



## **EWT/ Eco Web Town**

On line Magazine of Sustainable Design

SCUT, University Chieti-Pescara

Registration Court of Pescara n° 9/2011 del 07/04/2011

ISSN 2039-2656

---

### **Ecoluoghi 2011. Houses for a sustainable living.**

#### **Considerations on the edge of the competition Ecoluoghi 2011. Houses for a sustainable living.**

##### **Landscape Absence.** *Lucina Caravaggi*

The competition *Ecoluoghi 2011* expected explicitly that the research about new forms of sustainable living was traced back to the relationship with the landscape, understood as a “context of belonging” to which each proposal should not only relate but *connect*, interpreting the relationship development-environment in a sustainable way.

As recognized unanimously by the jury, the proposals as a whole have outlined a broad and varied field of research, first by emphasizing a widespread focus on technologies and design features aimed at energy savings and, sometimes, at micro-production of renewable energy.

Secondly, there has been a growing attention, although not spread evenly, to spaces/concepts related to contemporary living, to the broad change in place that is modifying the traditional relationships between building types and types of settlement in favor of spaces characterized both by greater versatility and multifunctional than in the past, both from a different relationship between inside-and-outside (that is, between houses *and* fields, woods, gardens, courtyards, terraces, green roofs, etc.).

But the relationship with the landscape, that is the relationship with the contexts in which the projects were “placed”, remained a background, in many cases reduced to a photomontage, simply a requirement for participation.

Of course, the winning projects demonstrated a greater attention towards this aspect, but it seems more useful, in this notice, indicate the overall shortage that has emerged in spite of the happy exceptions.

The so-called “new energy technologies,” waved as banners of sustainability a little too superficially, appeared self-referential, generally proposed in an abstract and repeatable form on the model of “product catalogs”, as if a photovoltaic roof would be sufficient to make sustainable an intervention. Instead it was just the landscape, in the spirit of competition rules, the intelligent connection, the synapse able to hold a dialogue between energy savings, new ways of living and territories involved in transformations.

In particular, a rift emerged between design and landscape, which has no more reason to exist for many years, indeed: the relationship between sustainable design of *objects* and the study of their possible effect in different contexts is the basis of interesting experiences, especially in Latin America, and especially with reference to the collective space.

The way the landscape, or rather its broad absence, has been interpreted in this competition seems to be due, instead, to some recurring attitudes in our country that I will try to outline briefly, and which would need to think a bit:

- a. In general, there is a lack of perception of the landscape as a collective value able to renew its *constitutional meaning* generation after generation. The perception of the great public good represented by the landscape seems to have blurred, perhaps due to the haze of technical and environmental interventions, to the crisis of agriculture and cultivated areas, the lack of urban planning appropriate to contemporary transformations, and I wonder how many other reasons.

In the last sad years of this country, the landscape has been considered, implicitly and explicitly, a "luxury" compared to the urgency of the economic crisis, and frequently turned in a kitsch background of exclusive residences: something to envy perhaps, but not necessary to the survival and therefore expendable.

The European Landscape Convention (2000) represents the attempt to overcome, even in normative terms, the idea of landscape as a privileged portion of territory (to defend) compared to a continuum of no value (which you can sacrifice), in the name of a more coherent definition of landscape *heritage* inseparable from environmental operation and local identities.

- b. Where the landscape appears, in most cases it seems to persist as a "*landscape background*", a panorama seen from a fixed viewpoint, or more precisely a landscape imagined as an "abstract" glance that moves from a fixed viewpoint ("fixed" as still, static, confined to the idea of belvedere).

It's needless to emphasize what has been said and written for decades about the nature of this cultural and collective perception of the landscape: it makes no sense to deny its historical value of noble attempt to defend the national patrimony from the 20s to the 60s. Instead, it makes sense to criticize the unconscious persistence of this imagery in design process, a sort of conditioned reflex that continues to fuel negative attitudes, derived precisely from thinking in terms of *View*:

"*acclimatization*" (in the sense of a mimetic placement and design), "*shielding*", etc.

- c. Thirdly, I think I can detect a certain lack of dialogue with the experiences of other countries, a certain tendency towards closure,: not a landscape interpreted as difference that helps and encourages the comparison with "other" differences but a *limited landscape*, closed to dialogue, to exploration, to comparison, etc. ...

Yet, sustainability is a concept that, more than other notions, invites comparison with distant and different realities, because preservation of resources primary of life, respect for the multiple identities, the will to live according to more equitable and less destructive patterns shape a *global landscape* that, far from constituting a threat to local identities, is able to reinforce their sense and to clarify their importance.

There are many themes that seem to directly influence the sustainability-oriented design exploration, whose spatial form takes on the sense of a landscape project:

the re-discovery of renewable natural resources in the functioning of houses and habits of the inhabitants; the relationship with the climate and its variations; the life cycle of materials and the many ways of recycling; the saving of space and energy given by the return to common services, the infinite

modes of environmental recovering of urbanized areas; the multiple combinations of living and cultivating; the potential related to a culture of design shifted from individual objects to public space, and so on.

Issues which, if extensive, could create new habitable landscapes, sustainable probably.

---

*Eco Web Town, N° 2 , December 2011*