Inter-generational exchanges
The meaning of an integrated sustainable process for inland areas’ development based on vernacular knowledge

Fabio Naselli, Department of Architecture
Epoka University, Tirana — Albania
Cinzia Bellone, Department of Sustainability Engineering,
Guglielmo Marconi University, Rome — Italy

ABSTRACT. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Mediterranean Countries have had to face the “global-grow phenomenon”, driven by financial and technological sectors. Such phenomenon triggered progress in productive, economic and technological fields, especially in the majority of the internal geographical areas. However, this improvement was not followed by a cultural and social growth in favour of people. Moreover, the high speed of changes did not allow the environmental adaptation required in many small communities. To switch from the theoretical framework to a concrete action, the MOTRIS development Program for the Mediterranean Regions has been drafted in 1999, funded by the Presidency of Sicily Government and held by the Italian-Egyptian Research Centre CRUEC together with several Euro-Mediterranean Partners.

KEYWORDS: Approach for integrated development, inland areas development, intergenerational relationships

Introduction

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Mediterranean Countries have had to cope with the global-grow phenomenon driven by financial and technological sectors. Undoubtedly, such phenomenon produced progress in many fields like productive, economic and technological. This happened especially in the majority of the internal geographical areas. Unfortunately, such improvement did not bring a cultural and social growth to people (Chomsky, 1998). At the same time, changes did
not allow environmental adaptation in many local communities, particularly in those communities more marginal and unable to receive spontaneously such kind of transformations. This global trend, unwillingly and with indifference, generated over the years some strong disequilibria among traditional economies and local knowledge and, likewise, imported a flow of external (international) references in development models forced into the smallest local communities (Yunus, 2008), mainly attracting the new generations. Reference models that are extraneous to the peculiar identities of these areas and communities.

A first result of this planetary framework we are facing today is a progressive “waste of memory” about any own cultural identity in most of the communities and single individuals. We are facing, furthermore, an impoverishment of more and more neglected minor cultural and environmental resources and a sort of “collective impotence feeling” in front of an invasive “global market” managed by its own rules and not tied up by any “physical place” (Bauman, 1998).

Without calculating, in addition, the enormous damage that such circumstance brings to the new generations (and the next ones) that, a tomorrow, won’t find a direct connection with their own cultural identity or, at least, will have an “international culture” related with other “international style of life” that actually does not belong to them. A real break of every intergenerational relationship at the local level.

The loss of the proper sociocultural heritage means, in the meantime, the waste of the bases of all the local vernacular activities (either material or not-material) from which and with which real life of the local people was been built until nowadays (Dematteis, 1985).

Undoubtedly, if the local handicraft and agricultural traditions disappear on the one hand, also skills, abilities of local workers, knowhow and those plural bonds with the past, that will not be possible to recover through the passing of the time, will be lost either. On the other hand, the native affiliation to the places and the minor heritage of the origins – minor that does not mean less important – will be lost as well.

At least, if the governance, the management and the common awareness on local resources fade away or weaken, there will not be any more traditional job activities for the inhabitants of inland areas.

Thus, this will result in new emigrations toward new places (especially coastal areas and large cities) and the opening of a regressive trend in which every involved local micro-system suffers only losses.

For all these reasons, it could be useful to individuate those specific actions that can create a valid local-based alternative, definitely different to the route of the rejection of the cultural identity and heritage. It could be a particular alternative model of development which accepts the global situation, its politics and strategies, but which is also able to create other kind of opportunities strongly rooted in the lands and in the local cultures, practicing the own natural, historical, material and, above all, not-material local legacy. The so-called “total capital” (Urbani, 2003).

Figure 1. Exploiting the values of centrality: when a territory thickens its internal relationships, in addition to favouring its repopulation, it also sees its ability to attract external relations increase, also modifying the direction of the latters (Urbani, 2003)
The resulting strengths, opportunities, suggestions and priorities, could become a strong incentive in improving collective awareness, raising and educating the local actors to help them not to forget their own total heritage but to learn, instead, to manage it in an integrated holistic approach to the inland areas sustainable development.

Education and training, although not exhaustive, jointed with a largest local awareness, could tend to strengthen and consolidate the trust in its own resources and opportunities and, not at least, in its own abilities inside the local community. They could aim at stimulating the growth of a different model focused on the social responsibility in the new (and next) generations (Foucault, 1966); a model also improved through the comparison between the Mediterranean’s cultural heritages, making aware the involved local actors about the richness and the value of diversity.

**Social actors and community connectedness**

Sociability plays an important role in protecting people from the experience of psychological distress and in enhancing well-being. Like loneliness, it is subjective in nature (Nevay, 2017; Singh, Misra, 2009). The literature terminology about sociability creates confusion in using various terms such as “social isolation”, “social integration”, “social capital”, and “social connectedness”. De Jong Gierveld and Van Tilburg (2006) use the term social isolation when referring to the lack of social ties of older people. The term social integration, instead, is used to refer to the opposite of social isolation. Finally, social connectedness is used when referring to the amount and quality of social relationships of older people (Toepoel, 2012). Despite their use, there exists a large debate on their meaning since they are difficult concepts to operationalise, and there does not seem to be any consensus on how to measure them (Toepoel, 2012).

This paper uses social connectedness to refer to the amount and to the quality of social relationships among older and younger people. For instance, institutional organization for theatres, outdoor concerts or free movie nights, neighbourhood gatherings, walking groups; having a drink in a bar, visiting a festival, gardening and reading are occasions where the company of others is enjoyed and relationships with friends, relatives, and acquaintances are strengthened. Consequently, loneliness is alienated and social connectedness increases (Emlet, Moceri, 2012).
Connectedness could be increased with another common activity: Internet (Toepoel, 2012). Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the technical aspects of being connected (i.e. by using specific devices) and actually feeling connected to others. Even so, older adults have shown interest in online connection. Digital interaction in the physical world with tangible, familiar materials and alternative interfaces may increase social connectedness. So far, older adults note barriers to engaging with new technologies including unfamiliarity, dissonance and difficulty navigating and reading screen-based communications (Nevay, 2017).

Interdisciplinary approach shows that both social connectedness and the perception of available support, (support from other local people or co-residents) minimise the deleterious effects of intergenerational gap. These effects are prominent conditions amongst people, with a significant impact on the well-being and the general quality of life. Other qualitative studies concerning intervention on social connectedness have addressed four main types of interventions:

1. enhancing social skills;
2. providing social support;
3. increasing opportunities for social interaction;
4. addressing maladaptive social cognition.

Studies illustrate that 80% of those under 18 years old and 40% of those over 65 years old are reported to be lonely (Hawkley, Cacioppo, 2010).

Therefore, loneliness is not only a subjective feeling but a societal responsibility as well. Various practices are dealing with desertion, prompting policy makers to seek strategies to promote social connectedness as a solution.

A pilot approach: Motris Program

To switch from the theoretical background to a practical action, the MOTRIS development Program for the Mediterranean Regions was drafted in 1999 (Gulotta et al, 2004), funded by the Presidency of Sicily’s Government and carried on by the Italian-Egyptian Research Centre CRUEC together with a number of Euro-Mediterranean Partners. The Program was structured in three stages: research (mapping-out), education (training) and application (design and implementation). The Program ended in 2009 with a great International Conference in Cairo at Helwan University (Trapani, Ruggieri, 2009; Naselli, 2012).

The purpose of first stage was to start from the exact and accurate knowledge of the real local situation in the places and identify the existing and potential resources for a self-sustainable and place-based tourism offer. In order to do this, the work-team has produced maps and data of all the existing activities, of the potential features and of the real resources that could constitute a concrete basis for a direct offer to the market, without manipulate the value of local identities. Some areas have been defined – described by us as District for the Integrated Tourism – in both Sicily and Egypt as pilot case studies. The existing or potential local operators (individuals, formal or informal groups or networks) have also been identified which will be brought into play later as drivers and examples to stimulate all the other actors who could be interested in the development Program. All of this has been very useful as a concrete start point in the implementation of other two further stages of MOTRIS Program.
In fact, in order to integrate all these “local fertilities” into the global market through a suitable offer, it is necessary to act on the organization of the place itself and on its local activities and operators. The individual has few opportunities if he acts in isolation (Zamagni, and Zamagni, 2008), even with the information technologies available today.

Figure 3. Egyptian/Sicilian pilot approaches: Motris Program (Gulotta et al, 2004)

The goal of the second stage (education) was to act on a key aspect, which was the delivery of an appropriate training to all the levels of local managers and actors that will operate in each local system. A training system was planned and held that from the grassroots-level goes through the medium-level and finalises with the highest-level, depending on the roles played by each actor in their own Districts.

Among the identified active roles, the one that interested us most, which has been pushed from the very beginning, is the place operator or Local Manager. This figure should be able to understand the territorial phenomena, to identify the whole local resources and to elaborate projects, designs, as well as market strategies. A real manager with an inter-disciplinary knowledge and excellent training but, at the same time, strongly tied to the local communities.

For this stage, we started with a university international Master, which took place jointly in both Sicily and Egypt for two consecutive editions (2005-2007 and 2007-2009). The Master, that was completed by 15 new Italian and Egyptian local managers, has established also an exchange of experiences between lecturers and students and, through the held activities, it allowed us to analyse internal areas both in Sicily and in Egypt and prepare project proposals and further researches. The master was followed by other two levels with some training and formative activities held in the under-experiment places in both Countries.

The last stage, the application, allowed the local systems to become “active actors” in their own development through the co-building of a new “local offer” able to generate and to guide the “demand” from the “offer” through a new kind of tourism development. In a fully open participative process, the design of local projects followed a logic of a network development in a real bottom-up approach. The increase and the circulation of information and through its exchange between the partners with the promotion in the use of ICT technologies and of GIS systems for mapping and cataloguing of material and not-material resources took place. Moreover, methodology of verifiable integrated approach, elsewhere in the basin areas, through the common development of procedures
and themes and the purpose to individuate innovative and integrated ways for the heritage management for a long-term development happened. This part was particularly delicate because it needed a deep public-private agreement, involving several no-profit actors (universities, research institutes, NGOs, associations, informal groups, etc.), in order to find propitious environments in terms of actors, facilities, ideas, desires, laws, and additional economic resources. Resources that cannot come from external international parties whom have the scope of expropriating local resources and sometimes destroying territories to reach its own economic goals, pushed, as they are, from the global market rules. 

Definitely, the need was to have a collective participation of all the actors involved in order to achieve a small revolution from the grassroots level against the logic of the tourism’s multinationals that have already destroyed many places, cultures and lands.

The regions chosen as pilot areas were those – among many – rural inland areas in both Egypt and Sicily, where agriculture, artisanship and cultural heritage are looking for an equilibrium between innovative environment and traditional culture.

Priorities in selecting the pilot case studies

In the selection of the case studies, in its huge complexity, we have chosen the ones that suit the following four priorities well:

1. showing the role and the importance of the cultural heritage in the Mediterranean regions as paradigmatic example;
2. stimulating the exchanges between local knowledge and the experiences of the involved territorial areas, because of its internal dynamism;
3. promoting the local awareness and the transmission of the vernacular knowledge inside the communities, through the forehand involvement of the different generations and through the constitution of local networks able to produce endogenous, shared and sustainable choices;
4. being open to the formative offer for education of local strategic figures and taking care of disseminating knowledge and basic training founded on the accessibility of the information.

Commented weaknesses to give replies

In the following, in order to set some MOTRIS model principles, the main weaknesses, related to an integrated model of development that wishes to be based on the intergenerational relationships and focused on Mediterranean rural areas, have been listed and commented (Naselli, Ruggieri, 2007).

Education/information of the local target groups (women, children, handicraft and agricultural skilled workers, local administrators, etc.)

There is a lack of informative and educative activities that might spread the themes for a long-term sustainable development based on the real resources; activities that might show, through applied experiences, the possible alternatives and their positive effects on the cultural, social and micro-economic aspect. In most of the Mediterranean Regions, there is not any opportunity from where the community might understand its own cultural heritage as a primary resource for its own future. There are not enough actions aimed to individuate local strategic roles and smart operators rooted in the territory; roles and actors that could be useful in protecting and enhancing the numerous
possibilities of raising a local development, integrated on more of the possible levels and fields of local activities (tourism, production, culture, innovation of processes, and so on).

**Public awareness about own cultural heritage by local actors (especially young people)**

Limited or superficial local awareness causes both a progressive lack of interest about the place of origin and the push in migration toward other places and other models of life, forced also by economic reasons.

Especially among youths, the lack of both future perspectives and financial resources in the realization of their own objectives in life – together with the unsuitable appropriation of imported and standardised models – create more and more often a dangerous division among the generations and between new generations and native environment. Thus, this leads to a consequent progressive loss of the awareness in the affiliation to a cultural identity of reference.

**Clear and shared policies for a real local development strategy**

The lack of serious strategies, that see involved protection and exploitation of both tangible and not-tangible local resources as component of a chain system, means an insufficient promotion of synergies among cultural heritage, traditional handicraft activities, agricultural and food sectors, activities that in the internal areas of our regions still maintain a primary and holistic role.

**Dialogue between public, private and associative sectors**

Without the necessary relations between public and private, a high percentage of the local community is excluded from any choices. The public sector very often manages out the policies, the strategies and even the local heritages, far away from the local community, thus producing an involution of processes such as the widespread democracy and the opening of awareness.

Without sharing choices with local actors, especially those weak social slots not (at all) represented in their needs and interests, the risk is to create a void that increases the escape of new generations and of the weaker individuals.

Too often the synergies among such sectors are not existent, weak and discriminating or it foresees farraginous and complex mechanisms, frequently not easily accessible to most people.

**Exchanges of local knowhow and dissemination of new methodologies for alternative develop models**

Among the main areas of the Mediterranean basin, an absolute lack is evident with respect to exchanges of knowledge about alternative models for a sustainable and local-centred development of any one of the well-defined local systems.

The construction of a suitable and integrated approach and the exchange of experiences and case studies, which could represent the methodology of experimentation and construction of next local models, are hindered by some issues. These issues encompass difficulty in the direct exchange, inadequate infrastructures and facilities, use of intermediary languages, deficit in dissemination of good practices, geographical dimension of the basin, cultural and religious differences/diffidence, etc.

On this basis, every local actor must individually handle his own useful information and any adopted plan or strategy become fenced and limited, with the limits that this implies.
Marginality of the rural and inland areas and territorial disequilibria among internal and external areas

According to its current condition, the desertification of the rural and inland areas is intensifying, thus causing the migration toward coastal and urban areas or, worse, toward those foreign countries boasting greater opportunities. In fact, in too much occasions the local actor does not see any future opportunities of self-growth in their birthplace. The data speak clearly: around 70% of graduates from the Mediterranean regions emigrate to find a job; more than a million of people move to the largest cities every year; the tertiary sector (typically urban activity) has overcome, with its 70% around of employees, the other two productive sectors, relegating the traditional productive micro-activities to around 10% (Zamagni, 1990).

On the way the residual productive local realities (handicraft and agricultural activities) succeed hardly in act for innovation and improvement, losing in the (false) competition with activities considered stronger (industries and services).

The absence of a diffused sentiment of re-evaluation of local heritages and the absence of local human resources specialised in the construction of valid alternatives, together with the carelessness of the upon-local administrative levels, produce a real impossibility to put in place actions of top impact, which could allow the change of the state of things. Therefore, involving the resources and the traditional activities does not mean only to give a possibility to the resilient operators, but also to give them potential skills for tomorrow, helping in maintaining a strong and reasonable garrison of the territory.

The apathy toward the complex system of relationships among the various involved actors

Particularly in those sectors where there is often a deep separation between external actors, local actors, market and environment, this habit has generated direct consequences and effects on the quality of local life and on the maintenance and correct evaluation of the territorial assets.

In most cases, we assist to an external build of local offers not respectful of the local relationships and managed by external subjects, with few or void positive repercussions on the local system and in absolute contrast with the set principles of self-determination of the people.

Languages and terminology in the participative actions

In most cases, the language used in the development process is not always intelligible to locals. It is often complicated and inaccurate, or, in more than few cases, it communicates concepts carrying negative connotations (e.g. developing countries, western countries, tourism and tourists, import of democracy, exogenous models of development, interiority and exteriority, etc.).

The process followed in standardising a common language used for communicating the information and improving the exchanges among experts; it has been for long time far away from the local languages still present in the basin.

The absence of a common language caused the lack of interaction between languages and dialects as well as the difficulty of translating complex terms and concepts into local languages and dialects. Consequently, there is no such thing as language accessibility, also considering the low sociocultural level of the target group.
Public awareness, dissemination and training to improve the intergenerational connections

Putting in relation formative/informative aspects, aspects of sensitisation and references of practical application to the vernacular heritage produces an exchange of knowledge in the place that, even alone, can stimulate all the generations into games. A “flywheel effect” that may bring forward useful actions and allow to do innovative choices, thus triggering a multiplier trial of continuous improvement able, not only to produce wealth, but in a model of spread and diffused wealth in the natural micro-economic field of the local target of reference.

Through dissemination of experiences, place’s knowledge, good similar practises and models of application, it seems to be possible in the real life to act for the improvement of the cultural and social level of the local communities, for the consciousness and the management of the real resources (Magnaghi, 2000).

The actions should foster community awareness about heritage, making people realise its cultural importance along with its economic value that can counteract the global standard models. The achievable results are evaluation and safeguard of cultural identities and construction of synergies between the generations of the past and the necessities of the present ones.

Concretely, marginal territories do not go lost. To protect our diversities, considering them as different past values for our common future (as set in the Barcelona Convention on 1995) they have to remain such as garrison and guarantee of a desirable territorial equilibrium between urban and rural areas. In this perspective, also the weak social bands, such as the youths and the aged, have a strategic role because, in an aspired model of integrated approach, also social connectedness has its important role.

A model of integrated approach must avoid also the problem of external managing, because the offer has to be built by the local actors and managed by themselves, to gain the most from benefits. This may be the way to keep on preserving the territorial value of the resources assuring social wealth but also openness to constructive exchanges between external and internal actors and between different communities of the Mediterranean basin. The purpose, through self-marketing and communication activities, is that of offering a unique and “different” experience as well as building cultural bridges between people worldwide in a peer-to-peer system of new relations.

Conclusions

If we want to achieve concrete results for a development that respects our lands (by lands we mean everything that is natural and human-made in them) and create integrated models for local sustainable approach and for improvement of the living conditions of local communities we should act on the actual strategies and policies of development at all its levels. All this should be done to avoid, as it happened many times, the expropriation of identities and cultural and economic resources by external actors. The resources we are referring to have made our Mediterranean regions very rich. These resources could be summarised in the cultural, historical, artistic and archaeological heritage; the relational abilities of our cultures; the quantity of local products of traditional handicraft; (and) the richness of the local agro-food productions, often spontaneously organic (as they do not contain chemicals).

This is the only path to follow if we want that the wealth generated by the local market in an integrated
vision, which could be considerable, stays in the places and provides concrete economic resources for the preservation, valorisation and promotion of local resources. We need to substitute, or at least give an alternative support, the policies of international operators and of great hotel chains with a system of local networks that include all local actors, jointed by strong inter-generational relationships to hand down the local legacy.

So if we want to trace new development routes and to characterise new models on this way, our attention has to be directed mainly to the inland rural areas that still have not been discovered (destroyed) by the massive logics and for this reason these areas have maintained untouched their, entirely or partially, cultural heritage.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dematteis Giuseppe (1985), Le metafore della terra. La geografia umana tra mito e scienza, Milano, Feltrinelli Editore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulotta Daniele, Naselli Fabio, Trapani Ferdinando (2004, eds), MOTRIS. Microcentralità relazionali nel Mediterraneo, Palermo, Gulotta Editore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnaghi Alberto (2000), Il progetto locale, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naselli Fabio, Ruggieri Giovanni (2007), Turismo relazionale, in Naselli Fabio, Purpura Antonio, Ruggieri Giovanni (eds), La componente relazionale nell’analisi sistemica del turismo, Palermo, GB Palumbo &amp; C. Editore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naselli Fabio (2012), Animare un’alternativa mediterranea allo sviluppo, in Naselli Fabio (a cura di), Animare un’alternativa mediterranea allo sviluppo. Il turismo per uno sviluppo relazionale integrato, Milano, FrancoAngeli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singh Archana, Misra Nishi (2009), Loneliness, depression and sociability in old age, “Industry Psychiatric Journal”, V. 18, N. 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
http://web.unep.org/unepmap/

Urbani Leonardo (2003), Habitat, Palermo, Sellerio editore


Zamagni Vera (1990), Dalla periferia al centro. La seconda rinascita economica dell’Italia (1861-1990), Bologna, il Mulino

Zamagni Stefano, and Zamagni Vera (2008), La Cooperazione, Bologna, il Mulino