

Increase the Potential of a Territory Starting from Culture

The Exemplar of the Ecomuseo della Pastorizia

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Abstract Although culture is considered the fourth pillar of sustainable development, there still not exist specific politics concerning this subject. Initiatives on cultural sustainability seem to take place at two separate levels: at international level with, for instance, CoE's Conventions and international research programs as *COST-Action*; at a local level, where there are interesting local initiatives considering CH as a way to interpret territories. This is the case of ecomuseums that carry on projects based on citizens' participation. In this paper we will propose some case study from the Piemonte region and we will try to place it in a general discourse on cultural sustainability.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Ecomuseums: Some Definitions. – 3 The Role of CH in Sustainability.– 4 Participatory Practices in Ecomuseums. – 5 An Example of Sustainable Economic Development: the Ecomuseo della Pastorizia. – 6 Conclusions.

Keywords Ecomuseums. Cultural sustainability. Landscape.

1 Introduction

The object of this paper is to investigate the role of citizens' participation in the activities of the ecomuseums and, more largely, try to place it in a general discourse of 'cultural sustainability'. At this purpose, a brief review on the evolution of the notion of CH is necessary.

After WWII the museologists proposed a new approach where museums were placed within the social, economic, cultural and anthropological context of the community which they originate from. UNESCO and ICOM took part in this process and, in fact, in 1972 they adopted the Santiago Declaration. This document establishes a social role for CH and proposes the definition of 'integral museum', which is based on an interdisciplinary knowledge and on a close connection with the community. The Santiago Declaration also defined the museum as an instrument for social change. Since then, UNESCO has led a reflection on cultural and natural heritage that produced the 2001 UNESCO Declaration where CH is defined as a

Creation [that] draws on the roots of cultural tradition, but [that] flourishes in contact with other cultures. For this reason, heritage in all its forms must be preserved, enhanced and handed on to future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations, so as to foster creativity in all its diversity and to inspire genuine dialogue among cultures. (art. 7, CH as the Wellspring of Creativity)

The term cultural heritage has evolved in the last decades, going beyond monuments and objects of extraordinary value. It now includes traditions or living expressions inherited from the past, natural elements, knowledge, skills to produce traditional crafts and much more. Today we consider CH

[...] an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. (ICOMOS, 2002)

The correlation between community, identity and cultural goods was accentuated by the 2003 UNESCO Convention that established “a connection between the static monumental artifacts addressed by the 1972 Convention and immaterial, knowledge-based traditional practices” (Adell et al. 2015, 10). UNESCO considers ICH an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization. The 2003 Convention recognizes the importance of the transmission of knowledge and skills through generations in addition to its social and economic value. Communities are the depository of their own CH and so they have the right and the duty to safeguard it. The central role of the communities is established in the art. 15¹ and it is reaffirmed in the *Ethical Principles for Safeguarding ICH* approved in 2015 during the 10th session of the ICSICH. Communities’ engagement as a necessary element to safeguard intangible heritage is underlined in points 3 and 12:

3) Mutual respect as well as a respect for and mutual appreciation of intangible cultural heritage, should prevail in interactions between States and between communities, groups and, where applicable, individuals.

12) The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is of general interest to humanity and should therefore be undertaken through coopera-

¹ Art. 15 - *Participation of communities, groups and individuals*. Within the framework of its safeguarding activities of the intangible cultural heritage, each State Party shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management.

tion among bilateral, sub regional, regional and international parties; nevertheless, communities, groups and, where applicable, individuals should never be alienated from their own intangible cultural heritage.

Even the CoE has always dealt with culture, by considering it essential to the development of a genuine openness of mind and basic rights. The numerous conventions drafted over the years provide a common framework of action for policy makers responsible for safeguarding and enhancing CH. For the purposes of this paper, it is useful to remember the ELC (European Landscape Convention). This Convention is about sustainable development, based upon the balance between social needs, economic activities, environment and culture. Its objects are the promotion of landscape protection, management and planning, and the organization of the European cooperation on landscape issues (art. 3). The landscape, here, is considered a good, independently from its value. In this conception, landscape must be interpreted as a fundamental part of the CH of a community (Da Re 2015, 258) and even when it has no historic or artistic value, landscape acquires value as such and for the people who leave there.

In 2005 CoE recognized, by mean of the Faro Convention, the value and potential of CH wisely used as a resource for sustainable development and quality of life in a constantly evolving society (Preamble). This Convention's innovation lies in proposing a definition of CH which basically includes any aspect of life:

cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time. (art. 2(a))

The originality of the definition lies in the expression "constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions" in which "the subjective elements (values, beliefs) prevail or in any case precede the objective ones (knowledge, traditions)" (Zagato 2015, 144). In this perception, the responsibility to identify and to safeguard CH falls on the heritage community, intended as a set

of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations. (art. 2(b))

The choice to use 'people' instead of 'individuals' focuses on the collective dimension of CH (Zagato 2015, 144-5). The definition of CH has expanded up to including objects and places that may not have

an extraordinary value, but they acquire importance if considered in correlation with the environment in which they are settled in. In this conception, communities take a prevalent role because they are called to define their own CH.

Communities' participation in the identification of CH is well specified in all the legal instruments we are taking into consideration; it is indeed considered the key to raise the awareness of CH's value and the role it plays in determining the quality of life of a territory. Both the ELC and the Faro Convention recognize also the importance of CH for the social and economic development of a territory. If in the ELC this approach can be deduced from the text, the Faro Convention specifies (art. 5) that CH is an element of sustainable development,² and that (art. 2) the term 'resources' underlines their feasible economic implications.

Also, UNESCO has pushed the theme of culture and sustainable development into its action policies for several years, giving particular consideration to ICH. In particular, in the last resolution approved during the sixth session of the GA of the States Parties to the 2003 Convention, which took place from May 30 to June 1 2016, part 2 is entirely dedicated to the existing connection between ICH and sustainable development. Chapter 6 invites States Parties to recognize

the role of intangible cultural heritage as a driver and guarantee of sustainable development, as well as fully integrate the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage into their development plans, policies and programmes at all levels.

The document also recognizes the contribution of ICH in realizing an inclusive and equitable economic development.

² Art. 5 - *Cultural heritage law and policies*. The Parties undertake to: a) recognize the public interest associated with elements of the cultural heritage in accordance with their importance to society; b) enhance the value of the cultural heritage through its identification, study, interpretation, protection, conservation and presentation; c) ensure, in the specific context of each Party, that legislative provisions exist for exercising the right to cultural heritage as defined in art. 4; d) foster an economic and social climate which supports participation in cultural heritage activities; e) promote cultural heritage protection as a central factor in the mutually supporting objectives of sustainable development, cultural diversity and contemporary creativity; f) recognize the value of cultural heritage situated on territories under their jurisdiction, regardless of its origin; g) formulate integrated strategies to facilitate the implementation of the provisions of this Convention.

2 Ecomuseums: Some Definitions

The discussions concerning CH went hand in hand with the discussions about the role of museums. Since 1950, in fact, ethnographers and museologists have been more and more interested in the industrial and urban milieu. Museum approach developed until rejecting the traditional idea of museum, designated only to objects conservation, in favour of a museum closer to the territory and more attentive to the relationship between men and the environment they live in. More in detail, in France, museologists experimented ecomuseums. This particular type of museums comes from the experience of regional parks and is founded on the concepts of human being and environment. George Henri Rivière³ was the first to develop the idea of ecomuseum in 1969, starting from 'en plein air' museums; then, in 1971, Hugues de Varine⁴ coined the noun. There are many definitions of ecomuseum proposed along the decades, but one of the most effective still remains de Varine one, which explains the differences between traditional museums and ecomuseums:

MUSEUM	ECOMUSEUM
Collection	Heritage
Static	Environment
Public	Inhabitants

This simple framework highlights the key concepts of the ecomuseums:

- CH: everything that is considered as such by the community. The inhabitants participate in collecting, inventorying and interpreting CH and they contribute to build it with donations and loans;
- Environment: is the place of the knowledge of a community and the place of relationships between human beings and nature. The ecomuseum allows inhabitants to re-appropriate their own territory and be aware of their history;
- Population: it is the first interlocutor of an ecomuseum and for this reason it has to be involved in any activity.

Hugues de Varine argues that the concept of ecomuseum reflects more ideas that complement each other:

3 George Henri Rivière (1897-1985) was a French museologist and the founder of Arts and Popular Traditions Museum in Paris, which is now in Marseille. He gave, with his work, an important contribution to New Museology and to ethnographic museums.

4 He is a French archaeologist, historian and museologist and he was one of the protagonists of New Museology. From 1965 to 1976 he was the ICOM's director and, with G.H. Rivière, he founded ecomuseums.

- Its scope is the CH of a community or a territory;
- It has an environmental dimension;
- It originates from a long process that goes with the environmental development;
- Inhabitants' participation is permanent and decisions about the territory have to be taken from local stakeholders;
- It is a tool for education and transmission of local culture, but it also encourages the openness to the world and to the other cultures;
- Research and conservation are not the main purposes of an ecomuseum, but rather they are tools to achieve its mission. (De Varine 2005).

From the early 1970s till now, ecomuseums have spread all around the world, assuming different aims and forms in accordance with local exigencies. In Europe, and in Italy in particular, they have based their actions on sustainable development, trying to increase local potentialities. This is also evident in the Italian definition of ecomuseum:

[...] is a participatory practice for the safeguard of cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, developed by an organized subject, expression of a local community, in the perspective of sustainable development. (Kaufman 2013, 28)⁵

Thus, an ecomuseum can be seen as the promoter of the sustainable development of a territory, which is achieved through the promotion of local cultural dynamics, the collaboration with the touristic and economic sectors, the attention to the environment and the promotion of sustainability. The ecomuseum approach focuses on the recreation of territorial knowledge, which is based on the interconnection of know-hows and on the promotion of CH by individuals who reinterpret them as a collective resource. To recognize local heritage and to be able to read the traces, it helps to be aware of the territory we live in and of its values. "What any particular place is, or seems to be, is shaped by the life story that each person brings to it". And since each person's life story is different, the meanings of places as well as people's feelings for them will also be different. But when we talk about communities, places take a common sense too. To interpret cultural and natural heritage means to consider individual preferences, backgrounds and cultural baggage, but also, and especially, to point out the common sense of this heritage (28). Ecomuseums differ from traditional museums just because they have an organization centred on the territory, that is viewed as a fabric of relationships, past and present.

⁵ Conference *Giornate dell'ecomuseo. Verso una nuova offerta culturale per lo sviluppo sostenibile del territorio*, held in Catania, Sicily, 12-13 October 2007.

The Ecomuseum model is instrumental to the sustainable development of a territory because it focuses on the territory itself, understood as a privileged framework of man-nature relations, as a place for storing knowledge of local communities, as a testimony of environmental values, as a space that synergies the ability of inhabitants to develop alternative economies.

3 The Role of CH in Sustainability

When we talk about sustainable development is now quite evident to include culture into the discourse. That's why it has been accepted, by now, that culture, intended in its anthropological definition, is a fundamental element of a territory or a community. This conception proposed culture as the fourth pillar – or an essential aspect – of the sustainable development; but it took almost thirty years to achieve this result. The notion of sustainable development was theorized in the 1970s when the Club of Rome published a report on the environmental consequences of rapid economic growth (Meadows et al. 1972)⁶ and in 1987 the Bruntland Report gave the first definition of sustainable development:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.⁷

The possibility to put culture into the discourse of sustainable development was suggested by the WCCD, whose 1995 Report *Our Creative Diversity* was published in 1995. In this report culture is considered “a part of a human-centred development paradigm” (Throsby 2008, 2). Once again, in 1997 the EU established ‘the model of the three pillars of sustainability’, which affirms that sustainable development concerns not only the environment, but also the social institutions and the economic achievements. Finally, in 2002, the Johannesburg Summit⁸ proposed culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. Here it is established that culture has

6 Commissioned by the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), the Report concerns the results of a computer simulation studying the interactions between worldwide population, industrialization, pollution, food production and resources depletion. The conclusion was that an unlimited growth would cause the deplete of energetic and environmental resources. The Report also argues that it was possible to achieve a sustainable development.

7 Report *Our Common Future* realized by the UN WCED in 1987, commonly called ‘The Bruntland Report’ from the name of the chairperson of the Commission, and former Norwegian prime minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland.

8 The World Summit on Sustainable Development was organized by the UN and took place in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September 2002.

a key role in public policies, such as education, science, economy, social cohesion, environment and international cooperation.

Cultural and natural heritage, tangible and intangible, can be considered as a social and a cultural capital for the population, because it is closely connected to the history and the system of values of a community and it participates in defining the environment of people's lives. Development can be seen as an aim that generates established actions apt to modify the territory and to help the inhabitants to re-appropriate it. Renovating actions have also the object to promote a responsible modernity that moves from the potentialities of the territory (historic, economic, social, cultural and natural) and takes place with the engagement of the population concerned. Frequently, these transformations include the knowledge and the transmission of CH (Gellereau 2011, 88-90). Here culture is intended to have a "mediating role to achieve economic, social, and ecological sustainability" (Dessein et al. 2015, 31), so CH is considered as a resource for the development of a territory, that has to be taken into consideration when aiming for sustainable development. In the author's opinion, this is partially true: considering CH as a capital means to assume that it can actively participate in the development of a territory. Precisely, culture could be intended as the keystone of the process, the "foundation for meeting the overall aims of sustainability" (33). In this way, culture is not one of the pillars, but becomes an overarching dimension of sustainability. Development could be interpreted as a cultural process in which sustainability is a procedure that involves all the actors (policy-makers, citizens, public and private institutions) in the same way.

Considering CH as a resource also means to acknowledge the presence of users of this resource, who are going to use it individually or collectively, as a community. It is necessary to take into consideration all the possible users of CH during the decision-making process. Participatory practices aim to get the entire community involved in every step of the process and offer alternative frameworks to rethink identification and inventory-making. 'Community participation' could be intended as the involvement of inhabitants of a territory in projects to improve their potentialities or to solve their own problems. This type of action is important because it helps to individuate what is heritage and what is important to preserve. It can be helpful also to promote 'a process of re-appropriation and comprehension' of the territory. That is particularly true in places that have suffered depopulation or impact in economic and social modifications. Participatory practices allow to highlight, and try to solve, the elements of continuity and clash between different generations. They provide sparks for dialogue with new inhabitants, helping them to recognize each other in the territory in which they live.

Heritage interpretation has to promote dialogue between stakeholders and also considering individual preferences. It has to take care of the

feelings inspired by places or objects that could appear to experts utterly lacking in heritage value, but that assume significance for the community. In a democratic decision-making process, these feelings are important because they can explain the meaning that people give to the environment (Kaufman 2013, 28).

4 Participatory Practices in Ecomuseums

The ideal place to think about participation is probably the ecomuseum. Due to its structure, the ecomuseum needs a participatory management of citizens and of political actors; moreover, the vast field of action allows it to reflect about the CH of a territory. An ecomuseum is usually created by a community and is that same community its very first interlocutor. But there are also specialists working in an ecomuseum which are necessary to train the inhabitants and to carry out research activities or projects. Furthermore, it constantly deals with public administration and local authorities. Ideally the ecomuseum holds, intrinsically in its nature, the role of mediator and it can be the depository of the instances of the territory. It can be crucial in combining the needs of promotion and development of a territory with the need to preserve cultural and natural heritage. As the guardian of knowledge and know-hows of the community, the ecomuseum becomes the ideal place where citizens, experts and local authorities can talk and can reason together about what could be preserved and what could be renovated to realize a sustainable development that takes care of the potentialities of the territory.

The inventory participatory and the Parish maps, for example, are the most widely used tools for spotlighting the vocations of places and communities. The creation of a Parish map or of an inventory enables people who inhabit a place to discover the highlights of their history and take back their landscape. Parish maps are tools through which the inhabitants of a particular place can represent their local heritage, their landscape, the knowledge in which they recognize themselves and what they wish to transmit to future generations. It does not matter what form they take, be it a map, a drawing or a scale model, what is important is to represent the instances of the community; for this reason, the work on a Parish map must be open to all the members interested in it. This is exactly what has been done by the Ecomuseo della Segale⁹ in 2007 when the Parish map of Valle Gesso was realized. This ecomuseum was created to contrast with the depopulation its territory was suffering from and to rediscover and promote the cultural roots of the valley. It is spread around the villages of Sant'Anna,

9 URL <http://www.ecomuseosegale.it/> (2017-12-15).

Andonno, Valdieri, Entracque and Roaschia and is situated in the Piemonte region, in a mountain valley in the district of Cuneo, Valle Gesso indeed.

To realize the Parish map, the ecomuseum's team coordinated an open-ended working group accessible to all citizens of the valley. In each session meeting, the group discussed about places, monuments and memories that best described the valley. After one year of work the result was a map reproducing the elements considered significant for the inhabitants of the valley, which often doesn't match with the most representative part depicted from a cultural point of view. So the people of Roaschia chose to represent a 'tèit'¹⁰ instead of the quarry of limestone; likewise the inhabitants of Sant'Anna put into the map not Sant'Anna's church, but only the statue of the Saint that is more important to them. Working on a Parish map can be the first step to become aware of the milieu, to understand what is important for the community. The process leading to a Parish map is not simple nor immediate, it is about going beyond judgments and preconceived values, in order to build common bases to take care of the environment. The work is done step by step and every subject participates to a collective reasoning that reflects, in the end, on the Parish map (Murtas 2013).

A more deepened approach in defining CH is the 'participatory inventory'. Whereas the Parish map is a detailed selection of the elements that best represent a territory and a community, the inventory consists in classifying all the elements constitutive of CH of a territory and of a community. When this operation is made with the participation of the population it encourages the action and the beginning of the community's empowerment. De Varine (2013) argues that the inventory is strictly correlated to the territorial development process; this process needs a diagnosis about the condition of resources, of the population, of the territory and about problems. When the inhabitants are called to inventory the elements of their heritage, they are also called to actively participate in the development process. It could take a long time, but it is a process that produces awareness of what elements define the community and why people choose some of them instead of others. It is not only a selection of items, but also a work on private sensations and on the significance that we attribute to a particular object or place. De Varine (2013) again argues that when people are obliged to face their CH, they become aware of it and they start to think how to safeguard it and how to do it. Assuming that participatory inventories are strictly related to territorial development brings us back to the concept of sustainability expressed beforehand in this paper.

"Both cultural and natural heritage imposes a duty of care on the present generation" (Throsby 2003, 166). At the same time, when we talk about sustainability we think of the best solutions for the preservation and

10 In the local dialect 'tèit' means a roof built with rye, typical of Valle Gesso.

the transmission of CH. CH does not mean only monuments or objects of extraordinary value; it also means landscape, traditional works, knowledge, and so many other elements like we said at the beginning of this article. To be preserved, CH needs to be in connection with the context and to be used by people that, in this way, regenerate it constantly. It does mean that CH takes part in all kind of processes that concern a territory, like for example the economic ones for which it becomes essential (168).

5 An Example of Sustainable Economic Development: the Ecomuseo della Pastorizia

The Ecomuseo della pastorizia (Ecomuseum of sheep farming) is founded on the tradition of the Sambucana sheep. The ecomuseum was created in 2000 with the contribution of the Valle Stura's Mountain Community. It is located in the Alpine village of Ponteb Bernardo, Pietraporzio hamlet, 1300 m. high, in the Piemonte region. This mountain area has been characterized, since the fifteenth century at least, by the pastoralism and in particular by the livestock of the Sambucana sheep. Shepherds living in the valleys of Stura, Maina and Grana, went to work in the near Provence, where there were large herds of sheep; their job consisted in conducting sheeps in the aforementioned valleys during the summer period.

Over the centuries, the transhumance has produced a considerable wealth of knowledge and traditions that are an important part of the CH of the territory, with the Occitan language which allows French and Italian people to understand each other. This activity has also modified the natural environment and determined the modern aspect of the landscape.

The Sambucana sheep is a typical breed of this valley; the great adaptability of this animal allows it to resist at cold temperatures and at high altitudes, so it has been able to survive and settle down in Valle Stura since ancient times. From this sheep, it is possible to produce excellent meat, milk and wool. Thanks to these characteristics, the inhabitants of the valley developed a sort of subsistence economy basically based on the Sambucana sheep, from which they obtained food, clothes and everyday objects. So it was, at least until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the area was interested by a migratory phenomenon that caused a strong depopulation of the valley. In 1980s the Sambucana sheep was in danger of extinction and, thus, the consortium 'l'Escaroun' was created to reintroduce the race. The consortium also encouraged the last sheep farmers to form a cooperative. These entrepreneurs continued to take flocks on the mountain pasture during the summer, and by doing this they contributed to the maintenance of landscapes and they avoided environmental degradation, caused by depopulation.

So the project of the ecomuseum was born in a context that was already aware of the importance of traditional activities and of the benefits of revitalizing them. The mountain community also felt the need to rediscover the traditions related to the pastoralism in Valle Stura. Here the ecomuseum is a tool for the interpretation of a territory and a way of life deeply influenced by the traditional economic activity. The work team is constituted by people who bet on the ecomuseum project, understood as an operation act to project a territory into the future, starting from the recovery of its past. It was one of the first ecomuseums in Italy to work with the Parish maps, in 2002. Back then, the inhabitants were invited to propose the elements that they considered representative of their place. The process was, also in this case, very long: the drawing of the map took more than one year. The lengthen of the process was due mainly to the initial difficulty of the local citizens to identify the places worth to be represented as CH. In the end, the Parish maps of Pietraporzio, Vinadio and Argentera came out and they were shared with all the members of the communities. To maintain the population active, the ecomuseum constantly organizes educational activities, like a laboratory for working wool products, as well as initiatives that are not strictly correlated to its mission, but that have allowed the ecomuseum to be recognized as a place of aggregation. At the same time, the ecomuseum has worked in close contact with the mountain community to recreate an economy based on the traditions of the Sambucana sheep. It thus opened a sales point for the purchase of precious Sambucana sheep wool artifacts and a small restaurant where the tasting of traditional culinary products is possible and helps to promote local productions among visitors. The headquarters of the Ecomuseum is a building in the centre of the village, acquired by the mountain community. On the ground floor, a small dairy allows local shepherds to prepare the 'Toumo' of the Ecomuseum, a sheep cheese. There is also a laboratory for processing the Sambucana sheep's meat, from which can be made excellent sausages. A second building hosts both the 'Arieti Centre' on the ground floor, managed by the consortium 'Escaroun', and the Interpretation Centre of the ecomuseum 'Na Draio for Vioure' on the first floor, which provides the visitors with a broader picture of the phenomenon of sheep farming and pastoralism, with a large part dedicated to the illustration of local reality, in his most direct reference to the goods and the flavours. Here there is also a multifunctional room for the activities of the ecomuseum.¹¹

11 URL <http://www.vallestura.net/ecomuseo/default.asp> (2017-12-15).

6 Conclusions

The complex definition of CH provided in the last years by UNESCO and CoE is the backbone of any discussion about sustainability. Although culture starts to be included in the sustainability debates, at least at a scientific level, to translate these purposes into practical and political actions still seems to be a great challenge, as explained in COST-Action conclusions:¹²

the policy challenge is that a broad understanding of culture requires cross-sectoral policies, and innovative modes of implementation that involve reexamination of governance, democratic participation and social equity. (Dessein et al. 2015)

COE's Conventions give to States Parties the instruments to achieve a sustainable development and encourage them to base the appeal of a territory (intended as the sense of place and the capacity to attract touristic and economic activities) on the CH. These international instruments, and the Faro Convention in particular, also introduce a very important statement:

the right to cultural heritage is recognized [...] as pertaining to the sphere of (individual, at least) human rights. (Zagato 2015, 142)

However, the concept of cultural sustainability has also been introduced in several public actions, even if sometimes "some ambivalence still persists regarding the application of the cultural notion" (Auclair 2011, 8). It can be assumed that the most interesting results were seen at the local level, where CH was considered a way to interpret territories. Beyond the cases mentioned in this article, many different actions have been put into practice for this purpose: for instance, the heritage walks, proposed within the framework of the Faro Convention and developed in local contest. In the city of Venice, for example, there are many associations who, during the year, bring citizens and visitors to discover the city and the Lagoon, outside the traditional tourist routes. Supported by the CoE Programme office, based in Venice, these associations – which are present on the territory since decades – take into charge that very part of cultural and natural heritage that is embedded with the daily lives of the community,

¹² COST is a European program that encourages trans-national cooperation among researchers, engineers and scholars across Europe. The COST Action IS1007 took place from 2010 to 2015 with the purpose to increase understanding of and determine the role of culture in sustainable development based on multidisciplinary principles. Twenty-five European countries got involved, including Italy. In 2015, the working group published the COST-Actions Conclusions *Culture in, for and as Sustainable Development*. URL http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/isch/IS1007 (2017-12-15).

but it is often underestimated. The involvement of the inhabitants as witnesses of the relevance of this heritage is the core of a 'heritage walk'. In this case people are 'used' as oral sources to describe the history of a territory. Participation can assume many other different forms, starting from the public participation in exhibitions till more complex forms. For example, when citizens realize their own research concerns particular aspects of their history and their environment, or when they get actively involved in the conception of an exposition. However, to achieve this result, a cultural awareness of the inhabitants is necessary as well as recognizing that the community is the main subject apt to operate a positive change on the territory (Rotondo 2016, 18). The construction of identities is often linked to a particular place; therefore, to enhance a collective sense of place, attention is increasingly paid to the importance of the elements that surround us and determine the environment in which we live (Dessein, Soini, Fairclough and Horlings 2015, 40). Local heritage is also central in producing lasting wealth and in defining particular characteristics of the economic future (Rotondo et al. 2016, 18), as well as citizen's participation, that can "improve risk-sharing" and help "alleviate the vulnerability of the heritage economy" (Wanner 2009, 133).

The need to combine the strengthening of the territorial vocation with the improvement of its environmental conditions and the achievement of social goals, determines a new concept of development and promotion of the territory, deeply embedded within the culture. In the author's opinion, the ecomuseum could be a tool to achieve this result. Being an institution that stands halfway between the population and the local administration, it can interact both with the inhabitants and the politicians/institutions and it assumes, as we said above, a role of mediation/coordination in the decision-making process. Ecomuseological projects bind economic development to the cultural growth of a region and to the choice of a lifestyle more coherent with the environment. It is therefore desirable to entrust its design to a local level, in order to represent the territory in a congruent and unique way. But, what is the role of the ecomuseum within this process? It can be one of the subjects apt to guide the population in the definition of its CH and, in that case, it becomes its guardian. With stakeholders it will develop a scientific-cultural project and it will promote the research. Then, it will return to the community the results of this work and promote a new interpretation of CH. This type of activity is continuous, for this heritage is not limited to a certain historic period, but it is constantly recreated by the community just living on the territory. The ecomuseum may therefore represent the instrument through which rebuild the memory, in a path starting from the past and oriented toward the future. But it also helps to observe transformations with critical ability. Participation promotes the enhancement of knowledge and the traditional practices during the selection process of the CH to safeguard and contributes to define

new models of sustainable local development. By collecting the memory of the community, ecomuseums - unlike museums - offer potential positive economic effects through the raising of traditional works or the promotion of a sustainable tourism.

Using CH as an instrument of social and democratic action gives people the means to understand their own CH, considered in its evolution, and helps to strengthen the local identity by increasing the population's awareness of the importance of taking action to safeguard its territory.

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