

The case of landscape planning in Italy

Anna Marson

Full Professor, Department of Architecture and Arts, IUAV University Venice, Italy
anna.marson@iuav.it

Abstract

The new impulse experienced in landscape planning in Italy after the National Heritage and Landscape Code of 2004 has changed the frame of Heritage protection as well as regional planning processes and plans, introducing interesting innovations. At the same time, current implementation practices show how even the most certain regulative contents depend on collective interpretation, and institutional actors seldom guarantee the continuity of institutional action and the financial, cognitive and relational resources needed for implementing landscape strategies. Finally, the paper offers some first evidence from an ongoing pilot project, regarding the mobilization of non-institutional actors whose interests are coherent with and could therefore contribute to the strategies of the Landscape Plan.

Keywords

Landscape planning, Landscape Plans, landscape strategies, non-institutional actors

Landscape planning in Italy: the state of art

Landscape planning has been introduced in Italy many decades ago¹, nevertheless the production of a relevant number of Landscape Plans was attained for the first time in the Nineties, following Law No 431/1985 and its safeguard provision transferring powers from the State to local authorities once planning requirement were fulfilled².

The National Heritage and Landscape Code (D.lgs. 42/2004) has foreseen a new typology of Landscape Plans and planning processes. On one hand these plans were required to know, safeguard, plan and manage the entire territory, and not only its most valuable Heritage (i.e. special protection areas), "in reason of the different values expressed by the diverse contexts constituting it" (National Heritage and Landscape Code, article 135). On the other hand, the planning process envisaged was a conjunct one, according to methods and timing negotiated by each regional government subscribing a specific agreement with the Ministry of Heritage. A mandatory content of this co-planning process is the complex and time-consuming so-called 'dressing' of each special protection area defined by decree or by law, with updated contents regarding its values' state of preservation and rules for managing transformation issues.

A few Regions have in any case agreed to co-plan all the contents, refusing a further jeopardization of

their territory as far as the care for the landscape is involved³.

A generous commitment, coherent with the challenging definition of 'Landscape planning' was given by the European Landscape Convention⁴, according to which "it means strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes" (European Landscape Convention, 2000).

So far as October 2019, five Italian Regions out of 20 have completed the process of approving their Landscape Plan according to the Code of Heritage and Landscape: Puglia, Tuscany, Piedmont, Friuli Venezia-Giulia, Lazio. Sardinia also should be mentioned for its Landscape Plan for the coast (Salzano 2013), which although not formally corresponding to the requirements of the Code, has played along the years a huge role in safeguarding the landscape in the area most required for new real estate developments. All these planning processes have required quite a long time, from a minimum of 4-5 years up to 15. The diverse statutes ruling each Region, so that in some cases both adoption and approval were voted by the elected Council, in most cases only the approval, in one case none of these two acts, express only a small part of the many technical and political causes which have concurred to slow down or accelerate the planning processes, and to qualify them through different substantial and procedural choices⁵.

The political debate beyond these plans, accused to further bureaucratize any building permit and to constraint development, has been quite harsh in all regional contexts⁶, and many opposition political parties have campaigned against them⁷.

Conversely to what the opponents were in many cases arguing against the plans brought to approval, the experience of these planning processes has brought a change of perspective in Heritage protection, claiming for a closer integration between single assets (single buildings, or single areas) to be protected and the wider context giving them significance. A list of constraints as that, in this new perspective, is not that much useful, the real target of protection and enhancement being the cultural frame giving structure to each landscape.

What is new in regional planning thanks to Landscape Plans?

The fact that the new Landscape Plans, compliant with the 2004 National Code of Heritage, are dealing not only with special protection areas but with the whole territory, including degraded areas, can be interpreted as a tribute to the European Landscape Convention, open to the signature in Florence in November 2000⁸, which states in its premises:

“Acknowledging that the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas.” (European Landscape Convention, 2000).

The consequences of this choice *de facto* open the issue of the relation between landscape planning and regional planning.

Practically, the void of recent regional planning tools going beyond purely functional schemes smooths the potential conflicts with other recent plans, making Landscape Plans the new reference for spatial planning (*pianificazione territoriale*) at the regional scale.

In Puglia, where there was no previous '*Piano Territoriale Regionale*', the Landscape Plan played this role even formally. In other Regions, the Landscape Plans have integrated or coupled existing '*piani territoriali*' with no evident conflict on formal aspects, yet on substantial contents (Marson 2018).

Thanks to landscape contents, the new way to look at regions means in first line going beyond large infrastructures, housing and local labour systems, functional zoning, and long-lists of single monuments or protected areas etc., exploring instead morpho-typological aspects, ecological values of traditional landscapes, rural landscape permanence and change across time, the rhizome structure of Heritage at the territorial scale, the relations between perception and structural basis⁹.

This shift, rather unusual for most public officials and elected councillors, accustomed to other frames, has in many cases taken them by surprise. New knowledge introduced, and interpretations offered, have nevertheless proved to be influential, framing debates and action design, both at local and regional levels.

Some more specific reflections deserves the regulatory content of Landscape Plans, the main object of political attention and contrast action within the planning process before the final vote on the Plan by the elected Regional Councils. The regulatory content of approved Landscape Plans is referred both to private and public action. Rules regarding directly any transformative action, by private or public actors, are mostly referred to protected areas, and represent a limited part of the overall normative contents. Most of them are in fact directed to make public action more careful about landscape quality. Not an easy task, given the established lobbies behind each public policy, as well as the greater ease of the 'doing as usual' business.

Another aspect somehow intriguing is that Landscape Plans generally include prescriptions and directives but also strategies, therefore dealing not

only with how things should be done, but also with non-ordinary actions to be brought forward for obtaining better landscapes. Of course, the idea behind all this, and especially strategic actions, is that general landscape quality can help also economic development and wellbeing, at least in a medium-long-time perspective.

Do Landscape Plans have really the capacity to ensure a better landscape quality? In such general terms, the task is enormously ambitious. For sure they have produced and are producing a positive effect, how positive depends greatly on the quality of institutional actions related to the diverse contents of the Plan.

Landscape planning as a multi-faceted process

In fact, too often the approval of a plan is considered the final stage of the planning process, and its implementation just an ordinary administrative task. If this is not so true even for an ordinary town planning regulation, in the case of the Landscape Plans we are considering, their approval is just the real starting point of a multifaceted planning process. How the plan is managed makes a real difference in results which can be produced by the implementation of these plans.

A relevant point is which institutional actors take part actively in this downstream process. The Ministry of Heritage and the Region, as co-planners, should both play a major role, but in practice the great deal of the job is left to the latter.

Most attention is concentrated on the evaluation process of municipal urban plans' compliance with the Landscape Plan. This is a complex and time-consuming task, often brought forward by a few civil servants under high political pressure. It would require the capability to consider compliance a substantive issue, not just a formal one, but the bureaucratic machine often does not permit it. Therefore, the translation of the Plan at the municipal scale, instead of an opportunity to

measure and enrich its matter with issues detectable only at a greater detail, with a deeper insight into the specific landscape relations qualifying different places, too often¹⁰ becomes a trivialisation of its contents.

The State, through MiBACT¹¹ local officials, should participate actively to this evaluation, but cannot afford it for diverse reasons¹², presiding over the field only when entire plans are discussed, not partial variations. This point is not so trivial, nor just a matter of principle, since, once urban plans of municipalities are compliant with their regional Landscape Plan, the opinion of the Ministry of Heritage local offices regarding any transformation proposal loses its binding power.

It is therefore the small policy community made by regional officers in charge of the plans' evaluation, a few professional towns planners, and technical personnel of municipalities which develops a common interpretation of what local plan compliance should consist of, with external inputs only from the political side.

Even in the regulatory contents of the Plan, therefore, which are in general supposed to be formally well defined and formally prevailing over any other plan¹³, we can say that the implementation path is scattered by large grey areas, where the meaning of regulations is continuously negotiated and redefined.

The uncertainty of the planning process following the approval of the Landscape Plan becomes larger and larger when we consider other contents of the plan, in relation to which there is no hierarchy of powers, nor resources definitely assigned.

One major issue is the integration of the Plan's contents into the diverse sectors of institutional action. For instance, how do infrastructural or agricultural policies take the Landscape Plan's into account when defining their measures? And who cares for this aspect, besides the few regional officers in charge of the Plan? Who guarantees institutional continuity to landscape policy?

Strategic scenarios and actions: who takes care, and how?

Besides their due regulatory contents¹⁴, most Landscape Plans contain also “strategies” for enhancing the quality of local landscapes. Strategies are quite important because they can contribute to demonstrate how landscape can define a different path of development, based on the specific landscape Heritage of each place and the perspectives to frame it in a different way, as well as introducing sensitive innovation. And can promote and test creative pro-landscape relationships among diverse actors and fields of action.

But are what Landscape Plans define as “strategies” credible path of actions, or just wishful thinking?

Who is really in charge of bringing them forward, and on which resources strategies can they count?

The National Charter for the Italian Landscape (*Osservatorio nazionale per la qualità del paesaggio*, 2018), which declines a strategy for landscape at the national level, so far has produced poor evidence of being taken seriously by the same Ministry which promoted it¹⁵.

Also, scarce evidence of a consistent commitment for landscape strategies can be found in the implementation processes following the approval of Landscape Plans, although with some bright signals. Puglia Regional Government, before approving its Landscape Plan, has done an interesting work on EU structural funds, based also on an experimental SEA evaluation process (Reho, Marson and Vitadini, 2011) aimed at integrating landscape components into the various plans and programmes on a regional and local level; regional calls on structural funds, in this case, were open to several projects aimed to implement the strategies of Landscape Plans. Another interesting work was done by Lazio Regional Government, appointing ‘Lazioinova’ (its company managing EU funds) to find opportunities for sustaining the landscape strategies, although

the effective results are less clear than for Puglia. Tuscany Region has been less active in explicitly integrating landscape into its EU structural funds allocation, although a sensible job was done in promotion of tourism, in introducing and maintaining tax benefits for donations aimed at improving heritage and landscape, in establishing and managing the Regional Observatory of Landscape, one of the few active in Italy¹⁶.

It is Piedmont, nevertheless, where the Landscape Plan has been recently approved after a long scientific and administrative work (Cassatella and Paludi, 2018) to offer currently a stimulating ongoing pilot project, with reference to the opportunity to activate diverse sets of actors, potentially caring for landscape, in different landscape contexts. The pilot project, promoted by Compagnia di San Paolo¹⁷, and based on a Memorandum of understanding signed by the Regional Secretariat of MiBACT, Regione Piemonte, started at the beginning of 2019 with reference to a first area, the Eporediese¹⁸, chosen for experimenting the implementation of the Landscape Plan’s strategies as an opportunity for fostering local development on the basis of its specific landscape structures and characters. An area non so far from Turin (and just a few more kilometres from Milan) but with socio-economic indicators much less dynamic, finding it hard to find again its own identity and development model after the age of Olivetti¹⁹, with its orphan-like condition dating back longer than half a century. This first experiment, so far in the middle of its duration²⁰, to succeed working on place’s landscape opportunities and actors, after a first more general inquiry was focused on two more specific contexts²¹.

In both contexts explored, the main issue regarding institutional action is its fragmentation: Turin Metropolitan Authority is too far away²², single Municipalities are focused within their municipal borders²³, nothing consistent is acting in-between these two levels. Private sector actors, although some of them

found their business on landscape qualities²⁴, are by their nature competitive, and not willing to invest on externalities; therefore, in some cases they do an excellent job on the landscape they own directly, but not beyond that. Local non-profit associations do important voluntary work²⁵, but alone are not capable to go beyond single small-scale projects they can manage directly, and without any institutional support they tend to fade.

In its networks weaving, the ongoing pilot project is focusing on what collective actors could and should do, for addressing social and economic energies available in each specific place towards results concurring to landscape strategies. Besides concurring to fulfill the strategies defined by the Landscape Plan, this action-research practice in some cases also opens new unforeseen innovation perspectives, enriching and qualifying the potential scenario.

What will be learned through this experience will nevertheless become fully useful if the local community – starting from its institutional representatives – will understand the importance of conceiving the Landscape Plan as a demanding process, to be managed along the time with institutional continuity and proactive initiative.

Under these conditions, the new season of Landscape Planning in Italy could really generate important outcomes for local communities and for the country, whose landscape, though uglier than in the past, is still one of its major resources. Left alone, as they were self-implementing tools, Landscape Plans risk to be yet other bureaucratic paperwork.

Endnotes

¹By Law No 1497/1939 and its implementing regulations approved by Royal Decree No 1357/1940. This legal framework gave birth to the famous Appia Antica Landscape Plan, whose controversial history slowed down further landscape planning experiences for quite a long period. These plans were promoted by the central State, although in collaboration with the technical offices of the Municipalities involved: “*La redazione d'un piano territoriale paesistico è commessa dal Ministro alla competente regia Soprintendenza, la quale vi attende secondo le ricevute direttive, valendosi della collaborazione degli uffici tecnici dei Comuni interessati*” (Royal Decree No 1357/1940, art. 23). In this case the plans coincided with special protection constraints managed by *Soprintendenze* (local offices of the State in charge of managing Heritage).

²The main objective of these plans was the specific mapping and regulation of the new special protection areas generally identified by Law No 431/1985: river and lake banks, sea shores, woods, mountains over a certain height, volcanos, glacial cirques and the landscape value of archaeological heritage. In some cases, as in the Emilia-Romagna 1986 Plan promoted by Felicia Bottino, this new requirement was taken as an opportunity to experiment a landscape interpretation of the whole region.

³Beyond this choice there is a strong debate about the technical-discretionary character of special protection regimes regarding Heritage vs the administrative discretion of local authorities (Severini, 2019).

⁴Promoted by the Council of Europe, the Landscape Convention was adopted on 20th October 2000 in Florence and came into force on 1st March 2004 (Council of Europe Treaty Series no. 176): <https://www.coe.int/en/web/landscape>.

⁵For a more complete and deeper comparative insight into the different Landscape Plans in Italy see respectively MiBACT (2017) and Magnaghi (2016).

⁶For Tuscany see Marson (2015).

⁷In Piedmont and Friuli Venezia-Giulia winning the regional elections. Anyhow, it is not so easy to estimate how much the campaign against Landscape Plans has weighed in the elections' results.

⁸Ratified by the Italian State by Law No 14/2006.

⁹Concerning the Plan of Tuscany, these aspects are explored by the different contributions in Marson (2016).

¹⁰Among the few exceptions the case of Puglia described by C. Iannotti in *Mibact-Osservatorio nazionale per la qualità del paesaggio* (2018, pgs 232-233).

¹¹*Ministero dei Beni culturali e del Turismo*, so far mentioned as 'Ministry of Heritage'.

¹²Mostly shortage of staff and lack of specific competences.

¹³Italian Heritage and Landscape Code, article 135.

¹⁴ According to the Heritage and Landscape Code which governs Landscape Plans contents, the Plan must contain both a regulation for each landscape protection area and for the whole landscape/territory.

¹⁵ Since June 2018, with the new national legislature and government, landscape has been dealt with as an ordinary duty regarding permits for Heritage protection areas to be complied with by offices. The National Observatory for landscape quality, an institution required by the National Heritage and Landscape Code, has no longer been convened, and no pro-active strategies have been implemented. A few months ago (September 2019), with a new government Dario Franceschini has been appointed as Minister of Heritage, who already played this role from 2014 to June 2018. So far (January 2020), however, the National Observatory is not back in action.

¹⁶ For a synthetic reference to what Landscape Observatories are, in relation to the Italian context, see Marson (2019).

¹⁷ Compagnia di San Paolo is an important Italian Bank Foundation, among the more active in promoting directly sustainable and fair development project, besides the more traditional calls for financing.

¹⁸ 'Eporediese' is the name of the area surrounding the city of Ivrea, derived by the roman name (Eporedia) of this latter. This area has been identified by the Landscape Plan of Piedmont as one specific landscapes area, thanks to the morainic reliefs defining its borders, according to which it is also known as Morainic Amphitheatre of Ivrea.

¹⁹ From the late XIX through the early Sixties of the XX century, first Camillo and then Adriano Olivetti promoted in this area a production model highly innovative yet characterized by a strong relation with the local territory.

²⁰ In this first area, the Eporediese, the project is expected to last from January 2019 to June 2020. Within the first

months of 2020 a second pilot area will be tackled. In this case, it will be an area formally defined as 'marginal' according to all the official indicators, in order to explore the resources landscape can offer in such a context.

²¹ Respectively a specific landscape unit, n. 2801, corresponding to the Carema and Settimo Vittore vineyards' landscape, and eastern part of the morainic amphitheatre, including both the sierra of Ivrea and the morainic hills hosting a number of castles, including the Masino one.

²² The main presence of the Turin Metropolitan Authority in these areas has been along these months pertaining to an Interreg-Alcotra project.

²³ In Piedmont municipalities are all together about 1200, with many micro entities. Municipalities' unions, created for the mandatory common management of public services in less populated areas, do not necessarily create cooperation and common action between Mayors.

²⁴ Wine producers, all activities related to tourism, quality food producers, etc.

²⁵ Among these the 'Via Francigena Association', the local 'Osservatorio del paesaggio' and 'Ecomuseo'.

References

- Cassatella C., Paludi, G. (a cura di) 2018, *Il piano paesaggistico del Piemonte/The Landscape Plan of Piedmont Region*, "Atti e Rassegna Tecnica", LXXII, n.3.
- Magnaghi A. (a cura di) 2016, *La pianificazione paesaggistica in Italia. Stato dell'arte e innovazioni*, FUP, Firenze.
- Marson A. 2015, *Il percorso di approvazione del Piano paesaggistico della Regione Toscana*, "Il Ponte", LXXI, n.7, pgs. 63-73.
- Marson A. (a cura di) 2016, *La struttura del paesaggio. Una sperimentazione multidisciplinare per il piano della Toscana*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- Marson A. 2018, *La struttura del paesaggio: una nuova cultura del territorio per la costruzione delle politiche pubbliche?*, in *Il paesaggio nel governo del territorio*, a cura di M. Morisi, D. Poli, M. Rossi, FUP, Firenze, pgs. 9-20.
- Marson A. 2019, *Integrated policies for terraces: the role of Landscapes Observatories*, in *World Terraced Landscapes: History, Environment, Quality of Life*, eds. M.Varotto, L.Bonardi and P.Tarolli, Springer, Cham (Switzerland), pgs. 335-347.
- MiBACT - Osservatorio nazionale per la qualità del paesaggio 2018, *Rapporto sullo stato delle politiche per il paesaggio*, Gangemi, Roma.
- Osservatorio nazionale per la qualità del paesaggio (a cura di) 2018, *Carta nazionale del paesaggio*, MiBACT-Gangemi, Roma.
- Reho M., Marson A., Vittadini M. R. 2011, *The strategic environmental assessment of the Pptr as an experimental process integrated into the making of the plan*, "Urbanistica" n. 147, pgs. 52-55; 70.
- Salzano E. 2013, *Lezione di Piano. L'esperienza pioniera del piano paesaggistico della Sardegna raccontata per voci*, Corte del Fontego, Venezia.
- Severini G. 2019, *L'evoluzione storica del concetto giuridico di paesaggio in Il "paesaggio" di Alberto Predieri*, a cura di G.Morbidelli e M. Morisi, Passigli, Firenze, pgs. 59-107.