

Urban morphologies in transition in the outskirt of Marseille

Michela Barosio

Politecnico di Torino, Department of Architecture and Design

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Territorial transformations are widely recognized as being characterized by long temporal horizons and by an irreducible dimension of uncertainty. The duration of these processes implies that intermediate stages—namely transitional phases—are often as significant as, if not more significant than, the final outcome. The uncertainty surrounding the eventual outcome is closely tied to political, economic, social, and cultural conditions, whose shifts are directly reflected—albeit with varying temporalities and modalities—in the physical and morphological transformations of the territory.

The research project, which also engages a thesis group within a master's-level design studio, advances scenario-based design, supported by computational digital tools, as an approach capable of anticipating a range of possible outcomes of ongoing transformations. The development of multiple scenarios may be articulated in relation to the various stakeholders involved, the planning instruments available, the temporal thresholds considered, demographic dynamics within the study area, and emerging political priorities. Computational design tools—enabling the generation of multiple spatial and morphological configurations in response to variations in both quantitative and qualitative parameters—constitute a powerful instrument for guiding the morphological and spatial transition of the evolving city.

The Plombières area in Marseille, situated at the interface between the historic urban core and the industrial periphery, has been selected as a case study for the proposed design methodology. This portion of territory, not yet fully consolidated as urban fabric, is currently regarded as strategic by the municipality of Marseille. Around Boulevard Plombières and its elevated roadway, productive plots, manufacturing activities, and, to a lesser extent, residential uses are concentrated. The gradual yet incomplete process of deindustrialization affecting certain plots, together with the heterogeneity of functions, morphologies, and densities, renders this area particularly suitable for testing the potential of a scenario-based design approach.