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Livable Cities: A Conference on Issues Affecting Life in Cities

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INTRODUCTION

Livable Cities: A Conference on Issues Affecting Life in Cities

What makes a city livable? Transport, housing, health. Open space, mobility and the environment. Matters of culture, entrepreneurship, crime and safety. Affordability and access to education. Depending on whose 'livability index' you look at, it may include design quality, sustainability and the digital infrastructures of the smart city. Other criteria applied may encompass food access, job opportunities or walkability. Inclusivity and the politics of participation also come into play. Discrimination in all its forms impacts livability and social and political equity.

The past two decades have seen an exponential rise of livability measures. Reflecting increased urbanity globally, they risk making the notion of the city ever more contested. The two cities that host this event are cases in point. The Mercer Livability Ranking takes New York as the datum by which all other cities globally are graded – as better or worse. London, by contrast, measures itself: the London Assembly scoring everything from air quality to indices of deprivation. When we consider the livability of cities then, it is clear we are dealing with a plethora of issues – both isolated and, inevitably, interconnected.

Responding to this scenario, the papers in this publication tackle these issues above from various angles. They examine how we live in cities, and how every issue we encounter morphs with considerations of others, whether housing, architecture, urban planning, health, IT, crime and safety, city management, economics or the environment.

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RAISING DEMAND FOR QUALITY PUBLIC SPACE AMONG YOUNG CITIZENS. PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES IN THE EDUCATING CITY

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INTRODUCTION¹

The degree of livability of a city is mainly related to environmental, structural, urban planning, economic factors, and essentially to the policies implemented by governments and administrations. However, how people relate to the city can also influence how livable the city is. Encouraging citizens to have a more conscious, informed and active relationship with the places where they live can have a significant impact not only on the perception and maintenance of common spaces, but also on lifestyles, mobility, ways of sharing urban space and living together. Educating citizens to observe and analyse the city strengthens their sense of belonging and, in the long term, can increase people's ability to influence change through the exercise of democratic rights, changing everyday behaviour and fostering the ability and willingness to actively participate. Building a culture of participation, sustainability, respect for the common good, inclusion and diversity, as well as widening access to education and cultural heritage (CH) in the area, are actions that have an important impact on social cohesion and the care of urban space and encourage increased demand for quality public space and collective commitment to a more livable city. These educational actions are important in all contexts and at all ages, but they become crucial when they are aimed at citizens in education; they should therefore not be limited to niche contexts, to occasional initiatives by museums and cultural centres, but should concern all children and therefore, first and foremost, the school as the main educational institution, widespread and accessible to all.

This essay refers to two interdisciplinary research projects, one in Italy at national level, the other at European level. The two projects are based on the co-design of innovative, accessible, interdisciplinary and inclusive educational methods by teachers, researchers, public and private institutions and associations, in order to improve young citizen's ability to analyze the context in which they live and to foster in them a sense of belonging to their neighborhood, a sense of active citizenship and responsibility for the common good. The text discusses the projects in relation to the theme of urban livability and the concept of the Educating City (EC), questioning the potential of educational projects to improve urban livability, particularly in relation to issues of access to education, participation, inclusion, quality of public space and sustainability.

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPE EDUCATION POLICIES IN EUROPE

The emergence of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in 2000² shifted the focus from landscape contexts of excellence to all landscapes, including the ordinary landscapes of everyday life, marking an important turning point for European policy in terms of recognising the value of living contexts and citizens' perception. More than twenty years later, however, ELC is still little known and little studied in education, especially in schools, and its actual application remains an open question.³ The Convention recognises landscape, even if ordinary or degraded, as a cultural heritage “derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity” (Art. 1) and links it to the concepts of identity, diversity and community: “Each Party undertakes to recognise landscapes in law as an essential component of people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity”. The text reaffirms the importance of activating educational activities (Art. 6) but devotes only a few lines to the subject and does not propose a direct link with heritage education. However, linking the ELC approach with heritage education provides a better understanding of how it can be spread across the territory and strengthen citizens' links with their living environment. The Recommendation concerning heritage education published by the Council of Europe in 1998⁴ also calls for CH to be seen as a vehicle for participation and active citizenship, and for a close link to be established between heritage and territory⁵; in this sense, urban and peri-urban landscapes, in their physical but also social and cultural components, can become important educational agents.

LIVABLE CITIES, EDUCATING CITIES

The concept of the educating city is the pillar on which the International Association of Educating Cities (IAEC)⁶ is based. Founded in 1994, it is a non-profit organization, set up as a permanent structure for cooperation between local governments and has around 500 member cities in 35 countries on all continents. Inspired by the theme of the “right to the city”, in reference to the reflections of the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre at the end of the 1960s,⁷ the network is made up of local governments committed to education as a tool for social transformation and to promoting the exchange of ideas, reflections and good practices.

The association draws on several documents and declarations, including the World Charter for the Right to the City (2001),⁸ the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (2015),⁹ and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015).¹⁰ In the preamble of the *Charter of Educating Cities*, we read: “today, more than ever before, cities and towns [...] have major elements for a holistic education: they are complex systems yet also lifelong educational agents, both plural and multi-faceted, capable of fostering educational and social transformation factors.”¹¹ According to this vision education is an ongoing process that goes beyond the school walls to permeate the entire city and involve the communities. In this sense, the role of education is to be considered on a par with the other multiple functions of the city (economic, social, political and service provision) and its aim is to empower people of all ages to respond to their educational needs and “to raise awareness in order to balance out freedom and responsibility, triggering the feeling of interdependence between people and nature as a way of inhabiting the city and the planet, promoting reflection and critical thinking, as in the ability to understand complex problems; fostering jointly responsible engagement in the design and development of policies; and imagining and picturing lifestyles that do not imply the destruction of the territory or inequality between people”.¹²

A CITY EDUCATION PROJECT IN THE OUTSKIRTS

The idea of the city as a place, a theme and a driver of education is the basis of the research and action project “ScAR Schools Activate Resources”, launched in 2018 thanks to the Politecnico di Milano's Commitment and Social Responsibility Programme called Polisocial and coordinated by an

interdisciplinary research group of the same university, in collaboration with a diverse group of public and private stakeholders and numerous schools, including five pilot schools located in vulnerable and peripheral areas of the city.¹³ In total, the project involved over seven hundred students from primary to secondary schools, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Through a process of co-design between researchers, teachers, administrators, associations and cultural bodies, ScAR has developed and tested a set of good practices, which are proposed as an open and implementable methodology, available to teachers and educators in general, and which, for the sake of simplicity, we can call “the ScAR method”, not to be understood as a defined and codified system, but rather as a collective work in progress. For an in-depth description of the project, please refer to the dedicated publications,¹⁴ nevertheless in this case we would like to return to the experience in order to reflect specifically on the issues of urban livability and the concept of the educating city.

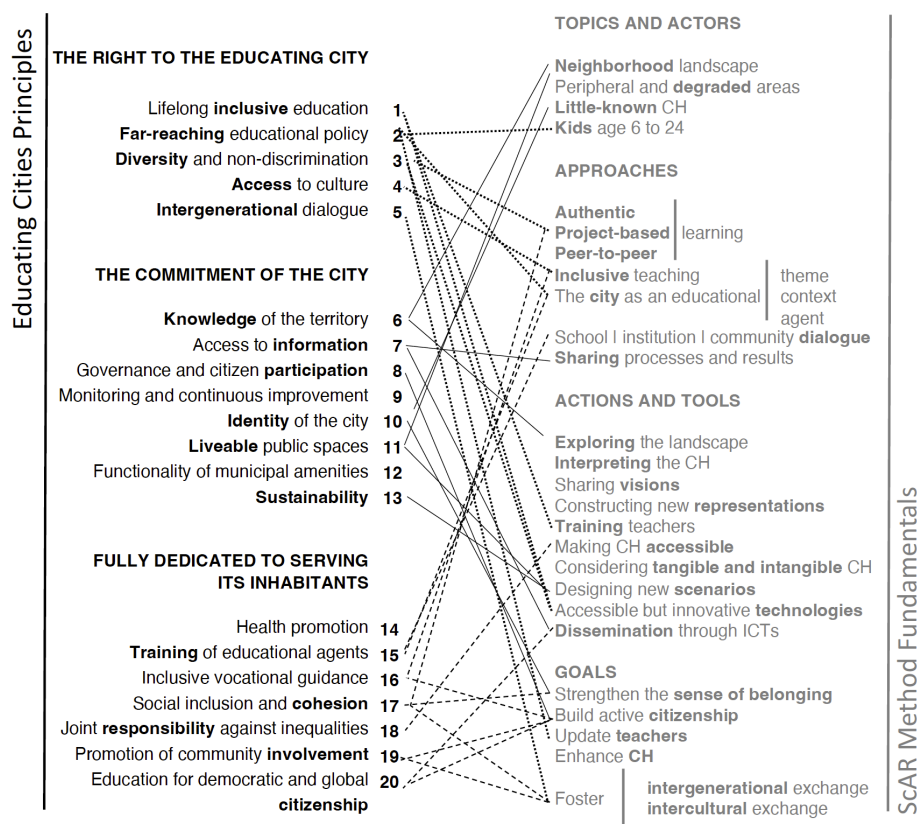


Figure 1. The diagram shows some of the possible connections between the 20 principles enunciated by the Charter of the Educating Cities and “the ScAR method”.

The ScAR project was not carried out in a city that is part of the IAEC network, and the research team was not familiar with the association. However, five years after its launch, it is interesting to re-read the project in the light of the principles of this international reality, to reflect on the commonalities and specificities that characterise the ScAR experience, and to focus reflection on the concept of the livable city, which is closely linked to that of the educating city. The project is now complete, allowing us to draw conclusions from the experience gained in the field; at the same time, its action is not yet finished, as new collaborations and follow-up experiences have emerged from the scientific discourse generated by the dissemination of the project, through which the “ScAR method” continues to grow and evolve.

The diagram shown here (Figure 1) shows some of the principles of ECs, as set out in the *Charter of Educating Cities*, and their direct links to the fundamentals and approaches of the ScAR project. The 20 principles set out in the Charter are organised in three sections as follows: “The Right to the Educating City”, “The Commitment of the City”, “Fully Dedicated to Serving its Inhabitants”. The following paragraphs outline the principles set out in the sections, selecting the themes that are closest to the ScAR experience, with the aim of verifying the extent to which the project and the methodological proposal that resulted from it can form a resource for disseminating and improving educational cities, and at the same time identifying new lines of action and new objectives to guide the development of research.



Figure 2. Upper secondary school students mapping the surroundings of their school in the periphery of Milan (on the left) and lower secondary students mapping landscape landmarks during a workshop in collaboration with the Prada Foundation (on the right).

The ScAR experience and the right to the educating city

For citizens to be able to exercise their right to an educating city, access to culture is essential: people's participation in cultural life – a right recognised as fundamental by the Faro Convention (2005)¹⁵ – is a vehicle for inclusion and a driver for the development of a sense of belonging.¹⁶ Accessibility of CH, understood not only in a physical and economic sense, but also in a cognitive, cultural and social sense, was a major theme of the ScAR project. In order to bring CH closer to all social groups and cultural communities, it is important to break out of the narrow confines of outstanding monuments and national narratives, and to introduce citizens, especially young people, to specific, local marginal expressions that allow the concept to be introduced that every cultural expression has value, regardless of whether it is an expression of a dominant culture. The links between heritage education and multicultural society have long been explored in the European context,¹⁷ but heritage education in school curricula, where it exists, remains mostly limited to the study of masterpieces of art history, which is obviously desirable in itself. The experimentation of the ScAR project proposed a different approach that, without replacing the traditional study of disciplines, introduced the exploration of different educational paths, from an experiential and transdisciplinary perspective. All the activities promoted by what could be called “the ScAR method” are based on knowledge of the territory: the different educational pathways tested involve different forms of exploration and study of the areas surrounding the schools, with radii that vary according to the nature of the project, the school order and the age of the children. In this way education goes beyond the school walls and permeates streets, squares and parks. In line with contemporary heritage studies,¹⁸ the project took CH as a constantly evolving system of values identified by the population, and activated a series of paths of discovery, study, interpretation and communication of the cultural values expressed by the territory, starting from the areas close to the schools, the landscape of the daily lives of students and their families (Figures 2-4). The very identification of the places and assets to be

studied was the subject of discussion with the children, giving space to their views, their families' memories and the consultation of groups of citizens, such as representatives of territorial associations, the elderly or ethnic or religious communities present in the neighbourhoods. Children and teachers were involved in all stages of the process, thus changing their role from passive users of CH and the cultural offers of the institutions to protagonists in the discovery and enhancement of the local CH, of which they became experts and active promoters. The shared knowledge-building process underlying ScAR is in line with one of the basic principles of ECs: the right of all to access the educational potential of the city also implies the duty of each citizen to contribute to educational action, through individual behaviour, but also through participation and associationism.

The ScAR experience and the commitment of the city

In an EC, knowledge of the territory and access to information are fundamental principles. One of the aims of the ScAR project was to provide schools with an update on the use of digital technologies in educational processes and to promote a conscious and responsible use of technologies among students.¹⁹ As part of educational projects with schools, students and teachers, with the support of experts, have created digital products to collect and disseminate knowledge about the area, and then made them available to the general public, in the spirit of authentic learning and digital participation (Figure 3).²⁰ These tools, which are still active and available to other schools, citizens, local communities and Italian and foreign tourists, are aimed at spreading knowledge about the material and immaterial heritage of the urban periphery, strengthening the sense of belonging of the inhabitants, enhancing the identity of often stigmatised areas, attracting visitors to areas off the tourist track and keeping alive the value of diversity and the coexistence of cultures. The digital mapping action, initiated in collaboration with the local museum of the territory, is still open to anyone who wishes to participate by offering their contribution to enrich the digital collections created by the students and other citizens already active on the platform.²¹ The students have also designed small-scale urban regeneration projects, some of which are in negotiation with the municipality for implementation, including in collaboration with private companies. In this way, ScAR wanted to raise young citizens' awareness of the livability of public spaces and demonstrate the potential of bottom-up participation and cooperation between different bodies (Figure 4).

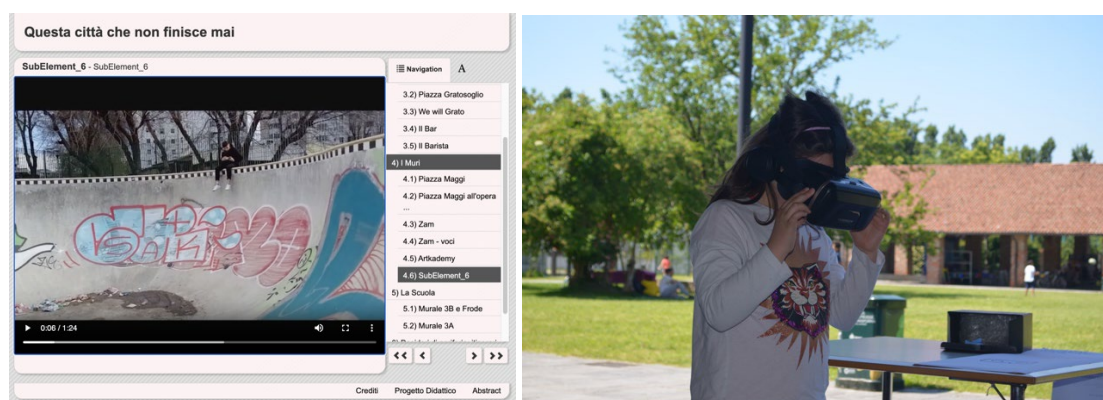


Figure 3. Examples of the use of ICTs in CH education. On the left: a frame of digital storytelling created by students of a secondary school. The narration investigates the relationship between street art and poetry in a peripheral neighborhood of Milan (Italy). On the right: a primary school student texts the virtual tour of a peripheral neighborhood of Milan created in collaboration with the local upper secondary school.

ScAR for a city fully dedicated to serving its inhabitants

“The educating city should provide the entire population with education in the values and practices of democratic citizenship that foster respect, tolerance, participation, responsibility, interest in public life, and commitment to the common good”.²² The educational pathways activated in the context of ScAR have made it possible to develop all skills, including those of pupils with special needs, and to create situations of exchange and cooperation between children and seniors, and between schools and families from different backgrounds. The idea was to train teachers, but also families and other agents who fulfil educational roles, by providing them with a set of practices and tools for cultural heritage education as a means of inclusion and social cohesion.

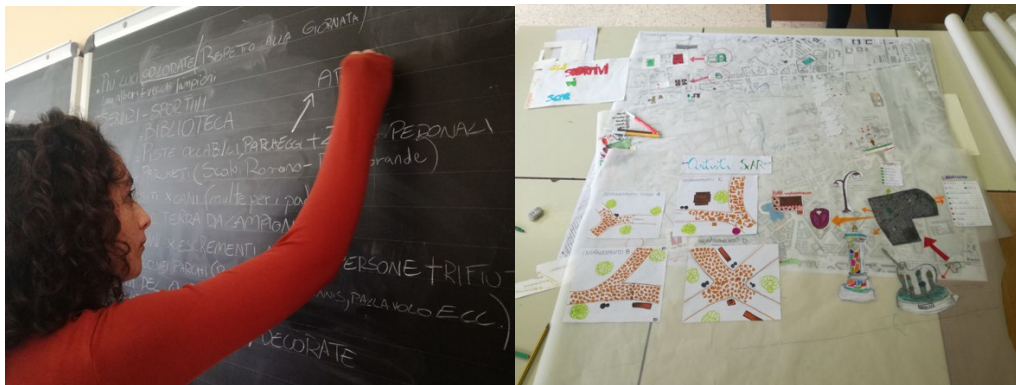


Figure 4. Workshop of public space co-design in lower secondary school

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND LANDSCAPE, A EUROPEAN PROJECT

The actions initiated by the ScAR experience are now being continued in a larger European project involving researchers and teachers from Spain, Italy and Austria. The “Edulands for Transition” project, funded by the European Erasmus+ programme, aims to build a pedagogical methodology that facilitates the connection between schools and their surrounding landscape (Figure 5).²³ The project adopts a transversal, multidisciplinary and collaborative approach and aims to co-create tools that can be easily adapted to any local context. Due to the international and interdisciplinary nature of the project, the approaches to landscape and ecological transition are diverse: from landscape as food and life cycle, to landscape as inner reality and sensory experience, to landscape as history, memory and common heritage. The challenge that Edulands proposes for the coming years is to accompany the new generations in a transition that is also – and above all – cultural and social, starting from the places, urban and otherwise, where the students live, inviting them to get to know and care for them.



Figure 5. A survey in the historical water-meadow area in Parco Lambro (Milan, Italy) and a workshop of maintenance and caring of the landscape during the training activities of the international team of the Eduland project.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of the principles of the EC shows that the projects mentioned here respond effectively to the principles of the educating city. In fact, they propose the school as the heart and engine of the EC, but also involve communities, institutions and administrations, thus bringing together different skills and social roles, potentially reaching all citizens; the school is in fact the first educational agent and also the first place to build a culture of inclusion and social cohesion for the future.

Both projects, through bottom-up dynamics and the integration of analogue and digital techniques, focus on the construction of new representations of the urban and peri-urban landscape, which are at once mental and material, textual and visual, individual and collective, concrete and visionary, and which take many forms: maps, stories, drawings, narratives, more or less complex digital applications.²⁴ These representations have proven to be essential for the understanding, confrontation, dialogue and dissemination of an educational process that involves the whole city and looks towards a sustainable future.

The testimonies of teachers, students and managers collected at the end of the ScAR²⁵ project testify to the importance of taking education out of the classroom, of highlighting the relationship that binds children and their communities to the city, in particular the space where families live their daily lives (neighbourhoods, the 15-minute city, home-school routes....). This creates a permeability between the school and the city and a synergy between the educational potential of the school and that of the city, stimulating respect for the common good and the conscious pursuit of a more livable city for all. Like the city in general, landscape and CH are complex, multifaceted phenomena that are often difficult to understand, interpret, represent and even identify in terms of the many different meanings they can take in relation to communities. For this reason, CH education stimulates reflection and critical thinking, as well as the ability to understand complex problems, and is therefore a key instrument for familiarising young people with the challenges of coexistence, inclusion, mutual understanding and cooperation for a shared community project and an effective ecological and cultural transition.

NOTES

¹ This paper discusses an interdepartmental and interdisciplinary research, the author is affiliated to the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of Politecnico di Milano (Italy).

² Council of Europe, *European Landscape Convention*, 2000.

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016802f80c6>

³ Council of Europe, ed., *Landscape facets: Reflections and proposals for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2012); Council of Europe, ed., *Landscape dimensions. Reflections and proposals for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2017).

⁴ Council of Europe, *Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states concerning heritage education*, 1998 (Recommendation n. R (98) 5). <https://rm.coe.int/16804f1ca1>.

⁵ Lida Branchesi, ed. *Heritage Education for Europe* (Roma: Armando Editore, 2007); Benedetta Castiglioni, “Education on landscape for children”, in *Landscape facets Reflections and proposals for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention*, ed. Council of Europe (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2012), 217-264.

⁶ “International Association of the Educating Cities”, accessed August 5, 2023, <https://www.edcities.org/>

⁷ Henry Lefebvre, “Right to the city”, in *Writings on cities* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), 147-159.

⁸ World Charter for the Right to the City, drafted in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre Brazil 2001. Available on the Global Platform for the Right to the City <https://www.right2city.org/>

⁹ United Nations, Paris Agreement on Climate Change, adopted by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, in 2015 Available on the UBFCCC secretariat portal <https://unfccc.int/>, accessed August 5, 2023.

¹⁰ United Nations, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, available on the Division for Sustainable Development Goals in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs portal <https://sdgs.un.org/>.

¹¹ International Association of the Educating Cities (IAEC), *Charter of Educating Cities*, 2020. Available on the IAEC portal <https://www.edcities.org/>, 4, accessed August 5, 2023.

¹² International Association of the Educating Cities (IAEC), 5.

¹³ “Schools Activate Resources Project”, accessed August 5, 2023, <http://www.scar.polimi.it/>, accessed August 5, 2023.

¹⁴ Camilla Casonato, Marco Vedoà and Cossa Gloria, *Discovering the everyday landscape. A cultural heritage education project in the urban periphery* (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue Edizioni, 2022),

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Camilla Casonato and Bertrando Bonfantini, eds. *Cultural Heritage Education in the Everyday Landscape. School, Citizenship, Space, and Representation* (Cham: Springer, 2022).

¹⁵ Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, Faro Convention*, 2005. <https://rm.coe.int/1680083746>, accessed August 5, 2023.

¹⁶ Thomas Carter, David Harvey, Roy Jones, and Iain Robertson, eds. *Creating Heritage. Unrecognised Pasts and Rejected Futures* (Losanne: Routledge, 2020).

¹⁷ Tim Copeland, “Whose monuments, are they? Whose past is it? The multicultural use of monuments”, in *Cultural heritage and its educational implications: a factor for tolerance, good citizenship and social integration*, ed. Council of Europe (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 1998), 39-43; Tim Copeland, *European democratic citizenship, heritage education and identity* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2006).

¹⁸ Gabor Sonkoly and Tanja Vahtikari, *Innovation in Cultural Heritage Research. For an integrated European Research Policy* (Lussemburgo: Publication Office of the European Commission, 2018).

¹⁹ Alessandro Luigini, ed. *Proceedings of the 1st International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Digital Environments for Education, Arts and Heritage, EARTH 2018* (Cham: Springer, 2019); Michela Ott, Francesca Pozzi, “Towards a new era for Cultural Heritage Education. Discussing the role of ICT”. *Computers in Human Behavior* 27 (2011): 1365-1371.

²⁰ Camilla Casonato, Marco Vedoà and Cossa Gloria, *Discovering the everyday landscape*, 125-156.

²¹ See the Ecomuseo Milano Sud (MUMI) website <https://www.mumi-ecomuseo.it/>.

²² International Association of the Educating Cities (IAEC), *Charter of Educating Cities*, 2020. Available on the IAEC portal <https://www.edcities.org/>, 18.

²³ “EduLands for Transition project”, accessed August 5, 2023, <https://edulands.eu/>

²⁴ Emma Waterton and Steve Watson, *Culture, Heritage and representation. Perspectives on Visuality and the past* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Camilla Casonato “Cultural Heritage Education: a Matter of Representation”, in

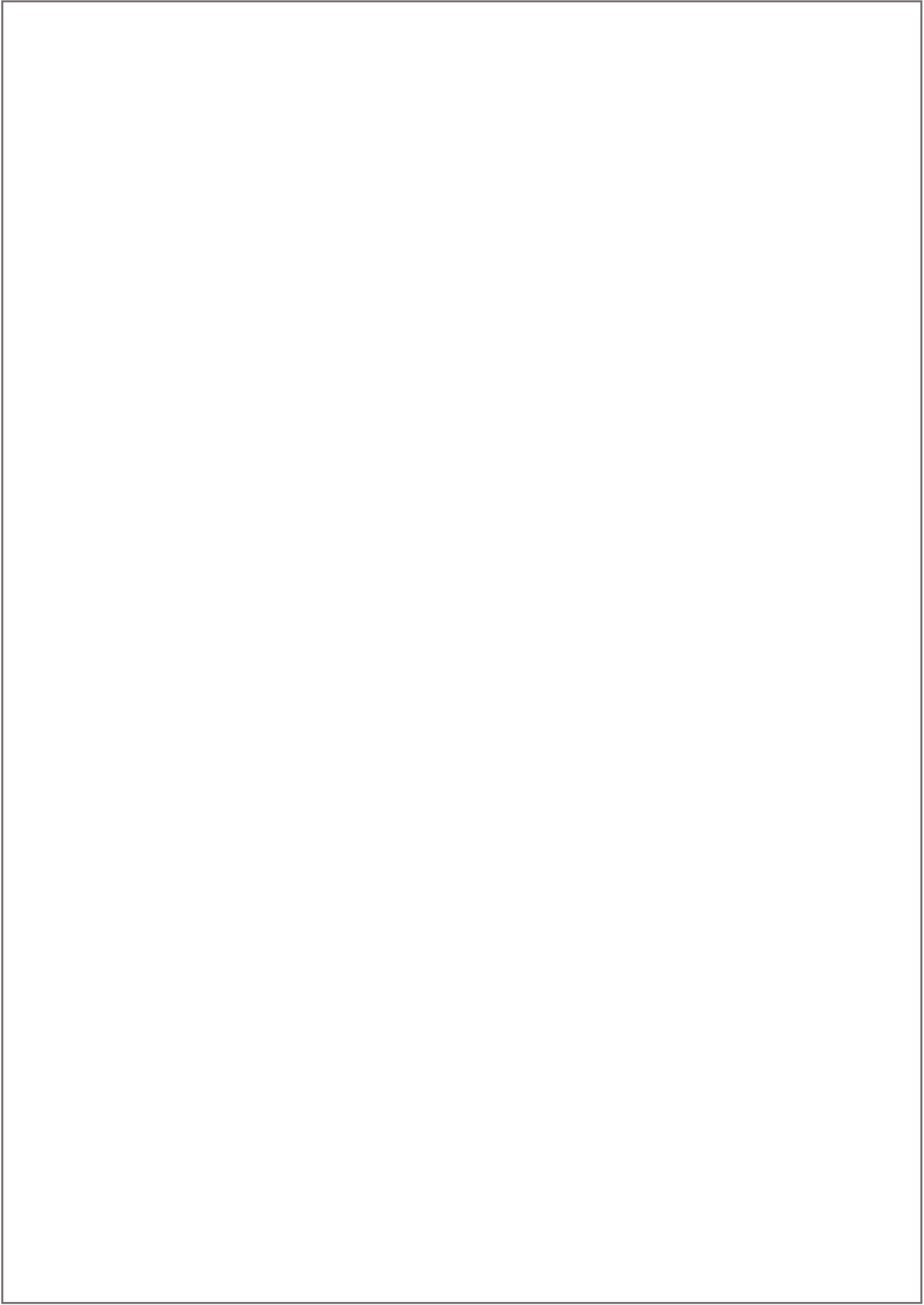
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²⁵ Camilla Casonato, Marco Vedoà and Cossa Gloria, *Discovering the everyday landscape*, 183-207.

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