

**Special Issue IT.A.CÀ**

# **FUORI LUOGO**

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Tourism, Technology**

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Patrizia Domenica Miggiano, Mariano Longo<sup>1</sup>

## **Practices of community and place narratives for IT.A.CÀ Salento 2021. The case #39 of A.Lib.I. Teatro<sup>2</sup>**

*Il pensiero ha bisogno di un luogo  
dove riposare;  
il pensiero deve avere una residenza  
spaziosa, una città,  
ma solo alcuni luoghi sono adatti a  
ospitarlo  
e la mente si sente subito portata a  
fermarsi, a riflettere.  
Calvino I., *Le città di De Chirico* (1994)*

### **Introduction**

This paper is an attempt to thematize the relationship between narrative practices and local identities, investigating the capacity of narratives to influence the social perception of places and local heritage, through a process of meaning construction which implies a change in perspective: our experience with space is relational, an experience “with” a place rather than “of” a place.

Our attempt is hence to deal with the relation between narratives and places in terms of reciprocity and interaction, so as to go beyond the traditional conception of fruition (which conceives places as the observed object of an observing subject). In other words, narratives are able to produce a “haptic” dynamic, a sort of sensorial exercise by which a specific cultural view of places may emerge thanks to the analytical and imaginative capacity of storytelling.

Starting from the assumption that a “place” can be defined as a circumscribed space to be distinguished from its geographical surroundings (Turco, 2010) - and that it is human presence that determines, constructs, seals and stratifies it over time -, to narrate a place presupposes the cultural capacity to grasp and reveal all the features which make a place unique and different from another.

In this sense, it is necessary to exercise our gaze so as to detect the uniqueness of each specific place. It is precisely this process that may clarify the relevance of the interactional experience mentioned above and which Deleuze and Guattari significantly express in the geo-philosophical reflections contained in *What is Philosophy?* (1994). They write: «Thinking is neither a line drawn between subject and object nor a revolving of one around the other. Rather, thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the Earth» (p. 85). In other words, the experience and the conceptualization of space is not simply the output of our relationship between a subject and the object “place”, or of its mere esthetic contemplation. It is, much more, the output of the constant process of space construction that is established in relational dialectic between the observer and what is being observed.

A thought, therefore, does not simply describe the Earth but - as Heidegger (1962) suggested - inhabits it, organizing it into territories: hence, the strong relationship between territory and *logos*, whereby one cannot exist without the other.

Human thought is in a relation of interaction and reciprocity with the places it inhabits. It is located, and generated narratively by making recourse to categories of the space-time, cause-effect

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type (Herman 2003; Herman, Jahn, & Ryan, 2005). Spatiality and temporality, cause and effect, before and after qualify thought as essentially narrative, supported by consequential categories (Bruner, 1986). It is a sort of narrative instinct that, as suggested by Fisher (1987), qualifies us as a narrating species (*homo narrans*): human mind, in fact, works on the basis of chronological-causal connections of events - that is, stories - and it is through stories that our mind represents itself, other people and the world (including places) (Turner, 1996).

The acknowledgment of narrative as a cognitive structure of human beings (MacIntyre, 1988) was, the driving force behind the so-called narrative turn. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, in fact, stories were recognized as having an important knowledge-building function. In particular, social sciences recognized the generative, relational and negotiating character of narratives (Herman, 2003; Herman, Jahn, & Ryan, 2005).

Our ability to conceive and understand stories is, moreover, is typically human and rests on deep and innate cognitive structures. In the period between the 1960s and 1980s, structuralist and post-structuralist philosophical-anthropological currents, stressed that we interpret the world on the basis of the relations we establish between what we know and what is unknown to us, comparing the new with a learned and stereotypical model (Foucault, 1966; Lévi-Strauss, 1972; Althusser, 1976; Barthes, 1965, 1972; Klossowski, 1968; Deleuze, 1969).

Narrative practices bear witness to human, historical and cultural evolution and are themselves a heritage, a cognitive paradigm that is handed down, with variation, from generation to generation, preserving and, at the same time, offering the educational and moral tools to enter into relationship with the world. Narrative is a way to let knowledge spread, to shorten the distance between us, the past and its heritage, to produce a chronography of the human in relation to our lived space.

This paper takes the triple relation between narratives, human development and lived space seriously and exemplifies it through the presentation of a case study which shows how the practice of storytelling may be intended as both a tool useful to connect experience "with" places and a means of constructing a shared cultural memory on a local basis.

## **1. A narrative approach for territorial development**

Stories and places are interconnected: by narrating, we make the history of a place available - a unique and unrepeatable product of a long process of production of shared meanings (Lefebvre, 1974) - making a difference among stakeholders. This may have concrete effects, for example, the production of a culturally sustainable development plan, which may make reference to local practices, so as to steer the direction of cultural economic growth of a specific area and at the same time determine the possibility for local communities to reclaim a common narrative-cultural matrix (Pollice, 2017).

Indeed, associating territorial development with its narration allows innovative and original processes of identity construction and representation linked to specific places. If it may be difficult to associate evocative terms such as "genius loci" or "sense of place" (Decandia, 2004) with the much more pragmatic concept of territorial development, at a closer inspection, we realize that the sustainable attractiveness of a place (i.e. its capacity to attract people, skills, investments and productive activities and to maintain them over time - Baslé, Cariou, & Suire, 2003), depends to a large extent on the imaginary and the universe of meanings and symbols built around it.

Beccattini (2015), speaking of "place consciousness", made the concepts of "sense of place" and "territorial development" compatible (Caldelli & Tantillo, 2006). With the concept of "place" understood as a set of knowledge, culture, historical and anthropic sedimentations, values and attitudes characteristic of a specific community, the author paves the way for a new vision of development understood as the synergic enhancement of all the components in play, with the

consequence of a profound transformation of the concept of territory itself, which is no longer conceived as a productive base, but as a resource that grows up through the increase of its social and human capital. In this sense, it is the territory that indicates the direction to take for its own development (Bonomi & De Rita, 1998): it is to be sought in the traces of its history, in the body of knowledge and practices built up over time.

The specificity of a place is, therefore, the starting point for a territorial empowerment strategy. Attractiveness is, in fact, determined, among other things, by "amenity values", aspects that have much to do with the creative effervescence of a place, with its capacity to explore and get to know itself, in a process of self-awareness that profoundly affects the quality of life and, therefore, the image it conveys to the outside world. What one could call community sentiment has a crucial relevance: it is both a component and an inevitable outcome of an authentically and culturally sustainable development (Florida, 2002). The first creative act with regard to a place consists, therefore, precisely in the ability to be able to read into its specificity. This specificity is the fruit of a unique and unrepeatable evolution that can be read as and as such and of a history - the process of territorialization, in fact - has the power to build a collective consciousness and to orient it in a strategic vision.

This way of looking at the relationship between development and the territory, significantly shakes up the old perspective: development, in this sense, does not depend solely on the resources available, but above all on the capacity of local communities to recognize them as such and to make the most of them, placing them within a process of value creation<sup>3</sup>.

The 2005 Faro Convention considers the driving force of sustainable development to be precisely the enhancement of cultural heritage and related symbols and meanings. And again, Article 27(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: «Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific progress and its benefits». The programmatic lines underlying these provisions, as well as the goals proposed in Agenda 2030 (among them Goal 11. 4: «Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage») and, last but not least, to the goals of Europe 2020 (where it speaks of «smart, sustainable and inclusive growth») thus open the way to a reflection on practices for a real involvement of the local community. This happens both with regard to the aspects of socio-economic development *strictu sensu* and with regard to the cultural aspects deriving from this vision (i.e. that set of processes of heritage valorization and community involvement that are fundamental precisely in all the processes with which we value a territory and its cultural heritage).

## **2. #39 di A.lib.I. Teatro for IT.A.CÀ Salento 2021: a tale of community**

Since 2008 IT.A.CÀ Responsible Tourism Festival, has proposed a model for sustainable travels based on the involvement of communities and the organic development of territories.

The attempt to experiment, together with local populations and visitors, a path for a profound rediscovery of common values, is realized starting from what we could define as minute, particular, everyday narratives (Georgakopoulou, 2007): they are «apparently unmoving histories», as Foucault (1971, p. 3) suggests, which hold, however, an extraordinary power for the construction of shared memory and for the strengthening of the feeling of belonging. The rationale of IT.A.CÀ model is consistent with the theoretical background we have proposed above: a place is narrated, and by being narrated, it produces identities and a cultural, immaterial, heritage which

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<sup>3</sup> This is all the more so if we pay particular attention to the tourism sector: the process of creating a cultural attraction implies a series of practices that must necessarily make use of tools for interpreting places (Bonadei & Volli, 2003). In fact, basing the tourist offer on the identity matrix of the place allows a virtuous circle to be set in motion that, by intercepting and responding to a qualified tourist demand, in some way promotes and fuels it, fulfilling a cultural function of extraordinary importance that is thus set in the direction of authentic cultural sustainability.

can be shared by both inhabitants and tourists. What is needed is a medium which allows the process of meaning sharing.

An appropriate example is the case of the stage of IT.A.CÀ Salento 2021, which saw the realization of a rich and complex dramatized itinerary between the localities of Marina Serra, Tiggiano, Lucugnano, Tricase, Tricase Porto, Biotopo delle Vallonee, Porto Museo, and Castiglione d'Otranto del Serra Mito.

The theme of the 2021 Salento edition was breath, understood as a tool for drawing, infusing and renewing life in territories and communities. Imagining breath as a movement of continuous emission and introduction, that is, as a dialectic that takes the form of an incessant coming and going between exterior and interior spaces, a territorial symbolization of the process has been carried out, through a mapping of the places that enable this regeneration.

Thus, a ring-shaped route was proposed, in which the Saracen towers (with particular reference to Torre Palane, located in Marina Serra and recently restored; Torre Nasparo in Tiggiano and Torre del Sasso al Mito) represent the generating point of the «breath that embraces the space of the world» (Aezio, DK 13, B2), which from the towers proceeds towards the sea and from there returns inland

The event envisaged and offered the public the performative restitution of the tale by the cultural association A.Lib.I. (Artisti Liberi Indipendenti), which has been working in the Salento area since 2013, in synergy with local public and private actors, mostly by means of theatrical performances and dramatizations aimed at the valorization and narration of material and immaterial sediments. Over time, the association has worked in the direction of the widest and most transversal knowledge of local heritage possible, even in the most peripheral territories, having understood that this particular kind of interventions and actions - which arise from communities and are directed to them - are an important lever for the creation of relations with the public and, indeed constitute a tool capable of directing interest and soliciting responses on issues perceived as relevant to the communities themselves, i.e. environmental education, conservation of the territory, and cultural narration for tourists (who, many times, are local visitors, i.e. locals or returning emigrants who wish to rediscover their territory and its history in its lesser-known aspects).

This means that, over time, the quality of audiences and their participation has also undergone important changes. Therefore, over the years, these types of community practices have therefore, over the years, been assigned a cognitive and critical role with regard to certain phenomena of the territory that, until recently, was eminently the task of journalists or activists (Wenger, 1998).

After all, according to Adorno's modernist canon, art is truly modern when it deals with the negativity of reality: without this «mimesis of the mortal», without this «poisonous material», «art would be a sterile consolation» (Adorno, 1973, p. 151).

The account of places offered by a certain contemporary dramaturgy, by virtue of its radical realism, expresses this negative aesthetics and does so to an even greater extent when it «blindly indulges in the representation of everyday life» (ibidem).

For this reason, it can certainly be said that community narratives help in the formation of public opinion on aspects related to the territory and perceived as crucial, but that, likewise, they affect social perception and territorial policies.

The first stage of the storytelling itinerary proposed by IT.A.CÀ Salento 2021, held in the municipality of Tiggiano, was certainly the one that presented the highest level of performativity. The A.Lib.I. association, in collaboration with the Permanent Laboratory of Active Citizenship and the Experimental Centre for Self-education and Citizen Activation, Celacanto, proposed the definition of a route that linked together the coastal areas and the historic centres, identifying in the municipal buildings, in the tufa *tajate* of the rural area between the municipalities of Tiggiano and Tricase, and in the points of interest distributed in the villages, a path of knowledge and exploration of the Salento territory.

The first performance of this route presented a selection of excerpts from Alessandro Leogrande's "Il naufragio. Morte nel Mediterraneo" (2011) by Alessandro Leogrande, from which the work

"Katër I Radës, La frontiera" (2015) was taken, which served as a significant premise for the invitation to reflect on Apulia as a land of landings and a crossroads of human experiences and trajectories that are daughters of history. The installation involved the placement of a number of frames on the belvedere of the Torre del Sasso, useful for the contemplation of the airy panorama overlooking Tricase Porto and Andrano. From here, spectators were invited to filtered observation through messages placed on the seats by other previous visitors, who dictated the rules of the game (e.g. before a trip, never look back; do not leave with relatives, friends and relatives-in-law, etc.) (Fig.1).



Fig.1. First stage of the IT.A.CÀ Salento 2021 route in the municipality of Tiggiano.

Photograph by Rocco Casaluci

The second stage included a stop at the baronial palace of Tiggiano, where it was possible to set out on an experiential journey through Salento's poetry and its testimonies: readers waited for small groups of spectators in a garden scattered with poetic traces of well-known (including Maria Corti, Vittorio Bodini, Vittorio Pagano, to name but a few) and lesser-known authors.

From here, the path headed towards Tricase Porto and the Chiesa dei Diavoli (the access point of the Otranto-Leuca Park, through the Biotope, a small garden of Walloon oaks and rural rural park), where A.lib.l., with opera #39 by Walter Prete, set the dramatization of the story of the local refugee camp (Displaced Persons Camp), active during the Second World War, from 1943 to 1948, The play, realized in 2016, constitutes, to all intents and purposes, the historical examination of a chapter of local life that is almost unknown even to the people of Tricase.

The restitution of the story in theatrical form was entrusted to the local people, hence to volunteer and non-professional actors, who told their fellow countrymen about the difficulties that arose with the arrival of Jewish refugees in one of the many occasions in which, throughout the 20th century and in conjunction with the various local and international crises that characterized

it, Puglia, due to its geographically strategic position, became a landing place for refugees, displaced persons and repatriates from neighbouring countries.<sup>4</sup>

The Refugee Collection Centres, including the one in Tricase, were created to manage the intense migratory flow at the time. The story of Centre No. 39, the subject of A.Lib.I.'s account, is significant above all for the initial misunderstandings that arose from the inhabitants' sudden impact with the new arrivals. After a long and difficult period of experiential learning, however, the story of Centre No. 39 teaches how it is possible to sow the seeds of acceptance and respect for otherness.

The work #39 - both in its theatrical form and in the audiovisual form of the docu-performance realized in 2021 and distributed as a didactic corollary in the area's schools - represents a real tool for reconstructing the profound and complex relationships between human groups and the space they live in and the history of places, both in terms of their uniqueness and as true incubators of plurality.

It should be emphasized that #39 is part of an already existing body of narratives on the subject: since the early 2000s, the research work of Ercole Morciano in the volume *Ebrei a Tricase Porto* (2017) and the documentary film *Rinascere in Puglia* by Gady Castel (directed by Yael Katzir, produced: Italy/Israel, 2015) have revived the collective memory of this historical event that, unfortunately, has left only scarce tangible traces, in suffrage of an intangible memory mostly linked to direct testimonies.

The dynamics of the work's research and writing envisaged a threefold definition in terms of phases: a) retrieval of historical sources, archive material and interviews with the community; b) dramaturgical rewriting; c) staging and restitution in theatrical form (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. A moment of the theatrical performance #39 by A.Lib.I. Teatro, in which the inhabitants' tell their fellow citizens about the episode of DP Camp No. 39.  
Photograph by Rocco Casaluci.

<sup>4</sup> One thinks, in this sense, of the Italians expelled from Smyrna (1912), the Armenians who escaped the Turkish massacres (1915-1922) or the thousands of displaced persons and former internees - in particular fleeing Jews - at the turn of the Second World War (1943-1948).

The examination of the case study for the purposes of this reflection, as well as the resulting territorial spin-offs, was also conducted through an unstructured interview with a privileged witness, Gustavo D'Aversa, director and creator of community practice #39, who recounts:

A.Lib.I intended to take up a challenge in an attempt to answer a question that represents an urgency for our community: how can an episode of our recent history, so relevant and rich in identity value, remain unknown to those who were not contemporaries of it?

This was the starting point for the artistic research, through a participatory path of a workshop and theatrical nature, but also historical, through the identification of sources, witnesses and historically relevant places. The dramaturgy of #39 stems from the narrative reworking of the materials resulting from this research. This original writing then became a play aimed at local audiences, tourists and occasional patrons, but also a site-specific performance with a strong vocation for the narration of places, intended as an opportunity to create heritage communities - as envisaged and desired by the Faro Convention - and, finally, a documentary filmed and realized thanks to the contribution of the citizens of the Tricasina community themselves and acting enthusiasts, with the pedagogical aim of disseminating the micro-history of DP39 to school students of all levels. An articulated path rooted in the territory, that of #39, which starts from the bottom, reinventing - through the tool of theatrical narration - a collective historical memory somehow removed.

After all, memory, as we know, has its own processes, forms and drifts, among which certainly include some conducts marked by oblivion, as in the case of Displaced Persons Camp 39, in which the collective removal of memory corresponds precisely to an intention that deserves to be investigated.

#39 has thus gradually become something more than our initial intentions. Today, it is configured as a kind of memory map, an emotional map of places, capable of engaging the local community through the interaction of narrative, historical, emotional, sensorial and participatory perspectives (Bresciani, Micoli, 2017).

By merging the narration of places with a map of memory, the performance is also an attempt to interpret a collective identity, understood as a complex reality in the making. A fortiori, so is territorial identity, whose change results in the loss or regaining of a sense of place.

The story of #39 is very little known even to the local population, so it seemed appropriate to have the story presented to the inhabitants themselves and in a one-to-one form between the non-professional performer and the audience learning this story. We chose, from among them, the story of Johanna Neumann, who tells of her crystal night in Hamburg; that of 17-year-old Golda, who becomes a full-fledged Tricasian by marrying a local. We told of her journey across the Balkan route to DP Camp 39, in search of a sister she believed to be dead. Two other selected stories focused on the reception of supra-local customs and ways of life by the population of the time (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. A moment from theatre performance #39 by A.Lib.I. Teatro.  
Photograph by Rocco Casaluci.

It was, of course, a complex relationship, which took the form of a real confrontation with modernity and the large European cities of the time. On the one hand, there were the rural populations impoverished by the war and for the most part illiterate; on the other, human groups marked by collective traumas and, at the same time, by the desire - which perhaps had more the profile of a utopia - for a promised land, which was being born near Israel.

A sort of war between the poor was thus generated, but also and above all an unprecedented cultural upheaval, since a large part of the population had never been so aware of what was happening outside the local borders. In other words, the idea of a Europe that lived outside the narrow perimeter of the Salento territory loomed large, with its unprecedented revolutions in the field of customs and habits.

The narrative of #39 refers to a real cultural collapse. In #39, for example, it speaks of a local culture clashing with the wearing of trousers, which was in vogue among the female population in the mid-twentieth-century European context. On the other hand, in Salento at the time, the female peasants still wore the traditional costume. It was a face-to-face encounter between extremely different ways of life, which caused discontent and suspicion, for example, regarding the nonchalance with which male refugees attempted to approach local women. This proximity led, however, to a significant number of mixed marriages and, therefore, to a consequent process of cultural contamination, which can be interpreted as an attempt to infuse both host and guest communities with new life and new forms.

A work, therefore, that tells the story of the territory with a historical dynamic, but it is also deeply emotional and worthy of examination, since the desire to remove the traces of the passage through the field over the years is evident.

The villas where the refugees had found hospitality, immediately after the camp was dismantled, were returned to their owners, who repainted the interiors and façades, effectively erasing the drawings and paintings made by the groups who had experienced the war and the distance from their country there. One of these is located in Santa Cesarea Terme, at what is now a bar that works mostly in the summer and was, at the time, the U.N.R.A.'s food distribution centre.

It is an episode that, beyond the attempt to forget it, continues to speak for itself through the use of certain lemmas in the local dialect language, in which, for example, the term '*brei* (Jews, precisely) continues to refer to the hawkers, also Italian citizens, of the second-hand market. This was because the Jewish refugees in Tricase sold what was left over from the blankets, clothes and shoes offered by the U.N.R.A. in order to monetize resources that, in money, could certainly be more useful to their own household. The effort of A.Lib.I. has been precisely to involve the citizens of Tricase in this path of knowledge in workshop form, to give back to the citizens themselves as well as to visitors a somewhat deeper and more critical awareness of their own history, through a narrative identity that springs from a memory that deserves to be recovered. Therefore, we believe in storytelling as an act of safeguarding tangible and intangible heritage. We have therefore tried to engage the community around a heritage that it sometimes does not see, does not know, does not feel as its own. Through the artistic filter, thus, we attempt to return a story to its protagonists, translating signs, symbols, traces that, at times, cultural habituation does not allow us to grasp.





Fig. 3. The community story #39 as part of the 2021 edition of IT.A.CÀ. Salento.  
Photograph by Rocco Casaluci.

## Conclusions

A.Lib.I.'s experiment for IT.A.CÀ Salento 2021, with its narrative made "by" the tricasini "for" the tricasini, proposes an experimental way of narrating the places and, for this very reason, stands as an interesting case study for reflecting on the opportunity, through narrative practices, to intercept and satisfy needs and desires of a community and to attempt to compose a mapping of cultural claims to which offer responses.

This is a strongly identity-based mapping, which offers a comprehensive picture of the ways in which the community demands, organizes itself or reorganizes itself in order to satisfy its cultural needs. These are also - and in some cases above all - determined by geographical location: cultural needs, in particular, change according to proximity or distance from large centres. Often, in fact, it can happen that the cultural life of cities engulfs that of small provincial centres and that the social and community needs of the latter are defined residually.

For this reason, and above all with a view to increasing a community's awareness of itself and its heritage, it is advisable to build a permanent dialogue with the population and the network of local actors, in order to create new synergies and discuss the critical aspects they encounter in their daily work and in achieving their goals.

The case study under consideration certainly focuses the discussion on the complex relationship between history, memory and narration, which is all the more complex when linked to the places that thematize and enhance this relationship: this is highlighted by Grande (2012), when he writes:

«curiosity for the places where memory crystallizes and takes refuge is linked to this particular moment in our history. A moment of transition, in which the consciousness of the rupture with the past mingles with the feeling of a broken memory; but where the laceration still awakens enough memory for the problem of its incarnation to arise. [...] Memory, history: far from being synonymous, we become aware

that everything opposes them. Memory is life, always sustained by living groups and, as such, it is in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembrance of oblivion, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to all uses and manipulations, susceptible to long latencies and sudden revitalizations». (pp. 129-131).<sup>5</sup>

The lack of awareness of an important and formative episode for the life of the community, brought to light through the A.Lib.I. research, thus poses some important questions related to storytelling as a viaticum for the construction of knowledge around the particular and unrepeatable stories that make up history. Therefore, storytelling is reconfirmed in its role as «vehicle of sociality and instrument of cognitive and moral development. [...] In this way, narration is transformed from an everyday and contingent fact into a cultural practice» (Longo, 2012, p. 19). On the other hand, narrating means talking to the human being about the human being, building a bridge to create familiarity (*sympatheia*) where before there was estrangement and interest where there was indifference.

And after all, a document, a story, an artefact interests us precisely insofar as it is the bearer of a particular humanity, historically determined, with all its values and its view of reality. To see in narrative community practices an opportunity for patrimonialization means, among other things, to ignite reflection on the concepts of «resource as inheritance» and «resource as responsibility» (Choay, 1992; Dal Pozzo, 2021). In the first case (resource as inheritance), cultural heritage is understood as a sort of treasure, of wealth inherited from the past, to be exploited with a conduct, let us say, of an «irresponsible heir»; on the other hand, in the second case (resource as responsibility), it is considered as the result of a long and particular historical-cultural process - anchored to that place and only to that place - of which the local community is a proactive part. It is precisely this latter aspect that makes it responsible to it and to future generations, requiring it to make a significant commitment in terms of conservation, preservation, enhancement, but above all in terms of increasing value and significance.

Storytelling, in this sense, can certainly constitute a ground for experimenting practices and responses, for identifying workshop formats or intervention models aimed at an authentic involvement of communities in the writing - or, as we have seen, re-writing - of a dynamic memory to be placed as the foundation of a strategic vision of development for the territory.

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