

## **De-Colonizing Art Institutions**

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## **Filippo Minelli**

*PADANIA CLASSICS, IDENTITY LOST*

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# PADANIA CLASSICS, IDENTITY LOST



Landscape has always been the engine for the creation of personal and collective identity because as individuals we tend to mirror ourselves in the places where we grew up into, regardless of their objective beauty. Just think of the feeling of belonging to the great empires, which historically have always been defined by their architecture - in some cases even urban planning - but also the pride of belonging that exists at various levels in the outskirts of contemporary urban areas, where provenance is so exasperated that it also affect local music and trends.

As individuals we need to know who we are, which values we refer to, which is the common plan: no matter the truth, we need a coherent narrative of who we are. Politics was able to ride this need in each historical periods: the most obvious legacies are dictatorial architecture and propaganda; to build consensus it's necessary to affect the perception of reality and the most effective way is through actions on landscape. A similar process was called 'colonization of the imaginary' by historian Serge Gruzinski, how the perception of reality differ from reality itself and how this gap can serve power?



Landscape is a mirror of who we are, and vice versa, because it imposes cognitive parameters by which we learn to distinguish what is different from the familiar, but also, on the contrary, in the landscape we can see the results of our actions. Reading the landscape is therefore an indirect anthropological research that helps us talking about many topics starting from reality, perception of reality and therefore the identity which is built on perception itself. How the perception of reality differs from reality itself? Which role do emergencies play in this framework?

In the last 40 years landscape has changed in the whole world and the reasons are found in the development of many Nations, in free trade and massive urbanism. Planning processes completely indistinguishable and interchangeable started everywhere, and are even more evident in countries in which the architecture was very defined, as in most of European states; Francesc Munoz, Doctor in Geography and Professor of Urban Geography at the



Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, talks exhaustively about the issue and coined the term 'Urbanization' to describe the phenomenon of flattening a rich landscape to the point where not only the main streets of urban centers offer exactly the same products and services, but much of the architectural highlights are designed by the same architects, where places of consumption and entertainment are so similar that they could be considered ubiquitous, and where housing is built with the same kind of (cheap) materials.

In this context where the most tangible aspect in the life of people has changed massively it's difficult to talk about identity as done so far, and in some extreme cases you can also speak of a 'lost identity'. What unites these testimonies is the transformation of the province - a place with a very precise identity - in the suburbs (of the world). The same feeling that you can experience in the widely portrayed highways or suburbs in the US, but without the exotic appeal.

'Padania Classics' is an archive of over 1000 photographs documenting the urban sprawl of the last 30 years in Northern Italy, which led to a quick disappearance of historic or recognizable elements of the landscape and therefore fostering a loss of identity. A political party managed to successfully exploit the situation to re-create a fictional identity and impose it through its narrative, leading to a struggle for the independence of the fictional Nation called Padania. Nothing was based on proven cultural, ethnic or historic differences. That party managed to stay in power (joint with other forces) for almost three decades and even though it's weaker than before it's now the oldest political party sitting in the Italian Parliament nowadays.

