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Davide Olori, Enrico Mariani[1]

The rhetoric of development in rural areas: the branding places processes in the earthquake-affected Central Apennines[2]

Introduction: identifying categories of disaster context

The observations below are based on both personal and collective life and research experiences that began during the central Apennine post-earthquake period in the autumn of 2016, which affected 140 towns and resulted in the displacement of around 50,000 people.

In December 2016, a call for research prompted the Central Apennine post-earthquake survey project led by the research group Emidio di Treviri (Emidio di Treviri, 2018; 2021). Dozens of PhD students, academics and professionals answered the call and started a collective and independent research-action experience that explored and reported on some aspects of the earthquake aftermath (Olori, Menghi 2019). To carry out this research, we conducted in-depth and prolonged participant observation of the context (2016-ongoing), the result of both individual and collective trajectories, alongside other qualitative methodologies mainly concerning semiotic and discourse analysis.

We consider it essential to draft these methodological notes in order to introduce the diachronic process, which begins with an examination of what happens during the emergency and ends by outlining the medium-term development horizons. We consider the immediate post-disaster moment as a laboratory of processes that will stretch into the long-recovery phase, drawing a common thread that the actors (inhabitants, visitors, institutions, stakeholders, etc.) consistently follow. The goal is to understand how a disaster may favour or discourage practices in the area under scrutiny, and to give an interpretation with regard to the relations between human groups and fragile areas.

While researching the emergency, we recognized the 'time' domain as a useful arena for understanding what was happening. We identified acceleration as an obvious polarity, aided by extensive critical literature that agrees in describing and exploring the exacerbation of some socio-economic trends in the post-disaster period (Saitta, 2015). At the same time, we found that for many people (displaced persons and families in particular), the earthquake meant a 'suspension' of real life, characterized by waiting for the moment when they would regain possession of their lives, consumed in an empty time marked by minimal existential rhythms. A suspension that in many cases corresponded with the medicalisation of discomfort, sometimes justifiable but aligned (in perspective) with a 'governmental' view of the subject. We posited this as a second polarity mirroring acceleration. At the same time, the earthquake aftermath has brought about a rush of events: processes that were already underway were caused to accelerate by the actions implemented to respond to the crisis. This is the case for the pre-existing pattern of the depopulation of mountains in favour of cities and coastal areas, which the emergency management irreversibly hastened. This is also the case for other trends affecting the fragile area of the central Apennines, i.e. population aging and impoverishment. The impacts of recovery actions in material and financial support of the primary sector play no lesser role on this front. In a context already marked by a progressive divide between small family-run agro-pastoral businesses and medium-large companies (Sotte, 2016), post-emergency measures rapidly widen the gap between those who are able to tap into national and EU tender market opportunities, and those who lack the means and sometimes even the formal qualification to access them. Emergency management aggravates impoverishment, aging and depopulation in the areas under consideration.

Alongside the duality between acceleration and halt, which will also be useful in understanding place-branding processes, the second time-related duality we identified is the one between precariousness and durability, which interprets the classic ambivalence of public emergency management choices. On the

one hand, precariousness points to an uncomfortable but flexible condition, on the other hand, durability means comfort but also stillness and costly restoration. This is what happens with the physical reconstruction of damaged heritage, but also with the management of temporary solutions and earthquake victims' trajectories. The dilemma intensifies the longer precariousness lasts, manifesting itself as a now classic issue for Italian earthquake victims[3].

Besides the time domain, we also identified the spatial domain, which encompasses the categories of proximity and distance. Many of the issues our research reveals stem from the centralised and bureaucratic management of recovery action, which, both at the regulatory level and in technical solutions, has shown little consideration for the peculiarities of places and situations. 'Local know-how' is bypassed (Pellizzoni, 2017) in favour of top-down planning. Spatial polarity is also key to understanding the relations between places and situations and more or less 'distant' entities such as regions, ministries, technical bodies and large corporations involved in supporting specific initiatives. Despite the variety of actors involved, what stands out is that in planning actions, the abstract or functional logic that prevailed is one that is more oriented to the needs and goals of the proponents rather than to those of the recipients or to the features of the implementation contexts. These categories of analysis will also be fundamental to the understanding of place-branding processes.

In addition to these two domains (space and time) which are useful to interpret the fractures generated by the earthquake in the Central Apennine area, there is the social organisation side. Whether they preferred to take direct action or to transfer resources that the beneficiaries could freely manage, the prevailing logic was that of the watering can principle: the uniform treatment of situations standardised by formal or easily formalised indicators. Thus, post-emergency actions based on the presumed equality of all citizens facing disaster have resulted in a repetition and amplification of existing inequalities. On this level, the research approached the concepts of vulnerability and resilience in a dynamic rather than static way, thus understood them not as inherent features of the subject per se (individual, groups, community), but as dynamic and relational factors of a process involving the pre-during and post-disaster period.

Besides being the basis of the scientific and political work of the research group[4], we think that the space and time polarities that were identified can be considered as useful categories to analyse post-earthquake place-branding processes.

1. After the disaster: the frictionless development paradigm

The analysis of top-down emergency management has proved fundamental in understanding what is happening in the recovery stage, where the topic of development has merged with that of 'reconstruction'. The resource and responsibility distribution model in the economic recovery stage, in fact, has become similar to that of the emergency stage, where the issue of governance action being managed by a nationally appointed commission distanced local communities from self-government even further. The status of exception, as a prominent feature of emergency regulation, extended and permeated the long-term post-disaster period.

During disaster management, decisionism usually prevails (Bonaccorsi, 2009), and it sometimes results in a status of exception, a moment in which law self-suspends and is in force without being enforced, giving way to sovereign decision-making. However, what we gather from the post-earthquake experience is not the suspension of law per se, but its exceptional proliferation, under the sign of bureaucratisation and technicalisation instead of genuine political action. It is not the decision that conforms to the law, but the latter that blends in with the former. Of course, depoliticization is a political act in itself, since it conceals the element of choice underlying even the most technical issue. This dispersion of recovery measures into a thousand singularly rational and justifiable but altogether headless trickles (or rather

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[3] This imperishable nature is precisely the one that puts the problem at the community sovereignty level, and thus to the level of agency and to the subject, rather than to the socio-technical level of the so-called shelter phase, which has meanwhile largely improved and gained experience.

[4] With this approach, the research team, albeit from a marginal position, contributed to the scientific and local discussion by using the results of field research to show the limits of the top-down model adopted during the emergency.

headed by the 'need-oriented' logic that has gradually imposed itself everywhere in the governance of things and lives) combines post-emergency management with long-term recovery marked by government action for local development.

This process of 'commissioning the future', which is the result of governmental contingency that spells long-term disaster, is reinforced by the concurrent destruction of the local subject.

Power centralisation and social fragmentation (Barbera, Rees 2020), which have affected Italian society over the last 20 years and have been particularly fierce in fragile areas of the country, become unavoidable in the Central Apennine crater. Here, they have overlapped and intensified, with the weakening of local communities due to post-emergency displacement processes and the jungle of regulatory measures that invalidated attempts to re-assemble the social infrastructure. The local community also disappears from the great public and private hegemonic narratives, that concur in imagining the future of the earthquake-affected mountains: an example of this is the Merloni Foundation, which in its report *Save the Apps* imagines an Apennine animated by stakeholder categories (commuters, smart-workers, etc. categorised into «tribes») (Spacca, 2019). No less, the design of governance tools (starting with the extraordinary SNAI areas, launched specifically in the crater, up to the Nuovi Sentieri di Sviluppo (New Development Paths)) never achieves a real change of pace in the involvement of local stakeholders, moving more and more towards target-based policies.

This has favoured the creation of a kind of clean slate. An ethereal space where power balances and imbalances between centre and periphery, between capital and labour, between profit and environmental sustainability seem to disappear. The reality of fragile areas (in truth very complex and full of tensions, historical trends and rooted errors) is depicted as a blank sheet of paper. This leaves ample room to design large-scale projects, for those who are capable and have the resources to imagine (Appadurai, 2012): this opens up scenarios for pilot cases (embodied by the recent Piano Borghi), for target-based strategies proposed by star architect firms and industrial foundations, for public policies dedicated to social innovators, etc. Developing the narrative of the clean slate is the condition that makes these areas functional to the construction of futuristic scenarios, dense of interpretations and answers to problems coming from outside the mountain (Reolon, 2016). This is where narratives play a major role.

If this is generally the case, it is even more so (because it is happening at an increased speed) in the Central Apennine crater, where the void to be filled is deeper, more evident, and the resources available are greater. It is precisely this greater wealth of suddenly available resources and development opportunities that gives an unprecedented acceleration to development policies. Now the commission structure (which works, as mentioned, with large room for derogation) is in charge not only of reconstruction but also of economic recovery, by appropriation of a package of resources and mechanisms which is far greater than any expectation (in the NRRP, the item 'Crater development' accounts for all the resources allocated to the entire Italian mountain).

This massive mechanism, which suddenly begins to plan the development of those fragile areas through unprecedented capital injections, is easily implemented without friction (Tsing, 2005). Indeed, the humanscape on which the gear of commissioned development hooks itself, is one of capitalism and earthquake rubbles, among which the true subjects have practically disappeared. As previously stated, during the emergency, governmental mechanisms had rationed resources and processes, leading to sharp accelerations in some areas and extensive dilations of the suspended time in others. The time of the capital accelerates and stalls on this topography of smooth and striated spaces (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980), moving among different but no less violent extraction practices.

On the one hand, we see the consolidation of classic, almost pre-capitalist extractivism dynamics: hoarding primary resources (forests, pastures, lands, springs), predatory practices on public funds (Klein, 2007), and hyperbolic infrastructuring (Simpson, 2014). On the other hand, the extractive capabilities of enrichment economy (Boltansky Esquerre, 2020) are strengthened: these processes are easily moulded around the emerging paradigm of the de-territorialised mountain as the theatrical setting for experiential activity. A mid-mountain (Varotto, 2020) now perceived, narrated and sold without its human-environment co-evolutionary dimension. In this framework, the creation of the metropolitan-mountain brand and the attempt to revive the appeal of earthquake-ridden areas trough policies focused on tourism and the outdoors play a key role.

2. Gastro-politics of the emergency

Understanding the dynamics of the tourism industry requires considering the importance of place branding processes (Medway *et al.* 2021). These processes are also increasingly relevant in the socioeconomic development dynamics of inner and rural areas (Gulisova 2021) and contexts that are marked by conflict and disaster (Seraphin *et al.* 2018, Gotham, Irvin 2017). In the Central Italian territory, contrary to the general trend, tourism was identified as one of the few growing sectors in the pre-earthquake period (Cerquetti *et al.* 2019). As much as insiders' perceptions were still those of general disorganization, lack of infrastructure and attractivity, between 2010 and 2015 the number of people employed in accommodation services had increased by 50 percent in the crater area, above the regional (48 percent) and national (43.5 percent) averages (Cutrini, Cerquetti 2020).

This relative gap can be read with more breadth within a historical trajectory that sees the replacement of agro-sylvo-pastoral methods of use of the territory, with those of tourist use (Dematteis, Gioia 2020, Varotto 2020). Taking the Sibillini Mountains district (one of the areas of interest in the 2016 earthquake crater) into consideration, the loss of 19,566 residents in the 1951-1981 thirty-year period (equal to over -47.8 percent since the beginning of the time frame considered) counters a considerable increase in the building stock. In other words, faced with an average decrease in population of 30.5 percent per decade, there is an average increase in built-up area of 280.2 percent (a massive infrastructural build-up, with the construction of accommodation facilities, second homes, and ski slopes). This is evidence of a change in the use of housing: seasonalized, flexible and no longer residential, as well as no longer directly involved in activities with the ecological system. Consistently, the new settlement pattern marked a consolidation of the loss of employees in the agricultural sector, which in the 1971-1981 decade reached 18.2%, with peaks especially among the youngest (while the elderly were engaged in the primary sector for 41.3% and in the tertiary sector for 46.4%, for the young these values were 9.4% and 55.1%, respectively).

This historical trend, where we recognize a transformation in the use and enjoyment of the mountainous territory, forms the ideological basis of tourism branding of the territory. Through the exaltation of certain characteristic features, this process is understood by social actors as the most valid, if not the only, viable option in the field of possibilities.

To understand the way in which the process of branding is implemented in the earthquake-affected mountain territories, it is necessary to specify that there are some specific vectors invested with material resources and symbolic capital. These certainly include food, air quality, rurality and, more generally, the metonymic idea of the national imagery that, even before the disaster, associated rural central Italy with features such as authenticity, genuineness and peasant spirit (Sabatini, 2020). It thus becomes possible to better understand what happened to those identity vectors during and after the socio-natural disaster affecting the territories in 2016.

As Saitta (2015) notes, the ways of intervening in disaster-affected contexts and relief for the damaged (ranging from the more institutional, «scientific charity» (Ibid., p. 203), to the more spontaneous forms) are deeply dependent on the prevailing ideology. One of the isotopies[5] (Bertrand 2002) that stands out from an analysis of public discourse in the post-earthquake Central Apennines is that of «reconstruction not only physical, but social and economic».[6] Due to the aforementioned growing trend in the tourism sector, "social and economic" reconstruction is primarily understood as the ability of territories to position themselves in the market of tourism flows. The symbolic capital of material resources plays a central role in affirming this syllogism.

According to Dickie there is a close relationship between disasters and the socio-historical construction of imageries. The «semiotic overload» (Dickie 2008, p. 21) that occurs in the aftermath of a disaster generates not only an empathic and compassionate movement, but also a series of «cognitive challenges»

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[5] By isotopy we mean the recurrence of semic categories, whether they are thematic (or abstract), or figurative, along a syntagmatic chain that ensure its homogeneity to the enunciated discourse. Greimas, Courtés 2007, pp. 171-173; see also Bertrand 2002, pp. 27-34.

[6] An online search was conducted via tags (reconstruction, housing, central Italy earthquake) of articles that came out between August 25, 2016 and November 30, 2021. We selected news published by six nationwide newspapers and two news agencies: La Repubblica, Corriere della Sera, Resto del Carlino, La Stampa, Il Fatto Quotidiano, Agi, Ansa, Huffington Post. The choice of audiovisual contributions, found online through the same tags, meets the same criterion of identifying isotopias.

(Ibid.) related to the subversion of the social order caused by the disaster (De Martino 1977). In the case of the Messina earthquake (1908) these cognitive challenges concerned the nation, which is «symbolized» and placed within «narrative scenarios» in which it appears as a contested concept, that is, at the same time as an «axiomatic common value» and «controversial weapon» (p. 43). We can put forward the hypothesis that, in the case of the crater in Central Italy, gastronomic cultures fulfil the function of pacifying subversions within a potentially conflicting imagery like that of living in an inland area in the post-disaster period. The idea of the presidium of earthquake victims in the difficulties of the emergency was accompanied by widespread resentment (Rodriguez-Pose 2018) and claim of «inequality in recognition» by institutions (Barca, Casavola, Lucatelli 2014). In the dramatic and critical post-earthquake scenario, gastronomic cultures are a symbol that resisting and continuing to inhabit the crater is a real possibility.

Thus, it becomes possible to trace the direction of some of the dynamics related to the sphere of food and nutrition that have been existing in the crater since the first emergency. Some elements in particular are summoned within the discourse, such as a widely circulated slogan: «we will recover with vincisgrassi, ciauscolo and Varnelli».   It is an example of a semisymbolic construction that holds much broader socio-cultural significance than mere slogans (Pozzato 2001). Gastronomic cultures endure, and they consolidate processes of recognizing a common identity despite the devastating effects of the earthquake on the territory as a whole. People (as opposed to buildings destroyed by the earthquake) can (and in a sense, consequently, must) withstand the trauma suffered, materially symbolizing the resilience of gastronomic culture. The latter is attributed not only with the power to connect (economically and socially), but also with the power to act as a guarantor of the "tough bark" of the earthquake victims: «Not just symbols, but an explicit declaration of belonging and mutual recognition. Those who utter that motto know what they are talking about, what territory, what common history» (Giovagnoli 2018, p. 120).

In addition to processes of symbolization, gastronomic cultures are able to activate practices of socialization and sharing. In the post-earthquake emergency period, these practices represent a kind of "topicality" capable of «relating victims and spectators» (Boltanski 1993) and directing the broad voluntaristic afflatus in the aftermath of the disaster. In fact, the Italians' solidarity takes the form of organizing a series of initiatives that fall under the heading of «solidarity amatriciane in the post-earthquake period», organized far beyond the borders of Amatrice throughout Italy. These benefit events provide a form of concrete action that can channel and agglutinate the enormous emotional energies mobilized in the aftermath of the disaster. Inside and outside the crater, proximity to earthquake victims combines civic engagement and gastronomic tourism. Several case studies show how food and gastronomic cultures constitute key elements in place-branding processes that occur in rural contexts (Lee *et al.* 2015, Blichfeldt, Halkier 2014). In our case, food constitutes a preferential channel for thinning the distance between the *here* of the media narrative and the *there* of the disaster, capable of coordinating collective commitment to the territory and the earthquake victims. The latter are released (temporarily) from the status of victims so they can rise to that of representatives of a tradition and, more generally, of the character of an entire territory.

In this emotional afflatus it becomes plausible to trace the reasons for the institutional intervention that identifies providing temporary infrastructures that guarantee the continuity of commercial activities (for essential services such as food, tobacco, etc; but especially for eno-gastronomic businesses) during the emergency as a priority action.

3. Material and symbolic architectures on the branded Apennines.

The construction of temporary commercial areas, mainly aimed at hit and run eno-gastronomic flows, takes off within a discursive environment, in which the solidaristic afflatus and the hopes that the emergency will turn into an opportunity (the so-called *building back better*, Esposito *et al.* 2017) are stifled by the slow bureaucratic mechanisms governing reconstruction. The widespread feeling is one of immobility and «suspended time» (Emidio di Treviri, 2018; Granata, De Lettera 2020): what is described as the liminal condition experienced by earthquake victims, which sees both the traumatic past and the horizon of the possible collapse on a stalled present. The first of the commercial areas, «Il Polo del Gusto», rises precisely in Amatrice and is supported by the *Un aiuto subito* campaign promoted by two of the leading media actors in the telling of the Amatrician drama, Corriere della Sera and La7. Temporary

commercial areas necessarily operate «figurations of taste», modes of transposition and staging (Boutaud 2011) that assume, in the case of Amatriciana and other typical products (such as Castelluccio lentils) the dual role of economic carriers and representatives (of certified quality) of the territory.

But the controversy over the actual temporariness of facilities that require urbanization works impacting the landscape and not having decommissioning plans emerges in another case, that of the «Deltaplano» commercial area in Castelluccio di Norcia, which opened in the fall of 2018, and where 11 restaurants are located. The debate is squeezed between two factions: on the one hand the «parlour environmentalists», and on the other, a front that saw the leaders of the Umbria Region and the few remaining residents, mainly devoted to commercial activities, agree. Those who wanted to «defend» the Piana di Castelluccio (the largest karst plateau in Italy, included in the Natura 2000 Network and therefore affected by SPAs, Special Protection Areas, and SACs, Special Areas of Conservation) from «the ecomonster that will destroy it forever» were antagonistic to the territory and to those who, through commercial activities, were trying to restart after the earthquake (Federici 2017).
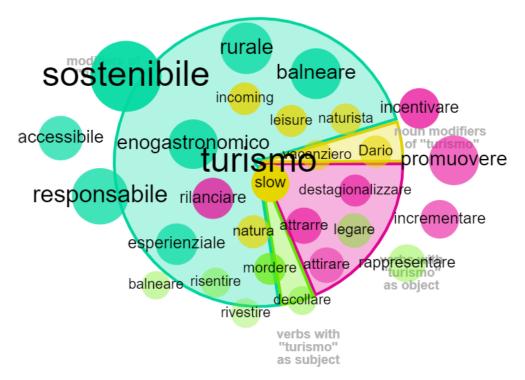
The fruition practices of the «Il Polo del Gusto», the Castelluccio «Deltaplano», and other commercial areas are (especially in the post-emergency period) inscribed within a set of socially and culturally defined meanings such as the ethical valorisation of leisure time, the goodness of typical product, and solidarity mobilization. An ethical valorisation of the tourist-gastronomic experience in the post-earthquake era is defined: doing something for the earthquake victims is also right because of what I receive in return (quality products, experience of healthy natural environment, quality of relationship with locals). Commercial areas equip the competencies (knowhow and can-do) from which a range of possibilities become available to realize performance (Bertrand 2002).

From the perspective of institutional communication in public discourse, the isotopy of «rebirth/restart/resumption» sees a unified and cohesive entity, the «community», moving toward «pre-earthquake» conditions. The «full house» of the weekend is one of the elements that, summoned in speeches, functions as a guarantee of the start of such a process: «Tourists are choosing our lands even outside the weekend and this is a very positive sign, especially for our merchants» (Ansa 2020).

The planning of tourism infrastructure makes it possible to optimize the visitor experience and secure rents for tourism operators. The production of an axiology, which occurs through the euphorisation of the positive term of the basic oppositions on which discourses are based (Pezzini 1991, Greimas, Fontanille 1996), is produced through the uncritical assumption of the territorial benefits of tourism development. What is actually a socio-culturally oriented value system becomes, in this way, common sense. Analysis of public discourse highlights some basic semantic oppositions: full/empty; visible/invisible; revival/decline. The positive valorisation of one of the terms in the category gives absolute positivity to infrastructures that will allow the area to revive and promote itself. Through these interventions, the territory will be full of visitors once again, and therefore also inhabited, because of the attractivity of certain components (typical products, outdoors, «good people»). Thanks to these, the reasons for *fullness* find their own argumentation: it will have to be developed from certain models that guarantee a possibility of modern, equipped and functional fruition.

The *emptiness* that the powerful nature of the earthquake threatens to amplify sees its antidote in tourist accommodation. Through this semiotic mechanism, the full is euphorised and becomes one of the main axiologies of public discourse in the post-earthquake period: the choice between the absence of prospects and the implementation of the tourism development model is a fake choice, which sees no real alternatives. Thus, commercial areas constitute the necessary prerequisites for «rebirth/restart/resumption». The idea of nature is proposed as a resource that lies inert, unexpressed, waiting for someone who knows how (through certain skills) to enhance and sell it. This way, the necessitating logic of the tourist monoculture becomes one of the main forces at play in the field of emergency, able to influence the imagery of territories, and to motivate and legitimize the choices of emergency urbanism.

Pic. 1 - Words with the highest number of common occurrences with the word "tourism". Translation of main occurrences: sustainable, rural, food and wine, experiential, nature, revitalize, promote, incentivize, deseasonalize, attract.

Source: original

The discourse analysis performed through Sketch Engine[7] returns us to the intertextual dimension of this debate (texts from media, institutions, social networks, and interviews that constitute an Italian-language corpus) and, at the same time, to the mechanisms of common-sense construction, based on some particularly recurrent lexical usages. By entering the headword "tourism" in the Word Sketch function (through which we trace the words that record the highest number of occurrences with the chosen word), the words that emerge are "enogastronomic," "experiential," and "rural" along with those that become real trends in defining contemporary tourism in the crater area, such as "responsible" and "sustainable" (Pic. 1). The Word Sketch Difference search function, on the other hand, allows one to compare the resonance between two words and their respective occurrences. By comparing three words that, according to the reasoning so far, connote the semantic area of tourism (food, outdoors, tradition) we realize how they have common occurrences with the word "tourism" in correspondence with the same verbs: "revitalize," "incentivize," "attract," "promote," and "increase". (Pic. 2)

Pic.2 - As the words associated with the word tourism change, the verbs remain the same. Through Sketch Engine we obtain a visual rendering of the words through which the tourism isotopy is articulated in different discourses. Translation of the main occurrences, consistently present as the association of the three keywords (tourism, food, outdoor) changes: increase, promote, deseasonalize, attract, incentivize, revitalize.

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[7] The research is based on the manual insertion within Sketch Engine of a corpus made up by the authors, consisting of newspaper articles, communiqués, and texts from major local and national Italian newspapers. The corpus also includes 30 interviews with key witnesses, collected during the field research periods. The period of relevance of the material is from September 2016 to May 2022.

Source: original

By drawing a thread between a certain idea of the environment (good mountain air), traditions (typical products) and people (resilient mountain people), an axiology is produced in the public discourse, understood as a shared value system (Marrone 2011) that will become the ideological basis of public and public-private intervention. This consists in a reassuring scenario both on the side of the inhabitants (for whom it is a matter of resuming work with tourism, in continuity with the pre-earthquake) and on the side of the outsiders (for whom gastronomic tourism allows them to put a form of mobilization in favour of the earthquake victims into practice). The axiology of tourism produces, within this framework, a pacifying and unifying imagery, and is articulated in some kinds of discourse that are prevalent in public debate. The conditions of possibility of such a discourse are rooted in the history of the recent development of the central Apennine area, but they see an acceleration as early as the post-earthquake emergency, which is consolidated in the development strategies that will design the future of the devastated mountain.

4. Toward a conclusion: deterritorialized mountains and non-inhabitant economies

In the year following the earthquake, about 2,000 of the tourist activities in the seismic crater were closed and the local area witnessed a 29% drop in incoming numbers. In addition to the damage sustained

by the hotels, B&Bs and similar (that do not allow to structure an offer that goes beyond hit-and-run tourism), operators report a real and ongoing "reputational damage" of the area. The sharp decrease in flows is made evident by comparing Umbria's data, which are clearly in decline, to those of Marche and Abruzzo, which are only stable because they are sustained by coastal resorts (Bank of Italy 2017). Still referring to the Marche region, particularly to the territory of the Sibillini Park (which takes an exemplary portion of the area), it is important to point out that the agro-sylvo-pastoral sector is among the least affected. It was precisely the sector of «typical local productions» that was identified in a Park Report as being «in close relationship with tourist flows» and able, because of its «potential, being in close contact with the natural environment with which it has always coexisted, to restart more quickly and with less invasive structural interventions» (Sibillini Park 2022).

Following the earthquake that struck Marche in 2016, the European Union made more than 400 million euros of resources available to the affected areas. The Marche ROP ERDF (European Regional Development Fund[8]) 2014-2020 can count on an additional 248 million, including 124 million in state co-financing, with the aim of «supporting the path of economic-social reconstruction» and «contributing to the return of socio-economic conditions prior to the earthquake».[9] Axis 8, «Seismic and hydrogeological prevention, improvement of energy efficiency and support for the socio-economic recovery of areas affected by the earthquake», which is in addition to the 7 previously identified, sees the allocation of 24.3 million in the «culture-tourism» sector.[10] This includes the «Ciclovia Mare-Monti» project, which, in the region's intentions, is intended «to make the Marche a more sustainable place, to reduce harmful emissions, to implement slow tourism, which is the future of our economy, and to connect the inland areas». Controversy over the actual impact of this operation on the earthquake-affected areas escalated following the release of the promotional campaign *Marche: infinite beauty*, also funded by Axis 8. In the tight editing of the commercial, the most representative places (and landscape elements) of the Region are seen appearing in rapid succession: hills, agricultural landscapes, historic villages, the sea, the Sibillini mountains, typical products.[11] The actors present render the idea of a vacation model suitable for everyone, with great availability of outdoor spaces. Not a single sequence is shot indoors. The beauty of the outdoor scenery transfers to the beauty of the experience lived by the tourist. The outdoor experience is a narrative element that intervenes secondarily, we could say in the background of the Region's cultural attractions. In the case of *Marche: infinite Beauty*, we see instead a decisive shift where the beneficial properties of the outdoors and typical products are proposed as a distinctive, leading element of the entire campaign. The strategic shift fortunately aligns with the wave of attention received by inland areas during the pandemic, with the increasing urban demand for open spaces and environments (Bindi 2021). The growing presence of proposals focused on wilderness and outdoor experiences, for that matter, benefits from a number of public funding proposals that are also directed at the «recovery» of the territory as a whole (as in the most recent cases of the PNRR and the Borghi Plan).

The emergence of cultural tourism in the crater area is, in an accelerated way, the local reflection of a systemic transition that, starting from the explicit rejection of mass circuits, is declined within paths aimed at new forms of intermediation in the contact of tourists with the territory and its inhabitants (Sedda 2011). Some aspects that were traditionally less considered in the proposal and the programming of itineraries, linked to the "authentic" character of territories, become instead the central stimulus for trips motivated by experiential desire. The search for «outdoor experience» and «authentic» is articulated through practices that, in the wake of the locals' daily lives, construct a doing-tourist inhabitant (Finocchi 2013). If tourism practice was by definition something different and exceptional compared to everyday life, experientiality produces identity negotiation processes (Simonicca 2016).

The integration of the «different elements that make up the identity of a place» (Ibid.) goes to substantiate the way a certain area presents itself in the market. MIBACT's *Strategic Tourism Plan 2017-2022* argues

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[8] The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is one of the main financial instruments of the EU's cohesion policy. It aims to help even out existing disparities between the different levels of development of European regions and to improve living standards in less-favored regions. Special attention is paid to regions with severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, such as the northernmost regions with very low population densities and island, cross-border and mountain regions.
[9] https://www.regione.marche.it/Entra-in-Regione/Fondi-Europei/FESR/Programma-Operativo-Por-FESR
[10] https://www.regione.marche.it/Entra-in-Regione/Fondi-Europei/Sisma
[11] https://tinyurl.com/TurismoMarcheSpot

that an integrated enhancement of landscape, natural resources, cultural heritage and food and wine products can help boost the economy and strengthen emerging destinations such as parks and protected mountain and rural areas.[12] Several initiatives (promoted by Airbnb in collaboration with ANCI) moved, and still are moving, in this perspective, such as Cammini d'Italia (2016), Anno dei Borghi (2017), Cibo Italiano (2018), and the Borghi Italiani (Italian Villages) plan. These same guidelines are taken up within a research project that saw the four Marche region's universities collaborate in the elaboration of a tool directed to policy makers titled *11 Paths of Development for the Central Apennines* (Cerquetti *et al.* 2019, pp. 217-248), with a strong neo-liberal vocation (Macchiavelli, Olori 2019). Despite the turn-over of regional and commissarial governance, the strategies implemented by public and public-private actors insist on the socio-economic planning of the crater starting from the metro-mountain brand.

The pacifying imagery of "restarting through tourism" is so well established in the most recent historical trajectory that it is not associated with a partisan or transient strategy. Through major symbolic and material investments, it appears as the most plausible option in the field, which is accelerated in the post-earthquake period. Together with particular socio-historical conjunctures, it experiences a real explosion with the unprecedented injection of public capital of the PNRR-Complementary Earthquake[13], anticipated by the Interinstitutional Development Contracts[14]. In both cases, a considerable percentage of resources emerges for experience-focused development projects. According to some estimates, projects allocated to infrastructure for outdoor activities reaches 43% of the total funds allocated to the restart of earthquake areas (Bonardo, 2022). Despite criticism, skepticism and opposition[15], the machinery of public and public-private governance chooses to clearly invest in a strategy based on non-inhabitant economies. In fact, the economies of the outdoors, experience, carbon credit markets, etc. become immediately compatible with the absence of inhabitant-communities as much as hyperbolic infrastructuring or resource hoarding, i.e., the classic ways in which capital puts extreme value on complex crisis situations. None of these economies, from flow tourism to carbon-counting, in fact, have a need to inhabit, coexist with, or regenerate ecological resources: the relationship with nature is fundamentally extractive. This shift enshrines the ultimate reversal of the human-environment relationship as it had historically been given in fragile territories, a re-invention of the anthropogenic presence in the middle mountains. In a sense, the concept of oikonomia is overturned, understood no longer in the Illichian sense of the art of dwelling, that is, of «well building the shelter that provides the home», but in the Agambenian sense of the modern triumph of «pure governmental activity that aims at nothing but its own reproduction».

Ultimately, we believe it is possible to say that development strategies based on the branding of mountain territories revolving around the outdoor/tourism proposal implicitly convey an economic model that relinquishes the relationship with natural resources. To accompany this ultimate disconnect, this model commits public and public-private resources, and mobilizes public discourse. This device has assumed mammoth proportions, amplified quantitatively by the post-disaster and the extraordinary mobilization of resources due to the both general (PNRR) and particular (reconstruction, CIS, PNRR-Complementary etc.) conjunctures, and qualitatively by the commissarial architecture of governance, which bypassed participatory processes and deprived local bodies of significant shares of self-governance.

When the device grafted onto the territories, it encountered a local subject dispersed by emergency management, uneven in post-disaster trajectories and interests. This produced very slight friction dynamics (Tsing, 2005), and sudden major alignments to the Central Apennine branding place strategy, in the name of an economy that promised a win-win strategy, without reckoning with the ecological issue.

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[12] https://www.ministeroturismo.gov.it/il-piano-strategico-del-turismo/
[13] https://sisma2016.gov.it/pnrr-area-sisma-2009-2016/
[14] https://sisma2016.gov.it/tag/contratto-istituzionale-sviluppo/
[15] See in particular the case of the "Disneyland of the Apennines" in Sarnano (Legambiente, 2022); the lawsuit against the Lazio region for the hotel in the Accumoli Pantani (salviamoipantani.blogspot.com); the case of Rubbiano (M. Di Vito - ilmanifesto 30.12.2021), etc.

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