



CENTRO UNIVERSITARIO EUROPEO PER I BENI CULTURALI

Ravello

Archeologia, storia, cultura

6

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH HERITAGE AWARENESS AND GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING



edited by
Luiz Oosterbeek & Fabio Pollice



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2014

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Performing arts, community empowerment and social innovation: a model of training-intervention-research*

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Preamble

In this paper, we present a model of training-research-intervention whose purpose is to trigger community activation processes for the promotion of community *empowerment* and *capabilities* to favour development and social innovation. The model is called ACL (Action Community Learning) and consists of a complex narrative-performative device, born from experiences primarily arising in the *Summer School of Performing Arts and Community Care*, which has been held for the last three years in the communities of the Salento region¹.

1. Epistemological and methodological assumptions

The Summer School was born in 2012 in Carpignano Salentino, which was historically considered a significant place for social theatre. In 1974, for example, Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret - settled temporarily there to prepare a show - gave birth to the "cultural exchange" construct. Even if we acknowledge this ideal reference to Barba's experience, the school draws its epistemological and methodological foundations from a plurality of experiences, which have fed numerous social activation sources through performative mechanisms: The Italian tradition of social and theatrical animation (Perissinotto 2004; Gruppo Abele 1971 et seq.), the libertarian pedagogy of Raffaele Laporta, proponent of community self-education (Laporta 1979), the South American one of Paulo Freire (2004), Augusto Boal (2011, 2014), and José Antonio Abreu (Miller et al 2010), the socioanalysis of Georges Lapassade (2009), certain suggestions of Ivan Illich (2010), the approach to training of Amartya Sen (2006, 2011) and Martha Nussbaum (2002, 2007, 2012), and the theories and practices of digital storytelling (2013).

The School, now in its third year of operation, aims to become an asset to the entire Salento region, continuing its work of deepening epistemological assumptions and intervention methods, while widening the framework of partnerships and arrangements with a view to extend its duration.

This idea of local development is not an abstract one, linked to territory-independent economic models, but one of a highly contextual and local nature, sustainable not only in terms of the environmental but also social and cultural balance, which ultimately safeguards the reproducibility of community ties. This is a prerequisite for achieving social innovation, a concept which is now ubiquitous in the whole range of policies of the European Commission, and which revolves around the relational ties of people and their emerging needs, namely those expressed albeit unsatisfied (Murray-Caulier Grice-Mulgan 2010). The founding epistemological principle of the training-re-

Photos by Carlo Elmiro Bevilacqua

* While the present work arises from the collaboration of both its authors, Salvatore Colazzo was responsible for paragraphs 0-3-4 and Ada Manfreda for 1-2.

¹ The *Summer School of Performing Arts and Community Care* is the brainchild of Salvatore Colazzo and Ada Manfreda. It is held every year by the university spinoff EsperO - born in 2009 around the chair of Experimental Education of prof. Colazzo - , which carries out applied research in the field of experiential and outdoor education.

search-intervention model inspired by the “Summer School of Performing Arts and Community Care” is that of Otherness, understood primarily as an organisational criteria of the “Self” process and its definition of identity.

Moreover, the model aims to encourage openness and engagement with the *Otherness*, assuming that the Self is a semiotic-systemic-relational process, therefore encompassing a sign interpretation function (whether of an electrochemical or linguistic nature), which permanently seeks self-definition by drawing the limits, always dynamic, permeable and *in the making*, which separate the inside, i.e. identity, from the outside, i.e. otherness. Thus, the Otherness stands as the pre-condition for interpretation: It conveys all the variability / diversity of the world and its signs, granting the Self its meaning by demanding from it a constant interpretation and self-interpretation, challenging thus its limits - hence what these dynamically define- and inviting the same to open up to the world and its signs (Manfreda 2014). Practising Otherness means avoiding a blind and comforting faith on such limits, giving them a substantial nature or taking their meaning for granted; it also means capturing demands to trigger re-signification or mere reflection processes and, therefore, of self-awareness and understanding of their meaning.

Expressed otherwise, practising Otherness in the ACL model means opening up to other stories and the curious glances from others, heeding other voices telling your story, and being influenced by the presence of other bodies close to yours, in a space that gradually becomes common. And letting yourself be surprised by the unexpected possibilities that this places before you.

In essence, this model is proposed as a high-density relational experience comprising storytelling and listening, physical body closeness, as well as meaning contagion and strengthening.

From a methodological standpoint, the model hereby is based on the principles of *participatory intervention-research* (Colucci-Colombo-Montali 2008), revisiting afresh the WebQuest (in its historical version and the updated version called New-webquest)² method and methodologies grouped under the LivingLab label, and making them functionally suitable to an intervention of exploration and activation of community resources, as the first phase of a subsequent, more complex process of promoting social innovation for local development. The research-intervention aims to keep theory and practice tightly coupled in a recursive process, defined as a change driver for an individual, group or social reality. Furthermore, the research-intervention considers working “with” people rather than “on people” of paramount importance, favouring a communicative exchange between researchers and research subjects, as it aims to promote participation, democratic growth and awareness. In those of a participatory nature, “the role of the researcher is profoundly changed,

² *WebQuest* is a pedagogical-didactic device based on theoretical assumptions arising from constructivism and cooperative learning, which is intended to favour the development of *analysis, synthesis and evaluation* of skills in students. It was initially developed by Bernie Dodge and subsequently refined by Tom March. Moreover, this method was later revised and expanded to reach the formulation defined by Salvatore Colazzo and Francesco Bearzi and co-named *NewWebQuest*, which is a creative cooperative activity involving study and research that values the training opportunities offered by applications and content on the Web in a blended learning environment. By co-creating a more or less widely shared product, learning communities, formed by a group of peers and a teacher-facilitator, develop intrinsic motivation for learning, refining cognitive and metacognitive functions, skills for critical, creative, divergent and lateral thinking, for problem solving and circumstantial and abductive reasoning, as well as interpersonal and “cosmopolitan” skills. To learn more: Colazzo 2004, 2005, 2007.

dropping its expert position [...] *to become an enabler*, i.e. one that enables a process and builds the conditions so that the process can be initiated and accompanied. [...] Participatory approaches are mainly adopted to promote change processes within communities “(Colucci-Colombo-Montali 2008, 67). In our model, we have introduced a third level hence the training-research-intervention approach: Besides interactions occurring between social researchers on the one side, and people and communities on the other, we have engaged a group of trainees, equally active and change drivers, thus creating a triadic relationship. In turn, this has created interesting and articulate dynamics, which depict the reflective and generative potential of the model.

2. Model

The ACL model seeks to connect intervention and reflection, social participation and generativity, highlighting the intangible resources of a community.

Its formula largely relies on the idea that activating a community and engaging the same in a multidimensional process of self-narration and reflection on its identity and potential (Colazzo 2012) will favour the emergence of sustainable participatory, supportive, inclusive, and generative experiences. Thus, storytelling, theatre, music and other arts are used to launch transformative processes towards new forms of social awareness, planning, and definition of purpose.

It provides a learning experience that consolidates three intervention levels:

1. *Field research*
2. *Training*
3. *Performative intervention*

all interconnected and often concurrent, so that their distinction is of a logical and not chronological nature. The *field research* intervention level involves the construction of a qualitative research at the community identified, aimed at the exploration and collection of stories concerning the subject of the Summer School. The *training* intervention level involves those working in various capacities on social issues in a local, experience-based learning process, full of workshops, seminars and reflective settings that offer theoretical, methodological and practical instruments to use storytelling and performing arts as a way to promote participatory and social *empowerment* from the perspective of community pedagogy. It does so in an experiential and interactive fashion and, above all, directly involving the trainees in the intervention process, availing thus of the support of facilitators-trainers, performers and experts of the School. Therefore, the School may serve the following purposes:

- Care workers (whether teachers, social workers, educators, psychologists, counsellors, mediators), which can source functional elements from the School to operate on more or less large groups and increase thereby their sense of self-efficacy and induce reflexivity processes mediated by the involvement of the body and its communication resources;
- Artists, cultural workers and event organisers, who heighten their awareness of the social dimension of their interventions through the training activities of the School.

The *performative intervention* intervention level concerns either the field research process, which adopts a real research-intervention methodology (as explained in the previous paragraph) for its implementation, or the methodology used in the interactions that the Summer School gradually builds among the students of the School and the community identified, which have their highest expression and fulfilment during the final performative restoration in the region held the last night of school.

From this point of view, the Summer School is a device in which culture, that is, symbols, meanings, values, imagination, and creativity, are inseparably produced and consumed. It mobilises the identities and differences, connects them in a relational and transactional network, from which new cultural artefacts and knowledge arise. The artefact is an intervention instrument and at the same time a channel to connect the subject with the environment, while designing practices for mutual interaction. Indeed, its relevance arises from its mediation function (Vygotsky defined artefacts as 'semiotic mediators') (Manfreda 2014a).

Therefore, the Summer School mechanism can be defined through two fundamental dimensions, characterised by two pairs of opposites:

- The "community" dimension, which is expressed in the *identity / otherness* opposition, on the one part;
- The "cultural artefact" dimension, which is expressed in the *gift / acceptance* opposition, on the other part.

Schematically, we can represent the dimensions introduced by the Summer School as follows:



The intersection of both meaning dimensions defines the semiotic space within which the actors involved can produce meanings.

The “community” dimension organises discursive and performative practices of those involved because of the conditions of existence and operation of a “community Self”, which may exist as either organisational closure on the Self (“Identity”, negative sign), or as an opening and therefore dialogue with the social environment (“Otherness”, positive sign).

The “cultural artefact” dimension organises discursive and performative practices of the actors involved concerning meaning dynamics drawn around the transactional object, which regulates community exchanges defined and interpreted by the “community” dimension, i.e. the cultural artefact, therefore represented either as a ‘gift’ (negative sign), i.e. something we part with to offer it to another, or as “acceptance” (positive sign), i.e. something we receive with the clear intent to favour its integration within our own limits. There are several possible trajectories of flows in the factor space, that is - in this interpretation - the community.

The semiotic space established by the Summer School (represented in the graph), which is a reflective and intervention setting, allows practices which serve also as meaning paths: That of Gift-Identity, i.e. to “donate its own identity”, which represents otherness for its recipients, who must thus prepare themselves to receive the same; that of Acceptance-Otherness, i.e. the act of “integrating otherness” received as a gift, in turn giving something of oneself (of one’s identity) to others, in a circularity within which the opposites identity / otherness move towards each other, through giving and accepting interventions via exchanged cultural artefacts (Colazzo Manfreda-2014).

In the Summer School, artefacts produced and exchanged encompass stories, performances, and media products of digital storytelling.

The *story* is both a carrier and instrument to convey meaning to relationships, self-awareness, and possible identity limits. It characterises numerous moments of our device, both as a methodology of exploratory research and mapping of community meanings, whether as workshop for re-narrating and analysing research materials to build a new cultural artefact, i.e. the *community dramaturgy*, on which one can develop performance and media activities to return the same to the community itself (Colazzo Manfreda-2014).

The story is thus a “dramatized” form of self-awareness. Meanings constructed in the story have performative value. Namely: the story does not only serve a descriptive / cognitive / constative purpose but, as it unfolds, it feeds back on the subject itself and influences its psycho-physical condition. Words trigger biological circuits and modulate the network of systems that constitute the human body³. In this sense, the

³ We refer to networks pursuant to PNEI (Psiconeuroendocrinoimmunology) definition. See Bottaccioli 1995.

story or narration (*narr-action*) is deemed performative, i.e. it constructs the meaning of what is said while establishing links thereto and, therefore, orienting the upcoming narrative. Upon narration, storytellers produce a significant reconstruction of their own life and past experiences, while stretching out and prospecting into the future - i.e. anticipating it. Indeed, it is precisely those anticipations and models (which we also call purposes, projects) that interpret and organise the narrative of the past. This means that the story told is not independent from the purpose for which it was conveyed; its underlying purpose is ever present, directing and organising the narrative material (Manfreda 2014). In this sense, memory arises from the inclination to planning that is inherent to humans. This assumption constitutes the basis of an educational initiative, which historically precedes the Summer School: the “Memory Laboratory”, covered in a paper to clarify epistemological assumptions (see Colazzo 2010).

Performing arts are either the means to involve all bodily senses in an immersive and mutual game of relationships and communication, or the space of reflection on the self and its contexts, as well as on regular social processes (Manfreda 2014b).

Cultural performances serve to deliver social critique. They constitute a sort of reflective and non-reflecting mirrors - Turner (1993), in the sense that the relationship between social and performative processes is not a one-way - i.e. reflective - relationship, under which performative processes would merely mimic everyday life, but rather a reciprocal and reflective connection, which affects both partakers. This raises thus a distinction between reflecting and reflective, whereby “reflecting” is to be understood as the mere reflection and reproduction of reality, whereas “reflective” introduces a critical, repositioning, and interpretive angle. Community performances have a reflective function. This is so in as much as performances allow influencing the Self, which these transform either into Other or Subject.

During model design, we have made every effort to ensure its openness, representing thus a plurality of positions.

Turner also noted that cultural performances often consist of different cultural media, i.e. verbal and non-verbal communication combined at will. Each one operates at a certain level and, therefore, it may well be that the meaning of one level subverts that of another. In this sense, we can claim that media manages to create “a theatre within a theatre”. Accordingly, Turner seems to suggest that the use of multiple media - hence further linguistic codes - and even additional sensory channels, offers broader guarantees as to the plurality of positions, meanings, and different positions and points of view held simultaneously, ensuring thus interpretative freedom (Turner 1993).

The *transmediality* (Jenkins 2010) is therefore another important feature of the Summer School: It occurs inside and outside of the digital realm, i.e. transmediality permeates the whole process, offering plural channels and expression and narrative codes, whether electronic and digital or physical and material (analogue), to thematise and provide meaning to mutually referencing semiotic objects of performative work, so that each one offers a specific point of view and contributes to the construction of a polydimensional, plural story. It is a device that jointly involves: *bodies* – those of communities in which it operates, of students who participate, of trainers, performers and artists involved – *spaces* and *time*, in the construction of a common story that becomes experience. Within these specially recreated framework, each one of us can trace new words, unheard meanings, and further narrative avenues. It is a plural and open device: It aggregates numerous professionals and performers from different disciplines, many territorial entities, including public bodies, social and cultural associations, accommodation facilities, and the community of Salento at large, which annually welcomes all Summer School participants.

This establishes a dialogue between the inside and the outside, that is, between the inside of the training offered to students, and the outside of the community hosting the Summer School and, more generally, of all seeking active involvement and participation.

Therefore, the learning experience provides opportunities for meeting, exchanging and mutual fertilisation through public events, which are open to anyone willing to participate with projections, conversations, performances, readings and discussions, to echo and pursue further the themes of the Summer School among students and the people, outside, in facilities and spaces belonging to the municipality, to the public and, ultimately, devoted to sharing (Manfreda 2013b). The School strives to meet all these goals each year starting from a social theme / issue to trigger reflection and activation processes, both in the minds of school students and in those of participants in the plurality of initiatives of this complex socio-educational project (Manfreda 2014a).

Last year's focus was on migration and global processes; the first edition dealt with some atypical workers, the toll collectors



of the Southeast Railway; this year, under the title “Territories are Stories”, we sought to highlight the intangible assets tied to the most prominent sites of Ortelle and Vignacastri, two small municipalities in the Salento region.

In reality, this year’s theme was already present in previous editions. As we told the story of toll collectors in the first edition⁴, we realised the extent of the stories and emotions held in their living spaces, which they forcibly abandoned as electronic technology made managers redundant in the small stations along the line and level crossings. Indeed, leaving those quarters behind was a soul-wrenching experience for most of them. That aside, they mostly resented that young people, taking over the premises for cultural development purposes under a concession from the Puglia Region, expressed no interest whatsoever in what those places were in the past and had been for the people who lived there. We realised that redesigning a place entails transforming its original meaning. Unless one manages to save the symbolisation created by its prior dwellers, restructuring / re-purposing a place is perceived as damaging to its meaning. The question is: Is it inevitable violence or cruelty resulting from insensitivity (Manfreda 2013a)? In the second year⁵, we told the story of Salento’s farmers, who migrated “to the Calabria region” to grow tobacco towards the middle of the last century. As we toured the places where they stayed during the seasonal migration, we visited the narrow quarters they inhabited and heard the tales these dwellings evoked. Their walls echoed words exchanged many decades ago, the cries of pain upon an unexpected incident, the whispers of two young lovers, who found a hideaway from the sight of adults, carving out their own little corner of happiness.

3. Territories are Stories

From this research, we have developed an interest in thematising places specifically while questioning their underlying meaning. Where do stories go as places change and spaces are transformed? They remain for a while in people’s heads, to progressively fade and finally vanish altogether if, by sheer chance, no writer, painter or photographer captures them. Who would be indeed interested in old stories of an alley, courtyard or square? Is keeping those memories even a worthwhile exercise? Is there really a point in bringing them back to life, reconstructing the spaces in the imagination or in their externalisation in the world of virtual reality? Whatever its purpose, it should not favour the longing for any paradise lost, but help people rethink the places and regain possession of spaces while living them in full. Also, it should enrich and provide them with an additional narrative dimension, which

⁴ During 2012, the first edition saw the construction of a field narrative research with the toll collectors of Southeast Railways, which provided the material for its dramatic rewriting and its performative arrangement during the residential activities held in Carpignano Salentino from 3 to 7 September. The theme-title was “Barter hubs exchanges: Between performing arts and community care”.

⁵ The second edition was held from August 20th to 29th in Carpignano Salentino (Lecce) with the theme-title “Stories from the earth for the earth. Small and large migratory movements of yesterday and today”. To complete the 10-day local tour, it was necessary to undertake a phase of narrative research on a group of ten Salento farmers, now in their seventies and eighties, who between the 50s and 70s of the twentieth century - little more than children then - migrated with all their family to the Taranto, Basilicata and Calabria regions to grow tobacco for several months. We captured their stories by taking them on a trip back to those regions, which they haven’t revisited in nearly sixty years.

can make them more appealing to non-superficial tourists, those who can express genuine curiosity for life.

How many urban projects went sour because we failed to understand the meaning dynamics at play on the premises in question?

It is important to understand that places incorporate emotions, memories, expectations, carry our affections and conform our identity. These places make us who we are. Thus, it might be worth gaining a deeper understanding of our relationship with the places and the stories that put us in them. Opening a dialogue with such places means allowing our inner world to expand and gain further insight. Places mutate into symbols, capable of surfacing our memories and leading us on a discovery journey into past social practices, which can also anticipate a possible future.

However, the meaning of historical assets must be contextualised by means of people's lives. Otherwise, such assets become mere petrified objects, delivered only for the specialist consumption of historians, archaeologists and, ultimately, professionals of the past. Regarding the past, present generations endeavour to preserve not only the tangible heritage but also the messages embedded in places and the lives and feats of their dwellers, salvaging them from the nothingness of oblivion.

"Places are clots of individual and social stories" is a leading idea that allows us to interpret, from our own perspective, the suggestions and indications arising from some official documents on the intangible culture and the cultural heritage:

- *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* (Adopted by the 33rd General Conference of the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture, Paris, 20.10.2005);
- *Convention on the Protection Of Intangible Heritage* (adopted on 17 October 2003, the 32nd General Conference of UNESCO);
- *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of UNESCO* (adopted unanimously in Paris during the 31st session of the General Conference of UNESCO on 2 November 2001);
- *Framework Convention of the Council of Europe on the value of cultural heritage for society* (Faro, October 27, 2005).

"Territories are stories" was therefore the focus of the Summer School of Performing Arts and Community Care, Edition 2014, held from September 7 to 14 in the municipalities of Carpignano Salentino, Ortelle, Vignacastri, Martano, and Martignano. This year we experienced with an itinerant school mode with the so-called "raids", while maintaining the more established structure, namely the proposal for moments-stimulus of a different nature in terms of content and relationship and communication procedures to request and plant seeds of reflection,



to learn-by-doing, i.e. while intervening, fieldwork is conducted and processes activated to perform and be performative:

- **Raids:** It is the approach we adopted to meet and engage the community of Ortelle and Vignacastri. As we arrived in the morning to the sound of the band and body percussion, house doors opened and words started flowing. That is when the magic of the gift did its trick. On the one hand, by the eager storytelling of the locals and, on the other hand, by our attentive listening. Groups of citizens and students of the School, engaged in lively conversation on streets and squares, and even at private residences, dotted for four days the lives of these two small and welcoming communities. In the words of a student: "The welcome we received was simply extraordinary". The eagerness shown by citizens to participate, speak, and tell their stories was absolutely unexpected. Thanking them for their willingness proved nearly impossible, as they could not stop thanking us for giving them a voice, for making them feel important and irreplaceable". Sight, hearing and taste were the stimuli that we presented our respondents to activate their memories of places. The extensive narrative material emerged, transcribed and videotaped, represented a tall order from the men and women of Ortelle and Vignacastri. Indeed, returning such material to these communities was the subject of extended reflections and discussions in subgroups and in plenary sessions.
- **Seminars:** In Carpignano Salentino, Martignano and Martano, we reflected on the theme of the School, its methods and aims through the contribution of external experts, who visited us and shared our experience, bringing perspectives from different disciplines of humanities and social sciences.
- **Conviviality:** the eight days of School were a time of sharing. Sharing everything amongst all participants, students, educators, performers, and artists. Lunch or dinner proved a great setting for spontaneous and intimate encounters: because the School wants to become, first and foremost, a community.
- **The evenings of the Summer School:** Every night we met on the streets with the host community. By way of presents, we offered stories, performance moments, video projections and readings of other places, cultures, and languages. Other stories and glances with which contaminate the community, urging it to encounter with otherness.
- **Performative restitution:** Later on, it came the time





to tidy up our notes, select and extract narrative fragments from the stories collected, rewrite the whole thing into a drama of sorts, i.e. a new text that was identical albeit somehow different from those stories, and which could take its own shapes, gestures, sounds and be returned to the people. The performance of the final restitution, the last night in the square of San Giorgio Ortelle, was the highlight of the whole process, one in which the “foreign raiders” returned the stories offered to them as a gift although, for this last new exchange, using different eyes, bodies, and voices. In this performance, the audience was not a mere spectator but its actor.

We produced hundreds of video recordings, audio recordings and extensive photographic documentation on the entire experience. Regarding photographic documentation, we have created a traveling exhibition that is still touring the Salento region to continue the experience of the Summer School, while creating contact opportunities with local communities.

4. Outlook

Finally, let us share some considerations on the developments planned for the research inspired by the ACL model. It goes without saying that the model, although developed during several years of targeted experiences, calls for further development and, given its fundamentally abductive nature, must avail of a diverse number of experiences, in a multiplicity of contexts, where it is possible to determine its composition. In particular, we must understand to extent and nature of digital media contribution. Furthermore, it must be ascertained whether the intervention, one of very short duration as proposed, can serve as a launching ramp for a longer one with the communities, so as to produce more profound and lasting

effects, stabilising thereby the transformations initiated by ACL. The idea is to stimulate the creation of citizenship labs downstream of ACL, where it would be possible to debate any contention points in the community, and use participation input to develop proposals whereby we can liaise actively with the institutions.

At present, we are analysing the possibility of developing, within the group of persons who have steadily contributed to the organisation, implementation and development of the Summer School, a process of awareness and empowerment favouring its incorporation as a social cooperative, to promote and strengthen the model, which is to be incubated within the University of Salento in a spin-off fashion.

However, the model presents a serious flaw in that it lacks a formal evaluation system. In the future, we must devote sufficient energy to seek such a system, which should of course be appropriate to the complexity of the intervention mechanism. Will all probability, it should be able to contain different perspectives by mutually connecting them through meaning negotiation processes, which allow understanding clearly the intervention effectiveness and any potential problems, with a view to improve the model over time. That being said, the formalised evaluation system need not start from zero, since a doctoral thesis (Patera 2013), which we have aligned towards that end, has reconstructed the literature on the subject and identified some dimensions to be monitored in participatory processes.

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