

Designing and building sensorial and interactive spaces in the natural landscape

The growing need to reconsider the relationship between man and nature calls for new ways of interaction. In this re-connection to natural values, architecture can create points of contact and experiences that maximize therapeutic benefits. This study explores the challenge of designing environments that foster positive connections with nature, focusing on the Cilento National Park, Vallo di Diano, and Alburni. The goal is to expand interest in inland areas by raising awareness of the architectural and landscape value of the local heritage.

This project proposes a strategy to enhance the area by involving Laurino and other surrounding municipalities, using a scalable methodology. The proposal includes the creation of alternative tourist routes, with sustainable architectural projects that promote local development. A new interactive exhibition center serves as the focal

point, while a suspended path over the landscape offers an immersive experience.

Enhancing places like the Cilento Park can counter this trend by offering sustainable tourism and reconnecting people with nature.

The multi-scale approach of this study provides a comprehensive strategy for landscape enhancement, transferable to other contexts. The analysis and representation of the territory form a solid foundation for future environmental and cultural enhancement projects.



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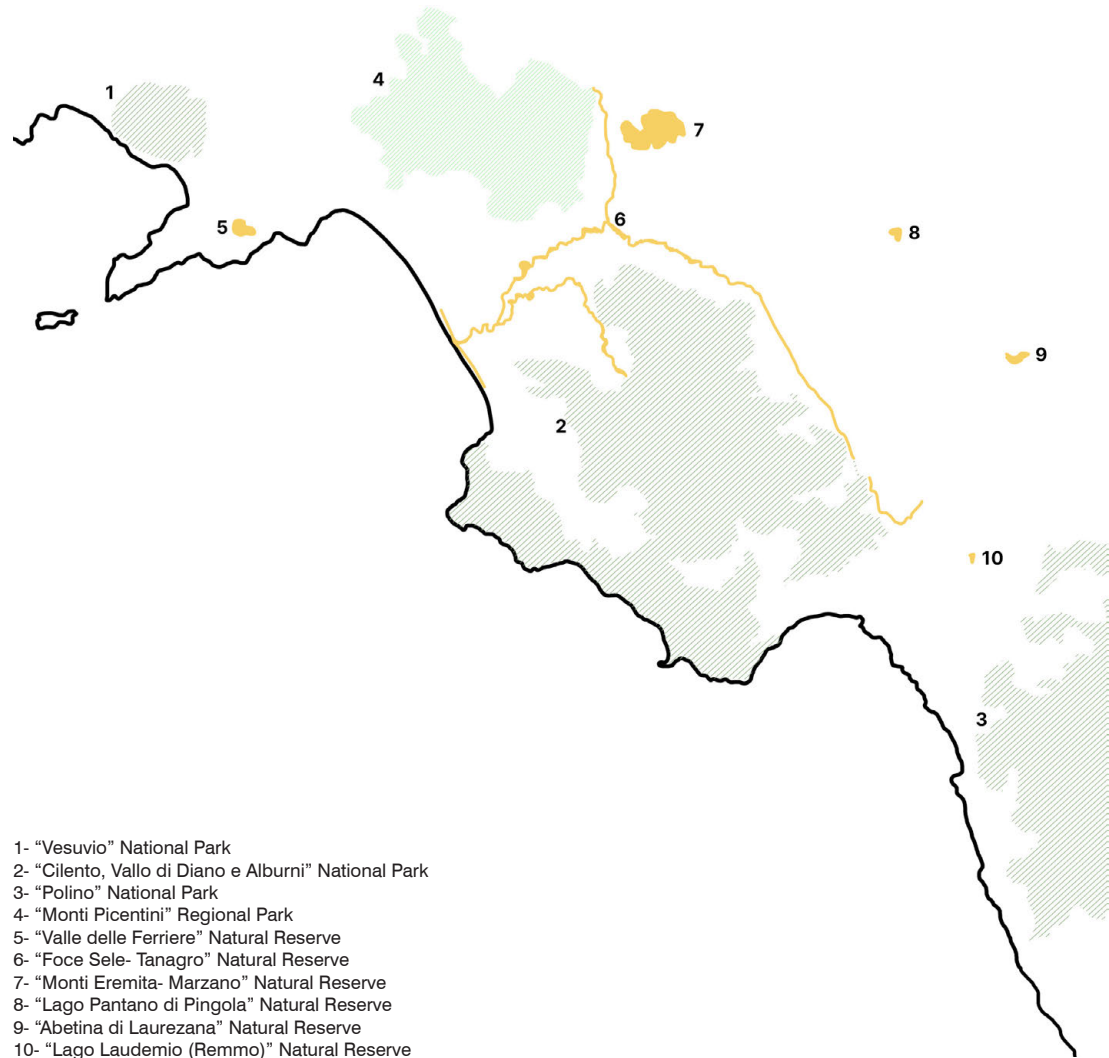
INTRODUCTION

The growing need to reconsider the relationship between humans and nature involves exploring new ways and modes of interaction. In this gradual rapprochement and rebalancing of interests and values towards nature-related lifestyles, architecture has the opportunity to create points of contact and relational experiences, maximizing beneficial and therapeutic effects for humans. This paper addresses the challenge of designing living environments capable of fostering positive connections with nature, through the case study of the enhancement project of the Parco Nazionale del Cilento, Vallo di Diano e Alburni (Fig. 1).

The research objective is to explore design strategies to expand the park's area of interest by redirecting urban policies towards the inland areas, triggering virtuous processes of awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of heritage from both an architectural and environmental/landscape perspective, considering it as a resource for local development.

The Parco Nazionale del Cilento is located south of the Campania region and covers an area of 180,000 hectares. Created in 1991, it was declared a Biosphere Reserve in 1997 and a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1998. In 2010, it was designated a geopark. In the same year, the mediterranean diet, born and recognized in the Cilento culinary tradition, was declared an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO. Despite being a tourist attraction, interest in the park is mainly limited to certain cities and the coast, which suffers from tourist overcrowding during the summer. The potential of the inland areas, equally rich in history, culture, and landscape value, remains unexplored and could be particularly attractive within ecotourism circuits and new frontiers of forest therapy.

Through a methodology (Fig. 2) that addresses the issue at four scales – XL, L, M, and S – various design and study variables are explored in the territory. The multi-scale approach allows



- 1- "Vesuvio" National Park
- 2- "Cilento, Vallo di Diano e Alburni" National Park
- 3- "Polino" National Park
- 4- "Monti Picentini" Regional Park
- 5- "Valle delle Ferriere" Natural Reserve
- 6- "Foce Sele- Tanagro" Natural Reserve
- 7- "Monti Eremita- Marzano" Natural Reserve
- 8- "Lago Pantano di Pingola" Natural Reserve
- 9- "Abetina di Laurezana" Natural Reserve
- 10- "Lago Laudemio (Remmo)" Natural Reserve

Fig. 1 - Location of the major natural areas in the region | Source: Created by the author.

for tackling projects with the appropriate tools and representations at each scale at the M and S scales, a detailed focus on the municipality of Laurino is proposed, observed as a possible scenario for new tourist itineraries and spaces.

The detailed study of the Laurino area included a digital survey carried out using image-based techniques such as aerial photogrammetry and range-based techniques using a dynamic laser scanner.

Specifically, the Laboratorio Modelli – Surveying and Geo-Mapping for Environment and Cultural Heritage of the Department of Civil Engineering of the University of Salerno conducted a preliminary survey of the Laurino cave and its surroundings to generate a database for the future enhancement of the hypogeal and rocky heritage of the area. The integration of aerial photogrammetry and dynamic laser scanning allowed for the precise collection of environmental data, especially from areas with limited accessibility and poor natural lighting. The use of SLAM technology (Simultaneous Localization and Mapping) was essential for navigating and mapping the cave's interior, while the aerial photogrammetry extended the survey to the surrounding terrain.

The results of these respective techniques were integrated into a single model to faithfully represent the environment for analysis and intervention. It was possible to reconstruct the internal and external space of one of the caves in the area, analyzed as a case study from a design perspective.

THE PARCO NAZIONALE DEL CILENTO AS A VECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL VALUE

The case study focuses on the Parco Nazionale del Cilento, Vallo di Diano e Alburni, located in the province of Salerno in the Cilento area in southern Italy, which includes a total of 8 mountain communities and 80 municipalities. The park is recognized for its high landscape value, with pristine

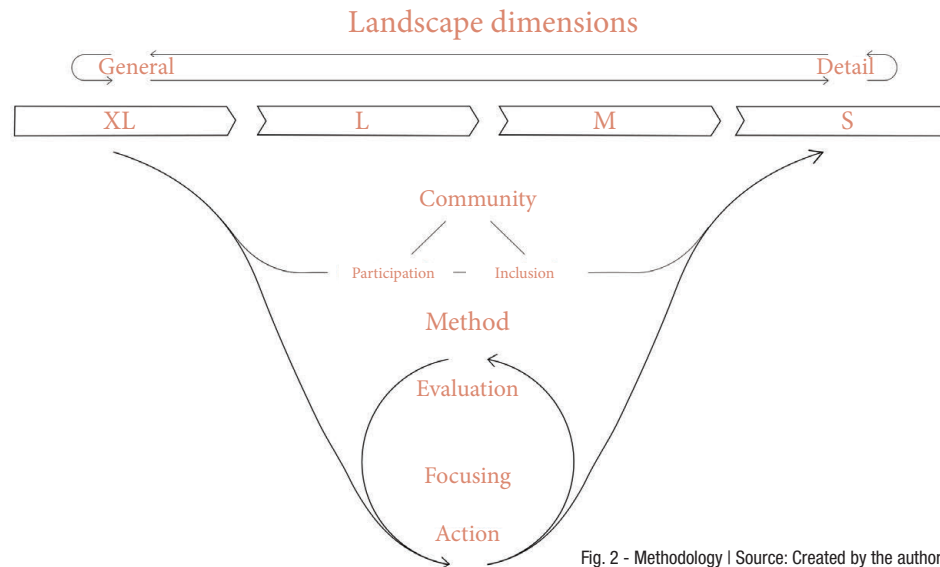


Fig. 2 - Methodology | Source: Created by the author

coastal areas designated as protected zones. Inland, the hilly and mountainous areas have a low tourist impact, thus preserving their original environmental matrix.

A first step towards the conservation and enhancement of the park was taken in 1998 when the park's protection perimeter was approved by decree of the Minister of the Environment. Its area corresponds to 181,048 hectares and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, along with the archaeological sites of Paestum and Velia and the Certosa di Padula, for the exceptional value of its landscape.

Since 1997, it has been declared a MAB Biosphere Reserve and joined the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network in 2010 due to the beauty of its geological heritage. The main objective is to preserve its geodiversity while combining its conservation with sustainable development actions, involving local communities in the process.

The cultural and historical relevance of this territory derives from a complex historical stratification with a series of influences that have enriched its identity. The park should be conceived not only as a container of natural and cultural resources valued for their individual merits but as an intricate territorial system inhabited by a millenary tapestry of peoples and civilizations woven into the living landscape.

Likewise, the relationship established between the park and contemporary society highlights a problem that has been accentuated over the years, rooted in a dualistic model based on the polarization between areas of development and those characterized by abandonment and marginalization. This creates a series of issues that call into question the cultural and natural richness of the places.

Today, there is a significant disconnection between the inland areas of the park, which struggle to organize themselves as economic and tourist

centers, and the coastal areas, which are overcrowded, especially during the summer.

This paper addresses the topic of enhancing the natural landscape of Cilento through a project aimed at promoting its rediscovery and use by building a network that strengthens the offer of more ecological and conscious tourism. This effort focuses on valuing local product production, strengthening the internal market with new job and training opportunities, and counteracting youth migration due to the lack of employment and alternatives. In this sense, architectural design becomes a tool for addressing broader issues, aiming to trigger processes of cultural recognition and economic growth for the Cilento natural landscape.

THE MULTI-SCALE PROJECT FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE OF CILENTO

The methodology adopted to build the project strategy is characterized by a multi-scale approach. Specifically, the project is divided into four scales: XL, L, M, and S. Each scale corresponds to objectives and strategic actions that are verified and further explored in the subsequent scales. From the analysis and intervention strategy at a territorial scale, the work is deepened at a detailed scale within a specific project for the municipality of Laurino, located centrally within the park's territory.

xl

The XL scale strategy was based on the study of existing urban planning tools, with particular attention to the Park Plan (Gambino, R., Nicoletti, D., 2001), aiming to understand the park's characteristics and current strategic objectives. The various themes analyzed were divided into topics and visualized through diagrammatic drawings, highlighting the central area of the park and the municipality of Laurino, which were studied in greater detail at the following scale.

The analysis highlighted that the park's identity is tied to a collage of images produced by economic, historical, and cultural events, along with the complex morphology of the territory.

The macro-scale strategy built a framework for action and general planning, aiming to promote the growth and consolidation of inland areas and development within the park and its surroundings. Supporting this strategy, the identified themes were reinterpreted through the lens of the United

Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the 2030 Agenda, focusing particularly on themes related to Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9), Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), and Life on Land (SDG 15).

The analysis identified five main themes, corresponding to critical issues in the territory to be addressed through the strategy's construction (Fig. 3). Specifically, the five themes are:



Fig. 3 - Critical issues in territory | Source: Created by the author in collaboration with Valentina Astini

1. Progressive population of inland areas:

The current settlement system of the inland area of the national park presents a general condition of weakness and marginalization due to the continuous demographic decline, especially in the heart of the park, where 60 out of 80 municipalities have a population of fewer than 3,000 inhabitants, and 15 have fewer than 1,000.

2. Low visibility and tourist appeal:

The tourist offer is underdeveloped in the park's inland areas, focusing more on the coastal strip and generating no economic impact for the inland areas. The naturalistic and historical-cultural vocation of the inland territory has never been fully appreciated, leading to economic disinterest and a gradual loss of territorial identity.

3. Lack of internal connections:

The main transportation routes are concentrated along the coast and the internal axis of the park, leaving the inland areas poorly connected to the main mobility systems, causing isolation.

4. Limited access to basic services:

In the inland areas, access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and transportation is limited, leading to a marked dependency on services available in more densely populated cities.

5. Underutilization and undervaluation of historical and cultural heritage:

The underestimation of the rich historical and cultural heritage is another issue affecting the park, resulting in inadequate maintenance and lack of enhancement of the urban historic centers. This situation reflects a lack of recognition for the existing cultural legacy, eroding its cultural identity and sense of belonging to the places.

The project proposes possible action guidelines to reverse or mitigate the problems identified during the analysis phase. Starting by enhancing positive aspects and proposing new urban configurations, the project aims to foster more equitable and sustainable development while creating innovative

activities within the park. The search for strategies to enhance the park identifies the Cilento natural heritage as the integration of two concepts: "cultural landscape" and "ecological tourism." This concept serves as a laboratory for experimenting with integrated policies aimed at preserving the full functionality of habitats and ecosystems, with a view toward protecting and enhancing the park's natural and cultural aspects.

Architect Ceballos-Lascurain defines the concept of ecotourism as:

"A responsible form of travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas to enjoy, appreciate, and study the natural attractions (landscape, flora, and wildlife) of such areas, as well as any cultural manifestation (past or present) that may be found there, through a process that promotes conservation, has a low environmental and cultural impact, and encourages the active and socioeconomically beneficial involvement of local populations" (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1922).

The emergence of this concept has led to the rise of new types of tourism linked to elements of culture, nature, gastronomy, and heritage, where one can experience the most authentic and characteristic aspects of a destination through playful and contemplative elements such as interpretation and education. This contributes to the conservation and safeguarding of ecosystems and local communities.

The landscape within the Cilento park represents a unique resource capable of linking ecological, cultural, and environmental interests with tourist and economic activities. Similarly, promoting ecological and cultural tourism within the park supports the conservation and protection of the social and identity value of these places. The XL scale strategy is implemented through five specific actions (Fig. 4):

1. Recovery and enhancement of natural landscape systems:

Promoting the creation of parks and spaces for outdoor activities that enrich existing public spac-

es. This includes installing trekking networks to promote ecotourism and direct contact with nature, boosting regional economies, and promoting environmental and economic sustainability. Among the proposed initiatives is the reactivation of the Vallo di Diano railway line, currently disused, to be transformed into a new linear park.

2. Creation of a territorial system based on centers and micro-centers:

This action responds to the need to improve accessibility to equipment and services in currently abandoned areas, establishing a network that connects the entire park through the creation of micro-centers strategically located in the inland part. The micro-centers were carefully selected and evenly distributed across the territory to serve as meeting points and service hubs for nearby communities. Their goal is to reduce urban pressure, promote more balanced and sustainable territorial development.

3. Creation of historical-cultural itineraries:

The aim is to transform the park's interior into a distinct tourist destination, far from mass tourism and centered on a slower, more authentic travel experience. This approach aims to attract travelers interested in exploring lesser-known but authentic natural sites, preserving the integrity of historic sites.

4. Sustainable mobility:

This action aims to promote cycling circuits and improve collective transportation, focusing on sustainable transport systems for tourists and residents, including charging points for electric vehicles. This will help establish an efficient network between centers and micro-centers, connected to other areas of the Park. The project also proposes implementing multi-modal stations for smooth transitions between different means of transportation, offering flexibility and sustainability options for the community and tourists.

5. Park entrances:

The project defines certain towns in the area as

“gateways” to the park due to their location and urban relevance. The gates not only mark entrances but also serve as a link between the park and its territory, featuring information centers and distribution hubs for internal tourism itineraries. In this scheme, micro-centers play a fundamental role in providing essential services and serving as starting points for exploring the park’s paths and attractions.

l

At the L scale, the project defines a series of small targeted interventions connected to a network of municipalities (Fig. 5), aiming to consolidate the central area of the territory due to its geographical location. The network comprises the municipalities of Laurino, Vallo dell’Angelo, Piaggine, Sacco, Roscigno, Felitto, and Magliano Vetere.

These municipalities are rich in cultural and historical heritage, as well as natural landscapes. The goal of the interventions is to provide an identity to the network of municipalities by linking them through new creative and introspective experiences, connected to nature and united by a single itinerary-path that serves as a cohesive and articulating element of all the spatial and natural scenarios proposed.

The proposed itinerary takes into account three fundamental aspects that connect the projects scattered across the territory: location, design model, and enhancement of natural resources. Specifically, the location and role of each project are evaluated case by case, observing the specificities and characteristics of the territory.

The interventions are also tied by a common concept that significantly contributes to the construction of a shared identity. The projects are based on the use of local and natural materials, promoting universal accessibility and energy efficiency. Some of the activities (Fig. 6) related to these new landscapes are:

- Itinerant markets promoting local production, enhancing typical gastronomy and crafts.
- Trails and interpretation centers through routes that educate about the historical and natural heritage, connecting various points of interest.
- Temporary shelters and rest areas for hikers and climbers along trekking routes.
- Picnic and rest areas in contact with nature.
- Information and support points for park activities.
- Observation points for flora and fauna, including pavilions and cabins strategically placed to observe the territory’s biodiversity.

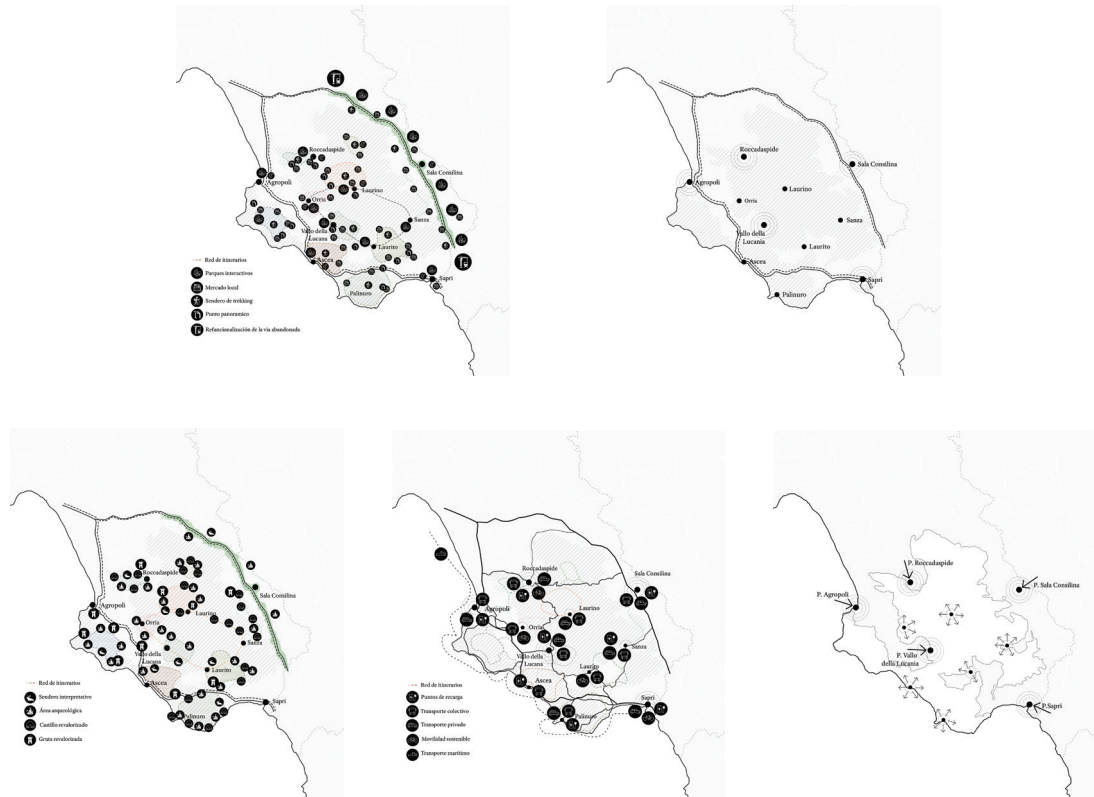


Fig. 4 - Proposal guidelines | Source: Created by the author in collaboration with Valentina Astini

- Interactive pavilions and educational spaces linking nature with playful experiences.

- Open-air museums, creating immersive experiences related to local initiatives and stories.

- Lookouts and panoramic points.

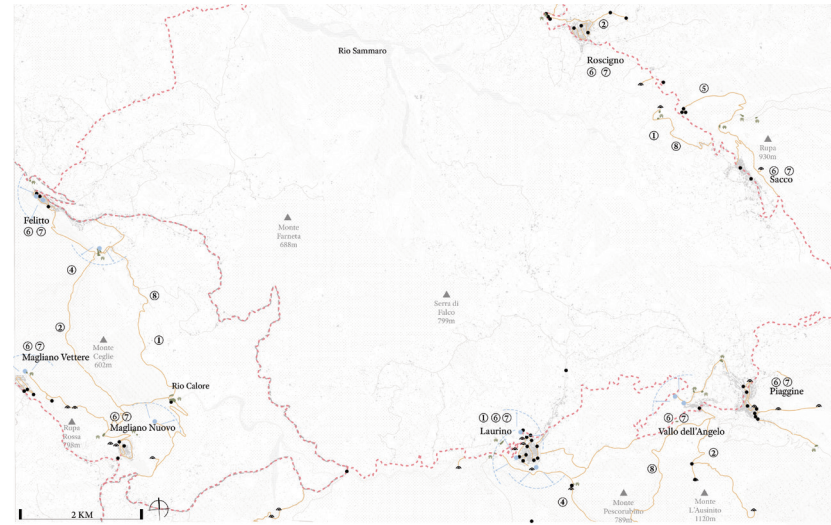
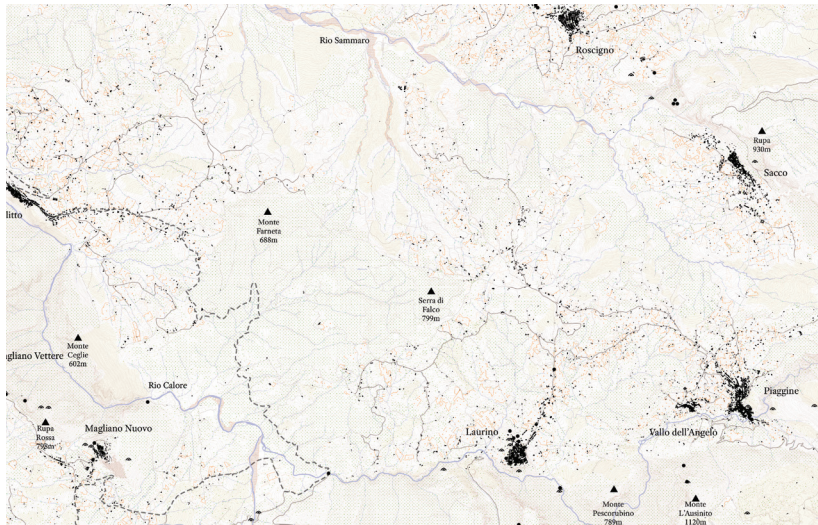


Fig. 5 - Composition of the center of the Parco Nazionale del Cilento | Source: Created by the author

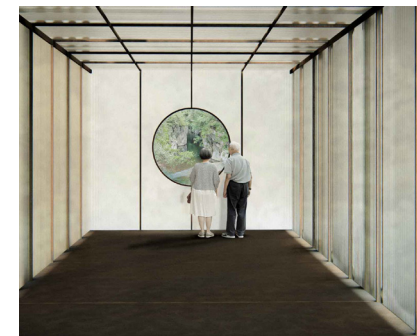


Fig. 6 - Activities related to new landscapes | Source: Created by the author

m

At the M scale, the territory of the municipality of Laurino is analyzed in greater detail. Laurino is characterized by being a historic settlement with a rich cultural heritage, which today is unfortunately underappreciated. Its small community faces a significant issue of demographic decline. Laurino is located at the geometric center of the national park. The presence of several churches, monasteries, noble palaces, squares, and alleys preserves the original medieval layout, which dialogues with the distinctive environment of the park. With a total area of 7,042 km² and a population of 1,277 inhabitants as of 2021, one of Laurino's urban qualities is the sequence of squares of various sizes characterizing the historic center.

The intervention proposed at the M (Fig. 7) scale aims to recover public spaces and create meaningful connections between the city's historical sites. The project creates a path through the his-



Fig. 7 - Planimetric of the interpretive segment | Source: Created by the author
<http://disegnarecon.univaq.it>

toric center, involving various stops of historical and natural significance. The path culminates with the creation of a small interactive pavilion located at the panoramic viewpoint Belvedere Degli Ulivi and the design of an exhibition space inside the cave. The solution unites knowledge and contemplation of the landscape in a new space, enhancing the natural environment and rocky architecture of the area.

Through a simple design language, the project seeks to create continuity with the built environment, respecting the forms and materials of the

existing landscape. This strategy aims to consolidate, under a single path called the interpretive trail, the network of public spaces scattered throughout the city's urban fabric. The project is realized through the spatial articulation of a corten steel strip that changes configuration depending on the locations it encounters and the types of spaces it creates. In some areas, it forms benches and planters, while in others, it takes the shape of an explanatory panel to increase awareness of the historical importance of different sites (Fig. 8).

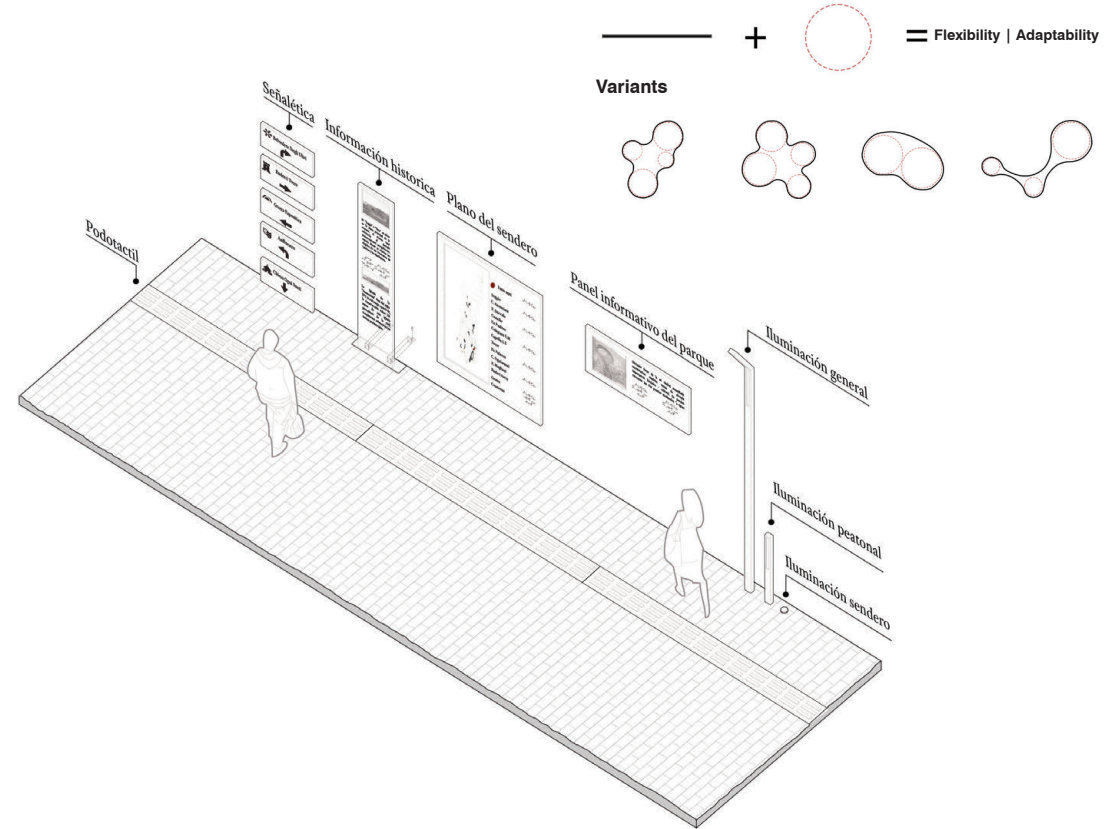


Fig. 8 - Compositional elements of urban furniture and the interpretive trail Source: Created by the author

S | Landscape amplifier. A sensorial space project to immerse oneself in the natural landscape.

At the S scale, the project focuses on enhancing the existing cave at the Belvedere Degli Ulivi. The proposal was studied starting from the analysis of an effective surveying and representation method to capture the complexity of this landscape.

As stated in the introduction, a digital survey was carried out using image-based techniques like aerial photogrammetry and range-based techniques using a dynamic laser scanner with SLAM (Simultaneous Localization and Mapping) technology. Both technologies and their respective results were integrated into a single final model. The photogrammetric technique was implemented to extend the survey area to the surrounding context of the cave. This involves acquiring data through aerial photographs, allowing for the construction of a point cloud (Fig. 9) and subsequently a textured 3D mesh. The tool used for this purpose

was a DJI Mini 3 drone. For the interior of the cave, specific morphological features of the site were considered, as the space has reduced accessibility and lacks natural lighting. In this context, the GeoSLAM ZEB Horizon was used, a laser scanner equipped with sensors to capture the composition of the space.

This integrated model provided by the Laboratorio Modelli of the University of Salerno, delivered as a single E57 file, was used as the basis for technical documentation and modeling of both the cave and the respective square and environment. Floor plans and sections were created by importing the point cloud into AutoCAD software and subsequently into the chosen 3D modeling program, SketchUp Pro.

The cave is located at the end of the interpretive trail on a small clearing above the cliff of Monte Cavallo Hill, where the Belvedere degli Ulivi is located. On the cliff edge, enclosed by a stone

wall, one can hear the sound of the Gorgo-nero springs. On one side of the square is the landing point of the Vollo dell'angelo attraction, currently not in use. On the other side is the cave entrance, accessed via a small space at a lower elevation, reachable by a steep ramp or staircase (currently, access to the cave is restricted, and it is in a state of degradation).

The project focuses on the square and the cave (Fig. 10-13), proposing an intermediate space that interacts with the natural environment, inviting visitors to slow down and take a break from the hustle and bustle of daily life and city living. Following the line of the interpretive trail, at the point where the square is reached, the ground gradually rises, forming a gently sloping ramp that leads into the cave. Inside, a suspended walkway made of natural stone leads to the internal exhibition space.



Fig. 9 - Use of point cloud for modeling the area of interest! Source: Created by the author

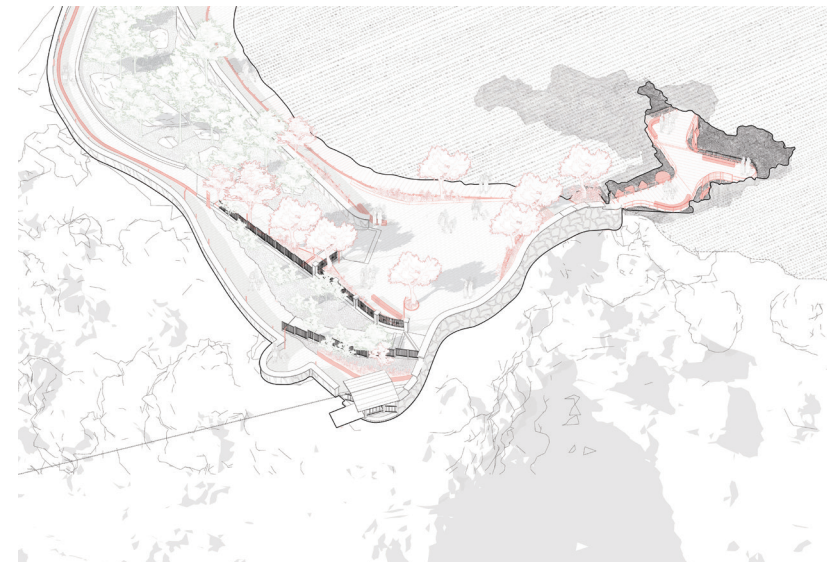


Fig. 10 - Axonometric perspective of the intervention in the square and cave! Source: Created by the author

The walkway is built with a dry assembly structure to minimize impact on the natural ground, offering reversibility and greater adaptability. This is achieved with a metal structure with adjustable supports that hold a wooden floor through a sub-structure.

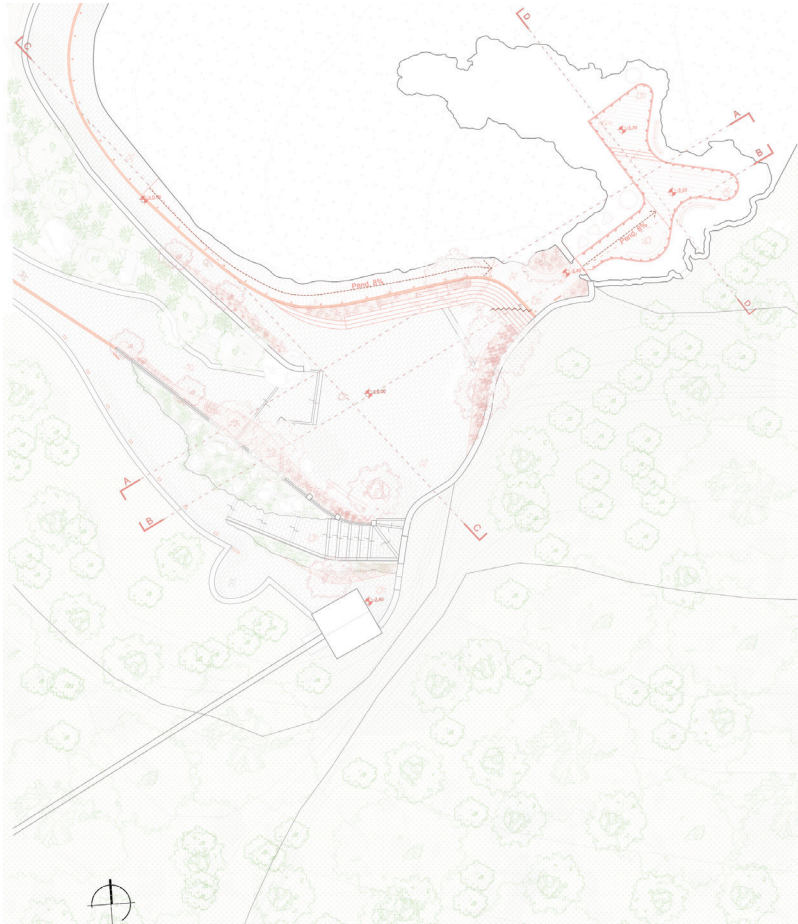


Fig. 11 - Planimetric view of the intervention in the square and cave | Source: Created by the author

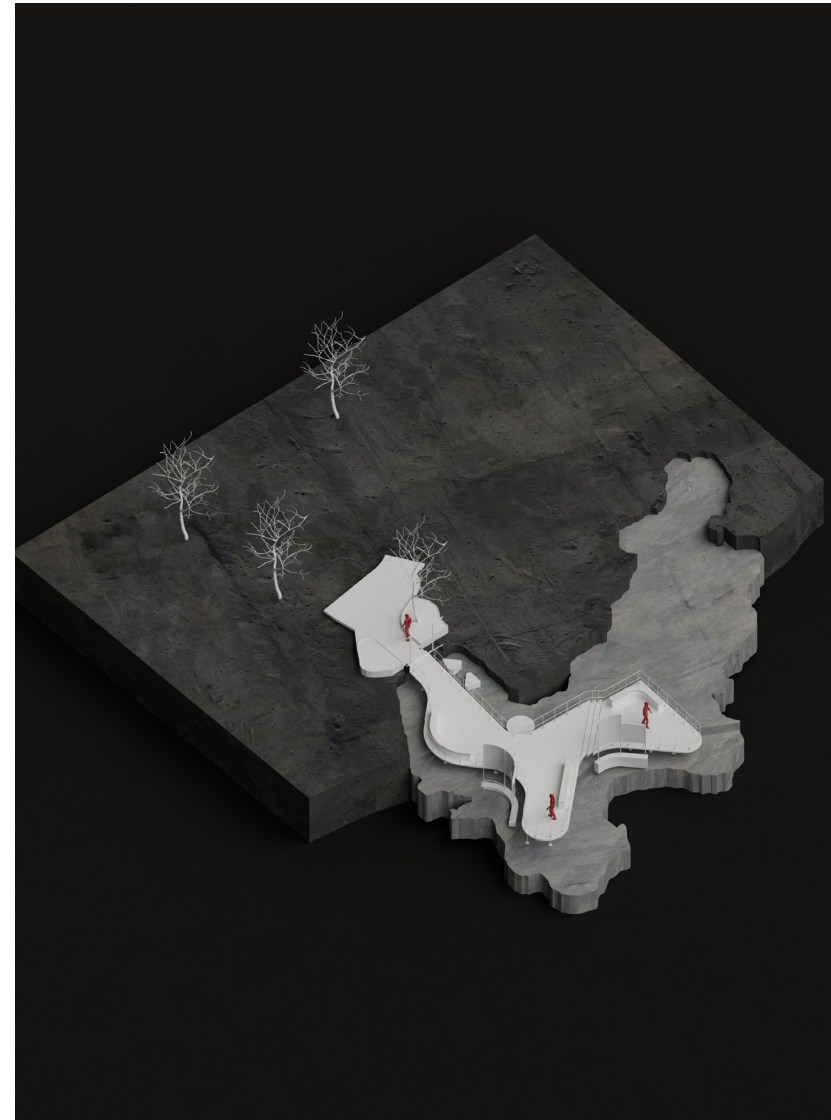


Fig. 12 - Virtual Model of the cave's interior | Source: Created by the author



Fig. 13 - Pedestrian perspective of the Belvedere degli Ulivi | Source: Created by the author

The design experiment concludes with a small pavilion perched on the cliff (Fig. 14-17), seeking to reveal new perspectives of the landscape. This space is called the natural amplifier for its ability to enhance the natural qualities of the surrounding environment, inviting the visitor to engage with the landscape. A thin walkway clings to the cliff, serving as a path connecting two spaces at the same elevation but separated from each other:

er: the Volo dell'angelo and the cave, generating a new access route into the cave. This route acts as an antechamber, emphasizing the sensory and emotional aspect of the landscape, offering the Volo dell'angelo a new arrival space.

A series of radially arranged shelves support the walkway, composed of a substructure holding a wooden floor. The cover is made up of inverted

shelves and a substructure supporting a sequence of polycarbonate sheets arranged like scales. The wood cladding is part of a strategy to use low-impact materials. Taking advantage of its placement along the path, a "scaly skin texture" allows for total ventilation of the space, both horizontally and vertically, reducing the impact of a possible greenhouse effect thanks to the translucent cover.

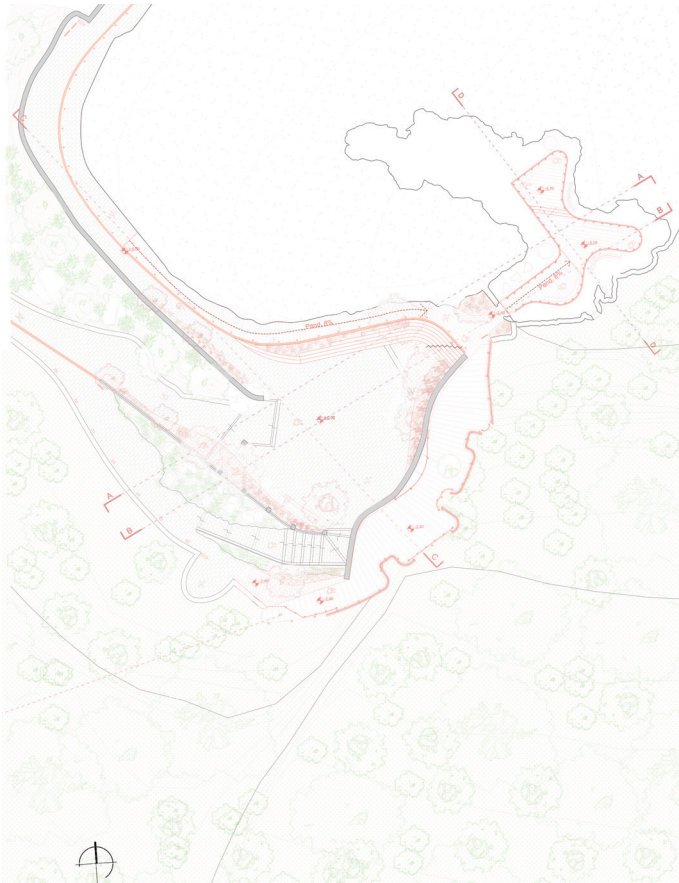


Fig. 14 - Planimetric view of the pavilion and the square | Source: Created by the author

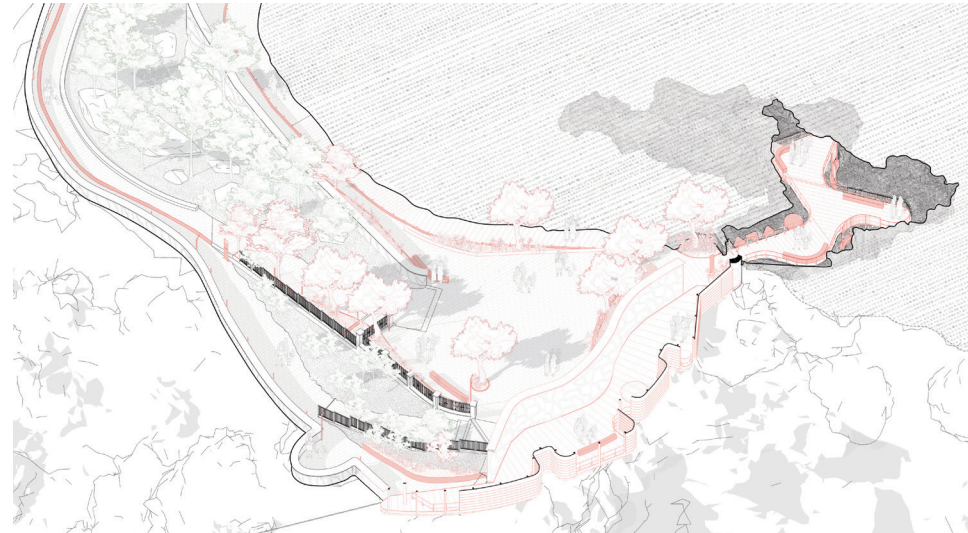


Fig. 15 - Axonometric perspective of the pavilion and the square | Source: Created by the author



Fig. 16 - Pedestrian perspective of the interior of the cave | Source: Created by the author



Fig. 17 - Interaction of the pavilion with the landscape | Source: Created by the author



Fig. 18 - Aerial perspective of the pavilion | Source: Created by the author

CONCLUSIONS

Living in a landscape with which to establish a constant relationship and dialogue is of fundamental importance for understanding the value that natural and historical systems bring to our lives. Contemporary society, characterized by its fluidity (Bauman, 2000), faces a growing disconnection from its environment due to the experiences and sensations resulting from immediate consumption. Individual and collective identities have been fragmented and weakened due to the increasing individualization of the population and its perception of society.

The enhancement of natural, historical, and cultural systems through education, awareness, and appreciation offers a sustainable and authentic alternative. Contact with the local population, its traditions, and its culture helps connect more deeply, allowing for a greater understanding of their ecological and cultural importance.

The proposed project creates a pause, a reflection, and a dialogue with the environment. Today, architecture can play a vital role as a tool to support knowledge and the pleasure of experiencing the territory, offering new interactive dynamics with the current and cultural landscape. The multi-scale methodology allows for multiple interventions to be articulated within a unified vision, responding to the common goal of enhancing the landscape as a territorial resource.

The landscape project encompasses aspects such as environmental sustainability, the conservation of nature, and the improvement of urban quality of life, creating spaces for outdoor activities, promoting social interaction, and thus contributing to society's well-being.

Further developments of the project may involve additional strategic plans initiated by the municipality of Laurino, such as the construction of a pedestrian walkway along the mountain perimeter, connecting the city's entrance square with the

Belvedere Degli Ulivi.

The research was also presented during European Parks Day in May 2024 (<https://www.europarc.org/managing-parks/european-day-of-parks/>), with a small exhibition inside the cloister of the Sant'Antonio complex in Laurino. On this occasion, representatives from institutions and public bodies, along with local citizens, had the opportunity to engage with the authors regarding the proposals and research prospects.

A second phase of consultation and community engagement is planned for September 2024, when a workshop will be held in Laurino, involving a group of Argentine and South African students on a study trip to the University of Salerno. The students will be guided by teachers and tutors in an ideas lab to improve the usability of the city's public spaces.

Finally, considering the large-scale strategic project, the applied methodology opens up a range of possibilities for developing further itineraries throughout the park, transformed into a true network of natural environments and landscape rooms connected by the common goal of building a network of natural habitats that emphasizes the value and importance of natural systems and landscapes.

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