

Landscape as heritage in museums.  
A critical appraisal of current experiences from the  
perspective of Geography.  
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In recent decades landscape has received full recognition in international heritage policies, particularly with the introduction in 1992 of 'cultural landscape' as a new kind of World Heritage and with the European Landscape Convention in 2000. Nevertheless, this 'heritageisation' of landscape raises many questions when shifting from general statements of principles to their application.

Firstly, they arise from the complex and ambiguous nature of landscape *per se*, abundantly explored by the geographical tradition and expressed by the opposition between the tangible nature of landscape as a material record of ecological and social processes and its intangible dimension as a cultural image. Problems also arise from the dynamic nature of landscape: both as the material product of historical processes and for the changing values attributed to it by people. Another source of problems derives from the difficulty to adapt to the management of landscape the practices and tools that have been developed for other kinds of traditionally acknowledged heritage, that – unlike the landscape – are confined to single objects, monuments or sites.

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This contribution focuses on the specific issues posed by the inclusion of landscape within the sphere of the action of museums. In fact, both theoretical museology debate and substantive museum initiatives have shown a growing interest towards landscape, recently leading to the 24<sup>th</sup> general ICOM Conference (Milan, 2016) expressly devoted to *Museums and Cultural landscapes*.

Looking at the European tradition in its global extension, we can identify several museum models that deal with landscape. The oldest one is the open-air museum derived from Skansen, originally conceived as a collection of vernacular buildings dismantled, reassembled and displayed in a town park to offer the public an immersive experience in past lifestyles. Often criticised for providing a frozen and nostalgic representation of the past, these museums show even greater shortcomings in the re-enactment of past landscapes. The landscape experienced in these museums, unlike the buildings and objects displayed, is neither authentic nor designed as a replica of an original past landscape: it is just a scenic fiction aimed to make the “time machine” effect of the visit more suggestive. As a response to this criticism, therefore, several open-air museums engaged in landscape reconstructions, based on thorough archaeological and historical-geographical investigations, creating a ‘museum landscape’ through which the public can appreciate the historic dynamics underlying today’s landscape, as in German *Landschaftsmuseum*.

A different model is proposed by Ecomuseums, that abandon the relocation and reconstruction practices in favour of *in situ* conservation of movable and immovable objects and traditional activities, to depict the relationships between a community and its territory, both from an historical perspective and with an openness to present problems and future development. Promoting a participatory idea of museum through the involvement of local people, the Ecomuseum not only acts for

the conservation of historical memory, but also for local development. Despite of the utopian character of much of the Ecomuseum theory and the disappointing results of some of its practical implementations, Ecomuseums show great potential in proposing a more integrated, dynamic and participated approach to landscape.

Finally, also the intangible dimension of landscape has been considered by museums: not only through the usual exhibitions of landscape paintings, but also in more recent and ground-breaking experiences. It is the case of the *Museo del Paesaggio* at Castelnuovo Berardenga, that stimulates reflection on landscape as a “way of seeing” and a form of representation in art and science. It tries to instil the perspective of New Cultural Geography in a new kind of museum, displaying ideas rather than objects.

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