

The Relationality of Collective Property. Commons and Convivial Conservation in Umbria, Italy

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**Michele Ravaioli**

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# The Relationality of Collective Property. Commons and Convivial Conservation in Umbria, Italy

Michele Ravaioli

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- 1 Introduction
- 2 In recent years, within the field of mountain geography, several authors have analysed the forms of territorial governance characterizing Italian mountain areas, highlighting the importance of traditional collective land management practices for local development and the maintenance of delicate socio-ecological balances (Nervi, 1993, 1999, 2014; Ciuffetti, 2015; Bassi, 2016; Bassi & Carestiato, 2016; Daici, 2021; Dalla Torre *et al.*, 2019, 2021, 2022).
- 3 The collective land arrangements, described by Grossi (2008, p. 2) as “manifestations of a primordial custom, [...] a prius to the State, genuine emanations of a society that spontaneously self-organizes in order to ensure a better daily survival”, represent unique modes of territorial organization linked to the presence of communities that have collectively managed agro-silvo-pastoral lands for centuries (Grossi, 1977). The collective self-management of a set of common goods, from which the entire resident community can benefit, is realized through the implementation of a direct and democratic socio-environmental governance, grounded in socio-anthropological foundations, ancient practices, and customs inspired by a communitarian and eco-centric societal model.
- 4 Formally recognized by the Italian state through Law No. 168 of 2017, which establishes regulations regarding “*domini collettivi*,” these territorial systems represent “another way of owning, another legal framework, and another social order that, unnoticed, has descended from ancient centuries to the present” (Cattaneo, 1851, p. 5). *Domini collettivi*, in fact, territorialize another social order through the use of *another way of owning* (Grossi, 1977), that is, the structuring of collective property relations among community members concerning a set of common goods.

- 5 By combining the multiple relationships that take place in collective resource systems (Ostrom, 1990), governed by self-made rules by the communities, it is possible to assess the processes of relational production of the territory (Brighenti, 2006, 2010; Raffestin, 2022) and the social production of the mountain environment (Zinzani, 2023). The central aim of this contribution is to investigate the territorialities of collective property, engaging in dialogue with property studies (Blomley, 2003, 2010, 2016), commons as positive social relationalities (Exner *et al.*, 2021), and the concept of convivial conservation (Büscher & Fletcher, 2019; Iordăchescu, 2022). Thus, the research questions around which the contribution is structured are the following: What types of relationships occur in collective resource systems? What territorial production processes emerge from these relationships? What are the implications of these processes?
- 6 In particular, the analysis aims to examine the relational forms that characterize collective lands, the territorial production processes resulting from them, and, finally, the socio-environmental governance implications of these processes. The underlying hypothesis is that the combination of relations in collective lands leads to the production of generative territorialities, within a convergence of environmental conservation, social aggregation, and democratic territorial governance. Indeed, the socio-environmental relations characterizing collective property tend to territorialize an ecosystemic community organization, that is, a mutually virtuous relationship between community and territory, guided by shared rules of preservation and protection, which in fact represents a potential solution to the eco-climatic challenges facing the *environmental futures* (Zinzani, 2023) of mountain areas and beyond. Moreover, although this text explores themes already prevalent in mountain geography and beyond, such as commons and collective property, the innovative and original aspect of this contribution lies in the use of conceptual frameworks through which these themes have not yet been explored, such as convivial conservation and property studies. In this way, it is hoped to promote both new inter- and multidisciplinary connections and new debates, for instance regarding the potential of collective property systems to create new imaginaries, methods, and tools for addressing current socio-ecological challenges.
- 7 The methodology used to address the research questions is based, on the one hand, on a bibliographic analysis of relevant literature, and on the other hand, on a mobile ethnography inspired by the idea of following the “footprints through the weather-world” (Ingold, 2021, p. 205). The bibliographic analysis is associated with a rather wide and varied body of literature, situated within the framework of mountain geographies. Firstly, the relevant literature considered in relation to the conceptual framework of reference focuses on three main aspects: the relational dimension of the concept of territory (Brighenti, 2006, 2010; Raffestin, 2022), the concept of common (Harvey, 2012; Exner *et al.*, 2021), Anglo-American property studies (Rose, 1994; Blomley, 2003, 2010, 2016), and the concept of convivial conservation (Büscher & Fletcher, 2019; Iordăchescu, 2022). Secondly, the analysis continues with an in-depth review of Italian literature on collective land arrangements, both in Italy more broadly and specifically in Umbria. This extensive literature, with the exception of Grossi’s 1977 text, spans from the 1990s to the present and includes contributions from various theoretical perspectives, such as development studies, conservation studies, legal, historical, economic, and

sociological studies. Through the analytical reading of books and academic articles, it has been possible to gather heterogeneous information on Italian collective land arrangements and, at the same time, construct a theoretical and empirical reflection that brings together the aforementioned theoretical strands and concepts.

The field research phase took place during a travelling journey through the *Comunanze Agrarie* of Massa Martana (PG) and Colpetrazzo (PG), as a mobile ethnography in which I was able to physically cross the territory, meet and converse with residents (both through informal chats and semi-structured interviews), and participate in various activities linked to collective institutions. The gradual immersion into the daily life of the communities inhabiting these territories allowed for the acquisition of specific information related to the local study contexts, whose collection was primarily made possible through sharing and experimenting with the same weather-world in constant evolution, an intertwining of histories, learnings, and relationships (Ingold, 2021). For example, participation in various collective events such as village festivals, forestry interventions, assemblies, hikes, and so on, allowed for the identification and deepening of the complex network of relationships (social, environmental, but also political, legal, and economic) through which not only the management of community collective patrimonies is structured, but also the space and daily life of users who experience its implications.

- 8 These *Comunanze Agrarie*, as *domini collettivi* widely spread across the Umbrian-Marchean mountains (Policattedra Institute of Geography, University of Perugia, 1983), represent essential elements for local communities in relation to aspects such as direct land management for environmental protection, the maintenance of good levels of community sociality, economic integration for resident families (albeit with less emphasis than in the past), and also in relation to symbolic-affective dimensions (Nervi, 1993, 1999).
- 9 In the first section, the conceptual framework of the research will be briefly discussed in relation to the topic at hand. The second section is divided into two parts. The first will provide a general overview of *domini collettivi*, in dialogue with the literature mentioned in the introduction. Specifically, the territories of individual private property (Blomley, 2016) and collective property territories will be compared, along with their respective implications. The second part will present the empirical observations emerging from the case studies of the *Comunanze Agrarie* of Massa Martana and Colpetrazzo. In the concluding section, *domini collettivi* will be conceptualized as spaces of possibility, that is, alternative modes of territorial organization from which potential processes of co-construction of new and unprecedented futures may emerge.

## Space, Territory, and Commons

- 10 According to Raffestin (2022), space in itself is something prior, something given, with which actors interact and within which relationships, key elements in the theory of the social production of territory, generally take place. Starting from space as a place of possibilities, every relational action carried out by an actor within it generates a process of spatial socialization, a transformation of space into territory, called territorialization. The articulation of the multiple and multilateral relationships between actors in space results in a phenomenon of social production of territory. In

this sense, specific territorial configurations, implemented within the territorial system, stabilize specific patterns of relations (Brighenti, 2006).

- 11 In the context of mountain geography—which has recently focused on processes of depopulation, marginality, and tourism development, as well as environmental policies and governance (Debarbieux and Price, 2008; Perlik, 2019; Varotto, 2020)—it is essential to highlight the processes of social production of mountain territories, which reverberate on their future environmental conditions (Zinzani, 2023). In the face of the eco-climatic crisis, which is threatening the stability of socio-ecological balances in mountain regions, it is crucial today to identify those generative social processes capable of rebalancing socio-environmental relations. For instance, the construction of collective and direct governance mechanisms, environmentally harmonious and socially oriented, such as those supporting common goods (commons), has been widely addressed in mountain geography, also in relation to forms of collective property dispersed across Italy (Bassi, 2016; Bassi and Carestiato, 2016; Daici, 2021; Dalla Torre *et al.*, 2019, 2021, 2022).
- 12 According to Exner and colleagues (2021), commons are essentially things, ideas, and spaces that people coproduce, maintain, and manage together. As with territory, in this case, the relational dimension is central. Harvey's (2012, p. 73) definition highlights this aspect, conceptualizing common goods as “social relations between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood”. These relations that underpin the idea of the common good are (re)produced through the collective social practice of *commoning*, i.e., doing and being together to create commonality (Exner *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, commons can be defined as a group of people creating relationships through a third element, whether it be an object, an idea, or a space. In particular, the qualities of such generative relationality lie in promoting values and (inter)actions revolving around both social and environmental protection. Thus, the existence of common goods and their relational qualities opens up new possibilities within conservation policies. While the advent of neoliberalism has subsumed, since the 1990s, environmental conservation processes considered natural in order to support capital accumulation and resulting profits, there has also been a resurgence of strongly dichotomous and exclusive neo-protectionist practices. Therefore, as suggested by Büscher and Fletcher (2020), a *conservation revolution* is now needed. This revolution is tied to the idea of *convivial conservation*, proposed by the same two authors, and closely connected to the revitalization of commons for its realization (Büscher and Fletcher, 2019). The intersection between the approach of convivial conservation and the field of mountain geographies lies in the shared will to explore the dynamics of environmental conservation that characterize mountain territories. In particular, the investigation of policies and environmental governance provides useful information for understanding and analyzing ongoing conservation processes, while the approach of convivial conservation offers new ideas and tools for addressing current environmental challenges. For example, studies on the tourism development policies of protected areas (Citarella, 2020; Pagliara and Gaglione, 2023) show the persistence of neoliberal views on conservation that spectacularize the environment in order to attract voyeuristic tourism to natural areas. Equally problematic is the neo-protectionist approach (im)posed by international organizations such as the European Union (EU) and the International Union for Conservation of

Nature (IUCN), which is based on the arbitrary establishment of protected areas founded on mechanisms of exclusion of access and use, to the detriment of local communities who have always interacted with their surrounding environment.

- 13 To overcome these limits in conservation approaches, the idea of convivial conservation supports the creation of local democratic governance systems based on principles of socio-environmental justice, promoting processes of direct and collective territorial management, rather than top-down forms of conservation. The elements necessary to implement forms of convivial conservation are the existence of a strong bond between the community and the territory it inhabits, the presence of democratic governance mechanisms connected to territorial management, and the ability of such mechanisms to preserve resources through non-dissipatory use (Iordăchescu, 2022). In other words, convivial conservation revolves around a convergence between environmental conservation, social aggregation, and the democratic nature of territorial governance. Here, the connection between convivial conservation, commons, and collective resource management is particularly marked. Specifically, the collective management of common resources (commons), organized through the implementation of collective property relationships, represents a *new frontier in biodiversity conservation* (Bassi, 2016). Graziani (2011), in his comparative analysis of protected areas and collective property areas, already highlighted how the latter essentially function as protected areas, even though they are not formally recognized as such: this distinction involves protected areas defined by arbitrary (inter)national classification, and *de facto* conserved areas. Indeed, while protected areas are designated by a public authority that imposes restrictions on the use of territorial resources, collective property areas intrinsically conserve the environmental patrimony through the efforts of communities, with the aim of passing it on to future generations (Bassi, 2016). Therefore, the relationship between protected areas and local communities becomes problematic when the top-down restrictions of the former preclude access to and use of natural resources by the latter (ibid.). Consequently, it is crucial to recognize the role of these communities in environmental preservation, underpinned by customary management practices expressed within regulatory frameworks that constitute complete forms of local governance of the environmental patrimony.

## The Territories of Property: *Domini Collettivi* and Property Arrangements

- 14 *Domini collettivi* represent a set of community-based institutions, which embody a specific property arrangement: a solidaristic intergenerational co-ownership of a collective patrimony, dedicated perpetually to agro-silvo-pastoral purposes, inalienable and indivisible, preserved by local communities through collective management forms (Grossi, 1990). These are planned and solidaristic communal forms, linked by networks of social relations, reciprocal bonds, obligations, and shared values, where a group of people co-own lands and resources—typically forests and pastures, but also cultivated fields, buildings, water bodies, roads, etc.—that the entire local community can use, in accordance with the rules approved by the assembly (Gobbi, 2005). In the Italian context, such territorial organization experiences are mainly found in mountainous areas, which are less attractive for mechanized and intensive agriculture, regions

where mutual support is essential for survival. In fact, collective land ownership, as a property institution, aligns with the characteristics of mountain life, where the community dimension assumes a primary role. The collective goods are not tied to the exclusive interests of the property holder, but rather are conceptualized as essential for the community's present and future life (Costato, 2001).

- 15 In particular, the concept of collective property refers to a property paradigm in which the ownership of goods is attributed to a continuously living community across time: for the relationship between community and territory to be realized as collective property, it is necessary to implement legal choices that establish a communal structure, which is an expression of a functional view of the relationship with goods, free from selfish and discretionary indulgences (Grossi, 1990). This property solution diverges from individualistic forms, as it is based on different “anthropological foundations” (Grossi, 1990, p. 507). While private individual property represents an “*individualistic anthropology*” (Grossi, 2012, p. 6), which emanates from the extreme subjectivism of the property owner, collective property constitutes a collectivistic anthropology, constantly pursued due to its intrinsic opposition to the rational atomized subject. In this alternative anthropology, the subject exists together with their relations, ideals, values, and daily life, but their individuality is attenuated in relation to the community and the land, which are the fundamental pillars of collective construction (Grossi, 2012). These land structures are organized around two fundamental principles that form their social order: communitarianism and reicentrism (Grossi, 2020). The first refers to the primacy of the community over the individual, viewing the community as an element that integrates the individual, strengthening their position within the collective. The second principle is the primacy of the land, which is considered beneficial as a source of life for the community. Consequently, this leads to the structuring, not only of collective land property relations but also of socio-environmental relationships inspired by these two principles. Thus, it is not merely a legal difference between types of ownership but rather a confrontation of worlds in action, with different foundational values (Grossi, 2020).
- 16 So, what are the relational implications arising from these two contrasting property solutions?
- 17 First, it is necessary to specify certain aspects of the concept of property. Property is not something static and predetermined but is rather continuously (re)produced through persuasive discourses, communicative claims, and material and bodily practices that relate to spaces and people. The proprietary space, therefore, is a performance through which the range of possible interactions within it is regulated (Rose, 1994), and the establishment of private land property constitutes a regulatory act of activities in the social space, the acceptability of which is connected to *where* they take place (Blomley, 2003). In essence, the *territories of property* constitute forms of relationships and geographical arrangements that are acquired and socialized, orienting individuals' behaviours (Blomley, 2016).
- 18 According to Soja (1971), private (individual) property represents one of the most evident examples of Western territoriality, which, far from being a simple relationship with territory, constitutes a triangular relationship that mediates relations among humans. Indeed, it sanctifies the owner, spatializing a self that is presumed to be separated from social relationality—an individual isolated in their own confined,

autonomous space, protected from others through the guarantee of property rights (Blomley, 2010). In this sense, territories of private individual property tend to socialize individuals according to relational arrangements based on ideas such as (presumed) freedom from external constraints and the pursuit of autonomy, achievable only through the separation and independence that private individual property itself grants. This fosters a distancing from values such as solidarity, reciprocity, shared responsibility, and relationality—a process with significant implications in terms of ethics, relational commitment, socialization, and the formation of subjectivities. Moreover, the absolute power conferred on the property owner, who is granted the right to dispose freely and without restriction of the owned goods, facilitates dynamics of extraction and exploitation for individual purposes. The absence of reciprocal constraints on individual economic action encourages excessive exploitation of resources.

- 19 Conversely, through the configuration of collective property relations, the territorialization of another social order emerges. Collective land structures differ from individual private property in their dual centrality of community and land, establishing a peculiar mode of territorial management rooted in the collective duty and right to protect and preserve collective interests in an intergenerational and solidaristic manner. These structures are based on the primacy of shared values, obligations, and goals at the community level, which harmoniously regulate socio-environmental relations, promoting virtuous behaviours in terms of ecological protection, social aggregation, and the creation of grassroots, democratic, and direct forms of governance. Thus, territories of collective property, as spaces of social inclusivity, are characterized by mutual recognition and shared responsibility in accessing and managing collective goods (Exner *et al.*, 2021).
- 20 In summary, the territories of private individual property territorialize boundaries of isolation and exclusion, separation and avoidance, while territories of collective property promote spaces of sociality, cohesion, inclusion, and aggregation. A fundamental contrast is evident between relational spaces of interdependence and integration with the world, and spaces constructed around the power of the individual owner detached from any form of reciprocity. If the territorialization of any property arrangement constitutes an evolving project linked to specific values (Blomley, 2016), the difference between these two types of territoriality lies in the promotion of different values through which spaces and people are socialized.

## The Territories of Collective Property: *Comunanze Agrarie* and Convivial Conservation

- 21 *Comunanze Agrarie* represent a specific designation for collective property institutions (*domini collettivi*), typical of the Umbrian-Marchean region, where the necessary prerequisite for participation is physical residence within the territory (Bettoni *et al.*, 2012). This paper focuses on two Umbrian *Comunanze Agrarie*, namely Colpetrazzo and Massa Martana, located in the Municipality of Massa Martana (PG). Both collective institutions, although active since the medieval period in regulating communal access to forest-pastoral resources in territories recognized as informally existing agricultural associations, were formally acknowledged with the enactment of Law No. 397/1894, which applied to the lands of the former Papal States (Ridolfi and Filippucci, 2021).

Thus, the present *Comunanze Agrarie* of Colpetrazzo and Massa Martana were formally established in 1914 and 1921, respectively. Today, each manages approximately 700 hectares of forests, pastures, and other lands, collectively managed by around 150 and 400 members, respectively (field interviews, 2023).

- 22 The selection of these two case studies is based, on the one hand, on the fact that they are privileged objects of study in relation to the research objectives, as they represent mountainous areas with forms of collective property<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, it is due to the reciprocal relationships built with local residents, their enthusiasm for the interest in studying their respective *Comunanze*, and the vitality that characterizes these institutions. The development of human relationships has allowed for a gradual and daily integration within these reference contexts through continuous and dynamic stays in the territory. The fieldwork thus unfolded through an “ongoing constitution of the field in the transition from one location to another, in stories of movement and horizons that change along the way” (Ingold, 2021, p. 227), thanks to the involvement and interaction with numerous stakeholders<sup>2</sup>. During this phase, it was possible to explore the territory, observe the activities and practices related to the studied *Comunanze*, and empirically identify the processes of territorialization of collective property and their implications by observing the existing relationships in the communal lands.
- 23 Firstly, property relations in the *Comunanze* are distinguished by their collective nature. While individual private property relations act as spatial classifications that pre-assign individual ownership of things within property boundaries (Blomley, 2016)—thus granting absolute power over the property without obligation or reciprocity—collective property relations, by contrast, presuppose interdependence and mutual recognition in the use and management of commons. In this sense, this form of territoriality generates relationships based on reciprocity and shared responsibility: it territorializes the primacy of the community over the individual and of the common good over the subject, expressed through socio-environmental and intergenerational solidarity. Therefore, the relationality of collective property runs counter to property forms that socialize the individual as a body separate from others and from the land.
- 24 In addition to the collective nature of property relations, economic relationships reflect a long-term patrimonial vision and the idea of intergenerational transfer of resources, accompanied by solidarity within the community, thereby fostering a management model distinct from those characterized by the ordinary logic of personal business profit (Bassi, 2016). This is evidenced by the statutory prohibition of profit sharing, which relates to the public role of local development historically played by the *Comunanze* under study<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, no *Comunanza*, like no *dominio collettivo* in general, may have profit-oriented purposes, and all economic income must be reinvested for the benefit of the local community through proposals developed by the board of directors and approved by the assembly of users. Therefore, these are democratic forms of territorial governance, in which decisions regarding the territory are made by the communities that inhabit them, independent of economic speculation aimed at profit accumulation.
- 25 Social relations within the community, as both observed in the field and described during various interviews, are predominantly of a solidaristic, collaborative, and aggregative nature. A central value that attests to such positive relationality is the idea of *aiutarella*, or mutual aid given in times of need, often cited by the users of these

*Comunanze* during interviews. Naturally, this does not exclude the fact that sometimes these relationships take on transactional, competitive, utilitarian, or even conflictual connotations. Nevertheless, the shared responsibility connecting all users in the management of a common, collective patrimony fosters relational dispositions oriented by reciprocity, collaboration, and solidarity. The promotion of such social relationality is fostered not only through the organization of various community events, such as festivals, communal dinners, popular celebrations, collective hikes, maintenance works, and collectively performed activities linked to civic rights, but also through the establishment of various places of aggregation like clubs, buildings for collective moments, recreational areas, and forest shelters. This positive relationality also stems from the very essence of collective property: the necessity to be, decide, and act together. Almost all of the activities in the studied *Comunanze* presuppose the performance of collective practices that, in turn, reinforce community aggregation, such as exercising civic rights and managing forests.

- 26 This links to the educational function carried out by these *Comunanze*, which is relevant in relation to the territorialization of specific values through which individuals are socialized. This function is pursued not only through the provision of archives and exhibitions, the offering of professional training courses, the organization of cultural initiatives, and the preservation of historical customs and traditions, but also through the relationality inherent in collective property: the necessary reciprocity and dialogue among users in accessing and utilizing common resources inevitably fosters a formative process, as individuals are daily confronted with collective property relationships. As a result, individuals acquire foundational principles that provide meaning and guide the functioning of such a property form, such as intra-community and intergenerational solidarity, the primacy of the community over the individual, and the primacy of the land over the human subject. Thus, alongside the efforts of the *Comunanze* to promote knowledge about collective land structures and environmental education consistent with the principles that guide them through educational and divulgative activities, it is the territorialization of this *other social order* that socializes the inhabitants of collective lands according to shared communitarian and reicentral values.
- 27 Environmental relationships are characterized by a profound connection to the mountain, the forests, the animals, and the landscape, which is translated into an ecosystemic territorial organization, i.e., an interactive relationship with the surrounding territory guided by shared rules of preservation and protection. The intimate interrelation between territory and local community thus fulfils the environmental protection function, which is implicit in the territorial governance methods implemented by local communities (Bassi, 2016). In fact, the *Comunanze* under study perform this fundamental function through daily collective forestry practices, that provide monitoring processes over the mountain as comprehensive as possible. Community forest management, on the one hand, serves as a deterrent to behaviours incompatible with ecological protection and, on the other, enables silvicultural actions aimed at improving the collective patrimony. This is related to the findings of a study conducted by Sheil *et al.* (2015) on three villages in Papua New Guinea. The authors introduce the concept of the “tragedy of the unseen sentinels,” in place of Hardin’s more famous “tragedy of the commons,” describing local communities as sentinels regarding sustainable resource use and biodiversity preservation. The results suggest that monitoring by village communities, which takes significant protective measures, is

more efficient than that conducted in many official protected areas. Therefore, the tragedy does not lie in the collective management of the territory, as Hardin argued, but rather occurs where local and collective forms of protection are compromised by public policies. Additionally, the decision-making competence of the *Comunanze* in relation to their territories serves as a bulwark against any invasive external projects, whether state or private, as any intervention on the land must be approved by the assembly of users. A relevant case comes from the *Comunanza* of Massa Martana, whose assembly of users blocked a project to build a tourist village on *Monte Castro*, in the *Monti Martani*.

- 28 This brief overview reveals that practices and relationships connected to the territoriality of *domini collettivi* align with the convergence of ecological protection, social aggregation, and democratic territorial governance, forming the basis of the concept of convivial conservation. Indeed, collective and direct participation in the management of common goods, oriented toward intergenerational ecological protection and carried out through the structuring of specific relational forms that foster social aggregation, leads to the production of generative territorialities and the socialization of individuals according to shared community values.

## (In)conclusions, Toward Spaces of Possibility

- 29 This article, situated within the framework of mountain geographies, offers a critical analysis of collective property as a virtuous example of territorial governance, engaging in a dialogue with several theoretical strands and concepts.
- 30 Starting with the importance of highlighting the social production processes of mountain territories, as they influence the future environmental dynamics of these areas (Zinzani, 2023), the article first provides a conceptual framework for territory and commons from a relational perspective. If territory is defined as the outcome of the articulation of multiple relationships taking place in space, it follows that specific territorial configurations, firmly maintained over time, stabilize particular patterns of relationships (Brighenti, 2006).
- 31 The various forms of collective land organization in Italy, which have existed and been active for centuries across the peninsula, structure a series of social relationships based on mutual obligations and shared values among community members, within the context of active participation in territorial management fostered by shared land ownership. The persistence of these relational patterns over time allows the maintenance of generative territorialities, within a framework that converges between environmental conservation, social aggregation, and democratic territorial governance. Specifically, by defining commons as groups of people who create relationships through a third element, it is evident that the functioning of *domini collettivi* involves the creation of common spaces and goods to be traversed, used, managed, and maintained together. Therefore, these Italian collective land structures represent unique commons, created and sustained by relational patterns historically implemented by local communities, whose temporal persistence in turn stabilizes these relational modes of action.
- 32 Secondly, the article examines in detail the implications arising from the territorialization of different property relations—both individual and collective—

through which a fundamental opposition can be identified between spaces of collective interdependence and relationality, and spaces where proprietary power separates the individual from any form of reciprocity. Specifically, the difference between these two types of territoriality lies in the promotion of different values through which spaces and people are socialized, fostering radically different socio-environmental behaviours. On one hand, individual private property fosters uncontrolled resource exploitation and individualistic attitudes; on the other, collective property promotes social aggregation and ecological protection, in other words, processes of convivial conservation.<sup>4</sup>

- 33 The results emerging from the analysis of the case studies of the Umbrian *Comunanze Agrarie* of Massa Martana and Colpetrazzo suggest that the positive relationality of collective property allows for the maintenance of common spaces and goods, which not only promote social and environmental benefits for communities but also serve as the basis for the implementation of direct and democratic territorial governance, potentially capable of addressing current socio-environmental challenges. Thus, if every territorial pattern is an expression of a precise social project (Raffestin, 2022), the territorial patterns of the *Comunanze Agrarie* examined here demonstrate a social project connected to both human and non-human communities, centred on forms of symmetrical and generative relationality.
- 34 In this regard, it may be interesting to connect these forms of collective territorial organization with the idea of producing spaces of possibility, understood as configurations of conditions conducive to the initiation of potential and affirmative processes of becoming, still awaiting materialization.
- 35 In the face of the global socio-ecological crisis characterizing the current historical period, it has become necessary to develop new sensitivities, narratives, and imaginaries (Armiero *et al.*, 2021) that support the pluriverse of potential experiences of alternative development (Khotari *et al.*, 2019), as well as those environmentally-harmonious and socially-oriented “community economies” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 79). *Domini collettivi* appear to represent one of many possible organizational solutions aligned with such ambitions. They territorialize a communitarian and reicentral paradigm, constructed in a collective, shared, and mutual manner, which could serve as a valid alternative to contemporary territorial organization and development models, which have initiated the destructive processes now blamed for the crises of our time. The promotion of such forms of community governance, tied to the related processes of convivial conservation—and the hopeful expansion of these practices—can be a key strategy for mitigating and addressing the future socio-environmental challenges of mountain areas, and beyond.

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## NOTES

1. I believe these areas can be defined as "mountainous" not only because the *Monti Martani*, on which the studied *Comunanze* are located, exceed the conventional altitude of 600 meters above sea level, but also in reference to the interaction between human communities and the mountain environment, which is almost daily and deeply ingrained. Furthermore, these *Comunanze* are engaged in activities typically associated with mountainous regions, such as forest and pastoral management. In this sense, the connection to the mountain is essential for the communities under study: the mountain has always been a guarantee of survival in terms of resources, which are still utilized by the inhabitants through the community institution of the *Comunanza*. In addition to the economic dimension, the mountain plays an important social role for the community, in terms of aggregation and conviviality, as well as an environmental role connected to the individual and collective well-being of those who live in these areas.

2. The field research began in March 2023 with several site visits, which helped develop the first knowledge of the territory. The investigation and fieldwork phase was carried out throughout the entire month of June 2023. In parallel to numerous conversations with various individuals, which were not recorded but later noted down, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with different types of respondents, each lasting an average of about an hour. These interviews took place in various locations (from bars to homes, from mountains to historical sites, and even at social events), sometimes while in transit, and were then transcribed and analysed in relation to the research questions, in order to understand the various relationships associated with collective resource systems. The questions posed varied depending on the context in which the interview took place and the personality of the respondent. Four categories of respondents were identified: users of the *Comunanza*, Presidents of the *Comunanza*, Councillors of the *Comunanza*, and local residents who are not users. The findings from the qualitative analysis of the two case studies have no external validity and refer exclusively to these specific cases.

3. In the case studies I have been able to explore, the *Comunanze* have often acted in place of public state entities through infrastructural interventions such as the construction and electrification of roads, squares, and fountains. While in the past this occurred systematically and extensively across the entire village, today it is limited to the lands owned by the *Comunanze*. For instance, the *Comunanza* of Colpetrazzo recently contributed to the construction of a playground, a social club, and a kindergarten.

4. This is a consideration, supported by the cited literature, derived from the empirical observations in the field related to the two case studies. Naturally, this does not represent a universal rule, as some critical issues related to collective property exist, just as there are potential benefits of individual private property. Nevertheless, it is argued that collective property and individual private property socialize spaces and people differently, promoting different values and behaviors.

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## ABSTRACTS

This article, within the field of mountain geographies, proposes a critical analysis of collective property, as a virtuous example of territorial governance, connecting *property studies* with the concepts of *common* and *convivial conservation*. Structuring a series of social relations based on mutual obligations and shared values between community members, within an active participation to the territorial management fostered by the collective status of land property, collective land structures represent peculiar commons that local communities use and take care of. In particular, collective land property and collective territorial management foster *convivial conservation* processes at the socioecological level, while the implementation of individual private property relations tends to promote uncontrolled phenomena of exploitation of resources and individualistic attitudes. The analysis of the case studies, that are the Umbrian *Comunanze Agrarie* of Massa Martana and Colpetrazzo, confirms the positive relationality of collective property, counterposed to the socialisation of people and spaces linked to the territorialisation of individual private property, as it allows the maintenance of common goods and spaces which guarantee a direct and democratic territorial governance able to contrast the present socio-environmental challenges.

Il presente contributo, inserito nel quadro delle geografie della montagna, propone un'analisi critica della proprietà collettiva, come esempio virtuoso di *governance* territoriale, mettendo a dialogo i *property studies* con i concetti di *bene comune* e *conservazione conviviale*. Strutturanti una serie di relazioni sociali basate su obblighi reciproci e valori condivisi tra i membri della comunità, nell'ambito di una partecipazione attiva alla gestione territoriale promossa dalla condizione di proprietà condivisa della terra, i domini collettivi rappresentano peculiari beni comuni fruiti e curati dalle collettività locali. In particolare, la messa in comune della proprietà fondiaria e della gestione territoriale promuove processi di *conservazione conviviale* a livello socioecologico, mentre l'implementazione di rapporti di proprietà individuale tende a favorire fenomeni di sfruttamento incontrollato delle risorse e atteggiamenti individualistici. L'analisi dei casi studio, ovvero le *Comunanze Agrarie* umbre di Massa Martana e Colpetrazzo, conferma la relazionalità positiva della proprietà collettiva, contrapposta alla socializzazione di spazi e persone derivante dalla territorializzazione della proprietà privata individuale, poiché permette il mantenimento di beni e spazi comuni che garantiscono una *governance* territoriale diretta e democratica capace di contrastare le attuali sfide socioambientali.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** collective land structures, property studies, commons, convivial conservation, governance

**Parole chiave:** domini collettivi, proprietà, beni comuni, conservazione conviviale, governance

## AUTHOR

### **MICHELE RAVAIOLI**

Dipartimento di Storia Culture Civiltà - DiSCi, Alma Mater Università di Bologna, Piazza S.  
Giovanni in Monte, 2, 40124  
michele.ravaioli6@unibo.it