

Preface

About the Subject

In a contemporary society that is becoming increasingly more globalized, without territorial restrictions in the production of goods, e.g., one is able to produce in China goods and products that are characteristic of South American crafts (to mention just two places located at the antipodes), the only element that is not able to be contextualized it is the identity of heritage, which is the result of close integration between cultural assets, intangible assets, and settled communities. Thus, the heritage identity is one of the few elements, together with natural resources, that has potential for economic development because it is still firmly tied to places and local populations. This potential must be carefully planned and developed in order to avoid the loss of identity, to maintain a sufficient variety of functions, and to avoid reducing these contexts to beautiful and empty “boxes” for tourists.

Believing that the protection of these heritage elements is essential for the very survival of settled communities, and also with the desire to enhance their full potential, the book attempts to make clear the key role that landscape and cultural heritage can play in settled communities in the pursuit of sustainable local development.

This is the general scenario in which the present book seeks to enhance the cultural dimension of sustainable development, in the view assumed in the text, by considering not only how to preserve heritage, but also what to preserve and why to preserve it. It is the attempt to make the best of the era of globalization, the battle between everything that tends to transform cultural heritage into purely an object of profit or “museification.”

The Main Themes and Objectives of the Book

In this cultural background, the focus of the book is minor historic centres and their natural and rural landscape. Europe is a land of ancient urbanization linked at the crossroads of civilizations that have occurred over time. The minor historical centres of European territories are normally an integral part of long-term settlement landscapes, in which the processes of urbanization are still deeply tied to the evolution of the agricultural landscape and that hinges on the environmental structures in which they are located (e.g., seas, rivers, hills, mountains, plains, etc.). In many cases, centres have been undermined by the more deleterious effects of industrialization during the last two centuries. It is obvious that providing a definition of small-size historic centres is not easy and would take a statistical analysis of existing urban centres in Europe to locate a size threshold capable of defining the terms “minor” or “small size” used so far. This size threshold varies from country to country because settlement organization is the result of different processes of human activity that have characterized historical evolution. To generalize the concept, beyond the possible size thresholds, in this context is intended to refer to cities located outside of the major lines of communication, far from large urban centres capable of catalysing economic resources and political attention. They are, in short, small size not only for demographic reason but also for economic one, e.g., they have few resources.

An alleged “minority,” these centres can now be considered a potential heritage as well as resource for both present and future generations. These towns are often the centrepiece of urban landscapes and geographical areas with original features; They are-not always but often-individual places within networks of minor historical centres linked by history, traditions, and/or natural elements in common (e.g., rivers, forests, river systems or other natural elements). They are situated away from major touristic networks, but there is a beginning interest to explore the touristic exploitation of these environments. Therefore, this is the right moment to pursue sustainable and local development of these centers in the context of a cultural perspective.

The Structure of the Book

The book is articulated in seven parts and twenty-four chapters. Part 1 describes the cultural background of the work. Part 2 provides lessons learned from planning and management practices on the safeguarding and revitalisation of minor historic centres in Eastern Partnerships. Part 3 describes a different approach to cultural heritage through by the concept of territorial cultural systems. Part 4 introduces integrated cultural territorial plans as a new approach to the management of cultural territorial systems. Part 5 analyses the first experiences in Eastern Europe and compares them in Part 6 with one of the most well-known traditions in cultural heritage of western European countries such as Italy. Part 7 concludes the book by defining possible perspectives for territorial cultural systems.

Cultural Territorial Systems

Landscape and Cultural Heritage as a Key to
Sustainable and Local Development in Eastern Europe

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(Eds.)

2016, XIV, 386 p. 177 illus., 31 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-20752-0