



Learning Landscapes. Introduction

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We are very pleased to present this issue focused on the theme of landscape. As is well known both inside and outside of geography, landscape studies represent an established and transversal field of research, an archipelago of questions capable of setting off and involving knowledge and heterogeneous perspectives that we recognise as “connected to” and “intertwined with” this concept. Different ways of looking at, speaking about, doing, living with and studying the landscape open up precious paths to deepening our lives and those of others in the present and future and generate a long series of interpretative options. Indeed, the abandonment of traditional morphological and objectifying visions has projected onto this concept new ethical, political, functional, symbolic, planning and post-representational functions and values.

Thanks to its topicality and branching, the landscape discourse is indisputably an inexhaustible and open field far from exhausting its heuristic charge: a “signifier of possible significances to be discovered within infinitely open horizons” (Dematteis, 2003, p. 72). Indeed, as Jean-Marc Besse recently wrote (Besse, 2018), this question is now central to our

contemporary societies: “Attention to the landscape has become a necessity for those who are concerned with defining the conditions to improve the way we live in the world” (p. 9). Landscape is the everywhere of the present, and every fibre of our being is interlaced with it; it refers to a social demand increasingly connected with people’s quality of life and well-being, active citizenship, settlement, social justice and inclusion. Therefore, even landscape studies point in a very specific direction: the urgency not to compromise the possibility of a future, and more just, life on Earth.

Following a consolidated research tradition, in 2018, some Italian geographers founded the AGel (Association of Italian Geographers) working group on Landscape Studies, the aim of which is to create a common space for discussion of these issues. Until recently, the group was coordinated by Benedetta Castiglioni; now, it is coordinated by Marcello Tanca. The goal is pursued in different ways. First, the group promotes (necessary) comparison with other landscape disciplines and interdisciplinary debate. The basic idea is that to respect the transversality of the landscape, its innate

ambiguity and duplicity (Farinelli, 1999), we need a discursive field that considers landscape concept in inter- and trans-disciplinary terms so that we can create the conditions in which fruitful dialogue among distinctive languages and research perspectives can flourish. Second, to be successful, discussions on landscape issues developed inside the group must consider different linguistic traditions and cultural approaches (for example, the Anglo-Saxon world but also other contexts, such as the French-speaking one). The reader can see that what has just been stated is not merely a theoretical purpose; among the authors who have contributed to this thematic issue, we find foreign scholars and those from other research fields. Third, the group's dialogue addresses not only the academic world; we strongly believe in interacting with different entities (local governments and public institutions, NGOs, schools etc.) that operate *in* and *for* the landscape. We are particularly concerned with protection and enhancement policies and education and awareness at various levels. In this sense, extra-academic activities undertaken with various entities in civil society present opportunities for "third mission" and to observe case studies that can enrich and deepen research and didactics.

Another aspect that emerges from the working group's activities concerns the connection between research and didactics. Most of the group's participants lecture at various universities addressing issues related to landscape studies in both bachelor's and master's programmes. Therefore, besides being a place to discuss theoretical and applied research topics, the working group is a place to debate curricula and lecture topics, share educational practices and analyse didactical tools so that we can effectively propose to students updated frameworks and notions for understanding the peculiarities and relevance of landscape issues in different contexts. Considering the importance of school education on landscape, the group is also highly focused on the need to properly prepare future schoolteachers during their academic training.

Actually, the role played by landscape issues in pre-university and university education is not

clearly defined: the presence of these issues at different levels of education and in various curricula, the general and specific didactic aims for each context and the methodologies and tools adequate to reach these goals are topics only rarely explored through research in didactics, especially in the Italian context. Branduini and Castiglioni (2019) present a general overview of the presence of landscape issues in schools, universities and professional and non-formal education in Italy, evincing the absence of a solid framework and clear overall strategies. In contrast, a survey conducted nationally in 2018 involved more than 300 didactic experiences on landscape in both school and non-school contexts, conducted by more than 150 cultural institutions and NGOs. However, in addition to the richness provided by the plurality of actors involved in the national panorama, the survey recognised some relevant weaknesses: a lack of clearly defined, specific educational goals concerning landscape (often confused with, for example, the natural environment) and the passive, transmissive methodological approach, which prevails over the active involvement of the subjects (Castiglioni and Cisani, 2022).

At the international level, in recent years, some in-depth studies and more practical guidelines have addressed the field of landscape education in different ways. The implementation of the European Landscape Convention, which commits the signatory parties to raising awareness and conducting educational and training activities, surely stimulates efforts and influences the approaches taken. Among others, *The Routledge Handbook of Teaching Landscape* (Jørgensen et al., 2019) is clearly devoted to higher professional education in the field of landscape architecture. A larger approach – closer to that of geography and with reference to wider educational levels – is taken by the book *Sur les bancs du paysage* (Sgard and Paradis, 2019) and a special issue of the journal *Landscape Research* (2/2022) titled *Landscape and education: Politics of/in practices* (see also Cisani et al., 2022).

Within this framework, the present issue aims to reinforce the presence of landscape issues in the geographical debate, addressing it also from the viewpoint of didactics and

underling the strong connection between research and didactics. This thematic issue collects papers previously presented and discussed by the working group's members during a seminar at the University of Padova (Italy) in May 2022. The title, *Learning Landscapes*, highlights some different perspectives on the complex relationship between landscape issues and the learning/educational processes addressed by the papers: i) "learning" more about specific landscapes, using multiple, varied methodologies to analyse and interpret them; ii) "learning" how to deal with landscape issues in pedagogical contexts and what methodologies and specific aims to use in different educational contexts; and iii) "learning" for landscape and through landscape, considering it both as an object and as a pedagogical tool from the wider perspective of active citizenship.

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