

Chapter 15

Marche

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15.1 Introduction

Similarly to Umbria and Tuscany, the countryside of the Marche Region has been shaped through the centuries by the activity of farmers living in scattered holdings. The Marche is a region of hills and mountains, and agriculture has had to adapt to difficult soils and environments. Presently, in agriculture, 42.5 % of the land is used for cultivations, 32.8 % is woods and only 6.7 % is pastures. Because of these difficulties, farmers have had to develop a particularly sophisticated environmental culture, which would allow them to be economically viable while respecting the delicate balance of a particularly fragile ecosystem. In the hill areas—as Sergio

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Anselmi notes—the small holding system has been successful, preserving ‘the territory, creating a myriad of perfectly integrated economic ecosystems, not only through a variety of cultivations using a combination of crops, vine and olives, with the rotation of forage cultivations, but also through an ingenious irrigation and draining system, which exploited rainwater and adopted ‘natural’ defenses based on hedges and carefully positioned trees, used for timber, fruit, and leaves.

In the Marche Region too the ‘Great Transformation’ of the mid-twentieth century has produced phenomena similar to the ones of other regions. The development of industrial activities in the few plains of the region, has not only subtracted land from agriculture, but also induced migration from mountainous agricultural areas to the plains. As a consequence, in the mountains and higher hills, the consequences of the decline of agriculture are clearly visible. Woods and shrubs are advancing, the old chestnut woods are disappearing, old farms and settlements are often in disrepair. But even in the lower hills, as well as in the plains, the landscape has been violently simplified by the development of tree-less wheat fields, in which hedges, terraces and ridges are also eliminated and tractors are used. Mechanized agriculture has erased the century-old traditions that had characterized agriculture. As noted by Marco Moroni: ‘The patiently constructed draining system is no longer maintained.

The areas selected in the Marche region exemplify a very diverse range of situations. The Hills of Maiolati Spontini are a splendid fragment of the mixed landscape typical of sharecropping agriculture. These hills extend for 1,200 ha on the right bank of the Esimo river. Agriculture includes terraced vineyards, wheat fields, and olive orchards, surrounded by woods and scrubland. In this area, the variety of cultivations and the preservation of traditional environmental balance seems to challenge the passing of time. Very different is the habitat of the Altopiano (plateau) of Macereto, in the province of Macerata, north-west of the Monti Sibillini National Park. Here, dominated by the imposing Mount Bove, there is a plateau that maintains both the appearance and the actual economy of a bygone age. The plateau is characterized by meadows and pastures and is surrounded by mountains, on whose lower slopes grow thick beech woods. About 5,000 sheep are permanently herded here while other herds are kept here only part of the year. In the hills of Loretello (Arcevia), woods typically alternate with crops. The area is dotted by castles and fortified settlements once serving to control the territory and the agrarian economy. Near Macerata, there are the olive orchards of Coroncina, whose presence is attested already in the fifteenth-sixteenth century. About 170 ha belong to the territory of the municipality of Caldarola while others are found in other municipalities. These olive orchards produce quality oil and also promote the image of these hilly areas, often characterized by a rough terrain with bare patches and others covered only by shrubs. The area of Sasso Simone and Simoncello, in the municipality of Montefeltro, part of the Italian State’s Military Land (*Demanio Militare*), includes one of the most significant Turkish oak forests, which for centuries was managed as coppice and is presently maintained by the military authorities, with trimming and cleaning of the undergrowth. The woods combine with pastures and meadows where the free range of animals is still practiced, a increasingly rare form of animal farming in Italy, which is essential to the preservation of the traditional landscape and its biodiversity.

15.2 The Plateau of Macereto (42° 58' 36" N; 13° 06' 55" E)

The plateau of Macereto is one of the distinctive landscapes of the Sibillini mountains. It is located at altitudes ranging from 900 to 1,100 m a.s.l. and extends for about 2,000 ha, on both public and private land, in the municipalities of Ussita and Visso in the Valnerina valley, in the province of Macerata. It is part of the Parco Nazionale Monti Sibillini (Monti Sibillini National Park). The landscape is protected under law 432/85. The splendid calcareous rocks of the Bove mountain serve as background to the pastures of the plateau. Economic activities in the area have always been completely centered on shepherding. The geological substratum is partly made of Scaglia Cinerea and partly of Scaglia Rosata (the term *scaglia* or 'flake' is used by Italian geologists to refer to thin, tabular stratifications of homogeneous pelagic limestone). The Scaglia Cinerea is characterized by the presence of marl and calcareous-argillaceous gray, greenish, or reddish schist, while the Scaglia Rosata is formed by calcareous-marly schist with red chert.

The area is highly significant, due not only to the historical persistence of vast pastures with isolated trees, but also of a 1529 sanctuary by Bramante, the greatest expression of the Renaissance in the Marche region. According to the legend, it is here that on August 12, 1359, mules carrying a wooden statue of the Virgin with Child from Loreto to the Kingdom of Naples stopped and refused to move on. Extensive beech woods surround the pastures on the slopes of the tall mountains that enclose the plateau. The existence of common land rights in the area has influenced the landscape, in which enclosures are almost entirely absent. No vine or cereal cultivations are present, though old documents attest to the past presence of vineyards. These pastures were once known for the presence of the *sopravissana* sheep, a cross between the Spanish Merino, the French Rambouillet and local varieties, which provided an excellent wool. However, the loss of commercial interest in this type of wool and, more in general, the difficulty of mechanically milking this variety of sheep has led to its replacement with other varieties. The survival of two sedentary herds, with official organic certification, has made it possible to maintain centennial traditions, including the production of the *pecorino vissano* cheese, which, though much appreciated, was on the verge of disappearing. In Cupi, a small mountain settlement whose economy continues to be based on sheep farming, the small farm Pastorello di Cupi, managed with passion by Beniamino Ciammaruchi, produces, in its small manual laboratory the real *pecorino of Cupi* cheese, made exclusively with sheep milk and natural rennet. In the settlement of Cupi, there is also a small museum of shepherding, where the traditional life of shepherds can be rediscovered. In the summer, herds of *vitellone bianco* or fatted calves of the Central Apennine (PGO label), which are also typical of the area, are also brought here to graze, while in the summer they are kept inside in the locality of Vallestretta. Recently, a plantation of saffron has been started in Cupi, which is used to produce a special type of cheese.

The landscape of the Macereto plateau has a high degree of integrity. Secondary pastures retain their integrity thanks to the herds that pasture here in the period between June and October. Besides the sedentary herds, which amount to about 3,000 animals, many others are taken here during the summer: the transhumance, that is



Fig. 15.1 The fascinating scenery of the Macereto plateau

the annual migration of herds to warmer areas, is still practiced, though nowadays it is done with trailer trucks. The permanence of sheep in the area in wintertime is not easy, because of the mountainous climate and the frequent snowfalls. Some sheep of the *sopravissana* variety still exist, but their survival in the area is dependent on the few animals of the organic farm Pastorello di Cupi, though the reintroduction of this type of sheep in the Sibillini mountains is one of the priorities of the Park authority.

The vulnerability of the area is tied to the abandoning of shepherding and the consequent disappearance of pastures, already evident in the locality of Vallestretta. The reduction in the number of animals favors the growth of new spontaneous weeds and worsens the development of secondary phases with the growth of shrubs, especially juniper, which for a long time was a species protected by regional legislation. This phenomenon is particularly visible in the locality of Arette. Also the black pines (*Pinus nigra*) used in numerous reforestation projects encroach on the native beech woods and do not fit in well with the local landscape. The presently uneconomic nature of sheep farming activities endangers not only those activities but also the traditional landscape. The surviving shepherds lament the lack of public support and the difficulties associated with organic certifications, and threaten to give up shepherding. The end of traditional transhumance has caused the abandoning of a number of typical small rural buildings, with square or semicircular design, which are still quite visible but now in ruins. The buildings were used by shepherds as temporary dwellings and to make cheese. They were made with stones obtained from the breaking up of the pastures and had no proper roof, other than a covering of branches and leaves in the summertime (Fig. 15.1).



Fig. 15.2 Low density olive orchards are a traditional form of the landscape of central Italy

15.3 Hills of Maiolati Spontini (43° 28' 55'' N; 13° 06' 55'' E)

The hills of Maiolati Spontini in the province of Ancona are characterized by the presence of traditional polyculture along with wooded areas. The hills extend for about 1,200 ha in the northern part of the municipality of Maiolati Spontini, from the sub-municipality of Scisciano, to the west, up to the border with the municipalities of Monte Roberto and Castelbellino, to the east. The area is private property. It is located on the right bank of the Esino river, which marks its border in the valley. Its altitude varies between 130 m a.s.l. in the valley and 400 m a.s.l. at the top of the ridge. The landscape is entirely protected under act 1497/39 and for a small portion under act 431/85. The hills can be accessed by taking state route SS 76 and exiting at Maiolati Spontini–Castelplanio and then taking the provincial road known as ‘dei Castelli,’ in the direction of Maiolati Spontini and Cupramontana. From this road you can take other secondary roads that go through the area of the hills. Geologically, the area consists of blue marly and silty clays, sometimes slightly sandy, with scarcely cohesive sands and sandstone, of lower Pliocene origin. In the area along the river, terraced gravelly and sometimes partially sandy fluvial deposits are found.

The significance of the landscape is tied to the historical persistence of an agricultural mosaic characterized by the presence of fields with olive-trees, vines and wheat, a typical sharecropping pattern, and small woods, which are integrated in the rural economy and used mostly for timber and firewood. Essential to the management and cultivation of the land was the presence of the monks of the communities of S. Michele di Massaccio, now Cupramontana, with their wheat mills set on the two banks of the river Esino, and of the abbeys of S. Elena and S. Sisto. In general,

the monastic communities of the eleventh century where the protagonists of the agricultural and civil renaissance of the entire area. The monks have 'built' a landscape characterized by a balance between cultivated areas and woods, cultivating not only wheat, olives and wine-grapes, but also creating a thick network of conducts used both for irrigation and to power the mills. The abbey of San Sisto, dating to the thirteenth century, is located at the center of vineyard on a clay terrace a few 100 m from the Esino river. All the castles positioned on the summits of the hills flanking the Esino valley have for centuries owned the 'woods of the Community,' a fundamental economic resource for local populations, used for both firewood and timber. The woods began thinning out since the first half of the seventeenth century but have resumed expanding in the second half of the twentieth, and remain a salient feature of the rural landscape. From the sixth century A.D. to the seventeenth century, these hills were entirely covered by woods. The expansion of agriculture caused a reduction of wooded areas in favor of crops and vines *maritate* (wedded) to field maples (*acer campestre*), i.e. vineyards using maple-trees as props. In the 1950s and 1960s,

Land use 2007	Surface (ha)	Surface (%)
Urban area and courtyard	75.51	7.19
Arboriculture	7.36	0.70
Shrubland	25.14	2.40
Oak forest	179.22	17.08
Vineyard with olive tree	1.62	0.15
Complex cultivation pattern	5.06	0.48
Water course	16.65	1.59
Fruit orchard	16.38	1.56
Fallow	35.97	3.43
Olive grove	76.57	7.30
Abandoned olive grove	3.46	0.33
Afforestation	14.83	1.41
Arable land	282.71	26.94
Arable land with tree	27.94	2.66
Arable land with olive tree	63.89	6.09
Hedge and tree rows	32.12	3.06
Riparian vegetation	49.71	4.74
Road system	8.67	0.83
Vineyard	123.82	11.80
Abandoned vineyard	2.86	0.27
<i>Total</i>	<i>1049.49</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Evaluating indices of landscape

Number of land uses	20
Number of patches	1010
Total surface area (ha)	1049.49
Average surface area of patches (ha)	1.04
Average surface area of arable land patches (ha)	0.94
Average surface area of forest patches (ha)	1.78
Hill's diversity number	10.45
Class of landscape integrity (I–VI)	IV

Hills of Maiolati Spontini
Land use 2007

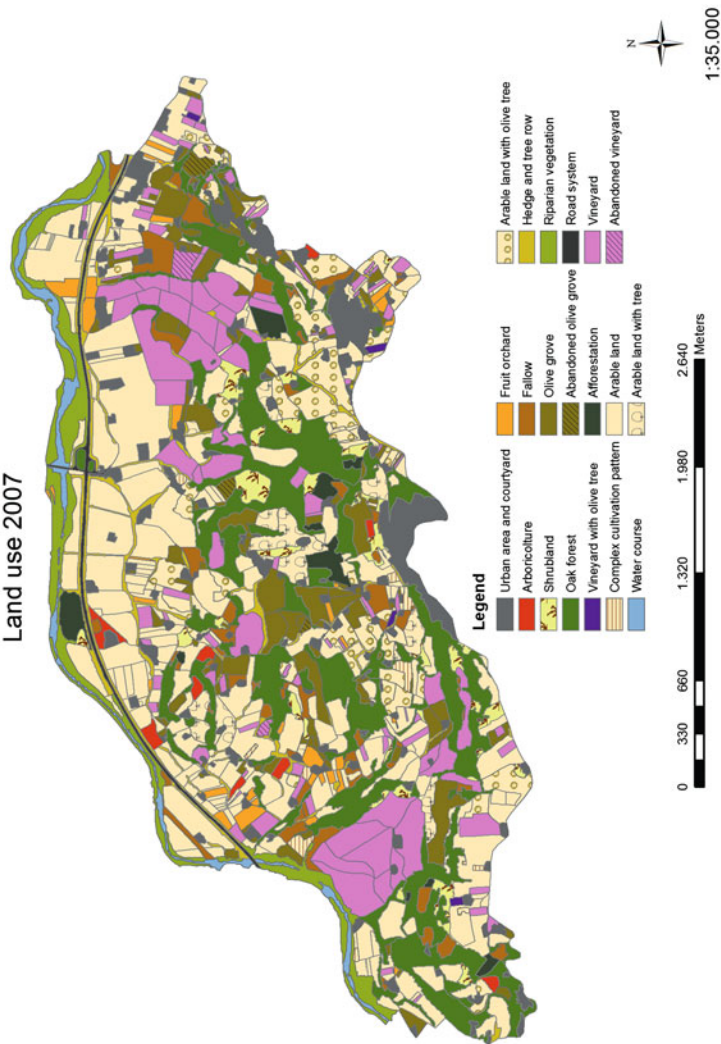


Fig. 15.3 The significance of the landscape of Maiolati Spontini is tied to the persistence of the traditional mixed cultivations of the sharecropping landscape pattern, arable with trees or olives, vines with trees and arable land, characterizing the historical landscape of Umbria, Tuscany and Marche regions. These features, together with a high fragmentation of the mosaic (1,010 patches in an area of 1,040 ha), the small surface of agricultural (0.94 ha) and forest patches (1.78 ha), contribute also to a high biocultural diversity. Overall, the historical landscape of Maiolati Spontini appears quite intact, due to the above features and the persistence of almost 60 % of traditional land uses in this area

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the area experienced a massive emigration of farmers. In the abandoned areas, the woods expanded, with a prevalence of holm oaks, English oaks and poplars. The local wine has been assigned the 'Esino' DOC (Controlled Origin Denomination) label.

The landscape maintains an good degree of integrity. The farmhouses along with the various traditional cultivations have survived, although the vineyards with maple-trees have mostly disappeared. In the area, there are many centennial oaks and olive-trees, for example at the border with the municipalities of Monte Roberto and Castellbellino, along via Boccolina, almost on the border of the woods. Some of the ancient farmhouses have been restored and are now used as tourist farmhouses. In the area near the river, in the thirteenth century there were many water mills, connected to a thick network of canals. Further down the valley, instead, was the beginning of the old canal that since the fourteenth century had brought water from the river to the mill called Molino della Torre, property of the City of Jesi. Nowadays, more than 2 km of the canal are still extant. The canal and the mill, which remained active up to the beginning of the twentieth century, attest to the historical importance of the entire area from an agricultural and economic perspective.

The greatest present vulnerabilities for the rural landscape of the Hills of Maiolati Spontini are the risk of further abandoning of lands, of the intensification of agriculture in other areas, and of erosive phenomena. So long as the co-presence of small wooded areas and traditional cultivations will continue, these phenomena will be kept under control, but if this balance is altered due the intensification of cereal cultivation, of sunflowers, or of olives and wine-grapes, as in other areas of the province, they will become a serious problem (Figs. 15.2, 15.3).

15.4 Olive Orchards of Coroncina **(43° 07' 55'' N; 13° 13' 04'' E)**

Though discontinuously distributed, the olive orchards of Coroncina, in the municipality of Caldarola, in the province of Macerata, impart a distinctive character to the local landscape. The area extends for about 550 ha, in the eastern part of the municipality of Coroncina. The olive orchards are mostly located in the sub-municipalities of Pievefavera, Croce, Vestignano and Valcimarra, at altitudes varying between 350 and 550 m a.s.l., on private land. The area can be reached by exiting state route SS 77 at Caldarola and then following the roads that lead to the various sub-municipalities. Alternatively, one can take the provincial road SP 78 and turn in the direction Caldarola at Santa Maria di Pieca. The hills on which the olive-trees of the Coroncina are grown belong to the Marche ridge, which is characterized by a substratum of well-stratified gray flaky sandy marls and blue silt and marly clays. In the hilly part towards the sub-municipality of Pievefavera there substratum consists of marl and grey and green marly limestone, while the area closest to the Lake of Caccamo (or Lake of Borgiano) consists of debris flow deposits. A thick network of streams

crisscrosses the territory of the five communes, the main one being the medium section of the Chienti river. Part of the area benefits from the mitigating effect of the microclimate of Lake Caccamo.

The significance of the olive orchards of Caldarola lies in the historical persistence of a varied scenery, in which the dominant olive cultivations of ancient origin combine with coppice woods of downy oak, untilled areas undergoing spontaneous forestation, and pastures with traces of ancient olive orchards, as well as numerous hedges and rows of trees used to mark the borders of fields. The olive orchards are small in size, often located on steep and scarcely fertile terrain. They are mainly oriented towards the south and the south-west and sometimes are still characterized by a low-density 'scattered' arrangement, with no fixed pattern. The first information on the importance of olive farming in the area of Caldarola, as well as that of neighbouring municipalities, date to the fifteenth-sixteenth century, as evidenced by old documents, and by the existence of centennial trees and ancient olive-oil mills, such as the one in Camporotondo. Small olive-oil mills are in fact found throughout the area. Among these the main one was possibly the one of the parish church of Pievefavera, which, at the start of the seventeenth century, was given to the Reverend Apostolic Chamber in exchange for certain land rents. This parish mill was shut down only in the 1950s. It was then re-opened in the 1980s by a cooperative, and definitely shut down in 1997 following a major earthquake. Since the mid-1960s, the 'Coroncina' had been officially labelled as one of the typical varieties of olive oil of the province of Macerata. The one produced in the territory of Caldarola and Camerino is listed as 'higher hills variety.' It is presently a much appreciated typical local product. In particular, the olive oil 'mono-variety Coroncina' is listed as Traditional Food Product by the Ministry of Agricultural Alimentary and Forest Policies. The presence and visibility in niche markets of this olive oil is helped by the scenic quality of the areas in which the olives are cultivated and gathered: rural environments in which the relation between people and nature is still balanced, also because of the absence of intensive agriculture and of the limitations on urban expansion in rural areas, a tendency which characterizes instead many other rural areas of the Marche and other regions.

The landscape of the olive orchards of the Coroncina, in its various aspects, appears to generally maintain a reasonable degree of integrity. The olive orchards occupy about 140 ha, but the olive-tree landscape extends to other municipalities for a total of 1,200 ha. Along with olive orchards using traditional patterns, there are also new orchards characterized by closer rows and greater density of trees, which alter the traditional look of the landscape. The farms that grow olives are all family businesses and the pieces of land set aside in each holding range in size from 0.5 to 2.5 ha. Cultivation techniques are still traditional, manure is used as fertilizer and no irrigation is usually done. Pruning is usually done every 1 or 2 years by family members, transmitting the culture of olive farming from one generation to the other. Olives are harvested from the end of November to the beginning of December, both manually and with pneumatic rakes. In the 1960–1980 period, young people often gave up farming, though in some cases they continued to work the land as a secondary

occupation. In more recent years, however, some farms have increased the cultivation of Coroncina olive-trees, aiming at a quality product and sometimes combining agriculture with farmhouse tourism. Up to now, there has been no intensification of agriculture, nor have the orchards been replaced by crop fields or pastures with isolated olive-trees.

An element of vulnerability is the danger of an intensification of agriculture which would lead to a gradual specialization of cultivations, as described above. Another danger for the olive orchards lies in the poverty of the soil and the low winter temperatures, with possible frosts even late in the year. The Coroncina variety has developed over the centuries a strong resistance to parasites and harsh climactic conditions, especially the scarcity of water, but the cold remains its worst enemy. Low temperatures of $-5/-6$ °C can damage the leaves and especially the flowers, the more sensitive organs, although blossoming occurs rather late, thus compromising production (Fig. 15.4).

Land use 2010	Surface (ha)	Surface (%)
Arboriculture	12.57	1.49
Shrubland	8.74	1.03
Recreational area	0.60	0.07
Woodland	235.56	27.89
Fruit orchard	1.57	0.19
Fallow	12.67	1.50
Abandoned olive grove	3.49	0.41
Irregular spaced olive grove	18.80	2.23
Regular spaced olive grove	111.73	13.23
Vegetable garden	1.23	0.15
Urban area and courtyard	70.92	8.40
Arable land	243.68	28.85
Arable land with tree	12.20	1.44
Arable land with olive tree	94.33	11.17
Arable land with vine and olive tree	0.44	0.05
Vineyard	14.35	1.70
Vineyard with olive tree	1.76	0.21
<i>Total</i>	<i>844.63</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Evaluating indices of landscape

Number of land uses	17
Number of patches	714
Total surface area (ha)	844.63
Average surface area of patches (ha)	1.18
Average surface area of arable land patches (ha)	1.02
Average surface area of forest patches (ha)	2.35
Hill's diversity number	6.61
Class of landscape integrity (I–VI)	II

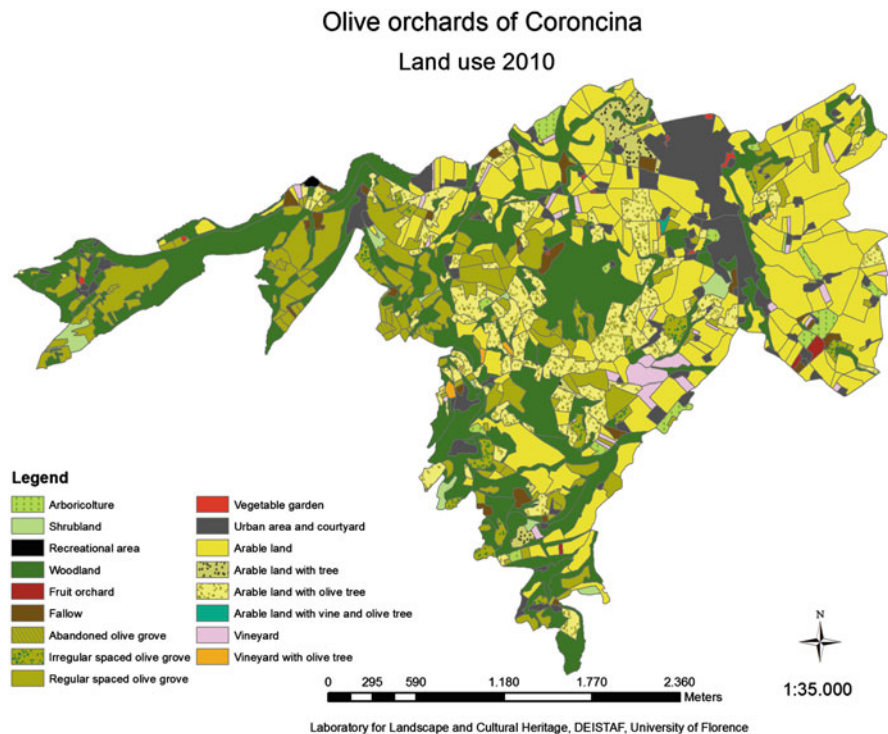


Fig. 15.4 The landscape of Coroncina is traditionally dominated by olive groves, coppice woods and mixed cultivations. Today we find above all regular spaced olive groves (13.2 %), while the irregular ones are very few (2.2 %), although there are still several mixed cultivations. The landscape mosaic is composed mainly of arable land, medium size patches, with an average surface area of about one hectare. Overall, the historical landscape shows a low level of integrity, despite olive groves and arable land with olive trees are still common. This degradation is due to the increasing intensification of agriculture reducing mixed cultivations, as well as to the spread of new orchards characterized by a very high density of trees especially suited for mechanization

15.5 Piagge of Ascoli Piceno (42° 50' 25'' N; 13° 34' 34'' E)

Adjacent the old city walls of Ascoli Piceno, there is a cultivated area known as the Piagge. The area extends for about 500 ha at an altitude ranging from 200 to 500 m a.s.l. The area is located within the municipality of Ascoli Piceno. It is privately owned and protected under landscape law 197/39 and 431/85. Many streams and torrents run through it and partly mark its borders. More specifically, the torrent Castellano marks its northern border, separating the area from the historical centre of Ascoli, while to the east the area is delimited by the gorge of Gran Caso. The Piagge extend on the northern slope of Mount San Marco and can be reached from Ascoli Piceno by taking provincial road SP 76, known as 'road of San Marco,' and going

south beyond the city walls. Geologically, the area is characterized by a substratum of travertine debris flow in the upper areas, above 300 m a.s.l., while in the area closest to the town, the geological substratum is made of gray-green calcareous marls with interbedded brown limestone.

The landscape of the Piagge is significant insofar as it represents a rural area rich in historical elements, in terms of the work done on the slopes, the type of agriculture, and the extant rural buildings. The area is emblematic of the intense relation between city and country in Italian history, and of the traditional identity of rural landscapes, in contrast with the ever expanding modern city, which by eroding agricultural land has sometimes compromised century-old heritages. Up to the mid-twentieth century, the Piagge were sharecropping land. Between the 1950s and the 1960s, the religious body Opera Pia 'Istituti Riuniti' granted the use of the land to provide food for the canteens of the local hospital, of kindergartens and orphanages. During those years, many olive-trees were planted for the production of the typical *olive ascolane* (olives of Ascoli). In the 1970s, the land passed to the Town of Ascoli. In recent years, many pieces of land have been gradually sold off to private owners. Among present

Land use 2010	Surface (ha)	Surface (%)
Arboriculture	0.96	0.29
Shrubland	7.53	2.31
Broad-leaved forest	133.87	41.01
Fruit orchard	0.08	0.02
Fallow	15.13	4.64
Fallow with olive tree	5.02	1.54
Fallow with grass	7.12	2.18
Abandoned olive grove	6.13	1.88
Irregular spaced olive grove	8.98	2.75
Regular spaced olive grove	43.64	13.37
Vegetable garden	1.12	0.34
Urban area and courtyard	28.83	8.83
Arable land	13.07	4.00
Arable land with tree	1.12	0.34
Arable land with olive tree	47.79	14.64
Arable land with vine and olive tree	1.44	0.44
Vineyard	3.31	1.02
Abandoned vineyard	0.35	0.11
Vineyard with olive tree	0.94	0.29
<i>Total</i>	<i>326.41</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Evaluating indices of landscape

Number of land uses	19
Number of patches	634
Total surface area (ha)	326.41
Average surface area of patches (ha)	0.51
Average surface area of arable land patches (ha)	0.38
Average surface area of forest patches (ha)	1.68
Hill's diversity number	7.11
Class of landscape integrity (I–VI)	III

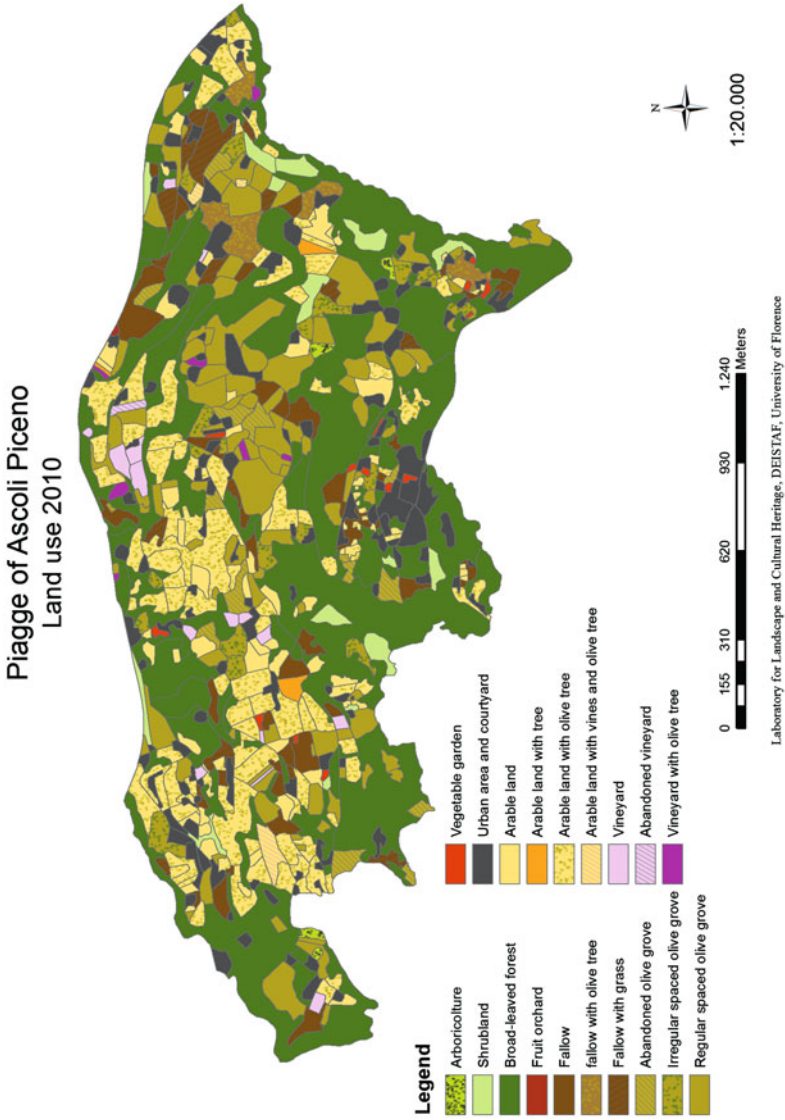


Fig. 15.5 The landscape of the Piagge of Ascoli Piceno shows the historical persistence of mixed cultivations in a suburban context. The landscape mosaic is composed mainly of small sized patches, with an average surface area of 0.4 ha for cultivated patches and of 1.68 ha for woodlands. Arable land with olive trees still makes up 15 % of the land use, although secondary forests due to abandonment are the most important land use (41 %). Overall, the historic landscape shows a medium-low level of integrity, mainly due to the abandonment of agricultural areas

cultivations, the dominant ones are vegetables gardens, crop fields, both bare and with olive-trees, arranged in small holdings often delimited by hedges. Usually the small olive orchards are located near rural houses. The *olive ascolane* of the Piceno area have been assigned the PDO label, and are present in the list 'Ark of Taste' of the Slow Food association, which lists quality food products produced in small quantities. The rural landscape is enriched by pastures and by small woods. Local rural architecture is particularly significant. Typical buildings are rural mansions, houses with tower, rural houses on flat land, usually with an external stairway, rural houses on slopes with internal or external stairway, and a number of smaller items, including wells, washing troughs, fountains and drinking troughs. It is not always easy to identify the traditional architecture, because of interventions by new owners who reside in these buildings, which sometimes have substantially altered the original traits.

Concerning the integrity of the area, a recent research has compared the land register of 1835 to the present situation, showing the persistence of the ancient network of holdings in certain parts of the Piagge. Holdings used to range from 2 to 6 ha, and were evenly distributed over the entire area. They adopted the polyculture system typical of sharecropping agriculture in the Marche. The intensification of cultivations, in the case for example of olive-orchards and vineyards, has partially altered the historical integrity of the agricultural landscape. Many of the present owners, having purchased their land from the township of Ascoli, are now restoring the old buildings. Some have passionately followed rigorous historical criteria, while others have instead modernized the old orchards with new plants for the production of *olive ascolane*.

In recent years, there has been a decline in pastures, but even more in vineyards. The gradual abandoning of agriculture has caused a problematic advance of woods and the degradation of the composite traditional landscape. This phenomenon occurs especially in marginal areas, no longer maintained by farmers. These areas have been practically abandoned to spontaneous vegetation, also because of the difficulty of applying mechanized agriculture due to the steepness of the terrain. The intensification of agriculture based on geometrically arranged high-density cultivations, constitute another element of vulnerability for the traditional scenery. Given the considerable gradient of the land and abundant water, in the past decades it has been necessary to maintain a complex system of small stone canals for channelling the water. Some of these canals are still functional, but the majority have been abandoned and are now in disrepair or buried. Another threat to this valuable rural landscape is the closeness to Ascoli, whose expansion risks transforming rural areas in residential ones, with the inclusion of the Piagge in future building plans (Fig. 15.5).

15.6 Polycultures of Loretello (43° 34' 18" N; 12° 56' 44" E)

The entire area of Loretello, a locality in the municipality of Arcevia, in the province of Ancona, is characterized by the presence of traditional polyculture. It extends for about 1,500 ha, at altitudes varying between 115 and 300 m a.s.l. The fields are

private property and surround the small town, which can be reached from Arcevia, at about 12 km distance, taking the local roads that run through the sub-municipalities of Montefortino and Torre. The area has the typical morphology of mid-valleys in the Marche region, with a series of medium-high hill ridges, flat and narrow valleys and ample slopes which become progressively more wooded moving from south to north. Geologically the area consists of sand and gray marl.

The significance of the land around Loretello lies not only in the historical persistence of traditional polyculture, but also in the unique relation between cultivated hills and historical settlements on risings, foremost amongst them the Castle of Loretello, which dominates the surrounding slopes. The rural landscape consists of a network of ancient buildings dotting the ridges and the transversal passages. The area was settled in the Higher Middle-Ages far away from the main routes, and belonged to the territory known as the Massa di Sorbetolo. The medieval hill settlements, originally a means to control the agrarian economy and therefore closely integrated with it, are perfectly preserved and restored: They include the castles of Loretello, San Pietro, Palazzo, Piticchio, Nidastore, which date to the period between the eleventh and the fourteenth century. These fortified nuclei vary in type and origin, but all served to protect the land and support the agriculture. The castle of Loretello was founded by the monks of the Fonte Avellana in the eleventh century. It is entirely built of ancient brick and still has a bridge with three arches. The name Loretello refers to the laurel woods that once grew in this area. The hills still show the signs of sharecropping polycultures, of the ancient arrangement of holdings, and of the old rural farmhouses and mansions. The variously cultivated fields often supported by artificial ridges create suggestive patterns, with a visual effect of order and regularity. The dominant cultivations are spelt, corn, chickling, olives and wine-grapes, and the quality of the products is high. Both the spelt (*Triticum dicoccum*) of Loretello and the chickling are listed as Traditional Food Products by the Ministry of Agricultural Alimentary and Forest Policies. The areas closest to the ridges are usually used as pastures-meadows. There is still a sizable presence of woods in certain areas, which alternate with cultivated areas and pastures.

The landscape of Loretello has largely retained its integrity, having maintained throughout the centuries the original relationship between human settlements and cultivated hills. Some elements of the historical landscape, such as rows of trees, artificial ridges, borders marked with trees, are still present, albeit in a sporadic fashion. There is also, however, a tendency towards an intensification of agriculture, which has created cultivations based on fixed patterns that have modified the historical landscape. Typical houses and other constructions harmoniously integrate with the patterns of the cultivations. Among these are iron crosses and country shrines at crossroads (the so called 'figurette' or small figures), rural chapels and small churches, attesting to popular religious sentiment, and, naturally, many farmhouses, some dating to the eighteenth century, which in recent years have been bought and conservatively restored, mainly by foreigners. Particularly interesting are farmhouses typical of the inner Marche region, in which rows of white stone and brick alternate on the façade. Also present are a number of fortified farmhouses with turrets and of mills still endowed with their original machinery. The castles have all been recently



Fig. 15.6 The Castle of Loretello and its agrarian landscape

restored by the town administration of Arcevia, which has included this area in its “Piano Regolatore” (the act that regulates building in the municipality) and defined it as ‘District of the Historical Landscape’ in which new constructions are forbidden. There is a debate on the possibility of instituting a ‘Park of the Historical Agrarian Landscape’ due to the great historical and cultural importance of the area and its excellent condition.

The main vulnerability of the landscape is the significant demographic decline of the last few decades, and the consequent lack of maintenance of the land, though in recent years corrective measures have been efficiently enacted, such as the reintroduction of traditional cultivations aimed at the production of traditional and organic food products (spelt, corn, chickling) and the development of agricultural tourism (country-houses and holiday farmhouses). The greatest threat however comes from the intensification and mechanization of agriculture and the consequent merging of adjacent lands, which would lead to the elimination of certain traditional features of the holding system, a phenomenon which has already occurred in adjacent areas (Fig. 15.6).

15.7 Sasso Simone and Simoncello (43° 45' 58" N; 12° 17' 20" E)

The area extends for about 1,500 ha and is characterized by the presence of woods and pastures. It is part of the “Demanio Militare dello Stato” (the Italian state’s military lands), and is located at the border between Marche and Tuscany, in the municipalities of Piandimeleto, Frontino, Carpegna and Pennabilli, in the province

of Pesaro-Urbino, and in the municipality of Sestino, in the province of Arezzo. The contour of the land is rather gentle, characterized by low gradients, often inferior to 15 %, at altitudes between 750 and 1,221 m a.s.l. A small section of the area towards the south-eastern border is located in Tuscany, towards Mount Simoncello and Mount Simone, whereas the north-eastern border corresponds to the border with the municipalities of Carpegna and Pennabilli. The northern border is adjacent to the road that connects the locality La Cantoniera with Valpiano, while to the west it runs almost parallel to the provincial road that connects Carpegna with Pennabilli, and then continues irregularly towards the south-west. Part of the area is included in the Sasso Simone e Simoncello Natural Regional Park, which belongs, both as SCI (Site of Community Interest) and SPA (Special Protected Area), to the Natura 2000 network. The area can be reached through the provincial road SP 1 that goes from Carpegna to Pennabilli, and then from the locality La Cantoniera, or through the local roads that run south-west of Carpegna, towards the localities of San Sisto and Belforte all'Isauro, and accessing the area from Pian dei Prati. The area extends on the left bank of the upper Foglia valley and on the secondary Apennine mountain ridge that is the watershed between the basins of the Marecchia river and the Foglia river. The geological substratum of the two hills is the so-called formation 'of San Marino,' in which massive white limestone is present, while the rest of the area has a more gentle morphology, formed by Holocenic debris deposits and by the 'Complesso Caotico,' i.e. a mainly argillaceous complex with fragments of marly limestone.

The significance of the landscape lies in the historical persistence of pastures and woods, which have been used for centuries. The beauty of the area is enhanced by the presence of Mounts Simone and Simoncello, two mountains of calcareous rock with flat summits, and by the fascinating 'calanchi' gullies found especially in the Tuscan section of the area. On the summit of Sasso Simone and Simoncello, evidence of human presence dating to the Bronze Age have been found. In the plain under Sasso Simone, shortly after the year one thousand, the Benedictine Abbey of Sant'Angelo was erected. Towards the mid-fifteenth century, Malatesta di Sestino ordered the construction of a fortified castle, and in the sixteenth century, the Medici of Florence ordered the construction of a civil military settlement. Stretches of walls and of paved roads, and the remains of a cistern are still visible though mostly covered by vegetation. The area includes extensive wooded areas and lands used for semi-free ranging pasture, which were once also cultivated for cereals and potatoes. Particularly interesting is a forest of Turkish oaks, considered one of the largest of Europe. In general, woods cover more than half the area, and are mainly aged coppices, in which the Turkish oak (*Quercus cerris*) is the predominant species. Traditionally, woods was used for firewood by local populations. However, in the last 30–40 years, the declining demand of firewood and the inclusion of the land in the Italian state's military lands, have caused an alteration. Besides the centuries-old Turkish-oak forest, there are also recent woods, grown in the last 40–50 years, after the land was acquired by the Italian state and the more marginal areas were abandoned. Other areas instead are pastures and scrubland, the latter a result of the abandoning of lands previously used for crops or pasture. The use of meadows and plains for pasture was historically a fundamental aspect of the local economy.



Fig. 15.7 The unique landscape of Sasso Simone and Simoncello

The area, also thanks to being owned by the state, retains a good degree of integrity, but the abandoning of pastures and agricultural activities has led to the spread of wooded areas. The silvocultural interventions listed in the recent Plan for the Management of the Mountain Community concern especially the Turkish-oak woods and call for pruning and mowing of the undergrowth. It would however be necessary to intervene also on a number of aged oaks. Pasture continues to be practiced in open areas, though less than in the past. The Sasso Simone e Simoncello Natural Regional Park has recently taken a number of steps aimed at preserving pastures and supporting free range grazing for the production of quality meat.

The area has a certain degree of vulnerability, especially in terms of depopulation, which has led, in the last 50 years, to the spreading of woods over what used to be crop fields and pastures, environments that are very important for the territorial balance of the area and for biodiversity. If measures are not taken, the prairies will be gradually replaced by scrubland first and then by woods. Prairies are also an essential habitat for birds, which need vast open spaces, and benefit also pastures and from marginal agricultural activities (Fig. 15.7).

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