

## Paesaggio - en



### Franco Corregia

The rural hills of the Asti province are renowned for their landscape, scenery, dynamic forms and widespread anthropologic activities. Over the centuries, agriculture, inhabited villages (particularly those found on hilltops), and vastly reorganised infrastructure and transport networks have dramatically shaped the geometric, symmetric and contrasting features of the natural landscape, including the eco-systems found on individual hilltops. Even today, mans extensive activities haven't had a major impact on the hills and natural landscapes, allowing the traditional cultures to survive. However, these elements that have managed to not be completely overpowered by the landscape have become a harmonious part of the surroundings.

The 22 councils in the Asti region involved in the Romanico-Monferrato project lie within these hills characterised by discontinuous flows, orchards and woodlands, high up pastures and sentinel like vineyards, yet is still peppered with ancient villages, bell towers, churches and castles that preserve the region's history. In this particular area, despite the closeness and natural affinity of the hills, they may not, at first glance, show huge differences, yet are surprisingly diverse when it comes to their capacity of retaining biotypes and micro-environments.

The morphology of the hills contributes to the lithological and geological foundations (including the pulvometric and thermal influences) of the soil. This is in contrast to the lands surface, with its diverse elements (orographic, topographic and edographic) and microclimates that determine the degree of plant coverage and the use of the soil. These unique environmental elements that are at the heart of the biocenosis mosaic create a haven for animal and fauna biodiversity, far exceeding that of any other region. This varied and preserved environment allows for the growth or crucial, yet vulnerable, diverse reservoirs essential for the evolution and harmony of the region.

The essence (genius loci) of the Asti hills is another crucial element in defining the region, its cultures, population, history and identity. The Asti-Monferrina hills, when examined more closely, are finely dotted by historical legacies of artistic, architectural and cultural presences that are an intrinsic part of the area and create a profound essence of Piedmont. The land is dominated by the presence of towers, medieval castles, churches and chapels, farmhouses, watermill ruins and fortress walls and wayside shrines. A layer of precious relics lie nestled in the hidden folds in the hills, bestowing on many hidden spaces the role of Piedmont's cultural authenticity. In the high grounds and wide valleys of the Piemontese hills there is a sheltered and isolated stillness, guarded by the old, forgotten walls and soft echoes of distant fables and memories. An uninterrupted and corresponding sequence of cultural microelements created a multicoloured and complex mosaic depicting ruins that survived the seas of ancient, wise and sacred worlds shrouded in legend.

There is no doubt about the fact that at the heart of this unique and integrated network of emerging historical elements, the most significant ones remain the austere Romanic churches, that for centuries have been hidden in the shadows of the woods or enclosed within village walls. This churches in the Asti hills lie the vast archives detailing the history of Piedmont.

The noteworthy quality (hence the strongest point) of this land is not the presence of single exceptional elements, but the presence of interrelated and interdependent factors that work together to distinguish an environmentally and culturally rich area in respect to other protected regions. An altogether peculiar, yet extraordinary factor is the mix of natural landscapes, history, artistry, and

anthropologic elements of the hills (holistically considered inseparable from their physicality and culture) that seem to contribute to the preserved history of the region.