

A Pasolinian Greenway: An Opportunity for Casarsa Della Delizia (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy)

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Abstract

As part of a research that, for the first time, intends to highlight the existing, but at the same time not evident, connection between the literary work of Pier Paolo Pasolini and the Friulian territory where he spent his youth. The authors have identified a series of essential places that are the basis of a particular "space" in which landscape, architecture and environmental design coexist, laying the foundations for a path that, starting from Pasolinian memory, can become the backbone of a green corridor. Recovering historical elements can allow their redevelopment and their integration with the present. The small town of Casarsa della Delizia is the place around which Pier Paolo Pasolini's literary production revolves between 1942 and 1950. The village has retained its rural imprint, described and idealised by the poet, becoming over time one of the major wine production centres in Italy, located within DOC (*Denominazione Origine Controllata* - Controlled Designation of Origin) wine areas such as the 'Grave del Friuli' and 'Prosecco.' What has been missing over the years is the development of significant thematic tourism that recognises the possibilities linked to the integration between the productive agricultural territory, designed by vast vineyards cultivated in the plain, the geographical characteristics of this plain divided between rough and stony areas and lush and water-rich areas, typical of a karst area and the places lived and described by Pier Paolo Pasolini that dot these places (Pasolini 1953 and 1993). Added to this is the possibility of reusing the bed of an old railway to create a cycle path that, connected to the other cycle paths of Friuli Venezia Giulia, would allow the activation of sustainable tourism that combines respect and study of nature and modern rurality with the places described by Pasolini (De Rocco 1994), which identified and protected within a green corridor can not only be visited, but preserved for future generations within an agricultural fabric that is constantly evolving and changing. The research proposes creating a system of green paths that combines literature, the landscapes and architectural elements described therein with wine production, natural resources, and the reuse of disused infrastructures that have not been exploited so far to enhance the tourist-cultural offer.

Introduction

Pier Paolo Pasolini's cultural legacy has received renewed attention in light of his centenary, celebrated in 2022 through national events, exhibitions, and publications, with complete and anthological works published or re-edited (Spila et al. 2022; Bazzocchi 2022; Cortellessa and De Laude 2022; Borgna 2022; Zabagli 2022). Despite this resurgence of interest, the intersection between Pasolini's work and the themes of architecture and landscape architecture remains relatively unexplored, especially considering the Friulian environment as a field of investigation. A brief chapter within the field of cultural geography (Vallerani 2007) represents an interesting analysis of the Friulian landscape in Pasolini; it aims to relate Pasolini's Friuli with an idea of a layered reading of cultures and meanings. Almost contemporary to this text, a book in the fields of eco-critics (Iovino 2006) takes Pasolini as a paradigm for a similar territorial reading, based on

the assumption that “*il corpo del paesaggio, insieme di tutti i corpi, sia un testo, un grande racconto materiale*” (The body of the landscape, a synthesis of all bodies, is a text, a grand material narrative – Authors’ translation) (Iovino 2022, 15).

The opportunity to deepen this relationship arises with the doctoral research project “*Architecture, Territory, and Landscape in the Work of Pier Paolo Pasolini*”, conducted at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of the Politecnico di Milano within the AUID doctoral school and funded by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR - 118 PC Research Field). The research is carried out in partnership with the Pier Paolo Pasolini Study Centre in Casarsa della Delizia, where the poet – born in Bologna but effectively Friulian – spent the summers of his childhood and lived between 1942 and 1950, primarily at his maternal family’s house, which today serves as the headquarters of the Study Centre itself (Naldini, 1989).

Pasolini in Friuli and in Casarsa

The study focuses on Pasolini’s Friulian period, during which he composed his first published work, *Poesie a Casarsa*, in 1942. Within this context, he developed a distinct conception of an archaic and rural landscape that, in contrast to the bourgeois world of his youth and university years in Bologna, revealed to the author a new and astonishing world:

Ho visto oggetti rustici in cortili di case povere; ho visto suppellettili e mobili proletari e sottoproletari; ho visto paesaggi non cittadini, ma suburbani o poveramente campestri [...] ho presto capito, è vero, che oltre al mio (mondo), piccoloborghese [...] c’era anche un altro mondo. (Pasolini 1976).

I have seen rustic objects in the courtyards of poor houses; I have witnessed proletarian and sub-proletarian furnishings and furniture; I have seen landscapes that were not urban, but suburban or poorly rural [...] I soon understood it is true that beyond my (world), petty bourgeois [...] there was also another world. (Authors’ translation)

From this world, he developed a poetics that would form the foundation of his future career. He would go on to explore the Roman peripheries and, later, the so-called Third World, always in search of forms of authenticity perceived as lost due to the homogenising advance of the capitalist and neoliberal system:

Perché io sono un uomo antico, che ha letto i classici, che ha raccolto l’uva nella vigna, che ha contemplato il sorgere o il calare del sole sui campi, [...]; che è poi vissuto in piccole città dalla stupenda forma impressa dalle età artigiane, in cui anche un casolare o un muricciolo sono opere d’arte, [...] (Non so quindi cosa farmene di un mondo unificato dal neocapitalismo [...]) (Pasolini 1975)

Because I am an ancient man, who has read the classics, who has picked grapes in the vineyard, who has contemplated the rising or setting of the sun on the fields, [...]; who has then lived in small cities with an excellent shape impressed by the artisan ages, in which even a farmhouse or a small wall are works of art, [...] (So I don’t know what to do with a world unified by neo-capitalism) (Authors’ translation)

The descriptions of the landscape found in Pasolini’s Friulian works, whether in poetry (Pasolini 1942) or prose (Pasolini 1962, 1982a, 1982b, 1994), depict a world that no longer exists today. This world has been profoundly transformed by the new socio-economic system established in Italy after World War II, which Pasolini consistently criticised toward the end of his life. The pace of these transformations unfolded with a rapidity of landscape change never experienced before, as keenly observed by Paolo De Rocco (1950–2012), a local landscape architect who worked extensively on preserving cultural landscapes in the area. De Rocco often referenced and developed projects related to Pasolini’s sites in Friuli and Casarsa (De Rocco 1994). This theme

of rapid change is vividly highlighted in the interview *Il Paesaggio Rubato* (The Stolen Landscape) (Venturini 2014). Conducted in the Friulian language in 2010 by Adriano Venturini, the interview acts as a video denunciation of the damage caused by land consolidation policies initiated after the 1976 earthquake to optimise the productivity of Friulian farmlands (Mauro, 2006), which resulted in the removal of centuries-old tree rows, hedgerows, and rural pathways. De Rocco underscores that the alienation from what was once a familiar landscape was greatly intensified by the rapidity of these transformations (Venturini 2014, 0:08:19). He suggests that, when comparing the maps of these areas created by Anton Von Zach between 1798 and 1805 (Rossi, 2005) with maps from Pasolini's era, one would find fewer and less radical changes than when comparing Pasolini's maps with the more recent cartography from the late 1970s onward. Nonetheless, it is essential to note that Pasolini's descriptions were not precise and faithful representations of the physical state of the places but instead of an idealised or dreamlike state. While rooted with tangible and measurable elements, these descriptions are idealised, distilling a collection of rustic and bucolic images imbued with a certain idealism. On multiple occasions, it becomes apparent that Pasolini envisioned "two Casarsas" (Colussi 1976), a duality that the author himself explains in the following passage:

D'altra parte – a causa delle esperienze infantili rimaste inalterate nella memoria – esistono due Casarse nettamente distinte: quella della realtà e quella dei sogni. Per esempio nella Casarsa dei sogni, il paese non finisce dietro la chiesa; al contrario, proprio lì dietro sorge una cattedrale un po' in rovina [...] e dietro questa cattedrale (che è la vera chiesa di Casarsa) c'è una profonda e verde vallata, in fondo a cui scorre un ruscello [...] (Pasolini in Ellero 1995, p.11)

On the other hand – due to childhood experiences that have remained unchanged in memory – there are two distinct Casarsas: that of reality and that of dreams. For example, in the ideal Casarsa, the town does not end behind the church; on the contrary, right behind it stands a somewhat ruined cathedral [...] and behind this cathedral (the real church of Casarsa) is a deep green valley at the bottom of which flows a stream [...] (Authors' translation)

This dualism makes it challenging to identify which places and spaces have been preserved and lost, which correspond to an actual bucolic landscape – worthy of rediscovery and enhancement – and which were a poetic invention. In this context, one can attempt to adopt the same approach as the poet, seeking to uncover environments, atmospheres, elements, and landscape layers that persist, starting with the question: do two Casarsas still exist today? Probably not in the dualistic sense of the real and the idealised as envisioned by Pasolini. However, a form of duality remains within the territory. If some of the sites associated with Pasolini's memory in Casarsa – such as his maternal home, the Loggia of San Giovanni, the Church of Santa Croce, and the Church of Versuta – are now situated within a context profoundly altered from the agrarian landscape of the 1940s, today characterised by the peri-urban sprawl of the productive northern Italian province, some others naturalistic and cultivated areas continue to reflect a deep-seated history and agricultural tradition. The "deep green valley" (*profonda valle verde*) behind "this cathedral" (*questa cattedrale*) – identified as the Church of Santa Croce in Casarsa – still exists today in the southwestern part of the municipality, south of the railway line. This agricultural plain is interspersed with areas of natural interest, including woodlands, streams, and tree-lined paths, all safeguarded by the local urban plan (PRG – *Piano Regolatore Generale*).

Within this area lies the *Polisutta*, an ecosystem featuring well-preserved oak groves, poplar plantations, and riparian woodlands. These spaces, close enough to reach on foot yet remote enough to feel like a separate world, represent a "second Casarsa."



Figure 1. An anthropogenic formation within the natural area of Polisutta. 2024.
Photo by Riccardo M Balzarotti.

The Recurrence of the Vineyard

Another distinctive feature of the abovementioned area is the presence of large agricultural plots, marked by a substantial number of vineyards neatly arranged in rows. This type of local production, a living testament to the area's ancient roots, now plays a significant role in the economy of Casarsa della Delizia, home of the Winery *La Delizia*, that in 2023 produced 34 million bottles with a turnover of 67,4 million euros.

The vineyard theme is also recurring in Pasolini's depictions of Friulian landscapes. These cultivations can be traced back to ancient times in the Casarsa area and, more broadly, in the Friulian region (Costantini, 2007). The landscape of the Casarsa plain was thus notably shaped by the presence of vineyards during the period when Pasolini lived there. References to grapevines abound in Pasolini's Friulian texts, a natural occurrence given the significance of viticulture to the region's social and economic life. The arrangement of vines in rows also contributes to a distinct and deliberate landscape composition. For instance, the following excerpts from his novel *Amado Mio* (Pasolini 1982a), written between 1947 and 1948 and set in the Casarsa area, highlight these connections:

“[...] spingendosi magari in avventurose puntate sopra la «rosta», alta sul fiume nascosto dietro i cespugli e i vigneti.” (p. 197)

“[...] il boccale di nero verso cui i piccoli allungano la mano poiché avendo lavorato anch'essi la loro parte nella vigna, ne hanno tutto il diritto.” (p. 203)

“Erano a un tavolino in fondo all'orto, sotto una vite.” (p. 213)

“La spianata era una campagna coltivata a granoturco, a medica e a vigna [...]” (p. 214)

“Ogni giorno Desiderio, svoltato fuori dal filare di gelsi e viti [...]” (p. 214)

"[...] venturing into adventurous forays over the «rosta», high above the river concealed behind bushes and vineyards." (p. 197)

"[...] the jug of red wine toward which the children reach out, as they, having also worked their share in the vineyard, are fully entitled to it." (p. 203)

"They were seated at a small table at the back of the garden, under a vine." (p. 213)

"The expanse was farmland cultivated with corn, alfalfa, and vineyards [...]" (p. 214)

"Every day, Desiderio turned out from the row of mulberries and vines [...]" (p. 214)

In these passages, vineyards emerge as an essential feature of the Casarsa landscape: they are depicted descriptively and objectively as part of the environment, yet they also serve as a space offering hideout or shelter. Furthermore, it is portrayed as a site of economic activity and labour, central to the livelihood of the local inhabitants.

Another aspect underscoring the importance of viticulture in the Casarsa area is the development of a distinct vine-training system, aptly named the *Casarsa System* (Giacomelli, 1969), which gained widespread adoption across northeastern Italy. This system, devised to address labour shortages (Dalmaso & Eynard 1975), eliminates the need to tie fruiting shoots and prune them during winter. It involves the horizontal training of vines at a height of approximately 1.7–1.8 meters, with rows about 3.5 meters apart, creating a distinctive agricultural landscape composition.



Figure 2. Vines cultivated using the Casarsa System in the Northern Versuta area. 2024.
Photo by Luca MF Fabris.

However, vineyards alone may not constitute what can be deemed a “Pasolinian landscape”; instead, they represent an element that encapsulates cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions, fostering critical reflection on the territory. Moreover, imagining the agricultural

sector unaffected by mechanisation and production optimisation processes since Pasolini's period is challenging. These changes, driven by a capitalist drive toward homogenisation, have often resulted – for instance – in biodiversity loss and reduced grape varieties cultivated in the area (Costantini 2019). Nevertheless, under specific conditions, viticulture – a sector deeply interwoven with multiple disciplines – holds the potential to enhance biodiversity (Cohen et al. 2005) and to promote the preservation of cultural heritage tied to local traditions (Biasi et al. 2010).

A Connecting Greenway

How, then, can we connect two valuable elements in the territory that, while seemingly distant, reveal several points of contact and affinity? While there are well-established initiatives to promote the local wine industry – most notably the Casarsa della Delizia Wine Festival, now in its 77th edition in 2025 – and although various urban plans have been proposed over the years to create Pasolini-themed itineraries, such as the masterplans for Pasolini's sites developed by De Rocco in the early 1990s or the unrealised project for cycling routes in Casarsa named after Pasolini's famous films, no integrated plan combining these two elements has ever been implemented.



Figure 3 - The former railway Casarsa-Spilimbergo in the northern outskirts of Casarsa, in the Torricella area. 2024. Photo by Luca MF Fabris.

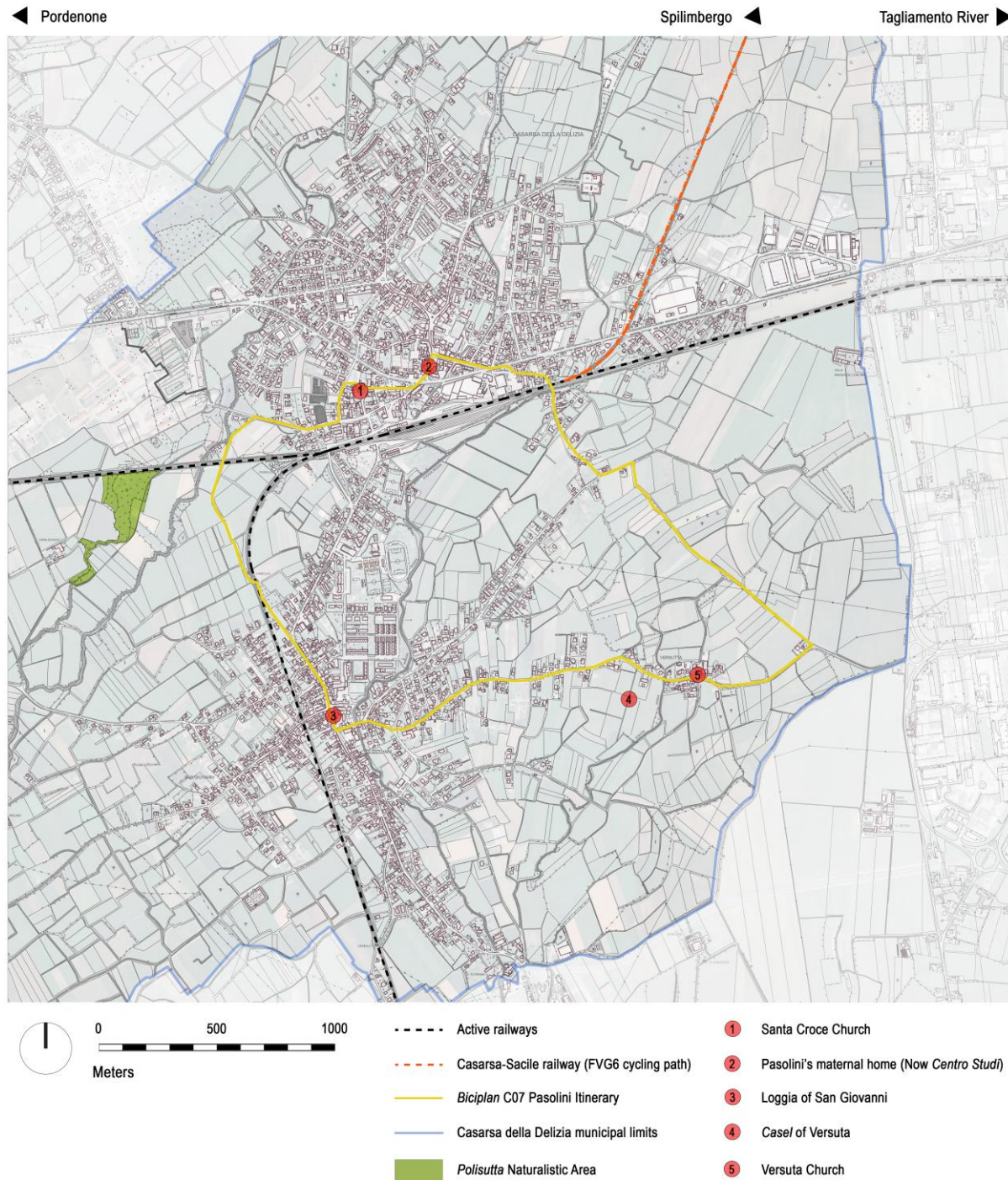


Figure 4 – Casarsa Municipality map. Drawing elaborated by Riccardo M Balzarotti.

This research identifies a third element of historical and cultural memory – the historic route of the Casarsa-Spilimbergo railway – as the backbone for a new greenway that connects the agricultural plain with the dreamlike yet tangible dimension of Pasolini's descriptions and memories. This railway line, constructed in 1893, extended to Pinzano in 1912 and

decommissioned in 1967, serves as an alternative branch of the historic Sacile-Pinzano line. The latter played a significant role in the first half of the 20th century, facilitating mobility for Friulian workers and emigrants (Fadelli, 2018). The line is now entirely abandoned, though the route remains intact and easily recognisable. In 2020, the region acquired the section from the national railway network to incorporate it into its regional cycling network. It is already slated to become part of a system of soft mobility paths integrated with planned cycle tourism routes, including the proposed (but unrealised) “Pasolinian Loop Itinerary” (code C07) listed in the 2023 Casarsa Municipality *Biciplan* (Comune di Casarsa 2023).

Conclusions

The regional cycling plan, although a valuable infrastructure proposal, envisions a standard approach to conversion, replacing the railway infrastructure with a coloured asphalt path (identified as FVG6), without considering solutions tailored to the specific character of the context. A new greenway along this route would merit a dedicated architectural and landscape design, incorporating planting schemes, rest areas, and bespoke amenities. Stretching from the centre of Casarsa to the north, crossing the agricultural plain and skirting the Tagliamento River – another prominent feature in Pasolini’s works – it could provide a compelling setting that merges ancient and modern elements. Such a project could stimulate sustainable tourism, linking a constellation of historical and cultural sites in a manner that transcends mere territorial policy. Instead, it could be the physical manifestation of a renewed sensibility, encouraging reflection on the region’s past and the sustainability of a landscape committed to wine production. Moreover, the railway itself is a recurring motif in Pasolini’s work. His fascination with its sharp linear trace on the land and its inherent dynamism, framing shifting landscapes through train windows, is reflected in specific texts (Pasolini, 1953 and 1993). This makes the railway an essential element in the synergy between Pasolini’s cultural legacy, the landscape, wine production, and the adaptive reuse of historical infrastructure to develop a new greenway.

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