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LIMITS AND POTENTIALITIES OF ECOMUSEUMS IN SICILY, BETWEEN TOURIST EXPLOITATION AND CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION*

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the limits and potentialities of innovative museum projects recently created in Sicily, the so-called “ecomuseums”, through a critical evaluation of some case studies set in the wider theoretical framework provided by the new currents of thought of museology and cultural heritage preservation.

In effect, ecomuseums have been recently standing out as new tools of protection and enhancement, due to their intrinsic capacity to reflect deeply-rooted relations among museums, environment and local communities.

Therefore, such inventive museum projects concern territories, not necessarily defined by conventional boundaries, where a flexible and dynamic museum model is based on in situ conservation, fragmented site interpretation and a community-based approach: this implies the enhancement of local distinctiveness as well as the growing democratisation of museum practices.

For this reason, ecomuseums, if shrewdly exploited, provide a more socially inclusive model supporting local development and small-scale cultural tourism, so that they can be considered as significant tools of reinforcing dynamically the local distinctiveness of places, apart from preserving tangible and intangible cultural resources (such as cultural landscapes, historic artefacts, customs, traditions).

As a result, the objective of this work is to highlight the impact exerted by these museum models not only on Sicilian local communities, in terms of shared identity enhancement and economic development, but also on the tourist industry of such territories, many of them very far from the main tourist routes.

Furthermore, the work aims at evaluating how far these Sicilian museum projects achieve the tenets of ecomuseum philosophy, apart from establishing whether the variation in practices is due to the highly specific features of the local territories involved, or rather to mere marketing devices conceived to attract tourists.

INTRODUCTION

1. Definition, genesis and evolution of the ecomuseum. Although the ecomuseum prototype goes back to the end of the 19th century and is connected to the initial phase of transformation of the cultural heritage’s concept, “less and less attached to esthetical values or values representing the <high> culture and more and more inclusive of <social> elements” [14], the origin dates back to the 1970s. In fact, while during the first Scandinavian experiments, as in the case of the Skansen open-air museum founded 1891 in Sweden, the main objective was to protect the territory from the fast environmental transformations and from the loss of values and the agricultural tradition’s social and cultural heritage¹, through the recollection and reconstruction in areas open to the public of an environment of the past, it is during the 20th century that different types of ecomuseums – historical, ethnographical, natural – spread rapidly all over the world (the Heimatmuseum in Germany, the Folk life museum in the United States, the atelier museums in Dane mark) [8] and in a more complete way during the Seventies in France, the ecomuseum gains clear connotations still tied to the popular culture, but not exclusively to the rural world, that remains nevertheless one of the defining elements. The ecomuseums tied to the theoretical basis of the “new museology” also pay attention to the everyday life in the city and to the workplaces in the industry, and the cultural heritage, both material and immaterial,

* Although this paper is the outcome of a shared work, paragraph 1 of the Introduction was written by S. Cannizzaro, paragraph 2 of the Introduction by G.L. Corinto, while Results and Conclusions were written by T. Graziano.

¹ Transformations derived from the industrialization process and from the consequential exceptional urban development.

instead of being transferred and recollected in appropriate museum structures, will be protected and given value in situ [18].

The “modern ecomuseum” follows, then, the evolution process of the concept of culture itself, and, more specifically, of cultural diversity in its more and more articulated and complex meaning, which, according to the universal declaration of the UNESCO approved during the 31st session of the General Conference on cultural diversity (Paris, 2/11/2001), is to be understood as “(...) the mixture of spiritual, material, intellectual and affective traits which characterize a society or a social group and which include, in addition to the arts and literature, ways of sharing life, systems of values, traditions and beliefs”.

It is clear, then, that in order to fully represent a people’s culture it is not enough to show works of art, pictures, sculptures, manuscripts, archaeological findings, but it becomes necessary to “show” also the immaterial elements of the everyday life’s actions of common people, of the popular way of life²; not only typical elements and elements of the tradition, tools of the crafts, of the country and the farmhouses, the same structures and fabricates representative of the popular, rural and craftsman world, but also the natural environments, the popular songs, stories and dances, the religious celebrations and entire landscape areas, which a traditional museum can’t host. All elements, these, of the cultural diversity, original and identity components of the different human groups, which can be defined as “Human biodiversity”, testimony of the different social experiences, able to facilitate the affirmation of the innumerable cultural horizons and to encourage the creativity in all its specificities.

And it is thanks to another UNESCO Convention³ that, considered the processes of social transformation and cultural homologation due to the globalization (seen as the cause of contamination and destruction of the immaterial, “regional” cultural heritage), we get to a cooperation and mutual assistance agreement in order to preserve and insure the respect of the immaterial cultural heritage of the community, the groups and people involved (sec. 1, art. 1). And it is, again, in that occasion that the “immaterial cultural heritage” concept defines itself more completely, as it contains “(...) the standard procedures, the representations, the expressions, the knowledge, the Know-how – like the instruments, the objects, the craft tools and the cultural spaces associated with the same – that the communities, the groups and in some cases the single people recognize as a part of their cultural heritage”, heritage (...) transmitted from generation to generation and constantly recreated by the communities and groups as an answer to their environment, to their interaction with nature and to their history and that gives them a sense of identity and continuity” (art. 2). A very articulated heritage that contains the traditions, the local historical narrated testimonies, the proverbs, the oral expressions and consequently the languages and dialects, the performing arts, the social customs, the typical costumes, the ritual and celebration events, the knowledge and standard procedures attached to the nature and the universe, the traditional craftsmanship and whatever else is an intangible expression of different communities.

The ecomuseums are, then, institutions that are strongly tied to their territory, their history, and their social, economical and natural environment. They are cultural areas that intend to “(...) insure the economic development in non-traditional areas where an identity can be preserved in the globalization era” [14] and from the consequential cultural homologation; preoccupations that today, in particular, “(...) are common to many rural areas both in the industrialized countries and in the less developed countries” [idem]; preoccupations, again, for which the “...most promising solution seems to be that of territorial development in the broader sense of the term (economy and identity, through the cultural rural district) avoiding the danger of the adaptative model (...)

² The term ecomuseum was coined 1971 by the museologist Hugue de Varine, general secretary of the International Council of Museums, while the institution was created by Georges Henry Rivière, promoter of the National Popular Arts and Traditions Museum of Paris, like “a mirror in which the population looks at herself in order to recognize herself, in which she looks for an explanation of the territory she is tied to (...) A mirror with which the population proposes herself to her guests in order to be better understood, with respect to her work, her behaviours and her identity” [22].

³ Convention for the Safeguarding of intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted in Paris the 17th of October 2003 [12].

and of the tourist hetero-focused exploitation, which is rewarding only on the short term” [idem]. The ecomuseums, then, far from being the mean of creation of an artificial identity and of a mere economic activity, tend to rediscover, preserve and promote the authentic local culture, and in their multi-segmentation and multi-dimensionality represent the “territory and identity museums”. In fact they are places that “contain” and the natural and human elements, both material and immaterial, “participate” to them; they are places where all the senses can feel the different environmental qualities and characteristics, where it is possible, in addition to admiring the works of the human brain in their original environmental context, to listen to the sounds of Nature and to see its “works of art”.

They are, certainly, physical places, but also open areas that change with time and that are ready to welcome the new things that nature and society propose, but always with respect to the past that gives value to the specificities, the peculiarities of the territory; they are institutional and cultural sectors oriented to the satisfaction of a broader and less exclusive public and to the prioritized respect of the local population’s needs and governed in synergy with the community’s will.

The ecomuseums are, then, proposals for a quality tourism growth and tools of a virtuous model for the development of the territory, while they promote the environmental safeguard, both of the natural and human elements, enable the economic growth and the social equity through the valorisation and the fruition of the cultural heritage, make the quality of life of the communities that live in the areas involved better⁴, which are basilar principles and objectives of the sustainable development’s paradigm.

The ecomuseums established in France in the Seventies, reach wide territories and include, in addition to the natural and rural environment, craft departments, small factories and industries as well⁵, where different services, receptive and complementary structures establish themselves, but also scientific, documentation and audiovisual centres, historical archives, pedagogic and commercial centres. During the same decade in Quebec (Canada) an experimental ecomuseum with a socio-ecologic character, the one of Haute-Beauce, was created, which also involved a small community [15], and in the decades to come these structures will spread over the European continent, particularly over the northern part, but also over America and Australia, and in the Nineties over Africa, Japan, and China as well.

Today in Europe, hundreds of ecomuseums, more and more multi-thematic (folkloristic, ethnographic, technologic, landscape dedicated), have taken the most different shapes and put, from time to time, in the protected areas and natural reserves, and are often organized in a net with other sites of cultural interest. Even though France has the largest number and the primacy of the first ecomuseums created in organized cultural structures, their presence is rooted in the Scandinavian countries as well and the first open-air Skansen museum, created near Stockholm for the protection of the environment and the local community’s identity, represented a starting point for the development and the creation of the “modern ecomuseum”. Germany has an ancient tradition in the field of the territory and popular customs’ museums that goes back to the end of the 19th century and that cemented during the National-socialist regime. Other countries that have a certain experience in the ecomuseum field are Denmark and the Nederland, where the ecomuseums are mostly dedicated to the rural tradition and the country life; Portugal, where the ecomuseums, which start to be created at the beginning of the Eighties, focus on the sector of handcrafted production (mills, oil presses). Britain, that, due to the historical role it had in the industrial field and in its museum experience, facilitated the creation of industrial archaeology, has recently proposed the open-air museums showing the traditional rural environments and the industrial and urban environment’s evolution as well. Spain, even though it started with the creation of the ecomuseums only in the Nineties,

⁴ Conclusive document of the National Ecomuseums’ Meeting, Biella, 9th-12th October 2003 [12].

⁵ The Le Creusot-Montceau-Les Mines ecomuseum in Borgogne, which can be considered with a right the first real ecomuseum, was followed by other experiences focused on the value’s increase in the population areas of the textile, glass, perfumes (Fourmies-Trèlon) and tuna and sardines preserving industry (Ile de Groix) and of the sites where seaweeds are processed (ecomusée des goémoniers et de l’algue).

shows today a relevant ecomuseum presence mostly in the rural areas; this presence contributes strongly today to the growth of the national tourist sector.

In Italy the ecomuseums have been experimented later, because, even though during the Eighties a relevant number of museums tied to the rural world were created, it is only during the following decades that order will be made in this sector and real ecomuseums will be created where also local communities will be “showed”. The Piemonte region will create the first ecomuseums, and, without a national law regulating them, approves her own normative instruments in 1995, followed by the Autonomous Province of Trento in 2000, the Friuli Venezia Giulia region and Sardegna in 2006, Lombardia and Umbria in 2007, Molise in 2008 and the Puglia region in 2011 [idem]. In our country the ecomuseums are mostly spread in the regions of the North and the Centre, but recently some relevant ecomuseum realities have been created in the South as well and, even though they are not ruled by a norm yet, in the Islands [12].

This modern museum formula represents today for Italy and for all of Europe a new possibility to offer the local cultural heritage, a strong and innovative magnet and an opportunity to assert a new model of tourism offer, capable to widen the more and more exacting and culturally focused demand towards the rediscovery and the fruition of the “memory and identity places” [5].

2. *From the farm-museums to the eco-museums, risks and opportunities.* As our society continues to re-examine its values so does the museum world. Among others, society deeply re-examined the role of agriculture lasting the long period of market political sustain and introducing social and cultural targets for the rural society and farmers themselves. It is quite easy to redefine the role of museums but it is not so easy and clear the future role of farming. Society has charged farmers with new social, cultural and environmental targets, assuring not to reduce the public sustain to farmland and continuing to maintain focus on the productive role of agriculture. For year, the farming lobbies have been afraid of reduce farmland to a “museum” activity, with less links to competitive markets, and then constraining the rural society in an “indian reservation” [2]. Nevertheless, since many decades the UE rural policy have fostered its second pillar (Rural Development Policy) in comparison to the first pillar (Agricultural Market Support) [10], diminishing its focus on productivity and enhancing that on immaterial targets, introducing the concept of multifunctionality.

The multifunctionality of agriculture includes all goods and services produced by farming activities. The concept was introduced in 1993 by the European Council for Agricultural Law [7], in search of an harmonisation within the legal scattered framework on agriculture in Europe.

The “multifunctional agriculture” rapidly entered the scholarly and political debate about the social and economic role of agriculture, after the Cork declaration of the European Commission “A living countryside” issued on 1996 [11]. The Cork declaration expressed the aims of the European Commission at considering agriculture as a real interface between people and the environment so that farmers have the actual responsibility of exploitation and maintenance of the natural resources of the countryside. Notwithstanding the term is still quite confuse, or at least the use is so, multifunctionality of agriculture actually indicates the production of food and fibres jointly to environmental amenities, agritourism, food quality, landscape management, preservation of biodiversity and *cultural heritage*⁶.

For the aim of this paper, it is very noticeable the italian debate on multifunctional agriculture which really states a more complex definition of the concept, focusing on and deepening its theoretical definition, that can be resumed [1] in the three following issues:

1. multifunctionality of the agriculture, which is connected to the by-productions of the main production of food, fibres and bio-energies;
2. multifunctionality of the farm, intending an agro-tertiary differentiation which produces services such as hospitality and meal serving;

⁶ Our emphasis

3. rural multifunctionality, which emphasises the local integration with other economic sectors and the all society.

Yet, a quite recent italian rule [13] modified the original definition of farm entrepreneur introducing new and broader possibilities in farm running besides the traditional ones including in its actual pertinencies:

“... any other direct activities aimed at supplying goods or services primarily using equipment or resources normally hold in the farm, including the activities of valorisation of the territory and of the rural and forest heritage, or accommodation and hospitality as defined by law.”.

Some authors [20] focus on possible non conventional development streams oriented to the new paradigm of farm enterprise multifunctionality. The authors classifies the following concepts pertaining the farm enterprise activities:

1. *deepening*, of the agro-food chains toward higher value added activities;
2. *broadening*, which is the enlargement of firm activities toward the production of market and non-market goods and services;
3. *regrounding*, which refers to re-positioning the farm resources (workforce, structures) in extra corporate uses, out of the farm boundary but within the surrounding rural territory.

Under point 2, amongst many others, such as agri-tourism or fitness, we can identify new activities in didactic farms and also farm-museum [19], but it is very clear that the concept could be enriched and enlarged as far as to the territorial significance and embrace the concept of eco-museum.

The territorial significance of farming, and its actual importance in the conservation of local communities memory in an dedicated eco-museum, can be deepened introducing some concepts coming from the italian studies on local development. Following the Marshallian findings, italian scholars focussed on local development, basing on the study of industrial districts. In Becattini's thought, social and economic changes are fully detectable in the variable shapes of territories. Localities, and selected sets of sites, are actually well localised spaces but, in the same time, living, towing elements as well as the result of reality transformation. The effects of development extend and deposit collective consciousness by means of psychological and cultural elaboration. In many areas of industrial strong decentralisation, the agricultural workforce found employment in local industries without the necessity of abandon rural residence and farm activities. In some of these, the rural society supplied labor to industry but also intertwined local networks producing original forms of interconnected SMEs which often evolve in industrial districts, in the framework of an evolutionary change in the productive and socioeconomic system, shifting from agriculture and handicraft to a very intensive industrialisation. For instance, referring to the so called Terza Italia, the part of Italy that has been the most economically dynamic over the past generation, located in the centre of the peninsula, the italian sociologist Arnaldo Bagnasco [3] noted that its industrial structure is largely composed by small, family owned and family-managed enterprises. Then, during time, poor peasant familism remains a specific characteristic only of the Italian South and the family business of the Third Italy became an innovative, export oriented and high-tech based industrial model. In this areas, many economists of small family businesses observed the tendency to cluster together into industrial districts of the same sort identified by Alfred Marshall, where they can take advantage of local pool of skills and knowledge [4]. Small family businesses have formed spontaneous networks with other firms for supplies on marketing services. The network provides an amount of economies of scale by vertical integration while retains much of the flexibility typical of small, owner-managed firms, and this kind of industrial district, populated by small, craft-oriented and high-tech firms, was one of the illustration of the flexible specialisation paradigm exposed by Piore and Sabel [17]. These authors stated the mass production in large scale enterprises was not a necessary consequence of the industrial revolution, but a different model would be possible, at least in Italy as well as in other asiatic countries.

In this particular area, the Third Italy, the cultural heritage from the ancient rural society compounds some interesting assets. First of all, the entrepreneurial attitude of the “mezzadro” (the sharecropper, or metayer), his own family-labour managing, the ethics of labour, the scattered diffusion of rural houses that became a large private building ownership, the possibility of labour allocation both in agriculture and industry, sharing the familiar labour schedule [6].

During time, many farmers became part timers in industrial firms, maintaining the original agricultural employment and allocating labour directly in their own industrial businesses or in at-home-handicraft, subcontracting with the leader industry [6]. This behaviour originated the economic figure of a multi-active worker that cumulates the agricultural and industrial earnings, scheduling labour during the day, the week and the entire year. The rural family grants disciplined, integrated, flexible and low costing labour-force and furthermore, in many cases, also a certain amount of monetary capital and transfers the “micro-entrepreneurship” from agriculture to handicraft industry.

We can easily conclude that not only in this area, but also in the rest of many other Italian territories with different social patterns, the rural landscape and the local cultural heritage values are the result of this kind of social exchange and networking activities between agriculture and the rest of economy [16]. It is arguable that the complete decoupling of large-area elements from commodity production – as envisaged in environmental and rural development policies from EU – will only be possible if substantial “mutation” of the landscape – is both acceptable and economically feasible. Even though on these arguments there is a substantial lacking of knowledge and field researches, it is arguable that any activity of memory conservation of cultural capacities in doing business, and *a fortiori* farm business, will have positive impact on culture maintainability and social cohesion.

With no doubts farmers can be considered as guardians of rural customs and traditions and of an “idillic” way of life. However, farm life actually evolves like any other way of life and the rural customs and traditions risk to enter into a folkloric pattern, especially in tourist areas, yet reflecting the way of life of past times. The rural way-of-life and traditions will continue to be transmitted to future generations through the farming population but they can also be perpetuated through clubs and cultural associations whose non-farm members share a profound appreciation of traditional rural values.

The ecomuseums can be the material area where the farming and rural culture do actually interface with people, fostering the sense of place, spreading the spirit of sustainability and the importance to consume local agricultural products in order to maintain the vitality of rural community, the one and only which have the skills and competencies for the territorial care. Furthermore, as tourist destinations the ecomuseums can also play the role of cultural and economic sustain of agriculture as a productive and social activity, avoiding the risk to be reduced in the above mentioned “Indian reservation”.

RESULTS

As far as the Sicilian ecomuseums are concerned, the impact exerted by the ecomuseum format on Sicilian local communities and tourist industry should be analysed within the wider theoretical framework of the new currents of thought in museology and cultural heritage preservation, which promote the community cultural identity and economic development. In effect, since ecomuseums are regarded as unprecedented ways of “telling” and interpreting the deeply-rooted relations among museums, environment and local communities, in this paragraph we evaluate how far these Sicilian museum projects achieve the tenets of the ecomuseum philosophy as well as establishing whether the variation in practices is due to the highly specific features of local territories or rather to an intrinsic lack of organisation, management and resources.

Thanks to the deeply-stratified ethno-anthropological heritage, Sicily seems to be the ideal natural and anthropic area where ecomuseums could be established, even though the lack of an integrated approach, together with the atavistic parochialism among territories, have precluded a

wider diffusion of this tool of local development. With a relative delay if compared with the rest of Italy, Sicily has not yet approved a regional law about ecomuseums⁷. As result, many of the museum structures which boast to be ecomuseums do not respect all the principles at the core of this new philosophy, which should concern territories, not necessarily defined by conventional boundaries, where a flexible and dynamic museum model should be based on in situ conservation, fragmented site interpretation and a community-based approach in order to promote the local distinctiveness as well as the growing democratisation of museum practices [9].

The only one which seems to adhere completely to the ecomuseum philosophy is the Buscemi ecomuseum - situated in a small rural village on Iblei mountains, in the province of Syracuse. It is a very town-museum, since the ethno-anthropologic itinerary files down the whole village, punctuated with different locations of the peasant society which have been shrewdly restored. This operation of rediscovery of old traditions and artefacts, launched by some volunteers in 1988, has contributed to the enhancement of the local community, affected by consistent outgoing migratory flows during the sixties and seventies and the consequent demographic and social decrease. In effect, from a theoretical point of view, the Buscemi museum follows the tenets of the ecomuseum concept, since the vestiges of the old country traditions are not displayed within classical museum spaces but rather within their own authentic contexts, structured in ten museum-units localized in different areas of the small town, in order to recreate the original socio-economical organization of the rural world. So, it is a “museum of ideas” [14] rather than a container of objects imitating a disappeared kind of life. As far as the impact of the territory is concerned, the museum boast about 5.000 visitors every year, coming from Sicily, other Italian regions and abroad, especially from France and Germany, both within organised tours and as independent travellers⁸. However, the local community has not been able to exploit the huge potentialities of such an innovative project: no restaurant nor hotel has been created in order to take advantage of the presence of visitors, who are forced to limit themselves to a day-visit without fostering allied activities. Thus, even the structure which is apparently the most adherent to the ecomuseum philosophy is lacking in a fundamental principle, the common-based bottom up process finalised to the enhancement of the tangible and intangible heritage.

The Buscemi ecomuseum is thematically linked to the house-museum of Antonino Uccello⁹, which is located in the nearby small town of Palazzolo Acreide, in the Province of Syracuse, within the baroque Unesco district. More than a real ecomuseum involving the whole urban fabric of the town, the house-museum is based on a single museum unit located within the baroque Ferla palace, where the ancient locations of the peasant society have been rebuilt with historiographic precision. It was opened in 1971 with a pioneering aim. Many years before the very concept of ecomuseum was deeply codified, the house-museum aimed at telling the history of a specific community by arising what is called an “emotional experience”, which does not derive for the artistic value of the artefacts, but rather from their ethno-anthropological significance.

Nonetheless, the museum structure does not seem to be strictly linked to the local community as the ecomuseum philosophy implies, since it is limited to the reconstruction of the peasant society within the perimeters of a palace, without involving other parts of the local

⁷ A proposal of law was presented in 2010 at the Regional Assembly, even though, in case of approval, this law will not be provided with an endowment fund to effectively support the already existing ecomuseums or to create new ones. As a result, the law is limited to plan a regional network, managed by the department of cultural heritage and Sicilian identity, through which ecomuseums can apply for European financing, by promoting a collective image of the Sicilian ecomuseums.

⁸ Our Phone Interview with the founder and current director of the ecomuseum, Rosario Acquaviva, 18/11/2011.

⁹ This structure is strictly linked to the eclectic personality of Antonino Uccello, a poet, anthropologist and musicologist who gathered and catalogued for all his life agricultural implements, songs, poems, pictures, artefacts and every meaningful vestige of the country traditions, which now are gathered in his house-museum.

territory¹⁰. Another Sicilian museum structure which boasts to be an ecomuseum, even though it is very different from the above-mentioned, is the salt museum of Trapani, perfectly inserted within the fascinating context of the saltpans, protected by a nature reserve with a wide biological diversity which imposes itself as an example of melting between highly specific geomorphologic features and a ceaseless anthropic process. From Trapani along the coastal road, the visitor comes upon the so-called lagoon of Stagnone. At the centre of this area, within a saltpan, in the territory of Paceco, there is an old windmill and a salt house, location of the museum which displays salters' tools as well as models and videos about the salt industry. However, this museum structure is very far from the ecomuseum philosophy, since it is actually a museum of country traditions which is the fruit of the entrepreneurial attitude of a salters' family, rather than the result of a community empowerment process¹¹.

In the province of Syracuse another ecomuseum has been created during the last decade, the ecomuseum of Climiti Mountains, born after an agreement between the municipality of Melilli and the Cutgana, an university centre of research for the preservation of natural environments. Its configuration, structured around different natural and anthropic sites, can be considered as adherent to the ecomuseum concept, even though in this case the bottom-up process of the local community has not been the driving force of the project, which has been promoted by institutional moving forces. Since the opening day on 2003, the visitors have been 20.000, above all school groups, interns, scholars, university students, coming from the province of Syracuse, Eastern Sicily and other Italian regions, apart from foreign visitors coming from North Africa, Germany, France, Switzerland, Usa. According to the director, the ecomuseum has been exerting a significant impact on the local territory, due to the creation of related activities and the implications in terms of image¹².

Moreover, at the very core of the island, in the province of Enna, two ecomuseums have been recently created. The Diodoro Siculo ecomuseum is more focused on a naturalistic museum which boasts many scientific materials coming from Erei mountains, and it is thematically linked to the nearby nature reserve of Vallone di Piano della Corte. More than a real ecomuseum, it can be regarded as an exhibition area thematically linked to the reserve, without a full respect of the ecomuseum tenets. Few kilometres away from this ecomuseum, the Branciforti ecomuseum is structured around the concept of a town-museum. The most innovative feature of such venture, launched by a group of young volunteers in 2010, is the preservation of old artefacts, traditions and architectural heritage through new technologies. Apart from many events involving the whole community, in fact, the strength of the ecomuseum is the digital archive aiming at collecting all the vestiges of old rural conditions, such as pictures and various documents. However, at the moment the real ecomuseum is postponed to the future, because there is not yet an organic and systemic organisation structure at the point that the impact is still low on the local community and from a tourist standpoint.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, Sicilian natural and anthropic landscapes reveal potentialities hitherto undervalued within the wide theoretical framework of ecomuseums, both in terms of enhancement of the local communities and tourist implications. In effect, ecomuseums, if shrewdly exploited,

¹⁰ In spite of the early opening, the ecomuseum is still today undervalued. Nowadays the structure, which is managed by the Sicilian region, survives thanks the enthusiastic support of many volunteers, even though the lack of regional funds precludes the house-museum to attract a higher number of visitors, since it is not possible to let it opened all days.

¹¹ The windmill and the building which partly lodges the museum belong to a salters' family, the Culcasi, who, after the complete destruction of the saltpan due to the flood of 1964 and the consequent owner's refusal to reactivate it, decided to buy it. During the eighties, the family rented out a part of the house to the local municipality, which converted it in a museum, in addition to open a restaurant.

¹² Our Email interview with the Director Pietro Pitruzzello, 18/11/2011.

provide a more socially inclusive model supporting local development and small-scale cultural tourism, in addition to reinforcing dynamically the local distinctiveness of places. In the Sicilian case, the lack of a rigid normative frame fosters an extreme freedom in the unscrupulous use of the epithet ecomuseum, by contributing to belittle its intrinsic potentiality.

The already-existing museum projects, if better developed, could be close to the real ecomuseum philosophy, but at the moment they do not adhere to the tenets of such a new museology current, due to the lack of a severe normative frame, not to mention the lack of funds as well as the not systemic approach in the process of management and promotion.

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