

Industrial areas and historic villages: two sides of the same coin? Proposals for enhancement and regeneration through urban strategies

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Abstract - *The contemporary urban landscape is increasingly characterized by a territorial structure divided into core and non-core areas, which face common critical challenges such as depopulation, infrastructural decay, and difficulties in adapting to contemporary needs. This study aims to outline effective urban regeneration strategies for marginal areas, identifying their criticalities, root causes, and potential opportunities for reconnection and revitalization. The main objective is to explore the transferability of successful models and practices from the Italian context to diverse settings, specifically within the metropolitan area of Tirana, focusing on the Uzina area in Shkoza. The methodology adopts a qualitative approach based on a comparative analysis of two case studies: the village of Campolo in Italy, which exemplifies the process of the urban regeneration in the Italian context, and the Uzina area in Shkoza, Tirana, a former industrial zone characterized by a unique blend of residential, industrial, and rural functions. The comparative approach is not based on a direct parallelism between settlement typologies, but on the application of a proven theoretical framework derived from the Italian experience to a new and distinct context, aiming to extract guiding principles such as the valorization of cultural and landscape heritage, rural sustainability, and participatory design. The results highlight how the Italian experience offers a solid methodological framework for reconnecting and valorizing Uzina's intrinsic territorial capital (the Tirana River, agricultural areas, the former industry, and the community), transforming it into a potential new urban hub. This systemic approach contributes to rebalancing Tirana's fragmented urban fabric, promoting resilient and inclusive development that transcends historical and geographical differences.*

Keywords - Urban Regeneration, Industrial Areas, Historic Villages, Participatory Design, Rural Development

Introduction

The contemporary urban landscape, both in Europe and globally, is increasingly shaped by a territorial structure divided into core and marginal areas. This diversified hierarchical system appears unbalanced due to the process of urbanization, which has accentuated the urban-centric nature of the territory (Lanzani, 2003) and has relegated marginal areas to the role of passive beneficiaries of urban development (Modica et al., 2021). Harrison and Heley (2015, p. 1130) also criticize this logic, arguing that non-core areas are often perceived "simply as an appendage hanging on to the coattails of the great modern metropolis." The distinction between core and non-core areas is not merely geographical but reflects profound socio-economic, infrastructural, and cultural disparities, contributing to phenomena of decline and depopulation. In

fact, core areas are generally understood as urban zones acting as "growth engines for regions and/or countries" (Modica et al., 2021, p. 237). They benefit from concentrated investments in essential infrastructure and services, such as education, healthcare, and transportation, which enhance their functional attractiveness and economic competitiveness (Basile & Cavallo, 2020). By contrast, the non-core areas are not only physically peripheral but also structurally disadvantaged in economic and social terms. They are frequently characterized by processes of depopulation, infrastructural decay, and the abandonment of cultural and landscape heritage, which reduce their attractiveness for residents and businesses (Oppido et al., 2019). It is difficult to identify the precise historical moments and causes that led

to the fragmentation of territories. Undoubtedly, processes such as urbanization, mechanization, globalization, the rise of the knowledge economy, and the economic crises following the Second World War have profoundly shaped the dichotomy between non-core and core areas (Lanzani, 2003; Modica et al., 2021). However, as Modica et al. (2021, p. 240) note, "from the United States to Europe, every country has its own historical peripheral areas produced by long-term processes, as well as more recent ones formed by contemporary phenomena." In recent decades, there has been growing interest in this issue, particularly regarding depopulation, among academics and international organizations such as the OECD, the United Nations, and the European Commission (Loras-Gimeno et al., 2025), given the importance of maintaining a balance between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas for the long-term stability of countries. Accordingly, international policies promote urban and territorial regeneration projects (Speciale et al., 2022) and advocate moving beyond the binary distinction between "leading" and "lagging" territories (Oppido et al., 2019, p. 2). This contribution aims to support the overcoming of the distinction between leading and lagging territories, therefore the main objective of this work is to investigate urban regeneration practices with the aim of fostering balanced development between urban centers and peripheral areas, enhancing local resources and mitigating territorial inequalities, and to better support the background of international policies that today appear weak, disconnected and lacking generalizability (Loras-Gimeno et al., 2025). More specifically, the study seeks to identify, through the Italian experience with historic villages, a set of tools and practices applicable to the Albanian context. It focuses on two international case studies, selected for their comparability in terms of fragility and marginality:

- Campolo (Emilia-Romagna, Italy), a historic village included in the so-called Minor Italy, composed of 5,683 small municipalities with $\leq 5,000$ inhabitants (17% of the Italian population), most of which are affected by depopulation and decline, and have already been subject to various initiatives and regeneration programs, such as those of

mountain communities, the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI), and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) (Flora & Crucianelli, 2013, p. 28). Campolo represents a significant example of the implementation of the National Villages Plan (Piano Borghi), within a region that has long been a socio-economic laboratory for processes of modernization, agrarian landscape transformation, and urbanization (Montanari et al., 2004). Its marginal location in relation to the metropolitan city of Bologna reflects the condition of much of the Apennines.

- Uzina in Shkoza (Tirana, Albania), a former socialist peri-urban industrial area, located between the densely urbanized city center and the rural periphery. Its regeneration responds to the urgent need to mend Tirana's fragmented urban fabric, alleviating pressure on the center and promoting new development poles. In particular, its position along the Tirana River makes it strategic for reconnecting the city along an east-west axis.

The two cases share common vulnerabilities, such as decline, depopulation and marginality, despite their historical and territorial differences, and represent voids, respectively territorial and urban, to be regenerated. The comparison adopts a qualitative, multi-scalar, and interdisciplinary approach, applying a theoretical framework tested in Italy to a distinct Albanian context, and promoting regeneration as a holistic process at the territorial scale. The international relevance of this work lies in the proposal of transferable models and tools for sustainable development and territorial cohesion. The comparison between Italy and Albania contributes to the global debate on depopulation policies, which are often fragmented and scarcely generalizable, providing insights for assessing transferable regeneration strategies and planning scenarios for the Uzina area and also for the other international contexts.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the methodology, based on a qualitative, multi-scalar, and interdisciplinary comparative analysis. Section 3 examines the Italian context, with a focus on the historic village of Campolo and its regeneration process, while Section 4 analyzes the Albanian case of Uzina in Shkoza, Tirana. Section

5 discusses the results of the comparative analysis, identifying common challenges and transferable strategies, and Section 6 concludes by highlighting the main findings, limitations, and potential future directions.

Methodology

This contribution adopts a qualitative approach within a multiscale and interdisciplinary framework, based on two international case studies: Italy and Albania. The use of a comparative analysis serves to explore the transferability of urban regeneration strategies between diversified contexts. The methodology was structured in three key steps.

The first involved a literature review (Emiliani et al., 2006; Barbera et al., 2022; Lanzani, 2003; Oppido et al., 2019; Modica et al., 2021; Basile & Cavallo, 2020; Islami & Veizaj, 2024) to define the context of marginal areas, with a particular focus on a type of Italian settlement: historic villages, which are currently the subject of research in regeneration practices. From this analysis, four important guiding elements emerged in the regeneration process, which assume the landscape as a development factor.

The second phase involved a contextual analysis of the Italian experience of the PNRR's Piano Borghi (Villages Plan). For this purpose, the village of Campolo, a rural and mountainous settlement in the northern Apennines of the Metropolitan City of Bologna in Emilia Romagna region, was selected. The case of Campolo is not intended as a case study for a direct and parallel comparison, but rather as a set of principles derived from the regeneration process in which it is currently involved. It illustrates how landscape and local identity can become generative elements in a requalification process, providing a valuable lens through which to analyze the context of Tirana. The regeneration process, especially when based on the principles of landscape and local identity, requires participatory planning where community involvement plays a central role. By way of example, the European experiences of the LEADER model (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale) and the CASPER project (Citizen Actions for Smart Public Enhancement of Resilience) represent valuable reference tools for the territorial context of Tirana and, in particular, Uzina. The LEADER model provides the framework for "bottom-up" local development, fostering cooperation between public and private actors and the enhancement of territorial resources (European Commission, 2023). The CASPER project offers a methodological approach centered on the direct involvement of citizens to address the challenges of demographic decline and improve services (Interreg Europe, 2023). Together, these models provide guidance for implementing strategies aimed at sustainable and inclusive urban regeneration. The final phase, based on the guiding principles extrapolated from the Italian context, saw the study conduct a detailed analysis of the Uzina in the Shkoza area, Tirana. The objective is to evaluate the area's potential and identify a series of plausible tools and strategies for its regeneration. The comparative approach, therefore, does not lie in a direct parallelism, but in the application of a proven theoretical framework, derived from the Italian experience, to a new and distinct context. This is possible by assuming that places in a state of degradation and depopulation require practices based on integrated, participatory, and shared approaches, regardless of the origin and nature of a given settlement, to highlight the importance of a new interconnected territorial system

The Italian Case

Italy has distinguished itself for its prompt adoption of European initiatives, becoming a model of reference at both national and international levels. One of the most significant aspects of its territorial structure is the urban phenomenon, an ongoing process that has led to a complex division between core and non-core areas. This process is generally traced back to the 1950s, with the emergence of suburban areas that reshaped the traditional relationship between the compact city and the countryside. In fact, alongside the traditional configuration of the compact city, increasing urbanization in certain centers and the experimentation with new settlement models have given rise to the so-called diffuse city, reorganizing territorial structures based on economic and administrative criteria. The causes of this transformation are manifold and vary depending on the context. In general, they can be attributed to technological factors, such as mechanization and the spread of motorization; socio-economic factors, including industrialization, the growth of the tertiary sector, and internal migrations; and finally, a new political approach to territorial management. However, this is not merely a cause-and-effect phenomenon but rather a complex process in which various elements have influenced each other (Lanzani, 2003). Nevertheless, the Italian territory stands out for its polycentric nature, where each settlement has historically functioned as an autonomous and self-sufficient center, with its own unique characteristics and deeply rooted history. Analyzing the literature from a historical perspective reveals deeper underlying causes that have undoubtedly shaped the fate of these areas, contributing to their isolation (Lanzani, 2003; Bagioli & Anfosso, 1977; Bagioli & D'Innella, 1978; Emiliani et al., 2006). The urban phenomenon in Italy has produced a variety of settlements, the result of redefining the historic center as cultural heritage and of the spread of new settlement logics such as suburbanization and the urbanization of the countryside linked to industrialization. This expansion of the city into the territory has generated fragmentation and socio-economic inequalities, often accompanied by a marked lack of public spaces and indifference toward the territory and the environment. Italy is now addressing these disparities through concrete urban regeneration policies and a form of "urban stitching" initiated in the 1990s, overcoming conservative immobilism and recognizing the landscape as a resource to be activated and as a new inhabitable territory. This Italian context is strongly comparable, albeit under different conditions and historical moments, to what Albani, and Tirana in particular, is experiencing, with its uncontrolled expansion and the evident disparities with peripheral areas. The comparison between these contexts, even among settlement types that may appear very different (such as historic villages and peri-urban industrial areas), falls within the perspective of integrated territorial development. The goal is holistic growth that enhances intrinsic territorial capital and fosters cohesion, recognizing the landscape as a dynamic and interconnected element, an expression of a society made of multiplicities (Lanzani, 2003).

The Italian experience of the Historical Village of Campolo

The Italian polycentric landscape is composed of a vast range of settlement types, from metropolitan hubs to small historic villages, bringing into focus the ongoing debate around the classification, role, and regeneration of non-core areas (Barbera et al., 2022; Emiliani et al., 2003; Lanzani, 2003). Within



Fig. 1. The Historical Village of Campolo, Emilia-Romagna, Italy.

Source/ author (2025)



Fig. 2. Imbalance between rural and urban: an overview of Tirana

Source/ author (2024)



Fig. 3. (Il)legal building

Source/ author (2024)

this framework, in recent decades, the theme of regeneration of historic villages has gained particular relevance, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The historic village, the Italian term "borgo storico," is a typical settlement linked to the period of "incastellamento" (castle-building) that began in Italy from the 11th century (Bagioli G. & D'Innella M., 1978). Over the centuries, it has undergone profound changes due to urbanization processes, and precisely because of this continuous evolution, it is difficult to define it unequivocally. Indeed, it embodies the complexity and stratification of the Italian territory, representing a historical, cultural, and landscape heritage that would be reductive to associate exclusively with tourism or a vision of well-being (Barbera et al., 2022).

The definition of a historic village adopted in this work derives from the synthesis of recurring aspects present in the literature (Associazione I Borghi più Belli d'Italia, 2024; Ministero della Cultura, 2022; DM 02/12/2016, n. 555; Touring Club Torino, 2023). It is a settlement comprising a palimpsest of historical stratifications that define its identity, chronologically placeable between the 11th and 18th centuries, with the Renaissance as the last reference era, as the subsequent modern age is characterized by different settlement criteria. The village is characterized by a strong connection with nature and the territory, which guide its urban conformation: an organic and irregular fabric, adapted to the natural morphology and located away from major urban centers. Its relevance also lies in aspects of social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Demographically, the debate is broad but oriented towards settlements with fewer than 5000 inhabitants, corresponding to small municipalities in severe conditions of depopulation, degradation, and social marginality. In administrative terms, they constitute approximately 60% of the Italian territory (Catone, 2020) considering also hamlets, the total would exceed 20,000 units. From this emerges the national necessity to activate regeneration processes. The most recent expression of this attention is the National Villages Plan (Piano Nazionale Borghi), launched in 2021 with a series of interventions on two fronts. In particular, Line A has selected 21 pilot projects, one per region, intended to guide the regeneration processes of historic villages (Ministero della Cultura, 2022).

Among these, the experience of the village of Campolo represents a significant case (Figure 1). Located at 600 m above sea level in the Bolognese Apennines, within the metropolitan territory of Bologna, Campolo is historically known as the "village of stonemasons" due to its tradition linked to local stone processing, evidenced by the now disused quarries and the inhabited area. The village preserves buildings dating back to the 15th century and traces of an older agricultural vocation, recalled by the Latin name *campulus* ("small field"). Immersed in nature, it is flanked by one of the area's most evocative landscape attractions: the Stonemasons's Falesia with the Montovolo mountain. The closure of the quarries, due to the scarcity of material and reduction of the workforce, led to a progressive state of abandonment and depopulation, reaching fewer than 50 inhabitants. Today, Campolo is involved in a regeneration process promoted by the municipality and centered on the project "Da Campolo l'arte fa scuola" ("From Campolo, art becomes a school"). The initiative aims to transform the village into a new cultural and tourist hub through the relaunch of entrepreneurial activities and the reconstruction of a solid community. In this process, the landscape becomes a generative

element: the recovery of cultivable surfaces, the contemporary relaunch of stonemason activities for the sustainable production of building materials, and the valorization of environmental resources as well as tangible and intangible heritage all constitute development drivers rooted in local identity. A central role is assigned to the community, which has contributed to rebuilding the village's identity through participatory, integrated, and shared approaches, a necessity arising from the complexity of revitalization processes. To this end, a community cooperative was founded, designed to operate with shared value and act as an intermediary between inhabitants and local administration, while also engaging stakeholders in development strategies. Identity is therefore not only historical and cultural but unfolds into plural and interconnected trajectories: productive, social, agricultural, and exchange-based (Druidi, 2022; Vivicampolo 2023). The program combines the safeguarding and recovery of the village's cultural, architectural, and artistic heritage with the need for social and economic revitalization and the creation of new employment opportunities. The project envisions Campolo as a "cooperative village," with affordable rental housing, temporary accommodation units for young families, researchers, artists, slow travelers, pilgrims, and digital nomads, as well as the regeneration of shared facilities such as a medical center, telehealth services, a civic hall, and sports spaces. Cultural buildings are being restored, and public areas are requalified with a strong integration into the surrounding landscape. Beyond these material interventions, the initiative also places great emphasis on the intangible heritage of the village, in particular the artisanal tradition of stonemasonry. This legacy is being leveraged to establish an Advanced Training School in construction and restoration, alongside the creation of a Casa delle Arti (House of the Arts) and the promotion of cultural events such as music and literary festivals, thereby weaving together tradition, education, and innovation (Lipparini & Antonucci, 2024).

A less developed but relevant aspect concerns infrastructures, especially in terms of physical connectivity: Campolo suffers from limited public transport services and accessibility conditions, which would require enhancement, also in relation to its proximity to the Via Porrettana and its important railway network (Manella, 2017). Simultaneously, the theme of digital connectivity has been initiated, which appears more easily achievable and strategic for the village's future. To date, the projects realized involve the requalification of some buildings and significant areas, but the question of next steps and future scenarios remains open, especially in view of the conclusion of the Piano Borghi funding, expected by June 2026.

The discussion of this experience, regardless of its level of implementation, aims to extrapolate relevant aspects of regeneration useful for application in other contexts, including international ones.

Deconstructing the Regeneration Process: Key Components and Strategic Guidelines

The experience of Campolo, shared by numerous Italian contexts, together with insights from the literature, including the valuable Glossary from the book *Urban Regeneration* by Lupatelli and De Rossi (Lupatelli & De Rossi, 2022), has made it possible to highlight the main recurring elements in regeneration practices.

An effective model must be grounded in the analysis of the specific challenges of each area and

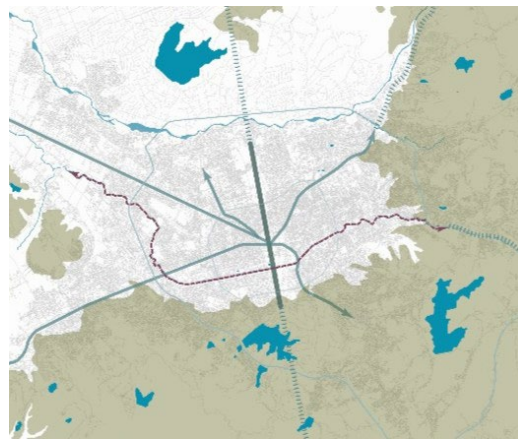


Fig. 4. The key elements of the pattern of the city of Tirana Source/ the author et al. (2024)

in the enhancement of local economic, social, and landscape resources. These are key elements for defining new models of sustainable development and growth (Stephenson, 2008). Such resources enable the tackling of issues like the protection of cultural heritage, innovation in traditional products, land access, sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, environmental risk management, and the involvement of local communities in evaluating adopted strategies (Basile & Cavallo, 2020).

Territorial and Infrastructure Dimension. Analyzing the territorial context, its critical issues, and available resources constitutes the first step in outlining the operational boundaries of a regeneration model, while also defining long-term objectives (Oppido et al., 2019; Modica et al., 2021; Basile & Cavallo, 2020). In this regard, the landscape plays a strategic role due to its multidimensional values, capable of triggering new development dynamics and shaping local identity. The landscape should be considered an essential asset to safeguard (Oppido et al., 2019), especially in light of its vulnerability to natural risks, thus promoting mitigation and adaptation strategies (Modica et al., 2021; Basile & Cavallo, 2020).

Cultural Identity and Heritage Valorization. Landscape and cultural heritage are essential to local development, acting as strategic resources to strengthen identity and foster socio-economic progress (Oppido et al., 2019). Heritage encompasses both tangible and intangible elements, which are fundamental in nurturing the bond between community and territory (Basile & Cavallo, 2020; Cervellò et al., 2012). Authenticity, defined as the compatibility between use, time, and place of origin, is a guiding principle in heritage enhancement (Basile & Cavallo, 2020). Place-based and history-based approaches place cultural identity at the heart of development strategies.

Rurality and Sustainability. Rural identity is a key element in the conservation and sustainable enhancement of territory. There is a close relationship between rural identity, sustainability, and authenticity: a solid territorial identity results from accumulated social capital, which becomes an intangible resource for local development, reinforcing the sense of belonging and engagement of local actors (Basile & Cavallo, 2020). In this context, sustainability is pursued through the responsible and non-dispersive use of environmental resources, such as water, soil, forests, and energy (Basile & Cavallo, 2020). An example of this effective model of rural development is represented by the LEADER approach (Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale), promoted by the European



Fig. 5. Location of the Uzina area in relation to the center of Tirana Source/ the author/ image reprocessing from Google Earth (2025)

Union. It is based on local development strategies elaborated and implemented by Local Action Groups (LAGs), which are public-private partnerships representing local socio-economic interests. The approach is characterized by seven key elements defined in EU Regulation No. 1303/2013: place-based strategies in well-defined rural areas, bottom-up design and implementation, public-private partnerships, integrated and multisectoral actions, innovation, cooperation projects, and networking (European Commission, 2023).

Participatory Design and Stakeholder Engagement. A key element in triggering sustainable development processes is the interaction with local communities and the dialogue with stakeholders. Participatory design is an essential tool to ensure the effectiveness of regeneration strategies by actively involving residents, local businesses, and institutions (Oppido et al., 2019; Modica et al., 2021; Basile & Cavallo, 2020; Cervellò et al., 2012; Barbera et al., 2022). A significant example in this field is the CASPER project (Citizen Actions for Smart Public Enhancement of Resilience). Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the INTERREG EUROPE programme, this project's primary goal is to improve territorial policies by directly involving citizens in finding solutions to the challenges of demographic decline, unemployment, and service deficiencies in rural areas across Europe. The project achieves this by facilitating the exchange of best practices among its partner regions, thereby strengthening the sense of belonging and enhancing the quality of territorial policies to ensure more effective and shared solutions (Interreg Europe, 2023).

The Albanian Case

To emphasize the presence of historical peripheries across different territorial contexts, the Albanian case is examined to identify both divergences and convergences with the broader European scenario. The analysis focuses on a specific case study within the city of Tirana: the Uzina area in Shkoza. Although located within the urban fabric, this area displays many of the characteristics typically associated with inner or marginal areas. Before delving into the specifics of this case, it is essential to clarify the nuanced distinction, within the Albanian context, between rural areas and marginal areas. This distinction arises from unique historical trajectories, markedly different from those in Western Europe. In Albania, the concept of non-central areas retains a strong rural connotation, rooted in the traditional relationship between settlements and the landscape, and historically

linked to an agrarian economy. Today, many of these areas face economic disadvantage, significant demographic decline, and diminished prospects for local development (Aliaj et al., 2003; Islami & Veizaj, 2024). The current territorial configuration of Albania is largely the result of profound socio-economic transformations following World War II, shaped by two pivotal events. First, the rise of the communist regime, which implemented ambitious development programs and restricted migratory flows, leading to substantial population growth. Second, the regime's collapse, which triggered the breakdown of the territorial system and marked the beginning of intense depopulation, particularly in rural areas. These territories experienced severe socio-economic and political consequences, including a dramatic decline in agricultural output (Aliaj et al., 2003; Islami & Veizaj, 2024).

Although decades have passed, the consequences of these transformations remain visible. In recent years, a first attempt at rural regeneration has emerged through the governmental "100 Villages" program, which adopts a methodology similar to territorial acupuncture (Islami & Veizaj, 2024), a widely used approach in Europe where landscape and nature are central to planning strategies. This initiative is supported by a classification of rural areas introduced by the Institute of Studies and Design in 1987, which categorizes villages into four types: small (up to 500 residents), medium (500–1,000), large (1,000–2,000), and very large (over 2,000 residents) (Islami & Veizaj, 2024). These historical dynamics did not only affect rural regions but also had a profound impact on urban areas, particularly Tirana. During the post-socialist transition, the city experienced widespread urban growth, driven by market liberalization and internal migration from the countryside (Figure 2). Alongside international emigration, Tirana attracted a significant internal population flow in search of employment, resulting in uncontrolled urban expansion, the proliferation of informal housing, and serious infrastructure deficits (Figure 3).

This chaotic growth led to what some scholars describe as the emergence of five Tiranans (Sotir, 2015), portraying the capital as a "multifaceted city" (Sotir, 2015, p. 144) with exceptional features that differentiate it from other urban contexts. The disordered expansion has made it imperative to rethink urban classifications and urgently adopt planning tools to address issues such as traffic congestion, service shortages, and environmental degradation, particularly in peripheral areas.

In this context, the city of Tirana today shows a clear social, economic, and cultural distinction between

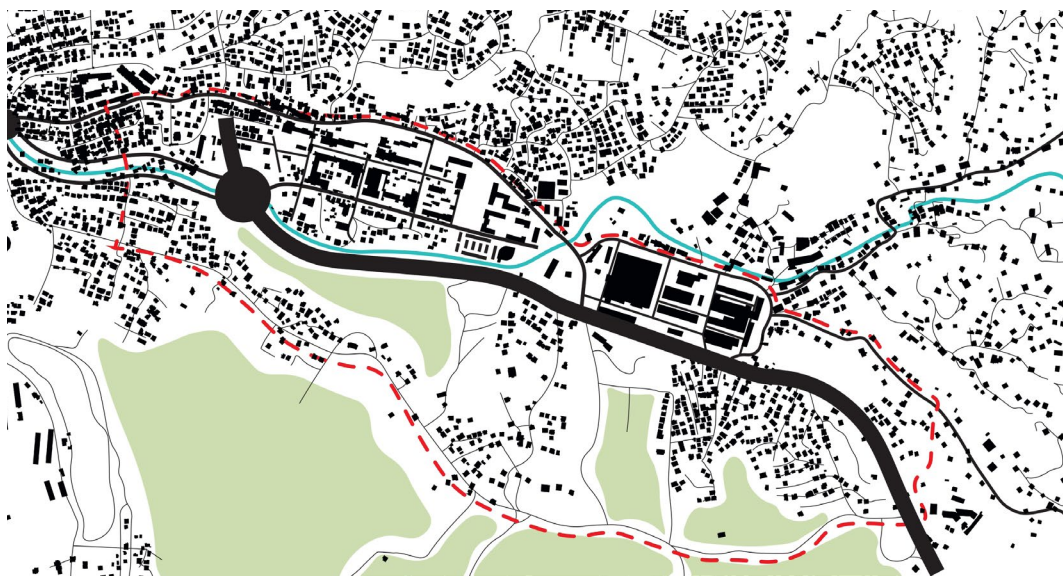


Fig. 6. Double layer of urban fabric in Uzina: organic pattern and rigid pattern
Source/ the author et al. (2024)

the city center and the surrounding areas. The study of historical maps has been crucial in tracing the city's evolution from its original core around Skanderbeg Square (Aliaj et al., 2003), revealing fundamental elements of the urban structure, such as the five main axes and the two rivers, Lana and Tirana (Figure 4).

Within this framework, the eastern sector of the city, and particularly the Uzina in Shkoza area, emerges as a focal point of interest (Figure 5).

Located in the eastern part of Tirana, Uzina represents a former industrial urban hub, historically marked by the activity of an important footwear factory, centrally situated within the settlement. The area is traversed by the Tirana River and the Unaza highway, which are the main connections to the city center, and serves as a connection node between two neighborhoods: to the northwest, Shkoza, characterized by the landscape at the foot of Mount Dajti, and to the south, the Farkë e Madhe neighborhood, with its Park and artificial lake. The Uzina area is primarily residential, with the presence of some services, including schools concentrated in the northeastern part. The southern part of the area, however, is less urbanized: to the west, rural spaces and uncultivated green areas prevail, while to the east, some lands are designated for agricultural use (Figure 6). The residential layout also presents a strong fragmentation: on one side, buildings arranged according to a regular hierarchy, and on the other, dwellings scattered across the territory in a more disorganized manner. This fragmentation reflects a condition of degradation and abandonment, especially on a social level, likely initiated with the cessation of the footwear factory's industrial activity. Based on this analysis, it is possible to summarize some key characteristics of the area through three main emerging aspects:

Accessibility: the area has a direct connection to the city center via the Unaza highway and the main roads along the Tirana River. However, these constitute the only privileged connections, generating congestion on the main arteries and in the historic center. Moreover, Uzina's location coincides with a break in part of the Ring, making access to surrounding areas and neighborhoods difficult, with the highway serving as the main

connection node.

Services: services are mainly concentrated in the north-western part, including schools, commercial activities, and primary services. This concentration, however, creates a heterogeneous distribution across the rest of the area, where residential uses prevail and other portions remain poorly served.

Informality and urban fragmentation: high, with disorganized buildings and discontinuous residential spaces, reflecting post-industrial decay and a lack of coordinated planning. The presence of the river and the highway further accentuates internal separation, dividing the area into two parts. Despite the abandoned state of the former industrial site, there are occasional socio-cultural activities, demonstrating the community's desire to recover local identity, of which the former footwear factory remains a key symbol.

Discussions

The neighborhood of Uzina in Shkoza, Tirana, represents a fundamental piece for rebalancing the chaotic and fragmented urban context of the Albanian capital. Its importance is not limited to reconnecting the surrounding territory with the city, but also lies in its potential to serve as a model for a new type of development.

The comparison with the Italian case of Campolo, although the historical and territorial contexts are different, reveals common factors such as degradation, depopulation, and marginality. These critical issues make the Italian experience, and particularly the approach to regenerating historic villages, a valuable source of inspiration for Uzina. The common objective is to initiate pathways aimed at economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Proietti et al., 2024), by exploiting the intrinsic potential of the territory, also with a view to a circular economy.

The analysis of the Campolo case has allowed for the extraction of key principles applicable to Uzina. Firstly, the valorization of cultural heritage as a starting point. In Uzina, the former footwear industry and its history constitute a material and immaterial heritage of considerable value, which can strengthen local identity and trigger new socio-economic development. Similarly to Campolo, where

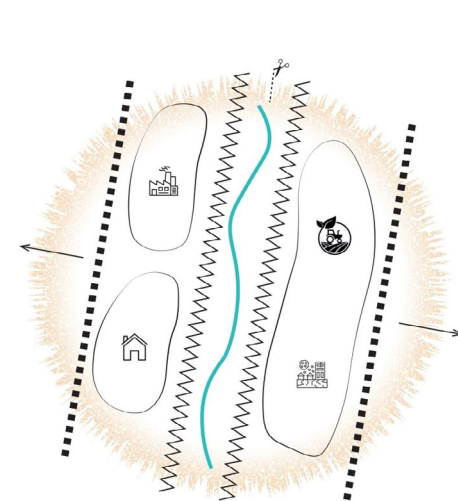


Fig. 7. Analysis of the current state of the functional areas of Uzina. The concept represents the poor dialogue between the four areas that characterize Uzina, where the river, along with the Uzana highway, acts as a separating element. Furthermore, there is a strong sense of alienation from the surrounding context.

production linked to stone extraction and agriculture guided development, in Uzina, the industrial legacy can become the pivot of new trajectories.

Secondly, landscape emerges as a key element for regeneration. While Campolo focused on its close connection with the mountain environment and hiking trails, the analysis of Uzina reveals intrinsic potentials in its landscape to guide change. The presence of four different territorial typologies (rural areas, spontaneous settlements, residential neighborhoods, and industrial zones) constitutes a unique asset. The presence of the Tirana River, from being an element of separation, can be transformed into a generative element, creating a collective central core and giving rise to new trajectories: a cultural center in the former industrial area, a

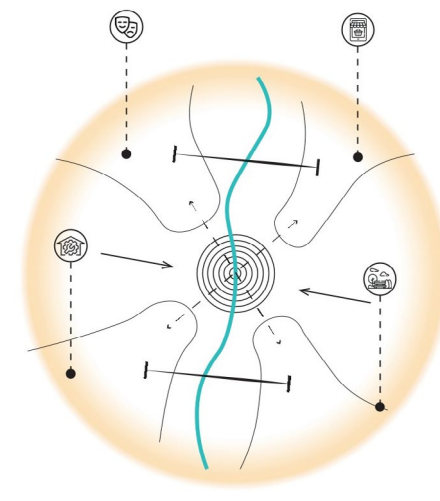


Fig. 8. Potential functional and administrative strategy for Uzina. The concept shows how the Tirana River can become a unifying and generative element, creating a central community space that connects the four areas: residential, socio-cultural, agricultural, and the urban park. The highway could be elevated to free up the space beneath for the community

an elevated space, such as a plaza, could be constructed above the highway, overcoming the barrier and reconnecting the portions of the area.

The success of the regeneration process critically depends on the strong involvement of the local community, which is essential in a densely populated area like Uzina. Drawing inspiration from Campolo, where a community cooperative played a central role in the dialogue between inhabitants and the administration, a similar model can also be established in Uzina to promote shared values and re-educate inhabitants to active participation. In this regard, the LEADER model can serve as a useful reference for Uzina. The first step is to verify the existence of locally active public-private partnership groups capable of undertaking

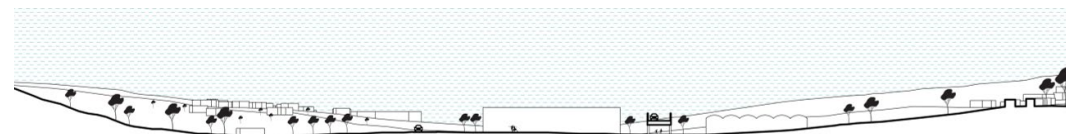


Fig. 9. Environmental section of Uzina: the landscape as the backdrop for the new social and cultural hub in the former Uzina factory
Source/ the author et al. (2024)

residential area, one dedicated to sustainable agriculture, and an urban park, while respecting pristine lands (Figures 7 e 8).

Furthermore, by transferring the altimetric data of the area into a conceptual environmental section, the landscape shows a natural orographic tendency to converge towards the river, drawing attention to the river, around which the new hub would develop, in which the landscape seems to transform into a container (Figure 9).

To fully leverage the landscape's potential for reconnection, it is essential to reconsider the strategy for crossing the Uzana highway, which currently marks a clear separation between the different portions of the area. Possible solutions could involve elevating the section that passes through Uzana, thereby creating a central hub capable of reducing fragmentation and informality in both the physical and social fabric, while also improving environmental quality. Alternatively,

territorial development practices. If such groups do not exist, it becomes essential to engage in dialogue with regional and national authorities to identify appropriate instruments for establishing a multidisciplinary action group guided by common socio-economic interests, tasked with collecting and outlining all possible development trajectories for Uzina. This action group should then seek to involve and integrate the participation of all other residents and the wider community, through planning workshops, community-led cultural initiatives, and the co-management of public spaces, adapting interventions to the fragmented urban fabric of Uzina, as exemplified in the CASPER project. Finally, the territorial and infrastructural dimension of Uzina is a relevant factor. Although its position is marginal compared to the center of Tirana due to some critical issues, the regeneration of the area as a new urban core would allow for rebalancing the socio-economic structure and decongesting central

areas. The revision of the infrastructural layout, for example through the creation of a transverse green corridor along the Tirana River and the valorization of the nearby Unaza highway, could improve traffic flow and reconnect the city in an east-west direction, linking the peripheral neighborhoods of Farkë and Kinostudio (Figure 10).

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the challenges and potential of marginal urban areas through a comparative analysis of two international cases: Italian historic villages and a peri-urban former industrial area, with the goal of identifying methodological insights applicable to the Uzina area in Tirana. The comparison highlighted common fragilities, such as degradation, depopulation, and socio-spatial marginality, emphasizing the importance of an integrated territorial perspective capable of valuing local peculiarities. The historical reading of villages and peri-urban areas is not used merely as a memory of the past, but as a tool to design contemporary interventions. From this perspective, the different territorial realities form a network of connections and collaborations, useful for addressing local challenges and supporting more coherent urban strategies at the international

level, where policies often remain fragmented and selective.

From the analysis, several possible scenarios for Uzina emerge. These include the promotion of social and community regeneration, with participatory spaces, cultural initiatives, and micro-entrepreneurial projects capable of strengthening social cohesion; the enhancement of the environment and landscape, through targeted interventions on the Tirana River, green areas, and connections with peri-urban agriculture; and a selective mixed-use redevelopment, in which the former industrial area becomes a hub for cultural, artisanal, and start-up activities, without altering the historical and territorial identity of the neighborhood. The implementation of these scenarios requires an integrated and multidisciplinary approach, based on ongoing dialogue between administration, community, and private stakeholders. Models such as LEADER and CASPER can guide the creation of local action groups and the participatory management of spaces. It is also essential to include tools for impact monitoring and evaluation, as well as the direct involvement of residents through interviews, participatory mapping, and workshops, so that actions are truly inclusive and sustainable over time. In this sense,

the contribution goes beyond the local analysis, showing how an experience like Uzina's can provide useful insights for international urban policies, in line with the objectives of sustainable urban development, social inclusion, and the regeneration of marginal or post-industrial areas. The intrinsic resources of the area such as environmental, social, cultural, and historical, can thus be transformed into instruments of resilience and inclusion, offering a vision of urban regeneration that combines innovation, participation, and the valorization of existing territorial capital.

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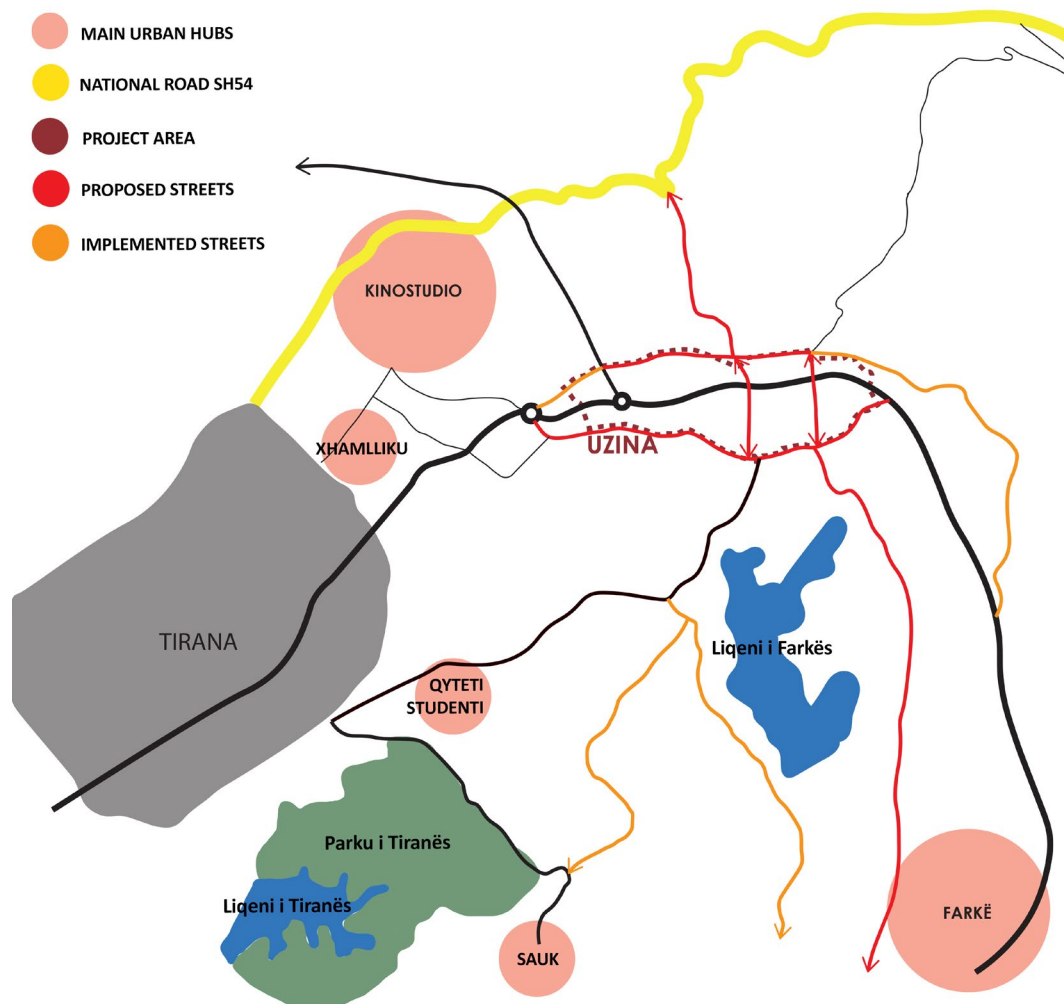


Fig. 10. Connection strategy of the Uzina area with the surrounding contexts and the center of Tirana Source/ the author et al. (2024)