

Foreword (to the special issue Crisis of Landscapes, Landscapes of the Crisis. What are the Solutions?)

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Foreword

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This issue on “Crisis of Landscapes, Landscapes of the Crisis. What are the Solutions?” is focused on the relationship between the vast phenomenon, and the vast phenomenology, of landscape, and the repercussions of the crisis that is affecting our society nowadays. As various authoritative scholars and intellectuals have pointed out, our contemporary times are facing up to an across-the-board crisis that runs the risk of transforming our life places in mere supports of economic-financial functions, spreading across any aspect of social life (e.g. Bonora, 2009; Harvey, 2010, 2014; Tricarico, 2012; Moore, 2015). This implies that the crisis factors are not circumscribed to the economic concerns, as they are experienced – with anguish – by common citizens; rather, such factors are connected to the landscape as well. For the impact of the crisis manifests itself in the environmental and landscape dimensions of lands and territories, causing an alteration of their balances, shapes, and forms, or even their elimination.

The concept of landscape has mutated over time. It has opened itself up to various disciplines and fields of knowledge so as to attempt to describe the indescribable, that is, the “structural obscurity of the world” (Farinelli,

1999, p. 43). For this reason, the landscape seems to be nowadays a sort of “seismograph” of the crisis. It appears as a sort of terminal device able to record locally the consequences – not always predictable and hoped for – of collective behaviours that depend on an inextricable chain of events. In this regard, it is sufficient to consider the common and collective sets in which our lives are immersed, or to think of the deep transformation arisen from the globalisation processes – a transformation that is alien to the qualities and the identities of places, as well as to their social-cultural and landscape features.

Such change processes can be now investigated according to a multi-disciplinary approach and modelled with reference to large sets of highly complex phenomena, whose nature is, at the same time, geographic, urban, biophysical, economic, social, cultural, aesthetic, and political. However, it may often happen that the various specialist disciplines and discourses do not manage to communicate with each other.

Thus, in order to avoid this kind of limit, we intend to embrace a synthetic point of view, in line with our previous contributions to the theme (Aru et al., 2012; Aru et al., 2013; Aru and Tanca, 2013;

Tanca, 2014; Castiglioni, Parascandolo and Tanca, 2015; Vargiu, 2015; Aru and Tanca, forthcoming).

After all – even within the compass of these short notes – it is not superfluous to recall that, like the word “landscape”, the term “crisis” is polysemic as well. Among the numerous meanings of the Greek verb *krinein* (the etymon of “crisis”) there is not only “to come to a crisis”, but also “to judge, to give judgment”, and also “to accuse”. It is precisely these two latter meanings that are the basis of our modern words “critique”, “criticism”, and “to critique”. In light of this, we may therefore point out that every reflection on crisis is inevitably a critical one, that is, a reflection that thinks critically of the crisis, or a reflection that criticizes the crisis. Thus, “Landscapes of Crisis” must be intended considering landscape as a tool in view of a critical inquiry both into the crisis and the landscape. On the other hand, “Crisis of Landscapes” must be intended both as “criticism of landscapes” and as “criticism of crisis (via landscape)”.

Conceived this way, such investigation will not provide all the necessary tools to “escape from the crisis”, just because “to escape from the crisis” would also imply “to escape from critical thinking”. On the contrary, we need more critical thinking in order to understand the crisis and to deal with it. From this point of view, a critical inquiry into landscape will allow us to shape a more articulate framework and to provide indications, if not about the destination, at least about the directions to take.

Moreover, such a critical perspective could have a very deep impact on the educational field, broadly considered, especially in environmental and socio-economical terms.

It is well known that the environment is used and transformed by human being, and that this relationship is the main object of the Human Geography as a territorial science. The understanding of the pros and cons of certain human actions and of specific socio-economic developments, as well as the recognition of the complex phenomena which are here at stake, may have the strength to activate and promote different visions of the world. A “new world” that will be more sustainable in economic, social and environmental senses and, in this way, more

just and equitable at the same time. For this reason, educational processes and practices pointed towards all the “protagonists of a same territory” become more and more crucial (Giorda and Puttilli, 2011, p. 17). Stimulating a critical approach in order to change attitude toward landscape in a time of crisis has a high educational value at different stages of schooling (but also outside the scholar system, for example in the perspective of lifelong learning). It aims to improve the awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the globalization processes, as well as of the challenges posed by an increasingly globalised world.

The issue here presented is an outcome of the fourth day of international studies on landscape (“*Crisi dei paesaggi, paesaggi della crisi. Quali vie d’uscita?*”) organized by the University of Cagliari on December 2nd, 2014. Although not embracing a specific educational point of view, we nonetheless hope that “Crisis of Landscapes, Landscapes of the Crisis. What are the Solutions?” will be a useful tool for teachers, educators, students, researchers, and all those people who are interested in deepening their knowledge on the current crisis and its impact on landscapes.

The eight papers here collected develop a critical approach to landscape from different disciplinary perspectives (geography, city planning, and aesthetics). Through this variety of conceptual and disciplinary lenses, the landscape appears in all its complexity, as a heuristic device not only for asking questions about the present crisis, but also for searching for answers to the contradictions of the present.

In “Crisis of landscapes, landscapes of the crisis: notes for a socio-ecological approach” Fabio Parascandolo, aiming to shed light on the process of change from “traditional” to “modern” territorialities, introduces a relational and genetic approach to the landscape crisis. This way, the paper embraces the idea that landscape cannot be “saved alone” and that it is necessary, first of all, to preserve our territories, our living planet and the natural commons essential to life.

In her paper entitled “The crisis of the landscape, the crisis of the norms for the landscape, the planning of the landscape

between uncertainty and second thoughts. A few basic issues”, Anna Maria Colavitti highlights the problems faced by the different Italian regional landscape planning systems in applying basic rules and regulations at a local level. The problems can concern norms which are perceived as too “strict”, as shown by the case of the Sardinian Landscape Plan (SRLP).

In a complementary line of reasoning, Benedetta Castiglioni distinguishes between the idea of an “institutional landscape” and the idea of an “everyday landscape”. Whereas the former is intended with a limited spatial extension and as ruled by an elite, the latter is intended as larger than the former and managed by the community. The paper “‘Institutional’ vs ‘everyday’ landscape as conflicting concepts in opinions and practices. Reflections and perspectives from a case study in Northeastern Italy” tries to combine and integrate different disciplinary approaches in order to consider both kinds of landscape.

After reviewing the historical evolution of the perceptions of the landscapes, Paolo D’Angelo stresses the role played by agriculture with regard to landscape in Italy. Starting from these premises, in his paper “Agriculture and landscape. From cultivated fields to the wilderness, and back”, the Author points out that all kinds of landscapes (not only the “exceptional” ones) are to be considered worthy of protection.

The focus of the issue shifts from the countryside (and agriculture) to the city. In fact, the main aim of the article “The smart city: urban landscapes in the current crisis”, written by Silvia Aru, is to present the new urban paradigm of the smart city, emerged in recent years as a planning answer to the ongoing socio-economic crisis.

Federica Pau, in her paper “Sardinian rebirth landscapes. An aesthetician’s outlook”, focuses on the complex changes that took place in Sardinia during the second post-war reconstruction. The Author analyses the impact of these changes through the photos of the Sardinian photographer Fabio Petretto.

Marcello Tanca’s article, “Cagliari’s urban landscape: a commons?”, opens the discussion

to a very topical issue in geographical field, the commons, that is the cultural and natural resources accessible to all members of a society (reservoirs, fishing and grazing areas, forests, etc.). Urban landscape appears similar to a public good, and its “health” is determined by the simultaneity and coexistence of different spaces, as demonstrated by the “fight” against the commercialisation of public spaces taken up by the inhabitants of the Marina neighbourhood in Cagliari.

This issue closes with the special contribution of Serge Latouche. In “Degrowth as a territorial-landscape project”, Latouche sees the present crisis of landscape as the result of the crisis of civilisation. Politics, culture, and the whole way of life must regain their territorial anchoring. To achieve this aim, the French scholar traces a new path, the policy of degrowth, that is different from that indicated by the leading development model. This new policy will imply the protection of the landscape as well as the search for the common good.

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