



POLITECNICO  
DI TORINO

# Honors thesis

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Master degree in Architecture

Architettura Costruzione Città

*Abstract*

**Understanding a border territory: Roja Valley**

**A strategy and hypothesis to promote key elements of  
the landscape**

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Roja Valley is a single valley at the border between two countries, within three regions and divided in three provinces; it's a very diverse territory that crosses the harsh peaks of the Maritimes Alps and leads straight to the mild Mediterranean coasts. Along the river there are the once-called *Strada Reale*, now *Strada Statale 20*, on the Italian side of the valley and *Route Departmental D6204* on the French one, and the railway line Cuneo-Ventimiglia. The history of the Roja Valley is closely related to the development of the infrastructures that have always run through, especially the road strategically connecting the Alpine regions to the sea; consequently the growth or decline of the Valley communities have been affected all along the history.

As in a series of successive frames changing from narrow and steep to the mild Mediterranean coasts, the traveler crosses two distinctive countries with their own cultural differences. A layered territory and an extraordinary landscape contrast with the recent decline that made the valley into an even more passing-by suburb of both France and Italy.

I conducted my study for the "traveler", the user that crosses the territory as quickly as possible, without taking into consideration any of the peculiarities of the cultural landscape that he travels through. Considering this traveler as strategic and potential to the promotion of the territory, my thesis is structured as an ideal journey divided into three steps to better identify some strategies to capture the traveler's attention and to push him to stop and understand the local culture.

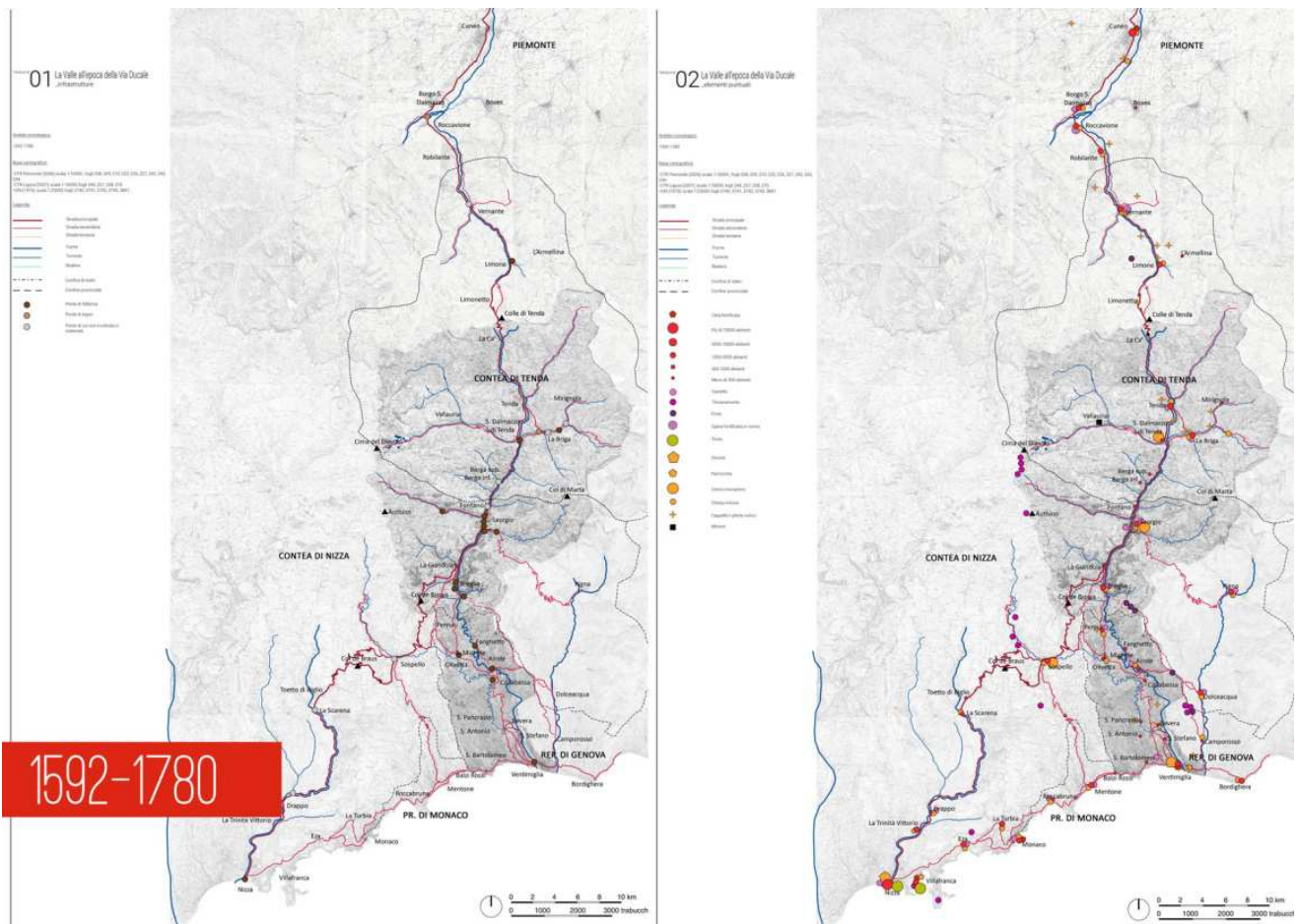
The goal of my research is to study, understand and define a strategy of promotion of this bordering area. The first step was the definition of the historical structure of the territory that was studied by historical periods. Successively, I created thematic maps for each period. For the first part of my research I studied historical maps of vital importance to fully grasp the territorial relations between countries, and I also analyzed written records and historical iconographic sources.

The second part of my research defines the identity of the Roja Valley territory, starting from its identification as part of a larger cultural system. The "material traces" of the elements that constitute the two major infrastructure systems of the valley, the road and the railway system, were then defined and categorized. The analysis and the technical files presented are already part of the promotion of the territory, considered as part of the process of knowledge.

The third part of my thesis consists of the definition of a promotional project based on the definition of homogeneous areas according to the traveler's crossing speed through the valley. My ultimate goal is to establish the criteria for a systemic project to allow the permeability of the cultural landscape of the Valley, inviting the traveler to stop and look at the surrounding territory, pointing out to the things he needs to observe; the general definition of these criteria allow us to extend this strategy to other cultural contexts, and at the same time, their definition allow us to carefully focus on the landscape. The project

design is based on the reorganization of residual areas, considered as infrastructural "knots". The design solutions are the result of the interpretation of the historical support walls that run through the Valley; these walls are recognized as an intrinsic element of continuity and constitute the basic element for a single unitary and systemic project.

Currently, several cross-border initiatives and local action plans have already tried to address some of these issues in a uniform manner. This research project wants to contribute to the debate on the enhancement and knowledge of the landscape project, based on the study of the most intimate and peculiar elements of the territory.



Part 1: historical thematic maps, first period



Part 2: identification of the material traces of the infrastructural systems



Part 3: design project to connect the traveler with the cultural landscape of the valley

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