2. *Vivace, Largo, Andante, Allegro ma non troppo.* Public Art, Creativity and Rural Regeneration in Four Movements

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1. Introduzione

The recent debate in rural sustainable development has registered a progressive shift from exclusive issues concerning sustainable and economic replicability of production activities towards a growing concern for transformation processes, social innovation, inclusion and participation of local actors in the countryside. This change aims at well-being, accomplished sociality, social inclusion, formal and non-formal educational achievements. A new relationship between spaces and times of life, connected to this kind of processes, engenders a new hierarchy between urban and rural dimension and a profound redefinition and remodeling of the boundaries between margins and the center (Carrosio, 2019; Verschuur, 2019).

Thus, increasing attention is paid to the development and revitalization of remote rural and fragile areas, ecological and socio-cultural concerns and expectations, highlighting the positive impact of innovative projects and the presence of 'creative industries' no longer only in the avant-garde and experimental spaces of big cities, but increasingly in the rarefied and

relaxed spaces of the countryside, though sweetened and represented from an urban-centered point of view.

This paper outlines how rural contexts, even in depressed, peripheral and depopulated areas, can experience a new socio-cultural effervescence and cohesion as a consequence of shared and co-constructed projects insisting on the value of local bio-cultural heritage and diversity, on the potential represented by traditional or ancient local activities and rural practices revitalized in the framework of innovative experiences and participatory processes, reactivating positive economic and social trends.

Recently, in Italy, a huge debate aroused around the "National Strategy for Inner Areas" and widely from the group of researchers, activists and representatives of associations and local institutions gathered in the group "Riabitare l'Italia" (De Rossi, 2018; Barbera – De Rossi, 2021). Moreover, other movements, festivals and seminars inspired to the concept of "restanza", the almost philosophical concept of 'remaining' or 'coming back' to the mountain/rural places/inlands (Teti 2014, 2016) have been organized in the last five years, according with a reflection on art and creativity as a driver for local regeneration.

More recently, with the Covid-19 pandemic and concerned social distancing, we have been compelled to rethink the relation between "margin" and the "center" (Cirese 1986; Carrosio 2019; Clemente 2021), redesigning the very idea of sustainable development of rural and peripheral areas.

If 'remote' and 'rural' are concepts associated with depopulated places, characterized by historical difficulties in accessing services and opportunities (works, schools, cultural services, information, shopping, and so on), what I'd like to appoint in this paper is the potential of

solidarity and circularity against the supposed inlands' isolation and of rural intimacy against the extremely interconnected, but often dramatically solipsistic urban dimension.

These are - of course - not entirely new concepts, actually animating the debate on local and social regeneration in degraded urban contexts, in peripheral areas of large metropolis. Conscious actions of urban revitalization and restoration as well as socio-cultural regeneration are linked to participatory dimensions and specific local mapping and co-planning actions. Virtuous networks stem economic and social marginalization as well as policies of inclusion are increasingly associated with art, performance, cultural animation (Bargna, 2011).

Thus, the essay addresses the dilemma of sustainability (El-Kamel Bakari 2017): if it is possible to live far from the city and to re-inhabit previously abandoned places, usually considered economically unprofitable or not interesting in terms of quality of life and well-being in a place. According to recent studies, cultural planning activities, widespread creativity, the intertwining between different actors of the territory and new-comers generates a new rural economy based on enhancement of the landscape and rural / mountain spaces and slowness as a context for artistic expression and representation, but also as an experience of strong local involvement in creative experiments of artistic co-construction and social innovation in agriculture.

The starting concept is that different kinds of cultural offer, based at the beginning on individual creativity, can enhance local wealth and new jobs through the generation and exportation of intellectual property, attracting tourists to rural regions and determining a positive economic impact in the rural context with new cultural facilities, considering such a

transformation in the local cultural offer as a matter of political radical change and civil rights (Dunphy, 2009).

The increase of visual and performing arts, in fact, is supposed to influence local collective behaviors such as aid engagement and mobilization by the community providing powerful opportunities and local actors' empowerment (Curtis, 2011, p. 15; Woods, 2007, 2010).

Culture and creativity, moreover, often suggest unexpected solutions to environmental concerns, contribute to social wellbeing and cultural community development, providing opportunities for a multifunctional rethinking of local rural economy and cultural landscape / bio-cultural heritage proposal as a tourist destination. At the same time artistic creations in depopulated and economically depressed areas radically raises the question of sustainability, durability and replicability of this type of creative experiences outside the large urban circuits of the cultural industry, as a recovery to culture and design of space otherwise destined for isolation and obsolescence.

This, as already mentioned, has been widely debated in the rich literature relating to the usefulness of art and creativity and the revitalization of cultural spaces in the peripheral areas of large urban centers, but it has been developed even more in the last decade through a reflection on the value of *Land Art* in natural environments and in the mountains as a form of creative individual action, with a new territorial sacredness, impacting portions of the territory. This implied, even independently from the more committed logic of public art or local institutions' commitment, new investments on internal territories or for the consensus-building (Cheetham, 2018; Baccichet, 2019). Other studies, by the way, have recently insisted on the political impact of these projects and creative

actions involving, beyond the artists and expert promoters, the local communities through forms of presence in the territories aimed at modifying the diffused space, the temporal scansion and sociality in rural and mountainous areas (Delfosse, 2011; Delfosse - Georges, 2013; Berneman - Meyronin, 2010).

At the same time, we must consider that arts and creativity produce a cultural and expressive space for civic engagement and political commitment, supporting shared representations of communities, a dialogical and dynamic local identity, and a radical critique towards dominant models that have been for a long time at the origin of the progressive marginalization and devaluation of rural and mountain contexts, of the areas farthest from the cities and more linked to native or traditional forms of life (Corrado, 2016; D'Incà Levis, 2016; Pulpòn – Cañizares Ruiz, 2020; Egusquiza et alii, 2021).

In recent decades we witnessed the spread of various forms of cultural organization, festivals, artist residences, recovery of urban furniture, new forms of craftsmanship and events organized in the rural *milieu* not only for their economic impacts, but more often as an opportunity to redesign the countryside, to connect pleasure and emotions to peasant experience. This trend must be attentively observed as one of the perhaps most innovative forms of re-inhabiting the countryside space, free from the complex of inferiority and marginality insufflated by a few centuries of urban/industrial-centric paradigm (Ray, 1998; Bell-Jayne, 2010; Phelps, 2012).

Ultimately, from these experiences emerges the need to rethink the city /countryside dichotomy, outlined in the concept of *Metromontagna*:

"a new word, which embodies a radical purpose: to bring together under a single glance what *naturaliter* appears to be divided, deconstructing the otherness between city and mountain. This drastic change of point of view appears necessary and illuminating, in a phase like the one we are going through and for a territory like that of our country, both characterized by a crisis of urban centrality and a rethinking of the relationships between centers and peripheries"

(De Rossi-Barbera, 2021, p. 3)

Reflecting on the limits of the economic growth detached from any environmental, human and even less 'post-human' consideration, the arts become a laboratory for the awareness of shared values and for the elaboration of a new sense of beauty as opposed to a mere idea of usefulness, stimulating artists and local people towards new challenges and a new idea of living and appropriating in a shared and respectful sense of common spaces of expression and community building (Kingma 2002).

Furthermore, the diffusion of cultural, artistic and creative actions in rural and peripheral areas requires a strengthening of the service system and of the overall organization of local / regional centers: institutions - for seeking funds and programs to support the cultural interest expressed by the base -, but also associations and individual entrepreneurs oriented to give continuity to this kind of experience.

Moreover, arts and creativity have the ambition to re-establish a fruitful relationship between young generations and depopulated territories and at the same time to intercept in a new type of tourist target, attentive to innovation and experimentation, development and social innovation, inclusion and sustainable / healthy, ecological and ethical agri-food

products. Such a kind of local actors and visitors is oriented to a holistic well-being and solidarity, increasingly taking in count post-human and post-colonial/post-anthropocentric forms of coexistence.

To create this type of experience, positive aspects must be leveraged, such as the growing presence of artists interested to nature, mountain and inland areas. At the same time a growing openness of financing lines, inter-governmental and supra-local programs, supporting this kind of activities and events are requested. Nonetheless, of course, critical elements persist in peripheral, rural and fragile areas such as the lack of appropriate services, the not always enthusiastic reaction of the local populations towards the newcomers, a still urban-centric approach of sponsors, brokers, tourist agents who are not seriously working on the promotion of marginal localities.

In recent decades there has been a special methodological attention towards the so-called Participatory Rural Appraisal, "a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act" (Chambers 1992, p. 1): a methodology of observation used by activists in participatory researches, agroecosystems analysis, applied anthropology, fieldwork research on farming systems oriented to open-ended, shared and comparative knowledge production enabling a real shift in rural development. Based on bottom-up approach, on non-standardized nor "extractive surveys questionnaires" towards local witnesses, the research has enhanced dialogue and awareness as well as self-confidence and local community empowerment, according to powerful theoretical frameworks such as Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" and the concerned experience of "conscientization" of poor and rural people (especially in Latin-American) (Chambers 1994). The fundamental issue in this approach

was that poor and marginal people were able to create and to produce a representation of themselves and of their own culture, but also that outsiders and newcomers can have a role of "convenors, catalysts and facilitators" (Chambers, 1992, p. 6) in the process of empowerment and recovery of local fragility.

At the same time Applied Anthropology and Anthropology of Development in the Eighties helped professional activists in rural cooperation to define and appreciate the value of rural knowledge (Brokensha, Warren and Werner, 1980), to rearticulate emic/ethic points of view, to realize conversation, participant observation, semi-structured and in-depth interviews and focus groups showing the fieldwork itself as an art. More than a rigid evaluation framework, the applied anthropology approach valorizes indigenous technical and embedded knowledge, local behaviors and relations enabling better local farming systems, using to the good sense and mixing new techniques with local farmers' knowledge and capabilities (Biggs, 1980; Richards, 1985; Farrington-Martin, 1988).

Over time there has also been a repopulation of rural areas by a variety of new actors with cultural characteristics and social behavior very different from those of the traditional inhabitants of rural and mountain areas, even if this too hitherto homogeneous idea of village and rural population must probably be greatly reconsidered.

Over time, alternative characters of all kinds such as "organic communards, ludophylic mystics, addicts digging their way out of their habits" (Mac Clancy 2015, p. 3), a probably underestimated category of rural "new incomers" (Strathern, 1987; Wrigh, 1992), extra-European immigrants, invisible and left in the margins of the market as well as of

the ethnography, shifted the idea of the 'archaic countryside' in something more innovative and on the move (Rogers, 1991; Demossier, 2011).

Such a variegate scenario of 're-settlers' is the object of a particular attention by researchers in the very last years, because of their interest to the processes of construction of a new and non-traditional countryside, even if some of these actors, considered alternatives only thirty years ago, are now probably to be considered as mainstream.

Anthropology with its exploratory, open-ended and intensive fieldwork methodology allows to discuss contemporary rurality and its complexities, local specificities, rural discourses and practices and local particular adjustments among different agencies producing a discourse on the countryside which is also a political discourse on the value of local landscape conservation and valorization, on traditional or native ways of live, on particular uses of the past enabling the conservation of a specific set of shared values (Svašek – Meyer, 2016).

This could engender the risk, in particularly difficult moments of crisis and economic and social fragility, of a certain nationalism, populism, and even exotism of the local representation of the countryside and of the traditional rural way of life opposed to the creative and innovative city (Chambers, 1997; Bassi, 2018).

In this sense, art and creativity in rural areas provide the extraordinary opportunity not only to generate new forms of sociality and circular economy, but also to rethink the opposition between city and countryside settled in the developmental thought of the past centuries and decades (Woods, 2012), out of the simplistic oppositions between innovation / creativity / urban and backwardness / traditionalism / countryside.

The potential for creativity in the rural, mountainous, and peripheral dimension is essentially associated with the quest for solitude, isolation, proximity with wilderness and unspoiled nature, concentration that writers, poets, musicians, figurative artists, actors and dancers, as well as professional researchers are increasingly looking for in particular moments of their work. At the same time, these newcomers are interested in encounters with traditional artisans, in experiencing ancient techniques or types of cultivation, on biodiversity conservation or traditional processing of raw materials.

Neo-endogenous development processes are also taking place at the crossroad between old values and new narratives and as well as the increasing diffusion of the digital dimension in the rural (Gallardo, 2016; Gallardo-Beaulieu-Geideman, 2021; Pēlucha-Kasabov, 2020). Another relevant aspect of the recent transformation in the countryside is associated with the presence of migrant people and the multi-cultural encounter this could engender.

Rurality is a multifaceted concept, dealing with land, landscape, nature, biodiversity, agriculture and farming, oriented to more sustainable patterns and new possibilities for local economies, cultural commodification and innovative agri-food productions.

In recent years, creativity and the arts represent strategy of economic adaptation in response to the reduction of other activities previously dominant such as agriculture, the extraction of raw materials (wood and metals), fishing and crafts. Today it seems to prevail a multifunctional model (Delgado-Ramos-Gallardo-Ramos, 2003), based on agri-food production as well as on economies of hospitality and cultural events.

Rural story-telling and participatory narratives support local economy, dealing with social changes, re-articulating a relationship to the past local identity as well as to present transformations which are facing the growing frictions of a post-capitalist economy based on the rhetoric of progress and of an indiscriminate growth. To look at these contradictions, into the interstices of the rural and mountainous regions as well as of native cultures, implies to reconsider relationships to nature, rural eco-tourism, sustainable farming and recent young people's reconnection with land (Bell and Jayne, 2010; Gibson-Luckman-Willoughly, 2010; McHenry, 2011; Phelps, 2011; Woods, 2010). In this framework, contemporary arts and cultural activities help foster respect, social cohesion and inclusion as well as citizenship participation and community empowerment, but also innovative visions and sustainable futures in the countryside. At the same time communities and artists must manage local development gaps, decreasing funding and poor recognition of the value of creative activities carried out, the persistent problem of mobility as well as the structural limits of communication and dissemination.

In this sense, it is interesting to outline some local experiences in order to understand the impact of arts and creativity in territorial regeneration of rural, mountainous and more or less depopulated/fragile areas in Italy.

Case-studies have been ethnographically observed between 2018 and 2021, throughout:

- recollection of documents about the different experiences on sight and online (all documents consulted are explicated in the bibliography or in the text and available in print editions or digital link);

- ethnographic and participant observation at the occasion of festivals, meetings, conferences, residency or in a day-by-day observation/exchange

(in some case the duration of the strictly ethnographic fieldwork has been longer, with several meetings and interviews – both on site and online -, with ethnographer's participation at different scale to the programming and realization of some events or contributing to conferences in different occasions/periods between June 2018 and June 2021);

- semi-structured or informal interviews and exchanges with special witnesses (particularly the ethnographic relationship with women coordinating and animating the four monitored activities – May/June 2021);

- return of the ethnographic account to the local actors in order to share with them the representation of the case provided by the author (such feedback has been realized through virtual exchanges, discussing and asking for a revision the four privileged witnesses of the specific case-studies and of the overall text – July/August 2021).

2. The creative supply chain: four 'movements' for social innovation and cultural regeneration in rural areas

2.1. *Vivace. Officina Creattiva / Liberi di Essere (Campobasso, Colle d'Anchise, Gildone, Toro)*

Officina Creattiva is a socio-cultural laboratory created in Molise by the "Liberi di essere (Free to be)" Social Promotion Association and supported by the work and solicitation of a group of volunteers and activists oriented towards a circular economy model. Concetta Fornaro, architect and agricultural entrepreneur, is, since several years, engaged with her family

in the production of an excellent wine (Tintilia del Molise doc, Cantine Herero SrL), an activity that she explicitly defines "an activator of endogenous rural development", with a characterization deeply centered on territoriality of the product, "AgriCulture" and female / multicultural entrepreneurship. This is strongly signaled by the logo of the company: a traditionally dressed female figure representing a Namibian woman of the Herero ethnic group, which also gave its name to the winery itself, immediately evoking messages of multicultural openness and contamination to a product traditionally characterized in a very strong way by the *terroir*.

Concetta also coordinates the activities of a collective group committed to different fronts of social innovation and practices of socio-cultural inclusion of the most fragile and migrant subjects. This is her "homecoming project" aimed at local regeneration (Toro, where she decided with her family to buy the vineyards and the cellar at her return), starting from biological and sustainable production and locally rooted agricultural traditions but also from a radically trans-cultural orientation.

This path is based on cooperation with the women and men of the territory as well as with the migrants. It's because she has developed the idea of stories and fairy tales as a form of promotion of locality, but also aiming at creating a concrete short and emotional supply chains based on the basic products of the territory - the milk, wine - and animated by experiences of welcome, of self-entrepreneurship development, of exploitation of derived resources.

Among the concerns of 'Liberi di essere' and *Officina Creattiva*, one of the characteristic elements of coexistence and transitions between local peasant and pastoral communities, groups of migrants welcomed in

temporary centers and local urban population as well as tourists of different remains one of the characterizing elements alongside the commitment against the forms of exploitation and illegal hiring that are increasingly found in the agro-industry.

Involvement of migrants in associative and creative processes of local development and valorisation of local products means the commitment to ethically produce and associate a high level of socio-cultural and environmental sustainability with quality agri-food production.

Officina Creattiva was born in 2014 "as an experience of coexistence, inclusion and participation in the transversal generation, inter-ethnicity and resistance" (Fornaro, 16/3/21), despite the considerable downsizing of migrant presences and the reception system in the Molise Region and more generally at the Italian level determined in 2019 by the Security and Safety Decrees. Then, despite the pandemic crisis, *Officina* was conceived as a laboratory aimed at developing co-managed chains of craftsmanship and local creativity, starting from the needs, relating to local productions, complying with the aim for a renewed openness and conviviality expressed by the inner territories of the region Molise, too often characterized by peripherality and isolation. The aim is clearly to keep together endogenous self-sustainable development with forms of global citizenship and facilitate the interaction with international and "extra-ordinary" experiences. "Liberi di Essere", in fact, is centered on sustainability and environmental lifelong learning, civil commitment, inclusion, vigilance over legality as fundamental principles animating the construction of regenerated spaces and places, well-being and resilient adaptation, but also cooperation, solidarity and circularity for citizens.

An emblematic example is the experience of Folusho, a tailor of Nigerian origins, who started an interesting artisan business by recycling and transforming basic garments, curtains and other objects/complements donated to *Officina Creattiva* by local people and supporters. "What for others is a waste, for the us is a resource", explicitly says Concetta Fornaro, presenting the Folusho laboratory during a public lecture (at the occasion of the Online International Course of the Erasmus + CBHE 'EARTH' project of 17.3.2021). Even the sewing machines used for the tailor's activity come from the virtuous circuit of the recycling and regeneration, bought from a dismissed textile company.

At *Officina Creattiva*, Folusho has managed to express his talent by collaborating on various solidarity projects, such as that of the "Good Soap", which involves various associations in the area. A soap that is good for its environmentally friendly ingredients, produced with native essences and above all made in collaboration with young adults suffering from mental disorders, thanks to the support of a dedicated association in Campobasso. Moreover, this soap unites and fosters collaboration between different realities. Folusho, in fact, makes cases and bags for these soaps, using recycled materials, perfectly realizing the complementarity and circularity of the Association's mission. There are also other immigrants hosted in the frame of this experience now engaged in the "Molise organic and solidarity" project, created in collaboration with the *Anchise Onlus Foundation*. As part of this project, an important space is also dedicated to the elderly of the community, custodians of ancient knowledge and ensuring the protection of past traditions, through the rediscovery of ancient crops and the wise use of medicinal plants.

Officina Creattiva is also a generator of stories through a project of participatory storytelling based on shared intergenerational and

intercultural fairy tales which has been realized thanks to school workshops and territorial animation activities, returned and systematized through a database. The wealth of environmental and 'other-than-human' references is striking in this archive, the narratives centered on the stories of animals or of primary resources such as forests, water, fire and the potential for variation and curiosity at the same time alongside the mutual recognition and encounter between the local population and people coming from outside.

The major strength of the experience of *Officina Creattiva / Liberi di Essere* seems to lie precisely in the drive to network with the associative and entrepreneurial system spread throughout the territory from the intertwining of innovative experiences and expert local knowledge. A new idea of 'cultivating' is set, consciously holding together the territorial networks of sustainable agricultural production and solidarity and the need to "put knowledge into the field". This concept is to be considered in the literal and metaphorical sense as an expert intervention supporting agricultural and / or artisanal activity - for example with new technological capabilities -, but also new ways of communication and dissemination in / for the territories (Molise Bio & Solidale and # Re-Vita2019).

Liberi di essere and *Officina Creattiva* try to compensate the poor integration between sustainable rural development and enhancement of creativity and arts at regional level enhancing self-promotion and tourism in the region, even taking in count the recent recognition of transhumance as a UNESCO intangible heritage and a series of other important elements of visibility connected to agricultural and rural assets (i.e., the Site of Melanico as a Rural Landscape of the Ministry of Agriculture inventory). In this sense, this rural innovative laboratory aims at reversing this trend

by promoting activities oriented to expressive creativity and experimentation, creating a laboratory for social and cultural innovation through intercultural dialogue and participatory representations of landscape and rurality.

2.2. *Largo. Nature, Arts and Habitat Residency (NAHR): Eco-Laboratory of Multidisciplinary Practice (Val Taleggio, Bergamo)*

Nature, Arts and Habitat Residency (NAHR): *Eco-Laboratory of Multidisciplinary Practice* focused around non-formal learning fieldwork and the value provided by the setting of a non-institutional think-tank. It is a form of intellectual positioning as a globally-focused entity within a local, historically rich rural community.

NAHR is located in rural Taleggio Valley, in the Northern Italian region of Lombardy, a summer residency cultivating awareness of the environment and emphasizing nature's insights as a source of inspiration open to a variety of scholars and professionals from different fields: visual and performing arts, writers, architects, urban planners, researchers in social sciences, and other disciplines. "The goal is to reveal intimate links between all living organisms and to support resilient development in which humans and nature can successfully coexist" – says Ilaria Mazzoleni, one of the founders and coordinators, using the time and space of the Residency as a source of inspiration and an opportunity of restoration (Jose, Jokela, Miller, 2007; Kohn, 2013).

Each year the Residency focuses on an element of nature: water, woods, rocks, grasslands, animals, within four main domains of interest: Regenerative economy, Bio-Inspired Design Architecture, Body

Performing Nature, and Design Futures, Technology and New Media. They are unfolding and displaying "a sensitive type of culture that looks at nature's resilience as a source of inspiration as well as a measure of available resources" (Mazzoleni, Santi, 2019). In 2020 and 2021 the topic has been *"Animals: Interdependence Between Species"* and it has explored "where and how species intersect in a post-human, post-anthropocentric era". Residents investigated the place of animals in contemporary ecological thinking, addressing human-animal relationships, their implications in management of climate crisis, and speculating on how humans think of themselves as animals.

So far, the Residency stands out for creativity as well as advanced research on relevant contemporary issues, and also attentively aims at integrating its action with local territory, landscape and local communities though it is still a "work in progress." It is probably more correct to say that the level of integration between the Residency and the local territory is under observation and determination as each annual program is unveiling its ability to create new local dialogues. In reality, however, "the Valley is the context for this non-institutional think-tank focusing on globalized thinking. The location offers a vast eco-canvas for bio-inspired design, art, architecture, theory, and creative writing, developed in alignment with the existing *Ecomuseum Val Taleggio: Civilization of Taleggio, Strachitunt and Rural Huts*, recognized in 2008 by the Lombardy Region "as institution dedicated to the dissemination of the territory's knowledge" (Mazzoleni, Santi, 2019). The ecomuseum works

"through resilient social and economic actions, implementing the tangible and intangible cultural heritage, collecting memories, raising community awareness; as well as economic operators, at developing tourism as a product of conscious

policies, aims at educating young generations, in order to project the valley towards a lasting and sustainable development"

(Mazzoleni, Santi, 2019)

NAHR brings to this scarcely populated valley professionals and scholars from all over the world where they spend a month conducting fieldwork, analyzing, studying, and observing its ecosystem. Significant to the residency are daily exchanges with local community, exploring local cultural heritage, particularly its traditions of animal husbandry, cheese production, and other land-based economies […] Many are the levels of engagement and exchange between local people and NAHR residents, overcoming the language barrier. Despite only a few of the fellows speak Italian and the local community members rarely speak English, yet the conversations are rich and frequent and nourish a level of interaction, comparison and practical / visual transmission of knowledge which constitutes one of the major enriching elements of the NAHR experience for both the users and the hosts" (Ilaria Mazzoleni, EASA Congress, Contribution to the Panel Rur03 - "Biocultural Heritage and Local Rural Development", 21 July 2020; Varine, 2005).

Among these experiences we can find forms of eco-logical explorations on nature conceived as collaborative fieldworks with local experts, works based on forms of "bio-inspired design and architecture" such as, in other editions of the Residency, the participative construction of a stone carpet, for example.

The specific value of such a rural setting – immersed in the Taleggio Valley – "offers inspiration on how to coexist and how to design urban

life". Most of the participants and "inhabitants" of the Residency come from large urban centers from all over the world. They especially appreciate "this quiet and intensively green space, scarcely populated, (which) allows them to concentrate on their observations and reflections before starting the work on their projects" (Interview to Ilaria Mazzoleni, 21/07/21).

Residents use the time spent in NAHR as an opportunity for "cultivating a deep mindfulness about our environment, emphasizing nature's insights as a source of inspiration, revealing the intimate links between all living organism and supporting them, and finally transmitting a resilient model of creative development in which human and non-human animals can successfully coexist". They can, moreover, get in touch with the storytelling of a "Bergamino", a shepherd and cheese-maker allowing them to become aware of the value of pastures and cheese-making, and of the full cycle of a product 'from grass to fork', according to a lucky formula. Likewise, during the Residency there are numerous opportunities for strong and creative performances and highly innovative use of technologies as digital installations (Transhumance Museum in Brembilla) aiming at transforming knowledge and actions into a network of exchanges where all the local stakeholders as well as institutions and local / trans-local players can have the opportunity to develop overtime.

The greatest expectations for the future development and replicability of the NAHR experience are connected, in the perception of its founders and animators, precisely to the ability to thicken relations with the territory. The durability of the Creative Residency in the Valley project is closely connected, in their opinion, to the ability to expand collaborations with local institutions (the Region, the Municipalities, the Mountain Communities, the Local Action Groups, the National Union of

Municipalities in the mountains), but also with the system of local companies - small and large, family-run and of a more industrial nature, as well as with the advanced training system - Universities, Schools, but also Foundations, Museum Institutions, Superintendence considered as the key-players in a process of mutual solicitation and cross-fertilization.

2.3. Andante. Casa delle AgriCulture (Castiglione d'Otranto, Lecce)

The first meeting with the Casa delle AgriCulture "Tullia and Gino" took place thanks to the mediation of Chiara Vacirca, another young woman engaged in a PhD research project in History of Contemporary Art, centered precisely on the experience of Castiglione d'Otranto and at the same time fully integrated into the project itself, being by now in all respects one of the promoters and animators. Casa delle AgriCulture is an association, chaired also in this case by a young woman, Tiziana Colluto, a journalist, expert in environmental issues and related to territorial development.

Chiara Vacirca presented Casa delle AgriCulture and the Green Night Festival that animates for ten years the territory of Castiglione d'Otranto in inner Salento, in the frame of the first Online International Course of the EARTH Project (20/11/2020). In her speech, she spoke of a "culture-led and arts-based regeneration of rural areas in Salento for a new-peasantry agriculture". The festival and the project developed since 2011, in an area of southern and internal Italy characterized by depopulation, distance from the main services (education, health, mobility), progressive aging of the population and high unemployment. The territory is characterized by strong social vulnerability and large fragmentation of the property as well as by a growing ecological crisis due to semi-intensive and pesticide-based

monocultures. There are growing environmental and social conflicts connected with the decline of olive cultivation linked to special pathologies starting from 2010. Tourism is almost exclusively seasonal in this inner part of Salento.

In this context of serious fragility, the *Casa delle AgriCulture* was born as a "way to stay", in line with the poetics and politics of "restanza (remaining)", matured in recent years by the reflection of the anthropologist Vito Teti (2014, 2016), and oriented towards cultural regeneration. A new idea of social inclusion and education to the sense of community and its values is reaffirmed, based on innovative and advanced research and an idea of the country and the rural community as a network of infrastructure, both tangible and intangible, of common goods.

Thus, *Casa delle AgriCulture* developed around the conceptual core of the sowing and collective cultivation of donated lands (about 15 ha) with ancient cereals, the so-called 'evolutionary seeds' and skillfully using rotation with legumes and vegetables. Alongside these shared agricultural activities, a community apiary and mill has developed as well as a shared animal shelter. The recovery of the built structures was carried out in bio-architecture and a "nursery of seeds of social inclusion" as well as an "agri-playroom" for the children of the community were provided within the same structures.

In 2017, the initially informal collective transformed into a cooperative set up as a non-profit organization that intends to guarantee the community declination of the new economic entity and the trust placed by the community in this group over the years. On the other hand, the constitution of the social agriculture cooperative is conceived in the key of

Van der Ploeg's new peasantry agriculture (2008, 2018): co-production, control over resources through collective commitment and self-production, the transition from forms of 'classic' financing towards innovative forms of economic support, based on community and mutual help, multiple employment, multifunctionality, cooperation and circularity.

On the background of *Casa delle AgriCulture* we can read a complex picture of meanings, metaphors and concepts acting in depth in the local context and transforming it in a generative and creative way. The same metaphor of evolutionary seeds refers to a cosmology - as Chiara Vacirca explains (focus group with EARTH International Course Students, 27/11/2020) - which alludes to the "seeds of the world waiting to germinate" and which plastically hold together the promotion of biodiversity, relations between species and the decolonization of thought from hegemonic as well as sexist schemes, local knowledge, and global connections. Such an approach aims at subverting the positivist idea of the domination of nature, the exploitation of agricultural resources, uniformity and imperialism cloaked in ecological rhetoric, but framed the Vandana Shiva's concept of "monoculture of the mind" (Shiva 1993). These same concepts were, if possible accentuated and developed, during the 10th edition of the Green Night in August 2021, when not by chance, in one of the debate evenings, Françoise Vergès, a decolonial feminist theorist, was first invited to speak and present her works. Later a debate took place between scholars, activists, new and historical entrepreneurs in the area focused on the critique of the gender subalternities and cultural belonging in the ownership of the processes of change and sustainable transition - ecological, economic and cultural - currently underway.

Against this framework of conceptual and practical dominations, to respond to the extreme crises represented by climate change, genetic erosion of biodiversity and new challenges of food citizenship and security, the best path is making common and radically participatory processes, enabling radical transformations and a new social and political agency.

In this coherent framework, the Green Night appears as an emerging performative and artistic event multiplying and communicating the mission and vision of *Casa delle AgriCulture* to the outside world, "an irreplaceable reflection collective on the value of the land and its care"- as its inspirers, Tullia and Gino Girolomoni defined it. *The Green Night* is not a fair, it is not an exhibition of agri-food products, nor does it present itself as a museum or a conservation path on peasant work: it is a time-space of debates, *lectio magistralis*, environmental theater, rural writing, ethnic music and at the same time it is "the effort brought to the streets and the minor biodiversity recovered", stages the arts of honey extractors and cheesemakers, the cosmopolitan creativity of the artist's residence animated by the Free Home University circuit, the surprising results of the crops managed by the *Adelfia* social cooperative engaged in a project with young people with mental discomfort or agricultural activities carried out by the guests of the SPRARs (Protection system for asylum seekers and refugees).

Over the years, the promoters of the *Zero Waste' Strategy*, the movement for happy degrowth, professional promoters of evolutionary genetic improvement producing grains in a cleaner way, have moved around *Casa delle AgriCulture* and have crossed the *Green Night*. With them, defenders of the pastures against abuses and mafia threats in Sicily, the guarantors of environmental legality against the countryside's risks and exploitation.

Once again, in Castiglione d'Otranto, the most advanced reflection on sustainable development comes from a happy encounter between technical and scientific knowledge, practical experimentation and conservation of wise memories of the past on the correct use and treatment of natural resources, from strength generative and performative of the arts and creative thought to nourish reasons to remaining which is itself, after all, "an art, an invention, an exercise that undermines the rhetoric of local identities", as Vito Teti wrote (2016, p. 1).

2.4. Allegro ma non troppo. C.A.S.A. (What Happens if We Inhabit) e IT.A.CÁ, Festival of Responsible Tourism (Ussita, Macerata)

Even in the case of C.A.S.A. – Cosa Accade Se Abitiamo (What Happens if We Inhabit) it is a woman who introduces this interesting experience: Chiara Caporicci was one of the promoters of the Association, together with Patrizia Vita, Roberto Rettura, Christian Tedde, Fabio Bianchini and many other people of this area affected by the 2016/2017 earthquake in the Central Apennine.

"C.A.S.A. is a social promotion association, but above all a space inhabited and crossed by several souls in Frontignano di Ussita (MC, Marche), a small fraction in the Sibillini National Park (http://www.sibillini.net/), 1,350 meters above sea level. Ussita is on the slopes of Monte Cornaccione, Bove Nord and Monte Bicco, among wolves, chamois, eagles and deer. It is a place born after the 2016 earthquake, open to conversations, high altitude residencies and grounded projects"[58].. It was born from the desire

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[58] C.A.S.A. Website:
http://www.portodimontagna.it/cosa_accade_se_abitiamo/#:~:text=%E2%

to continue to stay in a wounded and rapidly changing place, together with the communities of the Alto Nera and the guests the Residency that C.A.S.A. welcomes: artists, teachers, writers, designers, technicians, photographers, video-makers, journalists, researchers, naturalists, sportsmen, walkers, students, sensitive men and women. C.A.S.A. it is a mountain port: a crossroads of different cultures, energies, origins, experiences and languages. A space for dialogue in the name of environmental, social and economic sustainability.

"The time spent at C.A.S.A. follows the impulses and breaths of Nature, connecting with the wild spirit of the Sibillini Mountains, between the roar of a deer or the howl of a wolf, but also an undisciplined saxophone, a telescope pointed towards the night, a whispered reading in front of the fireplace"

(Interview to Chiara Caporicci, 26/7/21)

The story of C.A.S.A. is significantly linked to the trauma of the earthquake and the difficult and controversial path of reconstruction, but also to a dense network of experiences of proximity and regeneration connected by walkways: shared routes of solidarity and rediscovery of the territory, of awareness of " what remains". C.A.S.A. offers an occasion to reflect on the sense of a territory for those who usually inhabit the local dimension and those who visit it and return from the outside. For this reason, one of the main activities to which the association gives energy and support is the *Walk of the Mutated Lands* - a path promoted and sanctioned in 2018 across the wounded territories of the 2016 crater -, but also the participatory creation of a Guide / Non-Guide that is, somehow, a

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80%93%20Cosa%20Accade%20Se%20Abitiamo%20%C3%A8,Sibillini%20a%20mt%2 01.350%20slm.

community map: *Ussita. Unpublished deviations told by the inhabitants*. The realization of this guide was the occasion for important collaborations with historians, scholars, journalists. Moreover, it represented an opportunity for a new visibility of places transformed by trauma. The paths are intertwined, in this perspective, with the desire to remain, to come back to the mountain as well as to leave again, with a profound awareness of the sense of the Apennines.

At the same time the community has shared a reflection, looking through the objects and symbols embodying "what happens if we live". One of the most interesting narrative experiments identified six objects to synthesize all the shared work and particularly the last period of social distancing due to the pandemic. Through a sort of storytelling, they pointed out these objects: an *amulet of blades of grass*, a gift by a little girl from Ussita during a walk, synthetically expressing the emotional bond between C.A.S.A. and the people who live in this place; an *orange hard disk* that keeps track of what has been done; the *druse of an amethyst*, a stone of transformation that helps to abandon the old forms of thought to make room for the new; a *pumice stone* that comes from Lipari, Sicily: a volcanic stone, explosive and stubborn, resistant yet light and that helps to smooth and clean; a *wooden spiral*, as a recurring symbol of rebirth and expansion and cyclicality; and finally the *spinning top*, an ancient and unpredictable wooden game, rotating and changing direction, always ready to go again.

The association's activity includes meetings, events, proposals for territorial animation. In the spring, the *Mobile History Yards "Lands and memories in movement"* were organized by the Historical Institute of Resistence of Macerata, coordinated by Paolo Coppari, formed President of the Institute and a teacher engaged in study and reflections about history and culture of the Apennines. The webinars of this interesting

series of meetings questioned "how to secure history and memory in earthquake countries, discussing the experiences of other territories and thinking about the restorative value of memories from craters and the stories of the traumas of the earthquake" (Mobile History Yards Presentation 2021). In this effervescent framework, Ussita presents itself with obstinate resilience as a place to return to and from which to start again, a place to live that invites you to travel, and it is exactly in this oxymoron that its strength of resilience and regeneration resides.

C.A.S.A. joined in 2018 a national-scale circuit such as IT.A.CÁ, Festival of Responsible Tourism, organizing its stage in the Sibillini Mountains, together with the Pro Loco of Ussita and *Movimento Tellurico*, a group promoting the *Walk of the Mutate Lands*. IT.A.CÀ, is a responsible tourism festival, which "invites you to discover places and cultures through walking and cycling itineraries, workshops, seminars, workshops, exhibitions, concerts, documentaries, books and tastings to enhance eco-ethical tourism. The itinerant festival is thought of as a unique journey across different territories, transforming "incoming into becoming", combining the sustainability of tourism with the well-being of citizens". Pierluigi Musaró is its Director of IT.A.CÁ., Simona Zedda coordinates the National Secretariat, while the Head of Communication and National Coordination is Sonia Bregoli.

The festival celebrated its 1ˢᵗ edition in 2009 in Bologna taking inspiration for its name from the expression "*Ît a cà?* (Are you at home?), in Bolognian dialect. It is organized by a bottom-up national network, made up of over 700 realities including associations, public and private entities, tourism operators and accommodation facilities. For each territory there are one or two local coordinators, networked in a general board aimed at planning together not only the festival program, but also a real territorial policy.

There is also a communication board, composed by members of different sites, interfacing with the national coordination and press office. It is a large laboratory where a multi-voiced experimentation on sustainable and durable development takes place.

Each year a general theme of the festival inspires and connects all the appointments along the Peninsula, interpreted at local scale, intersecting with specific local questions. In 2021 the theme was, significantly, the "Right to Breathe". The explicit reference to the reflection developed during the months of the pandemic by the post-colonialist philosopher Achille Mbembe, brings the paths of the responsible tourism festival back to the protection and safeguarding of the environment ensuring health and well-being of people. At the same it evokes the "I can't breathe" pronounced by George Floyd shortly before his death because of asphyxiation during his arrest by the policeman Derek Chauvin.

The concept of the festival therefore focused on the idea of "breathing a new and regenerated world", a breath that "is also that of animals, plants, flowers and mountains", against the anthropocentric idea human domination of all things and other living and sentient beings, against the hierarchies between people and between species that "built the sinister castle of inequalities" by adopting gestures of "boundless humility"(IT.A.CÁ Festival Manifesto 2021).

The specific interpretation adopted in Ussita, Fiastra, Arquata del Tronto and the other locations of the Sibillini Mountains involved in the festival in the central Apennines is that of a mountain that from backward and marginal space returns to become a "central and revolutionary place in research of an authentic and no longer artificial way of breathing" (IT.A.CÁ Festival Manifesto 2021) and opens up, on the way, to many

other similar places from which it is possible to rethink a different development of territories and local communities. This transition in Ussita is realized throughout an articulated set of activities and proposals "enabling to combine tourism with words such as responsibility and rights, environmental protection, multiculturalism and common goods: to investigate new forms of conflict, against abandonment and depopulation, but also against speculation and the logic of pure profit ".

Thus, the "mountain port" opens "to the sailors of the Apennines" and focuses its attention around the state of the woods, on biodiversity conservation and economic and environmental sustainability of protected areas and of contemporary forestry policy, on the shared cleaning practices of Lake Fiastra, on the "conscious steps in the healing forest" together with the facilitators who are experts in forest medicine and on the discovery of the qualities of the medicinal plants of the forest and of the conifer and beech baths, but also with the yoga sessions immersed in nature, naturalistic walks, on foot and by bicycle, to discover the paths outlined and narrated in the "Guide to non-tourism of Ussita" and shared reflections on the "Apennine laboratory" in a tensile structure full of people. The journey is again – as in the previous edition of the festival - the pivotal concept of the program: a physical as well as mental journey, aimed at rethinking creatively a responsible way of live in these wounded territories, open to contamination and dialogue despite the prejudice of closed inner areas.

With an interesting photographic metaphor, wrote about the festival of Ussita Giovanni Teneggi, General Manager of ConfCooperative Reggio Emilia, one of the most engaged supporters of the model of community cooperatives and of an inclusive and sustainable idea of developing internal and fragile areas of the country:

"In the rarefied highlands you could use all the lenses, for the desire that comes to know immediately: with a *macro*, the secret that wants implication or the possibility of shortening with a *zoom* the immense spaces that present themselves in front of you. Only here, however, can you immediately dare - and perhaps you must - a *wide angle*. It could be for the large landscapes to contain, but with even more joy for the squares, the encounters, the daily scenes. Even a portrait you will have to expand it to what is around it to understand it; hold a *long exposure time* to see its movements; *focus* on what precedes or is the background. In photography we say *depth*. Only in this way will you be able to call who you are framing by name, being, in turn, recognized by them"

(Teneggi, 24/06/2021)

Perhaps one of the most interesting perspectives on solidarity and creativity is concentrated in this recognition of gazes, which is actually emerging, even if frail and suffering like the areas of the last crater. The regeneration process seems to be inextricably linked to reciprocity and attention, inventiveness and attentive care of what and whoever remains. In this sense, once again, an unprecedented synergy between systematic knowledge and reativity seems to represent the only way to get out of the shackles of a resigned immobility that would otherwise condemn rural and mountain areas to obsolescence or the tritest exploitation.

3. Conclusions

Trying to outline some traits characterizing the interaction between arts, creativity and regeneration of rural, mountain and fragile territories, we can identify four elements that are believed to provide a key to understanding the set of practices, visions and expectations outlined above.

3.1. Inhabiting fragility

The first focus is about inhabiting, 'making home', returning and / or staying in the place of belonging as a cornerstone of the shared creative processes of regeneration, emerging from deep local knowledge and participatory inventories (Ballacchino 2016; Broccolini 2016). The four cases outline co-constructed processes of development and revitalization sharing themes such as 'feeling at home', residing, staying, returning, and rebuilding.

This is evident at C.A.S.A. in Ussita that insists, since its acronym, on an interlocutory dimension of living (*Cosa Accade Se Abitiamo* = What Happens if We Inhabit). Inhabiting and 're-making home' is a very sensitive issue in a context marked by trauma of a disaster (Emidio di Treviri 2018, 2021; Falconeri, Fichera, Valitutto 2021). Historical research and recognition of specificities of living in the mountains (and especially in the wounded Apennines) are at the center of the present pathway. In turn, the members of C.AS.A. have chosen to take part of the Festival of Responsible Tourism IT.A.CÁ. analogously insisting on the very notion of "home" (*It a cà? = Are you at home?*), but also on the inspiring suggestion of

Ithaca and of Ulysses' journey. The members of the Association talk of Ussita as a "mountain port": a place from which to start and to return and to find home, a place for repatriating and 'return tourism'. The collective work on the "non-guide" of the territory is a work of awareness and sharing in a wounded place offering a self-representation to the outside world in a creative and generous way. 'Building home' becomes a way to get in touch with the profound sense of other places and to develop a dialogue by transforming an essentially private place into a meeting space.

Nature, Art, and Habitat Residency (NAHR) also is focused around this inversion realizing a continuous osmosis between public and private dimension. Visitors and participants to the Residency are welcomed, not surprisingly, in the living spaces of a family, in the traditional mountain buildings rebuilt by the expert craftsmen according to traditional building wisdom of the village. Hosts are mainly international artists, architects and scholars looking for a special contact with nature and a deep understanding of belongingness (Müller 2020). Bergamasque mountains are reappropriated through the recognition of knowledge and practices in dynamic tension with the rest of the world, especially California, where a parallel version of NAHR has recently been inaugurated. This shows once again the relationship between local and global dimension and the relevance of living and rooting in a habitat. The fragility and marginality of mountain and inland areas is in the background of this experience as well as the idea that new opportunities and new forms of territorial enhancement can emerge from the sociality and creativity developed during the Residency.

Even the experience of "Officina Creattiva" and "*Liberi di Essere* (Free to Be)" was born from "a homecoming" project. Concetta Fornaro has chosen to go back home and this return from training experiences in Italy and

abroad becomes an opportunity for innovation in rural areas in which she is committed at the same time as an entrepreneur in the wine sector and a promoter of social inclusion projects. "Home", thus, becomes the cultivated and rediscovered land of such a return process, but also the home of the others, of the migrants who have crossed these territories in the context of the SPRAR (Protection system for asylum seekers and refugees) and of the CAS (Extraordinary Reception Centres), connected with "Liberi di Essere". "Liberi di Essere", in particular, aims at removing the hosting centers from precariousness that had always characterized their welcoming actions and transforming them into more structured forms of inclusion. They proposed, in fact, a regular employment based on respect, justice as well as social innovation. Work and creativity help to re-establish bonds and solidarity, as a circular process that opens up the family space to make it a home for everyone where free personal expression and abilities represent the added value and make the meeting possible.

Moreover, the case of Castiglione d'Otranto is centered around the "House of AgriCultures Tullia and Gino": a personal home and at the same time a community house where staying and belonging. "House of AgriCultures" is set in a non-usual place for organizing a festival: a place of work and care of the territory, far from the easy and populous coast of hyper-exposed Salento. The inhabitants of Castiglione d'Otranto involved in this project benefit from a donated field and manage an agricultural experiment: they produce wheat and flours from ancient *cultivars* and traditional methods of milling, conserving biodiversity and enhancing the innovative practices of sharing, as well as the commitment to a cohesive and creative cultural campaign.

To inhabit live fragility and marginality, it is therefore necessary to challenge some stereotypes, to think about belonging according to critical approaches, breaking free from schematism. The cases that are briefly outlined here show in different ways how creative spaces and free collective expression become political laboratories of innovation while fully preserving the most intimate and affective traits of spaces of memory.

3.2. Walking knowledge and creative narratives

Another characterizing feature for territorial animation that holds together a profound interpretation of the territories, revitalization of abandoned and depopulated places, marginality compared to the great cultural and artistic circuits. Even recovery of cultivated biodiversity and traditional forms of transformation of raw materials are part of the paths and of the storytelling about belongingness and sense of community, despite the ambivalence and complexity of these notions.

In recent decades a growing attention has been deserved to sustainable tourism and respect for nature, but also towards a wellness-oriented tourism. 'Slowness' in experiential tourism, then, seems becoming a formula, sometimes abused and emptied of meaning (Ingold-Vergunst 2008; Solnit 2001; Bindi 2020).

Meanwhile, walking is increasingly considered pivotal by sustainable and responsible tourism actors, alongside the equally ambivalent definition of experiential tourism, resonating with emotional and at times mystical values of holistic syntony with nature and the more-than-human world. Pathways are presently an integral part of the packages offered to tourists,

reconnecting the urban and rural dimensions, the great stories of the past - monumental, event-oriented - with the minute and long-lasting agricultural practices, with rural landscapes and popular devotions. It is the way to guarantee a possibility for a detailed knowledge of the places and a close encounter with the other as a "human landscape" (Berlin, 2013) to be explored in the defined *temenos* (almost a secularized sacred space) of the tourist experience (Turner, 1984; Cohen, 1985; Graburn, 1989).

Experiences of territorial regeneration multiply and transform inhabited places through art intervention (graffiti, installations, sculpture with natural and rough materials, and so on). Meanwhile, national paths (CAI - Sentiero Italia, for example or the Path of San Benedetto or San Francesco) as well as the European Routes Networks (Camino de Santiago, Via Francigena) provide experiences and narratives, digital storytelling, but also performances, land arts, photo contests, etc.

Even in the cases outlined in this paper, the theme of paths and territorial knowledge / experience through paths is quite relevant. In the case of Ussita and the 2021 IT.A.CÁ - Monti Sibillini Festival, for example, immersive walks in the surrounding forests were organized, turning finally into collective performances and moments of meditation, but also in itinerant experiences of knowledge of local herbs and the forest ecosystem as a whole. The story and representation of the Sibillini Mountains enters into the construction of the paths and tourist proposals, basing on respect and gratitude solicited by the immersion in nature and the encounter with local knowledge and practices.

The journey exploration and relationship with the mountain and its resources similarly characterize NAHR and its proposals for a creative interpretation of the environment through architecture, design, but also

performing and figurative art, looking for aesthetics insights in traditional practices and even of different raw materials focused during the Residency. The residency experience restitution is realized through design and territorial planning as well as through performances inspired by discovery of the territory and by the encounter with animals.

The journey of migration and return to a land of origin is the background of the "Liberi di Essere" action: agrifood products as the Cantine Herero's wine are connected to the migrant paths of the guests at the first hosting center at Colle d'Anchise. A multicultural mix of techniques and knowledge of materials and packaging animates the open space of the association, for example through the creations by Folusho, a young tailor leading for "Officina Creattiva" a sewing and creative recycling laboratory and cooperating with Cantine Herero even for elegant packaging of Herero's wine bottles. At the same time, the narrative becomes crucial in Concetta Fornaro's collection of multicultural stories as a creative opportunity for cultural mediation and inclusion.

The "House of AgriCultures Tullia and Gino" launched in 2020 the "books on the road": an education-to-reading and eco-responsible-knowledge project implemented by the "Community Agri-Playroom" and the "Nursery of inclusion". It is essentially a wandering library, based on the circulation of books and environmental awareness activities aimed at educating young people and children thanks to the collaboration of volunteers of the House.

Analogously, the journey was at the very center of another 2018 "Green Night" event, the festival organized by "Casa delle AgriCulture" as a meeting and a disseminating opportunity on the territory and beyond. On that occasion, in fact, after a meeting in Melpignano on the theme of local

identity, a 50 km walk was started to symbolically collect and preserve the seeds of local biodiversity crossing several places in the Regional Park Costa Otranto-Leuca-Borgo di Tricase with the support of the associations "Albero Maestro" and "Made for Walking". The walk ended up in Castiglione d'Otranto where local people and external visitors discussed of food as an instrument of democracy, of autochthonous cereal farming, but also different events were organized such as screenings and rural art exhibitions, debates and shows on responsible waste management, rural writing and reading workshops (*Parla come mangi = Speak as you eat*), concerts with earth and fight songs and masonry reviews as well to scientific dialogues on the value of staying in the territories, rural economies and community alliances as well as responsible tourism routes.

Since 2018 different places and moments of the very rich activities of the festival were indicated as "roads" (road of biodiversity, road of natural agriculture, road of craftsmanship, road of "restanza" (Teti 2016), road of the "farmers of change". Even in this case we are facing creative narration and plastic representation of locality and rurality, a sort of aesthetically inverted gaze at peripheral, marginal and progressively obsolescent areas. Such an outlook enables a generative impact on the territories and for the groups of citizens who inhabit them.

Thus, the roads and paths alongside the narratives of return become symbols of transformation and crucial transition to be traveled in a conscious, creative way, attentive to the moods of the territory, but also to the new sensitivities coming from outside.

3.3. Being women in the post-development arena

The role of women is extremely relevant in these contexts of creative revitalization of peripheral, mountainous and rural territories. Beyond the most recent debates that claim for greater female protagonism in the various fields of socio-cultural and political activism, it seems relevant focusing on the important value of female figures who acted as hubs and doors towards the experiences and creative opportunities on the local dimension.

Concetta, Ilaria, the two Chiara, Tiziana and other women working with them on the daily care of these initiatives are connecting responsible development actions, alternative travels, care for the environment and regeneration of the territories, agents of development in the various internal and fragile areas of Italy and beyond.

This decisive female presence evokes the popular, communal, and feminist commitment in peasant movements of the Andean area and more generally in Latin America, opposing the idea of care and custody of the environment and local cultures to that of extractivism, openly in contrast with the colonial and neoliberal policies of soils and people's exploitation. The thought of a 'motherland' - *Patchamama* - which is at the same time deeply rooted in Andean thought, but at the same time a powerful dialogic device for the creative and generative encounter between experiences and cultures.

Women's presence implies a reflection for public anthropology, questioning the political impact of local actors' commitment and the specific declinations of women's belonging.

Their human and intellectual biographies first and foremost represent an element of specific interest for ethnography: the Concetta's training as an architect, mobile and cosmopolitan (Officina Creattiva) as well as for Ilaria Mazzoleni and Gaby Scardi (NAHR); the critical and radical ideas of a civic activist, expert journalist in social communication like Tiziana Colluto and the expertise in visual arts and social sciences of Chiara Vacirca (Casa delle Agriculture); the curiosity and commitment to restitution of a territory emerging from the narratives and the work of support of Chiara Caporicci (C.A.S.A.).

These women are interesting: they are travelers - in some case as 'extreme mediators' between two continents, as in the case of Ilaria Mazzoleni, alternating her work in Los Angeles as an architect and the animation of the Residence in Val Taleggio - or between internal territories and urban areas - as happens with Chiara Caporicci and Chiara Vacirca -, or in a widespread mobility meanwhile valorizing to stay and belong, though maintaining a delicate tension between permanence and mobility, as it happens for Concetta and Tiziana.

Female relevant presence alludes to a process of empowerment: on one hand reinhabiting internal and fragile areas, on the other rediscovering female agency in the processes of reconstruction and revitalization. A sort of reversal of perspective is thus manifested: what was once considered the most fragile - the depopulated areas, marked by disasters, the female gender – is now represented as an element of strength and cohesion. Countryside and mountains are no longer to be considered as objects of depredation, of productivism, extraction, profit-oriented processes (large sports facilities, overbuilding, invasive infrastructures), but on the contrary they are strengthened through traditionally sedimented experiences reaffirming the value of natural and cultivated landscapes,

through collective memories, migrants' inclusion, visitors' hosting which are especially transmitted, in small rural places, by women open to the world.

These local events, land art and creative festivals and residencies, recovered craftsmanship are usually not spectacular nor particularly commercial, but on the contrary they are inspired to sharing and inclusion, interconnection between small and very localized experiences and comparative reverberation with radical reflections matured on a transnational scale (Braidotti, Charkiewitz, Häusler, Wieringa, 1994): indigenous rights recognition, women's engagement in sustainable development, respect of the environment and animals, and the *buen vivir*, understood as a harmonious relationship with nature (Polo Blanco-Pineiro Aguiar, 2020).

In the recent social science debate a connection is established among ecological activism, post-colonial reflection and feminist or post-feminist liberation movements. Starting from the first Ester Boserup's formulation in the 1970s (Boserup, 1970; Boserup-Tan-Toulmin, 2013) the theme was developed through various international conferences on "gender and development" (Rowbotham, 1973), enlightening reflections on the proactive role of women in socially responsible development through the elimination of gender and social inequality as a transformative factor (Sen and Grown, 1987). In addition to this post-colonial and feminist perspective (Spivak, 1999; Portolès, 2004), those of the ecofeminist movements embodied (Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Bina Agarwal) insists on the greater compatibility with nature in the social and historical construction of female gender, on the role of women as bio-cultural heritage keepers, radically rethinking hierarchies between individuals as

well as between species (Haraway, 1991, 2016) as well as limits and frictions of the Anthropocene (Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2004).

Starting from the shared custody of common goods, solidarity and collective interest between and within communities, a feminist and "post-development" thinking (Escobar, 2015) has been developed, creatively impacting on local and regional economies opposed to large global markets. Women in rural and peripheral regions of the world are guardians against commodification and consumerism, opening non-profit activities, informal and family factories, often acting without an immediately considerable economic impact, representing the real backbone and support of the communities and in many cases also the drive towards their economic revitalization.

Post-feminist and eco-feminist reflection on development processes highlights informal activities of animation, care and enhancement carried out by women in the most depopulated and fragmented contexts, especially through artistic and expressive activities and traditional practices such as weaving, crafts, cooking, but also singing, acting, dancing.

Rural and native women – activists, policy-makers, farmers, shepherds, travelers of the inland areas and the mountains – support the political, economic and cultural relationship with their territories and communities as *buen vivir*: a radically post-colonial, anti-patriarchal and anti-hegemonic meaning, in what we could synthetically define the "political pluriverse" (Escobar 2011): a process of transition and change, radically disintermediated from the colonial, patriarchal and anthropocentric mortgage.

3.4. Restitutive circularity

Experiences observed in the "places left behind" (Wuthnow, 2018) seem increasingly oriented towards the revitalization of a deeply grounded agricultural and craft activities as well as towards the design of new forms of local regeneration based on sustainable tourism and newcomers' protagonism. In some cases, a potential for fragile and internal areas is affirmed, connected with the presence of new types of remote workers (*smartworkers*) or "digital nomads" (Capecchi, 2021). Some of them really take in consideration the hypothesis of living in rural and mountain areas, also very secluded, thanks to the possibility of remote work, considering the quality of life in these areas more sustainable than that of large urban areas way of life.

The reflection carried out in the last five years by groups and associations involved in the process of the "National Strategy for Internal Areas" (SNAI), the the scholars / activists of the "Riabitare l'Italia (Reinhabiting Italy)" Association, the studies conducted by several dedicated Centers of Research and more or less informal collectives conveyed the attention to the fluidity of the borders between margins and centers, between urban areas and countryside / mountains, outlining new forms of governance of development and economic and socio-cultural revitalization based on inclusion and participation, on a deeply rooted social innovation and circularity.

Nonetheless, the risk of reassuring narratives and, at times, of a new conformism of social innovation in rethinking rural and inland areas exists, both in the experts' than in activists' discourses, sometimes solicited by local actors, in other cases suggested by a new populism.

The evidence of the environmental, economic and social unsustainability of neo-liberal and post-capitalist choices and behaviors somehow implies the urgency for "doing otherwise". Rhetoric of "small villages" to be recovered, of the countryside to be cultivated in a low-impact and organic way, exaltation of inclusive and welcoming communities radically question the duration and persistence of re-inhabiting projects, the concrete potential for regeneration and sustainability (Bindi, 2021).

Multifunctionality of rural areas and their ability to manage innovation and recovery, history and enhancement of bio-cultural heritage represent today the real skills to develop to "cultivate beauty" and to look at late-modern rural economies from the point of view of financial sustainability and an overall well-being of citizens.

Thus, rural areas are today increasingly committed with biodiversity conservation and food citizenship, social inclusion of migrants and new inhabitants, low-impact accommodations and responsible tourism, new a sense of more-than-human community and cultural and social creativity. The circularity of exchanges in the contained and hidden dimension of rural and internal spaces, the cooperation that has influenced rural areas for centuries, the peasants' waste-reduction, respect of primary resources inspires today new creative and artistic experiences consolidating the collective bond as well as the vision of a less ethnocentric and even less anthropocentric development.

Arts and creative experimentation, cultural exchanges and cross-cultural contamination become a non-rhetorical way of rethinking the margin, creatively developing a radical critique of the limits of late-capitalist socio-economic development, questioning the asymmetries of an ethno-cultural and economic nature, the historical partage between the north and south,

the urban and the rural. In fact, the unprecedented and unexplored spaces of art and creativity redefine the margins between industrial, coastal, economically advanced areas - even if in reality they themselves are today marked by evident processes of recession and unsustainability - and internal, fragile, mountain and rural areas.

The groups that choose to practice this type of proposals and social innovation paths in "AgriCulture" are based on mutual understanding and profound care for places and people: a moral and emotional economy capable of creatively reweaving cracked, worn and lost relationships between people, between humans and "more-than-human", re-framing "global hierarchies of value" (Herzfeld, 2004) and the "mono-culture of minds" (Shiva, 1993).

In 1981 Maria Lai, a Sardinian artist, refusing to create, as she was asked to, a war memorial in Ulassai, her country of origin, and she proposed instead an extraordinary work of "relational art": "*Legarsi alla montagna* (Bind ourselves to the mountain)"[59]. She took inspiration from a legend according to which one hundred and twenty years earlier, in 1861, a ridge of the mountain dominating the landscape of Ulassai had given away, overwhelming a house and three girls who lived there. Only one was saved by holding a blue ribbon in her hand. Starting from this emblematic and legendary tale, the artist collected the tissues, distributed them involving all the inhabitants of Ulassai and made them, physically, connect to each other and stretch them around the mountain passing from door to door, from place to place in the country with the blue stripe. This

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[59] https://www.raicultura.it/arte/articoli/2019/11/Maria-Lai-9aa5a638-a435-41bb-81f5-50fc600238
1c.html.

simple idea of a thread or "a ribbon that unites" shifted in an artistic action and in an encounter between members of the same locality, creating connections where distance and mistrust or enmity have been imposed. This refers also to an idea of relationship with the mountain and the surrounding nature as elements of care and salvation, but also of commitment in building the bond. Maria Lai's work alludes to a relational and cooperative thought transforming each inhabitant of the village in a protagonist of the artistic and social action, spectators, users and actors at the same time, eliminating the dichotomies of a spectacularized and reified rurality. Relational art points to new subjects and new practices and suggests, out of rhetoric, the way to go beyond present ideas about development and regeneration, making possible to inhabit places, once again.

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