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**The system of the provincial green.
The ecological network of the Province of Novara**
Tiziana Masuzzo, Luigi Iorio

The Provincial territorial plan of the Province of Novara (Ptp) has in the environmental resources one of its main strong points; it has the value of Landscape Plan and it is effective on the base of the DI 490/99 (now DI 42/04); the topics of environmental and landscape content have been, in fact, faced in a deepened way, as strategic factors of the territorial planning. The protection and the valorisation of the landscape of the provincial territory find in the cognitive and descriptive phase the first operational passage to face the theme in its distinctive features of remarkable variety, that have brought to the individualization of fifteen different homogeneous areas of landscape that go from the 'ancient balcony of Novara-Vespolate' and the 'irrigated Novara lowland' in the south, to the 'prealpine zone of the Mottarone' and 'prealpine zone of the Fenera mountain-Sizzone Valley' in the extreme north of the Province. The main 'factors of characterization' of the territory, to be considered as invariant within the different areas of landscape, constitute a first level of protection. Among these, we find the system of the natural and artificial waters, that has a value both at landscape level and at strategic and economic level, especially in the portion of the provincial territory identified as 'agrarian landscape of the lowland', excessively made uniform by the rice monocultivation, in which by now the essential requalification of the landscape passes through the reconstruction and the new planning of the territorial points of reference

of the agrarian structure: rural roads with trees, directions of the great channels, little woods around of the fountains, etc. In this environmental contest, the Ptp individualizes in the construction of the provincial ecological network one of the leading structure for the protection and the requalification of the landscape and the environment and for the guarantee of a compatible development of the territory. The tool for the realization and the management of the project of the ecological network, including the whole territory, is established in a 'Strategic project' of provincial relief, as stated by the art. 8 of the LR 56/77 and following integrations, able to define, also through the contribution of different disciplines, the territorial actions and contemporarily to set the necessary analyses and actions on the economic plan and of feasibility. To the formation of the Project all the interested territorial components (Municipalities, other local authorities, consortiums of the natural protected areas, associations of entrepreneurs, east-Sesia irrigation association, environmental associations, etc.) participate. The Ptp indicates, also cartographically, the primary structure of the network (art. 2.8), attributing to the areas of elevated natural value, already defined (Natural parks and regional natural reserves, biotypes) and proposed by the art. 2.4 (System of the areas of remarkable naturalistic value at Regional and Provincial level), the role of natural milestones leading the whole system, and giving to the main natural courses of water, as Sesia, Agogna, Terdoppio, Strona, Sizzone, etc. and to the artificial ones as channel Cavour and other historical channels, the role of primary corridors, together

with some transversal important courses. The Province of Novara accepts and applies the concept of ecological network as main tool for the protection and the valorisation of the environmental and naturalistic emergencies of its own territory, according to the current community policies, leaving to the Municipalities the competence on the choices and their possible punctual changes. This way, it recognizes the importance that the maintenance and protection of the biodiversity, often relegated to a marginal role or however not integrated to the territorial policies, has like an objective of priority that must permeate any field of action and the managing of the territory. Preserving the biodiversity means, in fact, to maintain alive those elements (genies, species and ecosystems) whose network of relationships guarantees the maintenance of ecological structures which are fundamental for the maintenance and the evolution of the same life. After all, it would be limitative to attribute to the ecological network the only function to protect species risking the extinction, that once more would fix this tool in the space and in the time, removing from it the dynamism and the creativeness that are its own features. The ecological network, in an wider perspective of application, can be so defined as a 'polyvalent ecosystemic' tool (Apat 2003) for an integrated and ecosustainable development of the territory that increases the value of its environmental, historical-cultural, economic and social resources, generating virtuous conditions of territorial management. The most complex part of the realization of the ecological network is the carrying out of the interventions; to this scope

it must be activated an effective action. Currently the Province is facing the preparatory phase of the project. On last 30th March the *The leading lines of realization of the ecological network* have been approved. They constitute a methodological proposal for the realization of ecological networks that attributes a fundamental role to the activation of a participated path including the local realities, building social network that act in coherent and coordinate way, optimizing the possible collaborations. The area that has been selected for the first experimentation is the one included in the "Area of elevated landscape quality - environmental submitted to Landscape Plan of provincial competence" (art. 2.6 of the Nta of the Ptp) defined 'of the balcony Novara-Vespolate'. This zone has been selected in part because it belongs to the cited 'agrarian landscape of the lowland', where it is urgent, more than in other parts of territory, to requalify and to find again its distinctive features. We want to exploit the occasion to deepen the knowledge of this area, on the base of the compiling Landscape plan and to the relative preliminary studies, as well as of the same project of the Plan, in which specific interventions will be anticipated inside the ecological network, that includes in the area an important course of water: the stream Agogna, that has a fundamental role of corridor of interconnection for the transversal elements of the network and constitutes an important basin of biodiversity, strengthened by the presence of humid zones in the middle of the landscape plan. Furthermore a feasibility study has already been produced for the Province of Novara aimed at the re-

naturalisation of the portion of the stream Agogna included in this area, particularly between the bridge of the regional road n. 11 (before of the purifier of Novara) and the regional border between Piedmont and Lombardy. Here the stream flows at ground level, with prominent agricultural destination, and despite the present critical points, also strong, it is particularly proper to a renaturalisation that foresees also the 'correction' of its course even on the base of the historical documents that attest its changes, both natural and artificial, happened during the centuries.

The Landscape plan is a technical tool and an occasion to develop the ecological network, but its first applying and operational level, that we have put on the way, is the 'Contract of river' that is applied to the whole sector of the stream Agogna and results to be the fittest tool to develop a negotiated base in which, starting from the knowledge (qualitative and quantitative) and understanding of the river dynamics and the needs of the different objectives, different sceneries of development are evaluated, in the perspective to share, through program agreements and plans of action, the contest in line with a general strategy of river requalification.

So the challenge that is undertaken, and that we hope to win, is to improve the landscape starting by tools and presuppositions which are different from those traditional, with a bottom up approach and a sharing that eliminates the contrasts and the attritions that are fatally originated by lowering similar projects to a local scale.