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Designing the Latina Landscape: Graphic Images of Italian Fascism

The Latina Province in Italy is synonymous with Italian Fascism. This connection is manifest in the different design perspectives that contributed to the formation of the region's visual character during the twenty-one years of Fascist rule between 1922–43. Corporativist urbanism framed how Fascism's stories, myths and fables were told through numerous graphic objects that embellished new towns during the region's reclamation. Through the lens of graphic design as urban design, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how the Latina landscape was conceived, planned and made at the macro, meso and micro scale.

Keywords: Latina, Fascism, urban design, graphic design, legacy, sense of place.

Introduction

The Latina Province in Italy has attracted the attention of scholars from many disciplines because of its close association with Fascism. A snapshot of the literature about the region reveals interest from Planning (Bodenschatz 2014; Nuti 1988, 82; Rifkind 2012), Architecture (Kirk 2005; Millon 1978), Geography (Caprotti 2007; Caprotti and Kaika 2008; Gentilcore 1970), Politics (Frandsen 2010), Human Science (Burdett 2003; Burdett 2010), Italian Studies (Ghirardo 1990), and History (Snowdon 2008). However, none of these perspectives fully grasp the visual-aesthetic dimension of urban design, and the spatial, visual and object qualities that determine the character of a place (Carmona et al. 2010, 169).

Moreover, urban design discourse does not fully comprehend the smaller embellishments that add to a sense of place (Harland 2016). For example, when ornamentation and decoration is the central concern (Moughton et al. 1999) the way graphic objects contribute to the function of places is only partially understood. That

said, urban design's central concern for people, place, process and practice in the real world (Carmona et al. 2010, 3) invites the opportunity to extend an understanding of the visual-aesthetic quality of the Latina Province from the perspective of graphic design as urban design (Harland 2015; Harland 2016).

Graphic objects in the Latina Province

Graphic objects in the form of road signs promote two prominent settlements in the Latina Province as exemplars of the *Rationalist* style of architecture, Italy's early twentieth-century interpretation of modernism. See Figure 1. This is a by-product of an expanding tourist industry interested in the interpretation of significant Fascist-era buildings (Maulsby 2014, 33–34). On its boundary sign, the capital of the region, Latina, displays its credentials as a 'Rationalist City' (*'Città del Razionalismo'*), as does Sabaudia, a nearby coastal resort that declares the place as a model of Italian Rationalist architecture (*'modello della architettura razionalista Italiana'*). To the layperson, such economy of words does not attest to the origin of these places built by the Fascist government in the 1930s. Some will associate the 'stark, simple architecture' of Sabaudia (Dougill 1936: 46) as an exemplar of modernism, but such places speak of Fascism only to those familiar with the plain aesthetics and awe inspiring Romanesque approach to place making favoured by the totalitarian government of the time.

Figure 1: Boundary signs that promote ‘Razionalismo’ in the Latina Province, Italy.
Source: Robert Harland (2017).

Within this environment, Fascism relied on building adornment and design detail to convey its beliefs, myths, and rituals. For example, the hospital in Sabaudia conforms to the clean geometry and other distinguishing features of modernism, such as a large feature window or sans serif lettering. However, the mid-relief near the building entrance tells more about Fascist ideology, emphasising the nurturing of youth to become loyal saluting citizen of Mussolini’s Fascist regime. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Example of Rationalist architecture style hospital in Sabaudia, with additional embellishments that convey Fascism's attitude towards nurturing the young. Source: Robert Harland (2016).

This embedded layer of propaganda is a contested dimension of the province's past, and contributes to a wider historical discourse about 'difficult heritage' (Carter and Martin 2019; Malone 2017, 447; Samuels 2015), or 'dissonant heritage' (Hökerberg 2017b, 770). Examples of such propaganda are inappropriately defined as 'symbols' or 'iconographies' of Fascism. Drawing from the notion of corporativist urbanism, an all-embracing governing system and display of solid and soft power, from buildings to beliefs, a framework is adopted to explain how different design activities under the rubric of urban design were synthesised and scaled across written discourse, visual images, nonverbal communication, architecture and the built environment. Furthermore, widespread traces of Fascist propaganda in the province are featured.

Throughout, much of the empirical research is presented in the form of carefully configured photographic narratives, some depicting the various scales at which graphic objects function within the framework of corporativist urbanism. These provide visual explanations about the interaction between contrasting design practices at work in the region. Research has focused on the way graphic objects define the Latina Province, through exploring the role of graphic objects as urban objects at the macro, meso and micro level. and the inquiry is directed towards revealing a more comprehensive understanding of how the Latina landscape was designed and is seen today. A further objective has been to explore interdisciplinary dialogue between digital storytelling and design studies (Harland and Liguori 2016) from an insider-outsider perspective, putting into practice new approaches to archival visual research in an institutional data repository – the Loughborough Urban Graphic Object Archive (Harland et al. 2018) – for use as an educational resource. The photographic data included here is thus accessible to urban design academics as a research and educational tool (see https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/projects/Latina_Province_Italy_pilot_study_/15534).

Materials and methods

The Latina Province: a short history

The Latina Province was created in 1934 as the Littoria Province, but since 1944 it has been known as the former. Less than 40 kilometres from Rome, the province is set between the Lepini Mountains, the Alban Hills, and the Tyrrhenian Sea, and was initially created from part of the Lazio Province and a northwest section of Naples. See Figure 3. Born out of 750 square kilometres of reclaimed, uncultivated, mosquito infested marshland, (also referred to as the *Agro Pontino* or Pontine Marshes), inhabitants were affected by periodical malaria epidemics and at the beginning of the twentieth-century people still lived in semi-primitive conditions. The area had evaded numerous attempts at recovery since the time of Julius Caesar.

Figure 3: The Agro Pontino reclamation area. Source: Gentilcore (1970).

The establishment of the Littoria Province and several new towns identified the region as the foremost undertaking of Fascist Italy (Nutti 1988, 82) and exemplar of ‘dictatorial’ urban design (Bodenschatz 2014). This happened soon after the city plan for the region’s capital, also named Littoria (now Latina) was conceived by the architect Oriolo Frezzotti in less than ninety days (Millon 1978, 327). Drawings and photographs from the time illustrate the speed of transformation from landscape to townscape. See Figure 4 and 5. The radiating structure of the capital carefully positioned public buildings in relation to public space, consistent with other Fascist towns, each built around the traditional piazza surrounded by, for example, large institutional buildings, militia barracks, church, school, hospital, cinema and sports facilities.

Figure 4: Littoria master plan, 1931.

Source: http://www.casadellarchitettura.eu/index.php?do=arc_foto&idnomfoto=5

Figure 5: Aerial view of Littoria, 1932, featuring the church under construction.
Source: http://www.casadellarchitettura.eu/index.php?do=arc_foto&idnomfoto=5

The region's transformation soon became a major 'showpiece' and 'symbol' of Fascism in which 'every aspect of the life of its inhabitants was rigorously ordered' (Gentilcore 1970, 301). The province was considered 'the new Eden' (Burdett 2003, 101) and, treated as a new 'colony', thought to be 'perfect, meticulous and well arranged' (Burdett 2010, 16–19), with its network of new settlements 'lavishly publicised' (Ghirardo 1990, 179).

A large part of Italian publications about the new towns concentrate on their 'functional' use for fascist propaganda. This is endorsed in the architectural detail whereby the central position of important buildings provided opportunity to emblazon them with party emblems and inscriptions (Kirk 2005, 127). Such gestures have been extensively analyzed to catalogue the pillars of Fascist propaganda and its 'memento', for example, to prolong battle with the same spirit of sacrifice and dedication evident during the First World War.

One common element identified in the various accounts is an enthusiasm to do everything as fast as possible (Bianchini 1956) through reclamation that is first hygienic, then economic, and eventually oriented to increase the population with what has been referred to as ‘fascist rapidity’ compared to the ‘demagogy and apathy’ of the previous government (Andruzzi 1932). Yet there are few local studies in which the overall phenomenon has been analyzed within the frame of a regional social context. Local social life has often been ignored by studies with a national focus, when Littoria is represented as a ‘non-place’ (Antonelli 2017).

At a local level the nostalgic ‘myth’ of the Fascist origin of Littoria (perpetuated by ideological approaches) was substituted by a more lenient historic desire to explore Latina’s origin. The 50th anniversary of its foundation provided the first occasion for the transition from Littoria to Latina to be explored through political lenses (Stabile 1982), when the author of the most complete book about Fascism and the establishment of new towns was invited to be the editor of a volume about local history (Mariani 1976). After that came two translated books with a local focus, first from Germany (Vochting 1990) and then from USA in which Fascist Italy was compared to New Deal America from an architectural angle (Ghirardo 2003). Regarding the building of new towns, the specific focus was on the relationship between Rationalism and politics. Yet this provided an original and non-conformist interpretation of the planned community development in the two countries, in both cases characterized by the intention of spending ‘far more money on politically “safe” building enterprises – public buildings – than tampering with politically explosive issues such as land expropriation or significant direct intervention in the housing industry’ (Ghirardo 2003). Eventually a broader analysis of the social history of the region, published on the occasion of the eightieth

anniversary of the foundation of region, studied extensively documentaries and newsreels produced in that area by the *Istituto Luce* (Liguori 2012).

The multidisciplinary appeal of the development meant that during the time of Fascism the province became a ‘positive symbol’ for the National Fascist Party (*Partito Nazionale Fascista*, or PNF). Such optimism supported the relocation of inhabitants from the northwest of Italy, facilitated by Valentino Orsolini Cencelli and the *Opera Nazionale Combattenti* (ONC), and their part in the so-called ‘Battle for the Land’. The province has since retained that distinction despite the discrediting of the movement (Frandsen 2010, 78), but the residue of ONC’s importance is still evident today and the initials are still seen on the outside of some properties in the region. See Figure 6.

Figure 6: Initials of the *Opera Nazionale Combattenti* on rural buildings on the outskirts of *Borgo Grappa*. Source: Robert Harland (2017).

Symbolic representations of Fascist beliefs, myths and rituals

Discourse about the development of the region, and wider discussions about Fascism in general, is peppered with terms that convey Fascist beliefs, myths, and rituals in both the concrete and abstract. There is a heavy reliance on the generic use of the word symbol, and others such as iconography, icon, image, inscription, insignia, motto, motif, emblem, and sign, all used interchangeably. Some words often combine to emphasise a specific point. For example, in exploring the relationship between the mind, buildings and artefacts, memories and social experience of Italian Fascism, Benton (1999) explores the political meanings of Fascist ideology by aligning symbol, inscription and iconography with Fascism's monumental buildings and their inscribed meanings. Furthermore, 'symbols and inscriptions on buildings and monuments' are framed as the 'ideological intentions' of Fascism (Hökerberg 2017a, 64). This section examines the extent to which symbol is used, and emphasises a need for more exactness in the way graphic communication in the Latina Province is referred to.

Such terms have multiple connotations, and symbol is used indiscriminately to define a multitude of Fascist representations. For example, Gentile (1990, 248) refers to 'Fascism's entire symbolic world' as an institutional ideology, and, similarly, the reclamation of the Littoria Province is said to be a symbol of Mussolini's programme of ruralization (Luzzatto 1999). However, symbol stands for many other things: prominent buildings such as the public tower, the church and the square (Nuti 1988, 94), or architecture at its most distinct (Malone 2017, 458–462); dates for the completion of new town building (Caprotti 2007, 21); national standards of Italy, such as the flag (Heller 2008, 82); uniforms, the Roman salute, or the Italian goose step (Heller 2008, 87); the 'cult of Rome' as the movement's 'symbolic language' (Caprotti 2007, 93);

even the vertical height of the Sabaudia's buildings (2007, 26). In this broad sense, symbol is associated with a wide-ranging number of things.

Fascism is said to have crafted an omnipresent symbolic world for mass consumption that dismissed the immediate past whilst simultaneously glorifying the Roman Empire in what has been described as a 'war of symbols,' (Gentile 1990, 243). For example, writing in the newspaper Mussolini founded, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, in 1922, he expounds '*Rome is our guiding star; it is our symbol — or if you prefer, our myth*' (B. Mussolini, 'Pasato e avvenire' in *Il Popolo di'Italia* (21 April 1922), cited in Gentile 1990, 245). Rome, imaginably, became 'the most pervasive mythological belief in Fascism's entire symbolic universe' (1990, 244), precipitating what has been called an institutionalised use of 'intense symbolic iconography' to organise the Fascist state as something resembling a religion (1990, 239–240).

This conflict obliterated the iconography of enemies, for example, the replacement of enemy flags, and the imposition of public respect for the national flag and Fascist symbols. In this context, symbolism and iconography are one and the same. For example, when describing Fascism's first anniversary celebrations of Mussolini's appointment as Italy's prime minister on 28 October 1922, in Bologna, Berezin (1997) explains how '[t]he city "dressed" the train station for the occasion with an exterior mural of the March on Rome and decorated the *piazza* in front of the station with flags, disks with fascist iconography, ornamental plants and laurel wreaths' (1997, 72). Furthermore, Berezin goes on to say how the newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino* reported on the occasion using 'the language of feeling to create an iconography of emotion: vivid mental pictorial images drawn from the repertoire of Italian cultural schemata.'

Fascist iconography is something both concrete and abstract. However, the symbols associated with Fascism are not always obvious beyond the recurring themes

that feature in different portrayals of Fascist rule and discussion about Fascist culture. The media associated with this culture refers predominantly to what Luzzatto (1999) notes as ‘public speeches, newspaper articles and artistic, theoretical or propagandist works ... private documents, the rituals and symbols of mass mobilization, advertising posters, fashions in consumption and sexist or familist slogans’ (1999, 18). Those less familiar are directed towards the ‘iconographical culture of fascist Italy’ (Pinkus 1995).

Fascism is also said to have inflicted its ‘iconographic apparatus’ through urban planning in order to promote its concepts of progress, order, hierarchy, and racial segregation in its colonial expansion (Antonsich 2000, 325). These Fascist urban iconographies are referred to as a network of roads and tunnels followed by the formation of towns following geometric layouts to reflect civilization and progress, the intention being to impose a new social and spatial structure. One of the most significant examples of iconographic planning is defined as ‘the super-imposition of the new power over the old power’ manifest in the Latin cross, used as the central planning device for the new political administrative centre of Addis Ababa in 1936 (2000, 331–7). In this instance, fascist urban iconography is comprised of the widespread transport infrastructure, the geometry of the urban layout and the relationship between building structures, smaller elements such as monuments, all to convey the concept of civilization through a new sense of community and spatial arrangement.

Add to this the feeling of emotion, death, and youth, and the scope of fascist iconography as concrete objects and cultural schemata becomes apparent, if remaining unclear as a distinct phenomena. ‘[T]he Fascist state appears to people in rituals, representations and symbols’ (Schmid 2005, 137) and ‘buildings were imprinted with a “Fascist” stamp through inscriptions, symbols and assigned meanings’ (Caprotti 2007, 27). Leading on from this, a loose category of objects is broadly defined as ‘symbols on

the urban landscape' (2007, 38). In this context, symbol is said to mean 'inscriptions', and examples include: a mosaic on a church façade in Sabaudia; nearby plaques set into the pavements opposite the church, reading *Proprietà O.N.C.*, (denoting the important role of the ONC); the 'monumental' inscription on Sabaudia's municipal tower; the naming of streets and squares after prominent historical people or events; and Fascist 'symbols' (meaning the fasces) and dates (reflecting the Fascist era started with the March on Rome in October 1922) that adorned the city infrastructure from lampposts to manhole covers (2007, 38). See Figure 7.

Figure 7: Symbols on the Sabaudia landscape. Source: Robert Harland (2017–18).

In the urban environment, graphic objects of this kind are meaningful to people. The city and its support structure, emblazoned with Fascist symbols, reminds citizens that the movement was more than a political party: it dominated all aspects of people's lives (Schmid 2005, 131). Fascist symbols in the urban landscape imprinted Fascist ideology on public buildings and impressed stories, myths, and fables on its citizens. Central to this approach was the most iconic Fascist symbol of all: the *fascio littorio*.

The fascio littorio emblem

The most conspicuous symbol of Fascism's 'soft power' was the lictorial fasces or fascio littorio (Nelis 2014, 2; Nelis 2017, 134). *Fascio*, meaning bandage or band, and *fasci*, meaning bundle (for example, of sticks or books) provides the Latin etymology for fasces. The emblem is synonymous with the radical authoritarian nationalism that defined Italy during the early twentieth century, and became revered as the cultivation and destiny of country's future (Angelo Piccioli, cited in Burdett 2003, 99). It provided the foundation of Fascist aesthetics alongside other imperial Roman symbols such as eagles, standards, and daggers (Kirk 2005). The fasces was most significant for its analogous connection to the myth of Rome, providing the visual metaphor that endorsed the movement's aspirations and achievements. It was appropriated from an object carried by Roman guards (*lictors*) in ancient Rome to symbolise unity, discipline and power, and exemplifies, in all intent and purpose, how Fascists brazenly appropriated rituals and symbols.

This bound bundle and blade configuration was used as the basis for the design of numerous objects such as uniformed lapel badges and table lamps. However, unlike modern day brand marques, the fasces appearance was inconsistent, ranging between accurate to abstract depictions. It was utilised throughout Italy in various forms, and especially so in the built environment. Instances from Sabaudia have already featured in

Figure 7, but numerous examples can be seen in Italy's urban fabric – some from Rome are shown in Figure 8, and other depictions can also be seen in figure 10, 12 and 13.

Figure 8: Various depictions of the fasces on display in Rome. Source: Robert Harland (2017–18)

The fasces became the authorised emblem of the PNF in 1926 and endorsed all aspects of material culture and the built environment. The party adopted it as its emblem because it symbolised strength, authority and unity (Heller 2008, 80). Not only did it possess an analogous connection to the myth of Rome but it was also adaptable to scale: ‘You could stand—literally stand—in the shadow of the fasces and also hold it in your hands’ (Doorden 1997, 43). See Figure 9. It validated all manner of paraphernalia, linking people to place through, for example, passing displays of pageantry to permanent inscriptions in the urban fabric. The fasces symbolised the beliefs, myths, and rituals of Fascism, and the regime’s system of symbols manifest in the Latina Province.

Figure 9: Fascio Littorio as architectural embellishment, Post Office, Littoria, 1932.
Source: http://www.casadellarchitettura.eu/index.php?do=arc_foto&idnomfoto=5

The Latina Province is both a symbol of Fascism (at the macro scale) and a space for displaying the symbols of Fascism (at the meso and micro scale). However, this can be

confusing. On one hand the word symbol means the institutional ideology of fascism whereas on the other, symbol is said to be a stamp, or inscription. Hence, the language for defining the various levels of symbolism at work in the Latina Province is inadequate for explaining the multidisciplinary perspectives on the region introduced earlier. To better comprehend this, corporativist urbanism provides a framework for understanding how such symbols can be classified through the prism of design.

A synthesis of symbols in the Latina Province through corporativist urbanism

The Italian translation of corporative urbanism, as '*urbanistica corporativa*', makes sense of what urbanism meant at the time of the Latina Province's formation. For some it translates straightforwardly as 'urban planning' (Caprotti 2007, 18). However, at the time of establishing the Latina Province, '*urbanistica*' had come to mean 'the highest expression of the Art of Government' (Fuller 1996, 401, citing Carlo Enrico Rava, 1936), and 'everything that concerns the organization of a population's life' (1996, 401, citing Fausto Natoli, 1937). Through the concept of a rural urbanism, or '*urbanistica ruralizzatrice*', this, essentially, translated as managing the mix of effective agricultural production and urban services (Gentilcore 1970, 310), which conformed to the rural-urban aspirations of Fascism's aspirations for the Latina Province.

Corporativist urbanism coupled the state control, exercised through a combined political, moral, and economic force, with the archetypal relationship between architecture, urban and regional planning. Of particular relevance was a concern for the 'theorization of design at every scale' (Rifkind 2012), drawing from the scalar synthesis of modernist design principles endorsed by the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM). Fascism's 'rhetorical imperatives' to 'rationalise industrial and agricultural production process, promote hygienic and efficient living standards and instil in the citizenry a collective and militant mass identity in service of the [F]ascist

state' (Schenk and Bromley 2003, 52) was promoted as a way of life through the urban design practices of the time. This conjoining of the environmental and behavioural dimension of Fascist urbanism is manifest in the 'political programs to invest civic space with clear ideological value' (Kirk 2005, 120).

Fascism's adoption of a corporativist urbanism was concerned with a continuum of design at every scale. In the Latina Province this can be evaluated at three distinct levels, accounting for a comprehensive approach to design activity. This variable scale at which the various products associated with different design practices was utilised can be ordered through macro, meso and micro concerns. At the macro scale, regional planning, urban planning and architecture combine to form a so-called rural-urban region. This is illustrated in the top third of a composite image, respectively displaying from left to right a view of the Latina Province looking west, the City of Latina and the *Palazzo M* building. See Figure 10. At the meso scale an integrated network of canals, roads and railways link the province through irrigation and transport communication routes. This is illustrated in the middle third of the same image, featuring the *Canale Acque Medie* (also known as *Canale Mussolini*), the road bridge crossing the canal on the *Via Appia*, and provincial railway station at Latina Scalo. At the smallest scale, illustrated in the bottom third, the micro level is comprised of the 'topological signifiers' (Caprotti 2007, 39) that endorse the ideological values of Fascism. Numerous freestanding sculptures/reliefs, pictorial and abstract representations, written language in the form lettering and typography, and street furniture, convey Fascism's narrative: a mid-relief around the balcony (*arengario*) from which Mussolini addressed the public; a free standing sculpture of a family group; a fountain fashioned to celebrate the so-called 'Battle for Grain' (one of the various economic 'battles' promoted by the Fascist propaganda to limit foreign import and move towards autonomy); a military inscription;

a gateway entrance to a war memorial garden; manhole cover; wall plaques; commemorative lettering; and a typographic sign on a portico. This level illustrates the micrographic scale at which corporativist urbanism succeeded, where the ideological values of Fascism are at their most literal, rhetorical, and evocative.

Figure 10: Three levels at which corporativist urbanism worked in the Latina Province. From left to right, top to bottom: A view of the Latina Province; the City of Latina; *Palazzo M* building; *Canale Acque Medie*; *Via Appia* bridge; railway station (Latina Scalo); family group sculpture (Latina); mid-relief around balcony, (Latina); wheat fountain sculpture (Latina); military inscription, (Latina); gate post (Cori); manhole cover (Sabaudia); wall plaque (Borgo Grappa); commemorative lettering, (Pontinia). Source: Robert Harland (2016–17).

The totalitarian dictatorship adopted a Fascist form of urban design manifest through corporativist urbanism. This created a Latina landscape accentuated by graphic objects that pervasively propagated the stories, myths and fables at the core of Fascist ideology. At the macro scale, regional planning, town planning and architecture established a new space for Fascism whilst at the meso level transport and irrigation

infrastructure connected the existing and new settlements. At the micro scale graphic objects conveyed the meanings of Mussolini's regime. Much of this remains in place today, in remarkably good condition, but much has also been removed, leaving blemishes on the Latina land and townscape.

Fascist blemishes on the Latina Province

Soon after Mussolini's removal from power on 25 July 1943, and the subsequent collapse of Fascism, Italians desecrated the regime's publicity and other symbols that embellished the urban landscape (Arthurs 2010, 119). Small groups of anti-fascists spontaneously pickaxed emblems and lettering embedded in the various urban fabric. The crudeness of these iconoclastic acts is highly visible and remains an enduring characteristic of the Latina provincial urban fabric, and the regime's graphic prowess. See Figure 11. Within a couple of years, the signing of a legislative decree by Umberto Di Savoia, (Prince of Piemonte and Lieutenant of the Italian Kingdom) on 22 April 1945 disallowed the further manifestation of values and symbols associated with Fascism.

Figure 11: Symbolic embellishments on the Latina landscape provide crude reminders of the former fascist regime. Source: Robert Harland (2016–17).

Traces of Fascism are barely noticeable in the disfigured remains. For example, the strangely posed high relief above the *Municipio* entrance in Sabaudia, or the unoccupied space in the centerpiece of the bridge at *Canale Acque Alte* (formerly *Canale Mussolini*) on the *Via Appia*. However, archival photographic records reveal how the original designs feature the inclusion of Fascist emblems and insignia. See Figure 12.

Figure 12: Before and after examples of iconoclastic acts to remove fascist inscription and iconic symbols. Source: Robert Harland (2017), Francesco Nagni (1934), and http://www.casadellarchitettura.eu/index.php?do=arc_foto&idnomfoto=1

These iconoclastic acts were targeted as the most accessible symbols of Fascism, confirming graphic objects as the most potent force in the regime's propaganda. The regional planning, town planning, architecture, transport and irrigation infrastructure remained relatively unscathed – the scale obviously beyond the purview of the protagonists, but also a testament to what Benton (2000: 189) suggests is an 'ambiguity' in buildings that does not compare to the role of, say, inscription, in its ability to impact on collective memory. So too did objects remain that could not be chiseled, such as manhole covers. Still today the original Littoria name is cast in many of Latina's manhole covers, of which there are numerous designs. See Figure 13.

Figure 13: Eight Littoria manhole cover designs in Latina. Source: Robert Harland (2016–17)

Nonetheless, the name of the province and its capital did not survive. A royal prefecture requested to change Littoria's name on the 22 September 1944. Four days later, the municipality of Littoria proposed to replace the province name with Latinia, but the province responded with silent resistance and deliberate hindrance. The final decision, to call the province Latina, was taken on the 31 January 1945 when the name Latinia was rejected by the province, because the desinence '-ia' still resembled names attributed during the Fascism (such as Sabaud-ia, Pontin-ia, Mussolin-ia, Carbon-ia). This was approved during the same council meeting, despite the absence of numerous local political representatives.

Summary and discussion

Across the various disciplinary accounts of the Latina Province very little attention has been paid to providing a unified perspective on how Fascism's stories, myths, and fables were communicated in graphic form within a wider urban design context. The difficulty associated with this is evident when geographers do no more than classify these as symbols on the urban landscape. This article tackles an integrated approach to design by utilising a framework that links a continuum of four distinct but interrelated design activities, in scalar proportion, whilst showing how graphic design is a useful perspective for understanding the Fascist graphic object in the Fascist urban object.

Graphic objects represent a confusing array of artefacts that urban commentators have struggled to define in a collective cohesive language (Harland 2015, 370–371). The same can be said of those disciplines noted at the beginning of this article, and the subsequent implication that the word 'symbol' insufficiently stands for iconography, icons, images, inscriptions, insignia, mottoes, motifs, emblems, or signs, as symbols within a symbol. As has been noted above, a motif is a symbol but so is a region.

In the case of the Latina Province, Fascism's ubiquitous symbolic world is at the same time tangible and intangible, big and small, wide and narrow, aggressive and aesthetic, environmental and embellishing. Graphic objects have been shown to respond to demands for more manifest representations of Roman heritage, or *Romanità* (Marcello and Gwynne 2015, 323) as an example of how 'Fascism entrusted the materialization of its myths to the architectural world' (Gentile 1990, 246). In this study, visual analysis and argument has been steered through four interrelated design fields – urban design, graphic design, typographic design and type design – in ascending levels of design complexity, as depicted in Figure 14 (Harland 2016, 5). Emphasis has been placed on how graphic modes of communication enhance the 'graphic image of the city' (Harland 2015, 371–379), or the 'graphic treatment of the cityscape' (Julier 2014), in ways that establish the identity, structure and meaning of places. This has aligned graphic objects to urban objects, and encourages the idea that urban objects may display 'graphic' (Heller 2010) qualities in their vivid detail and communication intent. Graphic design is presented here as an intermediate layer that not only accentuates what Heller (2008, 80) refers to as the 'graphic identity' of Mussolini's 'revolution', but also acknowledges the inherent graphic nature of Fascism's symbolic universe.

Figure 14: Four ascending levels of design deeds. Source: Harland (2016: 5)

This approach is proffered as a tool for urban design research, and two final examples demonstrate how, through a fusion between urban-graphic-typographic-type design: the *Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana* building in the EUR district of Rome; and a building façade in the *Piazza di Augusto Imperatore*, in Rome city centre. See Figure 15 and Figure 16 respectively. Both examples feature prominently in discourse about Fascist symbolism and lettering (Baines and Dixon 2003, 163–165; Benton 2000, 183–189; Malone 2017, 455–458). Space does not allow for detailed discussion here, but these photographic montages further illustrate corporativist urbanism at work, but at a smaller scale than shown in the Latina Province seen in Figure 10.

Figure 15: The *Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana* building, in the EUR district, Rome.
Source: Robert Harland (2018)

Figure 16: *Façade in Piazza di Augusto Imperatore*, in Rome city centre. Source: Robert Harland (2018)

The scale at which graphic objects perform in these specific locations cut across the written discourse, visual images, nonverbal communication, architecture and the built environment continuum. However, contrary to the way built environment discourse might first analyse larger scale built components, these examples portray topography and typography with equal prominence. In a single composition, both the *Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana* and the façade in *Piazza di Augusto Imperatore* give equal prominence to the largest and smallest design considerations. Previous visual depictions of these places have been unable to visualise this in one photographic configuration (Benton 2000, 183–189; Malone 2017, 455–458; Nelis 2014). In these examples, specifically Figures 15 and 16, but also 10, Fascist corporativist urbanism is visualised as never before, treating epigraphy and environment as equals. *The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana building's inscription*, translated as:

A NATION OF POETS OF ARTISTS OF HEROES
OF SAINTS OF PHILOSOPHERS OF SCIENTISTS
OF NAVIGATORS OF VOYAGERS

is as prominent as the EUR setting. Taken from a Mussolini speech, it is styled elegantly to resemble a Roman inscription from the time of the Empire, set above 216 distinctive arches, and 28 statues at the base, celebrating the arts and crafts and referencing the Roman architecture of the past. Similarly, the configuration of graphic elements on display in *Piazza di Augusto Imperatore* incorporate Roman myths, such as the mosaic of the supposed city founders, Romulus and Remus, and the omnipresent *fascio littorio*. The façade lettering is in the preferred ‘*bastone*’ (sans serif) style favoured by Fascism (Benton 2000, 167) for its simplicity, squareness, legibility and readability from below (Marcello and Gwynne 2015, 323). Both illustrate how urban graphic objects contribute to defining places as Fascist spaces.

Design is a useful way to understand complex settings, and to identify the essential relationships and critical connections between designs and the larger systems within which they are embedded. Exploring the Latina Landscape through several interrelated design fields has implications for urban design in that the approach: extends discussion about the visual-aesthetic character of urban places (Carmona et al. 2010); challenges the physical, social and spiritual function of ornamentation and decoration in urban design (Moughton et al. 1999); provides a platform for further discussion about ‘political design’ (Doorden 1995; Doorden 1997) as an enduring feature on the Latina Province landscape and in the variable townscapes at a regional scale; contributes to recent calls for a ‘(re) new (ed)’ culture in regional design at the systemic level (Kempenaar and van den Brink 2018); utilizes recent frameworks that determine the contribution that graphic objects make not only to the image of the city but the image of a fascist region (Harland 2015); develops and further substantiates a so-called mesographic domain for analyzing the function of graphic design as urban design (Harland 2015, 388–389; Harland 2016, 66–71); and, finally, makes available a digital photographic resource for urban design research and education (Harland et al. 2018).

This article began with the acknowledgement that Latina and Sabaudia have recently positioned themselves as exemplars of the Rationalist style of town planning and architecture. However, the region is portrayed here as a testimony to the way Fascism told its stories and treated the landscape and townscape as a propagandist place, facilitated by a vast array of urban graphic objects functioning within a corporativist urbanism agenda.

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