

# THE VALORISATION OF AN “INVISIBLE” TERRITORY ALONG THE WATER LANDSCAPE OF THE DRAINAGE: A NATURALISTIC, CULTURAL, MEDIA, SOCIAL ITINERARY FOR A CONSCIOUS TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

The “artificial” landscape of Po Valley is the result of the evolution of many elements which have contributed to its formation: water, soil, cultivations, structures of drainage, daily action and presence of man. If we read it “from above” we understand a map not only “real”, but also “cultural”: a unicum composed of many identities. Identities like artificial canals, hydraulic architectures, water basins become points of attraction in the itinerary made accessible by Consorzio di Bonifica dell'Emilia centrale for a multidisciplinary audience.

Here it is presented the valorisation project carried out with specific interventions developed on six stages spread over the territory of Po Valley, on architectural spaces, natural landscapes, museum fruition, service systems. The itinerary has been planned carefully studying objectives and expected results, monitoring system, sustainability and replicability, relation to local communities, communication aspects.

## INTRODUCTION

Local understanding of a territory is the result of daily life, together under a system of time, seasons, history knowledge.

This simple but effective explanation could lead to erroneously think: in this way only the residents of a specific country could appropriate the power (but also the responsibility) to intervene in the development of that territory. However, a single point of view, that of those who live and work towards a place, may be not enough to fully understand and analyze it. Actually reading a place from “outside” can bring new life, new ideas, new design; otherwise a merely “indigenous” view could also become careless as made by a single *point de vue* interested in the specific (the strictly local) and not to the global, suspending the integrity of a process.

From a limited but substantial checking of all the territories along the district of the drainage Consortium “Consorzio di Bonifica dell'Emilia centrale” (but also, over the years, analyzing numerous other areas of Po Valley and Northern Italy) (Visentin 2008), with the aim to organize a census (Visentin 2011) of the main Heritage Consortium artifacts, and the following intention to prepare scientific material to aid in future decisions, it was found a certain unawareness of the own inhabitants of the territories examined, between city and countryside.

Many of these communities of people do not know the identity and history, nor the purpose and use of the Drainage elements (buildings, hydraulic machines, bridges, canals, water basins, etc.), those are essentially involuntary co-protagonists of their daily habits of life. Well, these “drainage and water cathedrals” are architectural and hydraulic machines that work for many decades now, with today’s sophisticated control mechanisms needed to ensure the safety of hydraulic territory and for this essential to know and understand.

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The ordinary routine of this horizontal landscape has unique characteristics in the Italian panorama, even though it is less recognizable than more “attractive” landscapes of the Bel Paese.

Works and heritage together are the heart of the largest Institution that manages the water of this area of the Northern part of Italy (Consorzio di Bonifica dell’Emilia centrale), whose history began centuries ago, dating back to the Sixteenth century and to the first laws of the Kingdom of Italy (1864), extending for 3,113 square kilometres and covering three regions, five provinces, sixty-five municipalities. The huge route project carried out by the Consorzio last year aimed at tracing the ‘network’ of water and draining nodes which have contributed to the definition of this cultural landscape, updating roles and functions, disclosing its presence, always seen but never consciously perceived, through a conscious contemporary valorisation.

## RESULTS

A 90-kilometre itinerary has been formulated, involving 2 regions and 3 large provinces of Emilia Romagna and Lombardy.

The project plans the opportunity to get in tune with landscape through a manifold circuit which reads natural habitats of the land, with its artistic and suburban and urban resources, intercepting the natural, engineering and architectural heritage of the Consortium. The so-called “low Emilia” has always been a great laboratory of hydraulic engineering and architecture. Landscape appears as crucial interpretative and designing key of cultural and social history, where agriculture and water system are inseparable parts of the Valley, with characteristics which can be traced in the drainage network built in the 20s-30s of 1900 on an ancient Roman net (*agro centuriato* and *centuriazione*).

People today are unaware of the draining plants, although at least thirty buildings, built between the half of the Sixteenth century and the 1940s, have relevant high artistic and architectural features of monumental value. They are perceived as elements in their own right, not attributable to the huge environmental protection of draining system.

Iconic and working locations but, at the same time, *invisible*.

They represent, also thanks to their figurative language, Renaissance typology or Eclectic revivalistic fashionable style, a fundamental tool for the interpretation of an artificial territory, helping us orient ourselves stylistically, morphologically, chronologically, along a journey which is generally divided into three main intervals: the oldest, from Renaissance to the end of Nineteenth century, the second one, from the beginning of Twentieth century to the end of World War II; and, finally, the contemporary period.

They become points of attraction in the itinerary made accessible to a multidisciplinary audience.

The valorisation Consortium heritage project carried out with specific interventions developed on six stages spread over the territory, on architectural spaces, natural landscapes, museum fruition, service systems. The itinerary has been planned carefully studying objectives and expected results, monitoring system, sustainability and replicability, relation to local communities, communication aspects.

The tour is organized through specific six stages: a journey into the Drainage landscapes, which are evaluated in their specific fields. The itinerary is always available by individual (pedestrian and motorized) and cyclists, according to schedules and procedures to be identified in the guides and brochures of the project.

In the intentions will be also organized in two specific times of the year, three months to three months in spring and autumn (the best period for Po Valley landscapes), with the using of a dedicated equipped minibus.

The whole project itinerary can not therefore leave the detailed verification of what happens in each stage, finally bringing back the particular value, which is clearly given, to the qualitative growth as a whole all the way. The general route is designed to intercept the landscape not only the main staging six stages, but also other “invisible assets” that will become moments of knowledge along the way.

The aspect of communication and information for understanding these “moments in the landscape” will be provided by a uniform signage system that increases recognition of cultural, historic, naturalistic and tourist features of this relevant territory, in addition to oral communication provided by guides, and to a specific audio and video communication. Each point of departure and arrival (stop at every stage of your choice) in the itinerary are to be arranged through a careful indications (for example the path length). At each stage there is also the reporting of additional points of interest, cultural and environmental, which can be seen in the neighborhood: this is thought to increase the attractive value, economy and tourism of the local communities.

## CONCLUSIONS

All Consortium heritage has relevant points of attraction to make them accessible to a multidisciplinary audience, through the explanation this buildings/canals/hydraulic systems in a sort of cultural itinerary of global information and communication.

An *atlas* of many places that form when “combined with pleasure”, a fascinating personal geographical knowledge tour, with many different aspects, from natural to historical, from hydraulic engineering to architecture, from landscape structures to agro-food industries: a various reading of a scenario as unique as Po Valley, where the formal and stylistic aspects of architecture of great quality come together with the necessary organization of an hydraulic machine inside the network of irrigation or draining canals.

Places, landscapes, architectures: real characterizations of the territories, of the history and the processes that produced them: “a second nature that civil works for” thus Johann Wolfgang von Goethe defines, at the the end of the Eighteenth century, the agricultural landscape of Lazio region that he travels in his *Italianische Reise*: well, this quotation can also refer to the drainage work of Renaissance period, and also of late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century along the vast territorial region today monitored by the Consortium, extending up from Reggio Emilia to Modena and Mantova.

Human works in a rural and suburban landscape, extraordinary blend of technology and environment, happy marriage between the sacredness of nature and the needs of men.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## FIGURES



Fig. 1 – the map with the extension of the territory of Consortium (Consorzio di Bonifica dell'Emilia centrale)

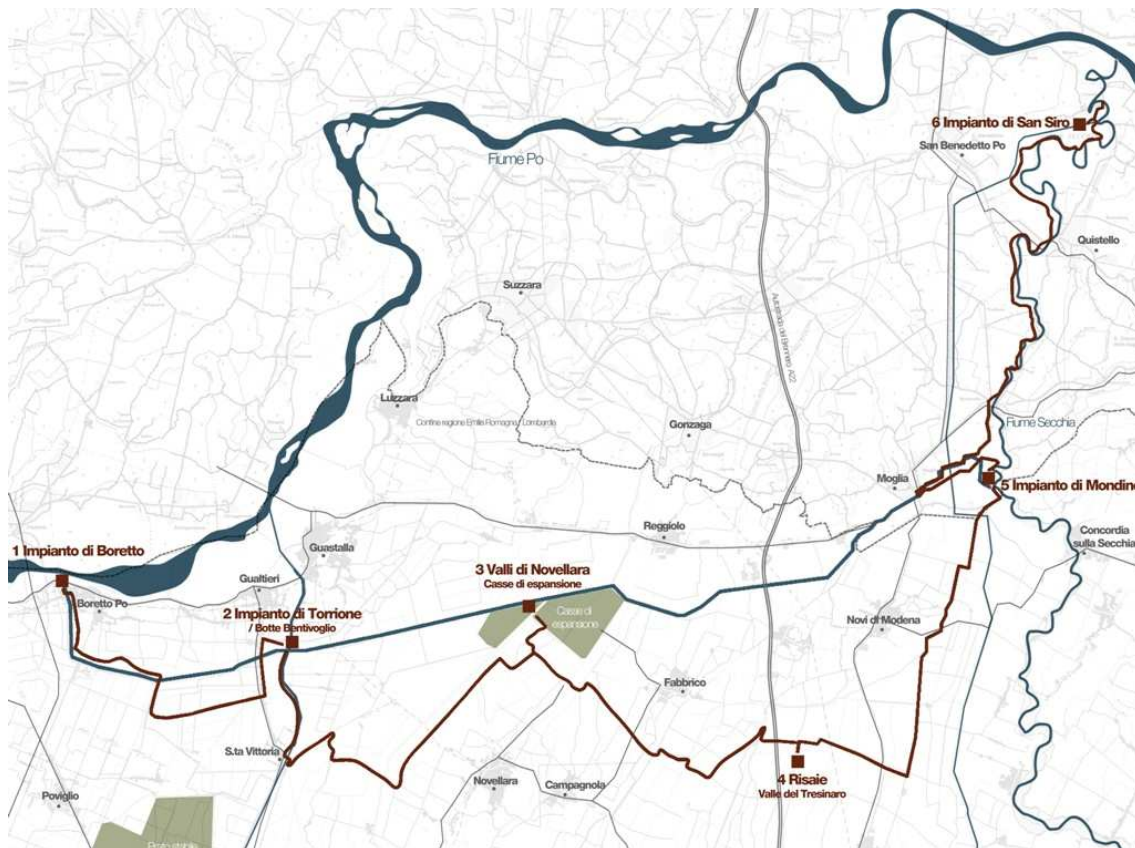
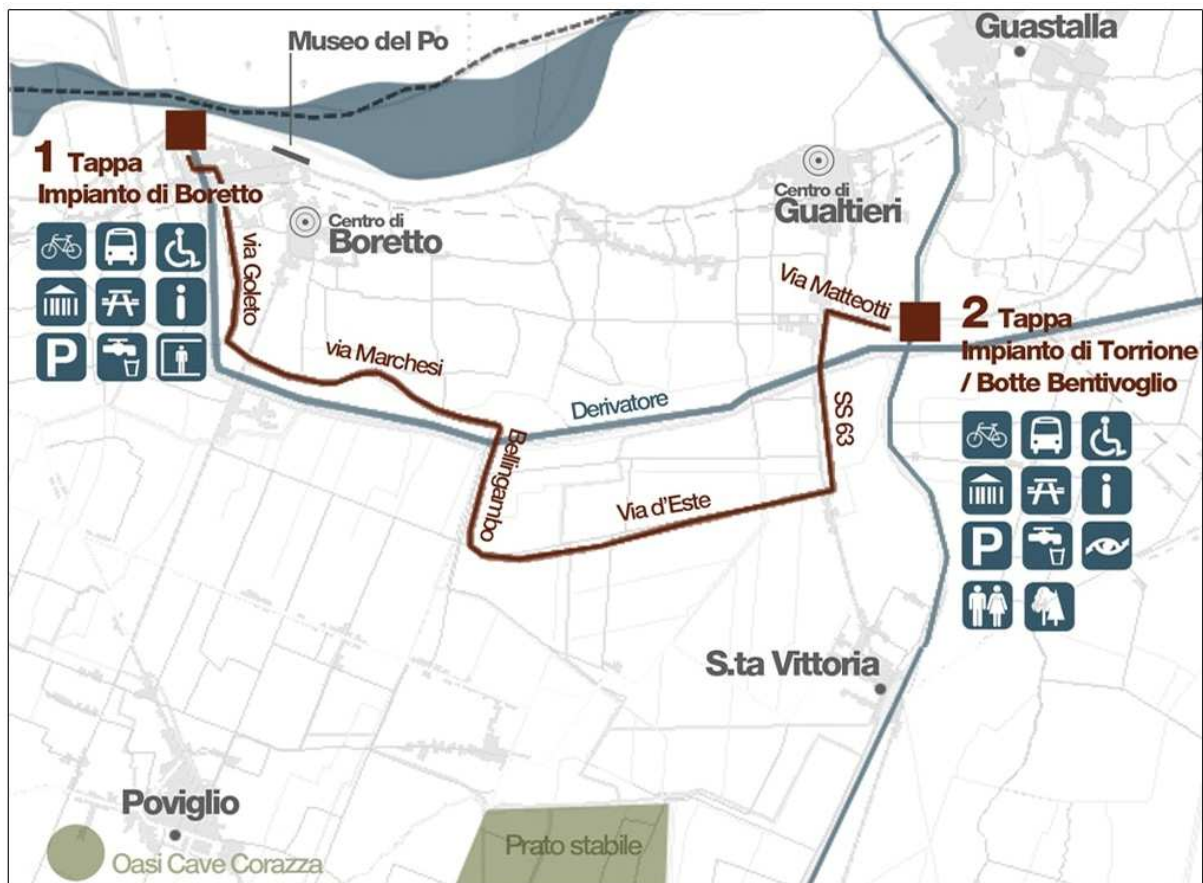


Fig. 2 – the 90-kilometre itinerary project that involves 2 regions and three large provinces of Emilia Romagna and Lombardy



### 1° ITINERARIO DA BORETTO SUL PO A TORRIONE E BOTTE BENTIVOGLIO

Fig. 3 – First itinerary (of five) of the valorization project. The starting point of the whole itinerary. From Boretto on the Po river to Gualtieri, two locations near Reggio Emilia



Fig. 4 – The dramatic drainage wide hydraulic buildings in Boretto (1920 construction) , the first step of itinerary