

Aspromonte National Park The heart of the Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria: design scenarios

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Abstract

The Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria has a complex territorial system with different fields and context from the morphological and settling point of view to economic development. Inside of the city we find the Aspromonte National Park, almost like a 'metropolitan garden', a mountainous park of more than 65,00 hectares, which is an almost unique example on European level. The Park is in fact one of the five homogeneous territorial areas as identified by the latest Statute of the metropolitan city. The territory of the Aspromonte National Park is a sort of show, full of history and culture which arouses sense of belonging in the established communities, also for the significant relationships between man and nature which could become a source of interest to the potential opportunities of project. The proposed paper put in evidence the fact that in order to develop a different growth/improvement plan, it is necessary to have a complex and coordinated projectual strategy in the PNA settlement system, aimed at combining economy and enhancement of cultural and landscapes' resources with environmental protection. We want to propose of the possible design scenarios regarding the link between a proper growth of the territory (which has to be congruent with history, heritage and resources of the landscapes) and the necessity to be actively involved in the development of a wider territorial system, the one of the Metropolitan city which it is part of.

Keywords

Enhancement strategies, Metropolitan City, Settlement heritage, Connective and Networks

Introduction

The Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria is characterized by a complex territorial system with different settings and contexts for each morphological form, settlement nature and levels of economic growth. Its territory coincides with the one of the former province, while links and vocations can be found in more territorial systems full of different details and identities. The PNA is one of the five homogeneous territorial areas of the metropolitan city (the other are the plain of Gioia Tauro, the Strait, the Locride and the Grecanica area). This choice represents one of the most innovative aspects of the Statute that recognizes the Park Area as a metropolitan territory which wants to par with other territorial contexts to activate Forms of development and enhancement consistent with the peculiarities of the places. The presence of a protected area (the Aspromonte National Park, a mountainous park of more than 65,000 hectares) included in the metropolitan perimeter, is a unique example on European level. It is an area which is characterized by an extraordinary landscape, cultural heritage and a rural but also mountain settlement system in which the residential side is becoming more connected to the tourist attraction with cultural, landscape, historical, archeological, enogastronomic and naturalistic goals. Inside the park there is a mixture of places characterized by a rural worlds that combines itself in a thousand different narratives, and it is push out to the future in a common and at the same time peculiar project. The territory of the Aspromonte National Park is a sort of show, rich in history and culture that wants to give a strong uniqueness in established communities. Its barycentric position in the 'vast' context of metropolitan territory, which includes 37 municipalities, one third of those that make up the entire area, represents a strong point in the metropolis process of the city of Reggio Calabria. In addition, the multiplicity and variety of so many local contexts give rise to so many settlement systems, the most often fragile centers of the metropolitan context. They also produce a geography, another view, for which we need to find forms of aggregation and specific spaces for intervention in the process of constituting the Metropolitan City, especially in the light of the homogeneity that provides the territory of the Park. Geography, therefore, reveals a territory that has experienced more or less positive events, depopulation phenomena, demographic and economic crisis, and ultimately the phenomena of physical degradation of the territory, all accompanied or otherwise resulting in a general depletion of the Territory itself. Here, therefore, processes are opening up to new geographies that intercept new issues: environmental, cultural-identity, strategic-infrastructure, bringing attention to the upgrading of the territory and the infrastructure network, the reorganization of services and the public space, on the necessity of physical accessibility, not of places and things, of reconnection of different parts of the city and of the territory through the project of red, green and blue networks.

The relationship between metropolitan system and park

The identity of the settlement characteristics of the PNA system have created structured links between urban centres and defines active contexts in local projects that are expressed in the search for forms of related development. From a functional point of view these areas present types of integration and exchange, and the characters of settlement systems, strongly influenced by the various morphological configurations, allow an aggregate reading to which you can associate the search for a primary vocation that each of them can unitarily carry in a comprehensive metropolitan city project. The settlement of the Aspromonte Park land characters allows detection of macro cultural areas, according to different homologous and identity matrices and functional relationships that are present in the territory of the park, which have created structured links between centers and areas themselves. The configuration of the metropolitan city territory is therefore closely linked to the presence of the Aspromonte massif. The rugged orography does not favour the establishment of inhabited centers and productive settlements; the greatest concentration of soil is recorded along the coastal strip of territory with the poles of greater aggregation species in the municipalities of Reggio Calabria, Palmi and Gioia Tauro on the Tyrrhenian side and in the municipalities of Marina di Gioiosa Ionica, Siderno, Bovalino and Locri on Ionic slope. The most impervious centers and least accessible areas of the territory do not reach the thousand inhabitants.

The reading of the metropolitan city's territorial system reflects the twentieth-century settlements dynamics and is characterized by the presence of a fragile infrastructure web both in connection with vast territory and in the relationships between the inner areas and the progressive abandonment of the inner centers for the benefit of Coastal areas, a process that tends to increasingly marginalize them. These considerations lead to the definition of a kind of reading of the settlement system of the heart of the metropolitan city, that is, of the PNA, functional to the design of the metropolitan city, determining for the structuring of a polycentric territorial armour made up of carriers, over-local system and systems Local areas that concern both the functional system of services and the accessibility network to converge and contribute to the design process of metropolitan city.

The system can be read through its features:

Settlement centers are the urban centres that represents the central settlements of the Park territory, as the 'directional' poles of a network of mountain settlements related to them. Equipped with discreet accessibility, they allow easy penetration to the highest odds. The territories of these municipalities are rich in interesting landscapes and have no significant environmental detractors. The factors of tourist attraction, in particular for Gerace and San Giorgio Morgeto, are distinguished by the rarity of the offer, also in terms of urban quality and image and atmosphere of the places. The level of services for residence and tourism is satisfactory and excels at Gambarie in winter sports, with the presence of interregional reconnaissance facilities.

Centers with strong identity and landscaping have compact and closed urban planning matrices and locations with strong perceptual suggestions. Characterized by a perched and defensive position, camouflaged in the landscape and not visible from the coast, dominate the surrounding area with a wide perception of the Mediterranean. They mainly belong to the Grecanic area and the Ionian hinterland, and are united by urban matrices, dwelling forms and building technologies, which together define a cultural lab that feeds and is renewed even under unfavourable conditions. The territories of the communes are rich in interesting landscapes and the factors of tourist attraction are predominantly historical-cultural and landscaping. In the case of Bova, the particularly striking atmosphere of urban places is enriched with numerous monumental-testimonial emergencies. Accessibility has critical elements in the Grecanic area, while it appears more appropriate to local needs in locals. The level of services for residence and tourism is very modest despite the presence of tourist accommodation along the coast.

Sea-mountain integration centers are located in the 'pre-pard' spatial area. These centers are characterized by a barycentric or strategic position in the coast-mountain relationship in a sort of 'hinged areas' between the strong coastal settlement system and the weak mountain linkage system. On the Tyrrhenian side, these centers represent the crown of hilly centers with a good level of infrastructure – logistic and cultural – that mark the Piana in a fan that has the summit of Gioia Tauro and as correspondence the arch of the coast stretching from Palmi to San Ferdinando. In the Strait area, the integration axis between Gambarie and the coastal area is strengthened by the presence of Santo Stefano d'Aspromonte, which marks a crucial stage of introduction to the discreet infrastructure park. On the Ionian side it is possible to interpret a kind of bijective mountain-coast relationship by linking the centers to an area characterized by the possibility of passing, in little more than half an hour, from mountain tourism to coastal-bathing. Overall development is achieved through a dense integration of the roles and the mutual support of mutual collaboration between mountain and coastal centers and the strengthening of relations between the Tyrrhenian and Ionic side.

The centers of the rural economy are those not otherwise characterizable. These are agricultural centers that experience a difficult balance between the landscape quality of the sites and the extreme weakness of the territorial dynamics. They exhibit weak identity matrices and are affected by progressive phenomena of depopulation and the consequent shrinking of valuable crops.

Bosch and Forestry Economics Centers are characterized by rather fragile development dynamics that are amplified in relation to depopulation processes. The urban matrices from the centers have the typical characteristics of fragile economy agglomerations, often associated with low quality and recognizable building growth.

Settlement islands of great cultural and landscape interest have strong elements of fragility both from physical and socio-economic point of view. In the process of depopulation of some centers due to floods and instability, it is associated with the abandonment of other villages such as Amendolea of Condofuri for the migration processes towards the coast and the progressive demographic decline of the entire cultural area of Grecanica. The fires of great potentials can be a great opportunity for settlements of great potential because of places of pilgrimage (Polsi of San Luca), of solidarity (meeting community of Don Gelmini in Zervò) and of high altitude and climatic settlement. The future of these places and highlands that preside and structure is closely linked to the ability to understand the various potentialities in a network logic.

The Rural Fractions of the Rural Economy are characterized by a close relationship between residence and agricultural management of the funds. They are affected by progressive phenomena of depopulation and have very weak identity matrices.

The rural nucleus of the territory consists of the rural nuclei of the Grecanica and the Ionian slopes that serve as a function of mountainous territory. They are linked to the valorization of hiking trails, as they compose, together with the forty-two trains of the forest, a potential network of hiking service (huts, shelters, information)

In the typology of the **Places of Memory**, ancient settlements fall under the condition of no longer recoverable ruins that can be of tourist interest as sites of memory (organized in thematic networks) that insist on areas of extraordinary landscaping interest. The creation of thematic networks and integrated nature-culture-memory circuits is of extreme interest to the metropolitan city project as they allow the relationship between the little known natural resources, the network of memory centers, the complex of archeological goods and the numerous testimonies Architectural features of Calabrian history in favour of a cultural tourism strongly rooted in the complex character of the Aspromonte's territory.

Design themes and lines of action. The Park as the heart of the metropolitan city

The design themes that emerge from the interpretations of the settlement system lead to the possibility of exploiting the potential expressed by the 'new metropolitan city' to overcome the current fragmentation of the places. Strengthening the prospects for functional integration through conscious and innovative use of resources can be a challenge of great complexity, but potentially capable of producing benevolences that are very important to the metropolitan airline in its entirety. The great issues that emerge from readings can therefore be summarized in four values to guide the planning actions of the metropolitan city's formation process: **quality, vivacity, identity and productivity.**

- **Quality** of landscapes, beginning with those most frequently perceived by the main axes of penetration and quality of settlements and built in terms of image and atmosphere of the resort, urban furnishings, characteristics of the settlement and urban fabric.
- **Vivacity** in seizing the opportunities and in the ability to valorise the strengths and to transform fragile elements into their own favour; Vivacity in adopting the new level of technical procedures and methods and expressions of hospitality, receptivity, cordiality and conviviality.
- The propensity to innovate can well coexist with the affection of traditions and the concept of **identity** that can be combined with the historical, cultural and environmental peculiarities of the places and in the area of typical and enogastronomic products that more than any other call attention and Tourist attractions.
- **Productivity** as a capability to gain visibility and recognition in a precise market segment and progressively refine the product, gain quality awards, promote its diffusion and marketing. It certainly represents an advantage for the planning of the Park's residential environment, in the metropolitan context, pursuing these values that already belong to the context, and stunted however for the many obstacles to development that permeate most of the internal territories.

Working on the progressive implementation of the called values means directing every energy, every opportunity that is determined within the Park territory project in it towards the metropolitan context, outwardly towards the guiding principle of the continuous, progressive and shared improvement process.

The methods and the ways to operate are of a different kind. There are direct Park Party interventions to improve relations between the established environment and the Park, which must ensure the weight and role of pilot interventions to indicate design guidelines and generate reverberating effects in the sphere of contiguous transformations of the vast metropolitan context.

A second mode is related to the role of directorship improvement that the Park Authority can play in steering **the transformation** government towards the continuous improvement of the quality of settlements centers, fractions and nuclei even through incentives for the progressive achievement of a Quality of the established environment.

A third planning orientation concerns the activities that the Park Authority can express for the **formation of a new culture of residency and of living** more adherent and meeting the Park conditions in a metropolitan reference context in formation.

All of the recalled interventions modes allow a for the first structuring hypothesis for design themes the **park's directional locations**, the promotions and enhancement of the park's central park system complementary roles in the centrality system;

- **The material connective networks** for the multi-functional valorization and integration of the various existing types;
- **The network of receptivity and reception**, for the rationalization, enhancement and promotion of diffused, qualified and diversified receptivity and for the promotion of local tourist offer systems;
- **The network of cultural and recreational infrastructures**, the promotion of projects for the enhancement of cultural structures and the creation of educational and scientific laboratories and an integrated system of leisure activities;
- **The quality of the settlement environment and the safety** of the parks for the promotion of projects aiming at the progressive achievement of the quality of the established environment of integrated projects in support of the high rural areas and of environmental re-qualification.

All this leads to the transformation of settlement system into attractive poles, bringing those types of economy that form new social and cultural aggregation models raising the quality level of the entire metropolitan context.

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