

## CAN PARISH MAPS INSPIRE FUTURE?

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Contents: 1. A sick landscape 2. A museum of the community 3. The parish map 4. Parabiago's parish map 5. Interactive map 6. From parish maps to community projects

### 1. A sick landscape

Parabiago is a town of 27,000 inhabitants, in the north west part of the suburban area of Milan, Italy.

As in many urban contexts, Parabiago is characterized by citizens' widespread inability to perceive the value of places, to recognize in the territory not only the space available to build, produce and move, but also the landscape to preserve and improve.

Taking up the metaphor of landscape as a theatre, among the others dear to Eugenio Turri, acting only as actors, while forgetting to act as spectators has, since the 1950s, deeply wounded the landscape. The wounds of the landscape are the loss of biological and cultural diversity, the imbalance and the physical separation between human and natural habitat, the serious malfunctions of landscape systems whose the polluted river Olona, unable to manage floods and support a complex biological community, constitutes its emblem.

According to Maggi, those cited above are symptoms of the failure of the "invisible landscape": social relations, customary use of places and common resources, especially territorial, rules and practices of coexistence and reciprocity, communication methods and intergenerational transmission of knowledge.

### 2. A museum of the community.

The landscape ecomuseum of Parabiago was born to answer to the "placelessness" or "loss of place" syndrome: citizens do not appreciate the "small scale" heritage that characterize the landscape. Parabiago's ecomuseum is a cultural institution recognized by the Lombardy Region in accordance with the law no. 13/2007. Its goals are to study, conserve, enhance and show the landscape; it is a pact with the community to make the landscape clearly and fully visible first of all to its inhabitants and therefore also to visitors, according to sustainable development. It's managed by the Municipality of Parabiago that wanted to develop this cultural Institution in the local Agenda 21 path.

The ecomuseum is a museum of the community: it is legitimated by the participation of the citizens. For this reason, the landscape ecomuseum of Parabiago was not designed according to the conventional custom that sees the Institutions designing "for" the community but not considering citizens as decision-maker. The design of this ecomuseum was carried out "with" the community, according to the logic of the participatory and inclusive planning.

Public and private educational Institutions, associations and citizens of different ages were invited to learn, discuss and interact to shape the idea of the ecomuseum and to activate their resources, knowledge and skills to test some local actions and to design the ecomuseum action plan.

The participation path is important at least as much as the result of designed actions: in fact the interaction of local actors and the creation of a sense of belonging to places are required to achieve the designed goals.

### 3. Parish maps.

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To realize the ecomuseum action plan, a parish map was drawn. The parish map is a participatory mapping of a landscape, resulting from a shared reading of the tangible and intangible heritage, according to the model of English parish maps.

In Italy, ecomuseums made dozens of parish maps, in particular, thanks to the practice community called "Local world".

#### 4. Parabiago's parish map.

Parabiago's parish map, one of the first in Lombardy, was produced in about a year and a half working with the financial contribution of European Union, Lombardy Region and Parabiago's Municipality.

The citizens' forum, the ecomuseum participatory organism made up of associations, municipal technicians, politicians and citizens of Parabiago and neighboring communities, created a working group that met regularly to design the map.

The working group first composed a questionnaire that was submitted to the citizens. Citizens were asked to indicate the heritage elements characterizing Parabiago's landscape and those that have highest value for them. Moreover people could suggest the heritage elements that should be reclaimed and enhanced by the ecomuseum.

During the 2006/07 school year the ecomuseum involved about 250 students and their families.

Led by the operators of the ecomuseum, children walked through the areas near to their school to recognize, or discover the landscape salient features, as well as the history that has determined them; They also filled out the questionnaire and administered it to their parents and grandparents.

Thanks to some highly-motivated teachers, some classes created their parish maps.

Children drew and painted these maps that were instrumental to design the final map.

The mappers working group, according to the results of the survey and to the children maps, identified those heritage items that characterize the community. The group chose within this heritage inventory the items to be reproduced on the map and drew up a draft of the parish map.

According to this draft, the local artist, Patrizio Croci, designed the map which was submitted to the citizen forum. The artist, according to the forum comments drew the final map.

Additional heritage informations, as well as some indications about history and landscape, were published on the back of the map.

The printed map was submitted to the City Council and then distributed to each families in Parabiago, enclosed to the municipal newspaper.

Early in 2009 the map was reprinted with an updated and corrected back in order to provide visit information and ecomuseum services.

In the years 2010 and 2011, as technical partner and with the same methodology above described, the ecomuseum contributed to realize the map of the Mills natural Park, promoted by the municipalities of Parabiago, Nerviano, Legnano, St. Vittore Olona, Canegrate.

Likewise to the parish map of Parabiago, also this map was aimed at realizing a heritage inventory and an action plan.

#### 5. The interactive map

The parish map does not end with its release. It is a participatory process, a permanent and upgradeable archives of tangible and intangible heritage. In fact, immediately after the release of the map, the ecomuseum received proposals for adjustments and integration. With the community participation the ecomuseum conducted several researches about the heritage identified on the map.

An interactive and multimedia map was carried out to make it easily upgradeable. It reports informations about the heritage of Parabiago's and Mills Park's communities, identified on the maps.

The interactive map is made by web pages published within the ecomuseum web site.

Each heritage object, represented on the map, is connected by a hyperlink to a in-depth web page containing texts, images, photographs, audio/video interviews and anything else necessary to detail the contents.

As the printed map, also the interactive map requires the participation and cooperation of everyone concerned: only in this way, it becomes a real parish map. Besides the usual involvement of the citizens forum and the educational and cultural institutions, which represent the local community, the interactive map is also based on high quantity (and quality) of informations, produced by the web community through the Wikipedia project, the online free encyclopedia.

The text, once validated by the ecomuseum, are uploaded on the website in the interactive parish map section.

The informations are also uploaded on the interactive map thanks to the education courses for the schools, to the participated walks that the ecomuseum organizes periodically to read and interpret the landscape and, finally, to high schools and university students contributes.

## 6. From parish maps to community projects

The map explain not only the state of a landscape. It can help to remember what made it and to explain how improving and enhancing it.

In the parish map of Parabiago the desires of the community can be detected: for example the tower Cavalleri, now in ruins, was drawn as at the time of its peak, that is how people would like as soon as possible. It is also clear that some monuments and heritage items shown in the map are not currently accessible by the public, others are little known or abandoned. This is the case of the church of S. Ambrogio della Vittoria, closed to the public and remembered more as “the church of mads” (since was near a psychiatric hospital), than the site of an important cistercian abbey. The remains of Riale, a medieval watering ditch, active until 1928, at the designing map time were hidden in the vegetation, ignored by most citizens as the river that feeds it, the Olona, that lot of people would like to erase from the landscape because it is synonymous of pollution and flooding.

Ecomuseum, cultural associations and students have studied, reopened to the public, even though temporarily, and promoted the knowledge of these heritage elements.

Some animals drawn on the map, still widespread, are also unknown by most people who think they are even extinct. However they are not biologically extinct, but they are culturally extinct. Example of this phenomenon, the beetle *lampiridae* commonly called firefly: fewer children know its existence, much less name it, echo the chant to invite it to fall and be caught, put it under a glass at night, to give a little light. So showing animals like the firefly on the map means wanting somehow redeem their cultural existence too.

The educational projects for children, the local actions and the participate walks or workshops usually allows people to suggest for improvement and enhancement of the places visited or studied; in this way, citizens and organizers on the one hand acquire a deeper and shared understanding of places and of people who helped to shape them and, on the other, they express desires useful to improve the landscape.

The actions identified by the citizens were included in the ecomuseum and mills park action plans; with the help of the communities simple actions have already been realized. Other proposals, related to the urban and the landscape planning, were approached in the urban and the environmental plans whose updating are in progress. The draft of urban plan of the City of Parabiago reveals, connects and protects the heritage items listed on the parish map, including those currently little or hardly accessible or poorly protected as the minor elements (individual trees or hedges of historical and natural value, material heritage items associated with traditional agricultural practices, devotional chapels, etc.). The goal is to protect, restore and give new function to the heritage elements and connect them to each other and to the surrounding environment system.

Before long we'll know if these maps have played a useful role in the local sustainable development. We'll also know if they have been able to effectively deliver a project through which the community draws and inspires her future.

Certainly, Parabiago's parish maps allowed the ecomuseum to census the cultural and natural heritage in a participated way and citizens to progress in the hard path of recovery the sense of places and the social and environmental responsibility.

The urban district of local trade (DUC), started in 2012, is good news in this path. The DUC is a project sponsored by the Municipality of Patabiagio with the wide participation of artisans, shopkeepers, local associations and cultural institutions including the ecomuseum.

The goal of the DUC is the promotion of local manufactures, retail trade and agriculture that are in serious trouble because of the economic crisis and the development of big shopping centers. The action plan of the DUC aims to create a network of commercial, cultural and environmental proposals. The community heritage, also the immaterial one, is a resource for local development: this is the vision both of the DUC and the ecomuseum.

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### Web site

About english parish maps visit the official website of Common Ground [www.commonground.org.uk](http://www.commonground.org.uk) and [www.England-in-particular.info](http://www.England-in-particular.info).

About Parabiagio and Mills natural Park parish maps visit the ecomuseum of Parabiagio web site <http://ecomuseo.comune.parabiagio.mi.it/> link "Mappa di comunità"

About italian parish maps visit the site <http://www.mappadicomunita.it/>