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## Geography and Territorial Planning: Established Approaches, New ‘Spaces’ for Research, and Case Studies

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# Community Maps: A Participative Tool for Land Use Enhancement

## The Case of Casentino

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### ABSTRACT

Community maps, adapted to the Italian context from the English Parish maps of the 1980s, have been an increasingly used participatory tool in our country for almost 30 years. Some of the processes for enhancement marginal territories have in fact used or use these tools. In the specific case of Casentino (Tuscany), there are three community maps created in the 2000s and continuously implemented. This essay will analyze the paths peculiar to each of them, activated and accompanied by the local ecomuseum network, which have allowed new processes of local growth and development to be “rooted” in this mountainous context.

*Keywords:* community maps; participatory tools; ecomuseum network; Casentino; local development.

*Parole chiave:* mappe di comunità; strumenti partecipativi; rete ecomuseale; Casentino; sviluppo locale.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Community mapping is a participatory tool frequently used in bottom-up processes to enhance local territories and their tangible and intangible assets. This tool originated in 1983, in England, with the name parish map, thanks to a volunteer association, Common Ground,

with the idea of local distinctiveness at its heart. Projects [...] have captured the imagination of hundreds of communities all over the country and con-

tinue to unearth very strong feelings of attachment and belonging, to local history, to language, nature, architecture, folklore, and to the landscape of places.<sup>1</sup>

Sue Clifford, one of the founders claims that building a

Parish Map is about creating a community expression of values, and about beginning to assert ideas for involvement, it is about taking the place in your own hands.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike geographical maps, community maps are actual cultural processes that allow us to highlight the ways in which the local inhabitants represent and attribute value to their living context. Community maps can be produced in cartographic or other forms where the communities can be identified. In this way,

a ‘new’ concept of territory can be articulated, not only as the place where one lives and works, but also one which preserves the history of the people who, in the past, have inhabited and changed it, and the features that have characterised it. Within it is an awareness that the territory, whatever it is, contains a widespread and highly detailed heritage and, above all, a dense network of relationships and interrelationships between the many elements that characterise it.<sup>3</sup>

The initial limitation of parish maps, as conceived by Common Ground, was essentially that they sought to record local tangible and intangible assets through bottom-up processes. Later, thanks also to foreign examples, in England too they developed into “a starting point for local action, they are demonstrative, subjective statements made by and for a community, exploring and showing what it cares about in its locality”<sup>4</sup>.

The Italian parish map process, which was renamed community map (Clifford *et al.* 2006), is also structured as a cultural process through which a local community defines, or rather “draws”, its own territorial identity. It is not therefore “[...] a ‘snapshot’ of the territory but contains also the ‘process with which it is photographed’”. Setting up a community map means initiating a procedure aimed to obtain a permanent, and constantly updatable, ‘archive’ of the people and places of an area”<sup>5</sup>. In

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.commonground.org.uk/what-we-do/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.commonground.org.uk/places-people-parish-maps-%E2%80%A8by-sue-clifford/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ecomuseo.casentino.toscana.it/mappe-di-comunita>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.commonground.org.uk/parish-maps/>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ecomuseo.casentino.toscana.it/mappe-di-comunita>.

the Italian “translation” of the text from parish map to community map (Clifford *et al.* 2006), there is an explicit reference to the sense of place so dear to geographers (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977), and to the difficulties of collective action aimed at the

continuous creation and re-creation of the distinctiveness of a place [because] communities are subject to both simultaneous conflicting and participatory pressures, [because] the balance between inhabitants and outsiders requires constant relationship building, [because] maintaining the required enthusiasm and commitment is hard work. The biggest step is the first: community maps are a way to begin. (Clifford *et al.* 2006, 2)

The launch of the Italian experiences were facilitated by the customary participation in urban planning that developed throughout the country during the last decades of the 20th century. Such community map experiences are not intended to be limited to the definition of a jointly participated census of existing tangible and intangible assets. Although essential when starting to redefine local identity, when initiating a process of enhancing the relative spatial contexts, their territorial added value (Gastaldi 2011) does not reside

so much in the elaboration of the final product (whether on paper, or cartographic...) but rather in the actual use it will be put to within the context that produced it. And it is probably this, now referred to by experimenters as ‘the after map’, that differentiates the Italian experience from the English one. In fact, it is the vibrancy of the proposals that emerge, the enthusiasm of the participants and their proactiveness that confirm or not the effectiveness of the process triggered through the map and that allow us to continue on the course set in motion, also by means of concrete actions. (Rossi 2011, 113)

Most of the Italian community maps developed over the last twenty years have been able to rely on local ecomuseum-like facilities which have enabled important and extensive participation projects to be undertaken (Marengo *et al.* 2021). In these contexts, community maps have become a permanent process, a sort of mosaic in which each of the pieces that compose it represents a recognised element of the identity necessary for the advancement of the dynamics underway. In short, these maps

can represent both the manifesto and the action plan of the ecomuseum that produced them and are a valuable tool for cultivating the quality of life of the inhabitants even in settings considered marginal, yet are rich in values and potential, such as those in the mountainous areas. (Rossi 2016, 133)

## 2. FROM ECOMUSEUM EXPERIMENTATION TO COMMUNITY MAP WORKSHOPS

The Casentino is the first stretch of the Arno river valley in the province of Arezzo, Tuscany. A mid-mountain Apennine valley that suffered heavy demographic and functional decline after World War II, it chose to re-focus towards the exploitation of local territorial resources during the last decade of the 20th century. The ecomuseum project was launched in 1998 by the *Comunità Montana del Casentino* thanks to EU funding (Leader 2 and Leader plus). It was originally coordinated by a university researcher who created the ecomuseum network project (Rossi 2006). The Casentino's ecomuseum network now numbers 16 ecomuseum "branches" dispersed throughout the territory (*Fig. 1*), that have specific enhancement objectives, but all using similar working and management methods.



Figure 1. – Casentino ecomuseum network<sup>6</sup>.  
Source: Casentino ecomuseum.

<sup>6</sup> Ecomuseum network: 1. Bucchio's water mill – 2. Museum of Porciano Castle – 3. The ski museum and the forest and mountain museum. The "Carlo Beni" ornitological

The Casentino Mountain Community initially and later the Union of Casentino Municipalities coordinate the ecomuseum through a Network Service Centre (C.R.E.D.) and an Advisory Committee that comprises all the local public and private stakeholders involved in the project. During the 2000s, when the network became established, the C.R.E.D., as well as various associations and interest groups, embarked on new territorial projects. Experimentation with community maps began during this decade and later evolved into a permanent “Community Map Laboratory”. The reasons why Casentino, embraced the community map project, right from the time of the Italian ‘translation’ of the tool invented by *Common Ground*, are manifold:

first and foremost, we were interested in understanding and exploring the inhabitants’ perceptions of their living environment, whether they felt they were living in a territory that feels close to them or whether their ties to their places were slipping away. Then we wanted to adopt a tool that was both a ‘participative exercise’ and one which could produce a real, visible, tangible and useful result for the community. Not least, we thought it seemed stimulating to be able to compare ourselves with other contexts and share tools and working methods with them. (Rossi 2006, 31)

### 3. COMMUNITY MAP PROCESSES IN CASENTINO

The Casentino community map routes/projects allowed us to create three maps that referred to specific territorial settings: Valle del Teggina (Raggiolo community map), Alta Valle del Corsalone (Vallesanta community map), Alta Valle del Solano (Solano community map). The maps made it possible not only to record local heritage using participatory methods, but also to strengthen ties between the inhabitants and their living context by implementing real initiatives, including self-managed ones, to salvage artefacts and reclaim paths, to upgrade meaningful

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collection – 4. Ecomuseum of the charcoal maker – 5. The stonework museum – 6. Castle of Poppi. Information and exhibition centre of the ecomuseum – 7. Permanent exhibition on the war and the Resistance – 8. Rural collection at “Casa Rossi” – 9. Walking path along reclaimed embankment – 10. Castelletti path – 11. Ecomuseum of the Vallesanta – 12. Ecomuseum of Chestnut and transhumance – 13. Ecomuseum of contraband and gunpowder – 14. Documentation centre on rural culture in Casentino – 15. Guido Monaco’s house and birthplace – 16. Archeological documentation centre – 17. Stories of water.

places for the community, to organise exhibitions and initiatives, and to revive traditional customs.

These maps have acquired value according to the process that was triggered, the human resources involved, and the effects and initiatives that it was and will be able to promote. This has given rise to the name “The Community Map Workshops”<sup>7</sup>.

The procedures followed in the three Casentino community map projects, though centred on the same ultimate goal, followed different routes, depending on the presence: of a close-knit community and a group of residents already aware of this type of project (Raggiolo); on the desire above all to safeguard the memory of the valley’s inhabitants through visuals (Valle del Solano); and on a challenging relational and intercultural situation in the valley between old and new inhabitants (Vallesanta). These distinctions allow us to clarify how community mapping processes are, to all intents and purposes, “building sites” to which residents contribute according to local issues as well as according to the implicit plan, at least at the outset of joint working processes.

### 3.1. *The Raggiolo community map*

Ideal conditions for launching the first community map trialling initiative in Casentino were found in the ecomuseum of Castagno di Raggiolo (Municipality of Ortignano-Raggiolo). In 2004, the tender for Study Circles (*Circoli di Studio*), provided a real opportunity to begin a collaborative process. This project, promoted by the Province of Arezzo, awarded small grants for local studies conducted by groups of volunteers. The *Brigata de Raggiolo*, an association that had managed the local ecomuseum since its inception, conducted a small research project focussed on the local toponymy. The community map (*Fig. 2*) project emerged from this first workgroup, integrating ideas and activities already in place, and adding the dimension of participatory work and knowledge sharing.

The first work group meetings began in early 2004 and lasted till the summer of 2005, when the map was presented to the community. Any mistakes, misunderstandings or inaccuracies had to be avoided: these are unacceptable if one wants to identify and enhance both the material and non-material features of the living context of the local inhabitants.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ecomuseo.casentino.toscana.it/mappe-di-comunita>.





Gathering the information took a considerable amount of time, as it was necessary to verify and compare the data collected before actually implementing the map. It is worth noting that the work group consisted mainly of local elderly people, so that the final product assumed a connotation focused above all on the mapping of memories, lifestyles and activities of the past. One interesting and practical result of the map was the implementation of the project for safeguarding the *Fonte della Diavolina*, one of the local emergencies highlighted in the map. The *Brigata di Raggiolo* managed, thereafter, to remain active as well as stimulating the interest of the people of Raggiolo. The preservation of the village's "fragments of identity" has been accompanied by various projects for the cultural and socio-economic enhancement of the area: a small restaurant, a B&B, an *albergo diffuso* (widespread hotel), inclusion in the list of Italy's Most Beautiful Villages promoted by the *Touring Club Italiano*, and the institutionalisation of the annual conference (*I Colloqui di Raggiolo*) focusing on the preservation and appreciation of local tangible and intangible heritage. Furthermore, many educational activities are organised by the local ecomuseum sector, with concrete benefits for Raggiolo.

### 3.2. *Vallesanta community map*

A marginal valley close to the watershed between Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna, this area was once much travelled by pilgrims as the Via Romea Germanica (from central Europe to Rome) runs through it via the Serra Pass. Located in the municipality of Chiusi della Verna within the Casentino Forest National Park, this small enclave, suffered a substantial post-war rural exodus. Over the last two decades of the 20th century, the valley has seen a marked increase in population as a result of the arrival of new residents mainly from central and northern Europe. This has allowed not only the small primary school to survive, but the Union of Casentino Municipalities was recently persuaded to open a nursery school (Marengo 2020). The much-vilified marginality of this area has proven to be "[...] a value, an ideal context for life choices in close contact with nature. The area has become an interesting melting pot of different cultures, a stimulating laboratory in which to experiment with models of participatory local development"<sup>8</sup>, and an ideal

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.ecomuseo.casentino.toscana.it/mappavallesanta/downloads/Pubblicazione\\_Mappa\\_Vallesanta.pdf](https://www.ecomuseo.casentino.toscana.it/mappavallesanta/downloads/Pubblicazione_Mappa_Vallesanta.pdf).

context for lifestyle choices focused on sustainability, in line with the neo-rural spirit (Marengo 2021). In Vallesanta, the community map journey lies at the root of the area's enhancement project; in fact, in fact it was chosen tool for the implementation local ecomuseum's definition process. Work on the map (*Fig. 3*) began in the spring of 2007 with the creation of a workgroup composed of representatives of local authorities and associations, schools, and "new" and "old" inhabitants of the area. At a later stage, the stakeholders from the associations involved decided to establish a specific ecomuseum for Vallesanta, which was integrated into the Casentino ecomuseum network in 2008. Volunteers were selected for each section of the valley, to be responsible for the various activities and work phases: data collection, dissemination of information, targeted interviews, analysis of results and realisation/management of micro-events. Using a cognitive map drawn up from the first analyses of the information collected, the meetings organised by the volunteers enabled other meetings to be scheduled to compare findings and make any necessary adjustments in order to proceed with the final compilation of the map. In terms of dynamism and creativity, the progress made during the meetings was remarkable, particularly among the region's new inhabitants, mainly young adults capable of offering new perspectives for the valley (Marengo 2020). The initiatives they have taken over the past decade in creating local businesses, projects and other activities have helped to re-energise the entire valley. Thanks to the new residents, the team working on the map seems to have been further consolidated. Initiatives focused on the production, enhancement and marketing of local quality products, as well as the promotion of sustainable tourism activities. The overall objective of the Vallesanta ecomuseum is indeed to promote real opportunities for the regeneration of mountain areas, through projects centred on environmental and socio-economic sustainability that are capable of attracting not only new residents but also increasing alternative forms of tourist accommodation. Collaboration between public and private actors has ultimately created a very dynamic community cooperative that has attracted many new individual and collective members (Marengo 2021).





### 3.3. *The Solano Valley community map*

The process behind this community map (Fig. 4), began – as elsewhere – with the creation, in 2010, of a permanent work group, comprising local people of all ages and professions: young people, active adults, older people and new residents. This group was the driving force behind the collection, synthesis and interpretation of the data, but served also as a collective facilitator for the entire community. Thus, the Upper Solano Valley emerged as a microcosm of historically established relationships that are still recognised, well-known and pursued. The ecomuseum of Carbonaio in Cetica played an initial unifying role in this community project. Nevertheless, the involvement process followed an alternative route compared to others in the valley: prior to drawing up a map of the entire valley, several partial maps of individual hamlets were created<sup>9</sup>. Only after a series of negotiations and additions did the community map of the valley assume its final form, and later permanently displayed, together with the partial maps, in the Carbonaio ecomuseum. Two publications also resulted from this participatory process. The first is a sort of summary of the resources anchored to the territory, namely the relational networks, places and activities considered essential to the life of the valley (Upper Solano Valley community map 2009). The second is the result of a collection of period photographs, a veritable tribute to the memory of the entire Solano Valley, which was where the whole process began (Upper Solano Valley community map 2010).

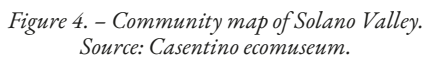
In a productive ‘after-map’ procedure, the permanent workgroup was also involved in the “Il Ponte del Tempo” (The Bridge of Time) project that dealt with one of the valley’s most important symbols: a Romanesque bridge that was in ruins and at risk of collapse (Molducci *et al.* 2015). The bridge was restored thanks to a project financed by the Tuscany Region. This project prompted a greater interest in mediaeval archaeology among the inhabitants, and has resulted in the recovery and appreciation of common features, such as former wash-houses or old stone paths<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Project financed by the Law for Participation Promotion of the Tuscany Region – LR 69/2007.

<sup>10</sup> “The Bridge of Time. Mediaeval Cultural Landscapes” is an initiative supported by the municipality of Castel San Nicolò with co-financing from the Tuscany Region, as part of the project “Investire nella cultura” (Invest in culture), in year 2008, included in the 2007/2013 PAR/FAS programming, in collaboration with the Union of Municipalities of Casentino (ecomuseum), the Archaeological, Fine Arts and Landscape Superintendence of Arezzo, the University of Florence (‘Mediaeval Archaeology’ department) and the Local Tourist Board known as the Pro Loco of the Three Borders of Cetica.





A specific scientific study led to the opening of a series of worksites that have enabled the recovery and enhancement of some of the valley's historical remains. Today this activity is documented in the "Pietra Lavorata" Museum in Strada in Casentino. The project has given rise to a process of enhancement of local cultural heritage in which, in addition to local actors, students from the Faculty of Architecture in Florence are participating for their internships.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS: COMMUNITY MAPS AS TOOLS FOR TERRITORIAL ENHANCEMENT

Reflections on the Casentino ecomuseum programmes and projects, albeit still in progress, allow us to draw some conclusions concerning the adoption and use in our country of a participative survey tool such as community mapping. Despite the differences in the mapping procedures of this Apennine valley, we may identify certain constants in the practices for the enhancement of the territories included in the 'map work-sites' we have analysed in this essay.

First and foremost, we should highlight issues concerning territorial. The mapping projects have enabled the redefinition, and in some cases the reactivation, of the process of local identity, from the identification of the spatial dimension recognised by the inhabitants, to the pinpointing of local tangible and intangible heritages considered fundamental to the identity itself.

Secondly, the mapping process has helped to (re)build relational networks weakened and loosened by the processes of defunctionalisation – demographic, cultural, economic– that occurred after World War II.

Thirdly, the community mapping process triggered important empowerment processes among local actors, both the "old" and "new" inhabitants of these marginal territories. Empowerment allows them to manage the 'after-map', although always accompanied by ecomuseum experts, in a largely autonomous way although ever more demanding in terms of planning and management skills. As a result, socio-cultural and economic enhancement dynamics have emerged around bottom-up projects that have made the 'mapping sites' permanent. The combination of all these points has also made it possible to establish ongoing relations between local public and private actors, bringing governance issues back to the centre of the socio-economic and cultural development dynamics of marginal, mostly rural and mountainous territories.

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