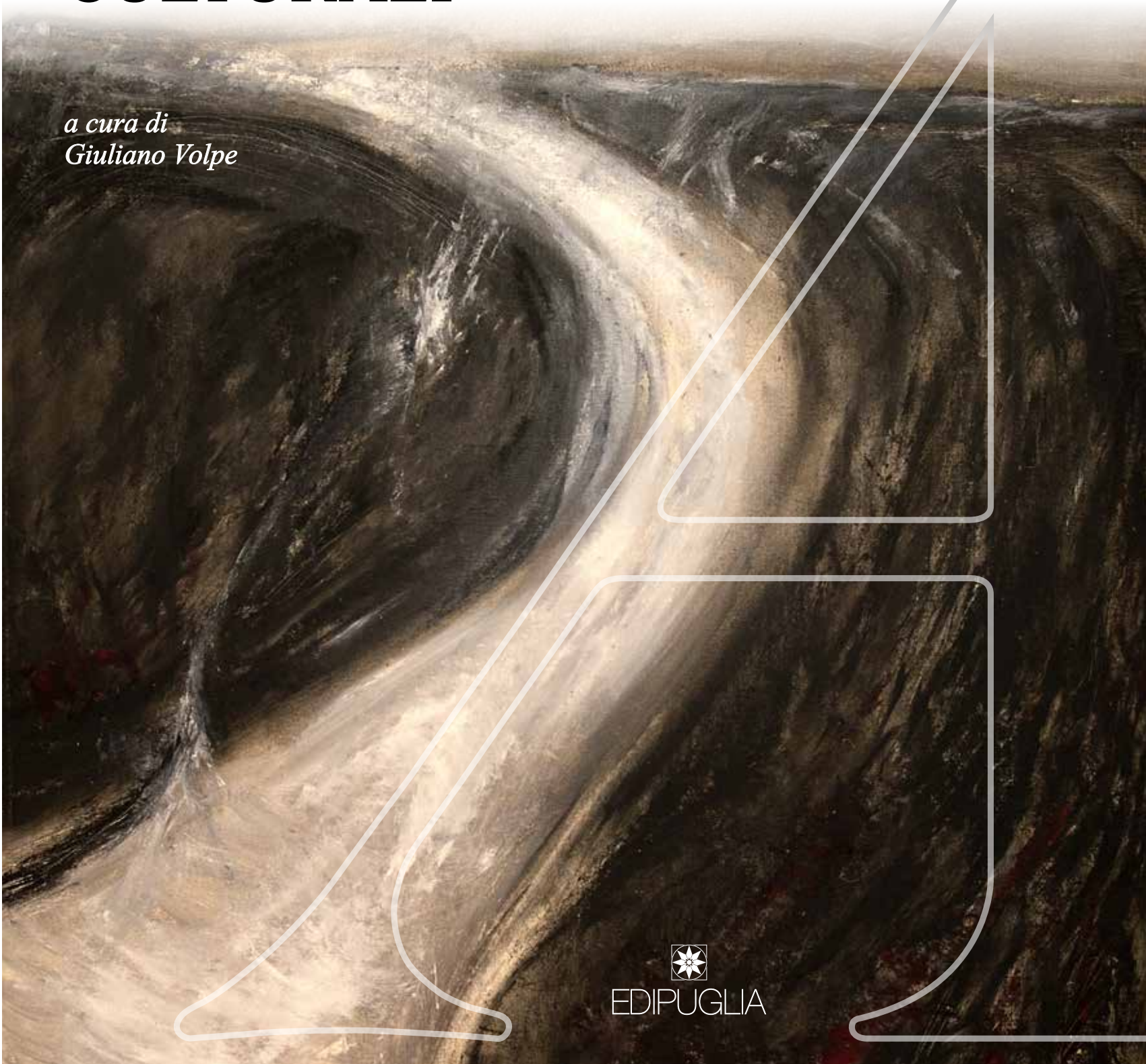
PAESAGGI STORICI, TRADIZIONI E IDENTITÀ CULTURALI

a cura di
Giuliano Volpe



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PAESAGGI STORICI, TRADIZIONI E IDENTITÀ CULTURALI

Historical Landscapes, Traditions and Cultural Identities

Contributi interdisciplinari dello Spoke 1 del progetto CHANGES
(Cultural Heritage Innovation for Next-Gen Sustainable Society)

a cura di
Giuliano Volpe

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THE LATENT LANDSCAPE-CITY: TERRITORIAL CARE AND ENVIRONMENTAL STRUCTURES IN THE ANIENE VALLEY

Alessandra Capuano[*]

ABSTRACT

The Aniene Valley is explored as a metropolitan framework through which to investigate new design approaches based on environmental structures and territorial care. Developed within the PNRR CHANGES programme, the research interprets the valley as a complex landscape where ecological systems, archaeological heritage, productive areas, infrastructures, and settlements interact across multiple spatial and temporal layers. Rather than considering fragmentation solely as a condition of decline, the paper identifies it as a latent resource capable of generating new territorial relationships. Drawing on the concepts of landscape as palimpsest and "context of contexts", it proposes a design approach that reconnects tangible and intangible heritage while revealing hidden ecological and spatial continuities. Within this perspective, the greenway emerges as a territorial device capable of reconnecting fragmented landscapes and integrating ecological networks, archaeological heritage, mobility, and public space. Design is thus understood as an interpretative and exploratory practice that uncovers existing potentials and constructs future scenarios for metropolitan regeneration, turning the Aniene Valley into a coherent territorial vision.

Keywords: Aniene Valley, Greenway, Heritage and Environmental Valorisation, Landscape Design, Metropolitan Regeneration.

This essay examines the Aniene Valley as a territorial framework through which to develop a design proposal aimed at enhancing a landscape that is simultaneously rich in resources and deeply fragmented. The reflections presented here stem from research conducted within the broader framework of the PNRR CHANGES project, and more specifically within Spoke 1, dedicated to Historical Landscapes, Traditions and Cultural Identities. Within this context, the research project *Sacred Landscapes: Ancient and New Routes to Re-signify Relationships between Archaeology, Nature and Settlements between Rome, Tivoli and Subiaco*, developed by our team, investigated how landscapes, mobility infrastructures and cultural heritage can contribute to reconfiguring territorial relationships across metropolitan and inland contexts. Today, this condition emerges along the Aniene Valley through discontinuities: ecological systems interrupted by infrastructures, archaeological traces detached from everyday life, productive landscapes transformed into enclaves, and open spaces fragmented by low-quality urbanization. Rather than interpreting these fractures only as conditions of loss, this contribution considers them as opportunities for re-reading metropolitan territories through their differences, overlaps and latent relationships. In continuity with the wider multidisciplinary work developed by the research groups involved in the project, the Aniene Valley is understood not as a static background, but as a complex and evolving landscape: a stratified system shaped over time by the interaction between environmental dynamics, infrastructures, settlements, productive activities and cultural practices. Read as both a palimpsest and a relational field, the valley becomes the framework through which tangible and intangible heritage can be reconnected, interpreted and projected towards future scenarios of transformation (fig. 1).

Landscape is therefore approached not as scenery or as an environmental backdrop, but as an active and relational framework capable of organizing connections between ground, water, heritage, infrastructures and forms of inhabitation. In this sense, drawing on Corboz's notion of territory as palimpsest and on Volpe's interpretation of landscape as a "context of contexts", as well as on a broader line of thought - from Donadieu to Magnaghi and Corner - that understands landscape as a living, productive and processual system, the valley may be read as a layered field in which material and immaterial dimensions, temporal sequences and functional relationships continuously interact and reshape one another.

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Fig. 1. - The Aniene River near the Montesacro district, Rome (@Alessandro Lanzetta, 2026).

Within this perspective, design is not conceived primarily as a problem-solving practice. Rather, it becomes an interpretative and exploratory tool: a means to reveal latent relationships, test new forms of territorial continuity and construct alternative scenarios through which fragmented elements may become readable again as part of a shared metropolitan landscape.

Ground as Generative Matrix

In Rome, ground has never been neutral. Morphology historically produced both opportunities and constraints, requiring continuous negotiation between urban growth and topography. Settlements adapted to slopes and strategic elevations; infrastructures followed ridgelines and valleys; water systems shaped productive landscapes and movement patterns. This condition becomes particularly visible in the eastern metropolitan sector, structured around the Aniene Valley and the via Tiburtina, where highly differentiated territorial conditions coexist within relatively short distances: narrow valleys alternate with open plains, agricultural plateaus confront industrial settlements, quarry landscapes overlap with protected ecological systems, while infrastructures run parallel to rivers and simultaneously separate them from surrounding neighbourhoods.

The Aniene Valley can only be understood by starting from the ground, since geography here is not a passive support but a force that has given form to historical processes. The geological formations produced by the Latium and Sabatine volcanic systems, together with the long-term action of the Tiber and Aniene rivers, have shaped the territory on which Rome developed, orienting settlements, infrastructures, productive systems and cultural landscapes. Tuff plateaus as depicted by Giorgio De Chirico, escarpments, river terraces, travertine deposits and deeply incised valleys still structure large sectors of the metropolitan area, defining thresholds, influencing accessibility and conditioning patterns of inhabitation (fig. 2).

Water has been a fundamental factor in the valley's territorial transformations. By making fertile plains possible, while also creating difficult crossings, the Aniene shaped economies, settlements and infrastructures over

Fig. 2. - Giorgio de Chirico, Mysterious Rocks, 1970.

time. Springs, sulphurous waters and thermal landscapes, together with the great aqueduct systems - Anio Vetus, Aqua Marcia, Aqua Claudia and Anio Novus - testify to the central role of this territory in Rome's long-term hydraulic and urban development. Travertine landscapes perhaps offer the clearest material expression of the interaction between geology, water and territorial transformation. Formed through the deposition of calcium carbonate by mineral-rich waters, and extracted since Roman times, travertine embodies the long relationship between hydrological processes and human construction. It contributed materially to the building of Rome itself, while quarries, extraction fronts and industrial areas should be understood not as marginal or residual spaces, but as integral components of the valley's historical and territorial structure.

Looking at the valley through this perspective means shifting attention away from isolated heritage objects toward the processes that produced them. Heritage, infrastructures, settlements and landscapes do not appear as separate layers superimposed over time; rather, they emerge as different expressions of long-term interactions between ground, water and human transformation.

The Aniene Valley is therefore not simply a landscape crossed by history, but a territory continuously produced through the reciprocal relationship between environmental structures and cultural practices, where

geology remains an active component of contemporary spatial organization.

Four Ecologies of the Metropolitan Landscape: Archaeology, Porosity, Enclaves and Radial Infrastructures

Understanding the Aniene Valley requires moving beyond sectoral readings. Environmental approaches often isolate ecological systems from urban processes; heritage studies separate monuments from their territorial context; infrastructural analyses privilege efficiency over spatial relationships. None of these perspectives alone adequately explains the complexity of the Tiburtine territory.

For this reason, the valley is interpreted here through a system of overlapping ecologies. The term "ecology" is not used in a strictly environmental sense, but as a way of describing interactions between physical structures, historical processes and forms of inhabitation. The reference is to Reyner Banham's reading of Los Angeles where he shifts attention from isolated objects toward interacting systems. Yet if Los Angeles could be interpreted through topographic flatness and the organizational force of mobility infrastructures, Rome requires a different interpretative apparatus, rooted in morphological complexity and historical depth.

Within the Roman territory, four ecologies become particularly relevant: archaeology, porosity, enclaves and radial infrastructures [1]. These categories do not operate independently. They overlap, conflict and hybridize, producing the discontinuous condition that still characterizes the city, and also the Aniene valley, today.

Archaeology as Territorial Condition

Archaeology in Rome is not simply a heritage category. It is a territorial condition where archaeological traces appear at multiple scales and in multiple forms: domestic and monumental complexes, infrastructures, productive systems, sacred sites. These fragments can be incorporated into contemporary landscapes, isolated ruins absorbed by vegetation, excavated areas suspended between protection and abandonment.

In Rome the density of these presences transformed archaeology into one of the principal agents shaping territorial development. Protection policies progressively limited construction possibilities across extensive areas, generating large portions of undeveloped land. Yet preservation rarely coincided with a coherent territorial project. The result has often been an ambiguous geography of protected remains: spaces neither fully urbanized nor fully accessible, neither entirely natural nor clearly public. This condition generated contradictions but also possibilities. Archaeological protection unintentionally preserved large portions of land from intensive urbanization, allowing these residual landscapes, spontaneous vegetation and unexpected ecological continuities to survive inside metropolitan expansion.

In the Tiburtine territory this condition is particularly evident. Villas, sanctuaries, funerary monuments, aqueducts, bridges and industrial archaeology coexist within the same territorial framework. The question therefore is not how to isolate monuments from their context, but how to reconstruct relationships among dispersed presences.

Archaeology becomes culturally fecund when interpreted not as isolated heritage but as territorial infrastructure (fig. 3).

Porosity and the Geography of Residual Spaces

If archaeology represents an ecology of permanence, porosity represents an ecology of suspension and latent possibilities. Rome is characterized by a rare abundance of spaces that remain unbuilt as protected areas, agricultural remnants, river margins, infrastructure voids, terrains vagues, abandoned plots, residual landscapes and spontaneous ecosystems. Many of these places emerged through conflict rather than design. Protection constraints stopped urbanization processes, infrastructural leftovers and suspended transformations generated unfinished spaces. However, incompleteness itself becomes a resource. These spaces rarely form continuous systems. More often, they appear fragmented, inaccessible or marginal. Yet it is precisely within these interruptions that Rome preserves one of its most distinctive conditions.

Porosity should not be understood simply as emptiness. It describes the capacity of territories to absorb other settings without becoming entirely saturated. Porous landscapes maintain ecological reserves, preserve latent biological connections and accommodate unexpected uses.

The Aniene Valley contains multiple forms of porosity. Riverbanks left outside urbanization processes, abandoned productive landscapes, quarry systems, railway margins, floodplains and protected areas compose an irregular geography of open spaces that frequently escape conventional planning categories (fig. 4). Rather

[1] See Capuano *et alii* 2007.

Fig. 3. - Remains of the Anio Novus Aqueduct with a medieval tower at Arci, Tivoli (© Alessandro Lanzetta, 2026).

Fig. 4. - Ancient quarries of Tor Cervara, Rome (@Alessandro Lanzetta 2026).

than eliminating these conditions, projective work within the valley should start from them. Porosity provides room for adaptation, biodiversity, experimentation and alternative forms of public space.

Enclaves and the Geography of Separation

A third ecology shaping the Roman territory is that of enclaves. Enclosure has long represented a structural condition. Historically, Roman land has often been organized through bounded and relatively self-sufficient spatial entities: walled settlements, fenced suburban villas and aristocratic properties, enclosed ecclesiastical estates. Along the consular roads, these large, self-contained landscapes produced a morphology of separation that persists today as green or heritage enclaves within the modern metropolis.

Contemporary metropolitan growth has reinterpreted this condition through new spatial forms. Rather than producing continuous urban fabrics, expansion often occurred through separated fragments: industrial districts, logistics platforms, residential compounds, specialized facilities coexist in proximity while remaining spatially disconnected.

In the Tiburtine territory this condition becomes particularly evident. Archaeological remnants cohabit with extraction landscapes, industrial settlements with agricultural systems, infrastructure corridors with protected environments. These elements rarely form continuous structures; more often they operate as adjacent but autonomous worlds.

Fragmentation therefore should not be interpreted exclusively as failure. Enclaves produce barriers and discontinuities, but they also generate thresholds, overlaps and friction zones where different territorial logics intersect. Many strategic locations along the valley emerge precisely where these enclaves collide. The projective

Fig. 5. - “Borghetto” at Ripa Mammea, Ponte Mammolo, Rome (@Alessandro Lanzetta 2026).

challenge lies less in eliminating enclaves than in constructing relationships among them (fig. 5).

Radial Infrastructures and Territorial Continuities

The fourth ecology concerns infrastructures. In Rome, infrastructures are rarely purely technical or contemporary devices. Roads, railways, aqueducts and river systems are territorial organizers, often combining current infrastructural function with historical permanence. Many are not simply traces of past systems but structures of extended temporal continuity, still functioning within the contemporary metropolis, as demonstrated by the consular roads and aqueduct networks. Radial infrastructures remain among the principal agents shaping contemporary metropolitan Rome.

The Tiburtina itself exemplifies this condition (fig. 6). Originating as a route of movement, exchange and seasonal transhumance connecting the Apennine territories with Rome, it progressively attracted productive activities, settlements, infrastructures and symbolic systems along its course. Rather than simply crossing a pre-existing landscape, the road actively structured the territory around it, shaping settlement patterns, economic activities and spatial organization over time. Infrastructures connect and separate. They produce accessibility while generating margins and residual spaces. Within the valley, many discontinuities originate precisely from infrastructural systems: inaccessible roads, fragmented ecological corridors, isolated neighbourhoods and interrupted networks.

Yet infrastructures also contain latent possibilities for reconnection. Not only persistent infrastructural traces and still-functioning systems, but also historic routes, interrupted traces from the past and infrastructural corridors can be reinterpreted projectively as connective structures. Similarly, stations, bridges, abandoned

Fig. 6. - Via Tiburtina near the Grande Raccordo Anulare, Rome (@Alessandro Lanzetta 2026).

structures and river crossings may become components of a different territorial logic, based less on separation than on the reconstruction of relationships across fragmented territories.

These four ecologies – archaeology, porosity, enclaves and radial infrastructures – do not describe separate landscapes. Rather, they constitute interacting systems through which the valley can be read from a projective perspective. Their coexistence explains why the Aniene Valley cannot be reduced either to an environmental corridor, a heritage landscape or a metropolitan periphery. It is instead a territory where different temporalities, spatial logics and forms of inhabitation coexist without ever becoming fully unified. The objective is therefore not to reconstruct unity where none exists, but to make discontinuities readable, connected and negotiable. This is precisely the condition that allows the valley to be understood not only as a fragmented territory, but as part of a broader latent environmental structure within metropolitan Rome.

The Latent *Landscape-City*: From Fragmented Territories to Environmental Structure

If archaeology, porosity, enclaves and infrastructures describe the conditions through which the Tiburtine territory can be interpreted, a further question emerges: how can these fragmented conditions be understood as parts of a larger territorial structure? The hypothesis proposed here is that Rome already contains, in latent form, another possible city.

This city is not primarily defined by built fabric, administrative boundaries or infrastructural hierarchies. It emerges instead through rivers, protected areas, agricultural landscapes, residual open spaces and historical traces that persist within metropolitan expansion. It is not an alternative city outside urbanization, but a structure embedded within it.

For decades, metropolitan growth progressively displaced open spaces and agricultural landscapes toward the margins of urban expansion, even though Rome preserves one of the largest systems of protected and agricultural land among European capitals. These spaces continue to be perceived as voids, interruptions or waiting areas rather than as active territorial resources. Yet many already operate as environmental infrastructures.

This latent condition can be read through Ian McHarg's ecological interpretation of territory [2] as a pre-existing structure and through the notion of the Landscape-city explored in a common research with Margherita Vanore [3]. In this perspective, the city is not understood as a compact built form, but as a relational field composed of environmental systems, open spaces, infrastructures, historical traces and forms of inhabitation. Landscape is therefore not a residual background to urbanization, but an active framework capable of organizing metropolitan transformation.

This hypothesis led to the identification of four major environmental structures capable of organizing metropolitan continuity: Veio to the north, Appia Antica to the south, the Tiber to the west and the Aniene to the east. Their relevance does not depend only on their environmental value, but on their ability to combine ecological continuity, historical depth, territorial scale and forms of public accessibility. Together, these systems form a double environmental framework crossing the metropolitan territory, almost like a latent cardo and decumanus defined not by monumental axes but by landscape structures (fig. 7).

Their importance lies in their hybrid condition. Rather than operating through specialization, these structures simultaneously function as ecological systems, public spaces, cultural landscapes and territorial connectors. This hybridity becomes particularly significant within fragmented metropolitan territories. Rome historically developed through radial systems and successive rings, from the ancient walls to the railway belt, from the Grande Raccordo Anulare (GRA) to the Grande Raccordo Anulare delle Biciclette (GRAB). Alongside these consolidated structures, however, another geography persists: one composed of rivers, reserves, agricultural lands and ecological continuities.

The relationship between these two geographies is crucial. Environmental structures become effective not when isolated from urban processes, but when intersecting infrastructures, public transport, neighbourhoods and everyday practices. Their capacity to operate as armatures depends precisely on their ability to connect scales and conditions that normally remain separated.

The concept of *Landscape-City* does not imply dissolving urban complexity into nature, nor imagining a continuous park system. On the contrary, it assumes conflict, interruption and heterogeneity as constitutive

[2] McHarg 1969; Waldheim 2006; Bélanger 2009.

[3] Vanore, Triches 2019. Il volume si inserisce nella collana di ricerca *La città come cura e la cura della città*, coordinata da Alessandra Capuano, che interpreta la cura come pratica progettuale capace di mettere in relazione salute, spazio urbano, paesaggio e forme dell'abitare.

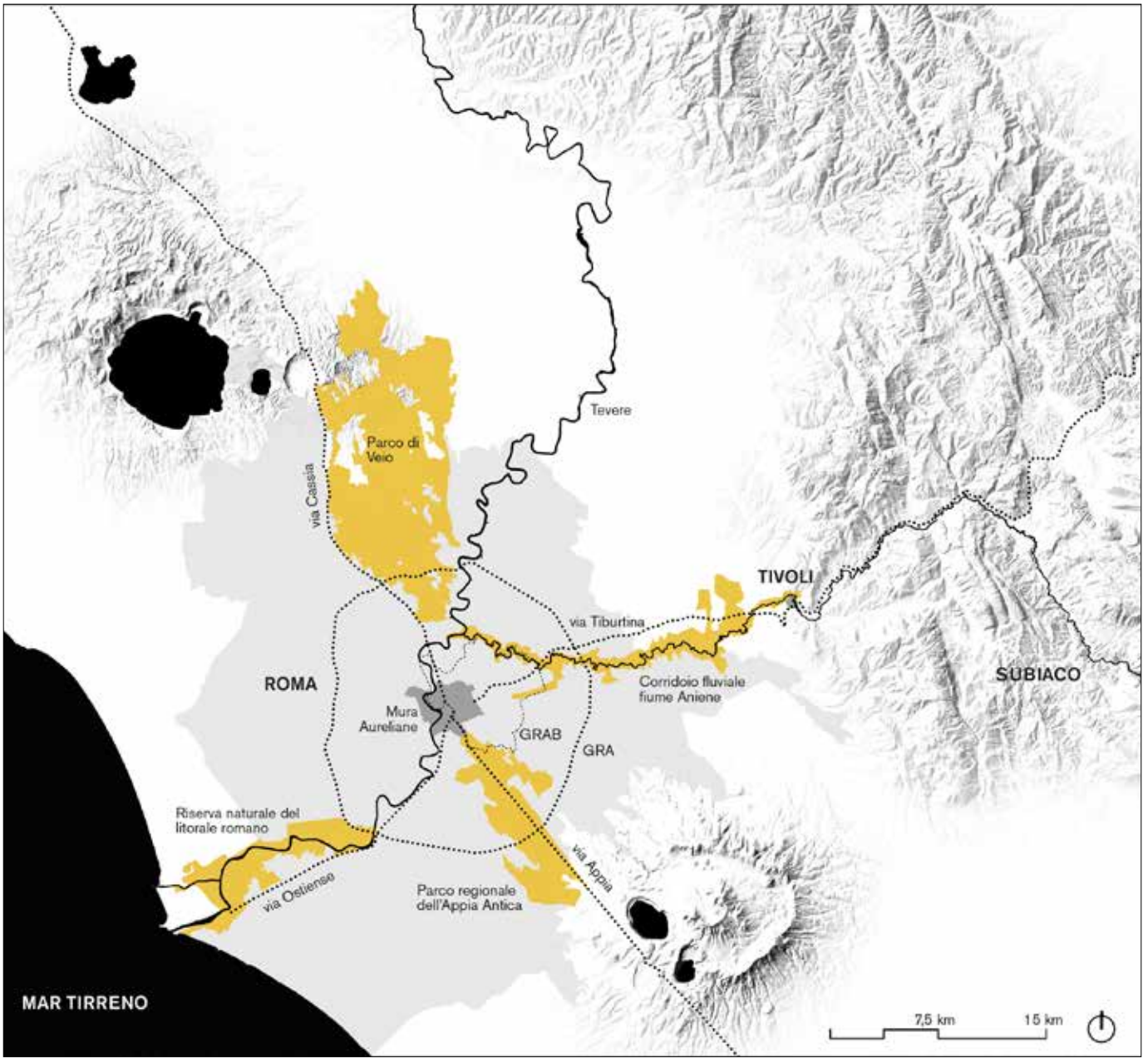

Fig. 7. - The Veio Park to the north and the Appia Antica Park to the south, together with the Tiber River to the west and the Aniene River to the east, form a latent cardo and decumanus defined by landscape structures (© Alessandra Capuano, 2026).

conditions. Its objective is not to replace the existing city, but to reorganize relationships among dispersed resources already present within metropolitan territory. Within this perspective, landscape becomes an armature.

Green Infrastructure as Interpretative Project: The Greenway as Method Rather than Object

Within this framework, the Aniene occupies a strategic position. If the Tiber historically structured Rome's western development, the Aniene defines a less visible but equally significant eastern threshold: a territory where metropolitan contradictions are not exceptional but constitutive. Here, nature, infrastructure, heritage and production coexist through frictions, separations and unresolved proximities rather than through coherent spatial systems.

Precisely for this reason, the valley becomes a critical field for testing the idea of *Landscape-City*. Its latent structure does not emerge from ideal continuity or from

the image of a unified park. It emerges from the possibility of recognizing fragmented conditions as parts of a larger territorial framework. Landscape is therefore not what remains after urbanization; it becomes the material through which metropolitan relationships can be reorganized. The valley can therefore be interpreted as a *Landscape-City*, where urbanization processes and environmental structures remain deeply intertwined.

A greenway is introduced here as the operative form of this hypothesis. It is not conceived as a linear object superimposed on the valley, nor as a simple cycling route or ecological corridor. Rather, it operates as a method of territorial interpretation and transformation: a device capable of revealing hidden relations, connecting dispersed resources and constructing continuity where continuity cannot be assumed. The role of the greenway is therefore not to erase thresholds but to work through them, transforming barriers into crossings and interruptions into opportunities for access, interpretation and encounter.

For this reason, the greenway cannot maintain the same configuration everywhere. It must adapt to different territorial conditions: remaining minimal in fragile environments, becoming more urban where accessibility is required, and more interpretative where archaeological, productive or extractive landscapes demand explanation rather than concealment. Its coherence does not derive from formal uniformity, but from the capacity to establish relationships across difference.

This approach can be articulated through three operational components: lines, nodes and actions. Lines define adaptive trajectories rather than fixed routes, accepting deviations and alternative branches. Nodes become the places where territorial relationships intensify stations, bridges, quarries and crossings operate as spaces of orientation, encounter and interpretation. Actions are often small but decisive interventions capable of unlocking larger transformations.

The greenway therefore works incrementally. Rather than imposing a finished order, it uses design as a form of territorial reading and care. Care, in this sense, is not limited to preservation. It implies maintenance, accessibility, adaptation and long-term responsibility toward fragile territorial relationships already present within the valley.

The objective is not to reconstruct a lost unity, but to construct new forms of continuity capable of working through difference. In practical terms, this means reconnecting archaeological sites, river landscapes, quarry systems, stations and settlements through a network of accessible routes, interpretative nodes and public spaces. The greenway does not seek to homogenize these different realities, but to make their relationships visible and operational within a shared territorial framework.

Design as Research: Testing Territorial Hypotheses Along the Aniene Valley

The interpretative framework presented so far did not emerge exclusively through theoretical reflection. It developed progressively through a sequence of research activities that combined institutional dialogue, fieldwork, mapping practices, design experimentation, teaching and publication. Meetings with public authorities, site visits, collective walks, redrawing exercises and interpretative mappings progressively constructed a shared knowledge of the territory, while workshops, design seminars and experimental projects allowed territorial hypotheses to be tested across different scales.

Research addressed the valley from different but complementary perspectives. Historical reconstruction, interpretative cartographies and narrative investigations contributed to the development of the concepts published in the book *The Aniene Valley and the Via Tiburtina. Places and Routes between Rome, Tivoli and Subiaco* [4], which interprets the territory as a structure shaped by long-term interactions between water, production, mobility and cultural practices. Parallel studies on sacred landscapes, pilgrimage routes and religious infrastructures led to the elaboration of the *Guide to Sacred Itineraries* [5], conceived not as a catalogue of monuments but as an interpretative tool capable of reconstructing territorial relationships through movement and narratives. Design explorations developed around the paths of Saint Benedict and Saint Francis further demonstrated how routes themselves can become instruments for territorial reading.

Teaching activities represented an essential component of this process. Design studios within the five-year degree programme in Architecture and the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's in Architecture, Landscape and Archaeology, developed over the three-year period of the research, addressed strategic areas such as Parco della Serenissima, the quarry landscapes of Tivoli Bagni and several archaeological sites along the valley.

[4] Capuano, Carpenzano 2026.
[5] Giovannelli, Valeriani 2026.

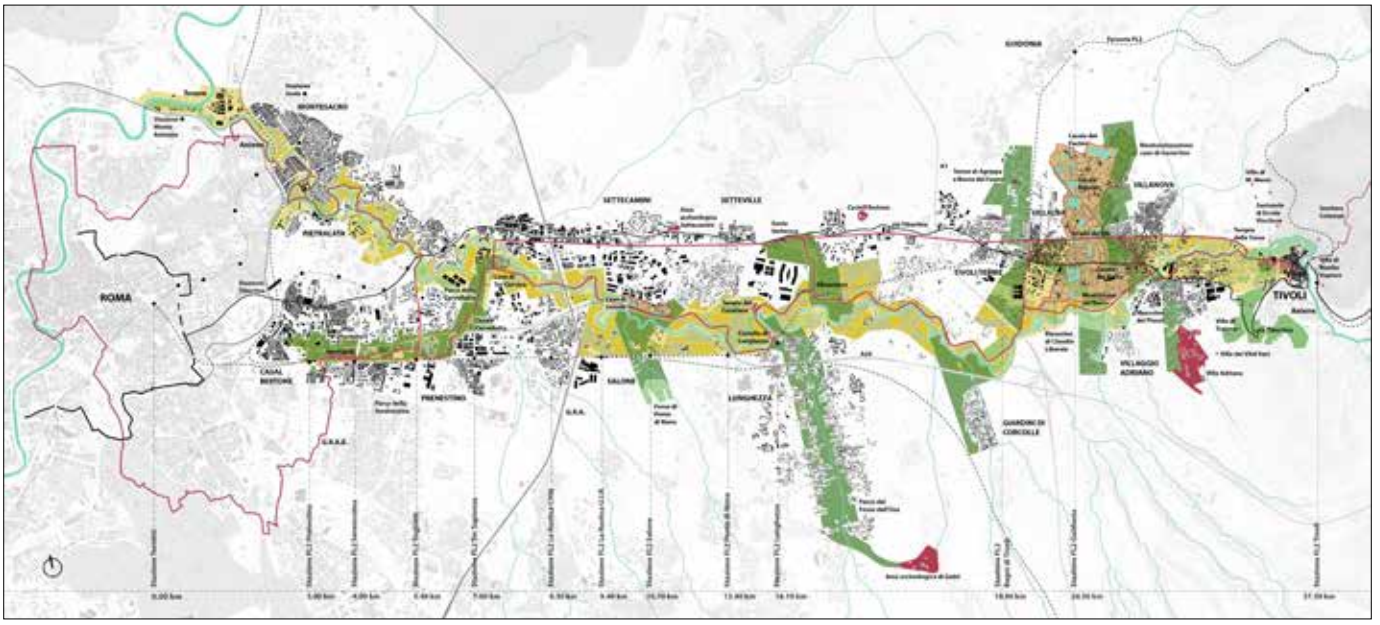

Fig. 8. - The Greenway along the Aniene Valley, project by Alessandra Capuano, Luigi Margagliotta, Marco Sorrentino, Andrea Valeriani, 2026.

Specific work focused on strategic nodes where multiple systems overlap, including the Sanctuary of Hercules Victor, Ponte Lucano, the Mausoleum of the Plautii, Santa Sinforosa, the Mausoleum of Claudio Liberale and the Temple of the Tosse. Their importance lies less in their individual architectural value than in their position within larger networks of infrastructures, water systems and heritage landscapes. Doctoral research further expanded the investigation, focusing on extractive landscapes and on the system of Roman *otium* villas in the Tiburtine territory.

At the same time, research explored broader territorial themes such as visibility, perception and accessibility. In the deeply incised geographies of the Aniene Valley, viewpoints, thresholds and crossings became devices for understanding territory, while investigations into quarry systems challenged conventional oppositions between nature and production, interpreting extractive landscapes as geological archives, productive systems and potential public spaces. These different lines of inquiry contributed to a more relational understanding of the valley, in which heritage, infrastructures, landscapes and settlements are interpreted as components of a shared territorial framework.

Within this broader framework, the greenway masterplan emerged not as the outcome of a predefined design process or as a fixed proposal, but as a research framework through which the various lines of inquiry could be connected, interpreted and translated into spatial hypotheses. Rather than defining a single route, it functioned as a device for identifying where continuity could be constructed, where interruptions became critical and which places possessed transformative potential. In this sense, project is understood less as the production of formal solutions than as an instrument for revealing hidden relationships, verifying spatial hypotheses and generating new interpretations of territory (fig. 8).

Toward a Care-Based Territorial Project

Across all these experiences, a common methodological principle emerged: territorial knowledge and transformation cannot be separated. Research, mapping, teaching, project and representation do not operate sequentially; they continuously inform one another.

The Aniene Valley suggests that another metropolitan geography already exists within Rome. Not a future city to be built from scratch, but a latent landscape-city embedded within existing environmental structures, historical traces and everyday practices. The task of design is not to impose a new order upon this complexity, but to reveal, reconnect and care for the relationships that already sustain it. In this sense, territorial care becomes both interpretative framework and a projective strategy for imagining more inclusive forms of metropolitan coexistence (fig. 9).

Fig. 9. - The Greenway along the Aniene Valley, project by Alessandra Capuano, Luigi Margagliotta, Marco Sorrentino, Andrea Valeriani, 2026.

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