

THE RICHNESS AND THE FRAGILITY OF ITALY'S HUMANISED ENVIRONMENT

Can a national environmental history contribute to global studies? The answer is yes, as this book sets out to prove. It tells the story of how the relationship between the Italians and their habitat has been transformed over the last two centuries as a result of social, economic, cultural and technological processes transcending the national boundaries. The volume reconstructs processes of change in the use of natural resources in Italy, and the associated environmental and social consequences. Throughout the study period, the ruling classes have tried to manage this transformation, oscillating between the promotion of economic growth and the protection of natural resources. Theirs has been a difficult task, because the Italian landscape is characterised by high vulnerability, great natural variety and a long history of human settlement. The environmentalist movements that sprang up in the 1980s failed to build support in society; among the ruling classes, local administrators and technical bureaucracy; and in the scientific and academic world. They have thus been unable to oppose the current neoliberal wave, which has aggravated the destructive and illegal use of natural resources. Today, in Italy and globally, the 'environmental question' has become closely intertwined with the 'social question' – that is, with growing inequality in the distribution of wealth and access to services and resources.

The book is divided into four parts, corresponding to four pivotal moments in modern Italian history and its topics include the effects of global changes; the repercussions for environmental equilibrium of 'commons' disintegration and the triumph of property rights; the impact of industrialisation and the hygienic revolution; the transition from renewable to non-renewable energies; nature protection, from the first movement to political environmentalism; the acceleration of soil consumption and of hydrogeological instability; the destructive modality of the expansion of metropolitan areas; the effects of agricultural modernisation, consumer society and the waste problem; and the growth of ecomafias and environmental crimes.

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A Short Environmental History of Italy

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Variety and Vulnerability

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