

MASSA LUBRENSE COAST AND ITS MODIFICATIONS DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Barbara Bertoli¹, Marina Russo¹, Loredana Marcolongo¹, Clelia Cirillo¹

¹CNR – IRET Research Institute on Terrestrial Ecosystem

Via Pietro Castellino, 111 – 80131 Napoli (Italy),

e-mail: barbara.bertoli@cnr.it

Abstract – This contribution, which comes from the study experiences of the research group The Landscape in Laboratory (*Il Paesaggio in Laboratorio*) (CNR – IRET), aims to analyse the stages of the anthropogenic activities that have marked and modified the image of some stretches of the coast of Massa Lubrense during the twentieth century.

The gradual impoverishment of the identity matrices of this “enchanted” place, the land of Ulysses and the mermaids, the destination of travelers and writers of every age, is the result of the progressive affirmation of new models of economic development. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the strong landscape values that through the centuries had defined the originality and uniqueness of this territory began to be altered; following the mining activities, the coast was literally devoured and modified in its secular structure.

During the second century the construction of bathing establishments, hotel complexes, private parks for second homes, not regulated by careful planning, has changed definitively the environmental and landscape parameters of this wonderful coast.

Both through the rich archival documentation, partly found during the research in the Historical Archives of the Municipality of Massa Lubrense, and through the vast repertoire of stereotyped images related to the phenomenon of mass tourism, we intend to analyze situations and cases that in the second half of the twentieth century changed the coastline in the two sides of Sorrento and Salerno.

Introduction

The natural theater that embraces the twenty kilometers of the suggestive Massa Lubrense coast is a variegated hilly landscape. The place is characterized by cultivation of olive and citrus trees sloping down to the sea, sometimes consisting of rocky ridges, and a wild spontaneous vegetation typical of the Mediterranean that is reflected in the blue sea. The progressive depletion of the coastal landscape identity began in the early twentieth century when, following the mining activities, the coast was literally devoured and modified in its secular structure.

In the twenty kilometers of the Lubrense coast, from Puolo to the Crapolla fjord, six quarries were opened for the extraction of limestone. Strategically, the quarries arose in the most sheltered bays and easily accessible by cargo boats and represent some of the most beautiful inlets of this coastal stretch.

The more sheltered bays, later converted for new activities related to the increase of tourism, changed again their identity and image. From the second half of the twentieth century, the building of bathing establishments, hotel complexes, private parks for second

homes, not regulated by accurate town plan, have definitively changed environment and landscape of this wonderful coast. In fact, the coast embraces the two sides of the Sorrento and Salerno gulfs, naturally divided by Punta Campanella, and morphologically very different¹.

There were several historical-cultural and socio-economic factors that determined the Italian coasts assault, from the fifties. The progressive occupation of coastal areas was defined in many cases during the second half of the twentieth century, through unsustainable development models that led to an increasing consumption of soil and natural resources. Also, the Lubrense coast, as happened in the more general case of Italian coasts, was not spared by the complex dynamics, which had as consequences plotting and building speculation along the coast. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that the intensification of construction, without adequate urban planning tools, has resulted in the construction of new roads which in many cases, altered the high landscape values of the entire coastal stretch of the Peninsula.

The image of the Lubrense coast, which over the centuries became a true literary and aesthetic myth thanks to the descriptions of travelers, gradually fell into a profound decline during the twentieth century².

The activities related to limestone extraction, the degradation resulting from a building disorder generated by the exploitation of the tourist vocation of the place during the economic boom, therefore the numerous private buildings combined with the lack of adequate urban planning tools, have contributed to a progressive and irreversible decline and modification, even morphological, of the valuable coastal landscape.

Despite this, Lubrense coast still preserves natural landscape beauties, as well as a dense and stratified cultural and biodiversity heritage to be enhanced and safeguarded³.

Transformations along Massa Lubrense coast, from Puolo to Crapolla, during the twentieth century

Massa Lubrense coast remained intact for millennia, risked to be seriously compromised in its integrity because of the mining activities started in the early decades of the twentieth century. The limestone mining activity linked to the building use of Massa stone, until then marginal for that area, in the early Twenties turned into an intensive activity⁴. It should be noted that the replacement of traditional mining activities in favor of more intensive exploitation, generated irreparable damage, even morphological to the coastal landscape⁵. Seven limestone extraction plants were opened only in Massa Lubrense municipal boundaries: Merlino quarry in Puolo, Chianella in Capo Massa, Vitale in

¹ Cfr. R. Pane, *Sorrento e la sua costa*, Napoli, E.S.I., 1955, p. 31.

² Cfr. C. de Seta, *Il sacco della penisola sorrentina*, in Id., *Città territorio e mezzogiorno in Italia*, Torino, 1977, p. 100.

³ Cfr. M. Mautone, M. Ronza, B. Bertoli, *Pressione Turistica, Quadri ambientali e Morfogenesi paesistica: La gestione delle qualità territoriali nei sistemi costieri della Campania*, Gangemi Editore, Roma, 2009, p. 87.

⁴ Cfr. R. Filangieri di Candida, *Storia di Massa Lubrense*, 1910, p. 738.

⁵ Cfr. G. Pignatelli, *Le cave dismesse sulla costa sorrentina tra storia locale danni ambientali e forme di riuso*, in: « Bollettino della società geografica Italiana », Roma, 2014, p. 595.

Marcigliano, Cenito and Mitigliano quarries insistent in the Gulf of Naples, while in the side of Salerno those of Jeranto and Recommono. The local and the many immigrant workers who arrived in the Lubrense area in those years, worked tirelessly and in inhumane conditions in the numerous quarries that dotted the coast⁶. The quarries arose in the most beautiful and sheltered parts of the coastal stretch, strategically easily reachable by cargo boats⁷. After the crisis of the forties, this economic sector under the weight of the very high costs of a muddled management went into crisis. The mining activities gradually ceased, until the final closures in the 1970s. The coast was therefore hit by new problems and dynamics related to the reconversion of the areas of disused quarries.

Puolo bay, which owes its toponym to the presence of Pollio Felice villa and insistent in the municipal boundaries of Massa Lubrense, was the first to be profoundly modified by limestone extraction⁸. The small fishing village, naturally protected by two promontories, retained its valuable landscape features unaltered until the early nineteenth century when, following the opening of two kilns for lime production, it underwent serious transformations⁹. The exploitation of of Puolo field was increased by the twenties of the twentieth century, when two quarries were dug close to the mountain, one east on the promontory called Calcarella, and the other west open in the area that from 1927 was acquired by Merlino company. Already in 1929 was denounced the gutting of the bay and the loss of the Roman domus of Pollio Felice al Portiglione¹⁰. The devastating impact on the environment and the coastal landscape, distorted by the massive presence of industrial and transport structures for the extracted limestone, was studied by Roberto Pane and archaeologist Amedeo Maiuri. When Merlino company definitively ceased its activities in the bay in the mid-seventies, the vast area of the disused quarry was the object of an advanced building speculation attempt by the private company "Cala di Puolo"¹¹. The speculative project, called "Marina Verde", if carried out would have again attacked the coastal landscape, already marred by mining activities even in the morphological structure¹².

⁶ P. Esposito, S. Ruocco, *La Lobra culla della Città di Massa Lubrense*, Castellammare di Stabia, 2000, p. 173.

⁷ Cfr. G. Pignatelli, *op. cit.*, p. 596.

⁸ Cfr. R. Filangieri di Candida, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁹ The poet Publio Papilio Stazio in the two Carmi: "Villa Sorrentina Polii Felis" and the "Hercules Surrintinus Polli Felicis", describes the place before the construction of the Villa di Pollio as: "a desolate beach that served only as a shelter for passing sailors".

¹⁰ R. Filangieri di Cancia, *Sorrento e la sua penisola*, Bergamo, Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1929, p.55.

¹¹ In March 1978, the private company "Cala di Puolo" requested the administration to grant a fifteen-year concession for a maritime area in the Cala di Puolo area, in order to provide a tourist port. The concession license was issued in 1979, also for the state-owned part of the former quarry, but at the same time it became necessary to provide for the delimitation between private and state property.

¹² Cfr. Senate of the Republic Assembly n.26 of 9/10/1979. In the parliamentary session, PCI Senator Fermariello, addressing the Minister of Merchant Marine, denounced the speculative aims of the Cala di Puolo company which intended to carry out a "pharaonic" tourism project.

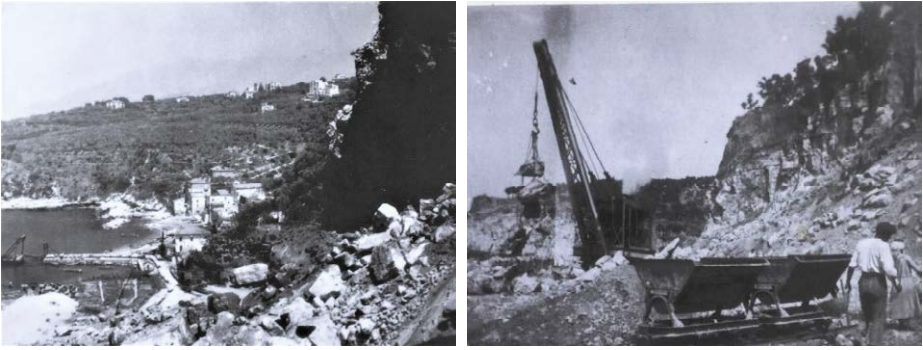


Figure 1- 2 – Puolo quarry in the early 1950s, di Leva family private collection.



Figure 3 – Model of the tourist village project to be built in Cava Merlino area, by ACML.

Fortunately, landscape protection associations and political groups, engaged to preventing the arbitrary privatization of bay state property, while preserving the public use of the only free beach on the coast from there to Amalfi, managed to hinder the speculative project. Currently the vast esplanade of the quarry area, dug into the rocky promontory close to the bay, houses a private parking, while the piers and docks close to the beach are occupied by seasonal bathing facilities. Continuing along the coast, after the small inlet of Chianella, which housed a series of small quarries for the production of rubble, we meet the bay of Marcigliano with the opening of the Cava Vitale, since 1910 had begun to irreversibly erode the high rocky ridge. The abandoned quarry area, in the sixties of the twentieth century, as happened in many other quarry areas insistent in the bays of the coast, was converted for tourist use. A hotel complex with a bathing establishment called “Conca Azzurra” was built in the bay. The hotel of modest architectural value is spread over three floors, the adjoining parking area was built on the esplanade of the quarry, while the

swimming pools were built in an embankment close to the sea. In the small beaches annexed to the hotel complex, the "brutal" concrete structures (partially eroded by the sea), built in the years in which the quarry was active and invading the coastline, are still clearly visible today. It should be remembered that starting from the 1950s, most of the Italian coastal coasts were hit by unregulated growth. The progressive occupation of coastal areas was defined during the second half of the twentieth century through development models that were unsustainable in many cases, due to various historical-cultural and socio-economic factors, which caused an increasing consumption of land and natural resources¹³.

Even the Lubrense coast was not spared by such dynamics. There are many cases of allotments authorized that then led to emblematic cases of building speculation. Meaningful episode of this new unsustainable way of occupation of the coastal territory is represented by the partition started in 1957 in the locality of Riviera San Montano¹⁴. The small promontory, bounded to the east by Vitale di Marcigliano quarry to the west by Marina della Lobra, at the end of the 1950s appeared as a hill sloping down to the sea, characterized by Mediterranean scrub and olive groves without houses and connecting roads¹⁵.



Figure 4 - 5 – Vitale quarry in the 1930s. The Conca Azzurra tourist complex at the end of the nineties.

Analyzing the considerable archival documentation, it has been possible to reconstruct the stages of the complex history that in a few years led to one of the largest plotting speculative background, built on Massa Lubrense coast. The speculation began in 1956 when Mrs. Maria di Leva in Pontelli, bought a parcel of land in a place she called Riviera di San Montano (from the name of the ancient church existing in the place), to

¹³ In the 1960s, faced with the intensification of speculative phenomena and the opening of new road arteries, the drafting of a Territorial Plan by the Ministry of Public Works became urgent. The commission chaired by R. Pane and L. Piccinato completed the work in 1968, despite the efforts made, they were unable to stem the reckless interventions along the peninsula.

¹⁴ Cfr. Riviera San Montano Lotting Project, Massa Lubrense Municipality Archive (hereinafter ACML), service no. 8 Urban Planning and Public Works, practices: n. 48, lot 42, no. 60 lot n. 3, no. 61 lots n. (4-5-6), n. 62 lot 18, no. 63 lot n. 19, n. 68 lot 13, no. 69 lot 16, no. 70 lot 17, no. 71 lot n. 23, n. 72 lot 35, no. 118 lot n. 14, n. 119 lot n. 12, n. 120 lot n. 8.

¹⁵ Cfr. General Plan and Riviera di San Montano Lotting Projects in ACML.

build its own house¹⁶. Analyzing this event, it appears evident that the intentions from the beginning were to create a speculative subdivision. The application for a building permit was presented to the Municipality in 1957, and the first stone was laid in March 1958¹⁷. In fact, the villa projects, signed by Eng. Matteo Mosca and Arch. Gino d'Andrea, were conceived respecting the panoramic views and following a general harmonious overall plan.



Figure 6 – The subdivision by Società Immobiliare S.P.A. on the promontory of Riviera di San Montano, the first villas under construction. Photo from Massa Lubrense Archeoclub.

Subsequently, the subdivision resulted in speculative activity never seen before in the municipal areas. At the end of 1959, fifteen villas had already been built, the road, the aqueduct, the power line and the waterfront, but thirty villas had already been built the following year. Although the Allotment Project insisted on an unconstrained fund, the Superintendency tried diligently to obstruct the project. In 1960 an order was in fact issued for the suspension of the works, soon revoked thanks to an amnesty¹⁸, and in the end the parceling took place anyway with a number of buildings higher than the concessions obtained. Continuing along the coast, past the Marina della Lobra and around Capo Corbo, another significant development started in those years also in Punta Lagno¹⁹. These were the years when the construction of the second house for the summer holiday became within

¹⁶ Maria Di Leva in Pontelli, will subsequently appear as sole director of the Sorrentina real estate company s.p.a.

¹⁷ Cfr. with the Technical Report of the Sorrentine Real Estate Company. (S.I.S.) of 09/21/1957, in ACML. The Riviera San Montano Allotment Project provided for the division of the area into 65 lots, and together with the construction of a carriage road, of about 20 villas, a small church, a promenade, and a cliff to protect the beach below.

¹⁸ Cfr. telegrams no. 9075-10068-10069, in ACML. The works were suspended in application of art. 9 of the law 29/6/1939 n. 1497.

¹⁹ Cfr. Subdivision project in Punta Lagno of the rustic land owned by Dr. Perusino Perusini in Punta Lagno signed by Eng. R. de Rosa, for which the building permit was issued in 1966 in: ACML, Historical Archive, provisional classification, S2-R2-n. 8, Allotment practices various letters a-b-c.

the reach of a large segment of the population. This phenomenon caused the aggression of the coastal areas of greater landscape value; along the coastal belts of Campania in those years were built houses of little value and perpetuated building abuses of all kinds. During the 1960s, a general awareness of the potential of Italian tourist destinations began, accompanied by a growing construction activity, aimed at increasing the tourist offer. Along the Lubrense coast in those years, there were many initiatives carried out by companies and private entrepreneurs, who created new tourist settlements, even in inaccessible coastal areas where in the past it seemed impossible to build.

In the bay bordered to the west by Punta San Lorenzo, in a locality called Gesiglione sul Nastro d'Oro, Guglielmo La Via on behalf of the Dutch company S.N.V. Hotel Maatshappij, realized in those years the Hotel Delfino²⁰. The hotel complex built on the impervious rocky ridge overlooking the sea, still in use and recently expanded, has profoundly altered the skyline of the bay. Along the coast, another emblematic case of the conversion of a disused quarry into a tourist facility is that of the "Romantic Garden". The tourist village built by Pasquale Ricci in the Cenito quarry, insisted on a vast soil that included the two promontories that delimit the bay, to the east that of Marciano and to the west that of Punta Baccoli²¹. The tourist complex was built in one of the most evocative stretches of the Lubrense coast, on the scenic landscape of the island of Capri. Already in the early 1960s, "Il Giardino Romantico" became one of the most fashionable structures of the coast.



Figure 7 -8 – Project for the construction of a hotel-type tourist park Mitigliano, 1965. From ACML. Tourist poster, Giardino Romantico, 1970s.

The project approved in amnesty in 1968, provided for the construction of 136 wooden bungalows and a bathhouse with stable facilities for services²². Later the owners

²⁰ Cfr. Project for the Hotel Delfino swimming pool, signed by Arch. Francesco Scarpato in ACML, Historical Archive, provisional classification, S2-R2-n. 8, Allotment practices various letters a-b-c.

²¹ Before the settlement of the Quarry on the promontory of Punta Baccoli, a coastal watchtower stood, as evidenced by the period images prior to the 1920s.

²² Cfr. Floorplan, technical reports, period photos, in ACML, Historical Archive, provisional classification. Issue n. 1970, File 350/14905. The approval in amnesty excluded the construction of the pier present in the drawings.

obtained from the municipality a remodeling of the project, with a significant increase in the number of bungalows which rose to two hundred units²³. At the same time, an application was submitted by the designers to convert the construction of the one hundred bungalows (to be built in wood) into fifty single-family brick houses. This subsequent application was rejected in March 1969, but in 1970, the construction of masonry buildings with wood finishes was granted. Fortunately, the association "Italia Nostra", committed to safeguarding the landscape of the territory, with a report presented to the Municipality of Massa Lubrense, urged to provide detailed information on the implementation of the project. The Superintendency issued two orders to suspend the works in 1970 and 1971 which, if completed, would have irreparably compromised the coastal profile of the promontory that opened onto the nearby Mitigliano cove, already altered by the opening of access road to the tourist facility. Currently, the complex of Giardino Romantico houses a bathing facility called "Baia delle Sirene", along the access road some of the brick houses built in those years and the other disused service structures remain clearly visible.

Even the nearby Mitigliano bay was not spared during the early twentieth century from the mining activity. Here there was a small quarry for the extraction and processing of the breach, and a small concrete loading dock forms the backdrop to the coastline. In the 1970s the bay was affected by various speculative projects such as the construction of a tourist park (for which the building permit was rejected), and the opening of a cableway connecting with Termini which, if built, would have disfigured the wild nature of the place.

After Punta della Campanella, the extreme offshoot of the Sorrento peninsula and a place of enormous mythological, historical, environmental, geological and landscape value, on the Salerno side of the peninsula we meet the bay of Jeranto, defaced in the early twentieth century by the quarry opened by ILVA. This quarry, unlike the other sites essentially related to the production of building material or boulders for breakwaters, has been characterized by a short-lived but very intense mining activity over the years. Having to continuously supply the blast furnaces of the Bagnoli steel plants, the material extracted daily in the quarry was transported by large cargo boats to the ILVA blast furnaces (later Italsider and then Nuova Italsider) in Bagnoli, to be transformed into cement blocks with which were built the breakwater barriers scattered in the Gulf of Naples. ILVA owned in the locality of Jeranto, a large property with an area of about 377 500 square meters, identified in two lots. In the first one fell the land of Punta Campanella, remarkably steep with limestone outcropping on the whole surface without direct roads with access from the ground, while in the second lot fell the land of Punta Penne, which was accessed via a mule track by land from inhabited area of Nerano. This last lot included a farmhouse and industrial artifacts built over the years for the exercise of the mining activity. The lot of Punta Penne, in the years in which the quarry was active, underwent the greatest modifications. An area of over thirty thousand square meters was leveled in the area below the tip. The interventions due to intense mining activities irreversibly disfigured the landscape of the bay, also morphologically changing the profile of the rocky ridge. Only on the occasion of the first Landscape Conference, held in Capri in the summer of 1922, did the Mayor of Massa Lubrense denounce the environmental destruction consumed in the

²³ Cfr. Additional variant project signed by Arch. Carlo Lapegna, approved on 04/07/1969 n. 3985, in ACML, Historical Archive, provisional classification. Issue n. 1970, File 350/14905.

bay²⁴. The quarry was definitively closed in 1952, but already in the early 1960s, Jeranto bay was the object of an attempt at building speculation by a Lombard real estate company, which on a project by the engineer Antonino Cesaro, close to Punta Campanella, in a stretch of coast with a centuries-old and stratified cultural heritage, intended to create a subdivision with 46 "terraced" houses. The attack on the nature of the bay, one of the most beautiful in the Sorrento peninsula, began in August 1963, when the Massa Lubrense mayor, Pasquale Persico, granted the engineer Cesaro the license for the construction of single-family houses, to be built close to the sea, in a place indicated in the project as "Rezzaro". Culture and politics immediately undertook to block the reckless project and, thanks to the intervention led by Antonio Maresca, then president of Italia Nostra, on 12 April 1972 the building permit was revoked. Subsequently Cesaro won the appeal to the T.A.R., began the construction of five villa. To the new complaints made by Italia Nostra, were added those of the Archeo Club Lubrense and the political groups, the new Mayor of Massa Lubrense Alfonso Gargiulo. Adhering to the unanimous vote of the City Council, in October of '76 Gargiulo revoked the building permit, but once again Cesaro recourse to the TAR, got a new ruling that leaded off the allotment project. Only after years of "struggle", thanks to the tenacity opposition of the municipal administration and the political and cultural groups involved in the protection of the site, the assault of Jeranto bay was definitively thwarted with the sentence issued by the Council of State published in December of 1982. Moreover, in 1977 the Campania Region included the entire area of the Jeranto Bay and Punta della Campanella, up to the Mitigliano Bay, among the natural parks to be defended and enhanced in the Territorial Landscape Plan of the Sorrento-Amalfi area.



Figure 9 - 10 – Jeranto Bay, Punta Penne defaced by the Ilva quarry, in the image can be seen the remains of the buildings built for quarrying activities, from Google hearth. Hotel le Sirenuse, statement. from ACML.

In March 1977, with a deed of donation, all the land owned by Nuova Italsider in the Jeranto bay passed to the FAI (Italian Environment Found), so that the bay was definitively removed from the dangers of speculation. Over the years of FAI's management, the entire area has been the subject of major environmental restoration interventions aimed at recovering the original Mediterranean scrub. Jeranto is currently recognized as a Site of Community Interest, included in the Marine Protected Area of Punta Campanella, also appreciated for the high level of biodiversity preserved. Having rounded Punta Penne, a

²⁴ Cerio E. (a cura di), *Il Convegno del Paesaggio*, Napoli, Casella, 1923, p.72

little further along the coast, we meet Nerano Bay. The legend handed down that owes its name to Tiberio Nerone who, struck by the beauty of the place, decided to build a further villa in addition to the twelve in Capri. From Mortelle to Marina del Cantone with the progressive affirmation of mass tourism in the second half of the twentieth century, connected to the economic boom, various subdivisions were also started in Nerano. As in other parts of Italy, the generalized type for tourist accommodation of those years was the cottage. Typical elements of the new seaside expansion of the time are also found along the bay hotels, campsites and facilities intended for the entertainment of vacationers such as bars, restaurants and bathing establishments. The bay skyline was certainly irreversibly changed in those years. The construction of the Hotel le Sirenuse, built at the end of the 1960s in the small square near the beach of Marina del Cantone²⁵, is emblematic. After Marina del Cantone bay, Recommono cove finally opens up, where a small quarry which gutted the tip of the Sciuscelluzza up until the 1950s. Also, in this case the quarry area was subsequently occupied by a bathhouse belonging to an accommodation facility.

Conclusions

The beautiful coast of Massa Lubrense has always been an evocative place and has been chosen since Roman times as an enchanting holiday resort. The place is characterized by a hilly landscape typical of the Mediterranean scrub, rich in olive and citrus trees sloping towards the sea. During the second half of the twentieth century, activities related to limestone extraction along the coast led to the beginning of a gradual degradation of the coast. During the 1960s, with the economic boom in Italy, an enormous building disorder was also generated due to the tourist exploitation of the place. The intrusiveness of many private initiatives and the lack of urban planning tools have contributed over the years to a progressive and irreversible degradation of the coastal landscape, contained only thanks to social and cultural initiatives aimed at protecting the environment.

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²⁵ Cfr. Building Construction Practice # 1311, ACLM.

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