

# 'Instituting' Care in Fragile Territories: The Role of the University in Reimagining the Urban- Peripheral Institution of the Prison of Florence (Italy)

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## Abstract

This article explores the evolving role of the University as an *instituting institution* within fragile and peripheral territories, drawing upon Roberto Esposito's theory of institutions. Focusing on the Sollicciano Prison in Florence, the paper examines how the University of Florence, through the I CARE project, performs its third mission of public engagement not only as a knowledge producer but also as an active civic agent, enabling processes of urban regeneration. By rearticulating the relationship between the prison and the city, the University challenges established spatial and social hierarchies, contributing to the emergence of a *peripheral centrality*. The paper positions the University as an *instituting institution* capable of transforming the prison from an isolated and stigmatised total institution into a catalyst for inclusive urban development and, in doing so, accomplishing Patrick Geddes' idea of the *Militant University*.

Questo articolo esplora l'evoluzione del ruolo dell'Università come *istituzione istituente* all'interno di territori fragili e periferici, attingendo alla teoria delle istituzioni di Roberto Esposito. Concentrandosi sul carcere di Sollicciano a Firenze, il paper esamina come l'Università di Firenze, attraverso il progetto I CARE, persegua la sua terza missione di coinvolgimento pubblico non solo come produttore di conoscenza, ma anche come agente civico attivo, abilitando processi di rigenerazione urbana. Riarticolando il rapporto tra carcere e città, l'Università sfida le gerarchie spaziali e sociali consolidate, contribuendo all'emergere di una *centralità periferica*. Il paper posiziona l'Università come *istituzione istituente* in grado di trasformare il carcere da istituzione totale isolata e stigmatizzata a catalizzatore per uno sviluppo urbano inclusivo e, così facendo, realizzando l'idea di *Università Militante* di Patrick Geddes.

**Keywords:** Prison; Institutions; Urban Regeneration.

**Parole chiave:** Carcere; Istituzioni; Rigenerazione urbana.

## Introduction: fragilisation of territories through prisons as the crucial dimension of the XXI century urban question

In many parts of the world – and notably across Southern Europe and Italy – prisons remain among the most stigmatised and spatially marginalised public institutions. Conceived as *total institutions* (Goffman, 1961), prisons operate through logics of

exclusion, surveillance, and spatial separation that render them infrastructural and symbolic outliers in the contemporary city. Their architectures are profoundly introverted (Moran, 2013; Milhaud, 2017), often situated in disconnected peripheral zones, severed from the urban and social metabolisms that sustain public life (Infussi, 2020). These spaces contribute to the production of what Sieverts (2003) called the *Zwischenstadt* – an ambiguous, fragmented urban condition that resists easy integration into the dominant spatial narratives of the metropolitan core.

Rather than confronting these dynamics, urban policies often obscure or neutralise them. Cloaked in the language of *glossy regeneration*, contemporary planning practices systematically fail to account for the social and spatial externalities generated by prisons and other total institutions. As a result, prisons become fixed points of infrastructural and symbolic rupture, zones of abandonment that intensify territorial fragility and social exclusion. In Italy, this neglect has become particularly acute, with the prison emerging as a key site of urban disjunction in the 21st century (Vessella, 2017).

This marginalisation is not accidental, but has deep historical and spatial roots (Rossi and Perrone, 2024). As Combessie (2002b) notes, the relationship between prison and city is marked by tension and mutual estrangement, rooted in the 19th-century separation between institutions of justice and punishment. During this period, hygienic and disciplinary imperatives of *positivist urbanism* drove the development of specialised carceral architecture (Marcetti, 2009), resulting in the progressive displacement of prisons from historic city centres – where they had traditionally coexisted with other civic institutions – to the urban margins. While premodern prisons were visible and integrated elements of urban life, symbolically reinforcing norms and community boundaries (Foucault, 1975), their modern relocation enacted a spatial logic of removal and exclusion, in which the deviant subject was hidden from public view and managed through spatial distancing.

In Italy, the post-20th-century expansion of prisons into suburban and residual agricultural territories (Marcetti, 2009), coupled with regionalised urban sprawl (Balducci, Curci and Fedeli, 2017), has deepened the processes of peripheralisation and differentiation that define contemporary urban space (Rossi and Perrone,

2024). Prisons today are embedded in complex urban fragments marked by overlapping vulnerabilities – social, ecological, infrastructural – that go beyond classical centre-periphery dichotomies (Infussi, 2020) yet remain spatially and symbolically excluded. This structural disconnection not only fosters social stigma but also reinforces collective denial and erasure of the prison problem, undermining both the social responsibility of care and the possibility for penal reform. Moreover, this spatial closure obstructs the emergence of intermediate forms of detention (Margara, 1993), or liminal infrastructures (Moran, 2013) capable of facilitating reciprocal exchange between prison and urban community. These dynamics contribute to structural deficiencies such as chronic overcrowding, lack of socialisation spaces, degraded visitation environments, and widespread decay in peri-carceral territories (Antigone, 2023)<sup>1</sup>.

Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative to rethink the prison not merely as a disciplinary institution but as a key node in the urban fabric, whose exclusion exacerbates broader social and spatial inequities. Within this context, we revisit Roberto Esposito's (2020) theory of institutions, particularly his distinction between *instituted* institutions – static, closed, and reproductive of existing orders – and *instituting* institutions – dynamic, generative, and open to transformation. Through this conceptual lens, the prison appears as a paradigmatic 'instituted institution'. At the same time, the University emerges as a potential instituting actor, capable of reimagining the carceral periphery as a site of civic and spatial regeneration.

Indeed, the paper explores that potential through the case study of the *Joint 'Prison, University and the City'*, launched by the University of Florence in the peripheral territory where the city's prison complexes are located. Through this initiative, the University activates its so-called *Third mission of Public engagement* (Boffo, Moscati and Trivellato, 2018) in the most literal sense, by instituting a space of encounter, research, and co-design that challenges the spatial and institutional estrangement of the prison. Far from being a top-down intervention, the Laboratory operates as a platform for instituting *CARE*, forming new alliances with prisoners, families, institutional actors, and the surrounding community. It connects the symbolic rehabilitation

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<sup>1</sup> For an extended argumentation on this topic Cfr. Rossi and Perrone, 2025.

of the prison with the urban regeneration of its peripheral setting, opening concrete pathways for functional reintegration, participatory planning, and the embedding of carceral space in broader processes of urban inclusion.

Telling this story, the paper also underscores the broader stakes of the carceral question as a defining dimension of the urban condition in the 21st century. It reopens a line of inquiry originally advanced by Combessie (2002b), who argued that the prison must be understood not as a spatial exception but as part of the city's own structure and metabolism. Revisiting the relationship between prison and city today reveals how contemporary urbanism cannot be fully grasped without attending to the carceral spaces it produces, displaces, or disavows. Grounding this analysis in both theory and practice, we aim to show how universities, acting as instituting institutions, can reweave the torn fabric between incarceration and urban citizenship, contributing to a more profound rethinking of the relationship between care, marginality, and institutional space.

The following sections examine the conceptual grounding, institutional mechanisms, and spatial implications of this initiative. By situating it within broader debates on urban peripherality, institutional theory, and carceral geography, we aim to show how the University, when acting as an *instituting institution*, can reconfigure the urban question of the prison, turning a symbol of abandonment into a site of civic invention.

### **From Carceral Mirrors to Territorial Fragmentation/ Fragilisation: Theoretical Foundations in Carceral Studies and Geography**

Research on prisons conducted during the second half of the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first has found one of its most fertile and critical arenas in France, where French sociology has played a foundational role in shaping carceral studies. Among the leading voices to emerge from this intellectual milieu is Philippe Combessie, whose work has been instrumental in reframing the prison not merely as a closed institution, but as a key analytical lens through which to understand society itself (Combessie, 2002a).

Combessie identifies two major research orientations within the sociology of the prison. The first treats the prison *as a society*,

focusing on the internal logics, cultures, and mechanisms of prison life. The second, more outward-looking, uses the prison as a *lens to study society itself* – a critical mirror that reveals broader dynamics of exclusion, inequality, and institutional order. It is this second perspective that proves especially relevant for understanding the role of prisons in shaping, and being shaped by, the urban condition of the 21st century.

Through this lens, prisons emerge not as isolated exceptions but as condensed expressions of societal contradictions. They concentrate and reproduce the structural marginalities that permeate social life: economic inequality, racialised control, spatial segregation, and institutional neglect. Prisons thus reveal how modern societies govern their margins – not only through confinement, but through territorial exclusion, infrastructural invisibility, and symbolic disinvestment.

Philippe Combessie's work (2002b) foregrounds the spatial and political entanglement between prisons and their territorial contexts – in his words: a *turbulent cohabitation* –, emphasising the ambivalent relationship that modern cities maintain with carceral institutions. His analysis anticipates core concerns of carceral geography (Moran, 2013) [a particular domain of contemporary carceral studies: see Foucault, 1975 and Wacquant, 2009], illustrating how the location of punishment reflects broader dynamics of moral distancing, exclusion, and fragmented territorial governance. Among the most influential theoretical contributions to contemporary carceral studies is Loïc Wacquant's concept of the *carceral continuum*, developed most notably in *Punishing the Poor* (2009) and inspired by Foucault (1975) idea that the prison operates not in isolation, but as part of a continuum of disciplinary institutions – schools, hospitals, housing projects – designed to regulate and normalise populations through spatial organisation and surveillance.

Wacquant argues that incarceration is not an isolated or exceptional mechanism of punishment but a structural component of a broader system of neoliberal governance. The concept of the *carceral continuum* connects neoliberal economic restructuring, urban marginality, and the expansion of penal institutions.

Carceral geography as a domain in itself emerges from the convergence between Wacquant's concept of the *carceral*

*continuum* and Combessie's idea of *troublante cohabitation* where cohabitation refers to the spatial and political interdependence between prisons and their urban and territorial contexts (Davis, 2003; Henry, 2004).

A growing subfield of carceral geography has examined the spatial dimensions of incarceration, showing how prisons are disproportionately sited in territorially fragile zones, rural, peripheral, or post-industrial landscapes marked by infrastructural neglect and economic precarity (Moran, 2013; Rossi, Perrone, 2024; 2025). These studies emphasise how urban planning, environmental degradation, and punitive architecture intersect in the production of what Gilmore (2007) calls *organised abandonment*.

Although Italian academic discourse has rarely adopted the term *carceral continuum* explicitly, several scholars, across criminology, sociology, law, and urban planning, have independently developed critical frameworks that converge with Wacquant's diagnosis especially around: the territorialization of exclusion (Marcetti, 2009; Infussi, 2020), the dispersion of punishment (Margara, 1993; Corleone, 2018), which obscures responsibility, while still reproducing exclusion, and the entanglement of welfare and repression; the humanisation of detention spaces by micro-innovations within existing prison architectures and the design of experimental, human-centered alternatives, promoting personal responsibility and supporting resocialization through prison environments that simulate conditions of life outside (Vessella, 2017; Di Franco and Bozzuto, 2020; Santangelo, 2020; Di Franco, Frangipane and Orsenigo, 2025).

When we consider the Combessian question of spatiality, Italian scholarship offers intriguing insights. As noted in the introduction, the work of Franco Infussi (2020) and Corrado Marcetti (2009) concentrates on the social implications of spatial distancing while providing a detailed account of how prisons in Italy are increasingly located in peripheral, disconnected, or infrastructurally degraded areas, reinforcing a symbolic and physical distance between incarceration and the civic life of the city. Their research connects carceral architecture to urban processes of marginalisation, echoing Wacquant's assertion that penal expansion is inseparable from territorial fragmentation. Moreover, it paves the way to new lenses in urban studies

(Balducci, Fedeli and Curci, 2017; Paba and Perrone, 2018) that show how new forms of urban peripherality, marked by infrastructural abandonment and administrative opacity, reveal a broader logic of exclusionary urbanism. While not focused directly on prisons, this concept maps neatly onto the territorial logic of the carceral state, as described by Wacquant.

Similarly, but with a projection towards an idea of contributing to the envisioning and designing of a new city – *La Nuova Città*<sup>2</sup> – the social architect Giovanni Michelucci (1953; 1985; Gozzini, 1992; Marcetti and Solimano, 1993) and social urbanist, Giancarlo Paba (2003; Perrone, 2022), inspired by Loïc Wacquant's thought, enriched the debate in urban studies, offering a profound rethinking of the relationship between carceral space and urban society.

Together, Michelucci and Paba resonate strongly with Esposito's (2020; 2024) notion of the *instituting institution*: one that does not simply manage existing norms but actively reconfigures the relationship between institutions and society. Their approach suggests that urban regeneration and prison reform must be pursued as interdependent projects, particularly in fragile peripheral territories where carceral architectures risk becoming permanent zones of abandonment and silence.

The next section of the paper explores such a process through the case of the University of Florence and its engagement with the western periphery of the city, where the main prison complexes are located (Sollicciano and Gozzini prisons). This area, marked by infrastructural discontinuity, economic precarity, and institutional detachment, exemplifies the dynamics of territorial fragility described by Infussi (2020) and others<sup>3</sup>. In response, the

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2 Giovanni Michelucci is renowned for his human-centered approach to architecture and urban planning. His vision of the *Nuova Città* advocates for holistic, socially inclusive, and sustainable urban environments that integrate social functions, architecture, and nature to enhance community life. In 1945, he founded the journal *La Nuova Città* to promote these ideas.

3 The Sollicciano-Gozzini prison area at the southwestern edge of Florence represents a highly complex and fragmented urban territory. Originally rural, it underwent an unsystematic urbanisation process from the 1970s onward, marked by an uncoordinated accumulation of industrial, residential, and infrastructural functions (Rossi, 2022; Zetti, Rossi and Viridis, 2022). The introduction of two central prisons in the 1980s, Sollicciano (1983) and Mario Gozzini (1986), further intensified this complexity. Conceived as self-sufficient institutional machines (Combesse, 1996; Infussi, 2020), these prisons sever

University has launched *I CARE – Inclusion, Prison, Architecture, Ecological Regeneration*, a research-action project aimed at restoring the connection between prison, city, and society. At the heart of this effort lies the establishment of the *Joint Laboratory 'Prison, University and the City'*: an Institutional permanent collaborative platform rooted both within the prison and in the surrounding urban periphery, led by the University of Florence and composed of a strong institutional network (as explained below).

This Laboratory positions the University as an *instituting institution* by fostering institutional networking, participatory design, community engagement, and the creation of shared knowledge. The project does not merely 'study' the prison from afar. Still, it aims to co-generate new spatial and social arrangements that challenge the invisibility and fragmentation caused by current carceral urbanism. In doing so, it redefines the prison not as a final point of exclusion but as a starting point for institutional innovation and territorial care.



Fig. 1. The territorial context. Fonte: Google Earth.

contextual ties with their surroundings, reinforcing spatial stigma and ecological fragmentation. The peri-carceral zones, defined by defensive architectures and neglected spaces, now constitute a socio-spatial void lacking services, integration, and urban quality, transforming this peripheral fringe into a zone of territorial fragility.

## Instituting Alternatives to Fragility: I CARE Joint Laboratory 'Prison, University and the City'

The *I CARE* project took its first steps in 2019, standing on the shoulders of two foundational figures: Giovanni Michelucci, who in the 1980s initiated the *Giardino degli Incontri / Garden of Encounters*, a unique and internationally significant participatory architecture project developed with inmates at Sollicciano as a space of encounter between prisoners and their families, and between the prison and the city; and Giancarlo Paba, whose radical and critical thought on urban participation advanced the notion that conflict must be translated into proposal, and complaint into constructive, community-driven action (Paba, 2003). His ideas have consistently emphasised the capacity to uncover and mobilize the latent social energy of marginalised territories, including urban peripheries and fractured city bodies, and continue to inspire a broader project of *La Nuova Città / The New City*: one grounded in rethinking the city – prison relationship and in recognizing citizenship rights for prisoners, families, correctional staff, and the populations surrounding carceral infrastructures.

The concept of *care* in the *I CARE* project is not merely a moral or humanitarian appeal, but a political and institutional practice grounded in Don Lorenzo Milani's radical ethics of responsibility. Reimagined today, *care* becomes a mode of civic engagement and spatial justice, especially in fragile, excluded territories, through which collective life and its spaces are reconfigured (Gabauer *et al.*, 2021).

This understanding resonates with Roberto Esposito's notion of *instituting institutions*, which, unlike static and normative *instituted* forms, generate new relationships and configurations of social life. *Care*, in this sense, is not a reaction to need but a creative, generative force that enables institutional transformation and the construction of new territorial solidarities.

In this context, *I CARE* unfolds across four key phases, each marked by an interactive, inclusive, and co-productive approach to institutional transformation and territorial care, mainly developed inside the prisons of Sollicciano and Gozzini, on the interface and in the city around the carceral institutions, experimenting with Paba's idea of participation and developing some experimental and radical approaches to the interaction with detained inmates

(Manzini, 2015; Rossi and Perrone, 2024; 2025)<sup>4</sup>.

*(I Phase)*. Its origins can be traced back to Michelucci's carceral engagement in the mid-1980s Michelucci's *Giardino degli Incontri*, inaugurated in 2007 within Sollicciano, set a precedent. Proposed by inmates in 1985 and developed through participatory design, the project redefined the prison courtyard as a civic space for family encounters, public dialogue, and performance. It embodied Michelucci's belief that architecture could serve inclusion, countering the alienating logic of traditional penal structures.



Fig. 2. Giardino degli Incontri / *Garden of Encounters* (Archive of the Giovanni Michelucci Foundation)

*(II Phase)*. The project was revived in 2019 through a research-action initiative explicitly designed to update and expand the conceptual legacy of the *Giardino degli Incontri*, focusing on the interface

<sup>4</sup> The entire process which was also a multiactor decision-making process, involved an institutional network comprising the Laboratory of Critical Planning & Design [Department of Architecture, University of Florence] as leader, in collaboration with a broad partnership composed of: the Municipalities of Florence and Scandicci, District 4 of the Municipality of Florence, the Giovanni Michelucci Foundation, the Sollicciano and Gozzini Correctional Facilities, the Ombudsman for the Rights of Prisoners of the Municipality of Florence, the Regional Directorate of the Prison Administration (Tuscany), and the Florence Chamber of Architects.

between prison and city, and envisioning a broader *social park* that would integrate the prison with its surrounding urban fabric – an external extension of the original garden inside the prison walls. It addressed the spatial tensions surrounding Sollicciano and Gozzini, particularly in the infrastructurally fragmented zone at the Florence–Scandicci boundary. Three conceptual frameworks informed this phase. First, the recognition of the prison as an *urban fact* challenged its spatial segregation and prompted formal inclusion in municipal planning. Second, the vision of a ‘living tree’ inspired a proposed agro-social park along the prison boundary, symbolically extending Michelucci’s garden. Third, the strategy of *mending the periphery* sought to reknit the fractured urban fabric through art and collective action. The so-called *trigger projects* exemplified this approach. *Orti Con-divisi* established shared gardens adjacent to Gozzini Prison, enabling cohabitation and rehabilitation through agricultural labour. *La Scritta che Buca* (*The Writing That Pierces*), a collaborative mural painted by inmates and artists on the Gozzini prison wall, coordinated by the University of Florence and its cultural partners, disrupted carceral imagery beyond its symbolic value, transforming the carceral edge into a public site of dialogue and expression.



Fig. 3. *La Scritta che Buca* / *The Writing That Pierces*: I CARE trigger project (Ph: David Virdis).

(III Phase). In 2022, the project gained political and territorial traction when the Municipality of Florence formally integrated a carceral-area regeneration strategy into its *Piano Operativo Comunale (Urban Operational Plan)* approved in 2025, adopting objectives of social inclusion and territorial wellbeing around the prison district.

It is with the third phase (of territorial institutionalisation and urban planning) that the project takes the name *I CARE*, an acronym of Inclusion, Carceral Institution, Regeneration, Ecology. At its core, this phase aims to reframe the prison not as an isolated facility but as a driver for broader territorial regeneration. It focuses on three interconnected objectives:

1. *Social inclusion* in areas marked by marginality and conflict;
2. *Spatial justice*, addressing the material consequences of urban inequality;
3. *Territorial well-being* and *ecological transition*, promoting new urban lifestyles and sustainable infrastructures.

The proposal centres on the co-creation of a *Guideline Plan*, an integrated strategy developed with local communities to transform the area's fragmented, infrastructurally weak context into a metropolitan node (peripheral centrality) of social and spatial experimentation. A key concept is *hospitality*, reframing this periphery as a site of civic innovation and reconnection between prison, community, and city.

The plan builds on earlier participatory efforts, responds to past agreements between Florence and Scandicci, and aligns with current territorial policies at municipal, regional, and European levels.

This phase is crucial for three reasons:

1. Institutional activation by the municipality marks a rare institutional recognition of prison-related urban questions as legitimate and structural components of territorial governance.
2. Consolidation of an inter-institutional partnership.
3. Normative and design outcomes as the final product is not merely a conceptual vision but a normative act, a set of design guidelines embedded in the Urban Plan and a public call for

an international design competition. The aim is to reimagine the Sollicciano prison complex and its surroundings as a *new peripheral centrality* (Phelps, Keil and Maginn, 2025), where the prison is no longer spatially excluded, but re-integrated into the city's civic and ecological fabric.



Fig. 4. Detained inmates coproducing the *Guideline Plan (III Phase of I CARE)*.

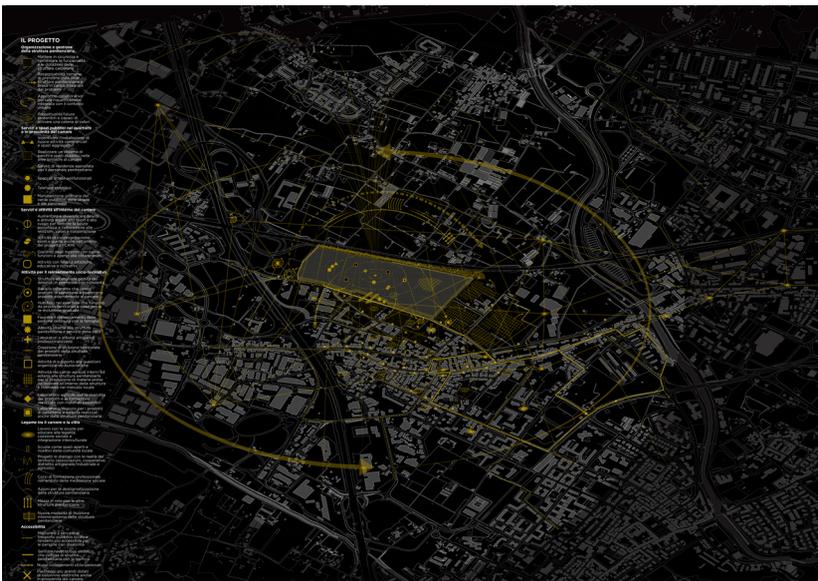


Fig. 5. An excerpt of the *Guideline Plan (III Phase of I CARE)*.

(*IV Phase*). The fourth and most advanced phase of the *I CARE* project marks the institutional and methodological culmination of the previous efforts, proposing a nationally significant and internationally resonant innovation in the intersection between carceral studies, urban regeneration, and public academia. The final step in this trajectory has been the University of Florence's commitment as an anchor institution, assuming responsibility for governance innovation around the prison question in situ and catalysing participatory territorial engagement through the *Joint Laboratory 'Prison, University and the City'*.

The foundational objective of this phase is the creation of Italy's first permanent national joint Laboratory connecting the University of Florence, the penal institutions of Sollicciano and Gozzini, hosted symbolically and physically at the *Giardino degli Incontri*, inside the Sollicciano prison. The Laboratory acts as a civic infrastructure for territorial care, designed to support, through action research, system design and public engagement, the ecological and spatial regeneration of the western periphery of Florence, an area marked by infrastructural fragility and institutional neglect.

This initiative represents a pioneering model in Italy. It is the first national case of a University-led institutional platform explicitly addressing carceral space and only the second national precedent for such an urban-university anchor role, following the *Mapping San Siro* Laboratory launched by Politecnico di Milano in Milan's housing periphery. In this sense, the project aligns fully with the University of Florence's Third Mission (*Terza Missione*) of civic engagement and public knowledge co-production.

The Laboratory adopts an innovative methodology: a *social extended peer review* model inspired by European guidelines for inclusive knowledge governance. This model involves a broad constellation of actors: institutional administrators, faculty, students, incarcerated people, prison staff, civil society organisations, and private stakeholders. By mobilising collective intelligence across institutional boundaries, the lab aims to raise the overall urban quality of the prison periphery and reimagine the carceral space as a domain of restoration, not repression.

The following diagram outlines the temporal and conceptual

development of the *I CARE* initiative. But before examining this framework in detail, let us take a step back.



Fig. 6. Phases of *I CARE* project

### Conclusion: Instituting Care as a Chance for Fragile Peripheral Territories

This article has examined how prisons, long treated as spatial and moral peripheries, can be reimagined not as isolated sites of exclusion, but as institutional thresholds where urban inequality, state violence, and spatial marginality converge. Drawing from carceral sociology, geography, and critical urbanism (Michelucci, 1985; Combessie, 2002a; 2002b; Paba, 2003; Wacquant, 2009; Moran, 2013), we explored how the prison functions as a key analytical lens for reading the territorial logic of modern cities. Within this frame, the *I CARE* project stands as a paradigmatic example of how an instituting institution, in the sense proposed by Roberto Esposito (2006), can act to disrupt and reconfigure entrenched logics of abandonment and confinement. By embedding itself in a territory historically defined by infrastructural voids, civic neglect, and institutional fragmentation, *I CARE* enacts a form of territorial care that is both situated and systemic. It activates an intermediate and relational role between carceral institutions, municipal governance, and the civil society that surrounds them. Through co-design, participatory urbanism, and institutional coalition-building, the institutional Laboratory

becomes a generator of new imaginaries for how incarceration is represented, spatialized, and ultimately transformed.

In this process, we observe a significant scaling up of problem recognition and intervention. What began as a marginal urban void has evolved into a broader territorial project, grounded in public engagement, shared diagnosis, and collaborative governance. Crucially, the transition from experimental practice to institutional recognition is marked by the inclusion of carceral issues in Florence's new Operational Plan, a formal policy turn that culminates in the launch of an international competition for reimagining the prison area of Sollicciano as a new metropolitan centrality.

This institutional pivot suggests the emergence of a new governance regime (Geels, 2005), one capable of reframing carceral space as a site of urban regeneration and democratic innovation. The University, acting not as a neutral observer but as a transformative actor, anchors a model of public institutionality that challenges the marginalisation of both prisons and the territories in which they reside. Engaged in such a way, the University fulfils the *Militant University* project, inspired by thinkers like Patrick Geddes (1980) and developed within the Italian territorialist school (Magnaghi, 2010; Paba 2011). It functions as a hub of interdisciplinary collaboration, where students, academics, institutions, and communities coalesce to act on pressing spatial and civic challenges. This University is thus not only a place of higher learning but a cultural engine for inclusive and sustainable territorial change.

In line with Esposito's theorisation, *I CARE joint Laboratory* is not merely an institution among others, but an *instituting institution*, one that reconfigures the roles and relations of all actors involved, fostering an institutional ecology grounded in reciprocity, care, and the redefinition of urban justice.

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