

THE LANDSCAPE OF THE PIETRA:

The Pietra di Bismantova, an EU “Site of Community Importance”, is a distinctive geological formation in the Reggio Apennine area. It is a narrow plateau with high vertical slopes, isolated from the Apennine range. This impressive prism-shaped formation is made up of layers of sedimentary calcareous rocks over a chalky rock base. It was originally a seabed during the Miocene Period. The subsequent splitting and fragmentation of the calcareous layers, followed by erosion, has left the currently visible part of the slab intact. The summit is a wide grassy plain, partly covered by sparse hazel shrubs. From there you can enjoy a unique panorama: the Apennines on one side, the Po Valley on the other, and hills with man-made cliffs.

The Pietra has always been the site of agricultural production, haymaking and wood-cutting. This is still particularly true as regards the production of Parmesan cheese, one of the most famous Italian products. On the surrounding road you will find the dairies of Carnola, Maro and Casale di Bismantova. Further away, the dairies of Garfagnolo, Cagnola, Minozzo, Madonna della Pietra di Bismantova and Fornacione complete the Parmesan cheese circuit, which reveals a close connection between the landscape and its prime product. It is well worth visiting one of the dairies during your visit here.

The Pietra environment, like the rest of Italy, was deeply modified by socioeconomic change. Putting the natural areas to crop reached its peak between 1850 and 1910. Later, the apportionment in tilled lands, pastures and woods remained steady until the end of the '30s. (There were only about 3.5 million hectares of woods at the beginning of the 1900's; nowadays there are over 10 million hectares.) During the '30s many cultivated fields were abandoned for the first time, and in the postwar period this behavior continued, reaching its peak in the '50s – '60s. In Italy the number of cultivated hectares went from 22.8 million in the 1930's, to 20.5 million in the 1970's, with a steady increase in wooded areas.

The table below explains the changes in the Pietra di Bismantova landscape and its surroundings:

Area typology	ha 1954	ha 2003	% 1954	% 2003	Diff. %
Woods	108.38	177.26	16.41	26.70	+ 63.55
Shrubs	79.48	76.87	11.97	11.58	- 3.28
Tilled lands and meadows	446.40	376.09	67.23	56.64	- 15.75
Urban areas	22.24	33.42	3.35	5.03	+ 50.27
Other	6.92	0.38	1.04	0.05	- 94.51
Total areas	664.02	664.02	100.00	100.00	

In 1954 the agricultural sector was very diversified due to the more widespread presence of small family properties and the use of crop rotation. By 2003 it had become quite homogeneous, with fodder cultivation mostly in grass fields and Lucerne meadows. In 1954 the woods were exploited to the utmost whereas by 2003 they had grown thicker (due to the larger size of the trees). The socioeconomic situation has changed dramatically over the years, and today, the area's potential for tourism requires a proactive and competent management. This must be implemented by means of agreements forged between the agricultural and environmental authorities and property owners.