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*Paolo Avarello*

If the plan...

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Piergiorgio Bellagamba  
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Luisa De Biasio Calimani  
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## Environmental resources

*Franco Panzini*

The town of San Benedetto is bounded by two primary natural elements: the coastline and the system of hills rising a short distance inland and running parallel to the coast. The town lies in the very limited space of the coastal plain, conditioned by the natural morphology which has caused it to develop in the form of an oblong strip that follows the general conformation of the physical framework. Lacking any real historic centre or any memorable monumental elements, it is the hills and the seashore that determine San Benedetto's landscape identity. There is indeed a wealth of diversity. Following the coastline from the south, one first encounters the Sentina, a naturalistic area where a sandbank still protects some small brackish pools, although in an extremely degraded state, inserted in an agricultural area, with many lines of trees and some historic examples of rural houses. The remaining part of the seafront with its bathing beaches also has an exceptional naturalistic character. Throughout its length the seaside is in fact lined with juxtaposed rows of palm trees and small pine groves, which have earned for San Benedetto its description as the 'Riviera of palm trees'. The hill system has a likewise variegated character. On the higher ground, limited cliff areas alternate with arable land, vineyards and olive groves; but no less interesting are the small valleys cutting through the hills, providing a wealth of tree cover. Addressing a potentially interesting situation, but still wholly to be developed and in constant danger of the loss of specific identities, the general strategy of the Plan has been that of

recognizing the situations that are 'strong' from the landscape standpoint, to be protected and exploited in the best way.

The Sentina area has been subdivided into sectors, to guarantee its protection, but at the same time to enhance its environmental features; the remaining seaside belt has been tackled by trying to highlight its really original botanical characterization, by means of providing walkways through the spaces having the richest concentration of trees.

The hill area, too, has been provided with an articulated complex of measures. Additional functions have been identified to that of production, recognizing that agriculture in the peri-urban areas improves the quality of life for the persons who live in the vicinity: in terms of landscape, historical memory and environmental quality.

In addition to the strong elements of the environmental structure of San Benedetto, there is a further characterization: the widespread presence in the built-up area of interstitial green areas of agricultural use, the result of the uncertain urban planning in the past. Areas that are strategic due to their position, which have offered the Plan a decisive opportunity for rethinking the identity of the territory. A number of considerations, which in recent times have been made in the field of landscape architecture, appear to be pertinent to the case of the territory of San Benedetto. It has by now been generally accepted that the world in which we live is no longer based on the binary reading of the territory as culture versus nature or town versus countryside. As also the fact that the city does not have the features of a recognizable body and that the confines between functional zones, residential, productive, ones dedicated

to recreation, have become progressively more tenuous. San Benedetto seems a paradigmatic situation from this point of view: a town split up into districts intermingled with unbuilt areas, kitchen gardens and allotments, criss-crossed by channels: the sense of city is everywhere and nowhere. The plan thus aims at upgrading these surviving fragments of agricultural land in the town, to convert them into a sort of new backbone between the sea and the hills: a system of district centres, able to give fresh strength to the special identity of this polycentric town, making it at the same time functional.

The green backbone avails itself also of the system of channels running down from the hills at right angles to the coast: these still have the function of acting as a minute ecological network and, after being cleaned up and reclaimed, can play an important role in guaranteeing the continuity of environmental quality. The plan for San Benedetto thus proposes changing the entire town into an articulated landscape system, in which the various urban parts are not viewed as a collection of more or less successful buildings, but as parts of a complex landscape, which together with the buildings encompasses natural fragments, elements of the orographic network, and intercluded snatches of countryside.