

# TOWARDS A SHARED IDEA OF LANDSCAPE CAPABLE OF MANY MINDS, MANY DIRECTIONS, MULTI-LAYERED TRANSFORMATION

## THREE CASE STUDIES AS THREE DIFFERENT INFLECTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION

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The paper presents three case studies where the landscape design is the upshot of a collective process of recognition and of construction of meanings and signifiers which reply and give voice to the complexities of the contemporary society. They show a landscape that, for different reasons, can be considered as “deprived” for its inhabitants, and that is re-conquered through different processes able to FORM and IN-FORM the landscape with new elements and new meanings.

The first one is the project of a medieval village regeneration in Tuscan countryside, sold to an international tourism company, where a law on inhabitants participation has allowed citizens to take part in decision making processes which concerned the future of their territory.

The second one refers to a totally automated tiles factory that was transformed through an artistic installation improving the quality of the working environment. Here the artistic expression of a particular form of “site specific art” combines an anonymous industrial plant with an artistic installation which contributes in giving a new meaning to this environment.

The third one is the project of a self-renewed building for homeless Roma families. They were directly involved in the project by working on the restoration: realization of a shared image of landscape is expressed through the process of self-renewing to create a sense of living which more corresponds to their culture and needs.

These case studies support the research of a shared image of landscape, which is open to different visions of the territory’s future, raising the question of inclusion within decision making processes and, in general, the question of asserting the rights of citizenship.

### **Statement of objectives**

The present paper aims to analyze how the concept of landscape introduced by the European Landscape Convention can be

developed in contexts where the inhabitants lack a perception of belonging to their territory.

Through the description of some processes

of re-possession of an “alienating” landscape, the paper demonstrates that landscape does not exist of its own as an already existing entity to which inhabitants have to conform themselves, but it takes shape and becomes significant through cultural processes involving inhabitants themselves in the construction of a renewed landscape perception.

The paper confronts three different contexts of the Italian landscape characterized by different problems of disaffection by the inhabitants and transformed through three different processes of “landscape re-possession”: regeneration of an expropriated landscape through citizen participation; transformation of an alienated landscape through an artistic installation; renewal of an “excluded” landscape through a process of self-restoration.

Each transformation project is introduced through five main points: 1. The territorial context; 2. The problem; 3. The proposal of landscape re-possession; 4. The project results; 5. Conclusions.

## Introduction

The European Landscape Convention states that landscape is an expression and, at the same time, a foundation of social identity. Given this assumption, we can say that landscape does not exist as such, but takes shape only if there is someone to observe it, live in it or construct and deconstruct it in a continuous process. Landscape exists if we actually give it a sense, a cultural significance to its components and transform them into signals through which we can communicate with other people: a landscape cannot but be generated in and through a process of exploration and ongoing creative re-design, implemented in the process of the changing relations established by the citizens with the different surrounding terrains (Pezzoni, 2010 a).

The paper presents three case studies where the landscape design is the upshot

of a collective process of recognition and construction of meanings and signifiers which respond to and give voice to the complexity of the contemporary society.

The three case studies show a landscape that, for different reasons, can be considered as alienating for its inhabitants, and that was re-conquered through different processes able to FORM and IN-FORM the landscape with new elements and new meanings.

The first case study describes the project of the regeneration of a medieval village in one of the most interesting European landscapes that was sold to an international tourist company. Here the introduction of a law (Regional Law n. 69/2007) on inhabitant participation in projects implying significant territorial transformations has allowed citizens to take part in decisional processes concerning the future of their territory.

The second case study refers to a tiles plant, totally automated, that was transformed through an artistic installation and thereby improving the quality of the working environment. The artistic intervention changed the industrial building transforming the work environment by inclusion of aesthetical elements.

The third case study is a project of a self-renewed building for homeless Roma families. The building was in a state of decay and the families were directly involved in the project by working on the actual restoration. At the same time an artistic installation placed in front of the building, renewed the visual impact of the new building towards the wider community.

## Theoretical background

The paper contents, as far as the general assumptions, the objectives and the discussion, refer to the concept of landscape introduced by the European Landscape Convention: “landscape means an area, perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of

natural and/or human factors” (The European Landscape Convention, 2000, Art. 1). A concept that emphasizes the importance of people in the recognition of landscape and that embodies the part played by human actions in the construction of the landscape itself. The words used by the European Landscape Convention to define landscape “also underline the dominance of the interaction of nature and culture in making landscape, thereby encouraging integration and cooperation between separate disciplines. The Convention also recognizes that ordinary, typical, ‘everyday’ landscapes, often characterized as much by human impact as by ‘natural beauty’, have their own special value, contributing to the rich variety of the European landscape.” (Fairclough, 2002)

The theoretical background of the paper refers to the studies which, interpreting the innovative contents introduced by the European Landscape Convention, highlighted three main aspects: the cultural significance of landscape (Salerno and Casonato, 2008; Palmentieri *et al.*, 2006), people’s perception of landscape as a fundamental factor of the existence of landscape itself (Fairclough, 2002; Déjeant-Pons, 2002) and the interaction between natural and human factors as a structural element in the construction of landscape (Drury, 2002; Festas, 2002).

The three case studies of the present paper fit the general framework of the above mentioned literature. Each study represents a particular example of how the concept of landscape introduced by the European Landscape Convention can be developed into actual fact.

In the case of Castelfalfi Village, the theoretical background refers to the literature concerning the methods of participation about landscape transformation projects causing conflicts among the parties involved. The requalification process in Castelfalfi Village, has been a forerunner of the participating

actions that are now becoming integral part of the decisional processes in the government of landscape, thanks to a recent cultural change towards the involvement of local actors (Pacchi, 2008).

The Tile Factory in Valenza falls into the framework of international site specific art literature (Kaye, 2000). In particular, in 2010, the Valenza Factory case study appeared on the Italian journal *Territorio* (Inguaggiato, 2010) together with other artistic interventions concerning processes of urban transformation. The Installation-Doubling in Valenza Factory and the role played by inhabitants (the workers, the chief executive of the plant, the town Major of Valenza, the artist) is documented by the publication on the Installation (Ferrari, 1998) that collects the contributions of art historians and art critics, in addition to the chief executive, to the Major and to the author of the Installation itself. On the occasion of the opening of the Installation, many articles appeared on the national press.

The case of Dado in Settimo Torinese falls into the framework of the research of a new welfare for transitory populations (Karrer and Ricci, 2003; Pomilio, 2009), among them immigrants and Roma (Vitale, 2009). Being a pilot project of new ways of cohabitation, it is mainly documented on the web, where on occasion of the opening news about a series of events in town were published, and successively some considerations about the project were written one and two years later concerning the results of the experiment still open today.

## Data and methods: the projects

### 1. Castelfalfi Village

#### *The territorial context*

The first case study deals with a considerable investment project undertaken by a German tourist multinational company, on



Fig. 1. Castelfalfi Village follows and enhances the landscape design (source: Morisi, 2007)

the medieval village and estate of Castelfalfi, in Valdelsa (Tuscany Region, Italy).

The village was built around the walls of a castle, with buildings and houses built to support farmers. Around the Village area, 30 rural buildings are spread, which were vacant from the 1960s and are now in a state of ruin. The estate around the village (almost 1100 hectares) has represented a wide and unitary property, with traditional rural cultivation, managed by tenant farmers until the second post-war period.

From the middle of the last century, this area has suffered a high depopulation; since that time, the village and the estate have been in progressive decay. In the 19th century, the estate had almost 600 inhabitants; today there are only 15 residents. Though the place seems to be abandoned by the locals, there are some tourist infrastructures such as a restaurant in the medieval castle, a hotel in an old tobacco mill, a golf course and some swimming-pools.

#### *The problem: an expropriated landscape*

In March 2007, the estate and the

village were bought by TUI (Touristik Union International), one of the largest tour operators in the world, who bought the whole area of Castelfalfi. Then they presented to the local council a project that foresaw, besides the restoration of the existing buildings, the construction of new tourist infrastructures and, in particular, a holiday village and a new hotel with 430 and 240 rooms respectively, four “villages” around some of the abandoned farmhouses, and the modernization of the old golf facilities.

The project raises some relevant questions, such as the new volume of construction introduced and the broad landscape transformation caused by the new tourist facilities (Fig. 1) (Morisi, 2007).

#### *The proposal of landscape re-possession*

The project was consistent with targets and volumes foreseen in the Structural Plan, but the Mayor considered that an intervention of that importance required a more complex approval process and decided to conduct a wide consultation to allow all citizens to express their opinion about the

transformation project (Florida, 2008).

On the basis of the Regional Law on inhabitants participation (that had just been approved in 2007), the administration opened a public debate, promoting and stimulating the locals turnout. The goals of this proposal were: to inform the inhabitants about the future of their territory; to let the locals express their opinion about the transformation project; to prepare a report for the tourist company with possible suggested changes.

### *The project results*

Between 2007 and 2008, the process was begun and the public debate included: five public meetings, publication of 2500 copies of a “synthetic guide to the project”, individual meetings with experts (real estate dealers, tour operators, farmers and so on), national and international press, a web site with the project’s documents, a web forum with the citizens’ contribution, guided tours to the estate and many other tools to promote the participation of the local population. A final report summarized the highlights and the new proposals that emerged from the debate.

Under law n. 69/2007, the tour operator had to accept the changes proposed by the only citizens and to modify the project.

The participation of the citizens involved some essential points, which modified the transformation project as follows:

- The dimensioning: the volume of buildings could not be increased by more than 10% of the existing volume;
- The design of the landscape: it was recommended to create a system of terraces for wine-grape and olive cultivation;
- All the rural buildings were to maintain their already existing volumes;
- In proximity of the historical buildings two new villages (instead of four) were accepted and they were to comply with the typical structure of farmhouses in Tuscany;

As far as the golf facilities, the inhabitants chose a type of grass which does not require much water.

Finally, the name of the new village had to be changed: instead of “Robinson Club” (proposed by the tour operator) the new village was named “Art and Culture Hotel”, which better identifies the particularity of the place.

### *Conclusions*

The case study of Castelfalfi represents an applicative model of the Tuscan Regional Law on citizens’ participation, which was the first law on inhabitants’ participation introduced in Italy. A public debate is one of the procedures introduced by this law and adopted in Castelfalfi: it allowed people some control of the elements of their own territory.

The process introduced by the Regional Law n. 69/2007 deals not only with a project of consensus building, but first of all of the empowerment of inhabitants: the local population, in order to decide about the future of their own dwelling place, had to develop a deeper know-how to be able to confront the experts (geologists, landscape architects, natural scientists, architects), learning how to observe the landscape, considering different points of view and being open to different visions of the future of the territory.

## **2. Tile factory in Valenza**

### *The territorial context*

The second case study involved a tile factory in Valenza (Piemonte Region, Italy), where in 1997 a new plant was built to replace the old furnace of the international company Terreal Italia. This new factory was the first example of a totally automated furnace with continuous 24 hour processing.



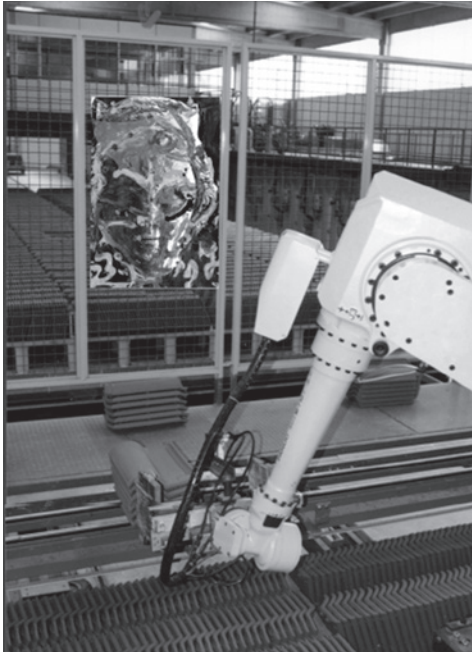


Fig. 2. Plotter-painting hanging in the robot area (source: Ferrari, 1998)

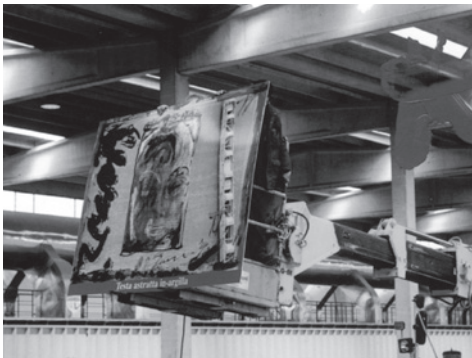


Fig. 3. Plotter-painting in the course of installation (source: Ferrari, 1998)

### *The problem: an alienating landscape*

The new plant, of 45 000 square meters, has very large and non-defined industrial spaces where the plant operators work close to the part of the plant which they have to oversee, but set apart and distant from each other.

According to the managing director, “The empty space between the machines and the workers can create a distance and a progressive loss of that proactive participation which is the most important factor, not so much for ‘good production’ as for ‘a good experience of the work space’” (Stangalini, 1998).

Another issue is that decreased workers attention, due to the automated furnace conditions, could compromise the safety of the working environment.

### *The proposal of landscape re-possession*

A new proposal was taken into account to address these issues: it consisted of the use of artistic elements within the industrial environment, providing “care” within the space and creating a less alienating place.

This proposal was in accordance with a particular form of “Site specific art” introduced in Italy by the artist-scientist Paolo Ferrari-Polfer, where the landscape is informed by artistic-cultural objects that modify the inhabitants’ perception of the place.

This project has been developed in two stages and it is a work in progress. The first stage, called “The (Dematerializing) Installation-Doubling in-Absence”, is a project composed of 30 plotter paintings. The second stage, called “Terre splendenti”, (Resplendent earth) includes ten plotter paintings that were added when the plant was extended with a new 6000 square meter sector (Figs. 2, 3).

The artistic installation consists of a method and of an aesthetical-compositive technique which is capable of assuming the undifferentiated space of the plant, which is excessively empty and poor, and transforming it into a different kind of space, capable of much more articulated and complex relational activities (Ferrari, 1998).

The artistic installation, by introducing works of art in a factory, intends to “take care” of the working space and thereby



*Fig. 4. Plotter-painting sliding across a track (photo by the author; Paolo Ferrari, 2008)*



*Fig. 5. Swinging plotter-painting hanging from the ceiling (photo by the author; Paolo Ferrari, 2008)*

create a less alienating place in which a more complex and abstract relational level can emerge and so improve workers' living/working conditions.

### *The project results*

The works of art were created expressly for and placed within the plant according to a project idea which is capable of integrating within their actual design the way of work life within the factory and the processes dictated by production exigencies. In this way realizing a complex operation in which the communicative strength and the intrinsic particularity of every art-work lies as much in the artistic quality of each, as in the relationship it realizes with the environment in which it is inserted, and also with the overall installation design (Pezzoni, 2010 b).

Through this process a strong relationship between the artistic installation and the working environment is achieved, whereby

the particularity of each work of art emerges not only in its visual impact but also in the relationship between the paintings, the working environment, and the installation as a whole.

Positioning of various art works which compose the unity of installation was decided together with the workers, seeking each time the convergence points between the artistic work and the daily human work life, which is constricted to a repetitive interaction with the machines and robots.

The supporting metal frames structures for the paintings were designed and built by the artist's staff and the plant operators.

Following the project idea and its construction, the art works become one with the plant environment. They are not lost within the large plant space but "redouble" it through the artistic gestures, and through their specific placement within the environment they are made visually accessible from each work place (Figs. 4, 5).

### Conclusions

The plant was not exploited as an exhibition space but rather the works were installed within it to be an integral part of it. This produced a humanizing and radical change of the relationships between workers and the work place, making it no longer as alienating as before (Verri, 2010).

Re-defying space, time and movement of an environment taken from its alienating potential, the works of art *inhabit* the factory and in this way make possible a dialogue with the workers.

For the visitor who comes into the boundless work space, along the production lines, within the enormous clay furnaces, the multilayered paintings appear like luminous presences within the atmosphere saturated with brick dust, the breaking brilliant colours and signs of the panels emerge little by little capturing the one's eye and freeing the mind from the hypnotic monotony of the space and the uninterrupted noise of the machines.

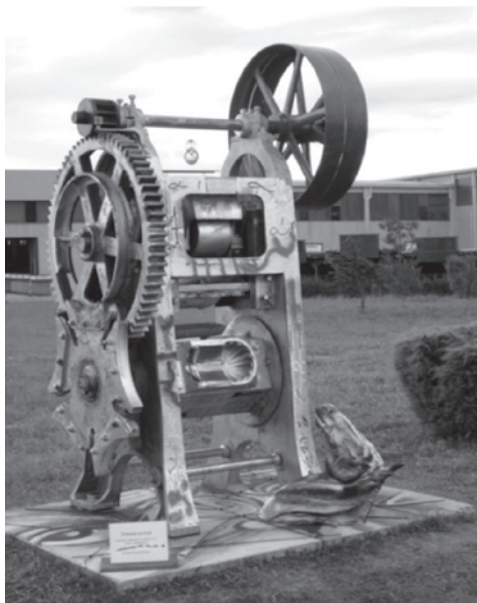


Fig. 6. The old press elaborated by the artist (photo by the author; Paolo Ferrari, 2010)

The old press placed in the garden at the front entrance to the plant becomes a sculpture which can be seen from the surrounding hills. An object of the work environment becomes an artistic item and the symbol of the whole process of aiming at improving working conditions (Fig. 6).

This intervention brought about a real reduction of work accidents. The chief executive of Terreal Italia, in 2008 maintained: "Data demonstrate that the frequency index of industrial accidents (the number of accidents in work hours) has decreased since 1999, the year of the Installation's opening: in 1998, the frequency index of accidents was 51 (18 accidents), the annual average from 1999 to 2007 is 10. Examining the last few years, the frequency index is 5.4 in 2005 (1 accident), 5.4 in 2006 (2 accidents), 5.2 in 2007

(1 accident)." For this reason the project was selected for inclusion in the Guggenheim Award, which promotes contemporary art.

The project highlighted and enhanced the relationship between art and the work environment as well as improving the workers quality of life.

### 3. 'Dado' in Settimo Torinese

#### *The territorial context*

The last case study involved a building located in a suburban landscape close to the town of Torino.

This building is called "Dado" (dice), due to its cubic shape, and it is a two-storey state-owned building, covering an area of 900 square meters. Built in the 1970s as a municipal sport-centre, in 2003 it was converted into "social housing" due to a shortage of flats.

#### *The problem: an excluded landscape*

Since 2003, single people and families in different levels of poverty lived in the building. As a result, it became an exclusion



and alienating area for the townspeople, and an example of urban degradation.

### *The proposal of landscape's re-possession*

In 2008, the Local Council decided to renovate the building and gave the mandate to the social cooperative "Architettura delle Convivenze", in collaboration with the artist-scientist Paolo Ferrari, and the association "Terre del fuoco". Together they planned a project of auto-reconstruction which would be able to directly involve the future tenants. At the same time they proposed a transformation of the site that would be a sign of regeneration even in the visual impact of the project in relation to the city (Fig. 7).

The co-operation between technicians and tenants created an environment based not only on welfare purposes. The families were actively involved in the project by working on the construction of their own flats

and common areas. By joining the project they could improve their own professional skills (De Salvatore, Riboni, 2009).

As a result of the regeneration of the building, it became a place of culture for the city, with an aesthetic message, as well as of cultural renovation. In this way a new and positive relationship between the building and its surroundings was created.

The project was realized with the contribution of the following associations and institutions: associations "Architettura delle Convivenze" and "Terra del Fuoco", Provincial Office of the Red Cross, Gruppo Abele, the Pastoral Office for Migrants, the Province of Torino, the Region of Piemonte. The San Paolo Bank gave financial support, the Settimo Torinese Municipality offered the building to be renewed and the Province gave scholarships to the Roma families employed in the renovation works.



Fig. 7. Dado front (source: Myartspace.com)

### *The project results*

While the internal spaces were renovated with a residential function in mind foreseeing the cohabitation of diverse types of inhabitants — not only Roma people, to avoid a “ghetto” place — the externals of the building facing the city was completely renovated with an artistic gesture which opens it to contemporaneity. The movements of forms, colours, masses, shadows and lights produce an oscillation of eyes and feelings, loss of the sense of reference and awkwardness which gives rise to a whole new understanding (Fig. 8)

Eight Roma, two Italian and one Romanian families are now living in the building, together with students and workers involved in the project Flare (Freedom Legality Rights in Europe) against organized crime. The families can live there for a maximum of three years; within this period they have the chance to find their own way in the integration process into the wider city.

Due to this project, the Roma were able

to find jobs in the companies involved in the renovation, gaining a professional skill that could be utilized somewhere else.

The building has a common terrace, a meeting point for both tenants and visitors, to be used for public and cultural events.

With the inclusion of the artistic installation of Paolo Ferrari on the front of the building, the project was articulated on many different levels oriented to enable the construction of a new and positive relationship between the structure and its surrounding area.

### *Conclusions*

What was previously a place of alienation and degradation has now been developed into a significant meeting point for the city and its inhabitants. The artistic installation on front of the building contributes in creating a new image, and changes the meaning of the place itself.

The co-presence of different levels — such as social mediation, the architectural



*Fig. 8. The sculpture in front of Dado projects into the city (source: Myartspace.com)*

project and the artistic installation — and the specificity of each of these come together to define an innovative character of the intervention which from a functional, aesthetic and construction point of view realizes a strategy which is able to facilitate the social and working inclusion of the Roma families and provides a meeting point between these and the wider citizens.

The artistic installation, seen from the road as part of the building's façade, gives rise to a process of transformation which involves many levels of reality and diverse readings: for example, aesthetic, social-political, urbanistic and architectural.

It provides a cultural and aesthetic basis for the habitable place: according to this project, staying in a place is not only a need to find a flat and a place to be, but it develops a symbolic and cultural meaning which the living experience is based on.

The inhabitants of Dado were interviewed by the Cooperative "Architettura delle Convivenze" one year and two years after the start of the project. They highlighted that the cultural aspects of the project — the artistic installation as a symbol of the renewed building, programmes for inclusion of inhabitant work, opening of the common terrace for cultural events to all citizens — helped them integrate in the society.

## Discussion

These three case studies show three different processes where the contemporary world is trying to consider and recognize the landscape as an essential component of people's surroundings and — as the European Convention states — a foundation of their identity.

In the first case study this assumption is based on a special regional law which allows the local people to recover a territory designated as a holiday resort. According to this law it is possible for the local people to put forward alternative proposals to realize a

transformation project which aims to express their own ideas of their own space.

In the second case study, the artistic expression of a particular form of "site specific art", combines an anonymous, insignificant industrial plant with an artistic installation which contributes in giving to this environment a new meaning. The industrial landscape is transformed and informed by artistic objects which modify the workers' perception of the place and improve their quality of life in this work place.

In the third case study, the consideration and description of landscape as an essential component of people's surroundings and a foundation of their identity, is expressed through a project of self-renewing to create a sense of living more correspondent to individuals culture and needs.

Therefore, by creating an artistic installation, the living standard improves and is transformed through a cultural element. The suburban landscape, which at the beginning was in a state of decay and degraded, was transformed through an artistic and cultural factor which gave a new identity to the place.

These three case studies support the research of a shared idea of landscape, which opens to different visions of the territory's future, raising the question of inclusion within decision making processes and, in general, the question of asserting citizenship rights. Once a project opens to creative participation of various entities involved, it has to deal with an open transformative process, in which an idea of the common good takes shape; an idea which cannot be pre-set or predetermined.

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