

ARICPELAGO BALKANI

ALTERNATIVE MAPS

by Claudia Zanfi (*Green Island* director)

The aim of the project *ALTERNATIVE MAPS* is to investigate the urban space and to propose alternative eco-tours of the Balkans, an area marked by geopolitical, socio-territorial changing and phenomenon of rapid transformation in the perception of places. This new geographical exploration of the territory will help a better understanding of the places and of the local communities. The project aims to establish a dialogue between interdisciplinary artistic and cultural activities, to stimulate an open debate, while reconstructing the role of art, its responsibility and its relation to society.

We've explored and mapped the **Landscape identity of the Mediterranean**, its many faces, its importance and its future. Thinking in terms of what the place can give, we may discover all the different ways in which we might understand its different layers of complexity. The relationships between different territories, shores, cities and inhabitants. A vertical and horizontal exploration of the landscape between East and West, North and South. A round trip providing new arrivals, contacts, migrations, contaminations, and endless propagations. We've initiated a circular trip, investigating the complexity and the porosity of the Mediterranean borders and its landscape in areas such as Tanger, Marseille, Lampedusa, Cyprus, Beirut, Istanbul, Alexandria, Tel Aviv/Jaffa, and the Balkans. A floating symmetry that generates the possibility of new maps.

Talking about the Mediterranean the sociologist Fernand Braudel points out the contradictions of the single and multiple sea, *"divided between north, south, east and west", yet united by a climate, a culture and vegetation which share common features from Cadiz to Beirut, from Jerusalem to Sicily. All within the greatest extent of terra firma in the world: the great and gigantic unit that is the Euro-Afro-Asian continent, a planet in its own right, a place where everything happened early on, and where man played the great scenario of his universal history, where the decisive exchanges took place. The sea of choices, as backdrop to the great events of our history and of our future"*.

As we can see on these 'new possible maps', some borders are vanishing, some others are growing. But LANDSCAPE HAS NO BORDERS! In fact we can find mobility without borders for fishes, birds, winds, seeds, water. And landscape can also be 'emotional', an immaterial place in our minds or in our memories (see images).

Therefore we've initiated a journey through **Alternative Cultural Landscapes and Sustainable Itinerary** in the Mediterranean area. A challenging program of eco-tours, starting from Italy, crossing water borders, travelling by boat or by bus, using mainly public and local transportations, to discover the natural, architectural and cultural aspect of the Balkans. The program ALTERNATIVE MAPS functions as a 'cultural antenna' and 'people encounter'; we have animate some of the main squares of the mentioned cities and create participatory moments for the citizens. The images features a great mosaic that brings together landscapes, ideas, emotions, photographs and images by the artists, called on to rethink and examine the Mediterranean area as a complex open space, a place of exchange and encounter, of freedom and equity, a crossroads of cultures.

In the Mediterranean Landscape we could find wild uncontaminated areas, and other places with architectural or cultural infrastructures. During our eco-tours we've created a series of meetings with local communities, small agro-producers; we slept in farms and small villages; we've organised guided tours by botanists, local artists and writers, to discover the most hidden places, and to find '*unity in the diversity*'. Cartography is thus the result of geography. Geography is not only a place on a map, but also knowledge, relationships and meetings.

Finally we've experienced the **LANDSCAPE AS A SOCIAL NARRATION**.

This program is part of 10 years of research, including main projects such as *Atlante Mediterraneo, From the Balkans to the Baltic, Maps, borders and new geography, Arcipelago Balkani*.

It has been developed with the support of the EU Cultural and Educational Office.

In collaboration with 9 European Universities, Faculty of Architecture, Landscape Design, Sociology;
with more than 50 institutional partners in all the Mediterranean area.

Along with this program a series of additional activities have been organized:

lectures and symposium; walk city tours;
urban interventions; international meetings;
workshops for kids and young students;
video and photo exhibitions;
editorial projects and publications conceived as new 'travel guides'.

More info on: www.amaze.it