

**NATURE, ENVIRONMENT,
LANDSCAPE: EUROPEAN
ATTITUDES AND DISCOURSES
IN THE MODERN PERIOD
THE ITALIAN CASE, 1920-1970**

a cura di Gabriele Zanetto*,
Francesco Vallerani **,
Stefano Soriani*

(*) Dipartimento di Scienze Economiche,
Università degli Studi di Venezia

(**) Dipartimento di Geografia, Università degli
Studi di Padova

Comitato Scientifico

Giovanna Brunetta

Giovanni Battista Castiglioni

Dario Croce

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Riassunto

L'ambiguità semantica dei termini paesaggio e natura sono ben evidenti nel contesto culturale dei primi decenni del nostro secolo, animato da un vivace contrasto filosofico tra le posizioni idealiste e positiviste. Le contraddizioni del dibattito sulla definizione e sulla protezione delle bellezze naturali ben testimonia questo aspetto. Il turismo culturale e le pratiche ricreative all'aria aperta (campeggi, scoutismo e alpinismo), ampiamente diffusi durante il primo dopoguerra, contribuirono a rafforzare le relazioni tra natura e nazione, tra paesaggio e patria. Anche l'istruzione scolastica svolse un ruolo fondamentale in questa prospettiva.

I concetti di bonifica integrale e autosufficienza energetica offrono una importante opportunità per valutare il ruolo dell'acqua all'interno di scelte politiche ed economiche fortemente condizionate dalla retorica nazionalista.

I bisogni della ricostruzione nel secondo dopoguerra hanno determinato un rinnovato orgoglio nazionale motivato soprattutto dalla fase di espansione economica. Questa situazione di crescita ha posto in secondo piano i principi estetici e i valori culturali che avevano alimentato i concetti popolari di bellezza naturale nel primo dopoguerra, sottomettendoli dunque a esigenze esclusivamente utilitaristiche.

Abstract

Discussion of Italian attitudes opens with a brief analysis of the contrast between idealism and positivism that characterised the cultural debate in the first decades of the century. This bears also upon the meanings attached to the term landscape. Semantic ambiguity of the terms nature and landscape becomes evident when we consider conservation guidelines in the inter-war period.

Popular approaches to Italian natural beauty and traditional landscape were stimulated by the promotional activities of the Touring Club Italiano and the Club Alpino Italiano, favourably regarded by the authorities for their unintentional success in consolidating among Italians a sense of place and thus of nation.

The concepts of integrated-land improvement and energy self-sufficiency offer a unique opportunity to assess the role of water in the political, economic and cultural administration of a country dominated by powerful nationalist attitudes not only during the Fascist period, but also post-war. The needs for reconstruction in the post-war years brought a renewed national pride from the economic boom, in which the aesthetic principle which had given such strengths to popular ideas of natural beauty between the wars, were subordinated to exclusively utilitarian attitudes.

PRESENTAZIONE

L'affermarsi della modernità ha prodotto profonde trasformazioni nel rapporto uomo-ambiente, producendo – tra l'altro – una vasta omogeneità all'interno dei paesi industrializzati. Tuttavia la varietà delle tradizioni culturali europee ha influenzato profondamente le forme ed i modi di costruzione del territorio, recuperando e costruendo rappresentazioni della natura e del senso della presenza umana nel suo grembo largamente differenziate. Al punto che il paesaggio poté diventare un proficuo veicolo di comunicazione dell'identità nazionale, intesa come figlia – e, al tempo stesso, artefice – del proprio ambiente.

Questo lavoro costituisce una parte del percorso italiano nell'ambito di una ricerca condotta in parallelo per quattro paesi europei, sulla scorta di alcune ipotesi comuni ma capace di evidenziare straordinarie divergenze nell'ambito di un'unica temperie culturale e tecnologica: il “moderno” (Cosgrove et Al., 1994 ne anticipa i risultati, di prossima pubblicazione).

Volendo indicare il significato di una considerazione “moderna” della natura e del paesaggio, più che alla comparsa di un'accresciuta capacità di controllo e rimodellamento umano, occorre pensare alla separazione tra la comunità locale ed il suo ambiente: separazione prodotta dalla diffusione capillare del mercato e della omologazione culturale che lo accompagna. La coerenza tra apparati sociale, culturale, economico e territoriale su un'unica base ambientale è infatti la forma tipica della geografia premoderna, ben espressa dalle esplicitazioni vidaliane di Claude Raffestin (1984) ed Adalberto Vallega (1976).

Il moderno dunque, prima che per il rimaneggiamento “costruttivista” della natura, si riconosce per la sua ridefinizione in concetti, classi di oggetti e loro significati (valga per tutte l'avvincente narrazione di Schivelbusch, 1988) che, indipendenti dalla congruenza locale, devono disporre di una triangolazione abitante-rappresentazione-natura in cui la rappresentazione è assai più indipendente che in passato dall'esperienza e dall'azione dirette, facendosi ideologia (Berdoulay 1991 e Cosgrove 1990).

La modernizzazione italiana, complicata dalla varietà geografica (in tutte le accezioni) del paese e dal relativo ritardo dell'industrializzazione, troverà la sua “lingua” in campi sorprendenti rispetto alle nazioni europee settentrionali: le bonifiche e le migliorie agrarie, il turismo, l'elettrificazione... Solo occasionalmente – e comunque tardi – l'industria in senso stretto entra nel nuovo discorso a sostituire le “dialettali” (nel senso di Zanetto, 1989), radicatissime dizioni del paesaggio. E quasi sempre associata fino a fondersi al vero paesaggio ideologico italiano: la città (cfr. Dubbini 1994).

È nel paesaggio urbano che in Italia si giunge a sondare l'estetica del moder-

no, mentre – volgendo lo sguardo a quanto la modernizzazione stava disarticolando – non si trovava una natura scempiata da proteggere chiusa in un parco, ma una campagna densa di cultura tradizionale. Tranne sulle Alpi, vera palestra di modernizzazione con le centrali idroelettriche, il rimboschimento anti-erosivo, la questione del confine orientale.

Se il periodo fascista (con le sue paludi redente e la Festa degli Alberi, ma anche con le leggi a protezione di una natura occasionalmente apprezzabile sul piano estetico) costituisce un punto d'acme (non foss'altro per la sua consapevolezza ed esplicitazione serenamente ingenua) della modernizzazione, resta da chiedersi seriamente fino a che punto questa sia da considerarsi compiuta nella cultura italiana, che a volte appare priva sia della coerenza locale (la *regula* di Raffestin) che di quella del mercato: l'*autoregula*. Una incertezza che si legge bene nella nostra popolare capacità linguistica, che usa mozziconi di parlate locali in dissoluzione impastate con pietose semplificazioni (vicine ad un pidgin) della lingua standard, invasa da echi anglosassoni mal digeriti.

Il nostro paesaggio – restando all'*ultima metafora* cui ho fatto cenno – ne è puntigliosa conferma: anche in quelle regioni che – per tradizione culturale ed economica – sono più vicine ai paesi con i cui geografi abbiamo condotto la ricerca.

Gabriele Zanetto

1. SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

When it comes to evaluate the semantic evolution of terms such as *natura*, *ambiente* (environment) and *paesaggio* (landscape) in Italy during the period 1920-1970, it is useful to make a distinction between two periods, 1920-1940 and 1945-1970.

During 1920-1940, both the popular consciousness and the academic discourses reflected the most important social and political circumstances that characterised the emerging fascist movement. This is not to argue that in that period an independent theoretical elaboration was totally absent. What is argued is that fascist rhetoric about the nation and national tradition on one side, and the strong influence of Italian neo-idealism on the formation of social attitudes and values on the other side, combined to create insuperable obstacles to greater communication between some new ideas about nature/society relationships and the cultural context in which social attitudes and values have evolved. In particular, historicism, aestheticism, and nationalism combined to define a very ambiguous semiotic framework.

The learned debate on nature and nature preservation in Italy during this period reflected the development of Italian Neo-Idealistic Thought (INT) whose main exponents were Giovanni Gentile and Benedetto Croce. In particular B. Croce (1866 - 1952) had a profound influence on Italian cultural life: philosopher, historian, and man of letters, he was one of the most important exponents of Italian liberalism during the fascist period. As Minister of Education between 1921-1922, he contributed to all the aspects of the cultural life of the nation.

Two aspects seem to be very important when discussing the importance of the INT in the process of formation of social attitudes and values towards nature during the period 1920-1940: (1) nature was not regarded by the INT as a relevant philosophical category: Only in discussions on economics and politics, was it considered possible to speak about nature; in this approach, nature represented only a practical pretence, coherent with the economic attitudes towards the world (Franchini 1966). (2) In the INT, physical sciences did not represent a source of knowledge but, rather, a practical action aimed at meeting material needs (Nicolini 1962).

It has been recognised that the above mentioned points have prevented scientific culture and its social relevance to develop and spread in Italy. The great store set by many opinion and culture makers to the humanities in general and, at the same time, the consideration of physical sciences as a tool for meeting practical needs, have combined to maintain a poetic vision of nature, thus retarding the penetration in the cultural life of the country of concepts such as environment and ecosystem. It should be noted that until the early 1970s the aim of

preserving the environment was still regarded as the clear manifestation of noble moral values. Moreover, as we will argue in section 6, this cultural climate represented the background in which the Italian educational system has developed.

The concept of nature in Italy (how it evolved, its different meanings, etc.) during 1920-1940 can not be directly derived from the INT; as noted, the INT did not appreciate nature as a relevant philosophical category to investigate. Nevertheless, the INT contributed to the creation of a particular cultural context in which the consideration of nature as a source of inspiration and feeling shed. In this process, the rejection of early nineteenth century positivism played a fundamental role. It is within this context that both the evolution of the concept of natural beauty and the relationship between natural beauty/natural beauty – which maybe represent the way the semiotic ambiguity involved by the use of the term nature in Italy during 1920-1940 has been partly overcome – can be better evaluated.

It is worth pointing out that the contemplation of nature (namely, the contemplation of its natural beauties – natural monuments and panoramic views) was regarded as a source of knowledge through artistic intuition. A prime example of the so-called *sentimento della natura* (feeling for nature) was supposed to be the character of San Francesco d'Assisi, who felt the communion/fusion between finite and infinite by experiencing a feeling for the nature. Luigi Parpagliolo (who was one of the most influential promoter of nature preservation legislation during the first decades of this century), for example, discussing nature and the importance of its preservation, referred to “*L'anima semplice e contemplativa del poverello d'Assisi*” (“The pure, simple, and contemplative soul of the poor boy coming from Assisi”) (Parpagliolo 1923, IX). This character was supposed to be the best example of the contemplation of nature, considered here more as a sum of natural (aesthetic) beauties than as a generating process (force, order, life, etc.).

Thus nature can be properly approached by adoration and contemplation, which was supposed to represent the distinguishing features of delicate persons. At the same time the contemplation of natural beauties was considered to be “(...) *la sorgente delle più grandi idee che guidano il mondo*” (the source of the most important ideas that run history) (Parpagliolo 1923, X-XI). Moreover, “Modern society and the pretence to democracy keeps man away from nature. It is therefore necessary for man to develop poetic inspiration (feeling, artistic intuition)”. In this view, to safeguard natural beauties (beautiful hermitages, the calmness of the valley, the loneliness of the mountain, the glamour of colourful places) from the egoism of economic (modern) interests was supposed to represent an aesthetic need.

Only by safeguarding natural beauties was it possible to prevent artistic intuition disappearing. While economic development is considered to be necessary and inexorable, the “*pathos della natura*” was regarded as the most positive (favourable) aspect of modernity. Goethe, Holderlin, Novalis were often quoted as important examples of the “*nostalgia della natura*” (nature sickness). In the same way, Petrarca was considered to be the precursor of the most noble and pure aspect of modernity; the feeling for nature (Parpagliolo 1923, 8-9).

By safeguarding natural beauties the past of the nation was also safeguarded. Natural beauty represented evidence of the civil traditions of a people (memorial values). By preserving the national natural beauties, traditions, moral circumstances, and the events that caused the people to unite as a nation were also safeguarded. During 1920-1940 the sentence “*Il paesaggio è il volto amato della patria*” (Landscape is the beloved face of the fatherland) was very popular in the debate about natural beauty, preservation, and national traditions. The feeling for natural beauty was thus depicted as a love for one’s native land and memory of old glory and traditions.

As one can see, the nature many authors in that period referred to was formed by natural spectacles, astonishing hermitages, the glamour of the colourful places. The lack of environmental or ecological concerns reflected the strong spiritualistic and aesthetic approach to nature, with a relevant semiotic ambiguity in particular with regard the nature/landscape relationship. This aesthetic approach, which tended to identify nature as panoramic views or memorial values, is also visible in the strong dichotomy that characterised the learned debate about the relation between economic development and nature preservation: expressions such as “delicate people sometime experience the feeling for nature by contemplating beautiful natural pictures”, “together with practical sense, modern man must have a poetic sense in order to feel in some (certain) moments the beauty of nature”, emphasise the consideration of nature as something that is opposite to private affairs, economic purposes, everyday matters. Moreover, nature – or its beauty – would appear to be a positive value only for those who are able to understand (or to feel) the moral force involved by spiritualism and aestheticism in a period characterised by the increasing weight of material and practical needs. It is not only a problem of snobbery, that undoubtedly represented a distinguishing feature of the developing preservationist movement: more important it is to underline how feeble was in the Parpagliolo’s argumentations the awareness of the relationships nature / social development (e.g. citizenship) and territory / planning. In such a way, nature became a relevant matter for noble and delicate souls, strictly interwoven to art and historicism.

It is worth noting that the debate about natural beauties in Italy during 1920-

1940 has seldom considered plains and country places (unless they were supposed to be important for preservation because of their historical or artistic values). Beyond its consideration as sum of aesthetic values, nature was considered as a natural base to be transformed according to economic evaluation. They were regarded as a natural base to be ordered and exploited for economic growth (agriculture above all). From this evaluation a new concept of the beauty of nature arose, that of productive nature. In this perspective, human work caused nature to become beautiful, because of its productivity, working out a new formal order, with strong aesthetic values (fig. 1). This productive nature was celebrated in nationalist rhetoric (rhetoric of “fervid human work” in the fascist age) in opposition to the untamed nature, whose distinguishing features were supposed to be unsalubrity and barrenness. According to the above mentioned remark, lagoons represented a very explicit illustration: by reclamation human society caused untamed and unwealthy nature to become productive and beautiful (an ordered landscape) (fig. 2). On the contrary, mountains, seaside, lakes, and hills located far from cities and working places in general, were considered to be attractive for tourism and recreation (healthy nature), founding their appeal on their natural beauties.

With regard to the period 1945-1970, it is necessary to point out that the end of World War II represented, for Italy, a turning point from different points of view. In particular, the end of the war entailed the end of the period of relative isolation (emblematic is the case of autarky) from other European countries, and the contemporary beginning of a period of extremely rapid large scale industrial development, whose underlying logic was, to a great extent, run by broader forces in an increasingly internationally oriented market.

Italy took its seat in the market game very late, showing remarkable weak points both in terms of economic and social structure and in terms of political conditions. The delay in entering market competition and, at the same time, the cultural and political heritage combined to define a situation in which the great industrial growth of the post-war period (particularly during the so-called economic boom 1957-1965) was not followed by a parallel process of country modernisation, from different points of view. It should be noted that Italy showed one of the highest rate of National Gross Product growth in the European context during the 1960s. Nevertheless, it seems to be correct to refer the expression “growth without development” to the above mentioned process. It is sufficient to remind the strong territorial uneven development, the economic, social, and political conditions of many southern areas, the gap between the boom in private expenditure and investments on one side, and the conditions of public services (health care, educational system, housing, public administration, etc.) to confirm this aspect.



Fig. 1 - An Italian river “... beautiful for its order” (da “L’Alpe”, 1926).



Fig. 2 - Example of untamed nature (da “L’Alpe”, 1924).

In this context, also the territory/environment relationship was considered (when considered) in a very ambiguous way. As a matter of fact, the above mentioned elements combined with the cultural heritage of the first decades of the century in creating a semiotic vacuum in the debate about nature and environment. On one side, given the Italian economic, political, and social conditions, the goal of promoting economic development (through large scale industrialisation, which has been considered for long time the real and only one way for improving economic and social conditions) caused other relevant dimensions (such as the impacts of territorial organisation upon environments, or the social relevance of natural environments, etc.) to be increasingly underestimated. On the other side, the increasing awareness of the environmental impacts of Italian post-war development and the consequent demand for nature preservation has proposed again the consideration of nature as natural beauties and landscape values. Thus, we feel justified in stating that the economic-social conditions of the country and the cultural heritage of the first decades of the century caused the gap between the consideration of nature as a stock of resources and its consideration as a sum of aesthetic values to steadily increase.

Only in the early 1970s with increasing public awareness of the environmental costs of Italy's post-war development, the creation of new preservationist associations, and profoundly changed attitudes towards environmental concerns, inspired many famous publications (e.g. *Silent Spring* and *Limits to Growth*), was a reconsideration of nature/society relationships prompted. But, the consideration of the natural environment as something different from territorial development (whose main dimension was considered to be an economic one) often caused conflicts about nature preservation to arise: nature preservation, for a long time, was regarded as an expression of noble moral values (and, consequently, as something relevant only for those areas developed enough to care) than a territorial concern. Territory on one side, nature (or natural environments) on the other : only recently this dichotomised approach has been partially overcome.

1.1 Healthy Nature

During the period 1920-1940, the consideration of the health of nature was also linked, to some degree, to an aesthetic approach to nature and landscape. In this context, therapeutic purposes represented important elements, both in the landscape appraisal and in the popular approach to leisure. If on the one hand body culture was practised in several sporting associations, whose seats were mostly located in urban surroundings, being relations with landscape only

casually assured (e.g. biking, rowing, sailing), on the other hand, the conviction that whatever extra-urban stay was healthy was a much more diffused mind.

Touring Club started the publication of detailed guidebooks devoted to the *luoghi di soggiorno e cura* (stay and curative resorts) in 1932, in such a way integrating its former historical/artistic series (T.C.I. 1914/1926, and T.C.I. 1932-1937). Beyond the usual nationalistic rhetoric, these guidebooks pointed out the objective plenty of national places and landscape to visit in order to take best advantage of their *virtù terapeutiche naturali* (natural therapeutic qualities).

The healthy effects of every environment were clearly expressed by giving wide prominence to landscape features of every locality. The stay in these healthy places was considered to be an efficacious *antidoto ai guai della vita cittadina* (antidote to the problems of living in cities). A lexical analysis of the landscape descriptions should be useful to understand the real importance of aesthetic values. As point of fact, the healthfulness of these places derived from natural features and from their historical peculiarity as well (beautiful villages, castles, villas, etc.). Visual and healthful qualities were singled out at three levels: (1) place (village, town); (2) environment around it; (3) climatic conditions. The former vagueness of used terms were gradually obtaining more precise meanings, delivering to the tourist reader explicit messages, which were perceived as useful in gaining a good perception of the locality. Moreover, texts were integrated by a modest photo/cartographic equipment. So, for example, the thermal centre of Abano (Southwest Padua) is defined with the expression *un sito arioso e aperto* (an open and airy centre), surrounded by *ridenti colli* (charming hills), endowed with *larghi viali, piazze spaziose, ampio parco* (wide avenues, broad squares, large parks), and characterised by *clima moderato dalle brezze* (climate cooled by breezes).

1.2 Social Values and Attitudes towards Nature/Landscape and Legislation

The elements stated above combined to create a particular cultural context that represented the basis in which the voluntary desire to preserve nature (or landscape, according to the aesthetic appraisal of national natural beauties) developed. A consideration of the legislative aspects is, therefore, necessary, so that we might shed light upon social attitudes and values towards nature/landscape. Moreover, the consideration of legislation instigated during the period 1920-1940 is of the highest importance to an understanding of how social attitudes and values evolved during the second post-war period.

The first law concerning nature/landscape preservation is the law 778/1922.

It represented the first attempt to explain and define a specific terminology on that issue. According to the cultural context stated above, it is possible to argue that this law showed many semiotic ambiguities, in particular as regards the objects to be safeguarded. As stated in the item 1, objects of the law 778/1922 were “(...) *cose immobili la cui conservazione presenta un notevole interesse pubblico a causa della loro bellezza naturale e della loro particolare relazione con la storia civile e letteraria. Sono altresì protette dalla presente legge le bellezze panoramiche*” (immovable things, whose preservations meets a great public interest, because of their natural beauty and their relationship with civil history and literature. Panoramic views are protected as well).

The adjective “civil” deserves attention. It reflects a long tradition that originates during the post-Risorgimento period, when national values began to acquire increasing importance. During the period 1920-1940 the same word was a concept which was filled with specific meanings strictly linked to fascist ideology. Increasingly, “civil” was stated for “national”. This is particularly the case when considering the difficulty of defining the concept of natural beauty and the role played by traditional and memorial values in the identification of places or things to be preserved. In this view, historicism, aestheticism, and nationalism represented the constitutive elements of the beauty of the nation to be preserved, reinforcing the double-dealing character of the relation natural beauty/tradition/nation. For instance, the hill where the Roman Menenio Agrippa addressed the crowd, thus causing the *primo sciopero proletario della storia* – the first proletarian strike in history – to end (Parpagliolo 1923, 55) represents a prime example of the national beauty to be preserved. According to the law 778/1922 the above mentioned elements can not be destroyed or altered without the permission of the Minister of Education.

At this stage the following elements are worth noting:

1. From the lexical structure of the legislative discourse no ecological approach came out. Nature was identified with a set of natural beauties, which were defined by means of aesthetic and historical/literary appreciation. As a consequence, only outstanding features were considered to be apt for preservation. Moreover, given the vagueness of the criteria to define the natural beauty, law 778 proved an ineffective tool for preservation.

2. It should be noted that the expression “(...) *sono altresì protette le bellezze panoramiche*” (panoramic views are protected as well) represented a meaningful statement for its potentialities in the preservationist debate. Despite of its aesthetic meaning, the expression panoramic views refers to a set of different elements considered as a whole: the sight focuses on a limited territory, where you can see complex

relationships between human settlement and physical elements. From this point of view, the law 778 could have represented an effective tool to achieve its aims by the consideration of these relationships. On the contrary, the interpretation of the law devoted the attention to the preservation of the original features of the site from which it was possible to enjoy the panoramic view more than to the preservation of the aesthetic features to be seen. In such a way, the law 778 proved to be an ineffective tool to preserve not only ecological elements but natural beauty as well.

3. The key role played by B. Croce (who was Minister of education during the period 1920-21) in the debate about the text of the law, represents a clear demonstration of the idealistic cultural context in which the law has developed.

The Royal Decree 1584/1922 set up the first national park in Italy (Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso). The decree was aimed at: 1) preserving rare flora and fauna, threatened by the greater and greater importance of economic interest in the modern world; in such a way, it was possible to save natural monuments from disappearance, to the advantage of people (national education, natural and national beauties), scientists, and artists (unusual landscape and poetry; uncontaminated nature and spiritual contemplation). 2) preserving rarity in geology, and panoramic beauty. 3) preserving territory, by submitting the construction of roads, buildings, etc. to public permission. (Copeta, 1992).

Points 1) flora and fauna, and 3) territory preservation, represented the most important elements of Royal Decree 1584/1922, that was then converted into the law 473/25: for the first time, not only natural (and national beauty) but also ecosystems were concerned.

The ambiguities of the law 778/1922 was recognised for the first time by G. Bottai (Minister of Education since 1936); Minister Bottai presented a report on June 1939 on the weak points of the law 778 (difficulty of identifying natural beauties; lack of co-ordination between the different public agents involved; lack of adequate sanctions), whose remarks represented the basis for the law 1497/1939 (Copeta, 1992).

The law 1497/1939 provided for the preservation of the following elements:

a. individual beauties

- a.1 immovable things; criteria: natural beauty, or geologic uniqueness.
- a.2 villas, gardens, country parks; criterium: uncommon beauty.

b. composite beauties

- b.1 composite immovable things; criteria: aesthetic value, traditional value
- b.2 panoramic beauties; criteria: view.

With reference to the law 778/1922, the following represented the main innovations of the law 1497/39:

- geologic uniqueness (uniqueness is rarity, or what other?): the nation must protect natural beauty, and rarity as well.

- with regard to the immovable things, considered as a whole, not only were aesthetic values to be considered relevant for preservation, but also, traditional values (localism, community tradition and history). It should be noted, however, that localism was considered a value to be preserved as far as the identification of national values (culture, tradition, etc.) were concerned. (For example: during the fascist period the nationalistic rhetoric placed great emphasis upon the Roman remains to the extent they testified the old glory of the Empire; in this view, every local historical remnant or ruin (or traditions) acquired importance to the extent that they were capable of promoting the construction of a national identity).

- law 1497/1939 provided for the future setting up of the so-called “*piani territoriali paesistici*” (territorial plans), aimed at avoiding damage to panoramic beauties (Copeta, 1992, p. 18). In order to prevent human activities damaging natural and panoramic beauties, in such a way, the law also provided for the preservation of those surroundings which contained the elements to be safeguarded. The drawing up of these plans, however, was not compulsory.

- In opposition to the law 778/1922, the 1497/1939 did not consider the relation with literature a relevant element to define the concept of natural beauty. Nevertheless, the problem of defining this concept still remained. To solve that problem, which clearly could not be faced at the national level, Minister Bottai assigned to provincial commissions the task of defining the natural beauties to be preserved. This administrative decentralisation, however, caused the application of the law to become extremely arbitrary, particularly in those situations where the political weight of economic interests was greater. Finally, it is quite interesting to note the composition of the provincial commissions: “*La commissione è presieduta da un delegato del ministero dell’educazione nazionale (...) La commissione (...) è composta: del regio sovrintendente ai monumenti (...); del presidente dell’ente provinciale del turismo; i podestà (...); i rappresentanti delle categorie interessate; esperti in materia mineraria o un rappresentante della milizia nazionale forestale o un artista (...)*” (art. 2) (The commission is made up of the royal superintendent to monuments (...), the president of the provincial tourist board, the *podestà*, the representatives of the economic interests involved, experts in mining and/or forestry, and/or an artist. The commission is chaired by a delegate of the Minister of Education).

This law was not carried out easily during the war and in the post-war period. Reconstruction needs prevented this law being effectively applied. In this period, the goal of safeguarding nature and its beauties was repressed by the tendency towards an unplanned territorial sprawl: speculative profits were considered to be justified by the national progress. Speculative actions were not subdued to any legislative control, and this wide freedom agreed with Government paleo-capitalist policies, which encouraged individualist attitudes (Lepre, 1993). In this context *piani paesistici* (landscape plans), which represented the main innovation in 1939 law, were never drafted. So, "(...) landscape suffered many wrongs, produced by speculative exploitation of land for housing purposes, whose policy was characterised by ugly and sprawl" (Cederna, 1975).

The *Sovrintendenze Provinciali* (Provincial historical/natural preservation boards) were not able to contrast the above mentioned trend, not only due to the lack of means and employees, but also because only issues of exceptional public interest were considered to be worthy of protection by the law 1497/1939. In this way, it was not possible to preserve "ordinary" landscapes, in spite of their inner historical/ecological peculiarities.

Furthermore, the scanty effectiveness of 1939 law was due to the large spatial extent of some provinces, ruled by just one *Sovrintendenza*. In these cases, it was the individual citizen who could help the administration to safeguard the law by informing it about violations. Because of the delay in official controls and, above all, because of the light fine that the transgressors had to pay to come back to legality (item n. 15), this possibility did not produce concrete results in most cases: in such a way, people were allowed to pursue their own private goals and cause a deterioration of the territory as well.

The Constitution of the Italian Republic (1948) reflected the same aesthetic approach: "*La Repubblica tutela il paesaggio e il patrimonio storico e artistico della nazione*" (item 9). "The Republic preserves the landscape and the artistic and historical heritage of the nation". The ambiguity of the term *paesaggio* was only partially overcome by jurisprudence. At the first national congress on landscape preservation and the Italian Constitution held in Ravenna (1966), for example, some jurists stated that, being only *valori paesistici* (landscape values) explicitly quoted in our Constitution, nature in itself (e.g. fauna, flora, ecosystem) is not kept under the Constitutional law. Other jurists subscribed to another point of view: *paesaggio*, in their opinion, stated for a complex symbiosis among physical and human elements by referring more and more to territorial issues than to visual approaches (Cederna, 1975). In any case, different interpretations arose according both to the ambiguity of the lexicon/complexity of the topic and to the steadily increasing need for meeting new social demands for environmental preservation.

Item 9 of Republican Constitution was issued after an interesting debate. The first draft of the item (Moro and Marchesini proposal, October 30, 1946) stated that "(...) artistic, historical, and natural monuments of the country make up the national heritage: wherever they are located inside the Italian borders, they are under the government protection". In a later discussion, the item was transformed as follows: "(...) artistic, historical, and natural monuments, whoever is the owner, and wherever in Italy, are under the government protection". As one can see, artistic, historical, and natural monuments are no longer regarded as national heritage. In such a way, both the collective responsibility about their use and the opportunities to encourage their public uses resulted weakened. Moreover, the attribute "natural" was replaced by the term *paesaggio*, whose meaning clearly appears to be much more indeterminate and faint (Cederna, 1975). These apparently unimportant semantic nuances clearly show how rooted in the Italian mentality idealistic attitudes were in that period. During the period from 1948 to the present time, lack of public control, semantic ambiguity and economic interests combined to prevent the application of the 1939 law. As a consequence, the national historical and naturalistic heritage was afflicted by continuous deterioration. In order to get a more effective natural and environmental awareness, a social and urbanistic investigation strictly related to public health, hydrogeological management, and recreation planning would have been required. Only by meeting the above mentioned needs would it have been possible to suppress the free pursuit of short-term economic interests.

Till 1970 (year of the European Conference on Nature Preservation), no legislative action was planned to face general pollution, or to encourage the control and the repression of environmental damage. In the same way, till the early 1970s neither new National Parks or Natural Reserves were set up, nor new planning measures were adopted to promote housing policies capable of meeting more public interests (health, recreation, etc.) than private business.

One of the most meaningful examples of the combined working of the factors stated above, was the increasing sprawl that characterised territorial organisation in coastal areas: under the pressure of the huge tourist development, most of the Italian coastline lost its natural features. In the same vein, the august 1967 urbanistic law made it easier to build without any public control. One year after, with the Ministerial Decree of April 2, 1968, many local authorities began to work out *Piani Regolatori Comunali* (Municipality planning), in order to get an equilibrate management of local areas. Independently of the extent this municipality planning proved successful, the Ministerial Decree represented a first turning point in the topic. Only in 1985, however, when the *Decreto Galasso* was promulgated (law 431/1985), were environmental concerns clearly recognised in our legislation.

2. THE CULTURAL DEBATE ABOUT ITALIAN LATE MODERNISATION

2.1 The Role of Hydro-Electric Energy and Water Regulation Projects

Given the Italian economic situation, the chances for promoting industrialisation were considered to a great extent dependent upon the capability of exploiting water in mountain basins. Many authors studied the situation of other European countries (in particular England, Belgium, and Germany, i.e. the nations which had more developed industrial bases), concluding that the lack of raw materials had to be considered the most important obstacle for national development to overcome.

In order to fill the gap Italy showed with regard to other European countries, two solutions were usually provided: i) to pursue the trading vocation of our country, thanks to its geographical position; ii) to promote industrialisation (in particular by binding industry to the widespread handicraft capabilities) in those areas where the availability of hydro-electric energy was the highest (Carozzi, Mioni, 1981).

With regard to point i), it is possible to say that there were many infrastructural developments during the first three decades of the century: these were aimed at meeting the requirements of a new era in which the importance of new relationships with other countries was supposed to become greater and greater.

To some extent, territory was increasingly considered as a space to be structured in a modern way, by defining new spatial relations based on an increasing international market (with division of labour acting as a new organisational criteria), and by emphasising the role of the internal market (regarded as tool of social and cultural homogenisation) in the process of the creation of national wealth and welfare. Of course, economic protectionism and the end of liberalism in politics represent the most obvious results of the difficulty in managing the wished project of social and economic modernisation, which was, to a greater and greater extent based at the sovranational scale.

Nevertheless, many projects conceived in that period (in particular those concerning alpine tunnels, new maritime port infrastructures, new railway axes connecting ports with cities, and new roads) testified to the belief in the coming of a new era, which could not be rejected but only faced in the right way in order to embrace the advantages it could involve.

In this context, every aspect of the territory was increasingly considered in positive or negative terms, according to the extent that it could support the con-

struction of new social and economic order, made possible by the thaumaturgic virtues of technology and market economy. In this perspective, the physical environment was increasingly regarded as something to be mastered according to more relevant economic dimensions: many new ports and associated infrastructures were constructed in very delicate coastal ecosystems, prompted by the increasing role played by maritime transportation (in this regard, the sea became considered a relational space) in national economic life; the railway network was greatly extended very close to the shore; new larger and larger roads were built in every mountain valley to reduce isolation and to make it easier to travel, etc.

With regard to point ii), it is possible to say that Italy did not succeed in promoting a “soft” (handicraft-based) industrialisation as many authors hoped in that period (it was necessary to wait for the late 1960s - 1970s, when so-called “peripheral Italy” showed greater capabilities of reacting to changed market conditions during the 1970s, such as uncertainty, recession, globalization of markets, spreading of the flexible specialisation paradigm in production, the crisis of Fordism, etc., to have in many regions stronger linkages between industrial development and the widespread handicraft capabilities). As a point of fact, in the first decades of the century, and later, the country industrialisation was to a greater extent run by foreign forces and by the alliance between the great rural bourgeoisie, a few national entrepreneurs and the state. In this context, and given the increasing importance of the sovranational scale in affecting economic development, Italy provided the conditions for large scale industrialisation very late, showing many structural weaknesses. In this regard the role of army in promoting the industry of the base was clearly fundamental.

It is easy to realise how relevant the problem of energy was in the context just sketched above. Actually, in comparison to other countries, it was very dramatic. For this reason, water was regarded as the most important resource to be exploited.

The case of the Veneto-Adriatic region (extending over the provinces of Venice, Treviso, Belluno, Padova, Trieste, Istria, Carnaro, Ravenna, Forlì, Verona, Vicenza, Rovigo, Ferrara) is instructive. At the beginning of the century the *Società Adriatica di Elettricità* (SADE; Adriatic Society of Electricity) was established in Venice; it aimed at co-ordinating all activities related with the production of hydro-electric energy in the Veneto-Adriatic region. The production units of the Cellina, Cismon and Piave rivers represented the first attempts to utilise water for industrial purposes (1905-1909).

These pioneer experiments were followed by other plants. In a few decades the most important water falls in mountain areas were utilised for energy production; the need for reducing the uncertainty involved by natural forces caused human intervention in water regulation to steadily increase, by the building

of artificial water falls, canals, and dams. The need for the development of new water engineering technologies promoted the setting up of new universities and high-level institutes in the field of hydraulics (at Padua, for example). In order to reduce the risk of seasonality in the provision of hydro-electric energy, a net of production plants and distribution lines which connected hydro-electric energy and thermoelectric energy was established. Clearly, the flexibility of the territorial organisation to the availability of energy steadily decreased as the role of industry became greater and greater.

From the analysis of the main publications devoted to energy production during the period 1920-1940, it is clear how strong the confidence in the role played by energy and new energy-related technologies in the designing of the modern territory was from two points of view (De Stefani, 1925; Isenburg, 1981):

1) A modern territory was a “territory that works”, where the bonds of the old social, economic and political territorial linkages could be overcome: energy and new technologies provided the conditions to enable a new territorial (re)structuring; thanks to an increased availability of energy and the increased capability of technology to control nature, people (workers above all), goods, knowledge and financial capital become increasingly mobile.

2) Only a “territory that works” could be an “open territory”, namely a territory where the relations with other countries represented a source of social and economic improvement; through technology, human intervention allowed the relationships with other countries to develop.

A clear demonstration of this attitude is given in a book published by a Minister of the Italian government in 1925 (De Stefani, 1925); the picture of the state intervention in the field of public works is extremely well detailed: road works, railway works, port works, river works, dams, hydraulic reclamation, etc., were regarded as elements capable of providing the conditions to enable Italy to benefit from the advantages originating from a new era, in which technology (and so, the opportunity to project human intervention and its impacts) and progress represented the most relevant dimensions to social organisation.

It is possible to argue that with the development of the fascist regime and the success of protectionism the point i) (a modern territory is a “territory that works”) became more and more important with respect to the aim of strengthening the economic independence of the Italian Nation: in this context, the problem of developing hydro-electric energy (and hydro-electric related technology) was increasingly considered with reference to the goal of promoting

autarky: Italy was to develop the capability to provide for its own energy requirements. In such a way, the rhetoric about “the powerfulness of our production plants”, “the capabilities of our engineers”, “the great natural endowment of water in our country” appeared more often. Moreover, the availability of hydro-electric energy became even more important after 1928, when the Mussolini law on “integral reclamation” was promulgated (see next paragraph): as a point of fact, energy represented the basic precondition in many country areas to promote reclamation.

“Fra tutte le professioni la più affine al mio spirito è quella dell’ingegnere. Se dovessi fare un’ulteriore discriminazione nel campo degli ingegneri direi che le mie preferenze vanno a quelli che studiano, creano, controllano l’energia elettrica”. (Among different professions, the engineer is that I like more. Further on, to distinguishing among different engineers, I prefer those which study, create, and control energy). (B. Mussolini, quoted in SADE, 1941, p. 1)

In 1955 the SADE published a book expressly devoted to celebrate the 50 years of activity in the field of energy and the role it had played in promoting the development of the modern Veneto.



Fig. 3 - Water, energy and territory self-celebrating representation of Piave river upper catchment. Centrale di Soverzene (Belluno). Mosaic in the hall of water power station (quoted in Sade, 1955, p. 34)

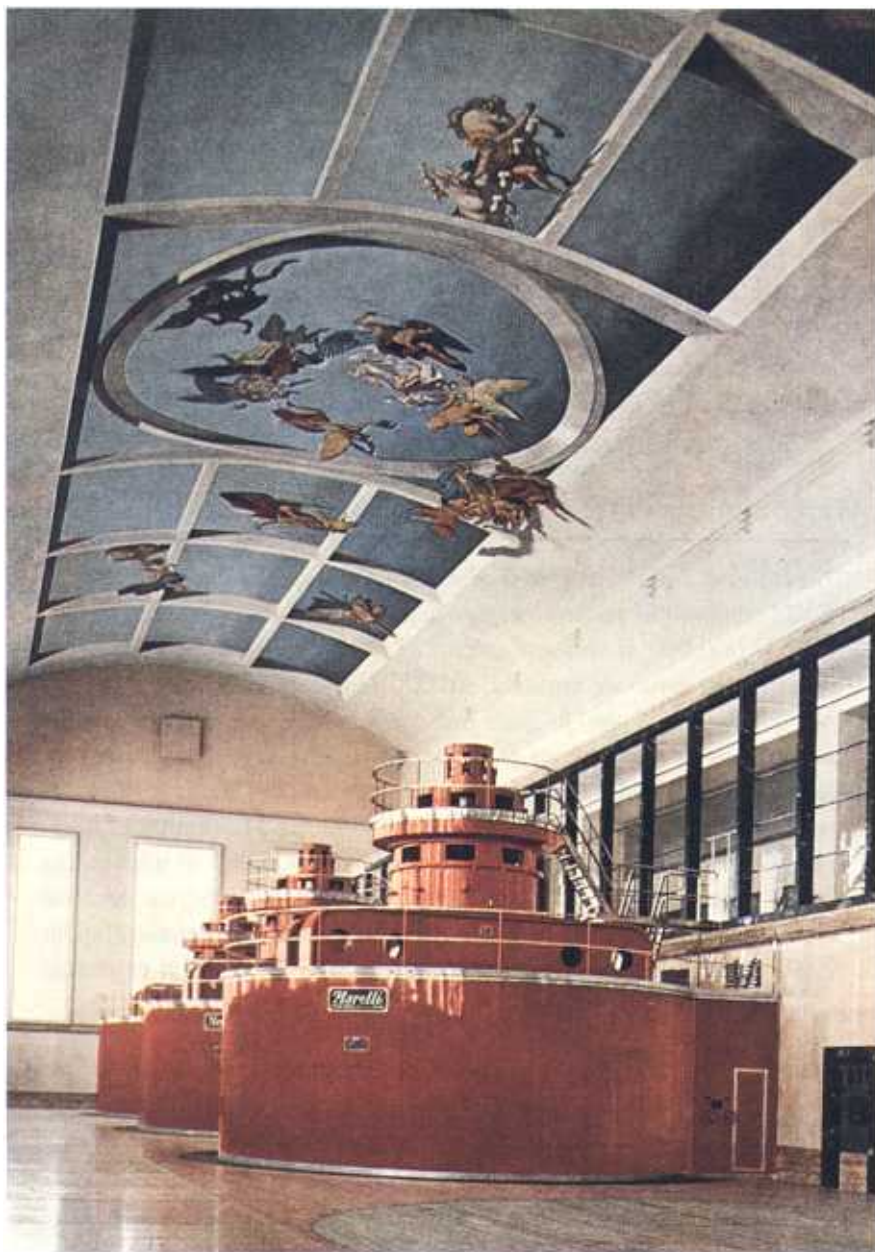


Fig. 4 - Water engineering and engines aesthetic; Soverzene power station (upper Piave river). (Sade, 1955, 55).

The book gives a map of all the production plants in the Veneto region which were built or managed by the SADE. The book provides pictures and tables for every production plant, indicating technology, energetic-power provided, and water-engineering works realised in the mountain basis (figures 3 and 4). Moreover, every production plant is pictured in a scenery in which new roads, dams, river-works, bridges, etc. had great importance. High-tension pylons, dams, roads, artificial basins become fundamental elements in a new landscape. The photographs of the production plant in the Marmolada (the highest mountain in the Dolomiti) are emblematic; one photo shows its imposing glacier (the panoramic view stressed its character as natural beauty), another one shows the building of a production plant in another side of the same mountain group: here, the cranes in the mountain scenery represent the elements to celebrate (figures 5 and 6).

2.2 Water and the Fascist Regime: “Integral Reclamation”

“In Italia ci sono: 2.000.000 di ettari incolti a causa della malaria; 2.823 comuni che possono essere definiti come costantemente malarici; 11.000.000 di abitanti esposti al rischio malaria; 2.000.000 di malati ogni anno di malaria; 20.000 morti all’anno per malaria. Negli ultimi venti anni lo Stato Italiano ha speso 1.900 milioni di lire per le ferrovie e 71 milioni di lire per bonificare terreni malarici” (In Italy there are: 2.000.000 hectares of unsoiled land because of malaria; 2.823 municipalities are affected by malaria; 11.000.000 of inhabitants risk their health because of malaria; 2.000.000 of inhabitants suffer from malaria every year; 20.000 people die every year because of malaria. In the last twenty years the Italian Government spent 1.900 million lira on building railways, and 71 million to defeat malaria by reclaiming lands” (Virgili, 1900, p. 434)

It was in this context that the debate about reclamations strongly developed at the beginning of this century. Of course, reclamations always represented a very relevant topic. Nevertheless, since Italian unification (1861) it acquired more and more importance.

When it comes to evaluate the problems involved by reclamations, three dimensions were concerned:

1) reclamations, and the search for defeating malaria and unsalubrity (health, salubrity of nature) (fig. 7);



Fig. 5-6 - Two pictures of the Italian mountain between natural beauty and modernisation (Marmolada, the Dolomites). (Sade, 1955, 74).

2) reclamations, and the search for improving productive methods in agriculture (national economy, self-sufficiency) (fig. 8);

3) reclamations, and social problems associated with urbanisation and industrialisation (social progress and modernisation of the country).

It is possible to say that the emphasis placed upon the topic by opinion leaders and the government progressively turned from point i) to points ii) and iii). As a point of fact, economic and social aspects associated with reclamations became more relevant since the beginning of the century.

One of the most important problem to manage at the beginning of the century was that of the productivity of agriculture. Many authors stressed that the recession affected the most important Italian areas in the first decade of the century; as a point of fact, ceaseless migration, strikes and social conflicts, the state of increasing neglect of many areas in the countryside, and the higher and higher mortality-rate represented very common elements. In this context, as many opinion leaders recognised, an increasing number of people tended to regard industrialisation and urbanisation as the real and the only true source of social progress (strictly related to scientific and technologic improvements), at the expense of agricultural activities, whose importance was increasingly less valued: "In saying agriculture", as Virgili wrote in 1900, "people refer to social and economic backwardness, as it were opposite to progress. In such a situation, the migration towards large cities is steadily increasing, with two serious consequences: once fertile lands are now becoming barren lands; cities are becoming places where unemployment and social degradation are causing social conflicts to steadily increase".

The Italian Government promulgated the n. 195 law (march, 2, 1900) in order to rule hydraulic reclamations. This law was especially devoted to giving a coherent legal framework to make it easier to reclaim lands; the context, in this phase, was that of promoting reclamation both to reduce malaria and to improve the fertility of lands through water regulation projects.

The reclamations constructed by the Serenissima were regarded as a pattern of reference by many writers; referring to the Venice mainland for example, C. Bortolotto, a scholar of rural problems, wrote:

"Questi centri rurali appartengono alla provincia di Venezia, sono campagne e bonifiche ridotte a colture intensive da uomini che discendono dalla dominante, ma che dalla città si trasferirono in terraferma per lavorare, per lottare con le acque, per conquistare palmo a palmo la terra, per difenderla contro la natura che fu



Fig. 7 - Body culture facing unhealthy nature ("Le Vie d'Italia", 1925).

matrigna” (these rural cities belong to the province of Venice; these lands have been reclaimed and transformed into fertile lands, where intensive farming has been adopted. These people moved from Venice to these marshlands to work, to fight against water, to conquer inch by inch the land, to protect the conquered land from stepmother nature) (Bortolotto, 1931, p. 199)

It is possible to say that large parts of the Italian territory were reclaimed during the first two decades of the century, thanks to financial provisions, new technologies, and the increased availability of energy produced by the great efforts made by the government and private companies in the field of hydro-electric plants. From this point of view, reclamations represented one of the most relevant issues in the process of country modernisation (which above all entailed the application of an engineering culture to territorial (re)structuring), accordingly to the cultural, political and economic context just sketched in the previous paragraphs.

At the same time, however, productive method improvements and the availability of new lands did not reduce social conflicts and migration towards large cities. As Bortolotto wrote

“La legge sulle bonifiche idrauliche ha avuto buoni risultati economici, ma socialmente è condannabile sotto ogni riguardo (...) I braccianti rappresentano una massa di gente malcontenta, nella quale facile è la diffusione delle idee socialiste” (Despite the good economic results produced by the hydraulic reclamation law, its social impacts were negative. Farm hands form a mass of dissatisfied persons, in which socialism can easily spread) (Bortolotto, 1931, pp. 244-245).

In this context one can properly evaluate the importance of the Mussolini law on the so-called *“bonifica integrale”* (integral reclamation). For several reasons this law can be considered a wide project of state intervention aimed at promoting economic and social change in agriculture. As a point of fact, this law, promulgated in 1928, was aimed at: 1) improving health conditions; 2) promoting the setting up of new production activities; 3) building new houses in countryside areas; iv) transforming landed property, in order to reduce social conflicts and improve the conditions of the labour market.

Points 3) and 4) represented the most relevant changes introduced by the law; undoubtedly, reclamations also remained a relevant topic for the health



Fig. 8 - Reclamation, agriculture and social progress. Frontespizio di Le bonifiche (Magistrato alle Acque, 1925).

matter, but their role as a tool for reducing social conflict was recognised to be increasingly important: in particular, reclamations were supposed to be a fundamental tool for providing the conditions to enable the farm-hands class to become a class of farmers. The Lazio experience was often quoted as a relevant example of the goal to be pursued:

“Dove fino a pochi anni fa, dominavano la palude, il latifondo e una micidiale malaria, sono oggi in efficienza aziende agricole medie (...) i braccianti sono diventati contadini”. (Only few years ago the life of farm-hands was ruled by the marshland, the great landed estate and malaria; today, farmers work in efficient medium farms) (Serpieri, 1933, p. 339)

Moreover, reclamations were regarded as a fundamental chance to reduce unemployment, which represented, together with the bad social conditions of farm-hands, the most relevant problem to be faced.

“La bonifica redimerà una ampia regione oggi desolata sia dal punto di vista idraulico che igienico. Queste aree diventeranno così terreno fertile, in grado di assorbire la disoccupazione e ridurre l'emigrazione” (Reclamation will redeem a wide region, today desolated, through hydraulic and hygienic interventions. Consequently, such areas will become fertile lands, capable of absorbing unemployment and reducing emigration) (Bortolotto, 1931, p. 12).

Referring to the problem of reducing unemployment, the limitations put by the Anglo-Saxon countries to the number of immigrants coming from Italy during the period 1920-1930, caused the political importance placed upon reclamations to steadily increase during the 1930s (Acerbo, 1930).

Moreover, it was during the 1930s that reclamations were considered increasingly important in the context of the fascist propaganda against urbanisation also (Serpieri, 1935). This aspect appears to be clear in the following passages:

“Oggi, grazie al fascismo, si vive in Italia in una atmosfera di ruralità. Ovunque si vuole parlare di un ritorno alla terra. Ovunque si vuole deflazionare l'urbanesimo deleterio ai fini della vita della razza. (...) Nelle grandi città è la morte che domina al di sopra di una vita esangue e declinante. Sia chiaro però che l'atmosfera della ruralità nella quale il regime fascista ha immesso la nazione non ha nulla a che vedere con le immagine idilliche o arcadiche. Ruralità

significa una fatica seria, incessante, amorosa, sottoposta al capriccio delle stagioni, fatica che non raccoglie ciò che è stato seminato, e pur tuttavia non si stanca, perchè il rurale è un uomo tenace e paziente. (...) La rivoluzione fascista ha trovato le sue migliori legioni fra i rurali. Negli anni 21-22 furono gli agricoltori della Valle del Po che scardinarono le baronie rosse e rovesciarono la situazione. (...) La vita nei campi abitua l'uomo alla sobrietà, al risparmio, al sacrificio" (Thanks to fascism, Italy lives today in a rural atmosphere. Everywhere the return to the land is at the fore. To reduce the bad effects of urbanisation on the life of the race represents a goal to pursue everywhere. (...) In large cities it is death that rules over a decadent life. Clearly, the atmosphere of "rurality" promoted by the fascist regime differs from idyllic and Arcadian pictures. "Rurality" requires serious, lovely and never-ending efforts, because rural workers have to face the caprices of the seasons and sometimes they do not get what they should; nevertheless, the farmer is a resolute and patient man, and he continues to work (...) The fascist revolution has its best legions amongst the rural population. In 1921-1922, it was the rural population who prevented the success of the red strikes. (...) The countryside life represents a training for sobriety, for the capability to save and to sacrifice) (B. Mussolini, Preface to Federzoni, 1933, pp. XII-XIII)

In the same direction, the following passages seem to be instructive:

"Politica antiurbanistica, bonifica integrale, sostegno dei prezzi dei prodotti agricoli sono i cardini fondamentali della vita del paese" (Politics against urbanisation, for integral reclamation and policies aimed at supporting prices in agriculture, represent the key elements in the national life) (Tassinari, 1933, p. 407)

"È necessario resistere all'urbanesimo, avviando la popolazione verso la sudata ma serena fatica dei campi, perchè il popolo resti forte, sobrio, disciplinato, risparmiatore. (...) Bonifica integrale come strumento per influire sulla qualità della razza, nel senso di mantenere ed intensificare le caratteristiche di elevata natalità, di sobria parsimonia, di attaccamento e amore alla patria, che costituiscono le doti delle popolazioni rurali. (...) Bonifica integrale è quindi bonifica dell'uomo oltre che della terra. È uno strumento per conservare l'equilibrio tra ruralità e urbanesimo, ruralità e

industrializzazione” (It is necessary to resist urbanisation; in order to make the people stronger, sober, well-disciplined and thrifty, it is necessary to promote country life. (...) Integral reclamation represents the tool to improve the quality of the race: by reclaiming and promoting agriculture the most distinguishing features of rural populations – high birth-rate, sober frugality, love of the native land – can be preserved and developed. (...) So, integral reclamation means not only to reclaim land but also to reclaim man. It is a tool to preserve the equilibrium between and urbanisation, rurality and industrialisation) (Acerbo, 1930, pp. 7-8)

As already mentioned, as far as reclamations and water regulation were concerned, three different dimensions were involved: salubrity, economy and social problems. Despite the great emphasis placed upon social improvements in rural areas by the Mussolini law, it is possible to say that only in a few areas did the social conditions really improve. In this regard, the great rural bourgeoisie played a fundamental role in preventing social changes in the agricultural sector to develop. Nevertheless, reclamations represented the most important engine in the physical transformation of the Italian territory during the period.

Moreover, the reclamation of lagoons and marshlands, did not exhaust these “environmental politics” (the expression refers to the physical territorial transformation pursued by the government in order to get some results) of the fascist regime. In fact, in fascist rhetoric, the concept of “integral reclamation” was applied to the whole national territory. An instructive example is given by fascist politics in mountain areas.

“La rinascita forestale viene posta, dall’economia fascista, all’ordine del giorno” (Forest recovery is in the agenda of the fascist economy) (Mussolini A., 1933, p. 265)

“Siate fieri delle vostre montagne, amate la vita delle vostre montagne, non vi seduca il soggiorno nelle così dette grandi città, dove l’uomo vive stipato nelle sue scatole di pietra e di cemento, senza aria, con poca luce, con minor spazio e spesso con grande miseria” (Be proud of your mountain, love the life of your mountain, don’t be tempted to live in, in large cities, people live packed in stone and cement boxes, without air, light, space and, often, in indigence) (Mussolini, quoted in Mussolini A., 1933, p. 265).

The movement of people from mountain areas to cities presented a problem

to be managed. It was well known, together with the abandonment of many mountain settlements, new impulses to urbanisation, new poverty (both in mountain areas and in large cities) and hydro-geologic disorder could develop. For that reason, the search for halting the outflow of population in mountain areas was at the fore in fascist rhetoric. Projects for developing new irrigation systems and new hydro-electric production plans were designed. New infrastructures were constructed in order to put many mountain basins in order (dams, artificial basins, water-falls, embankment consolidation); many lands were reclaimed in order to increase the productivity of agriculture also in mountain areas. Finally, many mountain areas were re-forested with the aims of reducing hydro-geologic disorder and of safeguarding the future of the wood industry.

At the same time, new propaganda campaigns in the educational sphere were launched: the figure of the “rural teacher” was aimed at promoting the benefits of open-air life whilst teaching about new production methods; the “trees holiday”, when pupils learnt how to plant a tree, developed in the context of forest recovery.

It is worth noting that the importance placed upon forest recovery during the period can not be entirely interpreted as part of campaign against urbanisation. Obviously, the relationships between the consolidation of mountain basins and the positive effects on water circulation in the plain were well known. As Serpieri wrote in 1931:

“È appena necessario ricordare i nessi che esistono tra le sistemazioni idrauliche-forestali dei bacini montani e la bonifica integrale dei terreni di pianura. La sistemazione montana (correzione, imbrigliamento dei corsi d'acqua, rimboschimento, sistemazione razionale dei pascoli) deve essere considerata come la bonifica integrale del monte; essa è la condizione per la bonifica integrale del piano” (It is easy to understand how important the relationships between hydraulic-forest regulations and the integrated reclamation are in plain lands. Intervention in mountain areas – river regulations, reforestation, rational settling of pasture lands – must be considered as the integrated reclamation of mountains and it represents the precondition for the integral reclamation of plain lands) (Serpieri, 1931, p.7)

3. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES

3.1 From Idealism to the Nationalist School: the Role of Nature Study

In contrast to the British school system during the same period, Italian education was strongly influenced by a sound humanistic cultural context. These traditional cultural contents became increasingly relevant to the Italian education system, as a rejection of the excesses of positivism, from the beginning of this century. Particularly during the pre-world war I period, many students were engaged in protecting national educational traditions – considered to be humanistic-based – from the over-spread of scientific pragmatism and from the spread of culture and education amongst the lower classes.

Such a school organisation, created to get a controlled and homogeneous formation of the leading class, was menaced by the rapid increase in the number of students pursued by progressive parties. Idealistic ideas came out in this debate, showing class and reactionary attitudes, where birth discrimination was a good way to get social control. For example, one of the most vivid protagonists of Italian idealism wrote: “Plebeian communities have to be pushed back to spade and slavish tasks as stated for their birth” (Codignola, 1919, 9).

The same reactionary aims were responsible for the preservation of old school programmes, where no renewal was allowed because of the fear of socialist ideology. Consequently, *curricula* bound to clerical schools humanistic/rhetorical traditions were maintained. In this context, not only education was considered to be a privilege to be preserved for the higher classes, but also school programmes remained strongly linked with philological subjects, exasperated nationalism and heavy encyclopaedism (Tomasi, 1969, 8).

Before the 1920s, the importance of scientific and naturalistic topics in school programmes was very low; moreover, in several education debates between men of letters, historians and philosophers, a strong distrust towards scientific subjects developed. The wish to create a national school was the only important novelty before Gentile’s reform (1923), which was strictly connected with idealistic philosophy. In this way, school programmes were regarded as fundamental tools aimed at fitting the “peculiar needs of national life, which must take root in ancestors’ blood and in fatherland” (Cento, 1918, 36). This education issue represented the result of the peculiar political/cultural context, as it resulted from the events of the first world war, where fatherland consciousness was supposed to be the main formative goal. It is easy to find in the above mentioned context the seeds of the following degeneration. “School’s task is to strengthen the sense of race,

namely the pride in our traditions, in our people's values..." (Cento, 1918, 61).

The end of positivist pedagogy in Italy represented the definitive estrangement of school from every aspect of contemporary life. Idealistic philosophy, based on the pre-eminence of human spirit over objective reality, contributed to form to a situation characterised by strong dogmatic attitudes on one side, and weak criticism on the other side. This was the context in which one of the most relevant ideas of B. Croce developed: only literature subjects were formative, because they were the best expression (and the only one idea) of spiritual traditions. In this approach, education was linked neither to concrete and daily problems nor to environmental issues. According to this ideology, the natural sciences lost their importance in the Italian cultural debate, and were relegated to a low prestige schools, which were attended by those students "(...) not cut out for the real knowledge" (Gentile, 1919).

By putting into effect the Riforma Gentile (Royal Decree, 6 may 1923, n. 1050), whose main ideas were well known since 1909, the situation of schools did not change at all. The main goal of Gentile's reform was the achievement of a *disinteressata conoscenza senza alcuna influenza democratica, straniera e utilitaristica* ("disinterested knowledge, without any democratic, foreign and utilitarian influence") (Gentile, 1923). According to this approach, Latin was introduced in all kinds of schools, acting as a tool to consolidate national pride and as a tool to select students and pupils. Moreover, Gentile showed a strong dislike for experimental methods, stating that "useful is never formative". As a result, scientific topics were not considered too highly in the new education system, as it resulted from the reform. Gentile wrote: "Science takes off the breath, it causes the feeling for life (with its throb, its art, its emotion and lyricism) to decrease..... science is as a world of ghosts where the human soul feels the cold of death" (Gentile, quoted in Tomasi, 1969, 53). Obviously, when Gentile speaks about sciences, he speaks about naturalistic issues too.

In the first period of Mussolini's dictatorship, Gentile's Reform ("the most fascist of all reforms", as is was recognised by many fascist politicians) revealed some likenesses between fascism and idealism: school was seen as the best place to preserve, to defend, and to spread nationalistic meanings. After the institution of educational and formative organisations which were directly controlled by the PNF (*Partito Nazionale Fascista*), such as the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, a clear break between Reform principles and fascist realism needs (*realismo fascista*) came out. In such a way, Gentile's idealistic school was forced to neglect humanistic attitudes and to adopt more practical goals: schools had to pay attention to technical capabilities, according to the most urgent requirements of the developing economy, namely to provide skilled workers to both agriculture and industry. As a consequence, during the 1930s the main goal was

to bind education and production: technicians were recognised as more useful than humanists. National progress required “modern” schools in order to allow a knowledge detached from the humanities to develop (Bonino, 1934). Despite these new elements – which were increasingly connected with a strong presence of militarist education –, school programmes still reflected an almost complete indifference to the natural sciences (Gliozzi, 1964).

If something related to the natural environment was taught, it was always subordinated to the practical needs of a self-sufficient regime. This is the case, for example, of agricultural teaching in primary schools, which was carried out not only in country villages but also in towns (e.g. the so-called *scuole all’aperto*, open schools) (Comune di Padova, 1942). It was a particular method of teaching worked out by an Italian – German commission who elaborated and promoted the open school system: its aim was “(...) to get, above all, a strong and healthy people by strengthening and taking care of the physiological and spiritual peculiarities of the race, consolidating its willingness and capability to fight” (Comune di Padova, 1942). In such a way nature was approached with a utilitarian point of view, as something to be exploited through human works (students and pupils would have acted as active members of a great national community) or as an opportunity to practise body culture.

In opposition to Gentile’s scanty interest in physical education, fascist schooling encouraged training aimed at promoting body efficiency, in order to build the physical strength of young people destined for the army. This tendency became stronger with G. Bottai, minister of National Education after 1936. He renewed school programmes with the aim of pursuing fascist humanism (*umanesimo fascista*): school had to consign good workers to the national community, with strong bodies and an obedient characters (Bottai, 1932).

3.2 Idealistic Influences on the Republic School: the Role of Environment and Nature Studies

The considerable social and political changes in post-1945 Italy had important consequences in the educational sphere. The main reforming task (*Consulta Didattica*, law n. 2100, 1951; Education Council) was to introduce new democratic issues into education practises. In this context, the term *ambiente* (environment) – both in social and physical terms – was considered for the first time. It was recognised by this Council, that the first biennium of primary school education should be attached to the study of the environment, in order to develop pupils’ capabilities to watch and explore nature (Ministero Pubblica Istruzione, 1952, 52).

This environmental awareness, however, remained strongly dependent upon idealism (still alive among Italian intellectuals). Therefore, this new interest in the environment stressed more *il godimento della bellezza* (the enjoyment of beauty) than a critical knowledge of environmental problems and issues. 'Environment' still represented an aesthetically valuable landscape.

In more precise terms, in the first biennium of primary school (children from 6 to 7 years old) environmental education was subdivided into "physical" topics (general characters and landscape most important features, more common animals and plants, first orienting tests, local lines of communications) and "social" topics (family and kinship, the school, the village and the neighbourhood, town and country life) (Ministero Pubblica Istruzione, 1952, 53). The second course of primary school (children from 8 to 10) was structured in such a way as to get a progressive knowledge of history and geography of the Italian Fatherland: in this respect, the word *ambiente* also included local folk (*costume locale*).

The semantic "width" of *ambiente* was used by school reformers to single out wide groups of subjects that formed the class *studio dell'ambiente* (environmental study), and were made up of:

a) History and Geography: physical and historical knowledge of local territory; collection of elements connected with local history.

b) The kingdom of nature: astronomic and atmospheric elements; descriptions of local environments and natural products; the human body organism; sanitary measures connected with food, dress, people and physical environments.

c) Man and nature relationships: importance of agricultural, forestry, ornithology, and fishery patrimony; natural resources; natural beauties, tourism and tourist education (Ministero Pubblica Istruzione, 1952, 55).

It is important to note that the role of nature in primary school was above all, linked with the analysis of environmental productive facilities (*ambiente locale e i suoi prodotti*: local environment and products), while the didactic innovation of teaching nature preservation derived more from utilitarian needs than from ecological awareness. Moreover, the idealistic outlook of nature appears evident especially when considering the expression *bellezze naturali* (natural beauties). Reform programmes exhorted teachers to practise open air activities to help pupils feel the beauty and harmony of nature, and to promote the contemplation of natural beauties. Despite this aesthetic approach, however, it is also possible to argue that with the 1950s' reform programmes the first suggestions

for ecological concerns came into the Italian education system.

In comparing the republican schools to the past education system, one can see that the idealistic and aesthetic attitude did not represent the only similarity. As a point of fact, the presence of a group of “practical” subjects, named with the generic term *lavoro* (work), can be considered a direct inheritance of Bottai’s *Carta della Scuola* (fascist school reform in 1936). These practical activities (agriculture and horticulture practices, bee-keeping, silk-worm and poultry breeding) testify to the considerable importance of agriculture in Italy after 1945. The spreading of outdoor activities promoted the common opinion that ‘nature’ overlapped agriculture, thus offering grounds to follow the kind of ambiguities and mystifications concerning the environment that still affect Italian environmental policies.

The *Consulta Didattica* introduced the direct observation of natural facts and phenomena in the programmes of the junior high school also (children from 11 to 13). It is surprising that literature teachers (graduated in history, philosophy, and Italian literature) were charged with nature teaching. The main reason was that they were supposed to meet the demand of linking natural facts with the understanding of geographical environments (Ministero Pubblica Istruzione, 1952, 60). As a consequence, nature education was conducted by a teaching staff without any particular competence.

It was not until 1963, with junior high school reform, that it was recognised that the natural sciences were subjects to be taught by teachers with specific naturalistic qualifications (Natural Sciences and Biology graduates). Ministerial programmes, however, did not express well defined formative issues, but relied on the teachers’ spirit of enterprise. Such vagueness did not allow nature preservation to be considered in relation to ecological matters: to preserve nature still met ethical and aesthetic demands. By watching and describing natural environments, pupils were trained to understand and feel the harmony and beauty of nature (Beer, 1970, 156). In this context, the spreading of ecological concerns in education continued to be dependent more upon the teachers’ personal diligence than upon education programmes and institutions. Finally, it is important to note that the ecological background of most teachers was still based upon an old Darwinism, not always capable of representing, in proper terms, the complexity of man – environment relationships.

As far as environmental and natural studies in high schools are concerned (from 14 years old to 18), the situation was characterised by even more ambiguity: it should be noted that scientific subjects in *Licei* (*Classico*, where students get a strong humanistic education, and *Scientifico*, where the study is more devoted to scientific matters) and in technical schools were still based on Gentile’s Reform (Beer, 1970, 157).