

Architectures of Re-fit. Reuse, proximity, and territorial care in a fragile valley

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Revisiting the notion of “goodness of fit” (Alexander 1964), the contribution examines the relationship between form and context in fragile, contracting territories, where socio-spatial relations are increasingly weakened by depopulation, infrastructural abandonment, and environmental instability. In such conditions, the “fit” cannot be assumed as a pre-existing equilibrium but emerges as a projective and situated construction.

The contribution towards a selection of design projects developed within the Architectural Design Studio “Strategies and Architectures for Fragile Contexts” (Politecnico di Milano, 2025–2026), focusing on the Roveto Valley (Central Italy) want to describe the role of architectural design as an instrument to re-fit the abandoned persistence with a new perspective for the community to reactivate the future of the territories, facing the increasing presence of environmental and social fragilities. The students engaged with disused railway buildings and underused infrastructures, transforming them into collective spaces and distributed first-aid facilities embedded within the territorial system.

The interventions in which reuse operates as both an architectural strategy and a form of territorial care are conceived as small- and medium-scale spatial devices. The projects, through precise, limited transformations, redefine accessibility, proximity, and spatial hierarchies, establishing new relationships among settlements, infrastructure, and open landscapes. Beyond the adaptation, projects selectively reinforce specific spatial relations, contributing to the reconfiguration of fragmented contexts.

The goal is to intervene on a limited scale, producing territorial effects by condensing and rearticulating weakened force lines. Architectural form operates as an agent that structures emerging spatial configurations and mediates between inherited material traces and evolving socio-environmental demands.

By foregrounding design as a situated and operative practice, the contribution proposes a contemporary interpretation of the “goodness of fit” as a dynamic, design-driven process in which the project’s scale plays a critical role in shaping the spatial and relational qualities of fragile territories.