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Atlases and landscapes

Attilia Peano

Atlases, originally systematic collections of bound and catalogued maps representing the image of the known world for the 16th century middle classes engaged in trade and commerce in distant lands, were highly successful for at least two centuries during which they were constantly reproduced in order to incorporate ever broader knowledge of new countries. The Ortelio (1574) and Mercatore (1595), considered to be excellent examples of the 16th century, are characterised by a common hierarchical interpretation of the world in which Europe reigned supreme over all the other countries. Subsequent atlases, printed and re-printed in the 17th century by European publishers to cater to growing demand from traders and entrepreneurs, in particular by the Dutch and above all Blaeu who increased the number of plates, publishing an atlas in 11 volumes, are of great importance. In the following centuries, atlases were specialised according to geographical area and topic; in Italy, the first national Atlas was published by the Touring club italiano in 1940; atlases gradually became less monumental with dynamic and also critical descriptions of the country represented. Contemporary atlas production is characterised by a wide variety of different types including road, tourist, physical, economic atlases. Each atlas, inserted in a specific cultural context and with its own specific purpose, type and form, relates a 'story' and reflects a vision of the world, regardless of claims and declarations of preciseness and scientific approach. Landscape Atlases represent a field of observation and knowledge

that started to attract attention at the beginning of this century when the first theories on the valorisation of territorial resources as a key to development were mooted, having abandoned the concept of constraints as an exclusive instrument of protection. Inclusion of the landscape in territorial policies was declared a major priority in the 1999. Development scheme of community space which indicated that European countries should adopt 'creative management' landscapes, considered as local and regional identity and as an image of history and of the interaction between man and nature. This consideration was also reflected in 2000 in the European landscape convention in which they were assigned a political role, expressing the need to consider the landscapes of the entire territory and to address these with policies and protection, management and planning measures based on recognition and evaluation, involving the stakeholders and populations concerned. The landscape atlas is, therefore, a theme-based atlas that addresses a recently rediscovered and valorised topic, still characterised however by noteworthy specific aspects and ambiguity. The landscape is, in fact, an image more of processes than objects; it is dynamic and holistic insofar as it expresses the complementary nature and relationship between various aspects relating to ecology, history, town planning, local economy, usually considered separately in territorial analyses. It is also particularly difficult to gauge the population's perception of these aspects, as required by the European convention in order to draft shared preservation and transformation projects. The Atlas project configured for

Piedmont, to meet the need for aperture towards new knowledge and interpretations, to chart the dynamic nature of the processes, to take into account change and the expectations aroused by existing programmes and projects, to permit use as a reference point for inter-institutional and social dialogue and confrontation also for the purpose of planning, has been organised as a hypertext, conceived therefore in a reticular, dynamic and interactive form, with information nodes consisting of texts and images derived from many disciplinary approaches and referred both to regional and local scale, as a constantly-evolving product with the possibility of continuous update. Specific attention has been dedicated to experimentation in order to chart social perception, adopting various methods and different scales.