

Metropolitan Cities as Living Monuments: Resilient Territories between Culture, Justice and Innovation

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Abstract

The text redefines the concept of the monument within metropolitan conservation, shifting from a static object to an active, antifragile device that generates values and behaviours over time. Conservation becomes a dynamic design process aligned with societal sustainability and evolving heritage, rather than mere material preservation. At the metropolitan scale, cities are seen as living monuments—relational infrastructures fostering cultural continuity and innovation. They catalyse social and environmental transformation, translating local knowledge into adaptive strategies. Case studies introduce the idea of eco-centrality as a node of territorial resilience, where new forms of living, producing, and governing emerge. These places integrate sustainability, spatial justice, and care for the commons, offering a forward-looking model of urban development rooted in cultural vitality and collective agency.

Keywords: Antifragile heritage; Metropolitan resilience; Eco-centrality

Heritage as an engine for localising the SDGs: culture, metropolitan policies and sustainable connections

The territorialisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), known as 'localisation of the SDGs' (Senatore, Bellabarba, 2021), is a key element in implementing a sustainable development strategy. This approach is based on multi-level governance and the involvement of territories, civil society, and non-state actors in the policy cycle, from planning to monitoring and evaluation.

There are four vectors of sustainability: planning and design for sustainability, policy coherence, culture and participation in sustainable development.

In particular, culture promotes training, information, and communication to strengthen governance and encourage population involvement. It also develops the capacity to closely observe contextual factors to identify what needs exploration in order to improve the quality of life for metropolitan populations.

In our research at the MSLab of the Politecnico di Milano, we asked ourselves whether humanity's quality of life remains the central reference for any consideration. Our reflection runs through the transformation of cities driven by emancipated and multi-ethnic societies shaped by technological progress.

Indeed, with the evolution of technology, geopolitical changes, and the expansion of cities into rural areas, there is a need to integrate non-linear urban realities by merging elements of ultra-modernity with fragments of neo-archaism. Modern metropolises, once deeply connected to the bodies of their inhabitants and urban spaces, now struggle to re-establish this relationship. Critical issues arise, such as the integration of historic and peripheral areas into the urban fabric and the need to design policies for metropolitan spaces that can engage with the local physical context, which has shifted in scale while maintaining its own identity to avoid producing a generic city (Koolhaas, 1995). Areas emerging from the destruction of war or natural disasters deserve special attention.

Our research focuses on implementing a strategic framework to guide the transformations necessary to overcome the negative impacts of the metropolitan scale. Furthermore, in line with the new European Green Deal, we emphasise the central role of sustainability in evaluating metropolitan-scale policies that require introducing the cultural component of local populations.

In this context, ecological and social transitions are intertwined in an integrated and cooperative transformation process. The final objective is to present examples of local cultural resistance actions that influence decision-making processes at the metropolitan scale for the development of inclusive public spaces and new metropolitan typologies, with a specific focus on metropolises' grey-green infrastructure and its impact on the individual and collective behaviour of 'conservative' and 'futurist' inhabitants.

The link between the localisation of the SDGs and culture underlines the crucial role of territories and their knowledge in promoting metropolitan sustainable development projects and policy coherence. Integrating the 2030 Agenda into horizontal metropolitan and vertical local planning processes relies on the meaningful engagement of various metropolitan and local agents.

A combination of culture and civil society movements is essential. Artistic practices can create a discontinuity with the past through an emotional rupture. However, this remains momentary and didactic if the wedge of mobilisation does not widen and if we stay anchored to a vision of art limited to individual emotion. Instead, they must be capable of leaving a mark of permanent value, contributing to constructing a collective landscape, producing a shared experience, and defining and recognising a community.

Millions of people, frightened and distressed by a significant rise in inequality, must be provided with a convincing alternative: a radical realignment of public governance to the collective interest and the right to their own 'lifestyle'. We would like to present proposals and experiments on this approach formulated by the MSLab of the Politecnico di Milano, particularly in Latin America.

That requires efforts to change the prevailing common sense, i.e. the mental predispositions, beliefs and attitudes that guide our decisions. Once again, science, history, knowledge, and local culture, which exist in the ashes, show us the way. We need a combination of two ingredients: culture and civil movements.

The new idea of a monument

According to the Venice Charter (ICOMOS, 1964), the notion of monument includes the architectural work and the urban/landscape environment.

I would replace this definition with that of a monument as an architectural sign that establishes a virtuous behaviour that is valid for a period of time (Choay, 1992).

That means that any significance of value we attach to an architectural fact is not linked to a 'then', but because it is recognised as valid today as it was then.

Thus, we can point to a value of time that does not focus on permanence but on duration, that is, on that which persists because it has determined lasting relationships with the context to which it belongs.

The relationship between past and present makes the past meaningful insofar as it can activate the reasons for today, and conservation is authentic if, after conservation, society can remain alive. With the extinction of society and, consequently, of subjective time, there is no longer any meaning or value in conservation; therefore, we can define that the sustainability of action is linked to its strong relationship with the survival of human society. Sustainability, thus, must be considered in the light of a temporality understood in its variance that requires an understanding of the meaning of the common sense, and of the accidental event that breaks into the metaphysical dimension of principles. The question is the value relationship between what we now consider eternal and accidental, temporary and consumable.

The theme of consumption encourages us to reflect on the relationship between human beings and nature, which has been profoundly transformed. This transformation carries philosophical, ethical, and practical implications that have shaped our understanding of the natural world and our role within it. It is linked to three interdependent concepts: freedom, constraint, and the secularisation of nature.

If we consider the metropolitan dimension, we can argue that the 'metropolitan commons'- that which today's generation must preserve for future generations as the mark of cultural value to leave as a testimony to its understanding of the world of this era and its society- is precisely what we can still call the cultural landscape, within which nature also lies, since it is no longer possible to distinguish human history and its preservation from that of the planet. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his *The Climate of History: Four Theses* (2009), leads us to look at the entanglement between culture and nature as an extreme attempt in the age of the Anthropocene to save the planet. The concept of entanglement, also proposed by the New European Bauhaus, is the eye of the storm from which to understand the current condition and to comprehend what the culture of nature means today, i.e. the entanglement between culture, technology, and the biosphere that is the unprecedented phenomenon of the current era.

That is where the discussion on the monument comes in. In our Western tradition, the monument serves as the warning that each generation entrusts to the next. But can every warning become a monument? No. A monument becomes a monument only when it elevates itself to a universal rule, a shared obligation, a secular sacred that binds all. In this sense, the monument is metaphysical sacredness made immanent.

This translation of the sacred into immanence is realised in heritage: a heritage that cannot exist only as a warning but takes shape in the collective expectation of leaving a mark of value to future generations, consolidating itself through law and intention.

Today, what gives the warning the status of the monument stems from an inverse process compared to the past, when the sacred deity sanctioned the law. Today, sustainable human behaviour towards nature has become a necessity, a spontaneous form of self-confinement. It is the detachment from the idea of a religious metaphysics, a vital and unavoidable act, to be handed down to those who will come after us as a universal condition and rule, binding for the very survival of humanity.

If heritage is not only a legacy of the past but also an engine of change, a hope, it is a strategic resource for shaping sustainable urban futures. As cities work to localise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), cultural and natural heritage becomes crucial to integrate policies across sectors, linking water, agriculture, food, mobility and social equity.

Heritage, serving as a bridge between tradition and innovation, conservation and transformation, underlies the New Urban Agenda's emphasis on strengthening the links between city and country through the definition of Urban-Rural Linkage Patterns, which are an integral and fundamental part of the new metropolitan landscapes (Contin, 2021).

Achieving the sustainability goals of our metropolitan cities enshrined in SDG 11 requires moving beyond isolated interventions to integrated metropolitan policies that address climate adaptation, resource efficiency and social inclusiveness while strengthening local identity. European frameworks such as the Green Deal (European Commission, 2019) and the Digital Agenda (European Commission, 2010) emphasise the alignment of heritage with green and digital transitions. However, systemic change requires adaptive governance and flexible institutions that respond dynamically to evolving challenges.

Metropolitan landscapes are complex ecosystems in which heritage plays a vital role in maintaining regional equilibrium; incorporating heritage into planning processes is key to addressing socio-economic inequalities and environmental degradation. The Mombasa Swahilipot Hub (<https://www.swahilipotHub.co.ke/>) demonstrates how youth culture, digital innovation and heritage entrepreneurship can challenge traditional patterns of preservation, transforming metropolitan heritage into a catalyst for economic growth and highlighting the need for strategies that integrate heritage into spatial development.

Even more, the Quintuple Helix Model (Contin, Sona, Pesci, Porreca, Pandolfi, Yang, Koike, 2025, p.253) includes the environment among the stakeholders and offers a governance framework that balances economic, environmental, and social factors. This approach is particularly strategic in conflict-affected areas, such as Gaza.

War erodes the protection of human rights and leads to the destruction of cultural heritage.

War is abhorrent because it also erases the complexity and dynamism of cultural heritage. It erases the multiplicity of human existence, cultural spaces, and shared meanings. It erases the possibility of crossing cultural boundaries and learning from others who appear different. UNESCO should have the courage to declare that the war in Gaza is destroying people's right to their Memory and History.

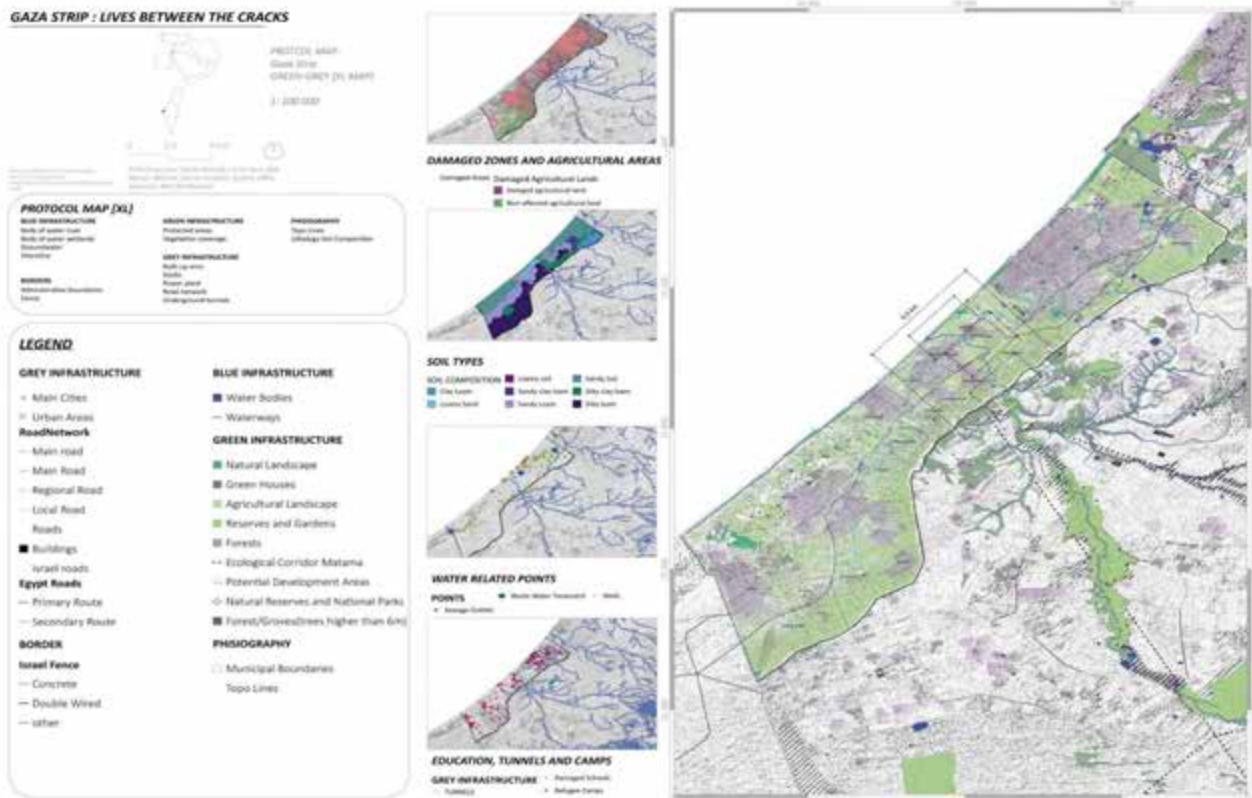


Figure 1. Metropolitan Cartography. Gaza Strip- XL Protocol Map. Credit: MsLab Polimi & Aktas E., Gandevikar K., Tsang W.C., Chen J.

Our study of the autumn semester 2024/2025 at the Politecnico di Milano was based on research and academic collaboration between the GLA programme, Birzeit University, An Najah National University and Gaza students enrolled in the online educational programme at the aforementioned Palestinian institutions, AUB in Lebanon and the Politecnico di Milano. The semester's intervention took place in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, focusing on the landscape of emergencies in the territories in transition. Students and teachers explored the concept of landscape in conflict and related planning for socio-environmental justice in a war-torn territory, Gaza, Palestine.

Landscape results from a dynamic interaction between a community and its environment, demonstrating how landscape architecture can foster socio-environmental justice by linking heritage conservation to resilience and recovery efforts.

This is why we have argued that urban resilience is no longer about survival but about anti-fragility. We use crises as opportunities to rethink governance and planning. This approach encourages urban planners, architects, and politicians to see heritage as an active force in transitions towards sustainability.

Urban planning in fragmented territories such as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is not only a response to systemic oppression but also a profound act of resistance and resilience. Our Master Studio Project demonstrated that by integrating nature- and culture-based solutions through metropolitan mapping (Contin, Galiulo, 2022) and participatory design interventions, it is possible to reimagine urban landscapes as spaces of equity, connectedness and sustainability.

The case studies and strategies presented, such as the reconversion of fragmented empty spaces into agricultural networks and rehabilitating coastal areas in Gaza to foster shared spaces that promote cultural identity, emphasise the transformative potential of urban design in addressing human and ecological needs. These projects exemplify how participatory design processes can counter systemic fragmentation by promoting ownership, solidarity, and collective action. These efforts align with the philosophy of 'Sumud', which embodies perseverance in the face of adversity, sustaining cultural memory and ecological balance (Massad, El-Astal, and Thabet, 2018).

Mapping the damage, segregation, and ecological disruption within Gaza highlights the critical role of cartography as a tool to visualise spatial injustice and imagine alternative futures. By exposing the mechanisms of fragmentation and proposing integrative strategies, the maps presented in this study allow us to transform boundaries into opportunities, gaps into centres and blockages into avenues for collaboration and restoration.

Ultimately, the projects emphasise that resilient urban planning must go beyond survival to envision hopeful, inclusive, and decolonial futures. They invite architects, planners, landscape architects, and policymakers to fuse local culture with global solidarity, creating spaces that resist erasure and support justice, sustainability, and equity. By bridging gaps between people, places, and ecosystems, design becomes a catalyst for healing fragmented territories, promoting lasting coexistence, and building infrastructures of resistance.



Figure 2a. Gaza Strip. Graded distribution basins flooded after heavy rains. Reduces flood risk while recharging groundwater and providing water for agriculture. Credit. MSLab & 2024Idil Mersin, Lynne Nabha, Jingrui Yang, Jialu Li

Figure 2b. Gaza Strip. Detailed section and water system management. Credit. MSLab & 2024Idil Mersin, Lynne Nabha, Jingrui Yang, Jialu Li

Figure 2c. Gaza Strip. Mosque, education complex - isometric view. Credit. MSLab & 2024Idil Mersin, Lynne Nabha, Jingrui Yang, Jialu Li

Finally, the Heritopolis Society (<https://heritopolis.org/>), a UN-Habitat initiative within the Korean Ministry of Culture, positions itself at the intersection of cultural identity, adaptive management and policy innovation, promoting cross-sectoral metropolitan connections.

By linking research and practice, as well as past and future, we aim to implement the habitat's local and sustainable cultural landscape. We consider heritage a fundamental pillar for localising the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) and constructing more just, resilient, and inclusive metropolitan territories, integrating other knowledge of local communities (Hale, Lynn Stephen, 2014) in current metropolitan projects and policies. It is time to move beyond static notions of heritage. Blood and territorial identity must be dismantled if we are to reconcile conflicts, thereby transforming the identity value of heritage to embrace a new, albeit ancient, idea of democracy.

The metropolis as heritage

The heritage debate revolves around two crucial issues: determining which heritage elements should be permanent and balancing conservation with community growth.

We argue that the definition of cultural heritage is inherently subjective. Traditions play a crucial role in maintaining heritage, but events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated how disruptions can alter perceptions of time and cultural continuity. Furthermore, we suggest shifting the focus to fringe events and alternative manifestations to revitalise heritage, emphasising the need for individuals to actively engage with cultural heritage as creators and users, shaping cultural appropriation.

The modern debate recognises the challenge of maintaining cultural heritage while allowing communities to evolve. A successful balance preserves key cultural elements such as street layouts and commercial activities. It also means emphasising the importance of branding cities while permitting the creative reinterpretation of historical heritage. Expanding the definition of heritage includes emerging technologies and creative expressions, arguing that heritage should not be confined to traditional monuments but evolve alongside societal changes.

For this, we must emphasise the transformative role of technology in discovering new aspects of cultural heritage (iHERITAGE, or the 'UNESCO Mediterranean ICT Platform for Cultural Heritage'). Digital tools can redefine the way we perceive cities and experience urban culture. However, we must emphasise the importance of responsible digital information management as it significantly influences our understanding of heritage. Future challenges include integrating technological advances to enhance cultural appreciation without diluting its authenticity (Buraghain, Meng, Deng, et al. 2024).

If we interpret heritage as an infrastructure capable of transporting values/resources, we highlight its dynamic nature. Traditions and recognisable elements ensure continuity, but the anti-fragile approach (Blečić, Cecchini, 2019) makes it sustainable in a changing urban context. The key lies in fostering participation, welcoming creative and counter-thinking reinterpretations, and harnessing technology to enrich the cultural experience, without sacrificing responsible preservation practices.

Our field of research is the Metropolis of the Second Modernity. In the ecological era (Khan, Vandevyvere, & Allacker, 2013), we need to focus on the paradigm of anti-fragility (Taleb, 2014) and de-risking that concerns contingent, fluid, and emergent structures and relations. The metropolis, therefore, in its dimension of bioregion (Barbanente, Fanfani, 2023), represents a 'different nature', a worldview in which nature overflows through its categories and touches culture (and vice versa) and in which human beings do not possess external characteristics that guarantee them a privileged viewpoint on things.

The Metropolis of the Second Modernity must be rethought from the demand for sustainability as a place where the soil, transformed with low environmental impact, becomes a critical node in the metropolitan processes that drive development and determine anthropological, social, technological, economic and managerial mutations. The consumption of energy, materials and, above all, soil must, therefore, be understood as the consumption of a rare commodity within a metabolic approach that calls into question a generational responsibility. For the new generations, it is a matter of building a life-cycle project that puts ecological issues at the centre. We must, in fact, consider the impact of metropolitanisation as a generational threshold: a transition that, in a short time, has

radically altered the lifestyle of local communities.

The coexistence of different places and their communities is typical in metropolitan societies.

The need to consider the metropolis as a cultural issue stems from the fear of losing due to the immeasurable size of the city today, our understanding and control of the spaces we inhabit, and the certainty of our social identities. This anxiety makes the conservative perspective on change extreme and exclusive, even though change is an undeniable reality. The issue of radicalised identities can lead to indifference to the dangers of obsolescence or disinvestment, and conflict intensifies with the rapidity of change. Conversely, there is hope for the future, but sometimes, an uncritical belief in its benefits often overshadows the past as we strive to look only ahead.

In this scenario, various cases of inequality and vulnerability are attributed to the inability to recognise and appreciate the value of cultures other than one's own and the consequent failure to include these cultures in a new metropolitan cosmopolitan culture; the loss of the plurality of different cultures and knowledge results in a resultant monotony of values, with risks of homogenisation and uniformity.

Cultural identity risks becoming a failed project if not conceived as a system of different resources. Moreover, it would be necessary to govern the dynamic transitions of processes and epistemologies, turning them into resources for designing new territories and lifestyles.

The metropolitan structure is based on a systemic approach: the metropolitan scale was chosen as the privileged dimension to observe, with greater precision, the gaps in local knowledge, particularly concerning the know-how of the territorialisation of the twin transitions and their impact on the SDGs.

The Metropolis of the Second Modernity is a system of places constituting its region, an alliance of multiple decision-makers and heterogeneous populations.

In the opening of a path of convergence between macro and micro scales, local intelligence intertwines with global dynamics, becoming a strategic axis.

Recognising the local languages of common sense and the earthworks that inhabit metropolitan areas is necessary. From these elements, we must be able to extract systemic resources that are treated as invariant data on a metropolitan and national scale.

Only then will a metropolitan architecture project be able to return these enhanced values to the territory, strengthening its local identity through conscious regeneration processes.

Resilient territories: Dialogues between city and country

In the past, in many culturally relevant areas, the lack of infrastructure drastically compromised the quality of village life, leading to the exodus of younger generations and triggering a demographic decline that reduced the availability of local labour.

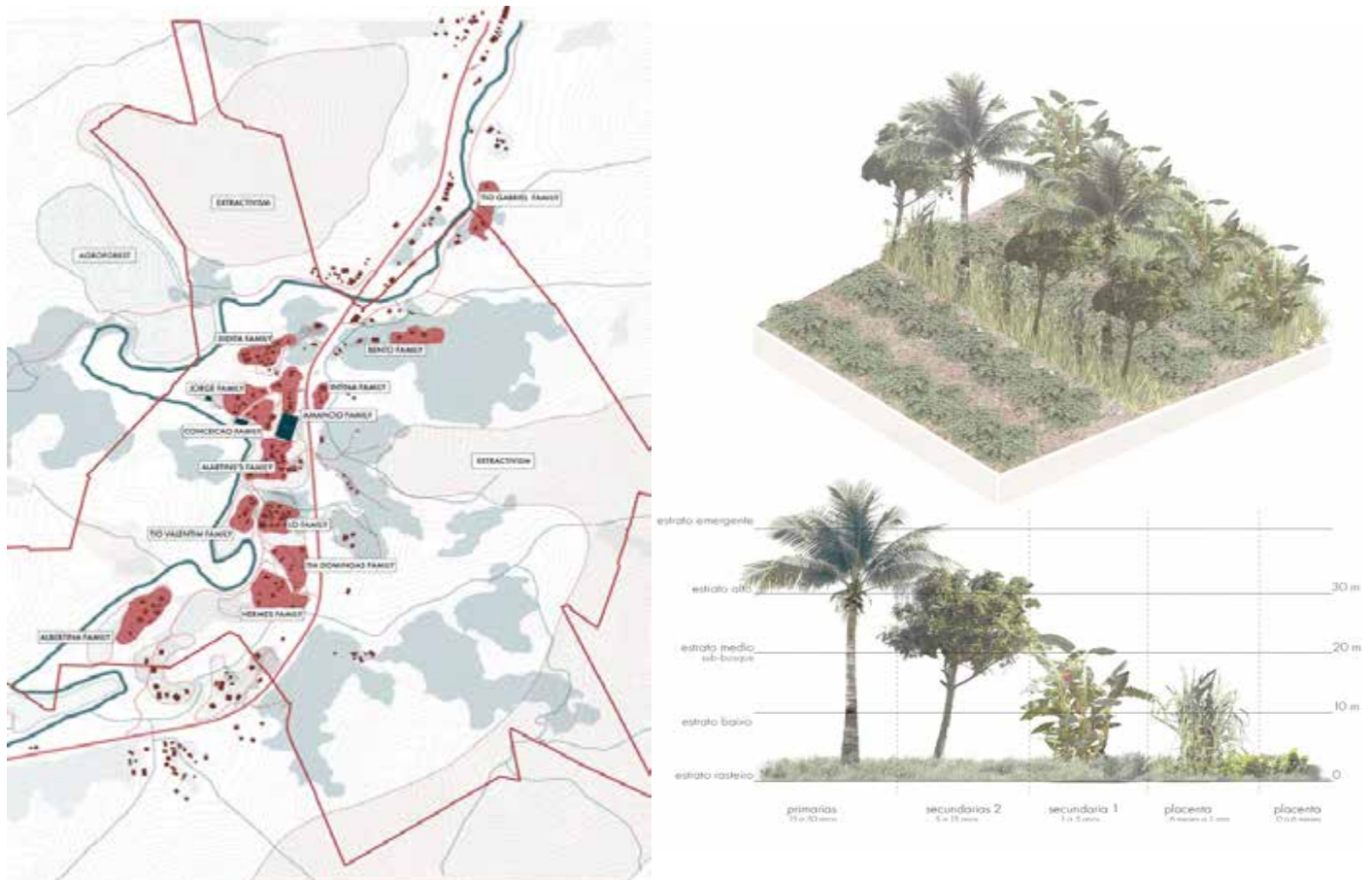


Figure 3. The perimeter of the Quilombo defined by the Palmeares Foundation encompasses the areas of 13 family plots, and Agroforest type. Credit. MSLab & Erika Nataly Amidati e Francesca Cisaria.

Today, in those same areas, the increasing influx of tourists has generated a progressive shift from the traditional agricultural economy to the tourism industry, narrowing the range of employment opportunities and reducing the diversity of jobs available.

This shift manifests itself on spatial, economic and socio-cultural levels.

However, alongside these material transformations, there have also been intangible losses: local knowledge - the legacy of practices and skills linked to the land - has gradually been supplanted by a tourist economy that, while bringing new flows, has eroded the fabric of the local economy and disarticulated traditional social structures.

Of course, geography is also instrumental in shaping the divisions between rural and urban areas. Topographical features, including mountains and rivers, as well as policies and regulations, have played a role in the clear separation of areas. This zoning has profoundly influenced the population, and its effects are visible in various places, from economic disparities to social differences.

The fragmentation of rural and urban areas results from a combination of geography, politics, and history, and its effects are still lasting and significant.

In the project Paraty-Quilombo do Campinho (Contin, 2025), we investigate how local knowledge and cultural landscapes can become active agents of change in the face of the most pressing global challenges: climate

change, inequality, and poverty. We propose that new ecocentres, through the strength of their living culture, can play a central role in building resilient and antifragile communities capable of adapting, transforming and thriving in contexts of uncertainty and pressure.

Protecting the natural reserve is crucial for preserving the region's biodiversity. Some areas have been safeguarded to maintain the delicate ecological balance and ensure the continuity of native species. The reserve served as an ecological and cultural barrier at one time, establishing clear boundaries between valleys and fostering settlement agglomerations with distinct morphologies and identities.

In our intervention, we recognised the existence and value of traditional villages, working to enhance the quality of public spaces within a broader heritage conservation project. The objective was to find a balance between the needs of the local populations and the need to protect the fragility of their cultural landscape. We thus decided to activate agroforestry processes in the capoeira areas that had remained inactive due to the cyclical nature of production. In some of these spaces, agroforestry has hosted an experiment in urban-rural linkage: housing units built according to local indigenous techniques have sprung up, revealing new ways of living integrated into the ecological cycle.

In parallel, we proposed revising the UNESCO boundary for the protected area: indigenous building expansion was pushing dangerously towards the Atlantic forest. The design hypothesis was to extend the boundary through reforestation to agroforestry. This strategy, inspired by the theories of David Gouverneur (2015), generated more collective spaces in an ecologically sensitive area and helped turn the Quilombos into active custodians of natural and cultural heritage. Attractive activities and welfare nuclei have accompanied this - true stem cells of the project - that testify to the institutions' presence, care and shared responsibility.

Thus, more living and usable spaces within a protected area can be a driving force for improving the inhabitants' quality of life and offering new opportunities for truly sustainable development and participatory heritage protection.

The gap between urban and rural areas remains significant and requires new strategies of connection and cooperation. Our research in Guadalajara (Mexico) aims to explore metropolitan dynamics capable of building an urban-rural continuum through a multi-scalar approach that enhances the role of small and medium-sized cities and rural service centres, generating new models of connection and complementarity between territories.

At the core of the analysis is the strengthening of local agricultural identity, integrated into the Guadalajara metropolitan region's green and grey infrastructure systems. In this context, rethinking food systems and prioritising environmental care in public policies are strategic tools to address complex challenges related to employment, mobility, access to services, poverty and social cohesion.

Since the second half of the 20th century, the development of the State of Jalisco has been intensely concentrated in the Guadalajara metropolitan area, which is now home to approximately 60 per cent of the State's population. This trend reflects a global process of urbanisation, which risks widening the gap between rural areas, which are often disadvantaged in terms of quality of life and opportunities.

Today, the relationship between cities and the country is no longer defined by clear boundaries. Daily interactions, the mobility of people and goods and functional interdependencies shape new relational geographies. Increasingly interconnected cities operate as nodes of complex networks embedded in specific ecological and spatial contexts.



Figure 4. Eco-centrality and Settlement Concept. Acatlan de Juarez - Guadalajara (Messico). Credit: MSLab & Valerio Rigamonti.

In this scenario, rapid urbanisation requires a rethinking of metropolitan governance. Urban dynamics now go beyond traditional administrative boundaries and require holistic strategies that integrate planning, sustainability and inclusion. It is within this framework that the role of Acatlán de Juárez emerges.

Officially integrated into the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area in 2019, Acatlán - although not yet physically connected to the consolidated urban fabric - acts as an intermediate city, facilitating dialogue between urban and rural contexts along a strategic axis for regional balance. Its location and potential make it a key node for experimenting with innovative models of territorial interaction, promoting a balance between development and cohesion. The MSLab project investigates the potential of an urban-rural connection, already observed in Far Eastern contexts, by importing and reinterpreting the concept of the Desakota region (McGee, 1991). In metropolitan environments characterised by rapid urbanisation - driven by industrial expansion and population pressure- the landscape has fragmented into a constellation of urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, often disjointed. The concept of Desakota, a fusion of Desa (village) and Kota (city), accurately represents this intermediate and blurred condition: a hybrid space where agricultural, residential, and productive elements coexist, forming a complex and interdependent territory. Starting from McGee's analysis and observing the evolutionary dynamics at work in the Guadalajara metropolitan region, the project proposes a systemic approach that activates synergies between rural and urban areas through a network of metabolic relationships. The system is considered a connective tissue in which integrating green and grey infrastructures becomes a fundamental lever to build a resilient, adaptive and learning metropolitan model.

Through a new infrastructural and landscape gradient, the project fosters an urban-rural connection that recognises and enhances the specific identity of each territorial fragment. This strategy mends existing discontinuities and activates a new morphogenetic layer in the metropolis's DNA, creating a capillary weave of coexistence and transformation. Local nodes thus become catalytic devices, generators of meaning and form, capable of triggering systemic regeneration dynamics throughout the entire metropolitan structure.

A theory for metropolitan city culture and a cartographic tool to explore the local sustainable habitat. Context matters and, in the end, context always wins. That is ultimately the true definition of sustainable culture.

To discuss culture seriously, we must first clarify its operational meaning: culture is the living link between what we know and how we know it. It is knowledge that becomes action. It is not an abstract concept but a reality that guides choices and defines priorities.

We also need a clear definition of the objective. However, targets - especially those with high abstraction - often lose their meaning precisely because they are taken out of context. Take, for example, SDG 11, the urban goal: Where is poverty? Where is inequality? Where is productivity? These are key words for understanding the urban environment, yet they do not appear. We can talk about cities without addressing the issues that define them.

What are we trying to improve with SDG 11 if we examine it from the perspective of the role of local culture in the sustainability of metropolitan landscapes? Does it make sense to discuss urban heritage without recognising that this heritage is embedded in contexts marked by deep inequalities, widespread poverty, low productivity, and high unemployment? It is one thing to speak about urban heritage in a poor African country and quite another in Italy: possibilities change, priorities shift, and the meaning of intervention evolves.

We cannot monitor changes in territory without considering the local economy, ecology, cultures (both formal and informal), institutions, and hierarchies. The local context is always interconnected. Without a theory of the city and an understanding of how urban space is constructed and transformed, we cannot grasp metropolitan culture, let alone comprehend how human behaviour influences urban spaces.

It must be stated emphatically to address a culture-related urban objective. Otherwise, the fundamental questions remain unanswered: How can we improve the living conditions of the majority of urban residents? How can we prevent poverty and inequality from increasing while tourism productivity grows for the few?

These are not abstract considerations; they are concrete problems affecting millions and billions of people. Urban policies must begin by analysing territories, vulnerabilities, and the relationships between local and metropolitan scales. Furthermore, they must adopt a less simplistic and less linear vision.

The World Bank speaks of 'global knowledge, local results.' However, the most crucial issue is the lack of local knowledge. Knowledge from the territories recognises specificities and lends meaning to action.

Even the word 'commitment', often used in the SDGs, remains empty if it is not based on a vision. Without an urban theory, the mechanisms of cause and effect cannot be explained. There is no social justice. There is no ethics. It is just a list of good intentions, but without the why.

The New Urban Agenda must serve this purpose: to build a vision, choose priorities, and use vulnerabilities as starting points for conscious, concrete, and coherent action.

We cannot solve problems without understanding the conditions that created them. For this, we need a comprehensive, integrated vision. Once again, we must start from the context.

The context influenced the tools, but the tools also reinforced the definitions of the contexts.

The master plan served as the context. Everything that was 'outside the plan' was truly outside and not taken into account. In many urban areas, what was outside the plan was, by definition, illegal and, therefore, subject to demolition by public authorities.

Policies and regulations guide urban behaviour, allocating resources through projects and strategic investment plans. In recent years, there has been a progressive shift of focus towards expected outcomes - what must necessarily be - under the assumption that those involved adhere, almost by nature, to codes of behaviour in design, construction, and use. The central question, therefore, revolves around identifying which rules can steer urban actors in specific directions and what the enabling conditions are for the emergence of that collective intelligence capable of recognising the metropolitan common good as a shared value and resource. That intelligence is necessary to achieve results that are not only formal but also transformative.

However, this is where the limitations of policy instruments emerge: the lack of institutional capacity to effectively implement policies, resulting in a disconnect between strategy and execution. In particular, market-oriented policies—especially in their application to the tourism sector—represent a crucial variant of this scenario. The issue lies not only in directing the actions of individual actors but also in attempting to shape the systemic

behaviour of society, intervening in common sense, shared representations, desires, and value mechanisms, both individual and collective.

In this framework, context refers to the dynamic set of spaces, sites, flows, and interactions between agents, which define the balance between supply, demand, and price. The instruments of stimulus packages - first and foremost, government spending - fit into this logic as typically Keynesian devices for stimulating the production of goods and services, injecting liquidity, and sustaining consumption (Keynes, 1936). The speed of public spending directly affects the pace of the creation of new demand and, thus, the trajectory of economic recovery. Nevertheless, how does this mechanism relate to the operating culture (Salazar, 2023)? How can the economy generate truly widespread forms of prosperity? What values and contradictions does the tourism industry generate for the world culture (Shepherd, 2002)?

The metropolitan architecture projects (Contin, 2015) were designed to translate, through principles of sustainability and interscalarity, the physical objectives of the plan into constructed forms: housing, infrastructure, and social services. The possibility was tested that values and resources linked to operational culture could act as active tools against poverty, inequality and low productivity, improving the quality of life. As a spatial and non-verbal narrative, Metropolitan Cartography (Contin, Galiulo, 2020) recognises and names these values, identifying them as resources to be translated into factual indicators capable of nourishing transformative and measurable processes in the dimension of urban reality.

In this context, the metropolitan architecture project (Contin, 2015) assumes a strategic role: it is configured as a tool to physically formalise values and resources from the operational culture, not as a theoretical abstraction, but as a set of living practices, behavioural codes, and local languages. Through these spatial devices, an accurate collective intelligence capable of recognising the metropolitan common good can be activated beyond institutional rigidities and the limits of normative planning. As a non-verbal narrative, metropolitan cartography makes it possible to identify and translate into measurable indicators those shared values that escape the logic of standardisation and rent. It does not merely represent the territory but traverses it, codifies it, and returns it as a relational space where culture becomes infrastructure and is no longer just symbolic heritage. In this perspective, urban planning must open up to the plurality of languages, recognising in situated behaviour and local practices - even where written law is absent - a generative heritage capable of guiding development, even in opposition to dominant economic interests.

Conclusions and openings: The reactivation of the 'culture of care'; the role of cultural and creative industries in promoting knowledge and education; why conserve?

The proposed project represents an innovative theory for the culture of the Metropolitan City, centred around a large-scale cultural enhancement strategy that focuses on creating an integrated model for utilising cultural heritage. This model, characterised by its unique dimensions and functions, aims to enrich local communities' knowledge and attract interest from non-regional audiences by leveraging the region's significant cultural, natural, and environmental heritage.

The proposal is based on a visionary project that sets the territory in motion, creating a connection between a physical path and an imaginary one: a transgenerational strategic plan project capable of promoting innovative functions for a green and digital economy that can attract new categories of entrepreneurs and users into the territorial system.

A vision that serves as a framework for the new common and public space of relations, acting as a figurative cornerstone and a tool for constructing a memorable yet everyday image to recognise the identity of the new agro-urban reality. This reality recovers knowledge of the environment through innovative mapping methodologies and modern communication technologies that refunctionalize industrial archaeology. It also reactivates the urban fabric by replacing certain features while respecting specific dimensional and formal considerations. However, it must identify a strategic cultural reason for its preservation.

It is necessary to consider supply chains that create a new economic dimension around which to 'do agriculture' and 'do handicrafts', starting from the understanding of the territory as a resource and analysing the data constructed by the citizens themselves. Synergy will be the keyword: between municipalities and their territories,

between hoteliers and tourists passing through, and between hoteliers, entrepreneurs, and schools.

Starting from a project as an engine for the renewed hydration of cultural energies within the identified urban system, a project that recognises its value concerning the three ecosystem services of supply, regulation, and culture (which are crucial today in light of the recent flooding phenomena), we aim to list areas and themes that can be subjects of a process of innovation and social evolution:

1. Urban-rural areas: The sociology of agriculture and the urban park;
2. Built city: mapping and diagnostics, common and public spaces (the sponge of the urban fabric), green areas reclaimed from built-up areas, the relationship between land use and water system management (the city as a source of quality water);
3. Neighbourhoods: maintenance, development and transformation. The recovery plan and innovative solutions;
4. New citizenships: cultural start-ups, inclusion (second-generation migrants), diffuse tourism.

The project identifies two approaches: one is based on molecular re-appropriation of the territory, promoting local values to create relationships between territory and settlement; the other aims to work on the nodes of interchange between regions and cities, viewing territories as archipelagos and networks of sustainable activities, with cities seen as systems composed of a web of networks and nodes, understood as dynamic and interconnected networks of relationships (Castells, 1996) that connect urban and rural actors, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, cultural practices, and forms of resistance (Srinivasan, 2017).

This network is expressed through social, economic, and cultural connections beyond classical spatial separations, generating a mutual and sustainable interaction between city and countryside (Ananthasubramaniam et al., 2022). The active nodes of this network - the hinge points - function as connection (web) hubs: points of tension and contact that, as in a web, spread and multiply these relations in the territories, traversing what Shane (2005) calls body of space, those 'spaces in between' dense with potential, friction, and transformation (see: <https://www.myvillages.org/index.php>).

By fostering the sustainability of agricultural areas through the creation of synergistic production circuits (agriculture, production-transformation of natural resources in a sustainable manner), a new model of territorial system is established that views agriculture as 'the other part of the city, but city', integrating it through the introduction of new functions and a new concept of supra-municipal public space.

To counter the dissipation of our heritage, which the new urban scale could induce, we need to refine the concept of sustainability: how is regeneration sustainable? We aim to honour the identity dimension of the context, where stagnation presently prevails instead of development. Agriculture is essential for the city, contributing to sustainability like a spring by safeguarding water and alternative energies linked to local waterways and the surrounding context. It is vital to envision supply chains that create a new economic dimension centred on 'doing agriculture' and 'doing handicrafts'. Synergy will be the key term for the project's structural component, while communication will be the second key term.

A pilot project, *City of Muses*. The arts of the city and metropolitan landscapes

In his text, *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch (1960) explicitly aims to control the production of the urban image by elaborating a visual plan for the city, promoting a reordering of public mental images of the urban environment to foster greater integration of citizens with their places of residence and work. Lynch's approach seeks to reveal a possible order beneath the chaotic appearances of the urban landscape, emphasising it through increased figurability, i.e., the individuality and visual evidence of forms.

Lynch's project, which we would like to support, aims for an urban figurability of the metropolitan dimension that is intended to manifest in a visual plan not confined to the aesthetic realm but also focused on the well-being and psychological safety of urban users. This state of 'feeling adequate' is closely associated with the ability to orient oneself: figurability is, therefore, the clarity of visual matrices.

The intention is to design a shared public mental image of the city and its metropolitan landscapes through the recognition of the profound identity of the selected places: a portrait that combines spatiality and the arts,

particularly music and images. In this context, the architectural project becomes a salient expression of the city, contributing decisively to its mental image.

The proposal - as already outlined by Tschumi in 1981 - is understood here as a network of stem cells or connection nodes (web) scattered throughout the new metropolitan landscapes. It aims to initiate a reflection on the relationships between architecture, cities, landscapes, and the arts, establishing a dialogue between architectural and urban design, technologies, and art. The ultimate goal is to enhance the quality of urban space, providing art with significant opportunities to communicate rhythms, sounds, sociality, and well-being. In particular, we intend to explore the relationship between art and urban space concerning the redevelopment of places through traditional and innovative devices activated by 'ephemeral architectures' capable of introducing an augmented sensorial experience in public areas through music and images.

The project supports a vision of the analysis, interpretation, and design of metropolitan urban interiors through forms that cannot be traced back to Euclidean geometry, capable of generating spatiality through the support of music and images. The aim is to envision structures that can be realised with inexpensive, durable, and sustainable materials. Among the areas of research explored is the use of 3d printing and solar concentrators (Müller, Zastrow, 2015), with the intention of developing a system that can be modelled during assembly using parametric digital tools. Experimentation also involves interactive technologies in design, architecture, and robotics, utilising physical computing systems, which are understood as environments capable of perceiving and reacting to stimuli from the surrounding environment.

If the project anticipates the subsequent deconstruction of the installations, it is configured as a permanent transformative action of the public space, which is enhanced both in the collective imagination and in the virtual dimension created ad hoc. The latter, reconstructed using sophisticated software and archived online, will host all data related to the places, allowing the installations to be revived and reapplied elsewhere.

A metropolitan urbanity project is outlined through a series of installations that experiment with innovative materials, augmented reality, and responsive interactions. Utilising new technologies opens up a new way to map the city, allowing urban values to be communicated on a different level. The installations interpret space in relation to sound, light, and sustainability, establishing profound connections with historical places and urban art, which are rediscovered and recognised through a spatiality where music, images, and narratives merge. The intention is to trace an itinerary capable of rewriting the narrative of the city and its suburbs, guiding citizens and users to discover an unprecedented historical and future heritage.

The elliptical itinerary will have a beating heart. It will construct a new narrative of the city that accounts for its past, recent history, and urban, rural, and natural contexts, laying the foundations for future perspectives that enhance a new metropolitan identity. Each landscape will tell its own story and serve as a treasure chest to be discovered, engaging in dialogue with other places through diffuse installations. With its scenic effects, technology will connect citizens with music, the city, its networks, and its forgotten or hidden landscapes.

The operation not only connects the mother city with its most precious objects, but also acts in the opposite direction by bringing the city into other hinge points of the metropolitan landscapes. The images, photographs, and videos of the places and their history conveyed by the installations will construct a new urbanity as part of the metropolitan landscapes. Just as in ancient times, large-scale event apparatuses were built to embellish the city, today, the urban landscape will be broken down into its most beautiful parts and distributed in forgotten places.

The route will be accessible both physically and through a dedicated mobile application. New technologies prove to be fundamental in creating innovative landscape settings that encompass historical, agricultural, and natural heritage. Responsive technologies are transformed into educational and informational tools capable of transmitting and archiving multimedia content. The reactivated places once again communicate the strong message of the city of the past, projecting it into the future.

The project aims to reinterpret the metropolitan city, fostering a new territorial awareness and a strong cultural identity for a sustainable future. It also seeks to integrate the cultural sector with tourism, research, innovation,

and education, identifying key locations for valorisation, cultural animation, dissemination, and training activities.

The interaction between new technologies and regenerated public spaces represents an opportunity to connect the metropolitan city's most prestigious institutions in an articulated system of places, knowledge, and visions capable of regaining an authoritative position in the global city network.

The metropolitan city of the second modernity is configured as an integral fusion of biosphere, water, and soil, which we call the critical zone (Latour, 2004). It requires regenerative agricultural techniques and a profound synergy between culture and science. This intertwining - the entanglement - strengthens the resilience of the natural system and places society at the centre of protecting this fragile but potential heritage.

In the Urban-Rural Linkage Patterns project, the network of hotspots- junction points, such as the metro-world web- functionally and symbolically interconnected, becomes a design element and socio-spatial device. These can activate resources and build ecological narratives and forms of environmental governance. In this context, we propose constructing an abacus of patterns of network hotspots, which will be included as recognisable elements in the metropolitan structural plan, along with defining information layers to create localised maps using open-source data.

The project is configured as a precise cultural enhancement strategy through an innovative and integrated model of heritage use. It is aimed at both the local public and external users, attracted by the widespread cultural, natural, and environmental excellence. The expected repercussions on the territory are multiple: a greater dissemination of knowledge of the heritage, an improvement in the quality of life, an increase in tourist flows and employment opportunities, as well as an enhancement of the image and local development. The project actively involves the local population, especially young people, through workshops and educational activities, while externally targeting users interested in exclusive, innovative and immersive cultural experiences. The ultimate goal is to expand the use of immersive virtual reality, moving it from mere entertainment to a cultural and academic sphere, opening the doors of museums and historical sites to the world in an accessible, detailed, interactive and deeply personal experience.

Through an application, each citizen will be able to experience and relive these spaces, creating individual mental maps and forging a new relationship with the city and its landscapes. This will be supported by effective, engaging communication that can reactivate the lost urban narrative. The City of Muses is not just a project: it is a system, a generator of art, innovation, economy, and future.

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