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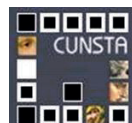
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# Workshops and tools for the knowledge and enhancement of cultural heritage. Experiences and synergies between University, Ministry of Culture and local authorities in Sardinia

Mauro Salis\*

## *Abstract*

The aim of this contribution is to illustrate the strategies for the valorization of rural areas in Sardinia, an island in which the entire territory with the exception of the coasts is to be considered a rural area. After an introduction which mentions the major initiatives adopted, which also have repercussions at an international level (inscriptions in the UNESCO lists), two case studies are proposed referring to two non-contiguous areas, characterized by different history, infrastructures and natural and economic resources. The first case concerns the town of Ulassai, in the Ogliastra sub-region, which in 2022 benefited from NRRP funds for small villages. The second case refers to the town of Neoneli, in the Barigadu sub-region, where a series of collaborative laboratories involving the community have been activated, relying only on the resources of the municipality with the collaboration of the University. In examining the two cases, reference is made to the bibliography and specific documentation.

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Obiettivo di questo contributo è illustrare le strategie di valorizzazione delle aree rurali in Sardegna, isola in cui tutto il territorio a eccezione dei litorali è da considerarsi area rurale. Dopo una introduzione in cui si accenna alle maggiori iniziative adottate, aventi ripercussioni anche in ambito internazionale (iscrizioni nelle liste UNESCO), si propongono due casi studio riferiti a due aree non contigue, caratterizzate da storia, infrastrutture e risorse naturali ed economiche differenti. Il primo caso riguarda il paese di Ulassai, nella sub regione dell'Ogliastra, che nel 2022 ha beneficiato dei fondi del PNRR per i piccoli borghi. Il secondo caso è riferito al paese di Neoneli, nella sub regione del Barigadu, dove contando solo sulle risorse della municipalità con la collaborazione dell'Università sono stati attivati una serie di laboratori collaborativi coinvolgenti la comunità. Nella disamina dei due casi si fa riferimento alla bibliografia e alla documentazione specifica.

## 1. *Introduction*

Policies and strategies to prevent rural areas from depopulation, and to ensure that they are valorized is a subject which in recent years has been very topical, but in some areas it has always been. I am referring specifically to the island of Sardinia, a large rural area well known for its coasts and beaches, less known for its inland areas and cultural heritage. In fact, in Sardinia the theme of enhancing the resources of rural areas has been for several years at the focus of attention of local politicians, who have finally understood that a responsible, aware and respectful tourism cannot rely exclusively on the exploitation of mass tourism – and therefore on cruises, beaches and holiday villages – but must also focus on internal resources, which consist of the rural landscape, intangible cultural heritage (traditions) and material cultural heritage (archaeology, architecture, art, etc.).

Evidently some actions have already been implemented in the last quarter of century, but these are spot operations rather than a real organized strategic vision. Among the most important actions, since 1997 Sardinia got some cultural heritage registered in the Unesco lists.

The first inscription concerns the archaeological site of *Su Nuraxi*, in the town of Barumini, a settlement consisting of a 17<sup>th</sup> century BC Nuraghe and a village developed around it. Among the best known and most impressive expression of the Nuragic civilization, the site was inscribed in the Unesco list of World Heritage Sites (WHL) in 1997 as *Su Nuraxi di Barumini* (fig. 1)<sup>1</sup>. In 2008, the Third Session of the Intergovernmental Committee (3.COM) in-

<sup>1</sup> See <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/833>>, 16.03.2023. *Su Nuraxi* means “The Nuraghe” in the southern variant of the Sardinian language. The *nuraghi* are a special type of defensive structure (for which no parallel exists anywhere else in the world) developed in a time span between the Middle Bronze Age and the Iron Age (17<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BC). The complex consists of circular defensive towers in the form of truncated cones built of dressed stone, with corbel-vaulted internal chambers.

scribed the *Canto a tenore*, Sardinian pastoral songs, in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (ICH)<sup>2</sup>, and in 2013 the Eighth Session (8.COM) inscribed in the same list the *Celebrations of big shoulder-borne processional structures* of which is part the *Discesa dei Candelieri* (Descent of the Candlesticks), involving the votive transportation of wooden obelisks in the city of Sassari<sup>3</sup>. Finally, in 2017, it was inscribed on the Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme the *Tepilora, Rio Posada and Montalbo Biosphere Reserve*<sup>4</sup>.

In the past, Sardinia has had other natural heritage included in the World Heritage Tentative List, but the applications were not accepted<sup>5</sup>. Recently, in 2021, Permanent Delegation of Italy to Unesco submitted two new applications to the WH Tentative List, and now the respective promoting committees are working on the Nomination file, which will then be evaluated by two Advisory Bodies mandated by the World Heritage Convention<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore,

<sup>2</sup> «*Canto a tenore* has developed within the pastoral culture of Sardinia. It represents a form of polyphonic singing performed by a group of four men using four different voices called *bassu*, *contra*, *boche* and *mesu boche*. One of its characteristics is the deep and guttural timbre of the *bassu* and *contra* voices. It is performed standing in a close circle. The solo singers chants a piece of prose or a poem while the other voices form an accompanying chorus»: <<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/canto-a-tenore-sardinian-pastoral-songs-00165>>, 16.03.2023.

<sup>3</sup> «Celebrations of big shoulder-borne processional structures are catholic processions that take place throughout Italy, but particularly in four historic city centres: Nola (a procession of eight wood and papier mâché obelisks commemorates the return of St. Paolino); Palmi (bearers carry a complex processional structure in honour of Our Lady of the Holy Letter); Viterbo (the *Macchina di Santa Rosa* – Tower of Santa Rosa – commemorates the town's patron saint); Sassari. The coordinated and equitable sharing of tasks in a common project is a fundamental part of the celebrations, which bind the communities together through the consolidation of mutual respect, cooperation and joint effort»: <<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/celebrations-of-big-shoulder-borne-processional-structures-00721>>, 16.03.2023.

<sup>4</sup> This biosphere reserve was approved during the 29<sup>th</sup> session of the International Coordination Committee of the MAB programme. Located in the North East of Sardinia, this Biosphere Reserve covers a total surface area of over 160.000 ha, with mountainous areas of different geological origins, a flat area, rivers, deltas and coastal areas. The Biosphere Reserve includes 17 municipalities and has a resident population of 50.000 inhabitants, which multiplies fivefold during the summer season, especially in coastal areas; see: <<https://en.unesco.org/biosphere/euna/tepilora-rio-posada-montalbo>>, 16.03.2023.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of the Environment and Land Protection submitted in 2006 four proposals: *Archipelago of La Maddalena and Islands of Bocche di Bonifacio* (<<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/2028/>>, 16.03.2023); *Pelagos: The Cetacean Sanctuary* (<<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/2032/>>, 16.03.2023); *Island of Asinara* (<<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5002/>>, 16.03.2023); *Sulcis Iglesiente* (<<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5003/>>, 16.03.2023).

<sup>6</sup> The first proposal is *Art and Architecture in the Prehistory of Sardinia. The domus de janas*, including 35 prehistoric monuments (necropolises, dolmens, menhirs). In Sardinia, prehistory coincides with the Pre-Nuragic Age, which includes a large chronological period from the Neolithic of ceramics, through the Copper Age, up to the Early Bronze Age, see <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6523/>>, 16.03.2023. The second proposal is *Nuragic monuments of*

since the last months of 2021, a promoting committee has been working to present another Biosphere Reserve to the MAB Programme list<sup>7</sup>.

As known, having a cultural site or asset included in the Unesco lists is a factor that itself favors and encourages improvement in terms of innovation, but it is also known that this factor alone is not strong enough to guarantee the long-term development of the territory, especially if the territory is located in a rural area and not near some urban center or main communication routes.

The Barumini site, thanks also to the action of a resourceful Foundation, in the space of twenty years has succeeded in creating a virtuous system, which is not free from critical issues, but compared to the island's context is nevertheless an excellence<sup>8</sup>. Barumini is located in the Marmilla area, which is a rural area with a strong agricultural vocation, characterized by large plains and low hills (fig. 2). Furthermore, Marmilla is contiguous to the most important high-speed road on the island and also to the regional railway line (fig. 3).

Necessarily, the monuments and sites that benefit from Unesco patronage are a small number compared to the generality of cultural heritage, and not all rural areas are contiguous to major communication routes connecting to the ports and airports of the island; nevertheless it is possible to implement good practices for their valorization, as demonstrated by the two cases illustrated below, referring to two different areas in terms of morphology, history, traditions and also their different approaches to awareness of the role of education in facilitating the valorization process.

## 2. *Ulassai, where nature meets art*

The first case concerns Ulassai, a small village in the center of Ogliastra. Ogliastra, located in the central-eastern part of the island, is one of the areas at greatest hydrogeological risk in Sardinia. It is characterized by a very low anthropization on the coastal strip and by an inland territory made up of karst plateaus and mountain ranges (fig. 4). This conformation led to an isolation of the area from the main communication routes of the island which lasted until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and which still today, for various reasons (inadequate in-

*Sardinia*, including 31 monuments of Nuragic civilization (protonuraghi, nuraghi, villages, temples, funerary monuments), see <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6557/>>, 16.03.2023.

<sup>7</sup> The Comunità Montana Sarcidano Barbagia di Seulo received funding from Regione Autonoma della Sardegna to work on the dossier, see <<https://delibere.regione.sardegna.it/protected/58694/0/def/ref/DBR58374/>>, 16.03.2023.

<sup>8</sup> The Foundation Barumini Sistema Cultura was founded in December 2006 with the intention of making a change in the management of cultural heritage in the Barumini area, see <<http://www.fondazionebarumini.it/en/about-us/>>, 16.03.2023.

frastructures, long-term roadway closures due to hydrogeological instability), has not yet been completely resolved: to reach the area, which is only 120 km from the island's capital, there is no railway, and road transport takes at least two hours on average (fig. 5)<sup>9</sup>.

Despite the difficulties in reaching Ulassai, the village benefits from a very interesting landscape condition: it is hollowed out in the inlet between two mountains from the tops of which it is possible to observe the whole of Ogliastra (fig. 6), and just one kilometer away from the town are the Su Marmuri Caves, which extend for over 850 m with peaks of 70 m high. The so-called limestone heels are also a landscape attraction, but until the early 2000s, if we exclude tourism to the Caves, which has been in operation since the late 1980s, the village had not seen any significant tourist flows: in the village there was only a small hotel, which in the summer season hosted those who had to go on holiday to the mountains to benefit from the healthy air, and there were no restaurants<sup>10</sup>. Yet the town was the birthplace of an artist who had already been well-known since the early 1970s, Maria Lai, who, in 1981, created in Ulassai the first relational art event ever held in Italy: *Legarsi alla montagna* (Binding to the mountain)<sup>11</sup>. Although the importance of the event in the field of art and culture was immediately clear to both Italian and foreign experts, the inhabitants of Ulassai, who actively participated in the event, experienced it as something eccentric and bizarre.

Since then, Maria Lai has continued to design and donate to her town a series of artistic interventions of environmental art located in the streets of the town and its surroundings. But the town's people did not understand and consequently did not value these resources. In 2000, during a survey conducted on the youth population of the town who in some way intended to exploit the

<sup>9</sup> On Ogliastra see Caravano *et al.* 1993 and the essays and studies published in the journal *Studi ogliastrini* (1984–still being published).

<sup>10</sup> On Ulassai see Serra 2000 and Serra *et al.* 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Maria Lai (Ulassai, 1919 – Cardedu, 2013) is considered one of the most significant figures of contemporary art in Italy. After studying in Rome and Venice, where she had the opportunity to train with Renato Marino Mazzacurati, Arturo Martini and Alberto Viani, she oriented her artistic language towards inner research and the enhancement of her Sardinian roots through the use of innovative technical solutions and everyday materials (pottery, embroidery, sewing and loom work, forms of bread), taken mainly from the ordinary tools of women's activities. From the 1980s onwards her research has focused on landscape interventions, in evocative performances such as *Legarsi alla montagna* (1981), in which, prompted by a local legend, a blue ribbon over ten kilometers long has wrapped around the houses and mountains of her hometown in a fluid and unifying knot. Present in important national and international exhibitions, as well as at the Venice Biennale (editions of 1978 and, *post mortem*, of 2013 and 2017), in Ulassai most of her works are exhibited at the contemporary art museum *Stazione dell'arte*. There are numerous publications of essays and exhibition catalogs on Maria Lai. Among the most recent see *Maria Lai* 2019; *Maria Lai* 2021; Pontiggia 2017; Pontiggia 2018; Pontiggia 2021; Pontiggia 2022; Ulassai 2006.

potential of the territory, when they were asked why they were not focusing on the works of Maria Lai, the most given answer was that just as they, who saw them every day, did not understand them, so tourists could not understand and appreciate them<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, as superficial as this statement may sound, the question lies precisely at this point: there can be no enhancement if there is no understanding and knowledge. It should be reiterated that Maria Lai was already an appreciated artist since the end of the 1970s, but not enough in Sardinia and not at all in Ulassai, where she managed to realize her works thanks to the personal friendship with local administrators, rather than for a planned and orderly political vision.

Understanding and knowledge then came, thanks to high education: in 2004 the University of Cagliari awarded her an honorary degree<sup>13</sup>, in view of which a series of lectures entirely dedicated to the artist's work was held. Following these lessons, several students decided to address their degree thesis to the artist, bringing new attention to her works, including the environmental ones distributed in the Ulassai area. And since Maria Lai strongly believed in the educational function of art, she would often meet students. This encounter between the eighty-year-old artist and the new generations did not go unnoticed by the regional administration, which in 2006, with the financial support of Sardinia's most important banking foundation, set up the *Fondazione Stazione dell'arte* and the *Museo Stazione dell'arte*, in which the works donated by the artist to the town of Ulassai are exhibited<sup>14</sup>. The museum brought a different kind of tourism to Ulassai than the one known until then. The caves were visited during the day by tourists who stayed in the seaside resorts, but with the addition of a new piece to the attractions to be visited, a single daytime was not enough to complete the visit and therefore the request for accommodation facilities became urgent. At the same time, the flow of tourists interested in the mountains increased, in particular foreigners, whose interest unlocked another resource: climbing, for which Ulassai is now one of the most visited destinations in Italy. Many young foreigners settled in the village and started to open Bed & Breakfast businesses: the local citizens, which until then had been sceptical about this type of hospitality, started to do the same. The only small hotel present in 2006 has now been joined by nine Bed & Breakfasts (three of which are run by young foreigners who have decided to move to Ulassai) and a campsite, and there are two restaurants and three pizzerias. Despite this, the demographic trend shows a decrease of 19.57% of the population in 20 years, so much so that according to the Sardinia Multiple Deprivation Index (IDMS), Ulassai is classified as a municipality in a state of current and

<sup>12</sup> This survey, carried out by the author of this paper, has never been published.

<sup>13</sup> Aresu 2004; <<https://archiviodistorico.unica.it/persona/lai-maria>>, 16.03.2023.

<sup>14</sup> Melis 2006; <<https://www.stazionedellarte.com/la-fondazione/>>, 16.03.2023.



foreseeable demographic malaise; the old-age index is equal to 212 (148.7 the national figure) with an incidence of elderly people alone of 43.9 (27.1 the national figure); the incidence of young people neither in employment or in education or training (NEET) increased from 9.8 in 1991 to 13.1 in 2011<sup>15</sup>. However, it is recent news (March 2022) that the Region of Sardinia decided to allocate to Ulassai the 20 million euros reserved for Sardinia as part of the NRRP (National Recovery and Resilience Plan)<sup>16</sup>.

The Ulassai municipality's project, entitled *Where nature meets art*, combines the enhancement of the strong cultural imprint that the artist Maria Lai has given to the town with the potential of the territory intended as the fulcrum of a heritage that is not only nature and landscape but also identity and community. The aim of the project is to integrate cultural, landscape and traditional values with innovation, new technologies and the green economy, in compliance with environmental and economic sustainability. To do this, it is necessary the involvement and participation of the community and local associations: the proposal consists of 38 initiatives involving tangible and intangible measures in the sectors of tourist accommodation, support for the economy, services for outdoor sports, electric mobility, enhancement of the natural, cultural and artistic heritage, protection of the area, organization of cultural events, territorial animation. Digital innovation is the transversal guideline for all interventions to transform and propose Ulassai as a smart community. Several measures are also dedicated to young people and to supporting families by intervening in schools and educational provision. The intention is to make the involvement of the population systematic through the activation of workshops and living labs applied to the participatory co-design of initiatives. The living labs methodology, already extensively tested in urban regeneration processes, will be used, conceived both to involve citizens in the co-design of the solutions introduced, and to test the solutions and improve their implementation in the light of citizens' needs and perceptions.

The project is ambitious, it starts from good premises, including the recent protective restriction imposed by the Ministry of Culture, which recognized

<sup>15</sup> See the statistic in the Regione Autonoma della Sardegna website: <<https://www.regione.sardegna.it/j/v/2568?s=433902&v=2&c=152&t=1>>, 16.03.2023. On IDMS see <<https://www.regione.sardegna.it/j/v/2568?s=220077&v=2&c=1337&t=1>>, 16.03.2023; <<https://www.sardegnaprogrammazione.it/index.php?xsl=1227&s=35&v=9&c=14173&es=6603&na=1&n=10&ni=1>>, 16.03.2023. The population of Ulassai as of 31 December 2021 is 1369, see <<https://demo.istat.it/data/d7b/D7B2021.csv.zip>>, 16.03.2023.

<sup>16</sup> Within Mission 1 (Digitalisation, innovation, competitiveness, culture and tourism), component 3 (regeneration of small cultural sites, cultural, religious and rural heritage), intervention 2.1 attractiveness of historic villages, line A, see <<https://cultura.gov.it/comunicato/21911>>, 16.03.2023; <<https://www.beniculturali.it/comunicato/22491>>, 16.03.2023; <<https://cultura.gov.it/pnrr-borghi>>, 16.03.2023; <<https://www.regione.sardegna.it/j/v/25?s=434033&v=2&c=95137&t=1>>, 16.03.2023.

the Open-air Museum (this is the name given to the set of environmental art works created by Maria Lai) as being of particular interest under the legislation on cultural heritage (fig. 7)<sup>17</sup>. To this must also be added the continuous research and related education carried out by the two Sardinian universities in collaboration with the Fondazione Stazione dell'arte.

### 3. *Neoneli and the collaborative laboratories*

The second case concerns an even smaller village than Ulassai, Neoneli, located in the Barigadu, a region sited in the transition zone between the mountainous territories of Mandrolisai and Barbagie di Ollolai in the east and the fertile plains of Campidano di Oristano in the west, including a basaltic plateau and the plain below where the Tirso river flows into the artificial basin of Lake Omodeo (figg. 8, 9). Neoneli too is at great risk of depopulation<sup>18</sup>, but has the potential to offer a range of cultural tourism options: the nature trails of the Assai wildlife oasis, whose holm-oak and cork-oak forests and Maquis shrubland are home to a wide variety of wild animals; the archaeological itineraries, with various evidences dating back to the Neolithic and Bronze Age; the ancient craft techniques of cork, leather and iron working; the traditional gastronomy; the compositions of the famous aforementioned *Canto a tenore* and its local variant *sa neunelesa*<sup>19</sup>. However, this cultural heritage is only valued a few days a year, on the occasion of old and new festivals, such as Carnival; the religious feast of s'Angelu; and the Licanias literary festival<sup>20</sup>. These days the village is visited by a few hundred tourists, but they leave in the evening because the village has no restaurant nor hotel.

In 2017, when I was appointed as a consultant for the enhancement of the cultural heritage of Neoneli, the mayor, asked why there were no accommoda-

<sup>17</sup> In the 28 June 2021 «Il Museo a cielo aperto – costituito da: *Il Lavatoio, La strada del rito, Le capre cucite, La scarpata, I libretti murati, L'arte ci prende per mano – La lavagna, Il volo del gioco dell'oca, Il muro del groviglio, Il pastorello mattiniero con capretta, La casa delle inquietudini*, è dichiarato di interesse culturale particolarmente importante ai sensi dell'art. dell'art. 10 comma 3 lett. d) e artt. 11, 12 e 13 del D.Lgs. 22 gennaio 2004, n. 42 e ss.mm.ii [...] in considerazione dell'importanza che riveste sia per la storia dell'arte contemporanea italiana, sia quale raro esempio di arte pubblica diffusa a livello territoriale, dal forte significato e impianto storico-relazionale, sia per le scelte innovative nella riflessione e costruzione di nuovi linguaggi artistici dell'ultimo Novecento». See <<https://www.sardegna.beniculturali.it/it/466/beni-dichiarati-di-interesse-culturale/18973/ulassai>> and attachments, 16.03.2023.

<sup>18</sup> The population of Neoneli as of 31 December 2021 is 622, see <<https://demo.istat.it/data/d7b/D7B2021.csv.zip>>, 21.03.2023.

<sup>19</sup> See note 2 above.

<sup>20</sup> On Neoneli see Zucca 2003.

tion facilities in the town, despite the fact that the municipality had built some *ad hoc* buildings to be managed, replied that inhabitants were afraid, because they claimed that tourists did not come there because there was nothing to see or do<sup>21</sup>. This was the common thought also in Ulassai twenty years ago, but Ulassai had Maria Lai and Neoneli does not.

I thought that an effective proposal to change this attitude could be to consider the possibility of extrapolating from the local heritage, both tangible and intangible, the vast range of still unrecognized value. In my case, I was helped by my condition of art-historian and the intention of knowing and understanding the past through the study of images: sacred and devotional images; architectural images; urban images; images of spaces for collective rituals, both sacred and not; spaces for the social life of the community. Actually, if approached from this point of view, the problem becomes less difficult to deal with, because any village in the rural areas, whether in Sardinia, or in any other region, has a series of values not yet recognized, which lie precisely in the specificity and identity of that community. As long as that specificity is not clear to the community that creates it in all its aspects and values, then it is really difficult to trigger the mechanisms upstream of valorization.

The urban and rural fabric of Neoneli is characterized by the extensive presence of trachyte – a volcanic rock – widely spread throughout the Barigadu area, which has been used by humans since the Nuragic Age for the construction of buildings. Its numerous tonal gradations – from pink to deep red, from gray to purplish brown – give the architecture a distinctive and immediately recognizable character. In relation to stone processing, archival documents from the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries refer to a professional category – the *picapedrers* or *pedrapiquers* (stonecutters-stonemasons) – dedicated not only to the laying of the blocks but also to the creation of architectural ornaments. These stonecutters – who boasted an ancient and consolidated tradition in the regions of Barigadu, Mandrolisai and Campidano di Oristano – carved capitals, arches, pilasters, corbels, doorjambs, church lintels, baptismal fonts and holy water fonts according to a figurative repertoire composed of classical, Byzantine, medieval, late Gothic and Renaissance motifs combined with great imagination. The result of their work, which was in line with the requests of a demanding clientele firmly anchored to tradition, are the numerous churches still present in the Sardinian villages and the residential architectures, still recognizable today in the urban fabric<sup>22</sup>.

This syncretistic culture, which through a popular filter draws on different styles combining them in a completely original synthesis, experienced its

<sup>21</sup> This survey, carried out by the author of this paper, has never been published.

<sup>22</sup> On the *picapedrers*, their *figurative repertoire* and the architecture in Sardinia during early modern age (16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century) see Naitza 1992; Scano 1991.

most flourishing season precisely in the early modern age (16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries) and constitutes a peculiarity throughout the western Mediterranean basin. Its most evident characters, slavishly repropounded for hundreds of years by craftsmen who learned and handed down the expertise in the workshops and on building sites, are manifested through the presence of classicistic ornamental motifs applied to a late Gothic structure. This particular balance is also present in the two churches of Neoneli, which therefore constitute an important and valuable testimony of the architectural and artistic production of the early modern age in Sardinia.

It is because of this exemplarity of the two churches – and of the artworks preserved inside them – that I thought it appropriate to study them according to that historiographical tradition that seeks to understand the general context through the analysis of the particular: from this point of view, a micro-history of the cultural heritage of Neoneli, as well as contributing to adding a piece to the knowledge of the vast and articulated historical and artistic context of the early modern age in Sardinia, can offer the Neoneli community and those who come to visit the village, the basic coordinates necessary for the use and organic valorization of its precious cultural heritage. The value of historical testimony and the ability to tell the history, cults and traditions that still characterize the territory can suggest possible strategies for the construction of itineraries (thematic and otherwise) aimed at the integrated enhancement of the whole territory.

It is in this transition that education has taken on a decisive role. Several students from the University of Cagliari's cultural heritage degree course took part in the art-historical research, having previously taken part in a series of preparatory educational workshops: workshop on iconography, workshop on cataloguing and workshop on artistic techniques. The results of this work have been incorporated into a publication, distributed free of charge to the citizens and tourists and presented during the aforementioned festivals<sup>23</sup>.

On the cover of the booklet there are two children climbing the stairs to the main church of San Pietro (fig. 10). This choice was made based on the thought that involving such young children in the operation would help achieve the goal the municipality was pursuing. The students who attended the university workshops and did the research and then wrote about it in the book, also took care of conducting training workshops for primary and secondary school children: these workshops necessarily involved their teachers as well as their parents. Basically, in order for the children to know and learn the hitherto hidden values of the local heritage, through methodologies suitable for their age, teachers and parents also had to become part of the educational process, in turn knowing and learning. Once the workshops in the schools were over, the municipality organized some exhibitions and guided tours with the children

<sup>23</sup> See Salis 2018.

and their parents as guides and the tourists who came to attend the festivals as users. The result is that now the inhabitants of Neoneli no longer think that there is nothing to see or do in their village. In fact, a group of young people from the village has finally come forward with the intention of taking over the management of the accommodation facility, the building of which has already been made available by the municipality.

Furthermore, since, due to depopulation, many buildings in the town are abandoned or in ruins, the degree course of architecture of the University of Cagliari, since 2020 has been running a series of architectural design and urban regeneration workshops. These workshops are divided into sessions of seven to ten days and do not take place in Cagliari at the University quarters but in Neoneli itself, where the municipality has made available some buildings set up as classrooms, where the students can meet the inhabitants, talk to them and listen to their needs and requirements. In return, the inhabitants offer the students free accommodation in their homes, thus also experimenting with B&B-like experiences.

Ultimately, this is the demonstration that many good practices in the enhancement of rural areas start and must continue starting from education, which can play the role of connection and cohesion between theory and practice, between different generations, between institutional purposes and needs of civil society.

Ulassai and Neoneli are just two examples: the degree course in cultural heritage has at the same time other collaborative workshops active in the field of enhancement, and in the same way, even with greater extensiveness, the degree course in architecture holds several workshops every year in villages at risk of depopulation or awaiting enhancement.

In addition to the good will on the part of the various local institutions, and the already tested methodologies and good practices, it is necessary to further focus and work on a wide-ranging vision in order to reach an organic coordination on a regional and possibly national scale. The hope is that opportunities such as the NRRP will be put to good use.

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## Appendix



Fig. 1. *Su Nuraxi* di Barumini (Photo M.J. Zirbes, CC BY-SA 3.0, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Su\\_Nuraxi\\_02.jpg?uselang=it](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Su_Nuraxi_02.jpg?uselang=it)>, 23.05.2023)



Fig. 2. View of Marmilla (Photo Ziegler175, CC BY-SA 3.0, <<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sar03Marmilla2.jpg>>, 23.05.2023)



Fig. 3. Marmilla (blue area) and Barumini (red dot) (Author's elaboration)



Fig. 4. View of Ogliastro (Photo M. Salis)





Fig. 5. Ogliastra (blue area) and Ulassai (red dot) (Author's elaboration)



Fig. 6. View of Ulassai (Photo Roberto Mura, CC BY-SA 3.0, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulassai\\_da\\_Brunco\\_Matzeu.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulassai_da_Brunco_Matzeu.jpg)>, 25.05.2023)



Fig. 7. Maria Lai, *La scarpata* [*The Slope*], 1993, Ulassai (Photo Nataliya Levitska, CC BY-SA 4.0, <<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scarpata.jpg>>, 23.05.2023)



Fig. 8. 5. Barigadu (blue area) and Neoneli (red dot) (Author's elaboration)



Fig. 9. View of Barigadu (Photo Aurelio Candido, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/terzocchio/2890062291>>, 23.05.2023)



Fig. 10. Church of San Pietro, Neoneli (Photo Pierluigi Dessì, © Comune di Neoneli)

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