Title: Preservation in Italy: The Regional Landscape Plan and the Case of Piedmont

Author: Valentina Burgassi

Institute/Affiliation: EPHE, France

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Preservation in Italy: The Regional Landscape Plan and the case of Piedmont.

Valentina Burgassi

Abstract: In Italy, as in the other countries in the European Union, degenerative processes eroded cultural and landscape heritage, were too often inadequately and irrelevant. Landscape heritage is characterised by its multidisciplinary nature: understanding landscape heritage’s different dimensions is essential to understanding the complexity of the element itself. Regional Landscape Plans, introduced in 2004 by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, have become an instrument for effective governance and have led to a sustainable development of strategies for preserving cultural and landscape heritage. This study considers the ‘poles of religiosity’ identified in the Regional Landscape Plan in order to guarantee the protection of religious complexes. Some guidelines were applied to the case study of nineteenth-century Marian shrines of Cuneo for the enhancement of micro-cultural and landscape realities in the territory.

Keywords: Landscape; regional landscape plan; piedmont

1. Introduction

Landscape heritage is characterised by its multidisciplinary nature. The very meaning of the word ‘landscape’ (or ‘landschaft’ in German) and ‘paysage’, in French, is very different across fields and countries. These differences result in an important lack of a common paradigm between the natural sciences and the social sciences.

Understanding landscape heritage’s different dimensions is essential to understanding the complexity of the element itself. This multidisciplinary approach to studying landscape heritage includes an eco-systemic dimension (i.e. as facies of a complex environmental mechanism), a historical-cultural dimension (i.e. as a result of human activities and transformations, archaeologic studies), an aesthetic dimension (i.e. as a component of the identity process), and a social-economic dimension (i.e. agricultural landscape heritage as a resource).

2. The landscape dimension and its features

2.1. The transformation of landscape

These different elements of landscape heritage characterise its complexity. Although identifying a landscape’s tangible features, such as the agricultural components or the environmental system, is easier, recognizing a landscape’s intangible characteristics can be a complex process. In fact, these features are not immediately recognisable, and analysing them often involves a long process of historical and identity analyses. Therefore, estimating a landscape’s intangible characteristics is a fundamental to understanding it and optimising its governance.

The essential problem is still landscape heritage’s double essence, or the fact that it contains both a natural and cultural heart. The first step towards developing intelligent politics around territorial governance and landscape enhancement is recognizing that a landscape has both natural and human shapes. This process is complicated today because of many factors contributing to changes in current landscapes: the transformations of cities without any criteria (ex. urban sprawl), the increase of infrastructures, the industrialisation of agriculture, the tourism’s uncontrolled effect. These
transformations give birth to new urban contexts, as characterised by the ‘non lieux’ theorised by Marc Auge\textsuperscript{[1]}, with increasing commercial, technological and productive spaces\textsuperscript{[2]}. The attention for the environmental problems is somehow moved by the demand to elaborate new territorial politics, according to the Dispositions of Rio 1992.

### 2.2. Protection in Italy

Even in Italy, as in the other countries in the European Union, degenerative processes eroded cultural and landscape heritage, were too often inadequately and irrelevant. Nevertheless, over the last few years, people\textsuperscript{[3]} have acquired more awareness of landscape’s importance and its value. One of the first important legislations in Italy regarding heritage was the 1089 Law in 1939, which ‘the protection of things characterised by an artistic and an historic interest’. The other crucial law was the 1497 Law, also in 1939\textsuperscript{[4]}, which protected ‘Natural beauties’, that’s to say all the environmental elements characterised by their natural particularity and beauty. Furthermore, the Italian Constitution introduced Article 9, in which the ‘Republic promotes the development of culture and the technological-scientific researches and it has to protect both the landscape and the cultural heritage of the Nation’.

The Investigation Commission for the protection and enhancement of Italian historical, archaeological, artistic, and landscape heritage, which was presided over by Franceschini, was established in 1964 and it worked until 1966. It carried out a careful investigation regarding the status of Italy’s cultural heritage. This work resulted in the issue of eighty-four declarations. These declarations clearly denunciate the abandonment and exploitation of the Italian cultural heritage. The first twenty declarations contain the notion of ‘cultural good’, defined as ‘all witnesses having the value of civilization’. The middle declarations are divided into four categories: archaeological heritage (Articles 22-31), historic and artistic heritage (Articles 32-38), archival heritage (Articles 39-49), and librarian heritage (Articles 50-53). The last articles are dedicated to financial statements. One of the first laws after the Italian Constitution that addressed not only landscape heritage, but also cultural realities, was the Galasso Law in 1985. Signed by the Italian government, the law classifies naturalistic beauties with their own peculiar characteristics and divides them into morphological classes. The interesting point is that the law first introduced the concept of Regional Landscape Plans, which aim to protect cultural and geographic heritage and encourage territorial governance. These plans are environmentally sound and acceptable in planning terms. However, there are some problems in the practical execution of this law. The difficulties of the Galasso Law are related to the regional applications, existing contradictions, the integrated complexities of environmental problems and governance exigencies, the bounding policy, the necessary city transformations with regards to the respect of the landscape, and finally, the critical balance of sustainability and environmental impact.

The first objective of cultural heritage preservation is to identify it, so that it cannot be excluded from protection. The construction of the general catalogue of Italian cultural heritage is a process in continuous development, and to date, there is no single catalogue. In 2010, numerous applications and websites have appeared asking for clearer identification of cultural heritage. The cultural assets that form national historical and artistic heritage are protected according to the provisions of the Article 9 of the Constitution.

During the European Landscape Convention in 2000, better known as the Florence Convention, the committee decided to redefine the concept of a landscape to join its natural aspects with its cultural and artistic values with the goal to better preserve heritage and governance. The European Landscape Convention promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes and organizes European cooperation on landscape issues. The new definition of ‘landscape’ was
extended to all territory, not just a singular element\(^5\); a renewed significance of protection, with the purpose of landscape conservation and cultural enhancement, was included with a central role of the governance. The population was encouraged to take an active part in a landscape’s protection by preserving and maintaining the heritage value of a particular landscape, management and planning it, and helping to address changes brought by economic, social, or environmental necessity.

3. The regional landscape plan

3.1. The regional landscape plan in the norms

In 2004\(^6\), the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism issued the Code of Cultural and Landscape Heritage, which had the task of protecting, preserving, and enhancing Italy’s heritage. In this code, heritage consists of cultural goods and those related to landscapes. The code considers cultural goods as all the movable or immovable assets which have an artistic, historical, archaeological, ethno-anthropological, archival, or bibliographical significance, in addition to anything that could be argued as evidence of value to civilization. The goods’ valorisation depends on how often their functions are exercised and how knowledge of the cultural and geographic heritage is promoted and spread. The code distinguishes between protection activities, which are an exclusive responsibility of the state, and enhancement activities, which instead include state and regional interventions. The code encourages regions to draft of landscape plans (the Regional Landscape Plans), with specific attention to territorial values and heritage.

Regional Landscape Plans have become an instrument for effective governance and have led to a sustainable development of strategies for preserving cultural and landscape heritage. These plans, in particular, require cognitive, prescriptive, and propositional skills. Plans encompass an entire territory and are enhanced though the analysis of historical maps and defining the landscape’s values for enhancement. Thanks to the studies on territory dynamics in continuous transformation and landscapes detection, the latter has been made much easier over the years. Plans also include preservation measures and management criteria for a territory. And finally, the plans list guidelines for recovery interventions in compromised areas with particular attention to preserving safeguarded areas and to applying some specific protection measures.

For the territorial planning, the Regional Landscape Plan represents a key tool for sustainable development of regional territory. The aim is therefore the protection and enhancement of landscape heritage in its complexity, the strengthening of the cultural identity of local populations, and the attractiveness of the region in networks on a global scale. The Regional Landscape Plan collaborates with the Territorial Plan to promote territory knowledge in terms of analysing strengths and weaknesses as well as in structuring a strategic reference framework to guide the governance policies. It must redefine rules and tools at a various level. The Plan has essentially three components:
- a framework that includes local networks and historical characters, tangible or intangible networks, and the landscape dynamics,
- a strategy that, coordinates policies at different levels, activates valuation processes, and involves the plurality of subjects in both the public and private sectors,
- and a part that contains the regulatory components of the plan itself to determine the effects that are not considered in a process of transformations\(^7\).

3.2. Piedmont and the regional landscape plan
Piedmont is the second largest of Italy’s twenty regions and connects Italy and North-western Europe through major roads and rail communications. In addition, Piedmont has an important role in the country due to a consistent industrial presence.

After the Law 3 passed in 2001 to replace classical town planning and give legislative powers to the state and regions, the Piedmont Region launched a new planning era[8].

The Piedmont Regional Landscape Plan, with technical support from the Politecnico of Turin, introduces a wider-than-usual set of categories of scenic features, visual relations, areas with specific characters, and visual detriments. All of these categories apply to natural, rural, and urban landscapes[9].

The plan has four functions: a cognitive one that concerns naturalistic aspects (including the morphological characters and the ecological network), a historical and cultural goal (the addresses anthropic areas), a regulative function that addresses normative disposals, and lastly, a strategic function that concerns the urban settings and local strategies. The relevant aspects of the plan for this paper are[10] the naturalistic-environmental characteristics (Articles 13-20), the historical-cultural sections (Articles 21-29), the scenic-perceptual aspects (Articles 30-33), and finally, the urban-settlement sections (Articles 34-40).

3.3. The religious aspect in the Plan

Religious devotional aspects are part of Article 28 ‘Poles of religiosity’. The Regional Landscape Plan identifies ‘areas and buildings of significant historical, cultural and landscape value, which constitute a qualified expression of religiosity, a reference pole for cultures and traditions’. They are identified as follows:

- Devotional paths of historical-cultural with architectural and landscape importance, as well as for tangible and in-tangible reasons,
- The shrines and the sacred mountains, which are defined as recognisable elements in the landscape context of the regional territory,
- Isolated or emerging religious heritage sites, especially those resulting from historically relevant public commissioning.

In order to guarantee the protection of religious complexes, including buildings, paths and related works such as pillars and chapels, the directives explicitly reference tasks for provincial and local plans. These plans must ensure the protection and link sacred buildings to devotional paths. Similarly, plans must provide for the maintenance or restoration of the vegetation component with philological respect for the historical structure.

Religious devotional systems are covered in Article 31 for the ‘Belvedere’, that is to say the beautiful, scenic, and aesthetic values. The Regional Landscape Plan identifies the sites and contexts of scenic and aesthetic value that deserve specific protection and enhancement in tables P2, P4, and P5. The norms specifically reference privileged places for landscape inter-visibility (such as belvedere, scenic paths and perspective axes), as well panoramic and landscape beauty.

In view of these objectives, the Regional Landscape Plan distinguishes some indications regarding the provincial and the territorial plans. These indications must include the establishment of adequate buffer zones to respect and protect of the scenic beauty aspects reported. They must also establish criteria and methods for tourist areas in order to improve visitors’ usability and to limit their impact. Furthermore, they must define the most appropriate measures to facilitate the removal or mitigation of critical factors to ensure conservation, belvedere enhancement, and scenic beauty. The Plan also regulates any transformative intervention in protected areas.
4. A case study

4.1 The religious heritage

Because the Regional Landscape Plan must be supported with more detail, Provincial Plans are important to intermediate execution strategies. The role of the Regional Landscape Plan is to interpose between regions and municipalities at a strategic level. It is therefore necessary to maintain a constant dialogue between a mostly supra-municipal dimension, as it regards the environmental and its networks such as the overall settlement and infrastructural dynamics, and a local one.

Considering the Regional Landscape Plan’s absence of timely requirements, some guidelines were prepared[11] and applied to the case study of nineteenth-century Marian shrines of Cuneo for the enhancement of micro-cultural and landscape realities in the territory.

In the plan, the devotional religious heritage was identified as a net of shrines and religious works, which includes territorial value with assistance of the sovereign power. It was important that shrines were considered both an architectural-topographical and a religious point of view. The historical aspects and the landscape components are both analysed.

The sacred space of the landscape is one of the themes within the Regional Landscape Plan; it refers to a systemic context. Religious elements assume a certain importance in the Piedmont landscape. The study of historical religious sites is included in the investigation along with related interdisciplinary fields. The analysis of the sacred heritage sites, such as the shrines and the Sacred Mountains for example, must take into account the sites’ characteristics as a whole, as they are part of a sacred complex and not of a single element.

This holistic approach, one where a site is analysed not by individual artefacts but by the complex of goods, can reveal evidence that contributes decisively to the territory’s status.

Sacred architectures are an incredible part of landscapes. However, even if they have survived more or less intact throughout the centuries, sometimes they have lost their original dedicated value. Today, one of the main problem affecting sacred properties is abandonment due both to the loss of function and a consequent closure to the public. The fate of this type of heritage site is sometimes to receive a new function or suffer degradation and demolition.

Decommissioning is an important reality in Italy and Europe. Secularisation, the spread of new cults, the depopulation of the countryside and mountains due to the urban effect, the expansion of new suburban areas, and the risk of deterioration and the abandonment of (mostly religious) historical and artistic heritage sites, all contribute to decommissioning. Indeed, the drop in priestly and religious vocations, the increase in building maintenance costs, and the public finances’ limits are all factors that limit restoration of sacred spaces[12].

4.2 The Savoy policy in Piedmont

A first phase of this research is identifying sanctuaries by creating a map on GIS applied to the Piedmont’s case study.

Piedmont’s case is particularly interesting because the counter-reformation has influenced the area’s social context, landscape, and the architectural and devotional heritage. The data, integrated starting from the Region Landscape Plan, display a very high percentage of sanctuaries dedicated to the Virgin Mary, so it was possible to create the first typological differentiation. This type of sanctuary certainly appears within a very particular historical-religious relevance in terms of chronology and the geographical location.
The Savoy policy has profoundly marked the territory, but also the religious reality of Piedmont. It is distinguished by the search for the internal cohesion elements and the link between state, dynasty, and territory in sacred sites, especially sanctuaries. The need to enshrine ducal power and to strengthen the dynastic-territorial identity of the state was particularly important for Carlo Emanuele I. In his fifty-year reign, two of the most prestigious Piedmont shrines were built: Oropa and Vicoforte, which were both dedicated to the Virgin Mary (figure 1). The choice of these two sites was significant because they represent two different geographical areas of strategic importance for the Piedmont’s territory of Savoy: in the North, the Biella area, and to the South, the Monregalese. The Biella area was an important crossroads of the East-West routes that connect Lombardy and Val d’Aosta to Savoy. The Monregalese was a crucial core connecting route between Piedmont and Liguria. In the period between the sixteenth and late seventeenth centuries there was a real spread on the territory of Marian shrines in the peripheral centres of Piedmont.

![Image of Vicoforte (Regina Montis Regalis)](image)

**Figure 1.** The shrine of Vicoforte (Regina Montis Regalis). Copyright of the author.

The age of San Carlo Borromeo resumed the tradition of the Counter Reformation but with modified visual models. The centric chapel model was particularly altered with volumetric variations and with an emphasis on interior space in addition to the site’s relationship with the landscape.

### 4.3 Nineteenth-Century Marian shrines in Cuneo

The historical-morphological system structuring the territory was analysed from a geographical perspective. Specifically, its localisation components in relation to the settlement context and infrastructure were examined as were the typical materials characteristically present. The area considered is Eastern Cuneo, which includes Langhe and Monregalese, in which the presence of Marian shrines as part of a religious devotional system is evident. Case studies were chosen to
represent significant samples for drafting of guidelines. These examples were selected in three different phases of nineteenth century history, as well as in different contexts: urban, peri-urban, and suburban.

The religious heritage perspective has been analysed from various angles. Historical, artistic, and religious points of view, and analysis formed with the aid of modern cartography, are the most relevant studying and managing this particular heritage situation. The study of historical religious sites and also their degradation process is a fundamental point for understanding the complexity of the investigation at a multidisciplinary level and for starting an enhancement process (beginning with restoration). The analysis of church properties, including sanctuaries and the Sacred Mountains, must be based on their essence as a complex; they would have not the same value or significance if examined individually.

4.4 The Tourism Carrying Capacity (TCC)

Adopting policies and strategies for sustainably managing the tourism phenomenon[13] can therefore give rise to a controlled growth process and reduce negative impacts generated by uncontrolled tourist activity. Therefore, it is essential to elaborate use paths, thus identifying tourist routes and observation points on the landscape.

If in the past, the sanctuaries and the Sacred Mounts had a votive value, today this role is undermined by a lack of religiosity and a function that is more properly cultural[14]. Subsequently, an application of a methodology for the economic evaluation was proposed. The analysis combined different research methods, including reading that covered history, nature, landscape, and an experimental application of a methodology for the economic evaluation[15] (the TCC, Tourism Carrying Capacity)[16]. The approach was implemented by the World Tourism Organization in the 1990s and allows the threshold value of the visitors which can be admitted in a certain area to be calculated. Within the planning and management of tourism flows, a site’s carrying capacity indicates the maximum limit of individuals sustainable by the environment and resources[17]. The results of the application allow effective tourist management policies to be planned.

To simplify the study, reference was made to the religious devotional net of shrines near Alba and its devotional path (figure 2). After a brief historical-territorial classification, the analysis addressed the issue of supply and demand. According to tourism statistics from the Piedmont Region[18] (based on the data of the Tourism Observatory of the Piedmont Region from 2006 to 2011), tourists are attracted to these territories, for the following reasons: nature, relaxation and tranquillity, food and wine traditions, and routes related to wine. As for age, the average tourist is young, followed by the over 65 demographic and families. The average stay is one day, or two days, especially weekends. Attracting factors are divided by priority, where the primary resources and attractions are first, and others such as reception, transport and commerce, and restaurants and bars are less important. As demonstrated by the case of the Vicoforte sanctuary, or Alba for the truffle fair, buildings with a strong tourist attraction attract visitors.
The approach outlined for the calculation of the TCC can be summarised in the following points:
- Analysis of available data
- Definition of sustainability indicators
- Creation of the participation forum extended to the various stakeholders (ex. local administrators, representatives of economic operators linked to tourism, local community, etc.)
- Analysis of the current tourist scenario
- Definition of constraints
- Definition of tourism development scenarios
- Definition of the calculation model for determining load capacity

The analysis was followed by action proposals depending on the critical issues identified and a list of ‘best practices’ recommendations for enhancing religious devotional systems. Stages of analysis have been useful to discern a methodological sequence that could be applied to other regional cases, notwithstanding the obvious differences[19].

5. Conclusions

5.1 The best practices
For assessing the current state of the shrine, the votive path, belvedere, quantity of parking spaces, location of the landscape, building theme and the accesses were all considered.

The ancient pylons and chapels, which historically led to the shrines, take on greater importance if their quality is in any way significant. The present location of these elements, due to the historical
transformations of the territory and its connections, is usually along a primary or secondary road that is in disuse. This location makes reading routes very difficult\[20\]. A fundamental phase in an enhancement project is analysing the current forms of complex use and existing access routes\[21\]. It is therefore necessary to rationalise the use of car parks as much as possible and to adequately report the presence of these access routes. An overall reorganization of religious sites becomes necessary to recover the landscape, cultural, architectural and religious values that the sanctuary and its votive route still offers today\[22\]. Enhancing places with a strong landscape imprint considers shrines not only as architectural and landscape complexes\[23\], but also as real landscape devices. In this sense, the historical investigation must be related to the enhancement project, to understand if a proposal can also set itself a philological repetition of the relational spaces to the shrine and its visual and territorial relations\[24\].

5.2 Restoring the emotions

The shrines’ environmental context is particularly significant precisely because the sites are buildings of a religious nature, where there is a close correlation between landscape and devotion. For this reason, the skyline’s protection also depends on maintaining the naturalistic background’s homogeneity. The votive complex of the shrine is undoubtedly a problem in terms of landscape: the complex can be defined as a belvedere point, because, depending on where it is located, it enjoys the view of the surrounding landscape (figure 3).

![Figure 3. Shrines. Copyright of the author.](image-url)

Usually radical interventions are not required in this situation, only ordinary maintenance, with some specific exceptions. Triggering and activating European co-financing strategies, thanks to the interdisciplinary study of this type of sites, can be useful for protecting and enhancing territory’s artistic and architectural heritage, especially for religious sites that, due to the economic crisis, may not have funding in most cases. For these reasons, a program of strategies becomes fundamental: what makes the shrines unique, in their small way, is their atmosphere\[25\]. Translating these perceptions into reality is the architect’s task, but also depends on those who manage these areas. This model of governance is therefore a work to be done with caution and the support of multidisciplinary analyses\[26\]. In fact, in the case of the shrines, it is mostly the intangible heritage, much more than the material one\[27\], that should be preserved\[28\].
The analysis also examined some management proposals for the devotional religious sites (the case of Ronchamp Chapel, where an abbot protect Le Corbusier opera, and the complex system of authority for Sacred Mountains, UNESCO site).

It is important in the case of Abbot René Bolle-Reddat, overseen by the chaplain of Notre-Dame-du-Haut, work of Le Corbusier, who in attempts to safeguard the ecclesiastical factory’s dignity and decoration, had tried to free the chapel from the sordid presences. He had struggled to maintain the original visibility of the work and had even asked to eliminate trees that obstructed the vision.

The example of the Sacred Mountains, which is managed by a protection agency, is also significant, with the aim of promoting tourism and knowledge.

The Sacred Mountains were declared a UNESCO heritage site in 2003 and therefore, they are subject to more particular protections and attention. In the case of the sanctuaries surveyed where funds are local or regional, the question is much more difficult.

Usually, these sites require not radical interventions, but ordinary maintenance, with the exception of some specific cases. It is therefore necessary to implement strategies for European funding, especially for religious goods which, due to the economic crisis, do not have a reference manager in most cases.

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