

Reloading Modern Heritage in Rome

Emotional Health and City-Making in Vigne Nuove

Abstract

This article explores the concept of “mindscape” as a driver for heritage regeneration, addressing the growing mental health crisis exacerbated by urban isolation and environmental disconnection. Drawing on the Council of Europe conventions on “Landscape” (Florence, 2000) and the “Value of Cultural Heritage” (Faro, 2005), the research investigates how cultural and natural heritage can foster emotionally healthy and resilient urban districts. Focusing on Vigne Nuove, a 1970s public housing complex in Rome, the study employs the mindscape framework to analyze immaterial layers of heritage, integrating emotional, affective, and perceptual dimensions into urban transformation processes. By operationalizing mindscapes, the research aims to better understand heritage sites in their multiple dimensions, as well as to mitigate urban challenges, redefine spatial production, and create new urban commons, ultimately contributing to a topography of collective wellbeing and adaptive urban futures.

Reloading Heritage

Building on the principles of the European Conventions on “Landscape” (Florence 2000)¹ and, more importantly, the “Value of Cultural Heritage for Society” (Faro 2005),² the following investigation was driven by a quest to explore alternative ways of considering the social role that heritage might play in urban contexts. By introducing the concept of “heritage communities”, the Faro Convention is widely regarded as a turning point in reframing how heritage is conceived and valued according to community and temporal variables. It sheds light on the prominent role of heritage relational

values, opening novel perspectives on their integration in both architecture and urban planning.^{3,4}

This contribution draws on the results of ongoing research that aims to advance urban strategies for integrating heritage discourses within cities’ transitions toward healthy and resilient perspectives.⁵ Increasingly, culture and cultural heritage are recognized as potential components supporting urban quality and wellbeing. Social cohesion, sense of belonging, and identity are examples of the potential benefits generated by heritage-driven transformation, that can nurture de-medicalized strategies to particularly address current emotional needs.⁶ Conceived as a meaning-making

1 Council of Europe, Landscape Convention (ETS No. 176), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/landscape/the-european-landscape-convention> (05.09.2025).

2 Council of Europe, Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (ETS No. 199), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention> (05.09.2025).

3 Katia Fabbri / Lucie Boissenin / Michele Citoni, Heritage community resilience: Towards new approaches for urban resilience and sustainability, in: *City, Territory and Architecture* 7, 2020, Article 17, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40410-020-00126-7>; Federica Fava, Ongoing adaptive reuse: Patterns of heritage resilience before and after COVID-19, in: *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development* 14, Issue 4, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-06-2021-0116>.

4 Heike Oevermann / Levente Polyák / Hanna Szemző / Harald A. Mieg, Open Heritage: Community-driven adaptive reuse in Europe: Best practice, Basel 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783035626827>.

5 This line of research was motivated by growing problems in regard to matters of mental distress emerging worldwide. During and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of common mental conditions such as loneliness, depression, and anxiety have become epidemic; cf. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3032ipote> (05.09.2025); Caroline Hickman / Elizabeth Marks / Panu Pihkala / Susan Clayton / R Eric Lewandowski / Elouise E Mayall / Britt Wray / Catriona Mellor / Lise van Susteren, Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: A global survey, in: *The Lancet Planetary Health* 5, Issue 12, 2021, e863–873, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(21\)00278-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00278-3).

6 cf. the concept of social prescribing, today part of the National Health Service England: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/> (05.09.2025).

process, heritage implies an emotional work whose effects extend far beyond material objects,⁷ affecting not only participants' feelings but also their agency. Following this evidence, it can be affirmed that for urban landscapes to be regenerated and cared for, a dual process of energization must act simultaneously on both the social fabric and physical structure of the city. In this perspective, heritage introduces key components of culture, education, and imagination, that help nurture—or even rebuild—those bonds which are increasingly important for preserving human and environmental life, contributing to advancing a dynamic and participatory idea of heritage conservation.

The psychological stance presented above has been developed as part of a European-funded research project titled “CHANGES” (Cultural Heritage Active Innovation for Sustainable Society), which complies with various missions and specific components of the Italian National Resilience Plan.⁸ In this context, our work has grown according to the sub-project “RELOAD” (REpairing heritage Landscape, Originating ADaptive abilities), which hypothesizes that the activation of cultural and natural heritage—as understood in the abovementioned conventions—can play a crucial role in defining new dimensions of public health. The investigation thus proposes a focus on “broken”⁹ contexts: those wounded by traumatic events, conditions of abandonment, or physical and social marginality. In other words: areas where both the territory and people can be considered subjects of repair. By linking mental and urban landscapes, our intention is therefore to propose “points of analysis” through which to consider community-based value and therefore foster a living idea of conservation, grounded in innovations¹⁰ and the vitality of care.¹¹

Our project benefitted from the collaboration with a regeneration project titled “We-Z” (emotional WELL-

being of generation Z: reconnecting communities and spaces through imperfect health)¹² working on a similar topic and focusing on the same area of Vigne Nuove, a 1970s public housing district located in the northern periphery of Rome.

The next sections present the theoretical approach that has led the development of the objectives and of a methodological approach to heritage objects/sites, followed by the case study of Vigne Nuove. The article concludes with remarks that open the discussion towards further research directions.

From Embodied Heritage to Palimpsest via Mindscales

“Wastescape”, “drosscapes”, and “walkscapes” are just some of the neologisms that in recent decades have accompanied the redefinition of the idea of landscape, supporting its shift from a static panorama to a dynamic and relational phenomenon. The concept of “mindscape”, introduced in 2017 by the Italian psychiatrist Vittorio Lingiardi, adds a further interpretation that is necessary to orient vital and healthy territorial developments. For Lingiardi, mindscales are defined as “*landscapes collected in the psyche and psyches immersed in landscapes. Visual perceptions that become mental visions.*”¹³ Beyond sight, therefore, the mindscape expresses an intimate relationship with the body, involving a sensory participation that entangles affects and memories of the land. Blurring the line between natural and cultural matters, the co-evolutive dimension of the (mind)landscape pairs with the performative heritage stance introduced above. The concept of mindscape is therefore instrumental to investigate other “*hidden dimensions*”¹⁴ that shape the territory, considering the relationalities between space, values, and behaviors. On the other hand, it can be paired with “supplement”—a

7 Laurajane Smith, *Emotional heritage: Visitor engagement at museums and heritage sites*, London 2021.

8 Italian National Resilience Plan, Rome 2021, <https://www.italiadomani.gov.it/content/dam/sogei-ng/documenti/PNRR%20Aggiornato.pdf> (05.09.2025).

9 The research includes emblematic case studies such as the former Borgo Sabotino nuclear power plant (Latina) and the Nazzano hydroelectric power plant (Rome). Along with Vigne Nuove, they are instrumental to addressing issues characterizing urban peri-urban territories, stemming from modern ways of production and living.

10 OMA, ‘CRONOCAOS’ (Venice Biennale, 2010), <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/5azy6oei/production/27a57c22474166b447b389f2c2660ba99182f711.pdf> (05.09.2025).

11 Elena Pulcini, *Care of the world: Fear, responsibility and justice in the global age*, Dordrecht 2013.

12 The project is funded through the first call of the European Urban Initiative—Innovative Actions in Support of the New European Bauhaus (NEB). The two authors jointly coordinated the project for Roma Tre University, Department of Architecture. For further details see: <https://www.urban-initiative.eu/ia-cities/roma/home> (05.09.2025).

13 Vittorio Lingiardi, *Mindscales. Psiche nel paesaggio*, Milano 2017, p. 17.

14 Edward T. Hall, *The hidden dimension*, New York 1990.

surplus of imagination, which Corbotz¹⁵ identifies as a fundamental part of the long-lasting stratification process that shapes the land, defined through his apt metaphor of the *palimpsest*. It is in the relationship between subject and object—psychic and physical—that Corbotz’s *palimpsest* is configured as a continuously open figure, a subject continuously in motion. The use of the *palimpsest* metaphor in contemporary design thus entails a critique of modernist planning. It introduces a reflection on the tension between time and history and the organizational structures that have shaped urban and territorial development. The *palimpsest* represents the result of a continuous stratification of transformations. This process is particularly evident in unintentional monuments¹⁶—places that emerge from the overlapping of disconnected intentions and become episodes of collective history, contributing to the construction of our shared space. The focus on unintentional monuments and complex and problematic heritage represents a crucial area for contemporary experimentation—a domain of particular interest to the authors of this article. The radical nature of these sites, which lack the pathos of beauty that often obscures the perception of transformation, positions them as genuine laboratories for experimentation and innovation.

As the philosopher Silvano Tagliagambe¹⁷ points out, the semantic shift from landscape to mindscape identifies landscape in an interim space between two worlds, the physical and the psychic, which becomes meaningful not only on a cognitive (rational) basis but also on an emotional and affective one. For the landscape to be collectively appropriated, cared for, and enhanced, such sensibilities assume a pivotal role. If the landscape is an “event”, resulting from the common intelligence, Tagliagambe insists that it becomes necessary to consider personal and collective stories of everyday life, usually marginalized, in order to recognize what the landscape truly is. It is evident that this openness requires new approaches and articulations, aimed at discovering what values, imaginaries, and meanings imbue the contemporary city.

It needs to be said that, among these values, that of conservation is certainly put under tension in the duality between preserving and losing; a duality that is no longer viable if the objective is to project into the

future, starting from what already exists, rather than merely bearing witness to the past. This understanding, therefore, becomes the prerequisite for orienting heritage and planning actions towards emotionally healthy urbanities, drawing on a subjectification process which is both singular and collective.

Vigne Nuove – An Interim Field

Since the nineteenth century, hygienic principles have matched with the need to guarantee a house for all. Post-World War II in Italy, the approval of Bill No. 43 (“Measures to increase blue-collar employment by facilitating the construction of workers’ housing”) opened up a peculiar urban discourse, firmly connecting housing, spatial production, work, and welfare. The Vigne Nuove complex is one result of this season of great public investments in the housing sector (Fig. 1), built during the late 1970s in the northeastern periphery of Rome and remaining largely unfinished. Designed under the coordination of Lucio Passarelli, today it is characterized by a diffuse sense of neglect and isolation. Inhabited in 1979, the complex originally housed approximately 3,300 residents and still retains a significant proportion of publicly owned properties. It concludes a sequence of public housing neighborhood, developed in the 1920s (Valmelaina), 1950s (Tufello), and the 1990s (Valmelaina Nuova), defining a territory where multiple actions of social, historical, and architectural valorization coexist.

Along with Corviale and Laurentino, Vigne Nuove is part of an experimental design initiative funded by



Fig. 1: Inner view of the Vigne Nuove complex (inner paths)

15 André Corboz, The land as palimpsest, in: Diogenes 31, Issue 121, 1983, pp. 12–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/039219218303112102>.

16 Paola Viganò, Palimpsest metaphor: Figures and spaces of the contemporary project, in: Urban Planning 5, Issue 2, 2020, p. 167–171, <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i2.3251>.

17 Silvano Tagliagambe, Il Paesaggio: Glossario, Melfi 2021.



Fig. 2: External views of the Vigne Nuove complex (south-east side)

GESCAL (Gestione case per i lavoratori resources) (1969),¹⁸ which aimed to combine residential solutions with collective facilities.¹⁹ The creation of an “urban effect” was entrusted to a central equipped axis that ideally completes the triangular layout of the complex, organizing a series of spaces of various types (both open and closed) to host common services of urban scale (including a mental health service, now devoted to minors). The monumental character of the project is justified by its role as an urban hub (Fig. 2), with Vigne Nuove envisioned as a futuristic landmark,²⁰ a quality perhaps more evident from the never-realized roadway section of the Eastern Directional System that was planned to accompany the settlement according to the 1962 urban development plan. Today, it is listed in the *National Census of Italian Architecture of the Second Half of the 20th Century*, promoted by the Ministry of Culture, and becoming a symbol of Italian Moder-

nism. Nevertheless, considering the interconnections described above, Vigne Nuove allows reflection on the complex urban landscape of the area, far beyond individual buildings.

Objectives and Methodological Results

Following the argumentations cited above, the research adopts the concept of mindscape to develop “points of analysis” (Table 1) that are useful for understanding the immaterial layers of an object or site. Due to the convergence of experiences, the Vigne Nuove district offers an experimental ground to test and further advance such tools. In this view, for instance, interviews collected through the oral history methodology²¹ in the “We-Z” project can be considered as both an operational instrument and a

18 *GESCAL* was a national fund dedicated to the construction of public housing for workers.

19 Piero Ostilio Rossi, Roma: Guida all'architettura moderna 1909–2011, Roma – Bari 2012.

20 Michela Esposito, Il Piano Di Zona n.7 ‘Vigne Nuove’ a Roma. Analisi e Strategie per La Riqualificazione, in: Benedetto Todaro / Federico De Matteis (Eds.), Il Secondo Progetto. Interventi Sull'abitare Pubblico. Linee Guida per La Riqualificazione Dei Quartieri Innovativi Nell'Italia Centromeridionale, Vol. 2, Roma 2012, pp. 49–62.

21 One of the project outputs is the realization of a Digital Memory Archive. This will be composed of video-recorded contributions from Vigne Nuove residents, inhabitants of the surrounding area, professionals, activists, and scholars engaged at different levels in the district.

reservoir of information to be processed through the mindscape framework.

The overall aim is to illuminate a territorial reality, sometimes anecdotal, made of perceptions, feelings, and affects, making them operational in the valorization process. Despite their central role in fostering the capacity to act and engage in the urban discourse, such immaterialities are usually underrepresented. Unlike traditional approaches, the definition of cultural heritage proposed by the Faro Convention shifts the focus to “*constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions*”²² that people recognize in their environment. Drawing on an anthropological perspective, this framework highlights the need to acknowledge everyday aspects as part of the cultural legacy through which the value of certain places or objects is defined.

Therefore, the recognition of this kind of stratification becomes a first step in representing vernacular histories and meaning, placing them at the center of the process of regenerating human and urban bodies.

Beyond site-specific objectives, this attention also becomes a way to reinterpret, make operational, and thus “save” one of the main objectives (or, rather, an “*obsession*” in Colomina’s words²³) of the Modern Movement: that of physical and mental health. Our investigation, indeed, is grounded in the conviction that technical solutions, even those that are nature-based, are insufficient to address the challenges of the present.

Accordingly, Table 1 identifies six analysis domains, each associated with specific questions deemed crucial for identifying the values and disvalues that communities and individuals attribute to a selected

ANALYSIS DOMAINS	DESCRIPTION	QUESTIONS	VALUE DOMAINS
1) Elective Places	Privileged spaces or contexts with strong symbolic value. They represent specific values or meanings, often tied to individuals’ primary experiences and central to defining identity, culture, or social practices.	• Can you say that the object/site is a significant place for you? Why? • Is there a particular story or anecdote you associate with the object/site? • What do you like or dislike about the object/site?	Subjective experience values
2) Orientation	Consideration of the object/site in one’s daily path; geographic and orientational significance.	• Is the object/site a notable point in your landscape? • Is the object/site relevant for orienting yourself in the territory?	Symbolic and identity value
3) Movement, Crossing	Perceptual considerations of the object/site while crossing the territory, taking into account the different evolutionary phases of the individual.	• How do you (not) cross the object/site? • What meaning does the object/site have in your evolutionary growth experience? • What feelings, perceptions, and emotions prevail in relation to the object/site?	Comfort value

22 Art. 2, Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society 2005.

23 Beatriz Colomina, *X-ray architecture*, Zurich 2019.

ANALYSIS DOMAINS	DESCRIPTION	QUESTIONS	VALUE DOMAINS
4) Images, Metaphors, Feelings	Exploration of the (dis) affective bond that individuals establish with the object/site, identifying references, metaphors, and associations that traverse the common sphere.	• What images does the object/site evoke for you and also in the collective imagination? • What names does it take in common jargon? • What territory/perimeter do you associate with the object/site?	Creative and imaginative value
5) Attractors, Detractors	Considerations of aspects that encourage or discourage the use, visitation, and participation in the object/site.	• What attracts you to the object/site? Why do you visit it? • What pushes you away from the object/site? What is missing?	Use and functional value
6) Daily Life, Rituals, Care	Considerations of identity based on the daily, ordinary, and ritual relationships that characterize the object/site.	• What makes you feel at home in the object/site? • What role does the object/site play in your daily experience? How do you (not) take care of it? • What symbols and/or rituals do you associate with the object/site?	Comfort value

Table 1: Analytical points of the mindscape

heritage object or site. As an open tool, it facilitates the emergence of immaterial layers that compose the mindscape, by connecting emotional, affective, and perceptual aspects to the land.

Conclusion

This article explores the concept of “mindscape” as a potential driver for heritage enhancement and regeneration. By healing the divide between the environment and human subjects, Lingiardi’s neologism offers a framework for focusing on the “normality” of relationality that shapes both the minds and the lands of contemporary cities. The “analytical points of the mindscape” serve as the foundation for a research

endeavour that seeks to place human imagination and memory at the core of urban transformation and management processes, thereby contributing to the creation of healthy and resilient territories.

Like other modern interventions across Italy and Europe, the case of Vigne Nuove will provide an experimental platform to test and further develop the ideas presented above. By operationalizing mindscapes, it is believed that at least some of the challenges affecting such contexts can be mitigated and/or prevented. In our view, this represents the first step toward a novel approach to spatial production, one that involves the creation of new urban commons to define a topography of affects.²⁴

24 Project PE 0000020 CHANGES – CUP F83C22001650006, NRP Mission 4 Component 2 Investment 1.3, Funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU.