



The city of Parabiago (Milan, Italy) Landscape Ecomuseum

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| | |
|---|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 2 |
| LANDSCAPE: A LIVING SYSTEM..... | 2 |
| THE LANDSCAPE: A HISTORICAL SYSTEM..... | 3 |
| “ALTMILANESE” TODAY..... | 3 |
| PARABIAGO TODAY..... | 3 |
| LANDSCAPE PATHOLOGIES | 4 |
| <i>Ecosystem syndromes</i> | 4 |
| <i>Cultural syndromes</i> | 4 |
| THE ECOMUSEUM PARTICIPATORY PROCESS..... | 5 |
| WHAT IS PARTICIPATION?..... | 5 |
| THE PARTICIPATORY PATHWAY: METHOD AND INSTRUMENTS..... | 7 |
| <i>Forum: not conventional assemblies</i> | 8 |
| <i>Technical-Politic Committee</i> | 9 |
| <i>Partners (not completed)</i> | 9 |
| EDUCATION..... | 9 |
| <i>Participatory reading of the places</i> | 9 |
| <i>Intergenerational meeting</i> | 9 |
| OUTCOMES OF THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS..... | 9 |
| 1. <i>Changes in the space quality (physic dimension)</i> | 9 |
| 2. <i>Changes in the way of working (methodology dimension)</i> | 10 |
| 3. <i>Cultural changes (relational and social dimensions)</i> | 10 |
| THE ACTION PLAN..... | 11 |
| <i>Action 1: The parish map</i> | 11 |
| <i>Action 2: give parks a life</i> | 13 |
| <i>Action 3: Inhabit past</i> | 14 |
| <i>Action 4: meeting landscapes</i> | 16 |
| <i>Action Plan Forum’s evaluation</i> | 18 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 18 |

Landscape Ecomuseum

Introduction

Imagine a huge mirror, so large to allow a whole community to watch itself in it. This is the Ecomuseum: a community's mirror. The "landscape Ecomuseum" is born from the Parabiago's Local Agenda 21, which has been launched in 2003 thanks to the Europe Union contribution. The project in its first phase has developed a report about the Parabiago environmental, social and economic situation. The Ecomuseum is the result of years of work and research. This work had the contribution of students from Milan Universities, specially three theses regarding the landscape and the Ecomuseum (one in the Natural Sciences range and other two in the Architecture field). Moreover, the help from stagiaires and experts from West Sussex Council and IRES Piemonte was really important to make the parish map.

The constitution of Parabiago's landscape Ecomuseum rest upon solid basis composed of years of historic research, made by the local historians - in particular the professor Egidio Gianazza, who wrote numerous publications of local history – and the research developed by the students of the schools in Parabiago about its cultural roots, nature and history.

Regardless, a group of experts is able to create a museum, but not an Ecomuseum. To raise such idea, the initiative must come from people who spontaneously want to see themselves reflected in that enormous mirror called Ecomuseum. Next to the community, also the landscape reflects itself here. Landscape is our life environment, consequence of the millenary interaction between man and nature.

Landscape: a living system

A landscape represents not only a spectacular place, but also the ordinary life. The 20th October 2000 European Convention says that landscape is "part of the territory, as it is perceived by the population, is manufactured by human activities, vulnerable to natural factors, and their interactions".

The Landscape: a historical system

The landscape is in continuous evolution: it is not a static system, but a historical one: the present is linked to the past, and the future is related to the present.

In the last 3000 years, the landscape of Parabiago has been suffering many changes. Previously the greenwoods recovered almost the entire area. The transformations begun with the settlement alongside the Olona's river valley. The deforestation started in the Roman age, and it has been severely enlarged due to the improvement of the agriculture and then in XX century of the urban and the industrial development.

"Altomilanese" today

Parabiago is a city placed in the "Altomilanese" region (in the north part of the Milan Province in Italy). The "Altomilanese" is in a strategic position of the Milan Province and is characterized of a linear dense urbanization alongside the Sempione's road axe, with a midpoint located in the urban centre of Legnano. This is one of the historical regions of the main productive platforms of the Milanese. Since twenty years ago the productive bases have been suffering a crisis, therefore some industries had to be closed. Indeed, in latest years this crisis has been accentuated. A prudent reorganization of the industry's physics space is necessary to recover the urban centers and the residence area.

Parabiago today

The population of Parabiago is composed of people who: have their family roots in the local region; immigrants who arrived here in the period of the industrial boom after the second world war; immigrants who recently arrived from extra-european countries looking for job opportunities (3,8% of the population); and of persons coming from Milan metropolitan zone.

Today, the territory of Parabiago is characterized by 45% of urban area, 47% of cropped area and almost 8% of forests and natural area.

Parabiago has a legacy particularly constituted by some precious historic buildings, and by rural landscape that receive custody of farmers who preserve the green zones from urbanization.

Landscape Pathologies

Our landscape is sick, everyone can see it. There are some syndromes that affect the ecosystems: the fragmentation of the habitat; the throw of balance between the natural habitat and human habitat; the overuse of the resources.

Other landscape syndromes are cultural.

Ecosystem syndromes

This syndrome is caused by the increment of the urban areas, especially alongside the Sempione's road. The urban landscape is more damaged in relation to the suburban area. The damage process has been emphasized due to the disappearance of natural environment since mid XIX century.

Cultural syndromes

The cultural sickness of the landscape is linked to the ecosystem syndrome. The landscape near the city of Milan was completely transformed and modeled during the centuries by local communities. Actually, the culture adopts different forms throughout time and space. As source of exchange, innovation and creativity, the cultural diversity is necessary for the man as well as the biodiversity is indispensable to the nature.

An example of the cultural crisis started with the end of the farming society. In that period, the fauna and flora's names used to be known in the dialect form and they were used to have a magic value associated with the local belief. Sometimes the specie's name disappeared before its factual extinction. One emblematic case is the *lightning bug*, insect still present near the Olona river and Canale Villoresi. Nowadays this insect is suffering a "cultural death", caused by the technological era. In fact, the local children are not familiar with its

existence anymore, and they don't know neither how this insect used to be catch, nor the tales related to it.

Despite that, fortunately the region has still a very interesting natural and cultural diversity. Thus, a central aim of this work is to reconstitute the link between man and nature, between humans and its landscape, because the xx century "ecological crisis" broke these links.

The Ecomuseum participatory process

The Ecomuseum is a museum of the community: it is useful in order to legitimate its existence people participation. For this reason the Ecomuseum is a participative process that involved not only the institutions, but specially the local community.

To make the Ecomuseum possible, we made a pathway of active involvement of the Parabiago's citizens and of the ones who come from cities of it's boundary. Starting from shared goals, we facilitated the promotion of some local actions. Parabiago's habitants were invited to inform, compare and interact themselves in order to draw their idea of Ecomuseum and activate their own resources, knowledge and competences to create the local actions and the Ecomuseum Action plan.

What is Participation?

The active involvement developed in Parabiago had as reference the concept of *participation*. We selected three definitions from three different experts in participatory planning/design to describe this process.

Jeff Bishop - City Planner - BDOR Bristol UK:

"The participatory planning is a methodology that implies the association and union of many points of view to create the best possible solution as regards plans, projects and strategies. It is indispensable to interact different capacities, competences and experiences."

Raymond Lorenzo - City Planner - ABCittà Milan:

“The participatory planning is an educative process. Making many persons working together (different knowledge) allows a mutual knowledge and to understand the problems of each other. Everything contributes to build a community concept and to increase the local belonging sense.”

Mark Francis – Expert in Participatory projection – USA:

Participatory process means: “Planning and making a project **with**, instead of **for**, the persons.”

These definitions of participation contain the most important features of a participatory planning’s pathway:

- The design/plan dimension: participate means construct the best possible solution, involving in this path who is directly interested.
- The knowledge and the improvement of different points of view: in a participatory pathway all points of view of the involved Actors have equal importance, relative of their different politics and techniques roles.
- The learning: participate also means learn with the differences, contrast personal ideas with other’s ideas, evaluate different points of view and find out new solutions.
- The construction of local and community identity: starting a decision process makes citizens aware of their own territory and encourages the rise and/or the strengthening of the relations among the habitants of a place.

The participatory pathway: method and instruments

Now we are going to define the key elements that make part of the Ecomuseum participatory path:

People: they bring life to the planning, project and local development. The project promoted the use of instrumentation to facilitate the local action capacity within the community. This path has been done through stakeholders and has reached informal groups who live in the city. The aim has been giving support to each person and stakeholder to help the municipality in constructing consensus around ideas and necessities that had been.

Landscape: is defined as “one specific part of the territory, as it is perceived from population, and its personality comes from the actions of human and/or natural factors, and from their interactions” (European Convention on Landscape – Florence, October 20th 2000). This was the heart of the participatory pathway, and it is proposed as the Parabiago’s community reading key.

Process: the urban planning and projecting has almost always been centering in “what” doing instead of “how”. This project solved the problem activating the participatory process wich was able to create conditions to a concrete interaction among persons, ideas, information, necessities and local instances to build an urban-architectonic project.

To promote the active involvement of Parabiago’s inhabitants, it has been proposed a participatory path that started in March 2007 with the congress “Toward the Landscape Ecomuseum”.

Within the first Public Forum the idea of Ecomuseum of the Landscape has been shared and priorities have been defined to be treated in the thematic groups. These thematic groups have worked in the months of May and June 2007 in order to define the Local Actions. Alongside of the moments of direct involvement of the citizens, we activated meetings of the “Technical-Political Committee” (Comitato Tecnico Politico), to link the Public Forums to the city Administration. The latest Public Forums were made in order to share and evaluate the Landscape’s Action Plan.

The method that has been adopted to conduct the meetings was the **Metaplan**. That was born in Germany in the '70s thanks to the work of the Wolfgang and Eberhard Schnelle brothers; this is a facilitating method that manages the communication process of the working groups. Metaplan collects the participant's opinions, organize them in logical blocks, and finally formulate action plans, in which there are evidences for the relevant problems and possible solutions are proposed.

Forum: not conventional assemblies

To encourage the full involvement of the citizens, the Public Forum was organized with some specific characteristics:

- Instrument of participation and decision space to involve different people from the territory, each one with own opinions, knowledge, and interests;
- Collective subject which represents the community with different actors. They bring specific interests;
- Sphere that facilitate the pathway to elaborate the "sharing" of ideas about Ecomuseum and intervention actions;
- It does not substitute the role, functions or responsibility of the Committee of the Municipal Council, instead, integrate, evaluate, propose ideas, projects and solutions to ameliorate choices of future decision to the Institutional Bodies

The objectives of the Forum are:

- To discuss the general orientations for the Ecomuseum construction;
- To compare ideas, experiences and projects;
- To make available the Forum's knowledge and capabilities to define the local actions;
- To evaluate the current work for the local actions;
- To define proposes to construct the Ecomuseum;

- To contribute to define the local Actions.

Technical-Politic Committee

This is the opened space settled to share the pathway and to join the Forum to the Local Actions Plan. It is constituted by technicians and politics involved in the process of construction of the Ecomuseum of the Landscape. It has monitored the process of involvement of Local Actors.

Partners (not completed)

Education

Participatory reading of the places

In the educational interactive itinerary proposed by the Ecomuseum, students have carried out an interpretation about the Parabiago's places. Subsequently, students create their territory map. These maps were useful as starting point to the edition of the "parish" or community's map, designed by the forum working group.

Intergenerational meeting

The students interviewed their parents, grandparents and neighbors. Besides that, some students met the old, guests of a rest house, to get information about how was their life at Parabiago when they were young.

Outcomes of the Participatory Process

1. Changes in the space quality (physic dimension)

The pathway to the construction of the Action Plan to launch the Ecomuseum of the landscape, was oriented to hypothesize concrete actions to increase the value of Parabiago's landscape. The most tangible outcome is the "Community's Map", developed through a rediscovery of Parabiago's localities, the evaluation of the places which represent the

community, interaction between public and private to prepare possible actions to requalify and ameliorate some buildings and symbolic localities of the city. Surely a community map corresponds to the synthesis of a participatory pathway to the rediscovery of the historic, social and environmental dimensions of Parabiago. The final version of the map, will be printed and send to all citizens by the end of the year 2007.

2. Changes in the way of working (methodology dimension)

In the administration level as well as in the local level, the participatory pathway allowed the practice of a new work methodology: sharing experiences. This methodology was able to create conditions to facilitate, activate and guarantee throughout the time the 'belonging' sense in the city's spaces. The process so far activated by the landscape's Ecomuseum, encouraged the reunion of public and private spheres: the Technical Politic Committee has symbolized the place of interaction between the different sectors of the administration as well as the discussion of the outcomes from the Citizens' Forum and of the Local Actions. Also the results of the meetings of the Technical Politic Committee have been shared in public moments as the Forum and meetings for the Local Actions. Despite that, this methodology allowed the union of the public and private knowledge, capabilities to complete the final Action Plan. The presence of public Forums and public Tables were essential to the debates, especially in the cultural and environmental areas.

3. Cultural changes (relational and social dimensions)

The Action Plan is a consequence of the dialogue between politicians and technicians who have taken part in the Technical Politic Committee, and also between citizens who have participated actively in the Citizens Forums and in the working group to the Local Actions. In effect, the outcomes (community map, memory bank, etc.) were consequences of the relations among persons, the rediscovery of the relational dimension between the persons who live and/or work at Parabiago, and contribute to build the community of Parabiago.

The Action Plan

The Local Actions

The local actions defined in the Technical Political Committee in the initial phases of the participatory pathway are four:

- Let's construct a landscape map
- Give parks a life
- inhabit past
- meeting landscapes

The Forum and the Technical Political Committee have identified projects for each Local Action to be planned and built in the future.

Action 1: The parish map

Description: this is the only action that has been established before the beginning of the pathway. This Action belongs to the project financed by the Europe Union and the "Regione Lombardia" (Lombardy Region) to the Ecomuseum. It is an important instrument to conduct a census of the heritage and create a local identity. It has been developed through the model of the English Parish Maps

What is the parish map? It is a tool to build a link between past and present: through the map, places and localities gain significance and are useful to reconstruct the history of a collectivity that has contributed to confer an aspect to the territory at present.

Why doing a parish map? The map that we are looking for is a source of contact between different generations, and that make the hidden linkages visible today, that inquiry the places and people in order to realize what they used to be. It can be thought as an agenda to remember the past and to project the future.

A map to register traces of community that remain in the local society, that trace the boundaries of the new rising aggregations, and the experiences of new forms of citizenship. The map is also an instrument to visit the Ecomuseum.

In the West Sussex English parish maps, there are three essential elements:

1. mainly concerning the present;
2. something about the past;
3. wild flora a fauna.

The maps celebrate the local identity and the elements of distinction within neighboring communities.

Who have done the map of the community?

The map of the community was made by the citizens, the technicians, the politics, and the students.

How have we done it?

We tried to answer the following questions:

- What characterize and yield particular the community of Parabiago?
- What makes it discernible and different in comparison with other places?

We used the following instruments:

- Interviews with local testimonies: grandparents, parents and children;
- Visits to the territory;
- Photo gathering;
- Historic research;
- Non conventional assemblies with a working group organized in the forum to constitute the map.

What has been done until now?

- Historic research about places and toponym;
- Interviews and local testimonies: grandparents, parents and children;
- Meeting between school children and grandparents, guests of the rest house;
- Heart places – intergeneration questionnaire about the landscape;
- Educative itineraries in schools, and the children map;
- Working group for the Forum to the participatory edition of the map (two meetings);
- Technical working group to the participatory edition of the map.

The collected material is available in the web site of the Ecomuseum, in the section “Memory Bank” (Banca della Memoria). The children maps, the results of the working group meetings and the map of the community draft are in the section “Community’s Map” (Mappa della Comunità).

What are the projects and initiatives to the future?

It is running the creation of a map that contains:

1. the in-depth examination of themes related to the material and immaterial heritage reported on the map;
2. The sound map: there are sounds recorded in different significant places of the city.

Action 2: give parks a life

Description: This Local Action, was designed by the citizen’s Forum, and its main objective is to emphasize, promote and ameliorate the Roccolo’s Park and the Mulini’s Park.

What have been done until now?

The working group chose the most important projects individuated in the citizen’s Forum. Here they are named in order of importance (defined by the group):

1. Participatory reading of the localities;
2. Education on nature and on biodiversity;
3. Pathways to link the countryside to the city.

The participants built the action plan trying to answer the questions: "who could we involve? Which resources could we use? What are the possible obstacles? What could be the program? And what could be the results?"

thanks to other two projects, the Roccolo's Park and the Parabiago's Municipality are doing the following initiatives:

- School education;
- The Project: "Atlas of the biodiversity", that has as scope study and divulge the natural, social and cultural heritage of the park;
- "Roads inside the green", a guide map of the paths and roads of Roccolo's Park.

What are the projects for the future?

Continue the initiatives and complete the Forum proposed project, starting by the Mulino's Park.

Action 3: Inhabit past

Description: pick up objects, photos, testimonies of the past to understand the present and project the future.

What have been done until now?

The working group has proposed the following projects for this action:

1. Memory Bank;
2. Exhibition of paintings of the Parabiago's landscape, painted by a local artist;

3. Recover the local language emphasizing the local poets' publications (who speaks so far the dialect language);
4. re-celebrate the Spain queen visit in 1708.

This last project tries to revive "positive" history pages, almost completely forgotten. "The history as life..." wrote Miss Maria Luisa Ciprandi, from S. Lorenzo di Parabiago "...usually emphasize the bellicose facts rather than peace, party and joy facts.

Memory Bank

Each place is much more than a simple geography surface: it represents and include the community history, the collective and single memory, relations, happenings, values, many complex facts that have created the landscape that is characterized by particular things that are different in regard of all other landscapes. For this reason we have proposed to every citizen of Parabiago and neighborhood to furnish photos, histories, receipts, songs from the past. This constitutes the Memory Bank, which is on-line in the Ecomuseum web-site.

Cultivate lives and mulberries, the use of the local language, recipes, the water landscape (the Riale, the Olona, the Mulini, the Villoresi), the shoemaker profession, the Parabiago landscape painted by the local artists, are the themes that the working group has proposed to deep.

Many persons from the group (single citizens, persons from schools, from the technical committee) have furnished material about some of these subjects, and the Technical Committee has deepened others. All material that has been produced is merged in the Memory Bank, whose main objective is to make our past known and, consequently, not to forget it.

What are the projects for the future?

To proceed the on-going projects and to confront the themes that till now haven't been discussed.

1. Promote paintings exhibition about the Parabiago's landscape;

2. Recuperate the local language: proceed the collection of texts and audio registration of local poets, register names (for example the work made by don Carlo Cozzi in the beginning of the last century, about the "abbiatese" region, in which he has documented names of original animals and plants), and proverbs in local language (to highlight the phonetics differences between Villastanza and Parabiago);

3. Remember the visit of the queen of Spain: proceed historic research made by Marco Ceriani from Parabiago.

Action 4: meeting landscapes

Description: Organize funny and involving events in order to develop a landscape as a place of living and meeting.

What have been done until now?

During the meeting, the working group has discussed some projects to promote and communicate the heritage:

1. Do the historic itineraries, with respective guide visits;
2. Education in schools;
3. Exhibition of the Ecomuseum outcomes;
4. Internet site/Ecomuseum DVD.

The goals of this action are two: 1) transmit the cultural and natural heritage, to assimilate and develop it 2) translate the local culture and heritage to visitants. Even though there are good probabilities to attract visitants, the working group decided that the priority are the residents, as De Varine said "the Ecomuseum should turn into a catalytic agent to the living culture of the community... (the Ecomuseum should turn into) the connecting point between the generations beyond the familiarly ties and between human groups, despite the social differences".

The local cultural identity can raise from:

1. The sharing infra generational of social and environmental elements in each community;
2. The respect of such values on a large scale.

The project: “the man and the tree” - readings itineraries to discover the landscape

Search the man-nature relationship and its changing throughout the history, re-examine the past traces so far present in the landscape, approach the population to the nature through the reading and the poetry, these are the aims of the Parabiago’s Municipality Administration project that has the origin in the exhibition “the man and the tree”, done in 2005 Christmas.

With the Milan Province contribution to the project “Metrobosco” it was written the “The Virgiliano Itinerary” that guides the visitors to discover Parabiago in the Rome ancient age. The itinerary is performed in the green areas and in neighborhood of the Madonna di Dio’l Sa church, national monument, in the constituent Mulini’s Park (Parco dei Mulini), and in the boundary between Parabiago and Nerviano.

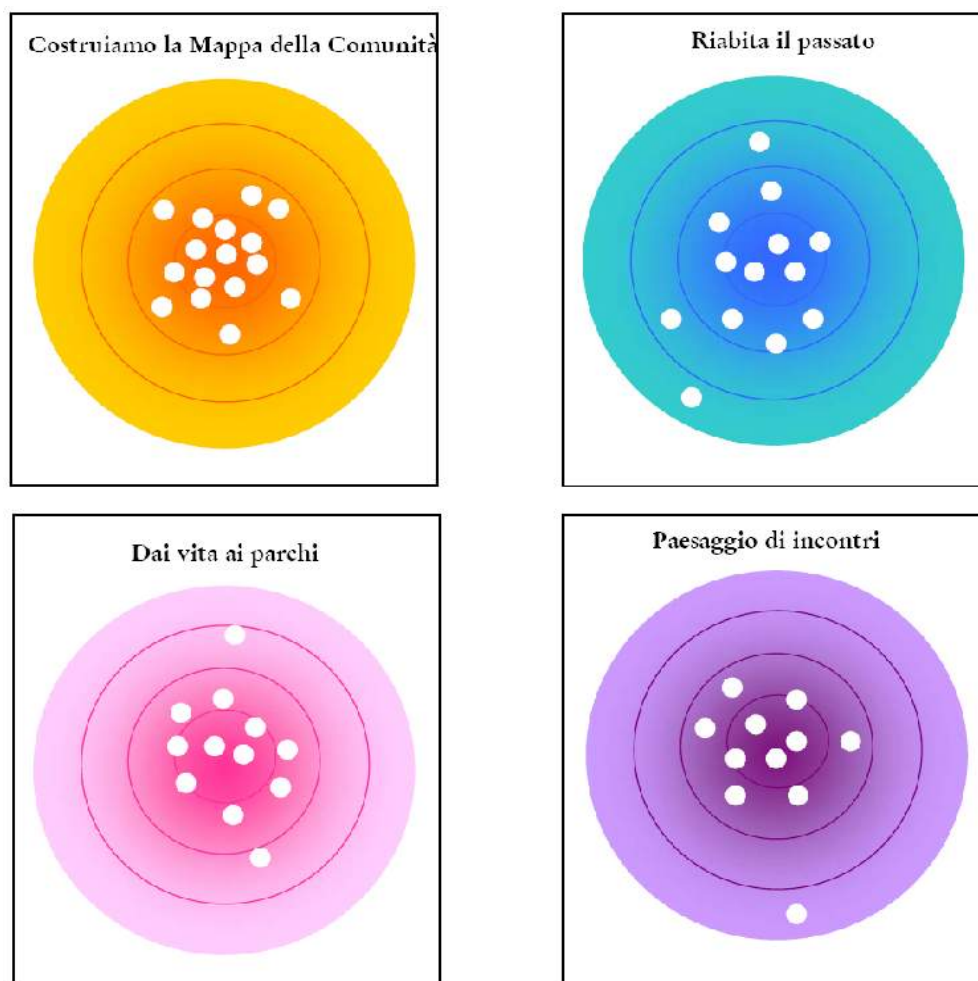
What are the projects for the future?

Proceed the on-going projects and confront the themes that till now have not been discussed:

- Provide historic itineraries, with respective guide visits (it is supposed at least two itineraries: mulberry silk warm itinerary; Carlo Porta and wine itinerary);
- Education in schools (activate to the scholastic year 2007/8 projects of education);
- Exhibition of the Ecomuseum outcomes (the program indicates: Christmas 2007: Community map; January 2008: Virgiliano’s Itinerary; February/march 2008: exhibition about the Ecomuseum);
- Ecomuseum website/DVD (is running the updating of the website and the procedure to make a video about the participatory process of the Ecomuseum).

Action Plan Forum's evaluation:

In succession is reported the description of the evaluation expressed by the participants of the Citizens' Forum. For each Local Action, the participants have answered to the question: "How much does this local action reflects the Community of Parabiago?" The answer was expressed through a red label pasted in its respective board. The center of the board meant "a lot", and the border meant "not in the least".



Conclusion

Marcello Archetti, anthropologist of ABCittà, during the 2nd Citizen Forum, said that "the community reflect itself on things and consider everything that recognize its own imagine. But

while the time go on, things become more and more strange... "Imagine a huge mirror, so large to allow a whole community to watch itself: Ecomuseum is the mirror of the community". The mirror, when reflect us, recognize the "we ourselves" (mine/ours and the own image reflected: the how I see myself and not how I am – maybe – or how I would like to be).

But there is a question: which thing recall you to the mirror (or the reflection) of the community? The mirror of the community recognizes something else (the natural landscape/human, that our history has produced/built); so it recognizes something else (from our imagination) but contemporary this "other landscape" becomes and **is** anyway me/us/the community. Here it is the Parabiago's Ecomuseum of the landscape: where I reflect myself and at the same time I **am**. We reflect ourselves and we are. With something else and from ourselves as singles and as community.

The four actions – 1. The landscape map; 2. Give life to the green parks; 3. Inhabit the past; 4. Landscape to "get-together" or meeting landscape – reflect and fulfill concretely what the citizens wish the Parabiago's Ecomuseum of the landscape is. That is the vision emerged in the participatory meetings: historical memory, human-environment, green-nature, visibility, living conditions, emotions-harmony.

Fortunately we realized that there are community's traces that still see in the landscape a living organism to take care, appreciate, foster, watch and enjoy. From here the Ecomuseum takes life.