



The construction of the country landscape in Veneto plains (North of Italy) during 18th-21st centuries

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This paper focuses on the transformation that has taken place in the last four centuries in Veneto's plain in northern Italy.

The analysis of statistical data over a long period of time has made it possible to chronologically reconstruct the gradual transformation of wetlands into arable land, suitable for human settlement and for the development of industrial activities.

Particularly relevant are the policies adopted by the Republic of Venice (14th-18th centuries) with regard to the management of waters, policies which were continued by the Italian State after its unification in 1861.

The evolution of the concept of land reclamation gradually came to include draining, hygienic, agrarian and environmental factors, paying attention to the specific character of both mountain and lagoon areas.

Over many centuries new country areas were created, 2/5 of them located below sea level, which can be cultivated due to complex systems of canalization and water pumping.

Both the State and landowners invested capital in a project that was not only meant to sustain private interest but that also met public needs. Since 1882 (when the Baccarini law was passed) the subject of the 'sanitary reclamation' began to be discussed in Italy. This concerned 1/16 of the total surface of the country, 400,000 hectares of which in Veneto, where malaria was directly or indirectly responsible for the death of thousands of people.

New livelihoods substituted those of the past: some economies based, for instance, on the harvesting of the marshes' products or on the common use of marginal lands disappeared.

The recent process of industrialization in Veneto, often carried out with little consideration for the environment, has eventually opened up a new chapter in the history of the countryside of this region, that of environmental and landscape enhancement.