Re-thinking tradition through a critical rurality

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For the Basque people the tree of Guernica is the symbol of freedom. Under the oak kings swore allegiance to the laws and respect the freedoms of the people. Because of drought and the passage of time the tree has been replaced, in 2005 a new oak has replaced the age-old survived the bombings of '37 and devoured by a fungus. The original tree, then, has not existed for centuries. His stay is not about the tree itself but what it represents and means for the Basques, a bond between generations and the recognition of cultural difference of a people.

This short report on the social significance of the tree of Guernica and its ability to represent the referent identity of a people, opens to investigate the process of capitalization of the scenery along the relationship between permanence and transformation.

I will address this relationship through a theme familiar to me looking at those events that trigger cultural processes, and for that identity, able to promote the regeneration of cities and territories playing alternately on the permanence in change or change in the stay.

1. Events, a game between continuity and change

The event - whether wanted or unwanted, designed man-made or natural character - is used here as a "amplifier of the possible" (Vitellio 2011), as an occasion in which a company is obliged to rethink localized in itself, to its present, its past to its future. This refers in particular to those events discrepant, distorting and disturbances which burst in ordinary space and organized and, as places liminoid (Turner 1986), activate the body social practices of discovery and transformative possibilities of space.

The events are fractures and watershed in everyday experience, and present themselves as opportunities and devices capable of promoting processes of re-signification of cities and territories, triggering dynamics of imagination and/or urban regeneration. Furthermore, in many cases, as it happens especially in natural disasters, the event is a metaphor of crisis situations in which reveal and emerge social phenomena whose complexity is greater than that observed in normal conditions. How to fracture experience the event, in fact, presents itself as 'social laboratory' where you build bridges between the before and after, between what was and what you would like to be.
In this sense, I had the opportunity to study how an earthquake, like the one in Irpinia of 1980 (VITELLO 2010), has declined stay/transformation through different reconstruction projects and how these are closely related to the collective memory and social vulnerability of the territories. Social vulnerability to mean the ability of a given community localized to react to a catastrophic event that occurs as a discontinuity with the past, a moment of sudden and abrupt. The vulnerability also affects the way in which then the possibility of recurrence of such an event is embedded in the culture and social organization, in institutional procedures as in social practices forms and ways by which one 'builds' the collective memory. Said in other words the greater the social vulnerability in an area, the higher the possibility that a natural disaster will turn into disaster. The disaster is the possible destructive effect of an event, the amount of which can be deduced only later, like as the social magnitude of a natural disaster.

The reconstruction after the disaster affects on the social vulnerability of territory by the practices of memory that are conveyed by the choices made. Play a role here the different interpretations of the relationship between permanence and transformation, where the predominance of the stay on the transformation and vice versa, is presented as a practical memory of the catastrophic event that strongly affects on the perception of the possibility that the event will recheck.

The report permanence/transformation in the reconstruction declines to tradition/modernity which is basically the choice between the realization of the city 'where they were as they were' or new town. Choices that are usually made on the basis of a stable interpretation of tradition, which looks to stay as replication and repetition. The term tradition means, in general, what is transmitted 'in the' past 'in the' present, referring to that body of knowledge and practices that can be transmitted from one generation to another. For unlike modernity becomes what 'of' the future is anticipated 'in the' present, following a process that is called development, which refers to the transformation and change.

Chasing this interpretation of the pair tradition/modernity, many countries destroyed by natural disasters have rebuilt their landscapes following the practice of the reconstruction project the city 'where he was'. Stone by stone, entire villages have been rebuilt 'as if' nothing had happened, as if the catastrophic event there had never been. Relegated to a bad adventure, the event is remembered in some monument, written, finding the picture.

The countries instead, always in line with that interpretation, have opted for a new construction of their landscapes destroyed, looked catastrophic event like an epiphany: the beginning of a new course for a modern development of their territories. Some findings of how he is preserved and mummified in some church, some fountain, sometimes in a museum, while the event is remembered as a start toward a new life.

They are two different modes of transmission of the past in the present, but both somehow cancel the catastrophic event: relegating him to a place of collective memory that becomes a bad adventure in the first case and the second initiation. From the interpretation of the relationship between tradition and modernity, these two alternatives appear to be the principal means of intervention in the reconstruction of the areas destroyed, in which all the mixes are possible. Speaking of the landscape and the slow process of building it, we can find several instances in which the preservation of artifacts such as are made in line with the interpretation of tradition. But if we look at many of the countries rebuilt (as they were where they were or how new...
town), which today appear territory of oblivion, abandoned by experience (as are many landscapes) perhaps we need to think of another interpretation of tradition. In a different perspective we can look to tradition as that which actualizes the past from the present, not the past transposes ‘in the’ present, and modernity as that which acts by discounting the future from the present. In this meaning is not the past that is produced and is repeated (as is) in the present, but it is the mind that configures the past, which is transmitted socially becoming collective memory.

The tradition, therefore, is not inherited genetically, but is transmitted socially through a cultural process continuously. The same heritage, wanting to transpose this idea of landscape heritage, as Derrida points out, is not what we are getting before you can choose from, but that ‘chooses’ to give new momentum and keep it alive (Derrida, 1997).

Heritage is not so much what ‘it is’ or ‘as it is’, but what it represents and signifies in the social experience. Thus refers to the referent landscape of collective memory that, as the tree of Guernica, shifts the focus from the objects to the protagonists and those emotional dimensions, symbolic, and social identity through which meaning is attributed to the practices that a society produces and reproduces. In this sense, the permanence in the landscape is not the replica or reproduction, but renewal and updating, is the result of a practice of capitalization and shared interpretation of the landscape. It comes as the result of a social practice that is continuously developing and continuously past from the present, recreates and transforms a ‘selection’ in time of what a function of use, material or intangible, in the present. It is the legacy of social time in the collective memory, which continually selection of memory materials for the construction of a narrative interwoven plots of connective. Lenclud, in this perspective, offers the tradition as that which integrates past and present ‘in the’ future through an unfinished process of creation-recreation, production-reproduction, continuity-discontinuity (Lenclud 2001).

The tradition, as the permanence in the landscape, as well as being a mother is the daughter of the present, continually renewed, invented, reproduced in social practices, opening to a glimpse of the landscape as an unfinished process, based on experiences and play actively constructed between continuity and change.

2. Rituals, social practices of activation the traditions

Returning to the events, rituals are as powerful engines of transmission of tradition, even when they consolidate continually invent (Hobsbawm 2002), they evoke and build the past through a dynamic permanence, changeable and adaptable. The Festival, such as modern transpositions of the rites of collective consumption of food in the festivities, constitute one of the most common ways by which society evokes a contemporary civilization. In them the tradition is presented as a authentic cultural component and representative of a rural world, from which all somehow come from. The ceremony of Festival responds to strategies of identity, where you have continuous process of adaptation and mingle the true and the false. In the Festival with a double movement prospecting forward and reflected deep, past and present, old and new, tradition and innovation influence each other, penetrating in a mutual permanence and change in a process significantly profitable.
Through this kind of events we can be observed as the change in the stay you play the process of promotion and development of the territory. In fact, the event does not work on the proposition as it is of goods available, but on building a ‘story’ that since this makes a selection from the past are able to attract a flow of tourism. The flow through the festivals now seems not to be that of mass tourism - which bases its competitiveness on the endless repetition of the same product and the same type of offer - but vocational character.

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Who participates in the event research new forms of self-representation, occasions in which to express their specific interests (culinary vocations), to give body to the passions, declare memberships (sometimes ‘origins’, sometimes exhibit “policy choices”) and build universes of relational to food (Pollarini 2010).

The success of the event derives not only from the offer of typical local food, but from the story of a past that bind the object (the chili, chestnut, mushroom etc.) with the individual user, following interpretation of the past that customizes the object by invoking the sense of belonging, identification and search for identity. What appears to mobilize the participation is not so much looking for a particular product (usually readily available on the market near home), but the taste of that product in that territory and on that occasion (in the event).

What becomes catalyst of the Festival is the experience of consuming that product in the cultural context, in a moment of sharing that becomes self-representation of himself and moment of belonging to a particular community, community which through the event (the festival) becomes visible.

These events thus become the engine through which are constructed and attributed identity. Thus, a wide ‘community’ of foodtrotter located in the village event the opportunity to experience a new rural community founded by sharing food on the authenticity of the experience and continuous research of belonging to a community of reference can of defined (even if temporarily) his identity.

In the event is sharing some food to sanction and renew social relations: becomes a bond constraints for a community (that of foodtrotter) and powerful propel-lant that promotes outward craft activities and local production. The event becomes the occasion through which participants share ethical values and political aspirations: “a desire to be there and communicate their inalienable cultural specificity, which now, in times of globalization, you play a lot on the culinary practices” (GuiGoni 2006, 135).

3. New emerging rurality

Practices described are also linked from the new rural and urban farmers who, between permanence and transformation, give meaning to the concept of tradition, in a world where the two souls of the rural and the urban mingle and sometimes get confused.
In recent years, despite not having arrested the exodus from certain areas to urban centers for study or work, we are witnessing a movement against those with a migration to rural areas where the cost of living are lower and affordable places are more human dimension, where they renew their relationship with the environment and nature and there is a greater quality of life and ability to reinvent a job.

According to the survey carried out by AgrieTour for the National Exhibition of the Farm in 2013, one third of Italians would return to rural life. The research, which is based on the ‘perception’ of the rural world, reveals that six out of ten Italians have rural origins (even if only 22% of respondents live in the countryside, 57% rest in the city and 21% in countries, however as much as 60% has origins linked to rural villages) and between the desires of the Italian there would be to go back to live in the country (to 32.7%) or at least have a rural area where you can produce food (for 31.7%).

A slow process of returning to the campaign - supported by good transport links with urban center - there is now accelerated by the complicity of new technologies and new ways of using communication through the use of the web, which allow you to change processes mobility related to living in the city transposing the workplace and socializing in the virtual.

This migration is typically composed of an urban population that after living for a long time in the city now looking for a different environment in which to build a ‘new phase’ of his life and that new agricultural and rural activities appear sees a second chance to give meaning to their existence. It is in fact generally young families (whose members are not necessarily young) and retirees who, for ethical and economic reasons the first and the second time, takes advantage of the opportunity of an event (the children for the first, the board for the latter) to give new direction to their lives. So simple living and downshifters generate a slow movement towards the countryside. But the new rural citizens are not only citizen on the run, indeed. Often are people linked to the rural reality for family experiences, that return to their original or calling in other rural places after periods of study and work in the city and work. In the countries the people reopen family businesses or engage in new activities linked to the rural world. Thus a population of ex-urban became neo-rural.

These people are calling for a new rurality that also responds to those needs ‘policies’ that are loaded with connotations ethical and social goods that are produced and consumed. The cultivation here becomes instrument of revival of often highly rural skills through the recovery of traditional cultures (as in urban gardens) propagate so ancient farming techniques, often reinterpreted in key biological, and we reintroduce local crops.

The experiences - ranging from new business initiatives, to farms (but also the allotment gardens for the elderly) - are characterized by the recovery of areas historically grown and the reintroduction of ancient traditional woods. In these cases, often, are reconstructed rural environments and develop initiatives for the promotion and marketing of local products. The people in this way recover those values traditionally recognized to the rural world according to a process that is not entirely without conflict. As it happens, the recovery of these values are accomplished by the ‘new rural’ without the commitment of traditional farmers. The traditional farmers, according to some, still feel a certain attraction towards the ‘urban myth’ and so change the behavior conforming to the dominant development model. While neo-rurals are attracted to the traditional values and stretch towards ‘myth farmer’ enchanted by the old techniques bearers of ancient knowledge, they tend to propose them with practices that farmers themselves have long since abandoned.
The myth of agriculture of the past becomes the glue of the newcomers, who are dedicated to activities related to the recovery of traditional crops, farm hospitality, the direct sale of farm products and educational activities, therapeutic and rehabilitative. Thus emerges a conflict, the neo-rurals are presented to the natives with a didactic approach and education aimed at ‘saving’ and reinterpret the rural culture and traditions of the rural world (Barberis 2009).

It also reverses the relationship between town and country as those between consumption and production. The same experience of short supply chains, allows - even at the cognitive level - to mend the relationship between production and market (separate from the consolidation of the city’s economy as opposed to the rural one) contributing to the debate on local development (MagnaGhi 2000) on new forms of ‘other economy’, agro-ecology and dissemination of practices that support alternative models of production and consumption imposed by the market. Often this reformulation of the relationship takes place in the production of quality and ambiguous in that universe of ‘traditional products’ which are areas of specialization of neo-bourgeois (Merlo 2006). Here new social figures, cultured organic farmers, realize companies with a social, cultural, educational, etc.

This interpretation appears to bring the countryside to passive receptor of exogenous values kindly distributed by urban society that inhabits it and ignore it, behind and inside rural production, there are not only these new players but also a diverse set of neo-rural people, that promotes a metamorphosis from the inside of the practices.

Many activities, in fact, see a limitation or reduction of the scale of production, the adoption of techniques less expensive, the reduction of the input from the outside, the intake of low cost techniques, the co-production of active products in the supply chain, the ability of determination market conditions (Ploeg 2009). The traditional activities related to the rural world are thus discounted from the present. In this sense, the interpretation of a bourgeois neo ruralesimo appears to underestimate the fact that the new rural producers are inserted so far from passive, developing innovative and creative forms of relationship with a consumer demand that creates new opportunities for those just producers rooted in traditional contexts of production.

Even in Italy are experienced rural hub able to consult with a new language to the rural world. Emerge as centers where promoting social innovation applied to the countryside through sharing platforms between people, ideas and innovative projects, rural incubators where start-ups and connect innovators, change makers rural and venture capitalists.

As has been noted (Corti 2007) rather than a hedonistic and aesthetic neo-ruralism - linked to the country as an aesthetic experience (the landscape, the food) and residential resource (rural idyll rural space as a garden) - seems to emerge a ruralism countryman with the redefinition of the centrality of agricultural production which reassembles, with innovative forms, networks of alliances geographical, vocational and cognitive, sharing, so, not only local resources, but knowledge systems embedded in local cultures.

4. If citizens go to the countryside, countryside enters the city

While people go to the countryside, many new urban farmers cultivate the interstitial spaces in the metropolitan belt, between big cities and small towns, and the residual areas or abandoned urban centers.
The practice of urban agriculture are urban phenomena, which reinterpreted in a contemporary key the green infrastructure of the city, first relegated to the flower beds, gardens and public parks, pursuing different strategies for sustainability.

The experiences that tell of projects dedicated to urban agriculture are the gardens managed by the inhabitants of the neighborhood or social promotion associations, the educational in gardens cultivated in schools by groups of parents and pupils, the ‘social’ gardens entrusted to elderly, the gardens therapy or rehabilitation of hospitals, nursing homes and prisons, the flower beds and abandoned spaces transformed by groups of occasional gardeners (guerrilla), small vegetable gardens for self-production and horticultural areas integrated into urban parks, national or regional parks, the result of the ‘bureaucratization of nature’ widespread in Italy.

Despite the variety of initiatives, describing a diversity of approaches and methods of management (Falletti 2012; Cognetti, Conti 2011; Pasquali 2011; Uffaro 2011), and regardless of whether such practices are promoted by the government or by groups autopromosse organized (especially web 2.0 as the Guerrilla gardens), these initiatives appear to pursue different strategies through actions that intercept the social, environmental, cultural and economic life dimensions of an area.

In particular, if in the case of festival is sharing food to make the glue in the communities of foodtrotter here is the cultivation, bringing out new social figures such as the new farmers, is presented as a tool activated for different actions variously intertwined.

In fact, in addition to show up as a way of revival of ancient knowledge and recovery of traditional cultures, previously mentioned, cultivation permits:

- **strengthen of social networks.** The cultivation becomes an instrument of social integration and aggregation occurring as an opportunity to weave new bonds between the inhabitants of a neighborhood by offering them a place open to everyone, place of contact and social interaction. Experiences, such as urban gardens or the gardens of the neighborhood, here are characterized by the construction of an open, symbolic and recognition, a place in which to weave social ties through a practice of care that produces a sense of belonging and responsibility of those who participate.

- **discover and reclaim abandoned spaces.** The cultivation, often improvised, is a tool for re-imagine - even temporarily - neglected parts of the city, introducing himself as an initiative of a vindictive and demonstrative. Experiences, such as those of the Guerrilla or organized groups of neighborhood, are characterized by a disagreement with the abandonment of public spaces with actions that seek to prevent deterioration and to contribute to the fight against urban desertification. These initiatives are promoted through demonstration projects in which the care of a space becomes the imaginary coupling in a direction of change, a possible way for the transformation of that place by those who participate and attend.

- **promote learning processes.** The cultivation is used as a teaching tool, educational or activate different paths than just agriculture. Experiences, such as agri-nurseries and farms and orchards teaching, are characterized by being dedicated to the involvement and interaction of children in cultural practices. While others, in places where there is social unrest or psychic, are aimed at the integration of excluded people. The initiatives are presented as a field of experimentation through which learns (environmental education) or break the isolation, encouraging moments of socialization and meeting. Alongside these, therapeutic and rehabilitative initiatives, where the activity of horticultural therapy - stimulating learning processes
- becomes a practical tool and enabler for inclusion (also working) and interacting with local disadvantaged populations, such as persons with disabilities, young people with learning difficulties, ex-drug addicts, ex-prisoners, immigrants, etc.

- *revitalization business*. The cultivation becomes an instrument to stimulate new economies in areas with high environmental and social degradation. The experiences, often in remote areas, are characterized by promoting the agricultural use of degraded areas by creating space for incubation for new entrepreneurs of the green. To encourage and create micro-enterprises here becomes functional to the development of new and renewed professional skills and the development of environmental quality for the resident community.

This set of ‘critical’ practices brings new contemporary figures - such as urban and neo-rural farmers, new farmers (Ploeg 2009) - and redraws the relationship between tradition/modernity, city/countryside, urban/rural, to reorganize, as has been mentioned, those between production and consumption. The results are also new territories strongly experiential and poorly endowed of a project, still poorly understood by urban culture and rarely focused not agricultural. Territories interpreted by practices which, focusing on economic and social models more creative, appear to participate actively in a complex reorganization of the experience of living (Minni 2006). It is those “urban countryside” (Donadeu 2006) in which the country is placed as a noun and as an attribute of the city, which turns the traditional meaning of a peri-urban agricultural area with the intention of programmatic change the cultural perception of the campaign from passive to active resource entities, where we can see a ‘critical rurality’ I have tried to describe.

A ‘critical rurality’ that, in the multitude of languages, small narratives (Lyotard 2001) and shuffles it produces, makes the traditions places of transformation continues, presenting itself as an active and integral part of the contemporary and “modernity proposing a different, heterogeneous, multiple and multilateral” (Chambers 2011) on which try to work.

**References**


Abstract

We know that agriculture in towns, or in areas close to them, is not new. Since nineteenth century onward, practices of urban agriculture have always been observed with different roles and goals. Today, such a return to earth takes on the shape of a real ‘urban phenomenon’, both because urban agriculture seems to consolidate, and because it appears to be characterized by purely urban cultures. In fact, a double urbanity is emerging, one related to places, in town, where agriculture is practiced (orchards, community or neighborhood gardens, etc.), the other related to the populations, typically urban, who move elsewhere, in areas close to the city or in the countryside, adopting innovative processes learned in the city.

Starting from the different interpretations of this return to the earth, this article aims to explore the ways in which agricultural practices occur; it is indisputable that the cultivation of urban and suburban areas is becoming an instrument for the reorganization of a new system in which “green infrastructure” counts as a field of critical reformulation where new emerging forms of rurality are coming out, reshaping the relationship between tradition and modernity, city and countryside, urban and rural, up to reorganize those between production and consumption.

Keywords
Tradition/innovation, urban agriculture, new urban cultures, neo-rurals, coming back to earth.

Profilo
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