

Landscape education, heritage and justice.
Towards a critical perspective on landscape as heritage
through a gaming approach
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Education plays a crucial role in promoting a critical approach to landscape as heritage. If landscape justice is concerned with issues of awareness, access and democracy (Mels and Mitchell, 2013; Egoz et al., 2018), then education should increase people's landscape literacy, intended as the ability to read and act with responsibility in/with the landscape, as something collectively created and shared (Spirn, 2005). However, landscape education may also indirectly be a tool for generating injustice, especially when it delivers a top-down and narrow definition of landscape. Insights from a research conducted in 2018 on several landscape education projects in Italy (Castiglioni and Cisani, 2020) show that an understanding of landscape as a shared and dynamic heritage is poorly represented and isolated, if compared with an interpretation of landscape as an area of outstanding beauty or as the repository of heritage sites and of pre-established and authorized cultural and natural exceptional values (Smith, 2006), to be protected from change.

Drawing from these findings, the project "Landscape Education, Heritage and Justice", funded by the Landscape Research Group, aimed, on the one hand, at deepening the research, focusing on how the concept of landscape as heritage is

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conveyed in educational contexts, and, on the other hand, at designing and producing an online toolkit for teachers and educators.

Considering games as powerful tools for an active and critical learning particularly suitable for landscape education (Lawson, 2003; Schroth *et al.*, 2015; Stingtzing *et al.*, 2020), the website created (www.land-ed.it) contains a prototype of an interactive game, designed in order to let the learners/players – from secondary school onwards – experiment directly the complexity of the landscape, its multiple values, the diversity between insiders and outsiders and the tensions between use, transformation and conservation. The game presents the case of the Canale di Brenta, a narrow valley in the Venetian Prealps crossed by the Brenta river, as it offers multiple opportunities to explore the relationship between landscape, heritage and justice. Based on a 3D map of the valley (Fig. 1), the player journeys through four stages, each of which deals with a specific issue and prompt to make a decision regarding the future of this landscape, presenting different scenarios (Fig. 2). The complex management of the river economy and ecosystem, the mobility issues of a narrow valley, the conservation of the UNESCO intangible heritage of drystone walling and, lastly, the multiple and conflicting recovery opportunities for abandoned hamlets on the terraced slopes are the topics on which the game hopes to trigger reflection and discussion, revealing the complexity of the landscape and its connections with social justice, favouring a critical approach to heritage. A short video-taster of the website and the game is available here: <http://bit.ly/land-ed>.

Reflections during the design phase and in the use of this tool led to an understanding of gaming approach as grounded on an interesting parallelism between games and landscapes: locations and journeys, emotions and engagement, various perspectives and ‘ways of seeing’, navigation tools and toolboxes, narrative and temporal dimensions, crossroads and

deadlocks, rules, roles, values and conflicts are some of the commonalities between (video)games and landscapes. Despite some limitations, namely the tension between real and virtual experience – particularly topical in the pandemic era –, this project ultimately offers the opportunity for a thoughtful consideration of landscape heritagisation processes, pinpointing to the importance of developing a critical understanding of landscape and heritage and, in particular, of finding ways for connecting the scholarly debate with public discourses and with the educational realm, engaging with the policy makers and citizens that will manage and co-create heritage landscapes in the near future.

Fig. 1 – Screenshot of the Land-ed 3D map

Source: Land-ed.it

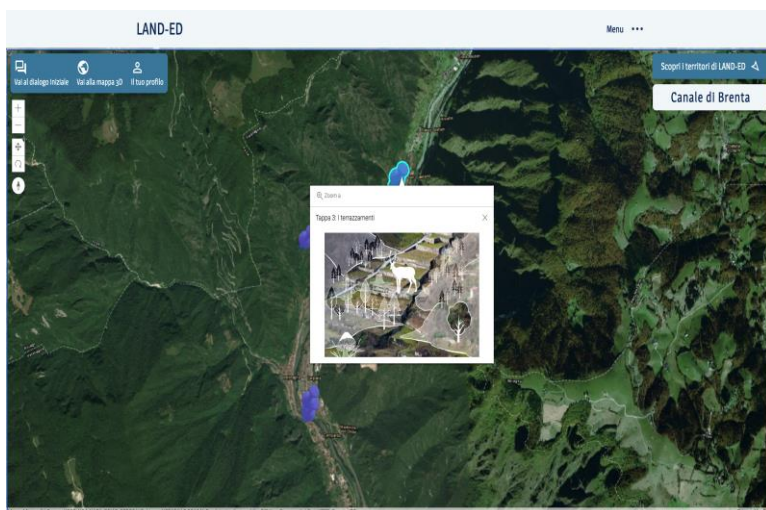


Fig. 2 – Landscape scenarios for the Brenta river

Source: *Land-ed.it*, illustrations by Giada Peterle



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