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POSITIVE ACTION TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

The year 1989 marks an important anniversary in our cultural history: it is fifty years since it was officially acknowledged that monuments and landscapes are an integral part of our national heritage. The relevant legislation was passed in 1939 and is still in force today.

It is clear, however, that the legislator never succeeded in stimulating public awareness. Only recently have local communities stopped regarding environmental protection as a burden imposed on them from above by a distant authority.

Decentralisation of powers towards the regions was a step forward in the process of making local authorities gradually more aware of their responsibilities. Scrutiny of the judicious use of valuable assets within the regional community became the responsibility of the relevant institutions at regional level. In recent years the Campania Region has delegated some of these powers to the communes.

This decentralisation has already made it possible to devise methods of protection better suited to the specific requirements of Campania. But this is not enough to get protection of the landscape accepted as a fundamental part of the local culture. There is a danger that the exercise of this power may be totally arbitrary, given that there are no objective parameters by which the quality of measures can be assessed and that attitudes and actions are easily influenced in small villages.

And current procedures are certainly not conducive to a new acceptance of the value of rural landscapes. Preventive scrutiny of projects is carried out in reality *after* local authorities have made their choices.

Conservation sometimes requires a lengthy dialogue between those who want change and those with the power to impose a given course of action. This is due partly to the fact that the relevant laws have not been updated for 50 years and partly to the widespread belief that sticking to the rules means poorer efficiency and higher costs.

And yet intensive exploitation of the environment has not always been irreconcilable with a good-quality landscape. On the contrary, whilst the countryside was the only "machine" men had for transforming solar power into products for the community, the form which made best use of the land was not only the most efficacious in the context, but also the most "beautiful". So much so that even today we recognise it as an intangible part of our rural heritage, hence for example the terraced agriculture of the Amalfi coast, the

orange groves of the Sorrento coast, the kitchen gardens and orchards of the Sarno plain and the vineyards of the "Terra di Lavoro", which are a living proof that efficacy and beauty can go hand in hand.

This objective is not unattainable. If protection of the environment is to be an active endeavour rather than restrictive, it may be a good idea to correct existing distortions by seeing that all structures indirectly or marginally involved are equipped with a standard methodology for assessing projects and strict formulae for analysing the context. This is the job of regional bodies.

The "Assessorato" (local council) was thus keenly interested in the work of the University Centre in Ravello to protect cultural heritage by reviving local "earthquake cultures".

Protection of valuable assets, like protection against earthquakes, cannot be achieved solely by legislative constraints or technical standards. It will only be effective if practised actively, that is to say it has to be "beneficial" to the community which uses the assets.

The hypotheses underlying the Research Project and its first conclusions - namely that in order to recreate an earthquake culture it is better to replace supervisory rules with standard procedures to be used locally, so that the technical methods most appropriate to the specific needs of the local system can be applied in each case - provide a methodological pointer which can also be used to protect the rural heritage of our countryside. And this is entirely consistent with the planning policy for which the Campania Region is responsible and which the Assessorato has undertaken to implement.

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