

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF THE VILLAS AND GARDENS OF LAKE MAGGIORE. CONSERVATION PROBLEMS

MAGGIORE GÖLÜ VILLA VE BAHÇELERİNİN KÜLTÜREL PEYZAJI VE KORUMA SORUNLARI

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ABSTRACT

The Lake Maggiore western coast environmental characters nowadays record a particular instance of cultural landscape building workshop, completely modified by anthropic action. Today, the garden system of western coast of the Lake, hardly structures the perceptible landscape physiognomy and configures as a green stripe almost uninterrupted, a sixty kilometres frame, made up of exotic vegetation, in the most part of it, bordering the boundaries between water surface and the surface of the hills that are reflected in. The massive garden landscape system, where it is possible to find a huge and eclectic architectural heritage, has modelled itself, overlapping the natural original morphology, in a meanwhile relatively close in comparison to the complexity of its environmental, botanical, architectural and cultural values. All these topics are still today perceptible even considering the unavoidable changes come as time goes by.

The intense lake-landscape modification process with the building of villas and gardens has taken place between 1850 and the 20ies of last Century. In the aftermath, as far as the World War Two, the phenomenon began to lose its firmness, considering single examples of Garden-Villa rarely achieved in stylistic terms and, generally, it took starting its slow decline. Decline going to be comprehensive also of a partial decay in the following fifties, as far as the current awareness of its value and consequent safeguard necessity.

*Since some years the Regional Administration has been stipulating a census work program of the gardens and villas of Lake Maggiore with the Museo del Paesaggio di Verbania (*Landscape Museum of Verbania) as part of a larger asset, now completed, of the entire garden heritage all over Regione Piemonte cataloguing and this with the intention to set up correct safeguard and valorisation actions for these important cultural heritages.*

ÖZET

Maggiore Gölü'nün batı kıyısındaki çevresel özellikler, günümüzde kültürel peyzaj yapı çalışmaları sonucu insan eliyle tamamen değişime uğramıştır. Bugün, gölün batı kıyısındaki bahçeler, su ve tepeler arasında kalan peyzajın, geniş bir bölümü egzotik bitkilerle kaplı, neredeyse kesintisiz 60 km'lik bir şerit olarak algılanmasını sağlamaktadır. İçinde çok sayıda eklektik mimari mirası barındıran baskın bahçe peyzajı, çevresel, botanik, mimari ve kültürel değerlerin çeşitliliğine karşın çevrenin doğal yapısı ile daha çok örtüşen bir görünüm sergilemektedir; zaman içerisinde kaçınılmaz değişikliklere rağmen bugün hala algılanabilir durumdadır.

Göl peyzajı, 1850 ve 1920'ler arasında kalan sürede villa ve bahçe yapılarının inşa edilmesiyle yoğun bir değişim sürecine girmiştir. Az sayıda villa-bahçe örneğinin görüldüğü ikinci Dünya Savaşı'na kadar olan dönemde bu değişim hızını kaybetmiştir. Söz konusu peyzaj alanında bozulmaların görülmeye başlaması, 1950'li yıllarda bu alanın değerinin ve buna bağlı olarak koruma gerekliliği bilincinin doğmasını sağlamıştır.

Verbania Peyzaj Müzesi (Landscape Museum of Verbania), Bölgesel Yönetim'in de katkısıyla Maggiore Gölü bahçe ve villaları üzerine bir çalışma gerçekleştirmiştir. Bu çalışma sayesinde söz konusu kültürel mirası korumak ve korumayı yaygınlaştırmak amacıyla Piomente Bölgesi'nin tüm bahçe mirasının envanteri çıkarılmıştır.

The western coast of Lake Maggiore is characterised by a cultural landscape of the villas and gardens of Lake Maggiore, located in North-East Italy, north of the Region of Piedmont, that is to say in a part of the region of pre-Alpine lakes, once known as Insubria (Lodari 1979, 1982, 2002, 2003).

The site is characterised by splendid natural and historic landscapes, by an environment that is still relatively unspoiled, although beset by the management and conservation problems inherent in far-reaching urbanisation and a tightly-woven infrastructural network.

This region and the surrounding area host one of the largest wilderness areas in Europe, the Val Grande National Park, and two artistic and architectural complexes dubbed Holy Mounts (Ghiffa and Domodossola) which are part of a broader UNESCO site of the *Sacri Monti* of Piedmont and Lombardy.

It also comprises the Fondotoce Nature Reserve which documents the natural, non-urbanised and now very rare aspect of the shores the lake and, in particular, the Borromeo Gulf with its palazzi and gardens, in addition to an impressive set of villas and gardens that contribute to forming a typical, recognizable landscape.

At the moment, the landscape system comprising Lake Maggiore (Fig. 1) and Lake Orta has been inserted in the UNESCO Tentative List (Ref. 325 – cultural landscapes).

The cultural landscape of Lake Maggiore, as can be admired today on the west shore, has been moulded by several modifications made over the years: first of all, very slowly and then at a much quicker pace from the mid 19th century which marked the start of the process of construction of the villas and gardens that have completely modified the original lakeside landscape.

During the previous century, Lake Maggiore and its surroundings were already greatly admired by foreign visitors, and also earlier, as they were one of the compulsory stops of the Grand Tour in Italy for travellers who crossed the Alps via the Simplon and Gotthard passes.

Their first view of the landscape was the vast expanse of the lake circled by mountains, with its shores dotted with fishing villages and small towns alternating with cultivated land, vineyards, orchards and chestnut woods and, in some cases, with pink and white granite quarries (still very important for the local economy).

The main attraction, worthy of unflinching attention, was the Borromeo Gulf and its islands and magnificent gardens. All the visitors were enticed to visit at least Isola Bella (Fig. 2), renowned in particular for its Baroque garden characterised by a series of stepped terraces that seem to form a fantastic flower-strewn barge that drifts on the waters of the lake. But also to view the romantic

garden of Isola Madre, with its luxuriant exotic plants, rarely found in other Italian gardens at that time and the offshoot of a passion for botany of various members of the Borromeo family who were pioneers and, subsequently, set an example in this scientific environment for other subsequent installations on the lake.

This landscape has been amply described and in many cases represented with different nuances that reflect changes in taste over the years, i.e. shifting of foreigners' interest from the formal Baroque garden of Isola Bella to that of more natural semblance of Isola Madre, to the picturesque villages of the Isola dei Pescatori, as far as the banks of the lake and its villages, whose typical local architecture was often considered more interesting as it complied more closely with the taste for picturesque of the second half of the 19th century. This aesthetic appreciation clearly transpires in literature and travel diaries, prints and paintings depicting the landscapes of the islands and of the lake in general.

This landscape, perceived as "beautiful", and the mild climate of the lake were ever more appreciated and visitors' desire to stay longer triggered a broad social and cultural phenomenon in the central years of the 19th century that was to continue uninterrupted until the first part of the last century.

The members of a rich, cultured social class coming from the countries of Northern Europe were prime movers in initiating the impressive process of transformation of the landscape, bringing to the lake a culture extraneous to that of the places and resulting in the introduction of completely new, shapes, models and styles.

As the fashion of holidaying gained ground, new hotels, holiday homes and villas were constructed in wide variety of different styles according to the owner's origin and cultural references.

Subsequently, in particular after the Unification of Italy in 1861, this process spread to a new social class, i.e. the middle classes of Milan and Turin wealthy enough to call on the best architects of the time and to procure absolutely innovative botanical species, transported first of all from all corners of the world and, immediately afterwards, cultivated locally in nurseries.

At the same time, the construction of the road and railway infrastructure facilitated new settlements and, in just a few decades, the original appearance of the places was modified by a sort of massive revolution of the landscape.

This resulted, in a relatively short period of time, in complete transformation of the west shores the lake, superimposing a new landscape that occupied, without interruption, all the Piemontese territory of the lake sides, from one city to the next, from Arona to Cannobio, along 60 km of the shores and now comprising 11 Municipalities.

The villas and gardens have moulded a new landscape in which each villa-garden combination, more or less important from an artistic point of view, plays its role in maintaining the characteristics of this immense linear garden, reflected in the water of the lake.

The Villas and Gardens Archive of the Verbania Landscape Museum has made an inventory of these assets, considering the entire territory involved, recording 250 toponyms, subsequently addressed by specific publications (AA.VV 2003).

Today, the architecture of the villas constitutes a precious legacy for documenting the phenomenon of eclecticism and of composite styles forged by the most disparate formal inspirations. The forms and vegetation structures of the gardens also bear witness to a style of landscape composition, such as "gardenesque", and also of extremely varied flora coming from all over the world.

The gardens of Lake Maggiore, with all their characteristic decorative elements that reflect the taste of the period, can be considered typical and, at the same time, in view of their structural composition, a milestone in the history of the European garden.

These gardens document a form of composition that, adapting to the site without forcing this, consider the surface of the water as a huge mirror able to reflect the image of the owner's social standing in that anthropological context. The lake determines both the appearance of the garden where the water has a mitigating effect on the climate of the surrounding area, permitting a luxuriant multi-varied

pallet of vegetation, and also its shapes due to the need to never impede the view of the water. In fact, the towering trees brought from North America, China, Japan, Nepal, Australia, etc. have been laid out according to a similar rule adopted in almost all gardens, thus permitting a true lakeside garden style.

Today, the landscape of the villas and gardens of Lake Maggiore (Figs. 3-9) is an exceptional legacy of great significance whose main values lie not only in architectural and botanical aspects but which is also laden with anthropological and cultural connotations.

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Fig. 1. Lago Maggiore (Regione Piemonte. Ce.D.R.A.P. Foto Farina)



Fig. 2. Isola Bella (Provincia Verbano Cusio Ossola Foto Scenari Srl)



Fig. 3. Villa Giulia, Verbania (Archivio Ville e Giardini Museo del Paesaggio)



Fig. 4. Villa L'Eremitaggio, Verbania (Archivio Ville e Giardini Museo del Paesaggio)



Fig. 5.
Villa
Barberis,
Baveno
(Archivio
Ville e
Giardini
Museo del
Paesaggio)



Fig. 6. Villa La Scagliola, Verbania (Archivio Ville e Giardini Museo del Paesaggio)



Fig. 7. Villa Pallavicino, Stresa (Archivio Ville e Giardini Museo del Paesaggio)



Fig. 8. Villa San Remigio, Verbania (Archivio Ville e Giardini Museo del Paesaggio)

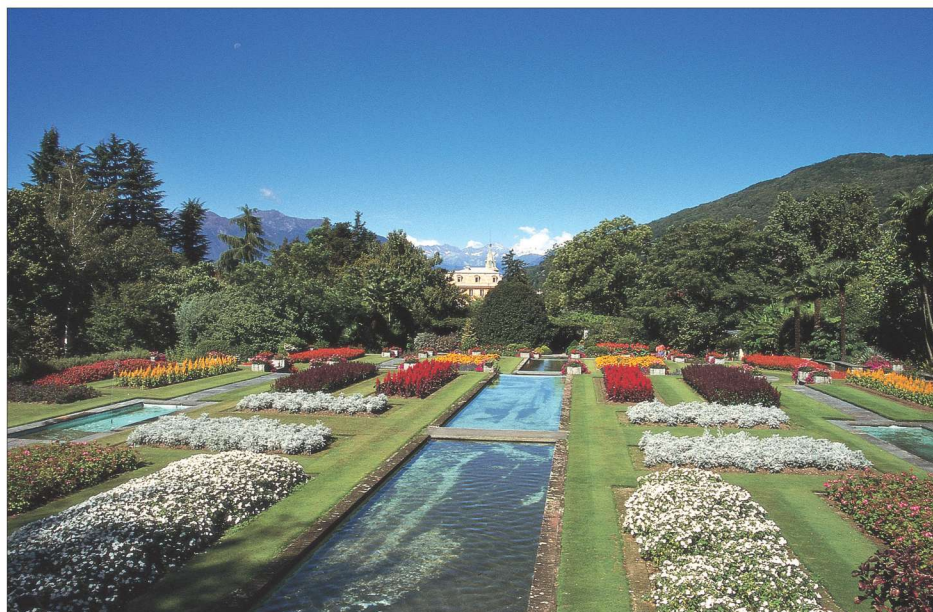


Fig. 9. Villa Taranto, Pallanza (Provincia Verbano Cusio Ossola Foto Scenari Srl)