

# Ecomuseums in Italy. Concepts and practices

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## 1 The diaspora of local culture

Foreign observers are often surprised when they encounter episodes of backwardness and social disorganization which, in our country, may accompany situations characterized by innovation and advanced civic development (PUTNAM; LOENARDI; NANETTI, 1993). It will be easier to understand this contradiction if we stop thinking of Italy as a nation-state in the true sense of the term, looking at it instead for what it is: a vast agglomeration of strong city-states. Each of these cities is in fact the capital of the area in which it is located, its "territory"; has a history that may go back a thousand years, or even longer; and represents an experiment of complex, advanced social organization from many points of view. The nation is instead far younger and since its inception has encountered problems of coordination (still unresolved), which have conditioned its authority and ability to function. Its cultural policies have been seriously affected by these limitations. Immediately after 1861, the year Italy was founded, deposing the sovereigns of the country's many mini-states was accompanied by intentional fragmentation of regional heritages, a true diaspora of local culture<sup>1</sup>. This process of repressing the bases of individual regional identities was supposed to have been followed by the re-composition of a new, more ample national identity. The second phase was not, however, as effective as the first, in part because the new nation found itself facing enormous difficulties. It was a country which was not even completely unified in terms of language, in which the only doctrines with nationwide influence that were deeply rooted in both urban and rural contexts - Catholicism and socialism - were viewed with suspicion and existed in a state of latent conflict with the culture of the liberal state. During the twenty years of fascist rule (1925-1945), the state in effect sought to conclude the operation of reconstructing a national culture. But fascist ideology was not favorable to increasing regional autonomy and in the cultural sphere (as in others), policies whose objective was to centralize power were actually reinforced. A great deal of attention was paid to local specificity, considered however, in terms of folklore, and valued principally so that it could be used to counter modernist urban culture (CLEMENTE, 1996). As far as local culture is concerned, little changed during the post-war years: communist ideology, which heavily influenced the world of culture during the Sixties and Seventies, although favorable to political decentralization and regionalism, was suspicious of local differences in culture, seeing them as politically ambiguous and anti-progressive.

## 2 New Museology in Italy: a missed opportunity

The construction of a new unitary, nationwide culture failed therefore, but the dismembering of the heritages of pre-unification states was successful, with effects

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<sup>1</sup> "... a cultural policy which was designed to destroy the symbols of the former Italian States dating back to the days before unification, while at the same time seeking to construct and disseminate new symbols of the new nation" (PINNA, 2001)

that are still being felt in the public administration and in the organization of culture in Italy, especially its museums<sup>2</sup>. In fact the repression of the symbolic significance of historical objects, accompanied by the enormous importance attributed to their physical preservation, has meant that the government's approach to organization focused on and defined its objective as the material safeguarding of historical objects rather than their overall significance. One consequence of this is Italian museums' lack of real autonomy, a factor which obliges them to bring their policies into line with changes occurring on the cultural scene and constantly depend on one elected administration or another.

In the Seventies, in Italy as in the rest of Europe, a powerful movement of rediscovery of local culture emerged. It was strongest in rural areas and many tiny "museums of farming life" were opened, often thanks to volunteers (FORNI, 1999). Traditional museology, interested principally in the existence of what is visible and structured, rarely grasped the importance of this new development. The many groups of people who put together collections of agricultural equipment and created small museums in restored old farmhouses were evaluated using criteria applicable to the traditional museum. If, for example, they did not ensure adequate opening times, the museology of the period considered them failures. In reality, for a small community it is the process of mobilization, collective effort and teamwork which leads to the creation of a local museum that is perhaps more important than the modest collection that represents the visible, somewhat fortuitous result of that process.

The innovative potential of this movement was thus undermined by a hostile environment. Strong, centralized power, interested only in "high" culture; local power that was still weak; museums heavily dependent on public administrations and in any case influenced by a backward-looking, traditional approach to the cultural heritage: this was the scenario to be found in Italy when, in the early Seventies, there were the first experiments in what came to be called New Museology. New museums, like the Anacostia Museum in Washington, D.C., l'Écomusée Creusot-Montceau-les-Mines in France, and il Museo della Civiltà Contadina in San Marino di Bentivoglio in Italy, were opened in these years, between 1967 and 1970. What was concerned were experiences that at the time were equally appreciated in terms of innovation and opportunities for development. In any case, the results of the experiments differed significantly from country to country and the determining factor was not ability to conceive a new museum, which manifested itself in all the countries cited, but rather the new creatures' compatibility with the museum environment in the widest sense. In the United States, the "ecomuseum" species quickly became extinct, or rather was never identified as a species; in France it adapted itself and its numbers increased; in Italy it maintained latent characteristics which made a new phase in its evolution possible as soon as the environment changed.

In the Eighties, little changed on this front. The dissemination of neo-liberal ideas in economics meant that the cultural heritage tended to be viewed as an entertainment factor that could be a useful resource for the cultural industry, or at best an element that contributed to development only within the narrow horizons of the tourist market (MAGGI; DONDONA, 2005). Once more, this made it difficult to grasp the value and potential of what was happening at the local level.

It was only in the Nineties that something substantial began to change.

### 3 New opportunities for local culture

The Nineties witnessed a strong demand for political devolution, especially in northern Italy. New local power structures began to demand that they be granted functions and resources and, as this involved seeking recognition in terms of identity, missed no opportunity to emphasize differences and regional specificity. Culture rapidly became a crucial field both because of its implicit identity content and for the resources that it made it possible to control. The sums involved were not enormous (little more than 2% of current public expenditure) but were able to guarantee a high degree of discretionary power and a visible concentration of expenditure: they were therefore extremely efficacious in producing consent<sup>3</sup>. Increasingly, regions counterpoised government policies

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed analysis of this period and its phenomena, see Maggi and Dondona (2005).

<sup>3</sup> On how this mechanism functioned, see Brosio and Santagata (1992).

of safeguarding and conservation with what was called *valorizzazione*<sup>4</sup>. It was not that they challenged the central government's authority in the field of its competence, but rather that they claimed to be those best able to guarantee the enjoyment of the cultural artifacts and allowing them to pull their weight in terms of economic development. The totality of artifacts, both material and immaterial, now commonly called "local heritage", became the perfect target for these claims. Unlike great works of art, historic *palazzi*, or archeological finds, which were the property of the state, this heritage (consisting of old farmhouses, mills, remnants of industrial archeology, irrigation systems, but also many intangible elements) was often the property of individual citizens and the central authorities were unable to enforce their right to manage it. Investment and running costs were modest: the ideal opportunity for emerging local powers<sup>5</sup>.

It was in this way that the first true ecomuseums came to be opened: in Argenta (Emilia-Romagna), Casentino (Tuscany), the Vanoi and Giudicarie Valleys (Trentino), the Elvo Valley (Piedmont). They are creatures whose numbers are still small yet have become aware of their own specificity. In fruitful contact with others of their species in other parts of the world, they intend to multiply: no longer will they be isolated individuals in a hostile environment, but rather an authentic new "species of museum". At the start, it is usually townships, working either on their own or in associations, that act as midwives and bring the new museums into existence, after which regional councils begin to move. Piedmont's regional law, adopted in 1995, was the first in Italy to deal specifically with the question. The Trento Province followed in 2000. After this, between 2006 and 2008, laws were passed in five other regions, including Lombardy, an area with approximately 9 million inhabitants. And while the purpose of the first laws was to allow ecomuseums to be born, recent ones limit themselves to recognizing their existence, in the face of a now consolidated dynamic that is witness to lively competition between local power structures<sup>6</sup>.

## 4 Two views of culture

The growth in numbers of ecomuseums and in many cases also the quality achieved by individual museums, should not mislead those who believe in the principles of New Museology into believing that our story will have a happy ending. Under the surface of our towns' and regions' heightened and increasing interest in their local heritage, there continue to exist different perspectives, which are not always in agreement in defining the function of culture, let alone that of museums. The large majority of administrators have long seen museums as a form of entertainment: an attraction that could be used along with live performances and sports events. But this alone would not have sufficed to cause a showdown with the government over who has the right to do what in the field of culture. In addition, on this basis the regions would have had to contend with much feared competition from the cities, which were surely better prepared and equipped (especially the larger ones) to offer cultural entertainment. The magic word, the one that made it possible for the regions to achieve new competence, to operate and legislate directly in the areas under their jurisdiction, and to take an active part in the fields of training and architectural renovation, taking over from both higher and lower levels of government, was "development". And it is here that the differences between traditional and innovative museology are clearest.

For the former, development is understood almost exclusively as tourism - unfortunately, an extremely passive form of tourism and the purpose of museums is to make a destination more attractive and competitive, increasing the influx of visitors. An updated version of this point of view assigns museums the task of making an urban context more appealing to the so-called creative class, thereby importing new social capital<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Can be translated as "profile raising", but it is an ambiguous, umbrella term in Latin languages: a mix of image creation, increased enjoyment by the public and exploitation for economic gain; a largely artificial contraposition that can principally be explained by local governments' need to cut out autonomous spaces for themselves (MAGGI; DONDONA, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> This also happened in other countries, see Ohara and Yanagida (2005).

<sup>6</sup> It is significant that recent laws on the subject should have insisted that there can be no more than two ecomuseums in the same township.

<sup>7</sup> This interpretation is supposedly based on the work of Richard Florida (2002), but is in reality a parody of it,

Ecomuseums are expected to do the same thing in those areas, rural ones in particular<sup>8</sup>, where there is no significant, highly visible cultural heritage. In reality, in the majority of cases there is nothing more than a sort of “modest cosmetic exercise consisting of events, conferences and happenings, kept at a safe distance from the local system’s ‘engine room’” (SACCO, 2006).

The approach taken by New Museology is different. Museum activity is seen as intrinsically connected to creating and fostering a sense of citizenship. Tourism is never the only economic resource and is seen as a way of enhancing local inhabitants’ well-being, a means for facilitating the transformation of their “territory” into something closer to local interest - and not vice versa. Ecomuseums that asked the regions where they were located to hold “public meetings on the landscape” to discuss how landscape was being transformed or do this by using “parish maps”<sup>9</sup> created with their residents<sup>10</sup>, those that drew up “contracts for rivers” to clarify the use of water resources<sup>11</sup>, planned new ways to structure agricultural and food supply chains to shorten the distance between producer and consumer and at the same time guarantee the quality of traditional products, or organized associations of local growers to create new brand names, products and distribution networks<sup>12</sup>, that talked with producers about how to make their economic activities compatible with maintaining their area’s cultural qualities<sup>13</sup>: all of these wanted to enter their local systems’ “engine rooms”.

The ecomuseum phenomenon in Italy is still living this double life. Public officials and politicians are inclined either towards one view or the other: in general at the administrative levels that are closest to people (small townships, often in mountain areas) the one that prevails is a concrete approach typical of New Museology, eager to transform the local area and its social processes; higher up the ladder (large towns and cities, provinces, regions), the approach is more formal, based not on transforming a place but on narrating it as though it were a passive object. Ecomuseums follow one road or the other depending not only on the personal leanings and abilities of their local leaders but also on the basis of the type of public body that oversees their activities. These ecomuseums are obviously very different from one another as in the first case participation is a crucial ingredient, while it is virtually useless in the second. From the very beginning, this significant, fundamental “genetic” heterogeneity between ecomuseums, far more important than any “morphological” one which depends on territorial difference, has made it difficult for them to organize and work together.

## 5 Ecomuseum networks in Italy

Ecomuseums have long realized they could benefit significantly from working as a network. In France there has been a national network, FEMS, operating throughout the French-speaking world, Belgium and Canada included, since 1989. In Japan JECOMS has existed since 1995. In Poland “Ekomuzea” came into being between 2005 and 2006. In 2006 China created an Ecomuseum Office as part of the Chinese Society of Museums. Brazil saw the birth of ABREMC in 2007.

It was in the late Nineties that Italian ecomuseums first asked themselves the following question<sup>14</sup>: how can we organize ourselves to work as a network and ensure growth? There has been a range of answers to the question, outgrowths - to some extent - of the dualism described above.

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as Pierluigi Sacco has clearly shown (SACCO, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> It is no accident that accepting this view makes it difficult to understand how an ecomuseum can exist in an urban context.

<sup>9</sup> Maps of special local features created by groups of area residents (see [www.england-in-particular.info/parishmaps](http://www.england-in-particular.info/parishmaps)).

<sup>10</sup> The following ecomuseums: Valle Elvo, Val Germanasca and AMI (Piedmont); Botrugno, Acquarica and Neviano (Puglia); Argenta (Emilia-Romagna); Orvieto (Umbria); Parabiago (Lombardy).

<sup>11</sup> The following ecomuseums: Adda (Lombardy) and Gemonese (Friuli).

<sup>12</sup> The following ecomuseums: Valle Elvo and The Museum of Terracing in Cortemilia (Piedmont); Casentino (Tuscany); Valtaleggio (Lombardy) and Lagorai (Trento).

<sup>13</sup> The following ecomuseums: Argilla (Piedmont); Vanoi Valley, Pejo and Argentario (Trento); Agro Pontino (Lazio) and Valle Raganello (Calabria).

<sup>14</sup> International workshop *Musei per l'ambiente* (Museums for the Environment), Argenta (Ferrara, Italy), June 3-5, 1998.

At one extreme, we find a formal, institutional response: first draw up a chart with different types of ecomuseums and decide which should be included; then decide how they could work together. Obviously in the absence of any initial form of organization, only a government body can direct proceedings and the approach can only be top-down<sup>15</sup>. In this case the implicit concept of the museum is a strictly functional one, i.e. something that must fulfill certain functions rather than obtain certain results. Some regions passed laws which made possible the creation at a regional level of forums of ecomuseums to discuss common problems. It was inevitable that these associations would only involve ecomuseums that had secured legal recognition. These provisions are all recent ones and it is still too early to analyze results. There are still no nationwide networks and it is not going to be easy to create them, given these premises. Once we get beyond rhetoric, there is in fact little cooperation between regions in Italy: competitive behavior prevails and even in the field of culture the duplication of activities is normal<sup>16</sup>.

The evolutive response, derived from the concept of the community of practice is almost diametrically opposed to the institutional one: first the common work already being done is observed so that, one step at a time, an organization can be established to facilitate existing dynamics. The activities conducted through the community of practice create a shared repertory of resources, a common language, convergent styles of action, routine ways of thinking and acting. The approach here is essentially bottom-up and the implicit concept of the museum is finalistic: it is results and social repercussions that count, rather than the ways (often original and not envisaged in manuals on museology) used to obtain them. One network of this type that is now operative in Italy is *Mondi Locali* (Local Worlds)<sup>17</sup>.

## 6 The first grassroots network: the *Mondi Locali* community of practice

In May 2004, on the occasion of the celebrations for the enlargement of the European Union to include important eastern European countries, a group of ecomuseums in Italy that had been working together for several years decided to meet to discuss the creation of a pan-European ecomuseum network. The meeting, held in Trento, saw the participation of just under twenty Italian, Polish, Czech and Swedish ecomuseums. Following three days of intense discussion on their activities and expectations, the museums endorsed a declaration of intent, the first document of its kind at a European level. Eight inter-European work groups were created to study in depth what were felt to be the eight most pressing issues affecting ecomuseums.

The work groups' research was presented the following year, 2005, at an analogous workshop held at the Ecomuseum of Argenta. Since then the work groups and annual workshop have become the focal points of the community. Organizing themselves in work groups meant that it was objectives that were given priority, that what participants were interested in is what is called a "purpose-driven museum" (WEIL, 1989). The annual plenary sessions have also been important opportunities for people to meet and make decisions. Rather than seeing the host museum merely as a backdrop, the meetings are organized to ensure that they provide feedback and have a positive effect on its activities.

Among its various tasks, the annual workshop examines the research work groups have done and decides which groups should continue and whether new ones need to be created. After the 2006 workshop held at Ekomuseum Bergslagen in Sweden, national networks began to grow rapidly, especially in Poland and Italy, and more recently in Spain, the country with the highest concentration of new ecomuseums<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> National Meeting of Ecomuseums, Biella (Italy), October 9-12, 2003; "Ecomuseum Days", Catania (Italy), October 12-13, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> An additional complication is that the draft of a national law on ecomuseums was presented to the Senate in July 2008

<sup>17</sup> Of course there are also intermediate responses. Some regions (Friuli and Trentino, for example) organize meetings for all the regional ecomuseums in operation (those which have obtained legal recognition and those whose applications are pending) to plan activities in the field of training and encourage participation in existing national and international networks, e.g. *Mondi Locali*.

<sup>18</sup> The network also involved ecomuseums in France, Great Britain, Turkey and Serbia, but their numbers are limited. The overall number of ecomuseums involved is about 15 outside Italy and (at the end of 2008) 25 in



In 2006 the network took the name “Local Worlds” and in 2007 the Italian branch, with 21 ecomuseums located throughout the country, registered *Mondi Locali* as a collective trademark, together with standards of quality (valid only in Italy), with the country’s Chambers of Commerce. It was also in 2007 that a system of self-evaluation formulated by one of the work groups was used on an experimental basis. It is a scientifically rigorous method constructed by a research group (CORSANE; DAVIS; ELLIOT; MAGGI; MURTAS; ROGERS, 2007a and 2007b) working in close cooperation with ecomuseums, thus benefiting from their experience in the field, and has also been used by some regions to organize networks of their own.

*Mondi Locali* is a network with “variable geometry”: created to be a community that would exist throughout Europe, it was subsequently put into practice in Italy<sup>19</sup>. At the European level, the organization has not done a great deal: there have been a handful of statements of objectives approved in common, the decision to hold a European workshop at least once a year, some learning journeys<sup>20</sup>. In Italy it is more highly structured: there are regulations for using the trademark, an internet site and newsletter, several work groups, rules governing the way shared activities are managed. It would in any case be a mistake to see it as a sort of countrified version of the International Council of Museums, “ICOM for ecomuseums”, or worse still as a traditional association of one category of museums, in competition with all others. More than a traditional museum association, *Mondi Locali* can be compared to a complex formative undertaking, inspired by constructivist educational theories “à la Freire”, whose purpose is to develop participants’ creative potential to the maximum degree possible and trigger processes of self-directed learning (FREIRE, 1971). Commitment and assuming personal responsibility are the key points of this network, which is based entirely on participation. The network has an internet site (MONDILOCALI, 2007a), with a password available to participating ecomuseums and any person who is in charge of an activity<sup>21</sup>. The page devoted to new members begins,

*Mondi Locali is not anxious to become larger through growth as an end in itself. Each new group or individual must be ready to share their experience and work together with others, in keeping with a spirit of community. A signature is not enough: responsibility and being an active citizen are fundamental prerequisites so that we can avoid becoming just one more of the country’s many museum associations. (MONDILOCALI, 2007b)*

Symptomatic of this attitude is the *Mondi Locali* network’s most complex undertaking, an event first held in 2008: National Landscape Day. The idea for NLD came from the observation that nearly all of Italy’s ecomuseums had important activities related to the subject. The day was launched in order to identify common problems and discuss possible solutions. Only groups (not necessarily ecomuseums) capable of producing a concrete, participative action in line with the European Landscape Convention are accepted as participants. All NLD activities are summarized in a national agenda which offers participating groups suggestions on ways to celebrate the day and a basis for comparing their activities (MONDILOCALI, 2009). The work group called *Paesaggio* (Landscape) directs the project and seeks to use it to involve other kinds of local groups and offer them the support they need to develop in line with ecomuseums’ objectives.

Another undertaking that illustrates the national network’s twofold educational and participative objectives is the traveling exhibition “Local Worlds: Needs, Energies, Opportunities” (MONDILOCAL, 2007c). The exhibit was designed by one of the network’s special groups to help local groups show their communities the potential of ecomuseums and is divided in three sections: the value of places, of people, and of choices. The last section brings together a series of stories of ethical actions, each of which transformed an area by using its local heritage, and the host group in each place the show is held is asked to add an action - either one they have completed or one they have planned - that is consistent with the spirit of the exhibit. In this way show has been enriched as it traveled through Italy and has been turned into a sort of living book of the energies for change (potential or real) expressed by its many local communities.

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Italy.

<sup>19</sup> There was an analogous process in Poland and Spain

<sup>20</sup> An exchange of visits for study purposes in a jointly prepared program, to date involving mainly Italy, Sweden, Poland and Spain.

<sup>21</sup> The only instance of this in Italy: the other two important sites on ecomuseums are provided by Regione Piemonte ([www.ecomusei.net](http://www.ecomusei.net)) and by IRES ([www.osservatorioecomusei.net](http://www.osservatorioecomusei.net))

## 7 Prospects

It is likely that the challenges of the immediate future will have to be faced on two fronts: both through the pursuit of greater rootedness and recognition at the local level, and by seeking supra-local forms of cooperation between ecomuseums in different regions in Italy and with those in other countries, to encourage the sort of qualitative growth that remaining in isolation would make it difficult to achieve.

On the first front, locally, ecomuseums will continue to promote grassroots forms of collective discovery of place identity (parish maps and outdoor walks), as well as actions which influence the supply chain of production processes, especially agricultural ones. The approach taken will be decisive in determining the results obtained. It has been realized that nostalgic re-evocations of local identity normally appeal only to a limited number of an area's seniors and to tourists interested in its folklore. When instead, learning about the past actually involves people and suggests ways the present can be transformed, it can mobilize young people and make greater opportunities for local development available. The promotion of local specialties can also be dealt with using either a passive or an active approach. If an ecomuseum merely provides a cultural patina for the marketing of traditional products, it runs the risk of increasing prices, transforming an everyday, widely used product into an elite one, and impoverishing the local culture<sup>22</sup>. Although the empowerment of local producers is less visible, it can strengthen gastronomic traditions and guarantee greater benefits to the local community.

On the second, wider, front ecomuseums will continue their search for networks that afford them opportunities for working together and exchanging information. Those created by regional laws do not always fully respond to this objective. Trentino's six ecomuseums meet once a month, either convoked by the Province or independently. They are now trying to create an official network that will enable them to receive financing, sign agreements, coordinate training programs, and participate in EU projects on behalf of the local government. It will be run along democratic lines by the ecomuseums themselves, but is as yet an isolated example. The two ecomuseums in Friuli which have been granted official recognition cooperate on training but maintaining dialogue is not always easy. In Piedmont the 25 recognized ecomuseums normally meet once or twice a year, convoked by the Region, without any true grassroots control and the majority of the museum directors do not even know one another. In Lombardy a network was created in 2008, gathering 26 ecomuseums and including not recognized initiatives. In Umbria and Sardinia there are also laws that stipulate something analogous but there are as yet no recognized ecomuseums. These networks could become truly democratic structures, in which each node could remain in contact with the others and would be encouraged to do so; or they could follow the classic hub-and-spoke pattern, with a dominant center that in fact determines each node's activity and disincentivates independent initiative.

In these conditions, it is crucial to draw up a workable plan for cooperation between grassroots networks (principally *Mondi Locali*, the largest and best structured) and regional ones<sup>23</sup>. The problem is that many ecomuseums are not really participative structures and belong instead to the category described above as formal or institutional. Many of them were created solely to obtain the financing available under regional laws. An overly traditional organizational approach requiring rigid forms of cooperation runs the risk of making the entire convoy move forward at the speed of its slowest members. In addition, those that have achieved excellence should not be isolated from others but should instead seek to help them to evolve towards an ever more advanced model of ecomuseum.

*Mondi Locali* is trying to adopt a co-evolutive approach, one that without confusing undertakings that differ widely, can keep channels of communication open and provide real possibilities for cooperating and sharing methodology. It is using four different means to achieve these goals.

The first is inclusion of new groups and local leaders, principally via participation in its annual workshop. It is a slow process but one that enables us to know each other well and by making everyone's expectation clear, prevents misunderstandings.

<sup>22</sup> See Maggi (2009), *From places to destinations: is it good business?*, paper accepted by IUAES for its 16th Congress, "Humanity, Development and Cultural Diversity", being held in Kunming, China, in July 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Especially in Lombardy and Trentino, where the most organised and influential networks operate.

The second is *Mondi Locali's* contribution to training. Many of the courses for ecomuseum staff<sup>24</sup> and nearly all the ones for facilitators of parish maps<sup>25</sup> held in Italy since 2004 have witnessed significant participation by the network's experts. Two important manuals, *Manuale del facilitatore ecomuseale* (Manual for Ecomuseum Facilitators) and *L'ecomuseo tra valori del territorio e patrimonio ambientale* (The Ecomuseum between Local-Area Values and Environmental Heritage) are evidence of this activity<sup>26</sup>.

The third means is its National Landscape Day. In 2007, the year the event was launched, 30 groups participated: 29 were ecomuseums and 19 of these belong to *Mondi Locali*. The undertaking was then extended to other ecomuseums, enabling all involved to work together. In this instance the mobilization was "contagious", "infecting" other sectors of active citizenry and spreading ecomuseum methods in the field.

The fourth means used to create cooperation involves using the regional networks of museums that are *Mondi Locali* participants. To date, few steps have been taken in this direction and the undertaking will have different guises in different regions. In Trentino, where all legally recognized museums participate in *Mondi Locali*, no problems exist. In Piedmont, where the regional government has long aspired to create a national network, relations are more precarious and *Mondi Locali* is seen as a rival. In Lombardy, the largest region and the one which in proportion will have the highest number of ecomuseums and where a regional network (with national aspirations) still exists, relations are good: two of the three most active ecomuseums participate in *Mondi Locali*, which is seen as a partner, not a competitor<sup>27</sup>. In Friuli relations with the region are good, but there are latent conflicts between local groups and these impact on supra-local networks. In Tuscany and Puglia, where there are no laws regulating ecomuseums, informal regional coordinating committees operate de facto, following *Mondi Locali* principles.

## 8 Summing up

In recent years Italy's ecomuseum scene has experienced a phenomenon of dynamic growth which shows no signs of flagging. As has been seen, innovation in the museum world has increased, in the competition between opposing pressures from different communities, tensions between innovators and conservatives in museology, and local governments' and the central government's interests: a "no man's land" that could become smaller or even disappear, a temporary rather than irreversible equilibrium which ecomuseums need to use to advantage. In Italy, "the country of 100 cities", there is no better way of rendering the possibilities inherent in New Museology in concrete terms. ■

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<sup>24</sup> Sardinia (2004), Umbria (2004 and 2005), Friuli and Tuscany (2007), Trento (2004-2008), Friuli and Tuscany (2007).

<sup>25</sup> Umbria (2004), Emilia-Romagna (2005 and 2006), Lombardy and Puglia (2007 and 2008), Calabria (2008).

<sup>26</sup> The first was published in 2005 by two of the network's ecomuseums (BORTOLOTTI; STEFANI, 2005) and the second in 2007 by CESVOT, a Tuscan volunteer group (BRICIOLE, 2007), both with sizable participation by the *Mondi Locali* network.

<sup>27</sup> *Mondi Locali* has been officially invited to the founding session of Lombardy's network, scheduled to be held from November 15 and 16, 2008 and Lombardy has offered to host *Mondi Locali's* annual workshop in 2009; in case they created a national network, *Mondi Locali* would cooperate.



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