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Università Iuav
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Benno Albrecht, Jacopo Galli

**RECONSTRUCT – SENSITIVE EMPLOYMENT CREATION
THROUGH BOTTOM-UP CELLULAR STRATEGY**

URBICIDE TASK FORCE

URBICIDE RURAL SYRIA RECONSTRUCTION OF VILLAGES

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**URBICIDE RURAL SYRIA
RECONSTRUCTION OF VILLAGES**

Urbicide Task Force, Università Iuav di Venezia

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a project by Urbicide Task Force

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Decentralisation

Jacopo Galli

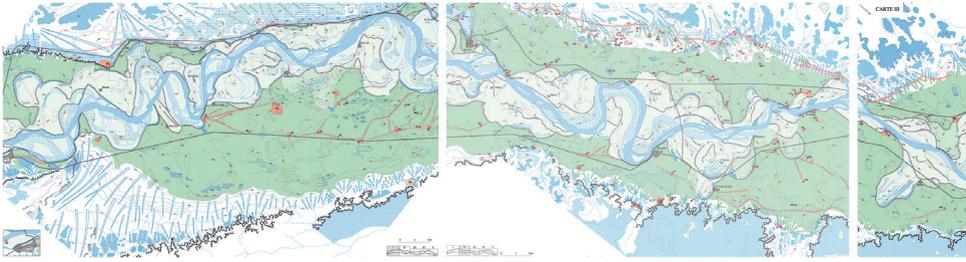
We live in an urban world. The phenomenon of displacement from the countryside to the cities, combined with continuous population growth, has made global metropolises the worst Malthusian nightmares¹ where demographic pressure makes any long lasting vision of social and urban progress impossible. We live in a depopulated world. The average age of the population in many industrialised countries is over 45, the migration and fertility balance in rural areas in Europe, the Middle East, Russia and Japan is negative. The immense challenges to the care of the territory posed by climate change and the necessary increase in agricultural production risk being battles fought by increasingly scarce armies. Desert and anthill² have become two contemporary and opposite poles of attraction: aging, depopulation and extinction on the one hand, crowds of hungry invaders on the other. The two poles paradoxically coexist at a small distance but increasingly they find physical concretisation in

1 – Malthus Thomas Robert, “An Essay on the Principle of Population”, J. Johnson, Londra, 1798.

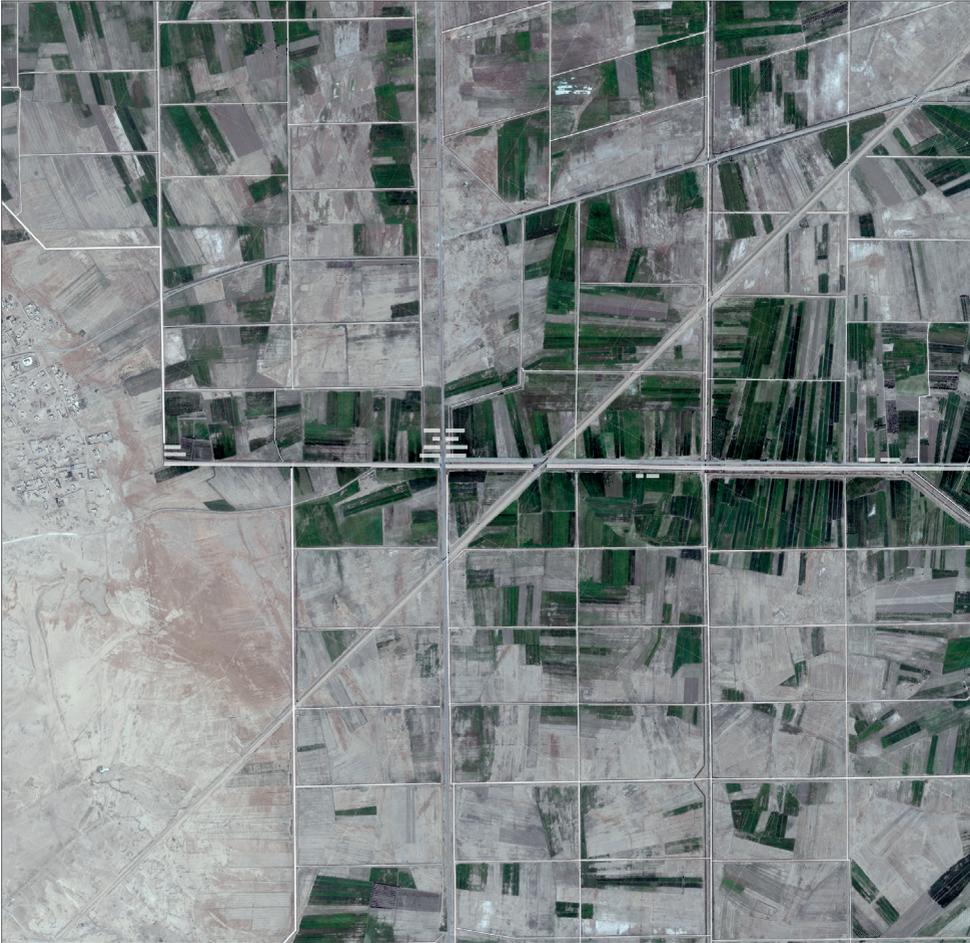
2 – Guarracino Scipione, “Allarme demografico. Sovrappopolazione e spopolamento dal XVII al XXI secolo”, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 2016.

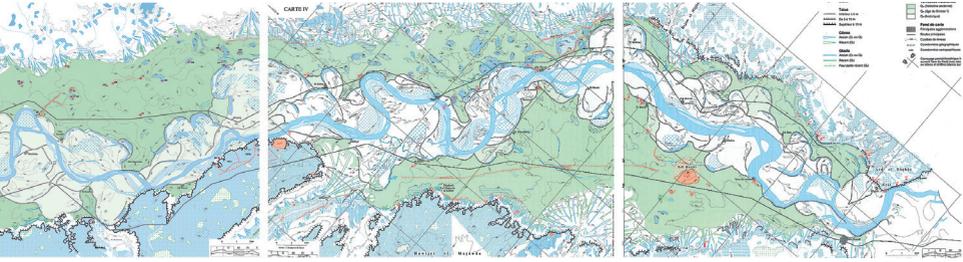
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URBICIDE RURAL SYRIA – RECONSTRUCTION OF VILLAGES

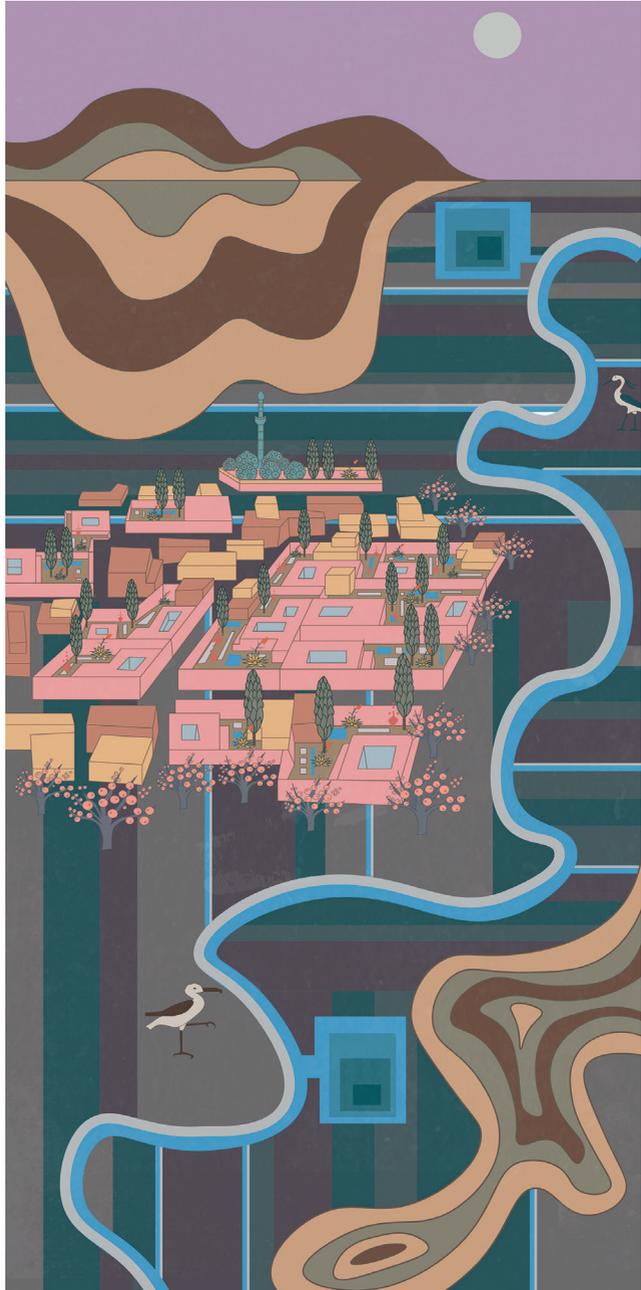




Decentralisation

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3 – Davis Mike, "Beyond Blade runner: Urban control the Ecology of Fear", Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, Westfield NJ, 1992.

4 – UN Habitat, Cities and Climate Change Initiative, "Planning for Climate Change, A strategic values-based approach for Urban Planners", UN Habitat, Nairobi, 2014.

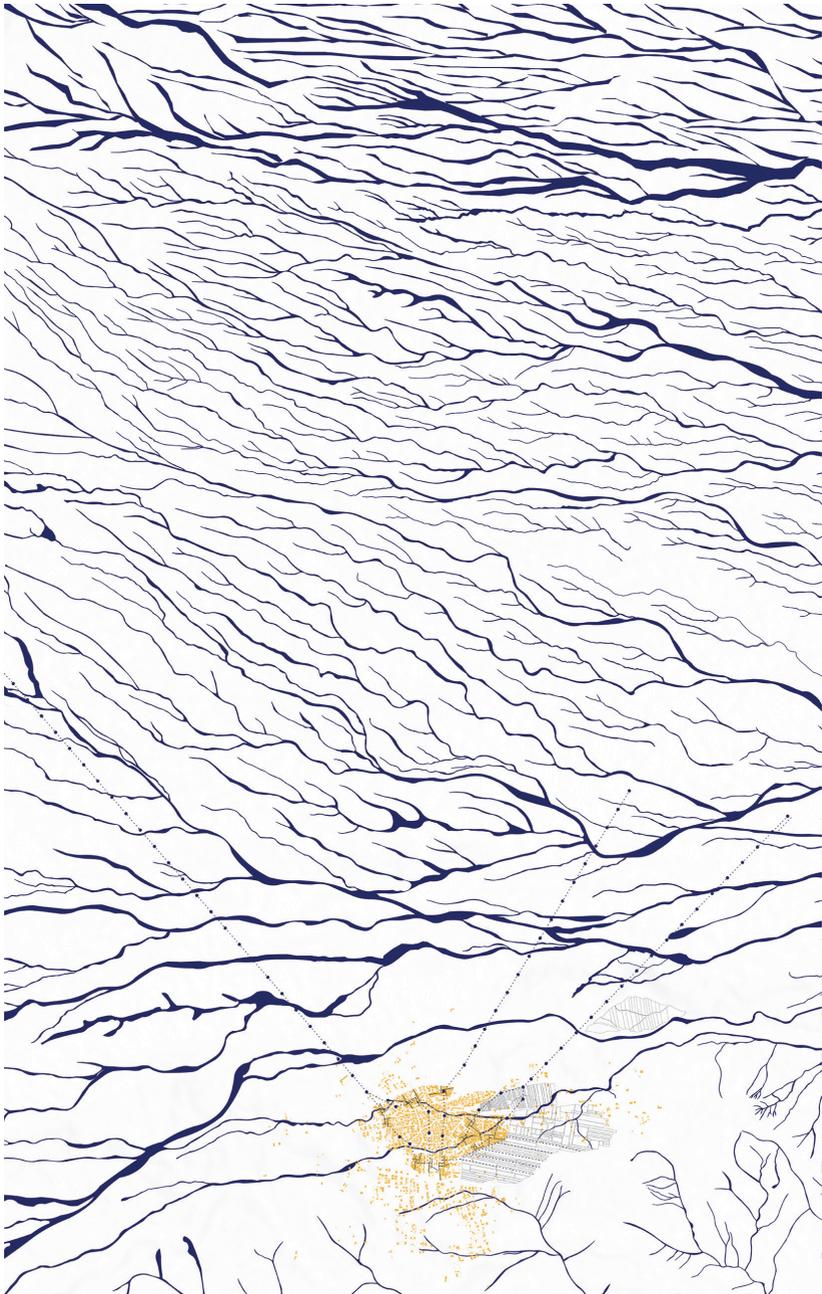
5 – Benevolo Leonardo, "Appropriate Habitat in Laleh Bakhtiar, Towards a quality of life: the role of industrialization in the architecture and urban planning of developing countries", Second International Congress of Architects, Persepolis, 1974.

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Jrajeer, M. Meneghello,
A. Signori, S. Zucchelli;
Al Jalaa, M. Germanà,
C. Pettinelli; S. Bortolato,
M. Maniero.

the urban/rural duality that has always characterised the settlement of the territory with different housing densities. The towered metropolis with exponential density and the abandoned agricultural field invaded by weeds or eroded by the advance of the desert; are today the best representations of the global condition.

The city and the countryside are both in a crisis of definition and meaning: the urban centres, always dedicated to innovation and singularity, are becoming uniformed and strictly controlled global spaces³, the rural spaces, guarding the millenary traditions of slow modification of the territory are forced to epochal changes from the changed climatic conditions and new economic models⁴. The virtuous social and economic balance represented by historical fabrics has now disappeared. Leonardo Benevolo, in a conference held in Persepolis in 1974, anticipated themes that have become central today, stating: "When the reserve of ancient dwellings in town and villages will be finished - and this will be finished very soon, because in the meantime people are moving from villages to towns, and from smaller to large towns - you will suddenly meet the problem in the whole enormity [...] you should be much more clever than others in order to master this process. Perhaps you should make use of these years for preparing the means, both in quality and in quantity, fit for the new wants. You could think of recuperating a part of the historic homes and quarters [...] and you could imagine a spectre of modern types of homes and quarters, not reproducing the standard of the international types, but trying to follow the peculiar needs of climate, of tradition and of wishes"⁵.

The theme of urban centralisation in the MENA region is linked not so much to the percentage of the population residing in urban centres, although some











6 – World Bank, “The Toll of War: the economic and social consequences of the conflict in Syria”, World Bank Group, Washington DC, 2017.

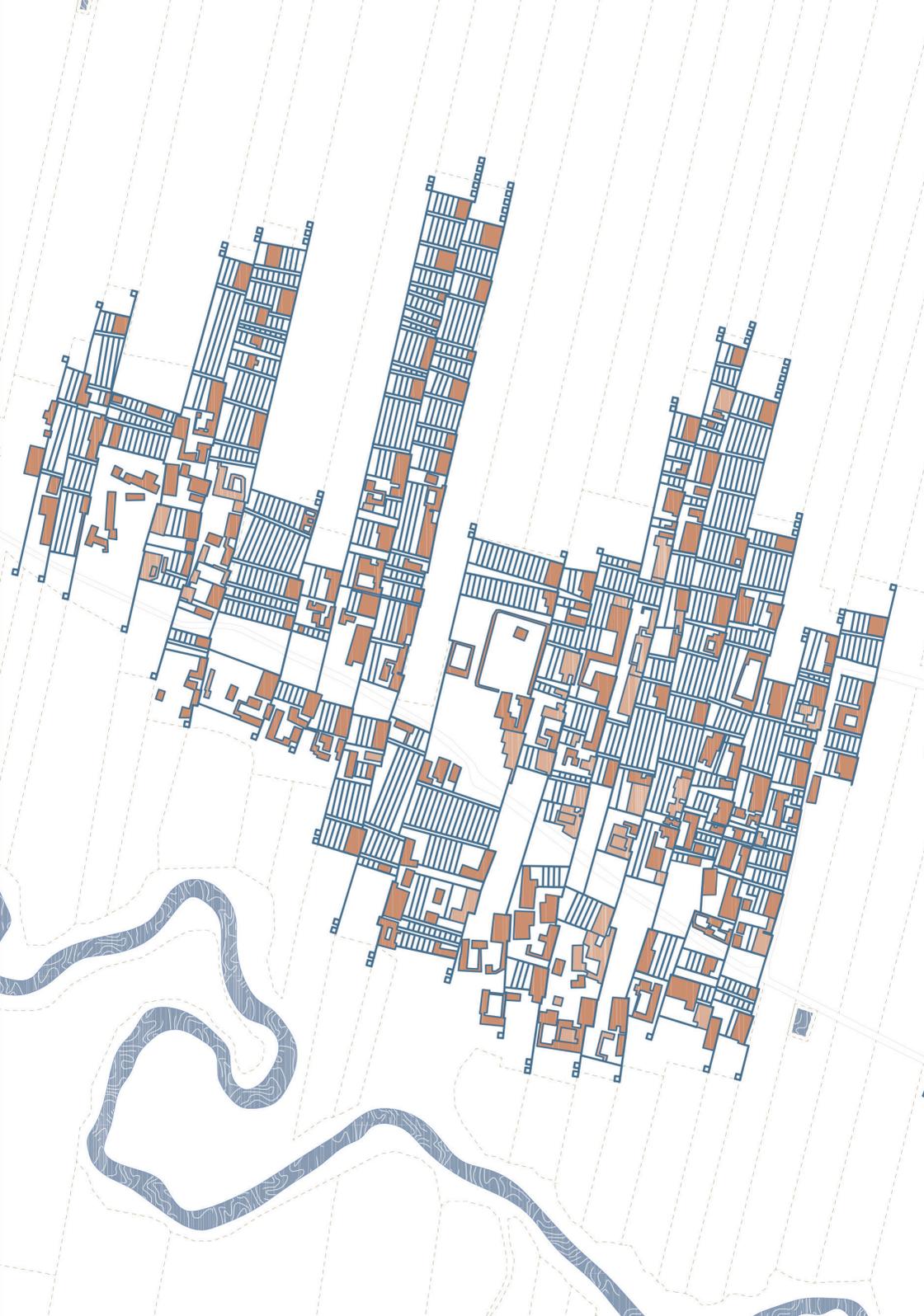
7 – Syrian Arab Republic State Planning Commission UNDP, “Second national report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Syrian Arab Republic”, Damasco, UNDP, 2005.

8 – Yazigi Ihd, “No going back: Why decentralisation is the future for Syria”, European Council on Foreign Relations, September 6th 2016.

countries in the area such as Jordan, Lebanon and the Gulf states are among the places with the highest global urbanisation rates, as to the difference in economic resources employed in the management of urban and rural areas. Syria is a case of absolute interest as economic development and the considerable increase in GDP in the decade preceding the conflict have been heavily unequal within the different governorates and urban and rural areas. The percentage of people living in extreme poverty has fallen considerably in the decade 1997-2007 in urban areas while it has remained virtually unchanged in rural areas⁶. The rural areas of the governorate of Aleppo and the north-east of the country were the places with the lowest economic development⁷ while the urban centres of Aleppo and Damascus and the port cities of Latakia and Tartous made the most of an economy nexus made up of wild liberalisations and strongly based on clientelistic dynamics. The almost perfect overlap between the areas controlled for long periods by the opposition and the areas with the highest level of poverty⁸ calls for a need for decentralisation policies capable of levelling inequality and maximising the development of rural territories.

It becomes necessary to imagine a totally different scenario, a scenario that puts communities and territory at the center of the processes of construction and reconstruction. A scenario in which bottom-up processes, starting from small centres, with limited but highly technological means and with a high level of integration of local knowledge, can constitute an alternative to the desert and the anthill. A process that can be defined as decentralisation, understood as the use of economic, natural and knowledge resources in a scattered manner throughout the territory without necessarily privileging cities and favouring

– On the next page:
Western Gherban,
Lorenzo Abate.





urban concentration. At the administrative level by decentralisation is meant the transfer of responsibilities from central governments to smaller institutions that allows the passage from a single policy applied on the whole territory to a differentiation at the level of local territorial entities⁹.

The spatial consequences of the process of administrative decentralisation and the application to the theme of reconstruction requires a conceptual, design and planning effort that allows to imagine and implement the tools necessary for the reconstruction not only of urban areas with high population density but also of rural areas and at the same time to design innovative low-density settlement processes. Thinking about decentralisation today is a conceptual effort against the contemporary conventional mentality¹⁰ that unifies the concept of development with that of high-density urban development; it is instead necessary to separate the two concepts to favour settlement models with variable densities on the territory. Only a policy of decentralisation that restores resources, both regarding financial schemes and decision-making processes, to rural areas can in fact guarantee the laborious work of modification and continuous care of the territory traditionally carried out by local populations. However, decentralisation must be guided by clear design and planning concepts in order to not become a mere form of parasitic assistance; a particularly important condition in the case of reconstruction, where the waste of resources can be exacerbated by administrative chaos.

9 – Brosio Giorgio, Maggi Maurizio, Piperno Stefano, "Governare fuori dal centro", Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, Ivrea, 2001.

10 – Kenneth Galibrath John, "The Affluent Society", Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston MA, 1958.

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