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Ecomuseums and cultural landscapes

State of the art and future prospects

edited by
RAFFAELLA RIVA

with contributions by
HUGUES DE VARINE, ALBERTO GARLANDINI,
ELENA MUSSINELLI



Ecomuseums, born in France in the 1970s, are nowadays experiencing a new season of development. A renewal expressed through the evolution of participatory models, the growth of the involved competences and professionalism, the expansion of the spatial, disciplinary, and strategic scopes. Moreover, a renewal that sees in the network model and in interdisciplinary and transnational cooperation, a prospect of enrichment, for the conveyance of good practices and the increase of effectiveness and efficiency in the management of transformations and in the enhancement of the built environment.

In the globalisation era, characterised by dynamics of transformation often detached from local contexts, ecomuseums express a potential for innovation in urban and territorial regeneration processes, and can, therefore, take on a referential role for the landscape design.

Through awareness-raising, information, educational, research, and experimentation campaigns, they educate local communities to recognise the value of their collective heritage, supporting the development of planning skills for its transformation.

This book, starting from the debate launched in 2016 in Milan, on the occasion of the 24th ICOM General Conference, with the Forum of Ecomuseums and Community Museums, and the conference “Museums and cultural landscapes. The ecomuseums and community museums perspectives”, accounts for such renewal. It presents reflections, projects, and best practices of recognition, care, management, promotion, and enhancement of cultural landscapes, offering an opportunity for a debate at an international level on the social role of the project, and on the importance of participation and the enhancement of heritage as incentives for social, environmental and economic development, in harmony with the values and needs of local communities.

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Cover:

*The cultural landscape of Parabiago
in the north of Milan, Italy.*

Photograph by Adrones - Alberto Dellavedova.

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The book has been subjected to blind peer review.

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The cultural landscape of Parabiago in the north of Milan, Italy (photograph by Adrones - Alberto Dellavedova). We are especially grateful to Raul Dal Santo and the Ecomuseum of the Landscape of Parabiago for kindly providing this image.

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(*) *Odalice Miranda Priosti, founder and Coordinator of the Ecomuseu Comunitário de Santa Cruz (Rio de Janeiro), passed away on Christmas Day, 2017.*

She was a contributor to the debates of the Forum of Ecomuseums and Community Museums, in Milan during the 24th ICOM General Conference. Her text is reproduced in this book.

We want to pay her a well-deserved tribute, for her pioneering role in the promotion and experimentation of ecomuseology in the last thirty years, not only in Brazil, but also internationally. She has visited ecomuseums and colleagues in Europe and America and she has organized, with great vision and wisdom, two international encounters of ecomuseums and community museums, in her own Ecomuseum, in 2000 and 2004.

We can say that she has thus paved the way to the success of the Milan Forum.

2.12 THE PLATANI RIVER: A POSSIBLE ECOMUSEUM

*Antonino Margagliotta, Paolo De Marco**

The Platani River, for its spaces, history, and vocation constitutes a possible ecomuseum.

In this sense, the territorial system of Platani has been analysed, for the establishment of an ecomuseum, in the undergraduate laboratory “*Ambiente-NaturaArchitettura*” (Degree course in “Building Engineering-Architecture”, University of Palermo), producing about 20 theses that led to as many projects, aimed at eco-sustainable enhancement. The laboratory topics have resulted in conferences and “good practices”, including a “journey”, from the sources to the river mouth, which allowed us to understand the continuous landscape variations, to dwell in the emblematic points, to meet the community and administrators to engage and discuss with them about the enhancement and the protection of the territory (Fig. 1).

Around the Platani, the research path is also an occasion to talk about nature and landscape, during great linguistic and technologic innovation times, in which is necessary to think about the anthropisation of our planet and its consequences.

The Platani constitutes one of the most important waterways of southern Sicily. The river stems on the last and high peaks of Monti Sicani and, despite the considerable width of its catchment area, has a torrential behaviour with floods in autumn and low levels during summer, especially in the first stroke of the river; in its way, the Platani encircles Monte Cammarata (1,554 m above sea level), passing through different landscapes and, after a slow 103 kilometres journey, flow into the Strait of Sicily, next to Eraclea Minoa. Because of several salty water strokes, flowing on rock salt deposits, the river was called *Halcyos* by Greeks, *Lycus* by Romans, *Iblâtanu* by Arabs, and this last name could be the origin of the current one. However, the etymology of this term refers to other Greek words: *platànon* is the *platanus* tree and *platomòn*, that means pebbly shore, low beach or fishpond, refers to some physical aspects of the river (Margagliotta, 2014).

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The natural geography of Sicily, and the resources surrounding the river (salt, sulphur, vast inland forests, fertility of the ground, crops introduced by Romans) enriched the Platani territory, attracting people from far away during the ancientness. Moreover, the numerous water sources has generated another river, the Torto, directed towards the Tyrrhenian Sea, defining a natural cross-way, the Torto-Platani, as an internal corridor that goes coast to coast, from North to South, between the cities of Imera and Eraclea Minoa.

So, the river has represented a road from the sea to the heart of Sicily, and the river mouth is a gate that invites to come to the inner territories. On this way, during the history, many men and cultures met, living together and influencing each other, often using the river as a border: the Platani in fact separated the Sicani lands from the Greek and then, after the battle of Imera in 480 BC and the peace in 306 BC, the Carthaginians' influenced territory from the Greek. Talking about Platani is telling the story of Sicani, the most ancient documented civilisation in Sicily, but also telling the myth of Kokalos, King of Sicani, Minos and Daedalus, the battles against Aegean's coming from the sea.

Daedalus, first architect and great inventor of the ancientness, was a refugee in Sicily after "fleeing" with his son Icarus, building the stronghold of *Kamikos*¹.

The Platani, as well as to myth, belongs to literature: next to the Acquaviva train station (in this "junction" of street, railway, and river) there is «*il fiume pieno di gazze, di sale, d'eucalyptus*»² where Salvatore Quasimodo passed his "homeric childhood"; to those places belong also the memory of Elio Vittorini (like Quasimodo, son of rail workers) that lived as a child in Acquaviva. The Platani of Castronovo's water mills refers to Giuseppe Pizzuto, while *Valplatani* is the imaginary (but not so much) territory that Alessio Di Giovanni builds from its physical, cultural, and productive identity.

It is possible to perform an architectural reading of the river Platani, going through the articulation and the complexity of its spaces: diverse scales, from the landscape point of view, to the urban, up to the fields (natural or artificial) of small scale with the dimension of the architectural artefact.

The Platani, as a whole, enables to read the concept of territorial plurality that marks many Sicilian landscapes, in their complex morphologic variability and countless themes, linked to natural features and the stratified human presence; moreover, it represents a territory with many historical and cultural influences, acquired and deposited by the time, with visible evidences (since prehistory with traces of indigenous peoples, through the Phoenician and Greek presences, Roman and Byzantine, Arab and Norman, till today and our recent history).

Every peaks, mountains or hills that is touched by the river, is a place with peculiar characteristics, telling its own story: stories that the river brings to-

¹ About the history of the river: Gerardi, 1926; Di Giovanni, 1873; Caputo, 1957; De Gregorio, 1986; Alessi & Vaccaro, 2003.

² Quasimodo, S., "Lettera alla madre", in (1975), *Tutte le poesie*, Mondadori, Milano, p. 179.

gether into a single narrative, revealing a continuity and enabling us to read a single long novel of its territory. So we find *Quisquina*, toponym from Arabic describing a shadowy place full of oaks; the *Kassar* of Castronovo, its fortified city controlling all the internal part of Sicily; *Monte Cammarata*, with twin peaks that are visible from the coast and a the great protagonist of the Platani landscape; *Polizzello*, with its ancient settlement and the sacred area with circle-plan buildings, was a reference for the surrounding villages (many finds reveal trade activity with Aegean cities); *Monte San Paolino* in Sutera, place of worship, harsh, and lonely, was firstly dedicated to Artemis, and then, during the Byzantine époque, thanks to Brazilian monks, devoted to Saint Mark; *Monte Conca*, between Campofranco and Milena, inhabited since prehistoric times, with its “*inghiottitoio*” (a kind of gallery: the river passes through the mountain, coming out on the other side) has crucial landscape role; *Monte Campanella - Serra del Palco*, in Milena administrative territory, with countless archaeological finds and a *thôloi* complex; *Colle di Sant’Angelo Muxaro*, may be the mythical Camico, fortified by Daedalus, where the King Kakalos moved his palace (archaeologists discovered signs carved in the rock and golden objects that testify contacts with the Cretan civilisation); and then, *Monte Cavallo* with the ancient site of *Hippana*, *Monte Sara* that, according to Endrisi, was the place of the *Iblatànu* stronghold, *Monte della Giudecca*, with its medieval settlement inhabited by Muslims; last, the hills of *Heraclea Minoa*, that from its viewpoint supervises the “gate” of the Platani, recalling the presence of Minos in Sicily. Several tridents carved in the rocks and small bronze bulls (also the famous *patera d’oro*, found in *Sant’Angelo Muxaro*) are precious reminiscences of an intensive commercial activity with Greek civilisation. The memory of Minotaur is imprinted in Platani’s places.

The large system is constituted firstly by settlements that are of modest size, located along the river, regrouped in the past, and that took the place of the villages in which the first organised societies were born. The geography (and topography) of the cities-villages derives from specific conditions: many of those urban centres are very old, others are new founded cities³. The first ones, castled and crouched like animals on peaks, were safe on mountains; the seconds, in more accessible places, controlled the surrounding agricultural lands and large estates. Many villages have the consciousness, because of history and traditions, of the presence of the river, other villages forgot it: for all of them, the

³ There are many cities, always small sized ones, related with Platani. Sometimes because their territory is crossed by the river, sometimes because of traditions and cultural heritage. Some cities have not a clear origin, but were always under the royal control (Bivona, Cammarata, Castronovo, Grotte, Mussomeli, Sant’Angelo Muxaro, Santo Stefano Quisquina, Sutera); other new founded cities were built after 1500, according to the Spanish territory exploitation policies (Acquaviva Platani, Aragona, Campofranco, Casteltermini, Cattolica Eraclea, Cianciana, Comitini, Ribera, San Biagio Platani, San Giovanni Gemini, Sant’Elisabetta, Valledolmo, Valledlunga). The situation is different in Milena, where the first settlement exists since the Arabic domination, becoming municipality just in 1924.

Platani represents a thread, part of a single territory and part of a great history. The river has always witnessed a human presence that has been able to get work and wealth because of the river, and build using the ancient wisdom of dialogue with Earth and Time. The man, the potentiality of the water and the land, have built a landscape marked by architecture rooted to the ground and linked to the flow of time, with their rich period and the subsequent decline, related with the agriculture production, the duration of natural resources, and the economy rules.

The territory witnesses the presence of water mills with horizontal wheels, grinding grain and salt, useful also for breaking the gypsum stone or for smoothing out the linen; the *pescarie*, with reeds' sluice gates or artificial embankments; the *fascellerie*, open structures for processing and weaving the reeds, plants and trees that grew along the river; the salt mines and the sulphur ones, excavated into the ground with their stone geometries; the *fastuchere* serving the cultivations of pistachios; *casali*, *bagli*, farms, then villages, necessary for the agricultural land, that sometimes have extended their ancient functions (monasteries, resting places, lapsed rural villas). The old territorial infrastructures have the same value: the *Ponte Vecchio* in Castronovo, built in 1555, as well as other bridges on the Bourbon route, or on the railway that connect Palermo to Agrigento.

In modern times, we find a particular situation where the railway and highway “flowed into” the river⁴ (Fig. 2), when people started to build next to the Fanaco Dam (creating unusual landscapes)⁵, a diffused industrialisation process of the territory began, bringing richness but also water pollution and, because of an uncontrolled building activity, leading to the breakdown of the secular equilibrium between humans, landscape, and river. Recently, the presence of the highway (that in the “overlapping game” won against the river and the railway), has encouraged an innovative type of economy, with commercial districts in the middle of the inland, crafts companies areas, post-industrial factories⁶. So, today people may see the river as a “no-man’s-land”, available for every kind of construction, open to every type of activity you want to establish. The territory’s exploitation logic is completely distorted, and the actions against it or the protection policies appear even weaker!

Nowadays, the riverbed has a strange sequence: strokes where the river has been mortified (even channelled through concrete pipelines) and other parts

⁴ The railway goes into the ancient natural path of Torto-Platani; sometimes rails and river are parallels, many times the infrastructure crosses the river with artefacts, built in 19th century, well placed in the landscape. Afterwards, roads moved from mountains to valley. So, often the river goes with rails and road, and sometimes the road is carelessly inside the river!

⁵ In the beginning the dam should have worked together with a hydroelectric plant; then the dam assumed the role of water storage for a very vast territory.

⁶ Few years ago, there was a regional plan for building an incinerator inside the riverbed, between Casteltermini and Campofranco. Today, even if the idea was abandoned, the site is still fenced.

with cultivated landscapes, with vegetable gardens and orchards (in order to follow the market, or fashions, there were citrus fruits, peaches, pears). Sometimes, areas of great nature and untouched beauty appear, unexpected and enchanted marvellous surprises (because we forgot, or maybe we even did not know about them). Spaces that give us the possibility of imagining a primordial landscapes, evoking tales of treasures, stories of the first inhabitants of Sicily, hearing the voice of a timeless myth (Fig. 3). The ancient architectures, carefully laid on the ground, enhance the special features and the sacredness of nature, giving identity to the territory. Those artefacts (or better, what remains of them), reminding us of a distant past, are memories of the human presence, telling the story of a lost time. The same fate came for all those factories, that have lived the time of an industrialisation dream, and now seem to wait for a new significance, a regeneration (both architectural and environmental), offering themselves for an innovated function in this territory.

The Platani geography is composed by extremely different scenarios: protected areas with great landscape interest, exciting views over the valley or towards the sea, alternating with extensive crops, *casali*, farms, water mills and pistachio factories, but also abandoned industrial installations, as monuments of past civilisations, where the highway and railway invaded the riverbed, and cemented embankments reduce the river to paltry trickle of water. Today, the Platani is a landscape to rediscover and valorise, forming a catalyst able to create new visions. It is also a river that has to be protected, giving back space to nature, making again peace between man and his historical environment.

The Platani River is a possible ecomuseum, but also an indispensable tool to recognise the territory and its values, to remember the history of its places and to innovate and develop the identity of its populations.

From this point of view, the understanding of places becomes a perspective for knowledge, and the recovery of history is a projection to the future. The history and the geography, enable us to find new identities, defining new collaborations that involve locals and administrations, (in our case study, some municipalities will merge together and there is an ongoing *Patto di Fiume*, with Castonovo di Sicilia in front row) indispensable to conceive visions of hope for those marginal territories.

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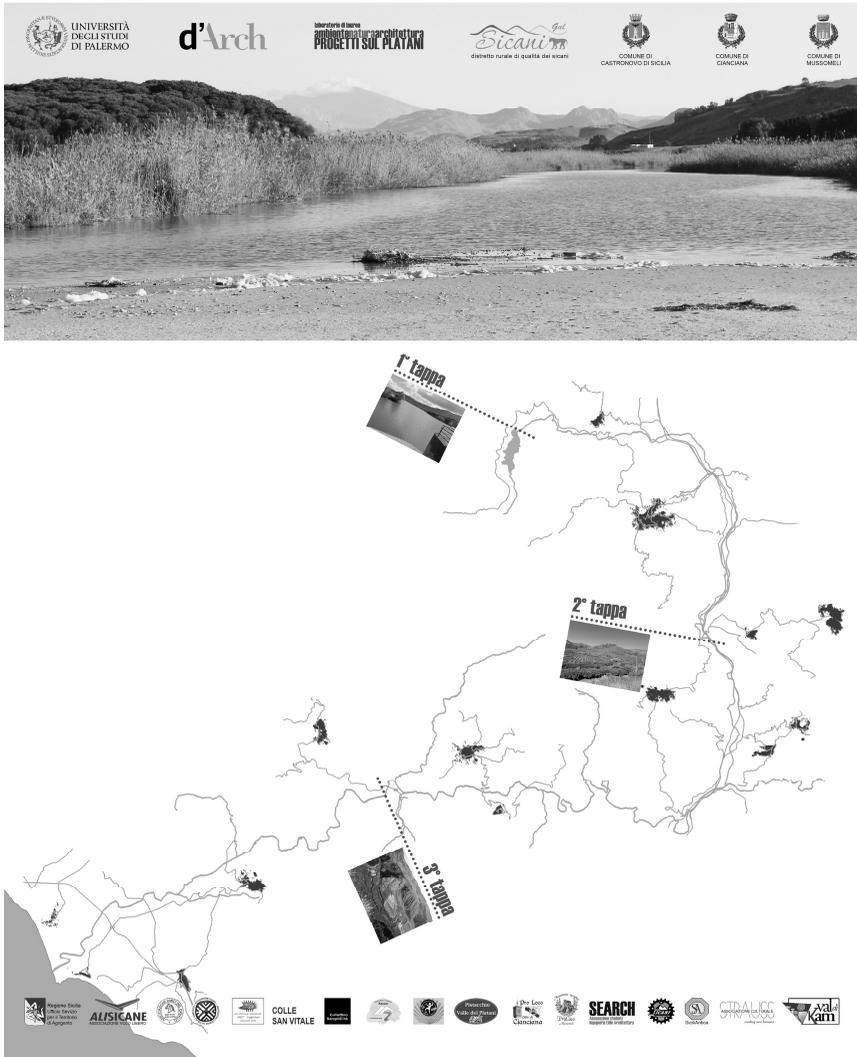


Fig. 1 - “Viaggio alla scoperta del Platani”, the journey was realised in September 2015.



Fig. 2 - Rails and river flowing together in the valley (photograph by Giovanni Gueli).



Fig. 3 - A wonderful place hidden in the canyons of Platani (photograph by Giovanni Gueli).