

The Siena
Charter

Museums and Cultural Landscapes

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1. Italian landscape

The Italian landscape is the country where we live, which surrounds us with the images and symbols that identify and characterize it.

It is one of the best known and celebrated landscapes in the world due to its character of a unique blend of nature and history: for this reason, the Italian landscape has always attracted the attention (particularly during modern times) of travelers and artists. They have described, painted and portrayed it, creating that composite and diverse image of great beauty that, despite aggressions and damage endured, continues to distinguish it and allows us to admire and love it.

But the Italian landscape is also what the remarkable transformations during the last century, more substantial and rapid during recent decades, have brought, adding and replacing its toughened features over time. It is the transformed and forever changing country we belong to, together with unsolved conflicts and difficult negotiations between often incompatible interests and values. These determine the evolution of the country, often for the most part far from the ideal notion we have of it and which we would like it to change into.

We are responsible for the landscape both as individuals and as a community and this responsibility must therefore be assumed in its entirety, taking into consideration all its countless and different components and dimensions. It is a responsibility that demands active interventions for its protection, conservation and understanding within a participatory logic and a sustainable development perspective. The museums together with all authorities, associations and institutions, involved in its protection and appreciation have the same responsibility.

2. Italian museums

The Italian museums due to mere numbers, dispersion and importance of their heritage constitute a significant element of the Italian landscape, in the great majority of cases associated with their own physical and geographical territories.

Without doubt this is the feature that characterizes the Italian museums and gives them, with rare exceptions, a territorial character, mainly due to the origin itself of their collections. Items come to light during archeological digs, objects from the closure of ecclesiastical institutes, those moved from other institutions unable to keep them, those collected in the territory, those saved from decay and destruction together with bequests, donations and private collections.

In this way, items removed from their context have not coincided with a relocation and the Italian museums are thus the depository of tangible and intangible testimonies from a more or less vast territory, however physically and culturally close. Although the relationship between territory and museum is not exclusive to Italian museums, it certainly distinguishes them from those in many other countries. Consequently this also makes museums responsible for the landscape where they are based and they can offer their internal knowledge and expertise, playing an active role in protecting and appreciating the landscape.

3. Cultural heritage

The identity of the Italian landscape is intimately related to the special nature of a cultural heritage which is broad, widespread, solid, stratified and an integral part of the environment as in few other places around the world.

This makes Italy a huge “open air museum”, an “extended” museum which is as large as the entire national territory and is made up of thousands of assets dispersed far and wide. By law or according

to universal values, such assets form “the landscape and the historical and artistic heritage of the Nation”. Their protection is ensured by article 9 of the Constitution.

This task, ascribed to the Italian Republic, does not concern only the State, the local governments but also every private and public individual involved in different ways in the protection and the preservation, regarding the handling and the valuation of cultural heritage. It is clear that the immense dimensions of the cultural heritage – in quantity as well as quality – has made and makes this task particularly difficult to carry out.

Factors such as inadequate financial investment, a severe lack of human resources, a regulatory structure not suitably coordinated with territorial and urban planning, an institutional framework which does not promote the accomplishment of common goals, are hindering the accomplishment of this task. Nowadays the situation for cultural heritage is also threatened by reduced public resources.

The critical situation in the care and management of cultural heritage, which is a crucial and decisive component of the landscape, inevitably affects its quality and integrity and stresses the need for a critical turning point if we are concerned about the safety of the cultural heritage and the landscape.

4. A new protection model

Italy needs a new and different model and system for protection. It needs an institutional reform which goes beyond the current partition of powers between the State and the local authorities, which recomposes the protection, the valuation and the management of cultural heritage and provides greater resources for it within this renewed framework. There is no need for more State, but for a State capable of performing a directive and leading function, overcoming ancient obstacles and stimulating the convergence of all - public and private– resources towards common goals using coherent and shared methods.

As part of a new and different model, museums can be a strength as regional offices for active protection of cultural heritage. Many museums are already involved in this work: they take care of the existing heritage outside their walls, they organize activities, they manage palaces and churches, monuments and sites, they participate in the monitoring of their conditions, they supervise restoration work and they organize tours and walks, they promote knowledge and communication, they look after the education of the cultural and environmental heritage in their surrounding area.

Formally giving the museums the role of regional offices for active protection of cultural heritage, under the framework of agreements and arrangements on a different territorial scale, between State and Regions, is a way to substantiate protection, management and enhancement of cultural heritage, taking advantage of the pivot of museum networks, but also through archives, libraries, cultural institutions, within the framework of integrated systems, that provide the active involvement of the citizens in the management of a heritage, too large to be maintained exclusively by public bodies.

5. Museums and cultural landscapes

Involving the museums in the management and care of the cultural landscape means to develop their natural vocation, by extending their responsibility from their collections to the cultural heritage and surroundings: their local towns, villages and communities.

This is mostly a potential vocation, having been prevented by lack of economic and human resources and by a regulatory framework, as it has become alien to the operational culture itself.

To develop this it will be necessary, wherever the conditions are met, for museums not only to assume the role of regional offices for active protection, but also to become centers for interpretation

of their territory by extending their own mission. They should develop their activities in the open field of cultural heritage and landscape that surrounds them and of which they may become responsible, to varying degrees.

Moreover, the concept of a museum almost exclusively involved in the preservation, the display and the information of its collections, must be replaced by another role, one more coherent to the nature of an institution that undertakes research and produces, elaborates and spreads knowledge.

If extended to the context in which museums work, this function of museums - especially if integrated with the function of archives, libraries, cultural institutions – becomes an extraordinary resource for the protection, care and interpretation of the landscape as well as a resource for the museums themselves that, by performing duties not limited to their own collections, might further increase and enhance as well as stimulate the growth of their own heritage of knowledge and expertise.

6. Responsibility for the landscape

The responsibility for the landscape involves dual commitment: the care and the management of the heritage in a framework of sustainable development of the territory on one hand and attention to the images and symbols that identify and characterize the landscape itself on the other.

As an *active manager of active protection*, a museum that is responsible for the landscape also takes on among its tasks the protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage, respecting the evolution of its identifying characteristics, in co-operation with everyone who, either public or private, has an interest in this.

A museum which is responsible for the landscape undertakes at the same time the *interpretation center* of heritage and territory, promoting its knowledge and its symbols making inhabitants and visitors conscious of their constituent values and encouraging them to preserve, promote and enrich it.

A museum fully responsible for the landscape intervenes on it to protect and save it as a material entity and to interpret and increase its value using all economic, human and intellectual resources necessary for this purpose.

7. A shared responsibility

The complexity and extent of the task enforce museums to share the responsibility of the landscape thinking about a partnership where they could be protagonists and actors of operations shared with other partners, both public and private.

This task could be very successful if it involves first their own responsible administration, if it associates with other heritage institutions, if it is recognized by local protection authorities, if it works in cooperation with associations and institutions engaged in the defence of the landscape, if it turns to economic entities and productive structures of the area, and if it stimulates processes of active citizenship.

Wherever this goal of cooperation with all parties interested in the landscape cannot be fully carried out, it must still remain among the museum activities, even if only partially.

In a framework of a redefined and enlarged mission of the museums which comprises the landscape in the activities of research, conservation, documentation, display, communication and mediation, it must be their responsibility to define, relating to its real possibilities, what can be done for protection, preservation and interpretation of the landscape, within a sustainable development perspective.

8. Landscape and sustainable development

Landscape is naturally in constant evolution, therefore it cannot be frozen or reduced to an object to be preserved in a museum. So to protect and to preserve it means avoiding any transformation that might delete, ruin, corrupt its identifying characteristics.

This aim can be achieved if the main elements of a landscape are first identified and known by all who work with preservation, management and development of the territory. And if the land development ensures its preservation and its maintenance by combining, in accordance with people's expectations, correct safeguards with the demands of transformation due to social, economic and natural evolution processes.

Museums can offer assistance to local governments which are respectful to the values of the landscape also with the help of the contribution they can give regarding knowledge of the territory, heritage and landscape; thanks to the activities of protection, conservation, interpretation of the cultural heritage in their territory; by being actively involved in regional and urban planning.

9. Landscape communities

Museums should promote the creation of "landscape communities" aware of their identity, involved in their preservation, participating in their sustainable development.

In their wide variety of forms and sizes, museums and similar institutions (parks and archaeological sites, monument complexes and other places of culture, eco-museums and territorial and environmental centers of information...) that assume a responsibility in the protection of the cultural landscape contribute in various ways to create "landscape communities".

The museums achieve this through their ordinary activities of study and research in the relationship with visitors and users of educational activities, information and promotion, knowing the expectations of the community from the landscape and the environment, through the care and management of cultural heritage and initiatives to develop active participation.

To create, develop, maintain "landscape communities" active over time should be a strategic goal of museums and the subject of planning, consultation and sharing with all involved in the protection, care and understanding of the cultural landscape.

Only a diffuse and active network of communities of extended landscapes makes it possible to achieve good protection and development of the landscape itself.

10. An intercultural vision of landscape

Even though the *European Landscape Convention* proposed a common definition, it is also true that cultural landscapes vary from one country to another. Thus it is necessary to create a dialogue between many different thoughts about landscapes in the world.

We need to do this in order to be more aware of the concept of the landscape we inherit.

It is necessary to reach an even more heterogeneous public regarding culture and origin, to establish a bridge between different visions, to have a dialogue, comparison, mutual understanding.

Adopting a clearly intercultural approach allows us to open ourselves to unfamiliar visions of our own landscape, enriching it with new and different values and enhancing our own ability to perceive and think about it.