

# From Hospitality to Urban Conflict

## Morphologies in Transformation in Mediterranean Ports

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**Keywords:** City-port, Morphology, Identity, Space Regeneration, Social Inclusion.

**Abstract:** Port is a complex non-place to analyze, it narrates the history of the Mediterranean, expresses the ethos of its populations, their deep sense of hospitality. Often the port coincides with the foundational nucleus or with the city gate, the economic pole, the favorite place for meetings and comparison. However, it also represents a limit, a closed perimeter that excludes the gaze and the presence of the citizen. Thus, the port is conceived only as an operational area, takes on typical forms that are difficult to integrate into the urban fabric, and can soon become an abandoned area, often in decline. The increasing migratory flows make the waterfront a very topical subject for social and design disciplines: issues of segregation and coexistence are associated with problems related to the use of public space. The aim of the research is to understand the mutual interactions between city and port, the morphological dynamics that have transformed the landscape into a territory, the role of design as a vehicle for spatial regeneration and social integration. With an integrated approach between morphology and design experimentation, applied for now only to the case of the city of Messina, the work aims to reconstruct the evolution of historic ports in the Mediterranean, recognizing the port heritage and enhancing it with inclusion strategies. Regenerating the city from the waterfront means rediscovering spaces and habits, expanding economic and cultural horizons, creating new community identity.

### 1. Introduction

The Mediterranean is considered the cradle of Western civilisation; hence myths, peoples, and cultures have influenced and inspired societies all over the world. For millennia, the sea has been holding lands and stories of different men together in the unitary sign of common identity (*koinè*). The main Mediterranean cities wind along the continuous line of its coasts, in correspondence with the focal points of the ancient trade routes. The common topographical and climatic conditions have favored the diffusion of similar settlement models that confirm the central role played by the port in the respective phases of foundation, historical or legendary. The seaside cities have a strong identity based on the union of the two urban and maritime cultures, but they are also heterogeneous organisms in which the continuous transformation of the natural and anthropic environment is more evident: they are based on a changing entity like the port, a place of transition par excellence, and contrast it with the historic center, a symbol of permanence and stability.

The port is a complex non-place to analyze. It is a heterotopia suspended between concrete space and allegory. It tells the history of the Mediterranean, expresses the ethos of its population, their deep sense of hospitality. Often the port coincides with the foundational nucleus or with the city gate, the economic pole, the favorite place for meeting and comparison. But it can also represent a limit, a closed perimeter that excludes the gaze and the presence of the citizen. Thus, the port is conceived only as an operational area, takes on typical forms that are difficult to integrate into the urban fabric, and can soon become an area of its own.

Port cities represent a highly topical interdisciplinary theme. On the economic-political level, their impact on the international market is fundamental, with 90% of the commercial volumes taking place by the sea. On a social level, while on the one hand the globalizing needs confirm the historical role of the Mediterranean in terms of mobility and interchange, on the other, the pressing waves of migration make it a scenario of violation of human rights and often death. On the urban level, the evolution of structures, forms and functions testify to the transition from a historical colony to a contemporary city, with very different morphological outcomes. In environmental terms, increasingly restrictive sustainability requires interventions to protect the landscape, recovery of infrastructures and enhancement of the waterfront, in which the problems of civil coexistence are associated with the management of public space. Furthermore, the relevance of the topic is confirmed in the response to Horizon2020 social challenges (inclusion, security, innovation) and in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG 7th and 8th).

In an attempt to give an answer, even partial, to the questions raised, the research aims to investigate what the role and value of a Mediterranean port city like Messina is today to understand:

- mutual interactions between city and port according to their contemporary evolution;
- morphological dynamics that have transformed the territory, conforming parts of the city and influencing urban behavior and lifestyles;
- task of design as a vehicle for spatial regeneration and social integration, in the name of new models of sustainability and intercultural cohesion.

### 1.1. *The State of the art*

The difficulty in dealing with Mediterranean ports is already revealed in the complex of definitions of the port city or in the multiplicity of its definitions (Alemany and Bruttomesso, 2011): from the gateway city (Burghardt, 1971) we pass to the hinterland/port/mainland triptych (Vigarié, 1979), from the commercial city that is identified with the port (Dogan, 1988) to the global city where the port is only its most futuristic zone (Sassen, 1991). Ports and coastal areas are today at the center of a renewed historiographical and urban debate aimed at defining the future of the great cities of Europe through systematic investigations on the built environment (Hoyle and Pinder, 1992). Since the second half of the last century, many theories have been formulated on the interaction between port and city, such as that of F.W. Morgan (1952) who first reconstructs the history of ports in different eras and geographical areas or as the six-stage evolutionary model proposed by Hoyle (1989). The most recent historiographical studies have confirmed that the relationship of mutual necessity between city and port has been admitted since the term “port city” was introduced, that is since the general layout of the city began to be subordinated to its mercantile needs and the streets instead of converging towards the cathedral are oriented towards the port (Colletta, 2006). Against this unifying approach, many

urban planners trace the conflict of use and form between the two parts of the city to the origin of the ports: they were born as commercial colonies, foreign settlements with their own urban structure. Following their localisation and functional specialisation, colonies and commercial squares share the same spaces of public exchange (Colletta, 2012). City-port relations have changed over time, giving rise to various urban configurations that, for years, architects, urban planners, geographers have been trying to trace back to static or dynamic, inclusive or exclusionary models. According to the morphological approach, through the study of the urban form and the architectural typology, it is possible to reach the recognition of the individual development phases of the port cities. Structures, functions, and technologies form urban fabrics that tend to converge or diverge based on the historical period or the economic and political vocation of the city (Fatiguso, 2015). The coexistence of port and urban functions is undermined by the port's need to have infrastructures useful for its development and the needs of the city to mitigate its environmental impact (Conca, 2013), so the waterfront is identified as the most vulnerable part of a city on the sea (Fatiguso, 2016). The waterfront has inspired much research on unresolved issues common to most Mediterranean cities: enhancement of the existing heritage in a state of degradation or disposal; reuse of strategic architectures (forts, docks, shipyards, etc.); redevelopment of the waterfront as a strategic core of renewal for the city; space regeneration and land use; policies of urban integration and social inclusion (Alemany and Bruttomesso, 2011).

## 2. Methodology

The research proposes an integrated approach between morphology and design experimentation applied to the city of Messina as a privileged case study in the Mediterranean due to its historical-geographical centrality.

In the first part, morphology is adopted as a tool for reading and analyzing past and present urban transformations, with particular attention to the development and functioning of the port area. Based on written sources and graphic contributions it is possible to translate the binomial city/port into differences and analogies. The city-port relationship is studied in historical perspective as a morphological and typological process, according to the criteria proposed by Muratori and the Roman school. The analysis is conducted on two levels of depth:

1. Macromorphology. The urban and port settlement morphologies are related by comparing the key elements of the urban space: routes, fabrics, polarity.
2. Micromorphology. The particular types that make up the port can represent tangible or intangible limits and determine conditions of continuity or rupture between the two urban systems.

From the *status quo* to the *project status*, the second part of the research focuses on the design dimension proposing possible scenarios for the future of port cities. Contemporary design provides for a general renewal of the entire urban body starting from the recovery and redevelopment of the waterfront, which goes beyond the renewal of traditional commercial functions and takes into account the priority environmental issues. Through the project we want to demonstrate that the relationship between city and port cannot be reduced to a problem of homogeneity, but of diversity as an added value. Port infrastructures must be recognised as historical, economic and cultural heritage, a collective heritage to be enhanced.

Finally, in view of theories and analysis, we discuss the initial questions and the need to transform ports from segregated non-places into places of sharing. Overcoming the occasions of conflict that generate urban dualisms, it is possible to find that common sense of identity and hospitality in every port city of the Mediterranean.

### 3. Case study: Messina, a natural port in the middle of the Mediterranean

History of Messina is deeply linked to the geographical nature of the territory, a *borderline city* that develops on the northeastern coast of Sicily, between the Peloritani Mountains and the Strait that separates it from the continent. The first settlement dates back to 756 BC when Greek colonists founded the city of Zancle – from the Greek Ζάγκλης, “scythe”, a figurative description of this strip of land – on the peninsula of Falcata or S. Ranieri which with its sickle-shaped profile forms a natural harbor. The site’s defensive potential and its central position with respect to the Mediterranean made the city a cultural and economic reference, but also a geographical one, as hills and waterways represented a structured limit of human settlement. In medieval times its importance was strengthened, becoming *clavis Siciliae*, a crossroads of trade, political and religious exchanges, as evidenced by the presence of productive structures and monastic complexes (Vermiglio, 2016). Since the sixteenth century, the oldest Spanish port cities were strategically reconfigured with a renewed “monumental seafront” (Colletta, 2012). With the advent of Charles V also Messina was populated by arsenals and a massive city wall from which rises the star-shaped fort of the Real Cittadella which officially marked the border between city and port (Calabrese, 2015). With the fall of the Bourbons, the city reconquered



Figure 1. Messina: historical evolution of city (a) and port (b).

its port and the emblems of foreign hegemony lost their meaning; some military references remained and the rest of the area was configured as an industrial fabric. An important date in the history of the Mediterranean was 1908, the cities on the Strait were destroyed by an earthquake of unprecedented intensity. The historic city of Messina was almost completely erased along with much of its population (Berlingieri, 2008). To the detriment of the traditional trade vocation, the reconstruction orientated the urban layout towards the hinterland and followed the principle “where it was and how it was”, which reproduced the historical image of the city while applying the new anti-seismic technologies. On the one hand the city opened towards the sea, replacing the representative buildings adjacent to the port, on the other hand the port area became a foreclosing urban system between military bases, shipyards and manufacturing areas: the unique junctions between the two urban systems coincided with the traffic knots (railway and maritime stations, dry docks, piers), which sometimes gained space for the sea by extending the waterfront using material on site and earthquake debris. Although the territorial geography in principle imposed a limit to the anthropic space, with the most recent demands of demographic and building growth the landscape constraint was exceeded: the streams were buried and transformed into the main roads, the urban sprawl was extended along the hillsides in speculative forms that were contrary to an organic development of the city (Caminiti, 2012). Today the metropolitan area of Messina is presented in a total planning and management stalemate. Despite the multiple plans and projects that demonstrate the administrative will to renovate and open up to the port starting from the rehabilitation of the waterfront, since then there has been almost no action on the matter. The city and the port coexist by excluding each other, the former lies in the need to consolidate itself at the rate of continuous environmental changes, the latter is isolated between abandoned complexes that limit free use in a place of historical and landscape value.

### 3.1. *Reading and Analysis*

The city of Messina developed according to a regime of the conurbation by bringing together settlements with different and still visible characters. The morphological study arises from the hypothesis that the functional and formal cohesion between city and port is as much possible as necessary, as already happened for the pre- and post-reconstruction urban systems. According to Muratori's theories, morphology is the result of a spontaneous anthropic process that transforms the landscape into a territory when paths, fabrics, and polarity are combined in a single system. In the long term, each of these components influences the other generating new synergies between disjointed areas. The analytical phase is carried out by using two distinct urban scales, it does not concern the entire city of Messina but focuses on the coastline, where urban dualism is more evident and critical. Reading and analysis are valid as a reflection on the surplus value of diversity, be it of a historical-urban or socio-cultural nature.

### 3.2. *Macromorphology*

The first object of analysis is the road system, considering the path as the foundational act of a settlement and the most permanent element of an urban layout (Cataldi *et al.*, 2012). There are four types of routes:

- *matrix route*: it is the first path that structures a settlement. In the historic center, only a short section of the original paths on which the medieval urban fabrics can be identified,



Figure 2. *Macromorphology: routes and polarity, urban fabrics.*

it remained intact until the earthquake (1908). In the southern part of the Falcata, the most recent matrix route reaches orthogonally to the coast, defining the rigid structure of the nineteenth-century urban fabric. The rectilinear direction that distinguishes these two matrices is disappeared in the port area, here the central route follows the peninsula scythe-shape and remains unchanged over time despite the neighboring buildings being changed by arrangement and typology;

- *building route*: it develops perpendicular to the matrix route and is recognisable by the direction change of the related lots. It is significant that the main routes coincide with the original rivers flowing to the sea: at the beginning, they were as a limit to the settlement, then they became natural matrices for the clusters that gave shape to the Messina conurbation finally, they were buried to facilitate the connection towards the coast. On several occasions, this forced anthropization has had a high environmental impact (floods, landslides) causing extensive damage to the city and population;
- *connection route*: it connects the building routes and defines the individual urban blocks. The road system in Messina essentially consists of this kind of paths connecting the building fabrics within a unique urban network which does not include the port;
- *restructuring route*: it represents the last generation of routes, it interrupts the existing urban fabrics with transversal paths that combine more polarities according to the shortest way. An example of this is the current Garibaldi Road which attempts to unify the seafront after the earthquake destroyed “La Palazzata”, a historic linear building that represented the city-gate from the sea.

This first analysis shows the ancient lack of direct connection between city and port, leading to social isolation and autonomous morphological development for both.

The second component shapes the city is the *urban fabric*. It is the result of a morphological and typological process in which route imposes a direction, lot suggests a type, typology leads to a prevalent form of house aggregation (Caniggia and Maffei, 2001). In the historic city of Messina there are three main urban fabrics for standard housing typologies:

- *inner core*: it is the oldest building fabric, obtained by the diachronic development the two main phases of the history of Messina, from the Middle Ages to reconstruction. Its irregular pattern persists following the profile of the Peloritani Mountains but the road sections have been enlarged and the urban density has been decreased as a result of reconstruction. Each block was formed by the evolution of two- or three-storey terraced houses, they were compact on the external front, more articulated towards the inner courts/ common spaces;
- *West district of Mosella*: the typically orthogonal pattern can still be seen, as shown by dimension and layout of buildings. After 1908 most of the displaced people concentrated here, in the barracks that evolved first in isolated buildings, then in the current blocks thanks to a long process of subsequent aggregation and specialised starting from the isolated typologies;
- *East district of Mosella*: the other half of the district extending towards the port looks like the most heterogeneous fabric. On the one hand, distances and positions confirm the preexisting square pattern, on the other hand each block differs in typology: terraced houses, lines, and isolated buildings are combined in angular solutions to shape closed, open or semi-open internal courtyards. Today it is possible to find sporadic portions of pre-earthquake buildings that have been completely included into the new urban fabrics.

In the Falcata port, different fabrics are recognisable from typologies and functions, even though all of them respect the low density and the spatial order imposed by the matrix route. In this area you can find:

- *monasteries*: there are few traces of the original complexes, churches, and related areas are still visible, while the lazaret and the cemetery connected to them there are no more;
- *military areas*: bastions, arsenals, garrisons of the Navy are associated with the ruins of the Real Cittadella. The existing structures confirm that a specific urban fabric corresponds to specific building types, although the mutual relations that distinguish an urban fabric from a simple aggregate are not so clear;
- *manufacturing areas*: docks, industries, merchant ports, maritime and railway terminals alternate with shipyards. They are the prevailing urban fabric spread throughout the peninsula of Falcata.

As opposed to the housing fabric that homologates the hinterland by repeating similar characters, the port can be considered a building environment of specialised typologies. Over the time the co-presence of specialised typologies has contributed to its historic isolation from the city in a completely arbitrary way: a traditional city includes areas dedicated to different uses (nature, sport, commerce, services), without interrupting the urban continuity, creating the fringe belts or favoring the urban sprawl.

Finally, polarities are fundamental elements for understanding the organisation of urban space since they have effects on structures in terms of permanence and continuity. These are not

intersection points like nodes, but references that tend to orient the city towards a specific direction. A pole is a centrality that attracts the population. In the city of Messina, we recognize:

- *inner polarities*: the matrix route abovementioned is dotted with public, religious, cultural buildings and squares which mark the most representative axis of the city from beginning to end;
- *outer polarities*: they correspond to the access gates to the city, such as the Messina Marittima Station with respect to the hinterland or the Ethiopia Pier with regard to the port. In particular, Fort Saint Salvatore surmounted by the Madonna of the Letter not only indicates the extreme tip of the Falcata peninsula but is also an iconic image for all: it attracts those who come from the sea, orients those who remain in the city or those who set sail. This last example underlines the importance of starting from the symbols of a common identity to regenerate city as a unitary organism.

### 3.3. Micromorphology

Moving to a smaller urban scale, the analysis focuses on the port area, here the typologies are examined not as a process but in relation to the functions that impose specific types and forms on the territory.

Over the centuries the peninsula of Falcata has played on a strategic role, because of its liminal position it was chosen as a privileged location for extra-urban functions. They were military,

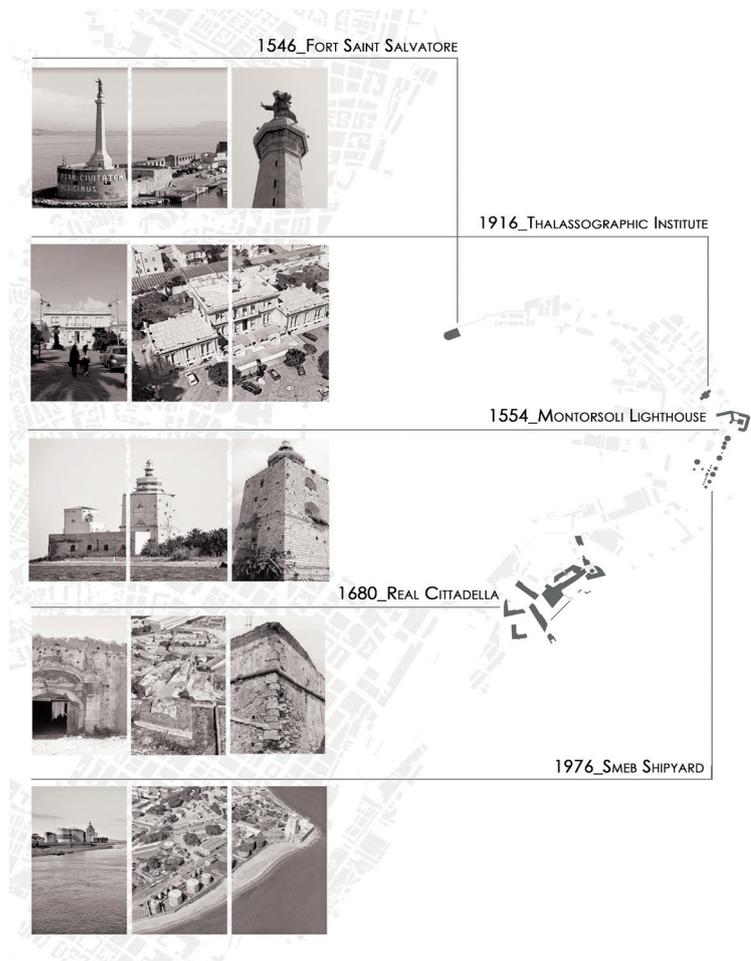


Figure 3. Micromorphology: historical typologies and functions.

religious or commercial institutes, necessary for the city to be located in neighboring areas, but not so important to be established in the urban core, where they could not find a place also due to the considerable volume of soil. Given the concentration of special functions within the peninsula, the few civil buildings have been reduced to service buildings (eg 6000 homes for the military). Thus, there was the spread idea that the port was an additional appendix to the city, not an integral part of it. The current problems of inclusion find far roots not only in this conceptual and intangible limit, but also in a series of physical and formal limits that have kept the two urban systems separated for a long time: sea for almost the entire length of the peninsula, the railways at the only point of connection to the hinterland, the fortifications that in more places interrupt visual perspective and constrain accessibility, the specificity of typologies that tend to create small introspective and autonomous realities from the surrounding context. The ideal type is shaped a particular strategic form that tends to repeat itself over time, as shown by the historic structures still present on the site:

- *Fort Saint Salvatore*: on the extreme tip of the Falcata stands a part of the sixteenth-century reconstruction (1540) of the oldest Basilian monastery founded in 1086 AD to support the work of “Frate Ranieri” (from which the peninsula takes its name). The Fort marks the first step for the fortification of the peninsula desired by the Spanish government, determining its subsequent predominantly military use;
- *Montorsoli Lighthouse*: another military structure, the octagonal lantern that surmounts the base of the original building still works;
- *Real Cittadella*: it is the most representative symbol of the Bourbon domination, it carried out the dual function of defense against attacks from the sea or from the city. Only two of the five original ramparts and portions of the double walls facing the city remain of it, the rest has been buried or destroyed by the earthquake;
- *Thalassographic Institute*: it is the last reference to the historic salt pans that have composed the landscape of the Falcata since 1100 AD. Furthermore, it is one of the few buildings with architectural and stylistic value (Liberty);
- *Smeb, Palombo, Rodriguez, Cassaro shipyards*: they represent the shipbuilding tradition that inaugurated the industrial phase of the peninsula reaching levels of excellence, here was built the first hydrofoil in the world.

Today the area is almost completely manned by the base of the Navy and by the few shipyards still active (Smeb): production facilities, abandoned structures, and disused docks main in full view, while public access is forbidden to most of the area.

#### 3.4. *Towards social inclusion: a landscape project hypothesis*

According to the most recent planning, the local administration appears willing to reopen the area to citizens and tourists, preserving the active services (ports, moorings, terminals, and shipyards) and intervening on the re-functionalisation of disused areas (forts, civil construction). In particular, the new functional set-up would include a system of interconnected parks (archaeological and marine), a tourist/hotel hub, urban and building recovery of existing structures.

We need to remember that Messina is a relatively new city because in 1783 a terrible earthquake left only a few 16th-century fortifications standing and, in 1908, the city was almost totally destroyed again by a tremendous earthquake and tsunami.

Therefore, the present configuration of Messina reflects the drafting of a regulatory plan aimed at rebuilding Messina as it was and where it was. The Falcata area, less than two kilometers from the city center, has been the subject of study by the Messina port authority which has drawn up the harbor town development plan. From this dedicated urban planning tool, the recent thesis project by Chiara Sturiale, lecturer Prof. Rosalba Belibani, takes inspiration and develops it in accordance with its directives. Part of the peninsula is currently occupied by a Navy base, while the shipyards, the dry dock and the adjacent Nuremberg dock where the boats of the Messina-Salerno line land are still in operation.

The port area has a significant heritage not only of the landscape but also historical and cultural. The landscape is bordered to the south-west by the Angiolo Mazzone station, built in 1939 as the first connection between Falcata and the city of Messina even if the railway limits its access actually. In the heart of the port zone, there are the ruins of the Real Cittadella, a stratified and imposing construction of which only some buildings remain; a landmark in the Messina skyline that today, due to the burial of about two meters, is almost invisible. In the North, the Montorsoli Lighthouse was built in 1554 by Giovannangelo Montorsoli, while the octagonal base was added in the 1800s under the French government. Fort Saint Salvatore has a very ancient history: the original construction dates to around 1000 or even earlier as the tower of Sant'Anna. In 1546 he Fort Saint Salvatore was built, together with the construction of the walls and the lantern. It suffered some damage during the earthquake and during the course of the 10th century, the Stele of the Madonna of the Letter.

The design hypothesis has the primary purpose of putting these important pre-existing structures into a landscape system through a network of connections. The project is divided into its

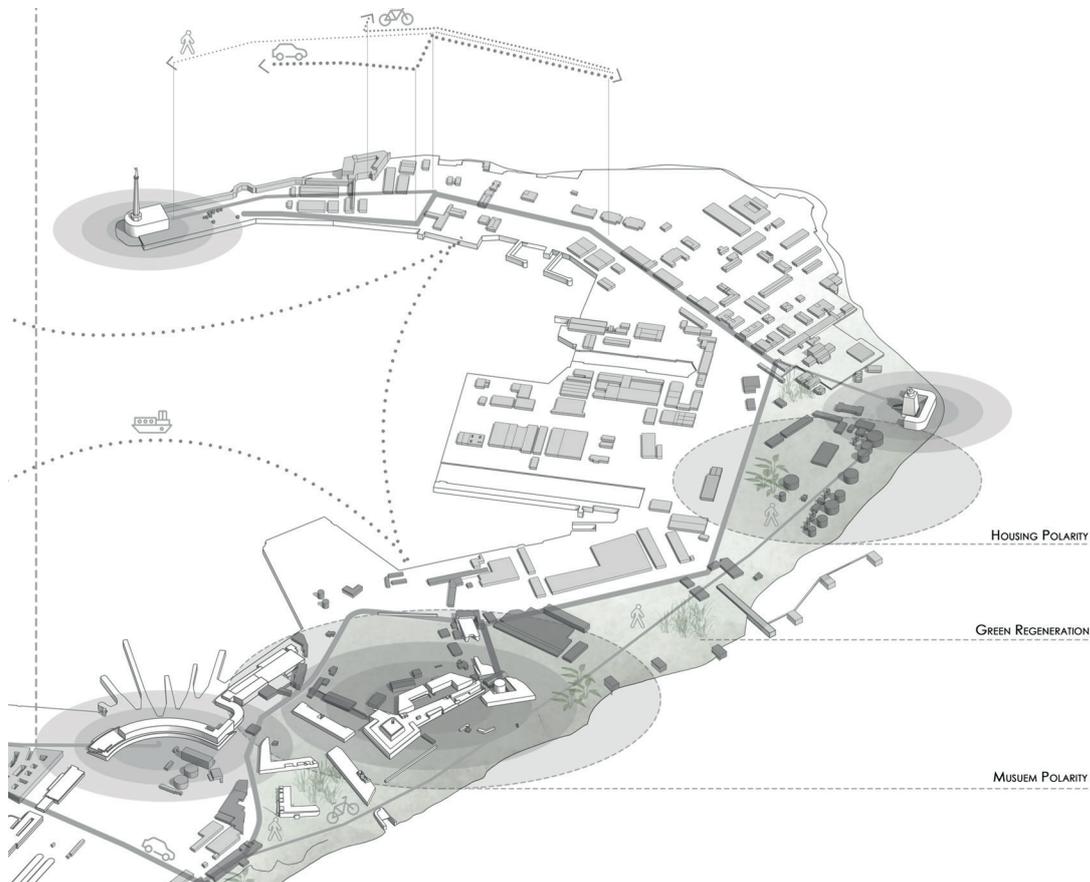


Figure 4. Peninsula of Falcata: a landscape design hypothesis

thematic areas following the course of the matrix route, connected to a secondary pedestrian road and a cycle path. The area, accessible through a renewed maritime public transport system in agreement with the port regulatory plan too, is designed as a large urban park within which other special projects and panoramic polarities are planned.

The first area of the project concerns the ruins of the Real Cittadella, involves the inclusion of new functions and an urban museum center. Since one of the design objectives pursued is to restore to the city of Messina the memory of the Real Cittadella, an imposing construction that over the years was a hindrance to the realisation of works such as the station or the port, the thesis proposes to rebuild the original star-shaped configuration including a square, paths, and thematic green lands. To mend the vaults of partially intact bodies and the best-preserved fragments of the Cittadella, the project prefigures a set of vertical elements, separated from each other. The solution is inspired by the restoration technique of "rigatino" which consists in filling a gap through a striped texture. The operation is also repeated outside with the presence of some stone septa that reproduce the pentagonal shape of the fortification. The connection system is completely new and is visibly in contrast from the original form, in terms of colours and materials.

The second intervention involves the insertion of new housing fabric with sports services located where the Smeb shipyard once stood. In this area, there are still the metal silos of the degassing station, artifacts which show no quality and of which the plan provides for demolition. Housing fabric is connected horizontally by balconies and punctuated by some voids that allow the design of common spaces facing the sea. Following the curtain-theme, the buildings present Messina's pre-earthquake typology of terraced houses, characterised by continuous and tight facades overlooking the waterfront, as it was once "La Palazzata". The façade is composed of sunshade panels, facing the seaside on the south-east.

On a large territorial scale, the design proposal is also based on a secondary strategy: a complex system of visual perspectives. The axes identified starting from the historical monuments define the four volumes destined for housing, public spaces and connections.

#### 4. Conclusion

Following the theories and analyzes expressed, the port cities requalification is timely and urgent today, as well as it is necessary to discuss the transition of the port from segregated non-place into a place of urban living, and how this would be possible by means of the design act. The critical process of integration must be preceded by a careful study of the forms of the territory (morphology) and of the construction (typology) that helps to understand the critical issues and the potential of the existing heritage, in order to achieve the transformation objectives aimed to urban and social inclusion. In this process of social inclusion, the design is a vehicle for spatial regeneration in which human and social integration are irreplaceable.

Recently the project has adopted analysis methods and tools based on the principles of Inclusive Design developed with attention to social sustainability. Through the design disciplines, the territory is not only regenerated but the bases are set up to promote comfort and a sense of identity and well-being that favors social inclusion. Regenerating the city from the waterfront means rediscovering spaces and habits, expanding economic and cultural horizons, creating new community identity<sup>1</sup>.

1. All graphics (Figg. 1-2-3-4) were drawn up by C. Sturiale and included in her MSc. thesis project titled "Urban renewal of Falcata, harbour area in Messina", Supervisor Prof. R. Belibani.

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