

Is the Po Valley a Type?

Hypothesis on Amos Edallo's *Ruralistica*

In his essays entitled *Is the Bay a Type?*,¹ Jacques Gubler wondered what relevance the concept of type had in the work of Louis Kahn. Apparently, it could seem paradoxically detached from the master's intentions; yet, in the hypothesis of Gubler, the concept of type unveiled an unprecedented character of Kahn's thought that could be related to Auguste Choisy's classification of structural types, such as the Gothic Bay type. This title seemed to me interesting enough to be recalled in relation to a subject that, although being different from Gubler's one, focuses on the same overall question: is it paradoxical to think of a territory as a type? The territory I have in mind is the Po Valley, the alluvial plain of the Po river basin situated in the north-eastern part of Italy. However, I'd immediately clarify to the reader that, in the context of this article, the Po Valley should not be intended in the sense provided by physical geography, thus of a place, delimited on a map by precise boundaries; conversely, the Po Valley is intended as a structure that highlights a kind of consistency between modes of agrarian production, rural settlements and building characters; all these entities are considered independently of their visible form. This structure is called the ruralist type.

The possibility to confer the Po Valley the status of ruralist type stands for the scientific hypothesis of foundation of a disciplinary branch of urbanism known as *Ruralistica* or 'Rural Urbanism', whose contents are outlined in the homonymous publication written by Amos Edallo and published in 1946. Unfortunately, *Ruralistica* had no future as a science as Edallo expected; nipped in the bud by criticism, it was quickly forgotten by practitioners and overlooked by historians. For these reasons, today *Ruralistica* has almost no scientific notice, as well as very little informations about its author, Amos Edallo, who is mostly unknown outside of his commitment to the rural traditions of his regione (Lombardy), and the restoration of the dome of Crema.²

In order to clarify what *Ruralistica* is about, it should be noticed that the ruralist type is not a territorial type and such difference is crucial. On the

¹ Gubler 1985.

² For an overview of Edallo's life and professional activity, see Edallo 2017 and Feraboli 2004; in relation to the dome of Crema, see Edallo 1955; on *Ruralistica* see Frassine 2006.

one hand, the territorial type refers to geography and, in particular, to the work of Vidal de la Blache, which has nothing, or very little, to do with *Ruralistica* (as we will see in the fifth section of this article). On the other hand, the ruralist type relates to a branch of architecture and urban planning oriented to non-urban places and rural areas. In order to show how this discipline works, Edallo assumes one single case study, namely a small area of the Po Valley, or more precisely of what in physical geography is commonly acknowledged as the territory of the Po Valley. Edallo believes that this area is large enough to develop and support his thesis, as this area embodies all the features that are needed to display a ruralist type. And this ruralist type cannot be refuted according to the criteria of physical geography but only according to the scientific criteria of *Ruralistica*. The aim of this article is to briefly summarize such criteria.

Therefore, the goal of *Ruralistica*, unlike physical geography, is not to identify and mark an area inside a map, but rather to understand which rules insist on a rural territory, independently of form and size of the territory itself. Indeed, in view of this effort, the extension of the area is not relevant because only flows and relationship between spatial entities are considered. In this way, scientific issues involved in this process are mainly about relationships, namely: how are settlements and rural fields mutually related? Which relationships occur between dwelling and stables? And so on. To this extent, I would claim that, while physical geography is based on topography, *Ruralistica* bears on topology; it avoids questioning forms and rather focuses on relationships and flows occurring in the territory at different scales.

To this extent, I'll argue that *Ruralistica* depicts the Po Valley as a flat ontological plane made of settlements, buildings, territories, and avoids whatever hierarchy between architectural design, urbanism, and planning as all boundaries between these disciplines tend to vanish. Indeed, the ruralist type is not solely related to the agricultural settlements of a territory but includes also isolated farms, as well as all those buildings and facts that are not even related to the idea of settlement. In this way, *Ruralistica* struggles the very idea of planning, as it is not addressed to the production of new settlements, but rather to understand how the territory is structured in relation to the agrarian modes of production and how this structure represents the deep character of a territory, involving both natural features (rivers, canals, animals, etc.) and human artefacts (buildings, agrarian fields, technological devices, etc.).

In this essay, I will try to show this condition and, especially, how the very possibility of conceiving the Po Valley as a ruralist type is the scientific hypothesis on which *Ruralistica* is grounded. In regard to other experiences, this scientific hypothesis should not sound strange, actually; for instance, the same condition concerns the relationship between Venice and Saverio Muratori's theses on the relationship between urban typology and morphology,³ as well as Milan periphery with Giancarlo Motta and Antonia Pizzigoni's thesis of the simple elements of the architecture.⁴ However, unfortunately, *Ruralistica* remains entirely limited to the Po Valley as no other experience of re-

³ See Muratori 1960.

⁴ See Ibid.

search in the domain of architecture and urbanism, during the decades later, develops a research that establishes a kind of continuity with this science.

Now, I briefly introduce the contents of this essay, following the same order in which they will be dealt with. In the first section I make a distinction between type and typology, which is not simply assumed as a matter of linguistics but rather of disciplinary content; here, I argue that Quatremère de Quincy's theoretical definition of type mirrors itself in the way *Ruralistica* uses type. In the second section I relate the concept of type to the Po Valley through the metaphor of the fractal intended as a reiterative principle of organization at different scales of design and planning. In the third section, I show how the ruralist type dissolves itself into a field of variations and the way in which this condition becomes intelligible through diagrams. Afterwards, in the fourth section, I address *Ruralistica's* guidelines for the design of future rural buildings. Then, in the fifth section, I deal with the historical references of *Ruralistica* as well as with his hypothetical relationship with geography. Finally, the concluding section portrays a reflection on contemporary policies of territorial safeguard and how the ruralist type might be involved.

In order to conclude this introductory section, I would like to clarify the general scientific aims of this essay. The first one concerns the rediscovery of *Ruralistica* in the domain of handbook publications in Italy, in the course of the second post-war period;⁵ indeed, along with other technical publications, *Ruralistica* shows evidence of a positivist attitude in architecture and urbanism that, albeit representing a minority position in the architectural scenario, constitutes an alternative to the conventional thematic primacy conferred to styles and languages of celebrated masters and avantgarde pioneers.

The second aim concerns the way tools and words are used in architecture. In particular, given the opportunity to publish this essay in an international journal of architectural theory, I thought that a more general reflection on the use of type could be undertaken alongside the case study of *Ruralistica*. Then, I'll argue that Quatremère's definition of 'type' can prove relevance nowadays in relation to subjects that lost their formal consistency. Thus, I tried to undermine the meaning of this concept by helping me with a territory, such as the Po Valley, which seems to perfectly fit in the domain of this effort. Such an attempt to 'undermine'⁶ the territory is oriented to its discovery outside of the disciplinary meaning acknowledged by architecture and urban planning.

Why type instead of typology?

First of all, a terminological clarification about type and typology, in relation to architecture theory, cannot be avoided. At the time of the publication of *Ruralistica*, neither of these two concepts has theoretical relevance. In the Italian architectural scenario, these two concepts achieve theoretical relevance during the sixties, thanks to the research on the city undertaken by well-known authors like Saverio Muratori, Aldo Rossi, and Carlo Aymonino among others.⁷

5 See Guenzi 1993; Dutto 2018.

6 See Harman 2013; Harman 2007.

7 See, in particular, AA.VV. 1964.

8 See AA.VV. 1985.

However, since typology plays a minor role in this essay, I will not elaborate on it. For the considerations that follow, I mainly considered the monographic issue 509–510 of *Casabella*, entitled *The Grounds of Typology*,⁸ which I also recommend to readers wishing to have a general idea about this concept. Indeed, contributions that are collected in this monograph, published more than a decade after the season of intense typological studies, orbit around a question that can be resumed in this way: is typology still relevant? Among the answers, which vary between affirmative and negative, a fairly clear picture of typology is outlined as a historicized concept strongly rooted in the city or, to be more precisely, in the scientific domain of urban morphology. Typology stands for a form of dwelling that, by repeating itself over time, generates the form of the city. Indeed, in urban studies, typology is not primarily related to public buildings, as it happens, for instance, in J.N.L. Durand's *Recueil*,⁹ but rather to the residential 'texture' of the city historical core.¹⁰ Nevertheless, typology generally stands for a 'model' and, before proceeding, I suggest the reader to keep in mind this word (model) as representative of typology.

9 Durand 1801.

10 For an overview on the methodology of urban analyses please consider Scolari 1985.

On the other hand, in order to face the concept of type, I propose to go back to the customary definition provided by Quatremère de Quincy's *Dictionnaire historique d'architecture*.¹¹ This choice has at least one reason; even though *Ruralistica* does not mention Quatremère in any way, it seems to actually embed his definition into its arguments; the way Edallo employs the word 'type' relates to a thing (a territory, a settlement, or a building) whose characters persist over time and can be recognized within a range of formal variations. For Quatremère, type should not be confused with model. A type cannot be copied because it cannot be fixed into an image; features of a type should be conceptually grasped from a reference and cannot simply be copied. To this extent, Quatremère writes: „[the type] is like a kind of nucleus around which the developments and variations of forms have been agglomerated and coordinated“.¹² For Quatremère, the type derives from the classic ideal of imitation of nature and differentiates itself from the model that stands for the copy of another object, a kind of mechanical reproduction without conceptual mediation. Although in an ambiguous form, nature represents also a theoretical reference in *Ruralistica*, inasmuch as: „at the base of this discipline there is a 'natural condition' from which, even when new laws are instituted, they never detach themselves from it“.¹³ In addition to this note about nature, which remains a speculative suggestion, Quatremère states something crucial, namely that: „the type is an object according to which everyone can conceive works that will not resemble each other“.¹⁴ Once more, it is important to underline that a type does not reproduce another object but only its main characters. This clarification introduces the crucial concept of 'character;' as for Quatremère, type and character are closely related, almost as the two sides of a single coin.¹⁵

11 Quatremère de Quincy 1992 [1788]; for an historical analysis of Quatremère's *Dictionnaire I* recommend to see Leoni 2018.

12 Quatremère de Quincy 1992 [1788]: 274.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 See the item 'Caractere', Quatremère de Quincy 1992 [1788]: 151–160.

Hence, going back to the hypothesis of this essay: is it possible to conceive the territory as a type? Unlike a building or a statue, the territory does not have an evident form; the territory-as-a-thing must be demonstrated,

and this is the purpose of Edallo's *Ruralistica*. Then, in order to portray this demonstration, he assumes the Po Valley as case study and shows that, behind its variable formal appearance, several characters are stable: they repeat themselves over time though in a different form conditioned by updates occurring in technology and economy. Therefore, the territory is a type insofar as its variations in agriculture and technology of building lead anyway to a previous form, a common root that is the ruralist type. Therefore, the ruralist type is not a model, it cannot be fixed into an image but rather into a field of variations.

A post-euclidean scenario

Ruralistica addresses the Po Valley as an organism made up of visible forms (buildings, fields, vegetation) and invisible functions (performances, production, and circulation lines). In this paragraph, I'll show how all such elements are conceptually flattened on the same 'plane':¹⁶ the ruralist type of the Po Valley implies no ontological difference among territory, settlement, and buildings.

Ruralistica does not represent Po Valley as a totality: it has no overall form. In order to deal with an object with no form, Edallo confronts himself with two possible choices; the first one, is to renounce, do something else; the second possibility is to undertake a project of fragmentation of all those small facts that still attempt to portray a clue of form to the overall. Edallo chose the second possibility. At each scale, he proceeds to fragment the form he's faced with; outcome of this fragmentation are simple elements. Each scale ends up into a multiplicity of such simple elements. At the territorial scale (i.e. scale 1: 25000) are: settlements, farmhouses, agrarian plots, roads, rivers, and irrigation canals.¹⁷ At the scale of the settlement (i.e. 1: 2000) there are: peasants dwellings, streets, public squares, churches, and schools.¹⁸ Finally, at the scale of the rural cell, actually the main building of the farm (i.e. 1: 200), simple elements are: owner's and peasants' dwellings, yards, barns, and cowsheds.¹⁹

Each one of these simple elements, independently from the scale it is conventionally related to, is linked to another element, potentially belonging to another scale as well. In this way, *Ruralistica* refuses the conventional split between urbanism and architectural design. This disciplinary subdivision simply does not work because their concepts and tools are not useful to face the hybrid quality of the territory. For instance, building typologies are useless because the territory shows no effective difference between private and public buildings, as well as between private spaces and public spaces. In this way, *Ruralistica* describes a completely isotropic space in which elements gather or distance themselves producing variable clusters of humans, animals, and agrarian plots. In particular, four variants of clusters are listed. The first type is defined as „promiscuous“²⁰ and indicates the prevalence of industrial over agrarian land and „it concerns more town planning than ruralist one“ (fig.1). The second type is called „disseminated“²¹ and refers to ar-

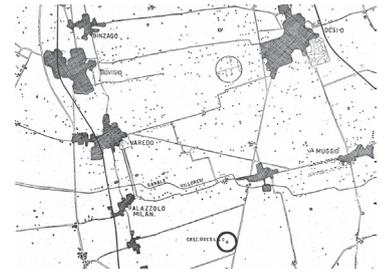


Fig. 1 Example of a 'promiscuous' area (of industrial and rural buildings) close to the village of Desio (the circle at the bottom indicates the size of a farmhouse)

16 The concept of 'plane' is related to the subject of cartography oriented to architectural design, see Motta and Pizzigoni 2016

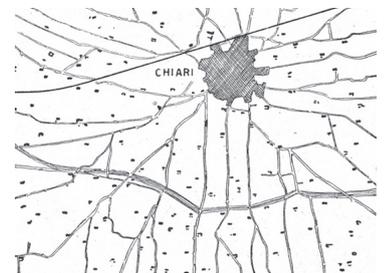


Fig. 2 Example of a 'disseminated' area close to the village Chiari



Fig. 3 Example of a 'nuclear' area close to the town of Crema

17 See *Ruralistica* al 25000, Edallo 1946: 87.

18 See *Ruralistica* nella scala da 1 a 2000, Edallo 1946: 111.

19 See *La cellula rurale*, Edallo 1946: 203.

20 Edallo 1946: 96-97.

21 Edallo 1946: 98-99.

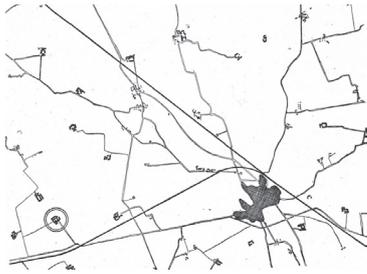


Fig. 4 Example of a 'radial' area close to the village of Casalpusterlengo

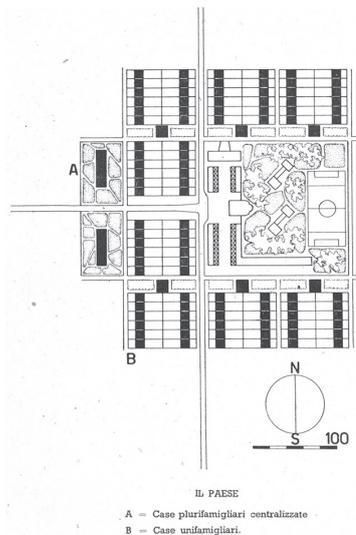


Fig. 5 Project for the village of Pieranica as a settlement featured by wage labor

22 Edallo 1946: 100–101.

23 Edallo 1946: 102–105.

24 "Les premier objet fractal qui j'ai rencontré, avant de lire Mandelbrot et de savoir par conséquent qu'il se nommait fractal, est justement le monde." Serres 1980: 101. Translated by Andrea Alberto Dutto.

25 "Le voyage ici ne va pas d'un point à un autre, il descend les degrés de l'échelle. Il entasse les cartes les unes sur les autres en un espace feuilleté. Il cherche la limite du représentable, il cherche le réel dans les anfractuosités du fragment. ... Et il descend infiniment vers le local. Son parcours connecte les échelles." Serres 1980: 96. Translated by Andrea Alberto Dutto.

26 See "Trasformazione del paese rurale di Pieranica in paese del salariato ed in paese della mezzadria", Edallo 1946: 192–201.

areas characterized by regularly subdivided agrarian plots and large availability of water; each plot has its own small farmhouse and avoids relationship with larger settlements (fig. 2). The third type is defined as „nuclear“²² and concerns small clusters of farmhouses gathered around a square, equipped with services and spaces for peasants' social life as well as a church, symbolizing the settlement social dimension (fig. 3). Finally, *Ruralistica* shows the „radial“²³ type in which farms orbit around a larger settlement endowed with public services (fig. 4).

Despite this, this is not yet sufficient to define the ruralist type; it is still too general and inconsistent in order to prove our hypothesis. Furthermore, there is no mention of how these territorial figures are related to each other. Fortunately, however, illustrations provided by Edallo, display really existent places and towns of Lombardy. From this, we can deduce that *Ruralistica* undertakes its analysis on an area that can be approximately included within a circle of 60 km of circumference with its centre in Crema. Such compression of territorial patterns into such a small area confers a visually fragmented appearance to the Po Valley, like a mosaic of possible territories.

From this it can be deduced that the space described by *Ruralistica* is not Euclidean; territory, settlement and buildings are all related by a recursive logic that overcomes the hierarchy between big and small scale implied in physical geography. In order to clarify this post-euclidean condition I suggest the reader to think about territory, settlement and buildings as object displayed on a shelf. To clarify the kind of condition I'm referring to, I propose to assume the metaphor of the fractal provided by Michel Serres who claims that the world itself is a fractal: „The first fractal object I encountered, before reading Mandelbrot and therefore knowing that it was called 'fractal', is precisely the world“.²⁴ But what effect does this fractal produce? In order to reply to this question, I refer once more to Serres when he describes the itinerary undertaken by a hypothetical New Zeno: „The journey here does not go from one point to another. [...] It stacks the maps the one on top of each other into a stratified space. It seeks the limit of the representable and looks for the real in the fissures of the fragment... it infinitely decreases towards the local. Its path connects the scales“.²⁵

Settlements are no longer recognizable within the territory; they vary from being radically compressed to extremely widespread or pulverized within the territory; and this is also why the ruralist type cannot be reduced to the domain of analysis of the agrarian settlement. In order to exemplify this condition, *Ruralistica* assumes the case study of Pieranica: a tiny rural settlement of 669 inhabitants, placed 10km north-west of Crema.²⁶ Edallo produces three examples of variation of this settlement. The first example focuses on wage labour, where peasants work without being owner of the agrarian plot; all dwellings are concentrated in a compact built-up area with the church and leisure spaces (fig. 5). Such configuration tends to expand towards the outside, involving the territory into a process of radial development. This figure reproduces the kind of centrifugal and centripetal motion that is ordinarily under-

taken by wage labourers: from their dwellings towards the agrarian plot and vice versa. In the second example, Pieranica is reconfigured into a settlement characterized by metayage. Here, peasants' dwellings are situated near agrarian plots, whose revenues are shared with the owner. Living space and working space are matched; the house has a symbiotic relationship with the stable and other rustic buildings (fig. 6). Shortly, metayage blurs the difference between city and country; rural cells are grouped in tiny 'nuclear' dwellings endowed with social services widespread along the road network.

Finally, the farm, is the productive building that 'fractally' reproduces in itself the overall territorial economy of the Po Valley, characterized by four main modes of agrarian production: family management, metayage, cooperative labor, wage labor.²⁷ The farm embodies and represents the relationship between center and periphery, culture and nature, humans and animals, into a physical building. For instance, in the case of metayage, humans and animals are closely tied together into 'nuclei' (fig. 7); conversely, wage labour tends to distance themselves further, forming concentric rings with 'radial' development with the owner's dwelling at the center and stables outside (fig. 8).

Therefore, what I tried to outline in this paragraph is not so much the fractal metaphor of the Po Valley, but rather the process of fragmentation of the overall form of the territory into a set of components and the subsequent gathering of such elements into an overall entity, namely the ruralist type, operated by *Ruralistica*.

Through the eyes of the diagram

Let us now return to the theoretical issue of the type with reference to the 'rural cell,' namely the main building of the farm.²⁸ As I previously stated, the 'rural cell' is not a building typology, as, according to production needs, its architectural form varies too often to be acknowledged as a model. The aim of *Ruralistica* is to achieve „the generic type of the rural cell of the Po Valley“²⁹ by overcoming the typological form to which the farm is conventionally, but incorrectly, bound.

To represent this mobility of characters, conventional technique of representation used in architecture, such as plans, elevations, and sections prove being useless. Instead, *Ruralistica* makes use of diagrams.

Conventional architectural symbolism is drastically reduced: furnishings, walls, openings, and doors are removed. The building is simplified to its boundary, drawn with continuous lines alongside the walls while dashed lines are drawn along porticoes. Afterwards, these boundaries are filled with solid black fills enriched with pictograms that suggest the kind of functional destination each piece of the farm relates to; different kinds of fills allow a visual differentiation between owners' and peasants' dwellings; then, other pictograms indicate animal spaces: cows stand for the cowshed, pigs for the pigsty, and so on (fig. 9). Moreover, a network of dotted lines describes how humans, animals and commodities circulate in the farm. So, the outcome of such a radical approach to representations turns the plan of the farm into a diagram.

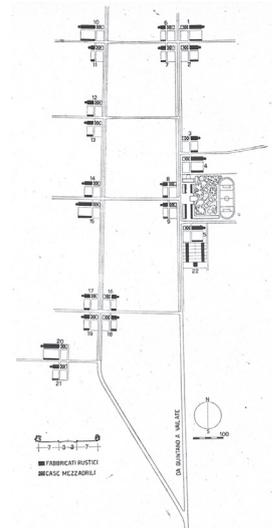


Fig. 6 Project for the village of Pieranica as a settlement featured by metayage

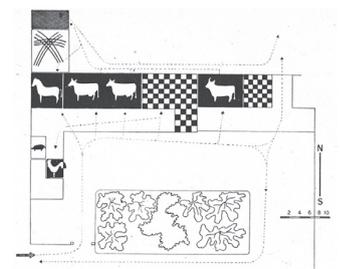


Fig. 7 Diagram of an average farm in the rural village of S. Maria della Croce

²⁷ See *Ruralistica* chapter III "I vari sistemi di conduzione", Edallo 1946: 31-46.

²⁸ See *Ruralistica* chapter VII "La cellula rurale", Edallo 1946: 203-282; Edallo 1949; Edallo 1951.

²⁹ Edallo 1946: 204.

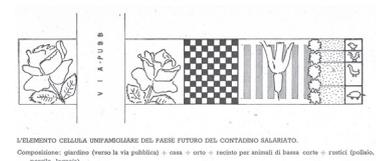


Fig. 8 Diagram of a rural cell for a single family of peasants

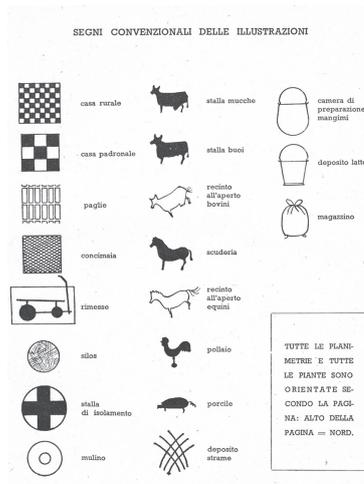


Fig. 9 Legenda with pictograms related to diagrams

31 See Ruralistica chapter II "Ruralistica antica e moderna", Edallo 1946: 17-30.

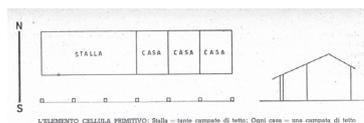


Fig. 10 Diagram of an ancient farmhouse

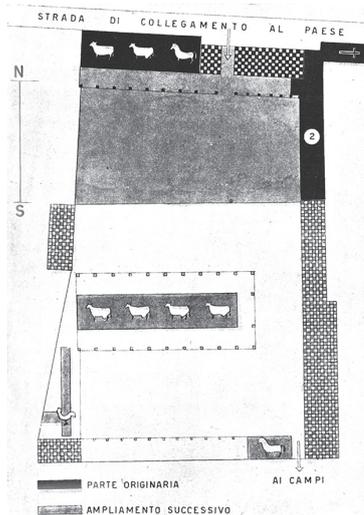


Fig. 11 Diagram of a nineteenth-century farmhouse

The diagram says what architecture cannot say, namely, how life develops inside the space of buildings. The more literal expression of this condition is related to the empirical movements of humans and animals. It reminds of Alexander Klein's empirical analyses of circulation inside the typical Berlin apartment.³⁰ Actually, the farm confers to Klein's circulation diagrams a further degree of evidence. Indeed, in the case study the Berlin apartment, such analyses are often too detailed with respect to the extent of the issue they deal with; for example, if the housewife and a guest cross each other in the corridor, or if the housewife has to lengthen the path that connects the oven and the sink by half a meter to get over the table, to be honest: it is not that problematic. Unlike this condition, the farm faces with hygienic problem due to the relationship between animals and humans that is also the cause of fragmentation of the farm into independent buildings that happens in the course of the twentieth century. In synthesis, the diagram is necessary to the farm, or rather: farm design implies diagrammatic thinking.

Therefore, the diagram transforms the building into a field of relationships between human space and animal space that proves continuity through the historical development of the farm, from the ancient rural cell up to the modern one.³¹ A continuity that architecture is no longer able to display and needs the diagram to be acknowledged. Originally, peasants' rooms and stables, were grouped together into a single building characterized by rooms aligned along a portico and distributed by a balcony (fig. 10). In a second moment, which dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century, due to the strong development of agriculture, cowsheds widen to the point of turning themselves into independent buildings (fig. 11). Then, the further step comes in the twentieth century and, in continuity with the previous one, implies a further fragmentation of the farm, with increasingly independent buildings, distanced from one another, also in relation to upcoming technical possibilities introduced by industrial prefabrication (fig. 12). In addition to such obvious technological updating, that confers the modern farm a further degree of complexity while compared to the old one, the relationship between humans and animals keeps unchanged as the problematic core of *Ruralistica*. On the contrary, the modern farm no longer displays formal relationship with the old farm: the architectural typology fails. While in the traditional farm, the wall enclosure grouped all rooms along the perimeter, the modern farm freely arranges a series of isolated buildings. The modern farm is no longer a model, a simple piece of architecture, but an organism that needs to be read through the lens of agrarian production and technology.

Rules without form

Ruralistica has among its scientific aims to predict the future development of the farm. This aim aligns perfectly with the idea of the ruralist type, according to which the evolutionary dynamics the Po Valley territory mirrors itself in the configurations of the farm. However, *Ruralistica* avoids any romantic aspiration to invent a new typology of farm. The type denies inven-

tion. This condition is precisely stated by Edalfo with these words: „instead of forging us with inventions, it is useful to define the future structure of the rural organism, deducing our definition from those elements of the past that still present themselves efficiently, and integrating them with our studies“.³² As it was previously stated, the type consists in identifying those rules that allow the transition from the ancient farm towards the modern one; rules that can be identified as the logical structure of the ruralist type; rules that consider the shape of the building as being only one among a multitude of components of the type.

By speculating on the future farm, *Ruralistica* shows how rules tend to gradually prevail over forms. The future farm is supposed to mediate between rural tradition and industrial modernity, where for ‘industrial’ Edalfo means „a building conceived according to its pure function“.³³ This apparent apologia of functionalism, in reality, introduces two very practical issues, namely: hygienic standards and prefabrication technology. Considering the emerging relevance of such issues as well as their dynamic becoming, Edalfo conceives the future farm as a composition of normalized components. Therefore, „the size of new buildings will be a consequence of the functional organization and will be calculated not by chance: rooms width will result from the analytical composition of various components“.³⁴ The building is no more intended as a physical object but rather as set of generic normalized rooms (living room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom) (fig. 13) to be combined together in relation to variable modes of agrarian production (fig. 14). The farm of the future, therefore, no longer presents itself as a fixed distribution typology but as a freer organism that reflects different issues like: production needs, building standards and other variations occurring in the economic structure of the territory.

What I have said, so far, about the rural cell requires further specification once extended to the cowshed. The cowshed introjects criteria and methodological inputs from the scientific analysis of distribution of minimal living units, supported by a wide diffusion of handbook publications in the first half of the twentieth century. Unlike the past, what intervenes to modify cowshed design is technology; thanks to technology the production cycle is accelerated in terms of performances and efficiency of labour spaces. The cowshed becomes an assemblage of innovative devices that replaces archaic equipment and affects building size and plan configuration. The reconfiguration of its typical plans is undertaken in strict relationship with the diagram of production: its walls are literally grafted onto the diagram (fig. 15). The tool that intervenes in this process is the module, understood as the possibility of a dimensional unification of the cow environment. Unlike modular building experiments conducted on human dwellings, Edalfo believes that „animals in their physical measure are best suited for unification and for a fixed housing system, due to their physical nature and a need for movement that avoids humans’ requirements of customization (especially true for cows)“.³⁵ Then: „the cowshed module offers high accuracy to design“.³⁶ The project of the ideal module does not originate from the analysis of existing cowsheds,

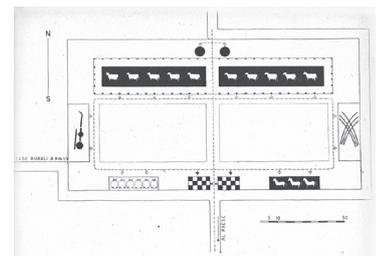


Fig. 12 Diagram of a modern farmhouse

32 Edalfo 1946: 238.

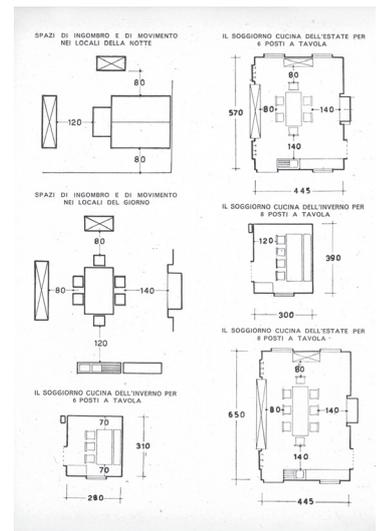


Fig. 13 Repertoire of normalized rooms for the peasant dwelling

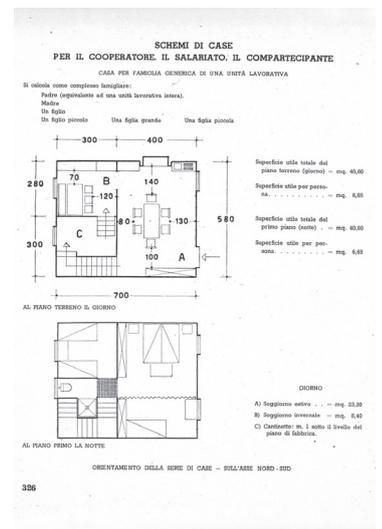


Fig. 14 Example of a combinatorial dwelling for co-op peasants

33 Ibid.

34 Edalfo 1946: 321.

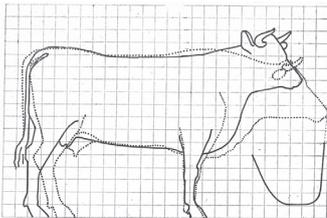
35 Edalfo 1946: 250.

36 Ibid.

but rather from the dimensional analysis of the most diffused cattle breeds of the Po Valley. This analysis ends up with the ideal space for one single cow of 2.20 x 1.10 m (fig. 16) and a submultiple of 55 cm which becomes the minimum functional module of the cowshed.

Such module submultiple becomes even more evident in relation to the stable. Following the same process undertaken for the cowshed, initially the horse is reduced to a general dimension that ends up with an ideal size of 3.3 x 1.65 m. Then, this dimension is, not accidentally, reduced to the same submultiple of the cowshed: 55cm. Therefore, the difference among animal species is supposed to be entirely absorbed by modular coordination; for instance, if the ideal horse requires 18 modules, the ideal cow requires less than half of it, namely 8 modules (fig. 17).

So, would the ideal grid of the Po Valley be of 55cm of unitary side? Probably yes, but such demonstration is not the goal of this essay nor of Edallo's *Ruralistica*, actually. What is important to clarify is that the ruralist type is based on a criterion of organic continuity between territorial components, or more precisely a minimum common denominator of all possible variations that might occur between territorial components.



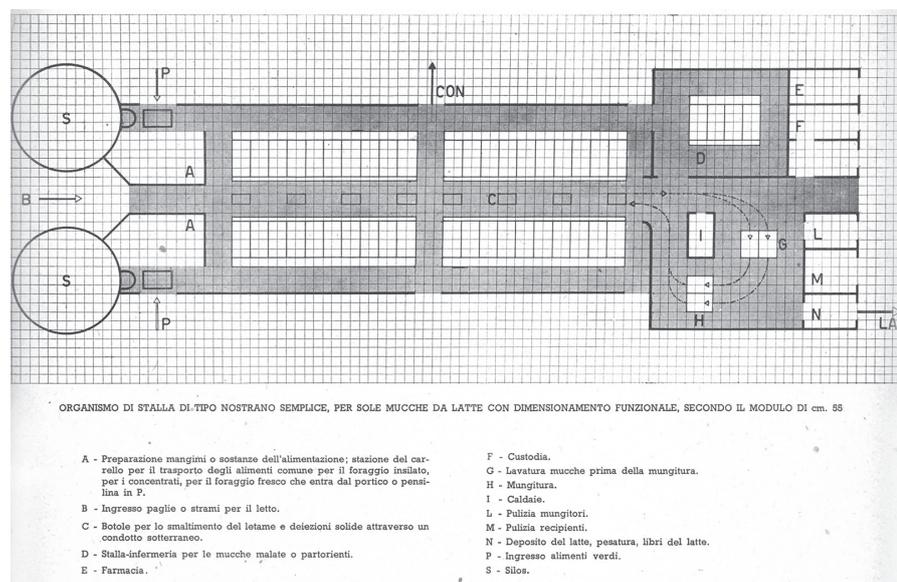
RIEVELO DAL VERO DI DUE MUCCHE DI DIFFERENTE RAZZA (BRUNA E OLANDESE) NELLA SCALA DA 1:50 CON LA POSIZIONE DELLA MANGIATOIA

Fig. 16 Diagram of the ideal cow of the Po Valley

Crisis of history and geography

Among the ancestors of *Ruralistica*, Edallo mentions the Romans and the Benedictine monks that, thanks to their industrious agrarian activity, approached the Po Valley as a territorial project. In particular, the Romans elaborated a kind of proto-*Ruralistica* theory, with Columella's „De Re Rustica „[The Romans] rather than revolutionizing methods in use and anticipating future advances, summarized agrarian systems in use, at their time, with the aim of discerning between what was good and bad in productive organization“.³⁷ Basically, Romans fully outlined the goals of *Ruralistica*: nothing new has to be

Fig. 15 Plan of a modular cowshed



invented; no new way of doing agriculture. Their aim was not the invention of new modes of agrarian production, but rather to improve spontaneous agriculture; indeed, though being already coherent with the natural morphology of places, spontaneous agriculture needed innovative tools and rational methods of soil exploitation, in order to achieve an higher level of productivity. In this way, the Romans provided the Po Valley with a grid of agrarian exploitation, known as centuriation, that *Ruralistica* attempts to upgrade with the grid based modular coordination of the farm (saw in the previous paragraph).

37 Edallo 1946: 21.

In the case of the Benedictine monks' abbey, the argument was almost the same. „The Benedictine developed their own *Ruralistica* according to nature [...] and in relation to natural resources, until reaching an organizational order able to solve all inherent problems inside itself“.³⁸ The Benedictine abbeys witnessed the relationship between territorial scale and rural buildings as the plan of the abbey reflected in itself the functional apparatus of agrarian organization. Shortly, territory and abbey originated and evolved together.

38 Edallo 1946: 27.

With these examples, *Ruralistica* shows to be grafted into a disciplinary vacuum that could not be filled neither by the sole history of architecture, nor by the history of urbanism or agriculture. In order to present itself as a new science, *Ruralistica* had to go beyond the usual limits between disciplinary histories; it had to be all histories and, at the same time, the crisis in the pretension of autonomy of these histories themselves. However, the history of this territory has still to be written today and, in view of this endeavour, perhaps *Ruralistica* represents a first thematic nucleus.

Furthermore, what has been said about history can also be extended to the domain of geography, although *Ruralistica* completely omits to refer to authors of this discipline. We do not know if this choice is due to the will of the author, therefore spoiled by ideology, or simply ignorance. In any case, speaking of territorial types, the domain of geography cannot be omitted, and

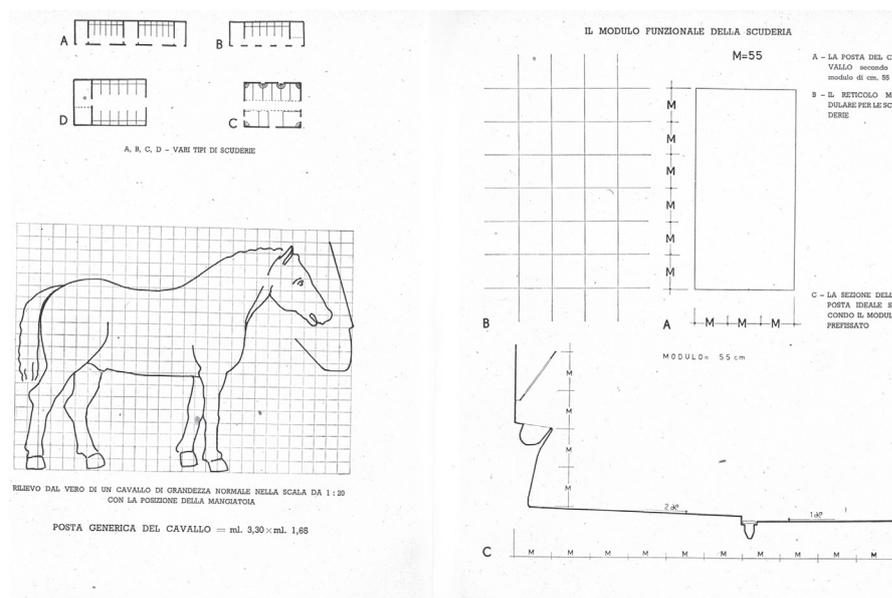


Fig. 17 Diagram of the ideal horse of the Po Valley

in particular to works such as Olinto Marinelli's *Atlante dei tipi geografici* (1921), debtor of an analytical approach of Vidal de la Blache, founder of the modern French geography.³⁹ Yet for reasons that we will explain, we propose a possible relationship between *Ruralistica* and geography through a work that is not traditionally related to the concept of type, namely Friedrich Ratzel's *Anthropogeographie* (1909).

39 See Dematteis 1985.

In order to summarize Ratzel's approach to geography I refer to one of his well-known Italian scholars, namely Franco Farinelli for which: „with Ratzel, for the first time, the geographical space becomes abstract because it is no longer produced by the simple relationship between physical objects, but by the intertwining of relationships between dynamic political entities, even though physically determined“.⁴⁰ Ratzel criticized topography as being the scientific ground of geography and proposed that geographic knowledge could be „something that can be approached only by eliminating absolutely subjective elements from our perceptions“,⁴¹ namely those elements related to the topographical perception and representation of a place.

40 Farinelli 1909: 136.

41 Ibid.

For Ratzel the visible form of places depends on characters that exceed the topographic vision and concerns economy and social structure; for example, Ratzel states that: „cultivation belongs to the essence of the village, though it is also much larger than space occupied by dwellings.“⁴² In this sense, this position was opposed to the topographic approach supported by Vidal de la Blache which, as Farinelli states: „amputated the village of its constitutive component, [...] the most important economic function: the cultivation“.⁴³ Ratzel thought that geography could prescind from the description of pre-constituted forms such as those of national boundaries; in his view, geography had the task of representing the diagram of the territory, made of entities in motion, that cannot be in any way reduced to topography thus to the domain of physical geography.

42 Farinelli 1909: 168.

43 Ibid.

In this sense, Ratzel seemingly put at stake, in geography, the issue of type in opposition to typology. In order to discover its own epistemological presupposition, geography has to admit its own crisis; a crisis that is rooted in the irrepressible mobilization of the characters of the places and the impossibility to fix this mobility into a model; into topography, actually. And *Ruralistica* is the expression of this crisis.

Reasons for a failure

As we have seen, therefore, *Ruralistica* is strongly rooted in the spirit of its time; it assumes the dogmas of progress, of technological integration, prefabrication, standards and so on. And yet, the territory on which it operates, the Po Valley, does not offer the same possibilities conventionally grounded in the city in which the ideology of progress shows immediate concreteness. The territory proves resistance to modernity and is substantially indifferent towards the ideology of progress.

The idea that modernity could be driven towards the territory by something that was not urbanism, inevitably failed. In order to colonize the territory, modern pioneers thought that urbanism was sufficient; however, Edallo had something else in mind. He did not think the territory as a big city, but rather as a space grounded into modes of production that had nothing in common with urban ones, such as the exploitation of land rent. He had in mind something that was genetically disjoined from urbanism. Nevertheless, Edallo failed and Hilbersemer won; thus, *Ruralistica* failed and urbanism won.

Eighty years after its publication it is difficult to understand how *Ruralistica* concretely affected the Po Valley. What we see today of this territory is a complete mess: a dense pattern of middle class single houses, tons of small warehouses spread all around and punctuated by rarely existent historical farmsteads subjected to environmental restrictions. Certainly not the outcome hoped by Edallo. What happened? Only very good typological exemplars of historical farmsteads were preserved and the remaining (thus, what did not correspond to this model) were simply neglected. In this sense, ironically: typology survived and type died.

Therefore, I'd argue that *Ruralistica* might still have a role nowadays as a testament. In fact, despite its technical contribution has now been largely overcome by incompatible policies and managerial technologies, it proves that a territorial project is possible and that this project can be undertaken regardless of the contemporary hegemony of other concepts such as that of 'landscape.' Conversely to landscape, in fact, *Ruralistica* refuses the primacy of aesthetics over logics; then, it counters a tendency that, already in the years of its publication, was widely diffused. In 1936 Giuseppe Pagano published *Architettura rurale italiana*,⁴⁴ a photographic repertoire of rural buildings throughout the Italian countryside. With this publication, Pagano described a fairy-tale dimension of the territory populated by curious buildings isolated from the world but apparently related to the modern architectural avant-garde; the rural world appeared to Pagano as a suggestion of a fairy landscape, which intrinsic organization had better to be left unknown, and in which all the presuppositions of rationalism found fulfilment, though in total absence of industry (and all that derived from it). By indirectly countering Pagano's seductive itinerary through vernacular settlements, *Ruralistica* proposed a method of analysis aimed at grasping the abstract structure of the countryside. It showed that a territory has a structure, thus a logical organization, and such structure reveals itself even where aesthetics would suggest the contrary. Basically, *Ruralistica*, proved that the territory is not the landscape; it avoided aesthetics, thus the 'beauty of the countryside' and all those suggestions that would implicitly feed the 'visual' over the 'logical'. In this way, *Ruralistica* overcomes the anthropocentric feature of landscape: the human viewpoint on the world; it flattens humans and animals, culture and nature, onto a unified common ground, refusing prevalence and hierarchy between them. And, the human vision can no more represent a virtue in such a flat ground.

⁴⁴ See Pagano 1940; Pagano and Guarniero 1936.

Shortly, *Ruralistica* refuses the landscape, or rather the possibility to consider the landscape as a structural feature of the territory. Nevertheless, such position against landscape did not achieve the desired success expected by Edalò and is surely one reason why the science of *Ruralistica* was quickly forgotten.

So, let's now return to the main question of this essay with a small change, namely: is the Po Valley a type nowadays? Surely, the concept of ruralist type allows to clarify whether characters of the Po Valley are still recognizable or not. Though being ugly, the territory still probably holds a structure and the establishment of the ruralist type as an analytical tool would be able to prove so. Indeed, as I've tried to show in this essay, the contemporary relevance of Edalò's methodology really stands in the way he shows how the territory results from complex relationships of ownership and production, and architecture should be understood as a part of these relations, forming and being formed by them. At stake is not the form of buildings, nor their typology, but rather the rules that provide the territory with an overall structural consistency. And the ruralist type is the tool that allows to identify and evaluate such rules.

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