



*Ministero della cultura*

## **Italian application for the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition**

The Ministry of Culture (hereinafter Ministry), following the invitation to participate in the 8th edition of the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe, has identified the Italian project which best represents Italian landscape culture and most effectively demonstrates alignment with the European Landscape Convention.

As in the past, this year the Ministry wanted to re-propose the effective methodology adopted in previous editions for the selection of the Italian candidacy for the COE Award, which allowed the identification of high-quality projects, and at the same time constituted an opportunity to raise awareness among a wider audience about the landscape's cultural and social values. Therefore, an open and transparent procedure has been implemented and the competition announcement has been disseminated through a widespread campaign.

Since 2016-17, the Ministry has reinforced the importance of the selection process of the Italian candidacy for the COE Award, given that the selected projects are awarded the National Landscape Prize on the occasion of the National Landscape Day celebration (March 14th).

Thanks to the strong commitment of the Ministry, the participation in the Italian competition has had a positive response, and 73 candidatures have been received through online applications, despite the limitations due to the COVID-19 emergency in previous years.

The Jury was set up by the Ministry involving academics and experts, who are engaged in various aspects of the field of landscape.

After an in-depth examination, the Jury identified a range of 17 particularly interesting projects. Among these, **“Orti Generali. The countryside comes to town”**, presented by Orti Generali social enterprise, was identified as the worthiest of representing the Italian application for the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe.

The project represents an exemplary experience of reclaiming and managing leftover agricultural areas in a metropolitan context, and is strongly inspired by sustainability and social equity, in full harmony with the European landscape convention objectives.

The research project started in 2010, leading to a four-year participatory project involving schools, associations, gardeners and the community from the Mirafiori neighbourhood, an industrial area located south of Turin. A park along the sides of the Sangone river, abandoned, in decay and illegally occupied was the object of a radical transformation and is now a park made of allotment gardens, accessible to residents and visitors.

The addition of academic collaborations and other partnerships has helped sustain the innovative and experimental character of the initiative, granting a scientific background to the general approach, for example in terms of the cultivation aspects.

The original NGO which conceived the project was created by a landscape architect and a sociologist; it then developed into a social enterprise, with the objective of managing a vast area entrusted to them by the city council, by fighting its state of neglect through the development of urban allotments. This



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experience represents an example of how the property management expenses for public administrations can be converted into landscape value, having a strong economic and social impact.

250 families living nearby use these plots today to be self-sufficient, implementing organic methods of cultivation, and putting into practice active citizenship principles. They are increasingly conscious of the importance of a lifestyle centred around prevention and wellbeing, fostered by healthy and ethical eating, and coming from local sources.

One of the social objectives of the project is the inclusion of a variety of subjects, paying special attention to disadvantaged people, foreigners and people with disabilities. Specific actions have been aimed at their active involvement, for example by allocating a share of the allotments to people in need.

The Italian jury especially appreciated the strong connection to the landscape structures pre-existing the industrial transformation, with the reintroduction of plantations in rows of willows and mulberries along the canals.

A large percentage of the overall space isn't allocated, but is destined to the enjoyment of the public, counting 170 total gardens which range in size between 50, 75 and 100 sqm. In addition, a collective garden for social inclusion, and an educational garden for school activities and family laboratories have been created.

Among the common spaces there is a refurbished farmhouse, where the gardeners and visitors can sit and have a snack, and which also represents one of the sources of revenue of the project.

One of the strong features of the project resides in the thorough care put into each single aspect:

- the minimal and archetypical design of the community spaces, sheds and fencing, drawn from the collective imagination, gives the gardens a contemporary yet familiar trait;
- the colourful, impactful graphic design, is consistent across membership cards, information booklets, and online contents;
- the effectiveness of the communication strategies, implemented through the website and other channels to vehiculate the experience and the events;
- finally, the originality in the selection of themes and contents of the initiatives, driven by a consistent and lively cultural impulse maintained throughout the various phases of the project.

Among the most interesting initiatives we find the film festival Ortometraggi, centred on sustainability and passion for farmland. Moreover, meetings, theoretical and practical classes are regularly being offered, fostering environmentally friendly, low-impact practices (growing organic vegetables, beekeeping, waste reuse, permaculture, etc.). The "gran gala" events are social dinners, based on products grown in the gardens by the members, often involving fundraising campaigns for the common new development goals. "Cucina popolare" has been the object of specific dinners, developed in cooperation with the University of Pollenzo, based on circular and zero waste cooking practice, in the context of the European call FUSILLI (Fostering the Urban food System Transformation through Innovative Living Labs Implementation).

The project was selected for the effectiveness of the implemented actions and the strategies that allowed the achievement of the set objectives, in compliance with the vast majority of the objectives set out in the Ministry call for projects:

1. Requalification and enhancement of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage.



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2. Redevelopment and enhancement of ancient uses and rural landscapes.
3. Redevelopment of urban, peri-urban areas and degraded or abandoned urban peripheries.
4. Contrast to the hydrogeological risk and to climate change.
5. Environmental sustainability (pollution reduction, eco-sustainable technologies, sustainable land use)
6. Cultural integration between old and new residents.
8. Attention to accessibility and inclusion.

Recognizing the important qualities of the project, the Jury also appreciated the compliance of the implemented actions with the four criteria established within the COE Landscape Award rules document:

In terms of **sustainable development**, the Jury selected the project due to its urban regeneration value. It is clear how, starting from the needs of the local community, the regeneration of the site has turned a neglected and underused area in the suburban neighbourhood of Mirafiori, south of Turin, into a quality landscape, capable of responding effectively to ecological needs, offering new economic opportunities and becoming a tool for social inclusion. All the practices have involved multiple aspects of sustainability, integrating its environmental, economic and social dimensions.

The first action has been the removal of waste materials that had been hoarded during the previous decades along the river Sangone banks. Besides promoting a positive land use strategy, the vegetable garden allotments follow organic methods of production. A large part of the events aims at increasing environmental consciousness. The enhancement of the area has taken into account the preservation of the existing historical patterns, and in particular of the traditional irrigation canals (*bealere*), which have organised the landscape structure through the last five centuries, and now represent a spatial reference for the garden lots layout; their presence is underlined by ancient apple and pear trees, as well as unmowed grass, for the benefit of pollinating insects. Along the central pathway, mulberries have been planted, an iconic species with a great environmental, historical and cultural value.

With regard to the criterion of **exemplary value**, the project represents best practice in landscape management, as well as an enhancement and transformation model that can be replicated in other residual agricultural areas, especially in the suburban areas of medium to large cities. The bottom-up participated process in taking care of the local landscape, triggering territorial transformation is undoubtedly an example of a good practice that could be inspiring in other contexts.

The project is exemplary also with regard to the materials used (chestnut wood cut and processed in the province of Turin, fixed furniture and fencing without concrete bases), the organic cultivation and maintenance of green areas and the digitisation of the automatic irrigation system, which reduces waste and copes with drought episodes.

Because of its innovative features, the project is being studied and used as an example in several cases of strategic planning for the management of residual agricultural areas, for example the city of Turin's strategic plan for green infrastructure.

Numerous delegations have visited from the rest of Europe and beyond, including France, Switzerland, Germany, Norway and South Korea.

As far as the **public participation** criterion is concerned, the project's design emerged from a collaboration between a public entity, a community foundation and a third-sector entity. It has been conceived and developed together with a number of local stakeholders, starting with the local





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community. The realization of the project idea was made possible thanks to the volunteers and active citizens' support. Since its very beginning, the project has been based on public participation and cooperation between different kinds of entities and organisations.

It is important to underline that from the start, all phases of the conception and implementation were determined by consensus with the general public, which for the first time defined ad hoc regulatory instruments for the creation of this unprecedented project.

Although the project is deeply rooted at a local level, in line with wider institutional policies, it was made possible thanks to the conspicuous contribution of a national initiative to support projects on Smart Cities, Communities and Social Innovation, as well as several funding lines of European initiatives.

People of all ages are involved as volunteers, working at the food stand, and regularly carrying out the maintenance of the park.

In terms of the **awareness-raising** criterion, the project has shown the ability to effectively disseminate landscape values from the local area to the European scale. The transformation process has renewed the community sense and increased environmental consciousness in local residents from the Mirafiori neighbourhood. Many of the former illegal gardeners, squatting along the Sangone river, have actively participated in the cleaning up of the area and in the creation of Orti Generali, opening up their gardens for laboratories in collaboration with schools and other organisations. Educational activities reach different targets and channel both formal and informal education, involving a large network of stakeholders, not only on a local scale.

Through the classes and laboratories everyone can acquire sets of skills which can be later put in practice directly in the gardening activities.

Finally, one of the main effects of the projects can be defined as the creation of a community which recognizes itself thanks to the new landscape, and the collaboration which shaped it.

For the reasons explained above and for the quality of the implemented actions – further detailed in the application form and in the attached documentation – the candidate project has been identified as the most deserving to represent Italy for the 8th edition of the COE Landscape Award.



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