

Alle origini della lettura ecosistemica nella pianificazione. Cities, and the Soil They Grow From

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Paragraph VI

As specific illustration of the need for regional planning - and wellnigh world-planning- what greater field for geotechnics than Afforestation? We need not here recapitulate the many endeavors in progress-in various parts of Europe, the ruined Mediterranean especially; yet also from Scotland to India, and back again, and similarly in the United States, from great schemes for the too largely desolated Appalachians to the admirable educational lessons of Ar-

bor Day. Assuming these as known, they are all admittedly insufficient to cope with a situation so manifold.

Capital, and on a great scale, is needed for such task, and this has to be sunk, at first with no return, and then with small, say for ten years with even the quicker-growing trees, and for fifteen, twenty, thirty years and more, for slower ones. Under these circumstances, old men see no return. Young men need all they have for their start in life; and by

L'emergere del tema dei servizi ecosistemici nell'ambito della pianificazione urbana e regionale, per quanto innovativo possa apparire nel dibattito corrente, di cui si cerca di rendere conto in questo numero di Contesti, se non una consuetudine nella storia del Planning trova comunque importanti riferimenti nell'originario formarsi della disciplina. Tra questi, in particolare, emerge quello di Patrick Geddes che attraverso una particolarissima lente interdisciplinare definisce le coordinate di uno stabile e fiorente insediamento umano basato sulla

relazione co-evolutiva tra genere umano, dotazioni e “funzionamenti” dell’ambiente naturale. Il brano che segue, tratto dal secondo Talks from the Outlook Tower: “Cities and the soil they grow from” del 1925, restituisce, tramite un breve estratto (sez. VI), la rilevanza nella lettura Geddesiana attribuita ad un corretto uso, delle dotazione naturale di una regione, dal cui può dipendere alternativamente il fiorire o il declino di una civiltà. In particolare, Geddes in questo brano, a partire dalla osservazione dei nefasti effetti erosivi indotti della deforestazione nelle aree collinari e montane colloca il tema della riforestazione e della gestione arborea all’interno della pianificazione regionale come fattore fondamentale per la rigenerazione del territorio e il recupero del suo originario splendore. Una chiara ed anticipatoria definizione del tema e del problema del “servizio ecosistemico” in cui Geddes, come spesso accade, adotta nel dominio del planning una lettura non riduttiva bensì organica e complessa. Ciò mentre propone al tempo stesso una sua particolare ipotesi risolutiva e pratica derivante da una postura geografica attiva, lungo una linea di azione ad un tempo individuale e collettiva. In questo caso ridefinendo

l’intervento di riforestazione come un investimento di lungo periodo che, superando i limiti dell’azione pubblica, in analogia con le forme di assicurazione personale, a fronte di un moderato costo individuale rateizzato e distribuito nel tempo, permette di maturare un rilevante valore, ambientale, territoriale e collettivo altrettanto tangibile ed efficace quanto lo stesso valore di mercato di un bosco maturo. In definitiva un “prestito” ma anche una garanzia per il futuro per un insediamento resiliente ed una comunità vitale.

maturity they have their funds fully involved in their concerns, and in ways of more speedy promise. Hence many cry to the state to intervene, and this now and then it does, but with measures in most countries, indeed all, quite inadequate. Yet a government has no magic purse; and, under growing democratic conditions, too often but a hand-to-mouth existence. Let us therefore face the situation - that no ordinary funds are available! On closer examination, there comes into view one fund, and that not inconsiderable, of annual savings by an ever-increasing proportion of the public, which are not invested in any highly remunerative returns, though appreciably cumulative within a lifetime.

I refer, of course, to our regularly paid premiums of life-insurance. But what dare our companies do with these, save invest them upon the best security they can find; and therefore at comparatively low interest? One of the most frequent forms of this investment, in fact the predominant one, must needs be in mortgages upon land: for they thus avoid the uncertainties, even risks, of its cultivation. Yet is not this task of afforestation one - even the very one- which may thus be undertaken? Suppose we form a Forestry Insurance Company, and so put our premiums into trees? They grow slowly, yet at compound interest, while attractive we are sleeping, and they are ready to be cut down and realized - at normally increasing values also, as timber and fuel prospects indicate - in time for our own life-cutting by the inexorable shears. True, there are forest fires, and blights and disasters of many kinds, but existing forest owners already insure against these; and so must we. The technique of forestry is well known: skilled direction and labor can readily be had, and on very reasonable terms, so attractive is such life. And this also of peculiarly high character; for the forester, of all occupations, with his long foresight, best learns the wisdom of his craft, with all its varied seasonal labors, from planting to felling, and then replanting, and with patient and thrifty vigilance meanwhile. And if so, is not all this an invaluable element of insurance?

Many years before the famous "rubber-boom", I had been preaching as botanist and tree-lover,

yet something of rural economist too, coming need of rubber, and the desirability of planting accordingly. But to deaf ears, for "the practical man" was not practical enough: and when in this case he did come to act, it was in haste of speedy returns.

Our forestry, then, as insurance, begins with family finance, at one end; yet it is also regional development at the other. As such, it is in principle a substantial economic interest, to be regulated and guarded by governments. But if so, here is another social element of security: so with all this why should not its policies be esteemed and come into demand as have those of older companies, on their existing business basis? Ordinary insurance reports are after all not very interesting reading, but ours would have cheering photo-blocks of its forests in growth: and it might even encourage its shareholders to come and see, and camp, in their own property, of pines, oranges or oil-palms, as their travel might allow. Surely these are form of advertising more interesting than can be mere ordinary print; and calculated to make new agents, interested in the propaganda, and not solely in their commissions?

So far we have been outlining this scheme towards afforestation as a new and separate undertaking: but may we not also incite the existing insurance companies to look into the matter, and begin experimenting for themselves?

Enough however of this illustration; for this is not a prospectus but an example of the thesis

of these papers; that of the coming in of survey and service, of geography and geotechnics along lines of constructive individual and social action, and towards turning declines and falls into renewing rise.