The project “Luoghi di valore” (Outstanding Places)

One of the activities that the Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche dedicates to landscape and places is the initiative called Luoghi di valore (Outstanding Places). Launched at the end of 2006, it invites people in general, explicitly and very simply through an annual announcement, to nominate and describe a place (or places) within the Province of Treviso that they believe to be of outstanding value and to give reasons for their choice.

The main objectives of the project, inspired by the principles of the European Landscape Convention (adopted by Italy as Law no. 14 of 9th January 2006), are to find out what individuals and communities, with their daily priorities, their various social and cultural backgrounds and their aspirations and feelings, think about the places where they work and live, and at the same time, to encourage every member of society to take part in this kind of reflection.

The project is a real example of collective research, in which people who respond, passionately involved since the first edition, take an active part, debating openly with specialists and technical experts and providing them with the information and materials needed to enhance awareness of the demands, the attitudes and preferences of the community.

On each of the six occasions the project has invited nominations, Luoghi di valore has aroused increasing interest, expressed not only in the large number of submissions (749) but also in the numerous people who have visited the annual exhibitions (more than 13,000) and taken part in the various public meetings associated with the project, all of which were conceived and designed to promote reflection on the universal bond between individuals or community and place. And the support thus generated is helping to create better conditions for our places to be safeguarded and appreciated, for the quality of our lives and our well-being and for the future prospects of generations to come.

Many of the nominations show a society that intends to play a part in the work of understanding and governing its places and whose attribution of value also expresses a willingness to contemplate planning, action, change. This is a promise of commitment for future landscapes and this needs to be underpinned by carefully prepared cultural competence.

Education and training are therefore (or should be) “pre-conditions” if it is agreed that the people involved are the mainstay of any definition of landscape and that looking after places must take account of their recognized characteristics and of the values attributed to them, always with the participation of the local communities and always taking their aspirations and proposals into account.
Public meetings

In each of the six consecutive years in which Outstanding places has been organized, the period for the submission of nominations has concluded with a public meeting to discuss the results. These occasions always attract a large and enthusiastic audience and offer participants and all interested parties the opportunity to voice their ideas, opinions and proposals and to describe their feelings and hopes for the nominated places.

Outstanding places interviews

Each year, the Foundation has organized visits to some of the “outstanding places” considered representative of that year’s submissions, meeting and interviewing nominators, administrators, owners and other witnesses of the life of the places concerned. Overall, the interviewees number about two hundred in around seventy places; video recordings and photographs of the meetings feature prominently in the annual exhibition of materials.

Outstanding places exhibitions

Ever since the first year, the Foundation has endeavoured to share all the supporting materials received with the nominations as widely as possible by displaying them in its exhibition spaces. No attempt is made to censure the materials nor to correct or adjust them; they are simply displayed in an orderly manner so as to be visible and legible, accompanied (in cases where interviews have been conducted) by short videos and photographs.

Participation

The participants belong to every social rank, live in every part of the Province (and even elsewhere in a few cases), and represent every cultural condition. Their relationship to the nominated place varies considerably: sometimes the nominator is the owner, the designer or the person responsible for the site or may also be a civil servant, a scholarly expert or a group of schoolchildren; but a significant element is also the participation of citizens who have no role or direct responsibility for the places they nominate: people who, individually or together with others, want nevertheless to have their say, with an objective that often goes beyond simply knowing and sharing and extends, more or less explicitly, to participating in decisions as to their use, protection and modification. Each nomination is an important example of “active citizenship”, but it is clear that those presented by more or less numerous groups of people frequently arise from a collectively experienced relationship with the place and from an existing joint commitment, a situation that introduces different perspectives as regards both appraisal and proposals for the future.

Participation 2007-2012

- Belonging to groups / committees / associations 11%
- Belonging to schools 25%
- Belonging to public bodies 9%
- Individuals 55%