

EUROPEAN PARKS AND LANDSCAPES: a territorial research programme

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Summary

1, Convergences. This paper traces a “research programme” directed towards constructing a reference framework for the integration of nature conservation, landscape protection and, more generally territorial asset valorisation policies. This objective is motivated by the fact that, although nature and landscape are increasingly the target of converging social demands, international agreements and initiatives, the related public policies reveal shortcomings and inconsistencies that heavily penalise their effectiveness.

2. Principles and values. Nature and landscape evoke different sets of values, not necessarily converging and often potentially conflicting, partly reflected in new citizenship rights, such as the right to the effective presence of the “social state” and to the quality of life context, including beauty. However, for a constructive, open and inclusive comparison of the various systems of values, it is necessary to “reason by principles”. Attention is focussed on evolution of the principle of conservation whose meanings (conservation as a place of innovation) and scope, both for nature and landscape, embrace the entire territory.

3. New paradigms. Any comparison between nature and landscape policies must take into account the new paradigms that have gained ground in both fields in the last ten years:

- the new paradigms for “natural protected areas” proposed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in the light of their spectacular growth in recent decades, their increasing diversification and the ecosystem fragmentation that surrounds them;

- and the “landscape paradigm” defined by the European Landscape Convention which throws a bridge between nature and culture and delineates new relationships between the city and nature, giving new meanings to “urban centrality”.

4. Relationships and networks. The new paradigms shift attention from objects to networks of dynamic, constantly evolving relationships, sparking the search for a “reticular” paradigm that crosses the various fields of action (a network of networks). Research inspired, already from the early 1990s, by different reticular interpretations: from ecological to historical and cultural, from urban to economic and infrastructural. New concepts are gaining ground, such as those based on “self-organized meshworks”, stemming from local realities, able to oppose and “resist” against hierarchical orders that link local realities in systems of exogenous and hetero-directed relations.

5. Interpretations and territorial projects. A new concept of territory that pinpoints the man/nature relationship implies new representations and vice versa: an interpretative effort that cannot hide between the claims of objectivity and neutrality of scientific knowledge. However, to render implicit projects explicit, available knowledge must be sifted, highlighting in particular “structuring” factors and relations. The “structural interpretations” of the territory, intended to highlight “invariances”, the “statutes of the places”, the rigidities and resistances that should condition any transformation hypothesis, guaranteeing conservation of the identity characters of the territory, represent a move in this direction. Interpretations that can therefore play a complementary role to that of the strategic frameworks in which fundamental planning intentions are expressed.

6. Planning and policies. The territorial project is the privileged arena for this integration of the various expected changes: a collective project that is much more than the incoherent summa of single administrative deeds. It involves the networking of the various public and private actions directed towards achieving shared strategic objectives and highlighting their landscape implications. A collective project that, as established by the European Landscape Convention, must take into account the perceptions, expectations and needs of local populations, activating suitable forms of territorial governance. It is only in this context that planning can effectively carry out its mission of evaluation, regulation and strategic guidance, making it possible to re-activate the utopian tension of the project.