

# Landscape as a symbol of power: the high/low marker

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Recibido: 29 de abril de 2013

Enviado a evaluar: 6 de mayo de 2013

Aceptado: 3 de octubre de 2013

## ABSTRACT

Space is a complex texture of signs, so that any landscape can be read as a history of symbols of Powers which have designed it. Many authors (Gregory, 1978; Massey and Jess, 2001) have argued that senses of space are inextricably linked to Power relations. The study of social structures could consist in analyzing the ways in which social relations accumulate on a space. Generally, there is a connection between Powers and Spaces. Powers tend to create a hierarchy of positions: the most authoritative is in the highest location, at the opposite the masses are relegated until the Lowest one. This hierarchy is naturally unstable, since the fights among different kinds of Powers and between the Power and the subjected masses are a constant in History. These fights design the landscape with the symbols of architecture so that to study a landscape actually means to read the History of Powers and also to write a Geography of Spatial Relationships of Powers. The signs of these fights are markers which can be detected in the landscapes; they reflect different positions deriving from the results of these never-ending struggles originated from democratic issues or from authoritarian decisions. Generally, who gains the decisional capacity tends to become authoritarian and occupy high positions; who is dominated is naturally relegated in a low position. Consequently, these contrasts spread out the landscape with high/low markers. It can be argued that who decides *what* place, actually decides *who* are the people that are supposed to live in it and imposes them what they should make into it and with it. A map cannot describe these political fluxes, so Geography needs new approaches to analyze both individual and collective actions shaping landscapes. There is a strict link between society and place. According to the literature of Social Geography, spatial theories are necessarily linked to social theories, because social structures (a result of the distribution of Power) derive from the accumulation of social actions. We could consider that spatiality is shaped by whole communities or by oligarchies which represent themselves and spread out their image through designed landscapes. Some of these can trigger forms of democracy if they include people, so that they can *involve* communities in the decision process. Other spaces can *exclude* them if they keep the dichotomy between rulers and dominated. In this paper we propose a new approach to grasp these different processes of landscape-making: we apply a semiotic model to several landscapes in Asia, Middle East, Europe. This model is built on two oppositions to study the high/low markers: 1- social welfare vs. oligarchic well-being; 2- democratic participation vs. authoritarian command-ship. In this view, what people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the Earth. We *are* the place-world we imagine and

therefore space is the more significant dimension, structuring personal experience. Space rather than time or history, should be studied to understand what kind of Power creates a landscape.

**Key words:** "high/low", "exclusion/inclusion", dictatorship, democracy

## El paisaje como un símbolo de poder: El "high/low marker"

### RESUMEN

El espacio es una textura compleja de signos, de modo que cualquier paisaje se puede leer como una historia de los símbolos de potencias que se hayan diseñado. Muchos autores (Gregory, 1978; Massey y Jess, 2001) han argumentado que los sentidos del espacio están indisolublemente ligadas a las relaciones de poder. El estudio de las estructuras sociales podría consistir en el análisis de las formas en que las relaciones sociales se acumulan en un espacio. En general, existe una relación entre Poderes y Espacios. Poderes tienden a crear una jerarquía de posiciones: la más autorizada está en el lugar más alto, al frente de las masas son relegados hasta el más bajo. Esta jerarquía es naturalmente inestable, ya que las peleas entre diferentes tipos de poderes y entre el Poder y las masas sometidas son una constante en la historia. Estas peleas diseñan el paisaje con los símbolos de la arquitectura de modo que para estudiar un paisaje realmente significa leer la Historia de Poderes y también para escribir una geografía de las relaciones espaciales de las potencias. Los signos de estas peleas son marcadores que pueden ser detectados en los paisajes, sino que reflejan las diferentes posiciones que se derivan de los resultados de estas interminables luchas origen en cuestiones democráticas o de las decisiones autoritarias. Por lo general, quien gana la capacidad de decisión tiende a ser autoritaria y ocupar altos cargos, que está dominada es relegado de forma natural en una posición baja. En consecuencia, estos contrastes se extienden los paisajes con marcadores de altas / bajas. Se puede argumentar que quien decide qué lugar, en realidad decide quién es la gente que se supone que viven en ella y les impone lo que deben hacer en ella y con ella. Un mapa no puede describir los flujos políticos, así Geografía necesita nuevos enfoques para analizar tanto las acciones individuales y colectivas que conforman paisajes. Existe una relación estrecha entre la sociedad y el lugar. De acuerdo con la literatura de Geografía Social, las teorías espaciales están necesariamente vinculadas a las teorías sociales, porque las estructuras sociales (resultado de la distribución de energía) se derivan de la acumulación de acciones sociales. Podríamos considerar que la espacialidad está conformado por comunidades enteras o por las oligarquías que representan a sí mismos y extienden su imagen a través de paisajes diseñados. Algunos de estos pueden desencadenar las formas de la democracia si se incluyen a las personas, para que puedan involucrar a las comunidades en el proceso de decisión. Otros espacios pueden excluirlos si mantienen la dicotomía entre los gobernantes y los dominados. En este trabajo se propone un nuevo enfoque para comprender los diferentes procesos de paisaje de decisiones: se aplica un modelo semiótico de varios paisajes de Asia, Oriente Medio y Europa. Este modelo se basa en dos oposiciones para estudiar las altas / bajas marcadores: 1 - el bienestar social frente oligárquico bienestar, 2 - participación democrática vs autoritaria de mando buque En este punto de vista, lo que las personas hacen de sus lugares está estrechamente relacionada con lo que hacen de sí mismos como miembros de la sociedad y de los habitantes de la Tierra. Somos el lugar en el mundo que imaginamos, por lo que el espacio es la dimensión más importante, la estructuración de la experiencia personal. Espacio más que el tiempo o la historia, debe ser estudiado para entender qué tipo de energía crea un paisaje.

**Palabras clave:** "Alta / baja", "exclusión / inclusión", dictadura, democracia.

## Le paysage comme un symbole du pouvoir: le "marqueur haut / bas"

### RÉSUMÉ

L'espace est une texture complexe de signes , de sorte que n'importe quel paysage peut être lu comme une histoire des symboles des puissances qui l'ont conçu . De nombreux auteurs ( Gregory , 1978; Massey et Jess , 2001) ont fait valoir que les sens de l'espace sont inextricablement liées aux relations de pouvoir . L'étude des structures sociales pourrait consister à analyser la façon dont les relations sociales s'accumulent sur un espace. En général, il existe un lien entre puissances et des espaces. Pouvoirs ont tendance à créer une hiérarchie des positions : le plus autorité est au plus haut lieu , à l'opposé des masses sont relégués jusqu'à ce que le plus bas. Cette hiérarchie est naturellement instable , car les combats entre les différentes sortes de pouvoirs et entre le pouvoir et les masses soumises sont une constante dans l'histoire . Ces combats concevoir le paysage avec les symboles de l'architecture ainsi que d'étudier un paysage signifie réellement pour lire l'histoire des pouvoirs et aussi d'écrire une géographie des relations spatiales des pouvoirs. Les signes de ces combats sont des marqueurs qui peuvent être détectés dans les paysages ; elles reflètent différentes positions découlant des résultats de ces luttes sans fin provenaient enjeux démocratiques ou des décisions autoritaires. En règle générale, qui gagne le pouvoir décisionnel tend à devenir autoritaire et d'occuper des postes élevés , qui est dominé est naturellement relégué dans une position basse . Par conséquent, ces contrastes répartis le paysage avec des marqueurs élevées / basses. On peut faire valoir que qui décide de ce lieu , décide réellement qui sont les gens qui sont censés vivre en elle et leur impose ce qu'ils doivent faire en elle et avec elle . Une carte ne peut pas décrire ces flux politiques , de sorte Géographie besoin de nouvelles approches pour analyser les actions individuelles et collectives qui façonnent les paysages. Il existe un lien étroit entre la société et le lieu. Selon la littérature de géographie sociale , les théories spatiales sont nécessairement liées à des théories sociales , parce que les structures sociales ( à la suite de la distribution de l'énergie ) proviennent de l' accumulation d'actions sociales . Nous pourrions considérer que la spatialité est façonnée par des communautés entières ou par des oligarchies qui se représentent et étalées leur image à travers des paysages conçus . Certains de ces éléments peuvent déclencher des formes de démocratie si elles incluent les personnes , afin qu'elles puissent impliquer les communautés dans le processus de décision. D'autres espaces peuvent les exclure s'ils gardent la dichotomie entre les gouvernants et les dominés . Dans cet article, nous proposons une nouvelle approche pour saisir ces différents processus de paysage de décision : nous appliquons un modèle sémiotique de plusieurs paysages d'Asie , du Moyen- Orient, en Europe . Ce modèle est construit sur deux oppositions pour étudier les hautes / basses marqueurs : 1 - La protection sociale contre oligarchique bien-être ; 2 - la participation démocratique vs autoritaire de commande envoi sous ce point de vue , ce que les gens font de leurs lieux est étroitement liée à ce qu'ils font d'eux-mêmes en tant que membres de la société et des habitants de la Terre. Nous sommes l'endroit du monde que nous imaginons et donc l'espace est la dimension plus importante , la structuration de l'expérience personnelle. L'espace plutôt que le temps ou l'histoire, devrait être étudiée pour comprendre ce genre de pouvoir crée un paysage.

**Mots-clés:** "haut / bas", "exclusion / inclusion", la dictature, la démocratie.

### 1. FOREWORD

This work concerns the semiotics of landscape. Maps represent human activities, buildings, structures, etc...through symbols, but symbols are also directly expressed in the landscape when they represent the hidden values of political or religious power. These symbols are usually expressed through architectural features. Generally high elements or positions are used to symbolize the aristocratic or oligarchic power, low positions are reserved for population masses.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Space is generally analyzed according to the cardinal points, but the constructed, socio-economic-political space is analyzed by levels. These levels are interpreted through symbols and revealed with markers designed by Power's dynamics. Landscape tells its history and can be read as a network of Spatial Relationships of Power which have planned the patterns of space.

Different kinds of Powers have always contrasted each other and marked their own spaces. In the framework of spatial design the hierarchies of Powers are continuously created and modified, changing the interpersonal relationships of Powers, quite a fundamental human characteristic, repeated since the antiquity.

Any Power cannot be taken for granted, but as provisional, so that a complicated plot of levels is stratified in the space. This plot can be detected observing the contrast between the high and low markers in the landscape, in which obviously High symbolizes the Power, Low the subjection. Human relations are always dynamic, so the High/Low relation is continually modified through the struggles which logically start from the Low towards the High, and from the High to the Low. Modern times, since French and American Revolutions, especially testify the rebellions from the Low which fights to get the High. In this fight, the subjected ones try to withdraw space away from the winners in higher position. These last ones (individuals or Powers) cannot accept any interference or compromise: they try to keep the *status quo* through the force, but a privileged condition can be subtracted only through violence. A struggle is triggered by this High/Low dynamic; sometimes the Political Power's *defaillance* can be sustained by a big economic Power. In fact, tension is softened when a part of Power is yielded, even if Political Power can be kept in an easier way with the donation of a fraction of Economic Power, from which many kinds of corruption can derive.

The subjected ones believe and hope to sort out from the political exclusion, but traditional Political Power gets stronger when it works together with Economic Power; it disguises itself in order to avoid direct contrasts and to maintain its privileged position.

A never-ending social conflict is the main result of this dynamic.

Nowadays, the present situation of global political and economic crisis is giving rise to a sort of helpless passivity so that people feel comfort in others who share the same conditions. If the situation is common for many, it is possible to accept to stay in a Low position, but this is the end of Democracy.

## 3. TO READ LANDSCAPE THROUGH HIGH/LOW MARKERS

According to Yi-Fu Tuan (2001), there are some architecture markers, like high/low and inside/outside, which can be considered as a changeless element in our history: in fact, "people everywhere recognize these distinctions, but the awareness may be quite vague. The constructed form has the power to heighten the awareness and accentuate the difference in emotional temperature between inside and outside"

(107). The high/low marker firstly appears in the “Neolithic semisubterranean huts that raise above ground by the aggressive rectilinearity of its walls” (*ibidem*), as testified by the representation of Çatalhöyük (*cf.* Torricelli, 2009), the first city ever built, that was characterized by social and commercial life on the top of the roofs. The low level was just for agriculture and transport. In this “map” (fig. 1) we can observe “the first landscape ever painted” (Torricelli, 2009, 51): it is an abstraction (the volcano is very far from the city, even if it is shown close to it), a sort of “urban self-consciousness act” (*ibidem*) in which Power (of a whole community, in this case) expresses itself.

Figure 1. Çatalhöyük Representation.



Source: Torricelli, 2009, *op. Cit.*

Since this Neolithic beginning, Power has been raising itself into verticality. From high positions a dominant perspective can be constructed, since from there a large view over the low place is possible. At the opposite, from low positions there is only a view of limits, restricted in the direction of the highest point.

The High element has a technological limit. The limit of the Low element is the Space itself, because it's a scarce resource. These markers are both reality and abstraction, cultural meanings that can be interpreted. Power imposes itself through these architecture markers, that can define (or not) how the Space is supposed to be consumed.

So any kind of Power has always looked for a higher position. In Greek world the Acropolis was built on the top of a hill and Greek gods were supposed to live on the Olympus, the highest mountain of the region.

If there is not a higher position (like in Negev Desert), a tool to substitute it is required: it has been identified since the origins of Christian religion with the Rock, and therefore with the act of building. In fact, Jesus told Peter: “On this rock (πέτρα in Greek) I will build my church”. So it can be argued that Architecture (the art and science of building) deals with Power, since it ties up resources in building plans because building is the core activity of the rulers: even God is identified with the rock that is also a symbol of Christian community.

Architecture tells the story of people who created it because Power arises itself physically through a spatial choice. When existing space doesn't fit Power needs, Power implements government tools like architecture to build its own space. Power exploits architecture for two main reasons: to glorify Itself and its regime or to intimidate opponents. From this relentless struggle between glorification and intimidation, it can derive a process of exclusion or inclusion. Authoritative domination tends to exclude the mass in order to keep well-being for the few privileged ones; on the other hand, the mass tends to be included even through riots and revolutions, in order to establish Democracy and well-being for the community. This process is never ending, because when a position is gained, the opponents tend to re-establish the former situation. This drifting has a strong influence on landscape which, according to a semiotic approach, can be considered a mediator of these democratic or authoritative issues. Moreover, any landscape can be read as the sum of the layers of different Powers which marked the space.

Political, religious, economic, financial and criminal Powers build High markers because they have knowledge and technological skills, decisional abilities and economic resources. Geography reads what a society (a set of Powers) has written into landscape, which is considered like a book that tells the stories of all the struggles among social *strata*. The story of landscape-image is complicated by this current social evolution: "communities that were once rural are now experiencing significant economic expansion, changing traffic patterns, infrastructure development, increasing demands on schools, and other issues connected to urban growth" (Wilkinson, 1991, 315). These transformations "result from continuous, dialectical struggles of power and resistance among and between the diversity of landscape, designers, users and mediators" (Aitchison et al., 2000, 19).

In this politically, economically, technically and culturally globalizing world, visual images have an unprecedented communicative significance "in matters of space and its formal, graphic representations" (Cosgrove, 1999, 4). It can be so argued that "local-scale changes in today's landscapes interweave with larger trends of globalization, time-space compression and media infiltration resulting in the alteration of the face of landscape, both rural and urban, around the world" (Terkenli, 2003, 165). These processes affect spatial simulacra determined by Power and strongly appear "in the context of landscape, due mainly to its visual/representational and relational character, geographical qualities apparently reinforced by current cultural transformation" (*ibidem*). These trends of transformation increasingly inform "a new cultural economy of space" (*ibidem*) which is materialized "through the creation of new landscape spatialities that require a reformulation of landscape definitions, as well as new conceptual models and methodological approaches" (*ibidem*).

Following these guidelines, Geography needs other disciplines like History, Architecture, Politics, Anthropology and so on, in order to analyze landscape as a history of Symbols of Power which shaped the space vertically (high marker) and horizontally (low marker).

Diamond (2005) clarifies this concept when he studies Easter's Island. The reason of the erection of the statues is still unknown, but their dimensions have been analyzed and now, according to Diamond, it seems clear that statues tended to be taller and taller, larger and more elaborated: "the increase in statue size with time suggests competition with rival chiefs, commissioning the statues to outdo each other" (2005, 98). This was the same reason for the erection of Bologna towers: the higher the artifact, more powerful the commitment.

Diamond also compares Easter's Island civilization to Maya culture: in both cases, several kings "sought to outdo each other with more and more impressive temples" (*ibidem*). Their private interests prevent them to heed collective and long-term problems: authoritative needs prevailed on the social ones, without taking into consideration the right use of resources.

### 3.1. INVOLVING OR EXCLUDING SPACES

Along the history, different kind of powers followed one another in shaping different spaces: mostly, religious and political power in the past, up to current economic, financial, but also criminal power. Nowadays, with the increasing public awareness, media control, institutional performance, the traditional manifestations of Power (political and religious) tend mostly to act indirectly, through the mediation of strong economic and financial powers. New economic and financial Powers are expressing themselves through new towers like skyscrapers, which are considered the temples of modernity and theaters of globalization.

To better analyze how Power shapes and organizes the space, it should be assumed a globalized and iper-mediatic frame: technologies, satellites and computer-scores which generate images of the Earth have destabilized the conventional architecture, meanings and significance of landscape, "exposing them to critical scrutiny of the social sciences" (Cosgrove, 1999, 6). Globalization is able to connect technologies, from one side of the globe, to the capital of the opposite side. It derives a new Geography dealing with this iper-mediatic world which is full of symbols. Conventionally, any symbol represents *spatial stability*, but this is denied "in a world of radically unstable spaces and structures" (Cosgrove, 1999, 5). The lack of "stability requires that we rethink the symbols. Reasons for this rethinking are also to be found in the changing techniques of seeing and making or reproducing images" (*ibidem*). To study this unstable dynamic of space functionalities deriving from Power, it should be detected a stable spatial pattern. To rethink landscape's suggestions, it can be supposed that *high/low* markers are elements of spatial stability in this dynamic and iper-mediatic world. In fact, among the changeable forms of inter-personal, social, and political relationships, a fundamental characteristic has been kept since antiquity: the association/opposition of high and low. Usually, high is representing the power, the low representing the submission. Being the human relations always moody, the high/low markers are modified by bipolar forces. Opponents Powers create fights in which the submitted ones try to move towards the high from the low; on the other hand, contrasting forces try to subdue the low from the high, like in the Esopo's novel.

The wolf gets higher position, the lamb the lower one. Modern times faced several rebellions since the French or American Revolution, but also demographic revolutions, since masses of population are fighting for space and participation. Governance needs new spaces and new symbols. It could be realized through the inclusion of people in theoretical and physical space. In fact, according to Castells, “spatial theories express social theories and spatial structure realize social structure” (1977, 127). To go further, Hirst (1975) points out that “spatial theories are necessarily social theories” even if it should be denied a simple and immediate correspondence “between structures and their concepts”.

This period of economic crisis in Western societies is accompanied by an unprecedented sprawl of political and religious riots from Northern Africa up to Middle East. A greater degree of democracy is required all around the world and several new kinds of landscapes are designed.

Some of them get forms of democracy when they include people, so that they can be considered *involving* communities in the decision process.

Others obviously are *excluding* spaces when they keep the dichotomy between rulers and dominated.

Gregory and Urry (1985) analyze “space rather than time or history” to better understand what kind of power created a landscape: space is the “significant dimension, structuring personal experience in the contemporary world” (*ibidem*, 30). Even individual/social identity now “involves a geographical rather than historical dimension; we should talk of people making not their own history but their own geography” (*ibidem*). The authors deal with social issues connected to space, reinforced by Leibniz who argued that “space is something merely relative” (*ibidem*, p. 21).

According to Jackson (1984), there is a strict link between society and place: “social structure [...] – a phenomenon of the distribution of power – is synthesized from the accumulation of social actions. The study of social structure does not consist in specifying the effects of “deep” structural constraints, but in analyzing the ways in which social relations accumulate” into a place (Jackson, 1984, 109). In this view, there should be also a connection between place and identity: “what people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the Earth. [...] We *are*, in a sense, the place-world we imagine” (Basso 1996, 7). It can also be argued that who decides *what* place, actually decides *who* are the people that are supposed to live in it and imposes them what they should make into it and with it.



#### 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Hodder, “contemporary humanism in geography emphasizes the study of meanings, values, goals and purposes” (in Wagstaff, 1987, 140). Space would be “converted into place, defined as a centre of meanings or a focus of human emotional attachment” (*ibidem*; cfr. Entrikin, 1977; Tuan, 2001; Buttimer, 1976). Place can give a person a sense of identity; “subjective perceptions of the built environment are important in satisfying human goals and safeguarding the quality of life” (*ibidem*). It can be so argued that who decides what to build and how to use a place, actually imposes his point of view on many people. Several studies deal with the connection among Power, Place and Identity. Local Identities and Places can be seen as “thoroughly penetrated and shaped in terms of social influence quite distant from them. What structures the local is not simply what is present on the scene; the ‘visible form’ of the local conceals the distantiated relations which determine its nature” (Giddens in Livingstone, 1995, 10). Power is considered this *distant force* that can shape landscape and identity, consistently with authors who point out that Power has an influence on the way people think about their community and their place (Chavis *et al.*, 1986; Basso, 1996).

As argued by Wilkinson (1972, 1986) and later extended by Bridger (1996), the sharing of spaces and symbols among local groups of Power can provide socially created senses of purpose and meaning. If these common senses are shared, they can improve a community’s ability to affect change in place-making (Bridger, 1996; Stokowski, 1996). Richards (1984) discusses several strategies that communities could employ to keep control over place-making in the face of external Powers. In this view, these strategies can be related to shared community values and public decision-making processes; the community’s ability to control the shape of a landscape is linked to people’s sense of their community within a larger geographic frame (Hummon, 1992; Cuba and Hummon, 1993; Basso, 1996; Galvani and Pirazzoli, 2013). An example of this can be detected in the Tianzinfang District of Shanghai (Pirazzoli, 2013), where people opposed the Economic Power which had decided to destroy all the ancient palaces to build a Commercial Centre. They succeeded in maintaining the ancient urban district.

Many works point out that people’s sense of community, referred to as “community identity”, can be detected in the way individuals think about themselves and interact with their community into a place (Lofland, 1991; Cuba and Hummon, 1993; McCool and Martin, 1994; Huang and Stewart, 1996; Wiesenfeld, 1996; Basso, 1996). This community identity is focused on individuals’ senses of We that link themselves together and build shared visions for a collective meaning of a place (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Summers, 1986). Although created through informal socialization processes and symbols (Greider *et al.*, 1991; Basso, 1996) or by decisions imposed by any kind of Power (Sudjic, 2011), community identities are connected to tangible landscapes, events, and history. For individuals, but also for communities, landscapes can link the past with the present (Cuba and Hummon, 1993) resulting in a perceived sense of coherence (Linde, 1993). As communities make such connections, these

landscapes are emblematic of the stories people tell about themselves to explain their values and life contexts: they can create and reaffirm community identities (Wilkinson, 1991; Basso, 1996).

Bridger (1996) refers to *heritage narratives* which represent community identity and suggests they have influence on place-making. In this paper, we try to understand *who* wrote these narratives: this means to understand who are the commitments (different kinds of Power) and who decides to build a space. In fact, within any local frame, there could be several community identities, because several Powers could fight each other on the same place. Bridger (1996) argues that conflicts concerning landscape are often embedded within inconsistent visions of community identity (Canan and Hennessy, 1989; Robbins, 1999), and that such inconsistencies can affect place-making.

However, planning processes cannot always impose landscape meanings nor represent a plurality of visions for a community (Brandenburg and Carroll, 1995; Gobster and Westphal, 1998; Gobster, 2001). So, we describe *what* kind of space is built and *which are the effects*. In fact, authors dealing with these effects, argue that place-making lacks of opportunities for people who cannot articulate their own perspectives (Reich, 1988; Yankelovich, 1991; Lee, 1993; Yaffee, 1994). We do not fully accept this approach. Obviously, Power has a strong influence to shape a place and the actions performed into it, but we have already pointed out (Galvani and Pirazzoli, 2013; Grandi, 1994) that even if there is an expected meaning (imposed by Power) people can eccentrically use any space in an unexpected way, like that defined by Soja (1996) *third space*, as a result of a creative and subversive production. We now try to find out the “law-codes erected in public places” that “would constitute a more straightforward indicator of who ruled whom” (Cherry in Wagstaff, 1987, 146). We assume that a study of landscape can tell us something about Spatial Relationships of Power (Boni, 2011, 66). We try to find out some permanent element in landscape (the high/low marker) in order to point out that Spatial Relationships of Power are actually a fight for identity awareness (cfr. *ibidem*).

To better study these, we analyze the spaces in which we build our identities, so we have to understand who has the power to define these spaces: it can be argued that is possible to read landscape as a control device (Boni, 2011, 69).

#### 4.1. WHO ARE THE MAIN CHARACTERS

There certainly is a tight link between space and social relations: “the dialectical relationship between the form of space and its varied contents renders it simultaneously the product and the primer of social relations” (Jackson, 1984, 122). We should now understand who build a space and, therefore, determines the social relations embedded into that space: in fact, Vegetti points out that Power can plan social development of a whole community because it can use Space as “a diagram in which to inscribe, register and select people’s life” (2009, 13).

According to Massey and Jess, “many authors have argued that all the senses of place are somehow inextricably linked to social power relations” (2001, 80), which

can be detected in Architecture that “tells the story of people who created it” (Sudjic, 2011, 4). In this view, “Power ties up resources in building plans because building is the core activity of the rulers (*ibidem*).

So it can be argued that landscape is shaped by social or oligarchic powers: these two kind of Power can establish a space oriented towards social welfare or oligarchic well-being. These two kind of visions can build a Space which can involve or exclude people.

## 4.2. WHAT POWERS CAN MAKE WITH SPACE

Up to now, in this paper two main oppositions are emerged:

- a. Social welfare vs. Oligarchic well-being
- b. Democratic Participation vs. Authoritative Command-ship

When landscape derives from democratic issues, it becomes an involving space whose goal is social welfare. When it comes from authoritarian decisions, it turns into an excluding space and this could boost social riots (cfr. Vegetti, 2009) because it only deals with oligarchic well-being. Public space is the main feature of involving space. The main features of excluding space are commonly described as: enclosures, sectors, emblems or sprawls (cfr. Farinelli, 2009).

Cox argues that “Political geography lies in twin concepts: territory and territoriality; territoriality as action to influence the content of an area; territory as the area in question” (2003, 608).

The two proposed oppositions are both applied to analyze the territoriality:

- a. the first statement (Social welfare vs. Oligarchic well-being) deals with Spatial Relationships: what happens into a space;
- b. the second (Democratic Participation vs. Authoritative Commandship) with Power: who is involved in decisions dealing with space.

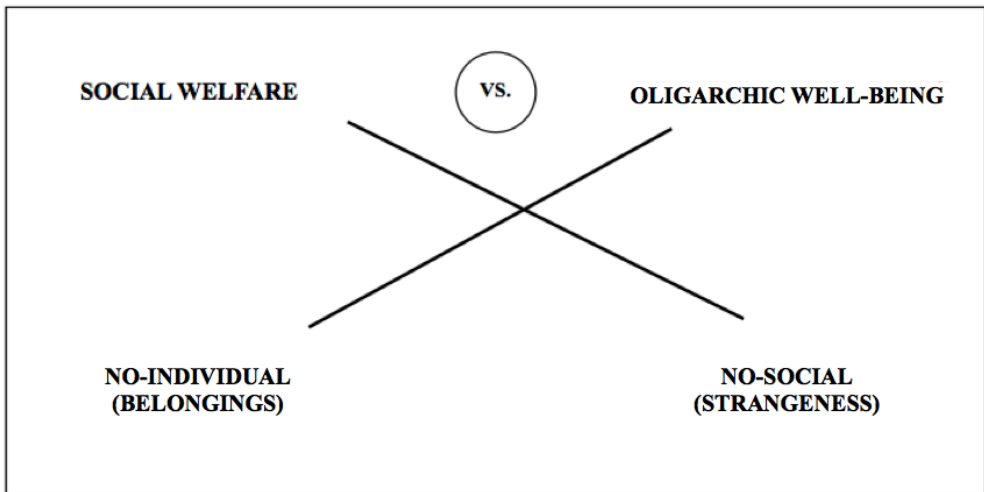
But that is not enough. As Cox points out, “the focus on the relation between people and their activities lies in particularly socially defined areas and what lies beyond: a focus on exclusion, inclusion, internal restructuring and subsequent competition and conflicts around a content of those areas” (*ibidem*).

In this paper, in order to analyze “what lies beyond”, we build two different Semiotic Squares<sup>1</sup> based on these oppositions. This approach allows to better study these exclusion/inclusion processes of landscape-making and to understand how people assign shared or imposed meanings to a landscape (competition and conflicts). These are the results:

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<sup>1</sup>It is a tool used in the structural analysis of the relationships between semiotic signs.

Figure 2. Diagram n°.1: what happens into a space.

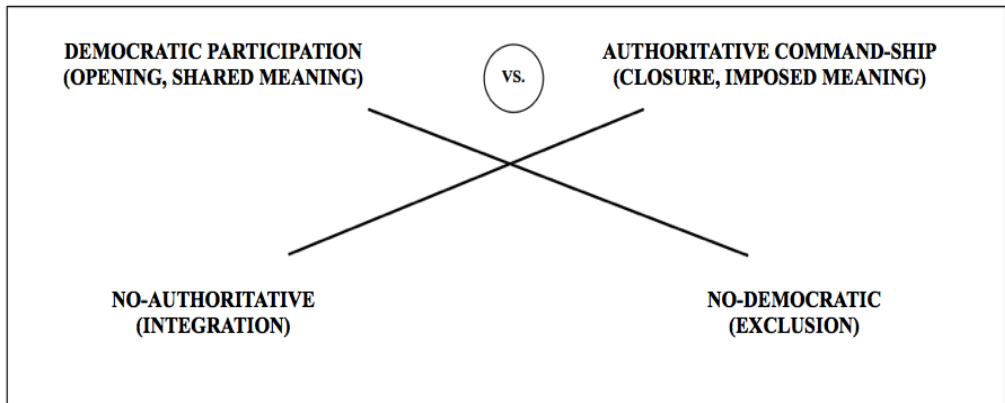


Source: Own elaboration.

When Social Welfare approach prevails, territoriality is featured by a sense of belonging: people share common meanings and goals dealing with *their own* space. According to Jackson “by anchoring social relations in space, particular locales are invested with a collection of meanings which not only become an expression of groups identities, but also provide a mean strengthening and preserving or unifying features. Acknowledgment is made of the active role of space inter-structures and organization of social relations. Space is shown to be significant beyond its role as mere constraint” (1984, 102).

When Oligarchic Well-being is the main principle to shape a territoriality, there is a lack of socialization and a sense of strangeness is spread out into the space: a private interest builds a space to exclude the rest of community and to impose an individual meaning on space. Closed meanings are imposed to the rest of population. Who plans such a space just asserts that “this is the world that I want”, this is the perfect tool to rule a State, an economic empire, a city, a family. It is “a way to create the physical version of an idea or an emotion, to build reality as we desire it, rather than it actually is” (Sudjic, 2011, 231).

Figure 3. Diagram n°.2: who is involved in spatial decisions.



Source: Own elaboration.

When Democratic Participation gives a shape to any landscape, meanings are discussed by a community and, at the end of the process, shared. This approach tends to build low, inclusive and public spaces, whose purpose is integration.

If Authoritative Command-ship decides, the main features of a space are closures, fences, high walls. They are supposed to exclude who is not considered as relevant in the process of decision-making. There are not shared meanings, but imposed ones. In other words, there would be no participation, but only a conquest carried out by few individuals against the community.

#### 4.3. FOR WHOM SPACE CAN BE CREATED

Power can build a space to include into it a whole community: in fact, it is commonly assumed that “when space feels familiar to us, it becomes place” (Yi-Fu Tuan, 2011, 73). In this case, place gives a person a sense of identity. Subjective perceptions of the built environment are important in satisfying human goals and safeguarding the quality of life. Space is so created for free citizens or free individuals who want to take an active part into democratic process. The meanings are openly discussed and, finally, shared.

On the other hand, Power can also build a space to exclude someone from the decisional process. Sudjic considers architecture as a political tool, exploited “by a human group to subjugate another” (2011, 227). In this view, space is “a mean to give glory to yourself and to your regime, but also to threaten all your opponents”(ivi, 27), so it is created to subject people who are not supposed to have a role in a democratic discussion.

So Space can be considered as something for many or for a few, open to everybody or closed for someone, exploited by communities or by individuals. We have already pointed out in a previous research (Galvani and Pirazzoli, 2013) that what is expected by builders/designers is not inevitably consistent with what is actually checked, experienced and then spread out by consumers of a space. There would not be a stable and uncontroversial interpretation and use of Space: a meaning can be imposed, but there is still the possibility of free interpretations. Sudjic suggests that every designer “cut the dress with a large size”, he just creates a storyline that “you can choose to follow or ignore” (2011, 232). It is up to us to select the interpretation imposed by the Power or to break the “practice of obedience” (cfr. Olsson, 1991).

#### **4.4. WHAT EFFECT ON SPACE AND DAILY LIFE**

This paper tries to study the meanings of high/low markers. It would be very easy to consider High as a marker for Dictatorship and Low for Democracy. As argued by Hindess (1977, 63-72), “spatial structures cannot be theorized without social structures, and viceversa, and the social structures cannot be practiced without spatial structures, and viceversa”.

According to this view, it’s not enough to build and use a low space to get democracy. High/low markers can be analyzed applying diagrams n.1 and n.2, and this testifies that Democracy is a very hard conquest. In fact, there are mixed used of high/low markers that can trigger chaotic behaviors of the crowd (like Piazza Verdi, the University square in Bologna) or impose a point of view so that a crowd is included but in a dictatorial plan (like in North Korea).

##### **4.4.1. HIGH IS NOT FOR DEMOCRACY**

Every High marker can be considered as a spatial embodiment of Power. High derives from a private or Authoritative Power that wants to build a space oriented towards Oligarchic Well-Being and to impose a closed meaning. It can be so argued that verticality is a symbol of power both in the past (Medieval Towers) and today (the skyscrapers). This can be true for any kind of power: monarchy, religion, political regimes, mafia and, currently, finance. Nowadays, it seems that “economic change, driven by technical advances in information processing and communication, and by new and highly flexible financial and industrial production systems, has reworked the experience and meanings of space” (Cosgrove, 1999, 4).

As can be observed in this picture, Shanghai skyline has been deeply modified in last 30 years, with an explosion of High Markers:

Figure 4. Shanghai Landscape.



Source: [www.ionoi.it](http://www.ionoi.it)

The functions of this territoriality have been changed, as well. Oligarchic Well-being (mainly deriving from Economic Power) destroyed a landscape considered a cultural heritage, in which “shared meaning is embodied into a shape” (Griswold, 1997, 26). This area, tainted by High markers, creates exclusion and strangeness: it becomes with no identity, no history and no relationship, so that “the ideal is density into isolation” (Koolhaas, 2006, 39). In this picture, High markers are a proof of the domination of *junkspace*, “the product of the encounter between escalator and air conditioning, conceived into an incubator of plasterboard” (*ivi*, 64). It is built just to be consumed, according to imposed regulations: this space is supposed to be exploited as a business/commercial area, no other options are allowed. *Junkspace* reduces any city to “a mechanic device, supposed to be efficient with measurable and indisputable goals” (*ibidem*).

#### 4.4.2. LOW IS FOR PARTICIPATION

If High is for exclusion, low could be a marker for inclusion, to “increase participation, empower marginalized groups and bring new voices that are unheard or ignored” (Hakley, 2012, 67). In 2006, the typical small Shikumen palaces with grey bricks in Tianzinfang district, Shanghai, were supposed to be torn down in order to build a new commercial centre.

Figure 5. Tianzinfang District, Shanghai.



Source: web.

This imposed transformation was not accepted by the inhabitants that opposed the plan: the sense of belonging shared by all the community allowed, through a “low budget requalification management”, to restore the ancient palaces (cfr. Zheng Shiling, 2012). In this case, (Economic) Power didn’t succeed in imposing its vision oriented towards an Oligarchic Well-being. Low markers are now the main feature of this area where space is felt like familiar, so “it has become place” (Yi-Fu Tuan, 2011, 73; cfr. Sassatelli, 2005), with a “local and creative” atmosphere (Zheng Shiling, 2012). The landscape can be now exploited by all the community (made by citizens, but also by tourists: there is no strangeness here), because meanings have been decided “by the low, through the participation of civic society” (Sassatelli, 2005, 67).

#### 4.4.3. MIXED USES OF HIGH/LOW MARKERS

Sometimes, there is not clear distinction between inclusion and exclusion, simply because the interpretation can be subjective and breaks the imposed meanings.



Figure 6. Sanaa street. Yemen.



Source: Steve McCurry

As it can be observed in this picture (fig. 6), of the old city of Sanaa, Yemen, there is the same High/Low dynamic: high is for private interests (all the doors are for shops), low is for collective needs (a public road, here portrayed during sewer works). According to some interviews we got, the High Markers (cleaner and more comfortable than the Low Markers) are commonly exploited by people to have a rest, to sit down, to chat with friends etc. There is an unexpected use of space: (economic) Power has designed and built a space supposed to be just commercial, but it has become an architectural feature for Social Welfare. The actions performed in this space break the expected rules and transform it into a Third Space (Soja, 1996).

This very same mixed use of High/Low markers can be observed in other countries.

Figure 7. Jodhpur street. India.



Source: Pirazzoli Photo

In Jodhpur picture (fig. 7) it can be easily observed that High markers are supposed to be exploited for Individual purposes: these are private houses and many people use these spaces to cook, work or chat. The Low markers denote collective needs: sewers, passages for walking.

Figure 8. Jaisalmer street. India.



Source: Pirazzoli Photo

The same dynamic can be watched in Jaisalmer, near Pakistan (fig. 8). Different levels mean different attentions: the High markers are usually very clean, the Low markers often dirty.

Figure 9. Kathmandu street. Nepal.



Source: Pirazzoli Photo

This can be true also in the modern areas of some cities. In Kathmandu picture (fig. 9) High/Low markers appear with the same features: High for Oligarchic Well-being (so, clean and private), Low for collective needs (dirty and public), but many people use them in a mixed way.

Figure 10. Piazza Verdi, Bologna.



Source: Pirazzoli Photo

If High is for exclusion, low is a marker for inclusion. A recent investigation of Bologna image (Grandi, 2013) seems to uphold this hypothesis. In fact, Bologna is mainly featured by porticoes (low), even if its most famous monument are the Two Towers (high). According to recent interviews (*ibidem*), Bologna is widely considered as a cozy and hospitable city. Low markers featured in porticoes seems to strengthen the interviews' result.

Low could be for Democracy, but if it is not shaped by shared meanings, it can also degenerate into chaos, as in Piazza Verdi (fig. 10) where any sort of deviance (drug traffic, criminality, fights and noise) is carrying on, in spite of a permanent presence of police. In the square, a process is occurring that has narrowed the democratic space “in which challenges to change the status quo can be imagined and realized. In its failure to allow for a genuine plurality of voices” (Peterson, 2012, 1), the Low markers are actually blocking “the emancipatory promise” of a meaningful participation.

Figure 11. A North Korea Square.



Source: web

It can be argued that Power “can use architecture as a mean to glorify Itself and its regime, and intimidate opponents” (Sudjic, 2011, 4). People into a square can be observed by a high point of view, so they are actually dominated by the dictator’s Power.

They cannot use the square as they want: they are supposed to respect the laws imposed by the power in order to be embedded into a system, not included in a real participation process of free politics. The mass becomes a tool for the power. Inclusion means participation, but participation is not always directly connected to democracy.

The Low can also be a marker of propaganda if it is affected by a High dynamic in search of consensus. Authoritative Governments try to activate mass participation as support to their regimes. A square can contain a mass, whose dimension is horizontality, so it can be a frame for a dictatorship, whose dimension is verticality, as shown in North Korea picture (fig. 11).

Figure 12. Tienanmen Square.



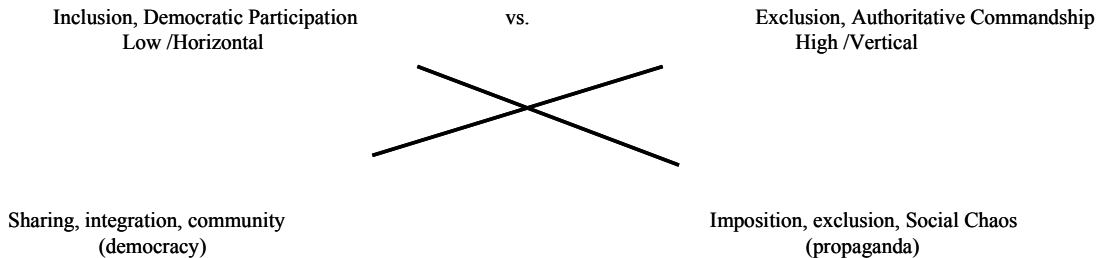
Source: web

Neighborhoods, squares, streets and other urban places are utilized, occupied or contested for political purposes, so the spatiality of power “has become central and endemic in world politics. However, while scholarship has been rich in analysis of the spatiality of historical and socioeconomic processes, the spatial turn in exploring political issues such as citizenship, democracy and social justice has been rather recent” (Turam, 2013, 412; cfr. also Sassen, 2006; Soja, 1996). In a square, revolution can be triggered when a mass reacts independently from the Power and acts to gain its rights. This occurs when the opponents encounter themselves at the same low level, like in Tienanmen Square (fig. 12). The upheavals were suppressed through the technological superiority of the political elites that succeeded in preventing “the wider body of citizens from meaningful participation in shaping democracy and deciding what role it should have in the everyday life” (Haklay, 2012, 59). The Power came down to the square, from High to Low, with its privileged devices of domination (like tanks) to undermine the marginalized opponents of existing power structures and to stop them from affirming their rights.

#### 4.5. SPACE, POLITICS AND SOCIETY

To sum up our hypothesis, we could propose this Semiotic Square to analyze landscape as a “matter of shifting visual cultures which differently control not only the framed space of representation, but also the spatiality of the viewer, in position, scope and distantiation” (Cosgrove, 1999, 7):

Figure 13. Diagram n°. 3: meaning of high/low markers.



Source: Own elaboration.

We can argue that verticality is a marker of exclusion and domination. Its architectural correspondent is High.

When verticality is combined with horizontality, it could derive an imposition because the mass is included in a system of symbols and values imposed by dictators or oligarchy. Therefore, this physical inclusion cannot be necessarily considered democracy, because spatial meanings are imposed from the High Command-ship through a propaganda. In this case, inclusion is not integration because there is not

any shared meaning freely discussed by the community. Integration needs shared knowledge; imposition is not shared, because propaganda is not knowledge.

Shared values, integration of people, community identity are the main elements to get Democracy.

Through a study of landscape it can be argued that inclusion doesn't necessarily mean democracy because spatial meanings are unstable, in fact they are connected to political forces which are also unstable since they depend on social forces which are changing mutual positions and relations.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It is easier to understand how High can rule the Low, not so easy to clarify the opposite, how the Low can emerge and rise to grasp its rights. It is difficult for the Low to stand up since it logically encounters the oppression of the High, which constricts it. If the movement toward the High risks to be erased, the Low has the only option to expand horizontally in order to get bigger and stronger and to affirm its own needs through a horizontal expansion. The necessary step of expansion needs also the share of meanings. Nowadays, the institutional control, rulers, dictators, politicians or criminals are even more repressed. At the opposite, the masses gain forces from the demographic numerical increase of population. If wars, rebellions and revolutions have destroyed political absolutist Powers, the future fight for Democracy will depend, not certainly only on quantity of masses, but principally on a shared identity which engraves the consciousness of communities. These debates should be understood "in the larger context of the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movements, which speak to the new significance of urban space in people's fight against varying forms of political authoritarianism across the world" (Turam, 2013, 412). To join the civil awareness for a conscious governance, the main requested characteristic is a global education.

Without education it is impossible that the mass joins consciousness, because it is the democratic force "which increase the number of people who utilize information in different ways and gain access to technology. When users have been empowered through education, they gain more political and social control" (Haklay, 66).

To utterly fulfill the democratization potential of Low markers, "a concerted effort is required to integrate new groups in society in the design and development" (Haklay, 2012, 67) of landscapes and, therefore, social structures.

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