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IMAGES OF EUROPE PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

ISSEI 2014 - Conference Proceedings
Porto, Portugal

Edited by
Yolanda Espiña



PORTO



IMAGES OF EUROPE PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE
ISSEI 2014 - Conference Proceedings Porto, Portugal
YOLANDA ESPIÑA [EDIÇÃO]

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Coleção · e-book
Coordenação gráfica da coleção · Olinda Martins
Capa · Olinda Martins
Miolo · Diogo Tudela
Coordenação · Yolanda Espiña

Data da edição · fevereiro de 2016
Tipografia da capa · Prelo Slab / Prelo
ISBN · 978-989-8366-82-5

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Closing Session

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Editorial Note

This publication presents the Proceedings of the XIV International Conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas (ISSEI), held from 4 to 8 August 2014 at the Catholic University of Portugal in Porto, under the theme “Images of Europe: Past, Present, Future”.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Europe shows signs of approaching a transformation that requires to rethink the European tradition and the values that formed and constitute the way Europe sees itself and the rest of the world, and vice versa, and to incorporate a clear idea of itself beyond its geographical boundaries. To discuss the proposed theoretical and practical challenges, featuring their extent, effects and implications for Europe and beyond Europe was the mission of the nearly 300 participants in this conference, coming from different academic fields and more than 36 countries and 160 institutions from all over the world.

The conference was organized in thematic workshops, proposed to and accepted by the ISSEI Conference Committee. At a later stage, each paper had to be submitted to and accepted by the chairs of the respective workshops. This publication contains a very significant number of the papers presented in the conference. The edition of the published papers was supervised by the chairs, as well as the internal order in which the papers appear within the workshops. The editor has taken care of the final supervision and editing of the final order of the workshops, which are alphabetically organized by the chairs' name within the different sections. We are very grateful to all the contributors, who have made possible this version of such an intense and highly motivating Conference.

The e-book was feasible only thanks to the precious work of the designer, the artist Diogo Tudela. We are also very grateful to the Universidade Católica Editora – Porto, for the backing to the online edition project.

And last, but not least, we would like to thank the High Patronage of the Presidency of the Portuguese Republic, and the support of the Institute of Douro and Port Wines and the Porto Commercial Association.

Porto, January 2016
Yolanda Espiña, Editor
Catholic University of Portugal in Porto

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Images of Europe: Past, Present, Future

SECTION IV

Art, Theatre, Literature, Music, Culture

LANDSCAPE & CITY REPRESENTATION
IN POST-EXPANSION EUROPE

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Adriana Veríssimo Serrão, Maribel Mendes Sobreira & Moirika Reker

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Moirika Reker

Identity through Landscape, Identity of Landscape

Luca Vargiu

Abstract

Assuming as a guideline Paolo D'Angelo's theory of landscape as "aesthetic identity of places", the paper discusses two ways of considering the relationship between identity and landscape: 1) identity as collective identity of a community, of a social group, or of a nation (*identity in or through landscape*); 2) identity in an ontological sense (*identity of landscape*).

The first meaning insists on the identifying function of landscape for the people who live in it. It's a meaning subject to demagogic dangers, which do not stem from the ambiguity inherent in this particular meaning of identity, but rather depend on the difficulty of recognizing it in the forms of landscape.

The second meaning deals with the search for the constitutive elements that allow to identify a landscape as *that* specific landscape and without which that landscape is not that any longer. Such elements are to be considered both in the sense of material ones and in the sense of experiential ones.

The paper ends touching on the issues of the transformations of landscape and of the role played by the professionals who deal with landscape design and planning, in order to make every intervention respectful of the identity of the places.

The examples given are taken from the context of Sardinia, witness of exemplar transformative interventions in the recent past, but today facing up to alarming alterations of its own landscape patrimony.

Keywords

Landscape, Identity, Identical vs. Identitarian, Sardinian Landscapes.

The concept of identity is at the center of discussion in many fields as well as in several debates: from philosophy to politics, from anthropology to geography. Landscape studies make no exception, with as many as 139.000.000 hits for searches in which the words "landscape" and "identity" occur together. Curiously, among the results of this search, one even finds that Lego, the popular line of construction toys, manufactures an "Identity and Landscape kit."¹

In this regard, the unavoidable starting point is Paolo D'Angelo's theory according to which landscape is to be thought as the "aesthetic identity of places"—an incisive formulation that greatly contributed to its reception, not only within Italy, but also abroad. D'Angelo shares with the Italian landscape

studies mainstream, mainly Rosario Assunto, the idea that every landscape possesses its own individuality and singularity, in which nature and history are intertwined². In his view, the aesthetic dimension is an essential part of a territory's physiognomy; therefore it allows us to identify a place as *that* specific place, different from any other³. Such a theory serves as a guideline for the whole debate as long as identity is intended not as the collective identity of a community, a social group, or a nation—whose corresponding adjective is “identitarian”—but, first and foremost, in an ontological sense—whose corresponding adjective is “identical.”

When this notion is understood in a collective sense, that is, social, political, and so on, it is possible to speak of an identifying function for the people who live in a specific landscape and, more generally, for all the people who come in contact with it.⁴ It's a concept that can be summarized as “identity *in* landscape” or “identity *through* landscape.” We can find countless examples of this way of understanding the relationship between landscape and identity in various contexts: in how people relate to landscapes, in scientific studies, juridical texts, and political writings. Formulations such as “identitarian landscapes,” “identitarian value of landscape,” “landscape as identitarian element,” or similar ones are signs of it.

However, defining identity in this way raises some issues. First of all, claiming that landscape possesses an “identitarian value” risks being elusive and ambiguous, or being subjected to demagogic ends. This may happen even more when such a claim covers a central role in legislative texts. For example, in the *European Landscape Convention* landscape is seen as foundation of identity of the people (art. 5) and in the Italian *Codice dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio* landscape is conceived as a “territory expressive of identity” and, more in particular, of the national identity (art. 131).

The risks of ambiguity or of demagoguery does not stem from the ambiguity inherent in this particular definition of identity. To this end, however approximately, it would be sufficient to refer to Jan Assmann's definition: “The collective or ‘we’ identity is the image that a group has of itself and with which its members associate themselves.”⁵ Rather, such a risk is associated with the fact that it is difficult to recognize this kind of identity in the forms of landscape⁶. Hence the rise of some narrow, particularist, or localistic perspectives in theory as well as in practice. A prime example, in Italy, is the separatist party *Lega*

Lombarda, or *Lega Nord*, who has used the river Po landscapes in an ideological way with the purpose of cementing the invention of an identity: the identity of the people living in North Italy, whose origins are claimed to be different from the rest of Italy. The so-called “rito dell’ampolla” (“flask ritual”), celebrated for many years by the party leader, Umberto Bossi, is telling from this point of view: to make things short, it consisted in filling up a flask with the water taken from the source of the river Po, “father” of the North-Italian people.

Other risks concern a sort of identitarian ambiguity which even the Italian *Codice dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio* seems subjected to. While it is clear that landscapes can play a role in recognizing local identities, apart from the particularist currents seen above, it is much less clear how landscape and national identity are connected. For an “Italian landscape” as such, to be opposed to other national landscapes, does not exist.⁷

For these reasons, although they are not the only ones, it is necessary to approach the matter from an ontological point of view. From this perspective, claiming that landscapes have an identitarian value will make more sense, and it will have more operational effectiveness. An ontological approach will serve to clarify what makes a landscape a landscape, and what makes this or that landscape exactly this or that landscape. Thus, the problem is finding those constitutive elements that allow us to identify a landscape as *that* specific landscape and without which—or in the event of their loss—that landscape is not that landscape any longer. Such constitutive elements are to be considered both in the sense of tangible, material ones and in the sense of—broadly speaking—experiential ones. That is, elements involving memory and history, both individually and personally as well as from a collective (social-cultural) and biological-environmental point of view.⁸ Considering the relationship between landscape and identity in this manner can be summarized as “identity *of* landscape.”

Taking into account the material and the experiential elements, it is worth noting that landscape is chiefly connected with the sense of sight. This idea is prominent in mainstream landscape studies, both in past theories that limited landscape to a panoramic view and in contemporary ones which insist on the deep relationship existing between “the modern usage of landscape to denote a bounded geographical space” and “the exercise of sight or vision as a principal means of associating that space with human concerns,” to quote De-

nis Cosgrove.⁹ This implies that even an analysis of the multisensorial character of landscape experience cannot downplay the importance of vision and of the sense of sight. After all, as W.J.T. Mitchell states, “to live in any culture whatsoever is to live in a visual culture.”¹⁰

On the other hand, focusing on the multisensorial, that is, synaesthetic aspects of the landscape experience means to deal with those theories that in these last decades, even from heterogeneous points of view, have been insisting on comprehending the relationship with the landscape not as an objectifying distancing, but rather as a primary experience of bodily involvement, intimate and affective. To make at least one reference, it is worth mentioning Jean-Marc Besse’s thematization of an “être au monde paysagere,” according to which “the body occupies a central place in atmospheres and in landscape experiences” or, more precisely, “the sensitive body is the core and the condition of possibility of landscape experiences.”¹¹

Besse’s use of the term “atmosphere” is an eloquent sign of the fact that the bodily situatedness relates to the sensory experience and to the sphere of feelings and emotions without the former preceding the latter—ontologically and chronologically—or vice versa. Rather, as the adage goes, they are two sides of the same coin. The two aspects are coessential and are part of each other. Philosophers who thematized the notion of atmosphere, such as Gernot Böhme, Michael Hauskeller, and Tonino Griffero, highlighted that atmospheres are “half-things” or “quasi-things.”¹² They are neither completely objective nor wholly subjective, but rather “a ‘between’ made possible by co-presence (corporeal but also social and symbolic) of subject and object and not only difficult to trace back to the two poles but, strictly speaking, even previous to them.”¹³

The path followed so far should have brought to light further elements that allow us to reconsider in a deeper way the crucial relationship between nature and culture, or—which is the same—between nature and history in the landscape experience. For landscape is always cultural and we must speak of a compresence, or better still, of an essential co-belonging of nature and history. This is also claimed, albeit more weakly, by the *European Landscape Convention*, as it acknowledges that the character of landscape “is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” (art. 1).

It must be not forgotten that the identity of every landscape can always change, that landscape is constantly subject to modification and transformation, otherwise we run the risk of providing fertile ground for particularist conceptions, as exemplified above. What is more, just because landscapes imply an essential co-belonging of nature and history, it does not necessarily mean that their preservation must be thought of in terms of mere conservation and protection. Rather, as D'Angelo claims, preservation "must have a *project* component. [...] A landscape, to be really such, must be a *living* landscape, which evolves along with history."¹⁴ Because of this, terms such as "mixing," "mestization," "hybridization," and similar ones have become commonplace—as in other fields—within landscape studies.¹⁵

Here the issue arises of which modifications are accepted by the people who live in a given landscape, and which are not. Or when a modification is approved of, even to the extent of becoming a typical feature of that landscape, which is to say, a constitutive element of its identity. It is a problem concerning all those who experience a landscape, but also—and maybe first and foremost—the professionals who deal with landscape design and planning: architects, town planners, gardeners, and landscape planners. In general terms, it is necessary to acknowledge that in some cases landscapes have undergone violent and irreversible transformations that, nonetheless, have been experienced as non-problematic. This is a sign that such modifications, however radical they may have been, have reshaped the identity of those places and given new sense to those landscapes in a positive way.

In Sardinia, a telling example is represented by lake Omodeo, one of the largest artificial lakes in Europe, created by a huge dam on the river Tirso between 1919 and 1924. This reservoir, built with the purpose of supplying water and electricity for agricultural needs, now looks as if it had always been there. It blends seamlessly with the landscape—as the so-called "Guida rossa" of the Italian Touring Club acknowledges¹⁶—and has become an economic resource and even a tourist attraction (fig. 1).



Figure. 1. Sedilo, Sardinia, panoramic view of Lake Omodeo (Photo by Maurizio Frongia, Ente Foreste della Sardegna. Taken from www.sardegna.digitalibrary.it, download permitted).

The forming of the lake submerged fields, woods, villages, and archaeological and architectonic remains. The only thing that was saved, due to its historical and artistic value, is the church of S. Pietro di Zuri, one of the jewels of Sardinian Romanesque architecture. Under architect Carlo Aru's direction the church was dismantled stone by stone and rebuilt uphill. This restoration is one of the best examples of anastylosis in Italy to this very day.¹⁷

Whereas lake Omodeo can be considered a positive example of landscape integration, the nourishment of Cagliari's Poetto beach carried out in 2002 is without doubt a glaring case of irreversible disfigurement, besides being a crime for which the local administrators, starting with the province president, have been recently sentenced to a near three-million-euro reimbursement.¹⁸ After decades of neglect, the beach was in bad condition. This was due not as much

to natural erosion, but because the local construction industry had used it as a cheap quarrying site probably as late as the 1970s. Consequently, numerous debates arose and, along with them, several projects for the beach replenishment were presented. In the end, it was decided to dredge the sand from offshore and pump it onto the shoreline. However, the sand revealed itself to be completely different, radically altering the beach, probably forever (fig. 2).¹⁹



Figure 2. A postcard against the nourishment of Cagliari's Poetto beach, 2002 (Associazione per il Parco Molentargius Saline Poetto, www.apmolentargius.it, Creative Commons License).

An interpretive grid based on what has been considered so far can help understand what has been damaged.

- Visual aspects. The color changed: the sand, originally white, is now dark.
- Tactile aspects. While the original sand was fine-grained, almost impalpable, the new one is more granular and coarser due to the presence of shell fragments and other fragments.

– Polysensorial and atmospheric aspects. The whole physiognomy is now different as well as the relationship between the beach, the shoreline and the sea. The water, once crystal clear, has become cloudy. Concerning depth, while before the nourishment the water was shallow for quite a distance from shore, now the seafloor is irregular and the water generally deeper. Furthermore, the sand's darker color made it hotter, making it unpleasant to walk on during the hottest hours of the day in summer.

– Emotional and cognitive aspects. Some experiences that everybody once easily had and shared, are now consigned forever to memory. As Allan T. Williams and Anton Micallef point out in conclusion of their analysis, “since any solution is technically, legally and politically difficult, the white fine sand will probably remain nothing but a recollection in the minds of elderly Cagliarians.”²⁰

After having seen two opposite examples, the issue of understanding which modifications are accepted and which ones are not should have gained more depth. To sketch a conclusion, albeit provisional, it is possible to gather from what has been said so far that every landscape intervention should respect and preserve its identity while trying to recognize its typical features and distinguish them from the spurious elements—however difficult this task may be, considering the changeable and even hybrid character of landscapes as such.²¹ From the designer's point of view, in any case, the task is exactly this. As Steven C. Bourassa argues, meaningfully in an interrogative form:

Questions about the role of the designer or planner can be viewed as questions about the role of personal strategies within the context of cultural rules (and, rather more speculatively, biological laws). In other words, how should the designer's creativity be constrained by existing cultural values? When should the designer be subservient to existing values? When should the designer attempt to change the “rules”? And when should designers merely employ different strategies within the context of existing rules?²²

In brief, the matter is still largely open to debate.

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Endnotes

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