Concept Paper

Far-Sightedness vs. Emergency: A Matter for "Not Outstanding" European Cultural Landscapes

Rossella Salerno [ID]

Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano, 20133 Milan, Italy;
rossella.salerno@polimi.it

Abstract: A far-sighted policy, designed to safeguard a State's land and culture, is one that would be able to go beyond emergency culture in the direction of shared far-sightedness in the territorial government, looking ahead to future generations. New and different visions capable of taking responsibility for fragile territories and landscapes are needed, rather than approaches that, to date, have only been considered as emergency policies. In order to realize such a new approach, some actions must be implemented, and this paper focuses on the most relevant ones: looking at heritage as a relationship among buildings, land, and intangible assets; garnering the attention of politicians and scholars to address fragile landscapes and inland areas; framing the issue in a European perspective; and pushing for moral and social commitment in identifying new working hypotheses and possible solutions.

Keywords: cultural landscapes; fragile landscapes; interpretation/presentation of heritage

1. Introduction

"What should we do to save 'beauty' (in other words, metaphors aside, the environment, landscape, and artistic heritage)?" In answer to this question posed by Salvatore Settis in his recent collection of essays, *Architettura e democrazia* [1], the scholar himself argues that beauty depends on us and that we can create it by looking at our assets with the far-sightedness befitting our responsibility to future generations.

To support this thesis, Settis echoes the warning issued by Jacques Maritain in his speech at UNESCO's inaugural meeting in Mexico City on 6 November 1947, in the context of the end of World War II, the start of the Cold War, and the threat of a third world war: "There is an urgent need to develop common practical ideas", according to Maritain; "a single body of beliefs for guidance in action, triggered by the principles of the common good and addressed at policy" [2].

The French philosopher's exhortation was intended as a reaction to the current state of affairs, as well as a strong opposition to any kind of devastation of nature and the Earth caused by man. The continuation, to this day, of the consummate destruction wrought on the environment and monumental heritage makes the concept of commitment to future generations a highly current issue.

This subject has arisen numerous times over the last fifty years, in United Nations (UN) letters and declarations, and was finally explained, in clear terms, in the UNESCO declaration of 1997, "*On the Responsibility of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations*", which includes an exhortation, addressed at policy, to "pass on a better world to future generations. [. . .] Each generation temporarily inheriting the Earth undertakes to ensure that it is utilized rationally, that it is not prejudiced by harmful modifications of the ecosystems, and that scientific and technological progress in all fields does not harm life on Earth" [3].

These policy guidelines are adopted into the constitutions—in Europe, those of Italy, Germany, and Spain—that see the specific culture of a country reflected in the territory of that State [4].

In effect, a far-sighted policy, designed to safeguard a State's land and therefore culture, is able to go beyond emergency culture in the direction of a shared far-sightedness in the territorial government, looking ahead to future generations.

Policies are necessary in particular to avoid the decay of old villages and those inland areas so often rich in the land's legacies of tangible and intangible heritage, as well as to prevent their depopulation, which compromises the whole environment through the abandonment of urban centers and the interruption of production, first of all agriculture.

This point of view is quite far from the emergency approach that concerns actions to be undertaken in crisis conditions of territories generated by natural events. However, it may be relevant to start from the point of view of such emergency approaches in order to focus on the key concepts and actions and try to propose what more can be done for the fragile, abandoned areas and small towns, both in Italy and in the whole of Europe.

Thus, the question is how to implement new and different visions capable of taking responsibility for those territories that tend to be excluded from the spotlight of tourism and the relative economic interests that this can mobilize. In Europe, in fact, small old towns and villages that are characterized by urban and land history, such inland areas and fragile landscapes, contain tangible and intangible heritage, and are worthy of being supported and revitalized.

In order to do what is required, a conservation policy should not only address the protection of buildings or artworks, but also consider the whole place's economic situation. In this perspective, the cornerstones upon which this far-sighted vision would be focused hinge primarily on certain issues which we will attempt to itemize below:

— The importance of considering old towns' and villages' heritage as a combination of buildings, land, and intangible assets, in other words as a *unicum* which therefore covers all those dimensions and can be most effectively synthesized by the notion of cultural landscapes.
— The attention of policy and culture must be directed at those areas—abandoned villages (small historic urban centers), inland areas, and fragile landscapes—most at risk of depopulation and abandonment.
— The responsibility—once again on the part of policy and culture—to shift attention and resources to a problem of continental proportions, as it encompasses all of Europe.
— The moral and social commitment to identify new working hypotheses and possible solutions, also taking into consideration the current potentialities derived from digital technologies.

2. Cultural Landscapes: Concepts and Definitions

It is crucial to clarify how the idea of cultural landscape can be applied to the small towns and villages on which we focus in this paper. As Fowler writes, this concept is quite recent; it had been elaborated at the beginning of the past century and then utilized by important international cultural organizations, such as UNESCO and ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites):

> "*'Cultural landscape' as a term was apparently invented in academia in the early twentieth century. The term, and a particular idea it embraced, was promoted by Prof. Carl Sauer in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. It only came into accepted professional use in conservation circles in the 1990s, not least through its adoption by the World Heritage Committee and its promulgation throughout the world by the World Heritage*" [5].

UNESCO and ICOMOS consider as cultural those 'exceptional' landscapes whose value is universally accepted as the result of the combined work of man and nature.

This idea of cultural landscape can be extended to "not outstanding" landscapes yet, following the most recently updated interpretation coming from the European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000), which also includes among the landscapes to be protected the so-called "everyday landscapes" [6].

Further, one more interpretation about cultural landscapes is possible if we consider them as a *unicum*, where urban facility and landscape transformed by human work are a result both of intangible and tangible culture [7].

This last point of view makes possible the view of many European areas, although situated in different geographical areas, rich in anthropic elements and widespread tangible and intangible heritage, as real connective tissue to be preserved using a far-sightedness addressed to save the infinite local identities that comprise Europe.

Many of these areas are in fact in a state of abandonment and incipient decay: 'marginal spaces' or 'fragile landscapes' are among the definitions most effective in denoting the condition of these places, whose conditions are borne of long-term causes.

We will attempt to describe them using the words of the historian Antonella Tarpino in her latest publication, which bears the very title *Il Paesaggio Fragile*: "Visible and invisible. What is striking in many forgotten villages, seemingly suspended along idle sections of Alpine passes or ancient salt roads, are the buildings themselves of a life lost in time: frozen as though something about its imperfect outlines did not quite add up. Caught between nature and memory (the distances between them, however, seeming to sporadically vanish), the fragile landscape, with its confused forms, thus becomes the emblem of a displaced lifestyle consumed, to the very last, in our society defined by no coincidence as "liquid", by a radical crisis in the practice of places" [8].

A fragile landscape is an "uncertain landscape, which has fallen by the wayside like the many societies that produced it—the mountains along the mule tracks of the Apennines, or the inland areas with their adobe houses—in the face of which there has been an ongoing attempt to connect the broken lines, to hold them together in a drawing of the mind. As hinted to us, indeed, by the meaning, emerging here and there, of the forms of buildings often in ruin or the enigmas of toponymy: that which, in a word, has fallen out, the wreckage, the leftovers, of time and is increasingly difficult to integrate into our displaced world" [8].

The road marked out by Tarpino for regeneration of the fragile landscape passes via careful listening to the respectful words of the habitation's long memory, in order to "extend the gaze" (today too short) of the present, and via the ability to "consider the landscape and, at the same time, have consideration for it". Fragile landscapes are the same landscapes that the language of policy has sought to subsume under the semantic umbrella of 'inland areas'. "A huge and majority portion of the territory, often not flat, highly polycentric, with widespread decline in the cultivated surface area, and often affected by particular population decline or ageing" [9].

In 2012, to tackle the problems of these areas, the Italian Ministry for Social Cohesion proposed a program for maintenance and revitalization of depopulated and abandoned areas of Italy, called the *Progetto Aree Interne* (Inland Areas Project). This was a tool for political action conceived to improve the use of resources, both ordinary and directed, not only at interventions on essential services—such as telecommunications, mobility, education, and training—but also at actions for the maintenance of the land and promotion of its production, tourism, craftsmanship, and agriculture, with reference to EU directives, and at restoring balance in the allocation of subsidies between intensive zones and mountainous or hilly areas. This proposal—whose effects to date are difficult to evaluate given the limited application of the project—is intended to revive the development of marginal areas in a perspective of economic growth and social inclusion, in order to grant their inhabitants access to socially acceptable services and life opportunities.

3. Emergency and Conservation in Cultural Landscapes

Maintaining and revitalizing "fragile areas", that here are intended as "not oustanding" cultural landscapes, looks quite different from the concept of employing emergency strategies.

Usually the strategies and instruments used in emergency actions are designed to intervene after human or natural impact on an environment. Instead, policies should seek to interpret the different

and complex stratifications in a territory in order to know its endemic weaknesses, and then try to revitalize it.

The logic of emergency planning is based on relocation and safeguard techniques for people and risk identification for buildings. Recently, it has also starting to focus on the possibilities to reduce and try to anticipate risk instead of centering the actions of rescue organizations [10].

In the specific case of cultural landscapes seen by UNESCO "outstanding", risk assessment and emergency planning are considered among the common issues in cultural landscape management: in other words, it is basically a matter of managing threats.

So, the Handbook for Conservation and Management devoted to World Heritage Cultural Landscapes [11] defines the Operational Guidelines for the main threats, listing: Development pressures, Environmental pressures, Natural disasters and preparedness, Visitor/tourism pressure, and Number of inhabitants within the site.

The issue has been addressed by a specific and technical contribution by Spennemann and Whook 1998 [12]. In addition, for improving actions in the risk-preparedness of World Heritage cultural properties there are explicit strategies prepared by ICCROM (International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) which mainly consider reducing the impact of fire, earthquake and related disasters, flooding (. . .), industrial pollution, and other hazards of human origin [13].

In general, the guidelines and strategies for managing cultural landscapes, defending them from threats and in emergency actions, must follow State or regional land use planning laws.

Instead, the risk and emergency approach to cultural landscapes, as detailed in the case mentioned above, some considerations outlined in the guidelines to heritage conservation and management, arising in recent times, draw a different point of view in considering the relationship between heritage, management, and conservation [14].

A conventional approach defined by identifying, documenting, and assessing conditions as well as planning for conservation interventions has lately been added as a "values-led approach". In many ways, it represents a response to the recognition of the increasing complexity of heritage. Better known through the Burra Charter, it promotes the assessment of the significance of a place—based on the values attributed by all stakeholders (not only by the experts) and the use of a Statement of Significance—as a basis for developing conservation and management strategies.

The key concept is to develop conservation and management plans based on values and, significantly, on the cultural significance of a heritage place to society. This approach adopts the premise that people in society ascribe various values to heritage [14].

4. New Strategies and Different Approaches

Which aspects to build on, then, and what targets to aim for in the revival of "not outstanding" cultural landscapes in inland areas? Some cornerstones should be taken into consideration: the preservation of buildings or any facility must, when possible, be related to economic utilization, and although traditional employments on the land are impossible to be re-activate, it is necessary to find new work, new professions, also possibly new technologies.

One strategy to pursue is that of attempting to create a system of diversified, innovative, and sustainable forms of connection between populations and cultural heritage—in line with the "values-led approach"—with the aim to develop tourism.

Experimenting, therefore, with innovative methodologies that enable local communities to build networks for the protection and management of well-known cultural assets is encouraged, including through sustainable management plans with quantifiable economic and employment benefits.

The long view of reviving abandoned territories is combined with the objective of creating a more solid Europeanization through the use of new catalysts for regenerating the links between populations and their cultural heritage. Here, we attempt to list the elements capable of performing this role as a catalyst in reviving areas:

− Sustainable tourism and revitalization of areas: but which actions should accompany the entrepreneurial initiative?
− Active involvement of the populations, actions for interpretation/presentation of heritage, and the role of digitalization.
− A "return" to the fragile landscape: construction of a mosaic of "rediscovered" cultures.

4.1. Sustainable Tourism and Revitalization of Areas

The issues of sustainable cultural tourism oriented towards the rediscovery of local products and knowledge is increasingly recognized as an important part of the cultural market and has the potential to become a major vehicle for the care and development of a fragile area by transforming dispersed cases into an organized system. However, this objective also requires other actions for the revitalization of the area, such as the replanting of traditional crops, promotion of small organized distribution, and development and systematization of local identities based on shared forms of knowledge and common and open uses of intangible culture.

This revitalization should also be accompanied by experimentation with innovative solutions in the creation of networks of areas and places with similar characteristics, with a strong focus on the analytical reading of local identities in physical and spatial contexts. Such a reading is a potential opportunity to implement positive processes impacting on the weaknesses of areas that are partially abandoned yet house great deposits of cultural heritage, with a view to systematizing shared good practices relating to sustainable tourism, marked technological innovation, the planning of rural smart hubs, and the promotion of niche gastronomic excellence.

Connecting forms of knowledge necessarily entails an in-depth understanding of the physical contexts from which the cultural heritage originated and evolved, followed by the development of innovative approaches, technologies, and tools to facilitate sharing and the enhancement of the dynamics of shared management of tangible and intangible cultural assets. It also poses the challenge of maintenance of locations' building and material characteristics and of 'sustainable innovation', which involves the maintenance and restoration of the built heritage to a usable condition, as well as identifying new potential uses for it. This leads to the promotion of themed and cultural routes through the landscape with the aim of involving the inhabitants and attracting tourists. Varied environments could come back to live once more in traditional rural landscapes, if these are reshaped at the hands of new generations of farmers who, today, show a renewed interest in the quality of life and work offered by the countryside, coupled with a new awareness of the landscape.

A further challenge lies in marking out or resuming 'appreciation routes', which may involve settlements and cultural assets of extraordinary importance. Indeed, routes through the landscape could enhance appreciation of the tangible and intangible heritage of the areas in question together with the uniqueness of their traditions, boost hospitality through systems of community hotels in which small owners become players in the process and tourists act as co-players, and, finally develop co-housing activities with the active involvement of the community.

Also of clear significance is the recent interest of large business groups in certain marginal areas, as in the case of the rental site Airbnb, which has a website dedicated to renting vacant houses in Italian villages to travelers, while at the same time proposing actions for the restoration of deteriorated spaces. Indeed, a damaged historic residence in Civita di Bagnoregio, in the Lazio region, has already become the first of these places available to rent. Joe Gebbia, founder of Airbnb, remembers how, at the time of 90 natural disasters in 18 different towns, from the flood in Liguria to the earthquake of Amatrice, he opened the houses free of charge to evacuees, seeking to balance the company's interest with social commitment [15].

Yet, entrepreneurial drive alone, however politically correct, does not appear sufficient to create truly effective solutions for restoring autonomy to fragile settings. It may, however, prove a useful tool for support and hospitality within a landscape reconstruction plan, on one hand founded on

the maintenance of or return to traditional cultures and, on the other, dependent on new methods of dialogue with society, institutions, operators, and stakeholders.

4.2. Active Involvement of the Populations, Actions for Interpretation/Presentation of Heritage, and the Role of Digitalization

European Union policies view cultural heritage from a perspective of social cohesion, in the hope that conservation and enhancement of the tangible and intangible legacy of the past will generate a new and better Europe. Heritage should therefore also be capable of producing social cohesion and integration by regenerating neglected and abandoned areas, thus opening up new employment opportunities and building new communities with shared values.

Based on these premises, the digitalization of heritage has the potential to open the door to new scenarios. Indeed, it is central to the European Agenda for Culture, having the objective, primarily, of improving public access to different forms of cultural and linguistic expression, but also of increasing opportunities for access to heritage by involving the public. At the same time, digital scanning tools are capable of facilitating the conservation and restoration of cultural assets. The issue of digitalization is, furthermore, closely interrelated to that of communicating heritage. ICOMOS identifies two possible approaches to the question of "communication":

Presentation strategy: "top-down" actions;

Interpretation strategy: "bottom-up" investigations and practices [16].

The first strategy involves meticulous planning of information and access (including physical) to a heritage site, normally performed by scholars and professional firms specializing in the field of heritage. It is a predominantly unidirectional mode of communication.

The second strategy, Interpretation, concerns the totality of activities, results, research, and creativity inspired by a site. In this perspective, the involvement of visitors and the local population—the resident community—is crucial to the interpretation and transformation of cultural sites (as well as landscapes) in locations where testimonies to the past have the potential to become a resource for future development.

The Presentation strategy is a broad field of application for those working in digital representation. The principal tools are three-dimensional (3D) models integrated into GIS used for archaeological sites, architectural heritage, and high-profile sites in general. The development of new and effective digital technologies, together with the consequent availability of digital models rendered in real time, combines the possibility of producing realistic photographic images of three-dimensional objects with that of presenting the information visually.

The representation of architecture and complex sites may be supplemented using text or iconographic documents. In addition, the placement of buildings in the setting in which they stand through the construction of 3D models may be georeferenced. The last, but by no means least important, tool consists, today, of the H-BIM (Historical or Heritage Building Information Model), a versatile digital device for the archiving and planning of historic buildings, based on large repertoires of traditional building technologies.

The key issues of "communication" and "sharing" thus become central to the consideration of heritage through digitalization in the direction in which ICOMOS defines Interpretation.

In this social and cultural perspective, the use of ICT and the internet makes it possible to outline new and interesting scenarios for heritage, which include:

− Multimedia for cultural heritage;
− Data processing for documenting the memory of places;
− Imaging and information technologies for sharing the experience of places;
− Open data- and web-based tools.

Direct and active participation by citizens, tourists, and the various stakeholders must be developed and enriched through careful and specific use of heritage information tools, firstly by

ensuring a substantial increase in free sources and methods for general access to information, and secondly by promoting specific local policies for reducing the 'digital divide'. It will therefore be a case of testing methodologies based on the web and, more generally, on ICT technologies capable of improving the reading of the quality aspects of well-known cultural heritage sites and acting as vehicles for easier interaction between populations and heritage, both in the terms in which digital cultural heritage is used and in the ways in which it can influence behaviors, expectations, and social demand for the enjoyment of well-known assets.

5. Conclusions

The issues listed above try to go beyond the emergency approach for heritage and cultural landscapes in fragile or in land areas, starting from a "values-led" strategy involving people, mobilizing economies, and incorporating technologies.

Such an approach is mostly based on developing the overall issue of far-sighted revitalization of "not outstanding" landscapes through sustainable tourism, the revival of traditional cultures, and an "appropriation" of heritage by the resident communities.

Investment in those areas requires an inversion with respect to depopulation and marginalization in order to build 'shared landscapes' by implementing a network of routes and connections in the physical (as well as digital) space between cultural heritage resources and making use of the new far-sighted strategies.

Reactivating "not outstanding" landscapes, employing "values-led" strategies for preserving heritage, can therefore result in the maintenance of the area with a consequent reduction in risk and a general improvement in the quality of life of the settled populations.

These are some of the potential far-sighted 'practical actions' that would permit us to leave future generations an inheritance of areas and landscapes shaped by the work and knowledge of previous generations. This can happen if we succeed in making effective use of our memory which, in addition to looking to the past or the events of the present, is truly capable of "extending its gaze" to the future.

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