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## INVESTIGATING 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY RURALITY AT DIFFERENT SCALES: THE MAMO WEBINAR CYCLE

### **Introduction**

The webinar cycle *Materializing-Modernity: Landscape, Architecture and Anthropology Intersections in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Rurality*<sup>1</sup> was organized and implemented from April 12, 2021, to May 6, 2021, in order to discuss the Albanian rural landscape and its multifaceted characteristics and challenges at the international level, and to place it within the wider framework of European studies on 20<sup>th</sup> century rurality<sup>2</sup>. The MaMo Webinar Cycle aimed to bring together experts in the field of architecture, ethnography, visual anthropology, cultural landscapes, and cultural heritage to discuss different methodological and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of 20<sup>th</sup> century rurality through different lenses.

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<sup>1</sup> The MaMo Webinar Cycle has been realized and implemented, within the framework of the EU-funded project *Materializing Modernity – Socialist and Post-Socialist Rural Legacy in Contemporary Albania (MaMo)*, by Federica Pompejano (MSCA-IF Researcher), the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art Studies (IAKSA), the Department of Cultural Heritage and Environment and the Laboratory of Ethnomusicology and Visual Anthropology (LEAV) of the University of Milan (UNIMI), Milan, Italy. All the graphic materials and webinar recordings are available in the MaMo Community webpage on Zenodo at: <https://zenodo.org/communities/materializingmodernity-mamoproject/about/> (Accessed: December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> The programme and the abstracts of the oral contributions are published at the end of this Journal.

Tackling and unfolding the theme of 20<sup>th</sup> century rurality through diverse methodological approaches, the MaMo Webinar Cycle sought to provide answers to the following questions: How can we explore, document, investigate and interpret these contexts? How can memories, cultural practices and traditions of the communities who still experience, or have experienced, these rural contexts and landscapes be investigated?

The contribution *The Albanian village as an anthropological encounter of modernity* presented by Olsi Lelaj and Nebi Bardhoshi<sup>3</sup>, discussed the space and place of the Albanian village as an encounter in which ethnographic practice, and anthropological and societal interpretation can be intertwined to provide knowledge about how modernity impacted and changed the Albanian peasants' life during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lelaj and Bardhoshi gave insights on the Albanian ethnographic school that started during the communist period as part of the archaeological commission in the Sector of History, Sociology and Economy of the Instituti i Shkencave, i.e., the Institute of Sciences (Bardhoshi and Lelaj 2018, 17). They pointed out how for Albanian ethnology, under communist ideology, the peasantry's life was seen as a fertile cultural territory within which to investigate and identify the national culture of the country.

From the rural village as an encounter for understanding a socio-cultural rural context, the cycle continued to the investigation and documentation of socio-cultural rural practices of a past rurality as sonic and visual marker in the ever-changing contemporary rurality. Nicola Scaldaferri and Lorenzo Ferrarini<sup>4</sup>, in their joint presentation *Exploring*

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<sup>3</sup> Olsi Lelaj is a researcher and a scholar of the anthropology of modernity in the Department of Ethnology at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art Studies (IAKSA) in Tirana. Since September 2017, he is the Head of the Department of Ethnology at IAKSA. Nebi Bardhoshi is Associate Professor and the director of the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art Studies in Tirana (IAKSA). Since 2015, he has been a research fellow at the Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies in Regensburg, Germany.

<sup>4</sup> Nicola Scaldaferri is an ethnomusicologist and an Associate Professor at the Department of Cultural Heritage and Environment of the Università Statale di Milano (UNIMI), where he teaches Ethnomusicology and Anthropology of Music. He is the director of the *Laboratory of Ethnomusicology and Visual Anthropology*

*Rurality in Southern Italy: the experience of “Sonic Ethnography”* explored rurality in Southern Italy by means of sonic ethnographic methods, demonstrating how sound in the rural landscape plays an important role in determining local identities that are continuously reaffirmed by the practice of performing. Scaldaferrri and Ferrarini gave insights into their experience with Sonic Ethnography by introducing three case studies in the Basilicata region, in Italy: (1) the sonic appropriation of space by the bell carriers of San Mauro Forte; (2) the manual reaping competition in Terranova di Pollino; (3) the voices and sounds’ recordings of the home village made for the migrant communities in the United States of America. The first two case studies represent an example of sounds from a rural past that, generation after generation, continue to mark the identity of the local population. The last case study stems from the analysis of an almost lost private archive containing voices and sounds recordings that Giuseppe Chiaffitella collected as a sort of vehicle of memories for a distant Italian emigrants’ community longing for their origins. In all the presented situations, Scaldaferrri and Ferrarini demonstrated how the sound plays a crucial role in the sensory experience of a place and, recalling back past traditions and memories, can determine and re-affirm a local sense of belonging of a specific community (Ferrarini and Scaldaferrri 2020, 129).

The most continuous and most evident imprint left in the landscape over the time by humans is the texture formed by agricultural landscapes, which overlaps a large part of countries’ territories with a regular geometry of fields, rows, terraces, canals, roads, and settlements.

20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity affected many rural landscapes in Europe and the introduction of modern agricultural intensive production often followed the implementation of agrarian reforms and reclamation projects that completely changed the pre-existing landscape.

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(LEAV). Lorenzo Ferrarini is a filmmaker, photographer and sound recordist based at the University of Manchester, where he teaches ethnographic documentary at the *Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology*.

Cristina Pallini and Axel Fisher<sup>5</sup> introduced case studies from the EU-funded project MODSCAPES<sup>6</sup>, which addressed agricultural colonisation projects implemented during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, claiming that such projects, despite being conceived in different political and ideological contexts as part of a nation-building strategy, are a distinctive feature of recent European history, and provided a supra-national testing ground for experts from many disciplines.

In her contribution titled *Embedded the Past into Modernist Rural Landscapes*, Cristina Pallini shed light on two case studies: the cases of the modernist rural landscapes of Northern Greece (1920s) and the Pontine Plain in central Italy (1930s). Pallini puts emphasis on these two case studies as results of opposite governmental rural policies. In fact, the rural modernisation policies in Northern Greece were an internationally agreed response to a geo-political and humanitarian crisis in the aftermath of the Greco-Turkish war (1919-1922), while in Fascist Italy, the example of the Pontine Marshes' reclamation works, was part of Mussolini's rural policies towards national self-sufficiency.

Despite the profound differences between the two case studies, Pallini underlined how both dealt with traces from a distant past in the landscape: respectively, the *Via Appia* in Italy and the *Via Egnatia* in Greece that composed the ancient roman route from the Adriatic to the Black Sea. This research led to an interesting landscape analysis that demonstrated how those different rural policies strategically embedded these ancient traces in the new modern rural schemes. Pallini critically interpreted these modernist

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<sup>5</sup> Cristina Pallini is an Architect based in Milan and Associate Professor of Architectural and Urban Design at the School of Architecture Urban Planning Construction Engineering of the Politecnico di Milano (POLIMI). Axel Fisher is an architect, scholar, educator, and editor. He is Associate Professor in Belgium, at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), School of Architecture *La Cambre Horta*. He is involved in research activities at the *hortence lab* for architectural history, criticism, and theory.

<sup>6</sup> More info about the MODSCAPES project can be found at: <https://heranet.info/projects/hera-2016-uses-of-the-past/modernist-reinventions-of-the-rural-landscapes/> (Accessed: December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

rural landscapes by identifying which elements of the historical palimpsest played a role in the 20<sup>th</sup> century's modern rural schemes, challenging the notion of heritage as a potential catalyst in a latent present order liable to predict possible futures.

An introduction to the oblivion of the rural planning at the architectural and territorial levels in the former Eastern Bloc was presented by Axel Fisher in his presentation *Figures in a landscape: notes for a history of rural planning and village design in the Eastern bloc*. Fisher addressed both visual and quantitative data in order to outline major shifts and breaks in socialist countries' agricultural modernization policies within main chronological periods. The interlacing of quantitative and qualitative data in Fisher's contribution are a reminder of the need to interlace different sources in a re-evaluation of 20<sup>th</sup>-century rural planning experts and professionals that contributed to the decision-making processes that shaped the rural landscapes in the former Eastern Bloc. At the same time, he aimed at situating the modernist rural artefacts in a wider historical perspective concerning the architectural theory and practice in former socialist European countries.

Centring the focus on landscape studies during our last century, scholars agree in acknowledging that landscape is a palimpsest of tangible and intangible traces. The landscape evolves with the society that inhabits it and is the mirror of its historical and social events, economic and political problems, and of cultural contrasts and nuances. It is a legacy that we are supposed to recognize, interpret, and include in our-present-time through heritage-making processes. These processes are always selective, being articulated through time in the notions of history, memory, identity, and authenticity. They demand an interdisciplinary, critical, and integrated approach (Vigotti and Pompejano 2020). In his presentation, Bosse Lagerqvist<sup>7</sup> discussed on the notion of integrated conservation as an

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<sup>7</sup> Bosse Lagerqvist is an Associate professor at the Department of Conservation, University of Gotehnburg (UGOT) in Sweden. Between 2012 and 2018 he has been Head of Department at the same University. He has been the leader of the EU-funded Erasmus+ Partnership on *Sustainable Management of Cultural Landscapes*, also representing the University of Gothenburg in the UNISCAPE network.

approach for heritage practices, to improve the sustainability of planning and managing landscapes, enhancing the resilience of society. Starting from defining the notion of heritage and landscape as complementary, Lagerqvist delved into the need of adopting the integrated conservation approach that considers landscape as the arena for heritage, in which natural and cultural history are interlaced. He stressed the need to examine it through a holistic perspective able to address the dynamic management of inevitable transformation processes.

Dumitru Rusu<sup>8</sup> closed the MaMo webinar cycle by introducing the participants to the *Socialist Modernism* platform<sup>9</sup> which is an initiative promoted by the Bureau for Art and Urban Research Association (*Birou pentru Art si Cercetare Urbană - B.A.C.U.*) based in Romania.

Rusu advocates for the protection of the socialist modernism architecture erected in Central and Eastern Europe in the period 1955-1991. The initiative he presented aims at researching, mapping, and monitoring the current state of preservation of socialist architectural elements and landscape markers. Moreover, the interactive map has been conceived as a community-driven tool with the objective of setting up and nurturing an open access database accessible to public. The community-driven mapping tool is also a way of raising the awareness among different stakeholders, underlining the importance to involve and engage the large online public in the participatory architectural heritage mapping initiatives.

What emerged from the variety of case studies presented during the webinar was the necessity to approach all of the different and multifaceted aspects of 20<sup>th</sup>-century rurality through an interdisciplinary methodology that considers qualitative and quantitative characteristics that strongly marked our most recent past. In fact, those legacies are still impacting our contemporaneity being heritage, understood in its most general meaning, as a link to the past and a door into the future. From this situation emerges

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<sup>8</sup> Dumitru Rusu is an architect and President of *B.A.C.U. Association - Birou pentru Art si Cercetare Urbană* (Bureau for Art and Urban Research), based in Bucharest, Romania. He is vice-president of the ICOMOS International – ISC20C.

<sup>9</sup> The platform is available at <http://socialistmodernism.com/> (Accessed: December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

the urgent need to deeply understand how 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity impacted rural landscapes and their communities, and how these traces and legacies of a recent past in the present can be explored, documented, investigated, and interpreted through different methods and approaches. In Simmel's words "in the immediate sense, as in the symbolic sense, in the corporeal sense, as in the spiritual sense, it is we, at every moment, who separate what is connected and connect what is separate" (Simmel 1903, 3), just as it is we that constantly shape the *biography* of our landscapes and vice versa.

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