

# Fragile Cultural Landscapes: A Regenerating Case Study in East Veneto



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**Abstract** The paper reflects on the case study of a reclamation landscape in the East Veneto region (Italy), framing it in the European strategies and policy about landscape and heritage: it will be taken into account what has till now been done by local government, first of all by the “Osservatorio del paesaggio del Veneto Orientale” respecting the *European Landscape Convention* guidelines, then the paper will point out both sustainable innovation and potentialities of this fragile territory. Further the paper will try to outline the digital infrastructures’ communication abilities in sharing knowledge, connecting them to main questions about preserving and promoting landscape and scattered heritage, again keeping in the background the European policies, mostly about digitalization. As regards the relationship between landscapes and heritage, it will be paid specific attention both on the called “Top-down” actions and on knowing and giving values from below, from “Bottom-up” practices. In fact, the two strategies are complementary, because the first—*Presentation*—regards the careful goal of informing and making heritage available in a way normally carried out by scholars, professionals and more in general experts in the heritage field. The second strategy, better known as *Interpretation*, refers on the other hand, to research and creativity activities and results generated in a heritage site. In such perspective, involving visitors as well local people and communities is crucial for interpreting and changing sites as cultural landscapes, into places where legacies of the past can turn to a resource for the future. Referring in a specific way to those last processes, as they are more innovative, the paper will illustrate, like an example useful to be applied, the recent experience of “*Alpinescapes*” web-platform, implemented to collect and share information about the cultural landscape between Lario and Ceresio lakes, and lastly, to map and merge Digital Cultural Heritage data from Italian and Swiss territories.

**Keywords** Cultural landscape · East Veneto · Alpinescapes

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## 1 A Point of View on Cultural Landscapes

Today it's possible looking at cultural landscape as a combination of tangible and intangible goods, rooted in a territory, in other words it's feasible considering the leading idea of cultural landscape as a *unicum* able to collect all the different and intertwined legacy dimensions, characterizing a specific site: this point of view is based on a rich and well-structured cultural and regulatory framework.

Such position is an outcome of different and combined perspectives: the *European Landscape Convention* guidelines [6], but also of the cutting-edge debate which in Italy produced, in 2004, the *Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio* [3], and last but not least, on a global scale, of the Unesco approach to cultural landscapes [9].

So the point of view here adopted, considers as inseparable the relationship between territory, inhabitants, tangible and intangible culture; the most evident synthesis as concerns such a complex connection finds its more appropriate expression just in the idea of cultural landscape: that is an idea able to join nature and changes made on the nature itself by human work.

It seems evident that such interpretation realizes a wide "cover" able to include the outstanding landscapes considered by the Unesco as *World Heritage*, and also the so-called everyday landscapes, "normal" landscapes which are far from mass tourism interests, better intended as non-outstanding, in the same time rich in memories for people living them and potentially open to a new sustainable tourism.

## 2 A Case Study: A Fragile Cultural Landscape in East Veneto

From this point of view, the reclamation landscape in the East Veneto region has, as matter of fact, the specific characteristic of a cultural landscape; how we can read on the *Manifesto per la tutela e la valorizzazione del paesaggio della bonifica del Veneto Orientale*, the reclamation landscape is an outcome of a long time work devoted to change the water system existing between lagoons and rivers, so regenerating a land to be employed for agriculture, human settlements, industry, tourism [4].

The reclamation landscape is a key-element characterizing for the East Veneto geographic-environmental infrastructure, together with the river Piave basin, next to the Cadore mountain area, the Treviso hills' piedmont system and further the valleys obtained from the reclamation, just next the Venetian lagoon.

As the VeGAL (Venetian Local Actions Group) affirms, the East Veneto territory is a clear example of "a new land" arisen in the XX Century; today the landscape maintained most of signs and characteristics in respect the ones emerged from the swampland during the '50s of the past century [10].

We are dealing with a new landscape, almost completely artificial, marked since it appeared, by a series of land and water infrastructure and very specific buildings (canals, banks, roads between small farms, turning bridges, basins, water pumps) which permitted and still today safeguard both a stable emergence and a civilized life. So there, we can find land and water geometries, colored by plantations, where it's possible to look at a kind of 'minor' architecture made of rural houses, farms and landowners' villas, all perfectly respecting the landscape context [1].

The landscape, arisen between the XIX and XX Centuries, finds out actually, since few time, a proper touristic potentiality, based on historic, cultural and environmental enhancing.

We don't consider such so long and complex changing process ended, it's in fact up to administrators and inhabitants trying to identify how the landscape evolves in respect of nature, rivers, valleys and coasts settings.

Anyway, as wrote Federica Letizia Cavallo, even if the reclamation landscape represented in different ways a shared reference for most Italian people, today it seems instead not so visible and known both for its history and functions [2].

The reclamation territory in East Veneto outlines a way of interpreting the landscape as a clear symbol of the relationship among a cultural, anthropic, and natural processes, where innovative approaches are strictly intertwined to new use practices by tourists, residents and metropolitan citizen.

The large number of restored projects both in historic centers and single buildings, rural too, the museums started, the green and wood areas regenerated, a special care for facades on canal or rivers, have been thought as taking part of an itineraries system.

Almost two hundreds of structural recycling interventions have been made on valuable manufactured goods as palaces, religious buildings, archeological settings, rural and reclamation houses, mills, etc., the most remarkable among them have been classified and mapped; at the same time, in some pilot areas, also each artwork belonging to buildings, palaces and so on, has been classified.

Considering the entire process, a turning point happened in 2012 with the *Osservatorio sperimentale per la tutela del paesaggio della Bonifica del Veneto Orientale* set-up [7]; it has been established by a regional law (L.R. 10/2011) and respecting art. 133 of the *Codice del paesaggio* (D.Lgs. 42/2004) [3], both aim to support the inhabitants in actions and practices devoted to recognizing local identity through heritage enhancing.

The East Veneto's administrators have been able to start a rural regeneration course, applying a new rurality strategy and investing in several and converging directions leading to setting-up itineraries, to re-discovering land products, to restoring unique buildings and small centers or historic villages, last but not least to organizing a structured research and studies plan about the territory.

The outcome is a strategic vision on the North East Italian Region, intended as a mix of coast and farmed environments which aspire to integrate each other; so the backcountry is not a land able to be crossed only or to provide human resources, but intends to be attractive for a new kind of tourism, slow tourism in another seasons; so travelers can find something different in respect of the coast where the rural

defines the territory and, in the end, redefines the built-up area too. It dealt with the work's results which can today produce, if conveniently supported, a new kind of economy. It needs also underlining that such policy is first of all a cultural effort. Intervening on historic centers, valuable buildings, regenerating and enhancing local products, designing itineraries, etc., so that everything can contribute to a social and economic growth, would be impossible without a new way to find out the "soul", identity and vocations of the territory [10].

### **3 Feasible Innovative Regeneration Strategies for Fragile Cultural Landscapes**

What has till now has been done to enhance the reclamation cultural landscape in east Veneto region is an interesting example for the fragile areas in Italy: a re-emergence of a valuable identity in a place, also for the relationships with a new strategy for the economic growth, shouldn't turn out to be constraining for other, diverse and innovative ways able to connect people and heritage.

Conditions exist to go beyond, to experience innovative methodologies allowing local communities to realize networks for protecting and running spread heritage, also employing sustainable management plans to foster economic and work-related effects.

The goal of enhancing the fragile territories can also aim to make Europeanization stronger and shared, using new catalyst to support and re-think the connections between people and their heritage.

Experiencing innovative communication forms can turn into opportunities to start positive processes affecting *non-outstanding* landscapes characterized by interesting spread heritage, aiming at the same time at setting-up shared good practices for sustainable tourism, signified by technological innovation and rural smart hub planning to promote culinary excellence.

Knowledge connection concerns essentially a deep understanding about geographical and historic contexts, where heritage becomes embedded and then approaches, technologies, innovative tools can ease both sharing and increasing actions for managing tangible and intangible heritage.

The heritage digitization issue opens for sure new scenarios: this represents a crucial aspect in the *European Agenda for Culture*, setting first of all to increase the public accessibility to different forms of cultural and linguistic expressions, but also to boost opportunities for people to be involved in protecting and enhancing heritage.

## 4 Digital Infrastructure and Strategies for Communicating Heritage

A European Commission Communication, *Towards an integrated approach to Cultural Heritage for Europe* [5], supports in a specific way a heritage vision aimed to share values and promote social cohesion, in other words it fosters heritage in a framework oriented to enhance cultural diversities and intercultural dialogue, considering culture as a catalyst for creativity, in the end to interpret culture as an active element for the Union's international dimension.

Following such mainstream, the crucial question this paper wants to focus on is the relevance today is assuming to know and share heritage through the digital, employing in particular, the digital technologies for communicating a cultural landscape.

Among the numerous infrastructure already operative in this field, a relevant position is represented by the *Europeana* ([www.europeana.eu](http://www.europeana.eu)) web platform which interprets in a different way how approaching heritage, through the triad: Digitizing, Communicating, Sharing.

The *Europeana* web platform makes access free to more than fifty millions of digitized items, among them there are books, music, artworks and much more, in order to share heritage with recreational, educational and research purposes.

As well *Europeana*, other on-line platforms adopt a similar strategy; it's important to recall at least <http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net>, Europeana Space, RICHES, Civic Epistemologies, Photoconsortium.

Unfolding the multiple local identities to a European dimension, going out each regional reference point to make the cultural resources in a territory accessible in a wider scale: all this represents a new challenge because, from that point of view, the digital issue becomes crucial as it is intertwined to the heritage communication one. The Icomos (International Council of Monuments and Sites) identifies two possible approaches to the "heritage communication" subject: on one hand a "top-down" strategy, better known as *Presentation* strategy, on the other hand we can find the "bottom-up" practices, defined instead as *Interpretation* [8].

The first strategy concerns a careful information and access (also physical) plan to heritage places, normally it is a approaching way for scholars, professionals, specialists in the field of heritage: so it's mostly a one-directional communicating system. The second manner is instead centered on the activities, results, research and creativity, which a heritage site can implement. In such perspective, involving visitors and inhabitants is crucial in order both to interpret and change the site and the cultural landscapes where past legacies can evolve in a resource for a future growth. The communication strategy *Presentation* requires experts both in the research field and in representing through digital technologies the outcomes, employing 3D models and GIS, in case of archeological sites, architectural heritage and more in general in tourist context of great acclaim.

A innovative and effective digital technologies' development and thus the possibility to realize rendered digital models in real time, joins together a feasibility

in producing photorealistic images of tridimensional objects and at the same time a possibility in making available information in a visual way: further architecture and complex sites representation can be improved by texts, documents, images, iconography, and by locating buildings in their proper context through geo-referred 3D models.

Today the most updated tools in this specialized field are however represented by the H-BIM (Heritage-Building Information Model).

Digital models for heritage anyway play a crucial role in communicating and sharing knowledge too; from this point of view, that is more social and cultural, the combined employ of ICT and web allows to outline new interesting scenarios for heritage, as for example the multimedia employ for cultural heritage, the use of data in documenting the memory of places, the image and information technologies to share the places' experience, last but not least the employ of Open data and web based tools.

Lately also AR/VR technologies, applied in a touristic field, have been implemented to boost knowledge in fact, of complex buildings or sites transformations.

## 5 A Possible Way to Follow

To paying back a tangible idea about a possible use of digital and technological infrastructures able to convey heritage communication on a wide scale, that is in a European horizon, we intend here suggesting for the case study of the reclamation cultural landscape in East Veneto, an available way to be pursued to direct the regenerating process towards a wider communication about heritage; so, as example, we would describe one of the on-line platforms—*Alpinescapes*—based on data collecting and visual representation of a cultural landscape; *Alpinescapes* deals with the territory between the Lario and Ceresio lakes, allowing to match and map heterogeneous data coming from different sources about Digital Cultural Heritage in the Italian and Swiss territories.

The web platform *Alpinescapes* (<http://www.paesaggiculturali.polimi.it/>) is an outcome of a research project developed under an Italy/Swiss research program, named “Il paesaggio culturale alpino su Wikipedia: Valorizzare il paesaggio culturale attraverso dati aperti, Wikipedia, Sit e allestimenti analogico digitali”.

So *Alpinescapes*—as we can see on Wikipedia—is a project which focuses on open data and the Creative Commons attribution-share alike license to provide access to existing content on the Alps (cultural and natural heritage, geography, anthropology...); it links data from the Geographic information system to Wikipedia; it contributes to Wiki Loves Monuments 2014 and produces the design of two museums in Italy which take into account also the link between digital and analog ([https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/The\\_Alps\\_on\\_Wikipedia](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/The_Alps_on_Wikipedia)).

The platform user can overlap different information levels and choose to manage a 500 m area around his location or contributing directly acting on Openstreetmap (OSM) o Wikipedia, using a dynamic map.

Further it has been provided by a new web based map, careful for alpine territories characteristics, and equipped with a web-app allowing to visualize and put in relationship heterogeneous data, as mentioned above, with local projects in fact of enhancing the cultural alpine landscape: all the sources are open and can be increased and the users can add items on Wikipedia, Wikivoyage or Openstreetmap.

*Alpinescapes* respects the European Union guidelines as regards *Digital Cultural Heritage*, facilitating a wider possibility to access data, boosting a sustainable tourism experience, promoting inclusive and participative processes by inhabitants.

It deals with an experience which represents a change of point of view towards aware, participative actions to protect and regenerate heritage to be opened not only to local people but to those digital communities involved by touristic or cultural reasons.

## 6 Conclusions

Heritage digitization can so enclose a very wide issues' range able to answer a boosting request of social inclusion, participation and accessibility to information sources; digitization doesn't consist in fact in a trivial "translation" from analogic to digital in order to get digital copies of text, drawings, maps, videos and so on.

Rather the utility of digitization should be addressed to share knowledge more and more and finally can represent an effective answer to an increasing request of social inclusion.

So it seems very suitable considering all those and knew scenarios able to link together knowledge from experts to a heritage vision from the inhabitants and the tourists visiting cultural landscape sites.

To conclude, digital technologies should so allow to build "a common ground" to protect and preserve heritage, at the same time to promote actions where several and different actors can "interpret" heritage and decide the future.

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