Landscape Preservation in Italy: The Piedmont Regional Landscape Plan and the Religious Heritage of the Area

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Abstract: Italy, similar to other member states of the European Union, has been subject to processes which have eroded its cultural and landscape heritage. Landscape heritage is multidisciplinary in nature: understanding the different dimensions of landscape heritage is essential to understanding the complexity of landscape heritage itself. Regional Landscape Plans, introduced in 2004 by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, have become an instrument for administration and have led to the sustainable development of plans 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 improvement of micro-cultural and landscape identities in the territory.

Keywords: Landscape; Regional Landscape Plan; Piedmont; Shrines

1. Introduction

Landscape heritage is defined by its multidisciplinary nature. The very meaning of the word 'landscape' (or 'landschaft' in German) and 'paysage', in French, differs significantly across fields and countries. These differences have resulted in an important lack of shared paradigm between the natural sciences and the social sciences.

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. complex environmental mechanism), a historical-cultural dimension (i.e. resulting from human activities and transformations, archaeological 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 denote its complexity. Identifying a landscape's tangible features, such as the agricultural components or the environmental system, is a relatively straightforward process, recognizing a landscape's intangible characteristics, in contrast, can be quite complex. 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 fundamental to understanding it and optimising its management.

The essential problem remains the dual nature of landscape heritage, or the fact that it contains both a natural and cultural heart. The first step towards developing intelligent politics around territorial governance and landscape im-

provement is recognizing that a landscape takes both a natural and a human form. Today this process is complicated by the many factors which contribute to change in contemporary landscapes: the unchallenged expansion cities (ex. urban sprawl), the growth in infrastructures, the industrialisation of agriculture, the uncontrolled effects of tourism. These transformations give rise to new urban contexts, which Marc Augé [1] has defined and termed 'non lieux', comprising expanding spaces for commercial, technological, and industrial production[2] Concern for environmental problems is somehow subsumed by the demand to elaborate new territorial politics, according to the Dispositions of Rio 1992.

2.2 Protection in Italy

Nevertheless, in Italy over the last few years a greater awareness of the importance and value of landscapes has emerged. One of the earliest Italian pieces of legislation referencing heritage was the 1939 Law 1089, enacted to protect 'things characterised as of artistic and historical interest'. Another crucial law from 1939 was Law 1497, which protected 'Natural beauties', namely all environmental features defined by their natural uniqueness and beauty. Furthermore, the Italian Constitution introduced Article 9, in which the 'Republic promotes the development of culture and technological-scientific research and is bound to protect both the landscape and the cultural heritage of the Nation'.

In 1964 the Investigation Commission for the protection and improvement of Italian historical, archaeological, artistic, and landscape heritage was established. It was presided over by Franceschini and ran until 1966, undertaking a painstaking investigation into the status of Italy's cultural heritage and resulting in eighty-four statements. These statements clearly denounce the perceived abandonment and exploitation of Italy's cultural heritage. The first twenty statements express the notion of 'cultural benefit'. The middle statements 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.

Apart from the Italian Constitution, one of the first laws to address landscape heritage as well as cultural issues, was the Galasso Law in 1985. The law classifies sites of natural beauty according to their own peculiar characteristics and categorises them into morphological classes. Of special interest is the fact that this law was the first to introduce the concept of Regional Landscape Plans, intended to protect cultural and geographic heritage and encourage landscape management. The plans fulfilled environmental conditions as well as planning requirements. However, some problems arose in implementing the law in relation to regional applications, existing contradictions, integrated complexities of environmental problems and management plans, the boundary policy, fulfilling necessary urban alterations whilst still respecting the landscape, and finally, maintaining a critical balance between sustainability and environmental impact.

The first objective of cultural heritage preservation is to identify what it is in order to safeguard it. Constructing the general catalogue of Italian cultural heritage is a process in continuous development, and to date, no single catalogue has emerged. Numerous applications and websites appeared in 2010 seeking a clearer identification of cultural heritage. The cultural assets which comprise national historical and artistic heritage are protected according to the provisions of the Article 9 of the Constitution.

During the 2000 European Landscape Convention, better known as the Florence Convention, the committee decided to redefine landscape as a concept by merging its natural aspects with its cultural and artistic values in the hopes of better preserving heritage and its management. The European Landscape Convention promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes and allows for European cooperation on landscape issues. The new definition of 'landscape' was extended to all areas of land [3] and protection was awarded renewed significance as part of the central role of management, with the purpose of landscape conservation and cultural enhancement. The population was encouraged to take an active part in landscape protection by preserving and maintaining the heritage value of a given landscape, managing and planning it, and helping to address changes caused by economic, social, or environmental necessity.

3. The regional landscape plan

3.1 Contemporary processes of landscape transformations

The Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism issued a Code of Cultural and Landscape Heritage in 2004 [4], intended to protect, preserve, and enhance Italy's heritage. The term heritage, as used in the code, refers to cultural goods and those related to landscapes. The code considers all movable or immovable assets which have an artistic, historical, archaeological, ethno-anthropological, archival, or bibliographical significance to be cultural goods, as well as anything that could be defended as evidence of value to civilization. The inferred value of cultural goods 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, for which the state is exclusively responsible, and improvement activities, which include both state and regional involvement. The code encourages regions to draft landscape plans (the Regional Landscape Plans), with specific attention to land values and heritage.

Regional Landscape Plans have become an instrument for landscape management and have led to the development of sustainable strategies to preserve cultural and landscape heritage. These plans require some particular official capacity. Plans encompass an entire 'territory' that is administrative area and benefit from the analysis of historical maps and defining the landscape improvement. This process has been facilitated by studies of the continuous changes in territorial boundaries and definitions of landscapes. Plans also include preservation measures and management criteria for a given administrative area. And finally, the plans list guidelines for rehabilitation procedures in damaged landscapes with particular attention to preserving safeguarded areas and to applying some specific protection measures.

The Regional Landscape Plan represents a key tool for sustainable development of regional territories in which the protection and enhancement of landscape heritage in all its complexity, the strengthening of the cultural identity of local populations, and the attractiveness of the region in networks on a global scale are included in the aims. The Regional Landscape Plan works in conjunction with the Territorial Plan to promote knowledge of a given territory by analysing its strengths and weaknesses as well as by structuring a strategic reference framework to guide management policies. It must redefine rules and tools at various levels. The Plan essentially contains three components:

- a framework that includes local networks and historical aspects, tangible or intangible networks, and the dynamics of the landscape,

- a strategy that coordinates policies at different levels, activates land valuation processes, and involves the multiple elements within both the public and private sectors,

- and, finally, the regulatory components of the plan itself to determine impacts that are not included in a process of transformations.[5]

3.2 Landscape protection in Italy

Piedmont is the second largest of Italy's twenty regions and its major roads and rail links serve to connect Italy to North-western Europe. In addition, Piedmont's long-term industrial activities play an important role in the country.

After Law 3 was passed in 2001, replacing the classic approach to town planning and giving legislative powers to the state and regions, the Piedmont Region initiated a new era of planning.[6]

The Piedmont Regional Landscape Plan, with technical support from the Politecnico of Turin, introduces a wider-than-usual set of categories of scenic features, areas of special significance, and eyesores.[7] All of these categories apply to natural, rural, and urban landscapes.[8]

The plan serves four purposes: a cognitive one that concerns natural aspects (including the morphological characters and the ecological network), a historical and cultural goal (in reference to anthropic areas), a regulatory function which deals with regulated disposals, and lastly, a strategic function to deal with urban settings. The relevant aspects of the plan for this paper are the natural-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)[9].

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, as well as architectural and landscape, importance, for both tangible and intangible reasons,
- Shrines and the Sacred Mountains, which are defined as recognisable elements in the landscape context of the regional territory,
- Discrete 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, delineate procedures for provincial and local plans. These plans must ensure that sacred buildings are protected and linked to devotional paths. Similarly, plans must provide for the maintenance or restoration of the vegetation component with philological attention for the historical structure.

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

In view of these objectives, the Regional Landscape Plan sets out certain conditions regarding provincial and territorial plans. These conditions must include the establishment of adequate buffer zones to respect and protect reported scenic beauty aspects. They must also establish best practices for tourist areas in order to improve visitor accessibility 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. The Regional Landscape Plan as a landscape protection tool

4.1 The religious heritage

Provincial Plans serve as an important intermediary to enable the implementation of the Regional Landscape Plan. The Regional Landscape Plan is intended to intercede between regions and municipalities at a strategic level, requiring constant dialogue between the local dimension and the mainly supra-municipal dimension, in regard to the environment such as the overall settlement and infrastructural dynamics.

Considering the Regional Landscape Plan's lack of completion best practices, some guidelines were prepared [10] and applied to a case study of the nineteenth-century Marian shrines of Cuneo for the improvement of micro-cultural and landscape heritage in the territory.

The plan identifies devotional religious heritage as a network of shrines and religious sites, as well as their land worth. It was important that shrines were considered both an architectural-topographical and a religious element. The historical aspects and the landscape components are both analysed.

The sacred spaces within landscapes is one of the themes of the Regional Landscape Plan, which references a systemic context. Religious elements assume a certain importance in the Piedmont landscape. The study of historical religious sites is included in my analysis along with related interdisciplinary fields. Sacred heritage site analysis, such as shrines and the Sacred Mountains for example, must consider the sites' characteristics as a whole, as they are part of a sacred complex and not of a single element.

This holistic approach, where a site is analysed not according to individual artefacts but according to the complex of goods, can reveal defining evidence with regard to the territory's status.

Sacred architecture is an incredible part of landscapes. However, sometimes, despite surviving more or less intact throughout the centuries, they lose their original dedicated value. Today, one of the main problems affecting sacred

properties is abandonment due both to the loss of function and a consequent closure to the public. Sometimes these types of heritage sites then take on 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 restrictions of public finances are all factors that limit restoration of sacred spaces.[11]

4.2 The Regional Landscape Plan launched in Piedmont

The research for the Piedmont case study began with the identification of sanctuaries by creating a GIS map.

The Piedmont case is particularly interesting because the area's social context, landscape, and its architectural and devotional heritage was impacted by the counter-reformation. The data, already integrated in the Region Landscape Plan, display a very high percentage of sanctuaries dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and this enabled the first creation of categories. This type of sanctuary certainly appears within a very particular historical-religious sphere in terms of chronology and the geographical location.

The policy carried out by the Dukes of Savoy during XVI and XVII centuries has profoundly marked the territory, as has the impact of religion as experienced in Piedmont.

The need to enshrine ducal power and to strengthen the dynastic-territorial identity of the state was particularly important for duke of Savoy Carlo Emanuele I. Two of the most prestigious Piedmont shrines, Oropa and Vicoforte both dedicated to the Virgin Mary (**Figure 1**), were built during his period as duke. The choice of these two sites was significant because they represent two different geographical areas of strategic importance in the Piedmont 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. A veritable growth in the number of Marian shrines in the peripheral centres of Piedmont occurred during the period between the sixteenth and late seventeenth centuries.

Figure 1. The shrine of Vicoforte (Regina Montis Regalis). Picture by the author.

The practises of the Counter Reformation were resumed during the time of cardinal and archbishop Carlo Borromeo, albeit with modified albeit using visually different models. The centric chapel model comprised volumetric differences in comparison to earlier models and included an emphasis on interior space as well as the site's relationship to the landscape.

Throughout the seventeenth century the concept of space and post-tridentine religious symbolism in the Catholic area, a very close relationship with liturgical-type reforms, introduced following the Council of Trent and the reaffirmation of the Dogmatic positions. Both the Council and the pastoral action of some Counter-Reformation bishops, such as cardinal and archbishop Carlo Borromeo, had developed themes around the liturgy, making the celebration of mass a key function of the mass and promoting the worship of the Eucharist in all its forms. The Catholic Reformation also placed value on the form of canonical spaces, especially in the areas bordering the Protestant world, that is, in the pre-Alpine region.

The seventeenth-century phenomenon of imparting symbolism on territory occurred frequently, especially in the Alps. In particular, the presence of religious architecture formed a basic element in highlighting this process of sacralization, both through typical elements of the tradition, such as the chapels, and through the establishment and strengthening of new typologies, that is to say of sanctuaries and sacred mountains.

4.3 The "poles of religiosity" in the Piedmont Regional Landscape Plan

The historical-morphological system was analysed from a geographical perspective. Specifically, its specific elements in relation to the settlement context and infrastructure were examined, as were the typical construction materials characteristically present. The area under consideration is Eastern Cuneo, including Langhe and Monregalese where the presence of Marian shrines as part of a religious devotional system is evident. Case studies were chosen to represent significant samples in order to draft 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 using the aid of modern cartography, are the most relevant methods of studying and managing this particular heritage situation. Studying historical religious sites and their degradation process is fundamental to understanding the complexity of the multidisciplinary investigation and for starting a process of improvements (beginning with restoration, in **Figure 2**). 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.

The imperceptible and symbolic network of chapels and churches constitute the religious and devotional path known as the Piedmont Sacred Mountains, which overlaps the physical territory and marks, in accordance with each place's own modalities, the mobility linked to the daily life and the extraordinary one of religious pilgrimages.
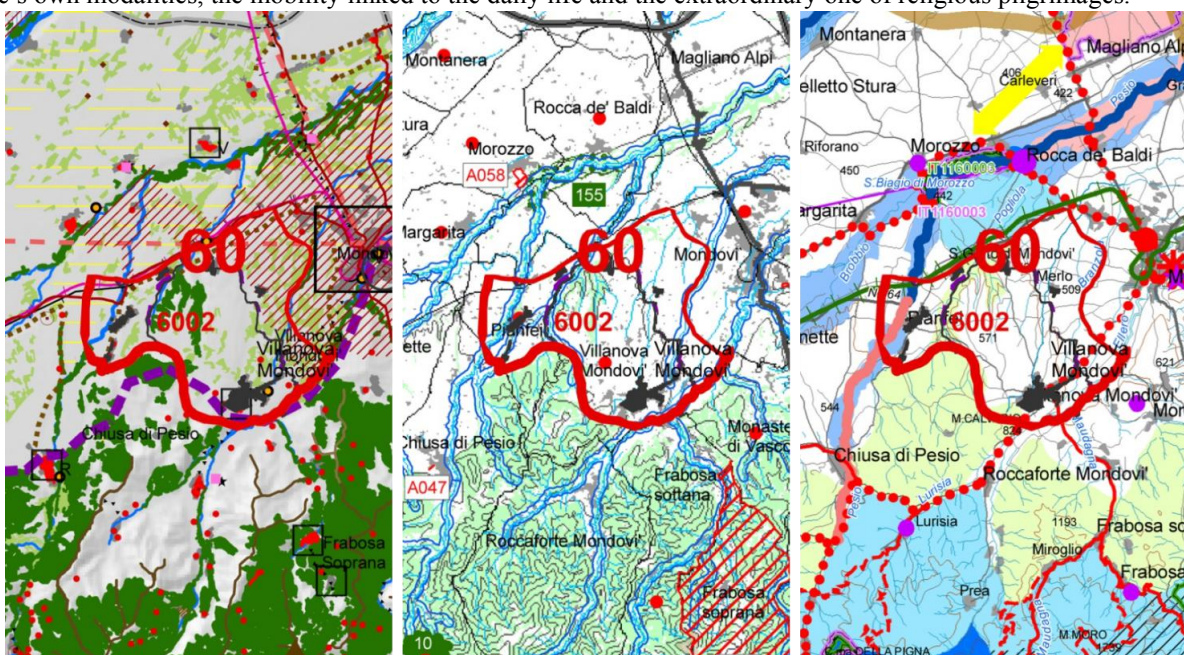

Figure 2. The shrine of Villanova di Mondovì in the Regional Landscape Plan. (courtesy of Piedmont Region).

5. Conclusions

5.1 The best practices

When assessing the current state of a shrine, its votive path, "belvedere", quantity of parking spaces, location of its landscape and its accessibility were all reviewed.

The ancient votive pillars and chapels, which historically led to the shrines, take on greater importance if they represent an important aspect. Due to historical transformations in the area and any associated role a connecting artery, these sites usually exist along a primary or secondary road that is no longer in use.[12]

A fundamental phase in an improvement project is the analysis of current forms of complex use and existing access routes. [13] 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.[14]

The improvement of sites with a strong landscape imprint involves viewing shrines not only as architectural and landscape complexes[15], but also as landscape resources.[16]

5.2 The Tourism Carrying Capacity (TCC)

By adopting policies and strategies in order to sustainably manage the tourism phenomenon[17] can lead 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.

Figure 3. The shrine of Dogliani (Santa Maria delle Grazie) and the landscape. Picture by the author.

Where the sanctuaries and the Sacred Mounts had a votive value in the past, today this role is undermined by a lack of religiosity and a function that is more properly cultural.[18]

Subsequently, it was proposed that a methodology for economic evaluation be applied in this work. The analysis combined different research methods, including reading that covered history, nature, landscape, and an experimental application of a methodology for economic evaluation[19] (the TCC, Tourism Carrying Capacity).[20] 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 that the environment and resources can sustain.[21] The results of the application allow effective tourist management policies to be planned.

To simplify the study, reference was made to the religious devotional network of shrines near Alba and its devotional path (**Figure 3**). Following a short historical-territorial classification, the analysis addressed the issue of supply and demand. According to tourism statistics from the Piedmont Region[22] (based on 2006-2011 data from the Tourism Observatory of the Piedmont Region), tourists are drawn to these territories for the following reasons: nature, relaxation and tranquillity, food and wine traditions, and vineyard-related routes. The average tourist is young in age,

followed by the over-65 demographic and families. The average stay is one or two days, especially weekends. (**Figure 4**).

The 'pull' factors are divided by priority, where primary resources and attractions appear 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 during the truffle season, visitors tend to visit buildings associated with a significant tourist attraction.
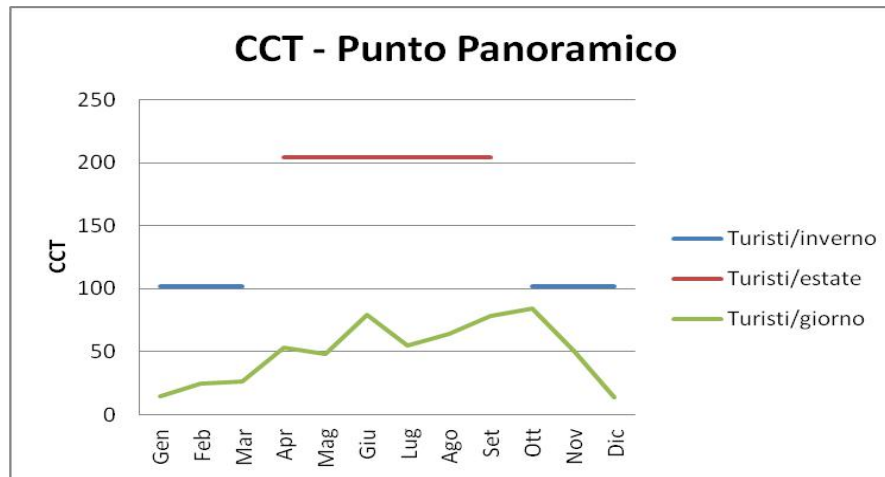

Figure 4. Tourism Carrying Capacity. Datas from Tourism Observatory of the Piedmont Region from 2006 to 2011 for the city of Dogliani of Dogliani. Elaborations for a panoramic point of view for the shrine of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Copyright by the author.

The approach outlined for the calculation of the TCC can be summarised in the following points:

- Analyse available data
- Define indicators of sustainability
- Extend invitation to various stakeholders (i.e. local administrators, representatives of economic operators linked to tourism, local community, etc.)
- Analyse the current tourist scenario
- Define current constraints
- Define tourism development scenarios
- Define the calculation model for determining load capacity

This was followed by proposals for action according to the critical issues identified and a list of 'best practices' recommendations to improve religious devotional systems. These analytical stages proved helpful in developing a sequential method which could apply in other regions, apart from obvious differences.[23]

5.3 Restoration of the emotions

The environmental context of religious shrines is particularly significant precisely due to the close correlation between landscape and devotion. For this reason, maintaining the natural environment and safeguarding the appearance of the surrounding area from detrimental changes also play a part.

The votive complex of shrines undoubtedly poses a problem in terms of landscape: such complexes can be defined as belvedere points, because, depending on where they are located, they benefit from the view of the surrounding landscape.

Radical interventions are not usually required in these situations, only ordinary maintenance, with some specific exceptions. Triggering and activating jointly-funded European strategies, through the interdisciplinary study of this type of sites, can be useful for protecting and improving the artistic and architectural heritage of a given site, especially for religious sites that tend not to receive funding due to the economic crisis. This necessitates devising a programme of works: the shrines' uniqueness lies in the atmosphere they generate.[24]

It is the job of the architect to translate these perceptions into reality, but much also depends on those who manage these areas. This model of administration therefore requires caution and the support of multidisciplinary analyses.[25] In fact, with regard to shrines, it is mostly the intangible heritage rather than the material one[26] that needs to be preserved.[27]

The analysis also examined some management proposals for devotional religious sites: for example, Ronchamp Chapel, where the masterpiece by Le Corbusier - that is Notre-Dame-du-Haut - is in the charge of the incumbent abbot, and the complex administrative system of the Sacred Mountains, UNESCO site.

The case of Abbot René Bolle-Reddat is important. He was seeking to protect the integrity and artwork by Le Corbusier and he has tried to safeguard the chapel from damages.[28] He had struggled to keep the work visible, as was originally intended, and had even asked to remove trees which were obstructing the view.

Similarly, significant is the example of the Sacred Mountains, which is managed by a protection agency, in order to promote tourism and awareness. The Sacred Mountains were declared a UNESCO heritage site in 2003. This means that they are subject to more specific protection and attention. Where the surveyed sanctuaries rely on local or regional funds this poses much more difficult questions. Most of these sites do not require radical interventions, but ordinary maintenance, with the exception of some specific cases. Therefore, European funding strategies are required, especially for religious sites which in most cases lack a responsible official due to financial shortcomings.

Acknowledgments

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