Archaeological Landscapes as *Landscape Commons*

A Learning Experience: The Landscape Project for the Enhancement of an Archaeological Site between Etna and the Sea

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Abstract The landscape design is a tool that addresses both questions of spatial planning posed by public authorities and of improvement of the inhabitant's quality of life. This is shown on the experimental field of an educational experience focused on the revitalization of an archaeological site on the slopes of Etna in Sicily. Approaching the landscape project as a sensitive experience, the design simulation is centered on the search for the elements—evoked by the European Landscape Convention—that constitute the identity of the place. The analysis of these elements has the potential to enhance the relationship of the local people with their territory and improve their life conditions. From this perspective and on the basis of this approach, landscapes and their resources can become local and global common goods that can be passed on to future generations. The present paper presents the results of a workshop's experience at the University of Catania in 2017 as well as the theoretical framework that fed them.

Landscape and design. Definitions and theoretical framework

Landscape design concerns the relationships between man and the environment. It can address these relationships by physically intervening on their material and geographical dimension or by changing their perception by the inhabitants. This means that landscape design does not necessarily imply the creation of new signs on the territory but can be limited to defining the policies and economic dynamics that govern its transformations. On the other hand, there are disciplines, such as economics, geography, or ecology, that are interested in the landscape as an object of scientific study, without attempting, in most cases, a

space transformation project. The latter can only be realized in the case of disciplines dealing with space, such as architecture or urban design. However, it is correct to speak also of a project: even pure knowledge in the landscape is in itself a project, because it is able to activate processes of recognition and care of local identities or *inventive conservation*.[1] A project about the landscape, in fact, cannot be reduced to a simple spatial determination but must always use the knowledge (ecological, social, cultural, artistic, etc.) deriving from various disciplinary fields in order to promote awareness by the inhabitants and orienting the physical-spatial transformations. The contents of the scientific disciplines dealing with the landscape thus flows into the notion of landscape as a project.

Working on the relationship between man and his territory, the landscape design *stages* the identity characters, with the aim of modifying and improving the social representations that the inhabitants build of that place. The landscape design, therefore, in line with the principles established by the European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000), collects the aspirations of the inhabitants in relation to their living environment and makes them the driving force behind the actions that will condition the future of the places. The landscape design should be understood, in other words, as an intention to arrange the space that takes charge of the material and immaterial becoming of a territory to improve its habitability.[2]

This approach is rooted in the theoretical debate on the notion of landscape, focused on the double dialectic articulation between subject (observer, inhabitant) and object (environment, territory) on the one hand, and between tangible and intangible elements on the other.[3] The landscape is linked both to the intangible dimension of representation and to reality beyond representation.[4] As a result, the landscape is, on the one hand, a set of signs to be deciphered: the visible tells a story, a reality that has to be interpreted and is itself an integral part of the observed landscape. On the other hand, however, the landscape cannot be reduced to a simple representation. It has a physical dimension, linked to the way man organizes the natural spaces to live in the world. This "realist" position belongs mainly to architects, landscape and urban planners, and not, for example, to art historians or philologists.[5] It therefore belongs to all those who have a relationship with the landscape that is directed towards the intervention and the project. On the other hand, the growing interest in the influence of the materiality of space on its perception and, consequently, on its

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1   Donadieu 1994, 51–80.
2   Donadieu 2006, 85.
3   A fertile discussion was animated by the team gathered around Bernard Lassus and Augustin Berque in the 1990s. The founding concepts are collected in the book—conceived as a glossary—entitled *La Mouvance: du jardin au territoire, cinquante mots pour le paysage* (Berque et al. 1999).
4   Alain Roger has developed the concept of *artialization* as a cultural process that allows the landscape to be created from the "land" through an artistic representation (Roger 1987).
5   Besse 2008, 95.

representation, has brought scientific reflection on landscape into the field of phenomenology. A forerunner of this posture was Augustin Berque, who introduced the concept of *médiance*[6] as a *sense of the human milieu*—whereas the word sense refers to the meanings and sensations of the living body but also to the objective material tendencies of the environment in question.[7] We can therefore speak of a *phenomenology of landscape,* in which the word landscape indicates "the relationship that human beings have with space; a relationship that is both corporeal and existential".[8]

The landscape is, therefore, more than a visible representation of reality, belonging to the realm of feeling; it is "participation in" and "extension of" a state of mind (*Stimmung*).[9] In this approach, inspired by the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, landscape is understood as a complex sensory experience that concerns the existential dimension of the relationship between man and the world and not only visual representation. Everyone who perceives the landscape through its culture and nature establishes a *meaningful relationship* with the environment. The landscape can therefore be also understood as a procedural reality, a product of the interaction between the culture and the *affordances of* the place.[10]

Landscape commons: between resources, heritage, and human rights

This frame of reference, in which the idea of landscape is closely linked to the ways in which man perceives, interprets, and therefore inhabits the world, shows the importance of the effect of landscapes on the quality of life of the inhabitants and their significance as a matter of collective interest. The role of the landscape as a resource for individual and social well-being has been clearly affirmed by the *European Landscape Convention of Florence* (2000), which considers the landscape that covers the entire visible territory—and not only the portions affected by historical-artistic heritage or views of particular beauty—as an important contribution to the public interest, in cultural, ecological, environmental and social terms.[11] Landscapes conceived as resources (physical or intangible) invested by a system of historical, cultural, and identity values of places—i.e. values that are not linked to the uses or usefulness of the resource—thus become *commons.* As Pierre Donadieu pointed out: "Applying the notion of commons to landscape implies mobilizing both meanings: the resource (material and perceived) and the value (as recognized in the judgement that accompanies

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6   Berque et al. 1999, 74.
7   Berque 1999, 58; 2006, 42.
8   Dastour 2011.
9   Besse 2008, 98.
10   Menatti 2014, 253.
11   *European Landscape Convention,* Florence 20. 10. 2000, Preamble.

perception)".[12] When non-utilitarian values are discovered by communities, landscapes are no longer resources to be exploited by someone, but become a necessity of communal interest:[13] stakeholders are involved not only for protecting their interests of use but also and above all for promoting their values.

Today, landscapes are the object of enquiry by different disciplines because they respond to general human, social and psychological, as well as political needs, insofar they can be considered not only as commons, but also as places for the construction of *communing*.[14] In this regard, Jean Marc Besse notes that the sensitive experience of the landscape is part of the commons "as an expression of human history in the diversity of its aspects".[15] Talking about the landscape in terms of common good, however, does not only mean looking back in time but also cultivating a vision of the future, by caring for the community in the temporal perspective of its growth. This is what Salvatore Settis observes, comparing the common good to the *publica utilitas,* the general interest, which was still very much alive in the consciousness of all of us a few decades ago, promoting a system of civic values that for centuries each generation handed down to the next.[16] Therefore, the idea of the landscape as a common good brings with it a perspective of perpetuation of common values. Landscape as a common good means thus, according to the definition given by Pierre Donadieu, "a resource that is perceptible and accessible to all in the governance of its transmission with multiple actors".[17] More generally, "any perceptible material space that is judged (and sometimes claimed) with moral values, as well as aesthetic (beautiful/ugly) or multisensory, from a collective and not just individual perspective"[18] is a landscape common.

Finally, it should also be remembered that it is legitimate to claim the landscape as a human right, not only in situations of conflict but also in daily life: there is a fundamental right to the landscape considered as the right to a healthy and culturally rich environment, to an ecologically complex entity, where all living beings can live together in harmony, and finally to a framework that can welcome and guide the pursuit of individual and collective aspirations and to make human rights effective.[19] This right was affirmed by the 2012 UNESCO Florence *Declaration on Landscape,* which states that "the landscape is a common good and the right to the landscape is a human necessity".[20]

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12 Donadieu 2014, 24.
13 Gerber and Hess 2017, 708–32.
14 Besse 2018, 5.
15 Besse 2018, 8.
16 Settis 2013.
17 Donadieu 2014, 28.
18 Donadieu 2014, 25.
19 Menatti 2017, 680.
20 *Florence Declaration on Landscape,* Final Declaration of the UNESCO International Meeting on the International Protection of Landscapes, Florence, 2012.

The right to landscape in Italy is enshrined in the 1948 Constitution, the first in the world in which the protection of the historical-artistic heritage and landscape is one of the fundamental principles of the State (art. 9). This statement of the Constitution, inspired by a vision of cultural and patrimonial landscape, must be read today in combination with another fundamental right, that to health (art. 32).[21] Together, they can represent a more complete interpretation of the right to landscape to be claimed today, which can also include environmental and ecological issues.[22]

From this perspective, the challenge of a landscape project is the co-production of landscapes as qualified living environments desired by inhabitants and economic actors, with or without the participation of public authorities. A landscape project is always oriented to the conscious management of the territories, according to different scales of space and time, as well as to the ability to trigger or reactivate historical, cultural, ecological, and functional relations within a specific geographical range. In other words, it tends to make environmental resources accessible and exploitable and to promote the attribution (or rediscovery) of values shared by a community, i.e. to produce landscape commons. In fact, the inhabitants, as active agents in the co-production of landscapes, produce interpretations of landscapes that can also be in conflict with each other and yet do not allow, on their own, the birth of a common good. It is the awareness of a responsibility to share that initiates the emergence of the common among the actors of the becoming of local landscapes.[23] The creation of common goods is a matter of social awareness and legitimacy and a landscape project can be a tool to trigger such processes of creation. This gives rise to a notion that integrates the *government of the territory and the transmission of a heritage.*

Landscape and archaeology project

From this perspective, in which a landscape project is considered a tool capable of articulating the past and future of a territory or site,[24] an important feature of the landscape emerges. It is its temporal depth. Historical landscapes are containers of memory for the populations and can be read as palimpsests, precious documents that testify to the reader (inhabitant, specialist, or visitor) the transformations, tumultuous or peaceful, that took place in the short and long term.[25]

Local identity is deeply marked by such transformations, which do not always leave clearly visible traces. The acceleration of communication and the diminishing of distances

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21 Settis 2013.
22 Menatti 2017, 669.
23 Donadieu 2018, 121–29.
24 Donadieu 2012, 241.
25 Matteini 2008, 85.

caused by technological progress have led to a growing separation of time and space, as prophetically stated by Giddens.[26] The consequence is a sort of loss of places, a disconnection from them of the settled communities, a deterritorialization determined by the increasing virtualization that affects their lives.[27] Therefore, the acknowledgment of the traces of historical landscapes in order to piece together them into a readable narrative through a landscape project is a challenge that allows us to give places their identity back, defending them against the homologating tendencies of globalization, marginalization, and loss of values.

Archaeological sites benefit particularly from this approach. It has been seen that the museification of those elements of a territory that possess patrimonial importance is not sufficient to re-establish the kind of relations with the communities which are indispensable for the re-signification of the same assets in contemporary contexts of use. As noted above, an action of social appropriation is necessary so that these assets can be understood, in a shared way, as common goods. For this purpose, it is useful to start from their sensorial rediscovery, by reactivating their relationships both with the environmental context that fosters them and with the other components that determine the distinctive features of the landscape as a whole. Considering the archaeological heritage not only in itself, as a set of goods, but also inserted in its landscape context, it is possible to reinforce the attribution of non-utilitarian values and reveal its status as a common good. In doing so, archaeological heritage can be rediscovered as a culture and identity resource for the territory. The relational approach to the project of landscape valorization of the archaeological heritage favors the reconstruction of a historical narration of the territory that does not limit itself to a linear and diachronic retracing of the events but tends to a systemic and complex interpretative reading. Through the landscape approach to archaeological territories, it is possible to take into consideration not only the visible features and the archaeological potential, but also the *archaeological intangible,* i.e. those connections that bind a *memory good* to its users, to the ways of use, and especially to the culture and the society that generated it.[28] Moreover, the landscape helps to put together "fragments" of heritage even from very distant eras, enhancing latent links and spatial and temporal relations.

Archaeological landscapes have therefore an apparent relevance to the question of landscape commons: being a specific expression of past historical eras, they can become territorial centers of accumulation of values and sense for the reactivation of processes of appropriation and local development, through a project that combines the diffusion of heritage with the quest for the well-being of local communities.

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26 Giddens 1994, 28 and 110.
27 Levy 1998, 18.
28 Martelliano 2014, 173–74.

The case study. The unbuilt spaces between Etna and the sea and the archaeological site of *Santa Venera al Pozzo*

The archaeological site of Santa Venera al Pozzo in Aci Catena, that we want to illustrate here in its essential lines, was the focus of the "learning experience" for the students participating to a workshop in Catania Santa Venera. It is part of a territory dominated by the presence of Etna, the highest active volcano in Europe. Located on its eastern side and overlooking the sea, the archaeological site is the most representative example of a system of ancient settlements between the mountain and the sea. The seaward region that welcomes it has urban settlements alternating with enclaves of agricultural land, partly abandoned, and crossed by a network of historic paths that connect ancient rural villages, dotted with churches, whose bell towers soar in the landscapes overlooking the sea. Even today, the presence of water in various forms (including sulphurous springs) marks the region through vegetation, crops, and the signs of man's work; it also explains why this area has been inhabited since prehistoric times.[29]

Although it is a site of minor importance compared to other more significant sites in eastern Sicily, it possesses some features that make it a site of certain interest in several respects. Archaeological excavations have brought to light finds from the Greek and especially Roman times, including numerous kilns for the production of pottery, new parts of the building of a wellness center (spa) and even traces of a palace with mosaics.[30] The monumental presence of the spa building has stimulated numerous artistic representations that show how the *ambiance* does not seem to have changed today. The site has been protected from the threats of urban expansion thanks to its geomorphological configuration. It is physically isolated: archaeological remains seem to nestle in the heart of the agricultural landscape of terraced citrus groves, around which only few or no traces of urbanization are visible, despite the galloping urban growth of neighboring towns close to its borders (Fig. 1). While these conditions can be considered an asset, they also reflect a lack of ties with the surrounding area as well as with the inhabitants and visitor flows. Preservation policies, through the imposition of restrictions and the establishment of parks,[31] have not been helpful in breaking this isolation and could not trigger processes of social appropriation of places. The archaeological site is very little frequented by the inhabitants of the surrounding municipalities and, despite its historical and cultural importance, is not indicated in the

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29 Bella 1999.
30 Branciforti 2006.
31 Recently the new Archaeological and Landscape Park of Catania and the Aci Valley has been established (2019). It brings together numerous archaeological sites under a single management and protection structure which, at least nominally, aims at an integrated management of archaeology and landscape.

Fig. 1 View of the roman baths and the church of Santa Venera al Pozzo surrounded by the agricultural landscape

tourist circuits. It is not accessible by public transport and not properly equipped for receiving visitors. These are the main problems in the valorization of this case of public heritage.

The 2017 workshop. Methodology and results

Organized as part of a course dedicated mainly to the construction and technological aspects of architecture and conceived as an immersive and intensive experience, the workshop *Architecture, Archaeology, Agriculture. Landscape as a project tool,* held in Catania in 2017[32], was conceived as an initiation for architecture students to the landscape project. For this purpose, the archaeological site of Santa Venera al Pozzo was chosen as a testing ground. The "initiation" consisted, on the one hand, in providing students with the means to compile a common vocabulary among the different fields of interest involved in the landscape

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32 Catania, March 31ˢᵗ–April 7ᵗʰ. The workshop was organized with the support of the Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture of the University of Catania. Special thanks are addressed to Pierre Donadieu, for taking part in the activities and guiding the students with generosity and commitment.

project: agriculture, ecology, archaeology, planning, architecture, etc.; on the other hand, in the direct field experimentation of the objectives and aspects of a landscape design as well as of the transdisciplinary complexity that enriches it. Mastering the *crossing of scales* (to use an expression of landscape architect Michel Corajoud),[33] immersing oneself in the dynamics of the agricultural world, and coordinating the different disciplinary contributions into a global vision of the project, are some among the main skills that was important to trained during the workshop.

The landscape has been approached as a sensorial experience. The site survey allowed us to search for the perceptible elements—evoked by the *European Landscape Convention*—that are able to fabricate the identity and singularity of the place (Fig. 2). These same elements and the emotions they evoke among the inhabitants are the basis of the collective perception of the landscape. They contribute to the construction of a *shared subjectivity* from

Fig. 2 The site survey with the guidance of the park director

which one can understand the *general interest* to which the community aspires. The role of the project, therefore, has been to transform the shared recognition of these elements into *federative concepts* for the re-appropriation and reorganization of the site at multiple spatial

33　Corajoud 2000.

and temporal scales. The project has been designed as an open tool: in a diachronic perspective, if a process of involvement of local communities begins, it is possible to conceive the work done during the workshop as the first stage of a development towards a generation of landscape commons.

The sequence of the design simulation traced the phases of a real landscape project. First of all it was necessary to identify the characters of the landscape in different categories (visual/sensitive, territorial, environmental, social, patrimonial). Through a sensorial immersion (*careful walks*) at the site, and trying to forget scientific knowledge, the students attempted to appropriate (symbolically) the places in search of a more personal knowledge; then they associated this sensitive approach with the study of physical elements and technical documentation for defining the entire geographical, territorial, environmental, and patrimonial framework in question (Fig. 3); finally they confronted the stakeholders of the site

Fig. 3 A moment of classroom work in the workshop

(farmers, archaeologists, public authorities, etc.) both for integrating their point of view in the analysis and project perspectives and for presenting to them, at the end, the project proposals (Fig. 4). In the following steps, the cognitive framework has been considered in its becoming, in an attempt to understand in which direction the site is transforming itself today. The aim was to identify the important issues and formulate precise questions to which the project should give answers.

Fig. 4 Presentation of workshop outcomes to stakeholders

The strategic vision that was subsequently elaborated starts from this framework of sensorial, technical-spatial, and sociological knowledge thas has been interpreted dynamically. It has not been limited to realistic hypotheses, which would risk directing the project towards short-sighted choices; the prediction of the future of the site has also been subjected to utopic assumptions that are considered important, because they are carriers of changes and able to go beyond the limits of the dominant thought, favoring innovation (Fig. 5).


Fig. 5 Workshop output: landscape design/storytelling through the federating theme of countryside
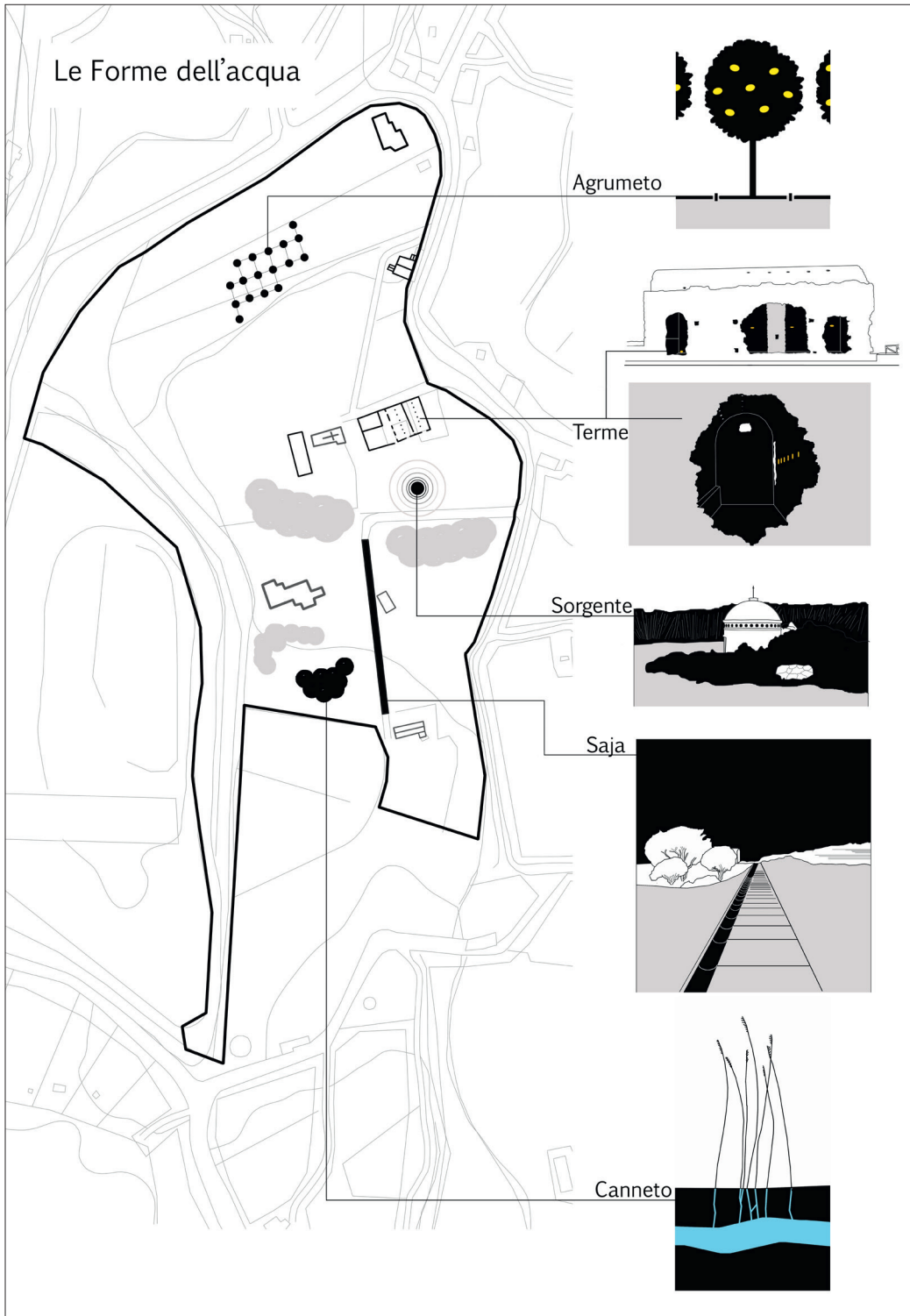
Fig. 6 Workshop output: landscape design/storytelling through the federating theme of water

The project was intended as a narrative describing the destiny of the site. Imagined in continuity with the previous phases, it was not conceived as an isolated gesture that gives new forms to the territory, but rather as an instrument for the recovery of places, their re-organization, and the discovery of the collective pleasure of living in a place, as already mentioned. We tried to bring out the functional program already contained in the site, trying to rediscover the *common sense* of the landscape. In this way, the transformations induced by the project, whether they are in continuity or disrupture with the existing situation, are more likely to meet the interests of all the actors (the general interest), achieving the project's primary goal of helping to inhabit better the places. The students, accompanied by the teachers, have developed different project solutions, centered on three federative themes: *time, countryside, water* (Fig. 6). Through the intertwining of these three points of view, it was possible to highlight those elements that constitute the landscape's identity: its historical depth, agroecosystemic dimension, and singularity. Each of these themes has been developed as a story and elaborated by means of texts, images, drawings, and models. Each day of work ended with a group presentation, during which the students were asked to refocus their ideas on specific questions.

The future archaeological park thus emerged from the workshop by superimposing the different stories (the paths of the countryside, the paths of water, and the paths of time) for arriving at the *staging* of the different points of view over the landscapes. The definition of a political-economic framework made it possible to bring all the projects together, envisaging that the archaeological site could be managed by an agricultural cooperative that would take care of production and at the same time open the archaeological site to visitors (Fig. 7).
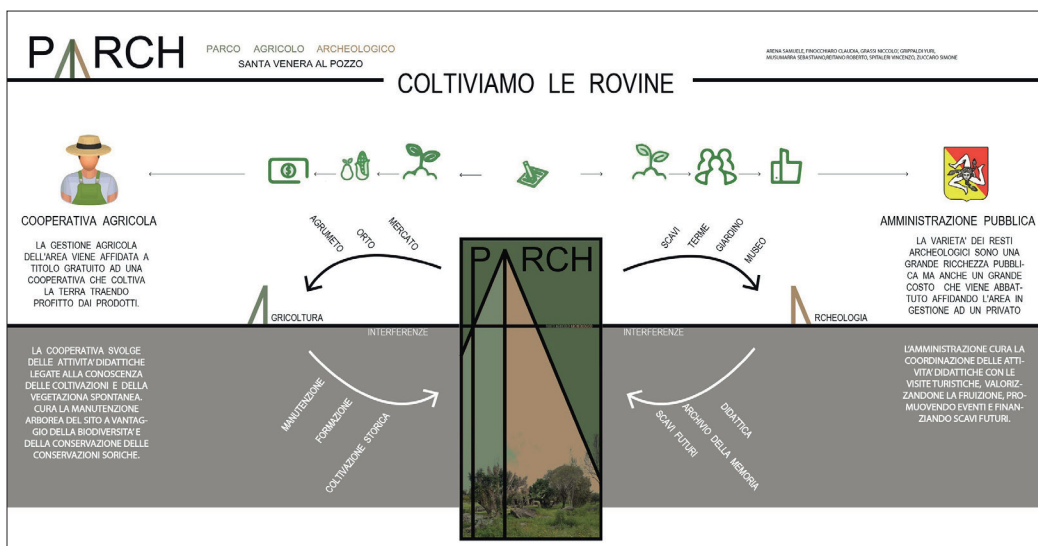
Fig. 7 Workshop output: the definition of a political-economic framework for the project

Conclusions and perspectives

This workshop showed a possible path of production of a landscape common. According to the collective proposal that came out as a result of the workshop, the archaeological site should be rented to a farmers' cooperative that would take the responsibility of making it sustainable with methods that are compatible with the presence of visitors. Beyond that, the site should become alive and accessible again to those who wish to visit it. The singular features of the place (water, orchards, ruins) should be highlighted on the basis of an arrangement of the spaces that aspires to *put them on stage,* with the introduction of new elements, if necessary, that help to better understand the overall narrative of this landscape.

All the actors in this project appear to be winners: public authorities manage and make the local heritage accessible at no additional cost; the agricultural cooperative achieves its economic viability through a multifunctional approach to agriculture. Farmers aim to produce agricultural goods and services for the community (educational workshops, events, meetings, etc.); for their part, the inhabitants benefit from an accessible place, the landscapes of which is finally revealed, a place where the charm of the past is added to the presence of ecosystem services (biodiversity for example) from the agroecosystem in which this heritage is embedded.

The workshop also showed that landscape can synergistically combine awareness of heritage value (in this case the memory of the site) and agriculture, thus triggering good practices to inhabit better the territory (Fig. 7). Agriculture, understood in a multifunctional way, can become the protagonist of the fruition of an archaeological heritage, allowing its revitalization, solving the problems of its management, and opening to the public, in a perspective of a multiple actors' stewardship of the territory.

We can also note that the result of the workshop is a piece of a possible wider path, that of the conception of an archaeological and agricultural park project. Framed in a territorial context, the park can be seen as a principle of reorganization of unbuilt spaces between the mountain and the sea, a first step to combine agricultural and natural ecological continuity between sea and mountain.

The ideas that emerged from the workshop were submitted to the evaluation of local stakeholders at the end of its activities. One limitation of this experience, however, was the involvement of local actors and inhabitants: the participation of politicians, representatives from public institutions, and local farmers in the workshop activities and the final presentation was rather weak. Hence, this procedure must be improved. Finally, it would be desirable to enhance coordination between the actors involved in protecting the site (public and research institutions, for example CNR, INGV, and University). Currently, projects and planning actions are being carried out in isolation from each other, without being able to foster a dialogue that could be vital for the advancement of knowledge and for the active and creative protection of the site.

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