

From Margins to System: Energy as Heritage and Socio-Spatial Infrastructure in Mediterranean Minor Settlements

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This contribution proposes a reinterpretation of heritage in minor settlements through the lens of the energy question, understood as both a critical and operational device for contemporary design. Within the framework of environmental, economic, and demographic crises, Mediterranean inland areas — often considered marginal — emerge as anticipatory contexts capable of activating new relationships between space, society, and resources.

Adopting the paradigm of her(M)itage, heritage is interpreted not as a static legacy to be preserved, but as a dynamic, energetic, social, and culturally active infrastructure. From this perspective, the Mediterranean is understood not merely as a geographical context, but as an operational field for design experimentation, where environmental and settlement conditions make evident the transformative potential of emerging contextual forms.

Within this framework, and in continuity with Giovanni Carrosio's interpretations of inland areas as laboratories of territorial innovation, the energy transition is not limited to the introduction of technological devices; rather, it configures energy as a cultural, social, and spatial infrastructure capable of profoundly redefining ways of inhabiting and producing territory. Renewable energy communities are interpreted, in line with Jeremy Rifkin's perspectives, as distributed and collaborative systems, while Reyner Banham's reflections on the relationship between energy, environment, and design enable these devices to be understood as part of a renewed ecology of architecture.

In minor settlements, heritage becomes an active support for the local production and management of energy, triggering processes of cultural, economic, and spatial regeneration. Moving beyond the dichotomy between conservation and transformation, the research proposes a reversal of perspective: from margins as places of fragility to margins as laboratories of innovation. In this sense, the theoretical triangulation between Carrosio, Rifkin, and Banham allows the energy transition to be interpreted as a simultaneously territorial, social, and design-related phenomenon, founding a new alliance between energy, community, and heritage.