

THE ROLE OF LITERARY PARKS IN THE RE-APPROPRIATION OF THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF PLACES

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The project of Literary Parks, which represents a new organization of space and incentive for development is becoming increasingly more important in the new territorial politics, which is oriented towards the search for more sophisticated models of development able to combine protection and transformation of the environment.

As is already known, the fundamental idea of the literary park is the result of a unique and unknown cultural route throughout the places celebrated in literature considered historical memory of the territory and its people (Lowenthal, 1975) and used as an unknown code to interpret the territory, in order to point out the cultural significance through a reading, which giving value to memory, transposes its meanings to the current day situation. Identity and economic, social and cultural energies able to transform memory into an innovative factor, in new forms of development and in preservation. It is an initiative, which permits an innumerable number of transformations in the sense of a productive metamorphosis of places in which a cultural identity and sense of belonging to the territory, are regained.

Literary parks, are therefore, areas or avenues that have been a source of inspiration for writers and poets, the land in which they were born or lived or in which there are traces, even today, of elements of their narration. The project is envisaged within the context of particular territorial ties and cultural expressions, which permit through literature to recover the local history in terms of habits, knowledge, traditions, environment, buildings and ancient professions. A complex interaction which allows for the restoration and protection of present day emergencies and earlier ones, with respect to consolidated value and potentiality of the place, of the cultural patrimony and of its environmental system and its potential productivity. This is evidence of divisions of space which then become containers of meaning that announce the will of the community to restore cultural ties with the territory and with its history.

It is a proposal to make the best of literary influences that specifically manifest the cultural aspect of the place in which the community feels connected to and has feelings of “nationality” or are proud to be connected with. It is the poetry of space and time in which local identity evolves and from which the cultural manipulation of space originates. It is an opening up to listen to places that are complex cradles of cultural identity, the search for intrinsic meanings of places that have been inhabited. It is a project that has as its aim an ambitious object to stimulate the re-emergence of the collective identity inside the cultural memory, indicating those forms of identification, that are translated in a dialogue with places through the literary patrimony which, in transmitting certain emotions helps establish precise levels of belonging.

The analysis used by Literary Parks, seeks to recognize the environmental vocations, the deep signs traced by the cultural stratifications on the territory, the eventual signs of ancient memories of places, that as Calvin suggests, do not recite the past but contain it “like the lines of a hand”. Tracing a palimpsest, that is a projection of human societies, Literary Parks become matrices of “territoriality” of local communities, understood as having deep ties with the places but also as a cultural identification.

A valid example of the role of such a project in regaining cultural identity of places can be seen in Sicily, a region that encloses a historical universe, cultural and environmental, central to the Mediterranean panorama, and in certain ways, unique within Europe, however, it is a reality in which the sense and memory of meanings, a reality identified by decadence of traditional landscapes characterized by a “crisis of legibility” that often has erased ancient meanings, making the places lose their reference point and changing them to insignificant “non places”, in spaces, that is, that the erratic style of life has inevitably ratified.

In spite of the huge territorial upheavals - produced by continuous and invading processes of modernization which have overcome the traditional order, often cancelling the historical cultural patrimony - in Sicily, it is still possible, today, to appreciate the original qualities of some territorial passages, that when read, give the particular sense of wonder for the cultural references that can still be captured and that are often tied in symbiosis with nature. It is these culturally significant "signs" that the Literary Parks, through literary reproductions destined for tourists, intend to recuperate and project again using themselves as an instrument of articulation, territorial regions as a strong cohesive in the social context.

Along literary paths, in fact, there are many forms and objects, witnesses of the history and culture of the territory, that are like an open door that leads to memory, the collective identity:

- the buildings, convents, castles, homes, small historical villages that are scattered around all over the Sicilian territory;
- the "farms"¹, that decorate the Plain of Catania and the extensive area of Iblei, those of "the village" of the Modicano, in Netino, and beyond the Plain of Catania; farms and "small huts" scattered in the valley of the River Imera;
- the "casedde", small houses of the lower hillside of the hinterland of Messina;
- "chiuse etnee", black lava cliff walls and terraces in the eastern side of the Island;
- "Etna's lava fields", formed by solidified lava, or "columns of lava" and the "hang" ones in the Alcantara region;
- the "caves"² of the Ibleo limestone landscape, still inhabited about ten years ago, by poor people; the characteristic stone caves of Palazzolo Acreide;
- the old "trazzere"³ dirt roads which mark the Sicilian agricultural landscape;
- the "fiumare" of the Peloritani;
- the terraces;
- the flour mills;
- the "sciare"⁴ of Timpa of Acireale;
- the mines, heritage of a civilization already cancelled out completely from history, like the sulphurous of Agrigento and those in Nisseno, the salt mines of Siracusa and Agrigento;
- the ancient sailor villages: Porto Empedocle, Capo Peloro and Acitrezza.

It is a strategy, that of the Literary Parks, aimed at ensuring the continuing cultural memory, peculiar to the Island, today, more than ever, at risk, due to the transformations and destruction of the last ten years that have determined in an ever increasing manner the disappearance of fundamental aspects of the cultural tradition. A reconstruction of historical co-ordinates, that is in the assigning of a new identity to the territory in the protected cultural area strictly tied to the concept of place and landscape, connects with an identity, ties the community to the territory.

Gesualdo Bufalino in *L'Isola Plurale*, an important page, which is dedicated to the interpretation of Sicily writes:

«So many Sicilies, why? Why has Sicily had the fate of finding itself, over the centuries, between the great western culture and the temptations of the desert and the sun, between

¹ Classical examples of rural architecture, the farms are the feudal system expression in countries, colonization's center of wide territory in an extensive way cultivated, but are also the last testimonies of a farmer disappearing culture.

² The water and wind's action cut the limy rocks, digging tight and picturesque throats, called "caves", with a overhanging walls by which natural sculptures, waterfalls and potholes emerge. These caves have received, since ancient times, settlements and rocky necropolis, among which the Ispica and the Pantalica ones, are the most well-known in the Valley of Anapo.

³ Wide tracks, earthy or stony, shaped because of recurrent displacements of flocks for wintering and constituting their usual passage way.

⁴ Accumulation of lava in the sides of the volcano.

reason and magic, the storms of feelings and the heat of passion. Sicily suffers, of an excess of identity, I don't know whether this is good or bad».

And it is just this identity that the Literary Parks intend to recuperate, after the most recent transformations have destroyed ancient meanings, and therefore resulting in the loss of a reference point for places, the loss of their own identity.

It is the resumption of a discussion abruptly interrupted a process of meaning that is been deviated by shattering transformations and ratifications, restoring a connection between meaningfulness and meaning, corroded by a process of functional adaptation, on which lodges, the process of “new territoriality”.

For writers such as Vittorini, Quasimodo, Pirandello, Sciascia, Tomasi di Lampedusa, D'Arrigo, Verga, Savarese, Sicily is the key to understanding all their works, synthesis of the diverse cultures that have followed each other, stratified and decanted in the Sicilian culture. And the Sicilian Literary Parks are born to seize the opportunity of collecting the vocations that in time have conferred a peculiar appearance to the diverse areas and that even if the penetration of new economic and cultural models have silenced, if not completely destroyed them, to continue connecting them with the place so that they remain in essence.

The discussion is exemplified and perhaps emblematic in the case of a city like Messina where natural events and human enterprises have often broken its dialogue with history and broken its tie with its own identity references, and where the deep transformations which have occurred in the regional planning have remodelled the landscape, removing the cultural aspects and taking away its individual characteristics laboriously reconstructed after the serious seismic event. If it is believed that in the city of the Peloritana, the thesis put forward by Vallega (2001), is affirmed, of the “double dissociation” between city and existential values and between city and nature with the consequent “drying up” as Pirandello says, one of the previous writers, then it can be understood, how it is absolutely necessary to regain those residual good signs, that because of the general context, in which they are, become “strong points” of the territory, true “subjects” that allow a certain level of cultural identity to be assigned.

It is here, in the city of the Straits, that a new attention towards cultural references, is bringing the discovery of historical values and the knowledge that is important for the community to return to cultural ties with the territory and with its history to regain its own identity.

It is also in this sense, that the project of the Literary Park *Horcynus Orca* - Stefano D'Arrigo should be interpreted; a park, which aims at reproducing the places where one lives, where in a ideal time line, unites the past and the present and projects into the future the cultural identity, that stimulates respect and a sense of belonging to the place, favouring a process of identification with ones own territory and therefore, with ones own history.

Situated between, Scilla and Cariddi, the Literary Park wants to re-appropriate and increase the value of the lost cultural identity, understood as essentially the tension that combines the signs of the past with the challenges of the future, banking on the improvement of local ecosystems. This is a strategy that profoundly touches the local community's patrimonial identity, elevating it as a resource and allowing it to be shaped and to be used. A park, the literary of the Straits, that qualifies itself, as constructing a network of collective identity; identifying common values and works of symbolic belonging to an identical cultural universe, of elaborating a semantic network of common shared values and experiences.

And yet, the Literary Park has already achieved valuable results. The environmental and functional requalification of Capo Peloro, the north eastern point of Sicily, the mythological and literary Cariddi, and the restoration of the five hundred year old “Torre degli Inglesi”, two elements embodied in the area of territory, highly peculiar, that have in time assumed the role of symbols of the cultural identity, that speak the language of identification and that are the image of a *unicum* environment of great historical value, a mirror in which is reflected the historical cultural image of the local community.

The Literary Parks project is a clear sign of a new sensibility towards cultural symbols of the territory that are becoming increasingly more pragmatic, and thanks to this, the pride of ones own roots can be found, the pride of local traditions, the consciousness of ones own identity. With their own local reading and micro history, the Literary Parks elaborates the

aspects and provides the indispensable instruments for the construction of an interpretative paradigm aimed at understanding, re-appropriating, protecting and increasing the value of the intense literary landscape as an identity story.

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