

Bruno Vecchio
Il paesaggio italiano

Concetti e tassonomia

(Padova, 24 novembre 2023)

Landscape: current definition

Let's start from the official definition of landscape contained in the European Landscape Convention (Florence, 20 October 2000):

"Landscape" means an area, *as perceived by people*, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and / or human factors [*emphasis added*]

therefore the existence of the landscape requires the *presence of one or more observers*.

Moreover, the mere presence of one or more individuals is not sufficient to "create" the landscape: these individuals need to be able to "see" a landscape...

What does this mean?

The following definition by sociologist Georg Simmel (*Philosophy of landscape*, 1911 [?]) is helpful:

"The landscape is not yet given when things of every kind extend, one next to the other, on a piece of land [...] Nature, which in its being and in its deep sense ignores individuality, is transformed in the individuality of the "landscape" from the gaze of man"

For further information, you can read, e.g.

<https://metode.org/issues/monographs/landscape-born-or-made.html>

SOME EXAMPLES



**Paul Cezanne, Mont Sainte-Victoire (1896-1898)
St. Petersburg, Ermitage**



Katsushika Hokusai, The great wave in Kanagawa (1820).

So also the Italian landscape, like every landscape,
exists when
it's in the eyes of the viewer.



The oldest landscape painting
(realistic, NOT symbolic) in medieval
Italy:
Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Effects of good
government on the countryside*
(1337), Siena, Town Hall

But generally speaking, Ambrogio Lorenzetti's sensibility remained isolated for centuries.

As the Italian anthropologist and historian Piero Camporesi writes in his book *Le belle contrade. Nascita del paesaggio italiano*, 1995 (more or less: The beautiful districts. Birth of the Italian landscape),

“The wonder for the beauty of a landscape is unthinkable for the men of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: their eye captures more the environmental concreteness and the reality of human geography than the aesthetic enchantment. It is an Italy, theirs, of things and people, of trades and anti-trade, of business and bad business, a long parade of objects, artifacts, products, activities, focused and identified not by the noble sense of sight but from the most popular ones of touch, taste, smell. The cultural acquisition of the landscape arises later, slowly and laboriously, and thus disinterested contemplation for the ineffable pleasures of the spirit [emphasis added] [...] The sea, from a superb and threatening expanse, turns into a pleasant and sometimes sensual resort for holidays; the bourgeois promotion of the mountains - assisted by the aesthetics of the sublime - makes that harsh verticality a fundamental requirement for the elevation of the spirit and for the examination of human frailty”.

The process of appreciation of the landscape is completed, instead, when J. W. Goethe writes his *Journey to Italy* (journey made in 1788; writing a few years later). Let's consider this description, about Veneto region:

“The road leading from Verona to Vicenza is very pleasant; it goes north-east along the mountains and always having their buttresses on the left, composed of sand, limestone, clay and marl. On the hills that they form are scattered villages, castles and farmhouses. On the right the wide plain that you travel gradually widens, and the road, wide, straight and well maintained runs through a very fertile countryside: the view ranges between long rows of trees around which the vine shoots twist towards the top, then fall back down like real festoons. The grapes have reached maturity and they oppress the branches that dangle and sway for their entire length [...]

Between the rows of vines the soil is exploited for the cultivation of each sort of grain, especially corn and sorghum. Near Vicenza the hills rise, again, from north to south: they are reportedly of volcanic nature, and close the plain. Vicenza it is located precisely at the foot and, if you like, in an inlet formed by the same hills”.



Current view on countryside near Soave (between Verona and Vicenza)

Those who perceive the landscape can use both a literary description and a description according to the rules of the "hard" sciences

Goethe's previous passage on the Veneto countryside is a literary description, but it contains some really scientific observations.

The landscape between Verona and Vicenza is thus effectively described by the eyes of the observer.

This way a problem arises: to rely on literary description or on scientific one to illustrate a landscape?

Someone's Response: BOTH!

The landscape as a field of attention of both art and science: Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859)

Ansichten der Natur, Stuttgart 1807

Vues des cordillères, et monumens des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique, Paris 1810

Atlas géographique et physique du royaume de la Nouvelle Espagne, Paris 1811

Voyage aux régions équinoxiales du nouveau continent, Paris 1814-1834

Reise nach dem Ural, dem Altai und dem Kaspischen meere [...] im Jahre 1829 ausgeführt, Berlin, no date

Kosmos: Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung, Stuttgart 1845-1862

The ideas of Humboldt about the landscape

Let's try to summarize Humboldt's thought in this regard, especially on the basis of what he writes in his monumental work *Kosmos* (4 vols., 1845-1858). It is through the landscape [*Landschaft*] that the feeling of nature as totality, variety and interdependence can be conveyed together. This feeling is certainly vague and full of mystery, but for this very reason it's an emotionally very powerful push towards naturalistic investigation. The objective of this type of investigation will be the rational understanding of the world: this understanding will confirm the initial feeling of connection between the various faces of nature, will give full account of nature itself, and therefore will allow access to an even higher form of enjoyment. than the initial one, purely aesthetic.

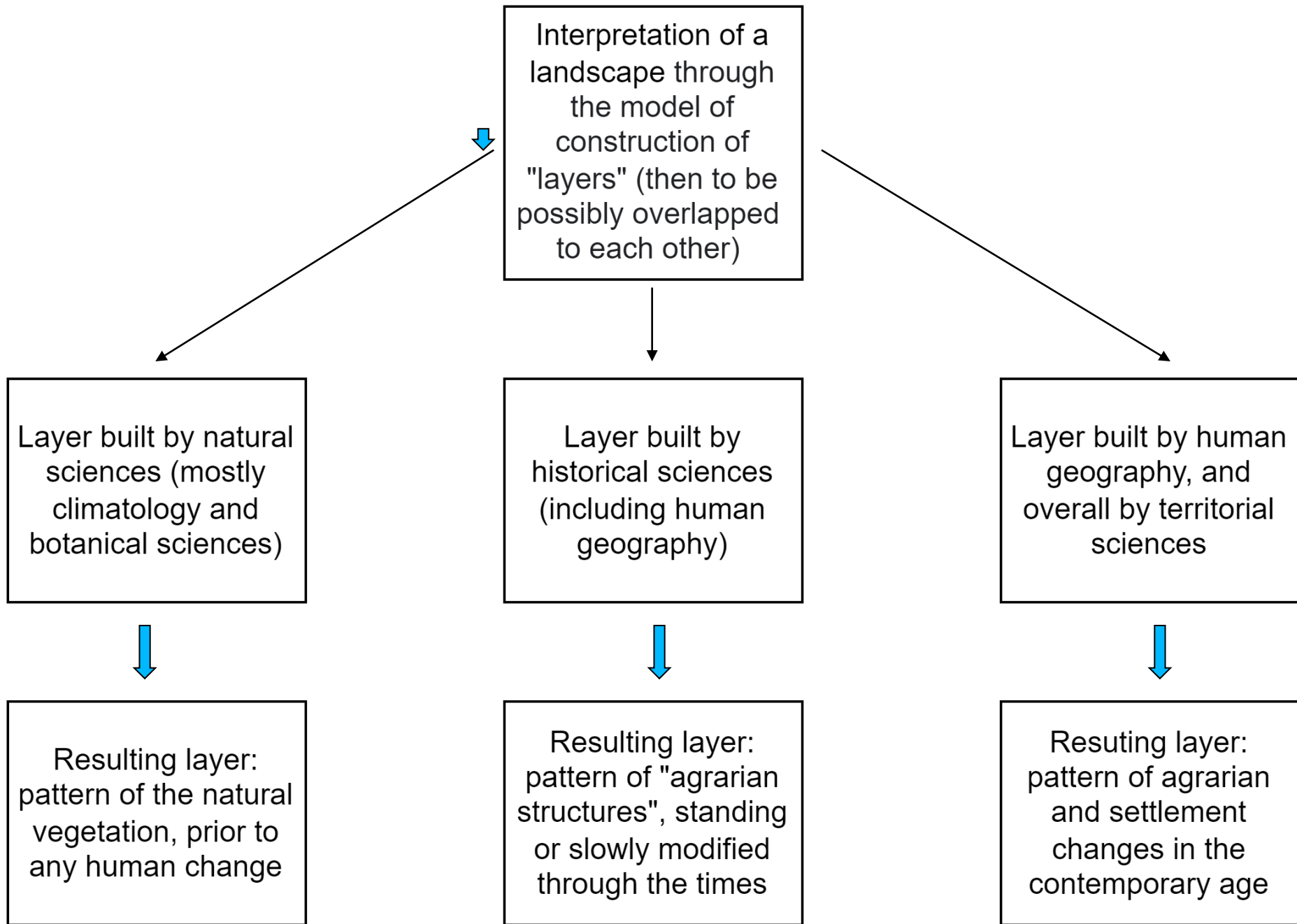
So, Humboldt's example is a valid push to draw attention to the landscape, not only as a means of aesthetic enjoyment (an attitude prevalent in the last phase of the Grand Tour) but also as an object of scientific investigation on it. This method is generally available, therefore also for what concerns Italy.



Having accomplished this indispensable clarification regarding the concept of landscape, let's now consider how the landscape, and the Italian one in particular, can be investigated.

Let us previously specify some principles.

- 1) Any landscape, as it is presented today, is "the result of the action and interaction of natural and / or human factors" (see # 2 slide)
- 2) So to interpret a landscape - any landscape - it is necessary to use both the natural sciences and the human sciences.
- 3) How can the use of both categories of science take place? It can be done using landscape interpretation procedures, which will be applied in succession to the same landscape, so as to constitute "layers"



The "layer" of the natural landscape.

Please note: Today the natural landscape is a completely theoretical model, because there are practically no landscapes in the world that have not been modified by man.

Nonetheless, as a theoretical model, it is essential for conceptually deconstructing, then rebuilding the world, and in this way to understand it thoroughly..

Here the world-scale natural landscape patterns, following Renato Biasutti, *Il paesaggio terrestre*, 1947.

FORME DEL PAESAGGIO TROPICALE UMIDO

I P. equatoriale (ileale)

II P. delle savane tropicali

FORME DEL PAESAGGIO ARIDO

III P. arido caldo

IV P. arido con inverno freddo

FORME DEL P. TEMPERATO FREDDO (CLIMI MICROTERMICI)

VIII P. delle latifoglie decidue e delle praterie boreali

IX P. delle aghifoglie boreali

FORME DEL PAESAGGIO NIVALE

X P. semi-nivale

XI P. nivo-glaciale

III-IV deserti sabbiosi

FORME DEL P. TEMPERATO CALDO (CLIMI MESOTERMICI)

V P. intertropicale montano

VI P. sub-tropicale

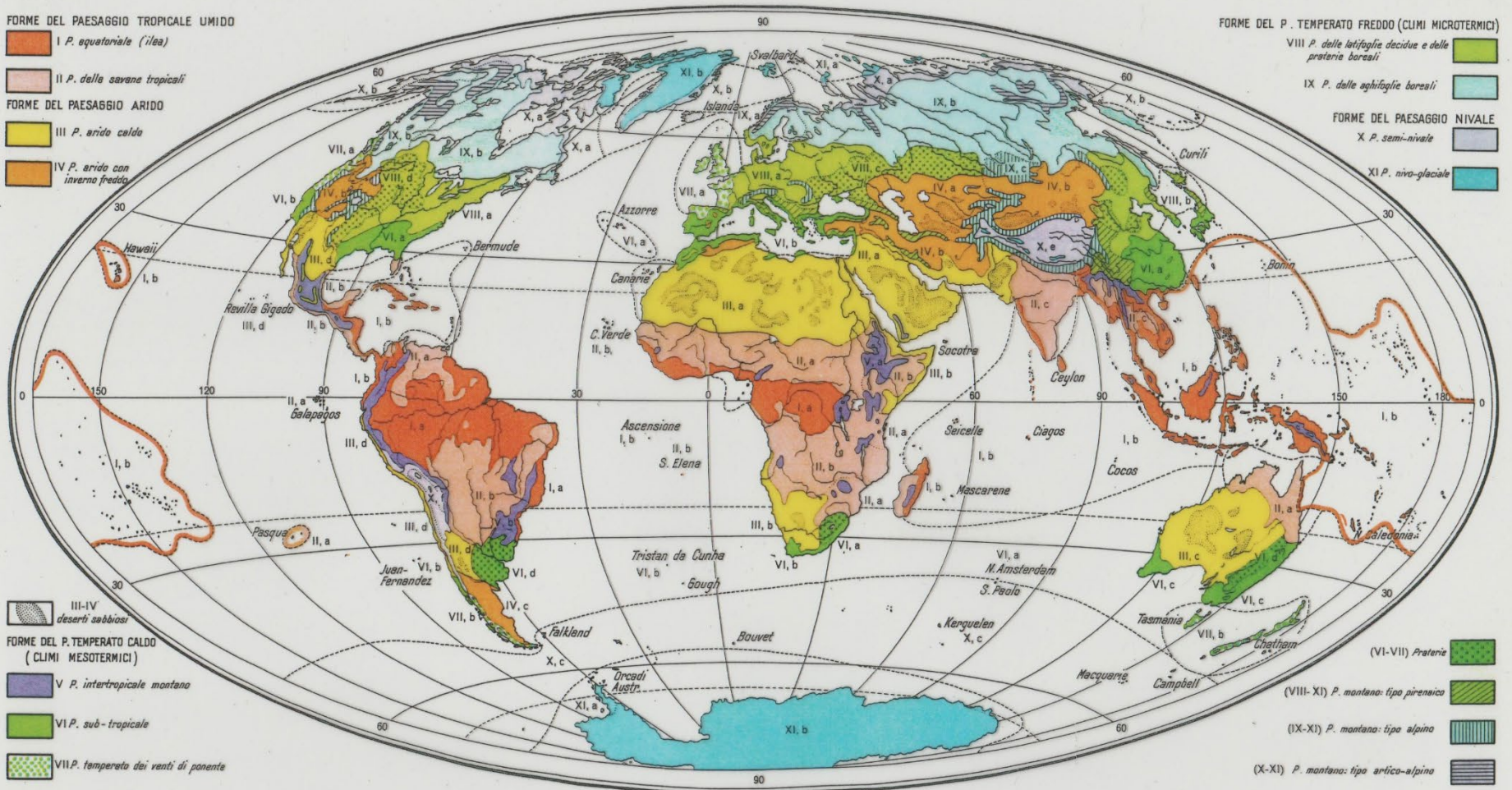
VII P. temperato dei venti di ponente

(VI-VII) Praterie

(VIII-XI) P. montana: tipo pirenaico

(IX-XI) P. montana: tipo alpino












(X-XI) P. montana: tipo artico-alpino



(Scala equatoriale 1 : 104.000.000.)

CLASSIFICAZIONE DELLE GRANDI FORME DEL PAESAGGIO TERRESTRE

Pattern explanation

-  Equatorial landscapes
-  Tropical mountain landscapes
-  Landscapes of tropical savannas
-  Sub-tropical and Mediterranean landscapes
-  Arid landscapes
-  Landscapes of the Western winds
-  Arid landscapes with cold winter
-  Landscapes of deciduous broad-leaves and boreal grasslands
-  Landscapes of boreal coniferous trees
-  Landscapes of tundra
-  Landscapes of snow and ice

A more detailed vision: the Italy's natural landscape, seen through the "natural potential vegetation" (in turn designated through "driver" botanical species)

Source: <https://www.ilnolline.it/vegetazione-italia/>



RED: oleaster (*Olea oleaster*),
carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*)

ORANGE: holm oak (*Quercus ilex*)

LIGHT GREEN: downy oak (*Quercus pubescens*), oak (*Quercus petraea*)

LIGHT BLUE: English oak (*Quercus robur*), hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)

DARK GREEN: beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)

VIOLET: spruce (*Picea abies*)

INDIGO: vegetation above the tree line

What now about the landscape «layer» built by historical sciences (including human geography)?

Some preliminary statements

- 1) The action of men on natural landscapes originates *human landscapes*
- 2) These human landscapes, both at the global and at the local scale, are much more varied than natural landscapes, because they are the result of potentially infinite combinations
- 3) It is then possible, and how, to construct a reasonable taxonomy of the human landscapes, such as the one we have just illustrated for natural landscapes, both for the globe and for Italy?
- 4) In our opinion, it's possible, at least for the human landscapes of traditional countryside (i.e. those that were formed until the mid-20th century)
- 5) The way to construct a taxonomy of human landscapes is the application of the concept of agrarian structures.

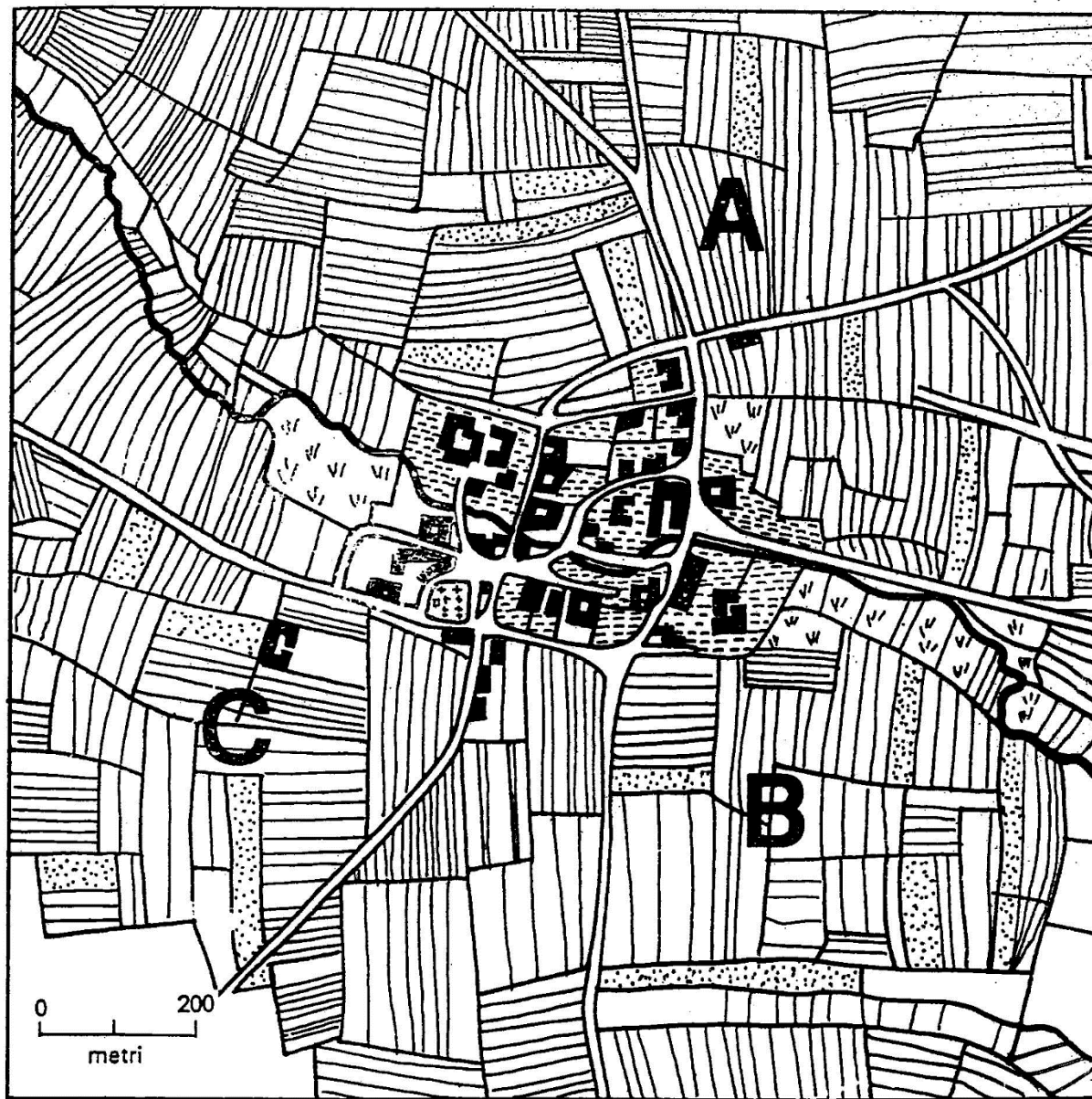
What is the “agrarian structure” of a particular area?

- It is not just the whole of the crops cultivated and of the animals bred in that area
- It is not just the particular “farming system” within which the crops and the animals mentioned above are cultivated and bred
- Instead, it is all that we have mentioned above, plus the SOCIAL RELATIONS present in the agriculture of that area, that is, the “relations between man and man regarding the land”.

The first scholar who systematically used the concept of "agrarian structures" is considered the French historian Marc Bloch, in his book

The original characteristics of French rural History (1931; first English translation 1966) through his distinction between two main agrarian structures of central-northern France, from the Middle Ages to the 19th century:

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A,B,C

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rotazione triennale
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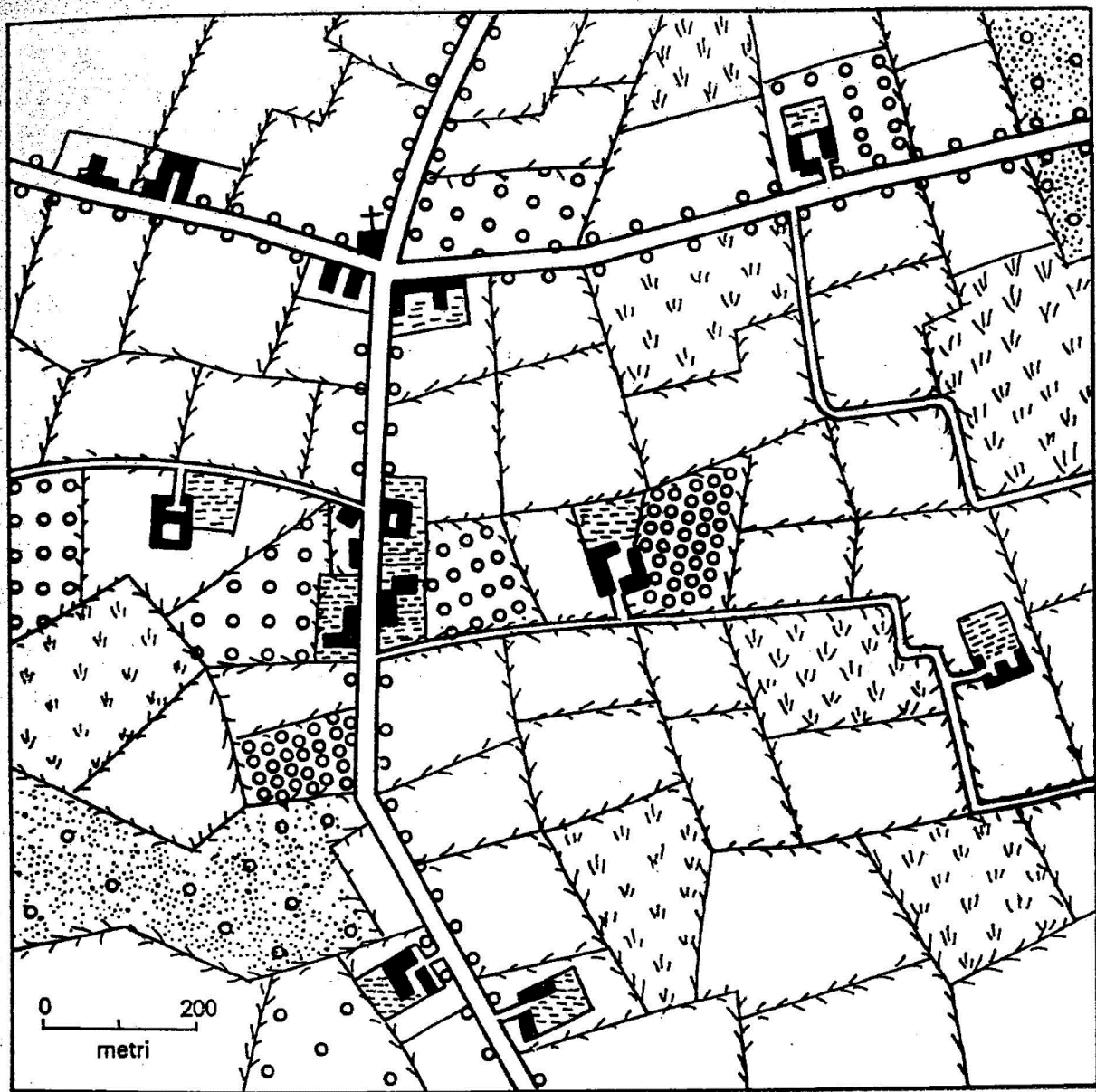
prati



divisione dei
campi in strisce



strisce di una proprietà
distribuite nei tre settori



0 200
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case con
orti familiari



prati



frutticoltura



siepi di recinzione



campi



boschi con
sottobosco

Through the theoretical toll of "agrarian structure", an agrarian landscape can thus be easily described, in any part of the world, and in any historical age.

What then about the traditional Italian agricultural landscape, investigated through "agrarian structures"?

The first scholar who

- adopting the method of Marc Bloch - proposed an overall description of the traditional Italian agricultural landscape through the instrument of "agrarian structures" was the historian Emilio Sereni, in his *History of the Italian agricultural landscape* (1962; first English translation 1992)

What about the seminal Sereni's book?

Sereni's book is a precious description of the traditional human landscapes of Italy.

However:

- In 1962 there was still insufficient knowledge of many ancient Italian agrarian structures (knowledge then greatly increased in the following 60 years).
- As far as I know, a cartographic vision of the pattern of traditional Italian agricultural structures has not yet been attempted.

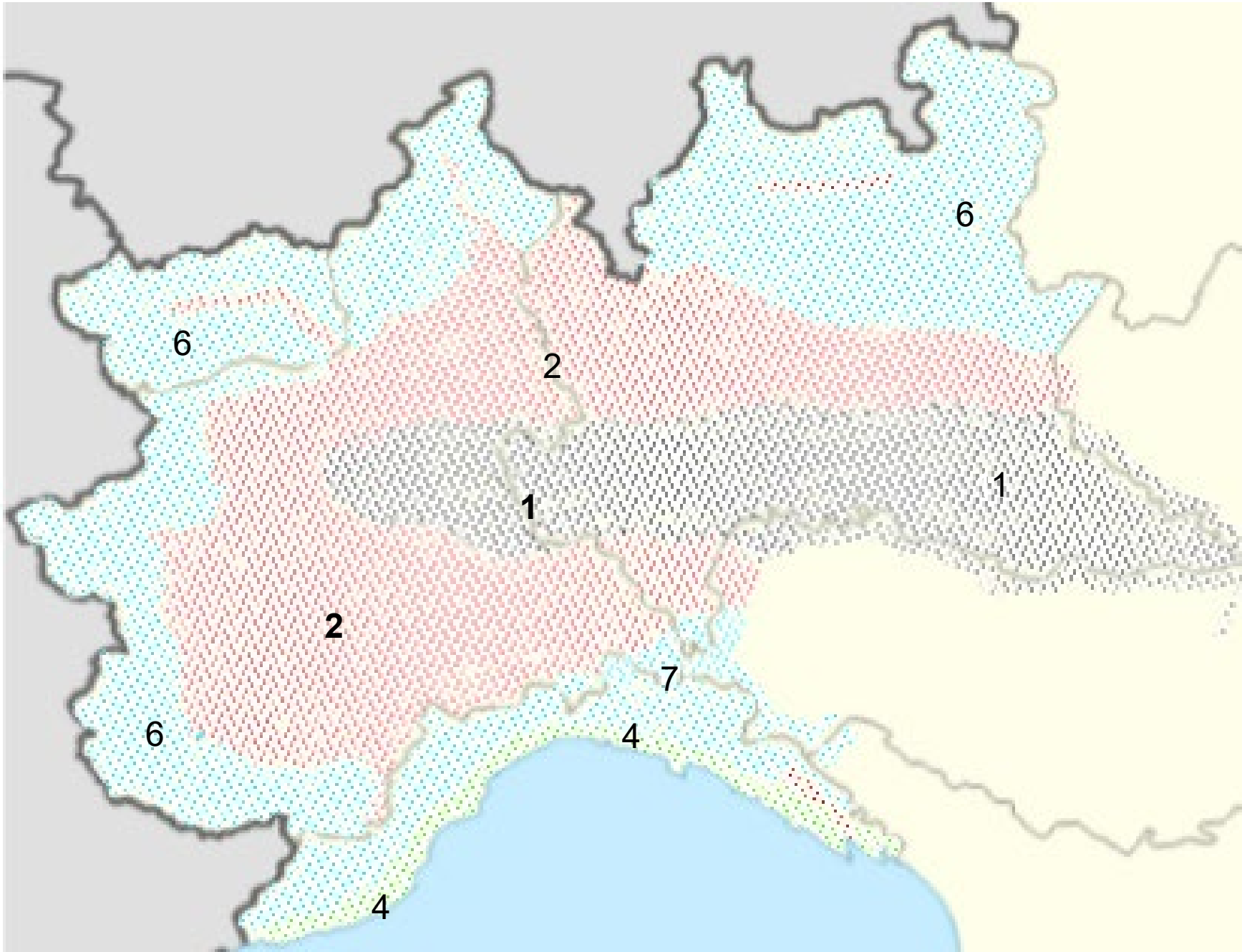
So, I have attempted to carry out this cartographic vision, and I am proposing it here to you for the first time.

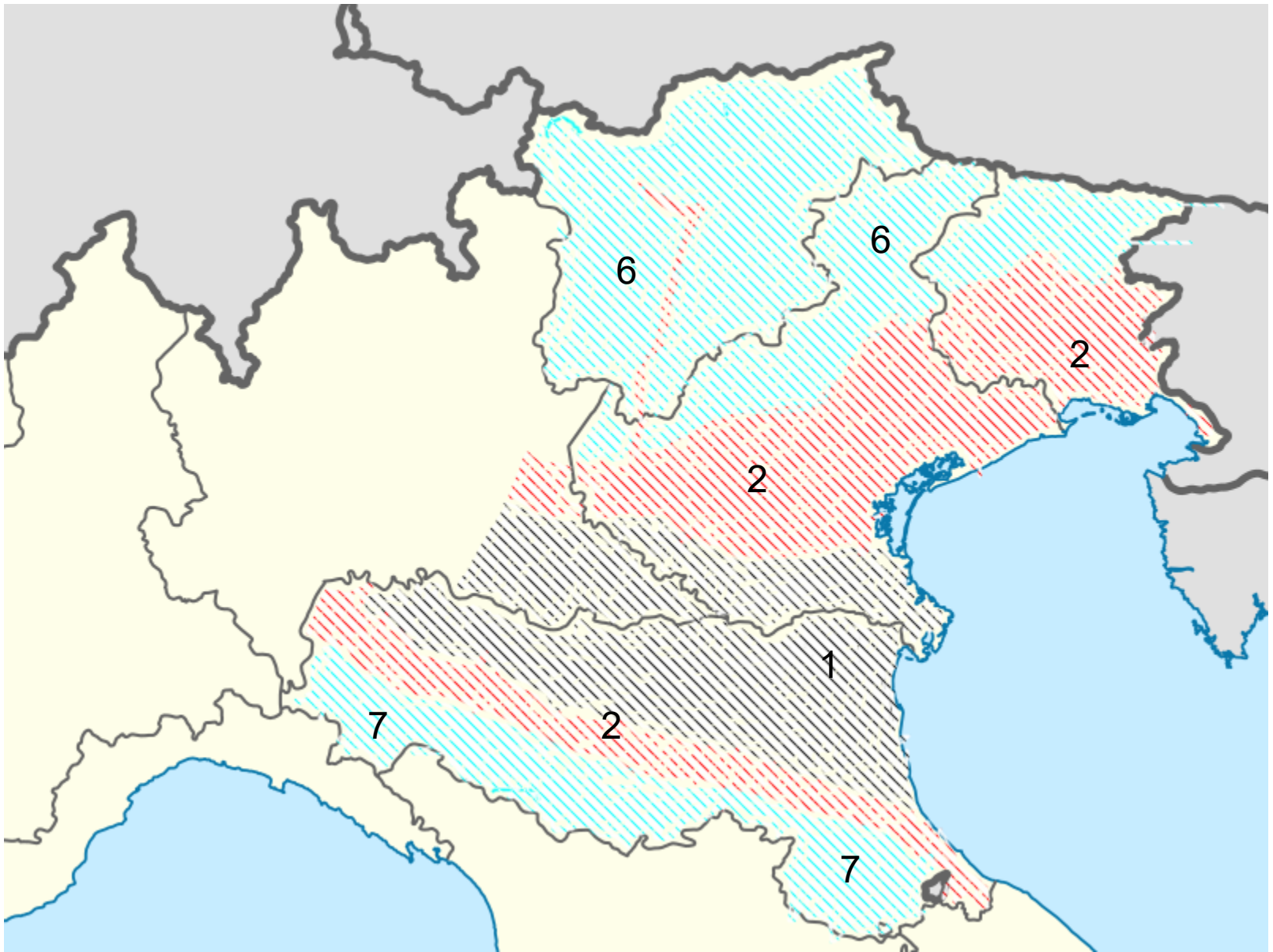
List of main Italian agrarian structures (up to the mid-twentieth century), and of the resulting landscapes, following the latest research results

- 1) The countryside of the large capitalist farms in the Po Valley
- 2) The medium and small-scale managed countryside in central-northern Italy
- 3) The central-southern countryside with medium intensity land use
- 4) The Mediterranean and sub-Mediterranean intensively cultivated countryside (“giardino mediterraneo”)
- 5) The extensively cultivated countryside of the central-southern lordly / capitalist estates (“latifondo”)
- 6) The Alpine agro-pastoral spaces
- 7) The agro-pastoral areas of the central-northern Apennines
- 8) The agro-pastoral areas of the central-southern Apennines (“latifondo contadino”)

1) The countryside of the large capitalist farms in the Po Valley – main features

- Large estates, centrally managed (black pattern on the maps). The majority of the production is for the market.
- The estates are "capitalist", because they involve a) an entrepreneur; b) a systematic use of large capital; c) wage workers (partly permanent, partly temporary)
- The company buildings are generally concentrated in a single point of the estate, and they are massive because they include: warehouses for the harvest and for agricultural machinery, stables, farmyards, dwellings for permanent workers, accommodation for temporary workers, etc.
- The crops are various: mostly rice in the west, dairy in the center, wheat and corn in the east of the Po valley
- Field irrigation plays mostly an essential role







A large farm and its land in Locate Triulzi, Lombardy



Paddy fields landscape in eastern Piedmont



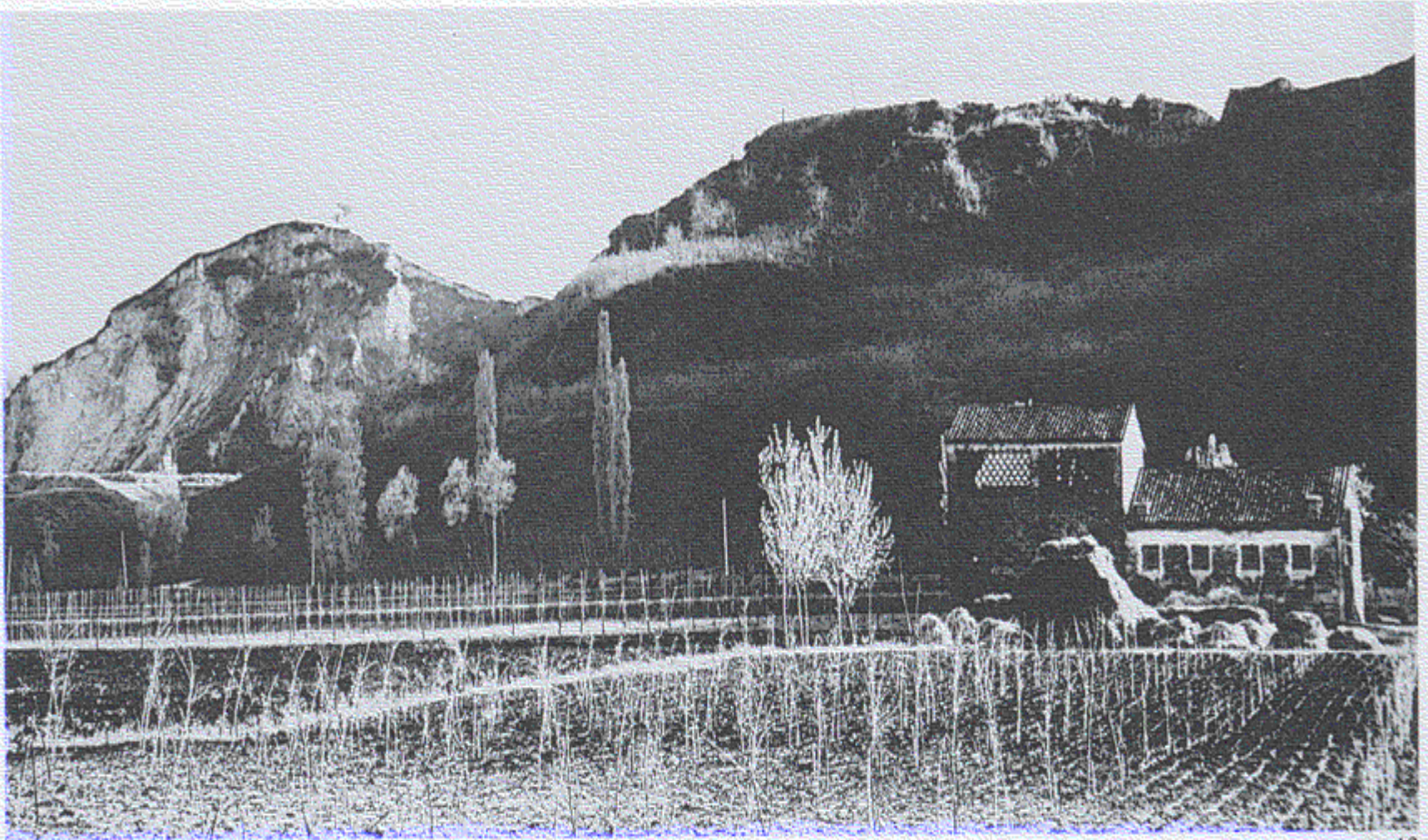
A typical inner courtyard of a capitalistic farm in the Po plain

2) The medium and small-scale managed countryside in central-northern Italy – main features - 1

- This is a very large area (red pattern on the maps), it includes the entire area of influence of the former medieval Italian municipalities (“Comuni”), where this area is not affected by the capitalist estates (#1 case)
- The medieval cities of the northern and central Italy in fact have poured into their countryside a huge flow of capital, which has produced a near monopoly of land ownership by the urban middle and upper class
- But this process didn't give rise to capitalist farms, as in the previous case; instead to family-run farms, by peasants who cultivate such urban properties
- Progressively, the farms are equipped by the owners with houses for the peasant's family, and with other buildings intended for the farm management

2) The medium and small-scale managed countryside in central-northern Italy – main features - 2

- Agricultural contracts are very different, but sharecropping prevails on the one hand (it's present everywhere, but above all in central Italy), the rent on the other hand: that is, the farmer pays the owner a fixed rent (it's present especially in northern Italy).
- In a few cases, after many generations, the peasant family can accumulate sufficient capital to buy the land it cultivates. The case, however, is generalized in the southern hills of Piedmont ("Langhe"), today famous for their vineyards (see the 2nd of the following pictures)
- Both in northern and central Italy, in the past in these types of farms the "mixed" cultivation is omnipresent: in every field, vines and other trees are mixed with cereals and other herbaceous plants (see Goethe's description, above)



Veneto's landscape, ca 1960



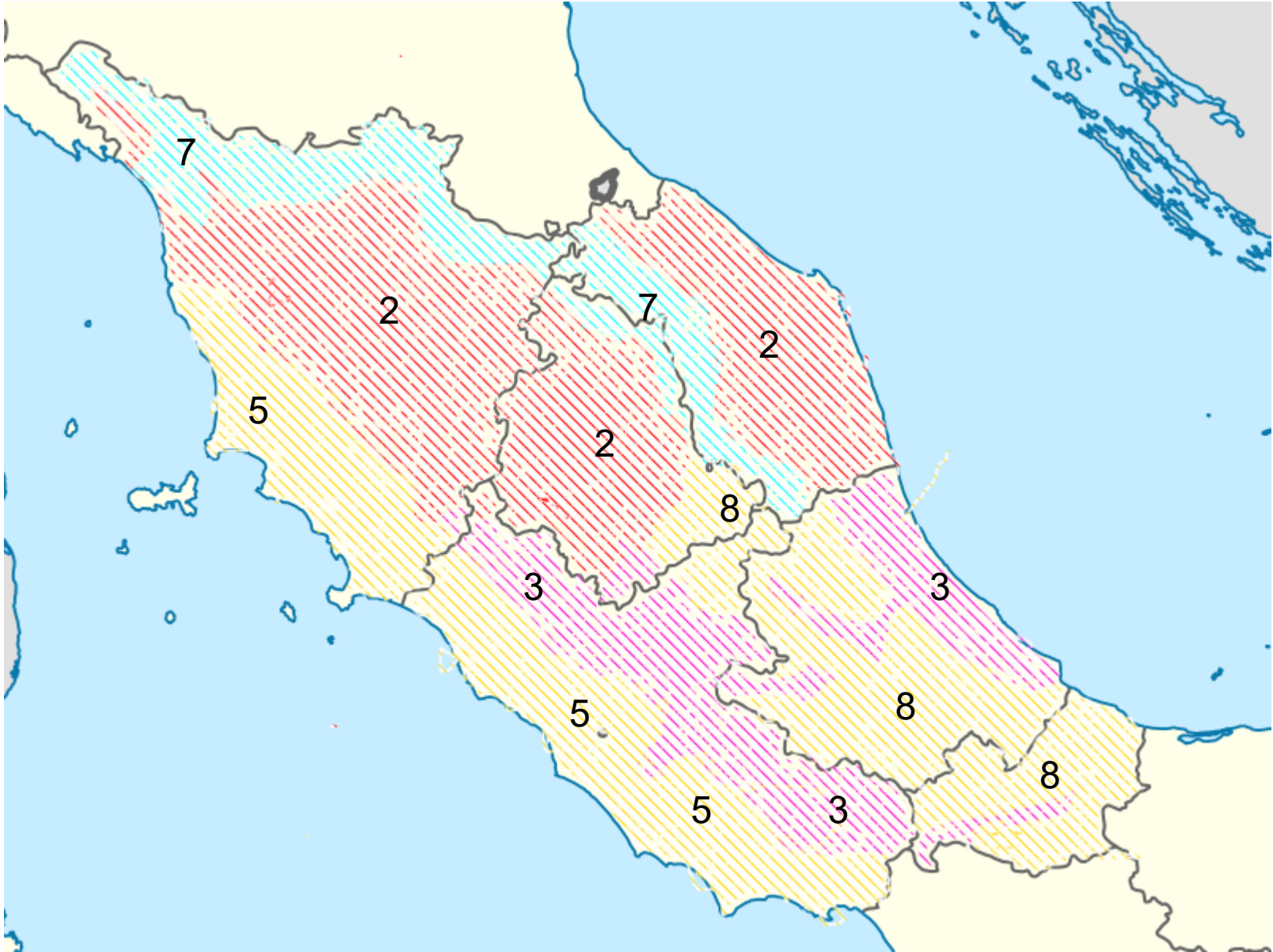
«Langhe» region, Piedmont, today

Torrechiara (Umbria region), 1964



3) The central-southern countryside with medium intensity land use – main features

- Even outside the area of Italian medieval “Comuni” (therefore in southern Italy) the urban middle classes over time acquire a certain degree of possession of the countryside; the result is a landscape of cultivated countryside with family home on the farm, as in the previous case.
- However this performance capacity on campaigns is less strong than in the previous case, and the affected areas are scattered, much more discontinuous (see, in maps 3 and 4, the purple color)
- More than in the previous type of countryside, in the crops the quota needed for the self-consumption of the peasant family is important: the result is a more strong polyculture.



Farmhouses in inner Campania countryside (unknown location), 1950

26

27



Colonnella (Abruzzo), today

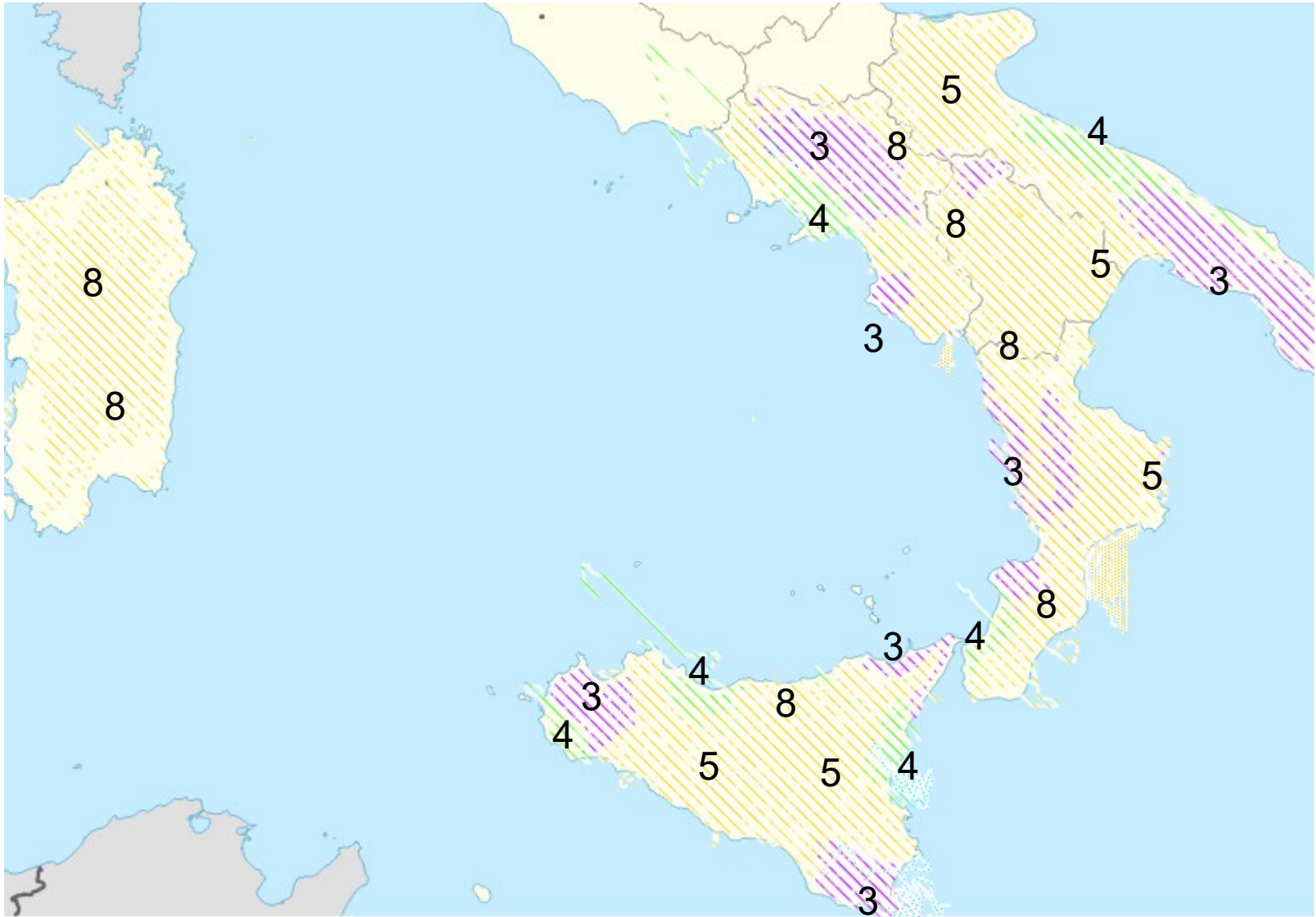




Countryside near Lecce (Apulia), today

4) The Mediterranean and sub-Mediterranean intensively cultivated countryside (“giardino mediterraneo”) - main features

- Mediterranean intensive agriculture (green pattern), whose lush appearance has impressed travelers for centuries, is not necessarily linked to a single form of agricultural contract, nor to a type of settlement; it can agree both with wage labor and with various partnership contracts and with farming by owners;
- Small and medium-sized farming is still important, with the important exception of olive growing, which in the aforementioned areas is mostly accompanied by large-scale farming and often also by large agricultural villages, which may seem similar to those of the latifundium.



Citrus groves in Bagheria (Sicily), 1934



Lemon groves on
the Amalfi coast,
today



5) The extensively cultivated countryside of the central-southern lordly / capitalist estates (“latifondo”) – main features

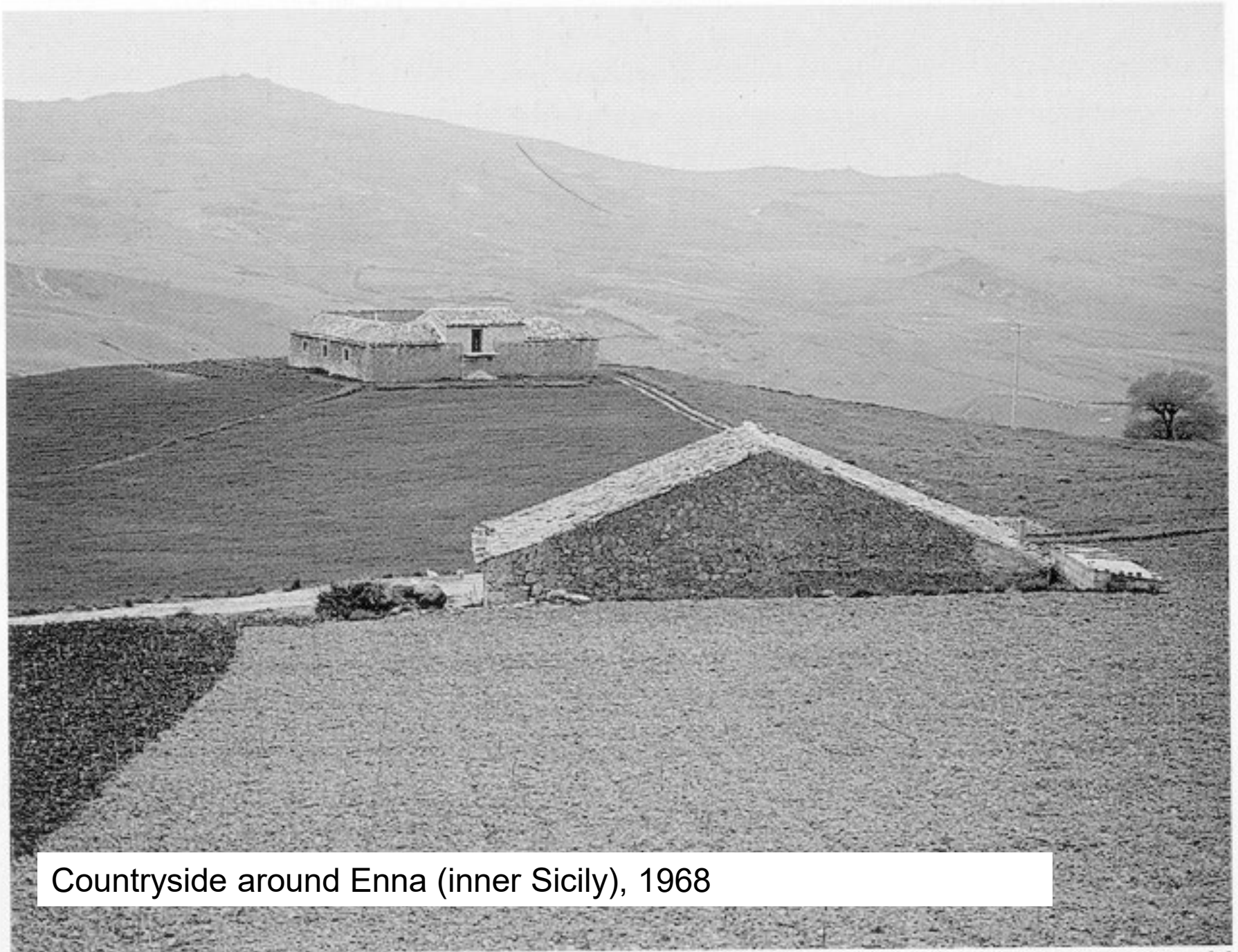
- This type of countryside (part of the yellow pattern on the maps) is typical for the presence of large estates, but very different from those of Northern Italy (case # 1). In fact, here the dry farming dominates, moreover very extensive, and based almost exclusively on wheat. No peasant scattered settlement at all, no trees in the fields.
- On the other hand, as in Northern Italy, these estates host large buildings (in the South named “masserie”), aimed to the coordination of agricultural works (usually only seasonal) and the crop management.
- An essential side of the traditional land use in the large estates is the massive presence in the winter of transhumant livestock, grazing in the large spaces permanently allocated to it or left free from field rotation.

Countryside around the city of Rome, ca 1920



Countryside around Melissa (Calabria), 1963





Countryside around Enna (inner Sicily), 1968

6) The Alpine agro-pastoral spaces – main features

- Into the Alps (part of the light-blue pattern) high altitude implies a much greater exploitation (mostly in community mode) of the forest and pasture than agriculture.
- Agriculture is practiced with difficulty, often through terracing, and in any case only in the most favorable spaces. As for the relationship between man and land, small ownership, or in any case forms allowing the acquisition of almost all of the product by the farmer, are prevailing: in fact, given the scarcity of the crops, it isn't possible to share them with a landlord.
- Except in the areas of Germanic tradition (South Tyrol, where the scattered settlement prevails) the agrarian system is the so-called infield-outfield: a crown of intensively used land around a compact settlement; at a greater distance, a space used occasionally and / or extensively (precisely pasture or forest).



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Faver (Trento Province)



Val Grande National Park, Piedmont



«Sentiero dei grandi alberi», Province of Vicenza

7) The agro-pastoral areas of the central-northern Apennines – main features

- In the central-northern Apennines (part of the light-blue pattern) the lower altitude implies less importance of livestock and also of forestry, compared to agriculture.
- Centralized settlement remains, however, and the forest is still well integrated into the production circuits
- The traditional periodic movement of cattle between high and low altitudes, following the seasons, doesn't take place into the mountains, as in the Alps, but between the mountains on one side, the plains on the other.



Village and valleys in Northern Apennines (unspecified place)



Fiumalbo (Emilia region)

8) The agro-pastoral areas of the central-southern Apennines (“latifondo contadino”) - main features

- To the careless observer, the spaces of the central-southern Apennines (part of yellow pattern) may appear to be the same as those of the central-southern lordly and capitalist estates (“latifondo”, case # 5).
- In both cases, in fact, the countryside (except around the villages; see below) is almost devoid of houses, and moreover the population is concentrated in a few, quite large villages.
- Here, however, there is no landlord, again because the low productivity doesn't allow the farmer a substantial sharing of the harvest (therefore the definition of "peasant latifundium" has been proposed)
- Live into the village allows the farmer to be at the center of his "scattered and changing enterprise" (M. Rossi Doria): in fact, he cultivates many small fields, far from each other. The tiring daily movements of the farmer derive from this, which greatly lower his productivity.



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Montescaglioso (Basilicata)

Gennargentu massif (Sardinia)



Castellino del Biferno (Molise)



Thanks for you attention!

