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# Landscape Culture – Culturing Landscapes

The Differentiated Construction  
of Landscapes

 Springer VS

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# Landscape Perception as a Marker of Immigrant Children's Integration

# 6.2

## An Explorative Study in the Veneto Region (Northeast Italy)<sup>1</sup>

Benedetta Castiglioni, Alessia De Nardi and Gianpiero Dalla-Zuanna

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### 6.2.1 "Using" Landscape: Research Questions

Over the last 20 years Italy has changed from a country of emigration to one of immigration (Gabrielli et al., 2007). Immigrants have arrived from a number of different countries: Romanians alone exceeded 20% of the foreign population living in Italy, and Albanians and Moroccans surpassed 10% (2011 data). People have come to Italy in search of job opportunities. After immigration they spread across a variety of contexts including big cities such as Milan and Rome (where immigrants mainly work in the service sector), industrial districts (working mainly in medium-small firms), and rural areas (mainly as labourers on farms). After an initial phase with the prevailing immigration of singles, many immigrants have been joined by spouse and children, or were married in Italy, mostly with fellow countrymen or -women. Consequently, a large proportion of foreign people living in Italy at the beginning of 2011 are young: foreigners aged 0-17 living in Italy numbered only 59,000 in 1991, compared to 993,000 now. This is equivalent to 9.7% of the population of the same age and 22% of the total foreign population living in Italy.

The astonishing rapidity of immigration, the variety of origin, the spread of the immigrant population to diverse areas, and the significant proportion of young age groups make Italy an interesting context for studying the integration of young immigrants and second generations. The literature demonstrates that processes of integration have been – generally speaking – fast (see the review published in Gabrielli et al., 2013). After just

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1 The research presented in this paper was developed within the framework of the "LINK" project – "Landscape and Immigrants: Networks/Knowledge" – a two-year project (2009-2011) based at the University of Padua (Italy), and financed by research funds from the same university. The research group is made up of scholars from a variety of fields: geography, urban planning, anthropology, sociology and demography. The authors acknowledge the contribution of colleagues – in particular Tania Rossetto, Viviana Ferrario and Davide Papotti – in the preparation of this paper. More information on the project can be found in Castiglioni, 2010 and Castiglioni, 2011. The present work is the result of the authors' close collaboration and content discussion. As for the compilation, B. Castiglioni edited paragraphs 6.2.1, 6.2.3.3 and 6.2.4, A. De Nardi paragraphs 6.2.2 and 6.2.3.1, G. Dalla-Zuanna paragraph 6.2.3.2.

a few years of living in Italy, the great majority of children of immigrants develop very similar attitudes and behaviour compared to their Italian peers: they feel Italian, claim to speak Italian well, and have a good number of Italian friends. This is probably due to the near absence in Italy of systematic segregation of foreigners and the largely inter-ethnic composition of Italian kindergartens and primary schools. One salient issue, however, for foreigners' children concerns school results (worse than those of their Italian peers) and – after primary school – their “segregation” into vocational schools (Barban and White, 2011).

Within this context, the study presented here aims to increase our understanding of the integration process of immigrants, focusing specifically on immigrant children living in the Veneto region (Northeast Italy). This research puts the focus on the concept of landscape, using the latter to investigate the relationship between teenagers (both Italian and foreign) and their everyday-life places. The questions addressed through this research are, how do children perceive and judge their daily landscapes? Are there evident differences between foreigners and Italians in their relationships with landscape?

In accordance with the so-called *médiation paysagère* approach (Fortin, 2007; Joliveau et al., 2008; Bigando et al., 2011), landscape is considered here not only an “object” but also a “tool” for research and action. Landscape – being, at the same time, a material reality and an immaterial set of images (1991) – allows for an exploration of both physical places and the meanings and values attributed to them. Landscape, therefore, provides a useful “tool” for studying the relationships between a local population and its surroundings, while such relationships are considered one of the aspects of immigrant integration processes.

Landscape is understood as reference in the processes of building individual and community identity. Landscape fulfills this role in exceptional as well as in everyday surroundings, and even in degraded areas. This has, in recent years, been highlighted by the European Landscape Convention (Firenze, 2000). According to the ELC, landscape is considered an important expression of local culture and identity, and a contributing factor in determining the quality of life (Luginbuhl, 2006; Nogué et al., 2008; Roca et al., 2011; Stobbelear and Pedrolì, 2011; Egoz, 2011). However, the Convention itself and its implementation process raise questions that require further investigation within the context of landscape studies, for example the ways in which people relate and assign value to their places of life (Lowenthal, 2007; Castiglioni and Ferrario, 2007; Sevenant and Antrop, 2010).

Focusing on the experience of immigrants is particularly relevant to these questions. As immigrants leave their homeland, they lose the direct relationship they had with their native landscapes which, in turn, become *locus memoriae*. Indeed, the host country is often a totally new reality for immigrants. This new reality requires learning to understand it better. This learning process involves not only satisfying “practical” needs, such as acquiring the capacity for orientation within a new environment. It also includes “developing individual and communal identities in the new place” (Ng, 1998). In this perspective landscape plays a potentially important role. For example, Tolia-Kelly (2010) argues that, for immigrant women, the new landscape constitutes a “material signifier of identification with land, territory and environments that contribute to formal and informal connectedness with national cultures and citizenship”. From landscape studies and immigration studies a

number of different interdisciplinary branches of research have emerged<sup>2</sup>, including the study of place attachment on the part of immigrants through landscape experience (e.g. Rishbeth and Powell, 2013; Rishbeth and Finney, 2006; Armstrong, 2004). This area remains, however, underexplored, including the context of children's geographies.<sup>3</sup>

This paper puts the focus on immigrant children and builds on previous studies, while also allowing for a broadening of understanding about children's "places of belonging" (e.g. Olwig, 2003), about the ways children use public spaces (van Lieshout and Aarts, 2008; Woolley and Ul Amin, 1995), and how they live in and value their neighbourhood (den Besten, 2009; Faulstich Orellana, 1999).

Finally, true to the perspective of using landscape as a tool, the research activities carried out in the field are also relevant in terms of intercultural education. Children increased their awareness of the value of their landscape, allowing for exchanges with schoolmates regarding their landscape experiences and perceptions and a shared "vision" of their surroundings (De Nardi, 2013; Castiglioni, 2012).

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## 6.2.2 Field Research, Case Studies and Methods Applied

Two case studies are presented that are placed in the territorial context of the province of Padua within the Veneto region, Northeast Italy. This area is home to nearly 5 million people, mostly concentrated in the plain area (about 56% of the larger territory). This area is particularly suited for the purposes of this study because it underwent, in the last two to three decades, substantial territorial and social changes. This period has been characterized by relevant economic growth based on middle and small-size companies (many of them currently facing crises) (Fuà and Zacchia, 1983; Bagnasco, 1984). Historically, the region has developed as a polycentric spatial structure without clear contrasts between large urban areas and the countryside. Instead, industrial and residential areas have expanded very quickly, mixing with existing rural areas and settlements (Indovina, 1990). Furthermore, villages, small and middle-size towns (like Padua) are scattered across the plains. The landscape has undergone profound changes, losing its more traditional rural features with the development of a densely constructed mix of rural and urban qualities

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- 2 Many of these studies are from English-speaking countries. Notable are studies on immigrants' use of parks (Byrne and Wolch 2009), and on how different ethnic groups prefer diverse landscape types and hold diverse "images of nature" (Kloek et al., 2013; Buijs, Elands and Langers 2009).
  - 3 In the field of children's geographies, children's perceptions of their surroundings and the processes of building relationships with the latter are relevant issues (e.g. Vanderstede, 2011; Loebach and Gilliland, 2010; Rudkin and Davis, 2007; Matthews et al., 1998), as are the ways children develop feelings of belonging, attachment, "insideness" and "friendship" toward everyday-life places (Ramezani and Said, 2013; Leyshon and Bull, 2011; Gordon, 2010; Lim and Calabrese Barton, 2010; Chatterjee, 2005; Dodman, 2004; Chawla, 1992).





**Fig. 6.2.1** The urban neighbourhood of Arcella seen through some children's picture (reproduced from the "LINK"-project, photos by interviewee)

(Munarin and Tosi, 2001). Today, this diffused and jumbled "urban sprawl" is viewed in a number of different ways. Experts tend to criticize the "consumption of land" and the loss of cultural heritage (Bianchetti, 2003; Vallerani and Varotto, 2005), while most inhabitants seem to accept the latter as the 'normal' and 'ordinary' landscape of the area (Castiglioni and Ferrario, 2007). From a social point of view, other relevant changes have taken place as well, including a general and considerable improvement in the economic conditions of the population and rapid growth in the number of immigrants (Tattara and Anastasia, 2003).

The two case studies carried out for this project include "Arcella", a neighbourhood on the periphery of the city of Padua (Fig. 6.2.1), and Borgoricco, a rural village located 14 km north of Padua, in the "urbanized countryside" (Fig. 6.2.2). Both locations are characterized by a high percentage of foreigners at the beginning of 2013: 21% of the total population in Arcella (33,527 inhabitants) and 11% in Borgoricco (8,352 inhabitants) – the same proportion was 7% in Italy and 10% in Veneto.

More specifically, one school was selected in each of the two localities. The study focused on one class group in each school. The study sample consists of 40 pupils aged 12: 10 Italians and 11 foreigners in Arcella and 14 Italians and 5 foreigners in Borgoricco.

Auto-photography was selected as the main research method. Researchers gave a camera to each child and asked them to "tell us about the place you live in with 12 pictures". The children presented their pictures within a photo-diary, writing a caption for each photograph. This method has sparked increasing interest among geographers (Bignante, 2011; Rose, 2007) and it has been used by scholars from a range of disciplines in studying the relationship between people and places (Lombard, 2013; Garrod, 2008; Dakin, 2003;



**Fig. 6.2.2** The village of Borgoricco seen through some children's pictures (reproduced from the "LINK"-project, photos by interviewee)

Dodman, 2003; Young and Barrett, 2001). The method creates distance between the child and the place. Indeed, the camera forces children to *look at* the place in which they live, creating a sort of "detachment", or distance, considered necessary to achieve a broader awareness of the place (Olwig, 1991; Proshansky et al., 1983; Tuan, 1980). The method allows children to *see* the landscape both in terms of physical place and meaning. Researchers subsequently carried out semi-structured interviews with each pupil using photo-elicitation, i.e. employing the student's photo-diary as a starting-point for discussion. Researchers also conducted focus groups in which the children discussed several salient issues that had previously emerged<sup>4</sup>. The combination of auto-photography, interview and focus group methods allowed a greater understanding of the relationship between each student and "his/her landscape" to be achieved (Cardano, 2011; Simkins and Thwaites, 2008).

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4 For example: the values children attribute to green spaces, their knowledge of the neighborhood/village, and their reference points within the territory.

## 6.2.3 Classification of Children Photographs and Data Analysis

### 6.2.3.1 Landscape Elements and Meanings, Denotative and Connotative Categories

Data were analyzed with the aim of identifying landscape elements that children chose to describe their places of everyday life, including the meanings attributed to them. The analysis also aimed at learning how the selected elements relate to a number of the children's personal characteristics, including their status as Italian or immigrant.

The children took 462 photographs in total. These photographs were classified according to two groups of categories, denotative and connotative. The denotative categories include landscape elements, places and objects portrayed in the picture (e.g. "school", "house", "green space", "outdoor space", "shop", "natural details")<sup>5</sup>. The connotative categories include the meanings and values associated with photographed elements<sup>6</sup>. The connotative categories are explained in table 6.2.1.

**Table 6.2.1** Connotative categories used in picture classification

Connotative category	Explanation – examples
Aesthetic value	Importance of formal aspect (colour, form, etc.); explicit judgment of places/elements as beautiful or ugly
Collective sense of place	Typicality and symbolical character of the neighbourhood/village; importance as representative places and meeting points for inhabitants; references to an idea of "common heritage";
Ecological value	Identification of ecological function; examples of respect/disrespect towards the environment;
Functional value	Usefulness in satisfying practical needs;
Personal place attachment	Importance of affective bond, personal memories or experiences; sense of ownership;
Social relationships	Importance of the relationships which occur in a particular place, especially with peers

Table 6.2.2 shows a bi-dimensional cross-referencing of denotative and connotative categories. When considering the denotative categories, the landscape elements that occur most frequently in the photographs are green spaces and shops, followed by outdoor spaces, churches, natural details, and schools. When looking at the connotative categories, one may

- 5 Some of the photographs contained in the photo-diaries don't exactly represent places or landscape elements, but concern people, animals, personal objects, or "selfies" – images considered by children to be relevant to their descriptions of their places of life.
- 6 Since each picture presents a complex and wide range of meanings, two researchers worked together to classify the latter into connotative categories, so as to best identify the most prevalent meaning expressed by the child for each place/object. Clearly, photographs of the same place taken by different children could be assigned to different connotative categories.

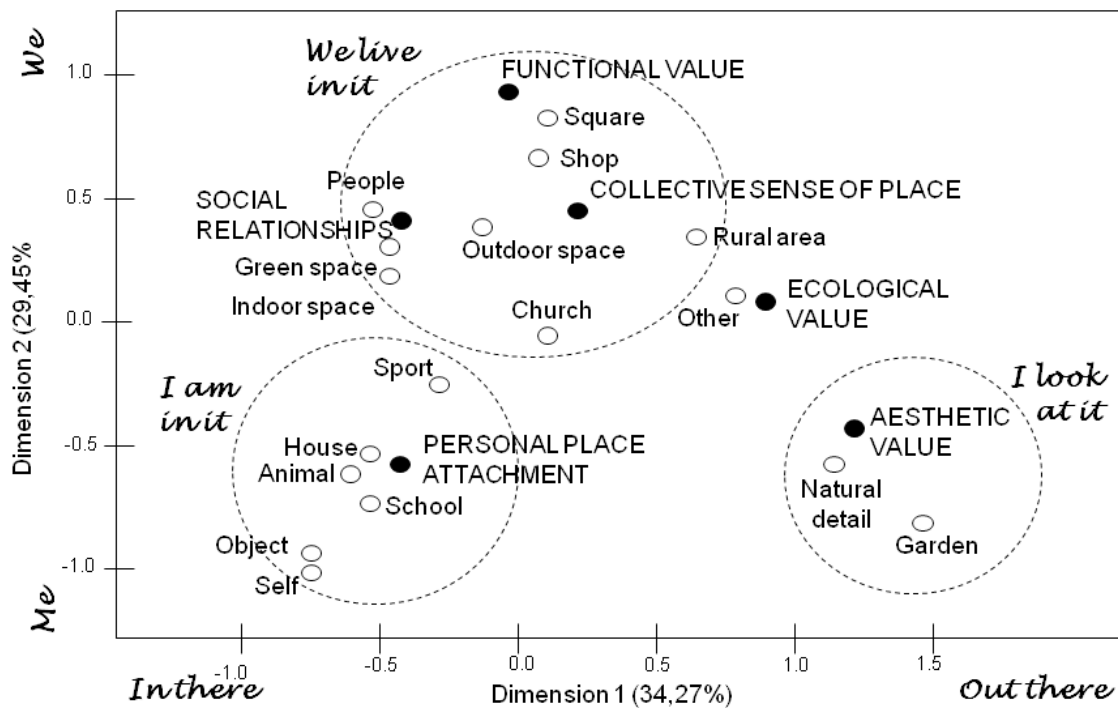
observe that personal place attachment clearly prevails, followed – at a distance – by collective sense of place and social relationships. Aesthetic value – often thought by experts to be one of the primary values in considerations of landscape – here appears of minor importance. The table highlights the relationships between landscape elements and the values attached to them. Among the most represented categories, we see that green spaces are primarily places of social relationships, house and school denote personal place attachment, squares and shops have a high functional value, and natural details and gardens an aesthetic value.

**Table 6.2.2** The relationship between landscape elements and assigned meanings: crossing denotative and connotative categories

WHYs	Aes- thetic value	Col- lective sense of place	Eco- logical value	Func- tional value	Personal place attach- ment	Social relation- ships	TOTAL
Church	7	16	-	-	14	7	44
Square	-	15	-	-	-	5	20
School	2	3	-	-	33	4	42
Sport	1	3	-	1	8	2	15
House	1	2	-	-	18	5	26
Outdoor space	4	4	2	17	15	9	51
Shop	5	13	-	22	10	5	55
Other built-up space	8	7	1	2	2	2	22
Green space	-	7	2	3	14	30	56
Natural detail	24	4	4	-	11	-	43
Garden	7	-	-	-	2	-	9
Rural area	6	12	4	1	1	5	29
Other	-	5	-	1	34	10	48
TOTAL	65	91	13	47	162	84	462

### 6.2.3.2 Looking for Landscape Dimensions

Results presented in table 6.2.2 show that the decision of children as to what they would photograph in their everyday surroundings, and the meaning assigned by them to the photographed objects, are to some extent different from common representations and ideas on landscape. Therefore a correspondence analysis (Fig. 6.2.3) was performed in order to identify “landscape dimensions” or the “hidden” drivers that guide the pupils in their perceptions and the choices they made. Such methods are often used to try and simplify the interpretation of large two-dimensional tables; the aim is to explore the type of dependence between the column and row variables (Greenacre, 2007). This statistical technique (1) allows us to consider synthetically the statistical dependence between the two



**Fig. 6.2.3** Correspondence analysis (source: authors' elaboration)

variables of the row and column of Table 6.2.2 (Why & What), minimizing the problems due to the low number; (2) measures the relative distances between the row and column conditioned frequency distributions of a bivariate table; (3) using these distance matrices, identifies principal factors, or the linear combinations that best summarize the statistical association between the column and row variable; (4) assigns to each row and column modality factorial coordinates that can be represented on one or more levels: when two row-points (or column-points) are near one another, then they have similar conditioned frequencies. For example, in the case of this study, the children clearly assign similar meanings to the row-points “Square” and “Shop” (see table 6.2.2). In addition, given that each row (column) coordinate is the weighted average of the column-points (row-points), when a row-point is near to a column point, this means that the two modalities (row and column) heavily influence one another. This happens, for example, in the case of the row-point “Shop” and the column-point “Functional value”: as seen – once again – in table 6.2.2, where it is quite common for children to give “Shop” a functional value.

Looking at the chart, the Y axis contrasts personal place attachment and aesthetic value (together with object, “selfies”, house, and natural detail) at the bottom, with social relationships, functional value and collective sense of place (along with green and outdoor spaces, rural area, squares and shops) at the top, ranging from what we might call “Me” – a personal and individual dimension – to “We” – a collective and shared dimension. On the other hand, the X axis contrasts personal place attachment (with house, school, animal, object) and social interaction on the left, with aesthetic value (with natural detail and

garden) and ecological value on the right: ranging from what we can call an “In there” dimension to an “Out there” dimension.

These results must be read with caution, since the total sample is small. The findings do, however, reflect the important additional value of the statistical multivariate analysis. Two identified dimensions were not easily discoverable through either the adoption of a theoretical deductive approach or by simply looking at the crosstable. The correspondence analysis shows that the two dimensions “Me & We” and “In there & Out there” appear as two independent forces shaping the landscape of the children who participated in this study. In addition, the two dimensions have approximately the same explanatory strength, amounting to 2/3 of the variability in the self-definitions of landscape.

The factorial plane can be divided into 3 areas, allowing for the identification of diverse styles of how children are relating to landscape:

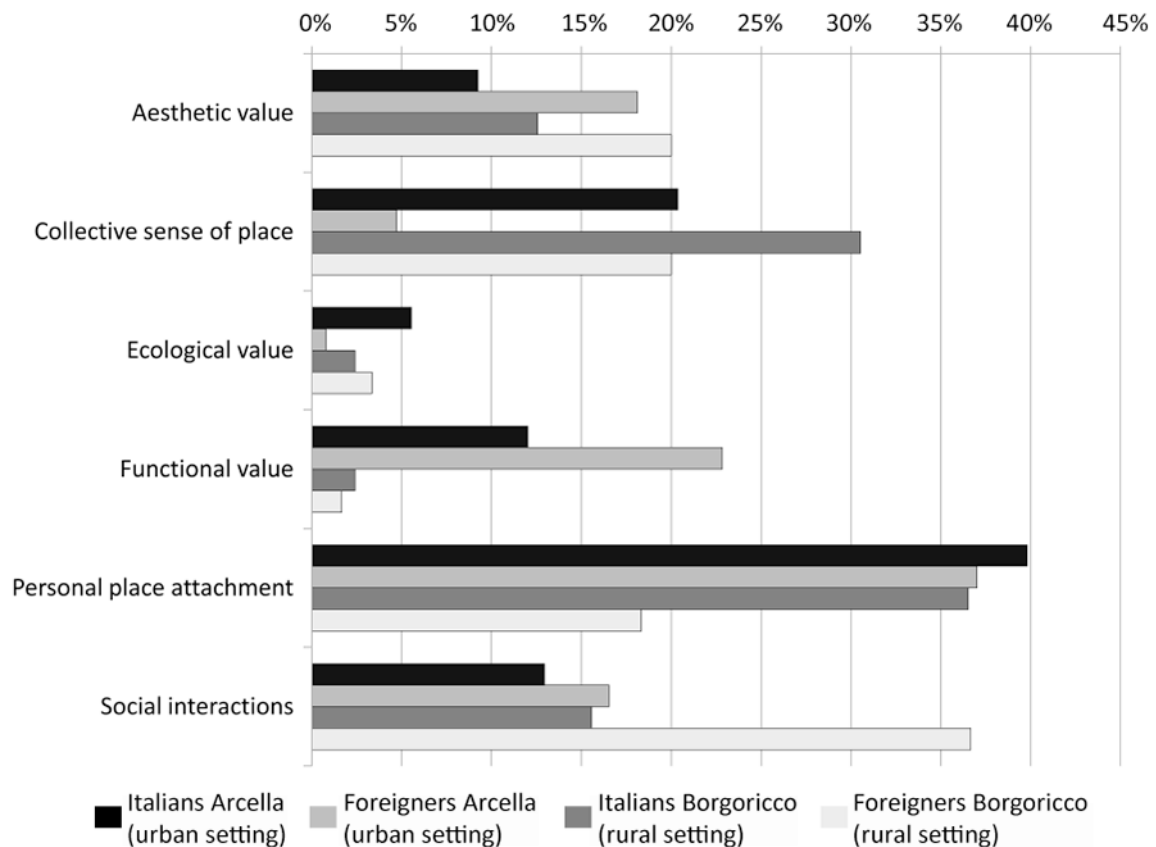
- a. On the bottom left side, a first area of cluster elements appears to be linked to the individual and the inner life of children around the value “personal place attachment”. This first style – called “I-am-in-it” – concerns mainly the individual and shows a sort of “introverted” or “self-centered” relationship with places.
- b. The second area includes elements linked to a collective dimension, somewhere between the “inner reality” and the “outer” one; it includes several landscape elements and values associated with different aspects of the everyday lives of the children. This second style – called “We-live-in-it” – may be characterised by different levels of awareness but generally suggests the building process of a “collective identity”.
- c. The third area, at the bottom right, emphasizes the aesthetic value children give to natural details and gardens, and includes those landscape elements that children seem not to be directly involved with. The third style – called “I-look-at-it” – represents an approach to landscape “at a distance”, from an “out there” or “other” point of view.

### 6.2.3.3 Italians and Immigrants

The sample is not numerous enough to achieve a sufficiently robust correspondence analysis, either when considering the photographs taken by Italian and immigrant children separately, or when differentiating them using other characteristics, such as place of residence (Arcella and Borgoricco) or gender<sup>7</sup>. However, carefully observing the data relative to the connotative categories and splitting the sample into four groups – cross-referencing citizenship and place of residence – (Fig. 6.2.4) shows interesting differences between Italians and non-Italians. While we observe personal place attachment and collective sense of

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7 In addition, the small number of immigrant children does not allow differentiation of the analysis inside this group, even if it is obviously heterogeneous.



**Fig. 6.2.4** Connotative category results divided into four groups (source: authors' elaboration)

place as prevalent meanings among Italians, non-Italians often assign meanings of social interactions, aesthetic value and functional value to landscape elements<sup>8</sup>.

With regard to the three styles described above, one may observe that the first (a) is quite common among both Italian and immigrant children. This is likely due to their age, given that at this early life stage teenagers are defining their personal identity and tend to take place for granted (Hay, 1998). The second style (b) concerns both groups, although in different ways. As highlighted above, collective references are less frequent among immigrants compared to Italians. However, immigrants do place great importance on social relations and this could be read as an attempt to find and build a “shared dimension”. Significantly, the third style (c) is that mostly chosen by immigrant children. They observe nature, plants, flowers, etc. more than Italians do and tend to have both a greater “aesthetic orientation” (Faulstich and Orellana, 1999) and territorial competence, observing landscapes in their surrounding more carefully, compared to their native school companions (Castiglioni et al., 2011; De Nardi, 2012). The attention to natural details and the tendency to attribute aesthetic value to their surroundings can be understood in two complementary ways.

<sup>8</sup> With regard to the denotative categories, Italians take pictures mostly of green spaces and churches, while foreigners pay more attention to natural details and outdoor spaces.

On the one hand, one might interpret the latter as reflecting a feeble relationship with the place of life and a difficult integration process. Natural elements are relatively simple to understand and can be similar to those in the foreigners' homelands, possibly sparking children's memories of those places (Rishbeth and Finney, 2006). Furthermore, assigning aesthetic value is a relatively basic way of relating to a still partially undiscovered place of life, where building more complex relations is demanding – personal place attachment and collective sense of place need time to grow (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976) while social relations can sometimes be problematic (Cologna et al., 2007). On the other hand, these attitudes indicate that immigrant children tend to pay greater attention to details, observing elements that natives don't notice. Foreign children's gaze seems more uncertain and hesitant, and yet also more curious and careful than that of Italians.

Finally, one might ask: is “ethnic origin” or “place” more important in determining children's perceptions of landscape? Answering such a question in a valid way would require carrying out a more thorough quantitative study than was possible here because of the small numbers. However, figure 6.2.4 does show very relevant differences both between the two settings (urban vs rural) and between the two groups of immigrant children when assigning meanings to the landscape: personal place attachment prevails in Arcella, while social relations prevail in Borgoricco. This finding – confirming the results obtained from the qualitative interviews to pupils involved in the auto-photography activity – suggests that immigrants' children relate differently to their surroundings, depending on the places themselves: being an immigrant child in a town neighbourhood or in a countryside village seems to be different. This finding calls for more in-depth studies to be performed.

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## 6.2.4 Conclusions

In drawing conclusions, the most significant aspects are highlighted from exploring landscape from the point of view of local inhabitants. This is a perspective that is rarely considered in scholarly work. The children involved in this study build their relationships with everyday places mainly through personal experiences and memories, but also through their most significant social relationships. A collective sense of place and an aesthetic appreciation might both be expected to prevail in terms of landscape; but they do not appear as the most important meanings assigned to everyday places. Based on empirically derived results, it seems prudent to further explore, through relevant studies, the approach proposed by the European Landscape Convention, which highlights the role of lay people's perceptions in the relationship between population and landscape. The aim would be to also develop theoretical concepts that are able to interpret complex realities better than existing concepts do, and also to build more effective landscape practices.

Results from the analysis of urban and rural contexts demonstrate how children perceive their surrounding landscape in diverse ways. There are perceptual differences between native Italians and immigrants, too. Indeed, differences linked to the contextual setting are as significant as differences connected to cultural and ethnic origin. Considering that



relationships with everyday life places depend on both the characteristics of the people and the landscape, it is important to avoid making generalisations. At the same time, the integration process of first and second generation immigrants should not be observed and managed in a univocal way; one must consider that every landscape can mould individuals and communities differently.

The focus on differences between Italian and immigrant children reveals that the latter take an approach to landscape that appears, in this research, to be more “distant”. Immigrant children appear to be observing formal aspects of everyday environments more than Italian children would, using what may be called an “I-look-at-it” style. Interestingly, this style is, to a certain extent, similar to that described by Tuan (1980) and Olwig (1991) who state that, in order to consciously attach meanings to landscape, it is necessary to distance oneself from it. Quite possibly the immigrant children can, in this study, maintain this “detached attitude” precisely because they come from another country, while Italian children, being unconsciously rooted in their everyday life places, have more difficulty in being detached. Tuan and Olwig also explain, however, that a mature sense of place is developed only when a “detached/decentering” phase is followed by a “recentering” one, in which people “return” to their landscape and observe it with greater awareness. The immigrant children who participated in this study appear not to be “entering” this recentering phase yet, thus remaining somewhat less involved in their places of life. In the meanwhile, their Italian peers “are part of the landscape and therefore are not able to detach themselves from their physical surroundings” (Jutla, 2000). Thus, while native Italians seem to lack a sense of detachment which would facilitate their ability to *see* the landscape, immigrants lack the rootedness that fosters the building of a stronger relationship with everyday places. Their detachment can be interpreted both as a careful and mature gaze upon their place of life, as well as a difficulty in developing a closer relationship to it.

Given that Italians and immigrants have different perspectives, it follows that encounter and dialogue between these two groups “through” landscape, and a shared and collective vision of the latter, could help foster the integration process. Indeed, during the study reported here, children were observed discussing their different perceptions as well as the cultural features of landscapes. These discussions provided the opportunity for children to share experiences, opinions and feelings, as well as to deconstruct stereotypes. As such, landscape can be considered an effective tool for intercultural mediation while, simultaneously, providing a valuable instrument for investigating these topics. Moreover, the set of methods used in this study seems to be effective in highlighting the main facets of the relationships between young people and places. Applying these methods to larger samples would contribute to gaining deeper knowledge of these issues among different groups of children.

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