

UN PAESE CI VUOLE

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



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ArchistoR EXTRA



«la loro storia è un chicco di grano.....»

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L'abbandono degli insediamenti è un problema attuale ma non nuovo; un fenomeno che dura da secoli. C'è da chiedersi cosa sia cambiato oggi o, piuttosto, quale siano gli aspetti nuovi nella questione dell'abbandono? La nostra percezione dell'abbandono è in parte influenzata dall'arte e dalla letteratura: dalla transizione nella tradizione occidentale dalla celebrazione della bellezza del mondo rurale e del sublime attraverso l'idealizzazione della vita rurale fino al compianto per la perdita dell'innocenza.

La conservazione può sostenere la rigenerazione e a quale costo? Quando ci si confronta con la narrativa dominante, bisogna andare oltre il confine della resistenza, della protesta, della oggettivazione della piccola scala sopravvissuta come "eredità", per trovare una verità compensativa, radicata nell'ecologia, nei complessi sistemi necessari alla civiltà per sopravvivere, e, infine, nella natura umana, nella creatività, apertura e generosità.

La sfida per l'accademia è di trovare strumenti per questa prova: integrare interessi e competenze di ciascuna disciplina con l'esperienza raccolta ai margini. L'accademia deve trovare un nuovo ruolo come partecipante/osservatore, pronta ad accettare fallimenti ma anche a celebrare conquiste, con impegno ma anche come testimone.

ONE NEEDS A TOWN

Studies and perspectives for abandoned or depopulated small towns

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«their history is a grain of wheat.....»

Loughlin Kealy

On the side of a mountain not far from where I live is a cluster of decaying buildings, almost consumed by the trees and undergrowth that have invaded the spaces between those elements that remain standing. It is an undistinguished place, romantic now that it is almost empty. A generation ago more than a dozen families lived here, now there is one. Its fate is commonplace, even unremarkable. In the locality it was known as “the city”, reflecting its comparative intensity of habitation and activity in a landscape otherwise characterised by scattered farms (fig. 1). The fate of that “city” is representative of an evolving landscape where small settlements are finding it hard to survive, not because of some cataclysmic event, but because of a progressive weakening of the muscles and sinews that supported the body of the community.

The abandonment of settlements is a contemporary problem and also one that is not new, it is one that has been an enduring phenomenon for centuries. One has only to consider Dosio’s 1561 map of Rome, with recognisable elements from the city of antiquity surrounded by areas in agricultural use, to appreciate the processes of expansion, decline and abandonment that characterise the arc of settlement history¹. In contrast we are concerned here with some lineaments of a pervasive

1. The processes establishment, expansion, decline and redevelopment are particularly well summarised in KOSTOF 1999, pp. 13, 245-251.



Figure 1. The remnants of “the city”, Nire Valley, County Waterford (photo L. Kealy, 2018).

contemporary phenomenon, the abandonment of small settlements, one that has historical precedent but has rarely commanded the attention that we give it today. We might ask ourselves: what is different about it today, or rather, what is the new quality of the question of abandonment?²

This essay presents a reflection on these questions in three parts:

- i. the new quality of the question;
- ii. «an emptiness filled with signs»;
- iii. the challenge: centrality from the margins;

In setting them side by side we can explore the inter-weaving of perspectives that characterise debates about the future of abandoned settlements.

The new quality of the question of abandonment settlements

The perceptions of abandonment of settlements have always had antithetical dimensions: the cultural and aesthetic as opposed to the economic dimensions, often set, not so much as irreconcilable standpoints but as representing different worlds.

«Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey, Where wealth accumulates, and men decay». Goldsmith's poem, *The Deserted Village* was written in 1769³, and is one of the best-known poems in the English language⁴. It was at one time a feature of every school child's literary diet. In emotive terms it evoked the effects of the abandonment of areas of the countryside resulting from radical changes in agricultural production and the creation of demesne landscapes. It was an experience mirrored throughout the continent of Europe. The words are today routinely quoted in criticism of the pursuit of profit at the expense of communities and the lives lived in the face of irreversible change. At the time of its publication in 1770's London, it was both popular and controversial (fig. 2). As well as articulating a particular sensibility, it was seen as an attack on the progress being

2. The sub-heading is borrowed from an essay by Bernardo Secchi, who wrote of «The New Quality of the Question of Urban Centres»: understanding urban processes has to take account of the dynamics of the construction industry and its interface with political governance. His analysis of urban change pays explicit attention to the dynamics that generate disparity of wealth and opportunity; SECCHI 2012.

3. GOLDSMITH 1770.

4. The poem by Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774), poet, novelist, playwright. He was born in the Irish midlands and would have had memories of the forced abandonment of areas of the countryside resulting from radical changes in agricultural production and the creation of demesne landscapes, with their combination of economic and aesthetic imperatives.



Figure 2. Joseph Severn (1793-1879) *The Deserted Village*, oil on canvas laid on wood, Art Gallery of South Australia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joseph_Severn_-_The_deserted_village_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg (accessed 10 June 2020).

made through reorganisation of the agricultural economy: an expression of aesthetic melancholia as much as a critique of the undermining of the established life of rural settlements.

In the world of painting one could also describe a transition from admiration to documentation, and ultimately to analysis or social commentary, a transition between the romantic vision and the awareness of the emerging industrialised world – the imagined serenity of rural life was in the process of disappearing, and the so-called honest toil and simple life of the peasant was being replaced by the shift work of the factory floor. In that juxtaposition we see an idealisation of rural life and the accompanying, haunting melody of a vanishing world of innocence. The fact of abandonment of rural settlements was explicitly linked with the revolutionary processes in agricultural and industrial

production, even if their depiction often remained on the margins of the mainstream artistic expression, and most visible in the etching or lithographs of the early 20th century. While he credits landscape painting with ushering in a revolution in that art from the 17th century to the 20th, Berger cites the failure of most art criticism to discern and consider the social realities behind depictions of rural life⁵.

The disjunction between the acceptance of abandonment as an unavoidable feature of change and the laments over their loss is a familiar characteristic of debate to this day. The western tradition has, at its core, a deep-seated ambivalence with respect to the relationship between city and country – the former the seat of progress, the latter the repository of the simple (and backward?) life, or, the city as the centre of evil/ the country the centre of innocence, and so on⁶.

The contemporary understanding of the phenomenon of abandonment is different from that of the past in a fundamental way: the traditional settlement has acquired social and cultural meaning for present day society, albeit in a complex fusion of value attribution, so that the interfaces between rational and emotional considerations are being articulated in new ways, their antinomies being acknowledged while their symbioses are explored. The new quality of the question arises from their inter-penetration, and that inter-penetration has become an explicit consideration in discussion of these settlements as potential resources and consequently in regeneration action.

Before leaving historical perspective and going on to discuss the changing mind-set, it should be borne in mind that intellectual and emotional legacies shape thinking about the future and have a long reach. The antinomies and sentiments regarding small settlements do not disappear. Our contemporary understanding of abandonment is coloured by historical experience and the folk memory of its effects, witnessed also by the experiences of emigré communities far from their places of origin. The narrative picture has been shaped over time by the impacts of art and literature on the collective imagination.

5. Gombrich cites the treatment of country life in Constable's "Haywain" and the celebration of the everyday in Millet's "The Gleaners" and Courbet's "Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet", and contrasts this with earlier work in which the labourer or peasant could appear within the context of genre painting, or in a depiction of the supposed bucolic character of rural life; GOMBRICH 1972, pp. 402-404. In Gombrich's version, the revolution in subject matter can be traced to the aftermath of 1848. Berger regarded much art history as disingenuous His critique was also challenged, BERGER 1972, pp. 106-108.

6. A comprehensive summary of attitudes and beliefs connecting city foundation with ideas about cosmic order and the human relationship with the divine can be found in EATON 2001, pp. 25-26. In one Judeo/Christian tradition, the foundation of the first city is attributed to Cain (the hunter), son of Adam, who had murdered his brother Abel (the tender of the earth).

We can ask where this “baggage” fits: what, if anything, does it mean for approaches to regeneration that place cultural inheritance among factors to be considered? In generic terms the purpose of conservation action is understood as being to prolong life in the interests of culture⁷. Conservation action has always been formulated as an ethical response to an inheritance, one that is geared towards ensuring that future generations can benefit from it as we have, and in that respect has been described as a matter of inter-generational justice. We need to recognise that it is an essentially aesthetic impulse as well. Empathy with the past is an imaginative construct, even when it is shared with others, and picturesque inheritances act as tropes of a narrative that prioritises the homely, the familiar, the promise of holistic living. Faced with what seems an inexorable process of loss, the understanding of conservation as transmission must be interrogated more deeply if it is to be useful. In terms of addressing the nature of the problem it will be necessary to go beyond it. As a way of establishing context for this transgression, the following paragraphs set down some of what we know in relation to shifts in the understanding of cultural inheritance that are underway.

The appreciation of cultural inheritance under the banner of “heritage” has become more diffuse. For some time, a phenomenon of valorization has become an integral part of the conceptualization of “heritage”. While in itself this is a complex phenomenon, the development can be clearly tracked through the international conservation charters and declarations⁸. Broader categories of the inherited built environment are seen through the lens of “heritage”, thus gaining a special status while becoming subject to new pressures (tourism, for example) including those brought about by the appropriation by different groups, of the meanings they bear. This latter phenomenon can be seen as a form of ownership, and its significance can vary in any particular point of application. It has arisen, for example, as a reflection of changes in ethnicity of inner city populations. We will return to that thought at the conclusion of the essay.

Appreciation of the form and fabric of old towns and small settlements is part of this valorization process, albeit with deeper roots in time, and today carries an overlay of new types of value. As we have seen they have moved from being appreciated simply as “picturesque” (that is, objects of aesthetic contemplation), being seen as evidence of the aesthetic power of the vernacular, to

7. A reading of the definition given in the ICOMOS Australia Charter (Burra Charter) 2013, Article 1.

8. The trajectory can be seen in seminal documents: the Athens Charter 1930, the Venice Charter 1964, the Washington Charter 1967 and the Nara Document of Authenticity 1994: in the first, the public is to be informed; in the second its involvement is important; in the third, essential and in the fourth, an integral component of cultural value. Nara+20 extends the process.

representing a way of life that might avoid the alienating qualities of the increasingly urbanized environments of everyday contemporary experience. In parallel with the diffusion of the concept of “heritage”, and driven by global access to information, these representative and suggestive qualities have acquired characteristics of the “ideal” beyond regional and national boundaries. Indeed, they may be more potent in proportion to the remoteness of the objects themselves, whereas valuation close to home tends to be coloured by local knowledge or the experience of living there. Small towns and villages throughout Europe, and notably in Italy, Spain, Portugal and elsewhere have acquired an international value, are somehow “owned” by millions who will never experience them or who can experience them only as spectacles in the countryside or images on the screen. Nonetheless they form a picture that captures the idea of a better life or at least where life can be briefly enhanced through a managed interface with the past. To many people they represent a concept of the town (communal living) as it might have been before erosion by the processes of urbanization and industrial revolution. An imagined lifestyle is borne by the image – part of its power lies in the capacity to evoke perceptions of the past, suggest associations and significances and carry multiple narratives, perhaps surfing over inconsistencies and contradictions in the process.

The former productive life of distressed or abandoned villages is often celebrated in “heritage” promotion literature and become the focus of special events, but is less potent as a factor in planning or for investment purposes. The continuing privatisation of services that were formerly a public responsibility (for example, transportation, postal services or policing) has accelerated the process of marginalisation, eventually ending in empty places without a social or economic future or the hope of one – a process well understood by the communities involved. In such circumstances the physical fabric may be simply an additional burden. Abandonment is a complex rather than a unitary phenomenon.

Such is the context for of the conservator’s focus on the surviving containers of declining or vanished activity, as is the consciousness that immaterial aspects have to be regarded differently from the material: at times being more fugitive than the material, at others surviving material decline. It is inescapable that in our time much of the inherited built environment faces adaptation for survival and must change to accommodate new uses. The essential drivers can be termed transmission and translation: the first concerned with continuity, the second with a re-conceptualisation that can accommodate adaptation while minimizing loss of significance. Adaptations often raise questions of meaning and legibility, about what versions of history are presented and relating to what messages

are conveyed in the decisions to conserve and the purpose of those who make them⁹. These factors shape the meaning of the resource in the present and the future. In regeneration, production uses often lag behind designation as “heritage”: strategies are continually being tested and inevitably, the interdependence of settlements and their surrounding regions comes into focus in this regard¹⁰. Loss is unavoidable.

If the new quality of the question of abandonment lies in demand that antinomies be resolved, the argument for a new future for these settlements still remains difficult to make: in terms of the larger picture of evolving settlement patterns it remains counter-intuitive. However, at that level there are shifts in mentalities that indicate a more hopeful future.

«an emptiness filled with signs»¹¹

Within the past half-century, throughout what we understand as the developed world, major categories of the built environment have become redundant. At the time of its publication in 1990, the Green Paper on the Urban Environment spoke of the challenges posed by abandoned industrial and transportation sites, as well as redundant military bases¹². The phenomenon of redundancy has affected towns, areas with larger urban agglomerations and buildings of symbolic value. Thus when considering issues affecting smaller settlements one remains conscious of the larger context in which built environment redundancy takes place, the enhanced value attached to many of these environments notwithstanding. Studies of population decline in rural areas and smaller settlements both point to the broad context of demographic change¹³, while indicating that abandonment is progressive and over long periods, partial: the first a manifestation of the continuing movement of people to larger urban areas, resulting in changes in age profiles towards older and less active populations, and of course, fewer children; the second reflecting the decline in intensity of activity and the progressive emptying of spaces. The arguments for regeneration of small towns and

9. One can note that adaptation has come to replace conservation as the dominant discourse on the ethical approach to existing buildings of cultural value; FIORANI, KEALY, MUSSO 2017.

10. This interdependence emerges strongly in the contributions arising from the 4th Workshop of the EAAE Conservation Network; CRISAN ET ALII 2015.

11. LEVEBVRE 2000, p. 135.

12. COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES 1990.

13. See GÁKOVÁ, DIJKSTRA 2010, ALSO HOSPERS, REVEDRA 2015.

villages are made in the larger context of finding uses for inherited environments that are losing or have lost their original purposes - a deep challenge for European civilisation. It is not just a social/environmental/technical challenge, but a cultural challenge that will shape future society, bringing with it the need for a new *weltanschauung* and new intellectual and practical tools.

This can be seen when considering another context to population displacement: the phenomenon is one that directly affects different regions of the world, as a result of conflict, natural events or the desire for a better life, and indirectly affects recipient regions. Looking to economic disparities and climate change we can see that this will continue into the future, and the phenomenon experienced as immigration will persist while the causes of population movement remain. One can note the developing literature on disassociation and displacement that focusses on the experience of exile - of being a foreigner. Sennett cites the experience of Herzen: «I did not come to England as a foreigner; a foreigner is what I have become»¹⁴.

We can recognise that displacement/disassociation is increasingly a characteristic of the human condition. Again and in the global context, and despite the overall surge in world population, the expectation is that population in key developed countries will shrink¹⁵. The desire to re-animate declining settlements has to contend, not only with the persistence of historical antinomies into the present but with the emergence of new ethical parameters to how the issue is understood¹⁶. And fundamentally, we witness deep disjunctions between urban and rural living: dialectical arguments of sustainability as against quality of life considerations. It is worth looking at this more deeply.

The task of regenerating and reclaiming the territory and the town contradicts the singular narrative of habitation as urban monoculture, dominated by large cities, a narrative most clearly articulated post WW2. Perhaps the earliest and clearest articulation was by Constantinos Doxiadis, who launched the Ekistics movement in planning and urban design. Doxiadis argued for a hierarchy of human settlement, but also maintained a core belief – that the world was undergoing an unavoidable and irreversible process – developing through expanding urban metropolitan areas, to the point where, in certain parts of the world they became contiguous, generating what he

14. The human and spatial impacts are delineated in SENNETT 2011, p. 82 and BURGIN 1996, pp. 117-118.

15. This will be the case in some 45 countries up to 2050 (UN 2007), and within that group are 14 EU member states – the highest rate of projected decline being in Bulgaria (35.2%) and the lowest in Greece (3.0%). Eurostat figures for selected Western European regions show declines of between 29% (Germany, Dessau) and 9% (Spain, Pais Vasco) up to 2030; GEYS, HEINEMANN, KALB 2007. The fact that the problem of abandonment is not confined to specific countries tends to put arguments for their sustainability at a disadvantage; PIRISI, TRÓCSÁNYI 2014.

16. The interface of ethics and global politics is one of the emerging concerns of our time; CAMPBELL, SHAPIRO 1999.

termed, megalopolis¹⁷. A simplistic acceptance of that vision would make it difficult to argue for the sustainability of rural dwelling and the value of the small settlement.

In concluding his seminal work on life in the modern city, Lefebvre writes about a sense that that processes are at work that are as yet indications of direction rather than determinants of the future: «we are surrounded by emptiness, but it is an emptiness filled with signs»¹⁸. His purpose, as always, relates to praxis – how ideas shape and are shaped in action. These reflections lead me to think that, when confronting the dominant narrative of abandonment, one needs to go beyond the boundaries of resistance, of protest, of the objectification of the surviving small scale settlement as “heritage” to find a countervailing truth, one that is rooted in ecology, in the complex systems necessary for civilisation to survive, and ultimately in the human spirit, in creativity, openness and generosity.

In recent times we see countervailing considerations to the singular narrative on rural depopulation, putting forward a vision of more complex settlement systems, in which smaller settlements play an important part. In writing about cities and regions, Soya identifies the future-shaping impact of the struggle for social justice and regional democracy: «Entwined with this refocussing of cities and regions and the concurrent spatial turn so integral to it has been the onset of something even more significant, the emergence of an active and situated practice of a cultural politics that is consciously driven by increasingly spatialized notions of social justice, participative democracy, and citizenship rights and responsibilities»¹⁹. He identifies what he calls a still evolving discourse that is triggering new ways of thinking about the generalizable particularities of city regions. In my view, the issue of regenerating abandoned settlements needs to come that level of thinking: it needs not to be understood as a problem of small settlements, but as a problem of achieving better quality of life throughout a region or even more extensive space. For that reason, as well as re-shaping the geographical imagination, it touches on governance and the exercise of political vision, with the overall purpose of working towards more inclusive, more creative communities. There are increasing signs that future models of settlement require deeper consideration and refinement²⁰. From an ecological perspective complex systems tend to be resilient. The inherited built fabric is a resource that needs to be understood in an analogous way - one needs to go beyond a singular concept

17. Doxiadis developed his theories from 1942 onwards. DOXIADIS 1968, p. 5.

18. LEVEBVRE 2000, p. 135.

19. The quote is taken from the Postscript of Soya’s book, which has generally a different focus; SOYA 2000, p. 407.

20. The strategic economic role of small settlements in rural regeneration has gained considerable recognition in recent years, HERITAGE COUNCIL 2015; see also OSBOURNE, WILLIAMSON, BEATTIE 2010.

of “heritage” as a determining factor in regeneration to shift the argument towards exploring the potential of the built inheritance to support new life, to adapt and to recover significance which is in danger of being lost.

The many experiments in regeneration start from both rational and idealistic premises: the first envisaging that working with community identity can be economically transformative where places have lost their former functions in regional or national economies; the second from the idea that there is a value and resilience in the small scale enterprise, in the local community. Here we can say that accumulating evidence has shown

- that smaller settlements can thrive in the correct circumstances – regional contexts are important
- their internal diversity is a significant factor in their ability to adapt and change
- the importance of networks/ connectivity
- time is critical: community-based regeneration as a process can be slow

The countervailing narrative sees the future coming both from the imagination and from evolving experience of difference. The fact that issue of small towns, their abandonment and their potential role in shaping the future of rural areas, figured strongly in the Venice Biennale of 2018, indicates that an emerging ecological position that can establish a context for policy on settlements is gaining ground²¹ (figs. 3-4).

They are worth noting, not because they offer a formula for intervention but as “straws in the wind”. Their significance lies in that they reflect a shift throughout Europe – a re-focussing on a central agenda facing this continent: how to shape a future that accommodates existing and new populations within what has been inherited from the past, and the development of engagement in that process.

They do not offer a formula for intervention - no single strategy, but rather an operating principle.

This essay began with a quotation from Oliver Goldsmith, writing in the 18th century. In a sense the new quality of the question of abandonment lies in the words of Patrick Kavanagh, a 20th century Irish poet from whom I borrowed the title of my address: «their history is a grain of wheat». Goldsmith’s poem concludes in an almost desperate assertion that the underclass, the peasant, the worker, by the fact of their presence and their labour, comprise an order that can prevail against the forces of

21. Some indicators from the 2018 Venice Biennale: Italian pavilion, ‘Archipelago’: «The imperative of the local grain its vigour as an essential counter to centralising dynamics of administrators and the privatising dynamics of services provision [...] a line of research and action on the interior areas of the country from the Alpine range, along the Apennines, to the islands; these areas are rich in small villages and hamlets far from the big cities. They are the exemplification of Italian identity, both for their scale and for their historical and cultural stratification», CUCINELLA 2018, n.p.

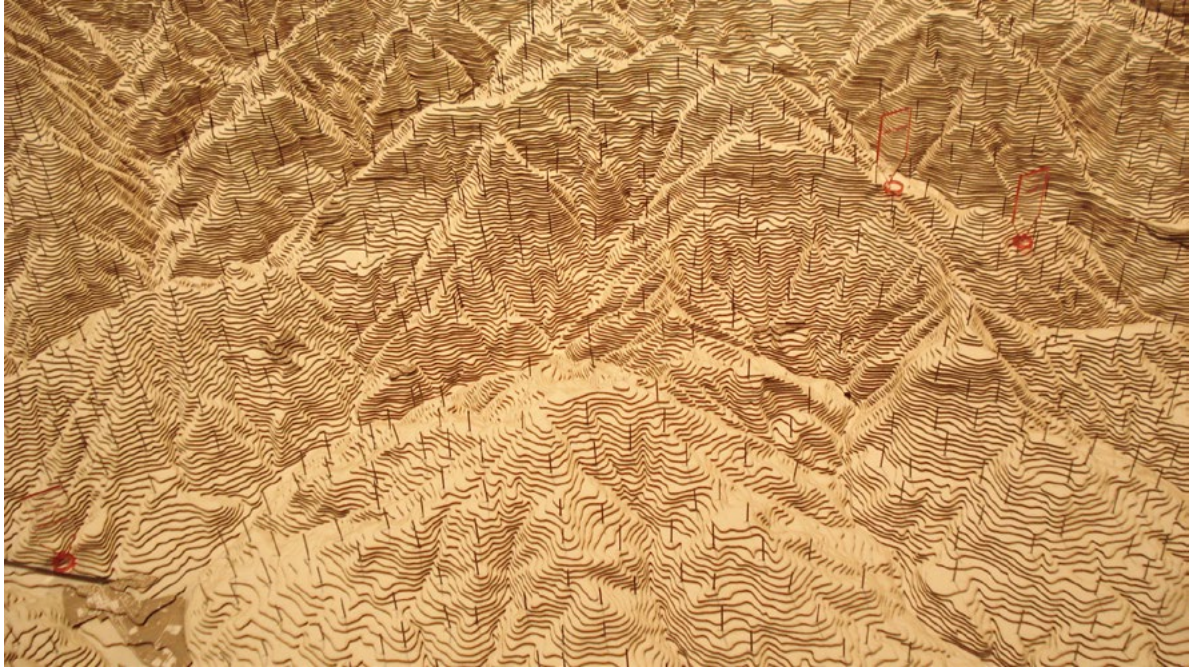


Figure 3. A selected element of the Italian pavilion at the 2018 Venice Biennale, *Archipelago: Borghi of Italy* (photo L. Kealy, 2018).

change²². Many might suggest that this is not so – that the forces of economic change are beyond local endeavour. And yet, this is precisely what the new, countervailing narrative is putting forward, albeit in a more sophisticated framework. Kavanagh’s words carry a powerful and subtle message:

«Their history is a grain of wheat. a season/The cycle of a race that will persist/ when all the scintillating tribes of reason/ are folded in a literary mist»²³.

22. While self-dependent power can time defy/ As rocks resist the billows and the sky; GOLDSMITH 1770

23. KAVANAGH 1992, p. 30.



Figure 4. Free Market: the Irish pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia 2018 (photo M. Thompson, 2018).

The poem articulates a deeper sense – that there are persistent dynamics rooted in attachment to place²⁴. Reflecting on what he had left behind the poem is a recognition that beneath the surface of rural life is a resilience in the people of the countryside that is deeply rooted and that can find ways to endure, a seed that must be nurtured. The thought brings us to consider how the academy can play its part.

The challenge: centrality from the margins

The challenge for the academy could be put like this: to how to assist in developing approaches that foster the countervailing narrative outlined above, to promote the dialogue at scientific, political and societal level that can advance the acceptance of the operating principle described, and develop tools for regeneration that are more effective. That challenge is three-fold: a disciplinary one, an institutional one and a challenge in relation to praxis, where the relationships within the corpus of social organisation are in question.

From a disciplinary perspective, there is already an understanding that contributing to knowledge acquisition and the understanding of complex issues require inter-disciplinary work, even if achieving this in the academic setting is often problematic. One would expect that the difficulties are fewer when those disciplines normally collaborate in conservation projects, but here we are looking beyond conventional projects towards engagements that are less straightforward. In the area of regeneration, and particularly where this involves existing communities, the required interface is with disciplines that are concerned with community and marginalised groups, disenfranchised groups, with displaced persons and new arrivals, and that have the necessary direct experience and theoretical grounding²⁵. Decline usually leads to population dispersal; recovery may lead to returns or to new arrivals. The academic challenge is to articulate a new, clear, theoretical and methodological dimension to multi-disciplinary research and innovation, to supplement the concerns and expertise of each discipline with

24. Kavanagh had left his small farm out of a desire to escape the stultification of life in an agricultural land of small towns and villages and in the hope of freedom, only to be disappointed by the small-mindedness of the urban bourgeoisie. The quotation is from his poem *Peasant*.

25. Conservation has often been described as the management of change. The impact of new arrivals and their interface with existing populations will pose deep questions and raise ethical questions as well as practical requirements for ongoing support. Shapiro's essay explores the inter-relationship between identity narratives and geographic coherence; CAMPBELL, SHAPIRO 1999, pp. 59-91.

the experience gleaned elsewhere. The primary reason is that a core requirement of regeneration is empowerment and capacity-building and not just the application of expert knowledge.

With regard to conservation disciplines themselves, the need to work with populations is prefigured in “doctrinal” texts in relation to urban conservation and renewal, firstly in the context of the conservation project in itself (eg. Washington Charter, the Australian Burra Charter) and more latterly, in the valorisation process as well (Nara, Nara+20). As remarked earlier, the trajectory of these documents shows a progressive deepening of awareness on the part of the expert community, that the goals they pursue are not achievable without active engagement by the public. There is a need for the academy to explore the relationships between the concepts in these documents in two respects: first to counter their internal focus with a vision of the challenges of engagement and re-animation; and second to explore in concrete settings, the interplay of material and immaterial inheritances and their implications for conservation action.

This perspective needs to be animated by a larger vision of a societal future and given operational underpinning to facilitate continuing engagements. This raises a second challenge for the academic institution, or perhaps more accurately, the academic establishment. In many institutions, supporting inter-disciplinary work is problematical in organisational terms because academic structures are disciplinary, and academic advancement is dependent on achievement within those silos. A commitment by the institution to acknowledge and support an action research model, and to promote the adoption of that model by funding agencies would greatly assist the necessary engagements. In addition to these factors, academic programmes are increasingly time-bound, and costs are closely related to targets. Community-based work tends to take time and sustained engagement, and this has implications for the support systems in place within institutions or from funding agencies for longitudinal studies²⁶.

Such studies are usually conducted in collaboration with development agencies, sections of public authorities or NGO’s. One of the continuing challenges for regeneration has been that agencies are restricted in what they can do – not so much by lack of resources (although that is almost always the case) but by organisational characteristics that make it difficult to act in appropriate ways, or to maintain actions over time that move outside the structures that underpin their operations. To some extent this is a classic dilemma facing organisations that must innovate while still trying to maintain

26. The difficulties in the way of long-term collaborations have often been discussed, even if solutions remain elusive. It is notable that long-term collaborations in the area of post-trauma reconstruction have been conducted with the support of international agencies such as the World Bank or UNESCO.

their core purposes. One can observe a deepening awareness on the part of development agencies that their tasks are similarly unachievable without such engagement. The question for the academy is whether it can be effective in bringing the perspectives together in the sphere of action, and for this, direct engagement is essential.

But the real challenge for conservation goes deeper than that. It involves concerted work to examine a new conceptual basis for intervention, to find ways of shifting the focus beyond protection and safeguarding towards continuing utilisation. To conclude:

- the challenges posed in re-animating small towns can be understood as an example of the wider challenges of redevelopment/ regeneration/ re-animation in which their hinterland is an essential factor;
- these challenges intersect with ongoing social and cultural changes, including displacement, internal and external;
- the processes of valorisation of inheritance are ongoing and will reflect the changing profiles of populations, affecting immaterial as well as material attributes;
- regeneration needs openness to potentials as well as retention of significances; the arguments for compatible reuse need to be made also in that context;
- engagement is a two-way process: a key objective is empowerment and regeneration will not work without it;
- compatible reuse is a key cultural task for the present and the future related to ideas about future society, an environmental, social and technical challenge.

Ends need to be embodied in the means to achieve them. The inheritance of small towns and their hinterlands can provide a laboratory for learning: the academy must find a new role as participant/ observer, as prepared to acknowledge and accept loss as to celebrate gains, engaged as well as bearing witness.

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