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Living in the Third Millennium

Agenda 2030 and the new Sustainability Objectives
for the realisation of a global utopia at local level

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Alice Giulia Dal Borgo - Maristella Bergaglio

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Sustainable places in Italian urban settings: abandonments and returnings at the time of Agenda 2030

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ABSTRACT

If we consider the theme of abandoned places on the one hand and their rebirth on the other one soon realizes how this issue must necessarily be traced back to the great question of sustainability, which goes beyond the borders of States, uniting all the peoples of the Earth in the difficult path that should lead them to the achievement of shared goals. It is no coincidence that Agenda 2030 set sustainable settlements as one of its seventeen strategic sustainability objectives. With the aim of providing useful food for thought for the debate on the principles and values to be applied in the planning and construction of sustainable settlements, the contribution will then focus on the theme of abandoned sites and the processes of return and re-signification that are manifesting in recent times, with particular reference to the urban context.

Keywords: sustainability; abandonment; urban reuse; Agenda 2030.

Parole chiave: sostenibilità; abbandono; riuso urbano; Agenda 2030.

¹ Although the result of joint discussions, the present work, in terms of individual contributions, can be divided as follows: Alice Giulia Dal Borgo is the author of paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 5; Maristella Bergaglio is the author of paragraph 4.

1. INTRODUCTION

On 25 September 2015, the United Nations approves the Global Agenda for Sustainable Development, indicating 17 Sustainability Objectives (*Goals*), divided into a further 169 Targets (*Targets*), to be achieved by 2030. Agenda 2030 goes beyond the strictly environmental vision of sustainability, widening the perspective to other dimensions of social equity, economic efficiency and institutional accountability and committing the signatories to the definition of a strategy for the achievement of the new objectives, as part of a process coordinated by the UN. For the purposes of our analysis on abandoned places, we believe that of the 17 sustainability objectives, the eleventh is the one to be used as an interpretative and analytical key of the processes under investigation. How, then, to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, durable and sustainable by 2030 when, according to estimates, the world population will reach 8 billion and 5 billion people will live in about thirty mega cities, most of which are located in Asia, Africa and Latin America? And what are the values to be safeguarded so that the planning of sustainable settlements can be effective and implemented in the short time available between now and 2030?

Answers to such questions are not easy to find and even if the best options are identified, their implementation is certainly not immediate, nor is the result guaranteed. Having made this consideration, we will dwell in the next paragraphs the theme of abandoned places and processes of rebirth and reactivation that, in recent years, are continuing in different territorial contexts, with the aim of finding answers, albeit partial, to the research questions raised above. In fact, it seems to us that the process of abandoning places, with the consequences that this generates, can provide a different perspective from those usually used when approaching the issues of settlement sustainability (such as the consumption of resources, polluting emissions, social discomfort and so on). A perspective that sees in the outcome of an interrupted living – the abandonment of places – not only the negative aspects, but also the multiple possibilities of return, rebirth and, finally, redemption of those places themselves.

2. THE ABANDONMENT OF PLACES, A COMPLEX PHENOMENON

The fact of abandoning places is certainly neither recent nor new: the history of humanity shows us how the environmental, socio-cultural, technological, economic and political changes of human groups have led, and always will lead, to abandoning places that had been inhabited and used up until then (Scaramellini 2016). However, in the last thirty years there has been a significant increase in the number of abandoned sites in many Countries, due to several factors. In this context, the Italian case seems significant and connected on one side, to the historical and socio-economic dynamics that in Italy have become more intense after the Second World War in the processes of industrialization and tertiarization, linking in a double way to migratory movements, both domestic and international. On the other side, in the post-modern era, to the disposal of industrial and agricultural structures and production areas as well as to urbanization and land consumption.

About 6000, according to the most recent estimates², are the villages, including villages, pastures and stables, with less than 5000 inhabitants (70% of the Italian municipalities, where only 17.2% of the population lives³). Of these 6000 villages, almost half are at risk of extinction as they are completely, some or almost, others, uninhabited. This situation can be found throughout the country, from north to south and from west to east, but it is becoming widespread especially in some regions of central and southern Italy: the internal areas of Tuscany and Marche, Basilicata, the entire southern Apennine arc, from Abruzzo to Calabria, through Molise.

In its more contemporary occurrence, the abandonment of places is characterized as a heterogeneous phenomenon because it affects very different ‘territorial objects’: certain parts of urban settlements, or the historic mountain centers⁴, the outlying areas of large cities as well as disused buildings in central urban areas. The abandonment of places can also occur in historical and architectural assets located in areas of high landscape value, or it can manifest in buildings intended to house offices. Again, infrastructure interrupted during their construction or never used, excavation and withdrawal of aggregates, uncultivated land, disused

² See WWF 2013.

³ According to data on resident population as of 9/10/2011 (ISTAT).

⁴ That have become depopulated because of emigration or catastrophic natural events, such as earthquakes, floods, landslides and so on.

areas and former construction sites lead us to the abandoning process. As long as the abandonments of places starts, it also contributes to increase the level of geographical complexity. This happens because it has consequences for the territories in which it occurs, linked not only to the risks that dangerous structures manifest, but also to soil pollution, or to collapses and landslides evident where mountain slopes are no longer cultivated (as in the case of terraces), to the degradation of the landscape, to a sense of disorientation and to forms of use that lie at the limit of legality. All the consequences underlined above pose many questions in terms of environmental, social, economic and institutional sustainability. The abandonment of places, moreover, shows unstable geographies as new cases are added or subtracted, thus defining an extensive archipelago with uncertain and constantly evolving boundaries (Garda 2016).

It is therefore important, in approaching the analysis of abandoned places, to use qualitative and quantitative instruments of investigation, which allow to define taxonomy and distribution of the phenomenon, as well as proposals and adoption of shared policies able to mitigate the effects of what is considered by many as a real emergence of territories and landscapes. An initial taxonomic hypothesis is that suggested by Amari, which identifies three categories of abandoned places: (a) ghost villages, i.e. towns and villages abandoned between the fifties and eighties of the twentieth century as a result of natural disasters or in relation to migration processes; (b) functional buildings, which have lost the function for which they were built; (c) semiophors of the incomplete, structures that have never played the function for which they were designed because never completed (Amari 2016).

Marini (2016) has indicated four macro categories useful to define a catalogue of abandonment referable to problems given by the context⁵, by function (which is lost, and with it the relational link between communities and places and the sense of identity), by dimension (which is often a trigger for abandonment) and form (which adapts to the processes of abandonment, according to the category of the third landscape).

Garda (2016), in its analysis of the multiple forms through which the abandonment of places is presented, underlines how important it is to dwell on the causes that led a place to be abandoned and that are generally attributable to economic and social changes, natural events,

⁵ For examples the lack of planning generates decontextualization and absence of a *milieu*.

material-environmental conditions (presence of pollutants) and the enduring economic-financial crisis that characterizes recent times.

The abandonment of places frequents, therefore, multiple paths generating, as it proceeds, heterogeneous forms of marginalization of territories, environments and landscapes. According to our research objectives, it becomes interesting, as well as useful, to understand not only what forms are taken by abandoned places, but also what are the alternative options to abandonment, depending on the context in which it occurs. This is because we firmly believe that the “sense of the place”⁶ in contrast to the “non-place”, is a value to be safeguarded even in the awareness of knowing how to ‘lay down your arms’ when surrendering to abandonment seems the only possible choice. In the following paragraphs we will focus, therefore, on the returns that allow us to restore meaning to abandoned places and we will do so first through a brief general overview dedicated to the ways of regeneration of these places, and then dwell in more detail on specific forms of reuse in an urban context.

3. SUSTAINABLE CHOICES: RETURNING TO PLACES

Since the Nineties, many initiatives have arisen dedicated to the redevelopment and reuse of abandoned places: awareness actions, scientific research projects, recovery and renovation programs, movements of citizens and associations, first in a pioneering way and then more and more widely, have had and continue to have as their object the neglected places. Beyond the geographical-territorial context, initiatives for the recovery of abandoned sites can be divided into two main categories. On the one hand, there are direct or site-specific actions, which focus on the specificity of places, local products and activities and the concept of adaptive reuse⁷, which defines intervention practices aimed at reusing old structures for new activities, through ways that can establish a dialogue with the characteristics of the place where the intervention is

⁶ On the concept of place and sense of place you see, among others, Y.F. Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974; Y.F. Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977; E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, London: Pion, 1976; A. Frémont, *La regione: uno spazio per vivere*, Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1978; V. Teti, *Il senso dei luoghi. Memoria e storia dei paesi abbandonati*, Roma: Donzelli, 2014.

⁷ For further details, see Bassanelli e Postiglione 2013.

done. On the other hand, indirect actions, which stimulate the creation of networks, local, national and international, promoted by various bodies and associations. In both cases, the actions and projects may be specific, i.e. they may concern a single element of the site in question (a building, a field); they may be spread over several elements of the site (several buildings, land, road networks); they may be linear when they are carried out on structures passing through several places (disused railway networks, paths, tracks, etc.); and they may be spread over vast areas and landscapes.

In the urban/metropolitan context, the forms of recovery and reuse of abandoned or unused places are multiple and range from temporary reuse⁸, to co-housing, which is often flanked by co-working and, again, from the restitution of spaces of various kinds to the use of collectives for the creation of urban gardens, public green spaces, meeting centers, museums, libraries, schools, etc., to the reclamation of disused industrial areas and former construction sites for housing and/or social use.

Finally, in rural and extra-urban areas, the possibilities of requalifying and enhancing abandoned places range from the foundation of educational farms, often linked to farmhouse and agritourism, to the planting of organic and biodynamic crop⁹ to simple environmental restoration (generally of former quarries and mining areas) aimed at encouraging the restocking of local flora and fauna.

The different interests aroused in citizens by the dynamics of abandonment of places also concern the representatives of the institutional and political world who have helped to accommodate in some normative instruments the request for recovery and restoration of these places. On a national scale, Law nr. 164, 11 November 2014, goes in this direction with the first "Programma 6000 Campanili". Among the issues touched by the program are aligned various types of intervention: from qualification and maintenance of the territory to the redevelopment of existing buildings through the reduction of hydrogeological risk.

Law nr. 2541 was also approved in its final text in the Senate on 27 September 2017 and provides for the establishment of a fund with a budget of 10 million euros for the year 2017 and 15 million euros for each of the years 2018 to 2023. The law is for the structural, economic and social development of small municipalities in abandonment or at risk of depopulation and it is intended to finance investments aimed at

⁸ Temporary shops, for example, are increasingly widespread.

⁹ Which are flanked by quality brands such as Slow Food presidia.

protecting the environment and cultural heritage, mitigating hydrogeological risks, preserving and improving urban areas in historic centres, making road infrastructure and educational establishments safe, promoting economic and social development and setting up new production facilities¹⁰.

Another instrument of great importance for the recovery of abandoned sites on a national scale is provided by the project promoted by the Agenzia del Demanio “Valore Paese. Paths and Trails”. This project has been implemented in collaboration with MIBACT¹¹ and MIT¹² and is aimed at the redevelopment and reuse of public buildings located along cycle paths and historical-religious itineraries. Canton houses, inns, farms, hostels, but also small stations, towers, historic buildings, ancient castles and monasteries will be given in free concession (for a period of 9 + 9 years) to companies, cooperatives and associations, consisting mainly of people up to forty years, or in concession of development for up to 50 years to operators who can develop a tourism project with high potential for the territories.

The “Valore Paese” project also provides for the redevelopment of state-owned coastal lighthouses and buildings that can be recovered and removed from deterioration thanks to innovative and sustainable business projects, while fully respecting the protection and safeguarding of the territory through the concession of development for up to 50 years. At regional and municipal level, regulatory and financial instruments are also multiplying, allowing the return to new life of abandoned places proposed in partnership between public and private institutions¹³.

4. URBAN GARDENING AS A WAY TO REUSE AND REVITALIZE ABANDONED URBAN AREAS WITHIN THE CITY

The use of interstitial abandoned urban spaces through the practice of urban gardening is the essence of urban reuse in a sustainable transcalar perspective because it merges, in the kind of space that generates,

¹⁰ MIBACT, art. 3.

¹¹ Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.

¹² Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei Trasporti.

¹³ <http://www.agenziademanio.it> [30/10/2018].

four dimensions of sustainability: social/political, economic/productive, juridical/institutional and ecological/natural.

Moreover, urban gardening is an opportunity for rehabilitation and for the functional relocation, within the city, of physical spaces in which the landscape languishes and surrenders to dereliction.

Urban gardening is also a useful tool, in many cases, to return to the community empty spaces that, often, could not have other uses or that would be destined to a state of permanent abandonment. Projects of collective reuse, in fact, can enhance the meanings contained in the deep layers of the urban social framework, reframing urban spaces and creating new landscapes within the city.

In almost all major European cities, in fact, the transformation projects carried out in the last twenty or thirty years have left, often at the borders but sometimes in the middle of the city, many spaces underutilized, more or less small, interstitial, residual, that have not been involved in the process of urban renewal (Bergaglio 2016).

These places are perceived as 'cracks in the city', almost like metaphors of fractures and discontinuities that affect not only the material context but also the social dimension of the city (Loukaitou-Sideris 1996).

These are, for example, areas of low real estate value, limited by the forms, long, narrow or hard to reach, gray areas, difficult to reinvent, such as spaces enclosed in transit routes where everyday life is often measured with dirt, noise and anonymity rather than livability and sociability.

The denomination of 'remains', in all these cases, fits proper because they are what is left behind during the transformation process of the contemporary city. Their presence should not be surprising because they are not only a physical but also a physiological element of change and, therefore, they are the permanent symbol of a fluid and continuous evolution of urban space. As the sociologist R. Sennett recalls, in fact, the discards of the city are privileged observatory of the latent urban transformations that deeply change the symbolic and material relations between men and territory (Sennett 1999).

According to the perspective of Marc Augé, the peculiarity of these 'other' spaces, different in their 'non-being-place', from urban decommission in the classical sense, lies in the fact that most of these spaces have never had a real identity, property, name or specific function.

In other cases, many abandoned areas have completely lost the role they previously played in the urban framework due to the stratification

of succeeding functions, or the passing of time, or the overlapping of different purposes from the original, often negativistic and repelling ones that have altered their usability (Augé 1993).

These areas have been defined in many ways since the mid-nineties: ‘terrein vagues’, ‘waste lands’, ‘derelict lands’, ‘brownfields’, ‘voids’, ‘dead zones’, depending on the idea that from time to time the term intended to underline. What tends to unite semantically these multiple definitions attributed to these areas is generally the common characteristic of the lack of regulation, the absence of order and the unstructured temporal sedimentation.

They appear to be excluding spaces, foreign to the city, to its circuits and its productive structures. The presence of these areas, sometimes, divide and separate, in the true sense of the term, different physical and social places creating segregating barriers (Barron and Mariani 2013).

However, just the physical indefiniteness, the absence of rules, structure and formal use of these forgotten areas, in the case of urban gardening, guarantees and promotes new forms of expressive freedom, offering different opportunities to reconnect past and future, reinventing the space in its shapes and dimensions.

Deregulated informality acts as an activator of creative experiments and feeds unique reuse experiences that, paradoxically, return significant portions of the previously abandoned territory to the citizens (DeSilvey and Edensor 2013).

In fact, as De Sola-Morales suggested in the nineties, the abandoned spaces inside the cities have a strong evocative potential, produced by the absence of use, which can inspire in the inhabitants a deep sense of unease, as if it represented the reflection of their insecurities. At the same time, these spaces give also to people using them, a great sense of freedom and hope of something possible outside of the formal architectural order (De Solà-Morales 1995).

The reuse, thanks to the spontaneity and informality of urban gardening, amplifies the dualism of the suspension between abandonment and regeneration of these spaces. These urban gardens live today a life on their own in the *mixité*, in the sociability, in the spontaneous and temporary aggregation of its users, waiting for a formal identity, that maybe they will never find or that do not have more reason to find (Franck and Stevens 2007; Paolella 2012).

The construction of the urban garden, geographically reframes the physical space in which it rises, thanks to the attribution of a denomination of the area. This happens when the spaces are recognized at an

administrative level, as happened to many urban gardens born in the municipality of great cities and also when they remain informal spaces becoming a point of connection for the community of citizens, who created and enjoyed them.

There are many urban gardens in the municipality of Milan, for example: "Giardini in Transito" near Bastioni di Porta Volta, "Isola Pepe Verde" in via Guglielmo Pepe, "Orto GiambellGarden" in the heart of the Giambellino district, created on small interstitial areas in the historic neighborhoods of the city. Some of them have been formally recognized by the authority¹⁴ but also when they remain informal spaces they have become a point of connection, meeting and sociality for the community of citizens, who created them and enjoy them every day (Ruggeri, Mazzocchi, and Corsi 2016).

In the city of Bologna requalification experiences of vacant areas employing urban horticulture include different typologies of abandoned spaces with both bottom-up and top-down initiatives, where citizens either started the activities independently or were invited to participate by the municipality or by organized-cooperative stakeholders. New Urban gardening in reused spaces grew up in the centre of the city, along streets and squares like "Aiuola Donata" gardens, on balconies and rooftops and in an ex military barrack like "Green Housing" and "Làbas" gardens. A project of permaculture garden has been realized in an abandoned ex industrial area in the suburbs (in an area renamed "Orto Circuito - Spazio Battirame") and two public spaces has been reused thanks to a top-down horticulture project involving primary school students of the suburbs: "I colori dell'Orto" and "Gli Orti della furnace" (Gasperi *et al.* 2016) urban agriculture has been asserting its relevance as part of a vibrant and diverse food system due to its small scale, its focus on nutrition, its contribution to food security, its employment opportunities, and its role in community building and social mobility. Urban agriculture may also be a tool to re-appropriate a range of abandoned or unused irregular spaces within the city, including flowerbeds, roundabouts, terraces, balconies and rooftops. Consistently, all spaces that present a lack of identity may be converted to urban agriculture areas and, more specifically, to urban horticulture as a way to strengthen resilience and sustainability. The goal of this paper is to analyse current practices in the

¹⁴ The Municipality of Milan recognized the construction of community gardens with the Resolution nr. 1143 on 25 May 2012: <http://www.agricity.it/wp-content/uploads/Giardini%20Condivisi/Delibera-giardini-condi-visi-definitiva.pdf>.

requalification of vacant areas as urban gardens with the aim of building communities and improving landscapes and life quality. To do so, the city of Bologna (Italy).

In Rome, at the end of 2011, approximately 100 initiatives for the reuse of abandoned areas as urban gardening were mapped in the city. The first experience of ‘community’ garden in Rome is usually identified as the “Orti Urbani Garbatella”, self-funded on a squatting area in 2009 and located in south-east of Rome in a popular district. Many others of this garden activities spread in Rome have been self managed by the citizens like “Orti Urbani Tre Fontane”, located in the southern periphery of Rome or “OrtoInSnia” a shared vegetable garden, created in 2011 in via Prenestina on ex-Snia area, reclaiming it from industrial contamination through the production of new soil over time. Some other urban gardens, instead, have been created directly by the municipality of Rome like “Orti Urbani della Consolata”, located in the south-western periphery of Rome, and “Orti di Tor Sapienza”. These urban gardens have been created to reuse abandoned areas or previously illegally occupied involving citizens in collective works for the maintenance of the area as a indispensable requirement for the right to have a plot (Celata and Coletti 2017; Mudu and Marini 2018).

Urban gardening, finally, creates new urban landscapes thanks to the creative assemblage between human and non-human and this is a very important opportunity for citizens’ communities to join the process of redefining the image of the city, its forms and its livability, but also of planning and improving of its ‘green spaces’.

Sharing the will to recover urban abandoned areas to fruition in radically new ways is an innovative and creative act that reconciles the sense of the past with the possible future, giving a new identity to the places and creating strong links between the re-use actors that find in themselves and in their being an active community the desire to ‘make the city’.

5. SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our analysis of the processes of abandonment and return to places has allowed us to approach the issue of settlement sustainability from an unusual perspective, in an attempt to highlight not only the many critical issues of the phenomenon, but also the many potential for sustainable

rebirth that can arise from it. Having reached this point of the contribution, we would like to draw attention to the theme of sustainable settlement, with the aim of answering the research questions posed in the introduction. Once again, we will do so by adopting a particular reading key. In fact, with a good dose of conviction deriving from an in-depth analysis of the literature and experience of field-research, we believe that many of the values to be applied for the creation of sustainable human settlements are to seek in the movements of the Eco-villages¹⁵ and of the Transition Towns¹⁶, depending on whether the context is predominantly rural or more markedly urban. Now, what are the values and principles that can contribute to the change of direction proposed by the movements mentioned above? Below we propose those that, in our opinion, are common to both.

1. The recovery of the community dimension: it is from small communities, rural or urban, that we need to start because it is easier to find links of solidarity, sharing, responsibility and cooperation that facilitate the implementation of sustainable processes and initiatives. If the issue of sustainability is inevitably to be tackled on a global scale, through the proposal of shared supranational policies that take into account the global dynamics in which it operates, it is at regional and local levels that concrete and lasting results can be achieved.
2. The attitude to resilience: as it is well known, in ecology resilient systems are those able to adapt to changes, even traumatic, produced by external agents without degenerating. The industrialised society is characterised by very low levels of resilience and this is due to its high dependence on oil, which is a depletable source of pollution and. Hence the urgent need to provide local communities with the means

¹⁵ The eco-village can be defined as a form of intentional community that bases its lifestyle on the principles of environmental sustainability, ecology, permaculture and organic farming. The eco-village is built according to the principles of reuse, limiting environmental impacts and using energy from renewable sources and is characterized by a marked trend towards self-sufficiency, acting as an alternative to the forms of living widespread in post-modern society, with the aim of meeting the needs of the people who live there, whether they be work, educational, emotional (Dawson 2006).

¹⁶ Cultural movement founded between 2005 and 2006 by Rob Hopkins, an English environmentalist, with the aim of preparing communities to face the consequences of global warming and peak oil through the spread of sustainable lifestyles and forms of economy, local and circular, and through the achievement of energy self-sufficiency and production according to the principle of resilience. The Transition Towns phenomenon is constantly growing and, to date, there are about 2000 companies in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Italy and other countries.

- to free them from such dependence immediately, so that they are ready when the available reserves of crude oil are over.
3. The use of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, geothermal, marine, hydroelectric, biomass. Current technologies have reached very high levels of productivity, replacing those based on oil exploitation, and are becoming more and more economically sustainable, thus finding an increasing diffusion at local, regional and national levels¹⁷.
 4. The development of local, circular and sustainable economic processes that favour the creation of networks and alliances that contribute to the economic sustenance of the community through the use of local resources, respecting the environment and following new methods: from forms of sustainable agriculture (organic, biodynamic, permaculture), to the retail trade of zero-km products, from community services to personal services, from the sharing of machinery to time banks and so on¹⁸.
 5. The ability to recycle, recover, reuse objects and places, which should be cultivated from childhood, contributes not only to escape from the tyranny of the consumerist disposable cultural model that has characterized industrialized societies up to now, but also to the reduction of waste production and to stem the consumption of soil which, at least in Italy, is mainly linked to residential densification and the construction of new industrial and commercial areas, pointing out very high rates, especially in regions already heavily urbanized¹⁹.
 6. Cultural and political activism, supported by members of the community who, through participatory processes and consensual decision-making, respond to the stimuli of today's society, providing a viable alternative, proposing sustainable models and lifestyles, engaging in the dissemination of a new culture of sustainability and hospitality,

¹⁷ According to the 2017 edition of Legambiente's dossier on renewable municipalities, in 2016 396 MW of photovoltaic, 282 MW of wind, 140 MW of geothermal, 513 MW of bioenergy and 346 MW of mini-hydroelectric were installed in Italy. Renewables accounted for 34.3% of total electric power consumption, down slightly compared with previous years due to a reduction in hydroelectric production (-8.9%). Nevertheless, it is significant that in 10 years production from renewable sources has gone from 51.9 to 106 TWh.

¹⁸ In this regard, see also K. Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Way to Think Like a 21st Century Economist*, White River Junction (VT): Chelsea Green Publishing, 2017.

¹⁹ According to the recent ISPRA Report on Soil Consumption, Territorial Dynamics and Ecosystem Services published in June 2017, the Regions that consume the most soil in Italy are Lombardy (12.96%) and Veneto (12.21%).

not only within their own place of life, but also outside, from the surrounding regions. In this sense, the metaphor with which communities in ecovillages and Transition Towns are defined as “yogurt-cultures” that seek to inoculate the ferment of sustainability in the surrounding bioregions seems very appropriate to us (Dawson 2006).

We would like these six points to be considered as ‘recommendations’ by policy makers who, from the global to the local, have the power and responsibility to chart the way towards building truly sustainable communities.

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