

Chapter 49

A Cross Reading of Landscape Through Digital Landscape Models: The Case of Southern Garda

Ilaria Forti

Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy

ABSTRACT

The paper illustrates the results of a research project entitled “Landscape Information: new tools and methodologies for the representation of the landscape.” The case study selected for this research on the many aspects of the landscape is the vast territory included in the municipalities facing the Lake Garda, a significant example of “territory-landscape”, where different environmental characteristics meet, and through dynamic processes of interaction and transformation were generated specific natural and social forms. The innovative outcome of the research is to be found mainly in the methods of observation and representation defined and used, in order to get to the synthesis of an observation and cataloging system continuously queryable and implementable, accessible through simple and common interfaces, based upon the DLM. Its goal is to lay the foundations for the creation of a virtual strategic space where preservation and transformation processes will be activated, a platform easily accessible to different users, thus allowing a plural and inclusive vision of the landscape.

THE DIFFICULT SEARCH FOR A SHARED DEFINITION

The term landscape has gained a central role in the cultural debate of our time, until becoming a widely recognized notion, while being at the same time also a very elusive one. Michael Jakob (2009) suggests this fact by naming a chapter of his book *A Landscape is a Landscape is a Landscape...* Similarly, paraphrasing Benedetto Croce, to the question what is landscape, it could be answered: it is what everybody knows it to be¹. This is not an immutable concept, but the product of a cultural elaboration, influenced in particular by the tension in contemporary times between the poles of the artificial and the natural.

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The landscape is in fact the subject of study of various disciplines – from aesthetics to natural sciences – and is one of the key themes around which the contemporary debate about architecture and urbanism is centered.

It is precisely to the aesthetic dimension of landscape that refers Georg Simmel (1913) in his essay *Philosophy of Landscape*. The German philosopher and sociologist wrote:

This seems to me to be happening when someone shapes a field of apperception into the category of 'landscape': a self-contained perception intuited as a self sufficient unity, which is nevertheless inter-meshed with an infinite expansiveness and a continual flux. It is contained within boundaries that do not apply to the intimation of the oneness of God, the wholeness of nature, which continuously re-shapes and dissolves the self-imposed boundaries of a given landscape. Torn away and standing on its own, a landscape is permeated by an opaque awareness of this infinite interconnectedness.

There is no doubt that the concept of landscape constitutes one of the critical nodes in the relationship between man and nature, and the modification over the centuries of nature itself. When confronting with landscape, both from the theoretical reflection and the linguistic practice point of view, a number of foundational paradoxes emerge, related to the fact that landscape defies easy and quick attempts of measurement and identification, as well as the fact that being it neither place, nor country nor site, it poses serious questions of representation (Jakob, 2009; 27).

Human vision plays an important role in this relationship: in contemporary times landscape is no longer simply understood as view, which takes into account especially the relationship with physical reality, of which the subject admires the naturalistic character, but as a space that the man's look subtracts to the purely natural dimension, while remaining in contact with it. That of landscape is a dynamic dimension, linked to successions in time and space in which the perception is ever-changing. This is a universal phenomenon that transcends language and disciplinary barriers. At the same time, it is not a neutral look, but closely linked to different cultures. Indeed Berque (1999) showed that "today, thanks to the studies carried out by historians and anthropologists, we know that all human beings see or have seen the landscape where we, the Europeans of today, see it. The best piece of evidence (though not the only one) for this difference is the fact that the notion of landscape has not existed always and everywhere." Several studies have investigated how words themselves suggest different nuances that the concept of landscape takes in different cultures. In the Italian case, as in other Romance languages, the term landscape is derived from the root *paese* (country) – see also the French *paysage* and the Spanish *paysaje* – while in Germanic languages the origin is linked to *land*, from which the English *landscape*, the German *Landschaft* and the Dutch *landschap* all derive. To date, the more current and shared definition is the one produced by the European Landscape Convention, which analyzed in the European context new ways and tools for the interpretation and management of the territory and the environment from a landscape point of view. The European Landscape Convention, held in Florence in 2000, after a series of initiatives carried on to clarify the policies in place and the existing weaknesses, has arrived at definitions as much as possible shared relating to the concept of landscape, with a view to a policy of protection, management and planning. The Convention has recognized the quality and diversity of European landscapes, stating in Chapter 1, Art. 1, letter A of the text, that "Landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors, thus spreading the cultural and artistic value of the landscape and the environment. A complex and dynamic field has been determined, precisely for the fact that landscape is considered as a

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