Landscape, together with the cultural identity deriving from collective memory, offers a very rich and complex semantic nucleus.

Collective memory evokes a landscape in which history is compounded with myth (Le Goff). In fact, the flux of life is accompanied by a continuous reinterpretation of memory, both individual and collective.

The globalisation of recent years has been accompanied by a rising need to redefine and reinterpret cultural identity, which has led to a more dynamic perception of landscape.

Any culture interacts with its landscape, not only in the sense of producing or modifying it with actions, or tangible and intangible relations, but also in the manner of actually conceiving of it and of attributing it with specific and changing meanings and values.

Every time a society undertakes processes of change, in which social relations and the economy transform, the actual physical landscape also changes to adapt to the new needs of society. Studying and understanding landscape means understanding the places and decoding the territory and its multiple values to cultural identity.

Today we attempt to respond to the identification of a new collective value in landscape, in which many local microcosms have actually been devastated by processes of modernisation.

The fact is that the “Italian landscape” is one of the worst possible landscapes, apart from the few marvellous exceptions emerged unscathed from the devastation of the 1960s and a subsequent senseless succession of regulatory plans. This demonstrates that there is a progressive detachment of the identity of places from the identity of their inhabitants.

The identity of places is a basic value for any policy of protection, because it ensures the diversity, the distinctiveness and the system of spatial references of its inhabitants.

Since cultural identities in Italy are as many and multi-formed as the communities that express them, territories must be redefined and reinterpreted in relation to the cultural history of each specific area of reference, through the forms that, over the centuries, have taken shape in that place.

The conception of a cultural interweaving of global and local historical processes frees us from the purely approach to viewing and protecting the landscape. Our reflections are enriched with a more attentive consideration of multiculturalism, understood as an overall reading of territory in which there is an interaction of artisanal activity, manufacturing, artistic and recreational opportunity.

Man must be interpreted in his natural, historic, artistic and social environment. The community must be studied as belonging to a defined place, to the physical and anthropic environment in its entirety: the relationships between man and nature over space and time that are the basis of all ethnographic study.

In England there are recognised “material cultures”, which preserve objects as sources of landscape history and keys to reading the community life of the surrounding territory.
The multidisciplinary approach, together with the inclusion of social elements in the landscape concept, free of aesthetic values or as representative of “high” culture, represents an indispensable analytical instrument. It dispenses with the overly utilitarian conception suggested by the cultural tourism market, for which landscape and history are simply appealing merchandise. Turri’s metaphor of the landscape as theatre offers a good representation of the phenomenon of perceiving signs that, only at the moment of observation, assume specific characteristics and meaning related both to the context and the observer. Landscape protection is also protection of the sequential structure derived from collective memory and from perceived signs. A map of the Italian landscape must necessarily be accompanied by a network of routes that decode its reading. This multidisciplinary map must include positions of those objects that, for recognition and viewing, can not be considered without an anthropological sense and which must be read and interpreted just as they exist, inserted in the spaces to which they belong. Every landscape represents the life space for the population concerned, and it must be remembered that there is continuous osmosis between rural and urban landscapes. It is obligatory to emerge from the museum logic, the logic of freezing as protection of the landscape, of landscape as heritage demanding conservation. But at the same time it is necessary to redefine the problem of places linked to daily life and the economy, in terms of both ethics and aesthetics.

The European Landscape Convention, first signed in 2000, overcame the “scenic” concept of landscape, distinguishing three categories of landscape: exceptional, daily and deteriorated. The recognition of such diversity prefigures differentiated and flexible policies, not only with targeted regulatory policies, but also capable of planning and bettering the theatre in which the story of all of us plays out.

A new conceptualisation of landscape is the first step in understanding and coding the territory according to its multiple indications of identity. This process is intended to assist the local community to realise and the importance and the specificity of the places and the cultures of belonging, and of orienting governance towards landscape-territorial transformations that are anchored in preservation, requalification and enhancement.