

PREFACE

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) allowed achieving important results through the promotion of approaches oriented to landscapes safeguard and valorization. Nevertheless, in the present context, risks and hazards able to threaten landscapes resources have been increasingly growing: environmental risks intensified by a wild urban development, climate change, excessive landscape exploitation or, on the other hand, landscape abandonment and depopulation. Twenty years on from ELC enactment, this special issue wants to take a stock of how much is still required to cope with all the different form of risk threatening “the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity” (ELC, 2000).

The special issue aims is to deal with all the different reasons that could produce alteration, decay, depletion or loss of material and immaterial assets that mark out landscapes. Therefore, risk is also understood as risk of alteration or interruption of the relationship between community and places, which lead to landscape’s features creation according to ELC. Therefore, the issue “Landscapes at risk” will be addressed considering its multiple meanings, starting from landscapes affected by natural risks, moving to the ones suffering shrinking or gentrification risk or even overexploitation and/or congestion, up to landscape in transition.

The first section of this special issue analyzes landscape affected by natural risks, from technical, organizational and social point of view. Landscapes are modelled by risks in many different ways. Some types of risks shape orography and influence the characteristic of natural environment (i.e. volcanic and hydro-geological risks) promoting specific economic activities more than others, generating population movements/settlements. Furthermore, grey works to struggle hazard (i.e. river banks, retaining walls, etc.) could distort landscape features. To cope with landscape alteration due to risk prevention new solutions that are landscape-consistent have been recently set up and local knowledge in dealing with disasters is reconsidered as a welcome supplement to scientific knowledge. Traditional practices to face risks could contribute to find solutions for risk mitigation, which are more respectful of nature, i.e. there is an expanding body of knowledge on locally rooted strategies for risk mitigation.

Furthermore, the presence of a permanent condition of risk affects the relationship inhabitants-territory and the way people live places under the constant threat of hazard; while some places are abandoned by population after a disaster, in other places people came back in hazardous areas to rebuilt their houses and their system of life. Sense of belonging, cultural identity, risk and landscape perception and representation, on one side, and social networks, information channels and risk communication modalities, on the other one, should be considered before and after a disaster, and have a special attention in Disaster Risk Reduction strategies. A special attention should be paid to cultural heritage and landscape features that are representative of identity and pride and needs to be proactively considered in post-disaster recovery. Safeguard of heritage and landscape features have a significant role in social cohesion and sustainable development especially in time of crisis.

The papers presented in this section focus on traditional techniques and customary practices to face hazards; everyday life and community resilience underpinning landscape creation; post-disaster reconstruction examples, which are consistent with landscape features.

The second section deals with the risks provoked by Climate Change for urban and rural landscapes. In particular, hydro-meteorological extreme events are increasing in frequency and intensity, generating dramatic negative impacts on ecosystems and increasing the hazards of other risks, such as fires, sea-level rise and biodiversity loss.

Climate change, thus, has been also altering the value system through which local communities traditionally interacted with landscape, and this change can be perceived both in a negative or positive way. If at one hand climate change is one of the main causes of rapidly changing landscape scenarios, on the other hand adaptation and mitigation strategies can become themselves drivers of profound land transformations.

The need to face climate-related risk has been pushing researchers, local authorities and policy makers to find and test viable solutions to mitigate climate change negative effects and to make landscapes more resilient to these effects. The implementation of solutions will significantly modify urban and rural landscape and its perception by communities. Examples of sustainable solutions that can transform the relation between landscape and its community can be found at urban scale, such as the implementation of sustainable mobility-oriented traffic policies (e.g. restricted traffic areas, bike lanes, etc.) or nature-based solutions. At a wider scale, climate-sensitive management of agriculture practices (e.g. by shifting to crops with higher carbon storage potential or reducing forest clearing for agricultural expansion) can contribute to significant reduction of CO₂.

This section presents contributes investigating how to ensure the reduction of risk by climate change with the landscape preservation and promotion. Papers included deals with:

- 1) methodological improvements or new modelling approaches to support strategies, measures or actions for the mitigation and adaptation of rural and urban landscapes.
- 2) case studies and experiences on urban planning and design, at nationally or international level and at different scales and extents, dealing with nature-driven urban and landscape regeneration (NBSs, green and blue infrastructure, ecosystem services, soil sealing recovering).

The third section deals with Landscape at Risk of abandonment. All over Europe there are extensive cultural landscapes at risk of depopulation. These landscapes typically belong to peripheral areas that were cut off by the main development dynamics. They have gradually become marginalised due to depletion of the local economy and demographic decline. Frequently these areas conserve uncontaminated natural environments with a rich cultural and historical heritage composed of a network of small historical centres, abundant high quality agricultural products and knowledge and skills utilised in traditional ways of working. This heritage is at risk since population decrease is leading to abandonment of these areas with the consequent decay of the tangible cultural heritage. These settlements play an important role in safeguarding the territory, custodians of memory and beauty, and their depopulation has led to a freezing and deterioration of places, an emptying of relationships, a desertification of the environment and culture.

These areas are often lacking in accessibility, have scarce economic visibility, low levels of enterprise, and have difficulties in becoming part of effective economic hubs. The global economy favours the concentration of assets in big cities producing isolation of peripheral areas. The broken link between generations, between

young and old people, prevents the natural transmission of traditional knowledge, which is based on previous experiences and drives the loss of intangible heritage composed of traditional skills, social organization forms, awareness, understanding and ability to use natural resources. The loss of intangible heritage with the associated culture, memories, skills, knowledge and imbedded sense of identity linked to these landscapes may further compromise the competitiveness of these regions. New ways of thinking, living and housing, are necessary to give new chances to these territories, using culture and traditional local resources as a leverage for a new tailored development.

This section explores different development paths for these landscapes, where the elements that are traditionally considered as weaknesses for economic growth could become the strengths of a new concept of development, the starting point of a “different” development pattern.

There is a strong request for new researches based on the:

- 1) creation of networks able to systematize and revitalize landscape resources;
- 2) engagement of local community (e.g. new forms of inclusion, hospitality projects, innovative agriculture, etc.);
- 3) triggering of intercultural and intergenerational dialogue to cope with the loss of heritage;
- 4) exploitation of the “different” resources held by these landscapes;
- 5) examples of development based on the hybridization of natural and cultural driven.

The section presents papers aiming at identifying innovative patterns for the revitalisation and regeneration of these landscapes at risk.

On the contrary, the fourth section deals with landscape at risk of overexploitation. It is evident how the intensity of landscape exploitation is producing unprecedented changes in places perception and configuration, in the levels of biodiversity and in social and cultural relations. In detail landscapes exploitation for touristic purposes has been producing extremely relevant effects on tangible and intangible landscape values through the construction of infrastructures, building densification, urban spaces and functions transformation, installation of seaside tourist accommodation structures, both seasonal or not.

Landscape resources are threatened by the intense overexploitation, for touristic aim and not: the massive growth of intensive cropping modifies the mosaic of rural land use, while the pervasive “hit and run” tourism produces severe impacts on urban historic centers, such as the replacement of traditional activities with facilities for tourists or the substitution of local population with tourists themselves. However, some practical experiences have shown how is possible to achieve a “delicate balance” between the landscape values enhancement the protection of natural environment and local identity and the promotion of tourism. According to these premises, this section tries to investigate which are or how should be the tools and good practices for the “sober enjoyment” of the anthropized and/or natural landscape, through a controlled exploitation of the resource.

The papers hosted in this section deal with case studies of tourism development patterns that are consistent with material and immaterial values of landscapes and strategic responses to enhance the ability of territories to manage and recover the tourism shocks and to cope with the loss of identity.