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Cultural heritage as a regenerative resource in transitional territories. Exploring the cultural landscape of Campi Flegrei

*Il patrimonio culturale come risorsa rigenerativa nei territori in transizione.
Indagare il paesaggio culturale dei Campi Flegrei*

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ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS

Cultural heritage as a regenerative resource in transitional territories

This paper explores the regenerative potential of cultural heritage in transitional territories, particularly in peri-urban contexts undergoing significant social and environmental transformations. In an era marked by multiple stress factors impacting cities worldwide and accelerating climate change, cultural heritage can serve as a regenerative resource capable of initiating new cycles of life and use. The issue is intrinsically complex due to the delicate balance between the apparent immobility of cultural heritage and its preservation, contrasted with the rapidly evolving dynamics of contemporary cities and territories in transition. The study explores the evolving meaning of cultural heritage, moving from traditional conservation policies to practices integrating preservation with socio-spatial regeneration. The research focuses on Campi Flegrei, in the Metropolitan City of Naples, as a case study. This transitional landscape features a rich yet often latent assemblage of historical and ecological resources, intersecting with both past and contemporary urbanization processes, environmental fragility, and volcanic risk. The research seeks to explore how a multifaceted cultural landscape can be identified, interpreted and strategically managed to stimulate broader sustainable territorial regeneration.

Keywords: cultural heritage, cultural landscape, transitional territories, peri-urban areas, socio-spatial regeneration

Il patrimonio culturale come risorsa rigenerativa nei territori in transizione

Questo contributo esplora il potenziale rigenerativo del patrimonio culturale nei territori in transizione, e in particolare nelle aree periurbane soggette a profonde trasformazioni sociali e ambientali. In un'epoca caratterizzata da pressioni crescenti, che incidono sulle città a livello globale, e dall'intensificazione degli effetti del cambiamento climatico, il patrimonio culturale può costituire una risorsa rigenerativa. La questione è intrinsecamente complessa a causa del delicato equilibrio tra l'apparente immobilità del patrimonio culturale e la sua conservazione, e le dinamiche in accelerato movimento delle città e dei territori in transizione. Lo studio affronta l'evoluzione del concetto di patrimonio culturale, dalle tradizionali politiche di conservazione a pratiche che integrano la tutela con la rigenerazione socio-spaziale. La ricerca si concentra sui Campi Flegrei, un paesaggio in transizione in cui le risorse storiche ed ecologiche, spesso latenti, si intersecano con processi di urbanizzazione, passati e recenti, e fragilità ambientali. L'obiettivo è indagare come un paesaggio culturale complesso possa essere interpretato e gestito strategicamente per attivare processi di rigenerazione territoriale.

Parole chiave: patrimonio culturale, paesaggio culturale, territori in transizione, periurbano, rigenerazione socio-spaziale

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1. Introduction

Urban condition is undergoing significant and continuous transformations worldwide. Processes of metropolization (Indovina, 2009), land consumption, climate-related risks, economic and productive restructuring and resource mismanagement are profoundly reshaping cities and territories.

The “new urban question” (Secchi, 2011) finds one of its most evident manifestations in peri-urban territories (Le Jeannic and Vidalenc, 1997; Piorr and Ravetz, 2011), which serve as a privileged lens to observe contemporary urban transformations.

The peri-urban is a transitional territory¹, situated between countryside and city, inside and outside, residence and production. It consists of discontinuous, violated, latent or fragmented landscapes, which, despite their precarious nature, hold regenerative potential rooted in natural, aesthetic, social and eco-systemic values (Russo et al., 2022). In this “immense repository of signs and practices” (Secchi, 2000), the disarticulations of the contemporary city intersect with historical and cultural permanences. In these marginal areas, cultural heritage acquires new meanings, no longer solely an economic asset, but also a territorial and public resource, understood in its broadest sense as belonging to the community (Flick, 2015; Janssen, 2017).

This contribution conceptualizes heritage as a regenerative resource, capable of initiating new cycles of life and use. Regeneration is understood as a circular process (EC, 2014), where heritage is not fixed in a purely conservative dimension but is integrated into contemporary dynamics, transforming into territorial infrastructure, public space and a vehicle for social welfare and accessibility. The circular regeneration of these resources is conceived as a strategic action that moves beyond a static vision of conservation, promoting a more adaptive approach, that intertwines memory and transformation, past and future.

Figure 1. The cultural landscape of Campi Flegrei



Source: photo by the author, 2025

For these reasons, the case study of Campi Flegrei serves as an experimental

laboratory for this study. Here, discontinuous and fragmented urban spaces coexist with historical and archaeological layers, yet face contemporary pressures such as abandonment, marginalization, infrastructural fragmentation and environmental degradation. This condition contrasts with the deep sense of identity, continuity and belonging embedded in its material and immaterial heritage (Russo, 2012) (Figure 1). It is worth considering whether cultural heritage, in its broadest sense, can foster renewed territorial relationships and networks (Colavitti, 2018).

This article is structured into three main sections: the first section explores cultural heritage as a regenerative resource, analyzing its conceptual evolution, policy frameworks and recent practices; the second section examines the role of cultural heritage in transitional territories, focusing on peri-urban areas as places of transformation and vulnerability; the final section delves into the case study of Campi Flegrei, a site of exceptional cultural significance yet shaped by overlapping risks, highlighting the need for integrated approaches to preservation and adaptation.

2. Cultural heritage as regenerative resource

2.1 *Evolutions from heritage protection to regeneration*

Over the past decades, the concept of heritage conservation has significantly evolved, gaining relevance in the context of sustainable urban development (Zhang, 2012). This shift has been driven by social, economic and political transformations, as well as recent crises – ranging from natural and anthropogenic disasters to health emergencies – which have highlighted the extreme fragility and vulnerability of cultural heritage (Arrhenius, 2012). In Italy, home to an unparalleled cultural patrimony², this scenario has led to an expansion of what is considered heritage, with a growing number of asset types and stakeholders involved in ‘patrimonialization’ processes (Ciorra, 2016). At the same time, policies primarily focused on protection have emerged. While these have safeguarded the integrity of many cultural assets, they have also produced ambivalent effects: on one hand, have promoted intensive tourism-driven exploitation, turning heritage into an economic resource (Arrhenius, 2012); on the other, rigid conservation policies have sometimes isolated heritage sites from contemporary urban transformations, limiting their usability and adaptation (Badami, 2017; Ricci, 2006).

Literature has long debated the need to balance protection and enhancement, seeking to reconcile heritage conservation with sustainable development. However, further questions arise regarding whether heritage, beyond re-signifying places and fostering intercultural dialogue (Jullien, 2018), can actively contribute to new regeneration strategies, reinforcing the connection between physical continuity and social integration (Ricci, 2009).

These conceptual shifts were notably reflected in “Cronocaos”, where Rem Koolhaas (2010) called for a “new value system between preservation and development”, warning that an imbalance between the two can lead to neglect and obsolescence. This perspective underscores the need for a renewed approach to protection, one that sees heritage not as a static entity to be preserved, but as an active agent in spatial and social regeneration (Badami, 2017).

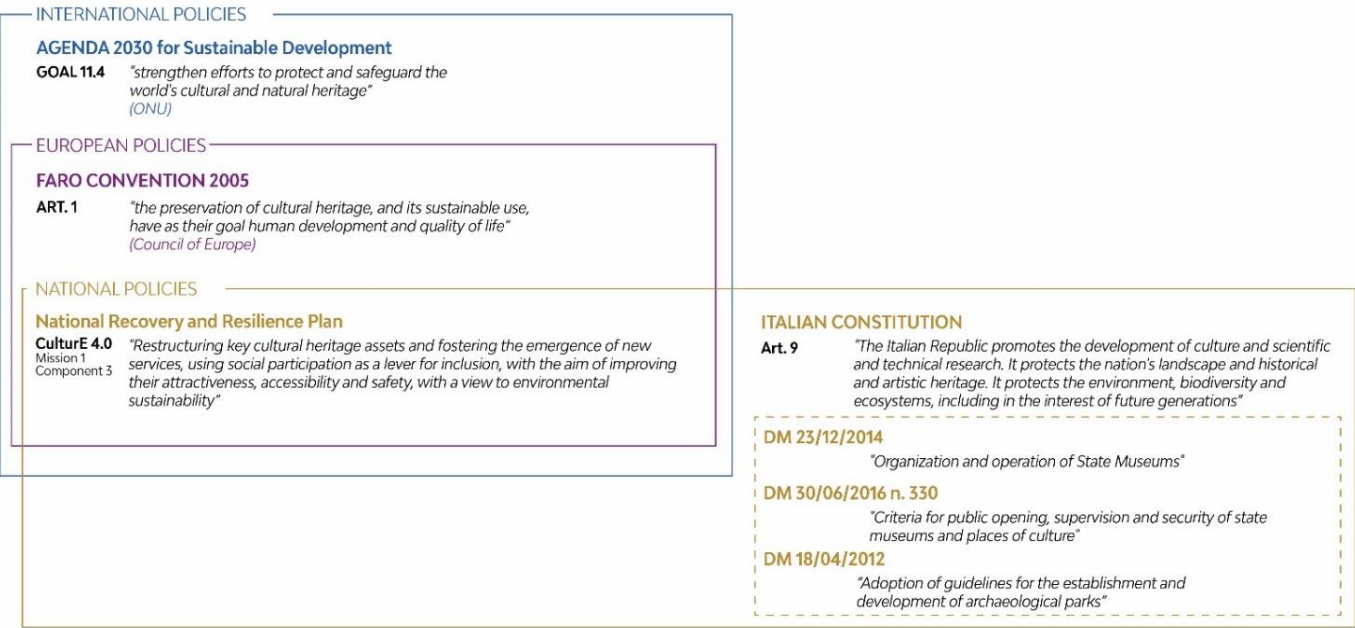
Consequently, alongside traditional regulatory frameworks (Bauman, 2015), a more fluid and interactive understanding of heritage is emerging. Today, heritage occupies a central position between landscape architecture and urban planning (Riesto & Tietjen, 2019), becoming an integral factor in spatial development (Janssen et al., 2017). This shift has fostered new experimental regeneration programs (Ricci, 2005).

and given rise to the concept of "new heritage" (Holtorf & Fairclough, 2013), which leverages cultural assets for local development. The focus is no longer solely on conservation and enhancement, but on embedding heritage within the evolving dynamics of the city (Ricci, 2006) to generate spatial, social, and economic regeneration. This transition is reflected in the evolving definitions³ of cultural heritage (European Commission, 2023; Faro Convention, Council of Europe, 2005), which have moved away from an elitist and aestheticized vision toward a more inclusive and civic-oriented approach, emphasizing heritage communities and the relationship between people and space.

2.2 Policies and priorities in the interplay between cultural heritage and territories

The evolving role of cultural heritage in contemporary society is reflected in the current theoretical and regulatory frameworks at both European and national levels. This shift recognizes heritage not only as an asset to be preserved but as an active resource capable of fostering social and urban development. This paper provides a preliminary overview of key national and international policies (Figure 2) that highlight the role of cultural heritage as a catalyst for urban and social regeneration.

Figure 2. Policy frameworks supporting cultural heritage-led regeneration



Source: elaboration by the author, 2024

The European Union has placed cultural heritage – as a collective resource, an expression of communities, and a common good – at the core of its policy agenda. Its protection and enhancement are integrated with broader priorities, including the environment, landscape, education, climate change and energy transition (EC, 2014). To support this vision, the EU has developed a comprehensive framework of tools, encompassing key policy documents, action plans and strategic objectives (European Commission Communication: "Towards an Integrated Approach to Cultural Heritage for Europe" (2014); New European Agenda for Culture (2018); EU Council Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026.) The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁴ reinforces this perspective, particularly through Goal 11.4, which advocates stronger efforts to protect and

safeguard cultural and natural heritage as a means of promoting social cohesion and urban resilience. Similarly, the Faro Convention⁵ (Council of Europe, 2005), ratified by Italy in 2021, redefines heritage not just as an identity-based element but as a territorial resource that contributes to quality of life and sustainable development.

Within this framework, the EU underscores the role of sustainable development in cultural heritage policies, positioning it as a key driver in balancing economic, social and environmental priorities. Specific attention is given to major sustainability challenges, including the territorial dimension of cultural heritage, emphasizing its integration into spatial planning and urban policies; the inefficiency of the built heritage, particularly in relation to energy use and adaptive reuse; the promotion of locally sensitive development, fostering sustainable tourism as a strategy for economic growth while ensuring cultural and environmental preservation.

At the national level, a key reference is Article 9 of the Italian Constitution⁶, amended in 2022, which reinforces the duty to protect landscapes and historical-artistic heritage, while also recognizing culture and research as drivers of civil progress (Settis, 2012). This perspective has shaped recent heritage policies, balancing conservation with enhancement to promote economic and social development. The Plan for 14 Strategic Investments for the Country's Revival (2021), part of the Culture 4.0⁷ program, aligns with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), aiming to restore and repurpose historically significant yet underutilized sites. Among cultural assets, museums and archaeological sites hold a central role. Recent regulations⁸ (D.M. 2014, D.M. 2020) emphasize their integration into social and cultural networks, moving beyond a strictly touristic function. The Ministerial Decrees of 2022 further reinforce this approach, promoting participatory management and strengthening heritage's role within territorial development strategies.

At the regional level, the Campania Region has embraced cultural heritage as a key driver of local development, combining cultural policies with economic and social objectives. The Strategic Regional Plan for Culture and Cultural Heritage (2018-2020)⁹, adopted within the Program of Action and Cohesion – Complementary Operational Plan 2014-2020, has financed initiatives aligned with national and European heritage policies. In 2020, this program was extended to include the Archaeological Park of Campi Flegrei¹⁰, supporting efforts to engage diverse audiences in an active and informed experience of heritage, reinforcing Campania's rich and multifaceted cultural identity.

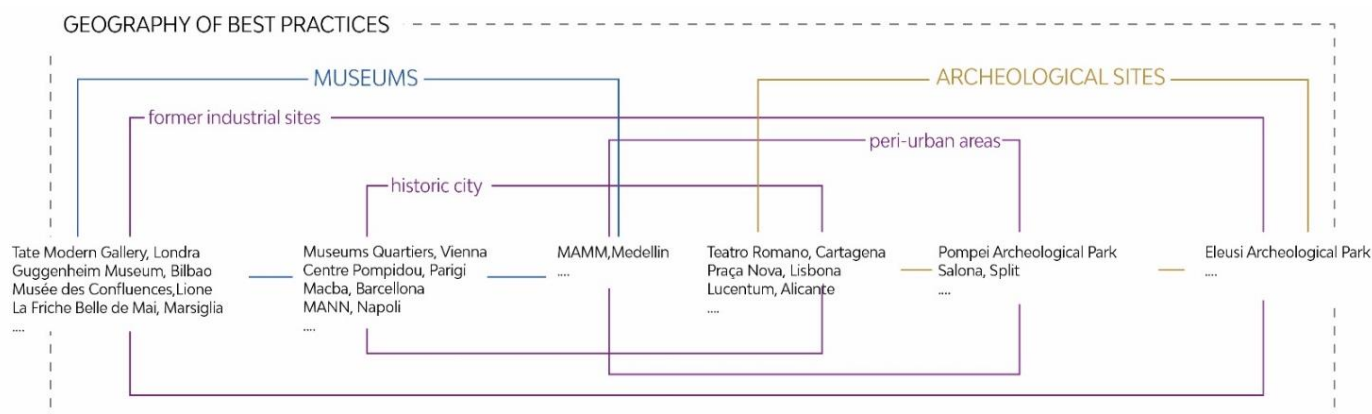
These policies reflect a profound shift in the perception of cultural heritage, positioning it as a dynamic resource for urban regeneration, economic growth and social inclusion. Cultural spaces – museums, archaeological sites and historic landscapes – are now viewed as hubs of innovation, bridging heritage conservation with the imperatives of modern urban planning, sustainability and territorial cohesion.

2.3 Recent practices for socio-spatial regeneration

The concept of heritage has recently undergone a revolution that, at the beginning of the 21st century, UNESCO defined as the "museums of cities movement" (UNESCO, 2006). This shift reflects an increasing emphasis on the urban role of cultural institutions, particularly museums, in shaping their urban environments. Once perceived primarily as repositories of the past, "hyper-museums" (Ciorra, Suma, 2002) have evolved into landmarks, social catalysts, and key drivers of urban regeneration, often playing a central role in redefining contemporary cities (Figure 3). However, this trend raises questions about the extent to which cultural heritage

interventions effectively contribute to socio-spatial transformation rather than solely reinforcing dynamics of selective valorization and commodification.

Figure 3. Practices frameworks supporting cultural heritage-led regeneration



Source: elaboration by the author, 2024

This contribution examines selected best practices at the national and international levels to explore how cultural sites can become active agents of urban transformation, potentially assuming the role of public spaces. The analysis focuses on three case studies that represent different approaches to heritage-led urban regeneration: (a) The Museum of the Roman Theater in Cartagena, (b) the Tate Modern Gallery in London, and (c) the Parque Biblioteca España in Medellín. Each case exemplifies a distinct urban condition: (I) the integration of archaeological heritage within a historic center, (II) the adaptive reuse of an industrial site, and (III) the regeneration of a peripheral and socially fragile area. While these cases are often celebrated as best practices, a comparative analysis reveals contrasting priorities, underlying tensions and potential limitations in their respective approaches.

The Museum of the Roman Theater in Cartagena¹¹ exemplifies an approach where archaeological restoration is seamlessly incorporated into the urban fabric. By integrating ruins and open spaces, the project not only preserves historical traces but also fosters a dialogue between past and present, revitalizing the historic center. This model prioritizes continuity with the past while ensuring contemporary accessibility and usability.

Conversely, the Tate Modern Gallery in London¹² represents a radical transformation of a former industrial site into a cultural hub of international significance. Here, the focus is on functional repurposing, introducing new public spaces that extend beyond the museum itself, with far-reaching effects on the social and cultural development of both the surrounding district and the broader city. This case illustrates how heritage can drive urban renewal, redefining a site's identity through a balance between historical continuity and innovation.

The Parque Biblioteca España in Medellín¹³ stands out for its social impact, situated in a marginalized, informal settlement on the city's outskirts. Unlike the previous cases, the project extends beyond cultural enhancement, addressing social inclusion and accessibility. Cultural heritage here serves as a tool for community cohesion, improving quality of life and fostering a sense of belonging.

These examples illustrate how museums and archaeological sites can redefine the relationship between cultural heritage and urban space through architecture and urban design. A comparative analysis of these cases highlights both shared principles and divergent strategies in conservation and enhancement, offering insights into how

different approaches influence urban transformation. The success of heritage-led regeneration is not solely determined by the intervention itself but is deeply influenced by the territorial context in which it unfolds. In Cartagena, the emphasis is on integrated conservation, ensuring a strong connection between past and present through direct urban integration. In London, the transformation of an industrial landmark leverages heritage as a driver of innovation and economic development. In Medellín, the focus shifts toward inclusive regeneration, using cultural infrastructure to address social inequalities.

This analysis underscores the dynamic interplay between conservation and regeneration of urban context, shaping the specific goals and outcomes of each project, revealing its potential to act as a catalyst for socio-spatial regeneration.

3. The significance of cultural heritage in transitional territories

In the contemporary urban landscape, transition – understood as a state of ongoing change – is closely linked to metropolization processes, which have redefined both the scale and nature of the “urban issue” (Russo, 2023). This evolution has shaped territories marked by morphological and social transformations, blurring the traditional boundaries between urban and suburban areas while fostering increasing cultural, social, functional and symbolic differentiation.

For these reasons, peri-urban areas (Le Jeannic and Vidalenc, 1997; Piorr and Ravetz, 2011) can be considered territories in transition: they occupy a liminal space between city and countryside, subject to continuous processes of functional densification, land-use change and settlement expansion, yet also characterized by abandonment, retraction, and ecological depletion. However, they also hold significant regenerative potential, as they offer opportunities for strategic, multi-scalar interventions capable of restoring their landscapes (Russo et al., 2022).

These landscapes are often fragmented and discontinuous, alternating between detracting elements, generic spaces, abandoned areas and identity traces – remnants of historical layers and high-value natural areas (Russo et al., 2022). The landscape, as defined by the European Landscape Convention (EC, 2000), is that portion of territory perceived by populations, shaped by the interaction between natural and human factors (European Landscape Convention, Chapter 1, Article 1, 2000). Culture can thus be interpreted as an active force, an anthropic expression capable of transforming the Earth's surface (Sauer, 1925). The concept of cultural landscape, defined by UNESCO as a “combined work of nature and humankind”, emphasizes the interdependence between society and the environment, highlighting the ability of human actions to adapt to the constraints and opportunities offered by the territory (UNESCO, 1992). This interpretation also extends to ‘ordinary landscapes’, which are not necessarily distinguished by exceptional scenic or historical-environmental values, but rather by the stratification of uses and anthropic transformations over time. These landscapes reflect the culture and way of life of communities, their relationship with the environment, history, traditions and daily practices, representing a dynamic heritage of meanings and cultural values.

This research investigates how the interaction between cultural heritage and territorial dynamics can transform the vulnerabilities of these marginal areas into drivers of socio-spatial regeneration (Caruso et al., 2021).

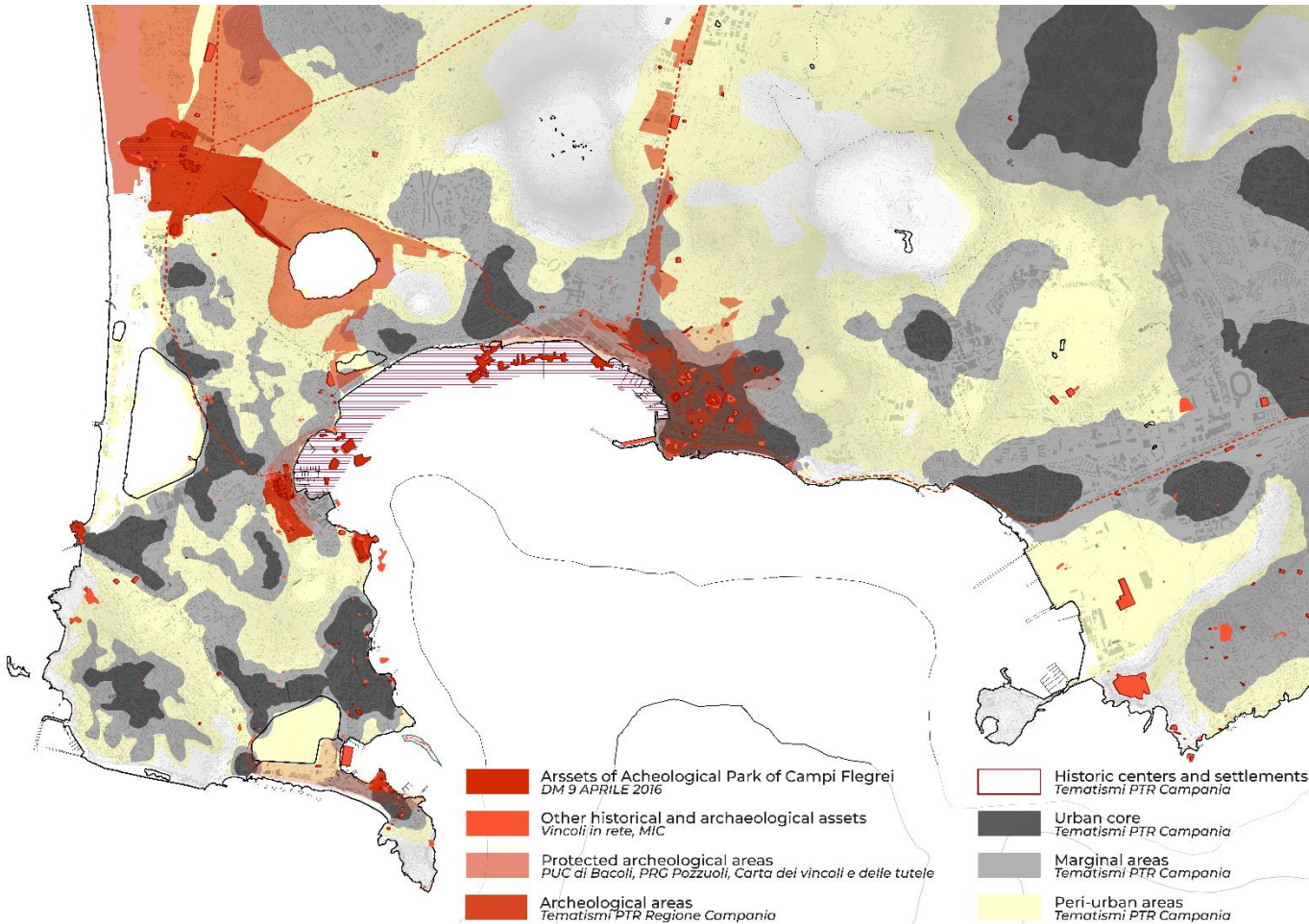
A key focus is the relationship between peri-urban areas and their dispersed archaeological assets, which presents complex challenges related to their potential for regeneration. Scholars have long examined the role of archaeological sites in peripheral contexts (Ricci, 2006), recognizing them as dynamic spaces where both change and cultural identity are actively shaped and renegotiated.

Figure 4. Stratified interaction between archaeology and urban fabric in Bacoli



Source: photo by the author, 2025

Figure 5. Cultural heritage and peri-urban territory in Campi Flegrei



Source: drawing by the author, 2024, from PE5 CHANGES, Spoke1, Wp4 research

This research specifically focuses on archaeological sites due to their unique ability to establish relationships with their surrounding contexts, which have evolved around them over time. Unlike in historic city centers, archaeological sites in peri-urban areas must contend with diverse and often contrasting urban realities, where historic remnants coexist with industrial zones, suburban fringes, expanding urban developments, construction sites and infrastructure corridors. These conditions further challenge their preservation and visibility, underscoring the urgent need for urban strategies and planning approaches that can reconnect them to their territorial environment (Ricci, 2006).

The complex relationship between heritage preservation and territorial transformations finds one of its most significant expressions in archaeological enclosures (Aymonino, 2010), understood as “boundary lines” (Jacobs, 1969) that often include or exclude protected areas from the city and the territories in which they are embedded. However, if such enclosures are regarded as the sole means of preservation, they prove both insufficient and inappropriate, unless reinterpreted in terms of livability, accessibility, and communication (Ricci, 2006). Over time, this conflict has evolved into a genuine functional discrepancy within the contemporary urban fabric. The archaeological artifact, once integral to the city’s historical continuum, has become an isolated element, separated from the dynamic processes that shape urban evolution. While the historical sites within protective boundaries have remained unchanged since their discovery, the surrounding context has significantly evolved, along with its spatial needs and conflicts. Consequently, planning must address this reality by actively integrating archaeological sites into broader urban and territorial dynamics, rather than confining them to isolated enclaves (Ricci, 2006). There is a need to overcome these enclosures by rethinking the processes and methods of integrating archaeological heritage into urban design, thereby reclaiming the historical dimension of the urban landscape.

4. Cultural heritage for a regenerative approach to Campi Flegrei

4.1 The cultural landscape of Campi Flegrei

Since the post-war period, Italy has undergone a profound transformation in the relationship between communities and their territory, leading to a radical reorganization of spatial structures. Uncontrolled urban sprawl has consumed land without planning spaces for the community, fragmenting highly diverse territories while making them all increasingly homogeneous (Boeri, 2011), shaping generic and introverted landscapes (Koolhaas, 1994). This process has resulted in a complex mosaic of elements, including residential buildings, production facilities and infrastructure, which today exhibit signs of deterioration and face significant challenges in terms of safety, reliability, ecological interactions, and resilience (Russo, 2016). These territorial changes have been accompanied by economic, social and environmental transitions, with particularly pronounced manifestations in peri-urban areas (Wandl et al., 2014). In these contexts, the discontinuity and fragmentation of the landscape – characterized by an alternation of deteriorated elements, generic spaces, and abandoned areas – intersect with networks of heritage values, remnants of the historical and environmental palimpsest. At the same time, Italy is home to an unparalleled cultural heritage, with 58 UNESCO sites, 53 classified as cultural heritage and 5 as natural heritage¹⁴. Moreover, recent studies and national reports (FAI, 2003-2013; ISTAT, 2021-2023)¹⁵ indicate that Campania ranks among the Italian regions with the highest concentration of historical,

architectural and archaeological landscape and environmental assets.

Building upon these premises, this study focuses on the peri-urban territory¹⁶ of Campi Flegrei, located within the Metropolitan City of Naples (Figure 4). This area is affected by processes of decommissioning and functional retraction, abandonment and marginalization, functional specialization, fragmentation and degradation of collective spaces. It is further intersected by critical infrastructural corridors and disrupted by discontinuities within environmental systems. These phenomena coexist with historical traces and archaeological remains, which are scattered across the territory in fragments, non-evident deposits and large concentrations (Figure 5). Despite their dispersion, these elements convey a strong sense of continuity, preserving the historical and cultural identity of the area (Russo, 2012).

Campi Flegrei, a vast volcanic caldera located north of Naples, represent a territory of extraordinary complexity and vulnerability. Their name, derived from the Greek *phlegraios*, meaning ‘burning’ or ‘fiery’ reflects the intense volcanic activity that has shaped the area for centuries (Di Liello, 2005). The vulnerability of this landscape is not solely due to its volcanic nature but also to the intensive exploitation and extraction of its resources. The Campi Flegrei's landscape is the result of continuous processes of stratification and overlap between human and natural actions, which have gradually shaped a distinctive and recognizable territorial identity (Di Liello, 2022). The area has long exemplified this fragility, with an extraordinary concentration of archaeological landscape and environmental assets representing a wide range of historical periods and ecosystems (De Martino, 2017). This territory aligns closely with UNESCO's definition of a cultural landscape (UNESCO, 1992), as the interplay of territorial transformations reflects the evolving relationship between humans and the environment. Campi Flegrei thus constitute an ideal laboratory for research investigating the potential role of cultural heritage in socio-spatial regeneration processes (Caruso et al., 2021) in transitional territories. Furthermore, the territorial conditions of Campi Flegrei intersect with major contemporary challenges, including multiple risks intensified by climate change, land consumption, illegal construction, lack of services and social inequalities.

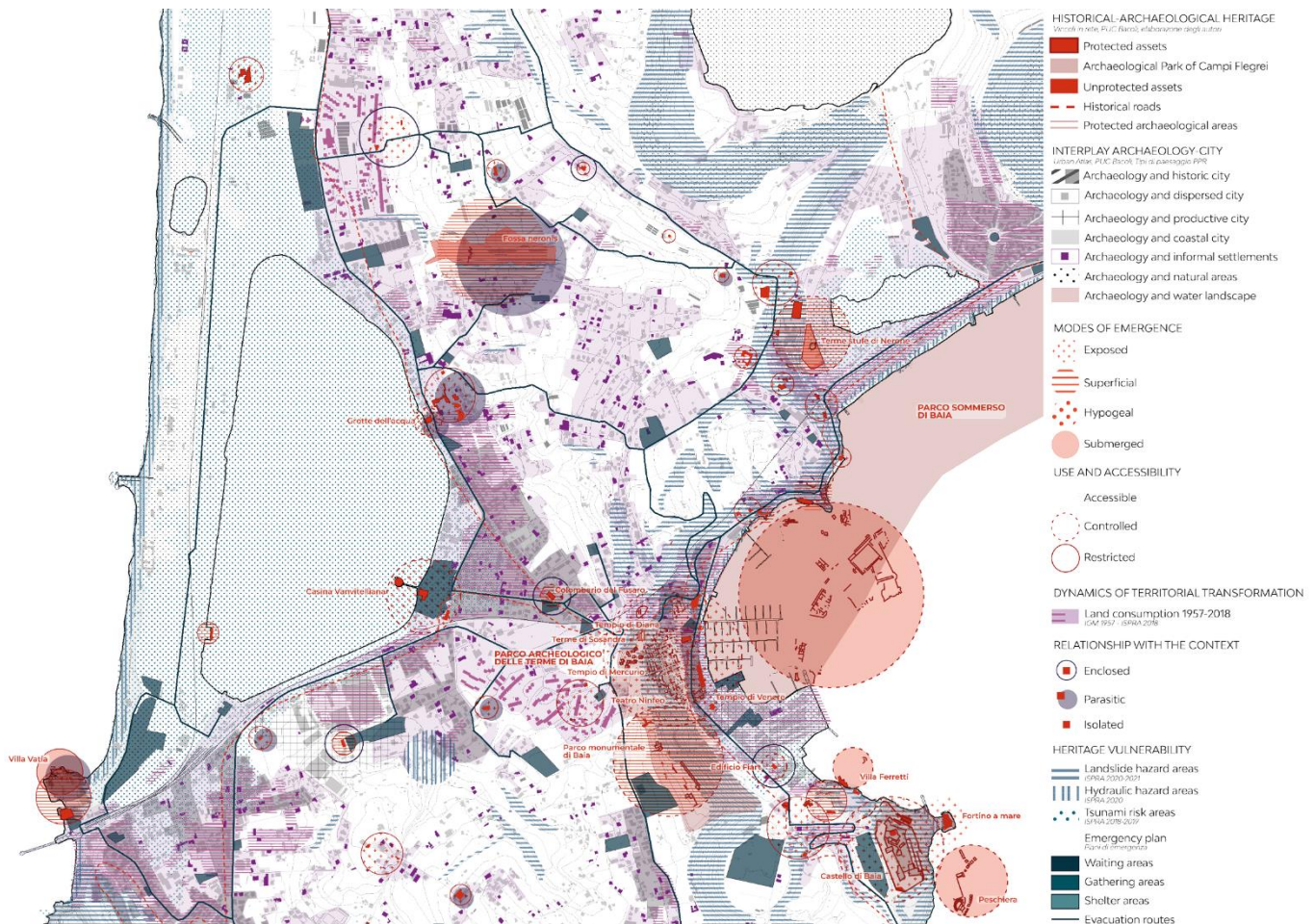
4.2 Stratifications and overlaps of archaeological heritage in peri-urban areas

The post-war urbanization processes of Campi Flegrei have led to disorganized and unregulated growth, often generating conflicts between urban expansion and the necessary conservation of archaeological remains. This dynamic has frequently resulted in the encirclement or destruction of archaeological sites, whether still in situ or sporadically unearthed. The outcome is a fragmented and transformed landscape where, in certain areas, the specific identity of the territory has become difficult to recognize (Miano, 2014).

These processes have also created disparities in the management and accessibility of heritage sites: while some have been integrated into tourism and conservation circuits, many others remain neglected or even unrecorded. As a result, a significant portion of Campi Flegrei's archaeological heritage remains largely underutilized, either due to restricted access or the absence of a structured enhancement network. Among the numerous historical and archaeological sites in the Campi Flegrei, 27 fall under the direct management of the Archeological Park of Campi Flegrei, which oversees their preservation and promotion through a structured institutional framework. Other sites are protected by the Superintendency for Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape, yet remain outside the direct governance of the Archeological Park of Campi Flegrei. Finally, there are numerous historically and culturally significant sites that lack any form of official protection, remaining excluded from

conservation and accessibility strategies. A notable example of this condition is the Piscina Mirabilis¹⁷, an ancient Roman water cistern that, for a long time, was excluded from structured heritage management. Until 2020 – when the Archeological Park of Campi Flegrei initiated a special public-private partnership, entrusting the site's management to the Temporary Association (ATS) StraMirabilis – access to the cistern was informally regulated by local custodians, who compensated for institutional shortcomings through spontaneous protection measures.

Figure 6. “Emerging archaeology”: the overlapping system between archaeology and the city



Source: drawing by the author, 2024, from PE5 CHANGES, Spoke1, Wp4 research

The archaeological areas of this territory take on different forms: large concentrations and archaeological parks (e.g., Parco Archeologico delle Terme di Baia), small enclosed archaeological sites (e.g., Tempio di Diana) and isolated heritage assets scattered across the landscape and urban fabric (e.g., Colombario del Fusaro).

The relationship between the city and its ruins varies depending on the context and the surrounding settlement patterns (Ercolino, 2014).

For this reason, an initial phase of research (Figure 6) – focusing on a specific area within the municipality of Bacoli (NA) – sought to analyze the ‘emerging archeologies’, conceived as the ways in which historical-archaeological heritage emerges and interacts with the contemporary city, identifying the relationships between heritage sites and the different contexts in which they are embedded (Figure

7-8): (1) historic centers and the consolidated urban fabric (e.g., Tempio di Venere); (2) the dispersed city, including peri-urban and fringe areas (e.g., Colombario del Fusaro); (3) the productive city, such as port or industrial areas, both active and abandoned (e.g., Edificio Fiat); (4) the coastal city (e.g., Villa Ferretti); (5) informal and unplanned settlements, including unauthorized construction (e.g., some remains north of Lago Fusaro); (6) natural areas (e.g., Parco Archeologico di Cuma); (7) water landscapes, including maritime and lacustrine environments, where archaeological remains are integrated into aquatic ecosystems (e.g., Parco Archeologico Sommerso di Baia).

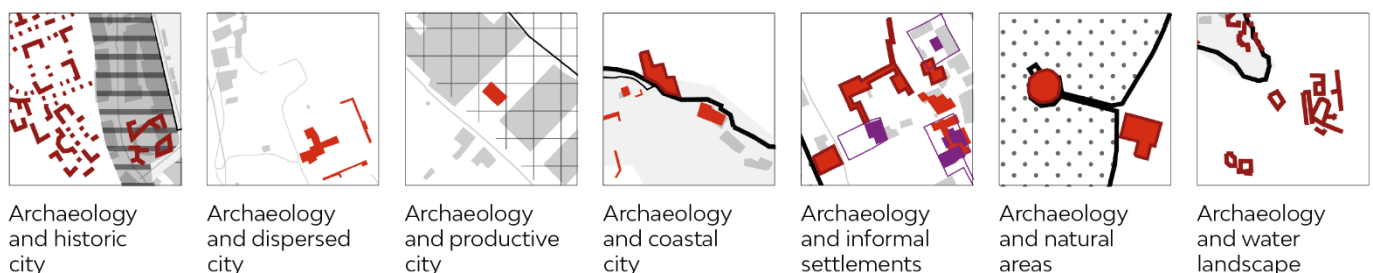
These different settings also influence how archaeological remains manifest within the territory. Some sites are fully exposed at the surface, while others emerge only partially, revealing fragments of their structures. Others remain entirely subterranean, concealed beneath layers of urban development.

A further distinctive feature of this landscape is the presence of vast submerged sites, a consequence of bradyseism, the cyclical uplifting and subsidence of the land due to volcanic activity. Over the centuries, these movements have either buried or revealed archaeological remains, which today resurface in both marine and lacustrine environments. An emblematic manifestation of this phenomenon is the Tempio di Serapide in Pozzuoli. The presence of holes left by lithodomes - marine mollusks - on the temple's columns provides direct evidence of the site's submersion phases and has enabled the reconstruction of ground level variations over the past 2,000 years.

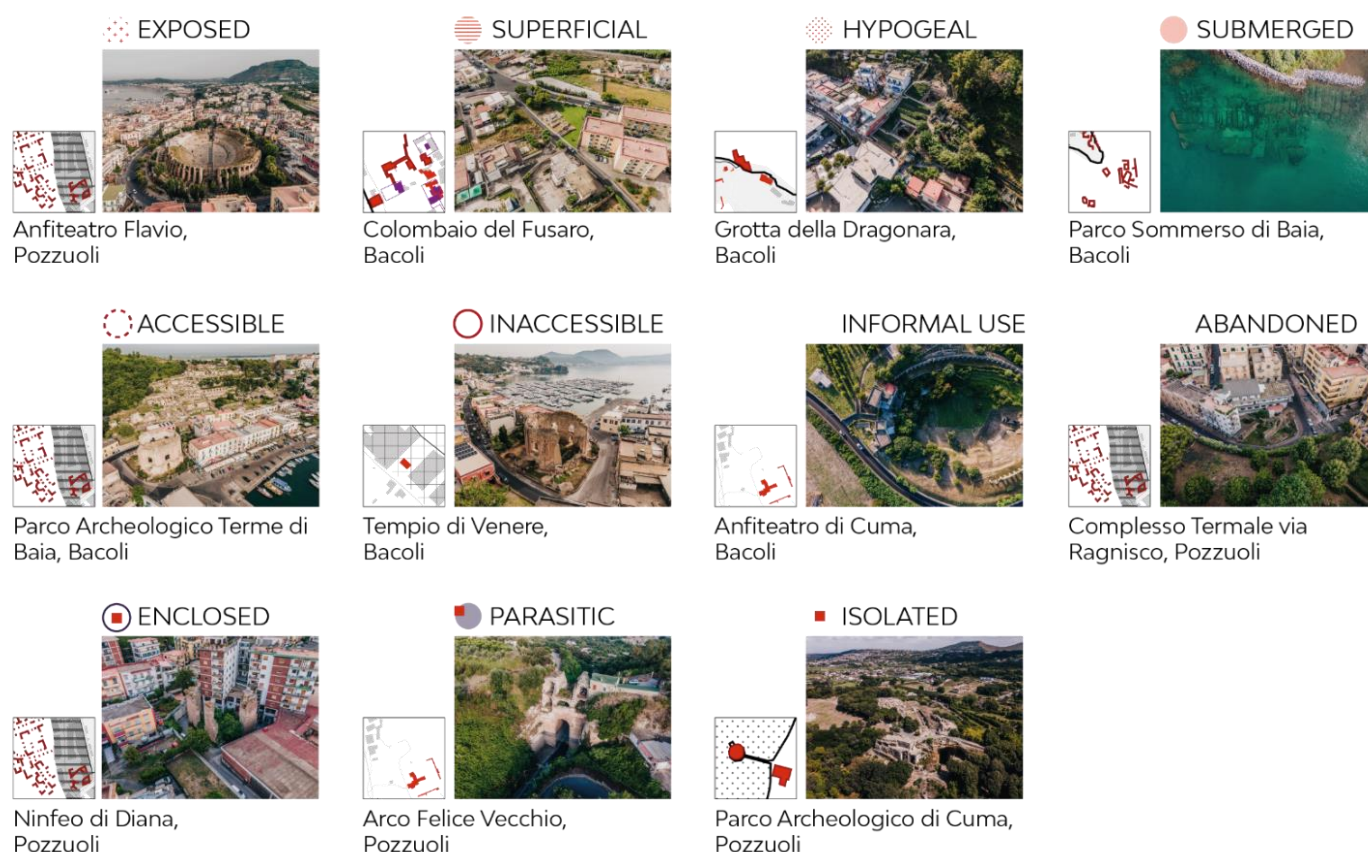
Another key aspect concerns the differences in accessibility and usability conditions. Protected sites are subject to controlled access, regulated by specific access provisions, while some remain inaccessible. As for the non-protected sites, many are subject to informal or improper uses, such as the case of the Anfiteatro di Cuma, partly occupied by a private orchard, or an underground columbarium in a historical area of Bacoli, which was used for years as butcher's storage, or the private construction against the Arco Felice Vecchio. Although unplanned, these uses have resulted in indirect forms of protection, ensuring in many cases the survival of the structures.

The analysis identified three main modes of interaction between archaeological sites and their surrounding space. Some sites are enclosed, surrounded by buildings or infrastructure that limit their visibility and, in some cases, their accessibility, as seen in the uncertain borders of the Parco Archeologico delle Terme di Baia (Figure 9), where spatial definition has been compromised by successive urban stratifications. Other sites appear to be parasitized by modern constructions, integrated into contemporary structures that alter their recognizability, as in the case of the Tomba di Agrippina. Finally, some sites are isolated, located in more natural contexts, free from surrounding constructions, and characterized by a direct relationship with the landscape, such as the Casina Vanvitelliana on Lago Fusaro (Figure 9).

Figure 7. City figures in Campi Flegrei



Source: elaboration by the author, 2025, from PE5 CHANGES, Spoke1, Wp4 research

Figure 8. Modes of “emerging archaeologies” in Campi Flegrei

Source: elaboration by the author, 2025, from PE5 CHANGES, Spoke1, Wp4 research, with photos by F. S. Sammarco

4.3 Risks and vulnerabilities as a strategic priority

An additional layer of complexity for cultural heritage in Campi Flegrei is represented by the fact that the area faces multiple vulnerabilities (Ali et al., 2022), of both natural (seismic, bradyseismic, and volcanic risks, Osservatorio Vesuviano) and human-induced origin (Figure 10).

Over the past decades, the landscape has been shaped by territorial contradictions, including the coexistence of archaeological sites and illegal construction¹⁸, seismic and volcanic risk¹⁹, high population density²⁰, protected natural areas²¹ and waste landfills and environmental degradation. These seemingly incompatible elements have become the defining constants of the area (Frallicciardi, Palmentieri, 2013).

Viewing the landscape as an indicator of environmental sustainability, residential development emerges as a key pressure factor in Campi Flegrei. These ‘living landscapes’ reflect a unique relationship between communities and the environment, where unchecked construction, often illegal, has expanded despite landscape regulations (Frallicciardi, Palmentieri, 2013).

This intensive land exploitation has gradually replaced agricultural and natural areas²², with historic dispersed settlements reduced to a minor presence, while low-quality, unplanned constructions dominate the landscape. The area's geological instability has further driven a preference for new settlements over traditional ones, often as a response to natural risks (De Martino, 2017).

Unregulated urban expansion, combined with high population density, is especially problematic when the territory is subject to landscape protection laws and its well-documented natural risks, which conflict with ongoing urban pressures

(Frallicciardi, 2013).

Throughout history, seismic and volcanic events have repeatedly reshaped not only the physical landscape but also the lives of its inhabitants, forcing continuous adaptation and resilience (De Martino, 2017). The millennial-old human-environment relationship in this region has shifted from balance to extreme fragility, underscoring the urgent need for adaptive and resilient strategies to mitigate risks.

An assessment of vulnerability factors highlights that the historical-archaeological heritage, along with the residential and infrastructural systems, are the most exposed elements.

Findings reveal critical weaknesses, not only in the territorial context's resilience but also in the emergency and evacuation plans, which remain underdeveloped, inadequate, and excessively fragmented.

Figure 9. Uncertain borders of Parco Archeologico delle Terme di Baia, Bacoli



Source: photo by the author, 2025

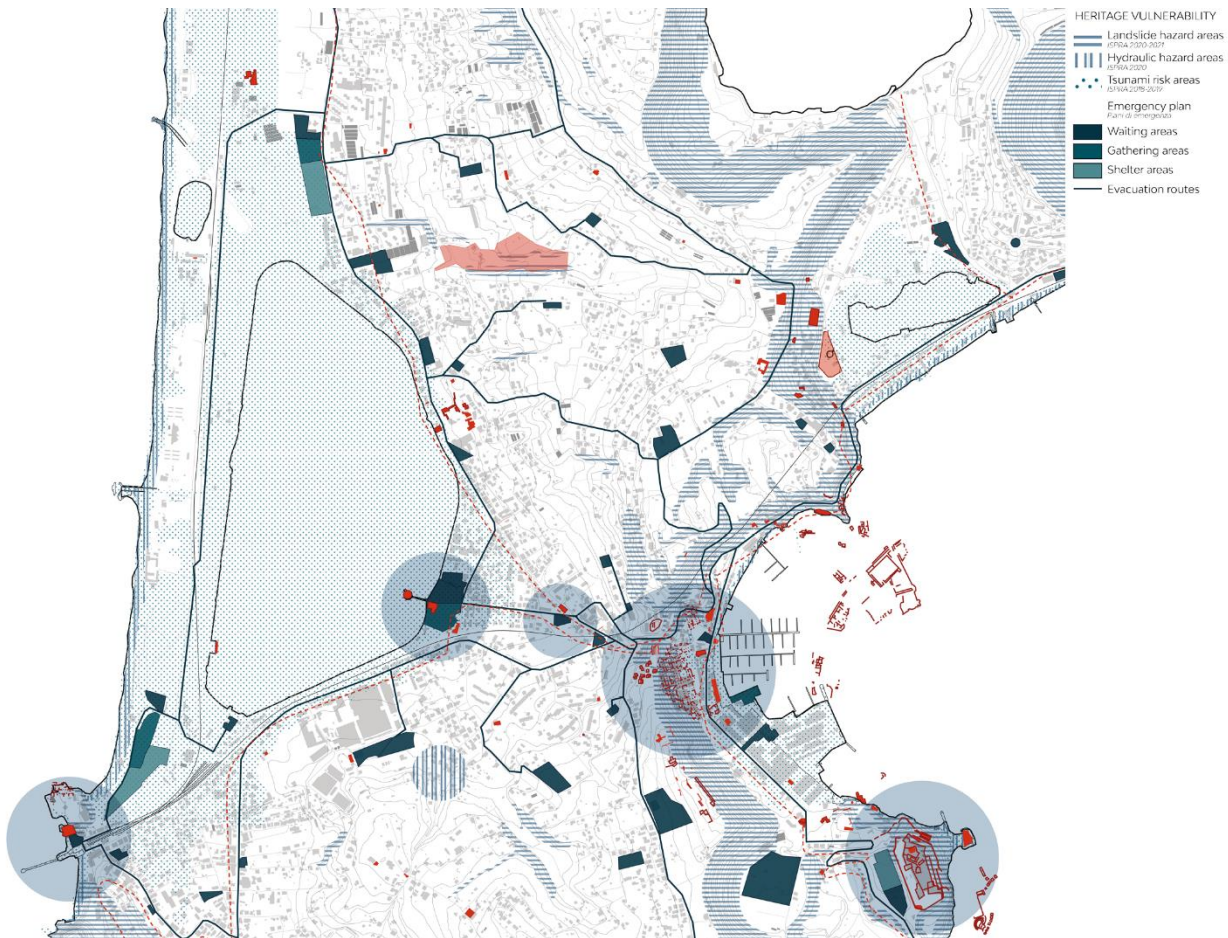
5. Towards a regenerative and integrated approach to "cultural landscapes"

As highlighted by the reference literature, peri-urban areas have the potential to become drivers of an 'alternative growth' fostering new territorial projects capable of promoting ideas, tools and practices for future-oriented development (Russo, 2014). Fragmented areas provide new opportunities to rethink and interpret urban transformation, as it is in discontinuity that space becomes visible (Bianchetti, 2011). Research must therefore focus on the increasing complexity of cities and the dynamics of change, which present ongoing challenges in urban management. Cultural heritage, recognized as a 'driver of resilience' (ICOMOS, 2013), holds critical knowledge for communities and can strengthen their adaptive capacity in response to global risks, including climate change (Jigyasu, 2010). In this sense, heritage becomes a crucial resource not only for conservation but also for the regeneration of transitional territories.

This research represents a preliminary exploration of the shifting definitions of heritage and preservation, emphasizing how these changes emerge not only in

updated policies and regulations but, above all, in real practices. The evolving concept of cultural heritage expands the spaces designated for its conservation, moving beyond a theoretical framework to actively involve the city and its communities. This shift creates new opportunities of socio-spatial regeneration, positioning heritage as a public resource integrated into daily life, as public space open to new uses and functions, rather than simply a touristic or economic asset.

Figure 10. Cultural heritage vulnerability in Campi Flegrei



Source: drawing by the author, 2024, from PE5 CHANGES, Spoke1, Wp4 research

The case of Campi Flegrei provides an opportunity to reflect on urban regeneration centered on the care and valorization of cultural heritage. How can cultural heritage, and particularly archaeological assets, be reactivated to serve as shared spaces and community resources, enhancing living conditions, infrastructure, services, public spaces, and overall urban welfare?

A new approach to territorial management is needed, one that moves beyond a purely restrictive model of heritage protection and instead reinforces its role as a territorial common good (Magnaghi, 2012). A perspective that actively involves local communities and recognizes heritage not as a static asset to be preserved, but as a dynamic driver in shaping more resilient and inclusive cities.

Constructing this preliminary knowledge framework represents a significant step forward for Campi Flegrei, fostering deeper awareness of the scale and potential of its cultural heritage. In a context of widespread risk, these challenges can also be reinterpreted as strategic resources. The integration of heritage protection strategies with emergency planning and risk management offers an opportunity to enhance the accessibility and usability of archaeological sites, making them active components

of a broader territorial network. It also serves as a foundation for integrated strategies, positioning heritage as a territorial infrastructure capable of promoting local welfare developing new networks and alternative itineraries to mass tourism, enhancing accessibility and intermodality, or proposing multifunctional public spaces, conceived also as strategic areas for emergency management, such as assembly points and escape routes.

Peri-urban archaeological areas thus represent an emblematic case of contradiction: they are located at the margins between peripheral urban fringes – remnants of past territorial transformations – and open spaces, often coinciding with rural areas or landscapes of high environmental value. While these sites unintentionally serve as connection nodes between the urban periphery and the countryside, they also constitute a complex system of historical, cultural and landscape values.

Considering current planning tools and regulatory frameworks, it is possible to envision new scenarios in which the protection of archaeological and landscape heritage is brought back to the center of cultural and political debate, generating positive economic and social impacts for the entire territory (De Martino, 2017).

Notes

1. The idea of landscape in transition is related to the notion of *movement*, a slow, gradual, and continuous shift that concerns urban settlements and territories traversed by material and immaterial, morphological and social changes, marked by an erosion of the boundaries between urban and suburban, centre and periphery, city and countryside (Russo, 2023).
2. Italy holds the largest number of sites included in the World Heritage List with 59 properties, 53 of which belong to the cultural heritage category and 5 to the natural heritage category, <https://cultura.gov.it/sitiunesco>.
3. A definition that reflects this discussion is that of the European Commission (2023). *“Cultural heritage is a rich and diverse mosaic of [...] natural, built, and archaeological sites, museums, monuments, works of art, historic cities, literary, musical, audiovisual, and digital works, as well as the knowledge, practices, and traditions of European peoples.”*
http://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/culture-policies/cultural-heritage_en.
4. Agency for Territorial Cohesion, Communication, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Goal 11.
<https://www.agenziacoessione.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/agenda-2030-goal11.pdf>
5. Council of Europe. (2005). *Framework convention on the value of cultural heritage for society* (CETS No. 199). Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faroconvention>
6. Italian Constitution, art. 9
<https://www.governo.it/it/costituzione-italiana/principi-fondamentali/2839#:~:text=9,nell'interesse%20delle%20future%20generazioni>
7. Mission 1 - Digitalization, Innovation, Competitiveness, Culture and Tourism, Component 3 - Tourism and Culture 4.0 <https://pnrr.cultura.gov.it/>
8. Ministry of Culture, Cultural Heritage, Sector Regulations
<https://www.beniculturali.it/normativa-di-settore>
9. Complementary Operational Program (POC) Campania, European Regional Development Fund (FESR) 2014-2020.
<https://porfesr.regione.campania.it/it/news/primo-piano/programma-operativo-complementare>
10. The Archeological Park of Campi Flegrei is a MiC (Ministry of Culture) institute with special autonomy (DM Jan. 23, 2016) and includes the main archeological sites and monuments of Campi Flegrei <https://pafleg.cultura.gov.it/>
11. Roman Theater in Cartagena, Rafael Moneo, 2008, Cartagena, Spain
<https://teatroromano.cartagena.es/index.asp?idioma=2>
12. Tate Modern Gallery, Herzog & de Meuron, 2001, London, England

- <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern>
13. Parque de la Biblioteca de España, Equipo Mazzanti, 2007, Medellin, Colombia
 14. Ministry of Culture: Italian UNESCO World Heritage Sites
<https://cultura.gov.it/sitiunesco>
 15. FAI Report 2003-2013 <https://fondoambiente.it/il-fai/grandi-campagne/i-luoghi-del-cuore/progetto/rapporto-del-decennale/>;
ISTAT Report 2021-2023 <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2024/04/9.pdf>
 16. In Preliminary Landscape Plan of Campania region (PPR 2022) Campi Flegrei are defined as one of the landscape areas in Campania where the phenomenon of settlement dispersion takes on greater significance and where an action on the areas of the peri-urban appears to be relevant. (source: linee guida per il paesaggio. DD 314 15 November 2024 <https://www.territorio.regione.campania.it/paesaggio-blog/linee-guida-per-il-paesaggio>)
 17. Until 2020, the Piscina Mirabilis was under the care of an elderly woman who acted as its informal guardian. In 2020, its management was formally transferred through a public-private partnership to ATS StraMirabilis, a consortium of three non-profit organizations selected through a public tender process. The selection criteria prioritized the third sector and proximity entrepreneurship, aiming to foster local development and community engagement. <https://fondoambiente.it/news/viaggio-nellitalia-virtuosa-piscina-mirabilis-o-la-cattedrale-dellacqua/>
 18. The urban settlement system in Campi Flegrei since the postwar years has experienced a rapid expansion, especially from the 1980s onward. The most significant phenomenon since the postwar period has been the spread of informal settlements: more than 5,000 applications for amnesty permits (some for partial abuses or minor changes) have been submitted on the municipal territory of Bacoli for the three “amnesty” laws (2,154 under Law 47/1985, 1,572 under Law 724/1994 and as many as 1,139 under Law 336/2003). This is a widespread phenomenon both in the territory and by type (housing, but also restaurants, accommodation facilities, beach and leisure facilities, craft activities, etc.), which cannot be addressed in an episodic or merely regulatory way but must be included in the urban and landscape planning of the plan. (Source: PUC Bacoli, 2021. Cognitive-methodological report, Tav. QCO12 Identification of squatter settlements)
 19. The Campi Flegrei caldera has been experiencing significant geological activity, with a progressive ground uplift since 2005. By the end of September 2024, the cumulative uplift at Rione Terra in Pozzuoli – the point of maximum deformation – reached approximately 133.5 cm, with an additional 15.5 cm recorded between January and September 2024. In early 2025, the rate of ground deformation increased, with uplift reaching approximately 15 mm per month. This acceleration has been accompanied by intensified seismic activity, including a magnitude 4.4 earthquake on March 13, 2025. (source: Department of civil protection, Council of ministers <https://www.protezionecivile.gov.it/it/>; National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology (INGV) <https://www.ingv.it/>)
 20. Istat's 2019 statistical data for the Campania region show that 5,801,692 people (9.6 percent of Italy's total resident population) reside in Campania. Slightly more than half are concentrated in the province of Naples (source: 15_Campania_scheda www.istat.it)
 21. From 2021 and 2022, Italy's protected areas recorded an overall increase in land consumption of 104.4 ha, including 18.8 ha in Campania. Specifically, in the “2023 Report. Land Consumption, Spatial Dynamics and Ecosystem Services” Campi Flegrei Regional Park (<https://parcodeicampiflegrei.it/>) is listed among the top 20 Regional Natural Parks by hectares of land consumption, with a land consumption density of 5.2 m²/ha. (Source: ISPRA processing of EUAP data and SNPA mapping)
 22. The “2023 Report. Land Consumption, Spatial Dynamics and Ecosystem Services” stated that the province of Naples had 35% of soil consumed in 2022 in relation to the provincial area and an additional increase of 105 ha, after last year's nearly 10 m²/ha/year. (source: ISPRA elaborations on SNPA mapping. Table 19. Soil consumed (2022) and net annual land consumption (2021-2022) at the provincial level.)

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Originality

The author declares that this manuscript is original, has not been published before and is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere, in English or any other language. The manuscript has been read and approved by all named authors and there are no other persons who satisfied the criteria for authorship but are not listed. The author also declares to have obtained the permission to reproduce in this manuscript any text, illustrations, charts, tables, photographs, or other material from previously published sources (journals, books, websites, etc).

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