

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT: ALTERNATIVE INITIATIVES FOR SOCIAL, CULTURAL,
AND ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENT IN SOUTHERN ITALY

Zachary T. Androus, Ph.D.¹

TWO DIFFERENT INDIVIDUAL CONTEMPORARY ART PROJECTS ADDRESSING FORMS OF DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN ITALY ARE DISCUSSED BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH THEIR ORGANIZERS. THE INITIATIVES HIGHLIGHT NON-ECONOMIC FORMS OF DEVELOPMENT FOCUSED ON AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY IN ONE CASE AND TERRITORIAL HERITAGE IN THE OTHER. THE MODERNIZATION PARADIGM CENTRAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT ENTERPRISE PROVIDES THE LINK TO SOUTHERN ITALY, WHICH HAS BEEN CONTINUALLY SUBJECTED TO A DISCOURSE OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT SINCE UNIFICATION. POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUES OF THE DEVELOPMENT ENTERPRISE PROVIDE A BACKGROUND FOR THE DISCUSSION.

¹ Unaffiliated Anthropologist, via Camillo Cavour 23, 50129, Firenze, prof.androus@gmail.com

In this paper I analyze two different innovative and unique contemporary art engagements with rural communities in southern Italy, each of which contributes in different ways to local social, cultural, and economic development. I draw on my own direct experience, ethnographic participant-observation, and formal interviews with the individuals responsible for creating them to contrast these individual initiatives with conventional micro-enterprise and localized development schemes; I argue that certain key social and political features of the alternative initiatives suggest they enjoy a better chance of long-term sustainability relative to traditionally institutionalized development programs. The first case is the Guilmi Art Project (GAP), a summer artist's residency based in a southern Abruzzese village that was created by an art history professor of Guilme origin who works in Florence. Guilmi continues to suffer a steadily declining population, from over 2000 inhabitants in the 1860s to less than 450 today, causing an attendant diminishment of available goods and services and decline of essential infrastructure, along with predictable social-psychological consequences. Beginning in 2007, GAP has worked to create a bridge connecting the community to the larger world in a number of ways, including the involvement of the community in the artistic production through a variety of collaborative alliances and with the arrival of close to a hundred visitors who would not otherwise have come to Guilmi, were it not for the public presentation of the artist's work at the conclusion of the residency. The second case involves a contemporary artist from Livorno occupied with food-based conceptual and performance pieces that explore themes of authenticity and sustainability, currently working with a master brewer in Molise to develop a beer made from the endangered turchesca potato, a historical variety adapted specifically to a certain mountainous environment in Molise. His project, called 10 passi dall'erosione genetica, includes an artwork addressing the theme, but more to our point, a commercial production of the beer sufficient to allow a guaranteed market for the crop itself, and the added economic power of its transformation into a value-added product. These projects are distinctive not only for their innovative approaches to generating additional economic activity for peripheral areas, but also for the ways in which they encourage social and cultural development by building bridges that connect people across geographic and economic distances.

Throughout my discussion I am drawing on the critiques of the development enterprise both explicit and implicit in the works of Escobar (1995), Nolan (2002), Wolf (1982), Mignolo (2001), Wallerstein (1990), Wallerstein and Quijano (1992), to two different peripheral zones of Italy in which individuals, rather than institutions, are carrying out alternative development initiatives. While the global development enterprise is generally understood to involve North American and European cores and South American, African, Asian and Pacific peripheries, just as the colonial enterprise is generally understood to refer to European expansion into those areas, my discussion here is based on the premise that all historical cases of colonialism must have something essential in common, a general principle of colonialism, so to speak. Quijano and Wallerstein (1992) describe this set of aspects or characteristics that any and every case of colonial activity shares as "coloniality" (550), the necessary condition opposite modernity in the hierarchy necessary to maintain the claims to superiority made by certain European powers. If, as Mignolo (2001) explains, coloniality is "constitutive of modernity" then coloniality must be located in a range of contexts apart from those of formal colonial administration, wherever the discourse of modernity appears to distinguish those groups with it from those without. This connects the modernization paradigm at the heart of the development enterprise to the colonial legacies that created the so-called cores and peripheries of the world by which the developed world's continued rate of natural, economic, and human resource consumption depends upon the continued political and economic submission of the developing world. But discourses of modernity are not limited to formally or formerly colonial relationships; they are frequently found both within and between the nation-states of the contemporary world system. Quijano and Wallerstein (1992) specifically exempt the domination of "East-Central Europe and Southern Europe" (549) by other European powers from their theory of coloniality on the premise that "the strength of the existing agricultural communities and of their indigenous nobilities was considerable," allowing them to "locate their cultural resistance to exploitation in their historicity, a locus that has served them right up to the twentieth century" (549). In a similar vein, Mignolo (2001) distinguishes "Gramsci's original conceptualization of subalternity in the context of class hierarchy in Europe under industrial capitalism" (430) from the expanded notion of

subalternity developed by the postcolonial movement in Indian scholarship represented by the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group, but I maintain that if the colonial is subaltern then the subaltern is potentially also colonial, at least to the extent that it finds itself subordinated to modernity in a hierarchical relationship. In this way, theories of the colonial relationship provide frames of reference for understanding the current underdevelopment of peripheral zones within nation-states. Gramsci himself invoked the image of colonial exploitation to describe the relationship between Italy's south and north in his famously unfinished essay on the so-called southern question (1969, 721). Verdicchio (1997) illuminates the racial presumptions implicit in the unification-era discourse on southern Italy that further support the application of postcolonial models to the current relationship between southern Italy and the Italian state.

In using a development paradigm to address the two cases studies I discuss, I am perhaps expanding the usual scope of what is defined as development. Nolan (2002) defines development as "the worldwide effort to eradicate poverty and its associated ills," (32) while Gardner and Lewis (1996, 2015) take a somewhat broader perspective, defining development in terms of "deliberately planned change" (1996, 2). Gardner and Lewis are critical of the tendency to reduce development to economic factors alone (1996, 6-8), noting that economic growth often creates or exacerbates inequality. I use this as a point of departure to make the case that non-economic aspects, including social and cultural development, are not only legitimate goals in their own right, but should always be taken into account in addition to the economic dimensions. The other distinctive feature of the enterprises I discuss is that they are all individual initiatives undertaken by private individuals without any kind of connection to larger institutional actors. While the absence of institutional actors moves them outside the conventional definition of the development enterprise, this element is important precisely because it offers an actual alternative as a response to the aforementioned critiques of development. Being anthropological, my analyses draws on both formal and informal interviews and participant-observation conducted in a range of contexts, as well as the literature I have already mentioned. Typically in an anthropological analysis, one would seek to guarantee the anonymity of their informants, but in this case I am dealing with two public enterprises, each of which I am already on the record as having collaborated with, making anonymity difficult to achieve. But more importantly, as public figures engaged in their enterprises, they speak for themselves. This means that when I make reference to these individual actors, even when I quote them, I am not speaking on their behalf. Instead, I am speaking as an observer and an analyst, which is to say I am speaking for myself and not for them. My analysis is my own and represents my perspective and my conclusions on these projects. Naturally, I seek to base my perspective and conclusions on data derived from direct interactions with the individuals and the enterprises in question, so that observation becomes participant-observation, which is the premise of generating anthropological knowledge, but I am not representing these enterprises here. Instead, I am presenting my own descriptive analysis of them.

In the months since I submitted my original proposal, the two independent development initiatives to which I referred have changed somewhat relative to their descriptions therein, so my discussion is in part historical. The first is a project by the Tuscan contemporary artist Andrea d'Amore called *10 passi dall'erosione genetica*, or 10 steps from genetic erosion, whose explanatory text by the artist includes the statement *salvare l'umanità dall'estinzione significa biodiversità agricola. Scambiare colture, condannare la privativa della produzione, sono un atto di resistenza, di sopravvivenza*, which I render as 'to save humanity from extinction means agricultural biodiversity. To exchange crops, to condemn the monopoly of production, these are acts of resistance, of survival.' And in fact, I would argue that the primary motive of the artist is to engage these issues, rather than any related to development itself. D'Amore's artistic preoccupations focus not only on agricultural biodiversity and the commodification of food processes, but also on making concrete maneuvers to resist the trends that he perceives to threaten human survivability. The latest iteration of this focus, which has informed much of d'Amore's earlier work, is the *10 passi* project, built around the Turchesca potato, a variety adapted specifically to a narrow range of the Molise highlands and now at risk of extinction. Like many heritage or historical agricultural varieties, the Turchesca potato represents a sort of micro-variety selected specifically for a discrete ecological zone and developed prior to the penetration of contemporary market-based commercial agricultural practices. Even within its narrow

zone of adaptation, this particular variety cannot compete with commercial, industrialized varieties developed for scaled production and the last producers are moving away from the Turchesca in favor of other varieties. I understand that some controversy surrounded the funding of a multidisciplinary study, published in 2010, addressing the various aspects of the Turchesca and its viability. Rather than engage this endeavor through established channels, d'Amore has relied instead upon his personal contacts in Molise to develop a direct relationship with some of the farmers growing this potato and with a master brewer who developed a beer brewed from the Turchesca. He is also collaborating with a local ceramicist on the preparation of an artwork consisting of sculptures in the shape of potatoes, which will contain the beer. The project aspires to reach a limited commercial production of the beer bottled for sale, the production of which would help to support a market for the potatoes. A key aspect, however, is the act of biodiversification, which describes d'Amore's planting Turchesca potatoes from Molise in the Casentino valley of Tuscany.

This relocation of the endangered Turchesca variety outside of its traditionally recognized zone of production expresses the artist's concern with the "industrial logic" that guides the operation of the organizations necessary to support protected designations like DOP and IGP that end up restricting the free exchange of seeds and varieties between farmers. Agriculture and sustainability are regular themes in d'Amore's work, but his involvement of both farmers in Molise and Tuscany with an artistic design intended to encourage the production of the potato represents a different kind of engagement that falls within my expanded conception of development, based upon the link with modernity. The institutionalized protections, like DOP and IGP, would actually serve to limit the kind of redistribution of the Turchesca potato that d'Amore is facilitating between Pesche and Casentino. So while the conventional producer associations necessary to acquire and sustain protected designations are typically associated with a region's development, this particular artist makes the opposite claim. This is moot for potato farmers in Pesche because they have no such internationally recognized designation to serve as a platform for becoming competitive in the marketplace; the inclusion in a contemporary art project, on the other hand, potentially incentivizes a continued cultivation of the variety, even if on a less than commercial scale, which in turn helps to ensure its survival without relying on a market based solution. The long term goal of developing a commercial bottling of the beer made from the potatoes would add an economic incentive as well, but the social and cultural incentive of being involved with a contemporary art project is already having its effect.

The other enterprise, the Guilmi Art Project, or GAP, began in 2007, and is the initiative of an art history professor named Lucia and her husband Chico. In addition to conducting formal interviews with the organizers in Florence, I spent ten days in Guilmi in August of 2014, attending the GAP events, the village's annual mountain walking day, and their annual summer fair on ferragosto, the principal Italian summer holiday, all of which occurred during the same week. I wrote over 13,000 words of fieldnotes and conducted several informal and a few formal interviews during that time. According to several Guilmeses, their town's population was over two thousand at the time of Italian unification, but subsequent waves of emigration have left a present population of between 400 and 450, with an attendant diminution of social and economic activity. Two examples of this to which I heard repeated reference were the closures of the village's bakery and pharmacy. In speaking with residents, the lack of opportunity for young people quickly emerged as an overarching concern, one that I would argue serves as an index for a number of other issues. For example, decaying infrastructure is another serious concern that results from depopulation, with abandoned housing, empty schools, the aforementioned bakeries and pharmacy, and so on. But if young people had jobs in the area, they would not only remain in the village, but they would rehabilitate the empty houses, their children would attend the schools, they would need goods and services, and so on. In and of itself, GAP cannot solve these problems. Nevertheless, GAP makes a set of direct and indirect social, cultural, and economic contributions to the community.

In my opinion, GAP was born from Lucia's deep and abiding love for her familial hometown. Despite living and working in Florence, Lucia maintains a series of connections with Guilmi and, given her work with contemporary art, establishing an artist residency in such an evocative setting seemed natural. The abandoned house that she and Chico have been slowly rehabilitating provides the living and working space for the guest artists, while the city administration donated the use of an empty space for the public

presentation of the work. Over the years this grew to encompass a series of associated events, like the *Nuova Didattica Popolare*, a name that I find very difficult to render into English; the People's New Approach to Public Learning is, I believe, a fair approximation of the sense it carries in Italian. This is a series of public lessons on historic and contemporary art in a dialogic format that grew out of the community's curiosity about the contemporary works that were being created and displayed. The year that I attended, close to a hundred people had come to Guilmi for the presentation of the artist's residency, most of whom stayed for at least a few nights and many of whom participated in the mountain walk and the summer fair. The school building was temporarily converted to a sort of dorm style accommodation, with cots set up in classrooms to accommodate the younger or more rustically minded visitors, while the organizers worked with the local community to coordinate the rental of various rooms in people's homes to those seeking more conventional lodging. The village boasts two restaurants, two small markets, and one *bar*, (what is known in English as a *café*). I imagine they all experienced a significant increase in business over the week in which the visitors were present, to say nothing of the money collected by the city and the private individuals for the accommodations. So the economic benefits are there in terms of increased activity for existing businesses and additional income for some households. I would like to turn instead to the social and cultural development that the project prompts, which are inherently non-economic and really only reveal themselves to a qualitative research approach.

When I was in Guilmi I heard many accounts describing or otherwise defining both the place itself and the Guilmi Art Project. Ultimately, the bulk of the experiences I had over ten days of participant-observation were about the place itself, which the GAP events were both based on and served to highlight. These narratives, together with my experiences, form the substance of the qualitative data that I collected there. The accounts I collected came from both locals (a deceptively heterogeneous category) and visitors (a more predictably heterogeneous category), typically as part of the normal conversational exchange, often between strangers or new acquaintances. This always felt quite normal, because the place and the event were the reason that those of us who were outsiders had come to the village. Increasing the population by almost twenty-five percent meant that we, the visitors, were ubiquitous and easily spotted. We became accustomed to being approached directly by locals who offered spontaneous explanations about the village or peppered us with questions, and we made small talk with one another about that, the food, the local language, and what exactly marked out the south of Italy from the north, if not geography. In terms of GAP itself, I heard several people repeat variations on the primary theme of the Project, that can also be found on its website, namely that the whole point of the thing was to involve the community in a direct way with the art work created during the residency.

Over dinner the first evening I was there, Lucia explained to me that her idea was to force the art world outside of itself, to create a sort of thing that could not be removed from the context of the village. By making the participation of the community in the work of art a condition of the residency, it requires the artist to create site specific works that go beyond being installed in a particular place, but create an actual interaction between residents in the community and the visiting artist. In respect to the art world, enthusiasts, curators, and other artists came from as far as Florence, Bologna, and Milan to attend the presentation of the work; a handful of these visitors appeared decidedly out of place in such an atypical setting for contemporary art. Beyond the public presentation of the artist's work done during the residence, there were performances and installations by other guest artists, a graphic design team that produced a series of thematic t-shirts, three different live musical performances organized by GAP, a radio documentary produced by the young people of Guilmi with the assistance of a crew from an independent internet radio station, and three installments of the aforementioned *Nuova Didattica Popolare*. In every case, the inhabitants of the village were directly engaged, however briefly, with an enlarged social and cultural experience.

2016 marks a major transition for the Guilmi Art Project, as it will be the first year with no artist in residence. Instead, the project will be continuing with other initiatives focused on *la territorialità*, a word with no direct counterpart in English; the obvious cognate territoriality refers to the use of space in nonverbal communication, or to the behavior of non-human animals, so it is important to not confuse the two. Instead, something like territorial heritage comes close to conveying the sense of the Italian word. This refocusing is

a response to the original vision of the Guilmi Art Project being coopted and exported by the art world, in contradiction to the stridently local philosophy of the project. A parallel exists to the notion that development benefits the zones far from the peripheries that are ostensibly being developed, because the social, cultural, and even economic capital of GAP are being extracted from the village and exported to the core. Instead, by expanding the project calendrically as well as conceptually, there can be a development that is located entirely in the community while supported by the bridges built to the world beyond the village, which will still have to come to the village to participate through engaging the people, that central element remains even as the artist residency goes away.

While each of these projects include economic benefits, their foci are arguably the non-economic aspects of development, including the social relationships and cultural experiences that they facilitate. Unlike institutionally sponsored programs, these projects result from the initiative of motivated and dedicated individuals, which effectively frees them from the burdensome aspects of the development enterprise, while simultaneously serving to reinforce the de-emphasis of the economic dimension of the development industry. This scale also allows for the specific application of interventions to areas otherwise overlooked because they fall outside of the conventional discourse of development. Operationalizing this style of development presents a set of challenges that are as distinctive as the approaches themselves, but in general terms the decentralization of authority and the downward distribution of responsibility helps to ensure that the community itself is served by development in ways that it finds meaningful. Progressing in this direction requires an expanded notion of not only development itself, but a recognition of the ways in which the modernization paradigm creates a situation of coloniality in southern Italy, which is the key to understanding how the territory falls into the category of a developing periphery in the first place.

Bibliography

- Escobar, A. (1995), *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gardner, K., Lewis, D. (1996), *Anthropology, Development and the Post-Modern Challenge*. London: Pluto Press.
- Gardner, K., Lewis, D. (2015), *Anthropology and Development: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century*. London: Pluto Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1969 [1926]), *Alcuni temi della quistione meridionale*. In: Spriano, P. (ed.) *Gramsci: Scritti Politici*. Rome: Editori Riuniti. 720-742.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2001), *Coloniality of Power and Subalternity*. In: Rodriguez, I. (ed.) *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press. 224-244.
- Nolan, R.W. (2002), *Development Anthropology: Encounters in the Real World*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Quijano, A., Wallerstein, I. (1992), *Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World System*, *International Social Sciences Journal*, 134:549-557.
- Verdicchio, P. (1997), *The Preclusion of Postcolonial Discourse in Southern Italy*. In: Allen, B., Russo, M. (eds.) *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 191-212.
- Wallerstein, I. (1990), *Culture as the Ideological Battleground*. In: Featherstone, M. (ed.) *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization, and Modernity*. London: Sage. 31-55.
- Wolf, E. (1982), *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.