Cultures and Local Practices of Sustainability

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Inner landscapes: Managing fragilities

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Abstract

The development model of the western world, marked by land consumption and useless expansive dynamics, has produced several episodes characterised by territorial fragility, marginality, depopulation, and abandonment. These territories (displaying "weaknesses" linked to the lack of facilities and accessibility), analysed through the application of traditional socio-economical evaluation parameters, have been included, at a national level, in the National Strategy of Internal Areas (*Strategia Nazionale delle Aree Interne*). However, if we are capable of amending ourselves from the logic of development and growth, we can see that these territories have not been interested by peaks of development and, therefore, are not subject to the fees of growth. These areas are almost completely intact, thus, the resources that surround them (air, water, forests, landscape, beauty) become the centre of new economies (sustainable, green, blue).

Gathering this untouched heritage can be a way to build a new vision, an interpretation, a narrative of the territory from which to trigger regeneration processes.

Landscape can be the key element to build this vision. According to its physiographic unity that does not have administrative limits, landscape can coherently guide the strengthening process of the territory as a common good, becoming the driving element for the evaluation of internal areas and weak and forgotten contexts. In fact, the landscape approach can define transformation scenarios (compensations, regenerations, reinventions, reinterpretations, new narrations) for those fragile territorial contexts, which is relevant to the "aspirations of the public with regard to the landscape features of their surroundings" (European Landscape Convention, 2000, art. 1 par c).

Keywords: natural capital, ecosystem services, landscape, inner areas, local development.

1. Introduction

The uncontrolled sprawl of conurbations along the costs, valleys, and plains of our planet led to the development of suffocating metropolitan areas, comfortable medium-sized cities, absurd tourist facilities, and polluting industrial areas; however, it also led to the creation of *Middle-earth* areas: wide useless territories that remain empty and abandoned among the lattice of urban poles and networks (De Matteis, 1995). These marginal areas, that are not affected by economic development, are useless from the economic statistics perspective, but these places are the reservoir of extraordinary cultural heterogeneity and rich biodiversity (Bonomi, 2018).[4]

Institutions generally assess the conditions of these areas by applying traditional social and economic parameters, which highlight conditions of fragility for these areas, mainly due to the lack of services and their limited accessibility; however, intervention policies are usually based on the results of these analyses (Barca et al., 2014).[5]

Nonetheless, if we set aside development and growth approaches, we can observe that these areas, which did not experience development peaks, did not face the challenges of growth either (pollution, soil erosion, and depletion of resources). Basically, these areas are almost completely intact and are characterised by a high quality of landscape and environment, where the resources of a marginalised place (air, water,

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[4] In the XVI *Biennale di Architettura* in Venice in 2018 the Italian Pavilion, curated by Mario Cucinella, focused on these areas and named them Inner Territories; he used the metaphor of the archipelago to indicate "that space in our country where also in remote times, communities expressed themselves through a different relationship between urban dimension and territory" thus determining the creation of a "Territorial archipelago made up of urban/rural settlements and by the landscape that connects them".

[5] In Italy, the *Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne* (SNAI) was launched in September 2012 by the Minister for the Cohesion by means of the appointment of a Technical Committee for Inner Areas that, after negotiations with the representatives of the various Italian Regions, drafted the guideline document (see Bibliography) that merged with the Partnership Agreement. The underlying hypothesis of the National Strategy for Inner Areas, identifies "distance" from essential services as a key element. In this perspective, Inner Area, does not necessarily mean "weak area" in absolute terms.

and woods) become the central focus of new economies (sustainable, green, and blue, for example).

By glancing at these areas from the *developed* side of the world, we are only able to identify what is missing or not working properly; however, if we experience these places and praise their beauty, we are encouraged to defend them and save what is at risk. The threat of these limited approaches and ideas is the impossibility to develop new interpretative scenarios.

2. Landscape as a heritage that may trigger new development opportunities for marginal areas

It is important to focus on the development of a new paradigm of quality for marginal areas; only by shifting our gaze, we will be able to identify the positive effects of processes which would, otherwise, be considered negative for these areas. From this new perspective, we will be able to understand that depopulation dynamics are also a demographic trend that contributes to preserve small villages immersed in an almost intact environmental/landscape matrix. Population ageing causes circumstances where the elderly are perceived as a burden, however, they represent the soul of a community, and an element of identity and aggregation; the weakening of the provision of basic services also reinforces neighbourhood relationships; the difficulty of reaching a place or complex mobility issues leave the air uncontaminated; the lack of industrial or intensive agricultural activities makes local nutrition schemes healthy and organic.

The values upon which the quality paradigm is based (food, lifestyle, social relations, and natural environment) have almost nothing in common with the GDP, as well as with macro- and micro-economic indicators (employment, income, services, and infrastructure) based on which marginal areas obviously rank at the bottom of the list in classifications that assess quality of life.

Without necessarily having recourse to welfare economics (Sen, 1997) or to the theories of serene de-growth (Latouche, 2008), we could confirm the existence (at least potentially) of an alternative development model influenced by the often unaware lifestyles of the populations of marginal areas: serenity VS urge, slowness VS velocity, diffuse sociality VS élite aggregations, and quality production VS extensive economies.

The re-inclusion of these areas in their contexts requires not so much a Fordist approach (large infrastructures, intensive production, and mass tourism). It should rather focus on advanced innovation, made up of minimal and ad-hoc actions that aim to attract excellences and specialised professionals; a sort of *territorial acupuncture* that can intercept the lines of force of the territory and multiply beneficial effects, by spreading them in a pervasive (and non-invasive) way.

The heritage of marginal areas upon which this model should be developed is landscape; a Fragile Landscape that —thanks to its physiographic unit nature— does not rely on administrative boundaries. The landscape approach, in fact, can define transformation scenarios (reparation, regeneration, reinvention, reinterpretation, re-narration) that are in line with the reference context.

Based on this heritage, a new vision, an interpretation, and a narration of these marginal areas could be developed; these would activate regeneration processes based on models that are far from traditional schemes. A new metabolism of the territory, where the values are overturned and the affected communities are no longer the beneficiaries of an economic process; rather, they directly collaborate with the progress of their environment, putting into practice one of the key acquisitions of the European Landscape Convention.[6]

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[6] "Landscape quality objective means, for a specific landscape, the formulation by the competent public authorities of the aspirations of the public with regard to the landscape features of their surroundings" (CAP.1 - Art.1, par. c – European Landscape Convention, 2000)

3. The narration of the territory as a tool for new economies for marginal areas

Internal areas, historical centres on hills and mountains, the villages of the agrarian reform, the cultural mosaics of the inner territories, productive landscapes, and agri-food excellence are the key elements for changes in marginal areas. These abandoned places could become the focus of new and proactive proposals that could transform them into innovative and identity centres. These areas are intrinsically resilient as their distance from the main urban areas has preserved some fundamental models of settlement, as well as identity, community, and landscape values that have been crucial for these places in facing their historical uncertainties and unexpected events (Carta, 2015).

A territory is the result of the complexities experienced across time and they find their expression through the anthropic actions on nature, culture and landscape. Territories are a complex structural system, whose components are the "non-varying features of the places, that characterise a community" (Carta, 2002, p. 120, our translation). A territory is an extremely complex entity that has defined its identity through the long-lasting co-evolutionary processes of human and environmental settlement (Dematteis & Magnaghi, 2018).

Communities reshape their territories across history by means of new information, stratifications, and substitutions; however, some elements of the territorial palimpsest (Corboz, 1998) remain unaltered, which form the basic identity and the recollections of a community: cultural roots and reference to past events that become the fundamental elements of a society.

Memory is not an objective and static truth; it changes over time and it is influenced by cultural models; it is both individual and collective. We can refer to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic studies to better understand the meaning of memory and expand it to territory. Freud's concept of stratified memory[7] suggests how to analyse the various layers of memory that could

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[7]   Sigmund Freud, *Briefe an Wilhelm Fließ 1887-1904 (Italian Translation)*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1986 (Letter 112, 6th December,1896)

be identified in a specific territory or landscape. The geomorphology of a site, its waterways, the natural vegetation and cultivated land, the thread of roads, the building typologies, and symbolic places all overlap among themselves and fuse together to give rise to a complex system. Here, we could seek the elements that introduce contradictions or breaches that pave the way towards a better future (Ceccarelli, 2012).

It is important to find these elements and to adapt them to contemporary contexts, to pivot a territorial innovation that can employ identity and collective memory as a tool to maximize opportunities in this heritage of specificities and values (Carta, 2002), considering territory as an encyclopaedia or a marketplace of the components of human life and of mutual relationships, of uses and meanings of spaces, and of achieved results (Harvey, 1992).

A multi-disciplinary knowledge of the territory and its processes allows to understand the rules of transformation and to enhance its heritage: territories accumulate memory like "springs loaded over centuries" (Becattini, 2015, p. 95, our translation).

The territorial heritage of Fragile Landscapes plays a more complex role. It includes the environmental heritage, the settlement heritage, the historical (rural and urban) landscape heritage, culture, and local knowledge. These values are the measure of the processes that generate new forms of local development (Dematteis & Magnaghi, 2018), where the employment of patrimonial resources should aim at the self-reproducibility of heritage and at the production of a "territorial value added" (Dematteis & Governa, 2005, pp. 26-29, our translation).

Territorial value should be combined with the complex system of the services and production chains located in an area; it should be a resource for local planning, and it should activate network policies. Therefore, the strategies to be implemented ought to integrate local heritage and different development sectors, such as tourism, marketing, scientific research, specialised school education and university education, vocational training, industrial production, and crafts. The integration of the different sectors and areas of a territory should take place through

territorial specialisation, for example, by identifying areas that could be suitable for the development of enhancement measures (Celani, 2006).

From this perspective, territory becomes a local milieu, an integrated system of physical, cultural, and economic resources that mould the identity of a place, thus becoming a resource for its development.

Creating an integrated system in a territory means:

- imagining the territory as a diffuse system of excellent offer, where development strategies can succeed only if they are interpreted and filtered based on the sustainability of the territory where they should be applied.
- fostering collaboration among the actors involved in projects of reinforcement of territorial identity and enhancement of excellences.

The chain that links agriculture, crafts, tourism, and culture marks the transition from a specific sectoral system to a multiple sectoral system; indeed, it is an example of an integrated system (agriculture – advanced tertiary). Through this approach, the self-reproduction of heritage resources (quality of the area, of waters and ecologic systems, hydro-geological balance, and landscape features) is the pre-requisite for the functioning of this chain.

A change of perspective is necessary; the new approaches to local development, should no longer include the need to apply policies of environmental, territorial, and landscape protection and enhancement, in which productive activities entail virtuous behaviours aiming at the self-reproduction of patrimonial and identity resources of a specific area (Dematteis & Magnaghi, 2018). Inner areas should make their territorial and social capital available for new forms of enterprises that employ innovative socioeconomic approaches, such as circular economy. This model of development redesigns the targets of production of material and non-material goods in a more responsible approach "that is able to re-develop the settlement model for the support of new economic relationships" (Carta, 2015, p.25, our translation).

The identification of new opportunities for economic development must incorporate the peculiar resources of a region that are unique and feature the identity of an area (Ceccarelli, 2005). Therefore, development strategies should be defined based on the sense of belonging and identity of a territory and a community. The crucial point is to deploy a vision focusing not so much on conservation but rather on evolution, linking the growth process to a dynamic vision of identity that could be the key for economic transformation (Gualerzi, 2008).

The essential idea is to enhance diversity from the traditional models of economic development typical of industrial areas, through a *back to the territory* approach (Dematteis & Magnaghi, 2018) characterised by the care for a place and its resources.

For the identity of an area to be perceived by its inhabitants, it is important to recognise its values, and its potential should be enhanced by coherently distributing goods and services, innovating institutions, and imagining an area as a project (Corboz, 1998).

The non-material heritage (values, knowledge, and techniques that created the identity of a territory) is made up of cultural processes as repertoires of ever changing and increasing creativity. Traditional crafts that are apparently the most concrete and tangible type of knowledge are, indeed, intangible heritage. What has characterised traditional craft is a bulk of skills and knowledge that are fundamental for production and, therefore, for transmission (Golino, 2016).

Local products are the elements that best contribute to the enhancement of an area, thanks to their ability to protect human and environmental resources, which are jeopardized by globalisation. By enhancing the know-how in traditional products, it is possible to launch a development process that includes other identity resources such as raw materials, landscape, and the quality of life. The products of the new circular territory should be organized based on productive cycles, supported by cooperative chains and production networks operating on the paradigm of planned recycling rather than on planned obsolescence (Carta, 2015).

This system should be dynamically developed, thanks to the contribution of new knowledge, and it should envisage policies that enhance, protect, and preserve the bulk of resources of the cultural heritage of a specific place. A territory can only continue to exist thanks to the close relationship between its physical features and the people who inhabit it, as "there is no territory without the imaginary of a territory" (Corboz, 1998, pp. 22-27, our translation).

A territory should differentiate and integrate the economic offer with new production forms that preserve the environment and traditions by supporting research for technological innovation, qualified training, and higher education. Being able to identify the emergency situations of an area by means of an endogenous process may help to highlight development schemes that need to be put into practice to limit their impact on the heritage and the values of an area.

The need to share local know-how, knowledge, and image of a territory is the necessary condition to create a development approach whose ingredients are: learning, strengthening of the social and institutional context, as well as the ability to generate a demand that goes beyond the limit of the local demand. The development of the awareness of a place can occur only though the involvement of the communities settled there; this implies greater attention to the historical identity of an area, as well as to other anthropological, social, cultural, environmental, and landscape features. These are the fundamental elements for the creation of unique products on the global market and the only approach that can guarantee the social welfare of local communities (Dematteis & Magnaghi, 2018).

4. Regenerating marginal areas by developing the natural capital and eco-systemic services

Fragile territories have a symbiotic relationship with their surrounding environment; the well-being of individuals is strongly affected by the conditions of the environment where they live. A traditional approach

to this topic implies that the quality of nature and the environment is assessed only in relation to the well-being or the damages that a context can generate for a community living in an area. Consequently, protection for the environment means protection for the individuals and local communities from the impact of pollution or the depletion of natural resources on their health. This approach highlights the importance that environment has for our lives by enhancing its relevance and our awareness. However, this is an excessively anthropocentric approach, as it justifies any intervention on the environment that is not immediately perceived as dangerous for human beings.

A shift in this perspective can be identified in the Constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia[8] which, for the first time, regulate the rights of nature. In these countries, nature is subject for legal situations rather than an object (Baldin, 2014). The philosophical foundation of this legal novelty is based on the vision of the cosmos of Andean people on earth jurisprudence, a theory of the law that advocates the rights of the earth (Cullinan, 2012), as well as deep ecology; a philosophy that refuses a traditional, anthropocentric, and relational approach to the environment, based on which the ecosystem is such only with reference to a subject or a reference term (Cafagno, 2007).

The rights to nature protected by the Constitution of Ecuador are of two kinds: those relating to existence of nature (Article 71) and those regarding its restoration (Art. 72). In the case of Bolivia, Law 71 of 2010 of the Plurinational State of Bolivia (*Ley de derechos de la Madre Tierra*) sets forth in Article 5 that Mother Earth is a collective subject of public interest; Art. 7 of the same Law envisages the right to life, to the diversity of life, to water, to clean air, to equilibrium, to restauration, and to pollution-free living.

The rights to the existence of nature and the rights focusing on the perpetration of life cycles do not raise any issue, in that the simple fact of non-interference and non-threatening of these rights bestows the right to water, and the prohibition of its privatization; the right to food

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8   In force since 20th October 2008 and 7th February 2009, respectively.

sovereignty in the sense of access to healthy and culturally-suitable food; the right to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment that could guarantee sustainability; the promotion of clean energies and of low-environmental impact alternative energies (Chapter II of Title II of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador).

As for the rights aiming at the restoration of nature and its jeopardized balance (in the case of damage), the two Andean legal systems found a solution: nature, just like any incapacitated subject or legal persons, cannot provide for the protection of its own interests; for this reason, a mechanism of representation was implemented. Therefore, human beings will act for the protection of the rights of nature or of Mother Earth. In this perspective, Art. 71 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador states that "All persons, communities, peoples and nations can call upon public authorities to enforce the rights of nature". Art. 34 of the Constitution of Bolivia sets forth that any person, in their own right or on behalf of a collective, is authorised to take legal action in defence of environmental rights. This possibility is given to individuals without prejudice to the obligation of public institutions to act on their own in the face of attacks on the environment.

If we look at a European perspective, the approach is different, in that there is a shift from the Andean vision of the cosmos to the economic pragmatism of the European Commission. In fact, the introduction of the concepts of *natural capital* and of *ecosystem services* allow to bypass the issue that the protection of the environment and economic development are contrasting and competing interests.

In particular, the "Natural Capital refers to the elements of nature that produce value or benefits to people (directly and indirectly), such as the stock of forests, rivers, land, minerals and oceans, as well as the natural processes and functions that underpin their operation".[9]

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[9]   *The State of Natural Capital: Towards a framework for measurement and valuation*. A report from UK Natural Capital Committee (April 2013), p. 10. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-capital-committees-first-state-of-natural-capital-report

Interaction processes between the assets of the Natural Capital in ecosystems generate the flows of Ecosystem Services, classified in 2005 by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment[10] into four functional groups:

- Provisioning services (products obtained from ecosystems such as food, water, fibre, fuel, and medicine).
- Regulating services, where the benefits are obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes related to climate, water, and disease control.
- Cultural, as the bulk of non-material benefits obtained by ecosystems from the spiritual, ethic, recreational, aesthetic, and recreational sphere.
- Supporting services, including all the services that are necessary to produce other ecosystem services such as soil formation, nutrient cycling, and primary biomass production.

The development of these two closely related concepts generated two main reflections. Initially, the focus of attention was concentrated on the importance to carry out biophysical and monetary evaluations to assess the environmental costs associated to the exploitation of biodiversity on one side, and the benefits for the wellbeing of a community (Wunder, 2005) on the other.

The second step was to explore how the Natural Capital is integrated in Territorial Planning by strengthening the promotion of actions for environmental requalification to reduce land consumption and fragmentation of ecosystems. When dealing with Territorial Planning and the assessment of programs and projects, special importance was paid to options in harmony with nature (Nature-Based Solutions and Green Infrastructures) vis-à-vis traditional infrastructural solution (Grey Infrastructures). The aim was to achieve greater territorial resilience, better quality of environment, landscape, and living conditions of communities, and to contrast the trend to densification that gets rid

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[10] MA - Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005). Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis. Island Press, Washington, DC. Available at: http://millenniumassessment.org/documents/document.356.aspx.pdf

of precious areas in the urban fabric that could instead play different ecologic and production roles.

In the light of the reasons above, landscape is an extraordinarily efficient tool for inner areas, marginal territories, and fragile contexts that are in a constant and unstable balance between the will to preserve, transmit, and enhance a heritage made of traditions, customs, experiences, and knowledge and the need for identifying new activities, initiatives, and economies that could ensure their survival.

Landscape should be considered as a natural, critical capital; for example, a criterion to define a limit to the exploitation of natural resources and also a complex and synthetic representation of cultural eco-system services. In this perspective, landscape is a common ground that fosters virtuous interactions among the various forms of capital available, for example: natural, cultural, human, and social capital (Costanza et. al, 2017).

Moreover, reasoning in terms of landscape is necessary to bypass the typically western coolness of the economic approach that bestows a traditionally passive role to those communities affected by public policies. On the contrary, the involvement of local communities in the care for their environment (for example, the protection of the rights of the environment based on the vision of the Andean people) is an embedded concept in the notion of landscape that highlights the responsibility of the actors in the implementation (effectiveness) of the sense of belonging and its necessary reinforcement.

Starting from these premises allows us to define a process of regeneration of these fragile areas/landscapes that, moving from some shared values (a virtually intact environmental/landscape matrix, fresh air, healthy products, contact with nature, as well as social and neighbourhood relationships), could leverage on the increase of eco-system services by devoting special attention to cultural-recreational services.

Such a specific type of ecosystem services affects values linked to the cultural, aesthetic, religious, and spiritual sphere, as well as education, research, and knowledge and the benefits deriving from recreational activities, sports, tourism, and social relationships. A

conscious action of regeneration of ecosystems that could foster the provision of these services, would determine a beneficial effect in terms of aesthetic quality of landscapes, reduction of social marginalization, and strengthening of identity values.

5. Collaborative Urbanism

Considering landscape as the main social, economic, and ecologic resource from which a new metabolism of fragile areas can be conceived, this introduces a new governance model, based on local communities.

In fact, policies that focus on the values of landscape and on wellbeing should be developed; landscape would become an indicator of the quality of life of communities and a shared heritage, acknowledged by them. Such policies should be implemented by means of new local democracy tools aiming at the collaboration between citizens and institutions. These tools should be able to identify values, interests, and stakeholders of transformation, thus triggering a collaborative governance approach. The term indicates a territorial government approach that could make stakeholders aware of their implementation and generate a citizens' sense of belonging that is necessary to start the transition from a mere consultative participation to a strongly managerial collaboration (Chirulli & Iaione, 2018).

Local actors must be the main characters of this development process in a virtuous model where success experiences trigger mechanisms of collective learning. The diffusion and sharing of these experiences can determine emulation phenomena that can reinforce the sense of belonging, willingness of commitment, and a sense of accountability towards the common good. Marginal areas, more than other areas, too often suffer from the imposition of products and services that, under the shed of innovation or the use of complex marketing techniques, invade the spaces of everyday life, not being able to generate the wellbeing that stems from the satisfaction of needs.

This is valid both for the small scale (objects) and for the large scale (services and infrastructures) and changes occur too often without considering the needs and expectations of local communities. Instead, an anthropocentric project of objects and space generates wellbeing and high quality of life.

The collaborative approach to the development of new products, services or processes, of urban spaces and economic activities, is probably the correct approach for putting into practice useful and sustainable innovations.

A new transformation for marginal areas should be proposed and it should be based on the landscape heritage of these areas; it is necessary to develop policies of re-integration of Fragile Landscapes in the global development dynamics that are based on a collaboration between local actors (private citizens, institutions, social innovators, enlightened entrepreneurs, and administrators) in the perspective of shared interest of the common good (Ostrom, 1990) and, thus, of the landscape conceived and adapted to local services and infrastructures (Iaione, 2008; Foster, 2013). To be able to plan such a model, new legal and legislative tools should be developed, to manage the relationships between the collective and the local administrators, as well as among citizens, within the framework of the common interest for a healthy, safe, and shared territory.

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