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Dilemmas and divisions in the landscape culture. Disciplinary consequences

Pier Carlo Palermo

Do we live or do we contemplate landscape? Even if the dilemma comes from the Nineteenth Century, the question is today absolutely current. This is a radical alternative between two profoundly different ideas of landscape as shared living environment or as a distant picture, as in the conceptions of Goethe and Simmel. These ideas are not unchallenged, for example the living environment itself hints at a world with unitary and stable identity, granting a harmony among urban forms and *genius loci*, influencing coherent behaviours, or rather it hints at ongoing conditions, risking scattered transformations guided only by multiple and sometimes contrasting views. In this sense, we should recognize that there are two main families of interpreting landscape and that each family is divided into different perspectives. One can consider landscape as a set of unique places, or as the actual form of living conditions; one can select a shared view or an intertwined and confused sum of ordinary views. Can this variety of situations be governed by the same tools?

Tools uniformity

The opinion that these questions require an adequate mix of tools of intervention is not diffused. High quality places evidently need strict preservation, but ordinary landscapes ask for an effective reformist policy, generating specific actions of mitigation or renewal and guiding evolutionary and incremental processes. The search for a shared vision is not always possible without

contingent mediations, requiring social interaction. Despite the fact that different situations suggest different forms of intervention, the disciplinary culture and the public administration diffusely seem to believe that landscape planning is founded on regulative tools. It is evident that landscape planning was created in order to face preservation problems. The effectiveness is uncertain as it is for the urban planning tools which have been experimented in the last fifteen years in Italy. Prescription is typically clear, but the guideline functions are merely evocative, not properly influencing real-world processes. The question is: why can't we try to face the peculiarity of such issues and to search for the different tools needed for their governance?

This is not a problem of one specialized sector

The majority of the members of our discipline are still convinced that the master plans, once renovated, are the determinant tools in regulating and programming the evolutions of landscape, even if the prevalent part of transformations are decided by projects that are not always guided by plans, but rather legitimized in progress or *ex post*. The attention for the actual variety of governing tools, that influence the effective transformation of landscape, seems limited. The contamination between the architectural and the public policy cultures should bring this theme at the center of the experiments and reflections. The questions are: how the implementation of urban planning tools, of fiscal, economic, social and environmental tools work and interact in critical local contexts? How this variety can be balanced and mixed to solve complex problems of urban and rural transformation? The

aspiration to create a single and coherent framework for the variety of visions, guidelines, laws, actions and interactions having significant implications for landscape is improbable. Landscape cannot be considered as a specialized theme for public action, separated from other relevant policies. The challenge is to recognize the landscape's dimension in a number of public policies and social practices and to intervene in their interpretation and implementation.

Fields of interaction

A crucial step is to interpret and to translate into public action the cultural divisions expressed in the introduction. The interest for such position is legitimate but limited, e.g. the art of landscaping gardens according the client's will or the author's models, or the ephemeral landscape design for its own sake. I am convinced that only the cultural interpretation of landscape can open up innovative perspectives, but this hypothesis does not imply an univocal way to do so. A cultural approach to the landscape is referred not only to the necessary circular links between visible forms and processes, interventions and local meanings, but it allows different views to coexist in the same frame. In this sense, the project is not formalism, but it enables the exploration and selection of the possibilities inscribed in a local context.

Ongoing experiments

I have been studying with interest Alberto Clementi's researches and experiments, which are potentially innovative and definitely not conformist, exploring the European landscape convention and moving from traditional and authoritative models toward multilevel design and policymaking. Every land is landscape and

its continuous evolution is to be governed through the adequate instruments. Landscape policies will obviously be more effective if mobilizing and including institutions and social actors. The difficulties of integrating and coordinating landscape policies with land-use, economic and environmental policies are critical. Common sense and the institutionalized view are typically assumed as reference for interpreting different actors' interests on landscape, avoiding to solve the conflicts underlying contrasting views. Probably the current questions posed by the public administration are ordinary, but it is left to the disciplines' responsibility to orientate those questions toward more innovative challenges.