

The Shared Landscape. Strategies for Ethical and Democratic Living

Vereno Brugiattelli

Abstract

Living is placed within an environmental fabric consisting of infinite abiotic, biotic and cultural threads. Integrated living is required to be part of this fabric. Ethical living, characterised by knowledge, awareness and responsibility towards the landscape is the only way to protect the environment and enhance its biological and cultural wealth to effectively contribute to the fundamental quality of living and man's well-being. Ethical living needs active participation shared by the inhabitants in the processes of protection, transformation and management of the landscape. In turn, such participation requires fostering by the ethics of living. In this study, from a phenomenological and hermeneutic viewpoint, I intend to highlight some fundamental structures of living to demonstrate that democratic participation is a determining factor in contributing to the realisation of integrated living, which is indispensable for respect of the landscape to promote quality of life and man's well-being.

Keywords: Landscape, Ethical living, Democratic participation, Quality of life, Well-being.

Introduction

The history of the landscape is the history of its transformations produced by interacting abiotic and biotic processes, and it is the history of the changes produced by human habitation. Man lives a landscape that is partly the result of his modifications. A destructive living of the landscape fabric produces material, ethical and spiritual degradation in man, and has a negative impact on his quality of life. Ethical living is the only way to enhance and protect the biological and cultural richness of the landscape and thus make a decisive contribution to the quality of living and human wellbeing. Ethical living requires the active and shared participation of inhabitants in the processes of protection, transformation, and management of the landscape. This participation, in turn, needs to be fed by the ethics of living.

Through a phenomenological and hermeneutic pathway, I intend to highlight some fundamental structures of living and then to show that the active participation of the inhabitants, guided by the ethics of living, contributes to respecting the landscape,

promoting the quality of living and improving human wellbeing. In the second part, I aim to point out the practical-operational methods suitable for achieving these goals. I will identify them in those forms of participatory democracy and planning capable of integrating individual and collective interests in order to achieve shared objectives.

Biological and cultural circularity between man and landscape

The landscape includes a multitude of territorial, environmental, biological, historical and cultural elements which are so closely interconnected to constitute a web of interrelations. Man is not outside this web but is included as part of an infinite network of chemical, biological and cultural processes. Man lives the natural and cultural landscape and, by doing so, modifies and transforms it while being changed by it at the same time. Thus, the landscape is not there simply to be contemplated by man. Westerners have separated themselves from the landscape limiting it to a picture subject to aesthetic judgement. In this gnoseological and practical setting man has forgotten the ontological dimension of belonging to the environment. Man's actions are interpreted as being external to nature and the landscape. This type of relationship has misrecognised the fact that man is also the result of the biological and cultural processes produced by the environment (Brugiatelli, 2020, pp 29-34).

The value of the landscape can not only be attributed to its visual and contemplative aspects or to what it offers from an aesthetic viewpoint. Originally, before being an object of contemplation, the landscape ties man to other living beings and material elements. Like man, all living creatures are involved in the landscape with each contributing to "making the landscape", modifying it and, in turn, being changed by the landscape which they have contributed to modifying. Like other living parts, man transforms the landscape but with the difference that he changes it more rapidly with lasting consequences, on a global scale.

Environmental transformations are frequently the result of cultural interventions on the landscape. Man is not only living an environment-territory, but he is also living his own cultural products with which he moulds the landscape. From this perspective, the landscape is also the result of long and complex cultural interventions (Bonesio, 2002, p. 80).

The ethos of living the landscape

Living is specified as relations, or complex interactions. Interaction, rather than relations, because the latter is positioned on a unidirectional level while interaction comprises both activity and passivity, giving and receiving according to circular paths and feedback. Living is circularity with the biological and cultural elements where its ethical sense is fundamental. Living ethically leads to the realisation of a connected living which is integrated with the territory, the environment and the natural landscape (including territory and environment). Such living is a complex living, or "tied" (*complexus*) fabric together with the landscape, being a natural and cultural part of it. Therefore, living cannot fail to be openness. It builds itself and refers to itself

but, at the same time, in its openness it builds itself with respect to a set of abiotic, biological and cultural elements. From this point of view, living does not contrast the landscape, but it constitutes a continuity. Living is the product of man's organisational activities, but such activity proves itself ethical if it is achieved openly and not separately from the abiotic, biotic and cultural context. Living acquires an ethical significance if established through complex interactions.

Originally Ethos also means dwelling, home. In a passage in *Brief über den "Humanismus"* (1976) Martin Heidegger speaks about ethos as living space, as a living place. In *Mille plateaux*, Gilles Deleuze and Piere-Félix Guattari observe that "ethos is both dwelling and manner, country and style" (Deleuze-Guattari, 1987, p. 464). Thus, on the one hand, ethos refers to customs, habits and behaviour while, on the other hand, to living, dwelling, the living relations with the world, with the landscape and place (Venturi Ferriolo, 2002). Living made up of complex interactions reminds man of himself and to search for a sense in his living-inhabiting (Brugiatelli, 2017, pp. 63-64). This meaning is born of care, concern, consideration and regard towards the environment and landscape.

Shared Living

On a biological level living is positioned in the processes of utilisation, consumption and waste of resources. Responsible living is characterised by mindful use, recycling, re-use and renewable energy sources. Over the last century, the market, an abstract yet omnipresent entity, has led to the loss of *status* as inhabitants by transforming people into consumers. According to this model, a good citizen consumes a lot and diversifies consumption, which is promoted as an indicator of well-being. It is time, however, to give people back their *status* as inhabitants and to allow their well-being to coincide with the quality of their living. It is necessary to claim that the good citizen is someone who lives well in the landscape and possesses an ecological conscience and thereby acts responsibly taking care of the landscape and reducing the impact of his actions on the environment.

Shared living of the landscape also means participating and taking part in the discussion of projects, choices, decisions relating to the protection and changes to the landscape. Living can be interpreted as a political action in the sense that it is seen as exercising shared democracy. The ethical goal of the good life needs, therefore, to be based on the doctrine of a shared and planned democracy which, according to Hannah Arendt should be achieved by people able to identify common interests and to collaborate to transform them into global actions (Arendt, 1977, pp. 103-108). This idea of democracy is related to Ezio Manzini's idea of *planned democracy* in *Politiche del quotidiano* (Manzini, 2018) in which he writes about the integration of individual and collective interests to achieve shared objectives.

The implementation of democratic practices through shared procedures and inclusive measures is doubtless fundamental for the protection of the distinctive and

characteristic features of the landscape and for decisions on responsible construction with regard to the environment and its cultural identity. This practice is necessary in order to raise collective awareness of living the landscape.

Knowledge and awareness, gained by the inhabitants of their living the landscape, are essential for the development of a democratic movement to protect and promote the environmental and landscape patrimony. Through the principal procedures of a shared democracy the inhabitants can implement various forms of mediation with the institutions to establish constructive channels of dialogue. Alternatively, they can activate initiatives or evaluate State proposals. The collective defence of the landscape often contrasts economic interests making any form of dialogue difficult, if not impossible. Certainly, however, the confrontation between the opposing parts must not descend into any form of violence. When economic interests become the only criteria upon which a choice is made to realise certain works, awareness and conscience are not always sufficient to preserve, defend and enhance the landscape patrimony. Yet, neither is it possible to accept nor reject the construction of the necessary infrastructure for economic development. The defence of the landscape and economic interests should find agreement based on reasonable compromises which guarantee, on the one hand, the protection and enhancement of the landscape and, on the other, the possibility to realise works which are effectively useful to the community from an economic and social point of view and not advantageous for particular economic interests.

Planning and implementing integrated living through processes of democratic participation

The protection and enhancement of the landscape patrimony (nature and culture) does not exclude changes and innovations, such as the construction of infrastructure. Conservation for its own sake may endanger the enhancement of the landscape and the development of integrated living, which, as far as possible, respects the biological rhythms and ecosystems protecting the cultural patrimony. Innovating does not mean destroying when it clarifies the natural and cultural potential of a certain landscape.

Knowledge and awareness of one's landscape are fundamental to promote and realise works to trigger the potential of the landscape involving the institutions through means characteristic of an active democracy. If it is the institutions, public bodies or private firms that are promoting innovations, the inhabitants should be informed about the planned works and be made aware of the possible natural, social and economic effects. The risk analysis which certain works represent for the natural and cultural landscape, as well as the quality of life should be openly discussed. With constructive debate, the planned project could be modified in the light of observations put forward by a committee of local residents. Some large-scale building projects, which are perceived as a threat to their landscape and the quality of life often awaken the sense of belonging motivating the inhabitants to rediscover the natural and cultural richness of their territory.

A community can become the protagonist of a living integrated with the landscape through activities that enhance the resources, respect the biological cycles and ecosystems, promote and appreciate the natural and cultural patrimony (Capra, 1982). A shared democracy of the landscape possesses the potential to activate a network of strengths, competencies, knowledge and capabilities able to regenerate the territory, the environment and the landscape. This can be done by planning economic activities which can generate both material and spiritual wealth with limited environmental impact.

Final considerations

The safeguard and protection of the landscape patrimony does not mean scarce economic development. To the contrary. Economic activities, such as organic agriculture, produce quality products because they optimise the resources of the territory and have a low environmental impact. Organic farming bonds with many other economic activities such as eco-tourism, commerce, handicrafts and small industry. Such low environmental impact activities can be supported by a transport system fuelled by renewable energy sources. In this way a network of interacting activities is established forming an integral part of the landscape. Therefore, the landscape is no longer considered a commodity.

Alberto Magnaghi defines this network of activities integrated with the territory and landscape as “multi-faceted” made up of: new-farmers, new-artisans (traditional, innovative, digital), environmental and cultural associations, movements focusing on local and global issues (against climate change, for democracy and human rights), youth groups, inhabitants in the peripheries promoting self-governing living experiences, ethnic movements, mutual help associations, cooperatives with ethical, fair, environmental and social aims, groups promoting self-sufficient consumers, critical consumption and fair purchase, fair trade etc. (Magnaghi, 2020, p. 217). Such activities, through common and shared planning channels, gradually enable communities to reclaim their territory, landscape, knowledge and practices.

Besides, they promote and enhance the environmental and landscape resources to such an extent as to positively influence the quality of living which fosters complex relationships with the landscape. In order to boost such processes, forms of shared and planned democracy, which can integrate individual and collective interests to realise shared objectives, are needed. These shared objectives are attainable by means of choices, actions, and activities based on knowledge, awareness and shared responsibility translated into practices through democratic channels. Therefore, it is a matter of promoting ethical and integrated living characterised by: 1. an *ethos* which differentiates it from other types of living; 2. actions dictated by care, concern, involvement and responsibility with regard to the landscape (Mortari, 2020, pp. 145-150); 3. an open and welcoming structure towards diverse cultures that is capable of recognising the cultural identities to which it contributes to producing; 4. enhancing the landscape together with the growth of man’s well-being.

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