

Symbol, icon and index. Tessellation as an architectural language

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Symbol, icon, and index are the fundamental categories of signs in semiotics. First theorized by Peirce and later applied to art and architecture by Krauss, the icon is a sign that refers to its object through resemblance; the symbol has a conventional and socially agreed meaning; while the index is the most complex sign, as it is the record of a real process or event, a trace of a past presence. In rural areas, the index can be recognized in elements such as the linear rows, the patterns of the irrigation network, and the crop patterns, signs that become tools for interpreting the landscape. These traces bear witness to how humans have perceived, used, and transformed the countryside, as each era has generated settlement structures consistent with the knowledge, available techniques, environmental conditions, and social relations of its time.

This paper aims to explore a language for analyzing the territory through the lens of formal coherence, interpreting recognizable patterns as manifestations of a phenomenon and as vehicles of meaning. To this end, configurational schemes are illustrated, inspired by Dardi, Polesello, Gandelonas, Forman, and Allen, authors who introduce complementary and innovative approaches to the formal analysis of the territory, based on the application of visual languages formalized through disciplinary contributions in the form of essays, books, or projects.

Applied to the case of the lower Friulian plain, this methodology has highlighted how the landscape is the result of an evolutionary process linked to farming practices. Land reclamation, agronomic practices, forms of land parceling, and settlement patterns are all material manifestations of an evolving relationship between society and space. The landscape becomes a fabric in which to read the stratifications of the various historical phases that have shaped the countryside. The methodology could also be adapted and applied to other geographical contexts, based on the hypothesis that settlement patterns in European plains tend to exhibit homogeneous characteristics.