Identity has been a major factor in establishing and maintaining traditional forms of dwellings and settlements. Today this connection between people and place has been fragmented because of social, economic and technological forces. An examination of the hill town of Giove in 1987 revealed how twentieth century people can identify with places built long ago. The author's "reading" of Giove and similar hill towns in the area revealed several key points: Each hill town should be experienced as an integrated whole rather than as a series of architectural elements; Adaptability to influences today is favorable when compared with earlier incremental changes of traditional urban form and is facilitated by modern communication and technology; The unique spatial settings of hill towns are of broad appeal and benefit to a diverse population; The contrast between the deteriorated environment of today's massive metropolitan areas and the clean air, quiet, human contact and opportunities for fresh identities in hill towns has become a viable resource for sustained vitality; The conformity of architectural traditions among towns is offset by a great diversity of morphology; A regional framework is essential to understanding the quality of individual places, their sources of identity, and current or potential vitality; The experiential, intuitive method of analysis can create new opportunities for user identity in contemporary urban design and restoration.

...Your gaze scans the streets as if they were written pages: the city says everything you must think, makes you repeat her discourse...


Perception of place grows in response to the breadth of experience of a place. Out of this comes an awareness of a place's intrinsic qualities and a
deepening of the fundamental relationship that binds a person to a place. Ultimately, a lasting sense of identity may evolve, and with it a knowledge of the human values and history that a place records. In today’s ever-changing built environment, opportunities for this kind of sustained identity are rare.

During most of Western history, traditional as well as vernacular patterns of individual dwellings and urban settlements have served the useful social function of maximizing the sense of identity through generations and epochs. There has been an unbroken continuity of urban places and ways of using them that has been reinforced by places’ small-scale nature and their greater regional independence. For all the advantages of the current trend toward mobility and concentration of population, the quality of self and its sense of place has deteriorated over time. Both rapid change in and the increased size of the urban environment -- plus the commercialization of land as a market item -- have contributed to the breaking of this continuity and the stabilizing influence it provides for both urban places and urban residents.

The human desire for identity with places that brings fulfillment and satisfaction (either by individuals, families or communities) goes on even in our largest metropolitan areas. The quest for "a room with a view" for one alone in life, housing for families, protection of neighborhoods, and historic preservation of downtowns has swelled into an energetic activist movement of major cultural and political significance.

An opportunity to explore these issues first hand came to me in the spring of 1987 when I was invited to live for a few weeks in a stone farmhouse in process of restoration adjacent to the small hill town of Giove in the southern tip of the Province of Umbria, some seventy miles north of metropolitan Rome (FIG. 1). Within the limits of words on pages, this paper offers to share with the reader that experience and the insights it evoked.

ARRIVING IN GIOVE

We left behind in Rome a lively and diverse neighborhood centered on the Via de Giubbonari and the Campo de Fiori whose village-like patterns evolved over centuries of interplay and adaptation between people and place. Even a short stay there provided an experience in identity useful as a prelude to Giove. We followed the oldest of Roman roads, the Via Tiberina, today Autostrada A-1, up the topographic corridor of the Tiber River Valley. In Roman times the journey would have taken two to three days on foot, but it took us just an hour and a half. Giove rose above us on the rocky promontory from which it has surveyed the vast valley for centuries. The serpentine road that would have taken more than several hours on foot half a century ago took us to the town in only ten minutes (FIG. 2).

At the crest of the hill, the road turned abruptly and placed us at the foot of a soaring Castello face-to-face with the broad facade of a twin-towered parish church set above broad steps the width of its broad piazza. The height and position of the church on axis with the road created a strong sense of entry that was reinforced by the cross-axis to the town’s main street and the position of the Castello. The clarity of this pattern spelled out the essence and evolution of the urban structure of Giove and welcomed a sense of identity.

Turning left, we could see "Old Giove" of the Middle Ages huddled at the foot of the Castello. At the end of the main street a glorious crescent-shaped overlook or belvedere, called Largo Macalle, opened up. From here the view was framed by the trunks of a dozen elms and stretched twenty miles up and down the Tiber River Valley. The overlook was directly on top of the ship-like prow of the promontory we had seen from below. Across the Tiber, the rugged mountains topped by Monte Cimino of the Province of Lazio formed a backdrop that suggested a turbulent history. Two neighboring hill towns, Bomarzo and Mugnano, could be seen on lower peaks. Along the Tiber and Route A-1, a few industries sprawled out on the outskirts of the old river town of Attigliano.

From this breathtaking belvedere, a ribbon-like road of light tan gravel dropped steeply to the farmhouse. We passed small farms with vineyards, fruit trees and vegetable gardens that carved a haphazard geometry into the brown earth. The farmhouse stood white-walled and red-roofed above fields of wheat that were dotted with red poppies...
Behind us and far above, the tops of Gione’s bell towers remained in sight. They invited us to fulfill the obligation to identify with Gione and its rural periphery that had orchestrated the lives of thousands of people for centuries. Just to sleep in the farmhouse, and be in the same environment among the same stone buildings standing on the same earth, was a head start toward understanding that identity.

AN EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH

For the next several weeks the farmhouse became the central point from which we set out to experience Gione and its companion hill towns. As a temporary “insider,” I came to know the place through daily living and through participating to a degree in the restoration and remodelling of the farmhouse, which was to become a retreat from metropolitan Rome for its new owner. I also used the time to carry forward (from studies of Dalmatian urban places) an exploration of the meaning of place in another type of traditional settlement seeking an identity in today’s world.

I planned to explore three general issues. What could my experiential, intuitive approach tell me about the identity and uniqueness of a place? How might these factors contribute to the social and economic vitality of the specific traditional settlement pattern and more human urban design in general? And how well would the “urban reading” method of determining a sense of place apply in a geographic and cultural region different from that of the Dalmatian towns and villages in which I had developed it?

Through that urban reading, “feelings” and intuitive responses to a carefully monitored visual experience revealed essential qualities of uniqueness, sense of place and people-to-place relationships. This experiential approach parallels the awareness that comes from phenomenological observation of the environment. Thus, I was prepared to put aside the popular notion that hill towns are a rarity from the past, and that they are filled only with architectural gems and picturesque by-ways mimicked in opera sets and kept alive by Michelin guides and tourist buses. Dalmatian coastal towns
had revealed a common identity based on intimate land-water relationships, and yet they had also displayed a remarkable difference in the morphology of individual places that resulted in a uniqueness in daily experience. Could the method I had developed respond to towns and villages built on hilltops and shaped by centuries of adaptation to a restricted, airy setting? The sense of space and constant visual exposure made the regional context a major source of difference with the Dalmatian towns. Mountains replaced the sea, providing a different though equally powerful human appeal.

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT: DETERMINANTS OF AN URBAN SUB-SYSTEM

The geographic fact of the Tiber River flowing down to Rome from the central ranges of the Apennines (a corridor of conquest and unification) has provided the foundation for the overall patterning of Umbria. Virtually the same system of roads, towns and villages is present today as in earlier times. The difference is that today modern technology and communication have eased problems of access and livability and lent a new dimension to social organization. A complete constellation of hill towns and villages has existed on these hills since Etruscan times, forming a sub-region with Amelia as its center (FIG. 2).

On all four sides of the sub-region, major transportation routes follow natural geographic corridors. The relatively small size of the area -- some twenty kilometers from east to west and thirty from north to south -- favors communication between settlements. The rolling landscape allows a network of local roads that follow the natural contours and needed little change to accommodate light automobiles. These readily connect most villages west of the three peaks that form a range which partially breaks the continuity from east to west. The sub-region has direct contact with major regional hill towns: Perugia, the capital of Umbria to the northeast, Spoleto to the east, Viterbo to the west in Lazio, and Orvieto to the north.

THE URBAN SETTLEMENTS OVER TIME

Establishing Orvieto as their regional center as far back as the eighth century B.C., the Etruscans took over earlier settlements in the sub-region from their predecessors, the Umbrians. After five centuries of a highly civilized Etruscan urban tradition, Orvieto and these other settlements became Roman outposts that carried forward many Etruscan qualities. The Gothic occupation through the Middle Ages broke the continuity of tradition, and Old Giove appeared in the early Middle Ages at a time when local lords were asserting the power that would lead to the establishment of city states prior to the Renaissance. It is in a sense phenomenal that these places have reached our times without losing the quality of narrative imprinted on them by these earlier periods in history. Today a part of their identity lies in the dynamics of earlier turning points in history, which are readable in their varying traditions of urban form and architecture.

The settlements range in population from small villages like Porchiano del Monte and Toscolano with several hundred residents, to larger villages like Giove and Lugnano with a thousand residents, to the only real town, Amelia. The sub-region holds a total of 35 settlements that share the same origins and traditional character, yet in which the people pursue normal lives.

The settlements can be ranked in hierarchical order. The hill villages, like Porchiano and Toscolano with only the most basic services, depend on Giove or Attigliano which are more accessible by car. Giove and other similar places, though well prepared for day-to-day needs, depend on Amelia for more specialized needs.

FARMS AND FORESTS: INTEGRATION OF NON-URBAN LAND

Living in a farmhouse in Umbria in 1987 surrounded by wheat fields with poppies, orchards of aged olive trees, and vineyards stretched out on the rich brown earth, one can sense what the environment must have looked like and how people must have lived in it when the hill towns and villages were still young. Well tended small farms prevail, each with its stone farm buildings, hens, ducks, dogs
and fruit trees. One also senses the social, economic and physical integration of the non-urban land into the hill-town system.

All land not in crops is in forest preserves; nothing is left untended. While parts of the landscape look like a wild wooded areas, stands of laurel and evergreen and deciduous oak are actually managed by public foresters who decide when trees are mature enough to be cut for firewood, and where replacement growth will occur. Seeing such devotion to the land, one gains a sense of identity with the region that is more like that of centuries past than that of our commercialized times. Yet the landscape clearly displays its adaptations to the present: the presence of pick-up trucks, light-weight tractors, jeeps, television antennae, and power and telephone lines tells us that fairly modern life is being lived in traditional settlement patterns that have been more than a thousand years in formation.

It became clear to me that a critical factor in the vitality of hill towns and villages in Umbria -- or anywhere -- is the maintenance of interdependence on the regional scale. From an ecological perspective, a constellation of urban places that forms a stable and coherent pattern provides conditions under which each place can have a separate identity while maintaining an interactive role with the others.

THE URBAN STRUCTURE EVOLVED

With this regional picture in mind, we walked back up the hill from the farmhouse to explore Giove's urban structure and "read" its parts. Travelling the same road as in Medieval times up the north flank of Giove's promontory, gives a close view of farmhouses and barns, livestock, farm equipment, and neighbors at work, a testament to Giove's contemporary reason for being. Above, the bell towers rise from the church, and to the north the neighboring hill town of Lugnano stretches along its elongated hilltop. Beyond, the sub-region's highest peak, Monte Croce di Serra, dominates the landscape. Devoid of major highways, signs, and the customary clutter of modern buildings, the same walk could have been taken when Old Giove, once the borgo of the early Middle Ages, was expanding during the Renaissance. Nearing the top, on the left, those women who do not yet have automatic washers wash and gossip at the communal washing place set into the rock. Finally, just below the Belvedere with its view west to the Tiber, stand the containers for disposing of refuse from this end of town. That these two functions were located alongside the nostalgic outlook reminded us that we were experiencing past and present side-by-side.

On this crest we found a starting point for our understanding of how Giove's foot-oriented circulation and land use had come to be organized through three major periods of change and growth (FIG. 3). Standing on the "prow of the ship," the Largo Macalle, with our backs to the Tiber Valley far below, we found a "Porto Romano" to the left which provided a confined entrance to Old Giove with its Castello rising above. The Castello's original eleventh century portion looks down protectively from the south on the old borgo and its walls (FIG. 4).

The Castello's Renaissance addition, rising above the Belvedere and the symmetrical piazza that greeted us on our original arrival by car, clearly symbolizes the second stage of the town's growth. The "new" Giove deliberately opened up the town to the larger world in keeping with the revival of classic traditions of visual order and grandeur. Here at the piazza and the church, which is located on even higher ground than the Castello, the men gather or play cards at the town's Bar Tabacchi. Only a scattering of small shops intrude. At the single point of arrival from three separate directions, the piazza provides the prime spot for keeping tabs on who comes and goes by car, motorbike, bicycle or on foot. From the Belvedere, the older men finish off the day on benches under the elms, gazing out over the valley -- a superb way to keep life in perspective.

We look east down the main Renaissance spine of the town a few hundred yards to the point where a bend in the street cuts our view of the Corso that extends east as the Via Vittorio Emanuele. One of Giove's attractions is this bend, which leaves more to be seen when we approach it from either direction. This spine runs east on high, level terrain to join the plateau land beyond, giving Giove an unusual lineal form that allows direct access to farm areas, Amelia, and other less accessible hill towns.
However, the ridge is only wide enough for this single street, two rows of dwellings on either side, and a minor parallel residential street to the north. At the end of this high urban spine, a minor branching road forms a "Y" intersection. Here Giove’s third sector, that built in the twentieth century, breaks the wall-to-wall construction of the Renaissance as a typical suburban subdivision of freestanding houses along the Via Amerina.

We come to understand the reason for Giove’s relative success as an intermediate service center between Amelia and the smaller neighboring hill towns. We now decide to walk through the three Giove’s, those portions of the town that have been added incrementally and that have sustained a vitality that together with the productive rural surroundings have created a source of identity and a heritage for today. On the basis of Giove alone, hill towns appear to alive and well in Umbria.

OLD GIOVE REVISITED

To do an urban reading of it, we must envision old Giove standing at the foot of the Castello eight to nine hundred years ago. At that time it would have appeared alone and aloof on a barren promontory without the currently visible Renaissance and twentieth century additions. The task of envisioning this fantasy is made easier for us by a pale early morning sun that shines through a misty sky, giving off a light that is reminiscent of the light in the work of early Italian painters.

Entering the Porto Romano, we gain an impression
of disorder, confusion, primitive construction -- a maze of tiny walks, tunnels, bridgeways, outside steps and doorways. This remnant of the past appears to be a place assembled for no other reason than survival, a place where people lived huddled together against harsh times literally on top of each other. Yet on mapping this seemingly shapeless community turn-by-turn in the mind's eye, and later comparing that mental map with an official one, we can arrive at a sense of the logic of incremental decisions made over time, decisions made in response to the demands of the physical constraints of cramped space and the need for privacy, access, open space and outlook. The result of all these decisions is a consistent vernacular quality with individual identity among dwellings. This pleasing variety of improvised building-form contrasted with the sameness of established architectural style that we later found in Giove's Renaissance second stage (FIG. 5).

In simple terms, the plan revealed itself to be based on an elliptical loop-route, connected by several communicating crosswalks and piazzas that bore such politically and culturally telling names as Viale Africa Orientale and Piazza Giuseppe Verdi. Retracing our steps with our mental map in mind, old Giove seemed to us to have been planned in a spirit of participation with the realities of materials and skills that produced a sense of connectedness between people and place. Its ninety to one hundred properties, today inhabited by old-time residents and weekenders, amounts to a non-designed condominium planned over generations, unselconscious in form yet full of human identity. One environmental source of this vitality was the way the Castello closed off the entire east side of the settlement and heightened the experience of seeing out to the west, an airy panorama glimpsed through narrow and unexpected openings between buildings.

RENAISSANCE GIOVE

As light came to the Dark Ages and power to local lords, the huge addition to the Castello in the early seventeenth century gave Giove a future adapted to the forces of the times. The town's prominent position, visibility and back-door access to Umbria favored this expansion. Where the old Castello's cramped rooms looked inward on a courtyard and had only the smallest of balconies and windows, the addition tripled the floor space, rose several stories higher and opened windows and broad terraces over the Tiber. No longer a mere fortified Castello, but now a towering Palazzo Ducale, it was no architectural wonder, but it was a remarkably situated element in an urban design, reverberating with the energy of the times (FIG. 6). With 50,000 square feet of stacked-up floor space in excellent structural condition, it should serve a purpose today. And that it does. The new owner is a motion-picture director from Hollywood affiliated with Rome's Cinecittà. Again, the universal appeal of nature and the built environment, combined according to traditions of the past, can be seen to

FIGURE 4. Giove displays an identifiable skyline from the Tiber River Valley.
"Old Giove's" identity stems from diversity of buildings and unexpected openings to the airy space beyond.

FIGURE 6. The Castello's Renaissance addition and axial setting demonstrates a major shift in tradition.

exert a pull on the men and women who have replaced the lords of the past.

Through our neighbor at the farmhouse, a Giovanese active in the current political life of the town and a member of an old Giove family, we arranged a walk through the Castello. Feature followed feature in our experience of a Castello-turned-Palazzo, now being recycled for today's international gentry. It was refreshing to sense how the Castello was used for living, free of the crowds of tourists that typically muddy up such visits. We rose three stories up a spiral indoor ramp from the street by the Porto Romano that originally accommodated horse-drawn coaches. There we found terraces the size of tennis courts, flooded with sun, and we viewed the river basin and the mountains surrounding Viterbo to the west. We moved through great halls with twenty-five foot high ceilings and overhead frescos portraying Roman gods whose values have been revived — Giove himself bearded, nude and embracing Aquila. From more recent times we discovered modern bathrooms with gilded swan faucets installed alongside primitive WC's that projected through the outside wall (as they are required to be left by Umbria's architectural preservation policies).

The internal experience of the Castello set the stage for the overall reading of Renaissance Giove. In contrast to old Giove's incremental and almost vernacular creation, we could see in the Renaissance addition the opening up of life to the environment that became the new tradition. We walked the straight axial route clearly and deliberately laid down by the hand of man establishing a predetermined urban form. Putting ourselves back at the time when new, powerful forces were moving in to create Renaissance Giove, we could see how the impact of changes in our time is just another increment in hill-town evolution. The Renaissance broke with past traditions by grandly linking the built environment to the natural setting and expanding social and cultural life, all in the interest of expressing power. In our times we have provided ourselves with efficient new regional auto routes (the Autostrada), electric energy, a reliable water supply and good sanitation. In this sense, Giove and neighboring hill towns and villages today are merely going through another major period of evolution. A new "tradition" in settlement is being introduced. The continuity of history is retained, and we who are now living in the future of the original Old Giove can enrich our lives by experiencing the present and the past side-by-side.

As we turned east on the Via Vittorio Emanuele from the Castello, the Palazzo Municipale and residences with shops here and there were on our right up to a point where the street bent slightly and became the Corso. There the small shops were family-owned and covered a range of needs. There were two groceries, two butchers, one superb
bakery whose fragrance pervaded the air, a pharmacy and a tiny gift shop -- all oriented to the residents of the area since tourists were rare. After the bend, the street was flanked on both sides by larger buildings, possibly smaller palazzos of a later period, and the street walls repeated the traditional Renaissance facade details. These buildings came to a sudden end at the Largo Cesare Battisti, which in Renaissance times probably marked the beginning of open farmland. Only an aged convent some distance beyond remained from the past, though it is lost today among houses on separate parcels of land in the twentieth century manner.

TWENTIETH CENTURY GIOVE AND ITS VITALITY

A second major break with the continuity of tradition in Giove occurred earlier in this century, when the somewhat wider flat land atop the ridge beyond the Largo Cesare Battisti was subdivided. This is where the road to nearby Penna Teverina -- a small hill village -- turns off. This typically suburban area is considerably larger than all of old Giove and the Renaissance addition put together, but it contains only about the same number of properties as in old Giove. With some of the parcels as large as the site of the entire Palazzo-Castello, and all their dwellings surrounded by gardens, a very different "tradition" was introduced from that of the Renaissance (FIG. 7).

It appeared obvious to us that the coming of the small Italian car caused of this change in road and dwelling type, along with commercialization of the land. The World War II monument to the dead of Giove dates this increment of modern-day suburbia. The modern scale of the post office, bank, COOP supermarket and building materials supply store along the Via Amerina told us of the role this sector of Giove has played in modernizing the lives of farmers and urban folk of the sub-region.

By the end of our reading of Giove (actually done over several days with time for reflection between walks), the mental map of Giove appeared to us essentially as a lineal "T"-shaped urban form, stretching from a fixed point in the west to an ever-elongating eastern end (FIG. 3). The flatness of the town at the higher elevations gave a sense of stability and firmness, while the drop-offs from three sides of the promontory assured the airy sense of space and detachment characteristic of hill towns. With clearly defined distinctions in scale and architectural character strung out in chronological order, we found three opportunities for identity with Giove rolled into one. Modern man shuttles back and forth through 1500 years of urban settlement formation simply in the routine of daily life. Development of an awareness of Giove's sense of place in this way adds a dimension of time to one's identity with Giove and -- as we were to learn through comparison with other hill settlements -- a source for its uniqueness.
Unlike other small hill towns, the ready accessibility to Giove by car and bicycle, the availability of parking in an area where car ownership is still low, and the prevailing subsistence farming reduces dependence on cars. These factors give Giove an economic base by which tradition might survive, and by which the sharp image of the past and the present might be retained. This basis for Giove’s identity will be further clarified by comparing the urban reading of Giove to a less detailed reading of neighboring hill towns.

**Lugnano:**
*Town of Hallways and Rooms*

Leaving Giove for Lugnano to the north, we experienced the phenomenon of a region virtually studied with hill towns and villages. To reach any of them, one had no choice but to descend and then climb up again. When one repeats this experience daily, it becomes as normal as a flight of birds dropping down and riding up in space. The town to which you are heading or the one you have left behind can always be seen at the crown of its hill. Indeed, it becomes a phenomenon to find a hill not crowned with a town or a village. Studying the drawing of these places done in the seventeenth century, we realized how aware of this pattern of urbanization the hill-town dwellers of those times were. The combination of high visibility from one town to another and the vertical access drawn in exaggerated style reveal the strong image and clear sense of identity that they perceived (FIG. 8, 12).

Rather than arriving abruptly from below or gradually on the level as one does at Giove, one curls upward toward Lugnano around two-thirds of the perimeter of its egg-shaped hill, following the outside of the Medieval walls. From the entry Piazza Marconi and the Belvedere at the top, the farmlands, hills, and profile of Giove command contemplative attention. We left the car in a tiny parking area, and began our reading on foot, leaving the twentieth century behind.

The analogy between the town and a home is accurate. Lugnano’s tiny unarticulated walks serve as hallways, always converging on piazzas of varying size that function like rooms where various types of social life take place (FIG. 9). These rooms are held together by a level “main street” -- the Via Umberto -- that runs from north to south. This street begins at the entry piazza, and at its end is a tiny tightly enclosed piazza where there is a small church and where the total lack of outlook expresses an image of finality. Other hallways took us to other rooms, and between the two end piazzas lay more piazzas, each serving a separate purpose. Among these were the Piazza Principi di Plemone, with the fine Romanesque church of Santa Maria Assunta, the Palazzo Municipale, and a

**FIGURE 8.** Lugnano’s level skyline reveals its livability.
smaller one -- a wide place in the Via Umberto with the ubiquitous Bar Tabbachi. Here the old men played cards indoors or in the shade under the few trees that the cramped space allowed, and the women frequented the few shops.

From these streets and piazzas the outlook to undulating Umbria is mostly blocked. But when we lost the sense of being on a hilltop at all, suddenly a space between buildings would appear like a port-hole on a ship, and a panoramic cultivated landscape would appear spilling down -- as in the Middle Ages -- from the flanks of Lugnano’s hill out toward distant peaks. The social-spatial experience of Lugnano, tightly packed on its sloping crown, was like being on a ship with no where to go but down to the land. The contrast between confined built space and the vastness of unbroken space seen from an elevated position instilled in us a sense of awe at being thrust up above the world and yet placed there in such close proximity to other human beings.

The relative flatness of much of Lugnano’s hilltop and its compact layout of pedestrian streets limited what we could see of it at any point in contrast to the totality of experience of Giove’s one had immediately upon arrival. This internalized circulation system induced qualities of intimacy, exploration and images of detail; we sought to repeat routes to find out how they connected up with each other and how the circulation system of the town
worked as a whole. There always seemed to be more corners to find in this searching, and the uncertainty evoked in us as outsiders a sense of intruding on the privacy of a stranger's time.

Where the built record of Giove's history was spaced out, with each period intact, Lugnano's Renaissance Palazzos either took over the open sites between Medieval buildings or made use of ledges immediately outside the walls that overlooked the landscape. In all cases the palazzos were located on the sunny side of the hilltop, leaving the dwellings of people of lesser status on the colder northern side. Virtually all the settlement of the twentieth century, consisting of single family houses, lie entirely apart on more level land in the vicinity of the main approach road. As in Giove, there is an outlying convent, but it is situated well below the hilltop and is surrounded by a park with a public swimming pool that has become a focal point for the younger people of Lugnano.

PORCHIANO:
A PRE-RENAISSANCE REMNANT

Porchiano del Monte, located about half-way between Lugnano and Amelia, is shown with both these towns on the seventeenth-century drawing mentioned earlier (FIG. 12). Porchiano should be compared not to Giove as a whole but with old Giove, since both were 

Porchiano's urban history stopped at one point, though its social history has continued to a fairly active present.

From a distance Porchiano's silhouette is something of a cup cake whose gentle slopes rise to a flat-topped peak (FIG. 10). This shape has determined the creation of an urban form that consists of two roughly concentric circles around the peak, with radial routes joined at the top. From the old deteriorated walls, irregular streets meander between buildings toward the hilltop center where a main piazza assures a single focus for the small amount of social life generated in the tiny town. A touch of Renaissance character does distinguish the form of a single main route that approaches the piazza on axis with the Palazzo Municipale. Porchiano gave off an air of quiet contentment, with its easy system of walkways and many distant views made possible by radial streets, and with no more than a Bar Tabbachi and a grocery store to take the place of Giove's Corso. But in Porchiano, Amelia looms large on a nearby hill that is only minutes away via Fiat, motorbike, or bicycle along a good asphalt road, and the nearby forest service headquarters appears to be another source of jobs.
TOSCOLANO:
RESTORATION FOR OUR TIMES

Another hill village only half the size of Porchiano and old Giove with no Renaissance additions lies just beyond Amelia. Toscolano stands on a circular hilltop like Porchiano, yet its hill is hemmed in by high land, and opens out only to the east. We found Toscolano to have its own distinctive qualities and basis for identity stemming from its convoluted circulation system (FIG. 11). In walking through Toscolano, we were choreographed into a spiral, upward movement around the hill on one street, and downward on another so that the curving facades of buildings unfolded step-by-step. We missed the airy outlook and open space; the arching of the buildings over the single main entrance made us feel as if we were entering a giant conch shell.

The construction is superior in Toscolano to that in either Porchiano or old Giove, giving the impression that some special quality of place has evoked a special affection by its residents. Too small to survive as a place of permanent residence, Toscolano has been extensively restored to provide second homes for families who hold a strong sense of identity with the town but have become full time residents of big cities. An example of this process is a single, free-standing fortified tower whose interior was being modernized with no change of the exterior. The stupendous outlook from the tower’s tidy, protective windows included both the hill village and the valleys toward Montecristilli and Aquaspartas.

Except for the smallest vehicles, cars must be left outside Toscolano in a parking area that is well placed along a handsome Belvedere that sweeps, crescent-shaped, along the edge of the east-facing hillside. Trees frame the outlook over the Umbrian landscape to the distant mountains, and benches invite rest, reflection and conversation for people of our times in a quiet, unique environment from the past.

AMELIA:
COMPLEXITY AND DISCOVERY

As we experienced all these places and compared them with Giove, differences in the sources of identity of each continued to appear. On reading Amelia, we could see how it played the leading role in the Amerina sub-region as far back as the time of the Etruscans. The colossal Etruscan stonework in a polygonal pattern on which the main Roman gate still stands dates from hundreds of years B.C. The Romans built the important Via Amerina on the old Etruscan road through Umbria. Amerina’s importance in the Middle Ages also became apparent in the image of it found in the sixteenth century engraving referred to earlier (FIG. 12, 13).

Entering this ancient symbol of power and protection, and then walking up the steep main street that penetrates the town, we anticipated a similar sense of order throughout. Amelia’s continuous storefronts and wide variety of merchandise suggested that the business district plays a larger role in marketing than that of a local center. But beyond the last shops the sense of purpose ended. A rugged and varied topography and a rebuilding over centuries had produced an urban system that was almost without discernable pattern. We lost our way readily in its complexity; the narrow streets failed to distinguish themselves according to width, period or use, though we were sure that an underlying order would be revealed with more continued experience. Three centers -- the main shopping street, the Piazza Municipale and hospital, and the Piazza del Duomo -- are separated by considerable distances and are located on three different levels, the Duomo standing free of the town at the peak of the hill as if in proud isolation from the rest of the community (FIG. 14).

Nevertheless, the disorder we perceived aroused our curiosity to explore further, and in time a spirit of discovery emerged that gave Amelia a special source of identity. Increased awareness of how its growth went through more epochs than Giove caused a human appeal to develop that was concealed within the confines of the town’s irregular terrain and spectacular peak. On leaving Amelia through the Roman gate, we sensed we had visited a town that remained just as it had been portrayed in the sixteenth century engraving -- as a jumble of Medieval and Renaissance frames marked by exaggerated proportions of walls, palazzos and campaniles. That image dissolved quickly as we step-
FIGURE 12. The image of Amelia held by its sixteenth century residents.

FIGURE 13. Amelia today shows little change in its skyline.

ped back into the modern world of cars, gas stations and apartments that sprawled just outside the Etruscan-Roman walls. Again we recognized Amelia's identity and her enduring role as a sub-regional center throughout history.

HILLTOWNS UNLIMITED

Drawing insightful conclusions between Giove and its neighboring hilltop settlements is a process that could go on indefinitely. However, these four com-
Comparisons demonstrate the many ways in which urban reading can evoke distinctive images, determine multiple sources of identity, and suggest concepts on which to base the continued welfare of such an urban phenomenon from the past. My several weeks of exposure to this microcosm of differing hill towns remind me of the urban places portrayed in Italo Calvino's remarkable *Invisible Cities*, each of which was based on the interaction between imaginatively distinctive urban forms and living patterns. The Umbrian hill towns might well have been his inspiration.

During our field research we visited and explored five other hill towns to round out the experience. Alviano, not far from Lugnano and Montecristilli east of Toscolano was similar in size to Giove, but it differed greatly in urban form, had less direct access, and lacked the clarity of expansion according to time periods (Fig. 15, 16). Across the Tiber, visible from Giove's Belvedere, Mugnano and Bomarzo were also inevitable candidates for reading. Mugnano stands on a small hilltop rising like an island from the intensely cultivated plain that parallels the Tiber. About the same size as Porchiano and Toscolano, the steep ascent to it from the plain, the low quality of its original construction and the lack of any supporting new development puts it in a marginal category for future vitality. Bomarzo falls somewhat into this category due to its lineal organization along the more rugged roads of...
mountainous Lazio (Fig. 17). However, the architectural characteristics, location, and integrity of the Medieval portion of the town which is set on a precarious set of soaring crags give it a strong sense of identity. Bomarzo is famed for its Park of the Monsters, where great natural rocks at the foot of the town were carved into outrageously frightening sculptures in the seventeenth century by one of the Dukes of Orsini as a way of mocking the formal designs of gardens such as those in nearby Villa Lante at Bagnaia. No other hill town in the region had a feature that could compare with the Bomarzo’s Castello’s spires that rise to Manhattan skyscraper heights from crags that in turn rise several hundred meters from the floor of the Tiber Valley (Fig. 10).

Finally, Bagnaia itself also demonstrated more clearly than any of the other towns how the planning concepts of the Renaissance combined with the opulence and power of the Popes to create an urban addition of order and serenity that completely broke with the traditions of the Middle Ages. Bagnaia and Giove share this distinction of allowing the old tradition to remain intact, while allowing a new settlement pattern tradition to be introduced. This combination offers the twentieth century the enriching opportunity to experience remotely how urban life was organized in succeeding periods.

IN CONCLUSION

In general, the brief through intimate experience with the hill towns of the Giove area, generated a broad spectrum of findings that responded generously to several issues I had set forth to be explored. My essentially phenomenological and intuitive research method, backed by selected fact-finding, appeared to be as productive in revealing differing identities as it had been in my study of Dalmatian coastal towns. Insights and understanding were gained which, through far from conclusive, would prove useful in seeking more decisive policy positions in planning for the future of these places. Simultaneously, the research could serve as a starting point for studies of traditional settlements in other locales and cultures.

I considered the following findings to be significant:

1. Each urban place – town or village – should be experienced as a comprehensive, integrated whole in terms of its natural form and physical systems of circulation and land use, rather than as a series of distinct architectural elements. Such a position leads to an understanding of how identity and uniqueness emerge from the interrelationship of systems and the form of settlement in terms of particular site and socio-cultural and political evolution. Thus, the urban designer or analyst can develop a personal identity with and genuine feeling for the qualities of a place in question. This awareness can offer a fertile context for interpreting those qualities obtained from the community concerning individual responses to urban form seen from a variety of realms of interest. This comprehensive understanding can guide with sensitivity the relevant quantitative studies of the future of the settlement.

2. The impact of changes and forces today that are determining future forms and roles of these traditional settlements is comparable with that of earlier
incremental stages of growth. In the past these places demonstrated an ability to adapt urban form to change, and to continue to evolve. Today administrative frameworks for monitoring the forces of change, together with the resources of modern environmental technology, are already facilitating the creative integration of these remarkable records of human life into a permanent place in the coming century.

3. The experiential approach used in the field research revealed that in present-day terms, the hill town with its unique urban compactness, its permanence of stone and its airy setting holds a broad appeal. A diverse range of groups find a universal set of qualities in these places with which they can identify: natives of the towns, older former residents, citizens needing relief from big, modern cities, and visitors from other countries.

4. The environmental deterioration that has taken place in Italy’s larger cities, such as Rome, Milan, Naples and Florence, places new value on hill towns as attractive places for permanent residence or second homes free of overdone tourism. The clean air, human contact, and opportunities for identity with a strong urban/rural image, are resources that contribute to the sustained vitality of these places. The relative economic well-being of Northern Italy in general, and Umbria in particular, as compared to the south of the country, increases this potential. The simpler life brings reduced costs.

5. Throughout the sub-region, urban structural systems differed widely between towns even though architectural character for each historic period displayed conformity. Differences in morphology provided a greater source of uniqueness and identity than did the level of architectural quality. Such a characteristic can contribute to the sense of belonging and connectedness on the part of the people who live in each place, and thus it can strengthen cultural vitality.

6. An understanding of the interdependence of places from a regional, hierarchical point of view is essential to determining the quality of individual places, the basis for their physical patterns, the sense of identity, and future social and economic vitality.

7. The method of evaluation based on first-hand experience and intuitive responses can become a creative resource for planners involved in contemporary urban design and renewal projects. Increased sensitivity to enduring user values and to user participation in shaping or re-shaping urban structural systems can maximize the potential for socially valuable, even “vernacular,” identity.

...Zora has the quality of remaining in your memory point by point, in its succession of streets, of houses, ... though nothing in them possesses a special beauty or rarity .... Between each idea and point of the itinerary an affinity or contrast can be established. So the world's most learned men are those who have memorized Zora.

— Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

FIGURE 18. Bomarzo's towering Castello Orsini overpowers the town's visual identity.
This paper grew out of a long-term interest in the phenomenon of people-to-place relationships, particularly under varying cultural contexts - the San Francisco Bay Area, Latin America, Spain, and Yugoslavia. Italian hill towns had remained unattended on my agenda through visits to Italy from 1937 to 1981 that included a half year of residence in 1970. An opportunity came about in the spring of 1987 to stay in a farmhouse adjacent to Giove and fulfill my agenda. I am indebted to Leonida Bavcevic and her neighbors there for their hospitality and insights, to Paola Pignatelli and Arnaldo Marino of the University of Rome for securing reference maps, to David Garda of U.C. Berkeley for developing illustrations from them and to Inez Zupanov, also of U.C. Berkeley for historic context material.

1. For the purposes of this paper, I am interpreting "traditional" as distinct in meaning from "vernacular." The former encompasses dwellings and settlements of our time whose style and symbolism have become a heritage and are preserved or carried on in new buildings. "Vernacular" refers to building entirely through the use of local indigenous methods and materials. Such design and construction does sometimes become traditional though built by industrial and commercial methods as in the American Southwest, for example. For a clarifying discussion of this interpretation, see Norman Carver, Italian Hilltowns (Kalamazoo, MI: Ducuman Press, 1985), pp. 7-30.


6. Christian Norberg-Schultz, Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Place (New York: Rizzoli, 1980). In this work I found common ground for thinking about urban social concerns in phenomenological terms.


8. For a valuable overview of hill towns, see, Carol Field, The Hill Towns of Italy (New York: E. Dutton, 1983).

9. Insights into contemporary social life in the traditional villages that were gained from first-hand living experiences provided valuable background for my study. See, Lawrence Wylie, Village in the Vaucluse (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

