

Moving Dolomites.

The heritage value of an ordinary landscape: the case of
Vallesina (Belluno, Italy)

SARA LUCHETTA, BENEDETTA CASTIGLIONI, MAURO VAROTTO⁸⁴

This intervention aims at reflecting on the heritage value of an ordinary and marginal landscape in the Veneto region, Eastern Alps, at the border of one of the nine systems that constitute the “authorised” Dolomites World Heritage Site (WHS). The case of the inscription of the Dolomites into the UNESCO Natural World Heritage List (in 2009) has encouraged several reflections on the identification, conservation and representation of mountain landscape. The border of the nine groups of the site includes the upper parts of forested slopes and dolomite peaks but excludes the lower part of the slopes and the valley bottoms with the villages and the human-made landscape. The UNESCO Declaration of “natural heritage” risks producing a double effect: in the name of its preservation, the Declaration has highlighted the values of natural heritage “immobility”, overlooking the values of the relationships that linked the Alpine communities with their mountains through a centuries-old agro-silvo-pastoral economy (Guichonnet, 1986).

Beyond the “immobility” of natural landscape conservation, ordinary and lived landscapes can also have heritage value, as

⁸⁴ Sara Luchetta, Ca’ Foscari University of Venice (Italy); Benedetta Castiglioni, University of Padova (Italy); Mauro Varotto, University of Padova (Italy).

argued in the case study of the village of Vallesina. The landscape of Vallesina is the complex and relational result of different times and socio-cultural processes, where nowadays depopulation and abandonment are the most important driving forces. Situated at the intersection of different roads (ancient historical paths through the Alps, traditional tracks linked to pastoral and handcraft activities, the old railway recently transformed into a touristic bike-lane, the congested main road of the valley connecting outstanding tourism destinations), the key category that emerges from the analysis of the landscape is mobility. Indeed, a constellation of mobilities (Cresswell, 2010) has contributed to the construction of the local ordinary landscape; mobility, in terms of materialities, practices and meanings, emerges from the landscape and is here viewed as *“an important concept for exploring how landscapes are produced, lived, experienced, and moved through in dynamic, embodied and highly politicised ways”* (Merriman et al., 2008, p. 209).

In the frame of an Interreg project, and aside from the material restoration of an abandoned path — which was at the core of the traditional economic activities — we were invited to analyse and interpret the landscape of the village, searching for the sense of place to disclose, to care for, and to share with both the inhabitants and the potential visitors. Through the processes of re-discovering past and present infrastructures, movements, meanings and memories that intertwine in Vallesina and re-reading its landscape, new perspectives are opening up for this marginal village.

Starting from the case study of Vallesina, we put into play the relationship between immobility and mobility in the identification of and care for alpine heritages, with particular attention to the relationship with the Dolomites UNESCO World Heritage Site near Vallesina. This case study guides us to look at the relationship between ordinary and extraordinary

landscapes, moving the debate on landscape as heritage in a mountain environment.

References

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