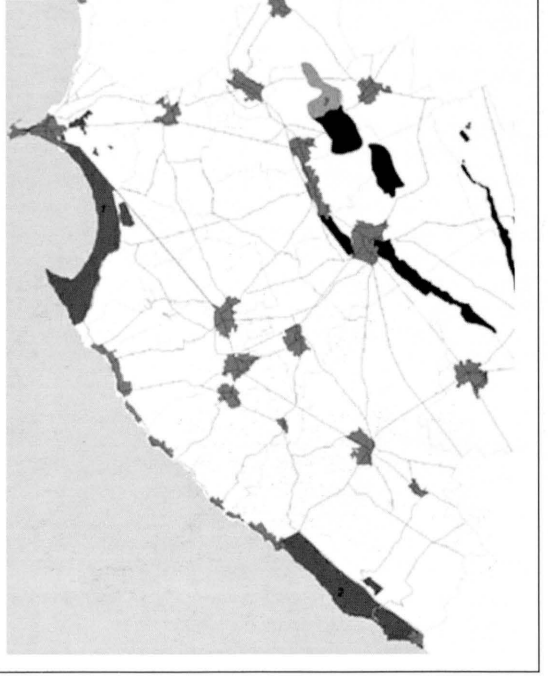
AN INTERPRETATION OF A MEDITERRANEAN LANDSCAPE: THE SALENTINE PENINSULA

The bird's -eye view (seen from above)

The geological model of the territory around Casarano features muted forms, and signs of the natural landscape are few and far between. The significance and origin of the physical and natural aspects in this area must perhaps be searched for elsewhere, over a wider area and a greater time scale that also embraces images of the past.
Occasions for interpretation of the landscape and reflection on the characteristics of environmental projects seem to offer some of the few chances for imprinting a plan on the modern city. An environmental system which places strong emphasis on the ecological function of the territory and its component parts can lead to a well-connected and integrated layout.
This requires reflection on the forms assumed by the modern city, which is no longer defined by the "filled-in" spaces of built-up areas but more and more by the "blank" spaces of the open, interconnected areas.
Increasingly then, designing a plan has become an important occasion for reflecting on the landscape and its integration with agricultural areas, woods and even abandoned areas.
These "blank" areas of open spaces can in Casarano offer a chance to research into the specific natural areas and spaces that constitute the city and mediterranean landscape.

LANDSCAPE IN A REGIONAL SCALE: THE SALENTINE PENINSULA ON JONIC SIDE



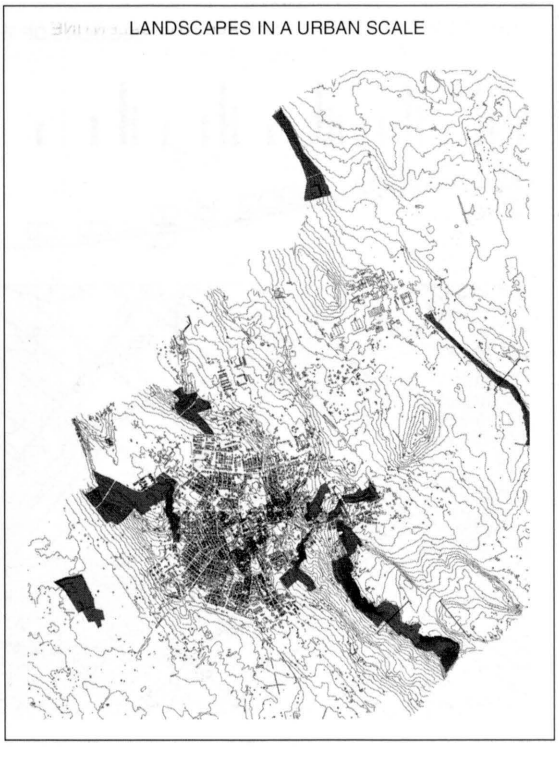
A long arm extending into the sea: the peninsula (the Salento) in the peninsula (Apulia) in the peninsula (Italy)

We have used the bird's-eye view seen from above to sum up the first impact with this land: in other words, the task of identifying the dominant characteristics of this territory, that cannot be be deciphered except in a wider context. From afar, high up above, the bird's-eye view descries the territory of Casarano at the furthest eastern end of the whole Italian peninsula. It is itself a peninsula that extends towards the Orient, where the inner land ends up overlooking the opposite coast (the central funnel is only about 30 km wide).
This peninsular situation causes the Salentine area to hold a number of Italian records, in that it is the nearest to many different geographical points: Capo Otranto is the easternmost point of Italy, the Canale di Otranto is the nearest point to Greece, the province of Lecce has the longest coastline (about 500 km).
It is a two-sided, sloping land that overlooks two seas and enjoys mild winds mediated by the lower part of the Adriatic sea and the Ionian sea and their counteractions (but is fully exposed to the hot waves of the sirocco winds blowing from the south-east).
From the geomorphological point of view, it is a confused system of slightly raised areas running parallel down to the end at Capo Leuca: the Serre Salentine are a triple succession of low hills (never higher than 200 metres) that merely ruffle the flat surface of the peninsula and organize the internal settlements on the outward slopes, like Casarano, or in the internal valleys between one hill and another.
The Salentine Murge have a markedly different lithology that is apparent both in the overgrowth and the use of the soil; calcareous crests and highlands of the Cretaceous era and interposed, overgrown gulleys filled with tufa stone here, there and everywhere, due to the breakdown of more ancient calcareous sites where marine organisms had accumulated.
The area attaching the Salentine peninsula to the rest of the Apulian region, the so-called Messapian isthmus, also called the Lecce Tavoliere, is where the tender, easily worked stone that was the raw material used to build in the Lecce Barocco style is to be found.
The territory thus features an unexpectedly rich variety of forms, low hills with internal valleys, Karstic landscapes, both hypogeous (heatsinks and gulleys) and epigean "specchie" (tracks

and surface rocks, that caused Brandi, when he was describing the rural areas and crafts, to refer to "orgies of stones".
Casarano is situated in this short, narrow Salentine territory and is also crossed by a line of Serra hills that divides the area into two great plains with the lithological features described above. To give a form to these slight rises it may be necessary to insert them in a wider context and to establish a sense of continuity and of belonging not only to a geographical scene but also to a particular design.
While it is normally the water supply that shapes the landscape, in this case there is no sign of running water along the terrain: erosions or channels are almost entirely lacking, since the hydrographic supply runs deep underground (groundwater) .
In reality, in the past there was a strongly conflicting relationship between these lands and the water supply, because there was always either too little or too much: the coastline was dominated by enormous malaria-ridden marshes that were practically deserted until these lands were reclaimed as from the '20s, whereas inland the geographical description (Sestini, 1963) referred to "Karstic, extremely bibulous soil where the roads needed no bridges" , which made it necessary to carry branches of the Apulian Aquaduct right down to the very end.
This passage evokes an image of great distance, of faraway places projected towards the eastern mediterranean (or, conversely, the westernmost point of the east), the heel of the Italian boot shape, a cul de sac territory where roads end, networks and infrastructures diminish and terminate. In fact, its position has strongly conditioned the nature of the Salentine landscape and the history of its human settlements, where borders are seen not as places where the world ends but where differences meet, according to the mediterranean line of thought.
This far-away position can be regarded as a special characteristic, an asset to be preserved and safeguarded, "regarding the area in the dual sense of guarding over it and having regard for it" (Cassano,1996), reconsidering its "marginal" condition as having preserved it from consuming and dissipating its identity, and thus presenting, on the contrary, a new path towards modernity.

A landscape that comes from afar

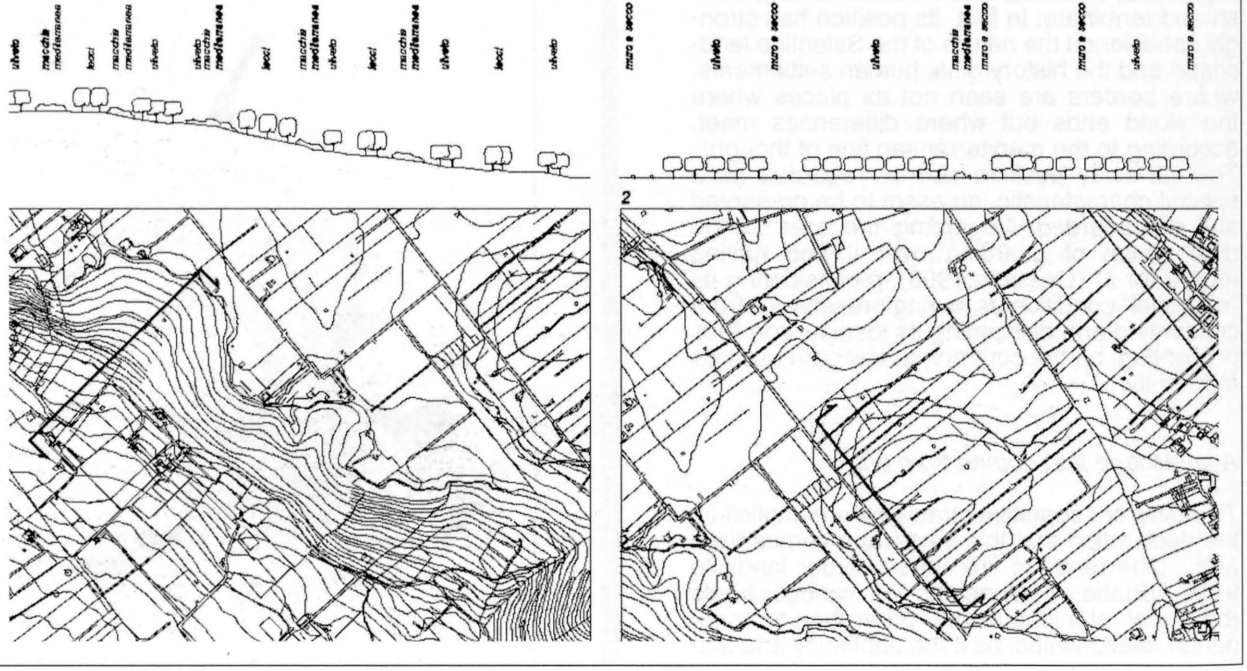
Two different cognitive strategies are implicit in the declaration that this landscape comes from afar. One tends to link these border lands to trans-Adriatic relationships of various kinds (botanical, ethnic, cultural) rather than to continental relationships, as if the continuity and affinities were stronger and more meaningful with the lands beyond the sea. The other encourages us to look back over the past, and to consider the historical condition as a prerequisite for describing these lands, based on a simple consultation of maps and some historical passages "before adventuring into the dark, dusty world of the archives" (Einaudi, 1976).
In the first approach, the biogeographical nature of the Salentine territory emerges from some references to spatial relationships in botanical and phytohistorical works analysing the plant life in the landscape of Southern Apulia . More than any other region in Southern Italy, the Salentine area features the presence of many species here growing at their westernmost limit, and which are more commonly to be seen in the Aegean, sub-Balkan and Oriental areas.. The affinities of the flora, but also the fauna and geological characteristics, with the botanical contingents of the species on the Adriatic (Balkan species) and Ionian (Aegean species) coasts, together with a greater botanical variety, render a sense of the dual opening of this platform of land projected between two seas and under the influence of the lands beyond the seas. Many botanical species are endemic, just one example being Quercus macrolepis K. (Q



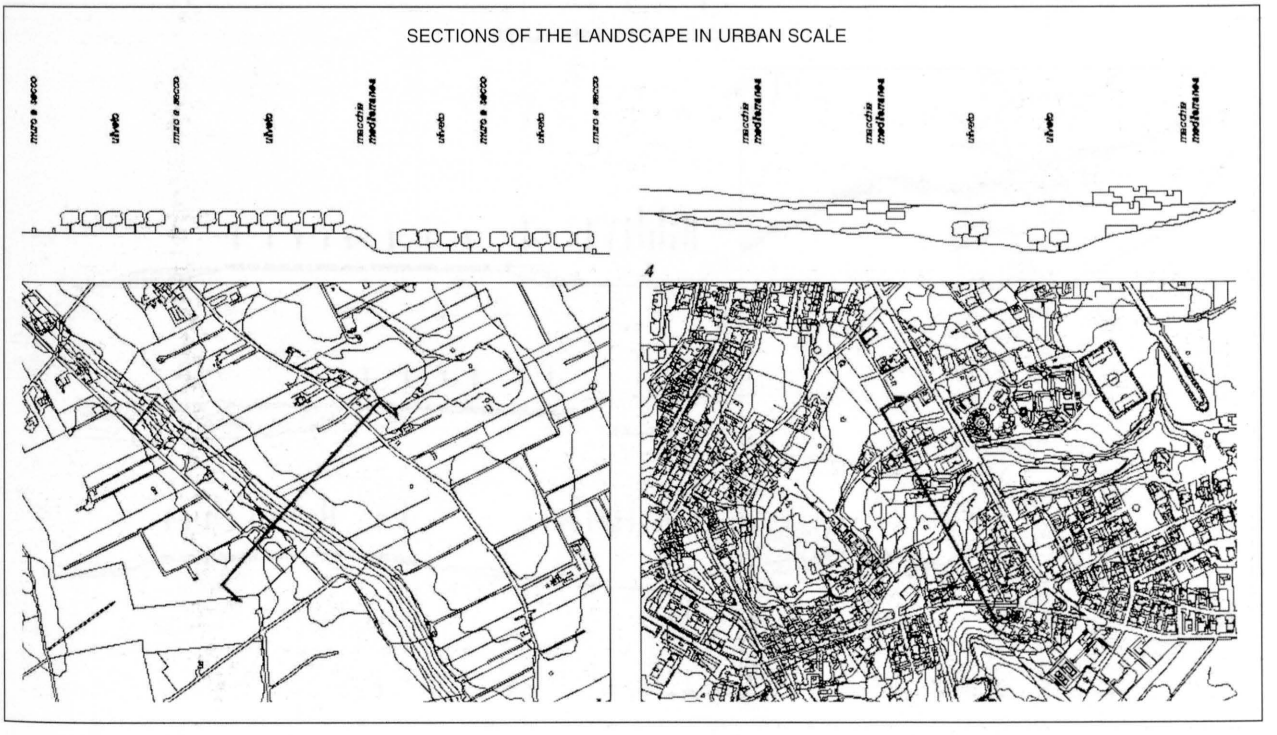
aegilops), commonly known as the Vallonea oak. It is one of the ten types of oak tree present in Apulia, but is typical of the eastern mediterranean, in Albania, Greece and Crete, while in Italy it grows wild only in the Salentine Peninsula.
There are many other relationships with the Orient, both cultural and ethnographic, that range from the presence of important Greek and Albanian communities where the dialect is based on their language of origin, and their customs and traditions persist, to the recent invasions of Albanian refugees fleeing to the many little ports running down the salentine coast. Looking back over the past, instead, some descriptions of the lands around Otranto written by botanists at the end of the 19th century and some recent re-interpretations of old maps delineate a landscape that no longer exists, and that we find hard to imagine because little or nothing of what is now present seems to recall these features. While today the wooded surfaces in the Salento account for less than 1%, in the past the inland country was covered with mesophile woods, i.e. woods that thrive in damp climates, while water was so plentiful as to allow fresh water fishing (Mainardi, 1989).

In the Serra dei Cianci, in the built-up areas of Specchia and Alessano, a few hectares of thick woods remain, where there is an interesting association of species recalling the original vegetation: ilexes, holm oaks, thorny oaks and the Vallonea oak, as well as an interesting accompaniment of undergrowth species. In fact, analysis of the data on rainwater shows that the Salento is one of the places with the highest rainfall in the region, mean yearly rainfall being over 850 mm in the Otranto channel. The lack of vegetation nowadays results in loss of the water down the ravines in the calcareous terrain, while a large part dissolves or evaporates, because the soil has become too arid and sterile.
The vegetation that we see in these territories nowadays is, therefore, the result of a long series of changes, of regression and advance of woods and wild trees and plants according to periods of greater or lesser agricultural activity and to the social and economic tendencies of the land rent. These have profoundly altered the contours of the terrain and should remind us of the relativity of our condition, where the present conformation of the terrain should never be taken for granted or regarded as definitive. It is interesting to look back rapidly over the

SECTIONS OF THE LANDSCAPE IN URBAN SCALE



salient stages of this process of transformation and definition of the terrain and to see how the change from a natural to a cultivated landscape is connected with the level of abandon and overgrowth that follows the lack of agronomic care. The Romans considered lumber and therefore woods as res communis and abandoned the Salento lands that had been cultivated by the pre-classical inhabitants (above all the Messapians), so that the landscape reverted to a wild state, covered with woods and secondary undergrowth (only the woods were primary growth), although in the most impervious areas some parts of the original landscape remained (for instance, on the slopes of some of the Serre, and in some marshy woods). In the following ages the conditions of the territory are reported to have been very poor. Olive groves were planted in the period of olive cultivation around the 16th century to exploit the opportunities for distributing and trading in olive oil though the ports of Otranto and Gallipoli, facing two different sides of the southern mediterranean. However, they were flanked by extensive boggy, malaria-ridden swamps along the Adriatic and Ionian coasts.
These marshes remained until the first hesitant attempts were made to introduce hydraulic reforms during the Napoleonic period. These continued, with mediocre results, during the Bourbon Restoration. Carlo Alfan de Rivera reported that he had travelled along 200 miles of virtually deserted coast, interrupted only by 4 urban centres, Brindisi, Otranto, Gallipoli and Taranto, and a few sparsely inhabited areas (especially to the south of Lecce) in adjacent villages with only a small number of villagers (more recently, Bissanti has described these settlements as "fragmentopolises", sleepy, whitewashed hamlets of a vaguely oriental style). There were two types of agricultural landscape in the 18th and 19th centuries, those sown with cereals and vegetables, organized around the estate, and the motley of sown orchards or groves, interspersed with thick, intricate woods. These are tending to diminish progressively owing to the changed conditions of land tenure that resulted from the abolition of large estates and feudal privileges, state and church-owned properties, as from the beginning of the 19th century.
Even the acque dormienti (still waters) are recorded today only by their topographic names paludi, paludaci, fontane, laghi, (marsh and marshy, fountain and lake). They disappeared gradually after the integral reclaiming works had been set in hand in the '20s, with the creation of consortia (Ugento, Li Foggi in the Casarano



area) that transformed the coastal marshes into typically "reclaimed landscapes" with regular subdivisions and cultivation of the reclaimed-land. Thus, scenes of abandon and overgrowth by wilderness when nature takes over alternate with cultivated lands, tilled to produce food, and with reclaimed agricultural lands and woods to be cut down. These have largely erased the natural landscape that, unless it was cut or burnt down, has slowly evolved and renewed itself according to its own laws (from undergrowth to wood and from contemporary single-species to plurispecies of different ages, from low diversity to high diversity wood, from spinney to forest, etc.).

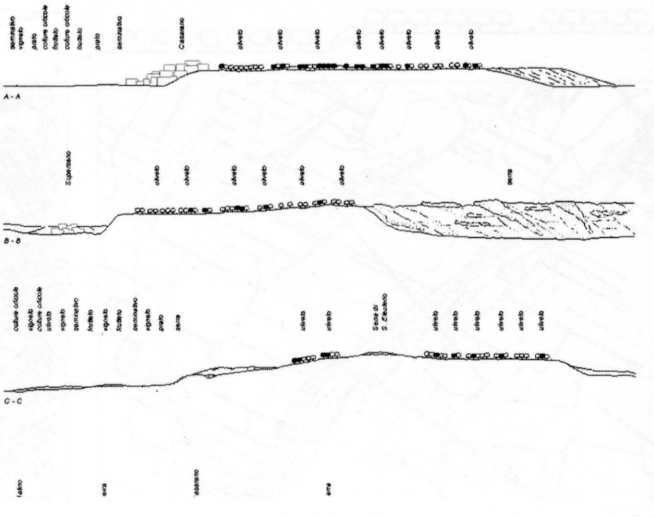
The traveller's view (as he passes through the landscape)

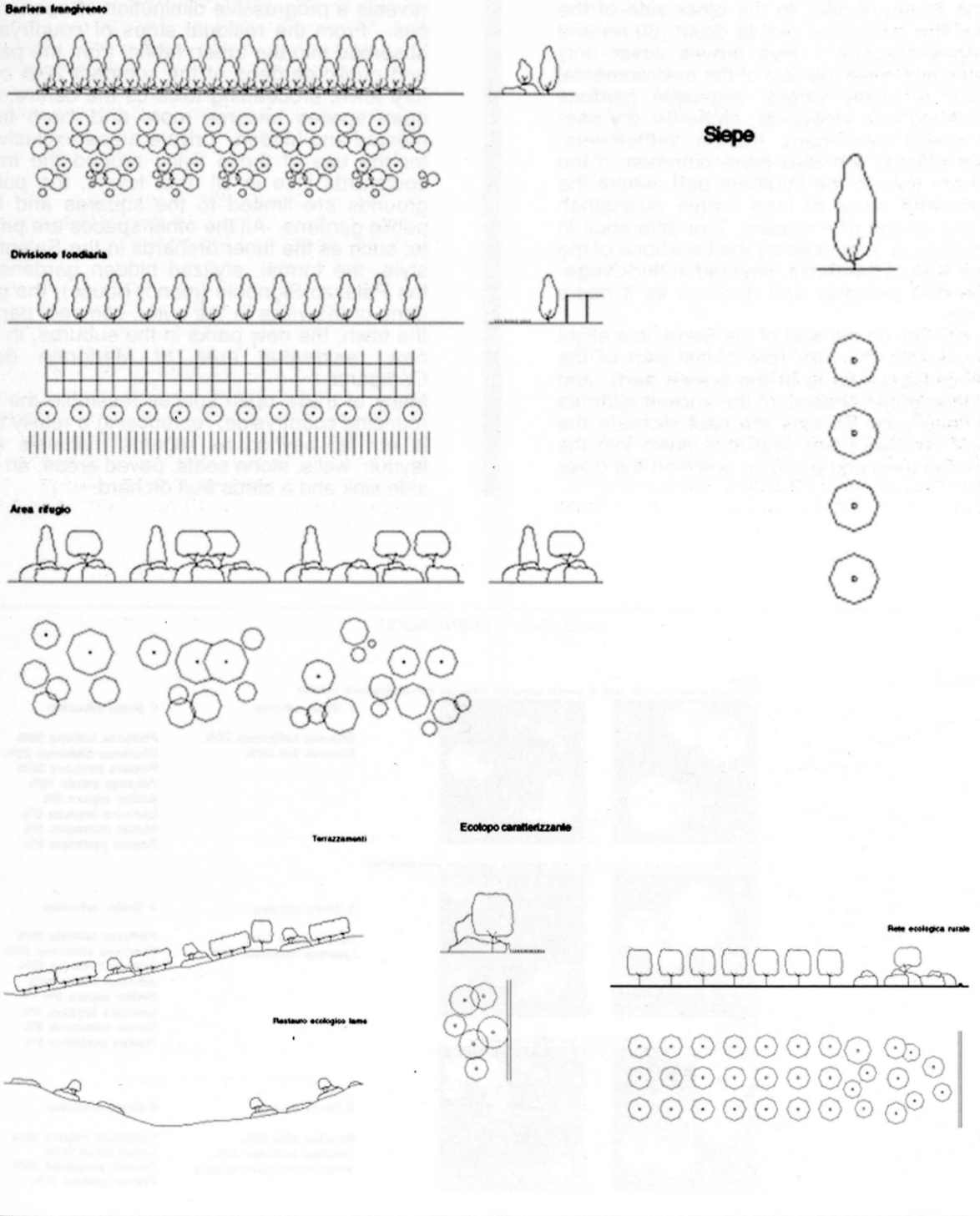
The second part of our description of the territory is seen on foot, from nearby and slowly, as it would appear to a traveller who passes through different landscapes and cities to reach his destination. He slowly becomes aware of drawing away from some forms and nearing others (both natural and artificial); as he proceeds, these gradually take on shape and consistency as others fade into the distance. The territorial model has a clear conformation of parallel terracing separated by a green wall (the subvertical wall of the Serra that runs diagonally down the territory) sloping northwest and southeast towards the Ionian coast, while to the northeast the subvertical wall again runs down from the low hills to the Supersano plain, beyond the territory belonging to the council of Casarano. Thus, there is a symmetrical system of plains and divisions (like a huge natural ziqqurrat), only part of which belongs to Casarano but that extends on beyond.

Two countrysides, (the olive woods and the mosaics of fields) and, in the middle, a green wall (the Serra) and the city

A clear distinction is immediately apparent between the overgrowth on the two terraced slopes. Proceeding downwards, the inhabited area of Casarano first appears and then, toward the northeast, that of Matino, with a slightly raised area between the two centres The northern platform (100-150 m) is covered by a closely planted olive grove, so thickly ent wined as to give the appearance of a wood. It has narrow passages, almost always on a square pattern, about 10 mt across, that have

SECTIONS OF THE LANDSCAPE

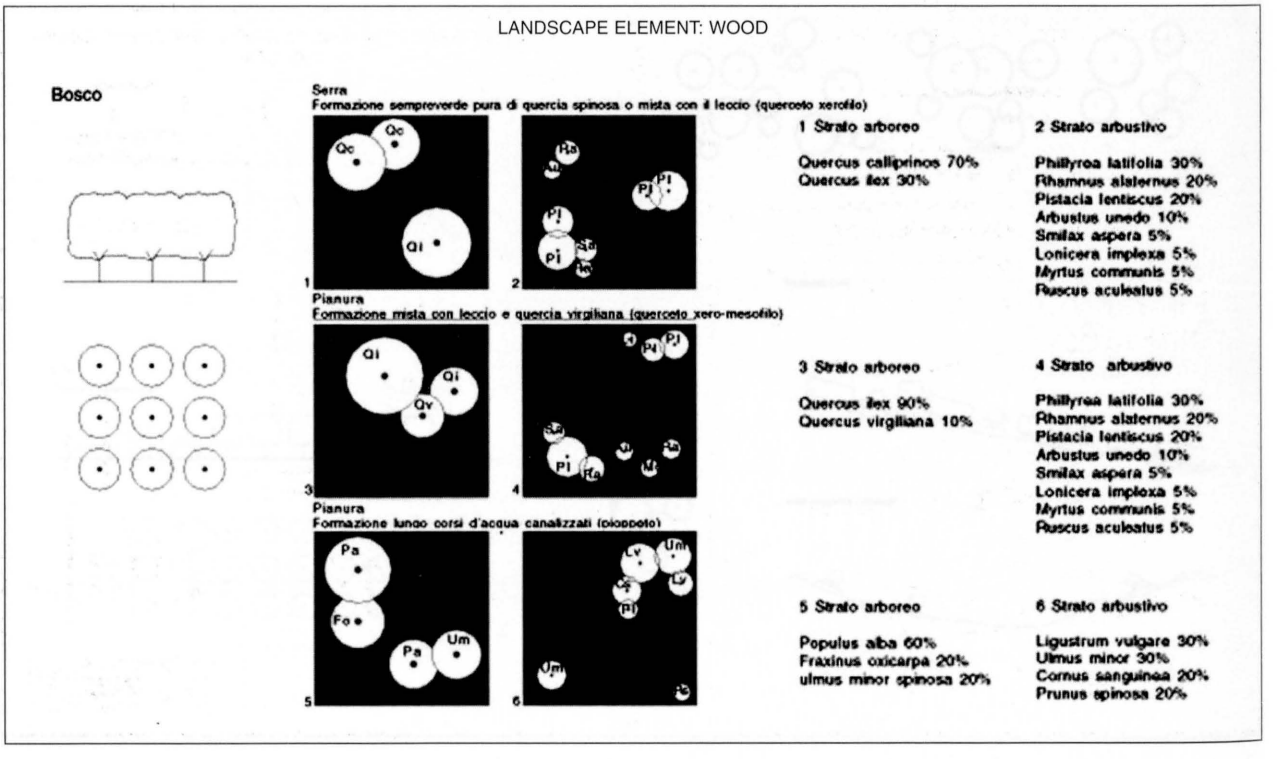



Barriera frangivento
Siepe
Divisione fondiaria
Area rifugio
Terrazzamenti
Ecotopo caratterizzante
Rete ecologica rurale
Restauro ecologico lame

allowed the olive branches full freedom to grow out on all sides, and the development of a true undergrowth (at least it gives this impression, although in reality there is no kind of vegetation on the ground).
In the southern part, to the other side of the Serra, the landscape slopes down (60 m) and changes abruptly. Olive groves cover only small strips while the rest of the environmental mosaic is highly varied, vegetable gardens alternating with vineyards, orchards, dry seeded areas and many human settlements. Large estates are also more common in the northern than in the southern part, where the fragmented strips of land further strengthen the impression of a mosaic. This difference in landscape is reinforced by the backbone of the green wall of the Serra, covered in thick vegetation that dwindles and declines as it nears the city.
The city lies on the wall of the Serra, in a slight valley within the hills (the oldest part of the town of Casarano is in the lowest part), and the deep green chasms of the ancient quarries that reap pear towards the east recreate the line of the Serra wall that runs down into the inhabited area and picks up again on the other side.

The landscape penetrates into the town (the relationships among the different parts of the town and the open spaces)

An analysis of the open spaces in the town reveals a progressive diminution of open spaces. From the residual strips of countryside absorbed into the urban fabric, from the parks and public gardens of the compact 20th century town, proceeding towards the centre, the open spaces become more and more fragmented and hidden, private areas exclusively for the use of those living around the inner courtyards Like in all rural towns, the public grounds are limited to the squares and few public gardens. All the other spaces are private, such as the inner orchards in the Salentine style, the formal, stylized hidden gardens of the Palazzo Signorile (manor house), the gardens of the villas in the outer, compact part of the town, the new parks in the suburbs, in the new residential area of Madonna della Campana.
Many of these open spaces resemble the sur rounding countryside, reproposing a reality that is not far beyond as regards materials and layout: wells, stone seats, paved areas, an out side sink and a citrus fruit orchard.

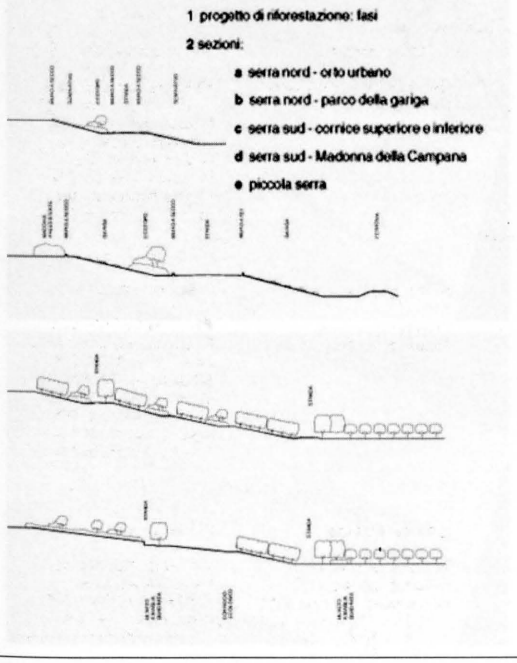


These rural enclaves are particularly commonto the east, along the line of the green wall of the Serra, and continue on towards the north, in the basins of the old quarries. The largest of these has been converted into a garden, as if it were aimed to create an interweave of open spaces that could ultimately take on the appearance of a system.
The northeastern town fringes are less well-organized, empty spaces left between the new houses that are no longer part of the countryside but have not yet become part of the town, together with small cultivated strips that still survive on the edges of the town.
It would be possible to create links between the countryside and the distribution of open spaces by: recreating open areas branching out from where the green Serra wall reaches into the town and from the "lama cupa" vale, that could connect up the open spaces gradually leading into the town centre; creating filtering areas that would mediate the change from the countryside to the town fabric through a kind of green belt of variable depth that would meld with the main elements connecting the town with the territory (the houses and factories) and the outlying inhabited areas.

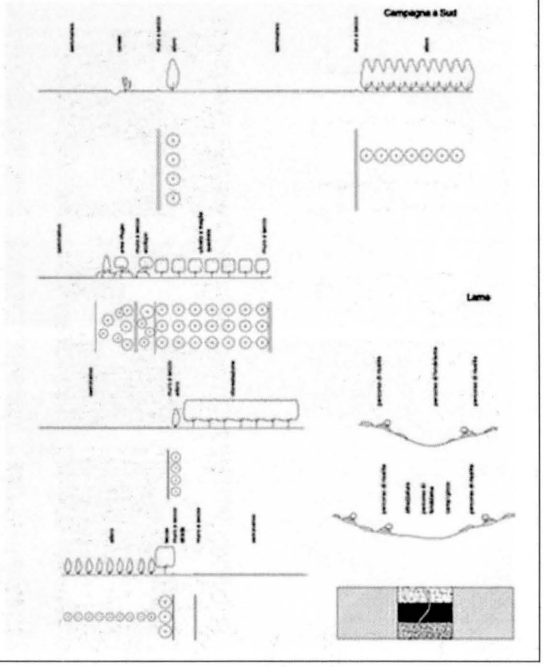
The main aspects of the plan

The search for a feasible environmental system for Casarano offers a chance to reflect on the characteristics of the mediterranean town and countryside.
The underlying theme is the spread of nature, a new and rather mysterious concept that no longer refers to uncontaminated places, "sanctuaries of nature in the wild" but starts from nature under new guises: small natural areas melding with the agricultural countryside alongside the dry-stone walls, fields left fallow and tending to grow back into woods, pseudo-steppes protected by EU directives that do not belong to the original natural growth but are now essential for safeguarding biodiversity and preserving the genetic characters of some species.
Together with innovative natural scenes associating temporary, dymanic features of the landscape, reference is made to:
a) the unique characteristics of the peninsular geography of the lower Salento area and its phytoclimate;
b) the fragmented distribution of the vegetation system, that is highly dispersive and could ultimately lead, according to the theories of biogeographical isolation, to a progressive reduc-

OLIVE GROVES MATRIX AS A OPEN SPACE AND COUNTRYSIDE



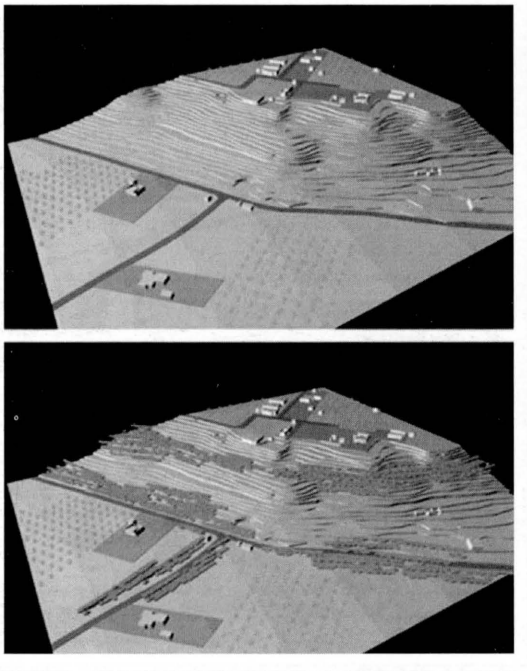
OLIVE GROVES MATRIX AS A OPEN SPACE AND COUNTRYSIDE



tion of the area species and final disappearance of the remaining woods;
c) the possibilities offered by the re-creation of ecological networks to safeguard the permeability of the habitats;
d) the opportunities afforded by recent EU policies, based on the principles of environmental protection, and their ability to give rise to coherent plans for the mediterranean countryside.
The environmental system for Casarano has attempted to give concrete shape to these targets, searching for coherent landscape models of all scales. Five subsystems have been identified:
The spread of Nature refers to the concepts outlined above, taken to mean the combination of latent natural growth and natural development. This is seen as a series of steps starting from a central theme, the reference area, whose margins fluctuate and spread out towards the surrounding territories. The Serra gives meaning to the environmental plan and the landscape scale, and establishes a sense of continuity with different ambiences: to the east as a natural sign that develops towards the west safeguarding the consolidated, built-up slope towards Matino. In the latter case, the reference area is the parks running along the lines of terracing.

The spread of nature must not only be interpreted and perceived within the existing landscape but also taken as a possible planning element that can generate new natural forms. A landscape element, the ecotope, has been taken as a point of reference. This is constituted by the dry-stone wall and the phytoclimatic associations, that include an entourage of highly selected species. This landscape pattern has been proposed in many different "renaturalizing" contexts, creating ecological links with the landscape and with new park avenues.
The spread of nature also concerns the urban fabric, the daily territory seen and used within the city. The deep erosive channels, covered with a natural overgrowth, that run from north to south along the two edges of the town, create a system of connections with the open spaces, the town facilities and the surrounding countryside.
The eastern zone includes the Parco di Monteforte and Lama Cupa, that combine to the conformation of the area, the Serra, the channels, the hill, with the facilities set up for leisure activities and sports.
The rural environment, composed of two different kinds of countryside, the olive groves to the north-west and the mosaic strips to the

PHASES OF EXPANSION OF VEGETATION ON THE "SERRA" SCOPE



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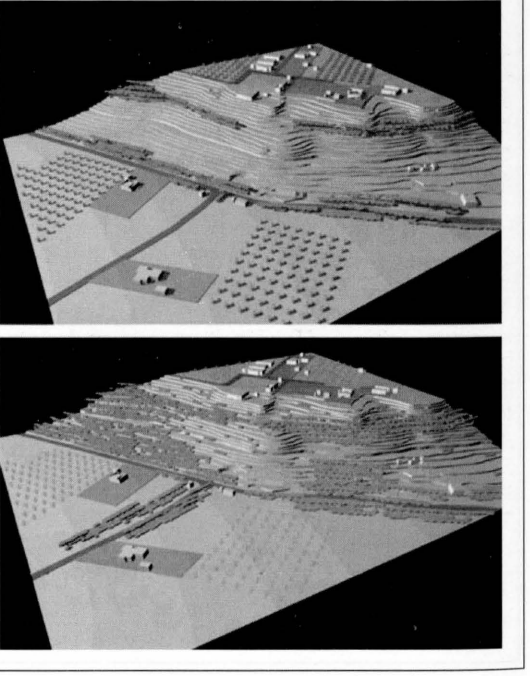

south-east, has well-defined characteristics that are not affected by the many, scattered inhabited areas. Both the olive woods and the multicoloured strips are seen as areas for growing traditional and alternative (biological) produce and offering spaces for use during leisure time. In addition to an ecological network link, small strips are set aside for reforestation, "refuge areas" for biological protection and the safeguarding of biodiversity.
The filter areas are sections of olive grove that penetrate into the fringes of the town without any alterations in their rigid planting pattern.
We call these rural pieces of the town "infiltrations" because the term seems to give an idea of the spaces created between the houses, that cannot be defined as open or empty spaces. The fabric that generated them is no longer recognizable, nor whether they should be counted as negative or positive with respect to the town or the countryside. However, they cannot be considered as residues, because it is sometimes these very spaces that determine the margins. The only certain element is the solid, hardy rural consistency of the olive groves, that survives regardless of the quality of the surrounding built-up areas.
The territorial links, that act as a taxonomy of ecological networks, represent the spread of nature combined with its functions connected with: (i) the capillary exploitation of the territory; (ii) the hierarchy of the mobility systems linked with the environmental systems.
The urban fabric, where the environmental system requalifies all the existing open spaces, aiming, wherever possible connecting them up into a continuous system. There are plans to take over the hidden gardens closed behind high walls and lying at the centre of the old buildings and thus create a secret path through the old town, to transform the old quarries into organized parks and to equip the town with facilities for leisure activities and sports. The large, natural parks along the deep channels link up both with the minute, fragmented system of town gardens and with the great territorial system of the green Serra wall.
The areas far from the town feature a diffuse, concentrated phenomenon of private houses built without planning permission. Here, too, there are plans for ecological requalification, that will aim to limit the soil and groundwater pollution caused by the lack of the minimum sanitation requirements. These will include technological networks, open spaces and residential facilties.

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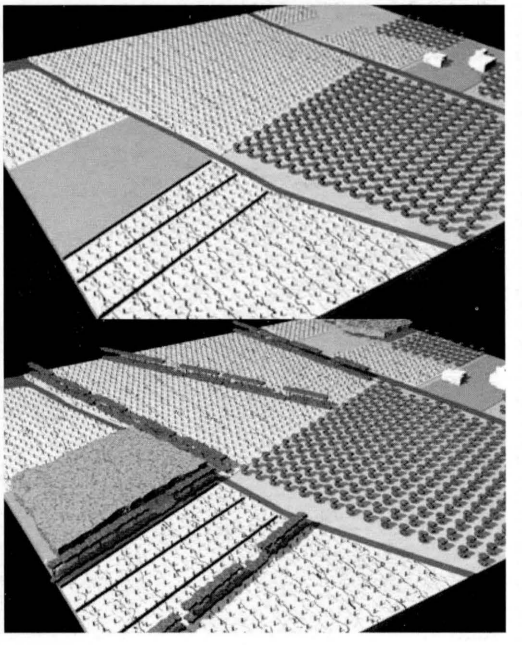
PHASES OF EXPANSION OF VEGETATION
IN ENVIRONMENTAL MOSAIC