

What practices to overcome the “cultural remoteness” of inner peripheries? A focus on Italian case studies

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Abstract

The contribution focuses on the role of culture in regeneration practices in inner peripheries. The few culture-based strategies promoted so far in these areas often consist of territorial marketing operations tailored to urban tourism, which risk of trivialising and flattening local culture and identities. Instead, the promotion of a contemporary cultural production, albeit based on local heritage, memories, traditions and identities could strengthen the ongoing socio-economic development strategies and offer alternatives to the prevailing urban cultural model.

The critical review of best practices, selected from Italian and European networks that bring together culture-led regeneration practices, allows to explore whether and how current practices in inner peripheries are contributing to generate new “cultural models”, tailored to the peculiarities of these areas and alternative to the urban ones.

Introduction

According to Eurostat data, in 2021 most of the EU population lived in cities (38.9 %), towns and suburbs (35.9 %). The remaining 25.2% lived in rural areas and the number of people aged 65 years or older, living in the EU’s predominantly rural regions, increased on average 1.8 % each year between 2015 and 2020. In addition, almost 9 out of the 10 predominantly rural regions in Europe recorded negative rates of natural population change over the same period (EUROSTAT, 2023). Issues related declining and aging population are intertwined with those related to fewer job opportunities, weaker infrastructure, poorer access to public services, and digital divide that largely contribute to the progressive abandonment of rural areas all over Europe.

The main consequences of rural abandonment concern the loss of the relevant tangible heritage, such as historical centres, natural resources and traditional landscapes, as well as of the intangible heritage such as memories, traditional agricultural or artisanal practices, which have for long contributed to preserving local identities and ecosystem services.

These aspects are exacerbated in the so-called “inner peripheries”, which represent remote rural areas characterised by low economic potential, poor accessibility to centres of economic activity and public services, as well as by the disconnection from the centers of political power (ESPON 2017, 2022).

Since the 1990s, the rebalancing of territorial disparities based on the urban-rural dualism has been addressed by EU policies on sustainable development policies in order to counteract both urban congestion and rural depopulation. The European Spatial Development Perspective (European Commission, 1999) proposed an integrated strategic vision of territorial development, recognizing rural areas as key elements for the balanced functioning of the whole territory.

In order to pursue sustainable development and improve territorial cohesion, the “Long-term Vision for the EU’s rural areas” aims to make inland rural areas stronger, by strengthening services and fostering social innovation; more prosperous by diversifying economic activities and sustainable production, more connected, by improving digital networks and favouring new forms of mobility and more resilient, by improving local capacity to cope with climate, social and environmental changes (European Commission, 2022).

In Italy, this theme has been addressed since 2014, through the National Strategy for Inner Areas (NSIA) (Barca et al. 2014), based on the classification of Italian municipalities according to their degree of peripherality. In detail, the NSIA defined “inner areas” as municipalities that are at least 20 minutes far from the first municipality offering basic services (education, healthcare, mobility). In this way, two different typologies of territorial systems are defined: poles, consisting of large, medium and small urban centres and highly specialised coastal areas, which are the centres of economic and social activities; inner areas mainly composed of rural territory and small villages, which are increasingly exposed to depopulation and impoverishment of their economic and social fabric.

According to the 2020 update of the NSIA classification (Italian Agency for Territorial Cohesion, 2022), about half of the Italian municipalities can be defined as inner areas (1929 intermediate areas, 1524 peripheral areas, 382 ultra-peripheral areas), covering about 60% of the national territory and hosting about 23% of the population. For these areas the NSIA has been addressed to improve accessibility to essential services, while promoting economic development and social cohesion through place-based approaches and active stakeholders’ involvement.

Although in the Italian experience the classification of inner areas has been essentially based on the notion of peripherality, intended as distance from the places where basic services are gathered, partially reflecting the approach adopted in the Espon Project (ESPON 2017), this notion can be also more broadly considered, referring not only to the physical distance of these areas from services but also to their marginality within the economic and political networks at different geographical scales (Bock, 2016). These areas generally appear to be far from urban ways of life, from social contexts full of interactions and activities (Membretti et al. 2022).

This broader idea of “peripherality” may include cultural aspects too: nevertheless, it has been so far firstly referred to the disparities in accessing cultural activities in some areas compared to the urban hubs of culture and creativity (Florida, 2002).

According to the report “The role of culture in non-urban areas of the European Union” (Johansen et al., 2020), the primary role of culture in peripheral areas is only recently gaining attention in academic and political debate, particularly due to the need of counteracting depopulation processes by fostering culturally driven innovation. However, cultural policies in these areas are lagging behind their urban counterparts (Lygard, 2016).

The role of culture in the development strategies carried out for inner peripheries has been for long neglected or related to urban-centred cultural models and policies, scarcely respondent to the peculiarities of these areas (Cruikshank, 2018). These models have typically emphasised the “access” to cultural services and infrastructure, such as museums, archaeological sites, cultural hubs, universities, often neglecting the need of enhancing local cultural capital, especially the intangible one, as a key tool for strengthening territorial identities and the sense of belonging of local communities.

On the opposite, the Faro Convention (COE, 2005) emphasized that cultural heritage consists of all the resources inherited from the past that populations identify as an expression of their values, beliefs, knowledge, and traditions. Moreover, some authors have clearly defined

"culture" as the intangible infrastructure of a territory, shaped by its human community (Magnaghi, 2010). Thus, culture is not only a fundamental right of people living in inner peripheries but should be intended as the result of the continuous interaction over time between population and places.

Based on these premises, this contribution aims at analysing “cultural remoteness” of inner peripheries, interpreted not only as accessibility to cultural services but, above all, as the capacity of local communities to recognize and re-shape their cultural capital, developing tailored-to-the-site cultural models, alternative to the urban ones.

The cultural “remoteness” of inner peripheries

Some data provided by the Italian National Statistics Institute (ISTAT) on the accessibility to culture in inner peripheries are here analyzed to quantify the persisting gap between urban centers and inner peripheries: number and distribution of museums, monuments, archaeological areas, number of visitors, number of entertainment and sports events, number of libraries, and so on.

In 2022, out of a total of 4'416 museums, monuments and archaeological sites, both public and private, about 40% are in inner areas (853 in intermediate areas, 698 in peripheral areas, 189 in ultra-peripheral areas):

- on average there are 6.2 museums or similar sites per municipality classified as pole (A) and 0.4 museums or similar sites per municipality classified as inner area (D, E, F) (Figure 1);
- all the museums in the 182 municipalities classified as pole (A) attract more than 70% of the visitors; about 44% of them has less than 5'000 visitors and about 81% of the museums or similar sites of ultra-peripheral municipalities (F) has less than 5'000 visitors and about half of them has less than 1'000 visitors;
- the average number of employees per museum is 22 in the pole municipalities (A) and 5 in the ultra-peripheral municipalities (F).

Further disparities can be observed when complementary services offered by museums (educational workshops, thematic itineraries for children, conferences and seminars, live shows and cultural entertainment initiatives, permanent or temporary exhibitions) and digital services (online ticketing, social media accounts, online virtual tours, online educational workshops, online conferences and seminars, online digital catalogues) are considered.

In detail, as regards the complementary services, the average varies according to the type of offered service between 57% (museums with live shows and cultural entertainment initiatives) and 65% (museums with conferences and seminars) in the pole municipalities, and between 31% (museums equipped for thematic itineraries for children) and 42% (museums with live shows and cultural entertainment initiatives) in the ultra-peripheral municipalities.

As regards digital services, the average varies according to the type of digital service offered between 14% (museums equipped for online educational workshops) and 76% (museums with social media accounts) in the poles, and between 4% (museums equipped for online virtual tours and online educational workshops) and 56% (museums with social media accounts) in the ultra-peripheral municipalities.

Moreover, in 2022 out of 8'131 libraries in Italy, both public and private, only 33% are in inner areas (1'373 in intermediate areas, 1'050 in peripheral areas, 277 in ultra-peripheral areas).

Looking at the percentage of film, entertainment and sporting events, in 2022, almost 87% took place in poles (A), inter-municipal poles (B) or belt municipalities (C), reaching 75% of the

audience, while less than 13% took place in intermediate (D), peripheral (E) or ultraperipheral (F) municipalities, reaching the 25% of the audience. Finally, only 2 of the Municipalities classified as inner areas (intermediate municipalities) host universities.

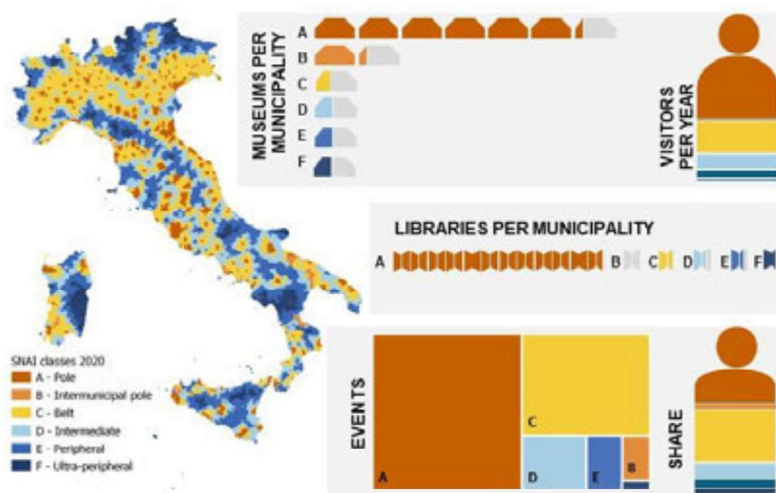


Figure 1. Distribution of museums, libraries, and events according to the SNAI classification (Source: Authors’ elaboration from ISTAT data)

The concentration of museums, cultural hubs, events and universities in cities not only denies the fundamental right of inner peripheries’ population to access cultural services, but also contributes to shape a concept of culture, capable of attracting a young and lively population, as a prerogative of urban areas.

Nevertheless, significant funding has been allocated on the topic “Culture and Tourism” in the inner peripheries selected as pilot areas by the first SNAI programming cycle 2014-2020, (about 16% of available funds for a total of 219 projects).

More than half of the funded projects have been addressed to relevant monuments’ restoration or to promote tourism; others to the sustainable use of natural areas, promotion of festivals focused on rural traditions and creation of inter-municipal cycle and pedestrian paths (DPC, 2022).

These projects, although addressed to reduce ‘cultural remoteness’ of inner peripheries, due to the close link between “culture” and “tourism”, may also induce negative effects, such as the museumization (Attili, 2018) of the historical villages or the loss of local identity (Sabatini, 2023): being “culture” the intangible infrastructure of a territory, shaped by its community, in fact, it is crucial to prioritize projects and initiatives capable of involving local communities in recognizing and reinterpreting legacies, practices and imaginaries to co-produce a contemporary local culture, linking ancestral and contemporary forms of knowledge, nature and technology, art and education.

According to this perspective, a kind of scouting has been carried out to identify bottom-up “culture-led” regeneration practices, capable of enhancing local resources in the field of production, maintenance, and care of places (Olcuire, 2023) in inner peripheries, starting from

the analysis of European and national networks that bring together culture-led regeneration practices, based on the peculiarities of territories, their memories, their historical landscape, local production, and new synergies between external resources and local communities (IETM, 2018).

Culture-led regeneration in the inner peripheries: from European and national networks to local practices.

To understand whether and how current practices in inner peripheries are contributing to create a new "cultural model", alternative to the urban one and tailored to the peculiarities of these areas, a methodological path based on a multiscale approach has been outlined (Figure 2).

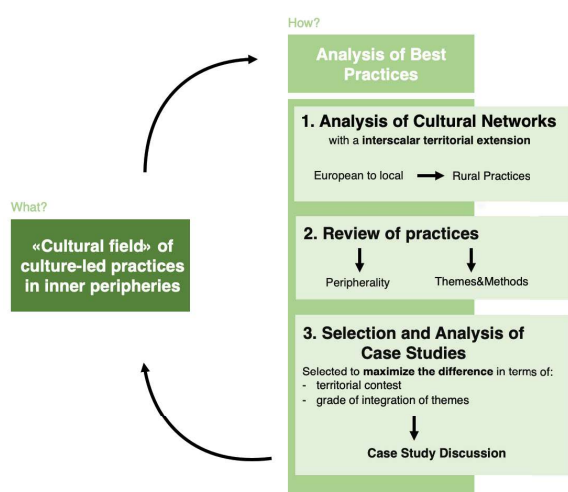


Figure 2. Methodological path for selecting of culture-led regeneration practices in inner peripheries (Source: Authors' elaboration).

This allows for a gradual focus on the local scale and the selection of practices that, being embedded in large-scale networks, benefit from the dialogue between heterogeneous actors and the possibility of exchanging knowledge and experiences developed in different contexts. Specifically, a three-step analysis has been carried out to select culture-led regeneration practices in inner peripheries:

1. identification and selection of European networks focusing on culture-led regeneration practices developed in both urban and non-urban contexts.
2. identification and selection of national or regional networks focusing on practices carried out in non-urban and rural areas.
3. selection and analysis of culture-led regeneration practices developed at local level, and namely in inner peripheries.

The prevalence of culture-led practices carried out in urban areas compared to those developed in rural and marginal areas is evident in the first step of the analysis. Based on a systematic review of different sources, such as institutional documents (Murphy and Cameron, 2020; Arterial Network et al, 2022; Burgos et al., 2023) and institutional websites, six networks and research projects at European level that focus on urban and territorial regeneration with a

cultural and/or a community-led approach, in urban and non-urban areas have been identified (Table 1).

Table 1. European Networks

Network/Project	Description	Involved Actors
Culture Action Europe (CAE)	A European network promoting cooperation and development in the cultural sector. It advocates for the value of culture and arts in contemporary society through initiatives, advocacy, and transnational collaborations.	- Cultural organizations - Artists and cultural operators - Cultural activists - Professionals in the cultural sector
European Creative Hubs Network (ECHN)	A network bringing together creative hubs and organizations to support the creative sector in Europe. It aims to foster growth, innovation, and sustainability of creative hubs by promoting collaboration, knowledge exchange, and networking among members.	- Creative hubs - Support organizations - Professionals in the creative sector - Academic and research institutions
European Network of Cultural Centres (ENCC)	A network uniting cultural centers to promote culture and art in Europe. The ENCC aims to promote cultural diversity, access to culture for all citizens, and local and community cultural development. Through projects and initiatives, it promotes transnational cooperation and builds bridges between various European cultural communities.	- Cultural centers - Cultural organizations - Local and governmental authorities - Artists and cultural operators - Public and local community
Trans Europe Halls (TEH)	A network of independent cultural spaces promoting cultural collaboration in Europe. TEH supports cooperation among independent cultural centers and promotes cultural diversity, innovation, and the exchange of best practices in the European cultural sector.	- Independent cultural centers - Cultural organizations - Artists and cultural operators - Local and governmental authorities - Public and local community
European Land+Art Network	A network of organizations and individuals across Europe dedicated to promoting land-based art practices. It brings together artists, researchers, cultural institutions, and environmental organizations.	- Artists - researchers - cultural institutions - environmental organizations.
Ruritage	A project promoting sustainability and innovation in rural communities. Ruritage aims to enhance the cultural and natural heritage of rural areas, creating new opportunities for sustainable development through active citizen participation and engagement of various stakeholders.	- Local and regional authorities - Cultural and local development organizations - Universities and research institutions - Entrepreneurs and local businesses - Local communities

European networks play a crucial role in advocating different culture-led practices and provide a significant support to local and regional communities in developing cultural and creative practices: they act as drivers and promoters of a range of initiatives aimed at fostering cooperation, exchange and development in the European cultural field through innovative practices that address both social and environmental challenges.

Moreover, the networks/projects bring together a variety of actors engaged in different fields of cultural promotion at different scales, such as national or regional organizations, territorial cultural centers, creative centres, networks of cultural associations, foundations, NGOs, cultural enterprises, research centres (e.g. universities and research institutes).

Among these networks, only few (e.g. Ruritage) are specifically addressed to promote culture-led practices in rural areas. A number of national/regional networks that pay particular attention to local practices carried out in rural areas have been identified (Table 2).

The selected networks operate in different geographical contexts, above all in Southern and Eastern Europe, where the depopulation of rural areas appears more significant than in the rest of Europe.

These networks aim to promote cultural ecosystems, by involving a variety of local actors, such as cultural hubs, cultural associations, artists, cultural activists, researchers, entrepreneurs as well as local communities and public institutions. They aim to stimulate innovation, improve access to culture and encourage civic and community participation in the development of strategies for the social and economic growth of local communities through cooperation and exchange of resources and knowledge.

Table 2. National/regional Networks

I Level Network	II Level Network	Location	Description	Involved actors
Culture Action Europe	Red de Espacios y Agentes de Cultura Comunitaria	Spain	Network that promotes community culture and citizen participation in Spain, facilitating collaboration between cultural spaces and community actors to promote access to culture.	Cultural spaces, cultural associations, community organizations, public institutions, artists.
Culture Action Europe	Clubture	Croatia	Network that promotes independent culture in Croatia, facilitating the exchange of resources, knowledge, and best practices between independent cultural spaces and cultural operators.	Independent cultural spaces, cultural organizations, artists, cultural activists.
European Creative Hubs Network	ARTERIA_LAB	Portugal (Alentejo)	Network of 11 creative hubs operating in the Alentejo region of Portugal, engaging in architecture, visual arts, performing arts, design and crafts, literature, and new media.	Creative hubs, cultural organizations, artists, creative professionals, public institutions.
European Creative Hubs Network	Matera Hub	Italy	Innovation and culture hub located in Matera, Italy, promoting social, economic, and cultural innovation through projects, events, and collaborations.	Start-ups, entrepreneurs, artists, creative professionals, social activists.
ENCC, European Network of Cultural Centres	Lo Stato dei Luoghi	Italy	Platform dedicated to sustainable development and valorization of the territory, focusing on the analysis and promotion of local resources.	Local communities, local development organizations, public institutions, NGOs, research institutes.
Trans Europe Halls (TEH)	Anténa – network for independent culture	Slovakia	A network of cultural centres and organisations that operates in the field of independent arts and culture in Slovakia	Independent cultural spaces, cultural organizations, artists, cultural activists.

Among the selected European and national/regional networks, several culture-led practices focused on rural areas with varying degrees of peripherality have been identified (Table 3). These practices are mainly promoted by cultural organizations or associations working with artists, cultural institutions, environmental organizations, local communities, and activists. Overall, these organizations promote initiatives that bring together art, nature and local communities, to promote community development, environmental sustainability, education and enhancement of cultural heritage. The selected practices were further analyzed, focusing on both their degree of peripherality and the specific issues they address (Table 4).

The analysis of the selected practices allows some initial reflections on cultural regeneration practices in rural areas. First, most of them are bottom-up practices, linked to cultural activism organized in different legal forms, including cultural associations, social promotion associations, social enterprises, foundations; only in few cases practices are supported by public institutions. Second, all the selected practices are developed in mountain, rural, or island areas, although only some of these areas are classified as inner peripheries. Finally, these practices focus on recurring themes that can be classified into four macro-areas (Figure 3):

- sustainable local production and innovation;
- sustainable tourism;
- new ways of living and working in the territory;
- new narratives of the territory.

Table 3. Culture-led practices in rural areas

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I Level Network	II Level Network	Practices	Location	Description
Culture Action Europe	Red de Espacios y Agentes de Cultura Comunitaria	3pedras	Spain – Ara, Alta Aragona	This organization focuses on art and ecology, promoting artistic and environmental projects.
Culture Action Europe	Clubture	Silba Environment Art	Croatia – Selva Island	This association focuses on environmental art and the island of Silba in Croatia, integrating art projects with the surrounding environment.
European Creative Hubs Network	Matera Hub	Wonder Grottole	Italy – Grottole, Basilicata	This project involves the community of Grottole, Italy, aimed at enhancing cultural heritage and promoting local development through sustainable tourism, local products and culture.
European Creative Hubs Network	ARTEHIA_LAB	Oficina do Convento	Portogallo - Montemor-o-Novo, Alentejo	This organization acts as a multidisciplinary cultural center in Portugal, committed to promoting traditional artcraft, arts, culture, and education.
ENCC, European Network of Cultural Centres	Lo Stato dei Luoghi	Interzona	Italy - San Martino Valle Caudina, Campania	Interzona is an Italian cultural association, serving as a multidisciplinary center promoting culture and art through events, workshops, and projects.
ENCC, European Network of Cultural Centres	Lo Stato dei Luoghi	Xfarm	Italy – San Vito de Normanni, Puglia	Xfarm focuses on sustainable agriculture and art projects, integrating art with agriculture and the natural environment.
Trans Europe Hales (TEH)	Antena	Periferne Centra	Slovakia - Dúbravica	Perifernecentra is an organization dedicated to promoting cultural activities in peripheral rural areas related to artistic residence, ecology and art education at schools.
Trans Europe Hales (TEH)	-	Plum Yard / Švestkový Dvůr	Czech Republic - Malovice, South Boemia	Svestkovy Dvur is an organization focused on cultural programs and events based on theater and performing art.
Trans Europe Hales (TEH)	-	Fundación Uxo Novoneyra	Spagna – Lugo, Galicia	The Fundacion Uxo Novoneyra is dedicated to promoting culture and the arts, particularly in Galicia, Spain.
Trans Europe Hales (TEH)	-	Farm Cultural Park	Italy – Favara, Sicily	Farm Cultural Park is a cultural center located in Favara, Italy, promoting contemporary art and culture through exhibitions, events, and cultural initiatives.
European Land+Art Network	-	Arte Sella	Italia - Borgo Valsugana, Trentino Alto Adige	Arte Sella integrates art, nature, and the environment through outdoor art installations and environmental initiatives.
Ruritage	-	Via Mariae	Rumania, Harghita	Via Mariae Association supports and implements through the cooperation of the local stakeholders, the pilgrim route Via Mariae, also known as Maria's Way, that has been a connecting Western and Eastern Europe.
Ruritage	-	Borgofuturo	Italy - Ripe San Ginesio, Marche	Borgofuturo promotes sustainable development and Communities-based rural regeneration in Marche region with culture-related projects and initiatives.

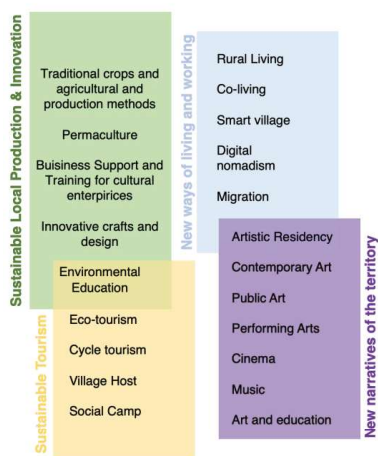


Figure 3. Thematic areas of cultural initiatives in rural areas. (Source: Authors' elaboration).

Table 4. Location and topics of the selected practices

Cataloguing Selected Practices						
Practices		A - Territorial Criteria			B- Thematic Criteria	
Name	Legal Form	Geographic Location	Typology of area	Inner Periphery (EPSON 2017)	Spaces	Themes of cultural initiatives
Spiedras	Foundation	Spain – Ariz, Alta Aragona	Mountain	yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artistic Workshop Guest House 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Education Traditional farming and production methods Artistic Residency, Cinema, Music Rural Living
Silba Environment Art	Digital Platform by Fundacion Kultura nova + Municipality of Zaira	Croatia – Selva Island	Insular			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Education Artistic Residency
Wonder Grottole	Association for social promotion	Italy – Grottole, Basilicata	Rural	yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guest House Village Facilities Territorial Paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Education Village Host – Ecotourism Traditional farming and production methods Artistic Residency Rural Living, Digital Nomads Innovative handicraft and design Traditional production methods Artistic Residency Contemporary Art, Visual Art Environmental Education Contemporary Art
Oficina do Convento	Cultural Association of Art and Communication	Portugal – Montemor-o-Novo, Alentejo	Rural	yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Centre Ceramic Workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artistic Residency Contemporary Art Environmental Education
Interzona	Association for social promotion	Italy – San Martino Valle Caudina, Campania	Rural		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artistic Residency Rural Living Environmental Education Traditional farming and production methods Contemporary Art Rural Living Migration
Xfarm	Project by Social Cooperative Qualcosa di diverso	Italy – San Vito de Normanni, Puglia	Rural		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confiscated Agricultural Land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Education Traditional farming and production methods Contemporary Art Rural Living Migration
Periféria Centrã	Civic Association	Slovakia – Dubravica	Rural	yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Education Traditional farming and production methods Artistic Residency Contemporary Art Performative Arts Artistic Residency Art and Education
Plum Yard / Švestkový Dvůr	Project by Theatre Group	Czech Republic – Malovice, South Bohemia	Rural	yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artistic Residency Rural Living
Fundación Uzio Novoneyra	Foundation	Spain – Lugo, Galicia	Mountain	yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> House-museum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artistic Residency Rural Living
Farm Cultural Park	Cultural Association	Italy – Fasaino, Sicily	Rural		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Center Guest Houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artistic Residency Contemporary Art Public Art Art and Education Eco-tourism Artistic Residency Contemporary Art Public Art Art and Education Eco-tourism
Arte Sella	Social Enterprise	Italy – Borgo Valsugana, Trentino – Alto Adige	Mountain		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gardens Territorial Paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artistic Residency Contemporary Art Public Art Art and Education Eco-tourism
Via Mariae	Cultural Association	Rumania, Harghita	Rural		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Territorial Paths Guest House 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eco-tourism
Borgofuturo	Association for social promotion	Italy – Pieve San Ginesio, Marche	Mountain			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Camp Environmental Education Music and Festival

However, although the initiatives promoted by the selected practices may address a specific macro-area as well as individual themes, they often address a variety of themes, emphasizing interlinkages and mutual influences between both themes and areas.

A focus on Italy: examples of culture-led regeneration practices in inner peripheries

Although the selected culture-led regeneration practices are in different European countries, several factors make Italy an interesting case study.

First, about half of the selected practices are in Italy (6 out of 13). Second, Italy has been so far underrepresented in studies on cultural and creative practices (Duxbury, 2021). Third, Italian practices offer a variety of contexts, being located in rural and mountainous areas from the North to the South of the country.

Hence, three Italian practices characterized by different degrees of peripherality and starting dates and addressing different themes (Table 5).

All the selected case studies started a process aimed at generating a “new cultural model”, where culture is directly shaped by local communities based on the recognition of local material and immaterial heritage. They also allow understanding how the initiatives addressing each theme, or more than one, can induce new territorial images and relevant impacts on the territory.

Table 5. The selected Italian practices

Name	Territorial Context	Foundation	Mission	Main Activities	Triggering Themes	Additional Cross-Cutting Themes	Governance and Innovation	Impacts
Wonder Grottole	Historical center of the village of Grottole, at 30km from Matera, Basilicata. Population of Grottole is 2,100 inhabitants.	Started in 2013 from the meeting of Casa Netural from Matera and a local inhabitant.	Facilitate the regeneration of the historic center through temporary living arrangements and the valorization of local resources.	Partnered with Airbnb for the Italian Sabbatical program, recovery of abandoned buildings, promotion of cultural initiatives and artist residencies.	Sustainable tourism, temporary living, architectural recovery, promotion of local territory.	Connection between local and global community, creation of training and skills growth opportunities.	Collaborations with local institutions, associations, and businesses to create collaboration networks and involve the local community.	Involvement of over 200 local community members, promotion on a national and international scale, attraction of tourists and "temporary inhabitants."
Arte Sella	Val di Sella, part of Borgo Valsugana in Bassa Valsugana, on the Trentino Alps. Population of Borgo Valsugana is 7,000 inhabitants.	Started in 1986 with an art exhibition in Villa Strobele in Val di Sella by the association «Friends of the Borgo»	Valorize the territory through artistic interventions integrated with the natural landscape.	Creation of artworks integrated into the landscape, educational projects like Arte Sella Education.	Collaboration with nature, integration of art and landscape, promotion of new models of cultural welfare.	Diversification of activities, partnerships with local and national cultural institutions.	Selection of artists with international perspective, financial and morale support from local and regional institutions.	Attraction of national and international visitors, creation of a network of cultural relations.
Interzona	San Martino Valle Caudina is an agricultural valley in the Apennine Mountains in the region of Campania. Population of 4,885 abitanti, inhabitants.	Founded in 2003 with the Interferenze festival, promoting indie and electronic music in a rural area.	Revalorize rural territories through artistic residencies and practices related to new media such as the deep listening of the territory.	Interferenze festival, artistic residencies of Liminaria project, collaborations with schools and local communities.	Use of sound and new media arts, experimentation with hybrid formats, research and field studies.	Education, open hardware, international collaborations.	Weaving relationships between local and transnational levels, collaborations with urban cultural institutions.	Drafting of the Rural Futurism Manifesto, international exhibition, collaborations with urban cultural institutions.

WonderGrottole: the Italian Sabbatical

Wonder Grottole is an experimental project aimed at promoting the regeneration of the historic centre of Grottole, a village of 2,100 inhabitants located in the Basilicata region (southern Italy) and classified by the SNAI as peripheral area. The project aims at recovering some abandoned houses and attracting of new temporary or permanent residents to encourage exchanges and relationships with the local population.

It is worth noting that in 2023 the Basilicata region, together with the Campania, has recorded the lowest negative migration balance in respect to all the Italian regions. The population trend in Basilicata shifted from -0.11% in 2002 to -0.66% in 2023. In terms of cultural statistics, Basilicata hosts less than 1% of all the registered Italian museums (or similar sites) and only 16,7% of them has more than 10,000 visitors per year.

In Grottole, the population trend moved from -0.65% in 2002 to -1.70% in 2022.

The historical center of Grottole has been characterized over the years by a progressive emigration, which has led to the gradual abandonment of the historical center where, currently, most of the buildings are abandoned. Today, the historical center hosts between 200 and 300 inhabitants, more than 70% of whom are over 70 years old.

The project started in 2013, following a walk (Netural Walk) organised by Casa Netural, a coworking space in Matera. Following this initiative, the first embryonic initiatives of the Wonder Grottole project were born from the exchange between Casa Netural and the Grottole’s residents, and in particular with Silvio, the Municipal Culture Councilor.

The small village of Grottole was involved in the initiatives of the Matera Design Festival. In February 2018, the first crowdfunding campaign was promoted to launch the project and in September 2018, the social enterprise called WonderGrottole was established. The first

initiatives were related to the mapping of local resources to be involved in the project. They promoted an action for the participation of the community to map the abandoned buildings in the historical center. Using a game developed as an app, the local community mapped 629 abandoned buildings in the historic center. At the same time, a map of local knowledge, mapping and photo-storytelling of local producers was realized.

WonderGrottole focuses on sustainable slow tourism and temporary residence as a driver for the historic center's regeneration. Specifically, the project aims at enhancing social innovation (Sacco, 2018), by favoring the exchanges between local community and temporary residents, such as tourists, researchers, artisans and artists, promoting meanwhile local resources.

A milestone of the WonderGrottole experience was the launch of the partnership with Airbnb in 2019 and the co-design of the Italian Sabbatical Programme: an international call for volunteers to host five "temporary residents" for three months, offering their skills to contribute to the revitalization of the village.

Meanwhile, the association has bought three abandoned buildings from private owners and renovated them to host WonderCasa, the association's headquarters where guests and artists are hosted and WonderStudio, a workshop where artistic works are created. Also, Wonder Grottole launched touristic experiences in collaboration with local wine, honey and ceramic producers and promoted several cultural initiatives, such as international architectural competitions (e.g. Chiesa Diruta in collaboration with ReuseItaly), project exhibitions, the Living Culture Festival and the co-construction of the "Wonder Bee", a community apiary. The Institut Francais Nouveau Grand Tour has supported artist' residencies, residential workshops for students and the Open School for Village Hosts hosted in Grottole.

Thus, WonderGrottole's initiatives have been aimed at promoting sustainable tourism and temporary living, with the aim of attracting energies and skills from all over the world and enhancing cultural exchange with the local community.

This is intertwined with the recovery of abandoned buildings in the historic centre, which are being transformed into accommodation and co-working spaces for the local and temporary community. The promotion of local products is also flanked by training opportunities, for both permanent and temporary inhabitants, to favor exchange and transmission of local skills. Hence, the different initiatives promoted by WonderGrottole have contributed to recovery historical heritage and promote local products and skills, renewing meanwhile the sense of belonging of inhabitants. Through collaborative projects with local institutions, associations and businesses, the project has promoted the exchange of knowledge and the empowerment of the local community that is currently more and more involved in political, social, and economic life.

Since the beginning of the project, WonderGrottole has involved more than 200 people from the local community. In 2018 and 2019, Grottole families opened their homes to students from all over Italy for the residential workshops of the Master in Relational Design of the Academy of Fine Arts of Catania, in Sicily.

The Italian Sabatic call for applications received over 280,000 applications in just one month, with over 3,000 national and international press articles on the Wonder Grottole project.

The international architectural competition for the Church of Diruta, promoted in collaboration with Reuse Italy Bcorp, collected 500 projects. The results of the competition were shown during the exhibition "La fragile bellezza" (The fragile beauty), hosted in the historical center thanks to the opening of some abandoned buildings.

In 2022, the activities of WonderGrottole brought around 2,000 tourists to the village. WonderCasa hosted 27 "temporary residents" from all over the world.

Arte Sella: the Contemporary Mountain.

Arte Sella is a cultural association that plays an important role in the valorization and regeneration of the Bassa Valsugana, in the Trentino-Alto Adige region (North-eastern Italy), a vast mountainous and wooded area, characterized by a strong depopulation dynamic, especially in former industrial areas and less accessible areas. Val di Sella is located in the municipality of Borgo Valsugana with a population of about 7,000 and classified by the SNAI as an intermediate municipality.

The population trend in Trentino-Alto Adige has decreased from 1.06% in 2002 to 0.33% in 2022. In Borgo Valsugana, the population trend moved from 1.41% in 2002 to 0.82% in 2022. Looking at the statistics on culture, Trentino hosts 4% registered Italian museums (or similar sites) and 31% of them has more than 10,000 visitors per year.

Only a few dozen of people from Borgo Valsugana live in Val di Sella. For a long time, this area was an alpine pasture, and later the valley became a touristic area. Since the 1970s, Val di Sella has experienced a slow population decline, with the gradual abandonment of traditional pastoral activities and tourism.

Arte Sella was born in 1986 thanks to three inhabitants of Borgo Valsugana that organized an art exhibition in the garden of Villa Stobele, a private historic building located in the center of the Val di Sella, with the aim of combining contemporary art and nature. The exhibition was an unexpected success, attracting around 2,500 visitors. As a result, the organizers decided to repeat the experience through the creation of the Biennial Art in Nature, specialized in Land Art, where artists look to the natural landscape as an integral part of their work. This led to the creation of a four-kilometers artworks' path called "Arte Natura": in 2002, the most famous artwork, the “Cattedrale Vegetale” by the artist Giuliano Mauri, attracted thousands of visitors and led other associations and local actors to join the project. Over the years, more than 300 artists from different parts of the world have contributed to the creation of three exhibition routes with artworks integrated into the surrounding natural landscape.

The success of the initiative led Arte Sella Association to formalize its initiative under the brand "Arte Sella. The Contemporary Mountain" and to broaden the scope of its initiatives.

The diversification of activities began in 1998, when the headquarter of ArteSella moved from Villa Strobele to another village in the valley, Malga Costa, which had lost its original rural character over time. Since 2002, Malga Costa has been enriched with numerous artworks and has become a pay-as-you-go place, hosting numerous cultural events, such as exhibitions, concerts, theater performances and literary events. The original site, Villa Stobele, was reopened in 2016 to host an infopoint and educational workshops.

In 30 years of activity, the Arte Sella Association has promoted in situ artistic interventions and cultural initiatives that largely contributed to the enhancement of the territory and its natural heritage.

Today Arte Sella promotes different but complementary initiatives: in addition to artistic events and biennials, initiatives have been carried out to integrate landscape and sports activities or to promote innovative and ecological learning paths for students, teachers, and educators, training programs for social workers and teachers, focused on themes related to nature, art and care, placing viability, biodiversity, environment and quality of life at the center, have been carried out.

Furthermore, Arte Sella is now a permanent fixture in the area: a pole of cultural well-being, with a growing number of visitors: from around 15,000 in 2006 to around 80,000 in 2022. Today, the association counts not only on the close collaboration with the municipal and provincial authorities, which is essential to support Arte Sella's activities over time, on the numerous partnerships with other cultural institutions and regional museums, but also on a dense network of national and international relationships.

Interzona: Sound, arts and technoculture in rural areas.

The cultural association Interzona - APS is concerned with the revitalization of some rural and inner areas in Southern Italy through artistic practices related to the use of new media in sound art and technocultures, that are based on the relationship between art, culture and technology. The association headquarter is in San Martino Valle Caudina, a mountain village of 4,885 inhabitants, in the Campania region. It has been classified by the SNAI as an intermediate municipality. Campania region is experiencing a significant decline in population: from 0.42% in 2002 to -0.26% in 2022. In San Martino Valle Caudina the population trend shifted from -0.40% in 2002 to -0.62% in 2022.

Interzona was founded in 2003 on the idea of Leandro Pisano, a researcher from San Martino Valle Caudina. He launched the first edition of the Interferenze festival, which included live events, performances, software art installations and digital experimentation in the rural area of Valle Caudina. Compared to other digital art festivals, Interferenze was the only one organized in a rural area, and it became a laboratory for experimentation and research in such territories. The 2005 edition of the festival took place in the historical center of San Martino Valle Caudina, which was transformed into a hybrid zone of meeting between locals, artists and tourists. The path of Interferenze continued until 2010, spreading to other rural areas of the Campania region. The last edition of the festival was held in Bisaccia, a village of the rural area of Irpinia, on the border between Campania and Basilicata regions. Then, a review process of the project and its sustainability, going beyond the Festival and its prevailing entertainment nature, was started. Hence, in 2014, Interzona launched Liminaria, a research project aimed at creating networks of cultural, social and economic actors from local communities and abroad.

The Liminaria project deployed different actions aimed at relating spaces, landscapes and inhabitants. In detail, it was addressed to re-launch marginal territories as privileged areas to promote cultural actions based on sound and new media.

The Project was tested over the years in several inner areas of southern Italy (Puglia, Molise, and Sicily), with hybrid formats in between of temporary residencies, laboratories, workshops and action-research projects. These actions converged in a research platform inspired by the concept of (neo)rurality, based on the exploration of the territory through a process of deep and immersive listening between artists and communities.

In 2019, Leandro Pisano, together with Beatrice Ferrara, drafted the Manifesto of Rural Futurism, a document in which the threads of the research carried out on the field during the first five years were pulled together, point by point, to share Liminaria's approach with other rural territories, both in Italy and at international level.

The Liminaria project was presented in exhibitions in Australia and New Zealand and, in 2022, landed in Japan with an exhibition of art related to sound and new media, as a conclusion of a three-year transnational cooperation project between Italy and Japan "Energies in the Rural", co-produced by Interzona and the public Aomori Contemporary Art Center (ACAC).

Hence, over the years the Interzona's field of action has extended from cultural and performance events, including a sound art residency program for international artists, to collaborative pathways with schools. The Interzona association has been involved in educational projects focused on land, communities and new technologies, developing open hardware projects with schools, cooperating with different village communities and weaving relationships between local and transnational levels, between exogenous and endogenous realities and actors.

Conclusions

The purpose of this contribution is to explore the “cultural remoteness” of the inner peripheries, interpreted not only as lack of access to cultural services but, above all, as the lack of bottom-up initiatives aimed at creating tailored-to-the-site cultural models, based on the recognition and

reinterpretation of local cultural heritage and alternative to the dominant urban cultural models (Duxbury and Campbell, 2011).

To this aim, a set of culture-led regeneration practices carried out in peripheral areas have been selected within some European networks/projects focused on culture-led regeneration in both urban and non-urban areas.

Most of the examined practices highlight the importance of actively involving the local communities and developing networks of relationships going far beyond the local boundaries, while preserving their place-based identity. Most of the practices have been carried out thanks to partnerships between different actors, in the public-private and third sectors, and have dealt with different themes, trying to connect natural and cultural heritage, different artistic languages, new technologies and local traditions, innovative agricultural practices and local productions, permanent and temporary residents, environmental education and sustainable tourism.

In particular, the three Italian practices are based on the enhancement of tangible and intangible cultural assets through hybridisation, overlapping and encounters with external resources, where cultural initiatives are never exclusively aimed at entertainment and the consumption of cultural products coming from outside the territory, but are always closely linked to the local natural and cultural environment.

This is evident in the case of WonderGrottole, where the attraction of temporary residents allows the exchange of knowledge and skills creates mutually beneficial relationships between permanent and temporary residents, facilitating the communication between people with different cultural backgrounds through expressive storytelling, visual arts or physical interaction with inhabitants and places.

The Arte Sella initiatives, in Bassa Valsugana, have contributed significantly to the development of the Val di Sella, thanks to the symbiosis between art and nature, where one contributes to the definition of the other (Sechi, 2022). Here the artistic process is the result of the link established between nature and art, creating unique and non-reproducible products. Artistic practices favour the emergence of new territorial imaginaries and generate new forms of culture, strictly rooted in the local context. (Lowe, 2000)

The projects carried out by Interzona, such as the Liminaria project, directly engage with local communities through the artistic practice of deep listening, to create new perceptions of places and environmental resources. The aim is to create imaginaries that nourish the possibility of looking at their own places of living with different eyes (or, in the case of Liminaria, listening with 'different' ears), with particular reference to the natural resources of these territories (Pioselli and Pisano, 2020).

Moreover, in the investigated practices, culture seems to emerge as a key tool for opening up new spaces of participation, valorisation of resources, sharing between local and external actors, as well as for creating large-scale networks of collaboration and exchange networks, capable of amplifying and extending the impacts of individual practices well beyond the local context.

Finally, using both artistic and non-artistic forms, often integrated, these practices, although so far, they did not produce an impact in terms of population growth, have surely favoured the regeneration of local relational and cultural capital, nourished by exchange and hybridisation with external resources, which might represent a more fertile ground for attracting young and lively population.

They have contributed to activate dynamic development processes that, framed in wider relational networks, guarantee the continuity of the local initiatives, and provide relevant

examples of overcoming the cultural remoteness of inner peripheries through culture, social/creative innovation and collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008).

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