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Annunziata Maria Oteri
Giuseppina Scamardì

UN PAESE CI VUOLE

Studi e prospettive per i centri abbandonati e in via di spopolamento

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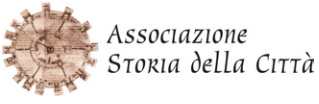
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a cura di Annunziata Maria Oteri, Giuseppina Scamardì

"ONE NEEDS A TOWN"

Studies and perspectives for abandoned or depopulated small towns

Giuseppina Scamardì, *Una storia di abbandono. Cause, conseguenze, trasformazioni* | *History of Abandonment. Reasons, Consequences,Transformations* 18

Annunziata Maria Oteri, *Strategies and Policies for Relaunching Depopulated Small Towns in Inner Areas. A Human Scale Perspective* | *Strategie e politiche per il rilancio dei piccoli centri nelle aree interne. Una prospettiva a misura d'uomo* 40

RIFLESSIONI INTRODUTTIVE
PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS

Carlo Carozzi, *Memoria e ritorno ai luoghi di origine*|*Memory and Return to Birth-Places* 62

Vito Teti, *Un paese ci vuole: dal villaggio della memoria a una nuova comunità del futuro* | *"One Needs a Town": from the Village of Memory to a New Community for the "Future"* 68

Loughlin Kealy, *«their history is a grain of wheat…..»* | *«la loro storia è un chicco di grano…..»* 96

Stefano Della Torre, *Dis-conoscere, Ri-conoscere: fattori dell'abbandono e del reinsediamento*|*Dis-own and Identify. Causes of Abandonment and Repopulation* 114

PARTE I - *UNA STORIA DI ABBANDONO. CAUSE, CONSEGUENZE, TRASFORMAZIONI*
PART I - HISTORY OF ABANDONMENT. REASONS, CONSEQUENCES, TRANSFORMATIONS

1.1 *I processi dell'abbandono* | *Processes of Abandonment*

Claudio Varagnoli, *Le conseguenze dell'abbandono: trasformazioni e permanenze* | *The Consequences of Abandonment: Transformations and Permanence* 126

Raffaele Amore, *Terremoto e abbandono: il caso di Aquilonia* | *Earthquake and Abandonment: the Case of Aquilonia* 134

Micaela Bordin, *La Valtellina: popolazione esistente e abbandono degli abitati in alta quota* | *Valtellina: Existing Population and Abandonment of High Altitude Settlements* 158

Donatella Rita Fiorino, Camilla Melis, Elisa Pilia, Maria Serena Pirisino, Martina Porcu, *Dinamiche di spopolamento in Sardegna. Problematiche e potenzialità di casi studio a confronto* | *Processes of Depopulation in Sardinia. Issues and Potentialities of some Case Studies* 182

Bruno Mussari, *Tra abbandono e ricostruzione: note dai carteggi degli ufficiali impegnati in Calabria dopo il terremoto del 1783* | *Abandonment and Reconstruction: Notes from Correspondence of Officials after the 1783 Earthquake in Calabria* 208

Emanuele Romeo, *Terremoti e conflitti religiosi come causa della trasformazione e dell'abbandono di alcuni antichi insediamenti in Asia Minore* | *Earthquakes and Religious Conflicts as Cause of the Transformation and Abandonment of Some Ancient Urban Settlements in Asia Minor* 238

Claudio Varagnoli, Lucia Serafini, Clara Verazzo, *I luoghi dell'abbandono. I centri minori dell'Abruzzo e del Molise* | *Places of Abandonment. Minor Centres in Abruzzo and Molise* 260

Rita Vecchiattini, *Borghi abbandonati in Liguria: cronache da un territorio fragile* | *Abandoned Villages in Liguria: Chronicles from a Fragile Area* 292

1.2 *Il rapporto con la memoria* | *Relationships with Memory*

Rosa Tamborrino, *Capacità adattiva dei luoghi e delle comunità a seguito di disastri naturali, eventi bellici, e inondazioni: ricerche e casi studio a confronto* | *Adaptive Capacity of Places and Communities Following Natural Disasters, War Events, and Floods: Research and Case Studies Compared* 316

Federico De Matteis, *Dopo l'evento. Archeologia dello spazio umano* | *After the Event. Archaeology of Human Space* 324

Ascensión Hernández Martínez, *Belchite: da simbolo franchista a risorsa patrimoniale. Passato, presente e futuro di una località segnata dalla guerra civile spagnola* | *Belchite: from Francoist Symbol to Cultural Heritage. Past, Present and Future of a Locality Marked by the Spanish Civil War* 346

Alessandra Lancellotti, *Borghi abbandonati come luoghi della memoria. La salvaguardia del patrimonio intangibile attraverso il cinema* | *Abandoned Towns as Places of Memory. The Safeguard of Intangible Heritage through Cinema* 374

Bianca Gioia Marino, *Patrimoni e memorie in dissolvenza: dinamiche di trasformazione e di abbandono dei centri dell'Alta Irpinia tra distruzione e ri-costruzione* | *Heritage and Fading Memories: Dynamics of the Transformations and Abandonment Small Towns of the Alta Irpinia during Destruction and Re-construction* 394

Monica Musolino, *Racconti di un abbandono. Dalle memorie di Gibellina alla memoria del Cretto* | *Tales from an Abandonment. The Notion of Memory between the Town of Gibellina and the "Cretto"* 418

Chiara Lucia Maria Occelli, *Rifondazioni: invenzione delle identità e traslazione delle memorie. I paesi sommersi per la realizzazione di bacini idrici* | *Resettlement: New Identities and Transfer of Memory. Submersion of Towns for The Creation of Reservoirs* 438

Gianfranco Pertot, *Memorie difficili: il Villaggio San Marco nel Campo di Fossoli e l'arcipelago dei quartieri per gli esuli giuliano-dalmati in Italia, periferie di ieri e di oggi* | *Problematic Memories: Villaggio San Marco in Fossoli Camp and the Archipelago of Settlements for Giulian-Dalmatian Exiles, in Italy: Suburbs, Yesterday as Today* 456

Sara Rocco, *I Campi di Raccolta Profughi dell'esodo giuliano-fiumano-dalmata fra abbandono e riconversione: una questione attuale* | *Refugees Camps of Istrian-Dalmatian Exodus between Abandonment and Reconversion: a Current Issue* 476

1.3 *Le trasformazioni del paesaggio* | *Landscape Transformations*

Salvatore Di Fazio, Giuseppe Modica, *Trasformazione del paesaggio, sistemi insediativi e borghi rurali* | *Landscape Transformation, Settlement Systems, and Small Rural Towns* 504

Ottavia Aristone, Angela Cimini, *Territori dell'abbandono. L'Appennino centrale e la campagna incolta* | *Territories of Abandonment. The Central Apennines and Uncultivated Countryside* 518

Maria Rossana Caniglia, *Il paesaggio della Sicilia «muta aspetto»: i borghi rurali dal progetto utopico all'abbandono* | *Small Rural Towns in Sicily from the Utopian Project to the Abandonment* 540

Salvatore Di Liello, *"Ferropoli" e il paesaggio occidentale di Napoli* | *"Ironopolis" and the Western Landscape of Naples* 568

Gaetano Ginex, Francesco Trimboli, *Fragili morfologie. La Calabria dei borghi abbandonati* | Fragile Morphologies. *Calabria of Abandoned Villages* 592

Ayça Özmen, *An Underwater Town in Turkey: Halfeti* | *Una città sommersa in Turchia: Halfeti* 606

Benedetta Silva, Carolina Di Biase, Mariacristina Giambruno, *Territori fragili in Lombardia tra abbandono, sottoutilizzo e trasformazioni del patrimonio costruito* | *Fragile Areas in Lombardy among Abandonment, Underutilization and Transformation of the Built Heritage* 628

Nur Umar, Tuğçe Darendeli, *A Desolate Village in East Anatolia: Tuğut (Çiğdemli)* |*Un villaggio abbandonato in Anatolia orientale: Tuğut (Çiğdemli)* 652

1.4 *Metodologie di indagine* |*Methodologies for the Study of Abandoned Small Towns*

Donatella Fiorani, *Metodologie d'indagine sul problema dell'abbandono dei centri storici. Un'introduzione* | *Methodos to Investigate the Abandonment of Historical Centres* 674

Francesco Bachis, Ester Cois, Caterina Giannattasio, Andrea Pinna, Valentina Pintus, *Silenzi apparenti. Abbandono e spopolamento dei centri urbani in Sardegna tra passato e futuro* | *Apparent Calm. Abandonment and Depopulation of Sardinian Towns, between Past and Present* 682

Adalgisa Donatelli, *Centri minori in Abruzzo colpiti da eventi sismici: scenari di danno e trasformazioni del costruito storico* | *Small Towns in Abruzzo Struck by Earthquakes: Damage Scenarios and Transformations of the Historical Building* 706

Paolo Faccio, Isabella Zamboni, *Civita di Bagnoregio (Viterbo). Applicazione di un metodo speditivo per la valutazione e la riduzione del rischio sismico di aggregati storici* |*Civita di Bagnoregio (Viterbo). An Expeditive Method of Seismic Risk Assessment and Reduction for Historic Masonry-Aggregate Constructions* 732

Renata Picone, Luigi Veronese, Serena Borea, Mariarosaria Villani, *La Resilienza della Storia. Trasformazioni e Permanenze nel Castello e nel Borgo di Marzano Appio (Caserta)* | *Resilience of History. Transformations and Permanence in the Castle and Village of Marzano Appio (Caserta)* 764

Valentina Russo, Stefania Pollone, Lia Romano, *Borghi storici, rovine, monumenti. Esperienze e prospettive di ricerca sui centri storici abbandonati in ambito italiano* | *Small Towns, Ruins, Monuments. Experiences and Perspectives of Research on Abandoned Historic Centers in Italy* 788

Sergio Sebastián Franco, *Ruesta: una bella rovina* | *Ruesta, Beautiful Remains* 818

Andrea Ugolini, Annalisa Conforti, *«A quando ritorneremo e l'orologio sopra la porta ricomincerà a pulsare». Strategie e problemi della ricostruzione nei centri abbandonati delle Marche dopo il sisma del 2016* | *«Till the day we will be back and the clock over the door will starts ticking again» Strategies and Problems of the Forsaken Towns of the Marche after the 2016 Earthquake* 846

Michele Zampilli, Michele Magazzù, *Borghi abbandonati della Tuscia: una proposta di metodo per riconoscere i caratteri identitari da conservare e restituire* | *Abandoned Villages in the Tuscia: Proposal for a Method to Recognize, Preserve and Restore the Identity of Sites* 870

PARTE II - *UN RITORNO POSSIBILE. STRATEGIE, PROPOSTE, PROSPETTIVE PER IL RILANCIO DEI CENTRI ABBANDONATI*
PART II - A POSSIBLE RE-TURN. STRATEGIES, PROPOSALS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE RE-LAUNCH OF ABANDONED SMALL TOWNS

2.1 *Strategie e prospettive per il rilancio dei centri abbandonati* | *Strategies and Perspectives for the Re-launch of Abandoned Small Towns*

Renata Prescia, *Politiche e disposizioni per il ripopolamento dei piccoli centri abbandonati. Alcune riflessioni* | *Policies and Rules for the Repopulation of Abandoned Small Towns. Some Reflections* 896

Stefano Aragona, *Reflections and Hypotheses of Ecological Re-territorialization* |*Riflessioni e ipotesi di ri/territorializzazione ecologica* 904

Sante Foresta, *Valorizzare i centri storici minori per contrastare lo spopolamento* | *Enhancement of Small Historical Centres to Hinder Depopulation* 926

Antonella Mamì, *Centri a forte connotazione storica nell'entroterra dell'Italia meridionale: ripensare la città tra valori, vincoli fisici e opportunità tecnologiche* | *New Strategies for Historical Towns in the South of Italy. Rethinking Values, Physical Constraints, and Technological opportunities* 948

Lucina Napoleone, *Borghi abbandonati in Liguria. Valorizzazione turistica e trasformazione del senso del luogo* | *Abandoned Villages in Liguria. Tourist Development and Transformation of the Sense of Place* 966

Gabriella Pultrone, *La sfida delle Aree interne, da aree problema a luoghi di opportunità per un futuro diverso dei territori marginali* |*The Challenge of Inner Areas: from Problematic Areas to Places of Opportunities for a Better Future of Marginal Territories* 982

2.2 *Possibili ritorni: dalle strategie alle esperienze* |*Possible Re-turns: from Strategies to Experiences*

Renata Picone, *Memoria e identità culturale come strumenti per il ripopolamento: alcune esperienze* |*Memories and Identity as Tools for Repopulation: Some Experiences* 1002

Cristina Cuneo, Daniele Regis, Antonia Spanò, *Riabitare le Alpi* | *Living the Alps* 1010

Pasquale Faenza, Roberta Filocamo, *La riforma organizzativa MiBAC come occasione di supporto alle iniziative dei borghi in via di spopolamento: il caso di Bova* | *The Reform of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage (MiBAC) to Support Initiatives for the Relaunch of Depopulated Small Towns: the Case of Bova in Calabria* 1038

Francesca Fatta, *Il borgo rurale di Schisìna a Francavilla di Sicilia. Processi di abbandono e analisi per il recupero* | *The Rural Village of Schisìna in Francavilla di Sicilia. Processes of Abandonment and Studies for the Recovery* 1066

Alessandra Ferrighi, *Venzone, il "Borgo più bello d'Italia" ricostruito dalle macerie* | *Venzone, the "Most Beautiful Italian Village", Rebuilt from the Ruins* 1092

Silvia Lottero, *Borghi sospesi tra presente e futuro* | *Abandoned Villages Hanging between Present and Future* 1118

Daniele Regis, *Un ritorno possibile: il caso della borgata Paraloup nelle Alpi occidentali* |*A Possible Return: the Case of the Paraloup Village in the Western Alps* 1138

Claudio Varagnoli, Lucia Serafini, Clara Verazzo, *Pratiche di recupero dei centri abbandonati. Esperienze dall'Abruzzo e dal Molise* | *Recovery Practices in Abandoned Centres. Experiences from Abruzzo and Molise* 1160

2.3 *Per un possibile ritorno: alcune esperienze* | *A Re-turn is Possible: Case Studies*

Xavier Casanovas, *New Paradigms for Possible Returns. European Policies and Case Studies* |*Nuovi paradigmi per possibili ritorni. Politiche europee e casi studio* 1192

Natalina Carrà, *Re_ThiNk Precacore. Idee di futuro per il borgo antico. Progetti e processi per innovare e valorizzare* | *Re_ThiNk Precacore. Ideas for the Future for the Ancient Village. Projects and Processes for Innovating and Enhancing* 1200

Sebastiano Citroni, Vincenzo Schirripa, Tiziana Tarsia, *Due strategie culturali tra marginalità e accoglienza* | *Two Cultural Strategies between Marginality and Reception* 1222

Rossella de Cadilhac, Maria Antonietta Catella, *Il borgo medievale di Craco: la "reinvenzione dei luoghi" tra nuove forme di antropizzazione e musealizzazione* | *Craco, a Medieval Village. The "Re-invention of Places" Throughout new Forms of Anthropization and Museum Display* 1242

Imane Djebbour, Ratiba Wided Biara, *Adaptive Reuse a Sustainable Strategy for the Revitalization of the City: the Case of Monuments Reconverted to Museums in the City of Tlemcen, Algeria* | *Adaptive reuse: una strategia sostenibile per la rivitalizzazione della città. il caso dei monumenti riconvertiti a museo nella città di Tlemcen* 1268

Gaetano Giovanni Daniele Manuele, *A_R_T_ (A_rtistica R_ivitalizzazione T_erritoriale): una strategia per la rivitalizzazione dei piccoli centri* |*A_R_T_ (A_rtistica R_ivitalizzazione T_erritoriale): A Strategy for the Revitalization of Small Centres* 1286

Barbara Scala, *Il ruolo dell'Amministrazione locale nella rigenerazione del centro storico: il caso di Gardone Val Trompia (Brescia)*| *The Role of Local Administration in the Regeneration of Historical Centres: the Case of Gardone Val Trompia (Brescia)* 1302

2.4 *Immaginare un futuro diverso. Strategie per il rilancio* | *Imagine a Different Future. Strategies for the Re-launch of Abandoned Small Towns*

Renato Sansa, *Salvare gli insediamenti dallo spopolamento attraverso i progetti. Una possibile prospettiva storica* |*Save Settlements from Depopulation through Projects. A Possible Historical Perspective* 1322

Rosario Chimirri, *Paesi di Calabria: "ritorno" al cohousing?* |*Small Towns in Calabria: "Return" to Co-housing?* 1332

Anna Di Giusto, *Da una nuova cultura a una nuova tradizione. Il dialogo culturale in alcuni borghi della Toscana e della Calabria* | *From a New Culture to a New Tradition. A Cultural Dialogue in Some Villages of Tuscany and Calabria* 1356

Antonella Golino, *La solidarietà al posto della competizione: una strategia per la rinascita delle Aree Interne del Molise* | *Solidarity Instead of Competition: a Strategy for the Rebirth of the Inner Areas of Molise (Italy)* 1372

Mariachiara Guerra, Public History e Audience Engagement: *lo spazio costruito come patrimonio di comunità* | Public History and Audience Engagement*: Urban Space as Community Heritage* 1388

Massimo Lauria, Giovanna La Face, *Indicatori di resilienza per territori fragili: strategie e approcci innovativi per i centri minori della Città Metropolitana di Reggio Calabria* | *Resilience Markers for Fragile Areas. Innovative Approaches and Strategies for the Villages of Reggio Calabria, Metropolitan City* 1408

Sarah Elena Pischedda, Tommaso Vagnarelli, *Il fenomeno dello spopolamento nella Sardegna settentrionale: strategie e soluzioni per un nuovo abitare* |*The Phenomenon of Depopulation in the Northern Sardinia: Strategies and Solutions for a New Way of Living* 1440

Sonia Pistidda, Eleonora Bersani, *"Costruire accoglienza". Il patrimonio culturale dei centri minori come occasione di rigenerazione urbana e sociale*| *"Building Hospitality". The Cultural Heritage of Small Centers as Opportunity for Urban and Social Regeneration* 1458

Antonio Taccone, *I laboratori di ricerca per lo sviluppo del territorio* | *Research Laboratories for Territorial Development* 1480

2.5 *Strumenti operativi per la tutela* | *Tools and Guidelines for the Protection of Abandonend Small Towns*

Caterina Giannattasio, *Leggere l'abbandono per saper ritrovare i luoghi* | *The Reading and Interpreting of Abandoned Places as a tool for their Rediscovery* 1496

Francesco Calabrò, *La programmazione integrata per la valorizzazione dei centri storici minori. Il Modello SOSTEC per la verifica della fattibilità economica per la valorizzazione degli immobili pubblici inutilizzati* | *Integrated Programming for the Enhancement of Minor Historical Centres. The SOSTEC Model for the Verification of the Economic Feasibility for the Enhancement of Unused Public Buildings* 1508

Concetta Fallanca, *Un nuovo rinascimento dei borghi dell'entroterra dalla messa in valore del capitale territoriale e sociale* | *A New Renaissance for Small Towns through the Development of Territorial and Social Capital* 1524

Donatella Fiorani, Carlo Cacace, *La Carta del Rischio come strumento di gestione conservativa dei centri storici* | *The Risk Map as a tool for Conservation Managing of Historical Centres* 1542

Cinzia Gavello, *Il valore del borgo:* Sewing a small town *per la rinascita di Bussolino e Bardassano* | *The Value of the Hilltown: Sewing a Small town for the Renaissance of Bussolino and Bardassano* 1564

Domenico Passarelli, Carlo De Giacomo, Giovanni Misasi, Longevity city: *urbanistica e qualità della vita. Un percorso virtuoso per garantire il benessere* | *Logevity City: Urban Planning and Quality of Life. A Virtuous Path for safeguarding wellness* 1582

Maria Rita Pinto, Daniela Bosia, Stefania De Medici, *Valori materiali e immateriali per la rigenerazione delle aree interne: tre contesti a confronto* | *Material and Immaterial Values for the Regeneration of Internal Areas: Three Contexts in Comparison* 1598

Renata Prescia, *Strategie e iniziative per il recupero e la valorizzazione: un bilancio sui centri storici siciliani* | *Abandoned Small Towns in Sicily. Strategies and Proposals for Recovering and Enhancement* 1624

PARTE III - *CONTRIBUTI E ESPERIENZE*
PART III - CONTRIBUTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Nino Sulfaro, *Storie di abbandono: il male e la cura. Alcune riflessioni* | *Histories of Abandonment: the Damage and the Remedy. Some Reflections* 1644

Gabriele Ajò, *I centri storici del Subappennino Dauno: un patrimonio in pericolo tra abbandono e sottovalutazione del rischio sismico* | *The Historical Centres of the Dauno Subappenine Area: a Heritage in Danger through Abandonment and Underestimation of Seismic Risk* 1654

Claudia Aveta, *Il borgo-fantasma di Conza della Campania, dove il terremoto del 1980 ha cancellato mura e identità* | *The Ghost Village of Conza della Campania, where the 1980 Earthquake Deleted Walls and Identities* 1678

Carla Bartolomucci, *Spopolamento e abbandono nei paesi montani d'Abruzzo: degrado e risorsa. Un processo reversibile?* | *Depopulation and Abandonment in the Mountain Villages of Abruzzo: Degradation and Resource. A Reversible Process?* 1694

Caterina F. Carocci, *Un affollato abbandono. Il cosiddetto "castello" di Pyrgos nell'isola di Santorini* | *An Overcrowded Abandonment. The So-called Pyrgos "Castle" in Santorini Island* 1722

Andrea D'Amore, *Le masserie delle Madonie: da segni di abbandono a potenziali fattori di crescita di un'area interna della Sicilia occidentale* | *The Madonie Farms: from Signs of Neglect to Potential Growth Factors of an Area of Western Sicily* 1748

Nicolò Fenu, *Strategie per territori a bassa densità nelle aree interne della Sardegna. I casi di Nughedu Santa Vittoria e Ollolai* | *Strategies for Low-Density Areas in the Inner Parts of the Sardinian Island. Cases of Nughedu Santa Vittoria and Ollolai* 1766

Carmen Genovese, Giovanni Minutoli, *I ruderi del centro abbandonato di Gioiosa Guardia (Messina). Studi e indagini per una memoria da recuperare nel territorio* | *The Ruins of the Abandoned Center of Gioiosa Guardia (Me). Studies and Investigations for a Memory to be Recovered* 1780

Dario Giordanelli, *New abandoned places: side effects of the "Miracle Architecture" in Spain* | *Nuovi luoghi dell'abbandono: effetti collaterali dell'"Architettura Miracolosa" in Spagna* 1804

Manuela Mattone, Elena Vigliocco, *Una risorsa culturale per la rivitalizzazione dei territori montani: il patrimonio dell'idroelettricità* | *A Cultural Resource for the Revitalization of Mountain Areas: the Hydroeletric Heritage* 1834

Valeria Montanari, *Ricostruzione post-sismica fra mutamenti dei luoghi e conservazione della memoria*| *Post-Seismic Reconstruction. Places Changes and Memory Conservation* 1854

Lola Ottolini, Antonella Yuri Mastromattei, *Temporary Set-ups for Recovering Built Heritage: a ''Pre-action''* | *Allestimenti temporanei per il recupero: una "pre-azione"* 1872

Irene Ruiz Bazán, *Il fenomeno del reimpiego nella fondazione di nuovi paesi come conseguenza della realizzazione di bacini idrici. Il caso del portale della chiesa di San Pietro in Vincoli di Borgata Chiesa Pontechianale* | *The Reuse of Parts of Buildings in the Foundation of New Towns as a Consequence of Water Basins Creation. The Case of the Portal of the Church of San Pietro in Vincoli in Borgata Chiesa Pontechianale* 1886

Rosario Scaduto, *Paesi abbandonati e il ritorno alla vita con l'arte* | *Some Abandoned Small Towns and their Return to Life with Art* 1908

Alessia Silvetti, Chiara Bonaiti, Francesca Andrulli, *New Life for Mondonico: from "Ghost Village" to Agro-forest University Campus* | *Nuova vita per Mondonico: da Ghost Village a polo universitario agro-forestale* 1930

Maria Rosaria Vitale, Antonella Versaci, *Un destino di marginalizzazione. Il ruolo delle politiche urbane nell'abbandono del centro storico di Leonforte* | *Destiny of Marginalization. The Role of Urban Policies in the Abandonment of the Historical Centre of Leonforte* 1948

Michele Zampilli, Giulia Brunori, *Metodi e pratiche per il recupero delle identità ed il miglioramento della sicurezza nei centri terremotati dell'appennino centrale* | *Methods and Practices to Rebuild Local Identity and Improve Structural Safety of Earthquake Villages of Central Apennines* 1970

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a cura di Annunziata Maria Oteri
Giuseppina Scamardì

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Strategie e politiche per il rilancio dei piccoli centri nelle aree interne. Una prospettiva a misura d'uomo

Annunziata Maria Oteri (Politecnico di Milano)

Il tema dello spopolamento delle aree interne e delle strategie per il loro rilancio è da qualche tempo tornato alla ribalta a seguito della pandemia e del conseguente periodo di quarantena che, tra le altre cose, ha messo a nudo le numerose fragilità dei grandi centri urbani. Dopo decenni di appelli inascoltati, all'improvviso sembra si sia scoperto quanto piacevole e sostenibile possa essere vivere nei piccoli centri delle aree interne e si ripropone, forse con più forza, una questione che era già al centro di alcune strategie e azioni sia a scala nazionale che europea. Ripercorrendo temi e problemi emersi nel corso del convegno internazionale "Un paese ci vuole". Studi e prospettive per il rilancio dei centri abbandonati e in via di spopolamento, tenutosi a Reggio Calabria nel novembre del 2018, il saggio propone una riflessione sulle reali prospettive di ripopolamento di piccoli centri in aree marginali partendo da alcune parole chiave che dovrebbero auspicabilmente guidare i programmi di rinascita. Al centro della riflessione si pone il ruolo che il patrimonio culturale può avere in questi processi, nella prospettiva però di un significativo cambio di paradigma che inserisce la conservazione e valorizzazione di tali beni in un processo circolare che parte dal territorio (inteso come un sistema complesso dove processi storici, culturali ed economici si intrecciano con le pratiche sociali) e al territorio ritorna.

ONE NEEDS A TOWN
Studies and perspectives for abandoned or depopulated small towns
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Strategies and Policies for Relaunching Depopulated Small Towns in Inner Areas. A Human Scale Perspective

Annunziata Maria Oteri

The topic of abandonment is fashionable. It has become more topical than ever in the last few months due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since March 2020, newspapers and blogs have been dedicating at least one article or editorial per day to the incredible rediscovery of how sustainable and liveable lockdown has been in hamlets and small towns in inner areas rather than in big cities. Thus, it seems that after years of unheard appeals from small local communities at risk of disappearing, rather than being a problem, small towns are now becoming important resources.

In Italy, before the pandemic, this perspective had already been studied by experts in many fields over the last 20 years. This common belief was brought into discussions, and the conviction that small towns are the best habitat for human life arose from many corners (scholars, local communities, experts in ecology, architects, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and so on). Politicians had been blind to this perspective until 2012 when a National Strategies for Inner Areas (SNAI) was laid out in collaboration between the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion and the European Commission. The Strategy marks a very slow process of relaunching small historical towns in inner areas, mainly based on improvements in health, education, and accessibility, and the enhancement of the cultural heritage they preserve.

The place-based approach proposed by the SNAI has significantly increased attention on inner or peripheral areas from many arenas involving sociologists, economists, anthropologists, urban planners, architects, geographers, and politicians in a relevant multidisciplinary approach.

The international conference "One needs a town". Studies and perspectives for abandoned or depopulated small towns, held in Reggio Calabria in 2018, was promoted in the wake of this attention[1]. The quotation from Cesare Pavese[2] is the starting point of the initiatives: Everyone needs a town, not necessarily a homeland[3] but a place to live. This vision implies a more dynamic idea of repopulation, which does not necessarily mean returning to the birthplace of those who have left; it means the arrival of new inhabitants to something new[4], hence the revival of local communities into a new social, cultural, and economic order, fully respecting (that is the challenge) the traditions and history of the specific place. The essays gathered in this volume and the experiences here told mainly look at abandonment and repopulation in this perspective.

Of course, repopulation implies actions and policies to foster a return in the sense described above. New tools to transform the potentiality of these areas into real projects are required, as the relaunch involves the economic and social regeneration of these territories. It is a fact that the topic has been studied with a multidisciplinary approach only in very recent times. Moreover, awareness of the essential role of cultural heritage in place-based strategies is also only recent. It is likewise true that experts in cultural heritage preservation have not played a relevant role in debates and strategies. Therefore, the conference purpose was to verify if and how the enhancement of cultural heritage might play a significant role in hindering depopulation. In other words, the aim was to assess how culture may play a part within the broader economic and social strategies for the repopulation of marginal areas, including cultural heritage, which is the focus of the reflections which follow. This approach characterizes most of the essays that follow, trying to overcome the boundaries of each discipline involved.

The Conference was born from a certain discomfort: the idea that those who work in the field of cultural heritage need to connect programmes and projects to preserve and convert this relevant heritage into more comprehensive economic and social strategies and policies for reviving inner areas. Otherwise, this work is useless, and risks falling into the trap of a nostalgic, anachronistic return to the past. The Conference "One needs a town" was conceived with the idea of overcoming this unreal and unfeasible perspective.

1. The initiative was born within the Cross Laboratory, a research centre (Centre for Historical Studies on Architecture, Town, and Environment) of the Department of Heritage Architecture Planning (University *Mediterranea* of Reggio Calabria) and coordinated by the author together with Giuseppina Scamardì.

2. See Pavese 1950, p. 6.

3. See essay by Carozzi in this volume.

4. Teti 2020, p. 173.

Conservation and development in depopulated areas: possible intersections and some keywords

In the slogan «Preserving by developing and developing by preserving», Luigi Fusco Girard, in 1991, predictively summarized a possible approach to hinder economic obsolescence and marginality in inner areas[5]. The guiding idea is that preserving ecological, environmental, and cultural resources could support, instead of preventing, more general development strategies in a forthcoming future. Economy and ethics, that is to say, the different spheres of facts and values, become interdependent and growth is fair (or sustainable, to use a more updated term).

Some years later, he reflected on the general, rising interest for small historical towns, which in his opinion, derives from the necessity to build a "strategy of resistance" against the troubling aspects of modern life, efficaciously emerging in the crisis of the big cities. In this perspective, he insists on the importance of preserving small historical centres, not only to restore the significant historical and aesthetical values which they hold but also to produce new values of use, hence economic and social values. He traces a circular process, which is the core of sustainable development, in which culture and economy can reciprocally foster each other through the relaunch of small historic towns[6].

This perspective has recently been the principal focus of international and national studies and strategies after the supremacy of urban policies addressed to big towns. Big cities, considered models for innovation, creativity, and attractiveness, have disappointed the great expectations of economic growth and wealth. Simultaneously, social inequality and the discrepancy between North and South and between metropolitan and marginal areas have increased.

In Italy, the Strategy for Inner Areas[7] considers social inequality and economic disparity that affected inner and marginal areas as the starting point from which to launch their rebirth. More in general, many scholars and researchers involved in the study of economic and social changes in the last twenty years, if not longer, underline the necessity for a "territorial" approach for marginal areas: a "bottom-up" approach based on the idea of fostering local development through the

5. Fusco Girarda 2009, pp. 118.

6. Fusco Girardb 2009, p. 109.

7. The National Strategies for Inner Areas (SNAI) was conceived in 2012 by the Agency for Territorial Cohesion to hinder depopulation, acting on social inequalities and enhancing inner areas cultural capital. In SNAI – which is a good methodological tool to face depopulation in inner areas – the phenomenon has adequately been seen as a national issue for two main reasons: the emergency which it implies, and the extraordinary potentiality, in terms of cultural capital, of the areas affected by processes of abandonment.

enhancement of local resources, also in terms of knowledge, skills, culture, and, last but not least, resilience[8].

The role of cultural heritage in such an approach has already been extensively outlined and emerges in the following pages. Many studies on the heritage-based approach in planning processes, mainly in inner areas strongly characterized by material and immaterial inheritance, also confirm these new tendencies[9]. However, from a first analysis of the results, it is also clear that the desirable connection between the policies for the conservation of cultural heritage and the rebirth of these areas rarely occurs. There are various reasons why heritage-based policies rarely get off the ground. It is unreasonable to list them, as the results of policies and projects (or the deficiency of policies and projects) heavily depend on the specific characteristics of each context; any generalization would prove to be simplistic and unreal. Nevertheless, villages and small towns, not only in Italy, present many similarities in traditions, rituals, habits, and poverty despite the geographical, historical, cultural, and economic differences[10]. In this light, some reflections on the main concerns of the relationship between conservation and development (apparently an oxymoron) in depopulated areas may help pinpoint how to address plans and programs based on cultural and natural heritage as drivers for economic growth. For this reason, gathering the suggestions from the authors of this volume, a focus on some keywords that should shape this relationship is proposed here[11].

The first word is *variety*. «Variety is the main source of the specificity of that particular site, and also of its competitiveness»[12]. In the *Manifesto for repopulating Italy* (*Manifesto per riabitare l'Italia*), terms such as granularity, diversity, and polycentrism often recur, and many authors insist on the necessity of founding the rebirth of the many "Italies" on the enhancement of the differences rather

8. Among researchers and stakeholders, the idea that marginal areas and their communities are fragile and resilient has been prevailing in recent times. In this case, resilience is referred to as the strong potentiality for innovation that they preserve, despite their rooted attachment to tradition and identity. See De Rossi 2018; Rossitti, Torrieri 2020.

9. The bibliography in this field is vast and multidisciplinary, so it would be impossible to be exhaustive. As the focus of the essay is mainly Italy, the contents in De Rossi 2018 and the rich multidisciplinary references can provide a useful synthesis of the more recent studies.

10. See the essay by Teti in this volume.

11. Of course, the wordlist here suggested is not exhaustive of this complicated topic. It mainly comprehends those words that describe the potentiality of the intersection between conservation of cultural heritage and development of depopulated small towns, which are ignored or underestimated in strategies for relaunching. Concepts strictly related to cultural heritage, such as historical and aesthetical values, authenticity, and so on, are intentionally excluded from the list, not because they are not essential but as one may consider them already embedded in the idea of cultural heritage.

12. *Manifesto* 2020, p. 7 (translation by the author).

On the previous page, figure 1. Pentedattilo (Reggio Calabria), overview (photo A.M. Oteri, 2018).

Figure 2. Pentedattilo (Reggio Calabria), top view of some ruined buildings (photo A.M. Oteri, 2018).

than forcing unreasonable homogenization. «Geography, morphology, and long-term historical sedimentations shaped an articulated, differentiated, granular, and rough country: a kaleidoscope of landscapes, woods, climates, economies, traditions, dialects, gastronomies, agricultures, towns, and institutions. It is from there that one has to restart»[13]. Variety and conservation are two words that match, but only if one does not consider cultural heritage[14] as a mere adaptation to changes (passive action). The relationship only works if conservation is acted in a co-evolutionary perspective (active action)[15]. In synthesis, it means that the rich, multi-layered heritage, whose values change over times, and the unavoidable economic and social transformations need to be connected.

On the contrary, the prevalent idea in public and sometimes local politics is that cultural heritage conservation processes are mainly anti-economic. Actually, changes in behaviour, which strongly influence our perception of the environment, are slower than economic changes. Hence, the coordination of one with the other is still very challenging despite the fact that the more recent national and international policies and initiatives strongly support the role of culture for relaunching marginal areas[16]. Looking at the scale of architectural heritage, for example, it is clear that "variety" has not been the mainstream in policies for conservation and re-use to date. Stereotypes have mainly guided strategies for regeneration: mills, farmsteads, "nativity scene" hamlets, and so on have been re-used and become museums of traditions and agrofood or scattered hotels for possible visitors[17]; stereotyped uses for stereotyped objects, in the light of managing cultural heritage without enhancing it and without any previous assessing of actual potentiality for the territory. These interventions, that generally ignore the multi-layered values of historical buildings, rarely affect the local economy or the locals; more frequently, they turn out to be self-referential, useless,

13. *Ibidem*.

14. Conservation. The reference, in this case, is mainly to architectural and natural heritage.

15. See the essay by Della Torre in this volume. See also Oteri 2019, pp. 180-181.

16. See European Commission, *Simplification Handbook. 80 Simplification measures in cohesion policy 2021-2027*, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Bruxelles 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/2021_2027 (accessed 15 September 2020). See also Cotte, Funds 2019; Voices of Culture 2020. In Italy, apart from SNAI, many initiatives and experiences in this sense are have been promoted by associations such as Legambiente and Symbola. At a local level, private foundations and cooperative communities have also been working to promote the role of culture for inner areas. Furthermore, it is important to underline the interest of the media on the topic; see, for example, the initiative by the newspaper «La Repubblica» in collaboration with Eni and Coldiretti. Every week since February 2020 a page has been dedicated to a "Circular tour" among the Italian territories, which are relevant examples for excellence, circular economy, and respect for the environment.

17. De Rossi, Mascino 2020, p. 178.

or even a burden in terms of costs for maintenance. Furthermore, this approach does not consider all the various, non-homogeneous historical constructions that contribute to defining the specific characteristics of a place even without following precise aesthetical standards (or stereotypes). In conclusion, the risk is trivialising heritage and places rich in history and traditions.

Heritage-based policies significantly change the idea of both cultural heritage and conservation. The former is not an object to valorise in itself, but a lever to activate processes for relaunching marginal areas. The latter is the physical preservation of heritage and a more multifaceted action that also implies the inclusion of heritage, with all its complex, rich, and often contradictory values, in transforming and developing a given territory[18]. In this co-evolutive perspective, the process is circular. It is based on the idea that the regeneration of local resources (including cultural resources) can drive new forms of development[19]. Therefore, *circularity* is the second word on the list, and should not be confused with localism. The territorial dimension could involve some kinds of claim for a nostalgic return to the past or an escape from modernity and progress, as sometimes seems to happen. On the contrary, in a circular vision, return to the territory implies the possibilities of enhancing the many creative and stimulating suggestions which come from marginal areas and capitalising the various "attempts of resistance" that have been promoted, in the last few years and with some clamour, in fragile and depopulated territories: New models of production, unique lifestyles, new relationships with nature, culture, and people. In conclusion, as correctly suggested in the abovementioned *Manifesto*[20], *new humanism* is another crucial keyword in the proposed vocabulary for relaunching inner areas.

In the light of the circular economy, local resources, which also include people, are essential. A heritage-based policy is also community-based. Hence *community*, not only in the meaning of people, but also institutions, rules, and mutual relationships, is another important word[21]. Actually, community-based processes are significantly slower than economic changes, as suggested correctly in this volume[22]. This is one of the main reasons why such a kind of approach takes root with difficulty. Nevertheless,

18. See the essay by Kealy in this volume.

19. Commonly known as circular economy, this "regenerative" process has been studied by economists since the 1970s and is usually associated with sustainability. Territories with their cultural capital can play an essential role in the circular economy; hence it also involves the field of conservation and management of cultural heritage and is now at the base of many territorial policies such as SNAI. See Rossitti (in press); see also Fusco Girard, Gravagnuolo 2017.

20. *Manifesto* 2020, p. 9.

21. See Torrieri, Oppio, Rossitti 2020.

22. See the essay by Kealy in this volume.

community involvement in cultural strategies is more frequent in policies for inner areas, even in Italy, which is behind on this aspect compared to other European countries[23]. In recent years, for example, growing attention to rural and mountainous heritage has been generated and there has been increasing involvement of local residents in practices for maintaining material and immaterial heritage (e.g., dry-stone wall maintenance, transhumance, and so on) but also in enhancing the role of this heritage as an essential resource for biodiversity. More in general, people and institutions hold and share the complexity of cultural heritage values, which are often hidden in the folds of the many stratifications and transformations over time. Hence, communities can play an essential role in explaining and boosting the significance of these values. This role is much more efficacious, if and when it is not self-referential and based on local relations, but if it is played out in a condition of otherness. *Relationship* is another keyword, as in such a view, connections among the different fragilities from different areas, and the many, significant legacies could become a resource in itself[24], also in the perspective of a fruitful exchange of experiences. Many recent studies also show the power of communities in imagining a new future based on creative and innovative uses or re-uses of cultural resources[25]. They propose "frugal innovation", which is not based on the nostalgic celebration of roots and identities. It is a more pragmatic and revolutionary interpretation of practices and shared cultural experiences in the light of care for the territory and its development[26]. Hence, *imagination* is another word on this list, accompanied by an additional essential idea to summarise in *generosity*. Beyond the limit of protests and recriminations for inequality and marginalisation, a cultural-based revolution against abandonment is possible only in the human spirit of openness and generosity[27].

As in many other fields of human life, generosity often implies *sacrifice*, which ends this very short list of keywords. The word sounds negative and unsettling and seems to invert the general positivity of the list, but it is also realistic. Loss is unavoidable, as Loughlin Kealy writes in this volume. In light of preserving our resources and structuring a reliable programme for hindering depopulation, it is finally clear that it is impossible to repopulate all the marginal areas. In this volume, many experiences of

23. Experts from diverse countries have shared many interesting experiences of community involvement in cultural strategies for marginal areas during the brainstorming Voices of Cultural held in Alfeld in February 2020. The final report now gathers the results. See Voices of culture 2020.

24. Pasqui 2020, p. 23.

25. Sacco 2018.

26. Sacco 2020, p. 131.

27. See interesting reflections in the essay by Kealy in this volume, particularly p. 104.

relaunching through tourism or welcoming refugees are told. However, from the pages which follow, it is also clear that the unfriendliness and wildness of some "empty" areas or their economic and social decline are irreversible. In these cases, only a (guided) abandonment is conceivable. This is not capitulation but, in a positive perspective, only the awareness of an irreversible change that could even transform, for example, a once inhabited place into a new, more sustainable ecosystem.

Not only tourism. Strategies and experiences on a human scale

As the results of the Conference and the essays in this volume have revealed, tourism remains the main objective of experiences and strategies for repopulating small towns at risk of abandonment, despite the awareness of the possible threats of these polices in such fragile and multi-significance contexts.

Since the 1990s, policies and strategies for rural and inner areas have been addressed to capitalise a selection of material and immaterial cultural inheritance[28]: a castle, a palazzo, a church, a wood or a relevant landscape in the case of material heritage; eno-gastronomy or some particular tradition in relation to immaterial heritage. Particularly concerning architectural, urban, and environmental heritage, this approach generally ends in self-referential restorations, rarely respectful of the authentic material and immaterial features of the object, and based on a narrow or unreal idea of development which excludes the sphere of production[29]: Castles become museums and woods pleasant places to stroll in; historical urban fabric is converted into scattered hotels and old mills or farmsteads are transformed into exhibition sites for local eno-gastronomic products which, generally, nobody produces anymore. In the last decades, invented traditions and celebrations have been proposed in every small Italian historical centre, from north to south, to create more attractive sites, and forcing their identity. Preservation has sometimes contributed to this misinterpretation, as practices of restoration of cultural heritage sometimes seem to validate the idea that the identity of a place is preserved only with a nostalgic return to the past, which all too often is invented.

New routes have been explored in parallel with this prevalent tendency in the last few years. History, not only in the sense of traditions and memories, but also the study of the productive

28. The selection is generally based on the aesthetic or symbolic values of the objects, and usually involves those buildings, urban fabric or landscapes that preserve their original or "authentic" aspects. The multi-layered, variously transformed heritage that constitutes most of our cultural heritage is excluded from this selection.

29. De Rossi, Mascino 2020, p. 178; Oteri 2019, pp. 188-189.

Figure 3. Ferruzzano (Reggio Calabria), view of the entrance of an abandoned building (photo N. Sulfaro, 2019).

On the next page, figure 4. Ferruzzano (Reggio Calabria), view of an abandoned house interiors (photo N. Sulfaro, 2019).

background of territories and communities, and new economies seem to readdress policies and initiatives for inner areas. Together with culture, in the broader and inclusive sense of the word, they characterize the most innovative actions for hindering depopulation and inequality.

The importance of focusing on the history of abandonment, also reconstructing the productive background (growth and decay) of a given territory to programme reliable strategies for the future is underlined in the pages that follow[30]. In this perspective, the limit of mere touristic development is overcome, and a wider ground of experimentation appears, as some of the experiences here told show. The "territorial" dimension of such strategies – mainly based on the idea that a proper awareness of the territory and its history fosters a "network of the return"[31] – is broken down into different results where the space for tourism is prudently included in a more general rebirth for locals and new inhabitants: investment for the recovery of local productions through innovative technologies; improving attentive strategies for "building hospitality", managing migrations, and welcoming refugees; investment in education which implies the involvement of students, both locals, and foreigners, in experiencing the territory where they live, with the idea that school is the place where learning is fostered, and also the place where connections with local resources, traditions, and heritage are forged; re-using abandoned historical urban fabric and buildings for co-housing and co-working, along with interesting public-private initiatives of "audience engagement"; re-use of historical and vacant infrastructures to improve slow mobility and protect and reactivate agroforestry heritage and productions[32].

The experiences mentioned above, and the many others which slowly emerge as the alternative to the traditional "bottom down" strategies are still heritage-based. The most relevant difference, which reflects the essential change of national and international policies for inner areas, is the human scale of the approach. It is also an in-progress approach that looks at these territories in the perspective of

30. See, in particular, the essays by Scamardì and Sansa in this volume. See also Bonfantini 2016, p. 9. The author underlines that tourism is not the only economic resource for relaunching historical territories, even if important.

31. See the essay by Pistidda, Bersani in this volume.

32. Part 2 of the volume gathers many reflections and experiences in light of a "territorial" perspective. As regards the re-use of vacant infrastructure, interesting examples can be quoted in Italy. Regarding cultural economy, the aim is to improve knowledge of non-urban and marginal territories, and sites reactivating disused connections, such as railway, and mule tracks or pedestrian routes. For example, in the Calabria region, the old steam train that connected some little villages in the Sila mountain has been reactivated, and it is now possible to cross uncontaminated landscapes, settlements, and forgotten traditions using a slow, fascinating old-style train. In the north of Italy, along the Po river, the VENTO project connects fragile territories with a "slow line", creating a system and enhancing local economies (e.g., recovery of abandoned buildings to host accommodations); https://www.cicloviavento.it/ (accessed 10 September 2020).

transformation, in contrast with the static, "old manner" and impersonal attitude[33]. In synthesis and simplifying the reasons for such complex changes, the new tendency seems to reflect the deep crisis of capitalism and the rising inclination for circular and sustainable economies in a co-evolutive perspective[34].

Cultural heritage and its preservation become one link of a highly complex chain that involves an "other". Dialogue with the "other" is certainly necessary to avoid the risk of falling into the trap of a nostalgic, useless return to the past. The discussion is also essential if we are to define realistic and updated strategies to face the many challenges that revive marginal areas involved in a sustainable perspective. In light of the green economy and circularity, cultural heritage is included in a more comprehensive and virtuous system where repopulation and better quality of life are mixed together. In Ferla, a small historical centre in Sicily, a so-called "green miracle" completely changed the perspectives of the small community at risk of depopulation thanks to the green revolution that the mayor has been implementing over the last nine years. The example, among the many that one may quote, clearly outlines that starting from ecologic choices (a revolutionary, ecologic system for managing differentiated waste collection and investment in photovoltaic energy), notable improvements in the quality of life and relevant economies are possible. Many other positive aspects can be recorded as a consequence of these policies: the attraction of professionals, also from other countries, to study the green turning point of the small community, the reactivations of some activities which were once closed, the return of local people attracted by the new perspective and, as a consequence, the recovery of some productive agriculture activities. At the end of this circular process, architectural heritage has been re-used for welcoming an increasing "ecologic" tourism and creating new spaces for co-working[35]. As in many other cases, the "green" method adopted in Ferla clearly shows that connecting economic, social, and cultural aspects in a given territory contributes to its relaunch[36]. Many other less or well-known examples have testified to this new direction, and it

33. See the essay by Giannattasio in this volume.

34. See the *Assisi Manifesto. An economy on a human scale against the climate crisis*, https://www.symbola.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Manifesto-Assisi_INGLESE.pdf (accessed 15 September 2020).

35. Amato 2020.

36. Many similar initiatives can be quoted at international and national levels which insist on the possible relaunch of these territories combining green economy, digital innovation, and cultural heritage investments. With no intention of being exhaustive, some very recent programmes and policies are here quoted, such as the Smart Rural 21 project, which aims to promote and inspire villages to develop and implement smart village approaches and strategies across Europe; https://www.smartrural21.eu/ (accessed 15 September 2020). In Italy, Legambiente and Symbola published the Atlas *Piccoli comuni e Cammini d' Italia (Small towns and walks in Italy)* with the idea to reinforce the network of Italian small towns and villages through walking tours. See Symbola 2020.

is now urgent to study and classify them at a national level in a well-articulated census of place-based practices[37]. Gathering and sharing such examples of good practices, trying to transform them into something more similar to urban policies and strategies, is one of the most challenging perspectives for researchers involved in the processes of transformation of territories and settlements.

In conclusion, and specifically looking at architectural heritage and its preservation, the "territorial" approach requires new reflections by academics and experts in this field.

They deal with methods, tools, and competences to face the challenge. It is clear that, in most cases, practices for preservation and re-use of historical buildings in small towns involved in place-based policies have been realized from programmed guidelines and protocols[38]. Generally, they result from spontaneous interventions from the locals or new inhabitants, and there are various risks in terms of loss of authenticity and improper transformations. In such a difficult framework, the first problem concerns methods and implies greater involvement in policies and practices of experts in the field. As the first results of SNAI reveal, the difficulty in achieving programmes and projects mainly depends on the inadequacy of local offices and technicians[39]. The second issue, closely related to the previous, deals with tools for knowledge, which is at the base of every possible, successful heritage-based strategy. Knowledge is here intended in a wide perspective; along with the history of the sites and their transformations, it includes the study of the fragilities (both material and immaterial) of such heritage and, on the other hand, its richness and complexity in relation to the territory, its development and decay over time. Again, the complexity of the topic seems to suggest that tools and methods should be flexible (but rigorous) and conceived in an evolutionary perspective. In this sense, some suggestions are to be found in the interesting and innovative examples described in the pages that follow, which propose operative tools to assess seismic risks (expeditious methods for seismic assessment), vulnerability, and risks of loss of cultural heritage (Risk maps)[40].

37. It is useful to underline the recent initiative by Uncem, the National Union of Mountain Municipalities, Communities, and Institutions, which launched a Census of the Alpine and Appennine villages and energy efficient buildings in Italian mountain villages and small towns. The initiative aims at gathering ideas, studies, creative projects, and concrete examples of sustainable interventions on private or public buildings by public administrations, communities and experts. See https://uncem.it/mappaturaok/ (accessed 30 September 2020).

38. The PhD course in Preservation of Architectural Heritage, Politecnico di Milano, has recently initiated research on the preservation of architectural heritage in inner areas. The first results seem to outline that these practices have been significantly increasing over the last few years. At the same time, the involvement of experts in such interventions is quite irrelevant. Often, the results are negative in terms of preservation and respect of the authentic values of the buildings.

39. Lucatelli, Monaco, Tantillo 2018.

40. See the essay by Faccio, Zamboni in section one and the paper by Fiorani, Cacace in section two of this volume.

Pandemic and repopulation: a crossroads for inner areas [41]

One of the consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic has been an increase in interest for inner areas. An opposite migration from big cities to small villages along the coast, and to the small settlements of the Appennini or the Alps has encouraged a new, sometimes excessive optimism[42]. Obviously, in small and marginal places, which are typically deserted as they are mainly depopulated, locals suffered segregation due to the quarantine less, and for those who live in such remote places, the impact of the disease during lockdown was practically irrelevant:

> «Before the lockdown – write Roberto Cabboi from a small town in Sardinia – here in Armungia we could do the shopping in the small shops of the village. In Armungia we could take care of our gardens, walk in the countryside, go to Gigi the Tobacconist, and take a coffee in Cristof's bar. Now, apart from going to the bar, we can do the same things as before»[43].

In such places, the quality of life during lockdown was better than in the big cities, which are usually crowded and were suddenly segregated. Probably, one felt the fear due to the inaccessibility of health services and the disadvantage of the digital divide. Furthermore, in some cases, the emergency showed the resilience of these communities who organized an impressive, alternative network of the domestic healthcare system (e.g., the so-called "barefoot doctors" who rediscovered a sort of "territorial dimension" to lighten the burden on the hospitals in some way).

Of course, the idea that this dramatic event would suddenly change the destiny of inner areas might appear demagogic[44]. The economic and anthropologic reasons why people leave small towns still persist, despite the slogans and proclamations. Even if dramatic, the emergency has been too short to change rooted policies and behaviours, and it is a fact that small towns in inner areas still present the same problems that have caused the continuous and persistent migration towards big towns since the last century. Those who decided to spend the lockdown period in their native, small town or village will rarely find the conditions to remain. Furthermore, some very recent studies clearly show that the very first national policies to help the country emerge from the Covid emergency do

41. Part of these reflections has been published in *Aree interne e città. Né vincitori né vinti nella lotta contro il Covid 19*, the blog *Territorial fragilities*, Dastu Dipartimento d'eccellenza Fragilità territoriali https://www.eccellenza.dastu.polimi.it/2020/04/22/aree-interne-e-citta-ne-vincitori-ne-vinti-nella-lotta-contro-il-covid-19/ (accessed 10 September 2020).

42. The reference is at the discussed interview with Stefano Boeri in April 2020 on the future of small villages and towns after the pandemic. See Giovara 2020.

43. Cabboi 2020, s.p. (translation by the author).

44. Merlo 2020, p. 32 (translation by the author).

not look on inner areas as resources[45]. Despite the initial enthusiasm, times are still not ripe for the "revenge" of the inner areas against the "Big Towns model" failure.

However, it would be a grave mistake to ignore the various place-based experiences that communities in remote areas organized in these dramatic circumstances. Only to quote some examples of "resistance", they reorganized themselves by focusing on the topic of care, health, and solidarity; they rediscovered the usefulness of small shops in the neighbourhood, the importance of open, public spaces commonly neglected or forgotten, and they sometimes revealed creativity and talent in transforming segregation into opportunity. Many of these experiences are spontaneous and conceived out of no programmed strategy, but they seem to work better than national policies.

After some months from the lockdown and the prolonging of the emergency, many aspects of these resilient reactions seem to require the attention of experts involved in urban policies. Even if it is unreliable to suppose that a massive movement from big cities to small villages could take place, it is reasonable to imagine that working from home, agile work and telework will in some ways positively impact on the demographic trend both in towns and villages. At least one now has more opportunity to choose which kind of life we would prefer to live. In this perspective and considering repopulation in the dynamic idea pictured above, historical small towns and hamlets are not only containers of old buildings and obsolete symbols of the past to preserve in the name of immovable traditions and identity. They are reserves of cultural capital whose value is strictly related to the quality of life[46] and production. This last aspect, intended as cultural production, does not necessarily mean tourism – in the mistaken idea that cultural heritage and tourism is the only possible binomial in this field (a binomial which rarely implies the preservation of the authentic values of the heritage) – or entertainment. The meaning, which is very difficult to put into practice, as the contents of this volume reveal, is to consider such productive, even if fragile, heritage as fully part of everyday life and the current challenging time.

45. A. Coppola, F. Curci, A. Lanzani, *Covid 2019. È necessario elaborare politiche differenziate nei diversi territori e guardare diversamente al sud d'Italia*, 16 aprile 2020, the blog *Territorial fragilities*, Dastu Dipartimento d'eccellenza Fragilità territoriali https://www.eccellenza.dastu.polimi.it/2020/04/16/covid-19-e-necessario-elaborare-politiche-differenziate-nei-diversi-territori-e-guardare-diversamente-al-sud-italia/(accessed 10 September 2020).

46. It is interesting to quote the recent initiative of the "National Association for the Hamlets of the Breath" (Associazione Nazionale Borghi del Respiro). A group of small historical villages and towns between Abruzzo, Lazio, and Umbria, which are characterized by good quality of fresh air, recently signed the "Breath agreement" ("Patto per il respire") to protect the environment, improving the liveability of the settlements, and promoting a proper health culture for citizens and people from abroad; https://www.isprambiente.gov.it/it/news/patto-per-il-respiro-insieme-per-il-benessere-della-natura-e-dell2019uomo (accessed 10 September 2020).

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