

Inhabiting Archaeological Remains. The Roman Villa of Ponticelli in Naples as a Public Space

The contribution investigates the regeneration of archaeological remains in suburban areas, which frequently survive as isolated enclaves cut off from their surrounding urban fabric. Moving away from conventional, passive conservation practices that treat heritage as static “conservative fetishes”, the study proposes a design-driven approach that reimagines ruins as active public spaces and “nodes of health” for social inclusion. Centering on this framework, this paper examines the case study of the Roman villa of Caius Olius Ampliatus in the peripheral neighborhood of Ponticelli in Naples. Currently enclosed by severe physical boundaries, this site serves as a vital testing ground for architectural and urban projects aimed at breaking down the traditional archaeological enclosure. Through the methodology developed within the International Master ALA (Architecture, Landscape, Archaeology), multiple design variations are analyzed, experimenting with varying degrees of urban accessibility, from strategic cuts in the historical enclosure to its complete removal. The results demonstrate that architectural intervention can transcend pure musealization by reintegrating ancient heritage into contemporary urban flows. Ultimately, this study provides a scalable framework for heritage-led urban post-production, showing how ancient remains can transition from static scenery into open, evolving components of everyday community life.

Keywords: urban archaeology; suburbs; public space; urban regeneration; heritage inclusion.

Introduction

Against the background of the Roman suburb, the image of a solitary archaeological remain, which has survived the evolution of the city, characterizes several frames of the film *Mamma Roma* (1962) directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini. This image emblematically shows the totemic, untimely and almost completely incomprehensible nature of the ruin in its fragmented state.

In contemporary architectural and urban debate, peripheral areas are frequently characterized by fragmentation, social vulnerability, and physical neglect. Within these marginal landscapes, archaeological remains often survive as isolated, silent *enclaves* – cut off from the surrounding urban fabric and largely ignored by local communities.

Rather than viewing these ancient ruins merely as static elements to be preserved, this paper argues for a paradigm shift that reimagines archaeological sites as active catalysts for urban and social regeneration. By integrating heritage preservation into the design of contemporary public spaces, ruins can be transformed into “nodes of health” and inclusion, capable of fostering civic identity and enhancing the daily well-being of citizens. In this perspective, architecture assumes the role of “taking care” of the territory, addressing not

only environmental sustainability but also the psychological and physical well-being of its inhabitants.

To achieve this, the architectural discipline needs to transcend the sterile boundaries that have historically separated archaeological restoration from urban planning. The contemporary peripheral landscape requires an approach capable of processing archaeological remains not as architectural friction points or structural interruptions, but rather as raw generative material. The separation of ancient remains within sealed urban yards has fostered a widespread sense of public alienation, where communities perceive historical heritage as an administrative burden rather than a shared resource.

Figure 1. *Marginal ruins, collage between: Pier Paolo Pasolini, Mamma Roma, frame tratto dal film, 19623; L. Rabaça Falcão, Neapolitan Suburbs, drawing done in the fourth edition of the ALA Master, 2023; Roman villa of Ponticelli, photo by F. Coppolino, 2022*



Source: Graphic elaboration by F. Coppolino, M. Benincasa, 2026.

Conversely, by embedding the principles of “public archaeology”, as for example expressed by Giuliano Volpe¹, into spatial configurations, architectural interventions can reactivate ancient grounds as civic platforms.

Centering on this theoretical framework, the following research work explores the relationship between archaeology, suburbs and public space through the design methodologies developed within the International Erasmus Mundus

¹cfr. Giuliano Volpe, *Archeologia Pubblica*, Carocci Editore, Roma 2021.

1 Joint Master ALA (Architecture, Landscape, Archaeology) in Naples².
 2 Specifically, the paper analyzes the case study of the Roman villa of Ponticelli,
 3 evaluating distinctive design variations that test the physical and conceptual
 4 breakdown of the archaeological enclosure to reintegrate ancient remains into
 5 contemporary life.

6 Through the different strategic approaches explored, the investigation
 7 demonstrates how architectural design can move beyond pure musealization to
 8 restore ruins to the “vital flows” of the contemporary open city.

11 Archaeology and Suburbs, Public Space and Care

13 To fully understand the structural role that archaeological remains can play
 14 within the loose grid of contemporary suburbs, it is first necessary to critically
 15 re-examine the concept of the ruin itself.

16 «What is a ruin, after all? It is a human construction abandoned to nature
 17 and one of the features of ruins in cities is their wild aspect: they are places full
 18 of promises and uncertainties, with all their epiphanies and dangers»³. The words
 19 of Rebecca Solnit, associated with the Pasolinian fragment image of *Mamma*
 20 *Roma*, well describe the condition of archaeological remains in peripheral urban
 21 contexts, suspended in a wild state between nature and artifice, mostly silent and
 22 not simply understandable. These are places of abandonment, or rather, places
 23 of “paradox” living, using a definition from Martin Heidegger, in an intermediate
 24 condition “between life and death”⁴. They are places that have lost part of their
 25 original meaning, their role and utility, becoming today the infinite terrain for
 26 future possibilities, new lands to explore⁵.

27 With rare exceptions, archaeological sites in peripheral areas are isolated
 28 and separated from urban areas, and are often unknown to citizens themselves,
 29 as well as being inadequately valorized. In these cases, it is primarily the
 30 marginal contexts in which the ruins are located that require regeneration actions
 31 aimed at defining new healthy and livable places, true urban health spaces, upon
 32 which many projects and research have worked in recent years⁶. This concept of
 33 architectural care deeply shifts the objective of traditional restoration: as
 34 highlighted by Salvatore Settis, the classic must not be treated as a detached
 35 aesthetic object, but as a living element whose survival is functional to the
 36 cultural and social continuation of western civilization⁷.

²Reference is made to EMJMD “ALA – Architecture, Landscape, Archaeology” (La Sapienza University of Rome – coordination, Federico II University of Naples, NTUA University of Athens, UC University of Coimbra).

³Rebecca Solnit, *Storia del Camminare*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2000, p. 75.

⁴cfr. Martin Heidegger, *L'abbandono*, Il nuovo melangolo, Genova 1998.

⁵cfr. Sara Marini, *Nuove terre. Architetture e paesaggi dello scarto*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2010.

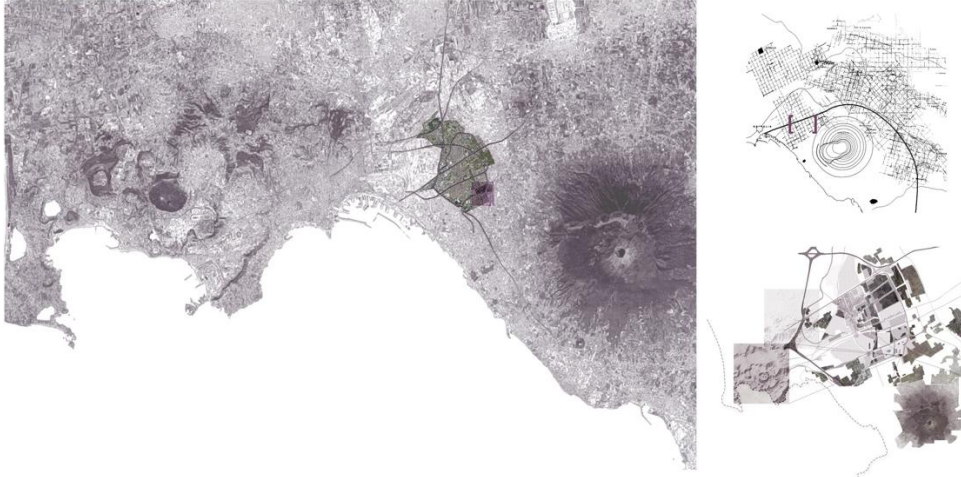
⁶Reference can be made, for example, to the 2015 PRIN research project “*The city as cure and the care of the city*” (La Sapienza University of Rome – PI A. Capuano, IUAV of Venice, Federico II of Naples, Foro Italico of Rome, National Research Council).

⁷Salvatore Settis, *Futuro del classico*, Einaudi, Milano 2004.

The dynamic integration of the antique into the modern texture has long been delayed by an ideological over-protection of historical matter, which has ultimately detached heritage from the living tissue of society. When a ruin is preserved under a purely contemplative lens, it undergoes a process of sterilization that strips away its relational potential. This is especially damaging in neighborhoods where public spaces are scarce and highly contested. In these situations, the enclosed archaeological yard stands out as a stark symbol of administrative distance, worsening the contrast between an idealized historical past and a degraded present-day reality.

The possible relationship between archaeology and urban space in suburbs thus becomes particularly significant for the future of these areas, as it can represent a determining factor for cultural, social and urban change. And this can happen only if the past is not seen as an extinct heritage, but instead as a precious source of new contemporary meanings⁸: architecture in the condition of ruin can represent the material space for new relationships.

Figure 2. *The Ponticelli suburbs in the eastern part of Naples, 2022*



Source: Drawings from the dossier of the second Naples Workshop edition, 2022; graphic rielaboration by F. Coppolino, M. Benincasa, 2026.

However, in practice, the current administrative response to conservation issues temporarily saves the heritage, but it risks disconnecting the preservation perspectives from the common feeling. The result is a lack of interest in investing resources for research and valorization, faced with the evident waste produced by “conservative fetishes”⁹. On the contrary, in these cases, it should be important to recognize that the amount of archaeological remains present in urban spaces could constitute an enormous design opportunity. If reconnected with the space in which they are located, it could become a big resource for the urban landscape¹⁰, giving life to new public spaces for urban inclusion, where archaeology plays a real role in contemporary society. This necessity aligns with

⁸cfr. Alessandra Capuano (ed.), *Paesaggi di rovine. Paesaggi rovinati*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2014.

⁹Giuliano Volpe, *Archeologia Pubblica*, Carocci Editore, Roma 2021, p. 13.

¹⁰Alberto Ferlenga, “Segni”, in Alessandra Capuano (ed.), *Paesaggi di rovine*, op. cit., p. 300.

1 contemporary theories on landscape palimpsests. Writing in the late twentieth
 2 century, André Corboz proposed that land should be read not as a static
 3 backdrop, but as a dynamic manuscript that undergoes continuous rewritings¹¹.

4 The theme of archaeology as urban public space is a highly debated and
 5 current topic, which requires preliminary reflection on how archaeological space
 6 can become a “place for the community”¹² as emphasized by Giuliano Volpe,
 7 marking the need for a more active social role of archaeology in the city. At the
 8 same time, it calls for reflection on how architectural design can take care of the
 9 city itself by defining “nodes of health” starting from the ruins. These specific
 10 nodes do not represent basic interventions; rather, they form what Pasquale
 11 Miano defines as multi-scalar territorial activators¹³, designed to restore
 12 physiological balance and civic spatiality to deeply compromised peripheral
 13 residential quarters.

14 The term “care” has to be understood here through its deeply political and
 15 deontological dimension. It implies that architectural practice cannot limit itself
 16 to the production of formal variations, but must structurally address the
 17 metabolic dysfunctions of suburban environments.

18 Archaeological landscapes, when left unmanaged, often undergo a slow
 19 process of social decay. On the other hand, when addressed via targeted
 20 architectural tools, they can form what Richard Sennett calls an “open system”¹⁴
 21 which means a flexible spatial framework that can incorporate new,
 22 unpredictable layers of local use, alternative sub-economies, and grass-roots
 23 environmental governance.

24 Moreover, it is important to not forget that, as Yannis Tsiomis reminded
 25 years ago: «the archaeological space is, by its own nature, always contained
 26 within the vital flows of urban space, and so it belongs to the system of its public
 27 spaces; contemporary public space is characterized precisely by the loss of its
 28 boundaries and its integration with the urban context, something that also
 29 consequently happens for archaeological space»¹⁵.

30 This is exactly the idea that he realized in the project for the surroundings of
 31 the Agorà in Athens, where he works on the elimination of the limits of the
 32 archaeological space, relating it to the public urban space, based on the
 33 assumption that an archaeological project in an urban center is always, after all,
 34 an urban project.
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¹¹ André Corboz, *Il territorio come palinsesto*, in “Casabella”, n. 516, settembre 1985, pp. 22-27.

¹² Giuliano Volpe, *Archeologia Pubblica*, op. cit., p. 54.

¹³ cfr. Pasquale Miano (ed), *Healthscape. Nodi di salubrità, attrattori urbani, architetture per la cura*. Quodlibet, Macerata, 2020.

¹⁴ Richard Sennett, *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*. Penguin Books, London 2019.

¹⁵ Yannis Tsiomis, (2002), “Progetto urbano e progetto archeologico”, in C. Franco, A. Massarente, M. Triscioglio (eds), *L'antico e il nuovo. Il rapporto tra città antica e contemporanea*, UTET Libreria, Torino, p. 182.

Archaeology as Urban Public Space

In relation to these considerations, it seems possible to say that understanding archaeology as urban public space involves addressing three main issues. The first is to consider archaeology as a layer of the city, meaning not considering the site as separate from the context, but as an inseparable part of it, an element of the ever-changing urban palimpsest. The second is to interpret archaeology as a possible trigger for urban transformations, a resource to be valorized not in an isolated intervention logic but in an effort to encourage the definition of an urban relational system that can reintegrate the remains into the urban fabric. The third issue concerns to see archaeology as a place of urban inclusion, where innovative uses, beyond tourism, but also related to everyday living, and to the care of the city and its citizens, can be introduced.

In this vision, the architectural project becomes a tool for taking care of the territory, a “taking care”¹⁶ intended not only in reference to actions related to environmental health and sustainability but also and above all to psychological and physical well-being. The goal is to ensure that individuals can live well thanks to the complex possibilities offered to them in the city, from a cultural, identity and social perspective¹⁷. This spatial care aligns with contemporary design ethics. As argued by Nicola Emery¹⁸, the duty of modern architecture must shift away from speculative construction toward a profound therapeutic practice that repairs broken territorial networks. Thus, the direction that can be explored in the case of archaeological remains in peripheral contexts becomes clear. The transformation of archaeological space into public space could trigger broader strategies and processes of social and urban regeneration.

The relationship between archaeology, suburbs and public space was the main theme addressed in the second, third and fourth editions of the Master ALA – Architecture, Landscape, Archaeology in Naples. Specifically, in the second edition¹⁹, the work was centered on the case of the Roman villa of Ponticelli and on the idea of inhabiting ancient remains, overcoming the logic of archaeological enclaves, to transform the spaces they are part of into new possible places of urban identity, everyday spaces that help to reevaluate and care for the neighborhood in which they are located, while still respecting conservation needs.

The critical methodology adopted by this investigation is grounded in design-driven research, formulated and tested through the operational framework of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree ALA (Architecture,

¹⁶cfr. Nicola Emery, *Progettare, costruire, curare. Per una deontologia dell'architettura*, Casagrande, Bellinzona (Svizzera), 2010.

¹⁷cfr. Alessandra Capuano, *Living Amidst the Ruins in Rome: Archaeological Sites as Hubs for Sustainable Development*, in “Sustainability”, n. 14, 2022, pp. 1-23; doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14063180>.

¹⁸cfr. Nicola Emery, *Progettare, costruire, curare*, op. cit.

¹⁹Second edition of the International Design Workshop organized in Naples as part of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree ALA by P. Miano, B. Ferrara, L. Cicala, F. Coppolino and G. Illiano, with the collaboration of G. Boenzi, entitled “*Archaeology and urban public space. The case of the Roman Villa of Ponticelli in Naples*” from February 7-25, 2022.

Landscape, Archaeology) in Naples. The program approaches heritage sites through a multi-scalar workflow divided into three sequential steps. The first phase is that of the spatial and structural palimpsest analysis and it involves documenting the stratified layers of the selected site. This documentation goes beyond standard top-down cartography to trace the conflicts between historical vestiges and contemporary housing plans. Researchers systematically map modern property boundaries, forgotten paths, vehicular roads, and hidden archaeological features to uncover latent territorial connections. The second phase is that of theoretical prototyping and it translates these spatial observations into explicit architectural guidelines. Design criteria focus on key aspects like threshold permeability, material additions, and programmatic open-space use. These criteria are then tested against the local community's daily habits. The final phase is that of the design workshop and it uses international collaboration to develop a series of distinct spatial variations. Rather than pursuing a single optimal project, this method tests multiple contrasting approaches simultaneously – ranging from minimal structural alterations to radical, wide-ranging urban transformations. This comparative approach uncovers the diverse social and spatial opportunities hidden within the heritage asset.

Figure 3. *The Roman villa in Ponticelli and its surroundings, 2023*



Source: Sketches by S. Mal and L. Rabaça Falcão, 2023; graphic rielaboration by F. Coppolino, M. Benincasa, 2026.

By cross-referencing field research with design-driven experimentations, this method treats design not merely as an aesthetic solution, but as an active tool of critical spatial analysis. Architectural modeling acts as a predictive device that tests how specific modifications to an enclosure can reshape the socioeconomic dynamics of a neighborhood. This methodological approach ensures that historical data directly informs spatial configuration, turning morphological analysis into an actionable strategy for public archaeology.

The “Afterlife” of Marginal Ruins. The Case of the Roman Villa in Ponticelli

Located in the delicate context of the Ponticelli neighborhood²⁰ in the eastern part of the city of Naples, the Roman villa of *Caius Olius Ampliatus*, open to the public since 2013, was discovered in the early 1980s during construction work for a series of public housing buildings within the so-called “Lotto 0”. During this process, several Roman remains were discovered and the intervention of the Superintendency for Archaeological Heritage of Naples and Caserta led to the suspension of the construction works to allow for a more thorough exploration of the area.

Archaeological excavations took place between 1985 and 1987 and again in 2007, revealing two Roman villas, one of which dates back to the Republican period and was destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius. The other villa, identified as the villa of *Caius Olius Ampliatus*, which occupied the area after the eruption (between the 2nd and 5th or possibly 6th centuries AD), has been preserved.

Its plan consists of two parts: the first part is open to the south, likely connected to one of the paths that led from the countryside to the villa. This area, which has been uncovered, shows clay paving, for the carts that arrived at the farm to unload foodstuffs. Some frescoes have been found in several rooms here. The northern wall, on the other hand, opened toward the main entrance of the villa and was divided into three different entryways²¹.

Currently, the ancient villa appears as a “denied space” whose existence is barely known, as it is enclosed by a tall wall, creating a rigid boundary that makes it a hidden place, little known even by the local residents, despite being an extremely important archaeological testimony of Roman rural villas in the Vesuvian area. It is, in fact, a place that has undergone significant transformations throughout history: from a natural and rural space to one inserted within large residential public housing plans, ultimately becoming a fragment completely detached from the rest of the urban dynamics. It is a walled space that has lost its original feature, randomly inserted into a new context of an entirely different nature. Today, it stands at the heart of the contemporary social debate on the regeneration of Naples’ peripheral areas, slowly coming back to life through the social efforts of volunteers and associations.

At present, the elements that make up the villa area are: the big wall that acts as an enclosure, separating the archaeological site from the neighborhood; the Roman villa road running along the area, slightly elevated; the discovered archaeological remains; the small wall that delimits the excavation area from the parts that have not yet been excavated; the roof built in the 1980s, which does not fully fulfill the purpose of protecting the remains; a small architectural element at the entrance serving as an info point; the open space between the inside and outside of the villa; the surrounding residential buildings, which themselves stand as ruins of the contemporary, establishing visual connections

²⁰For further information, see: Luigi Verolino, *Storia di Ponticelli. Dalle origini al XVI secolo*, Il Quartiere Edizioni, Napoli 2014.

²¹For further information, see: Sergio Cascella, Giuseppe Vecchio, *La villa rustica di C. Olius Ampliatus. Suburbio sud-orientale di Napoli (Ponticelli)*, Archaeopress, Oxford 2014.

with the interior; the “ruins” of the unfinished construction site for the Lotto 0 and, finally, the invisible elements such as the second villa, parts of the villa that have not yet been uncovered and the ancient cultivation traces.

The presence of these elements reveals a deeply fragmented topography. The historical remains are trapped at a lower elevation compared to the modern street level, which creates a significant vertical disconnect alongside the horizontal boundary of the concrete wall. This spatial layout isolates the antique ground plane from the modern neighborhood. The contemporary housing blocks of Lotto 0, built with industrial materials that are now deteriorating, create an unintentional spatial dialogue with the ancient masonry, highlighting a cross-temporal landscape of architectural ruins.

Figure 4. *The Roman Villa of Caius Olius Ampliatus, Urban Plan and Urban Section, 2022*



Source: Drawings from the dossier of the second Naples Workshop edition, 2022; graphic rielaboration by F. Coppolino, M. Benincasa, 2026.

In this context, the primary need arises to understand how to relate with each other these elements of different nature coexisting in this urban layer: the archaeological remains, which are difficult to access and not valorized, the contemporary landmarks in a state of ruin, the large open spaces, and the fences, all elements with great urban potential. Additionally, considering the persistent

over-sized road crossings for vehicular traffic, there is a need to reconsider possible routes for soft mobility to reconnect these spaces.

The main goal of the design strategy developed in the Master's program was based on the assumption that the archaeological site of the Roman villa of Ponticelli could become a trigger for not only urban, but also cultural and social, regeneration of extra-urban areas, disconnected from the development logics of the central areas of the city. Overcoming the traditional view of the archaeological site as a closed and inaccessible space requires the development of a strategy that reinterprets the ruin as an integral part of the urban public space palimpsest. This is achieved by defining new urban accessibility that transcends contemporary barriers, reconnecting the landscape and the open spaces belonging to the ancient agricultural vocation of the neighborhood.

At the same time, at the architectural scale, it is important to protect the ruin, make it accessible, understandable and open to visitors through a strategic approach that is informative, communicative and educational. However, the main focus should be on encouraging "daily" use, based on the social inclusion of local residents in the diachronic history of this part of Naples.

Figure 5. *The Fences, the Additions, the Open Spaces*, 2022



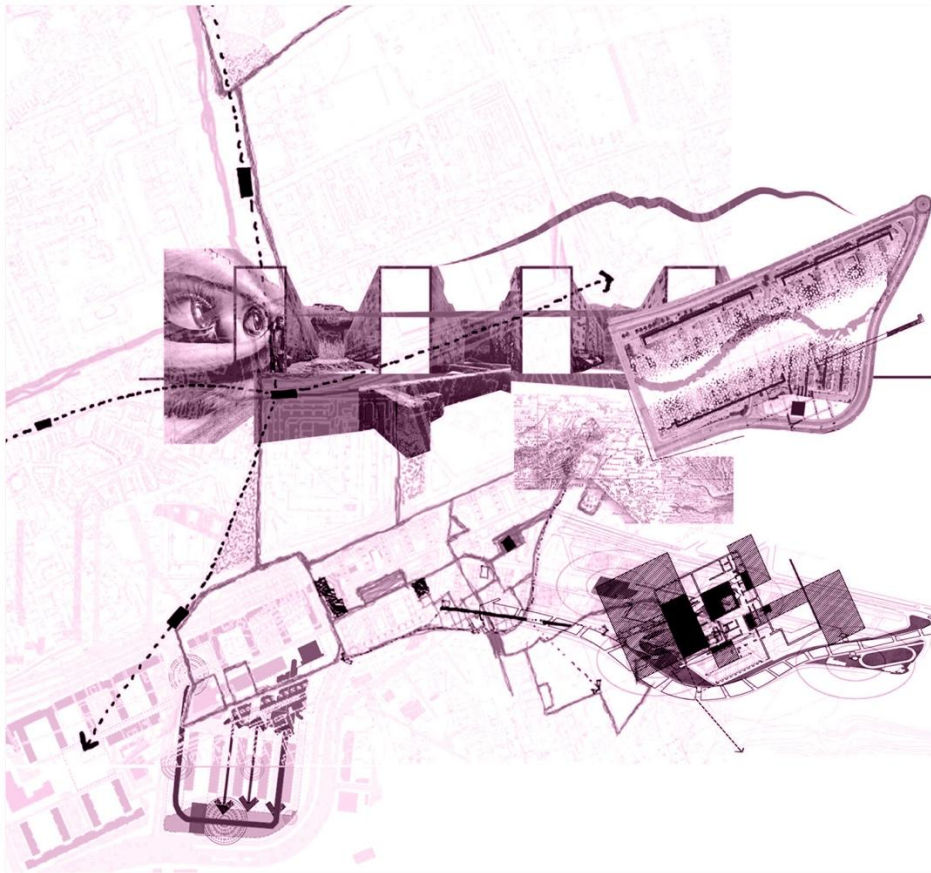
Source: Drawings from the dossier of the second Naples Workshop edition, 2022; graphic rielaboration by F. Coppolino, M. Benincasa, 2026.

It is clear that, in a part of the city already considered "sick", intervening in isolation on ruins to protect, enhance, restore and make them accessible and usable, is not sufficient to prevent further isolation and abandonment or to contribute to the broader development of the urban context. Strategies at a larger scale has to be simultaneously considered, strategies that reintegrate the ruin into urban flows and involve it in community development, connecting it to other elements and looking at the city and its parts in a unified way. In this regard, it is possible to look to the experiments carried out by the Athenian design group Point Supreme, which, in 2011, elaborated design scenarios for the city of Athens. These proposals, based on the appropriation of ancient urban ruins and the contemporary city, suggested the introduction of new public uses, defining a cultural and social regeneration of these spaces transformed into everyday

places²². The intervention of relating the ruins to the urban space is not only essential to give new life to the remains, but it can also become the “pretext” to trigger broader processes of urban “post-production”. The ruin can “move” the city²³.

As Josè Ignacio Linazasoro states, ruins introduce an internal movement to the static and hermetic architectural object to which they originally belonged²⁴, and in the same way, it could be possible to argue that they can induce “movements” in the cities where they are rooted, just as cities can, in turn, set the ruins in motion. Ruins should not block the movement of the city, just as the city should not exclude the ruin from transformation.

Figure 6. *The Roman Villa of Ponticelli in Naples as a Public Space, 2022*



Source: Drawings done by K. Ganesh, V. Dionisio, A. Blount, D. F. Andristou, B. Kheykhah, N. Pisimisis, E. Serjani, 2022; graphic rielaboration by F. Coppolino, M. Benincasa, 2026.

²²AA. VV., *In Conversation with 3 Rapidly Emerging Practices: L.E.FT, Point Supreme and vPPR*, in “AD. Architectural Design”, 21 giugno 2017.

²³For further information, see the chapter *Afterlife. Ritorno al futuro urbano* in the volume: Francesca Coppolino, *Rovine in divenire. Da scene a spazi della città della post-produzione*, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2024, pp. 188-224.

²⁴Josè Ignacio Linazasoro, “Rovine”, in Andrea Ugolini (ed.), *Ricomporre la rovina*, Alinea, Firenze 2010, p. 17.

1 Already thirty years ago, André Corboz's theories looked at the territory as
 2 a unified space, impossible to analyze in statistical terms because «the dynamism
 3 of the formation and production phenomena continues in the idea of an ongoing
 4 refinement of results, where everything is interconnected [...] Consequently, the
 5 territory is a project»²⁵. This perspective shows how, from that moment on, the
 6 relationship between ruins, cities and landscapes began to change: not defined
 7 by clear boundaries or in well-defined categories, but understood as a
 8 widespread and diachronic relationship. No longer distant bodies, but "spaces"
 9 of interaction. Following this direction, the project of the ruin as urban public
 10 space moves away from pure musealization and alienating conservation
 11 practices to try to build new urban visions, where transformations happen
 12 precisely starting from the ruins, understood as opportunities to introduce
 13 possibilities of the future. New urban spaces can be defined, where the ruins can
 14 return to being "living" elements.

15 About this point, the concept highlighted by Patricia A. Morton, drawing on
 16 Walter Benjamin's theories, is interesting. She focuses on the idea of the
 17 "afterlife" of buildings, referring to the possibility for these buildings to live, at
 18 different times, new lives²⁶. This term refers to the "return to the future" of ruins,
 19 seen as openings to the *mundus patet*²⁷, that is the "open world" where the
 20 boundaries between the past, present and future blur and disappear. This return
 21 to the future is only possible if the ruin, once a space of "exception", returns to
 22 being a space of human life, interacting with other elements, layers and urban
 23 spaces from different eras and transforming itself into a new point of reference
 24 for the community, able to contribute to the movement and care of the city.

25 26 27 **Design Variations on the Theme. The Fence, the Additions, the Open Space**

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29 Starting from this strategic position, in the work done within the Master's
 30 program in Naples several key themes for the enhancement of the Roman villa
 31 of Ponticelli have been preliminarily identified. These themes were explored
 32 through various design variations, such as the issue of breaking the enclosure
 33 and accessibility, the topic of the new architectural additions and new uses to
 34 insert and the theme of reconfiguring the open space and flows.

35 The theme of breaking the archaeological enclosure involves reflecting on
 36 the transformation of the site's margins and transition space, as well as
 37 improving urban accessibility to the archaeological area from central Naples or
 38 neighboring districts. This requires deciding which entrance, or entrances,
 39 should be prioritized. A fundamental aspect is understanding the architectural
 40 way through which to break the current enclosure, transforming it from a clear

²⁵ André Corboz, *Il territorio come palinsesto*, in "Casabella", n. 516, settembre 1985, pp. 22-27.

²⁶ Patricia A. Morton, "The Afterlife of Buildings: Architecture and Walter Benjamin's Theory of History," in Dana Arnold, Elvan Altan Ergut, Belgin Turan Ozkaya (ed.), *Rethinking Architectural Historiography*, Routledge, London 2006, pp. 359-363.

²⁷ Cfr. Giorgio Agamben, *La voce, il gesto, l'archeologia*, Palazzo Serra di Cassano, Napoli, 9 maggio 2019; link: <https://youtu.be/Qkvlp4hUpL4?si=QGrUGIKT-MT90SdI>.

1 boundary into an open and porous edge. Several architectural solutions are
2 possible, ranging from completely eliminating the enclosure to maintaining it
3 entirely. Some ideas include defining small “cuts” that reconfigure the
4 relationship between inside and outside, framing specific visual perspectives or
5 introducing large passage openings at different levels.

6 The topic of the new architectural additions, which mainly concerns replacing
7 existing covers and adding new access and service elements or recovering the
8 small existing building, is a very delicate subject. It should be conceived in close
9 relation to the ruins, the overall design and the new uses to be incorporated. This
10 is because, in reality, these elements represent, in a certain sense, the
11 “intermediary” of perceptual mediation between the archaeological remains and
12 the urban landscape, as well as the “vehicle” for narration and reinterpretation
13 of archaeology. Thus, these elements are not merely protective and safeguarding
14 functions, but true architectural additions that become integral parts of the image
15 and meanings of the archaeological area.

16 The theme of open space involves rethinking relationships at ground level
17 and different heights, organizing flows and spaces of different nature. On one
18 side, it is necessary to work around the in-between spaces, while on the other
19 side, deeper considerations of existing vegetation, ancient cultivation and past
20 territorial relations are important to develop.

21 This approach sees the villa as part of an urban park attempting to redefine
22 the meaning of the larger part of the city to which it belongs. The villa’s
23 enclosure becomes a very small part and the area is connected with the open
24 spaces of the surrounding buildings, also incorporated into the transformation
25 process.

26 Based on this premise, during the workshop held in Naples, four design
27 variations were developed to address these preliminary issues. The main goal,
28 common to all the proposals, was to move beyond a fragmented, obsolete view
29 of archaeology by introducing new tools capable of fostering participation,
30 social cohesion, enhancement and sustainable economic development.

31
32

Figure 7. Design Strategy “Lotto 1.0”, 2022



Source: Drawings done by M. Y. Baagil, A. Nusair, J. Arango, M. Zhou, T. Alshami, H. Ben Younes, 2022; graphic rielaboration by F. Coppolino, M. Benincasa, 2026.

The first variation “Lotto 1.0”²⁸ proposes maintaining the enclosure, opening it in precise strategic points, and defining a public urban path that moves through the area at different elevations, passing across the villa. A new element, that hosts a small exhibition space, marks the entrance and welcomes the visitors, while the remains, covered by a light and flexible structure, become part of a new design for the open space between inside and outside of the villa. The second variation “The Wall as a Landscape Infrastructure”²⁹ proposes the construction of a long habitable wall, integrating the area with the neighborhood and acting as a landscape infrastructure. From this linear structure, which can be adapted and modified depending on needs, the design of the open space begins, with the remains covered and flows of people managed. The third variation “Unfinished Strata”³⁰ works through specific, minimal interventions that open the enclosure towards nearby residences, adding few new, clear elements that primarily aim to allow the villa and its layers to be read, understood and narrated. The additions evoke, in part through contrast, the ancient configurations, asserting their contemporary nature. The fourth variation “Space Oddity”³¹ is the most radical. It entirely removes the enclosure, leaving the remains uncovered and integrates them into the design of a new public space, totally accessible and visitable. Specific very small additions are made for services, an info point and

²⁸Team 1 students: M. Y. Baagil, A. Nusair, J. Arango, M. Zhou, T. Alshami, H. Ben Younes.

²⁹Team 2 students: C. Espejel, A. Kostantinou, M. A. Palacios Carrasco, S. Mal, M. I. Guevara, L. Anghinoni, D. Dalladaku.

³⁰Team 3 students: K. Ganesh, V. Dionisio, A. Blount, D. F. Andristou, B. Kheykhah, N. Pisimisis, E. Serjani.

³¹Team 4 students: M. Rodriguez del Blanco, C. Zaidan, I. Zaninovic, K. Laghari, T. Gerich, J. Ahmad Tariq.

protection for the frescoes. The ruins become part of a new urban health space, where people can relax, play sports and spend their free time.

Figure 8. *Design Strategy “The Wall as a Landscape Infrastructure”, 2022*



Source: Drawings done by M. Y. Baagil, A. Nusair, J. Arango, M. Zhou, T. Alshami, H. Ben Younes, 2022; graphic rielaboration by F. Coppolino, M. Benincasa, 2026.

Further studies were developed in the internship³², where another variation synthesized the main issues that emerged during the workshop. Here, the enclosure is entirely replaced with an interactive edge, while covers and walkways are designed as movable elements made of steel and fabric, transforming the entire area into an archaeological garden.

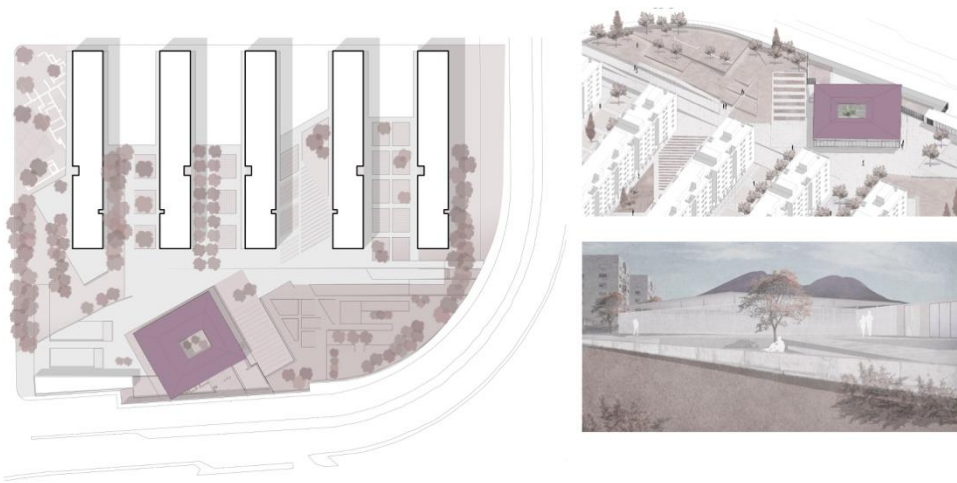
Additionally, two theses explored different aspects: the first, at the urban scale, focused on the relationship between archaeology and infrastructure, specifically linking the villa area to the nearby Circumvesuviana train station and other key neighborhood elements³³. The second thesis examined the relationship between care and public space, experimenting with the possibility of turning the villa into an urban park aimed at improving citizens' health³⁴.

³²Internship held in collaboration with the Superintendence of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape for the Municipality of Naples (responsible G. Boenzi) between March and May 2022 (students: D. F. Andristou, J. Arango, M. I. Guevara, B. Kheyrkhah, S. Mal, J. Ahmad Tariq).

³³Thesis work of S. Mal “*Accessible Archaeology: Integrating Urban Mobility in Archaeological Heritage to create new Public Space*”, 2022 (tutors: P. Miano, L. Cicala, F. Coppolino, G. Illiano).

³⁴Thesis work of J. Ahmad Tariq “*Architecture as cure for Archaeology: A Design Therapy between Archaeology and contemporary fabric*”, 2022 (tutors: P. Miano, B. Ferrara, F. Coppolino, G. Illiano).

Figure 9. *Design Strategy “Unfinished Strata”, 2022*



Source: Drawings done by K. Ganesh, V. Dionisio, A. Blount, D. F. Andristou, B. Kheyrikhah, N. Pisimisis, E. Serjani, 2022; graphic rielaboration by F. Coppolino, M. Benincasa, 2026.

This double analytical lens – investigating both mobility frameworks and therapeutic spatial parameters – is verified by the active engagement of grass-roots associations and local volunteers, who currently act as the primary custodians of the Roman villa. In fragile territories where municipal maintenance is structurally deficient, community-led stewardship represents the only viable alternative to the rapid decay of public open spaces. Consequently, the architectural design variations discussed above do not propose rigid, over-determined spatial layouts; rather, they provide an open infrastructure capable of welcoming and supporting these spontaneous social energies. By integrating dedicated spaces for community gardens, open-air classrooms, and independent cultural events, the design successfully transforms the archaeological site into a collaborative hub for local micro-economies and social redemption. The physical restoration of territorial relations thus aligns with a process of civic empowerment, where the neglected population of the eastern Neapolitan suburbs transitions from passive spectators of heritage to active producers of urban care. Bridging the gap between ancient historical layers and contemporary social needs, this design model establishes a sustainable framework of collective governance, proving that the ultimate survival of suburban ruins depends directly on their capacity to host and elevate the daily life of the surrounding community.

The themes addressed in these solutions – concerning margins and transitions, additions and inclusions, flows and connections – show possible actions to be tested within a framework aimed at promoting the urban inclusion of archaeological sites in the open city perspective advocated by Richard Sennett³⁵. It becomes clear that a project for inhabiting archaeology as urban public space should operate through an open mechanism, constantly evolving, with the primary goal of recovering the continuity of urban relationships between different elements of the landscape. This continuity aims to create new spaces for citizens, in which archaeology is only one of the threads in the overall urban fabric. No longer urban scenery, but places that can

³⁵cfr. Richard Sennett, *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*, Penguin Books, London 2019.

rediscover their most appropriate nature: being part of the movement of life that flows.

Figure 10. *Design Strategy “Space Oddity”, 2022*



Source: Drawings done by M. Rodriguez del Blanco, C. Zaidan, I. Zaninovic, K. Laghari, T. Gerich, J. Ahmad Tariq, 2022; graphic rielaboration by F. Coppolino, M. Benincasa, 2026.

Porouscapes. Conclusions and Future Perspectives

The design strategies and multi-scalar research developed for the Roman villa of Ponticelli demonstrate that an archaeological site in a peripheral context should not represent a boundary, but rather a porous threshold for urban inclusion. By testing different degrees of accessibility – ranging from strategic openings in the existing enclosure to its complete removal – the project moves away from alienating conservation practices, converting historical fragments into living components of everyday urban life. In this vision, the ancient ruin ceases to be a detached monument and becomes an active infrastructure for social cohesion, soft mobility, and community health. This shifts the focus of urban design from a logic of zoning to a philosophy of systemic coexistence, where historical artifacts function as catalysts for structural equity rather than static icons of past eras.

Looking ahead, these outcomes open up new perspectives for both heritage management policies and urban design theory. First, they suggest that archaeological projects in suburban areas must be structurally integrated into broader urban planning strategies, shifting from isolated interventions to systemic landscape networks. This paradigm requires local superintendencies and municipal planning offices to abandon top-down, independent administrative paths in favor of an integrated planning framework. Within this coordinated vision, public investments in heritage conservation can directly fund

the modernization of surrounding pedestrian corridors, sustainable storm-water networks, and public parklands.

Figure 11. *Future Development “Porouscape”, 2023*



Source: Drawings by S. Mal, 2023; graphic rielaboration by F. Coppolino, M. Benincasa, 2026.

Second, this approach establishes a scalable framework that can be applied to similar marginal heritage sites globally, emphasizing “taking care” as a diachronic process where history and future co-evolve. The methodology proves that peripheral ruins can act as democratic assets capable of stabilizing compromised micro-climates and providing high-quality cultural services to neighborhoods historically cut off from standard urban opportunities.

Consequently, this specific tactical methodology demonstrates that contemporary architectural research must actively convert historical conservation from a source of spatial friction into an operational, multi-scalar asset for sustainable suburban cohabitation, into a new porouscape.

Future developments should focus on creating cooperative management models involving local associations, academic bodies, and public administrations. These models should not just invite public participation in a symbolic manner, but structurally involve local residents in the everyday maintenance, educational storytelling, and programmatic choice of the spaces. By turning the archaeological landscape into a collaborative hub for educational workshops and community-led gardens, the surrounding population transitions from passive observers to active stewards of their territory. Only by fostering this collaborative stewardship can we ensure that archaeology stops acting as an urban scene, effectively becoming an open, evolving thread woven directly into the movement of life.

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