

# LANDSCAPE AND HISTORIC ROADS IN NEW OUTSKIRT CONTEXTS: CONSIDERATIONS OVER FRANCIACORTA AREA

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## ABSTRACT

The paper moves from a research in progress about the network of the historical roads in Franciacorta, a hilly country in the eastern Lombardia. This region – now very popular and internationally well known for its wines - shows high territorial values, the presence of ancient historical attestations, and a high demographic and economic development too, which led to an important increasing of the demand of settlement and to the consequent urbanization. The paper wants to compare the historical sources about roads in this area, trying to understand how they have changed according to the surrounding background, which are the main critical landscape urgencies and how can we now try to practise a little *roadscape*. To understand which is the right way to reach this aim, the paper shows an ambitious program of interventions supported by the Province Council of Utrecht called *De Stichtse Lustwarande*. So, if a road is a member of the landscape, it's also true that the road is a preferential look-out post of the landscape and its transformations. The aim is to show some rules and good practises to preserve the memory of this road according to three kinds of reasons: historical, infrastructural, and ecological.

## 1. FRANCIACORTA AMONGST HISTORY, LANDSCAPE VALUES AND URBAN SPRAWLING

### 1.1. Notes about location

The survey wants to investigate the landscape aspect of historical roads, seen both as infrastructural works devoted to mobility, marks on a piece of land and a privileged place to analyse the surroundings. The region studied is Franciacorta, today an environmental district in Brescia province of about 232 sqm, spreading like an *oblong pentagon*<sup>1</sup> between the south coast of Iseo Lake, the Oglio river in Bergamo province, the high alluvial plain and the hills that reach the western side of the city. From a natural point of view, the Franciacorta region can be theoretically divided in the northern highlands, with the *Torbiere* (peat bog), a mid, hilly region and a third, plain zone.



Figure 1 - Vineyards in Franciacorta

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<sup>1</sup> The expression is after ROSA GABRIELE, *La Francia Corta – Notizie*, Mazzoleni, Bergamo, 1852

The etymological debate on the name is hoary, but the origin is like to be the Latin expression *francae curtes*, the small Benedictine communities that in the Middle Ages were tax-exempt, provided that they reclaimed and worked the land entrusted to them. The toponym appears for the first time in Brescia's annals in 1277 to identify the area between the rivers Oglio and Mella, to the south of Iseo Lake. Today, grape growing is the main feature of rural landscape in Franciacorta, since when, about forty years ago, local wineries begun to produce a new kind of sparkling wine<sup>2</sup>. All over the region there's a careful zoning and a continuous, dangerous ground modelling to deliver ground from the woods, creating new terraces, where they can grow grapes.



Figure 2, 3 – Typical landscapes in Franciacorta area

Since XVI Cent. nobility from Brescia built up in Franciacorta land many of their own suburban villas, because the Venice Republic excluded the local nobility from any public office, so that they devoted themselves to rural businnes. Till the end of XIX Cent. country villas in this area evolved their architectural tipology, and changed from rural settlement into buildings of private delight, with gardens, terraces, perspectives, just like we can see at Villa Bettoni in Cazzago village<sup>3</sup>. The architecture of Villa Lechi in Erbusco is a pardigm in the history of local suburban country house, for its “U” plan (a central body and two wings used as rural service buildings), its porch at the ground floor and the lodge at the first floor. The establishment overlooks the road that runs below, at the base of the main entrance terrace. The relationship between villa, countryside and (historical) road is often enlarged by a lined with trees axis, that extend in the surrounding landscape the private garden of the house.



Figure 4, 5 – Villa Lechi (XVI Cent.) in Erbusco and Castelletto house (1910 ca) in Coccaglio

<sup>2</sup> In 2003 the whole outturn was 4 millions of bottles for 1650 hectares.

<sup>3</sup> CASTELLINI P., *Ville di Franciacorta*, in MARCHESANI TONOLI F. 1994, pp 149-173 and also MORONE R., *Il paesaggio agrario bresciano del XVIII secolo*, in BOSCHI R., 1981, pp451-460.

## 1.2. The view from the road and the landscape of the historic sources

In 1852 Gabriele Rosa, poet and scholar from Brescia, author of a large bibliography of local history, defines Franciacorta as “a wave of hills that follow one another in different ways at the foot of Retiche Alps [...], almost bumping into each other”<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, he adds that “smooth, nice roads, some climbing, some running down, some others running along the lake, punctuate Franciacorta in a thousand ways and, every mile, you find a nice village in the green [...], roads not larger than what it is necessary, not lined with monotonous rows of trees, to which dust gives an ashes-like colour, but with blooming hedges that surround and divide farms so beautifully cultivated that they look like gardens.” This passage, though poetic and sometimes hyperbolic, describes a countryside that we know was characterised by enclosures, olive trees, pastures, mulberries – very popular at the time – and obviously wines<sup>5</sup>.

It is the natural environment typical of the second historical source of this survey, the road map of the Adro zone in *cavezzi bresciani*<sup>6</sup>, made in 1802 by the cartographer Giuseppe Monti and kept in the Brescia State Archives. It is a milestone for the history of road geometry in Franciacorta, since it reports the infrastructural network of the time, describing in detail the crossings with minor roads, the presence of canals, shrines, nets with decoy for attracting birds and the distances between the various reference points.

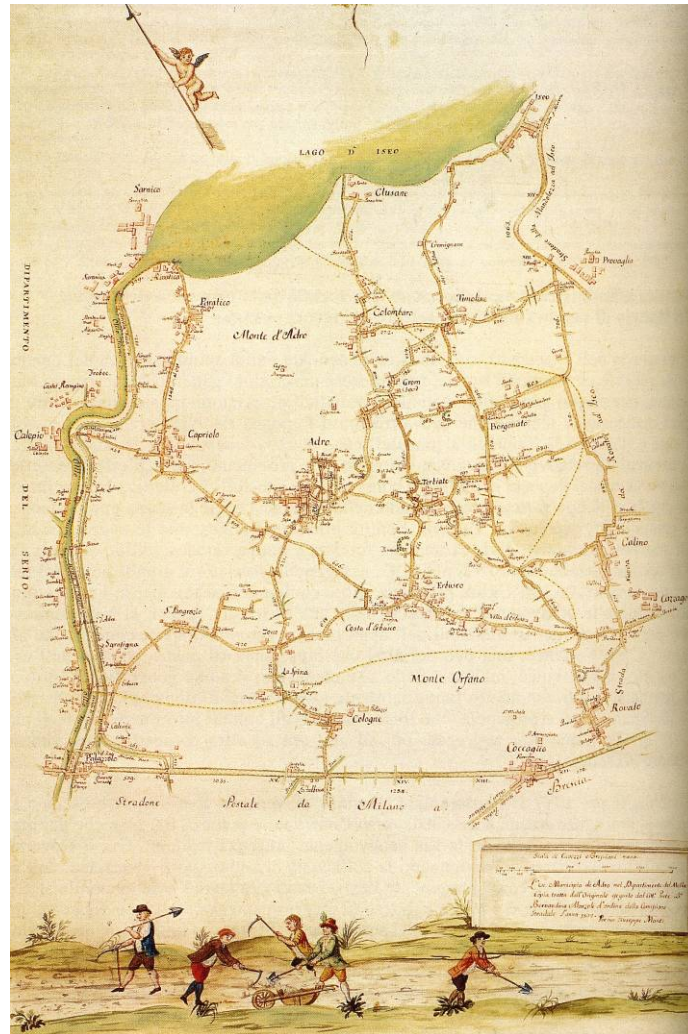


Figure 6 – Map by Giuseppe Monti about the roads network around Adro (1802)

<sup>4</sup> ROSA G. 1852, *cit.* p 4

<sup>5</sup> for a complete treatment of the Italian rural landscape, see SERENI, E. 1961

<sup>6</sup> the *cavezzo* is a submultiple of the *piò*, the square measure used in Brescia areas, equal to 3.255,59 sqm

During the time between this paper and Gabriele Rosa's one, the road network of the region developed greatly, also because of the end of the century-old Venice rule on the Brescia region and Napoleon's renewed influence<sup>7</sup>. Afterwards, the railway to Milan<sup>8</sup> and to Bergamo and, above all, the highway A4 "Serenissima" caused such cuts in Franciacorta's landscape continuity, added a different road network to the historical one and produced a sometimes foolish soil exploitation that the whole district can be considered in all respect a segment of the so-called *Padan megalopolis*<sup>9</sup>.

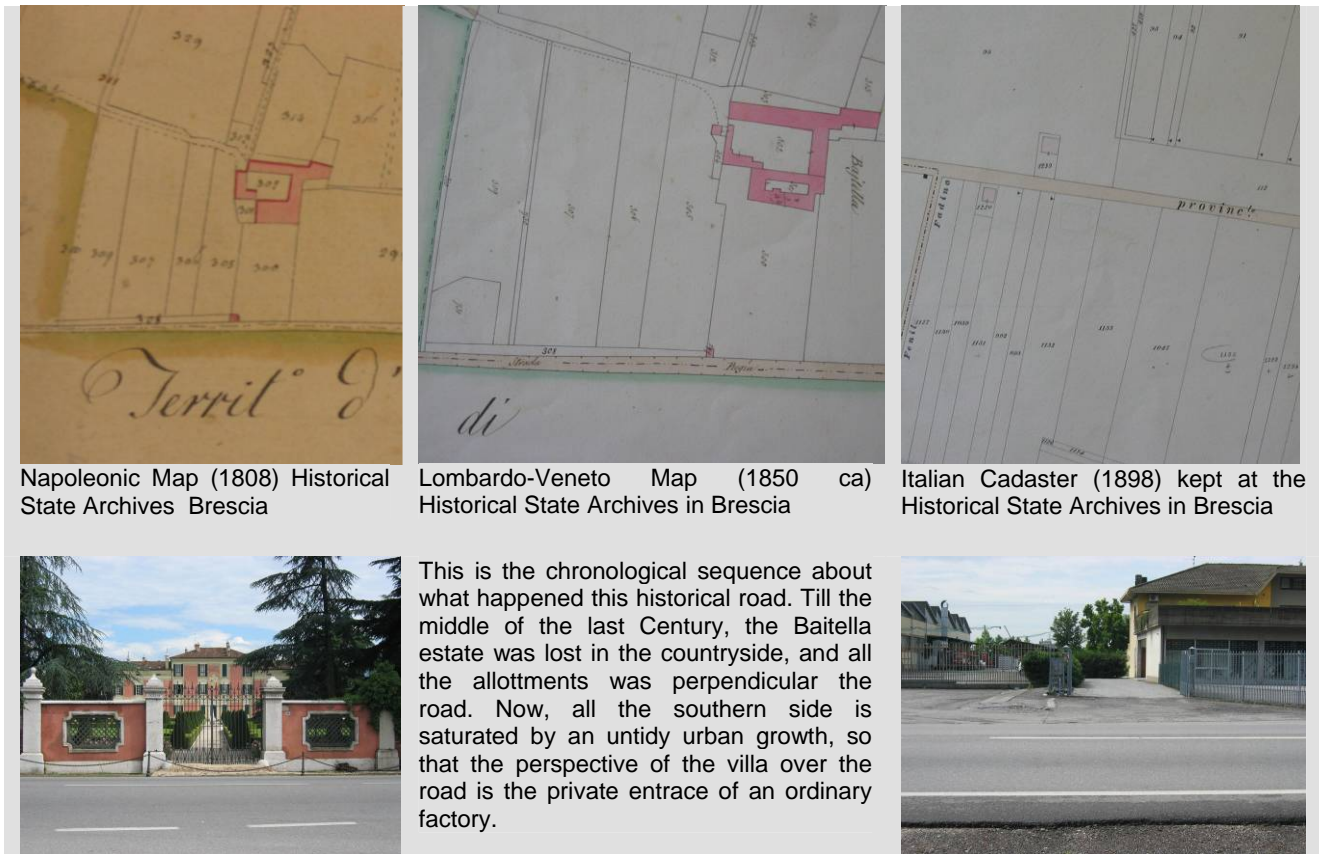


Figure 6 - Historical sequence about an ancient sub-urban palace, called *Baitella*

On that map there are two kinds of roads; first of all we can see the system of the local roads, sloping among the hills, connecting all the villages in a thick network. Most of them have been deprived of their ancient relationship with landscape: new urban developments have changed the orientation of the natural gradient, many visual barriers hamper the landscape to be understood, a trivialization of buildings, signs, structures mines the identity of this area. The second kind of road is the ancient Postal Road at the bottom of the map, who linked Brescia to Milan. The first news about this road go back to the Middle Age,

<sup>7</sup> in June 1797 Napoleon founded the *Repubblica Cisalpina* and Brescia became part of it in October, with the Campoformio Treaty. During Napoleon rule Brescia saw a strong innovative process, both in the administration and the infrastructures, with the creation of the *Catasto*, the nomination of a "honorary inspector for water and roads" and a great development of the road network, to face the infrastructural lack reported by the English traveller Arthur Young, who wrote "le chemin sont mauvais dans les Etats de Venise".

<sup>8</sup> the railway from Verona to Coccaglio was open on 24 April 1854

<sup>9</sup> definition given by Eugenio Turri in his homonymous essay to describe the conurbation extending, without interruption, from Turin to Venice. This area hosts about 20 millions of inhabitants on a surface of about 30000 sqkm. In this settlement, each person is calculated to cover 20 km per day (in 1980 only 10) and 16000 km per year (twice as in 1980). The average motorisation degree has increased by 50% (from 380 to 585 cars every 1000 inhabitants) and CO2 emissions – the main greenhouse gas – due to traffic are 66 million tons per year, with a rise of 71% (in 2000 compared to 1980).

when a complete description of the bridges, the crossings, the boundary-stones, the votive buildings and the rules for maintenance was written<sup>10</sup>. Now it is a National Road, choked with traffic, in a gradual loss of its own historical identity (stone walls fallen down, fragments of ancient rows of plane trees, urban sprawl...).



Figure 7 - Roundabout in Rovato

The highest risk about the binominal name historic road/landscape is in Franciacorta region the gradual loss of identity, fostered by the economic development that in the last thirty years produced either the widespread city and the "rurbanisation", or the reticular sprawling process whose shape follows the road network. The obvious outcome of this is a welding of the urban centres a linear urban development, just like has already happened alongside the Postal Road between Rovato and Cologne, where an industrial zone soaked the corridor between the historic road and the railway, cutting every ecological and visual connection between the Northern (eco)system of Montorfano and the southern (eco)system of the alluvial plane that still shows some vestige of the Roman centuriation<sup>11</sup>.



Napoleonic Map (1807) Historical State Archives in Milan



Aerial view (2001)

The comparison between the images of the same place shows how the ancient Postal Road has been the engine of a heavy industrial urbanization that caused a strong barrier between the northern and the southern country systems that flank the road.

Alongside, the railway runs, arising a second occlusion between the systems. On the other direction, the ancient track that runs north-south has been chosen as the border of the new urban shape.

Figure 8 - The ancient Postal Road in the surroundings of Cologne

<sup>10</sup> in *Liber poteris communis civitatis Brixiae*, we can find a document (written in 1224) about the building of a bridge over Mella River, that is the starting urban point of the Postal Road, the text also talks about the rules about the maintenance of the road. In a later document, kept at the State Archive in Brescia, I could find the official application in 1814 a farmer forwarded to the Department in charge about planting a 660 metres long poplars row (*Populus nigra* var *italica*, I suppose). The document, indirectly, gives many details about the road (width, ditches..) and the rural landscape all around it (cultures, distances...). A third document written in 1827 relates the specifications about the ordinary maintenance of the Strada Postale Veneta between Brescia and Coccaglio and describes segment by segment, for 16 kilometres, the road equipment, often referring to the surrounding landscape elements (Grandovere creek, shrines, gates...).

<sup>11</sup> It was a means of distributing land to settlers of colonies using a grid traced out on the ground. A *centuria* commonly measured 20 x 20 *actus* (20 x 22 in this region m 710x781), with an area of 200 *iugera*.

## 2. DE STICHTSE LUSTWARANDE: A SHINING EXAMPLE CLOSE TO UTRECHT

Far from Franciacorta region, they are carrying out a remarkable landscape program along an historical track, focusing both the road and the surroundings connected with the road: this is the reason why, at this moment, a consideration about *De Stichtse Lustwarande* in Utrecht outskirts could be useful to focus a correct planning idea about historical roads in Franciacorta too.

### 2.1. The physical context and the aims

The project for *De Stichtse Lustwarande* (literally translated *land of delight*) arose in the frame of an ambitious program of interventions supported by the Province Council of Utrecht: this name was given to an extra-urban road tract (the county road N225) that moved south-eastern from the town centre of Utrecht to the region of Limburg, crossing a territory where the agricultural exploitation of the land was strongly present with deep and narrow plots oriented towards NE-SW direction and running all along the Utrechtse Heuvelrug<sup>12</sup> and throughout the peri-urban built-up areas of De Bilt, Zeist, Dreibergen-Rijssenburg, Doorn, Leersum, Amerongen, Elst, Rhenen.

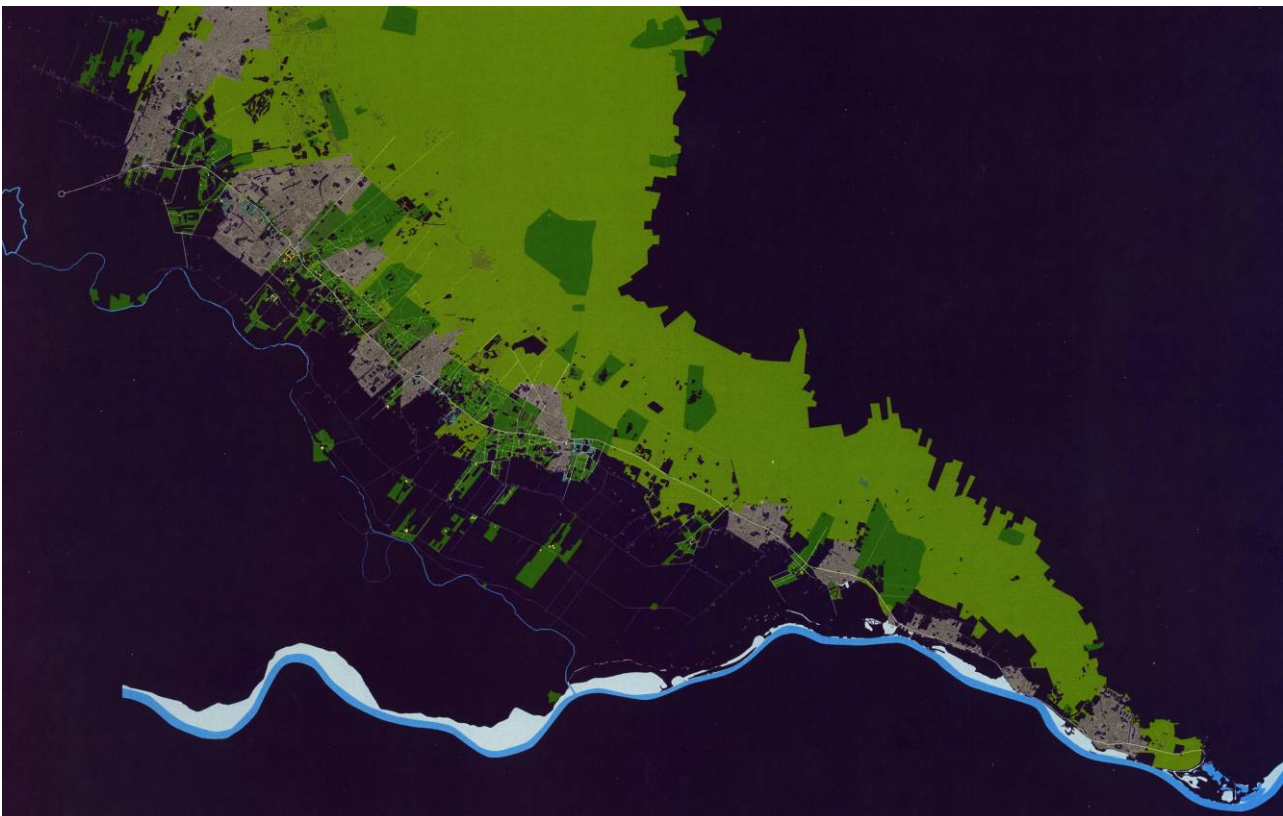


Figure 9 - The landscape system along N225, from Utrecht (up on the left) to Rhenen (down on the right) (LA4SALE)

The will of the Council was to promote and implement a series of local interventions to increase the value of the landscape, the infrastructures, the ecological connectivity, the urban re-design, moving from the common geographical factor on which all these suburbs lean on. The reasons of the architectural, economic, cultural and infrastructural importance of the part of the territory are to be found in its history: it dates back to Early Middle Ages when the relief was ploughed at mid-hill by the “winter” road tract of *via Regia*

<sup>12</sup> It is the most important relief, on a geological, glacial and natural point of view, of the whole Netherlands territory that ranks 60 metres above the sea level on its summit.

that avoided the marshes and connected Amsterdam and Utrecht to Köln – already in the Roman Age; in summer season it offered a parallel path at the foothills of the relief<sup>13</sup>. Unlike today, the scenery offered to the wayfarer at that time was a bare landscape, totally devoted to sheep pastures and devoid of trees.



Figure 8 – N225Zeist Hoog Beek en Roijen house

The extraordinary private houses built up in the region starting from the late seventeen hundred and the conversion of the soil exploitation mentioned here-above shaped the landscape of *lustwarande* as well as the urban set-up of the town centre that, even though still connectable to a perceivable dimension and far from reciprocal welding phenomena, were not exempt from the dynamic notes of the sprawling caused by the mobility that a road artery usually engenders. In fact, the continuity of the urban texture was disintegrated and the consumption of soil often affected the line of the historical landscape and eluded the axialities, the visual cones, the relations with the main historical road network.

Moving from the frame summarily referred here, the Province Council through its Agenda Programme 2010 implements from 2002 the project for the *Stichtse Lustwarande* and entrust the Landscape Office LA4Sale<sup>14</sup> with a survey on the identity of the territory affected by the project.

## 2.2. Looking for an identity

The analysis work ended one year later and was collected into an atlas<sup>15</sup>: it started from a historical reading of the territory and carried out a diachronic survey on the changed that affected the Utrechtse Heuvelrug area over the centuries, both from an settlement point of view and from the soil exploitation feature, according to a vision of the landscape as a complex palimpsest. The interest was focused on the genesis of the settlements connected to the historical route, on how the “colonization” process of the road front all along the suburban properties created a series of signs in the landscape beside the road ( fences, tree-lines, drains, prospective rows, representation courtyards, minor road network...) that got consolidated or even lost over the centuries, but forced the designers to identify the *lustwarande* as a “pearl necklace”<sup>16</sup> or as a mosaic of components that

<sup>13</sup> Along the road tract between the villages of Drebergen-Rijssenburg and Doorn the high and low road are still driveable and identified in the Hoofdstraat and in the Oude Arnhemse Bovenweg.

<sup>14</sup> The acronym stands for Landscape Architects for Stedebouw, Architectuur, Landschap, Ekologie. The agency, seated in Amsterdam, works under the guide of Pepijn Godefroy, landscape architect who attended the celebrated Faculty of Agriculture of Wageningen University. The project approach that marks LA4SALE is a detailed photographic, structural, perceptive, vegetational, geographical...) analysis of the landscape components on a territorial scale, with continuous and progressive focus on the project themes. For a specific panorama on the activity carried out by LA4SALE, see MEYER HAN, VAN DER BURG LEO, 2006, pages 41-55 and to website <http://www.la4sale.nl/>

<sup>15</sup> LA4SALE, *De Stichtse Lustwarande – identiteitsonderzoek*, 25th December 2003

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, page 46

compete to create the identity of the place. This represents an important stage in the process of understanding – and landscape design – of a road tract with historical values. It engenders a radical change in the projection, the road is more than a linear infrastructure, and the road surrounding is an occasion to match road and landscape projection. Therefore the search for identity carried out by the landscape experts focused also on the warp (*weefsel*) of the landscape around the road<sup>17</sup> and identified a plot made by the road network parallel to N255 and another plot by the road network perpendicular to it. The superposition of the two directions engendered an articulated warp of minor road networks, often an agricultural and sometimes an exclusively private one that allows a hierarchical reading of the space and the paths beside the main road network. The synthesis abstracted the definition of the three “landscape units” along which the road path run, it identified three priorities and built up three pilot projects, one for each segment. Therefore the above-mentioned analysis identified three areas:

- *Wetering Lustwarande* (literally the “*Lustwarande* of the streams”)
 

It is located between the immediate urban edge of Utrecht and De Bilt, in the outmost North of the road tract, at the foothills of the first slopes of the glacial relief of Utrechtse Heuvelrug. It is a rim area characterized by an infrastructural intensity that records the presence of motorway roundabouts, a pulverised and confused urbanization that coexists with a formal matrix of a peri-urban country part denoted by a sequel of long wide plots separated by a close rhythm of drains that run perpendicularly to N225. The necessity of a new urban expansion and the identification of new building plots<sup>18</sup> moved LA4SALE to implement the first pilot project described below the survey on identity dated 2003.



Figure 9 - De Bilt, proposal for a new urban development and preservation of the rural patterns (LA4SALE)

The core project principle was to respect the composition matrix of the agricultural plots, to search and line up with the urban expansion consolidated on the opposite carriageway of the historical route, to derive the new building pattern from the historical building on site and to privilege isolated outcomes, small courtyard buildings

- *Romantisch Dinamische Lustwarande*

It covers the segment of territory enclosed from De Bilt and the inhabited town of Doorn, where the town centres are separated by the surviving part of wood, planted

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, page 20

<sup>18</sup> The pilot project was suggested also by the imminent dismissal of a wide commercial volume on the road side and its likely demolition as well as the creation of new building volumes by the owners.



over the centuries for haunting. The presence of picturesque gardens and historical aristocratic villas is very widespread. Actually, this area is strongly threatened by the settlement pressure and its risk of compromising is very high. The project designers focused their attention for this part on the opportunity of rethinking the landscaping impact of the railway station of Dreibergen-Zeist: this station is nowadays an isolated episode in a barycentric position between the two towns, with a little justified soil compromising. The proposal was to rethink the railway station and evaluate the opportunity to make this structure the engine of a new settlement reality, linked either to third sector or residence, but carefully focusing on its insertion in the landscape. The project result was multiple and stemmed from the typical building patterns of tradition: the *stationspark* (a new station and the joint buildings plunged in a park), *stationsbuurt* (a new station and a new village conceived according to the most recurrent patterns along the *Lustwarande*), *stationslandgoed* (a new station with its joint buildings disposed and conceived to evocate a typical farm), *stationscomplex* (a new station located in the centre of an isolated semi-closed made by the pertinent buildings of the real station).

- *Agrarische Lustwarande*

It coincides with the road tract leading from Doorn to Rhenen and it is marked by wide spaces open to pasture, wide areas of moors and a close relation with the river that progressively touches the rim of the Heuvelrug slope.

The pilot project, located on the edge of Ameronger, aims to give the guidelines to preserve as much as possible the spaces still free from buildings and, in case of new developments, to privilege the saturation of interstitial free areas, replacing a compact settlement form that eludes the precedent place semantics. The project case concerns three office/shop buildings and their parking, manoeuvre spaces and deep green. The relationship with the historical road network is always mediated by arboreous rows sewing the interrupted lines of the surrounding landscape; the distributive solution privileges the saturation of wooden fringes, the occupation of free plots, the pulverization of fabric bodies that lose their reciprocal connexion and sometimes risk to engender, all along the path, processes of saturation of the surroundings that can be hardly stopped.

### 2.3. The actions

From an operative point of view, the *De Stichtse Lustwarande* project was implemented three years ago and involved the local representatives who chose both the priorities and the participation from an economic point of view during the implementation.

It is likely to assess that the *Lustwarande*, the road, is nearly an excuse that unifies a multitude of projects on different scale, all linked to the local landscape, its fruition, its active preservation and its promotion in economic terms too.

Looking at the huge quantity of interventions listed in the consultation programmes of intervention in the years 2005 e 2006<sup>19</sup>, the following points shall be highlighted:

- Implementation of a panoramic wooden tower inside the Kaapsche Bossen;
- Implementation of a route for disabled people inside the *arboretum* of the Kaapsche Bossen;
- Restoration of a hornbeam boulevard, recently re-planted using dwarf species in the historical garden of Amerongen;

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<sup>19</sup> PROVINCIE UTRECHT, *Project Stichtse Lustwarande Uitvoeringsprogramma 2005* and *Project Stichtse Lustwarande Uitvoeringsprogramma 2006*, unpublished material for internal use issued by the Council.

- Urban restoration of the main square in Doorn, around the cultural centre, close to the crossing between county roads N225 and N227;
- Different ecological corridors that connect both sides of the road, among which the *Ecopassage* of Elst is one of the most important: it overcomes the N225 and connect the fauna system (especially ungulates) of the hills with the banks of Lek river running North-South;



Figure 10 – Doorn: oval-shaped roundabout, by-pass and shortcut road

### 3. BACK TO FRANCIACORTA: CONCLUSIONS

The wide model of the *De Stichtse Lustwarande* can be successfully used to come back to the study case of Franciacorta, trying to draw some guidelines on a program about preservation of historic roads in new outskirts context.

There are four kinds of factors to consider:

- Historic-Cultural Aspects
  - architectural store (bridges, retaining walls, *case cantoniere*<sup>20</sup>, crossroads and intersections, shrines, noble farms and suburban villas)
  - historic literature, travel books, ancient sources



The fallen down wall shows, behind, the effect of an anonymous industrial building along the ancient Postal Road. The priority should be restoration of the wall and mitigation planting, using local species (*Populus nigra*, *Carpinus betulus*...)

- Perceptual Aspects
  - Sights and scenarios
  - Focal points, high/low visibility
  - Strong chromatic changes for different land uses

<sup>20</sup> They are the lodging-houses where the maintenance staff working for ANAS was used to live, alongside of national roads. All of them are painted in a reddish purple colour, but now they are widely unused and many of them are falling into decay.



The picture taken from the ancient road from Rovato to Iseo, where some years ago the Administration decided to build a heavy shopping centre. But there is a strong conflict with the wet area laid behind and a co-visibility problem with the Romanesque monastery on the background.

- **Infrastructural Aspects**

- Medium cruising speed;
- Kind of surface /pave (asphalt, paved road, gravel road...)
- Connection with contiguous viability (rail crossings, subways, junctions...)
- Course (bends, bumps, strights)
- Safety matters



This is one of the neuralgic points in Franciacorta region where infrastructures completely deleted the memories of the historical viability. So, close to the highway exit you can find a shopping centre, a multiplex, the PIP (Piano Insediamenti Produttivi). It is an irreversible process that can be stopped now and be helped, in the future, by a strict planning discipline, also starting from the traffic and advertising signals.

- **Ecological Aspects**

- Tree and hedge rows;
- Streams, irrigation ditches;
- Voids (uncultivated allotments, secondary succession...) alongside the tracks.



The Fusia irrigation ditch (opened in XV Cent.) is one of the elements that set up a thick net of water ways, all over west Franciacorta, taking water from Oglio River to the rural plan. A complete re-naturalization of the banks (using close-to-nature engineering) and of the river bed would be recommended to improve the ecological connection, the bio-diversity and the view from the road.

So that we can't plan the road (or preserve the historic road) without having a deep look at the surroundings: the road is not a landscape by itself, it lives just related with its "catching" area, and in a periurban context like in Franciacorta the road is so often a weak sign in a twisted landscape that we can preserve, just preserving its system, that sometimes begins also kilometres far from the paved edge.

That's the reason why, as an instance, preserving the ancient postal road to Milan will mean laying four kinds of maps:

- The map of the historical heritage, where we can find the footprints of the centuries;
- The mosaic of the urban plans (PRG or PGT) of all the counties facing along the historic road;
- The Provincial Coordination Territorial Plan (PTCP) of the Brescia Province, showing the landscape units, the main persistences, the values, the processes, the plans and the risks;
- The map of the Ecological Network of the Province that allows thinking about an historic road related to the whole system of ecological connections, remedying, as possible, the landscape fragmentation the urban sprawling produced.

In far 1960, Geoffrey Jellicoe said that a new road is the team work of an urban planner, an architect, an engineer, a landscape architect: they all aim to make the road an element of the crossed landscape<sup>21</sup>; is like the landscape takes possession of road. Thinking about the historic roads, in Franciacorta as everywhere in a suburban context, I think the aim is the road can be the starting point for a reversal, taking possession of the surrounding landscape.

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<sup>21</sup> JELICOE GEOFFREY, *Studies in landscape design*, Oxford University Press, London , 1960.