

LOST AND FOUND

Processes of abandonment of the architectural and urban heritage
in inner areas. Causes, effects, and narratives (Italy, Albania, Romania)

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Frammenti di una sociologia dell'abbandono: il fantasma del borgo tra rovina e immaginario

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La sociologia italiana, con poche eccezioni, ha a lungo trascurato il problema dell'abbandono dei villaggi rurali, per poi riscoprirlo tardivamente negli ultimi anni. Le ragioni sono molteplici: da un lato, una tradizione sociologica interessata principalmente agli aspetti industriali e urbani delle trasformazioni del paese; dall'altro, una maggiore inclinazione della nostra sociologia a indagare gli aspetti economici e sociali della dissoluzione degli spazi rurali, a discapito di quelli culturali, lasciati principalmente a storici e antropologi. Da qui la scelta di analizzare alcuni di questi aspetti specifici e a lungo trascurati, cogliendoli nei villaggi studiati: la continuità delle memorie e il fantasma del passato, mettendo in luce le tracce e i simboli della "decontadinizzazione", per usare la terminologia di Pierre Bourdieu, raccontata dagli eredi. L'immaginario della campagna sta lentamente svanendo. Tuttavia, si manifesta nella persistenza della visione e nella costruzione collettiva di veri e propri monumenti involontari, che possono fungere da base per lo sfruttamento turistico ("turistificazione") e per gli sforzi di ripopolamento.

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Fragment of a Sociology of Abandonment: the Ghost of the Village between Ruin and Imaginary

Agostino Petrillo

The fragments the title refers to are due to the fact that Italian sociology, aside from few notable instances, has long overlooked the question of the abandonment of rural villages within the country, aside from rediscovering it only in the past few years¹. The reasons for this are numerous, on one hand there's the weight of a sociological tradition which having only developed after WWII was prevalently interested in industrial and urban aspects of the country's transformation, but on the other hand also a bigger propensity of our sociology to investigate the economic-social aspects of the dissolution of countryside spaces to the detriment of the cultural aspects more or less left to historians and anthropologists².

In the years of the rapid industrialisation the village is judged as residual, a fragment of "yesterday's world", expression of backwardness and of an ambiguous overlap between personal ties and economic interests, an overlap which is often feared in the south, and considered dangerous in its implication of "amoral familism"³. A reality at the margins of the new urban civilisation, where

1. CARROSIO 2019; BARRERA, CERSOSIMO, DE ROSSI 2022. Interesting, isolated, and original approach is in TOSCANO 2011.

2. See the example quoted in CARROSIO, OSTIO 2017.

3. The reference is to BANFIELD 1976; for a critical reading see PIZZORINO 2001; MURASKIN 1974 and the more recent KERTZER 2007.

the ones who did not want to modernise stayed and stays, in which vain instances of conservatism were harboured. A dichotomic and tranchant view which both liquidated with an almost “colonial” glance complex⁴, secularly structured ways of life, pushing them aside while permitting sociologists self-absolution to divert attention away from villages, diversion which lasted a rather long time, at least up until the abandonment reached dramatic proportions.

From there on the choice of analysing some of these overlooked aspects, clearly too vast a topic to produce something more than small suggestions. The objective is however to try nonetheless to understand the surprising “persistence of the vision” in the heirs of that which had been the way of life of these villages.

1. A transversal methodology

The objective of the in-depth study proposed here is the development of a methodology that cuts across different cases. The four villages we have traversed, Africo, Bruzzano, Canolo and Ferruzzano, with their marine "doubles," and on which we collectively reflect in this volume, can be understood as fields of cultural experimentation and instruments of knowledge configuration. Villages whose history is rooted in a remote past, sometimes very remote, as in the case of Canolo and Africo, dating back to an antiquity that is not easy to define, villages that were already present at the beginning of the 16th century, such as Bruzzano and Ferruzzano, and that shared similar fates from the 18th century onwards: earthquakes, in 1783 and 1905, floods, in 1951 and 1953, several times tenaciously rebuilt, then gradually abandoned⁵.

They represent physical and symbolic realities from and through which individual and collective images of self and community are not only created, but also become effective, operative. The question is how to make comprehensible and overt the durability of the ways of life that villages still disclose and identify the social repercussions of these patterns in their specific forms of enactment and production of imagery. To understand how to conceptually describe the area of transition and the interrelationships between remembrance, socio-spatial orientation, possible planning and perhaps, one day, landscape re-design. To this end, a conceptual differentiation can be made between village spaces by considering them "prefigured," "configured," and "refigured," to follow,

4. SCHNEIDER 1998.

5. BRANCIFORTI 1987; PERRONE 2007; PALAMARA 2003.

for example, Paul Ricœur's lesson on the memory of places⁶. The heir, the "posthumous" inhabitant, proceeds to a phantasmatic reconstruction of the lost village, "refigures" it, shapes an a posteriori image of it. But what is the meaning of these images? Is there a "collective memory of places", as Maurice Halbwachs suggested?⁷ If the answer is an affirmative one, how is it built? And what does it tell us? To understand one must refer to other research traditions: in France sociologists and geographers such as Edgar Morin, André Fremont and Henri Mendras have explored village affairs and investigated the reasons for its residual vitality. They analysed social ties, hidden virtues, the less eye-catching freedoms and the endurance though time of cultured ties to it, survived even when "deep France" had to deal with modernity⁸.

2. *De-peasantification?*⁹

Beginning with an introductory reflection on the continuity of the ideal type of village in Italian and European history, as Max Weber had tried to circumscribe it¹⁰, seeing it as an inescapable node within a centuries-old network of territorial relations, as a decisive element of a substantial balance between town and village that lasted at least until the end of the Middle Ages, the essay therefore proposes to analyse, following Pierre Bourdieu, the cultural aspects of the processes of "de-peasantification" that went through the realities being analysed. A seemingly abrupt process in some cases, where, after natural events whose magnitude is often questioned (at least in ex-post re-evocations), deportations and the displacement of inhabitants occurred more or less hastily following governmental decrees and emergency measures. But, if the dislocation of populations marks an undoubted rupture from a material point of view, in reality "de-peasantification" takes place at a longer and slower pace than one might think, and not without conflict. The "abolition of the peasants" does not take place by decree alone, but by the action of a combination of forces¹¹.

6. RICOEUR 2000, pp. 183-188.

7. HALBWACHS [1950] 2001; for a contemporary actualization and re-interpretation see NAMER 2000 and NAMER 2000a.

8. MORIN [1967] 1969; FRÉMONT 1981; MENDRAS 1992.

9. With the term "de-peasantification" we try to translate the French de-paysannement introduced by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

10. WEBER [1921] 1999; On the relationship between *Dorfe Stadt* in the German sociology see also PETRILLO 2001.

11. The debate about "end of peasantry" is huge and dates back to the fifties: see in Germany, Lühr 1954, Steinführer 2015, in Italy see SERENI 1956.

In the sociologist's view, peasants have particularly complex relationships with their individual and collective identities, which go beyond the stereotypical figures of the dutiful peasant who talks about his life in elementary school subsidiary accent, or the rhetoric that attributes to the figure a timeless wisdom, linked to a cyclical conception of time and life. The complexity of the discourse regarding the villages that we have briefly analysed must instead be developed starting from the permanence and modification of a collective identity, also frequently played out in relation to the decisions that the urban bourgeoisie takes on the destiny of the inhabitants of the villages, with which an evident conflict destined to last over time is created, and also on the dynamic capacity of this identity to persist and re-propose itself, albeit in different forms. Bourdieu spoke of the peasantry as an object-class, in the sense of a social class that has undergone a process of dispossession, which has paid the price for its historical subordination to the urban bourgeoisie¹². According to the French sociologist, the representations we have of the social world derive from a process of construction operating through individual or collective struggles during which social groups attempt to impose a vision conforming to their interests.

The peasant world is crushed in this dispute, and the rural/urban dichotomy is nothing but the result of a defeat, which has transformed the urban bourgeoisie into the dominant and the peasants into the dominated. Thus, other conceptual pairs such as the *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* elaborated by Ferdinand Toennies in his classic work¹³, which photographed the end of a social and productive organisation that had had its fulcrum in the countryside, and with it also drew the sunset of a world of secular values and customs, should be read as the result of a historical defeat of the peasant world.

For Bourdieu, to do a social history or historical sociology is to question the genesis of these concepts, to understand why institutions came into existence to support them and why some worlds continued to exist while others died out. In such a perspective, so-called “de-peasantification” is a violent process, it is the definitive actualisation of a previous defeat. We could say that in Bourdieu's vision there are at least two models of this process: one is what the French sociologist can see at work in the countryside of the Béarn where he was originally from: a slow and insidious process of emptying the peasant world from within¹⁴. In particular, Bourdieu focuses on marriage strategies. The growth and spread of celibacy are cruel sign of the altering relationships between men and

12. BOURDIEU 1977.

13. TOENNIES [1887] 2011.

14. BOURDIEU 1977.

women and the countries the sociologist considers. The crisis of peasant society is rooted in a series of socio-economic determinants, but also in internal mechanisms, such as the prevalence of an urban imaginary whereby women come to no longer want local men as husbands. A deflection of the feminine whereby even dance parties where encounters destined to lead to nuptials are steadily being deserted. The crisis of the peasant world is thus also a crisis of a universe of symbols, the product of a “symbolic violence” in which the imagery of the peasant world is annihilated.

However, there is also another, more radical model of “de-peasantification” analysed by Bourdieu: the military-colonial model put in place during the Algerian war of independence. In a book he wrote with Abdelmalek Sayad, the French sociologist analyses the mechanisms of *Déracinement*, or the brutal uprooting to which Algerian peasants are subjected¹⁵. They are transferred from their villages to new settlements, called *regroupements*, modular agglomerations partly taken from previous settlements, partly artificially created, inspired by a “morbid geometrism”, in which the peasant population is herded according to a completely uneven arrangement that has nothing to do with the organisation of spaces and ways of life of villages, whose symbolic order it disrupts. *Regroupement* is both functional planning and “social surgery”, purporting to be a moment of emancipation from the “pathological” archaism of colonised culture. It represents a sharp break precursor to emigration, first to the cities and then to France¹⁶. Deportation to *regroupements* is prelude to emigration, with a dynamic that closely resembles, albeit in a different context, what happened in the Calabrian villages examined. Here after the “administrative” relocation to new settlements, the migratory flow became virtually uninterrupted. Displacement or uprooting as Bourdieu puts it, triggers mechanisms of indifference to the location, further facilitating emigration.

3. *Forms of lingering and insidiousness*

What seems to transpire by gathering information of the new villages, in the “doubles” by the sea where most of the last survivors of the old mountain villages and their descendants live, is that in the abandonment the both of Bourdieu's “de-peasantification” models are at play: on the one hand, the fascination with urban life and the weakening of old social bonds, and on the other hand, the semi-colonial model of forced uprooting, with its aspects of engineering-administrative

15. BOURDIEU, SAYAD [1964] 2023.

16. PETRILLO 2010.

despotism, not devoid of political components as some inhabitants also recall. Africo vecchio's descendants cast doubts on the extent of the flood that led to the definitive displacement of the population, they remember unpalatable protests against the ruling authorities such as the one in 1945, in which the Carabinieri barracks were stormed and destroyed¹⁷, and they mention even more ancient battles, episodes of a never entirely forgotten “peasant radicalism”¹⁸ that preceded the displacement to the sea. A radicalism which is all but episodic, as confirms the last living inhabitant of Ferruzzano Vecchio, Mister Cicco Talia, a sort of “custodian of collective memory” - especially political memory, such as the story of Giuseppe “Little Joe” Zangara, which he narrated to anthropologist Ettore Castagna¹⁹. Giuseppe, class of 1900 and inhabitant of the village until his emigration to the USA after having frequented socialist and libertarian circles and afterwards joining the Italo-American anarchist movement, was the protagonist of the failed assassination attempt on President Roosevelt for which he was executed by electric chair. These figures of “Mountain anarchism” emerge from a forgotten past²⁰, but restore a village reality much more varied and multiform from what may be thought today; socially complex and animated by a strong community spirit. Even in instances in which the process of destruction of peasant roots seems inevitable due to the new conditions of settlement and organisation of living spaces which manifested for the population of the interested villages and the imaginary of the countryside seems to slowly fade while also continuing to persist over the urban one at intervals, even a long time after moving to these new inhabited realities.

It is not only a matter of direct transmission of festive traditions, food cultures and the relationship with the land. It is the “rural mind”²¹ that in certain aspects survives, and in some cases even tends to perpetuate itself according to an intergenerational line²². This is something that is deeply ingrained in societies that have experienced displacement, a persistence of outlook that is not just regret and nostalgia, but rather identity continuity. The dissolution of imaginary of the peasant world occurs much slower than its material disappearance²³ (fig. 1). As if the trauma of forced detachment made it possible

17. This episode is mentioned in TETI 2004, p. 225.

18. The expression was introduced by Carlo Ginzburg; see GINZBURG 1976.

19. CASTAGNA 2023.

20. Other memories of “mountain anarchism” presence in Casalnuovo-Africo are in the autobiographic novel by Rocco Palamara; PALAMARA 2022.

21. The reference is to the classic work by SMITH 1927.

22. KAYSER 1990.

23. For this non-residual aspect see BÄTZING 2020.



Figure 1. Africo, Reggio Calabria. Ruins of the old settlement (photo A.M. Oteri, 2022).

to raise, to use Freudian lexicon, a *Reizschutz*²⁴, a protective shield that protects and perpetuates memory: that draws that which is distant closer. The memory becomes a form of lingering²⁵. Where other realities in the same areas are subject to a process (surely following and due to other causes) of depopulation and abandonment, “old villages” seem to linger much more tenaciously in memory.

4. *The memory paradox: inhabiting the ruins*

This way the sense of time is preserved in absence. It is an artificially realised void in a sense, a kind of a cultural devotion aimed at the preservation of an identity whose parts are perpetually disintegrating. A local dimension “in search of lost time”, *à la recherche du temps perdu*, in which ruins enter the flow of time and orient it, become fixed points of reference. It is certainly astonishing to see the descendants of Africo's inhabitants, hours' walk from their current homes, moving with familiarity among the ruins that remain of what was once the town, reconstructing with devotion details, routes, historical stratifications, recalling revolts and riots belonging to their grandparents generation, just as they were handed down to them by their parents, insinuating doubts about what was the real dynamic of the events that led to the forced exodus. In Canolo, the former mayor takes us on a pilgrimage to one of the three collective ovens of the old village, naming the owners of the dilapidated houses one by one. Memories are Proustianally attached to places, to the ruins, and it is not only a matter of re-establishing a link with past forms of life, with its lost habits and customs, but also, as the anthropologist Ernesto de Martino recalled²⁶, in some cases the challenge is to resurrect the dead, evoking them through places they lived, to make them appear in the form of a oniric image or ghost. The ghost of the village as a collectivity survives the material country in memory. In Ferruzzano Superiore, Ciccio's family survives, others occasionally spend time there. In Ferruzzano Marittima, an elderly woman explains to us while we are having coffee that during the summer, when many emigrants return, they go back to Ferruzzano Superiore to celebrate certain festivals, and as in the past, they put chairs outside the door to recreate a community public space. The houses are not open, she says, but lean almost outwards, people pass from one house to another, they stop to have a word, to eat something together.

24. FREUD 1977.

25. The translator chose “lingering” for the Italian term “restanza”. For the idea of “restanza” see TETI 2022.

26. DE MARTINO 1958.

5. Non-uments

With the term “non-uments” the artist and architect Gordon Matta-Clark indicated all those object that are consecrated de-facto as monuments despite not being so deliberately or as a conscious choice. Matta-Clark wrote: «I mean everybody loves a ruin sometime [...]. I realize what a perfect vacuum is needed to preserve our sense of time. That is a manicured vacuum, a cultural devotion to maintaining the identity of constantly disintegrating parts»²⁷. In an interview he further clarified the concept of a non-ument stating:

«One of my concerns here is with the Non.u.mental, that is, an expression of the commonplace that might counter the grandeur and pomp of architectural structures and their self-glorifying clients'. If the monument is about fixing a place in history by giving shape to memory and form to power, the non-u-ment is about a forsaking of power, a stepping outside of boundaries, and a release from the economic constraints of space»²⁸.

Hence, the “non-ument” is situated on the slight boundary between architecture and ruin, continuously oscillating between these two conditions, it is a perpetually transitioning element, its survival tied in double knots to the memory and love of those who continue to give it life and distance it from its destiny of ruins.

In at least two of the studied villages, ruins gain this monument aspect, assuming near-devotional traits. The architectonic pre-existence continues to play a symbolic role of landmark/ connection for the ‘no-longer-peasants’ of generations following the exodus; it is a ghost of the village as collective reanimating and revived by the contact with memory. The blown-up picture in the town hall of the new Africo depicting village women carrying water speaks clearly, narrating a sort of “lost childhood” lived on the boundary between the memories of strife and difficulties and the dimension of community now lacking and lived as a sort of nostalgia. It is a “identity collage” attempting reconstruction using fragments of memory jealously guarded, reactivating with this aim spaces of collective experience.

It is the same for Canolo, in which there is even a material spatial continuity between the old settlement and the new one, in which what that had been practically around the corner, and in which depopulation dynamics manifest once again today even in the new settlement due to an occupational crisis and a crisis of the productive areas of the territory. The ruins of the old village overlap with the

27. G. MATTA-CLARK, *Letter to Dan Forresta, 2 April 1972*, quoted in DISERENS 2006, pp. 154-155.

28. D. WALL 1976.

remnants of long-shut local industries, becoming in a way a monument to an attempt and failure of rebirth, manifesting once again in the growth of uninhabited homes.

The local job market becoming asphyxial produces a sort of “endless escape” lived as a sort of collective damnation, reappearing generation to generation, and to which the small nucleus of remaining inhabitants tries once again tenaciously to avoid. The old village and the abandoned factories rise to a spectral “non-umentality” of sorts, a warning of a chain of defeats looking difficult to stop.

In Bruzzano Vecchio a monument does exist, and it is a proper one, here the presences are imposing between beautiful archways and the ruins of a noble family’s residence there are already structures that serve the role of modest touristic attractions, shining with their peculiar charm, placed the way that they are in an area of rare natural beauty (fig. 2). Here, too, the risk is that the “non-ument” stops serving its identity-related function and starts becoming a banal landmark, between the many feeding into a touristic “ruinism”, supporting hordes of occasional visitors and feeding the business of some small hotel nearby. The “non-ument” stripped of its aura and history is reduced to a mere object to insert on a tourist guide, devoid of pathos and connection to and for the collective.

6. Does Nature take over?

Despite the strength or pre-existence in Bruzzano Vecchio the village in its entirety no longer belongs to men, who have withdrawn from it. The village turns back to nature, earth. A land of silence where only the wind and birds speak. The echo of past human presence can be heard only as an absence. In the new village, Bruzzano Zeffirio, memories of the past appear tied to singular happenstances, and in conversations a sense of distance stands out, the memory of a strife, a hard life, of steep mountain paths and of a long time of isolation. Here moving to the seaside effectively represented a radical shift, and “de-peasantification” appears a fact: done and dusted. As Canolo Nuovo, Bruzzano Zeffirio is depopulated, and it is mainly the elderly that now remain (fig. 3). Ferruzzano instead has a more recent taste of abandonment, as if the citizens only left not long ago. Here the feeling is that not much would be needed to repopulate: it would be enough to simply reconnect that which has been disconnected, creating transport lines, services, in a natural reality of astonishing beauty. Also due to the fact that as has been said already the memory of the old village is still alive and well within the inhabitants of Ferruzzano Marina. When during the summer those who have emigrated to Northern cities or even Australia and the US come back to the village the present and memories of old festivities intertwine, some even go up to visit the old village.



Figure 2. Bruzzano Vecchio, Reggio Calabria. View of the so-called "Triumphal arch of the Carafa" (photo F. Vigotti, 2023). On the next page, figure 3. Bruzzano Zeffirio, Reggio Calabria. A glimpse of the "new" village (photo F. Vigotti, 2023).



There is a rebirth of what with his beautiful definition Amitav Gosh calls an “airport village”²⁹, a place from which the migratory diaspora sprung citizens towards every corner of the earth, but to which its citizens long to come home to, a place in which nostalgia becomes a re-discoverable part of a collective identity.

The location of Africo vecchio, much more remote, in which the feeling of complete isolation is pervasive even from a natural geographical standpoint differentiates itself from the other villages. Africo is entirely submerged, swallowed up by an overpowering, dominant nature. On the other hand, in this whole area of Aspromonte there is a feeling of a slow descent, of being progressively further from the human presence. Even the region of Calabria loses inhabitants, but in these areas the sensation of emptiness is even stronger.

7. The village between abandonment, memory and re-population

To understand what has transpired it is imperative to bring the village imagery back to the centre of sociological discourse. The images that were rediscovered and the symbols utilised in this context can be comprised and analysed in terms of narrative models too, in which different political, economic, social and historical contexts and situations are represented and questions or epistemology and different ways of life are characterised. There lies the key of possible future developments. To make a monument (“non-ument”?) out of the ruins? Re-inhabit the ruin itself? How? What is the price? A reflection on the ruinistic aspects of tourism is needed, which can already be seen, despite in its infancy, in some cases. And an evaluation of the positives and negatives of these aspects must be drawn. In which direction do future developments go? Is it possible to patch up relationships between the wilderness of abandonment and what is currently inhabited? Does it make sense to think of a future for these places in a region steadily losing inhabitants, in a declining area in which settlements seem more generally to continue leaving the mountains to head towards the coastlines? It is for this reason that a different set of guidelines is needed in order to re-inhabit the village: if Europe does intend to develop sustainably, then it is essential to redevelop urban-rural complementarities, which, as mentioned, had long existed throughout Europe’s history, articulating it in a new ways and in new forms, against the dominion of mono-structured and suburban landscapes, against the dominion of ‘non-places’, as re-evaluation of a

29. The quotation from *The Imam and the Indians* is in CLIFFORD 1997, pp. 1-2.

decentralised diversity, a rediscovered time for that which is local³⁰. Something which actually does still exist in Europe and Italy, despite in a derelict and neglected manner. This means that cities must go back to being urban, and the countryside back to being rural, and the relationship between the two go back with being more equal. Patching up what was torn apart by “de-peasantification”, to work towards the direction of the “bioregion” dreamed up in the recently departed Alberto Magnaghi’s last works³¹.

To operate this apparently impossible recomposition, what better tool is there than memory, remembrance, to reembody and give back physical matter to ghosts. It was once again Magnaghi who stressed the importance of supporting a construction process, a reclamation from the bottom up of “locational conscience” by the inhabitant, pinpointing it as a key element to feed conviviality, life, and sustainable use of the territory’s resources (fig. 4). A key element also to activate local and regional self-sustained economies, without which any planning possibility in these areas becomes unthinkable.

8. Conclusion: apories of recomposition

In his great trilogy on the question of time, Paul Ricoeur denounced an irreducible split between “time of the world” and “time of the soul”, between cosmological temporality and time of the individual.

Time becomes fully and properly human time when it is retold, when it is articulated in a narrative manner. Thus, also for Architecture it is possible to establish a parallel between Architecture and narration, whereby Architecture stands to space as narration stands to time³². We find the truth of these considerations in the path taken so far. Certainly the “islands of the past” of which Maurice Halbwachs spoke³³, and which in the realities we have taken into consideration often assume the dimension of a ghost, to underline a discontinuity, a historical caesura constituted by the process of de-contamination, re-emerge in the narrative, re-proposing elements of a life of bygone times in which the community dimension is mainly pursued.

30. BRAND 1998.

31. MAGNAGHI 2019; MAGNAGHI 2014.

32. RICOEUR 1991, p. 17.

33. HALBWACHS [1950] 2001, p. 115.



Figure 4. Bruzzano Vecchio in 1920s (image courtesy of Carmelo Altomonte).

On the next page, figure 5.
Ferruzzano, Reggio Calabria.
View of the old depopulated village
(photo N. Sulfaro, 2022).



The ghost thus also becomes a potential resource, an opening to the possibility of a new time in which the revival of the old villages takes place under the guise of mending the tear in memory and a rediscovered space of the collective (fig. 5). In fact, the “non-ument” exists not only in the collective feeling, as a materialisation of memory, but also in its architectural tangibility, and is still vital, revivable, usable with an eye towards the future, as Avery Gordon suggested in her seminal book³⁴. We must, however, be wary of easy solutions and ad hoc constructed identity rhetoric, of the usual re-proposal of the hotel scattered as a cure-all and a solution to issues which, as we have seen, are much more complex, which go beyond the villages themselves, in their investment in the territory of the entire region and the entire country. There is therefore also the possibility of a misuse of memory, if it is used as a premise for a sham social construction, as an element in the activation of folkloric scenarios for tourist and commercial purposes.

An insufficient answer if the objective is that of reducing urban-rural disparities. The imbalances that have been created between urban networks and wilderness are not compatible with the idea of sustainability, and the extreme spatial contrasts that have been created tell us how damaging the absolute character of the economy and prevalence of low-grade commercial interests can be while the social, cultural, historical, and ecological prerequisites of local activities are being eroded. The result is social conflict, loss of cultural identity and growing environmental problems. The risk if no action is taken is therefore of oblivion, of the loss of what still survives after the disappearance of the peasant world, of the fading of the persistence of the traces in subsequent generations, perhaps masked behind the façade of some cunningly restored house offered to new upper-class residents. The design ideas must be developed now, while recomposition is still possible, before the era of phantasmic remembrance and “non-uments” is over for good.

34. GORDON 1997.

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