

Comparison. An international overview of community-rooted rehabilitations

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rooting empowering reactivating

Rehabilitation of traditional heritage and local development

Martina Bocci and Andrea Bocco (eds.)

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Rehabilitation of traditional heritage and local development



2024

Politecnico di Torino



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"Past and future ties in Edalia's alpaca threads"

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to nonna Elena and Edalia

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COMPARISON



An international overview of community-rooted rehabilitations

The chapter provides some theoretical basis and offers a framework, but also tries to stimulate a curiosity to delve deeper into what was presented in the lectures and panels. It represents a sort of synthesis of what emerged from the author's doctoral research (Bocci 2023).

Starting from what emerged during the seminars, the intersection between heritage rehabilitation and local development was analysed by adopting a multidisciplinary and multicriterial analysis of the work of the NGOs that contributed to the RTHLD seminars with their unconventional practices of community-rooted rehabilitation (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017; Veer 2016).

Indeed, it is not a proper comparison, but a parallel reading in which each case suggests directions to analyse the others (Robinson 2011, 2017).

The data collected through the seminars are heterogeneous in quality, quantity, depth and topics covered, primarily because most NGOs did not take part in all the editions and because the answers in the round table discussions were more or less exhaustive. This is not, nor does it aim to be, a complete and exhaustive representation. Moreover, one of the NGOs was explored in deep through fieldwork during the PhD research, and thus recurs most frequently in the chapter.

In order to complete some missing data, information gathered from the documents written or made available

by NGOs have been consulted: scientific articles, books, and book chapters, but also grey literature such as handbooks, dissemination publications, annual reports (THF, FA, Tr), guidebooks (FA, Tr), documentary films (Tr), and even workshop and summer school posters.

To open up an external opinion, additional documentation not produced by the NGOs was included (where available), e.g., masters' theses or doctoral dissertations, articles in both journals and newspapers, descriptions at awards. I also looked for information – especially on transmission methods at construction sites and workshops – from partner NGOs in specific projects (FG with Cultural Heritage without Borders, MG with the Spanish Cooperation, PI with Rempart, etc.) and from social channels and websites. Finally, I attended seminars, conferences, and meetings that NGOs organised or which they were invited to.

The choice of NGOs to be invited to the seminars was meant to focus on subjects able to carry out actions extensive in time and in size to have a significant impact on a context.

In selecting the case studies, preference was given to initiatives that had been active for at least a decade (ARF and BI are exceptions) and were still active (Md is the exception). This choice is motivated primarily by the need to read the interventions and their effects on the local context after a sufficient



Martina Bocci

1. Cover images of the RTHLD seminar series.

settling time, during which the population may have had the opportunity to feel involved and participate in the initiatives.

Furthermore, it is quite common to see the launching of admirable associations which fail to have an extended duration. Once the initial enthusiasm – in some cases generated by having obtained some funding – wanes, initiatives may fade and disperse, failing to reach an adequate degree of maturity necessary to take root, professionalise and gain recognition.

These discriminating factors therefore limited the inclusion of people working without an organisation. In fact, while very often the initiatives originated from the interest and action of private individuals, their persistence over the years is partly related to their formal establishment, opening greater possibilities to access funding.

State top-down programmes were also not included: the approach adopted in these programmes has revealed to be too distant and detached from local communities and the sustainability of the development of the territories in which they were implemented, often mainly benefiting tourism (López Levi et al. 2015-2020).

It was decided to focus on the current situation, adopting 2019 as the reference year, for a pre-pandemic perspective. However, where possible, the subsequent evolution over time was also considered.

This chapter is structured on the work, characteristics and information drawn from the NGOs and uses words and examples brought by them to analyse different aspects.

In creating the comparative narrative, the experiences and anecdotes

gathered from the NGOs participate in a heterogeneous form: alongside a general overview of how all NGOs relate to a specific topic, consistent examples were selected to deepen it.

Summary tables complement the chapter and allow a first overview of the differences between the NGOs, a qualitative assessment of the relevance of the issues for each of them, and provide a navigator of the topics explored.

The NGOs involved in this series of seminars operate mainly in the restoration of lesser, diffuse, and non-monumental heritage, that is functional and aimed at satisfying basic needs (Oliver 2006; Rudofsky 1964). It is an indigenous, contextual heritage, that belongs to a place, and that is communal and/or shared in a community or region. Is often privately owned but has a strong collective value (§3.2.1).

The rehabilitated heritage is often located in marginal places, that have experienced strong migratory phenomena in recent decades. In some cases, communities and inhabitants themselves are no longer there and the owners are sometimes physically distant from their built heritage. In other cases, tourists have taken the place of the inhabitants, who have moved to less attractive parts of the city.

Depopulation was often coupled with a radical change in lifestyles, which have altered the rhythms of living, the bonds, and the reciprocity links between villagers that used to allow survival in such contexts (§3.3.1).

Local society has dissolved, and consequently the collective care and maintenance of heritage and places has faded. Next to this, inhabitants often show a lack of interest in taking care of a heritage, both because it is linked to imaginaries of poverty and

backwardness, and as a consequence of a decrease in manual skills and traditional knowledge.

Communities are often no longer considered autonomous regarding the technical management of their own heritage and in many instances the intervention by outsiders has been instrumental, if not necessary, to conserve, protect, rehabilitate, and transmit a heritage that would otherwise probably no longer exist today.

NGOs however have set themselves the objective of not only preventing the loss of artefacts and the local building knowledge associated with them, but also of traditions, social ties, and ways of living, by channelling the impulse of those few people who still believe in such possibility. In this sense, heritage restoration and recovery of traditional practices can represent a strategy to promoting living again in marginal places, as well as reactivating the local community. This requires a holistic approach, an in-depth knowledge of local needs and aspirations, and also a broad and transversal view.

This chapter tries to understand if and how the rehabilitation of traditional heritage through the conservation, transmission, and adaptation of traditional construction techniques, represents an opportunity for the local development of marginal places.

At the intersection between these two themes, it delves into the interactions between NGOs, communities, heritage recovery and possibilities for development and reactivation.

The first essential element in the success of the initiatives proposed by the NGOs is the 'becoming local' and **ROOTING** of the NGOs themselves, by living in or by frequent and repeated contacts. Next to this, is the involvement

and empowerment of the local communities (§3.1).

§3.2 addresses the strategies and challenges in (tangible and intangible) heritage rehabilitation through the transmission, evolution and adaptation of traditional construction knowledge and techniques to meet today's and tomorrow's needs, **EMPOWERING** inhabitants and communities thanks to their active participation in processes.

§3.3 looks at the holistic approach adopted by the NGOs in **REACTIVATING** marginal places and the role that heritage (extending the definition to the set of traditional ecological knowledge embedded in the territory) can play in strengthening local and circular economies and stimulating autonomous initiatives by inhabitants.

ROOTING



NGOs' approach to the local community

3.1.1 The NGOs involved in the RTHLD seminars

THF's André Alexander first visited Tibet in 1987. In 1993, he and Andrew Brannan initiated the Lhasa Archive Project, to document and catalogue vernacular architecture that was increasingly disappearing. The success of this project (which received support from UNESCO) led to the founding of THF in 1996, an international non-profit organisation engaged in the field of international cooperation. In 2000 THF was forced to leave Lhasa following extradition and started working in Amdo, Kham (Qinghai and Sichuan), Beijing in China, in Mongolia, as well as in India (Sikkim and Ladakh). The Leh Old Town Conservation Program was initiated in 2003, and is now THF's main focus of intervention. André Alexander passed away prematurely and unexpectedly in 2012. Pimpim de Azevedo and Yutaka Hirako have since taken THF's management.



Md, a non-profit civil association, is based in the city of Arequipa (Peru), and was established in 1997 to complement the work of the Spanish cooperation agency AECID, active in the south of Peru. It evolved together with it, as happened in 2005 (**Md 4.5**). In 2007 this led to the creation of the Oficina de Gestión Patrimonial y Cultural del Colca (OGPC), to the broadening of its actions and to the installation of micro territorial management units. Angel Guillén comes from the regional capital, Arequipa. Md did not start out as an open-ended initiative.



FA started with a trip to the Andean highlands of Arica and Parinacota (Chile) of Cristian Heinsen and two friends in 1991. On that occasion they met the missionary father who oversaw heritage and local communities, who invited the young students back in 1996. Some would be part of the founding group that started FA in 1999, which was formally established in 2001, and obtained legal status in 2002. Since its foundation, FA experimented a transition from a voluntary phase to professionalisation (2009-2019). Today FA describes itself as being in its third phase of development, pursuing a major change of direction, seeking to consolidate as a school of sustainable conservation, passing part of its work to community representatives, and moving its activity to other regions of Chile.



PI, a non-profit environmental NGO, was founded in 2000 in the region of Trás-os-Montes (Portugal) under the name of "Palombar – Associação de Proprietários de Pombais Tradicionais do Nordeste" at the encouragement of the Douro International Natural Park (PNDI), which had carried out a rehabilitation programme of some 60 dovecotes between 1997 and 2000. Over the years the NGO has increasingly adopted an integrated approach, working to recover the traditional ecological function of dovecotes (Martins 2010). Due to this shift, in 2013, the name was changed to "Palombar – Conservação da Natureza e do Património Rural" and the statute was updated, focusing more on environmental conservation. Currently, most of the team is made up of biologists and agronomists.



AC's beginnings date back to 1989, when Ken and Kali Marquardt (from US), arrived in Canova, a medieval village in Ossola (Italy) almost devoid of inhabitants. Here Ken (later naturalised as Italian citizen) decided to buy and recover a house for his family to settle in. This first restoration was followed by the rehabilitation of two other buildings commissioned by a Swiss man. The Canova Association was formally founded in 2001 in Canova, Crevoladossola. Since 2011 AC focuses its rehabilitation efforts on Ghesc village. In 2024 it was transformed into a foundation.



The Gjirokastra Conservation Office (GCO) was founded in 2001 by the Packard Humanities Institute (PHI, US) at the solicitation of the City's mayor and of the Albanian Republic's President under the auspices of the Butrint Foundation (Lamprakos 2010, 6). In 2005, upon the inscription of the historic centre of Gjirokastra as a UNESCO World Heritage site, the leadership passed to the Albanian Sadi Petrela, and the name changed to Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organisation (GCDO, later simplified to Fondazioni Gjirokastra - **FG**). From the initial focus on saving key buildings, FG shifted to a vision aimed at the future of the city (Lamprakos 2010, 9). Since 2010 FG also works in the town of Berat, where it opened an office to manage the REVATO project.



Originally from Tokyo, Hagino Yuki and Kiichiro moved to the Noto peninsula (Japan) in 2004, after a four-year residence in Philadelphia. From 2004 to 2009, they self-built their house (the future location of the MG project). In 2009, after having been trained in the Noto Satoyama/Satoumi Meister Program (2007) of Kanazawa University, Yuki took part in the "Citizen science programme," within the Ministry of the Environment's "Monitoring 1000 site project" entrusted to the Wajima City Biotope Research Group. Taking over the monitoring activities, the couple founded **MG** in 2010.



Tr started its work in the M'Hamid Oasis (Morocco) in 2012, after an initial period of educational activities in Spain, made up of a group of architects specialised both in Cultural Heritage Preservation and Cooperation for Development. Since 2018 it has started to focus also on Mauritania, and carried out projects in Egypt, Niger and Spain. Tr's "Plan estratégico (2020-2025)" aims at a leap in scale in the M'Hamid Oasis projects, and includes rural development projects in Spain (Terrachidia 2020a).



Inspired by an encounter with the rural environment and local lifestyle in 2007, Sanada Junko organised the first drystone restoration course in 2009. Years of annual courses followed, while **DSW** was formalised in 2013, to inherit the techniques of Japanese dry stone walling. To this end, they organize practical workshops to learn how to build and repair dry stone walls, deliver lectures and classes to raise awareness about the value of dry stone wall construction techniques, and engage in various other activities.



Elena Vasić Petrović was born in Pivot (Serbia), in the same district as Gostuša, but 'discovered' that village only in 2010. In 2012-13 the Ministry of Culture financed a research project on the village, which evolved into a conservation project in 2015. **ARF** was founded in 2016 by the Institute for Cultural Heritage Preservation Niš, which she served as the director of. ARF is dedicated to Architect Aleksandar Radović from Niš who worked as director of the Institute from 1976 to 2004.



Boulouki (**BI**) is interdisciplinary research-and-practice collective, whose work is focused on the study of traditional building techniques and materials and dedicated to the study of traditional craftsmanship. Based upon these thematic axes, the group's course of action includes conducting research, organizing workshops, conferences and cultural events; promoting projects in collaboration with local communities and their stakeholders. It was founded in 2018, based in Athens and active in various locations in Greece.

Case Study	Tibet Heritage Fund	Medesus	Fundación Altiplano	Palombar	Fondazione Canova	Fondazioni Gjirokastra	まるやま組 Maruyama Gumi	Terrachidia	石積み学校 The Dry-Stone Walling School of Japan	Фондација Архитекта Александар Радовић Architect Aleksandar Radović Foundation	Μπουλούκι Boulouki
Acronym	THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
Foundation year and place	1996 Lhasa, Tibet, CN	1997 Arequipa, PE	2000 Arica, CL	2000 Santo Adrião, PT	2001 Crevoladosola, IT	2001 Gjirokastra, AL	2010 Wajima, JP	2012 Madrid, ES	2013 Tokushima, JP	2016 Niš, RS	2018 Athens, GR
Initiator/ present chairperson	André Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo / Pimpim de Azevedo	Ángel Guillén	Cristian Heinsen / Álvaro Merino	Nuno Alexandre Raposo Martins / Américo Guedes	Ken Marquardt / Maurizio Cesprini	Packard Humanities Institute / Sadi Petrela	Yuki and Kiichiro Hagino	Carmen Moreno	Sanada Junko	Elena Vasić Petrović	Panos Kostoulas, Grigoris Koutropoulos, Christoforos Theocharis, Ionas Sklavounos, Mina Kouvara
Origin of the initiator(s)	outsiders (another continent) who live there	insider (same region)	outsiders (other regions) who live there	insiders (same region)	outsiders (another continent)	outsiders (another continent)	outsiders (another region) who live there	outsiders (another continent)	outsiders (another region)	insider (another village)	outsiders (another region)
Type	NGO, NPO	Association, NPO	NPO	NGO, NPO	Association, NPO	NGO, NPO	NPO	NGO, NPO	NGO	NGO, NPO	NGO, NPO
Place(s) of intervention	Tibet (until 2000): Lhasa, Amdo, Kham; Beijing (CN), Nomgon sum (MN), Sikkim, Ladakh (IN – from 2002)	Valle del Colca (PE)	Arica and Parinacota and other regions of CL	Trás-os-Montes (PT)	Val d'Ossola (IT)	Gjirokastra and Berat (AL)	Mii-machi and Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture (JP)	M'Hamid Oasis (MA); Chinguetti, (MR – from 2017)	Itinerant in all JP	Gostuša and Justiniana Prima, RS; Trebinje, BA	Epirus, GR



Table 1: Description of the main characteristics of NGOs.

2. *Pawa* before the excavations in the Chiu Chiu church (Chile). Martina Bocci 2022.
3. Geographical location of the NGOs. Martina Bocci 2024.

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Table 3: NGOs' multidisciplinary teams.
Table 4: NGOs' collaborations.

NGOs' teams	THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
Multidisciplinary teams	••	•	•••	••	•	••	•	•	•	•	••
Majority of architect & restorers	•	••	•		•	••	•	•••		•••	•••

Collaborations	THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
Int. cooperation	•••	•••						••			
local governments & municipalities	••	•••	•••		•	•••	•	••		••	•••
institutions	•	•	•	••		••				••	••
Church and missions			••								
universities	•••		•••	•	•••		•••	•••	•••	•	•••
NGOs	••	•••	•	••	•	•••		••	•	•••	•
SMEs		••	••			•••		•			••

The NGOs differ considerably in terms of **permanent staff**, which in many cases has evolved over the years. Generally, the core and permanent team is quite limited, rarely reaching a dozen people (as is the case of FA, PI). On the other hand, craftspeople working for the NGOs are often numerous, albeit on project contracts. Significant is the case of FA, whose staff tremendously increased (from 10 people in 2008 to 90 in 2019 – only a minority have permanent contracts), while in turn THF's team decreased considerably after moving away from Lhasa.

Not all NGOs offer full-time or paid jobs, and many people involved in them have got other jobs: they may be university lecturers and researchers (Tr, DSW, MG, AC, BI), architects and restorers (Tr, MG, Md, ARF, BI). Being part of an NGO and working in the third sector can be challenging in terms of time and effort required, sometimes with little financial return and lack of job stability.

In many cases NGOs rely on the support of volunteers participating in courses (PI, AC, FG, MG, Tr, DSW, ARF, BI) or on the owners of dwellings and artefacts (FA, THF as co-funding, DSW, PI, ARF) to carry out the rehabilitation initiatives.

Alongside members, various international consultants collaborate – both academic and from institutions and other NGOs.

Almost all NGOs also co-operate with **scholars** and **universities**, even from different countries and continents. The most typical forms of collaboration are technical consultancy, calls for tenders and the execution of projects. Academics are invited to lecture at events, festivals and seminars organised by NGOs (FA, PI, FG, BI). University students are in many cases involved in practical courses, as well as in the realisation of useful documentation for NGOs, such as photogrammetric surveys and tests both on site and in university laboratories. In turn, NGO members are sometimes called to share their experience in seminars and lectures at universities.

Local public and private **institutions** are frequently partners in NGOs' projects and initiatives: for instance, FG works in close cooperation with the local branch of the Institute of Cultural Monuments; PI cooperates with the Douro International Natural Park; ARF

works in cooperation with the regional museum of Trebinje in Bosnia and Herzegovina. FA's work started from collaborating with a mission linked to the Catholic Church, that is the owner of most of the churches in need of rehabilitation. BI works in cooperation with the Greek Ministry of Culture.

NGOs often create partnerships with other key local bodies such as associations, NGOs, and foundations, possibly taking advantage of their facilitation in contacting inhabitants, as expressed by Américo Guedes (PI 5.1.1) referring to the AEPGA (Associação para o Estudo e Protecção do Gado Asinino). Sometimes NGOs even support the creation of local associations and local branches (THF, FA, Md, Tr).

Over the years, some influence and collaborations also occurred between the NGOs themselves, such as FA and Md (who inspired each other); the courses offered by AC for DSW students (Kaneko 2019, 2020); the invitation of Tr and BI members to AC's annual meeting; but also Tr-FG, GO2-FG, FA-MG, and Tr-FA.

On top of that, FG, Md and FA collaborate with local **SMEs**.

Financing is quite tricky for almost all the NGOs analysed (table 5). It often implies a mix of solutions, and instability over time. Funds are generally obtained

from donations and through the participation in calls or competitions. Only THF, FA, FG afford to rely on relatively continuous funders; Tr and DSW rely on income from training courses. PI, AC, ARF, BI instead receive funding for given periods or projects. This affects the salary of a permanent staff and the chances of growth of the NGOs, as well as the number and size of interventions. Américo Guedes of PI reported that applications and bookkeeping require capacities that are not always available to an NGO.

Co-financing by building owners does not seem to be common, even though the rehabilitated buildings are often privately owned. On this regard, Maeno Masaru's position is: "when the residents are not able to preserve something using only individual or community resources they should be helped by local, state, or national government. Preservation cannot be people's responsibility alone" (Anzorena 2000).

Sources of funding	THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
international grants	•			•••	•••	••				•••	•
national, regional, local public grants	••	••	•••	••	•	••	••	•		••	•••
other NPOs	•••	••	•	•	••	•••	•			•••	•
donations from particulars	•••		•		•	•		•			
sale of courses and services			••	••	••		••	•••	•••	•	••
membership dues	•			•	••		••			•	
local population	••			••							

Table 5: NGOs' source of fundings.

3.1.2 Insiders, outsiders, and 'new locals'

As Andrea Bocco Guarneri has emphasised in the introduction to a round table, it is quite common that the first person to 'notice' and recognise the value of heritage is not the local inhabitant, but an outsider, or a person who has had the opportunity to get a training and to travel abroad (**ABG 5.1**). It is often such immigrants who pursue practices of conservation and valorisation, reinterpreting and re-appropriating knowledge and landscapes. The 'soul' of marginal places is often cultivated by guests and foreigners, while locals remain idle, aiming at exogenous imaginaries and aesthetic-social models of modernisation (Magnaghi 2010, 103,135).

Most of the initiators of the analysed NGOs are not native to the regions where they act. They come from other continents or countries (THF, AC, FG, Tr), other regions (FA, MG, DSW, BI) or other cities, usually the regional capital (Md, ARF, GO2). Quite often behind moving to a rural area lies an attempt to get away from the hectic city life and its formalisms (FA), to start a more balanced life rhythm, in contact with nature (AC, MG). Only PI's initiators can be considered local.

Especially in the early years of NGOs' development, many **staff members** were also outsiders; particularly in the higher level roles (THF, Md, FA, Tr). This is typical in initiatives in 'emerging' contexts where the level of training in specific fields, such as restoration, was not considered adequate to the needs of the NGOs.

To some extent, NGOs can therefore be considered **outsiders** to the local communities.

A community in fact can be considered as a group of individuals who identify themselves around one or more common characteristics and build their relationship around it. In our case we are referring to heritage and cultural communities, but also communities related to a specific place (Kröll and Cortéz 2008). Community is self-defining and based on a voluntary sense of belonging and common goals.

Another important aspect is related to the internalised reflection that people make of their social group, and the mutual recognition between a community's members: an 'insider' is recognised by the community as part of itself, and refers him- or herself as a member of such group (Council of Europe 2005a). Consequently, an 'outsider' is a person who is not identified by the members of a community as part of it, either because of their different origin or because they lack some common characteristic (religion, tradition and/or interests).

There are no easily identifiable boundaries, neither permanent nor fixed – they are rather dynamic and subjective. The final perspective as to where '**identity boundaries**' are perceived, and who is outside or inside them, is actually in the hands of the community itself, or, better still, of each of the individuals deemed to belong to it (Remotti 1996). This broad and **slippery** definition allows for **multiple interpretations** of who the community is, depending on the circumstances of observation that stimulate it.

Andrea Bocco Guarneri also reflected on how the community may include, for instance, the **historical**, ancestral, and indigenous inhabitants of a place, but also **newcomers** who bring different cultural models and sensitivities (**ABG 5.1**). At the same time, people who

do not live in the place – but who have **kept property** and come back from time to time – and **U-turn** immigrants – people who were raised in a community and come back after formal training (as Maurizio Cesprini describes himself – **AC 5.1.1**).

In this sense, places should not only belong to the historical inhabitants by birth right, but to those who perceive a connection and sense of belonging to that place, i.e. 'place attachment', driven by affective, logic and symbolic meanings, both past and present. This sense of rootedness can flow into social interactions, collective interest, reciprocity and care of the common good (Watson and Davis 2019, 15).

It is possible to change the **gradient of outsidership-insidership** – defined on the basis of identity issues, common traditions and history, 'invasions' and claims, similarities and differences, common interests and actions, coexistence and sharing – over time, getting the NGOs closer to the local communities.

In their answers to this question (**§5.1.1**), the NGOs reflected precisely on the dynamic between outsiders and insiders and its positive developments, showing that blurring internal-external 'boundaries' is a slow process which requires time, a strong commitment, constancy and persistence, integrity, transparency, sharing, and communication in the long term and through wide-ranging actions.

The possibility for outsiders to take root is primarily dependent on the community's interest in this contact and dialogue, its willingness to let in and to share the care of 'its own' traditions and heritage.

In some cases, the first approach was facilitated by the introduction by a locally-known and respected person (FA, FG).

The initial contact with communities is typically to present the NGOs, and to inform about what they do, sharing motivations, results, and strategies, and identifying the most appropriate **ways of dissemination**. Being aware of what an NGO is doing can improve the trust and mutual esteem between the NGO and the community.

The NGOs engage in the dissemination of their work in various forms – the outcomes of which represent the data source of this chapter together with the information collected in RTHLD seminars – that range from grey literature (reports, manuals, through websites, blogs and social media, local newspapers...), academic and popular articles and books, participation in seminars, conferences and lectures, and dissemination through radio and television broadcasts, as well as documentaries.

Despite coming from faraway, many founders have been living in these places for long periods of time – in some cases for more than twenty years – working in close contact with local communities, sharing, creating ties, and integrating themselves into local social processes (this is not the case of FG, Tr, DSW, ARF, BI though). **'Becoming local'** appears a key element in the rooting of these initiatives: for THF, FA, AC and MG, working and living in these locations has become a long-term life project. However, being accepted by locals is not always easy or possible, especially in small, strongly traditional communities (**MG 5.1.1**).

Particularly in cases where founders and members live elsewhere, maintaining **constant and repeated contact**

(Tr and DSW) has been crucial to take root and give continuity to local projects. Sanada Junko believes that working in one context for a limited period, moving elsewhere and ignoring the follow-up of the project generates a sense of mistrust in local people (**DSW 4.2**).

A sign of the good response from communities and of the willingness of NGOs to take root is the fact that a number of people from the region (and even the communities themselves) have been gradually integrated into the teams. From the outset, some NGOs have assembled **teams of local builders** (THF, FA, Tr, Bl), and have been training and collaborating with native professionals (THF, Md, FA, AC, FG, Bl). As the initiatives strengthen over time, there is a general trend towards hiring locals even in top roles. Over the years the **leadership** may have passed to people originally from the region (AC, FG). Some NGOs have set up local branches: in 2007, **THF** created, together with local people, the Leh Old Town Initiative (LOTI), registered as a local NGO under the Indian Society Act.

In acting locally, NGOs implement a more or less conscious **interference**, influencing the development trajectories undertaken by communities, and in some cases by local institutions and governments. **Being aware** of this is necessary, especially considering that often the 'power' to act of the NGOs – given their greater economic resources, their position as intermediaries, their contacts, and specific skills – is unequal to the communities'.

In some cases, NGOs import exogenous thought schemes and socio-economic models, linked to their own origin and education, which are considered functional (Escobar 2018). In other cases, they can modify local development

patterns they deem unsuitable and/or unsustainable, based on their own knowledge.

In 'becoming local', the position of some NGOs on certain issues is openly non-neutral, taking sides in causes felt by the locals. These issues are often related to socio-environmental topics, as in the case of FA's support for the communities' struggle against new mines on the Arica and Parinacota plateau. Interference can in some cases lead to imbalances and **unintended results or negative impacts**. These may concern uncontrolled and unsustainable increase in the number of tourists, as happened in Gjirokastra (FG 5.3.3) as it happened with many sites following their recognition as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Other unexpected outcomes may involve changes in heritage and local customs as a result of improvements in infrastructure and services (**ARF 4.7, Tr 4.4**).

Sometimes there are **no communities** which NGOs can collaborate with, or they are very weak, either because of a lack of people or because of the increasing loss of bonds, relationships, and reciprocity typical of traditional societies. The case of FA is particularly emblematic: some communities show strong ties to villages despite having moved to the city.

Most of the communities which the NGOs collaborate with are largely composed by **natives** (FA, Md, THF) and are considered as **minority cultures**, i.e. "sub-national cultures of numerically weak populations within nation-states, usually located within specific geographical regions, and frequently retaining their own language" (Eliot 1948), to which ethnic and racial labels are often assigned. In some countries,

processes for the recognition of indigenous rights, the creation of protected areas, and the support for the maintenance of local cultures and traditions are being implemented. In some cases this results in closure and crystallisation eventually freezing the development of these communities and places (Clifford 2010) and leading to distrust of the exogenous.

Despite there is no delineated boundary between outsiders and insiders, the **different roles** often set in fact a clear demarcation. The locals' opinions can be contradictory and NGOs sometimes 'confuse the roles', crossing the line between insiders and outsiders (FA). If the mutual positions and boundaries are not clarified and mutually accepted, problems can often arise.

Very often, relations between NGOs and communities present **conflicts**, contradictions, and complexities, in some cases resulting from previous internal and external problems (which NGOs cannot and are not expected to take responsibility for) but also from who or what the outsiders **represent** (e.g., the centralised or oppressor state, because it financed the project; a colonising power, due to geographical origin of the NGO's members; economically privileged people). Aversion in these cases is often related to refusing to feel subsidised.

In other cases, NGOs represent a countercultural movement that is not always understood by the local population, who instead aspire to live in urban areas (**MG 5.1.1**). FA, despite the ever-increasing number of 'community people' within its staff, and despite being known and recognised in the highlands, is still seen as an external institution, run by 'white' people from the central part of the country or even

Europeans, and is perceived as a representative of the Chilean state.

At the time of the first approaches AC, PI, Tr and ARF noticed **suspicion** and **distrust** due to a lack of mutual acquaintance. The outsider was often seen as an 'intruder', resulting in reluctance to cooperate (**MG 5.1.1**).

Among the main problems in approaching communities, NGOs mentioned communication problems and mutual misunderstandings (Tr), confusion, especially in the case of complex projects (FG), and lack of recognition and respect (AC). The members of the NGOs who are in some sense **part of the communities**, described this initial perception by the population as difficult, a sort of small clash in local common sense between the 'how it has always been done' and the different point of view regarding the management of heritage brought in by the NGOs (AC, PI).

Md also reported that residents often show a **subsistence** mentality, rarely taking active positions (**Md 4.5**).

Conflicts sometimes jeopardize NGOs' effort, in some cases interfering with their work. NGOs in some cases limit interactions with communities when **conflicts** arise, preferring not to openly discuss possible delicate matters in their relationship with inhabitants.

Many NGOs bring forward reflections about a **conscious** inclusion in the local context (also regarding the respect of hierarchies, social roles, and local associations - FA), stimulating coexistence, **balance** between the different **viewpoints**, and mutual understanding. MG, beside settling at the outskirts of the village, asks the participants in its activities to wear a pendant, so that they can be identified by the Mii-machi community as its guests (Masami 2019, 287).

Another element to be considered, as mentioned by Carmen Moreno, is to posture in a **genuine** and **transparent** manner, showing that NGOs do not have speculative intentions and preventing complaints.

NGOs **gain trust and local recognition** by sharing and including, adopting an (as much as possible) internal point of view and carrying out long-term processes, offering support and advice, fostering exchanges in convivial moments and **showing openness**, and **commitment**.

Relationship-building with communities also occurs through respecting, valuing, participating in, as well as organising, local **ceremonies** and **practices**, such as the ceremonies performed in the occasion of some specific moments of the rehabilitation works to request for permission and protection and to thank for the achievement to local deities and beliefs (THF and FA, who team with the *yatiri*, the Aymara spiritual authority), and the Aenokoto ritual (since 2009 designed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage) revisited by MG, performed to "encourage people to think about how to commit themselves to food, agriculture, and the environment in their daily lives" (Hagino 2018; Hagino Atelier 2012).

Similar attention is paid to local dialects and languages (FA uses the Aymara language and promotes it through training courses), traditional music (THF, FG, FA), and other aspects of indigenous culture. Since these activities are carried out by an external party, in some cases they may risk being seen as **cultural appropriation** (Clifford 1988; Rogers 2006; Shugart 1997).

A marked difference – in part based on the socio-cultural peculiarities of each context – was observed in **how NGOs**

talk about their relationship with the local communities. Only THF, Tr and FA mention the inhabitants in their website or printed publications. One can know the names of the owners of the recovered buildings (THF and FA), as well as names and roles of some of the craftspeople (FA, Tr, BI). Community people are the spokespersons of their own stories and are shown as concrete examples of the possibility to live again in marginal places and set up autonomous initiatives – to the attention of inhabitants, investors, institutions, and governments (FA). This is increasingly done through images and video clips. Presenting a community is not enough to strengthen it, but shows a positive attitude towards the individual person and their life, creating a local narrative. However, such narrations do **not** always **match** with the actual relationships between the NGOs and the local communities – sometimes they amount to exercises in rhetoric.

3.1.3 Local community participation and capacity building

In dealing with vernacular heritage, it would be appropriate not to forget its inseparable relation with a community and its survival.

Scholars and international guidelines recommend – with different degrees of involvement – **community participation** in heritage management and rehabilitation processes (Council of Europe 2005b; Hodges and Watson 2000; ICCROM 2015; ICOMOS 1987; Newman and McLean 1998; UN 1996; UNESCO 1972, 1989, 2003): traditions are passed on by communities not (only) to maintain them and avoid their loss, but because they are part of their life, roots to places, and identity.

Without the active involvement of cultural communities, conservation loses its importance: “there is nothing to safeguard without the enactment of cultural practitioners” (Blake 2008, 67, 2019). People and owners can be understood as active and conscious agents in a process of regeneration and transformation of know-how and practices.

Former president of ICOMOS Japan (2008-2009) and honorary member of ICOMOS (since 2011) Maeno Masaru’s pioneering three community-based “principles for the preservation of historical buildings” (from mid-1960s, to preserve Tokyo’s historic wooden buildings) emphasise the liveability of houses and cities focusing on the needs of residents and the importance of people being proud of the architecture of their houses (Anzorena 2000).

UNESCO (1972) considers community participation and economic development as related to conservation and promotes the involvement of local and

indigenous communities in the management of properties inscribed in the World Heritage List (UNESCO 1989), recognising that community participation can represent an important strategy in heritage management (UNESCO 2011).

ICOMOS (1987) focuses on the participation of residents and their correct information, and encourages social and economic measures so that they remain alive (Larkham 1996, 289-92).

The “**integrated urban conservation**” strategies connect conservation and housing considerations, and recognise a pivotal role to planning and implementation processes for the local resident community (UN 1996).

ICCROM programmes (2003) (ICCROM 2015) are aimed at community empowerment, strengthening people’s “capacity to meaningfully engage in making conservation and management decisions for themselves and their heritage” also through a support network. Moreover, they acknowledge the potential of heritage to “play an active role in communities and benefit people” (ICCROM 2015).

The **Faro Convention** (2004) identifies human development and quality of life of everyone as the primary goal of conservation (Council of Europe 2005b, 2005a, 6). It recognises the value of heritage as source and resource, thus also declaring its economic profile (Council of Europe 2005a, 3), and makes values and beliefs (subjective elements) prevail over knowledge and traditions (objective ones) (Zagato 2015, 145). It acknowledges the right to cultural heritage; “promotes principles for sustainable management, and to encourage maintenance”; “develops the legal, financial and professional frameworks

which make possible joint action by public authorities, experts, owners, investors, businesses, non-governmental organisations and civil society”; and “respects and encourages voluntary initiatives which complement the roles of public authorities” (Council of Europe 2005b).

The Faro Convention also “encourages reflection and respect for **diversity of interpretations**” (Council of Europe 2005b). Heritage in fact acquires (or does not acquire) meanings depending on the place. Unlike in Western societies, in many countries such as Morocco, India or Chile local and indigenous people have a cyclical vision and identify architecture mainly in functional terms, and are not particularly keen on restoring the buildings themselves and their materiality (Laureano 1995). The heritage’s function within the society would be maintained even in the event of a reconstruction, and thus for example many of the Chilean highland churches are the result of a succession of rebuilding (Pérez de Arce 2019, 200).

In **§5.2.1**, NGOs reported that in some cases inhabitants show disinterest in heritage, which is linked to imaginaries of poverty and backwardness, and is seen as a **burden** that is difficult and expensive to maintain – materials are hard to source and costly, workmanship is unaffordable. The rehabilitation of heritage is therefore turning into an elite process (Bronner 2006; Laureano 1995). Lay people often aim at demolishing and **replacing** heritage buildings with conventional materials, which are not always adapted to the local climate (**ARF 4.7**, **FA 4.3**, and **FG 5.1.1**).

The rehabilitation of traditional heritage also brings “**ethical**” issues with it. In realising that the communities to which it belongs, or which have an

attachment to it, have no interest in its maintenance and restoration – for example preferring brick houses to the earth ones because they are considered more “modern” – NGOs often carry out “consciousness-raising” actions, leading people to reconsider the value of heritage.

However, to define the lack of consensus on heritage value as “backwardness” is incorrect and arrogant, as well as the presumption of teaching “values”. The Faro Convention recognised that “The fact that an item is regarded as the cultural heritage of one or more communities or interest groups does not negate private proprietorial status” and suggests to apply a proportionality principle and “set bounds to the public interest, recognising that it may conflict with private interests (...) because everything cannot be protected”(Council of Europe 2005a, 7). “However, limitations in the exercise of private rights may be justified in the public interest” (Council of Europe 2005a, 6–7).

NGOs report that negative perception is sometimes **generational**: generally, it is older people that are biased against heritage buildings (**DSW 5.2.1**).

In addition, it decreases in contexts where heritage has remained sufficiently lived-in to **evolve**, responding to the needs of inhabitants, and local traditions have been adapted to both the influences of other cultures and modernity. Usually, it is the unused and abandoned heritage that appears as immobile and static (Davis 1999; Vellinga 2006).

Many of the NGOs are mindful of the fundamental relationship between heritage and inhabitants, and therefore promote awareness, training in construction techniques, and rehabilitation, succeeding in many cases in

Table 6: Involvement of the local community.

Involvement of the local community	THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
Survey participants	••		•							••	•••
Owners	•••	•••	•••	••		••	••		•••	•••	
Requesters of rehabilitations	•••	•	•••	•••					•••	•	•
(Co)financers	•••		•	••			•				
Meetings	••	••	•••			•		•		•	••
Decision-makers	••	•	•••			•		••	••		••
Workshop attendees	•	••	•••	•	•	•	•	••	••	•	•••
Trainers	••	••	•••	••	•			•••	•	••	•••
Employees	•••	•••	•••	•	••	•		•••			••
Permanent staff	••	•	•••	•	••	•	•				
Autonomous rehabilitation	••		••	•	••				••	•	•
Maintenance	••	•	••	•	•	••	•	•	••	•	••
Leadership			••								

modifying the people’s attitudes and reactivating their interest in heritage. Within the international guidelines, involvement actions range from appropriate information and encouragement (ICOMOS 1987) to assigning a central role in planning and implementation processes to local communities (UN 1996).

Participatory processes do not consist in packaged solutions but require a continuous search for context-based responses, reciprocal sharing, and feedback, involving different approaches and degrees of engagement: sporadic or long-term, remunerated or voluntary, in cooperation with NGOs or autonomous.

Depending on the context and stimulus, communities are offered **various roles** – either within the outsiders’ rehabilitation activity programme or aimed at autonomous care (table 6). These are not roles that the community must assume, but possible actions that its members may undertake. They require personal

investment, interest and motivation, support, and stimulus. In some cases, however, the community or some of its members do not feel a responsibility to take part in any rehabilitation process.

Not all NGOs focus on establishing links, contacts, and collaborations with locals. Some **limit** their exchange to specific occasions and activities (like construction workshops) or collaborate only with people entrusted with a specific role.

The **community** is frequently involved in its **extended form** only at specific moments for surveys to collect needs, expectations, and perceptions, and is rarely called upon to play an active, decision-making role. NGOs often dialogue just with **representatives** and spokespersons of the broader community (local stakeholders, figures of local relevance, associations and institutions). People are often involved by NGOs because they are the **owners** of the heritage to be recovered, or because they are linked to it by “ancestral ties” (THF,

Md, FA, PI, DSW, ARF - seldom AC, FG, MG, Tr).

A first active role on the part of the population is to show an interest for, and to **request heritage rehabilitation**. On the websites of FA, AC, DSW and PI are forms for requesting support, whether for technical advice, help in obtaining funding, or for rehabilitation works. According to NGOs, requests from inhabitants (THF, FA, PI, AC, DSW, ARF) or local authorities (THF, Md, FA, PI, FG, Tr) have become more and more frequent.

THF and PI call upon the community to **co-finance** the rehabilitation of their own dwellings and dovecotes, either economically or providing materials or labour. This strategy gives the inhabitants a "sense of ownership", turning them into the "driving force" of the rehabilitation process and increasing their interest in maintaining their property, which stimulates a subsequent sense of responsibility for maintenance and care (Alexander 2007, 62; Maeno in: Anzorena 2000).

NGOs admit however that communities are not always interested in investing in their heritage and show a tendency towards welfarism. Recurring motivations include not seeing the heritage's value and not having interests and perspectives on it, also linked to the difficulty of living in these places.

Involving **young people** is strategic for the future of the processes carried out and for their commitment to heritage, and offers alternative job opportunities to them. Some NGOs prioritise the inclusion of the most vulnerable populations: young people, women, elderly, unemployed or unschooled people (THF, Md, FA, Tr).

The call for the inclusion of the community stems primarily from the inhabitants' demand to see their views and opinions more strongly represented (Smith 2006, 35), on which to base choices concerning the liveability of houses and cities and connecting conservation and housing considerations (Maeno in: Anzorena 2000; UN 1996).

Often NGOs give communities voice through dialogues, interviews, ethnographic, socio-cultural, and economic research addressed to all inhabitants or local leaders. The main issues studied include community relations, local traditions and values, aspirations and perspectives, difficulties and needs. NGOs pay attention to the different **perception and attitude toward heritage** between themselves and the inhabitants, as well as to the communities' willingness to collaborate in the proposed projects, trying to prevent possible problems. Thanks to the information collected in the dialogue with inhabitants, FA has been able to reconstruct the history, customs and traditions of the villages of the Andean region where it operates.

Interviews can create a contact with residents and initiate a dialogue (FG), but some knowledge can only be obtained through a longer-term engagement and a dialogue stripped of the respective roles.

Almost all NGOs organise **meetings** to call upon owners, communities and local representatives to **actively participate** and take strategic decisions, having a voice in the processes and in some cases taking on more and more responsibility (THF, Md, FA, FG, Tr, BI). Encounters are organized mainly in the preliminary stages of projects, but sometimes go together with the progress of rehabilitation work (FA, THF).

Strategic decisions may concern planning, priorities, criteria, selection of the buildings to be rehabilitated, functions, technical solutions, and the choice of people to involve in the works.

NGOs stimulate reflection, exchange of views and opinions, and the (re)activation of **community dialogue** to solve problems, discuss on the importance of community relations, and decide to undertake joint projects.

In some cases, communities themselves request moments of exchange, entrusting NGOs with the role of facilitator.

Some NGOs facilitate such exchange by offering community **gathering** spaces, sometimes through adaptive reuse or in new “vernacular” buildings.

In addition to the study of the local population, some NGOs are concerned with the analysis of current and traditional **human/environment relations**.

The methodologies of FA and THF to study communities and their possible inclusion in projects – analysing their supportive or conflictive relationships – are particularly well-detailed and structured. THF carried out socio-economic surveys of the residents of the old city of Leh (in 2003, 2004 and 2006) in the form of house-to-house visits to 178 historic buildings, as well as interviews with local opinion leaders and officials (Alexander 2005a, 6, 2007, 7,11).

Social fieldwork is very seldom carried out by **sociologists and anthropologists**: only PI reported a psychologist in the team. Sometimes some locals act as **intermediaries** between NGOs and other community members, stimulating networking and conflict resolution, and helping to reactivate social ties (THF). FA limits possible nuisance to communities and stimulates an open dialogue, by entrusting a few designated persons (who must be “known”

by the community) with recording the inhabitants with photographs, audio, video, and even conducting interviews. On the other hand, Edvin Lamçe pointed out that the involvement and consultation of the local population by decision makers can be sometimes abused and only theoretical, leading to failure (**FG 5.1.1**).

Based on a deep understanding of people’s aspirations and socio-cultural stances, outsiders can over time transform themselves into new inhabitants who are highly aware of the place where they have settled.

NGOs interpret communities and propose initiatives to address current issues and needs adapted to the local context guided by the narratives of inhabitants: “the success of any intervention or management plan [for Leh] will depend on the planner’s knowledge of the people living there” (Alexander 2007, 36). Analysing the opinions of the local community makes it possible to **improve the methodologies** over time (as was particularly evident with the turnaround of the Spanish Cooperation in Peru – Md).

To this locally rooted knowledge, the external agent contributes with its global vision: NGOs relate local peculiarities, needs, and ambitions to broad themes and problems.

Informing and involving, **sharing knowledge and raising awareness** of the value of traditional heritage and traditions is aimed at creating a **relationship of cooperation, trust, and mutual esteem** with the local communities, that may start to see the organisation as a benefit to the region (**PI 5.3.1**).

The promotion and conservation actions carried out by the NGOs, especially if repeated and continuous, offer

different points of view the local population was not aware of (ARF 5.3.1).

An increased awareness of who and how built the heritage (often one's own ancestors), which is "not just a panorama, but the result of work" (DSW 5.3.1), encourages the strengthening of **identity ties** and **connections**, and promotes **change in the perception of heritage**, making the inhabitants proud of their dwellings and reconnect with traditions (Maeno in: Anzorena 2000). Sometimes heritage is no longer seen as "non-modern", but as a pivotal element of the inhabitants' own history, culture, and family, stimulating **interest** in rehabilitation. Becoming aware of their status as main representatives of a given tradition empowers the inhabitants and stimulates them to take the role of local agents, reactivating their willingness to take care of their heritage. The sense of backwardness and poverty, and the initial distrust, may be thus replaced by interest, care, and collaboration.

The diffusion of such awareness-raising initiatives helps developing frameworks for joint action, support networks and active community groups (ICCROM 2015).

In some cases, increased community participation has promoted the strengthening of the relations between the inhabitants and a return of **reciprocity** and collaboration, as it "reinforces social cohesion by fostering a sense of shared responsibility towards the places in which people live" (Council of Europe 2005b). THF recounts how, thanks to its interventions, "the community spirit (...) was revitalised, prompting people to meet and discuss problems, as well as work together, even overcoming sectarian tensions between different communities" (Alexander 2005a,

31). Moreover, it should be recalled that identity perceptions and the sense of belonging are always evolving (Remotti 1996).

Through this involvement, the actions carried out by the NGOs are shared with the insiders, which assume an increasingly active role within the processes and gradually become spokespersons of the ongoing initiatives, stimulating a gradual devolution aimed at a future self-sustainability, and rooting the processes initiated.

EMPOWERING



Rehabilitation of heritage through the transmission of traditional knowledge

3.2.1 Vernacular and traditional heritage

As Francesca Governa suggested, heritage can assume various roles (§5.3). It can be seen as a cultural practice, a dynamic, interactive, collaborative, and dialogical process (Harrison 2015). The roles entrusted to it include catalysing identity values (Remotti 1996); enabling the maintenance of connections to places and reciprocity between inhabitants through shared values (Appadurai 2008; Byrne 2008); creating collective memories, producing and transforming a society and/or a culture, and promoting social change (Harrison 2009, 38; Samuel 1994).

Traditional and vernacular buildings "belong" to a given **place** and its history and can be understood as the "unself-conscious translation into physical form of a culture"(Rapoport 1969, 2, 2006, 181).

All forms of vernacular architecture are built to meet specific **basic needs**, accommodating the values, economic structure and ways of living of the cultures that produce them (Oliver 1997, 2006b). Vital needs, taking up Yona Friedman's *Architecture of Survival*, are "embedded in the problem of housing, in the form of a roof for climate protection, and food" (Friedman 1978). In his view, these include the supply of water, the safeguarding of private and collective goods, the organisation of social

relations and the aesthetic satisfaction of everyone.

"Traditions often represent an absence of choice" (AlSayyad 2006, xvii), since their expressions derive in part from geographical and economic **limitations**, showing "how humans have adapted to extreme conditions of ecosystems over long periods of time" (Lawrence 2006, 110–11).

To adapt to difficult climates and constraints, local techniques may involve thick walls (at Leh 60-90 cm) and the use of materials such as earth and stone that are capable of storing and releasing heat, and of balancing moisture levels inside the buildings. Next to this, the design of homes answers the necessity to let in or shield from the sun, winds, and rainfall. In the extremely hot climate of Morocco for example, the traditional earth houses are naturally ventilated by a central empty space and kept cool by shaded areas and small openings; these traditional solutions work without mechanical ventilation and cooling systems, which are necessary in contemporary houses. Therefore, traditional houses often prove to be **healthier** and **more comfortable**, and – if properly maintained – **more durable** than modern ones.

Vernacular architecture tends to **minimise the transformation** of the environment in order to render it human-friendly, allowing a peaceful

4. Haydee and Omar hotel in the Codpa Valley (Arica and Parinacota, Chile). Martina Bocci 2022.

coexistence between communities and the environment (Friedman 1978). It is low-tech – i.e. simple, unsophisticated, uncomplicated, and based on **appropriate technologies** (Özkan 2006, 100; Watson and Davis 2019, 20) – and “built using natural and ecologically sustainable resources and technologies” (Steen, Steen, and Komatsu 2003). Traditional techniques have thus a low **environmental impact**, as they use locally available raw materials, which have not undergone energy-intensive processing often involving harmful emissions.

Bernard Rudofsky had described traditional architecture as '**anonymous**' due to the lack of determinable authorship and to having been produced without involving schooled architects (Rudofsky 1964). Such heritage reflects the “conscious and/or unconscious know-how of local craftspeople and the inhabitants” (Lawrence 2006, 114) that emerges from the community, from the accumulation of concrete and personal experiences that have allowed people to settle in a given local environment (Lévi-Strauss 1962).

The builder is often from within the community or the inhabitant him- or herself – e.g., dry-stone retaining walls and lesser heritage used to be built by peasants, not by masons or other professionals (Asquith 2006, 129). Often, construction and maintenance are the result of joint action between community members (Oliver 1997, xxiii).

3.2.2 Learning by doing: keeping tradition alive through transmission

Architecture, vernacular culture, indigenous knowledge about the ecosystem, values and ways of living are all part of cultural processes, not only material products (Asquith and Vellinga 2006, 19; Harrison 2009, 36).

In rehabilitating the built heritage, NGOs deal with the **intangible heritage** associated with it (UNESCO 2003). Traditions are part of **living heritage**: a set of practices, expressions, knowledge and cultural traditions integral to the identity of communities, charged with human, identity, and cultural values (Akagawa and Smith 2019; Smith and Akagawa 2008; UNESCO 2003). Vernacular building techniques are part of the set of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) embedded in living a territory, and “embrace what is known and what is inherited about dwelling, building, or settlement. It includes the collective wisdom and experience of a society, and the norms accepted by the group as appropriate to the built environment” (Oliver 1986, 113). Such knowledge includes places and ways of sourcing materials, their transformation and assembly, climate-related notions, and a whole set of cultural practices, rituals, and symbols.

Construction traditions represent the major theme of vernacular architecture (Abu-Lughod 1992; Bourdier and AlSayyad 1989). In describing **vernacular know-how**, Paul Oliver stated that “There is not such things as vernacular buildings, but rather buildings that embody certain vernacular traditions” (Oliver, 1988 in 1st IASTE conference). Traditions are invisible practices and meanings of tangible

heritage, 'inherent' qualities 'wrapped' around it (Harrison 2009, 2015); they are the culturally-based, generative grammars of building passed down through generations.

Vernacular traditions are increasingly at **risk of disappearing** also due to 'modern' problems like the breakdown of production and extraction chains for the materials needed to carry maintenance work out, the advent of modern techniques and materials in the building industry, and the high cost of materials and specialised labour. Planning regulations, resource depletion, building performance standards, mortgage restrictions and insurance criteria also work against the conservation of vernacular heritage (Vellinga 2006, 83, 93–94). Moreover, traditional constructions are no longer part of the main cultural and architectural discourse.

The autonomous transmission and evolution of traditional knowledge and techniques from generation to generation, as well as experiential interaction with materials and the diffusion of manual skills, have all been decreasing over the last few decades (Davis 2006; Illich 1973; Laureano 1995; Ploeg 1992; Sertorio 2005). Inhabitants and local builders still skilled in traditional technology have declined considerably in recent decades and have not been successful in training the new generations.

Recovery is urgent: in some places, just a few (old) people remember and are still able to practice traditional ways of building. There is a strong need to re-appropriate traditional knowledge to develop local skills into feasible solutions which can meet today's needs.

Techniques can be tools for the re-appropriation of places through capacity-building processes: people from a

community, as active agents, may interpret past knowledge and experiences to meet the challenges and demands of the present (Asquith and Vellinga 2006, 7), creating and actively using heritage to maintain connections to other places and things (Harrison 2009, 38).

In order to guarantee a future for the vernacular, it is necessary not only to preserve particular artefacts and buildings, but above all to safeguard and promote the skills needed to reproduce them (AlSayyad 2006, xviii; Bourdieu 1977).

Transmission of know-how as a process

All the NGOs presented in this book are active in the **transmission** of traditional building techniques and know-how: besides decision-making, they involve communities in heritage restoration. However, not all pursue learning by doing as their principal focus. The most active in this respect are FA, THF, Tr, DSW, AC, BI, while PI, FG, MG, Md, and ARF include it among other activities.

The transfer of knowledge is **not** generally **based on language**. It is rather a practical, dynamic, and active transmission through on-site apprenticeship (Lewcock 2006; Marchand 2006, 47): a traditional teaching based on the observation of ways of doing and the practice of skills (Marchand 2006, 47). Part of such know-how is related to physical and objective aspects that can be summarised in more general best practices partially codified in writing, but another part is intangible, untellable and highly context-specific. This "performance-based knowledge collapses the classic dichotomies between mind and body, theory and practice, tradition and modernity" (Marchand 2006,

Table 7. Source and documentation of the NGOs' knowledge.

Sources and documentation	THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
catalogues and manuals			•	•			•••				
know-how of residents and builders	•••		•••	•••	••	••	•	•••	•••		•••
study and a careful observation of buildings and artefacts	••				•••		•••			••	••
external experts	•••					•••	••				•••
scientific knowledge	••		••								••

60). The transfer of tacit knowledge can be achieved by observation and subsequent practice under the guidance of more experienced people, physically embedding it through cognitive and sensory inputs – such as tactile and auditory perceptions (Ferrari 2023).

In their answers to [§5.2.2](#) question, NGOs reflected on the different sources and forms of documentation on local heritage and techniques (table 7).

Only rarely local vernacular techniques have been **described in catalogues and manuals**. Archival research was however carried out by FA, and PI referred to previous anthropological and ethnographic research.

Next to this, all NGOs carry out meticulous **study, careful observation** and surveying of buildings and artefacts ([THF 4.8](#), [AC 5.2.2](#), [DSW](#), and [GO2 4.10](#)). MG acquired a lot of knowledge and technical information during the demolition of *dozō* warehouses after 2007 earthquake ([MG 4.11](#)).

Oral sources are the main way to learn about traditional techniques. Depending on the time elapsed since the rupture of generational transmission, traces of this memory may still be found among older inhabitants or have been lost and cannot be used as a link to a collective past anymore (Bourdieu 1977; Harrison 2009, 38). Where knowledge is still active, NGOs may mobilise it involving local master craftspeople and traditional builders still able to

build with traditional techniques in the role of **trainers in workshops and construction sites** to pass on their know-how and tacit skills regarding materials and their processing, tools, techniques, forms, and functions (Marchand 2006; Oliver 1997, 2006). In some cases, NGOs decided to form local teams and to train local people after some unsatisfactory experience with construction companies ([THF 4.8](#) and [FG 4.1](#): in the latter case, working with “licensed restoration contractors” was a requirement of Albanian government and UNESCO). In the case of PI, some members are the repositories of these knowledge, handed down by their ancestors or learned through practice in traditional restoration work.

NGOs gradually devolve their role to the craftspeople over time, making them increasingly autonomous and pivotal (Tr 5.1.1, FA, and [BI 4.9](#)).

Where local skills are lacking or insufficient, external specialists may be called upon to provide support. NGOs involve craftspeople from regions where such techniques are still alive, as occurred with the Peruvian builders initially involved by FA, the Tibetan experts and Arga master invited by THF ([4.8](#)) in Leh and Kham, the famous master plasterer Kuzumi Akira who helped in MG’s rehabilitations ([4.11](#)), and the experts from other regions of Albania and Kosovo who worked for FG ([4.8](#) – after the fall of communism, many of Gjirokastra

qualified masters moved to Italy or Greece).

In some case this can lead to a “revival of [ancient cultural links,] traditional skills and local wisdom”: THF stimulated the reopening of exchange channels between Ladakh and Tibet (the border closure in the 1950s led to a decline in Ladakh’s traditional culture and society) (Alexander 2005a, 17).

Academics, sometimes from other countries or continents, may be involved to provide support on some specific aspects, like the restoration of wall paintings, structural performance of buildings, or heritage management (THF 4.8, FA 4.3, FG 4.1, and BI 4.9).

The three main modes of transmission of traditional construction techniques adopted by NGOs are: training in **conventional construction sites** (THF, FA and Md), **apprenticeship** (FA, Tr, BI), and running **workshops and courses** (PI, AC, FG, MG, Tr, DSW and ARF). These often complement each other, either by involving specialised labour or master craftspeople to complete certain difficult parts (AC, Tr, FG). Some of THF’s rehabilitations were carried out with considerable support from the local community (THF 4.8).

NGOs involve locals (students, residents, and builders – either sporadically, or within formal training courses) along with outsiders, mainly students and enthusiasts. THF and FA give priority to inhabitants.

The first mode mainly involves local builders and even the inhabitants themselves, under the supervision of master craftspeople and experts.

In this case NGOs carry out permanent heritage rehabilitation activities mainly on **entire buildings**: participants have the opportunity to couple learning

about a particular procedure with increasing their awareness of how the artefact works as a whole.

At the end of the training process, the builder is often granted master status. In some cases (THF, FA, Tr), training allows the reactivation of the relay knowledge transfer typical of tradition, sometimes through the creation of a **hierarchical system**, achieving a continuous, self-sustaining, and self-training process (Marchand 2006, 49). A long-term participation in the construction site may allow the builder to become a mentor, capable of guiding the training of the next generation of participants (Marchand 2006, 46–50). Trainees can later play the role of trainers, thus involving people who are not professionals but “are schooled in principles of design throughout their **long apprenticeship**”. The system of senior masters (at least one for each construction technique involved in the restoration), monitors, training officers and training assistants arranged by FA is particularly well structured.

These figures are hired from the local population and often have regular contracts. This can allow to return part of the investments to the local communities, with a positive socio-economic impact as well as the creation of local skilled labour in contexts where trained restorers are scarce (Bocci 2022). Traditional construction techniques, being labour-intensive and using generally low-cost, locally available materials and minimal production infrastructure, move investment towards people, rather than towards large manufacturers or transport companies. The largest costs of the NGOs in fact concern building materials and – in case of paid workers (FA, Tr, THF, PI, DSW) – salaries. Several NGOs state that most of the money obtained is

² AECID for Md, French Union Rempart and Croatian NGO Dragodid for PI, CHWB and CHWB-Albania for FG, Istituto Tecnico per Geometri and student group Forti of the Politecnico di Torino for AC, and European Heritage Volunteers for ARF.

invested locally (about 60% for FA, 70% for Tr in labour alone, THF, Md, FG).

Transmission can take place also through **courses**, whose duration may range from a few days (DSW, PI, BI) to some weeks (Tr, AC, PI, ARF, MG, FG, BI). The frequency of these courses is usually at least once a year during holiday periods (PI, AC, FG, Tr, ARF, BI): DSW offers courses much more often, AC and BI during most of the summer. ARF, on the other hand, ties courses to particular projects, not on a regular basis. Some NGOs have come to organise a high number of courses in recent years, PI and AC exceed fifty, DSW over one hundred.

The task may consist in experimenting with some technique, or (re)building a portion or an entire artefact. The construction techniques transmitted are often quite **simple** and straightforward to learn in a short time (**DSW 4.2**); yet, knowing how to build with these techniques requires experience that can only be acquired through repeated contact and experimentation.

The interventions of PI, AC, FG, MG, Tr, DSW can be defined as more sporadic and usually concern **portions of buildings** or **experiments** with certain techniques. In some cases, several workshops and interventions, even if deferred over various years, add up to the total rehabilitation of buildings. Maurizio Cesprini emphasised the importance of focusing AC's action on transmission rather than on completing rehabilitation rapidly, with Ghesc serving as a laboratory village.

The training may be managed by the NGOs (AC, DSW, BI), supported by locals (Tr, MG, BI), or brought about in cooperation with other specialised NGOs or institutions², which can take care of

some organisational aspects as well as providing substantial funding.

For the most part, the courses are aimed at **students** (both same-university and mixed groups), but also at professionals, whether local or international (PI, AC, FG, MG, Tr, DSW, ARF, BI). Despite its initial clear division between trainers (internal and external), trainees (external) and owners (internal), DSW began to involve the latter in the workshops as trainees due to the communities' desire to include people capable of carrying out restoration work (**DSW 4.2**).

NGOs explain that courses are targeted at students to offer them practical training that is lacking in most university programmes. Accounts in this regard, in addition to the author's personal one, were given by Carmen Moreno of Tr and Maurizio Cesprini of AC, referring to their own backgrounds (**AC 5.1.1** and **5.2.4**, **Tr 5.2.4**, **MG 4.11**). Training young people allows to pass knowledge to the new generations and offer job opportunities and expertise (the Spanish Cooperation in Peru set quite low age limits, around 25). Often because of the experience gained in the workshops, participants develop a particular disposition towards natural materials and vernacular construction techniques; some continue experimenting with them and adopt them in their academic and professional careers.

Sometimes, participants from previous courses help as trainers (AC, FG, BI) or establish an association (as the Wajima Dozō renovation project group founded in 2007 by Hagino Kiichiro – it dissolved as a non-profit organisation in 2014, remaining active as a voluntary organisation). DSW considers it significant that its courses are attended by young people who are expected to work in the planning and implementation of environmental and territorial policies (**DSW**

5.2.4). FA and PI organise volunteering periods and open days of training for local communities.

Course attendees are usually **volunteers** – sometimes in civil service (PI) – who may even be asked to pay a registration fee to contribute to expenses such as insurance, board, and accommodation (PI, AC). Training aimed at young people is often subsidised for local participants and/or NGOs' members, as in the cases of FG and ARF. DSW created a 'school' system and does not rely on voluntary work since it deems it does not guarantee a satisfactory level of competence and quality (**DSW 4.2**).

Halfway between these two modes comes **apprenticeship** aimed at a new generation of professional craftspeople (FA, **Tr 4.4**, AC, **BI 4.9**), in some case to compensate the absence of professional schools on traditional construction. On the one hand, this mode allows to extend the transmission of knowledge beyond the short duration of workshops, and on the other it may also involve enthusiasts who are not necessarily interested in making crafts their job (**BI 4.9**).

In addition to hands-on learning, NGOs offer training on ethical, theoretical, and practical aspects related to the rehabilitation and reactivation of heritage and communities. In some cases, training is also provided through exchange programmes and learning journeys abroad, to acquire specific skills which may later grow locally and avoid calling in outsider specialists – and saving the costs associated with this (**THF 4.8**, FA).

NGOs that involve external participants (students and non-students) in the rehabilitation processes, perceived an increased **sense of pride** among the residents. This can be due to the

collaboration of locals and outsiders, and to the presence of external people who show interest in the local heritage and commitment to its rehabilitation (**PI 5.1.1**, **Tr 5.1.1**, **DSW 5.1.1**).

Participation in workshops may encourage cultural exchange, overcome prejudices and promote mutual understanding: students work with each other and with master craftspeople, exchanging knowledge, experience, views, and discovering different cultures and ways of life (Tr, AC).

The participation in the rehabilitation works, especially if it involves locals – both in the role of participants (THF, Md, FA, and to a lesser degree AC, DSW and BI), and trainers (THF, Md, FA, Tr, DSW, BI) – positively influenced the **preservation and re-circulation of traditions** related to building, restarting their evolutionary course interrupted by abandonment, as well as fostering their gradual evolution and adaptation to current needs.

The involvement of local communities can enhance a recovery of social values (Laureano 1995, 214), counteracting the tendency of our modern economic and social systems to prevent builder and inhabitant from being the same person: people re-appropriate skills more or less voluntarily delegated to others (Friedman 1978; Illich 1973).

Once recovered, traditional and vernacular heritage needs constant maintenance, according to the location and the materials that constitute it. In the absence of maintenance, materials deteriorate quickly, particularly in harsh climates. Especially in the case of lesser and private heritage, the responsibility of care is in the hands of the **inhabitants** and **owners** themselves.

Communities, through involvement in know-how transmission processes

can achieve tools and skills and thus autonomy and responsibility in terms of conscious care of heritage, subsequent maintenance operations, **autonomous bottom-up rehabilitation**, and adoption of traditional techniques in **new constructions** (Davis in Asquith, Vellinga 2006:232, Illich 1973) also thanks to the reactivation of reciprocity (Davis 1999, 2006).

Recovered buildings can in turn be a source of inspiration, in some cases encouraging residents to emulate the renovation, or even attracting visitors to exemplar interventions (de Azevedo 2018, FA, AC, FG). During my field research on FA, I had the opportunity to discuss with various inhabitants of the plateau who, inspired by FA's work, decided to rehabilitate their family dwellings and start small tourism-oriented businesses. FG reported that when they started working in Gjirokastra they were alone, but now there are numerous and capable operators who work independently from them (**FG 5.3.4**).

Changes in the perception of heritage limit **inappropriate** heritage rehabilitation and may influence the destiny of some artefacts, such as the church of Socoroma, which the inhabitants wanted to demolish and rebuild following an earthquake. Thanks to FA, the residents re-evaluated the cultural and patrimonial value of the church and reconsidered their choice, becoming actively engaged in the restoration

work (**FA 4.3**). PI noted how local people stopped employing concrete mortars in stone masonry (**PI 5.3.1**).

Some NGOs instruct the inhabitants on maintenance through customised **handbooks** (THF, FA, FG, **DSW 4.2**, and **G02 4.10**) and offer free or paid consultancy services (THF, FA, **MG**, **AC**, **PI**, **ARF 4.7**) as well as support (co-financing or partnership in applications) to help and stimulate private individuals in recovering their heritage and improve the living conditions of their homes.

In some cases, they offer to evaluate the need for intervention, create technical documentation, contribute a project or the work of their master artisans. By providing services and opening physical and virtual **consultancy** desks, NGOs assume a **reference position**, to which the inhabitants can turn in case of need. On more than one occasion FA has provided consultancy services to other companies, supporting them technically and methodologically.

Training activities can also stimulate some participants to start **collaborations** and **networks**. It is worth mentioning a recent initiative supported by AC concerning a form of mutual-aid time bank, both for the rehabilitation of stone houses and for small jobs related to subsistence farming, among some thirty locals and newcomers in the municipality of Montecrestese.

Activities carried out	THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
handbooks	•		••			••			•••		
consultancy	•••	•	•••	•••	•••		•••	•	•	••	•
follow-up and maintenance	••	•	•••	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
creation of local independent teams	•	••	••		••	•	••	•	••		
heritage management and fund raising			••								

Table 8. Activities carried out by NGOs to support the triggering of local autonomous rehabilitations.

The involvement as masons or as trainers in heritage rehabilitation may strengthen people's "professional identity, practice and sense of responsibility", self-appreciation, ambition and **self-esteem**, leading masons to perceive their work as living heritage (Marchand 2006, 61–62). The experience acquired through the participation in the NGOs' restoration works is sometimes **formalised** and **certified**, helping the builders to improve their curricula (FA, Md).

By economically and formally enhancing the work of masons and craftspeople, NGOs also support the creation of local **teams** of builders and small enterprises skilled in traditional construction techniques, who spend the knowledge acquired and continue their own work path in the sector, opening job opportunities (**THF 4.8**, **Md 4.5**, FA, MG, DSW³). In some cases, NGOs support such new businesses by involving them in their rehabilitation sites (**MG 4.11**). FA engages them in minor tasks, such as procurement of materials and production of adobes. Despite this, the people I interviewed in the Chilean highlands reported difficulties in finding work related to traditional local techniques: most of the residents still want contemporary houses (Bocci 2023).

Marchand recommends "empowering masons not by paternalistically protecting them from the fragility of their economy or the changing tastes and demands of their public, but by granting them greater autonomy and centrality even in the design and study phases, involving them in an interdisciplinary dialogue that addresses knowledge in relation to building traditions" (Marchand 2006, 61–62).

Community involvement may extend to self-planning, understood not only as designing one's own house, village

or environment, but as distinguishing and defending one's own interests, and understanding the language and grammar of the dialogue between inhabitant and house (Friedman 1978). Moreover, FA also supports building autonomous local capacity in **heritage management** and **fund raising**.

On another scale is the strategy used by INTBAU, the Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural de España and Tr, to strengthen and promote the work of craftsmen: they created the Red Española de Maestros de la Construcción Tradicional, which brings together hundreds of craftspeople and traditional builders active in Spain, categorised according to their techniques or location (Terrachidia 2020b:9).

Several NGOs pursue the inclusion and growth of locals within their teams of **professionals**, training and upskilling them up to leadership roles – this training is especially offered to young people. Their work aims at making communities self-sufficient, preparing them to continue autonomously the engagement with heritage and to make the interventions self-sustainable over time, in anticipation of a 'withdrawal' of the NGO itself (**Md 4.5**).

³ Minami Alps Masonry Girl, Yamanashi Prefecture; Hinohara Village Masonry Training Camp Executive Committee was launched to restore masonry in Hinohara Village, Tokyo; "Tabisuru Masonry" opened a business repairing stone walls and private houses in various parts of Japan (source visited in november 2022).

3.2.3 NGOs' strategies in heritage rehabilitation

To carry out constant maintenance and care, inhabitants need to be **motivated** to do so. This is facilitated in **lived** heritage, that has or regains a **function** and/or generates **income**. Maeno Masaru refers to a conservation responsibility: "to preserve a building or a town effectively it is important to have good reasons for its selection and to determine its use after the preservation" (Anzorena 2000).

Most of the constructions rehabilitated by NGOs is not part of monumental heritage, but can be described – like "most of what has been built" – as **lesser heritage**: "dwellings and all other buildings of the people" (Oliver 1997, xxiii) "much more closely related to the culture of the majority and to life as it is really lived" (Rapoport 1969, 2, 2006, 181). Vernacular built heritage represents a "local style of architecture concerned with **domestic** and **functional** rather than monumental buildings" (Davis 1999; Rudofsky 1964).

According to many NGOs, priority in restoration of **private heritage** should be accorded to still **inhabited** buildings and/or to constructions locals want to make use of (houses in villages or historic neighbourhoods, or structures linked to farming – such as warehouses, dovecotes and terrace retaining walls). However, in many cases the places where NGOs work are places of strong **emigration**: as an example, 60% of the houses in the Arica and Parinacota highland, as well as 10% of the houses in Leh are empty (Alexander 2007, 37). Where communities are no longer able to take charge of care, the choice is open whether to intervene, and for whom.

A common problem – especially in the case of larger buildings or fractioned land – is the difficulty in **tracing the owners** and then persuading them to rehabilitate. FG spent a long time to retrace the seventy owners of the Babameto House due to the destruction of the documents of the communist expropriation. A similar situation, albeit for different causes, affects the

Table 9. Categories of building and infrastructure involved in heritage rehabilitation by NGOs.

Categories of heritage			THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI	
private	dwellings	in villages		•••	••		•••		•			••	•	
		in the historic quarter of towns	•••					••						
	structures connected to rural and production activities	dry stone walls				••	••					•••		
		warehouses							•••					
		dovecotes				•••								
public / communal	public monuments	castles, markets, theatres, libraries...	•		•		•	•••		••				
	religious heritage	temples, mosques, churches, chapels, monasteries	•••	•	•••		•			•		••		
	structures connected to rural and production activities	mills, bread ovens, forges, fountains, washhouses, sawmills				••	•						••	
	infrastructure	gathering spaces		••		•		••			•••	•		
		roads and paths		••					••				••	•••
		bridges						•						••

Table 10. NGOs' rehabilitations and scale of the areas of intervention.

Scale of the interventions	THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
village systems spread over large areas	••	•••	•••	•••			••	•••			
historic quarters of town	•••					•••					
single villages					•••					•••	
itinerant	•								•••		••

stone heritage in the Ossola valley that AC deals with.

PI, AC and BI have also worked on buildings owned by NGO members or the NGO itself.

NGOs working on private heritage also face conflicts that the **selection** of artefacts to rehabilitate can generate. Among the strategies adopted to limit discontent is the establishment of priority lists and selection criteria including materiality, state of conservation, interest of the owners and their inability to carry out the work independently, present and future use, technical appropriateness, and employment of local labour (THF, FA, **FG 4.1**, and **ARF 4.7**). THF and PI give priority to owners willing to **co-finance**, take part in the restoration work, or provide materials.

Only rarely NGOs have restored public and **communal buildings** to make them museums of themselves, in memory of a remote past; rather, they may be rehabilitated because of their value for the community.

Communities identify and structure themselves around such heritage: "shared traditions allow people to maintain connections to a common past, and therefore to each other" (Davis 1999, 17; Shils 1981). It is often cared for by a plurality of actors, and can represent a socially meaningful place even though the inhabitants have moved away (as is the case in the highland villages whose churches were recovered by FA). In addition, the restoration of such heritage

may boost the local economy, as well as attract tourists.

Religious heritage includes village churches, Buddhist temples, mosques and *stupas* (**THF 4.8**, **FA 4.3**, **Tr 4.4**, and to a lesser extent AC, ARD, and Md).

More seldom the NGOs deal with **non-religious public monuments**, chosen for their visibility, relevance and interest from a tourist point of view (**FG 4.1**, FA, Tr, and THF).

In some cases rehabilitation is carried out on community-owned artefacts linked to **production activities**, such as the water mill, the bread oven, and the forge restored by PI (**4.6**), the wash-houses and the water sawmill by AC (Fondazione Canova 2019), as well as the dry stone walls supporting terraces (DSW, AC, and PI). In others, small community-owned and private buildings were re-purposed as social spaces, such as the Socoroma Museum of FA (**4.3**), the Frasta School by BI, and Gostuša community centre by ARF (**4.7**). On several occasions, the NGOs landscaped **open spaces** around rehabilitated buildings. One common work is the repaving of streets, paths, squares, small bridges, and external stairs (**THF 4.8**, **FA 4.3**, AC, **FG 4.1**, **Tr 4.4**, and **BI 4.9**) sometimes adding rainwater drainage systems.

The **size of the built heritage** and the **scale of the areas of intervention** range widely. Buildings may be as small as simple dwellings of a few square metres for FA, or as large as castles

⁴ In the late 1980s and early 1990s, **THF** created the open access [Lhasa Archive project](#) including more than 100 historic residential government-owned buildings in order to support official protection. Although the city government approved the list in 1998, only a few dozen buildings currently retain their original features, as documented in the [Old Buildings Demolition map](#). An [inventory of buildings in the old city of Leh](#) was carried out in 2003-2004 (Alexander 2007, 7).

As its main strategic project, **FA** catalogued (1999) and brought together in the “Plan de Conservación Sostenible de Iglesias/Templos Andinos de Arica y Parinacota” the set of Andean churches from the colonial period scattered across the northern Chilean plateau, of which 32 were recognised as National Monuments.

PI created a georeferenced database including the 3450 dovecotes of the Northeast of Portugal (2001-2004).

Together with the Ossola Museums Association, since 2012 **AC** carried out a census (available [online](#) and as [freely downloaded catalogue books](#)) of the historic buildings in eight out of 37 Ossola municipalities.

Tr carried out research on each ksar, drawing plans of the twelve villages in the M'Hamid oasis and documenting their buildings.

DSW carried out research on the conservation status of 252 terraced fields in Tokushima in 2012-2013 (Okamoto and Sanada 2016).

In preparing the proposal for the Research Project “The Revival of the Stone Village”, **ARF** created a georeferenced catalogue of 256 houses and drew up a priority list for interventions.

(FG), monastic complexes (THF) and mosques (Tr). AC concentrates current work on a **single small village**; FG and THF on the **historic quarter of a town**, with sporadic operations in neighbouring areas. FA, Md, PI, MG, Tr, ARF deal with larger areas, in some cases involving **village systems**.

Moreover, some NGOs associate one main operation area with interventions in different regions of the same country (FA, FG) or even abroad (THF, Tr).

Quantifying the cost and number of interventions is not straightforward: the main difficulties are the extremely different contexts, scale and type of interventions, and system boundaries. For example, when NGOs speak of “realised projects”, they generally count not only the restoration of buildings or artefacts, but also dissemination activities, courses, and other initiatives. However, the number of rehabilitated buildings range from under a dozen (Md, AC, MG, Tr, ARF, and BI) to tens (FA and FG) and hundreds (THF and PI). DSW recovered 1,973 m² of stone walls; FA 3,900 m² of façades in six villages; GO2 has not started any site yet.

Vernacular buildings are social representations of what is “**common** and **shared** in a community or region” (Bronner 2006, 23–24). These aggregations of lesser heritage – sometimes characterised by “rigorous seriality” and generally spread over larger areas – create a multiple and interrelated system of collective value, which can be described as a whole as a territorial cultural system (Devoti and Naretto 2017, 145–46). Highland churches, dovecotes, dry stone walls, Buddhist temples, gates can be considered as **parts of wholes**.

Many NGOs strategically chose to operate on lesser heritage ensembles on the one hand because of their inherently limited capabilities and funding possibilities, on the other because focussing on it they can generate a **discourse** and a local narrative.

To elaborate these, NGOs count, record, document with photographs and drawings, georeference, **inventorise, catalogue** and research buildings and techniques; they base their subsequent interventions on such documentation, and they use it as a tool to promote protection status recognition and to obtain support from institutions, associations, and private individuals.⁴

The classification of heritage and the very labelling of it as such, elevate it from being just seen as 'old' or 'outdated', and represent an important evidence of a fragile heritage at risk of disappearance. Indeed, surveys are often performed only when there is a risk of losing a certain heritage (Harrison 2009, 13).

Protection is often achieved by **obtaining monument/heritage status** (THF, FA), also included in national and international lists – ARF obtained Gostuša's inclusion in the cultural heritage list of the Republic of Serbia; FG contributed to the inscription of Gjirokastra in the UNESCO world heritage sites list; Leh Old Town and its palace (2008) and the Arica and Parinacota churches (2010) were included in the annual World Monuments Fund's Watch List, allowing to apply for international funds such as the Wilson Challenge (Alexander, De Azevedo, and Hirako 2015).

Another strategy adopted by some NGOs is to focus their actions on **model areas**, villages or neighbourhoods.

Scattered action limits the possibility of forging dense relations with the population, returning frequently to the places, and reaching that degree of complexity and maturity that allows to show the opportunities offered by the actions undertaken.

By focussing their commitment, NGOs demonstrate the feasibility of the proposed programme, increasingly ensure that the inhabitants know, respect, and consider their work as relevant, gain greater visibility – therefore attracting the attention of governments, donors, and tourists; increasing the chances to successfully reactivate the local society; and even triggering other initiatives. The concentration of efforts may also create an example for both bottom-up and top-down approaches in other areas (Alexander 2005a, 9–10, 2007, 80).

Model areas may be chosen because of their relevance, their state of repair, the willingness of their residents, but also because of their easily accessible position for visitors and residents alike: a central area of Leh Old Town for **THF 4.8**; the so-called 'laboratory village' of Ghesc for AC; the village of Belén and the Codpa Valley for FA. The latter was chosen because of the affection bond that many FA members had developed for the area.

In model areas, NGOs implement pilot initiatives in heritage rehabilitation, monument preservation, infrastructure

improvement, capacity building and empowerment, and organise festivals and events.

Since their inception or over the years, some NGOs have been part of local, regional or national **public strategies** related to heritage preservation (FA, FG, THF, Md, Tr, ARF), and were able to create collaborative and supportive relationships with local governments, obtaining visibility, support and funding. In some cases, municipalities requested the intervention of NGOs (PI, FA, DSW, BI; FG was even established at the request of the mayor), and Tr and THF signed memorandums of understanding and agreements with the respective local government (Alexander 2007, 76).

The object of such co-operation with local governments may be projects of **public interest** (FG, Md, Tr), designations as **Heritage Zones** (**THF 4.8** in Leh Old Town and Lhasa), the drafting of regulations and guidelines, as well as the establishment of a decision-making authority such as the Heritage Conservation Committee in Leh (**THF 4.8**) or the Board of Gjirokastra created by FG and the Albanian Ministry of Economy (Lamprakos 2010).

In other cases, NGOs and municipalities worked together in the elaboration of **management** and **development plans** for villages, portions of cities (usually historic centres) and/or territories – THF

Activities carried out	THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
social/ethnographic surveys	•••	•	••	•		•	••	••		•	•••
inventorisation and drafting of building catalogues	•••	•	•••	•••	•••	•	••	••	•••	•••	•
legal protection	•••	•	•••	•		••		•		••	
rehabilitation of a model area/village	•••	•••	•••		•••		•	•			
management planning and co-operation with governments	•••	•	•			•••				••	••

Table 11. Activities carried out by NGOs to identify population and heritage needs, protect and plan for the future.

⁵ Officially known as the Rajiv Awas Yojana, or RAY, scheme, wanted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation for a “Slum-free India”. Indian urban planning regulations stipulate that concrete structures are permanent, while those made of stone, adobe and wood are considered as non-permanent pending replacement (Alexander, De Azevedo, and Hirako 2015).

wrote a proposal for the Management Plan of the Old Town of Leh to avoid the uncontrolled development of the city (Alexander 2007, 9–10); Md worked on the Plan de Acondicionamiento Territorial Valle del Colca (2012); FG authored the Conservation and Development Plan of Gjirokastra (Kasi 2002).

In some cases, NGOs encourage and catalyse wider actions, significantly influencing regional public policy (FA), and even changing the government’s viewpoint regarding the importance of heritage (ARF 4.7). The case of THF in Leh Old Town is particularly significant: in 2012, it had been officially designated as a slum⁵ and seventy-three historic buildings (40 per cent) were to be replaced with standardised individual 25-square-metre concrete buildings (Alexander, De Azevedo, and Hirako 2015). THF contributed to halt such ‘slum development plan’ stimulating dialogue among stakeholders and creating awareness about the value of local heritage, as well as the need for conservation and regulation (De Azevedo 2018).

A recurring strategy to obtain visibility and funding is the participation of NGOs in national and international awards related to heritage restoration, tradition preservation or community engagement: THF won three UNESCO awards; FA two national prizes that led to the inclusion of its project within the country’s heritage funding programmes; FG, ARF, and BI won a European Heritage Award. AC, MG, and Tr were also nationally awarded.

3.2.4 Tradition and innovation: material and immaterial heritage as a 'living heritage'

Traditional buildings were shaped by adaptive innovation, hybridisation, and evolution processes to respond to environmental challenges and circumstances, socio-cultural needs, and external influences (Oliver 2006, 265). Vernacular architecture “perfected itself” (Oliver 1969) and took significance through long and frequent use. It was being transmitted, and tested, through time – and often renegotiated in every generation and in every community (Bronner 2006, 26). Vernacular traditions are “generated through a continuous and dialectic interplay of stasis and change and remain rooted and meaningful in contemporary times” (Asquith and Vellinga 2006; Skounti 2008; Wijesuriya 2018).

Living heritage can thus be understood as the set of practices, expressions, knowledge and cultural traditions transmitted from generation to generation, an integral part of the identity of a community or group (Akagawa and Smith 2019; Smith and Akagawa 2008; UNESCO 2003). Built heritage, building techniques, and vernacular know-how represent a dynamic, interactive, collaborative and dialogical process (Harrison 2015; Lawrence 2006, 111; Remotti 1996, 111; Winter 2013).

However, the discourse on the vernacular does not always acknowledge this processual, heterogeneous and adaptive character of cultural traditions: “the processes of cultural interrelation, merging, change and indigenization that have been increasingly acknowledged in disciplines such as anthropology, cultural geography and history

(in architecture) are largely ignored" (Vellinga 2006, 86).

The very word 'vernacular' has become appealing as an adjective in architecture, as it allows for distancing the inhabitants from their own artefact, identifying cultures through building styles rather than through human mediation and the ways of life that involve them (Bronner 2006, 28).

The evolution and transmission of techniques to reproduce and maintain the built heritage have been interrupted in many places, immobilising its appearance and hindering its adaptation to current needs. Traditions are seen as "frozen in time, incomplete and romanticized" and "inappropriate to today's society" (Davis 1999, 17; Vellinga 2006, 83). The vernacular becomes a "stereotype", "the culture of *true* communities"; it is seen "stable, passive and instinctive rather than as changing, active and conscious" (Upton 1993, 10–11).

Any change brought to the vernacular heritage in the encounter with modernity is often understood as cultural decline, contamination, and loss of authenticity and integrity (Vellinga 2006, 86,88). This is linked to the evolution of the meaning of '**authenticity**' with respect to heritage.

While until the 18th century, heritage was approached with ease and transformation and reuse were quite unrestrained, during the Enlightenment, the concept of 'history' idealised the past as something distinct from present. Neoclassicism led to a crystallisation of cultural heritage, which ought to be preserved in its 'authentic' form; buildings were restored with the aim of recovering their original form but at the same time increasingly distancing them from everyday life and functionality.

More recent definitions of authenticity range from indicating the heritage's physical and material integrity (ICOMOS 1964), to embracing material, aesthetic, historical and social values (UNESCO 1972). In 1987, ICOMOS adopted the International Charter for the Protection of Historic Towns, which identifies historic towns as living entities that must inevitably change, just as they always did in the past (ICOMOS 1987).

In the 1990s, the *Nara document on authenticity* considered it as a continuous and dynamic historical, cultural, and social process, connected to "a great variety of sources of information" (ICOMOS 1994). It is based on the concept of heritage diversity and its non-universality, thus paving the way for regional and local interpretations of authenticity to complement UNESCO World Heritage List's universal vision. It also emphasised the importance of an integral and differentiated approach to conservation and heritage management systems and recommended a balance between satisfying the needs and aspirations of residents and the preservation of cultural and architectural values (ICOMOS 1994; Larkham 1996, 289–92).

The Faro Convention's key concept is that the creations of today, together with their environment, "form the cultural heritage of tomorrow" (Council of Europe 2005a, 10). It advocated to "promote respect for the integrity of the cultural heritage by ensuring that decisions about change include an understanding of the cultural values involved", ensuring continuity "not by the systematic reproduction" but "linking contemporary creativity to existing heritage" or at least "ensuring that there is no damaging dichotomy between the two".

In contrast with “a notion of authenticity conceived as rootedness, faithfulness or fixedness”, intangible cultural heritage is “fluid and never performed identically” in a constant ‘re-creation’ through “its differentiated application within a group or society, its diversity of meaning for all and everyone” (Skounti 2008, 78). The acquisition of heritage status may entail a loss of connection to the locality, and facilitate a process of tradition “invention” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Caring for a living heritage and its community implies sensibility for the past but also a creative **reinterpretation of heritage in response to present and future demands**. The physical decay of a built structure should be approached in a dynamic, not fetishist way, developing and allowing it to evolve and endure, actively and creatively using traditions ensuring sensible, appropriate, and sustainable change, while remaining distinctive to a specific place (Cain, Afshar, and Norton 1975; Harrison 2009). Adopting an approach of “[continuous], **active re-use, re-interpretation or adaptation**” allows the vernacular to change and adopt technology innovation to maintain its functionality over time (Asquith and Vellinga 2006, 5).

It is this “tradition as process” which should be conserved (Davis 1999; Marchand 2006, 47). Conservation emerges as a process that starts new cycles of development (Samuel 1994). This is possible only blurring the imposed boundary between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ and seeing traditional knowledge as part of an ongoing process, “more explicitly recogniz[ing] the ways in which old and new building traditions merge, adapt, combine and, in

the process, become vernacularized” (Oliver 2006, 89).

In this creative process, people are seen as active agents who learn to negotiate the boundaries of tradition.

In addition to **increasing the value** of artefacts, heritage rehabilitation has primarily a **functional** purpose, coupling usability with preservation. Heritage rehabilitation could thus take the strategic function to sustain human settlement, and overcome stigmas of backwardness, poverty and underdevelopment. It can be linked to the preservation of the community itself and to the improvement of its living conditions. Safeguarding heritage requires a non-separation of spiritual, cognitive, and material heritage, as each is an indissoluble element of the system (Laureano 1995, 71).

In the round tables, NGOs’ representatives were asked to reflect on the evolution of traditions and on authenticity (**§5.2.1** and **§5.2.3**).

Respect for assumed ‘integrity’ and ‘authenticity’ is mainly felt relevant in UNESCO heritage sites and monumental heritage (FG and Tr in Chinguetti). But working on **lesser heritage**, NGOs assume a certain **freedom** in their rehabilitations, adopting evolutions of traditional building traditions within the constraints of regulations, funding schemes, and attitudes towards the heritage. They also propose **alternative approaches** to modify the policies of owners and local governments (**THF 4.8**).

As discussed in **§5.1** by Andrea Bocco, standards and prescriptions, building regulations, directives on heritage (if any⁶) – especially if under protection (FG, Lamprakos 2010, 11) – as well as public investments often constrain

⁶ Most countries do not cover traditional materials and techniques in their **building regulations**. Where they exist, public policies on traditional heritage are sometimes relatively recent, and they do not necessarily match with building regulations in force.

rehabilitation. Such regulations seem to be mainly concerned about preserving the exterior appearance of buildings (“rescatar los pueblos originarios a través de su imagen”, as the governmental program that finances FA’s rehabilitations states) or imposing the use of some materials and techniques (the Japanese government pushes the use of concrete for terrace repair).

The formal habitability of traditional houses is sometimes hindered by their inability to comply with modern **hygiene requirements** and **building standards**, which often clash with the characteristics of traditional houses such as lower floor heights and smaller surface area of windows (AC). While the regulations on heritage buildings direct towards solutions that respect the values of such heritage, they often inhibit the possibility of making use of it, in some cases compromising the affordability of any rehabilitation, or implicitly transforming it into lifeless showpieces. NGOs try to overcome this situation in various ways.

Of course, the value of the built heritage is not always acknowledged officially. Regulations and policies can concur in the **devaluation** of certain categories of traditional buildings (FA, **DSW 4.2**) or even encourage (**MG 4.11**) or impose (**THF 5.2.3**) the demolition and substitution of artefacts.

The first step taken by many NGOs was the identification of living-related issues through social surveys to identify

inadequate conditions in dwellings and propose solutions to improve **living conditions**. Innovations were proposed in techniques and materials, as well as in functions and meanings. Heritage upgrades may imply both traditional materials and techniques and modern materials and products, also including what Peter Harper described as “industrial vitamins” (Harper in: Bocco Guarneri 2020, 22, 201).

‘Hybrid’ forms where modern and traditional ways of building coexist are of course possible. Industrial materials must be **compatible** with traditional ones, both in terms of structural – for example, dry stone walls should not be associated with cement-mortared constructions – and moisture behaviour.

In some cases, NGOs introduce **exogenous techniques**, sometimes through the involvement of masters from different contexts. This is, for example, the case of *quincha*, introduced from Peru by FA. Traditional wisdom is complemented by **scientific knowledge**.

The upgrades may affect the external appearance of traditional buildings: however, the **aesthetic aspect** has an important role in the valorisation of lesser heritage.

To adapt buildings to current lifestyles and needs, some NGOs modified the **internal distribution** to improve the use of space (THF), enlarged or created new openings to increase natural lighting (THF) and introduced measures to

Activies carried out	THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
performance upgrading	•••	•	••	•	•••	•	•	•	•		•
improvement of basic services and infrastructure	••	•	•		•	••	•	•••		••	••
adaptive reuse	•••		•••	•••	•••	•••	•			•	••
adoption of traditional techniques in new buildings	••	•••	••				••		•		•••

Table 12. Types of heritage approaches adopted by NGOs.

improve the thermo-hygrometric performance (AC is experimenting with hemp-lime insulation in dry stone buildings (Consoli, Bocco, and Raimondo 2020), Tr, FA).

In some instances, taking part in rehabilitation activities has led the local population to recall techniques practised by their ancestors: for example, the *caruna* – a traditional way of building the ceilings – was re-introduced by FA on the suggestion of one of the masons, who remembered it being practiced by his family.

To upgrade the **services**, some NGOs installed **bathrooms** and drainage systems and equipped dwellings with systems to generate **electricity** and hot water, “to show that building rehabilitation and infrastructure (and services) improvement must go together” (THF 4.8). THF and FG carried out actions on the reactivation of traditional methods of water storage. Some interventions involved **large areas of villages and towns**, as the creation of drainage, water collection systems, and sewers (Tr 4.4), and the repaving of roads and public spaces. THF runs the Small housing repair and sanitation project.

If they are properly constructed, the **performance** of traditional buildings against earthquakes is often better than those built with concrete and other ‘stiff’ materials. However, over time the features that made them resistant may have been dismissed: for instance, the thickness of walls of the Andean plateau houses has been decreasing (FA).

The NGOs’ representatives have discussed different ways adopted to improve the **structural performance** of buildings (THF 4.8, FA 4.3, DSW 4.2, MG 4.11). Some NGOs implement solutions developed by university research – FA

uses synthetic ropes and horizontal wooden elements (reticular beams, tie rods and *escalerillas de madera*) incorporated in or placed on top of the walls – or based on local traditional solutions, such as the use of a horizontal ring beam at every level of the building (THF 4.8) or the addition of buttresses to the Andean churches (FA). In doing so, they try to avoid steel and concrete, that are “materials unrelated to the vernacular architecture”.

Where communities are no longer able to take charge of heritage care, NGOs increase the **durability and consequently reduce maintenance** requirements of artefacts (even with **exogenous and non-traditional solutions**). Following the preference of communities and widespread practice, FA adopts sheet metal roofing painted with oxides (coupled with an insulation layer to improve the thermal performance) as an **economical and durable** solution, instead of reintroducing the traditional thatched or earth and straw roofs.

Heritage rehabilitation is often associated with changes of use and adaptive reuse of pilot buildings, **giving heritage a function (back)**, be it residential, commercial, or linked to production (such as THF’s AAA House, a work space for artisans), tourism, or cultural projects.

This transformative capacity of heritage strategically stimulates care and maintenance (PI 4.6), helps to attract local youth and new residents (THF), makes interventions economically viable (FG), gives the possibility to implement functions needed by the inhabitants, and stimulates alternative projects for the cultural dynamisation of the rural world. FG calls ‘restoring

and revitalising' ("2Rs") its strategy in this regard (4.1).

NGOs repurpose buildings as **gathering spaces** to host activities and community initiatives. This is the case of THF's Kushu House and Lala's Café web, FA's *prototipos*, PI's *curralada* – an enclosure for agricultural use that has been converted to host the NGO's activities –, AC's houses in Ghesc, FG's headquarters in a former school (4.1), a *dozō* rehabilitated by MG (Bocco Guarneri 2020, 209; Hagino and Koji 2014; JCIE 2016), as well as BI's Frasta School. Pilot buildings are also used to test re-functionalisation approaches, to strategically activate places, and to provide an example (THF, FA).

Similarly, **new buildings** are erected which employ natural materials and traditional techniques, to give them visibility, attract interest, show their feasibility, ennoble their adoption, provide examples of their possible compatibility with today's needs, and "give the vernacular a chance for the future" (Oliver 2003:17; Vellinga in Asquith, Vellinga 2006:93).

Construction traditions represent a culturally based generative grammar of building solutions – well adapted to local climatic and cultural contexts – of which the indigenous and local populations are the repositories (Bronner 2006; Watson and Davis 2019, 399). Local knowledge "may offer many valuable lessons and precedents"; once "re-extracted from the pre-modern past" they can be "applied creatively and innovatively even to sustainable contemporary buildings".

Some NGOs propose an adaptation and evolution of local solutions to meet the habitability requirements of communities. THF called this approach "New vernacular" and adopted it in the Central Asian Museum (CALM) and the

reconstruction of portions that have collapsed or are to be demolished, such as in the rebuilding part of the Kushu House with a "new design in line with the historic building" (THF 4.8). FA decided to build the first floor of its new office in the city of Arica in *quincha*, and adopted traditional solutions in the design of some houses for tourists in the Codpa Valley; Hagino Kiichiro was inspired by the local architecture for his house and MG's headquarter (MG 4.11) and uses rammed earth in his projects. BI implements local knowledge in the construction of a new oven and a tree house (BI 4.9).

REACTIVATING



The role of traditional ecological knowledge in local development

3.3.1 Marginal places

Although the choice of the case studies was not prompted by the geographical location of the NGOs, it fell on initiatives operating in similar territories in terms of the **fragility** and **marginality**. This common characteristic is probably not random.

Several NGOs operate in **border territories** sometimes subject to conflict (Ladakh is disputed and has been subject to clashes between India, Pakistan, and China since 1947 – THF), in some cases **recently acquired** (Arica and Parinacota was only annexed to Chile in 1929 – FA).

They are mainly **rural** and inland areas, often **mountainous** regions and

rugged landscapes, which can reach **high altitudes** (THF now works mainly in Leh at 3350 m; FA operates from sea level to 5000 m; the Colca valley lies at 3600 m but can only be reached from Arequipa through a road going over 5000 m). The **local climate** can be extreme: for example, Leh is completely isolated in winter and its typical temperature is -20°C; 50°C are usually reached in M'Hamid oasis.

Some of the countries where the NGOs operate have been subject to **European colonisation** (THF, Md, FA, Tr). This generates a number of issues from the identity perspective, in the relations with central governments, and also in the relationship with the former colonising country.

Local context	THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
border territories	•••	•	•••	••	•		(•)	•	-	•	
recently acquired territories	•••		•••						-		
high-altitude areas	•••	•••	•••	•	•	•			(•)	•	••
difficult climate	•••	•••	•••				•	•••	-	•	
rugged landscapes	•••	•••	•••	•	•		•	•	•	•	•
distance from large centres		••	••	••	••		••		(•)		••
lack of basic services and infrastructure	••	•••	•••	•	•		•	••	(•)	••	••
lack of job opportunities	••	•••	•••	•••	••		••	•••	(•)	••	
population is shrinking and ageing	•••	•••	•••	•••	••	••	•••	•••	(••)	•••	
drastic change in socio-cultural context	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	••	•••	(••)	••	
former colonies	•••	•••	•••					•••			
indigenous areas	•••	•••	•••	(•)	(•)	(•)	(•)	•••	(•)	(•)	

5. Adelaida in her oregano fields in Socoroma (Arica and Parinacota, Chile). Martina Bocci 2022.

Table 13. Characteristics of NGOs' local context.

Key to dots in brackets:

- MG is located on a peninsula, thus not literally a border region, but still a marginal area for research purposes.
- In the case of DSW, the analysis considered characteristics typically found in the various intervention areas.
- Regarding indigenous areas, dots in brackets indicate areas where indigenous populations are present but not legally recognised as such.

As mentioned by Andrea Bocco in his introduction, a common feature of some of these marginal areas is **demographic contraction**.

Since the '50s (the Andean plateau of FA, Trás-os-Montes region of PI, the rural area of Ladakh of THF), '70s (the Peruvian South Andean plateau of Md, the Oku Noto peninsula of MG) and '90s (Gjirokastra of FG, the villages of the M'Hamid oasis of Tr, the Pivot district in Serbia of ARF) people move away from the rural areas to the cities in search of job opportunities, better education and services, sometimes facilitated by the improvement of roads.

This migration often occurs due to changes in production, such as agrarian reform (Md, FA), the mechanisation of agriculture (PI) or industrial development (the mountain villages in Ossola of AC, MG, ARF), and the predatory use of resources, first and foremost water. Another factor is the urban development of near cities (FA, Tr, THF). Since opportunities for survival in rural areas have reduced, if not disappeared, the city may seem the only possibility. But once communities reached the saturated, polluted, and chaotic cities, in some countries they clashed with perhaps even harsher situations than those they left. In other places, the historical quarters of traditional towns are experiencing gentrification processes.

Strong changes in lifestyles have affected most of these places in recent decades. Migrations, changes in production and land management have converged in the gradual dismantling of the traditional subsistence economy. The long-standing collective wisdom that ensured the habitability of these marginal places was replaced by new techniques with short-term effectiveness, leading to an "interruption of

the millennial chain of transmission of knowledge appropriate to the environment through the generations" (Laureano 1995:18-19,286). The standardisation of bodies of practices and customs in favour of the integral development of countries detached communities from the territory, producing a decontextualization and a feeling of alienation from the places and reducing the importance of locality (Magnaghi 2010, 41-42; Ploeg 1992). Professional specialisation has dispossessed individuals of many skills regarding their daily activities and well-being (Davis 1999; Illich 1973).

Ancestral ways of life are deemed 'non-modern' and not prestigious. The general abandonment of local traditions is jeopardising the preservation of cultures and social identity. Local cultural value systems, customs, habits, and ways of life are depreciated (Davis 2006; Illich 1973; Laureano 1995; Ploeg 1992; Schumacher 1973; Sertorio 2005; Vellinga 2006). Modern societies seem to have forgotten their shared responsibility to keep the ecosystems in balance, and to have lost the ability to inhabit these territories harmoniously, i.e. to base their actions on the renewal of resources so to ensure long-term subsistence.

The places where NGOs work show a general **lack of job opportunity**, even in jobs related to traditions. Traditional ways of production are often limited to a subsistence activity due to the low return, the introduction of commercial cultivars, and a lack of promotion and specific measures at the regional level (FA). In the Arica and Parinacota highland, the demography creates further difficulties, as there are very few young workers who can manage fields and animals.

The inhabitants have often felt they had no choice other than migrating to big cities in search of work. Those remaining are mainly engaged in the extraction industry, road transport, or the tertiary sector. In some cases, tourism is the only form of livelihood for those who have decided to stay (Colmenares Fernández et al. 2015a, 42).

Further troubles in living in these areas are related to the distance from large centres and the lack of basic services and infrastructure. Geographical marginality is often coupled with a lack of investment from central (and regional) governments. The few development actions put in place are often erratic and not part of larger, multidisciplinary, more structured, and lasting programmes.

While on one hand, dynamics of abandonment, emigration, and 'development backwardness' are acute in marginal areas, on the other these areas have managed to maintain their distinctive characteristics, both in certain social structures and from a cultural point of view (Clifford 2008; Remotti 1996). This is more evident in really remote areas, where some inhabitants have maintained a lifestyle linked to traditions. Which is not to say that these are homogenous: they may be the result of stratification and exchange, producing a notable cultural density.

The ability to live in marginal places is linked to a skilful provisioning, use and transformation of the – sometimes scarce – locally available resources. Thanks to a highly contextualised knowledge it has been possible to inhabit markedly rural, sometimes isolated and/or mountainous territories. For example, FA and Md explained the importance of the complementarity between the 'ecological storeys' in

northern Chile and southern Peru (**FA 4.3, Md 4.5**). Similar extraordinary adaptation to extreme living conditions can be seen in the oases of Morocco (Tr), and in the Ladakh plateau at the foot of the Himalaya (THF).

However, as Francesca Governa pointed out (**§5.3**), it must be emphasised that the idyllic image sometimes projected from the outside does not correspond to the real living conditions in these places – the present ones as well as of their pre-industrial history. Rural life often implies hardship and deprivation, to an extent that would not probably be accepted today (Arminio 2012; Massey 1994).

3.3.2 Reactivating marginal places

In highly indigenous and traditional, but also marginalised places, attention should be paid not only to safeguarding heritage, but also to **care for the dwellers** in the first place.

Actions that could overturn lifestyles and evict communities from their heritage should be avoided. NGOs perform both sporadic and long-term heritage-specific actions to enhance the living conditions and stimulate the inhabitants to find new (especially economic) motivations to living in these places (Appadurai 2008; Jullien 2018; Ploeg 1992; Ray 1998).

While almost all NGOs place equitable and sustainable development of local communities among their objectives, this is the main focus of none. Some, however, make the holistic care of people and places an integral part of their work.

NGOs often act as social innovators rooted in the context, bringing technical and cultural competence: knowing

and taking into consideration is a key element to propose **place-consistent interventions**. In many instances they were active in recollecting – both from oral tradition and historical studies – past ways to inhabit places, and were able to re-interpret such knowledge in the light of the aspirations, needs, projects, and choices that emerged from the dialogue with the communities.

To carry out these initiatives, RTHLD seminars participants emphasised the importance of broad and horizontal competences in **multidisciplinary teams** and collaborations (THF, Md, FA). However, architects and restorers predominate in all NGOs except PI and DSW.

In some cases, NGOs showed through a holistic approach how the reactivation of these places can start with a reconsideration of the set of knowledge, customs and traditions that have allowed people to survive there in the past. NGOs try to channel the locals' impulse to find local alternatives without necessarily losing their cultural traits but rather drawing on their peculiarities. They help community in creating job opportunities from local resources through the activation of circular economies and bottom-up initiatives, as well as earn real money, not subsidies (**ABG**). Inhabiting and investing in these marginal places are upstream decisions that need support, but also strategies capable of connecting traditions to current needs and ways of life.

Traditional ecological knowledge (Berkes 2018) represents a human development asset in that it fosters balance between humans and nature.

Many NGOs care not only for the heritage and the local population, but also for the protection and preservation of

the environment. Through actions of recovery and re-transmission of the knowledge of how to live in places, NGOs stimulate the reactivation the bottom-up mechanisms that took care of it. Md, PI, MG, Tr, and DSW show appreciable achievements in the preservation of biodiversity and the creation of symbiotic **relationships between humans and nature** (Friedman 1978; Watson and Davis 2019, 399).

PI associated the recovery of the dovescotes with the recovery of their traditional ecological function – the surrounding fields were cultivated again to guarantee pigeons the access to food, and their excrement was again used as fertiliser (**PI 4.6**). MG focuses on learning and preserving the traditional Satoyama lifestyle. These initiatives have contributed to changing the habits of local farmers, who are now more attentive to preserving rare species, and to supporting young organic farmers. MG wisely couples the preservation and revitalisation of local traditions with the introduction of scientific knowledge to preserve the balance between humans and nature and promote life in a rural area.

Among the proposed initiatives, many concern the enhancement of local economies based on traditional production: NGOs support initiatives related to the promotion of local **culinary heritage** (FA, FG, MG), **handicrafts** (THF, FA, FG, MG) and **agricultural production** (FA, PI, Md, FA, PI, MG, DSW), helping to keep the craft traditions alive.

As with traditional building techniques, the evolutionary cycles of tangible and intangible heritage related to the use of local resources were interrupted, 'frozen', or slowed down.

Through **courses and training**, some NGOs support the communities in the

rethinking of local strategies for production and **on-site processing**. Primary and complementary processing linked to craft and agricultural traditions are suggested, to ensure greater diversification and counter standardisation and cultural homogenisation (Md, MG). Action was directed towards the valorisation and **adaptation** of products to current markets (also in terms of standards compliance), making both use of ancestral and modern knowledge. Interesting examples are THF's AAA House (4.8); FA's two editions of the school for winegrowers of the Codpa valley to improve quality and profitability and its help in the designation of origin for local oregano; and FG's Artisan Centre/Incubator (4.1).

In some cases, transmission is structured in 'schools' linked to the dissemination of traditional values and practices. FA established the Escuela de Conservación Sostenible Sarañani, that aims to become a reference in the region as a centre for the conservation and updating of ancestral knowledge.

Next to this, NGOs implement **training and capacity-building activities** – especially related to entrepreneurship and professionalisation – to support local artisans and farmers in creating their own businesses, encouraging the establishment and the operation of groups, cooperatives, SMEs, associations, as well as in opening and running workshops and shops. In some cases, such buildings were included in pilot rehabilitation projects (THF, FA, FG, Tr). In 2015, Tr supported the creation of the Coopérative Agricole Femmes Ksar in M'Hamid El Ghezlane, currently consisting of forty women artisans (Colmenares Fernández et al. 2021, 71 – 4.4). FG supported the formation of "GjiroArt. Shoqata e Grave Atizane", an association of women artisans (4.1). Through the recovery of *dozō* warehouses, Hagino Kiichiro contributed to the continuation of the traditional *urushi* lacquerware industry (MG 4.11). NGOs often support new and existing businesses by accommodating their teams in locally owned hotels and restaurants (FA, FG), purchasing

Table 14. Activities carried out by NGOs in addition to the rehabilitation of traditional built heritage and the transmission of construction know-how.

Multidisciplinarity		THF	Md	FA	PI	AC	FG	MG	Tr	DSW	ARF	BI
environmental protection and conservation, landscape design		•••	•	•••	••	•		(•)	•	-	•	
local production & tradition enhancement	agriculture	•••		•••						-		
	breeding	•••	•••	•••	•	•	•			(•)	•	••
	handicrafts	•••	•••	•••				•	•••	-	•	
	culinary heritage	•••	•••	•••	•	•		•	•	•	•	•
	music		••	••	••	••		••		(•)		••
	ceremonies	••	•••	•••	•	•		•	••	(•)	••	••
	indigenous languages	••	•••	•••	•••	••		••	•••	(•)	••	
creation and support of SMEs and cooperatives		•••	•••	•••	•••	••	••	•••	•••	(••)	•••	
festivals, events, fairs, and cultural activities		•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	••	•••	(••)	••	
education		•••	•••	•••					•••			
sustainable tourism		•••	•••	•••	(•)	(•)	(•)	(•)	•••	(•)	(•)	

furniture and craft objects (THF, Tr), and hiring master artisans for courses, both related to restoration work and offered to tourists (THF, Tr).

Financial support (FG) and collaboration in applications for state and regional funding (FA) are other examples of activities implemented to strengthen businesses.

Traditional handicrafts and foodstuffs are often targeted at **tourists**, rarely at the local market. NGOs support artisans and farmers in promoting and selling products through fairs (FA's annual fair of local artisans within the Arica Barroca Festival, FG's National Artisan and Cultural Heritage Fair), local markets (FA supports the Poblado Artesanal of Arica), cultural events, and international networks and platforms (THF, FA's Feria Sarañani!). FG organised the Gjirokastra Food Tours: a network of local families prepare and serve typical dishes to groups of tourists directly in their homes.

The NGOs have initiated numerous festivals, events, fairs, and cultural activities, in many cases involving the extended community and attracting visitors from outside (**BI 4.9**): THF's monthly series of talks "Early Memories of Leh Old Town" (**THF 4.8**), FA's three festivals (**FA 4.3**), PI's Incontro de Arquitetura Tradicional e Sustentabilidade as well as its cooperation in various ecological festivals (PI), AC's International Architecture Meeting, and MG's Aenokoto ritual (**MG 4.11**).

Several NGOs carry out formal and non-formal educational activities about the value of heritage with **children and teenagers** (**\$5.2.4**), trying to overcome the negative perception of traditional techniques (FA's "Talleres Wawa después de clases"; MG's "Satoyama Local Education programme", aimed at opposing the 'inferiority complex'

experienced by young people once they move to large cities (Hagino, Ito, and Hagino 2016); Tr's workshops in Spanish kindergartens and primary schools to introduce pupils to the lifestyle of southern Morocco (Colmenares Fernández et al. 2015b, 84–91); PI's environmental courses; DSW's dry stone walling courses).

The transmission of heritage is sometimes entrusted to the **elder** inhabitants, who NGOs put in contact with the local youth, to encourage exchange and sharing. This is expected to create a **bridge between generations** (THF, FA, MG, DSW, Tr).

NGOs were asked to discuss the possible negative impacts of increasing **tourism** (**\$5.3.3**). The case studies show substantial differences: Leh, the Colca Valley, Gjirokastra and the M'Hamid area in Morocco are experiencing a substantial increase in tourists to the disadvantage of the local population. The other territories where the NGOs operate experience lower tourism impacts.

In marginal contexts, tourism activation may seem one of the most immediate and reliable ways of boosting the local economy. However, NGOs argued that this may generate vulnerability – since tourist destinations are subject to trends and fashions –, and that tourism is often controlled by external agents, which results in unequal distribution of income and little profit for the locals. In some cases, such as the Moroccan oases and Leh, towns are used as accommodation and service facilities, and as departure bases for excursions. An excess of tourists can overexploit the limited local resources, like in Leh (Alexander 2007, 47,64), or stimulate an improper occupation of productive areas, creating territorial segmentations and unequal distribution of revenues,

as Md explained about the Colca Valley (Md 4.5).

Historic centres, hamlets and terraced fields are increasingly turning into subjects for postcards, that are 'cleaned up' of stratifications and inhabitants, to create a nice image for tourists. Sometimes they are repurposed for accommodation coupled with 'performances' and traditions 'invented' to meet the tourists' tastes and expectations (FG 5.3.3).

To foster a local economy based on a wide range of options which offers a variety of job opportunities, NGOs help residents to promote a healthy, sustainable, locally-managed, community-based, and aware tourism, capable of bringing economic benefits to the inhabitants and respectful of the local cultural and natural heritage. Great attention is given to involving residents in the definition of an appropriate tourism model.

Through training and awareness-raising, NGOs strengthen the ability of the local economy to cope with the challenges posed by tourism, in some cases completing the local offer, and supporting the adaptive reuse of existing premises as well as the construction of new ones (THF, FA, FG, ARF).

Through tours – such as THF's Heritage Walks in Leh old Town –, information centres (FG, THF), tourist guidebooks and websites (FA, Tr), as well as collaboration with local guides and authorities, NGOs promote visits to local heritage, often linking them to their rehabilitation projects.

Other strategies are more wide-ranging, such as the implementation of community tourism models, as in the village of Sibayo (Md) and the development of long-term strategic plans such as FA's "Ruta de las Misiones" to support local networks of entrepreneurs, which

in the Codpa Valley was coupled with the creation of a sustainable tourism committee.

THF has proposed to introduce a tax to regulate the development of tourism in Leh, and to use the money to transform it into ecotourism (Alexander 2007, 64–66). So far, this measure has not been adopted by the local government.

3.3.3 Long-term initiatives to catalyse interest and support

In the attempt to support the local population, NGOs operate as **social activators** in multiple directions, creating and maintaining networks which involve both internal and external actors, and collaborating with institutions, governments, stakeholders, associations, and universities.

NGOs often assume the strategic role of **intermediaries** who are able to deal with the inhabitants – giving voice to the needs of the communities and triggering bottom-up actions – and at the same time can act as **catalysts** of top-down attention and investments, and even of the support of international funders. Some of them were successful in bringing strongly marginalised communities to the centre of the discourse, raising public and institutional awareness about the importance of building on local knowledge when taking decisions about the future of places.

The support of local governments and funders can help NGOs to carry out complex, long-lasting, multifaceted actions (Tr).

In acting locally, NGOs incorporate themselves in local processes, and propose alternative development models which might enable living again in neglected villages and historic centres, placing the "people factor" at the centre (THF).

The strategies adopted by the NGOs include local and regional projects; initiatives of national and international institutions and organisations (such as Slow Food and FAO with its GIAHS programme – FG); inscription among UNESCO’s Cultural Landscapes (FA, Md). Md supported the candidature of the Colca Valley as Biosphere Reserve within the MaB (Man and the Biosphere) programme, and formulated strategies for a reconversion of Andean territories in the *Plan de acondicionamiento territorial del Valle del Colca*, based on the Vertical Complementarity Model which would enable the reconnection of the valley to urban areas.

Tarapacá’s Regional Government entrusted FA to collect local needs and aspirations and propose wide-ranging initiatives in a ‘catalogue’ of solutions based on the population’s views and the local development possibilities linked to agriculture.

Sanada Junko (**DSW 4.2**) reported that she is trying to change agricultural and cultural policies in Japan to support the inhabitants of terraced areas to sell their produce with more added local value.

The success of such efforts is certainly linked to the **constant and long-term care and vision**, as well as to the local embedding of NGOs, which would allow settling practices over time and achieving a self-sustainability of the initiatives, eventually handed over to the local population (Dematteis 1994:13). FA endeavoured to structure a local Committee for the management of heritage and the support of community, which is in place but does not seem to be yet ready to take on such a task.

In **§5.3.4** Andrea Bocco asked “What after?”, i.e. at which point of the process of competence transfer and community

empowerment NGOs felt to be. Despite a possibly long presence in a certain area, NGOs may change their fields of action or their goals over time, leaving the communities with the task of maintaining, and maybe advancing, the processes they had started.

Community members – by acquiring awareness of the value of their own assets, strengthening their community ties, taking actively part in initiatives, participating in the development of projects, contributing to strategic decisions, and being recruited as NGOs’ employees – may gradually develop useful tools and skills that are essential for the local rooting of initiatives. Over time, such skills may enable communities to gradually take charge of the projects.

3.3.4 (Re)inhabiting marginal places

The population of marginal places is gradually ageing and human-made landscapes are in danger of culturally disappearing.

By creating alternative possibilities for local sustainable development, improving living conditions, and showing that the quality of life can be higher than in urban areas, NGOs contribute to re-establishing the possibility of remaining, returning or moving in marginal places as “conscious inhabitants” (Ferrari 2023) (THF, PI, AC, ARF). Resettlements may not be significant numerically, yet they may reverse the demographic trends.

The demographic profiles of people returning or moving in marginal territories differ from country to country. Initially, the people who move are in generally outsiders, attracted by the beauty and pristine qualities of the places.

In some cases, NGOs went so far as to stimulate local inhabitants to stay or

return their place of origin. THF, AC, DSW and MG reported to have been successful in convincing young people to move in, in some cases autonomously recovering small clusters of houses in rural areas (AC). These people are often motivated by emotional issues and ties to the area, but also by the prospect of raising their children in healthier environments, in search of a less hectic and more sustainable lifestyle. While in some cases this rapprochement to marginal places and the re-inhabitation of inland areas is associated to teleworking, in others it involves the integration into the local labour market and a deep investment in the territory. The situation is different in Arica and Parinacota, where the population currently returns to the Andean highlands after retirement.

Especially in Europe, re-inhabitation of marginal areas is a trend that increasingly generates a sort of extension of the urban lifestyle, reproducing in some particularly attractive inland areas its unbalanced dynamics and its predatory use of space, a sort of shifted extractivism that starkly contrasts with the supposed aspiration to move towards an 'uncontaminated nature'.

Is there a future for marginal places?

Despite years of field work and awareness-raising, NGOs' experience shows how difficult it is for traditional techniques to enter the repertoire of current practice, just as it is hard to re-evaluate heritage as something truly related to the life of today and tomorrow.

In many cases the vision of NGOs is more advanced – and 'enlightened', one may argue – than the results achieved so far in terms of generating lasting effects that have a 'life of their own',

capable of taking root and leading to substantial change. On one hand this may be a sign that the 'ideal' values brought by outsiders have not yet always managed to translate into actions that locals feel as feasible or desirable. On the other, the limited response of the population is probably partly related to the socio-economic marginalisation of the target areas, which makes it less able to take autonomous, bottom-up initiatives.

As fragile as these contexts are, so too is the rooting of initiatives if effort and care are not adequately supported and maintained. Where NGOs continue to exist and operate (5.3.5), and where there is a handover to a new – perhaps more local – generation, the response may however evolve over time.

Quoting a reflection by Franco Arminio, to reactivate inland and marginal areas "You need two gazes (...) an internal and an external one. Intimacy and distance. To discuss about a village, one needs to be inside it, one needs to have the inflammation of the residence, but one also needs to feel like an outsider (...). One needs to weave local expertise and external contributions into every important choice. Interweave politics and poetry, economy and culture, scruple and utopia" (Arminio 2012:21-22).

From my research, NGOs have shown that in some cases they can and intend to assume this position.



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