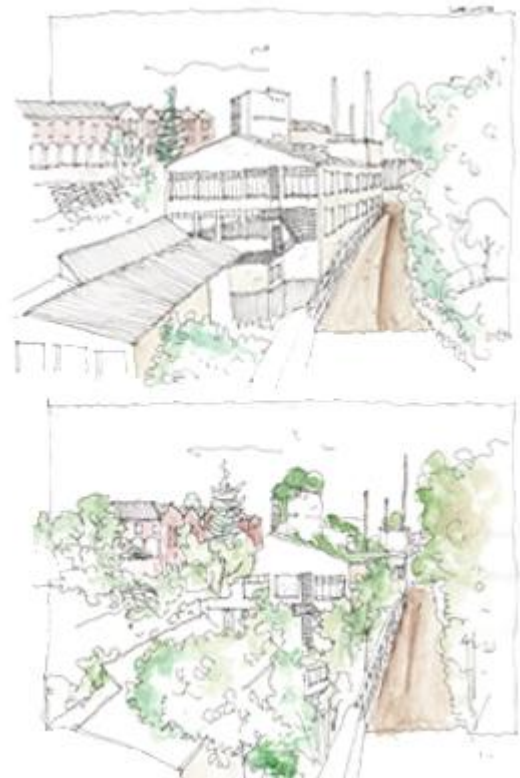
Conclusions describe the new territorial complexity focusing on changing conditions, growth of multiplicity and emerging effervescences. After giving some answers to main Biella "vexatae questions" conclusions focus on further steps and open issues: (1) Because of the changed background conditions and inadequacy of the past one, architecture and urbanism require a renewed reflection on their specific research method, boundaries, goals and tools. (2) Contemporary world seems to face a kind of "new urban middle age" where surplus of culture, buildings, inequality, rust, dross, ruins... constitute a new reality whom we are not able anymore to give meaning to. What we used to name as "dismissed", "recycled", "reused" represents our cities permanent contemporary condition. (3) Nowadays trends radically change the meaning of "well-being" regarding living, privacy, public space. Planning is supposed to take it into consideration exploring new paradigms as well as dealing with the emerging role of social effervescences.



*Strada Trossi: a drastic emptying. The crisis of 2008 provoked the near-total closure of more than 50k m<sup>2</sup> of plants, offices and shops. From the dream of an 'outlet city' to a long impersonal tail of giants with no identity*



*Valle Cervo. The triple crisis (of the Whole, of demography, of welfare) asks for a triple afterthought. About designing: we have draw a city that works for parts instead of Gran Plans. About taking care: we have to imagine a district for elderly. About welfare : a combinatorial game of effervescences*



*Vallemosso. Thinking about dross and ruins means also look for new way of designing. Ranging from Nature' re-flourishing to 'gardens of ruins' passing by Cedric Price' 'magnets' and open, dynamic, flexible architectures*

The **Introduction** is about the main representations of Biella, an historical survey, a sociological analysis of contemporary way of living, a description of trends.

**Lettere** (Readings) describes Biella through four territorial sections. Each of them is presented through a geographical description, an analysis of crisis implications, an interpretation of the main issues. Tools of the inquiry are: photography, mapping, data collecting, drawing, writing.

**Scritture** (Writings) describes Biella from the planning point of view. If crisis generates a more complex and dense territory, planning theory needs to get deepened. The "Horizontal city" metaphor is frequently given as the answer to XX Century main issues. We re-discuss here this metaphor through the four sections for proving its relevance, failure, re-tooling.

**Full thesis is available at:**

<http://territoridellacondivisione.wordpress.com/2014/10/09/beyond-the-crisis-biella/>

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