

# **AGAINST GLOBALSCAPE: landscape architecture to defend and promote local or regional identities**

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## **Abstract**

Transformation is a characteristic of landscape, but the changes connected to globalisation determine a loss of significance of local culture, introducing a lower and lower quality in everyday life, weakening the landscape diversity. Metropolitan suburbs show some dull characters of this phenomenon, as well as areas corrupted by the spreading out of diffused urbanisation, mixed with abandoned areas, new commercial centres, and so on.

Globalisation also affects rural landscapes, involving cultivation, production and distribution systems, with strong effects on materials, structures, agricultural techniques.

Italian cultural landscapes are seriously menaced by globalisation effects: abandonment, on one side, and european agricultural development programmes, on the other side, are modifying the image of our country.

In some Ligurian examples we can observe globalisation as a “disturb”, and, in different cases, we can find out some particular local adaptation to globalscaping tendency: these are signals of landscape potentiality to recover. Landscape architecture can have an important role in the identification and evaluation of local identities, to stop simplification and to re-build a social model of landscape comprehension and assessment. The aim is to re-establish relations between people and landscape, re-discovering landscape as a resource for our daily life.

## **1. Transformation and globalisation effects.**

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Landscape is moving: this is a vital characteristic of landscape, that needs a solid method to look at past and future, through different spatial scales, to manage and plan landscape quality. Globalisation is involving our landscape, endangering the significance of our ways of life and of our way to live in it. Many transformations are moving from a local and peculiar landscape to a new one, where most of the relations between inhabitants and territory are lost, and in which the new standard of life tends to link people with everybody, in every part of the world, by rapid communications and quick infrastructural connections. This is a particular dualistic character strictly linked also to European Community: these both souls are together, the one trying to find similarities, common tradition, searching for a European common standard and culture; the other one, on the opposite, trying to underline the local values, the peculiarities of each region, the specific significance of every single cultural ambit. Considering a worldwide perspective we can say that globalisation can be assumed as a way to assure a common standard welfare, to get over economic and physical gaps, but, relating to its wrong declination, it is affected by many bad consequences.

Figure 1: Metropolitan landscape in Milano-Bicocca (Vittorio Gregotti's architecture).

Looking at our everyday landscape we find out that we are losing something important, concerning our own personality, our own **cultural heritage**, towards a simplified equal anonymous **homogeneity**. This phenomenon concerns modern society in a deep way: also from the point of view of landscape ecology, we are losing our "**diversity**". If transformation is part of landscape, we are also part of it, and we are able to control some of the changes: our

job, as landscape architects, is to understand and to know our dynamic landscape, to find correct modalities to force it in a direction towards a better balanced situation.

To understand landscape transformation, it is necessary to individuate development strategies, in order to face degradation and to control dynamic processes.

Some transformation are involving european landscapes in the same way: we know **metropolitan landscapes** and peripheral conurbation changes, where the loss of significant spaces and of architecture quality is combined with a lot of pathological signs and manifestations similar all over urbanized world. Figure 1 and 2 compare architectural product to anonymous new building: the urban quality is far from both.

Somewhere else vaste areas are changing from agriculture lands to **extensive spread towns**, where high-speed roads, commercial centres, marginal activities, residual cultivated areas are side by side with new extensive residential buildings, touristic villages, and so on, changing the character of these landscapes, erasing, little by little, their substantial nature of rural landscapes.

Globalisation influences touristic market, social references and culture, even low price food. The global landscape is characterized by the same uncoloured low quality, in a general mid-comfortable standard level.

Figure 2: New buildings in the Genoese periphery.

## **2. Italian cultural landscapes and globalisation effects.**

Globalisation deals also with productive and commercial systems: agriculture organization is changing rapidly, following a world-wide market. We have to adequate our production or to loose convenience in cultivating.

“Italian beautiful landscape” is represented in the well-known Lorenzetti’s fresco in Siena (Tuscany)<sup>2</sup>, showing good governance effects on country: a measured rich rural landscape is shown, with trees strips and shrubs along the fields delimitation, different cultivation techniques, composing a complex mosaic of different elements.

Figure 3: Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s fresco “Good governance effects” (Siena, 1337-1339)

Rural landscape in Tuscany has deeply changed, exploring development possibilities of agriculture maintenance, such as European Agricultural Programmes and contributions to encourage biological production, to evaluate landscape image by marketing and strategical plans, offering Tuscany as a touristic cultural landscape: today’s image of Tuscany is linked to sunflowers, cereals culture, extensive culture, that is very different from the rich diverse mosaic of the past<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> E. Sereni, E. 1964 *Storia del Paesaggio Agrario Italiano*. Laterza, Bari, Calcagno Maniglio, A. 1983 *Architettura del paesaggio*. Calderoni. Bologna.

<sup>3</sup> Vos, W. & Stortelder, A. 1992 *Vanishing Tuscan landscapes. Landscape ecology of a Submediterranean-Montane area (Solano Basin, Tuscany, Italy)*. Pudoc Scientific Publishers Wageningen.

Figure 4: A Tuscan road signed by *Cupressus sempervirens* and *Pinus pinea* behind sunflowers cultivation.

In Figure 5 we can see the clayey countryside near Siena, where extensive monoculture leaves only a patch of *Cupressus sempervirens*: is this new landscape able to recover from any climatic event, without protective shrubs and trees or drainage structures? The most relevant aspect concerns the people assessment of Tuscan landscape, this is assumed as the same of past, even more appreciated because of its recent simplification.

Figure 5: Cereals culture in Tuscany, near Siena.

**Abandonment of agricultural landscapes** means in Italy degradation of **cultural landscapes**. In **Liguria** the terraced lands constitutes an extended part of the territory: some important historical and cultural landscapes, such as the **Cinqueterre**, are endangered by the loss of relations man-landscape. Many other cultural landscapes can be shown, in their relationship with globalisation and maintenance problem (Portofino park, ...).

The European Landscape Convention points out the important to recreate these relations, to reinvent daily landscapes, to re-discover our identity and our cultural, historical, social and traditional heritage.

Figure 6: Terraced landscape in Ligurian Cinqueterre.

### **3. Landscape against globascope: global “disturb” recovered by local landscapes.**

Globalisation can be seen as a “disturb” (according to Landscape Ecology <sup>4</sup>), taking landscape in a different balanced situation. In some examples we can see how local landscapes can recover that globalscaping disturb passing to new interesting condition.

#### 3.1 Global materials reinvented by local tradition.

An effect of globalisation is the diffusion of some materials, that are on the comun market. Landscape is marked by all signs and traces of the past, as well as by new materials. Sometimes a very small object can characterise a particular landscape, even when it is not a landmark, but it can be representative of a place. This is another character of landscape, being interested and composed by elements of different scales. In Figure 7 and 8 some materials are reinterpreted by local tradition: in the first case some blue plastic bottles full of water are

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<sup>4</sup> Ingegnoli, V. 1993 *Fondamenti di ecologia del paesaggio*, Cittàstudi, Milano.

hunged to olive trees against olive flies; in the second one plastic tanks are arranged in a serial water reservoir system, reinventing water storage in ligurian terraced landscape. In particular we can assume plastic tanks in Liguria as a landscape indicator, to notice the maintenance of agricultural activities on terraced rural areas, where abandonment is the most relevant problem.

Figure 7: Blue bottles in olive trees (near Imperia).

Figure 8: Water reserves in a terraced area in a Genoese suburban area.

### 3.2 New agriculture landscapes.

New agriculture landscapes are forming according to global market logic: in Liguria we can study some interesting examples, like the terraced glassed landscape, the aromatic-potted landscape, the “en plein air” shrubbed landscape (see Figures 9-11).

When the market needed flowers from Ligurian Riviera, glasshouses covered the terraced hills near Sanremo, producing roses and other flowers: different kind of glasshouses, from a simple glass-cover to the complete transformation of the hill-slope, with strong transformation by cement, interesting permanent change concerning drainage and pollution. The actual tendency is the abandonment of glasshouses, transforming some of them, when possible, into shrubs cultivation in the open air, to produce ornamental branches (from esotic plants, such as *Eucalyptus gunnii*, *Grevillea spp.*, *Pittosporum tenuifolium*, *Acacia dealbata*, to mediterranean shrubs, such as *Viburnum tinus*, *Genista spp.*, ...). New landscapes are born, showing economical possibilities to the terraced rural Ligurian landscape.

Figure 9: Ligurian terraced glassed landscape (near Sanremo).

Figure 10: From glasshouses to industrial “en plein air” cultivations on Ligurian terraced landscape.

Figure 11: The “en plein air” shrubbed Ligurian new landscape (near Ventimiglia).

#### **4. Methods to individuate and evaluate landscape peculiarities.**

From the results of some researches (for instance: Ministerial national research “Methodology to compile an Italian Landscapes Atlas”, Interreg communitarian programme “Mediterranean and Alpine Landscapes”), starting from Landscape European Convention contents, we identify

in landscape variety a value to be pointed out, even by adapting a common method to understand landscape complexity.

Foundamental topics are:

- **relational analysis** among the different components of natural and antropic systems,
- **landscape transformation**, comparing different historical thresholds to the present situation, in order to understand actual processes and to pre-figurate future tendencies or possible scenarios,
- **social/cultural landscape perception** to point out needs and intentions of the inhabitants and to understand the significance of the different elements and of the past and present processes transforming landscape.

### **5. Planning strategies and landscape architecture potentiality.**

Where urbanistic and architectonic traditional approaches have failed, landscape architecture can offer a different cultural interpretation, under the role of **mediation**, trying to rebuild relations from landscape to urban areas, from contemporary society needs and landscapes resources.

Boundary areas are a typical subject of landscape architecture: there is where all the differences can be seen, where the most interesting relations inside-outside are involved. Today "everywhere" metropolitan space need to be reinterpreted: what we are called to deal with is the nature of the place in which we try to moderate town and land, where the sequence of urban spaces changes into a system of places, in an open landscape.

To make a space/place recognizable and different from the others, we have to design its relations to landscape and to society, by relating cultural significances to people ways of life and behaviours.

A **new challenge** for landscape architecture is also to find out new development strategies to promote local or regional landscapes, linking little and somehow faible projects into general system to qualificate landscape and social identity. In many cases landscape has inner resources and important values, that need to be shown, to be underlined by a landscape plan.

Objectives of this plan are to restaure relations man-landscape, to involve the inhabitants, making them conscious of their landscape value and reconstructing a landscape culture.

Operative ways to be used can be incentives and financing reserved to specific projects dealing with landscape quality, helping little local communities **to invest in their landscape** to promote their cultural and traditional production, to ameliorate their touristic offer by high quality materials, peculiar attractiveness and specific character, using new technologies for a more respectful landscape exploitation.

Inhabitants are landscape proprietaries and managers, their convincement to develop its potentialities is the departure point of any efficient landscape planning.

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