

# UN PAESE CI VUOLE

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



a cura di Annunziata Maria Oteri  
Giuseppina Scamardi

ArchistoR  
EXTRA



## 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

[www.archistor.unirc.it](http://www.archistor.unirc.it)

ArchistoR EXTRA 7 (2020)

ISSN 2384-8898

Supplemento di ArchistoR 13/2020

ISBN 978-88-85479-09-8

DOI: 10.14633/AHR210



# 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<sup>1</sup>. The quotation from Cesare Pavese<sup>2</sup> is the starting point of the initiatives: Everyone needs a town, not necessarily a homeland<sup>3</sup> 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<sup>4</sup>, 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 Scamardi.

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<sup>5</sup>. 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<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> 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 GIRARDA 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<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup>. 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<sup>10</sup>. 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<sup>11</sup>.

The first word is *variety*. «Variety is the main source of the specificity of that particular site, and also of its competitiveness»<sup>12</sup>. 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. Pentadattilo (Reggio Calabria), overview (photo A.M. Oteri, 2018).

Figure 2. Pentadattilo (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»<sup>13</sup>. Variety and conservation are two words that match, but only if one does not consider cultural heritage<sup>14</sup> as a mere adaptation to changes (passive action). The relationship only works if conservation is acted in a co-evolutionary perspective (active action)<sup>15</sup>. 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<sup>16</sup>. 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<sup>17</sup>; 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](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<sup>18</sup>. 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<sup>19</sup>. 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*<sup>20</sup>, *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<sup>21</sup>. Actually, community-based processes are significantly slower than economic changes, as suggested correctly in this volume<sup>22</sup>. 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<sup>23</sup>. 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<sup>24</sup>, 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<sup>25</sup>. 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<sup>26</sup>. 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<sup>27</sup>.

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 policies 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<sup>28</sup>: 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<sup>29</sup>: 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<sup>30</sup>. 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”<sup>31</sup> – 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<sup>32</sup>.

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 SCAMARDI 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<sup>33</sup>. 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<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup>. 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<sup>36</sup>. 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](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<sup>37</sup>. 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<sup>38</sup>. 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<sup>39</sup>. 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)<sup>40</sup>.

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*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>. 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»<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup>. 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<sup>45</sup>. 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<sup>46</sup> 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 respiro”) 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-dell'uomo> (accessed 10 September 2020).

## References

AMATO 2020 - G. AMATO, *Ricchi e virtuosi. Un affare essere green*, in «La Repubblica», 29 settembre 2020, [https://www.repubblica.it/ambiente/2020/09/30/news/ferla\\_ricchi\\_e\\_virtuosi\\_un\\_affare\\_essere\\_green-268904351/?ref=RHPPBT-BH-1158018720-C6-P4-S1.6-T1](https://www.repubblica.it/ambiente/2020/09/30/news/ferla_ricchi_e_virtuosi_un_affare_essere_green-268904351/?ref=RHPPBT-BH-1158018720-C6-P4-S1.6-T1) (accessed 29 September 2020).

BONFANTINI 2016 - B. BONFANTINI (a cura di), *Attivare risorse latenti. Metodi sperimentali per l'analisi, la mappatura e la gestione informativa integrata per la gestione di territori e manufatti del patrimonio culturale diffuso*, Planum Publisher, Roma-Milano 2016.

CABBOI 2020 - R. CABBOI, *Da Armungia, appunti in tempi di coronavirus*, in «Dialoghi mediterranei», 2020, 44, s.p., <http://www.istitutoeuroarabo.it/DM/da-armungia-appunti-in-tempi-di-coronavirus/> (accessed 10 September 2020).

CEROSIMO, DONZELLI 2020 - D. CEROSIMO, C. DONZELLI (a cura di), *Manifesto per riabitare l'Italia*, Donzelli, Roma 2020.

COTTE, FUNDS 2019 - A. COTTE, F. FUNDS (eds), *Culture Crops. Cultural Practices in Non Urban Territories*, Beyond the Obvious 2019 edition, Report of the Conference, Culture Action Europe, Brussels 2019, [https://cultureactioneurope.org/files/2019/12/BtO\\_2019\\_Report.pdf](https://cultureactioneurope.org/files/2019/12/BtO_2019_Report.pdf) (accessed 15 September 2020).

DE ROSSI 2018 - A. DE ROSSI (a cura di), *Riabitare l'Italia. Le aree interne tra abbandoni e riconquiste*, Donzelli editore, Roma 2018.

DE ROSSI, MASCINO 2020 - A. DE ROSSI, L. MASCINO, *Patrimonio*, in CEROSIMO, DONZELLI 2020, pp. 177-181.

FUSCO GIRARD 2009a - L. FUSCO GIRARD, *Sviluppo sostenibile e aree interne: quali strategie e quali valutazioni, atti del XXVII incontro di studio*, in «Estimum», 2009, 21, pp. 115-159.

FUSCO GIRARD 2009b - L. FUSCO GIRARD, *I centri storici minori: questioni di sostenibilità tra dimensione economica e istituzionale*, in «Estimum», 2009, 27, pp. 107-126.

FUSCO GIRARD, GRAVAGNUOLO 2017 - L. FUSCO GIRARD, A. GRAVAGNUOLO, *Circular economy and cultural heritage/landscape regeneration. Circular business, financing, and governance models for competitive Europe*, in «BDC», 1 (2017), 17, pp. 35-52, <http://www.bdc.unina.it/index.php/bdc/issue/view/424/230> (accessed 15 September 2020).

GIOVARA 2020 - B. GIOVARA, *Coronavirus, Boeri "via dalle città, nei vecchi borghi c'è il nostro futuro"*, in «La Repubblica», 20 aprile 2020.

LUCATELLI, MONACO, TANTILLO 2018 - S. LUCATELLI, F. MONACO F. TANTILLO, *Il punto sulla strategia nazionale aree interne*, in S. LUCATELLI, F. MONACO (a cura di), *La voce dei Sindaci delle aree interne. Problemi e prospettive della Strategia nazionale*, Rubettino editore, Soveria Mannelli 2018, pp. 89-98.

*Manifesto 2020 - Manifesto per riabitare l'Italia*, in CEROSIMO, DONZELLI 2020, pp. 3-10.

MERLO 2020 - F. MERLO, *Gli architetti e il mito del buon selvaggio*, in «La Repubblica», 12 maggio 2020, p. 32.

OTERI 2019 - A.M. OTERI, *Architetture in aree fragili. Criticità e nuove prospettive per la cura del patrimonio costruito*, in «ArchHistoR», VI (2019), 11, pp. 168-205.

PASQUI 2020 - G. PASQUI, *La postura e lo sguardo*, in CEROSIMO, DONZELLI 2020, pp. 21-28.

PAVESE 1950 - C. PAVESE, *La luna e i falò*, Einaudi, Torino 1950.

- ROSSITTI, TORRIERI (in press) - M. ROSSITTI, F. TORRIERI, *Circular Economy as 'catalyst' for resilience in Inner Areas*, «Sustainable Mediterranean Construction», Special Issue 4, Vol. 2 (in press).
- SACCO 2018 - P.L. SACCO, *Il vuoto al centro. L'innovazione sociale a base culturale*, in DE ROSSI 2018 , pp. 537-550.
- SACCO 2020 - P.L. SACCO, *Immaginazione*, in CEROSIMO, DONZELLI 2020, pp. 129-133.
- SYMBOLA 2020 - SYMBOLA (a cura di), *Piccoli comuni e cammini d'Italia*, Revelox, Roma 2020, <https://www.symbola.net/ricerca/piccoli-comuni-cammini-italia/> (accessed 5 September 2020).
- TETI 2020 - V. TETI, *Paese*, in *Manifesto 2020*, pp. 171-176.
- TORRIERI, OPPIO, ROSSITTI 2020 - F. TORRIERI, A. OPPIO, M. ROSSITTI, *Cultural heritage, social values and community mapping*, in C. BEVILACQUA, F. CALABRÒ, L. DELLA SPINA (eds), *New Metropolitan Perspectives. NMP 2020. Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies*, Vol. 178, Springer, pp. 1786-1795, [http://doi-org-443.webvpn.fjmu.edu.cn/10.1007/978-3-030-48279-4\\_169](http://doi-org-443.webvpn.fjmu.edu.cn/10.1007/978-3-030-48279-4_169) (accessed 25 september 2020).
- VOICES OF CULTURE 2020 - VOICES OF CULTURE, *The Role of Culture in Non-Urban Areas of the European Union*, Brainstorming meeting (Alfeld, 4th-5th February 2019), Final report, April 2019, <https://voicesofculture.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/VoC-Brainstorming-Report-Role-of-Culture-in-Non-Urban-Areas-of-the-EU.pdf> (accessed 25 September 2020).