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Plans, housing question and modernization of the country

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Jordi Bellmut, Maria Goula

Gabriele Paolinelli, Antonella Valentini

Problems, policies, and research

Atlases of the landscape in Europe

Atlases and landscapes

Methodological proposals for the management and promotion of Piedmont landscapes

Social perception of the landscape and the Atlases

The Atlas as a metaphor for the history of territory and landscape

The European context

Experiences on the landscape catalogues for Catalonia

Tuscany landscapes Atlas and spatial planning

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Enrico Gualini

Projects and implementation

The Ptcp of Naples: the land and its fertile resources

Presentation

Dilemmas and obstacles in the management of objectives

A heritage to defend and exploit

The Ptcp of Naples: from the plan of 2003 to the new proposal of 2008

The landscape in the plan

Naples Ptcp directions

Settlements system

The assessment of territorial contexts and the landscape analysis

Agricultural landscapes in the Naples province: a heritage to be protected

A soil science to urban landscape planning: the case study of Naples and its surroundings

Cultural heritage, landscape and metropolitan system: is planning possible?

Sustainable mobility for Naples' metropolitan area

Statistical analysis in support of territorial planning

Gis for spatial co-ordination planning

Knowledge and action in the 'structural' interpretation and representation of territory

edited by Paolo Pileri

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Paolo Pileri, Marta Maggi

Profiles and practices

Consuming land, consuming the future

Four countries, six experiences, for a single issue: limiting urbanisation

Towards sustainable land use in Germany: reviewing the German experience

with antisprawl policies and tools

Urban containment strategies in the Netherlands

From an economical use of land to land use management strategies, tasks and

challenges in Switzerland

Land use and consumption in England: how is land use controlled and monitored?

How has land use changed?

Assessment of sustainable land use in Germany: the project Fin.30

Integrated European research on sustainable urban development and periurban

land use relationships

Interpretational figures and methods for knowledge and evaluation of land consumption:

the transition matrix

Rosario Pavia

Methods and tools

Zoning, zooning

Michele Talia

Reform of territorial governance and the new urban order

Clovis Ultramari

By the way, what urbanism really is?

The European context

Angioletta Voghera

Experimentation in Europe of practices for understanding the landscapes directed to their planning and management has been the main spin-off from the European landscape convention (2000), during which stress was laid on the need to identify and evaluate landscapes to render them an integral part of the 'collective memory'. The result has been an innovation of the traditional forms of landscape understanding, a process influenced by interaction between the international indications and individual historical-cultural roots for land organisation, and development and protection of the landscape (Voghera 2006). Countries with a germanic-anglo-saxon cultural root (such as the Netherlands, Germany and United Kingdom), characterised by a tradition of drawing the best benefit from the landscape integrated in land use policies, share common notions of landscapes and their protection, whereas dated notions of landscape are typical of the Mediterranean countries (such as France, Spain and Italy), and it is here that the first innovations are taking shape.

Experiments of Atlases in the understanding of the landscapes develop an objective description of the landscapes to disseminate identity, elaborating multidisciplinary readings, and a subjective interpretation founded on social perception of the landscapes.

Interesting for the evaluation methodology, as a process of understanding the landscapes for action aimed at the construction of policies and plans shared by the social actors, are the German, the Slovenian, the Dutch and the English

Atlases.

The wide range of methods devised by individual countries for identifying, interpreting and/or evaluating landscapes can be compared in terms of their: scale of analysis and representation; criteria for the identification of landscapes; types of values represented; participation; operativeness.

Landscape interpretation experiments have been conducted on a national scale (in Britain, Spain and Slovenia), on a regional scale (in France), and on a local scale (in Denmark) (Coe 2006).

A common feature is the interdisciplinary nature of the analyses, which converges in the identification of units or ambits that embrace landscapes with similar physical geographical, historical, environmental or socioeconomic characteristics. Experiments in Spain, Denmark and the Netherlands are identifying characterising systems that constitute large ambits arranged around a landscape matrix.

All too often, however, disciplinary analyses constitute sectorial interpretation that is rarely recomposed for public discussion through a synthetic and structural interpretation. The types of values represented (as monuments, documents, use, symbolic, environmental) are influenced by a nation's traditional protection and management of its territories. The most common category is historical, accompanied by recognition of symbolic value and, since the 1990s; the ecological-environmental and use value.

Atlases are primarily directed to understanding. They have little operativeness and refer to tools for the assessment of values and orientation for intervention. A common

feature of countries with a Germanic-Anglo-Saxon culture is the elaboration of evaluation methods as a process of collective learning to render explicit values and selection criteria useful for planning.

Participation is a critical aspect. Atlases are an 'expert representation' of landscapes for use in raising the consciousness of the population (as in Germany, United Kingdom, and elsewhere) as an actor of the form of the landscape and involved in its maintenance and management.

Different as they may be in their operativeness, Atlases are the main tool for the communication of values, spreading awareness throughout the population, and creating a framework of reference for policies and actions.