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Titel: Landscape und Museums: Some Critcal Reflections on Initial Developments in Italy

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Ort: Berlin

Jahr: 2007

PURL: https://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?385984391_0138|LOG_0010

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DIE ERDE **138** 2007 (1)	Special Issue: Mediterranean Landscapes	pp. 47-69

• *Landscape – Open-air museum – Ecomuseum – Italy*

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Landscape and Museums: Some Critical Reflections on Initial Developments in Italy

Landschaft und Museen:
Einige kritische Überlegungen zu ersten Entwicklungen in Italien

With 2 Figures, 1 Table and 3 Photos

Landscape is increasingly recognised as a part of the heritage of a nation or region. This paper focuses on a particular aspect of this heritaging of the landscape: its assimilation amongst the objects dealt with in museums. Two kinds of museums (open-air museums and ecomuseums) are examined in their historical development, theoretical principles and operational structures and critically evaluated as possible tools for the conservation and management of landscapes. These questions are then examined with particular reference to the Italian context, characterised by the absence of open-air museums but by a recent spread of ecomuseums. Some critical remarks are advanced on the basis of a classification of Italian ecomuseums and of a closer examination of the case study of Cortemilia, in the Langhe.

1. Introduction: Landscape as Heritage and its Treatment in Human Geography

Over recent decades the meaning and usage of the term "heritage" has expanded exponentially: from the legal definition of "inheritance that an individual received in the will of a deceased ancestor" to include "almost any sort of intergenerational exchange or relationship, welcome or not, between societies as well as individuals" (*Graham* et al. 2000: 1). Within the second, all-encompassing, definition it is possible to identify a subdivision, directly linked to the term used in Italy – *beni culturali* (literally "cultural properties") – which comprises all cultural manifestations of the past identified by today's society as worthy of recognition, conservation and public utilisation, being at the same time a resource for the thriving tourism and recreation industry. Even considering the term "heritage" in this relatively narrow sense, it is possible to note a progressive extension of the type of object and experience to which society has gradually accorded such status. The early preservation laws issued in some European countries towards the end of the eighteenth century concerned only restricted catego-

ries, such as historical documents, works of art, monumental buildings and archaeological sites. Only subsequently was the concept extended to tangible and intangible manifestations of folk culture. Finally, landscapes have also been included – not merely as a background and support for individual objects and buildings – in the category of heritage – and rightfully so. While it is difficult to give a uniform chronology on an international scale, it must be said that the full recognition of landscape as a form of heritage is a relatively recent acquisition in terms of policies and among the general public. Significant examples of this tendency can be seen during the last two decades on different scales: from the introduction of "cultural landscape" among the categories considered for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1992 (*Fowler* 2003) to the evaluation of landscape as a "basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage, contributing to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity" in the European Landscape Convention (2000), echoed in several national and regional policies during the following years.

In recent decades Geography has essentially faced the questions posed by the consideration of *landscape as heritage* from two standpoints which reflect the evolution of Historical Geography and the increasing acceptance of the approach of Cultural Geography. On the one hand, Applied Historical Geography has emerged, coherently with the notion of landscape as a set of material structures which visibly express the interaction of past and ongoing ecological and social processes. This applied approach provides heritage planning with knowledge, accumulated during empirical research, on the morphogenesis of specific landscapes, for the interpretation of their historical characteristics. It constructs specific methodologies for inventorying, mapping and assessing these components (*Newcomb* 1967, 1979; *Denecke* 1982a, 1982b, 1985, 2000; *Hooke* 1994, 1998, 1999; *Renes* 1994; *Vervloet* 1994, 1998). On the other hand, with the development of New Cultural Geography, during the 1980s, a vision of landscape as a cultural product matured and prevailed in landscape studies. From then on it has mainly been conceived as a cultural image, both the result of and the means of affirming symbolic values (*Cosgrove* 1984; *Cosgrove* and *Daniels* 1988; *Baker* 1992). Within this second tradition, which deals with landscape as a form of representation rather than as a material phenomenon, landscape is linked to heritage from a different perspective. The attention is focused on the role it plays in museums or heritage sites as a means to the constitution of local and national identities and the transmission of ideological values (*Crang* 1999; *Graham* 1998; *Graham* and *Proudfoot* 1994; *Johnson* 1996, 1999; *Sörlin* 1999; *Yeoh* and *Teo* 1996, 1997; *Young* and *Riley* 2002)

We use this twofold perspective as a starting point for exploring one specific aspect of *heritaging* of the landscape: its assimilation amongst the objects and the themes dealt with in what might be called "landscape museums".

2. Landscape, Open-Air Museums and Ecomuseums

Given the atypical nature of landscape as a material object – or rather, as a set of physical structures spread out in space – it has rarely been dealt with in traditional museums, which are based on the collection and presentation of objects in an enclosed space. Beside the attention sporadically paid to landscape by local and regional historical museums, specific treatment has been reserved for landscape by early geographical museums (*Semenov-Tian-Shansky* 1929; *Reinhard* 1934) or has been developed by more recent indoor initiatives, such as those further mentioned for the Italian context.

Nevertheless, the various kinds of outdoor museum seem to offer greater potential for dealing with landscape: open-air museums, ecomuseums and museum networks or systems. We have ex-

cluded the latter from this analysis, since they are generally management solutions designed to link indoor museums and pre-existing sites rather than museum models explicitly designed for the conservation and interpretation of landscapes within the area of the network or system. In the first two cases, however, the museum is founded with the aim of preserving, studying and displaying to the public the natural and man-made environments in which past generations conducted their daily life; the cultural landscapes they fashioned therefore become a key element of the museum.

The open-air museums, now widespread in Europe and overseas, are inspired by the Skansen prototype, founded in Stockholm in 1891. These museums are based on a collection of original buildings – usually rural, but sometimes urban or industrial – conserved *in situ*, but more often dismantled and rebuilt in the open-air, precisely recreating the internal settings and, as far as possible, the immediate surroundings. The setting may also be animated by the presence of live animals and costumed workers who carry out traditional activities, directly involving the public at times. Along with the innovative opportunities offered to research and conservation of vernacular architectures, this kind of museum has been celebrated for its educational advantages: the direct experience of past life that is realised in these settings, combining learning and entertainment, makes it possible to reach a much wider public than that of the traditional museums. These characteristics are more similar to historic theme parks, re-creations of bygone environments, which, usually not based on original exhibits, are not museums, but operate – on a more or less solid scientific basis – a prevalent function of entertainment (*Sorensen* 1989). While there has been a tendency to contrast the scientific meticulousness and the search for authenticity of the open-air museum reconstructions with the purely commercial set-up of the theme parks, the most recent debates have attenuated this opposition (*Macdonald* and *Alsford* 1995; *Young* and *Riley* 2002) and highlighted considerable limits in the way the past is presented that are common to both experiences. In particular, it has been noted that these museums, including Skansen, tend to offer a vision without diachronic depth, in which time appears frozen in a generic past, represented as a "holistic, static and bounded cultural entity" (*Crang* 1999: 452). The social conflicts, the processes of change, the various spatial relationships and scales that historically moulded and transformed the local cultures are hidden by an appeasing and holistic representation, often inspired by the desire to offer historical grounding to national identity discourses (*Crang* 1999; *Conan* 2002; *Johnson* 1996, 1999; *Graham* 1998) or to support present environmental concern with a vision of the past as an age of harmony between man and nature (*Overdick* 1999: 21ff.). A sort of conservative romanticism seems strongly associated with the representation of the past offered by these museums, not only in their rural versions but also in industrial ones, as has been critically noted for the United Kingdom, where open-air museums of both kinds are widespread and popular (*Bennett* 1988). These limits seem to be confirmed if we analyse the specific possibilities offered by open-air museums in the interpretation and communication of the landscape. In the first place, it must be noted that the authenticity of the reconstructions is particularly ineffectual from this point of view: in fact, although the individual elements presented in the museum – utensils and tools, clothing, furnishings, buildings – are original or replaced by rigorously researched replicas, the overall setting which they create is totally artificial. With the exception of heritage centres based on the hypothetical reconstruction of entire settlements dating back to a certain, often prehistoric, age, the need to document types of buildings representing different areas and historical periods creates an artificial juxtaposition of places and times within the museum area, disguised by the apparently organised and unitary scheme of a village or a town street. The spatial organisation of the buildings, the other material structures, and the

vegetation are not a representation of the relation patterns that once linked these elements in the landscape to which they belonged.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that during the last two decades several open-air museums, especially in Germany but also in other countries like the United Kingdom, have tried to apply their reconstructions to more extensive landscapes, recreating entire settlement patterns with fields, woods and pastures, railroads, roads and paths. This evolution – even with the unavoidable compromises imposed by the narrow limits of the museum's area – in some cases successfully led to the transition from a rural buildings' park to a true "landscape museum" (*Aurig* 1999; *Denecke* 1999: 40ff.; *Overdick* 1999: 19ff.). In these recent developments the reproduction of historical landscape features, together with the conservation of *in situ* landscape relics within the museum area, are supported by researches in Archaeology, History and Historical Geography. The museum landscape that results from these practices, while being artificial, can function as a model through which the origins and transformations of the regional landscape are explained and a sensibility for its historical meanings and values can be fostered among the public (*Denecke* 1999: 50ff.).

But in many open-air museums that have not evolved or have only partially progressed towards the "landscape museum" the interpretation of landscape – or rather of the fragments of landscape presented there – remains of limited diachronic insight. In these museums communication stresses the visitors' visual and material experience, which, in the absence of specific interpretative aids, risks making the processes underlying the outward appearance not intelligible (*Alfrey* and *Putnam* 1992: 189, 237f.; *Bennett* 1988: 68; *Johnson* 1999: 196, 204).

The potential of the ecomuseum, though originally inspired by the open-air museum, is radically different. The idea of the ecomuseum was conceived in France by the ethnologist *G.H. Rivière* as a re-interpretation of the Skansen model and was repeatedly re-elaborated by its author between the nineteen-thirties and nineteen-eighties. The well-known "evolutionary definition" (*Rivière* 1985) conceives the ecomuseum in the relationship between a given population and its environment, interpreted in the contemporary situation, but also in the historical evolution and with a critical awareness of future developments. More specifically, according to *Rivière*, the ecomuseum "shows man and his natural and cultural environment according to two systems. A temporal system: the evolution of a given region, from the geological era, through the prehistoric and historical periods, blossoming into modernity and concluding with a conjecture of what is to come. A spatial system: representing this portion of the world, the original landscapes in their wild natural form and forged by man, the settlements and agricultural systems in their own environment and transferred to equivalent environments" (*Rivière* 1971: 94f.).

The repeated, theoretical re-formulation of the ecomuseum concept reflects the changes that it has undergone in its practical applications, which can be traced back in France alone to at least three different generations (*Hubert* 1985, 1997). The first ecomuseums were created at the end of the 1960s in regional natural parks. In these cases, the museum structure becomes a "museum of time", a building in which the permanent exhibition illustrates the historical evolution of the region, and a "museum of space", through the paths that link representative sites within the area of the park. The prevailing method is – in contrast to the translocation of buildings to open-air museums – the *in situ* conservation of rural buildings and generally of extensive portions of the landscape, at times reviving the traditional agricultural and pastoral activities. The next step is represented by the experience – now paradigmatic on an international scale – of the

ecomuseum of Le Creusot-Montceau-les Mines, established in Burgundy in the early 1970s (*De Varine Bohan* 1973; *Bellaigue-Scalbert* 1985). In an area marked by a long industrial history and by the first signs of waning of these activities, the question of unemployment and the need to identify new development strategies were strongly felt, while at the same time safeguarding and managing the tangible and intangible heritage of the industrial tradition. In such a context, the ecomuseum assumes new connotations, above all with regard to content, being focused more on the social aspects than on the question of the relationship between man and his environment. However, the break with previous experiences lies less in the themes dealt with than in the relationship between the museum, the public and the territory. In effect, the separation between the users and the professional museum staff is abolished: On the model of the American community museums the local population is actively involved in the management of their heritage and in the evaluation of existing problems and prospects for development. The ecomuseum is therefore a way of making the local community more aware of its history and of its future. On the organisational level the formula of the *musée éclaté* soon emerged, structured as a group of sites (*antennes*) spread around the entire territory of the community served. All the moveable assets and real estate present in the area form the collections of the ecomuseum, while remaining mainly entrusted to their owners, and potentially all the inhabitants are involved in the activities of the museum – administration, cataloguing, conservation, communication – with the assistance of a small team of external restorers and scientific consultants. In the 1980s and 1990s this model of French origin proliferated on an international scale, with early and important applications in Quebec (*Rivard* 1985) and a more recent quite global spreading of the concept in the museological debate. But the persistence of different museum traditions, particularly in English and German speaking countries (*Davis* 1999), still means that the ecomuseum model is more sporadically adopted in practice. In parallel, France shows signs of crisis, with the restructuring of some previous experiences and a considerable increase in new small ecomuseums, dedicated to limited themes and sites and often emphasising the anti-institutional component to the detriment of the scientific dimension (*Hubert* 1985; *Chaumier* 2003).

While it is difficult to trace this plurality of experiences to a single and stable model, it is possible to identify certain distinctive elements of the ecomuseum philosophy which are particularly interesting in relation to landscape. Although the discipline from which the ecomuseum is born is Ethnology, it is impossible to ignore the strong similarity between the central theme of an ecomuseum and the very core of geographical research. For instance the notion of landscape also finds a place, although not central and predominant, in the planning of many French ecomuseums. However, it is a casual similarity that contrasts noticeably with the persistent lack of attention paid by Geography to the ecomuseum movement. As a matter of fact, the analysis of the main periodicals representing French Geography has shown, even in the motherland of ecomuseums, a diffused unawareness of this experience until the 1990s (*Sturani* 2000: 426) and similar results are given by the examination of international English-speaking literature in this field, with few exceptions (*Tunbridge* and *Ashworth* 1996: 37f.). Generally, in the English-speaking world, the appreciation of ecomuseums has come very late also in the museological debate (*Walsh* 1992; *Davis* 1999), as in Scandinavian countries and in Germany (*Overdick* 1999: 28ff.), where the open-air museum's tradition prevailed. The principles that guide the ecomuseum movement, above all those of the first and second generations, can therefore easily be re-read from a geographical perspective and appear rich with implications for action with regard to heritage/landscape. Here, we feel that three aspects, which are at the same

time strengths of the ecomuseum concept and potential practical difficulties, are worthy of note.

In the first place, the ecomuseum differs from a traditional museum and from an open-air museum inasmuch as it has definitively overcome the procedures for the collection, concentration and exhibition of objects or buildings. This would be extremely limiting if applied to the landscape as the latter is dealt with as a coherent set – the expression of historically matured relationships between a population and its environment – and not as isolated fragments. This new approach to landscape already arose in the first ecomuseums, realised in French regional natural parks: The network of paths was proposed here as a spatially spread means of interpretation of the landscape, rather than a simple way to link isolated sites. But it is with the second generation of French ecomuseums that an approach to the landscape as a coherent whole becomes inevitable. In particular, in the experience of Le Creusot the identity between the collection and the territory of the community it serves emphasises the problems already faced within the narrower boundaries of protected areas. So the museum's activities in relation to the landscape are necessarily placed at the junction between conservation and planning. Thanks to this interweaving, the ecomuseum, though not playing a decision-making role, can be important in terms of information and criticism (*Rivière* 1985: 182). It is undoubtedly a role that requires considerable creative effort if it is to be translated into practice, so that the visitors to the ecomuseum are effectively offered adequate means for interpreting and understanding the landscape as a coherent and integrated system, rather than a casual grouping of elements. Otherwise there is a risk of simply replicating "the traditional eclectic display of many local museums" (*Tunbridge* and *Ashworth* 1996: 38).

Moreover, the ecomuseum project seems to be explicitly based on a dynamic vision of the landscape, founded as much on the reconstruction of the processes that have historically shaped it as on the awareness of present-day problems and the dilemmas regarding future development. Nevertheless, experience has shown that the difficulties posed by the representation of the past, with the risk of nourishing mystifying reconstructions and the emergence of conflicts between memory and historical reconstruction, also exist in the case of the ecomuseum (*Chaumier* 2003; *Hubert* 1997; *Wassermann* 1997).

Finally, the close involvement of the local population in the ecomuseum that characterises the turnaround of New Museology is crucial when an object as complex, extended and inhabited as a landscape is to become a museum exhibit. Once again, we must stress the need to reconcile conservation, management and local development. Yet this is where an element of fragility emerges at an operational level, and at the same time an element of fundamental ambiguity of the idea of a homogeneous and stable relationship between a community and its territory inherent in the concept of an ecomuseum. *Rivière*'s evolutionary definition uses the metaphor of a mirror, in which the local community recognises itself and which it proffers to visitors at the same time to make itself known. In effect, the images reflected in the mirror are plural and often express dissonances in the interpretation of the past and of the present role of the ecomuseum: between the various agents and groups within the community, between the latter and professional operators of the museum, between the insider's perception of the inhabitants and the outsider's gaze of external visitors (*Chaumier* 2003).

We are convinced that on all these three points a merging of the experience of the ecomuseum and the theories matured by Historical and Cultural Geography regarding landscape could produce interesting results and it is by beginning with this three-fold challenge that we have attempted to re-construct and interpret the recent spread of the ecomuseum movement in Italy.

3. Landscape and Museums in Italy: Potential and Weaknesses of the Recent Development of Ecomuseums

Despite relatively slow development, marked by some contradictions, in Italy the extension of landscape heritage conservation and management policies is now largely established and has been recently reaffirmed with the issue of a new national "Code for Cultural Properties and Landscape" (May 2004). Besides the advancements in legislation, the growing sensibility for cultural and historical features of the landscape – along with the traditional appreciation of its aesthetic and naturalistic values – has stimulated the spread of many institutions and events specifically dedicated to the conservation and management of Italian landscapes, both for research and educational purposes and tourist exploitation in recent decades. We have selected – amongst these mushrooming heritage initiatives – those that evidently share museum character and aims.

In very few cases indoor museums of recent foundation, sometimes integrated in museum networks, are specifically dedicated to landscape. Through the presentation of objects, images, plastic models and texts they serve as interpretation centres for the landscape of the surrounding region. One of the more interesting examples for the soundness of its theoretical basis, among these initiatives generally aimed at illustrating local features, is offered by the *Museo del Paesaggio* (Museum of Landscape) founded in 1999 at Castelnuovo Berardenga, in the Province of Siena. It has been focused, through the contribution of geographical research, on a twofold subject: the idea of landscape, presented according to the approach of New Cultural Geography, and the Sienese landscape, with the explication of its specific material features and genetic processes, based on ecological and geohistorical analysis (*Vecchio* 1997; *Vecchio* and *Capineri* 1999). Even though these indoor museums can play an important role for research and education, they are not directly involved in the conservation and management of the surrounding landscape and their approach to the local community and the public is founded on traditional patterns of relationship.

As regards outdoor initiatives, which in the international experience have given important contributions to a wider landscape treatment, Italy, like other countries in Southern Europe, has not been affected by the spread of the open-air museums. On the contrary, the acceptance of the ecomuseum model, even rather belated in comparison with its beginnings in France, has rapidly increased since the 1990s. This wide diffusion of ecomuseums makes the analysis of their potential with regard to the conservation and management of Italian landscapes particularly interesting and induces us to focus our attention on them.

Unlike in the French experience, which serves as a model, a shared definition of the Italian ecomuseums and regulations valid on a national scale are still missing, because this subject has so far been controlled only by regulations issued by some sub-national administrative authorities: Piedmont Region (law enacted in 1995), the autonomous Province of Trento (law enacted in 2000), Sardinia Region (law enacted in 2006) and the autonomous Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia (law enacted in 2006). For this reason it is difficult to take a census of the exact number of ecomuseums existing in Italy. There is in fact a problem that concerns the relationship between denomination and substance: It is not easy, in the absence of a clear legislative framework, to distinguish between those which are truly ecomuseums and those which are merely ecomuseums by name, or which – having been in existence for a number of years – have decided to adopt a fashionable new name, without amending the content, which is often very different from the model of ecomuseum that should be their reference point. However, although we are dealing with a continuously and rapidly evolving picture,

Fig. 1 Ecomuseums in Italy (the location of the *Ecomuseo dei Terrazzamenti e della Vite* at Cortemilia is highlighted) / *„Ökomuseen" in Italien (die Lage des Ecomuseo dei Terrazzamenti e della Vite in Cortemilia ist hervorgehoben)*

Piemonte
1 Ecomuseo della pietra ollare e degli scalpellini
2 Ecomuseo del granito di Montorfano
3 Ecomuseo della Valsesia
4 Ecomuseo del Lago d'Orta e Mottarone
5 Ecomuseo del Biellese
6 Ecomuseo delle Terre d'Acqua
7 Ecomuseo delle Terre al confine
8 Ecomuseo del Freidano
9 Ecomuseo Colombano Romean
10 Ecomuseo dell'Alta Val Sangone
11 Ecomuseo del Basso Monferrato Astigiano
12 Ecomuseo della Pietra da cantoni
13 Ecomuseo delle miniere e Valle Germanasca
14 Ecomuseo dell'Argilla
15 Ecomuseo delle Rocche del Roero
16 Ecomuseo dei Feudi Imperiali
17 Ecomuseo delle Cave di Visone
18 Ecomuseo dei Terrazzamenti e della Vite
19 Ecomuseo di Cascina Moglioni
20 Ecomuseo dell'Alta Val Maira
21 Ecomuseo del Castelmagno
22 Ecomuseo della Pastorizia
23 Ecomuseo della Segale
24 Ecomsueo dei Certosini
25 Ecomuseo del Marmo di Frabosa Soprana

Lombardia
26 Ecomuseo della Valle del Bitto di Albaredo
27 Ecomuseo Adda di Leonardo
28 Ecomuseo delle Valli Oglio Chiese

Trentino Alto Adige
29 Museo Provinciale delle Miniere
30 Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Provincia di Bolzano
31 Ecomuseo della Val di Pejo
32 Ecomuseo dalle Dolomiti al Garda
33 Sentiero Etnografico del Vanoi
34 Il Sentiero Etnografico Rio Caino - Porta del Trentino

Veneto
35 Ecomuseo del Ghertele
36 Ecomuseo della paglia e della tradizione contadina
37 Ecomuseo della Laguna di Venezia

Friuli - Venezia Giulia
38 Ecomuseo delle Acque del Gemonese
39 Cjase Cocèl - Museo della vita contadina

Liguria
40 Ecomuseo La via dell'Ardesia
41 Museo Etnografico di Ortonovo

Emilia - Romagna
42 Ecomuseo di Argenta
43 Ecomuseo della collina e del vino
44 Centro Etnografico della Civiltà Palustre
45 Ecomuseo del sale e dell'esperienza salinara

Toscana
46 Ecomuseo delle tradizioni popolari e dei mestieri
47 Museo della città e del territorio di Monsummano
48 Ecomuseo della Montagna Pistoiese
49 La via di Castiglioni
50 Ecomuseo del Casentino
51 Ecomuseo dell'Alabastro

Umbria
52 Ecomuseo del Paesaggio Orvietano

Lazio
53 Ecomuseo del Litorale Romano
54 Ecomuseo di San Donato Val di Comino

Abruzzo
55 Ecomuseo d'Abruzzo
56 Ecomuseo della Maiella Occidentale e delle genti d'Abruzzo
57 Ecomuseo della Riserva Naturale di Zompo lo Schioppo

Campania
58 Ecomuseo del Fiordo di Furore

Puglia
59 Ecomuseo del Poggio delle Antiche Ville
60 Ecomuseo della Pietra Leccese

Calabria
61 Ecomuseo delle Ferriere e Fonderie di Calabria

Sicilia
62 Itinerario I luoghi del lavoro contadino

Sardegna
63 Ecomuseo della Valle del Cixerri
64 Ecomuseo dell'alto Flumendosa

on the Italian territory we can count today more than sixty museum enterprises which approximate to varying degrees the concept of ecomuseum, but whose exact definition is still under discussion from a museological point of view. Even if there are some sporadic but significant previous experiences, most ecomuseums were created after 1995, when the Piedmont law was passed. That was a starting point from which the idea of ecomuseum itself was popularised in Italy, and the number of ecomuseums brought into operation – or those of which projects were presented – increased with relative rapidity also outside the promoting region. In fact, Piedmont Region[1], in addition to generously subsidising the institution on its territory, has widely contributed to the spread of the ecomuseum model in the Italian context, through the creation of the *"Laboratorio Ecomusei"* (Ecomuseums Laboratory). This institution, connected to a documentation centre, operates at a regional level offering scientific and management support both to the formulation of new ecomuseum projects and to existing ones, also stimulating cooperation between these latter. At the same time it has become a reference point at a wider scale, with the starting of census and research work and with the organisation of two meetings of Italian relevance. During the last years other institutions, like the *"Osservatorio Ecomusei"* (Ecomuseum Observatory), located in Turin and linked to a Socio-Economic research centre of Piedmont Region (IRES Piemonte) have also begun research and networking activity among ecomuseums at both the national and international level.

Analysing the overall geographical distribution of the phenomenon in Italy, it becomes evident that there is a high concentration of ecomuseums in Piedmont and a generally higher distribution of ecomuseums in northern and central Italy, and only few and isolated cases in the south. Alongside this aspect, less evident but not less significant, is a characteristic common to many ecomuseums: with the exception of those located in Turin's metropolitan area, in the town of Lecce and in some old industrial areas (Biellese and Verbano), they are located in smaller towns and mainly in rural areas, often marked by economic decline. In these contexts the ecomuseum seems to be proposed as a means of reflection on the problems of local development and sometimes also as the pivot of strategies for tourism-based exploitation of the heritage.

Apart from these general traits the picture of Italian ecomuseums looks rather unstable and elusive under certain aspects, because most initiatives are still, at present, at an embryonic stage; they even have not yet reached a planning stage. For this reason it is objectively premature, on the one hand, to give a full appraisal of the role they play in the field of preserving and managing landscape. On the other hand, it seems useful to try at least a first critical examination of the operational potential and the scientific basis of the projects. The latter highlights the general absence of research work in the realisation of ecomuseums, although with some rare exceptions, as another characteristic of the Italian case, unlike other European contexts, where cooperation has been much more intensive. This deficiency is evident both in the initial planning stages and in the subsequent management, with the risk of impairing the choice of content and the interpretations which are passed on; such deficiency is frequently evident on a geo-historical level where stereotyped visions of the past and of the historical elements of the landscape are generated and perpetuated.

If we want to single out from the varied picture of Italian ecomuseums those which seem more specifically oriented to the interpretation of landscape, it is possible to recognise some recurrent models (*Fig. 1*):

A) ecomuseums which are based on the description of a traditional productive activity and in which the reference to the landscape is implicit and not necessarily illustrated by itineraries or trails;

B) ecomuseums which are based on preserving and safeguarding individual landscape features – i.e. a building or other material structure which has become a museum and a centre for collecting records and documents;

C) ecomuseums only by name and basically structured in the same way as traditional museums, whether deriving from a long-standing ethnographic museum devoted to material culture and peasant culture, or another recently founded institution, but with no theoretical or practical reference to the landscape;

D) ecomuseums whose theme – more or less explicitly declared – is the territory of a community and its landscape, though the theoretical awareness of the latter is not always evident.

Although with all these types, except for type C, a potential reference to the landscape emerges, however from the standpoint of analysis centred on the potential of ecomuseums for landscape management and conservation, we find it useful to consider the projects most specifically centred on the interpretation of the landscape, that is the projects in category D. Specifically, among these initiatives, we decided to focus our attention on a case study taken from the Piedmont context which, thanks to its thematic orientation and to the advanced stage of its activities, offered sufficient material for reflection.

4. The Case Study: Cortemilia, Langhe

Our case study is the *Ecomuseo dei Terrazzamenti e della Vite* (Terraces and Vines Ecomuseum), near the hamlet of Cortemilia, situated at the border between Piedmont and Liguria, in the valley of the Bormida river[2] (*Fig. 2*). Among the various Italian initiatives it is one of the cases in which greater and more explicit attention has been given to the theme of landscape, both in the aim of the project and in the implementation of the first concrete phases of work. If the contents of the project already seemed to be promising with regard to protection, convincing with regard to local development and founded on explicit reference to scientific research, the first interventions implemented by the foundation up to the present seem to confirm some of the initial premises. Formally founded in 1996, but active and financed only since the end of 1999, promoted and run by the local authority, the ecomuseum aims to protect, study and make known, as well as return to productive status, the characteristic landscape of terraced vineyards of Cortemilia and Bormida Valley.

Since the last century this area has been affected by demographic decline and an ageing population which characterise Piedmont's mountains and high hills. They take us to a transition from an agro-pastoral economy founded on small peasant holdings to a growing integration between part-time farming and an income from other activities, linked to industrialisation. The latter began in the area when a chemical factory was established in Cengio, in the upper valley, in 1882. This industry, although beneficial in terms of employment, rapidly gave rise to dramatic problems of water and soil pollution, which eventually led to the declaration of the whole Bormida Valley as "area of high environmental risk" by the Ministry of Environment in 1987 and subsequently to the reclamation programme under the pressure of a large mobilisation of the local population and of environmentalist groups.

In this context, marked during the last decades by serious environmental problems and by hard political struggles, the ecomuseum comes into being out of the wish to protect and recover the landscape of terraces as a historical product and a foundation of the local cultural identity. As a matter of fact, terraces are acknowledged – in the project elaborated by the ecomuseum – as "one of the most noteworthy aspects of the cultural landscape, of those landscapes that recount the

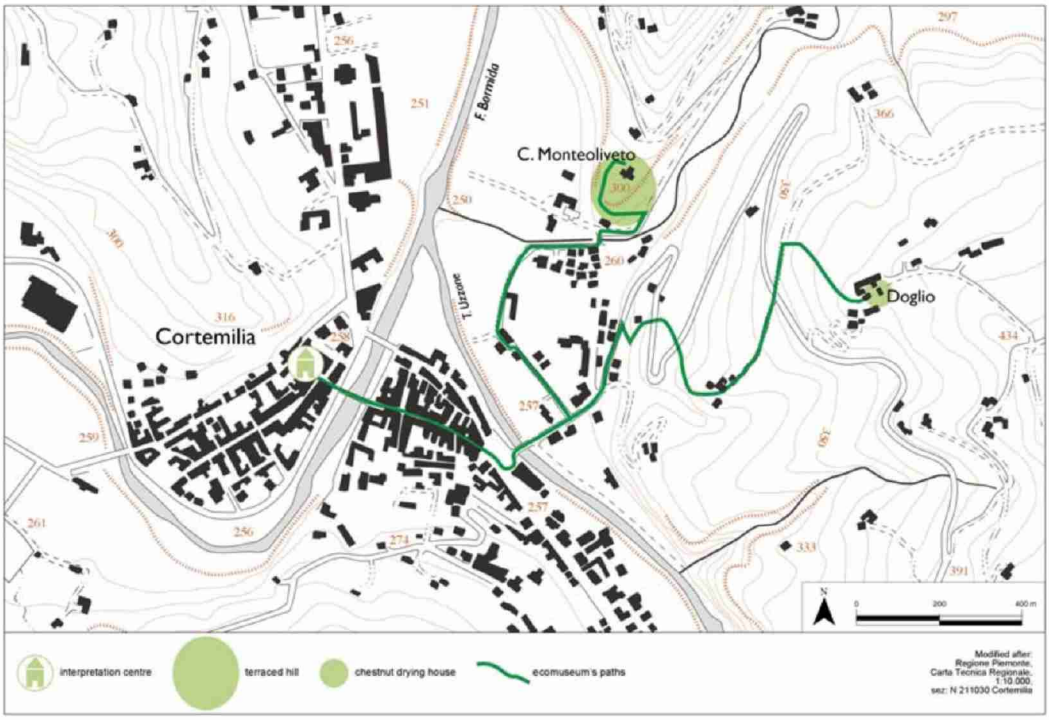

Fig. 2 The ecomuseum sites and paths at Cortemilia
Die Einzelstandorte und Wege des „Ökomuseums" in Cortemilia

history of man and nature and which bear witness, through their evolution, to the realisation and the formation of the uniqueness and the identity of this area"[3]. The project also envisages the revival of agricultural activities and the possible recovery of traditional land uses, dramatically reduced due to the effects of pollution.

As in many other cases, one of the first concrete initiatives which followed the project phase consisted in the restoration of the building destined for the location of the interpretation centre – a historical building situated in the borough of Cortemilia – and in setting up a permanent exhibition inside it. The exhibition consists of four rooms in which short descriptive texts and plastic models present information on the terraced landscape which the visitor can observe outside. In particular, attention is drawn to some of the material features of the landscape, whether natural (geomorphology), or man-made (paths, dry-stone walls, chapels, rural buildings and huts for the storage of tools), in addition to the illustration of the main areas of geographical distribution of terraced landscapes in the world and of productive activities connected to the presence of such landscapes. At present, this exhibition, although evocative and effective from the point of view of communication, seems lacking in content related to the interpretation of the historical dynamics of the forms and functions of the local landscape, which could be usefully supported by geo-historical analysis.

Photo 1 The terraced hill of Monteoliveto / *Der terrassierte Hang des Monteoliveto*

In addition to the indoor exhibition, museum activities are developed in the open air. The initiatives of landscape restoration are of particular interest, moving in two directions. The first has led the ecomuseum to buy, from private owners, a hill called *Monteoliveto*, with terraces and a paved path, that climbs up to a farmhouse on the summit (*Photos 1* and *2*). It has been acknowledged as a particularly significant example of the territory the ecomuseum illustrates, and it seems ideal to represent the morphology of terraced landscapes thanks to its position and the good state of preservation of the dry-stone walls.

The whole complex of dry-stone walls has been restored and the soil has been made productive again by planting vineyards on the sunny side. A modest quantity of grapes is gathered each year to make wine which is sold with the trademark of the ecomuseum itself, thanks to a cooperative society of local producers. On the opposite side a "catalogued cultivation" has been started with the purpose of documenting and maintaining the varieties of fruit trees and vegetables that have been recognised through a census as typical of the area; its aim is to create a small tree nursery to preserve local varieties. The whole hill is the open-air route of the ecomuseum, an interpretation path that winds up from the built-up area of Cortemilia and along which the main basic aspects of a rural terraced landscape will be illustrated: geomorphologic conditions

Photo 2 Dry-stone walls and vines at Monteoliveto
Trockensteinmauern und Weinreben am Monteoliveto

and man-made changes, landscape evolution and the risks connected to neglect. It is supposed that from the interpretation centre visitors will get enough information to enable them to read the landscape, supported only by unobtrusive signposts along the open-air route; the use of larger explanatory panels has been avoided as it is considered aesthetically unpleasing.

In the second project, the ecomuseum was responsible for the restoration of a building in the neighbouring hamlet of Doglio, traditionally used as a drying house for chestnuts, currently privately owned and leased for thirty years to the local authorities (*Photo 3*). The reactivation of the drying house has successfully involved part of the local population in the activities of the ecomuseum, both in the refurbishment and in the subsequent undertaking of the activity of chestnut drying by the inhabitants of Cortemilia; this involvement is particularly significant since it could be said to have been minimal previously, in contrast with the general principles of the philosophy of the ecomuseums and in particular to the *Ecomuseo dei Terrazzamenti e della Vite*. The project is, however, problematic given the lack of scientific research, which in this case seems to be limited to a study, not even carried out on primary sources, of the material forms rather than of the morphogenetic processes they underwent.

Photo 3 The restored chestnut drying house at Doglio has again been brought into use by local inhabitants (by courtesy of the *Ecomuseo dei Terrazzamenti e della Vite*). *Der restaurierte Bau zum Trocknen von Kastanien wird durch einheimische Bewohner wieder genutzt (Photo freundlicherweise zur Verfügung gestellt durch das Ecomuseo dei Terrazzamenti e della Vite).*

Alongside these initiatives we must mention a further project, currently hardly at more than the planning stage, that seems more difficult to attain, as generally happens whenever the attempt to combine conservation and development involves private interests, but particularly important with regard to the possible function of the ecomuseum as a tool for landscape management. After coming to agreements with the different owners, the ecomuseum intends to promote restoration operations of the terraced slopes of an area called "Regione Morera", at present in a semi-abandoned condition, with the purpose of making their cultivation possible again; their owners should lease the slopes to a local cooperative association which would manage the cultivation of vineyards and fruit trees.

Although it is not possible at present to draw up a definitive balance of the ecomuseum's experience with regard to landscape conservation, interpretation and management, it is possible to identify certain trends. We will try to consider the latter in the light of the three strengths of the ecomuseum model analysed in section 2.

Undoubtedly, the ecomuseum at Cortemilia – with its thematic emphasis on the terraced vineyards

and the definition of its area of activity as the territory of the local community – is focused on the landscape as a whole, approaching the "landscape museum" model and the second and third generations of French ecomuseums. Nevertheless, it must be noted that until now its conservation and education activities have been centred on individual material features – particularly buildings and terraces, but also old cultivated plant varieties – while they remain limited with regard to a full presentation of the functional role played by these landscape elements in the agrarian and settlement system.

The adoption of a dynamic vision of the landscape, inherent in the ecomuseum theory, seems also partially achieved by the ecomuseum at Cortemilia. Its project is certainly grounded on the sensibility for recent environmental and social problems of the local community and on the search for new development strategies, together with the aim of recovering the heritage of the past. In order to take root in the local community, the ecomuseum has decided to concentrate on the reflection on the present and on the dynamics of development, leaving the reconstruction of the processes that have historically shaped the landscape to further stages of activity. As a matter of fact until now the conservation and education activities have been implemented without the support of precise historical investigation. In this respect, it seems desirable that the initiatives of research promoted by the ecomuseum, so far focused on the agronomic sector, may in future be extended to the analysis of the morphogenetic processes of the landscape where Historical Geography could proficiently offer its competence.

Finally, from the viewpoint of participation, the Cortemilia ecomuseum experience can be considered generally positive: in particular, because it has involved both local schools in laboratory experiments and in setting up the exhibition and the older population, which includes the owners of the land, in the safeguarding of the material assets (maintenance of the dry-stone walls, restoration of the drying house) and the return to traditional practices, with a view to local development (cultivation of vines, fruit trees, vegetables, drying of chestnuts and sale of the products). Recently progress has also been made with the involvement of several younger local farmers in the trading of their products with the ecomuseum's brand. These achievements are particularly important – even if still limited to a small portion of the local population – if we consider that the institution of the ecomuseum, promoted by the local authority and supported by Piedmont Region, has initially followed a top-down approach. In this direction, where the first results already look consolidated, it is possible to notice numerous consonances with the theme of the value of landscape for the constitution of local identity, as analysed by Cultural Geography, and with the studies on local development, for which the assessment of economic and social results of the ecomuseum's activities in next years could represent an interesting object of further research.

5. Conclusions

Following an international tendency, the process leading to the full recognition of landscape as a form of heritage has greatly advanced in Italy too, with regard to both its exploitation as a resource for heritage tourism and the enactment of laws and policies specifically devoted to its conservation and management. There is, however, a considerable risk that – as happened to previous legislation – the measures recommended by the recent "Code for Cultural Properties and Landscape" may have limited and controversial practical effects. This ineffectiveness is due to the frequent enforcement of provisional acts, like the remissions of violations to planning and building regulations repeatedly approved in the recent past, in sharp contrast to the aims of heritage policies devoted to landscape. But in more general terms it can be traced back to the fragmentation of competencies exercised on the landscape by different

levels and branches of the public administration and to the manifold theoretical and operational approaches matured by different academic traditions, which have sometimes become an obstacle to effective decision-making and management, as already recognised for neighbouring countries (*Bouillon* 1991). Moreover, it must be noted that the contributions of Geography and, specifically, of Historical Geography to the conservation and management of Italian landscapes has so far been sporadic, and that applied research has developed to a lesser degree than in northern Europe.

The few initiatives of indoor museums dedicated to landscape and the recent spread of ecomuseums in Italy is to be set against this background characterised by light and shade. Although based on various degrees of theoretical awareness and, in general, only superficially linked with geographical debate and research, they will ultimately deal with the landscape in a variety of ways. Sometimes, as we have seen for the *Museo del Paesaggio* at Castelnuovo Berardenga and in the case study examined above, landscape is explicitly assumed as one of the main objects of the museums' activities for the pursuit of research and for conservational or educational aims. But in many other cases the main focus is on different themes, according to an approach that gives more importance to Ethnology or Social and Cultural History than to geographical studies of the landscape. Landscape is simply considered as an ordinary setting upon which the museum or ecomuseum operates. What is done to the landscape in such cases – which is not to be critically appraised – can concern first of all its physical aspect: For example, formal or functional features of the landscape can be changed when some of its components – generally buildings – are restored for new uses, or when new infrastructures (paths and roads, parking areas, poster panels etc.) are built in order to implement the development of educational or recreational programmes. On a less material but not less important level, the use of landscape as an image is often found in the communication strategies adopted by ecomuseums in order to attract external visitors. In this perspective, landscape is frequently referred to in a stereotyped manner, which exalts aesthetic or natural values rather than historical insight.

In the end, the Italian situation is marked by a growing attention for the landscape, but by a rather embryonic development of the museum as a means for its treatment and often grounded on a weak theoretical basis. In this context, two directions seem interesting for future developments. On the one hand, as regards museology and museography, the lack of a specific Italian tradition with regard to landscape makes it necessary to look at the international experience. This latter should be considered in a flexible way, deriving from it not so much static theoretical models but examples of evolving practices, both from the recent evolution of open-air towards landscape-museums and from the best ecomuseums of the first and second generation. On the other hand, with reference to the themes and concepts dealt with in museums, it seems desirable that the traditional divide and lack of communication between the world of ecomuseums and that of geographical research should be overcome. Attempts should be made to establish cooperation and exchange relationships that should be put into practice in the planning and management of ecomuseums that potentially could bear positive outcomes for both sides involved. As to Historical Geography – in Italy, but also in a wider context – cooperation with ecomuseums could offer a sort of research laboratory which could be used to test the empirical and theoretical results of the longstanding tradition of landscape studies. Furthermore, it would be a good opportunity to stimulate the growth, as yet stunted, of an applied approach. But ecomuseums will also offer interesting opportunities for interaction with other fields of geographical enquiry: with cultural geography – for criticism of landscape representations produced by ecomuseums – and with local development research – for the analysis of

possible uses of heritage as a resource in local development strategies. However, ecomuseums themselves could draw useful suggestions from an approach to geographical tradition, not only for the important amount of knowledge on specific landscapes that could be derived from it but also from a critical standpoint. A deeper awareness of the questions dealt with by the geographical debate on the idea and concept of landscape could probably foster the definition and communication of less static and stereotyped images by ecomuseums.

Notes

[1] At a lower administrative and territorial level the spread of ecomuseums in Piedmont has also been supported by the Province of Torino, Biella and Vercelli which have promoted specific ecomuseum networks comprising different sites on their territories, and by the Town Council of Torino which is organising an urban ecomuseum. As at the moment these initiatives have only partially been recognised as ecomuseums by the regional administration we have considered in the list of Italian ecomuseums only the few which have already been officially instituted according to the regional law.

[2] The study of this case has been based on the review of the projects presented to the regional administration for the institution of the ecomuseum, on the information provided by the two official reports on ecomuseums in Piedmont (Laboratorio Ecomusei 2001, 2002) and on several visits to the ecomuseum and interview with the ecomuseum's director.

[3] Quotation from the project presented to the regional administration for the institution of the ecomuseum.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Laboratorio Ecomusei of the Regione Piemonte and the Ecomuseo dei Terrazzamenti e della Vite for their documentary support, and especially *Donatella Murtas*, Head of the Ecomuseum at Cortemilia, for her generous help.

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Summary: Landscape and Museums: Some Critical Reflections on Initial Developments in Italy

Landscape is now recognised as a component of heritage, not only in academic debate, but also in national and international policies and public opinion. In recent decades Geography has explored this relationship between landscape and heritage with two approaches. On the one hand, Historical Geography has applied the results of morphogenetic analysis to the recognition and management of the historical features of the landscape, and on the other hand, Cultural Geography has offered the tools for the identification of the symbolic and ideological values underlying the use of landscape in heritage policies and in the process of constitution of local and national identities. Beginning from this twofold perspective we have focused our attention on a particular aspect of the *heritaging* of landscape, examining two types of museums that seemed particularly interesting in relation to the landscape – open-air museums of Scandinavian origin and ecomuseums of French origin. We have traced the historical development, the theoretical basis and the different operating structures, critically evaluating their potential as a means of conservation and management of the landscape. With particular reference to the geographical debate on the concept of landscape, the principal potential for research, awareness and conservation would seem to derive from the ecomuseums rather than from the open-air museums, although elements of fragility frequently emerge when these principles are put into practice. These issues have therefore been examined with particular reference to the Italian context, characterised by the absence of open-air museums and by a recent and rapid spread of ecomuseums. At present it seems premature to draw up a definitive report on the role played by the Italian ecomuseums in the management and safeguarding of the landscape, since the majority of them are still in the initial phases. Nonetheless it is possible to present some critical considerations on the basis of the classification of the Italian ecomuseums in relation to the role assigned to the landscape in their themes and activities, and on the basis of a detailed analysis of one case study: *l'Ecomuseo dei Terrazzamenti e della Vite*, created in 1999 and dedicated to the characteristic landscape of the terraced vineyards of Cortemilia in the Langhe.

Zusammenfassung: Landschaft und Museen: einige kritische Überlegungen zu ersten Entwicklungen in Italien

Die Landschaft wird heute nicht nur von akademischen Kreisen als wichtiger Bestandteil der Umwelt und des kulturhistorischen Erbes gesehen, sondern auch von der in- und ausländischen Politik und von der öffentlichen Meinung. In den letzten Jahrzehnten ist das Verhältnis zwischen Landschaft und kulturellem Erbe in geographischen Untersuchungen unter zwei Gesichtspunkten erforscht worden. Auf der einen Seite hat die historische Geographie die Ergebnisse der morphogenetischen Analyse zum Erkennen und Verwalten des historischen Bestandes der Landschaft beigesteuert. Auf der anderen Seite haben kulturgeographische Studien Methoden zur Identifikation der symbolischen und ideologischen Werte geliefert, die die Landschaft nicht nur in die politische Verwaltung des Kulturerbes eingebunden haben, sondern auch in den mit ihr eng verbundenen Prozess einer Identitätsfindung. Aus dieser zweifachen Perspektive hat sich die Aufmerksamkeit auf einen besonderen Aspekt des Landschaftserhaltung konzentriert. Landschaft wird zum Objekt und Thema der musealen Welt. Die Freilandmuseen skandinavischen Ursprungs und die „Ökomuseen" französischer Herkunft wurden von der Forschung als Museumstypen identifiziert, die sich besonders für eine Einbeziehung der Landschaft in den Museumsbestand eigneten. Die historische Entwicklung, die theoretischen Grundelemente und die verschiedenen Verwirklichungsmodelle sind kritisch auf ihre Bedeutung für die Erhaltung und Pflege der Landschaft analysiert worden. In Bezug auf die Grundsatzdebatte zum Konzept der Landschaft in der Geographie scheinen die wichtigeren Anstöße für die Erforschung und Erhaltung der Landschaft von den „Ökomuseen" zu kommen und nicht von den Freilandmuseen, auch wenn sich bei beiden konzeptionelle Schwachpunkte bemängeln lassen. In diesem Beitrag sind diese Themen vor allem im Hinblick auf den italienischen Kontext untersucht worden, der sich durch eine rasche Verbreitung der „Ökomuseen" in der jüngsten Zeit auszeichnet, während keine Freilandmuseen realisiert worden sind. Da sich die meisten Projekte noch in einem Anfangsstadium befinden, scheint es zum heutigen Zeitpunkt verfrüht, eine Bilanz zu ziehen über die Bedeutung, die die

italienischen „Ökomuseen" voraussichtlich für die Landschaftserhaltung haben werden. Anhand der Rolle, die die Landschaft in ihrem Themenkatalog einnimmt, kann man die italienischen „Ökomuseen" jedoch schon jetzt klassifizieren und kritisch betrachten. Ganz besonders deutlich wird dies in einer Fallstudie, die das *Ecomuseo dei Terrazzamenti e della Vite* vorstellt, das 1999 eröffnet worden ist und den charakteristischen Weinanbau auf Terrassen bei Cortemilia in den Langhe zum Thema hat.

Résumé : Paysage et musées : réflexions critiques sur les premiers développements en Italie

Le paysage a désormais été reconnu comme composante du patrimoine non seulement dans le débat académique, mais aussi par les politiques nationales et internationales et par l'opinion publique. Au cours des dernières décennies, ce rapport entre paysage et patrimoine a été exploré par la géographie à partir de deux approches. D'un côté la géographie historique a appliqué les résultats des analyses morphogénétiques à la reconnaissance et à la gestion des caractères historiques des paysages, et de l'autre, la géographie culturelle a offert les instruments pour l'identification des valeurs symboliques et idéologiques sous-tendues à l'utilisation du paysage dans les politiques patrimoniales et dans les procès de construction identitaire qui leur sont reliés. C'est à partir de cette double perspective qu'on a focalisé l'attention sur un aspect particulier de la patrimonialisation du paysage : son admission parmi les objets et les thèmes traités par les musées. L'enquête a privilégié deux types de musée qui paraissaient particulièrement intéressants en relation au paysage : les musées en plein air d'origine scandinave et les écomusées de dérivation française. De ces derniers on a reconstruit le développement historique, les fondements théoriques et les différentes structures opératives, en évaluant de façon critique leur potentialités comme instruments pour la conservation et la gestion du paysage. Avec référence au débat géographique sur le concept de paysage, les plus grandes potentialités sur le plan de la recherche, de la divulgation et de la conservation sembleraient venir des écomusées plutôt que des musées en plein air, même si des éléments de fragilité émergent fréquemment dans la traduction pratique des deux modèles. Ces questions ont donc été examinées avec référence spécifique au contexte italien, caractérisé par l'absence de musées en plein air et par un développement récent et rapide des écomusées. Au moment il paraît prématuré de tracer un bilan du rôle joué par les écomusées italiens dans la gestion et la conservation du paysage, à cause du stade initial où se trouvent la plupart des expériences. Toutefois on avance quelques réflexions critiques sur la base d'une classification des écomusées italiens en relation au rôle attribué au paysage parmi leurs thèmes et activités et sur la base de l'examen plus détaillé d'un cas d'étude : l'*Ecomuseo dei Terrazzamenti e della Vite*, créé en 1999 et dédié au paysage des terrasses de viticulture de Cortemilia, dans les Langhe.

Riassunto: Paesaggio e musei: riflessioni critiche sui primi sviluppi in Italia

Il paesaggio è ormai stato riconosciuto come bene culturale non solo nel dibattito accademico, ma anche nelle politiche nazionali e internazionali e da parte dell'opinione pubblica. Nel corso degli ultimi decenni i rapporti tra paesaggio e beni culturali sono stati esplorati dalla geografia a partire da due diverse prospettive. Da un lato, la geografia storica ha applicato i risultati delle analisi morfogenetiche al riconoscimento e alla gestione delle componenti storiche del paesaggio e, dall'altro lato, la geografia culturale ha sviluppato gli strumenti per l'identificazione dei valori simbolici e ideologici sottesi all'utilizzo del paesaggio nelle politiche patrimoniali e nei processi di costruzione identitaria cui queste contribuiscono. E' a partire da questa duplice prospettiva che si è focalizzata l'attenzione su un aspetto specifico di tale patrimonializzazione del paesaggio: la sua inclusione tra gli oggetti e i temi trattati nei musei. La ricerca ha privilegiato due tipologie di museo che paiono particolarmente interessanti in relazione con il paesaggio: i musei all'aria aperta di origine scandinava e gli ecomusei di derivazione francese, di cui si ricostruiscono lo sviluppo storico, i fondamenti teorici e le strutture museografiche, valutandone le potenzialità e i limiti ai fini della conservazione e gestione del paesaggio. Con riferimento al dibattito geografico sul concetto di