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CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF ECOMUSEUMS

Abstract
In the age of the knowledge economy, cultural institutions are drivers of local development to the extent to which they contribute to creating social capital and finding resilient responses to the challenges of globalisation, in line with the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development. This role is typical of ecomuseums, which base their action on the landscape project, the participation of communities, the sustainable growth of local systems, the care and management of cultural heritage in a creative way. In this regard, Italian ecomuseums offer a repertoire of good practices relevant to the themes of participatory territorial planning and management, and ability to generate new economies. The paper illustrates the studies conducted by the Research Group “Governance, design and enhancement of the built environment” at the ABC Department of the Politecnico di Milano in collaboration with the National Coordination of Italian Ecomuseums.

Keywords: cultural landscapes, sustainable development, participation, ecomuseums, enhancement.

Framework: culture serving sustainable development
In accordance with the 17 Goals defined by the 2030 UN Agenda, the sustainability of development is the pre-requisite of any transformation intervention, starting from the level of supra-national policies to the local intervention scale. Sustainability meant in the broadest sense of the term - environmental protection, economic feasibility and social equity - that combines natural resources, anthropic elements, economic aspects, material and immaterial values that structure the territory. In order to act along these lines, it is necessary that the environment, the landscape and the tangible and intangible cultural heritage are fully-fledged recognized as common goods, that is assets for which public or private legal ownership overlaps with collective cultural property. As a result, the transformations of the territory and of the local system should be the outcome of participatory planning and of the collaboration between public entities and private parties for the protection, enhancement and management of the common goods [1].

The main barrier lies in the fact that participation is a difficult condition to achieve: often the level of information is reached, sometimes that of consultation, seldom the level of deliberation and active involvement in planning and management choices. What is noted, particularly in Italy, is a widespread “indifference” often due to inadequate training and a misconstrued search for representativeness of the community within the participatory planning processes. The result is a lack of willingness to take on the burden of choices, with public entities forgoing their role of orientation and coordination, and private parties waiving their efforts for the community [2]. Therefore, it is necessary a different cultural approach on the issue of development, based on a dialogue and the pursuit of compromise solutions between different, sometimes even conflicting, interests. This approach also demands new governance models, that go beyond the collaboration between public bodies and private actors, to open up to the participation of the wider community [3]. Indeed, the community should determine the demand for commodities and services, which can define the objectives of the development and enhancement of common heritage [4].

In this perspective, the action of cultural institutions in close synergy with local administrations, aimed at equipping communities with the tools to form a new active citizenship and stimulate greater responsibility-taking towards the common heritage, is fundamental [5]. Cultural institutions are called to take on a role of driver to facilitate the launch of local development processes and contribute to the creation of social capital and “open cities” [6], through continuous training, support to creative enterprises, the quest for resilient answers to the globalisation’s challenges and the dissemination of a “culture of sustainability” seen as an “adaptive process” to social and environmental changes [7]. Through the culture, the community becomes aware of the importance of memory for the construction of a shared future, stimulating processes of design re-appropriation based on a shared reading of the landscape, in the complex dimension that the European Convention attributes to it.

At the international level, a significant step was taken at the 24th ICOM General Conference with regard “Museums and cultural landscapes”, that highlighted the social responsibilities to which cultural institutions are called upon as safeguards for the active protection of “cultural landscapes”. Thus, emphasizing the crucial role of communities in landscape shaping and transforming as a living sphere of life [8].

Sustainable development and cultural landscapes enhancement: the ecomuseums experience
The role of “facilitators” of processes of local development well represents the activity of ecomuseums, very peculiar cultural institutions, born in France in the 1970s, whose main objectives are local development and social inclusion. In fact, ecomuseums by their very nature have the ability to promote a culture of sustainability, because they are strongly rooted at a local level and able to endorse well-balanced initiatives and actions for the territory, enhancing foremost memories and social relations [9]. In their most innovative interpretation of “cultural enterprises of public service”, in other words cultural institutions operating for an economic regeneration of the territory to keep “alive” the landscape and the cultural heritage [10], they have the potential to offer quick responses to local questions, because they develop a deep, critical and shared knowledge of cultural landscapes, and can, therefore, propose their “adaptive renewal” [11].

This guiding role in the management of common goods was officially recognized during the 24th ICOM General Conference (1), for the
best practices that the ecomuseums experience on territories, representing participation laboratories, “capacity building” and “good governance”, able to provide a shared interpretation of the landscape and the widespread cultural heritage, and offering design support tools owing to their transdisciplinary approach, acquired through practice [12].

The commitment of ecomuseums for sustainable development is significant. Several actions have been promoted with respect to social issues: from education to professional and technical training, to the valorisation of cultural diversity, to social inclusion. There are also observations on environmental issues: from the implementation of measures to combat climate change and for resilient management of the territories, to the responsible management of water and resources, to the protection of ecosystems, to energy-saving and energy use from renewable sources. Equally important is the fact that ecomuseums are also active with respect to economic issues: from the sustainability of agricultural productions with actions aimed at the conservation of biodiversity to the development of new production chains, based on recovery in terms of local knowledge innovation, to the promotion of forms of responsible tourism and models of sustainable production and consumption. [13].

The ecomuseum phenomenon in Italy is relatively recent, the first experiences can be traced back to the 1990s, borrowed from the neighbouring French model. In these 30 years, however, such phenomenon has had success and a widespread diffusion throughout the Peninsula, to the extent that nowadays one can count over 200 between recognized ecomuseums and institutions that call themselves such [14]. Another peculiarity of the Italian case is the existence of laws and regulations that acknowledge them.

The Italian uniqueness creates favourable conditions for a real and effective collaboration of the ecomuseums with local administrations, economic actors, associations, private individuals, visitors, for the valorisation of productive areas. In this regard, Italian ecomuseums can provide a repertoire of best-practices compared to the generation of new use-values and economic income, which indeed make sustainable the costs of conservation and rehabilitation of the cultural heritage and common goods, and in general of development.

Sustainable development best-practices from Italian ecomuseums

A certainly significant contribution of the Italian ecomuseums to the topic of local development relates to the participatory and integrated planning and management of the territory. In this current, we can attribute the experience of creation of the mappe di comunità (community maps) by the Ecomuseum System of Salento SESAI in Apulia. The community maps are means of knowledge of the local heritage derived from the English parish maps, that “narrate” the territory from the viewpoint of the population, in a subjective and contextual way. In Apulia the development of ecomuseums coincided time-wise with the process of drafting the Piano Paesaggistico Territoriale Regionale PPTR (Regional Territorial Landscape Plan), and this allowed the development of strong connections and relationships. Ecomuseum laboratories have been initiated to support the PPTR informative phase, to stimulate participation through the preparation of community maps. The maps created have been included among the PPTR implementation tools [15].

From Lombardy comes the experience of Piani Integrati della Cultura PIC (Integrated Plans for Culture), introduced by regional law 25/2016, aimed at implementing, both on a territorial scale and on priority areas, integrated actions to promote cultural heritage and activities, to promote territorial valorisation processes that involve the environment, craftsmanship, training, education, research, tourism and welfare. The PICs are design thinking processes and require coordination between public and private actors. Lombardy Region has provided that these Plans can be coordinated and promoted also by the recognised ecomuseums. In this respect, the Parabiago Ecomuseum of Landscape is taking steps to propose a territorial PIC on the theme “The Valley summons you. A river of culture for sustainable development” for the valorisation of the Olona river, in collaboration with local cultural institutions, and the scientific support of the Politecnico di Milano [16]. Along the lines to find resilient and adaptive responses to environmental issues and climate change, we should read the lake contract promoted by the Ecomuseum Cusius of Lake Orta and Mottarone in Piedmont. The contract was stipulated in 2018 among Piedmont Region, Provinces of Novara and Verbano-Cusio-Ossola, economic and association bodies, for the tourist and productive-industrial valorisation of the lake, proposing a management of the territory mindful of environmental, cultural and socio-economic values. The voluntary agreement for Lake Orta, for years considered a dead reservoir due to the industrial spills, was signed with the objectives of: assessing the hydrogeological situation of the reservoir, improving the ecological status of the waters, redeveloping the environmental systems and the abandoned industrial areas, enhancing the landscape, the widespread cultural heritage and settlements of the catchment basin, encouraging a sustainable use of the lake, promoting the keeping of the landscape with public spaces maintenance, sharing and spreading knowledge. The direction for the implementation of the lake contract is entrusted to the Ecomuseum.

Italian ecomuseums also offer a repertoire of best-practices related to the ability to generate new economies.

In this regard, it is iconic the path undertaken by the Ecomuseum of the Elvo and Serra Valley in Piedmont for the recovery and innovation of traditional production chains and the promotion of community certifications. In 2003 the Ecomuseum put forward a survey on the laboratories authorised to process raw milk following the local dairy tradition. The results allowed to bring together a dozen producers motivated to share a process of production valorisation. Since 2005 these producers recognize itself in the “Lattevivo” manifesto, which sets common principles linked to the substantial value of the products, to the environmental value of the production processes, to the origins’ value of the local dairy traditions. The “Lattevivo” manifesto has now a collective brand, and allowed the valorisation of a traditional knowledge, that otherwise risked being lost due to the small size of the manufacturing companies that individually could no longer bear the costs of productive processes in an increasingly competitive market [17].

Fig. 2 - The cultural landscape of Parabiago (photo by Adrones - Alberto Dellavedova).
With respect to the creation and knowledge transfer for land management, the Ecomuseo delle Acque del Gemonese, in Friuli Venezia Giulia, has started a systematic cataloguing of the conspicuous heritage of dry-stone walls that structure the territory and organises the "landscape construction sites" training courses, conducted by local artisans with the purpose of providing methods and practical advice on the recovery of these artefacts.

There are also several best practices of Italian ecomuseums for the development of responsible tourism, with the facilitation of architectural artefacts recovery paths. In this context, there is the experience of the Val Taleggio Ecomuseum in Lombardia which, faced with the need to preserve and maintain the consistent identity heritage of mountain cabins built with the characteristic sloping roofs (pióde), whose maintenance costs are extremely high, it became an advocate of a complex process of recovery for accommodation purposes. Starting from the Bed&Breakfast model, the Ecomuseum has come to define an accommodation regulation in the cabins and obtain from the Municipalities the possibility of granting limited volumetric gains to allow the conversion of some stables into accommodation areas. In this process the Ecomuseum carried out a first pilot project in 2008, with the transformation into a “Cabin&Breakfast” with an adjacent wellness centre of a building in Sottochesia di Taleggio [18].

The evaluation of the results in terms of local development

It is possible to observe that the contribution to local development and to landscape project is more effective in more “structured” and “innovative” ecomuseum. In general, it is necessary to consider that the ecomuseum, moving past the voluntary element, despite it being essential to its functioning, regardless of the legal recognition and management model adopted, has a solid internal organisation with a clear identification of individuals and roles, that enables the establishment of effective and lasting models of governance with all the actors in their different capacities are engaged in the territory. Simultaneously it is necessary that the ecomuseum process keep adequate degrees of flexibility and adaptability to the changing needs of communities and local contexts, while retaining some of the cornerstones of its activity.

In order to achieve the goal, the technological approach to the project, which, starting from the detection of a needs system, transforms them into requirements and, therefore, into performance, is useful. With regards to ecomuseums and a vast reference area, this approach can enable the elaboration of a “metaproject” of the ecomuseum, to “target” the activities from the definition and establishment phase to the management at full capacity, in a long-term time frame, offering a panel of planning alternatives and, above all, a reference grid to frame the individual actions in a more articulated strategic vision, and to assess the effectiveness of the process undertaken [19]. The assessment of the achievement of local development objectives is a difficult topic, since required taking in consideration both direct and indirect economic effects and other points that are not easily quantifiable, such as improving the quality of life and the environment, education and the training of the population with respect to themes of collective interest, the capacity for innovation and the creativity that the system can express.

In this regard, it is interesting to note the model developed by the Ecomuseo delle Minere della Val Germana in Piemonte. To “assess” the results achieved, the Ecomuseum applied the concept of Local Added Value, which represents the incremental growth of the local society, meaning the lasting growth of the heritage, produced by the integrated and relational value of environmental, territorial and socio-economic resources [20]. The results obtained were shared with the community. This has increased the consensus and participation in the development process.

It is noteworthy also the experience of the Ecomuseums Network of Trentino which since 2010 has started a process for the social reporting of both individual ecomuseums and the network as a whole. The selected tool was the social report, meant as a process through which the ecomuseum carries out a self-analysis in a first phase, then defines its strategic guidelines and, finally, accounts to the local community of its choices, of the process with which they were made, and of the social results achieved. It is both a final balance to evaluate the performance and efficiency of the activities carried out, but also a budget estimate which then becomes a tool to support decisions and to involve potential stakeholders.

In terms of assessment of ecomuseums, Hugues de Varine, pioneer of the ecomuseum, recommends operating on three different levels: an evaluation of the ecomuseum structure to verify sustainability, an assessment of the impact on the community to measure its social utility, an evaluation of the process and methods used to identify improvement actions [21].

Conclusions: transferability of the ecomuseum model

The evaluation method suggested by de Varine opens the door to a wide range of opportunities for debate, research and experimentation, particularly in the area of technological and environmental design. Ecomuseums can offer a suitable and responsive context for the experimentation of inclusive and participatory management techniques, such as co-programming, co-planning the creation of private-public partnerships, the creation of participation foundations, the stipulation of agreements or the implementation of horizontal subsidiarity actions, the administrative exchange, the implementation of social protection projects. Such tools are present in the reform of the Code of the Third Sector and they are common to different regeneration processes of the built environment.

These tools, based on the ecomuseum approach, are able to produce high and lasting levels of participation, bridging the recurring design distance between the central administration and expert knowledge, and the community, bearer of knowledge and memory. Research and experimentation within ecomuseums, in limited contexts and with “empowered” communities, of design methods and of evaluation systems of the effectiveness of local development processes can therefore allow a useful transfer at urban and territorial scale in the management of processes of local regeneration and development, overcoming the design impasse that often characterizes Italian cities.

The reference to the ecomuseum approach to local development can also contribute to an update of the authorization processes, of the skills of the decision-makers and of the support.


[23] G. Podda, "I prodotti e la ‘certificazione di comunità’ dell’Ecomuseo Valle Elvo e Serra”, in R.

technical commissions, in favour of an enhancement and greater involvement of the knowledge and the landscape culture that the territory expresses.

REFERENCES


PAESAGGI CULTURALI E SVILUPPO SOSTENIBILE: IL RUOLO DEGLI ECOMUSEI

Abstract

Nell’e ora dell’economia della conoscenza, le istituzioni culturali sono driver dello sviluppo locale nella misura in cui creano capitale sociale e trovano risposte resilienti alle sfide della globalizzazione, in linea con i 17 Goals dell’Agenda 2030 del Sviluppo Sostenibile. Questo ruolo è tipico degli ecomusei che fondano la loro azione sul progetto del paesaggio, sulla partecipazione delle comunità, sulla crescita sostenibile dei sistemi locali, sulla cura e gestione culturale in chiave creativa e innovativa. In particolare, gli ecomusei italiani, a partire dall’esperienza di gestione del paesaggio, offrono un repertorio di buone pratiche di pianificazione partecipata e integrata del territorio, e sviluppo di nuove forme di dialogo e collaborazione.”

NOTES

1. In particolar with the Scientific Conference “Museums and cultural landscapes. The filière ecomuseens à enjeux spécifiques et aux multiples perspectives”, hosted and organized by the Politecnico di Milano, Department ABC, with the National Coordination of Italian Ecomuseums and the patronage of the Italian Society of Architectural Technology SITA.


2. Diversi sono chiamati ad assumere un ruolo di driver per facilitare l’avvio di processi di sviluppo locale e contribuire all’oggetto delle entrate locali e di “comunità aperte” [6], attraverso la formazione continua, il sostegno alle imprese creative, la ricerca di risposte resilienti alle sfide della globalizzazione, e la diffusione di una “cultura della sostenibilità” intesa come “processo additivo” a cambiamenti sociali e ambientali [7]. Attraverso la cultura si sensibilizza la comunità sull’importanza della memoria per la costruzione di un futuro condiviso, stimolando processi di riappropriazione progettuale basati su una lettura condivisa del paesaggio, nella dimensione complessa che gli attribuisce la Convenzione europea. A livello internazionale un passo significativo è stato fatto in occasione della 24^ ICOM General Conference sul tema “Museums and cultural landscapes”, che ha evidenziato le capacità di diffondere la cultura della sostenibilità per fortemente radicate a livello locale e in grado di promuovere iniziative e interventi ben calibrati per il territorio, valorizzando innanzitutto la memoria e le relazioni sociali [9]. Nella loro accezione più propositiva di “imperi culturali”, ovvero di istituzioni culturali che operano per una rigenerazione anche economica del territorio per mantenere “vivi” il paesaggio e il patrimonio culturale [10], hanno le potenzialità per offrire risposte rapide alle questioni legate ai cambiamenti inadeguati e a una fraintesa ricca di rappresentatività della comunità all’interno dei processi. La conseguenza è una mancanza di disponibilità ad assumere l’onere delle scelte, con la rinuncia del pubblico al su ruolo di orientamento e coordinamento, e del privato a impegnarsi per colture di abbandono [2].

Richiama la lunga vita del progetto culturale al tempo dello sviluppo, basato sul confronto e sulla ricerca di compromessi tra interessi diversi, a volte anche conflittuali. Questo approccio richiede anche nuovi modelli di governance del territorio, oltre alla collaborazione tra enti pubblici e operatori privati, per aprire alla partecipazione della più ampia colettività [3]. È la coesistenza, infatti, che determina la domanda di beni e servizi, e che può definire gli obiettivi dello sviluppo e dello spazio culturale. È il “processo adattivo” ai cambiamenti sociali e ambientali [7]. Attraverso la cultura si sensibilizza la comunità sull’importanza della memoria per la costruzione di un futuro condiviso, stimolando processi di riappropriazione progettuale basati su una lettura condivisa del paesaggio, nella dimensione complessa che gli attribuisce la Convenzione europea. A livello internazionale un passo significativo è stato fatto in occasione della 24^ ICOM General Conference sul tema “Museums and cultural landscapes”, che ha evidenziato le capacità di diffondere la cultura della sostenibilità per fortemente radicate a livello locale e in grado di promuovere iniziative e interventi ben calibrati per il territorio, valorizzando innanzitutto la memoria e le relazioni sociali [9]. Nella loro accezione più propositiva di “imperi culturali”, ovvero di istituzioni culturali che operano per una rigenerazione anche economica del territorio per mantenere “vivi” il paesaggio e il patrimonio culturale [10], hanno le potenzialità per offrire risposte rapide alle questioni legate ai cambiamenti inadeguati e a una fraintesa ricca di rappresentatività della comunità all’interno dei processi. La conseguenza è una mancanza di disponibilità ad assumere l’onere delle scelte, con la rinuncia del pubblico al su ruolo di orientamento e coordinamento, e del privato a impegnarsi per colture di abbandono [2].

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responsabile delle acque e delle riserve, alla salvaguardia degli ecosistemi, al risparmio energetico e all’uso di energia da fonti rinnovabili. Non meno importanti, gli ecomusei operano anche rispetto ai temi economici: dalla sostenibilità delle produzioni agricole con interventi mirati di valorizzazione, alla base industriale, con lo sviluppo di nuove filiere produttive basate sul recupero in chiave di innovazione dei saperi dei territori; alla promozione di forme di turismo responsabile e di modelli di valutazione territoriale che coinvolgano ambiente, cultura e storia.

In Italia, nel corso degli ultimi anni, le prime esperienze si sono far risalire agli anni ’90, in particolare nel Lago d’Orta, per ripristinare un bel comune vantaggio, investendo nella qualità della vita e nel turismo responsabile. Il Contratto di Lago è affidato all’Ecomuseo. Gli ecomusei italiani offrono a documenti sulla sostenibilità delle produzioni agricole con interventi mirati di valorizzazione, alla base industriale, con lo sviluppo di nuove filiere produttive basate sul recupero in chiave di innovazione dei saperi dei territori; alla promozione di forme di turismo responsabile e di modelli di valutazione territoriale che coinvolgano ambiente, cultura e storia.

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