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The JUST2CE project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101003491

CHAPTER 26

Participation Beyond Statements: Some Critical Considerations about Inner Cilento, Italy

Chapter 26. Participation Beyond Statements: Some Critical Considerations about Inner Cilento, Italy

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Abstract

Italy has adopted several initiatives for the engagement of the different stakeholders, within the framework of Circular Economy oriented policies. Italian inner areas have recently been very much focused by both Italian and European institutions, and many funds and initiatives have been dedicated to these territories. The aim of this chapter is to evaluate two participation initiatives in a specific territory of Campania Region, inner Cilento, to examine whether they are building empowering experiences for local communities or not. The first one is a bottom-up initiative, the MAI (Meeting Area Interne – Inner Areas Meeting); the second one is a top-down initiative organized by a local municipality to create a connection between the interested subjects and European calls for agrivoltaic projects of local energy production. Therefore, the study's main purpose is to provide a reading guide for territorial participation initiatives, in order to define their real empowering potential for local communities and to what extent they can encourage a just transition from linear economy towards a circular model.

Keywords: Participation; Local Communities; Inner Cilento; Territories; Just Transition.

With the aim of providing suggestions for decision makers, this chapter analyses some participation experiments in the inner Cilento territory, Campania Region, comparing the practice to the political intentions included in the strategic documents dedicated to participation

26.1 Introduction

The centrality of participation measures towards Circular Economy has been recognized by a joint initiative of European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) that, in 2017, created the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (ECESP)⁴⁵, in order to guarantee that the actors of civil society play a role in the transition. In Italy, the National Plan on Sustainable Production and Consumption⁴⁶ (foreseen by

⁴⁵ <https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/en>

⁴⁶ It is important to highlight that a draft of this plan has been created in 2008 and revised in 2013. After this, the 2015 law which is mentioned below foresees a definitive plan, but it is still unaccomplished. From the 2008 and 2013 drafts and from the aim of the law's article 21, it is possible to outline what is said here. See also <https://www.mase.gov.it/pagina/la-strategia-europea-consumo-e-produzione->

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the Law 221/2015⁴⁷), only includes people in the operational area called "Consumption and Sustainable Behaviours". This means that they are mainly considered as consumers and that the approach consists in emphasizing individual behaviours and responsibility instead of collective organization. On the other hand, recent initiatives of implementation and revision of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development⁴⁸ include, at least formally, the concept of territorialization, which suggests that the individual/consumption oriented/behavioural dimension should not be the only one to conceive participation. Italy's inner areas have recently been very much focused both by European and national institutions, and many funds and initiatives are dedicated to these territories.

According to Pansera, Genovese and Ripa (2021), however, the so called "ecological transition", together with the transition towards Circular Economy (CE) is often presented as a merely technological issue, thus neglecting social and political aspects which deal with discrimination, participation, social and environmental justice, among the others⁴⁹. Reducing the matter to a simple necessity to create new products which can be considered adequate to be labelled as "circular" may lead to an unchanged neoliberal market where profit is still the rationale but the goal becomes that of selling labelled products. Furthermore, this technocratic option might also produce a rebound effect⁵⁰.

Building upon the above insight, this chapter looks at the initiatives that are promoted within rural contexts, and particularly at two specific cases, to investigate whether they represent techno-oriented policies or an authentic way to widen the participation of local communities.

Many initiatives are detectable in the territory of inner Cilento in the fields of environmental preservation, social promotion, just ecological transition, circular economy and sustainability, especially within the agri-food and tourism sectors. This is true both from the institutional side and the world of local associations. For this reason, it is possible to investigate both top down and bottom-up initiatives⁵¹.

During the period spent on the territory, many circularity experiments have been detected, especially in the agri-food sector. Many of them are driven by young people (under 30) who had been living and working abroad or in other Italian cities, before the COVID pandemic started. Their stories have been collected during a six-month period (and several other brief periods after that) spent through the territories of Laurino, Sacco, Valle dell'Angelo and Roccadaspide. These young people were mainly employed in gastronomy and hospitality-related jobs: this means that all of them had problems when this kind of activities had to be closed due to the several lock downs; some of them also ended up losing their jobs.

Having to choose what to do in that difficult situation, many of them decided to go back to their hometowns for two main reasons: a) the possibility to stay safe from the sanitary point of view (small towns were incomparably safer than big cities during the COVID pandemic, due to their isolated positions and the scarcity of people's movements); b) the loss of their own salary, because of which they were not able to afford urban living.

[sostenibili#:~:text=Piano%20d%E2%80%99azione%20nazionale%20su%20Consumo%20e%20Produzione%20Sostenibili,Strategia%20Nazionale%20per%20il%20Consumo%20e%20Produzione%20Sostenibile](#)

⁴⁷ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2016/1/18/16G00006/sg>

⁴⁸ https://www.mase.gov.it/sites/default/files/archivio/allegati/sviluppo_sostenibile/SNSvS_2022.pdf

⁴⁹ Pansera, M., Genovese, A., & Ripa, M., (2021) Politicising Circular Economy: what can we learn from Responsible Innovation?, *Journal of Responsible Innovation*, 8:3, 471-477, DOI: 10.1080/23299460.2021.1923315, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2021.1923315>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Spending time on the territory is always the best option to have information about local initiatives, but some web-sites giving local news can be helpful, like for example <https://www.sentieridelbuonvivere.it/gal/>.

This might appear as a big fracture in a young person's life; however, many of these young people created new job opportunities for themselves and their communities, thus changing the destiny of some family businesses settled in inner Cilento.

In order to create the possibility for this phenomenon to change the trend of depopulation in inner areas, the participation of local communities in local public life – particularly of the youngest component – becomes crucial. Indeed, a recent study developed by the association "Riabitare l'Italia" in collaboration with the University of Torino and several other research entities has revealed that young people from the inner areas of southern Italy have a peculiarity in terms of wishing to stay or to leave, compared to similar sample-groups from central and northern Italy: they are characterized by the pattern "wishing to stay but believing not to be able to stay" (Mazzocchi et al., 2022)⁵². As it is possible to see in the results and discussion section, this observation seems to be confirmed by both the topics engaged by the organizers and the feedback collected among the participants during the MAI-Lab (Laboratorio del Meeting Aree Interne – Inner Areas Meeting Laboratory), performed in Valle dell'Angelo the 1st of July 2023.

26.2 Materials and Methods

As it is possible to read on the dedicated website⁵³, the "Inner Areas National Strategy" ("Strategia Nazionale Aree Interne" – SNAI) is an Italian national plan aimed at developing projects and actions to intervene on the difficult situation of 1077 municipalities, divided into 72 "project areas" (official denomination) and including about 2.072.718 inhabitants. Taken together, these areas represent 60% of the whole national territory and the 52% of Italian municipalities, but only the 22% of the population, due to the well-known phenomenon of depopulation in inner areas, sometimes described as a "demographic bleeding".

A territory is classified as "inner area" when it falls within the boundaries of the "intermediate", "peripheral" or "ultraperipheral" area in terms of distance from the "poles", which are the municipalities where the three main typologies of services – health, education and mobility – are concentrated⁵⁴.

The selection of the territories to be classified as "inner" has started in 2013 and, from the financial point of view, two national laws – the Stability Law of 2014 and the Budget Law of 2018 – comprehensively allocated 281,2 million euros for the implementation of the SNAI. These funds have been destined to services (school, health and mobility) in the selected areas. In addition to these funds, the regional institutions also dedicated economic resources from the co-financed programs of the European Development and Investment Funds 2014 – 2020 (SIE Funds) to support local development projects. Moreover, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza – PNRR) has foreseen 825 million Euros for services, social infrastructures and rural pharmacies to allocate in municipalities with less than 3000 inhabitants and a more specific investment of

⁵² Mazzocchi, G., Barbera, F., Bochicchio, D., Cersosimo, D., Cutello, G., Leone, S., Lucatelli, S., Membretti, A., Orio, A., Scotti, M., Sonzognò, G., Storti, D., Tomnyuk, V., Urso, G., 2022, *Giovani Dentro. Uno sguardo alle prospettive e ai bisogni dei giovani delle aree interne*, Publisher: Riabitare l'Italia.

⁵³ <https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/strategia-nazionale-aree-interne/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/273176>

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300 million Euros for the improvement of the roads⁵⁵. An additional 310 million Euros for the three-year period 2021-2023 have widened the funds⁵⁶. **Figure 26.1** shows the map of the 72 Italian inner “project areas”.

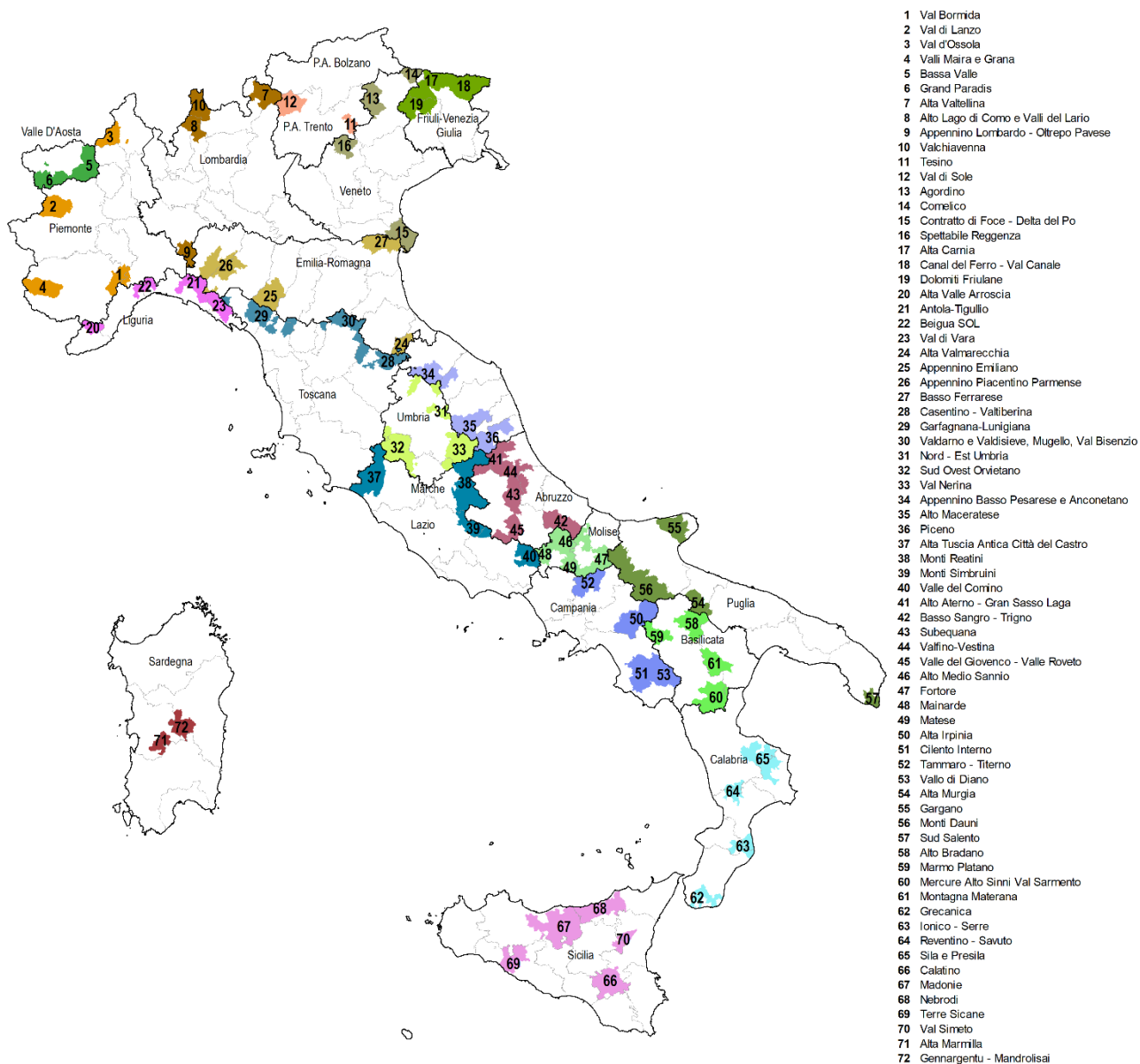


Fig. 26.1 The map of the 72 “project areas”. Source: <https://politichecoesione.governo.it/it/strategie-tematiche-e-territoriali/strategie-territoriali/strategia-nazionale-aree-interne-snai/le-aree-interne-2014-2020/>

In addition to these 72 areas, in 2022 the Government decided to include also small islands, because they are considered as having the same problems of inner areas in terms of services and distances. They have been grouped in a 73rd area and include about 240 000 inhabitants, divided into 35 island municipalities⁵⁷.

⁵⁵ Relazione annuale sulla Strategia Nazionale per le aree interne, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Dipartimento per le politiche di coesione, anno 2020, https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Relazione-CIPRESS-2020_finale.pdf

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ <http://territori.formez.it/content/isole-minori-prima-area-ufficiale-snai-2021-2027>

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Among the inner areas of Italy, it is interesting to focus on specific territories and issues that seem to be representative of the real level of implementation of what is stated in the official documents.

This chapter focuses on the participation processes in the area of inner Cilento ("Cilento interno"), providing two examples of participation, one that can be considered bottom-up and the other top-down, using two tools provided by literature to evaluate whether they are complete or improvable.

The two events are: 1) the MAI-Lab (Laboratorio del Meeting Aree Interne – Inner Areas Meeting Laboratory), performed in Valle dell'Angelo the 1st of July 2023. The laboratory has been built to create a discussion session among young people, other residents, associations, and multiple subjects of the inner areas of Cilento, and has taken place during the MAI (Meeting Aree interne – Inner Areas Meeting) initiative. The host of the event is an agri-food small facility named Àusono; 2) the institutional event organized by the municipality of Roccadaspide about agrivoltaic projects and the dissemination of information about calls for EU funds, that has taken place on the 23rd of September 2023 in Roccadaspide, organized by the coordination office and the areal desk of the Municipality. The two participation examples are not meant to be representative of every initiative taking place in the territory of inner Cilento, but to build two specific cases which may represent a frame of reference of what can be treasured and/or criticized about participation-related experiences.

The chapter also aims at analysing the statements included in political documents and comparing them with the reality that has been investigated by means of several visits, interviews and questionnaires performed during a period spent on the field, within the framework of a P.O.N PhD project.⁵⁸

It is important to specify that, due to the narrative and informational nature of this chapter, data will be presented in the form of a storytelling, with the aim of disseminating information and giving a point of view which can be helpful for the future decision-making processes.

Regarding the investigation on the field, visits, participation in the events and interviews have been performed to collect data. Then, findings have been discussed trying to use the two tools literature, used to criticize the current practices. In addition to this, the previously mentioned "National Strategy Plan" has been considered, as well as the document "Carta della Partecipazione Aree Interne" ("Participation Chart for the Inner Areas")⁵⁹, in order to have a set of national specific documents to compare with the local situation. Finally, another evaluation consists in analysing the programmatic document "Strategia d'Area per il Cilento Interno" ("Inner Cilento Areal Strategy")⁶⁰ and trying to compare it with the national documents and – more importantly – with the real initiatives on the territory. Inner Cilento includes 29 municipalities listed in the footnote⁶¹, 14 of which are considered as peripheral and ultraperipheral⁶². **Figure 26.2** shows the map of inner Cilento, dividing it according to the territorial definitions that have been described above. Translating the caption from Italian, the first four colours stand for: Belt (orange), Intermediate (light green), Peripheral (emerald green), Ultraperipheral (dark green).

⁵⁸ developed by the International PhD Programme/UNESCO Chair "Environment, Resources and Sustainable Development" at the Department of Science and Technology, University of Naples "Parthenope".

⁵⁹ Cittadinanzattiva, with the support of Strategia Aree Interne, *Carta della Partecipazione Aree Interne*, 2020, https://www.cittadinanzattiva.it/multimedia/import/files/Carta_della_Partecipazione_Aree_Interne.pdf

⁶⁰ Strategia d'area del Cilento Interno, 2019, https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Strategia_Area_Cilento_interno.pdf

⁶¹ Aquara, Bellosguardo, Campora, Cannalonga, Castelcivita, Castelnuovo Cilento, Castel San Lorenzo, Ceraso, Controne, Corleto Monforte, Felitto, Gioi, Laurino, Magliano Vetere, Moio della Civitella, Monteforte Cilento, Novi Velia, Orria, Ottati, Perito, Piaggine, Roccadaspide, Roscigno, Sacco, Salento, Sant'Angelo a Fasanella, Stio, Valle dell'Angelo and Vallo della Lucania.

⁶² Ibid.

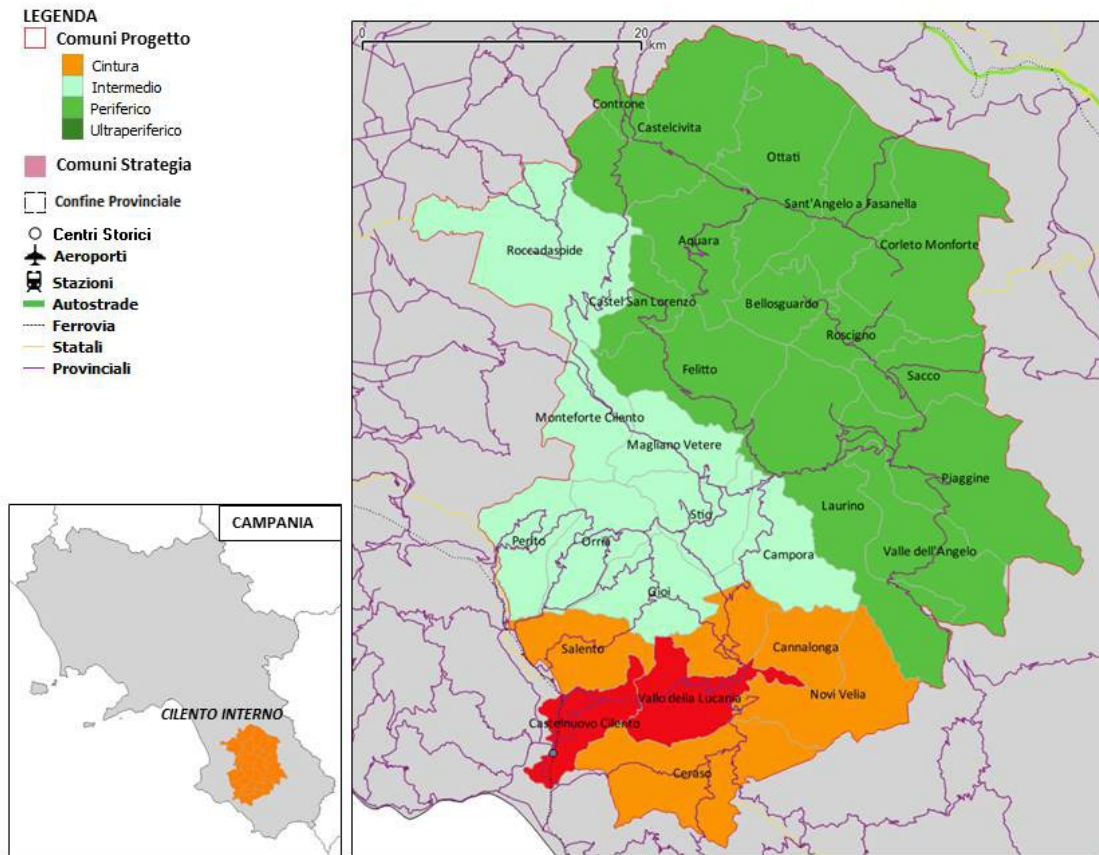


Fig. 26.2 The map of inner Cilento. Source: <https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/strategia-nazionale-aree-interne/regione-campania-aree-interne/cilento-interno/>

Data from the event have been directly collected taking part to the initiative and by means of an interview to one of the organizers.

26.2.1 Two main tools for a critical perspective

Starting from the end of the '60s, it is possible to find several studies and theories about the interaction between local communities and institutions. Without any doubt, the most famous work on the topic is the one published by Sherry Arnstein in 1969, creating a linear progressive diagram (the "ladder") of the levels of participation, starting from the absence of citizens' control (namely "manipulation") and culminating in the total control by citizens.⁶³

As it is possible to see from **Figure 26.3**, the linearity of the model suggests that it has been conceived in an historical and cultural context that did not take into account the multitude of plans that real situations show. The model just goes from level one to level eight, considering that the best circumstance for citizens is the top of the ladder. However, this model has capital importance as it introduced the idea that participation is always a matter

⁶³ Arnstein S.R. (1969), A ladder of Citizen Participation, in Journal of the American Institute of Planners, vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224.

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of power and that sometimes institutions use the narration of participation to hide the reality of policies that are not participative at all.

Arnstein's reflections were very much concentrated on the exclusion of subjects that she called the "have-nots" and the author is completely aware of some of the limitations of her model. Indeed, in her words:

"The justification for using such simplistic abstractions is that in most cases the have-nots really do perceive the powerful as a monolithic 'system,' and powerholders actually do view the have-nots as a sea of 'those people,' with little comprehension of the class and caste differences among them⁶⁴.

Another about Arnstein's ladder is that participation is conceived as a tool of interaction and sharing between the two categories of institutions and citizens: there is no room for the categories of non-citizen inhabitants. Of course, this can be normal, considering the historical period of Arnstein's reflection. In the present world, maybe one of the most representative groups of "have-nots" would be the one of non-citizen inhabitants, being the citizenship rights one of the strongest tools for the exclusion of the poor minorities.

Despite these issues, the ladder is still used as an inspiration for more recent studies on participation, like for example Frelih-Larsen et al (2023), that uses it to create an assessment method for the level of participation in consultations and deliberative democracy about the use of pesticides in EU⁶⁵. Another example is Teladia & van der Windt (2022): the study includes Arnstein's model within a new framework based on the Socio-Ecological System Framework and assess the level of participation in Dutch energy communities⁶⁶.

Arnstein's ladder – although its declared limitations – seems to be appropriate for the evaluation of one of our cases of interest, which is the institutional event organized by the municipality of Roccadaspide about agrivoltaic projects and the dissemination of information about calls for EU funds. The results of this evaluation are presented in next section.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Frelih-Larsen A, Chivers C-A, Herb I, Mills J, Reed M. The role of public consultations in decision-making on future agricultural pesticide use: insights from European Union's farm to fork strategy public consultation. *J Environ Planning Policy Manage.* 2023; 25: 476–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2023.2212369>.

⁶⁶ Teladia, A., van der Windt, H., A new framework for analysing local participation in community energy initiatives *IOP Conf Ser Earth Environ Sci*, 1085 (2022), Article 012034, [10.1088/1755-1315/1085/1/012034](https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1085/1/012034)

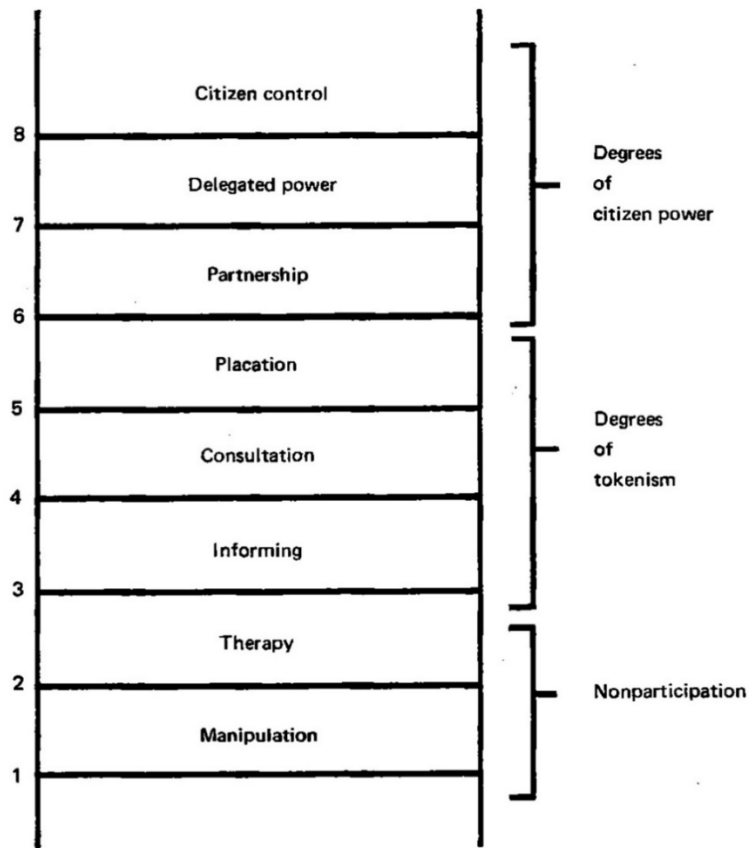


Figure 26.3 The Arnstein's model of the Ladder of Citizen Participation Source: <https://organizingengagement.org/models/ladder-of-citizen-participation/>

The boundaries of participation have been widely explored also by Luigi Pellizzoni in his "Participation Circle"⁶⁷. The "circle" creates a distinction between private and public participation, but also between civil and political participation. It is interesting to notice that, in this model, the common identification of the private dimension with the civil one, as well as the assimilation of public and political issues is dismantled, so that the four dimensions can be matched together in four different combinations.

To make the model simpler, Pellizzoni creates four paradigmatic situations that represent each quadrant, using football as an exemplary topic.

We have reproduced here the circle without the example of football, using examples that fit better in the overall contest of one of our two cases of interest, the MAI event. **Figure 26.4** represents the "Participation Circle" adapted to our work:

⁶⁷ Pellizzoni L., 2005, «Cosa significa partecipare», *Rassegna italiana di sociologia*, 46, 3, pp. 479-514, DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1423/20432>

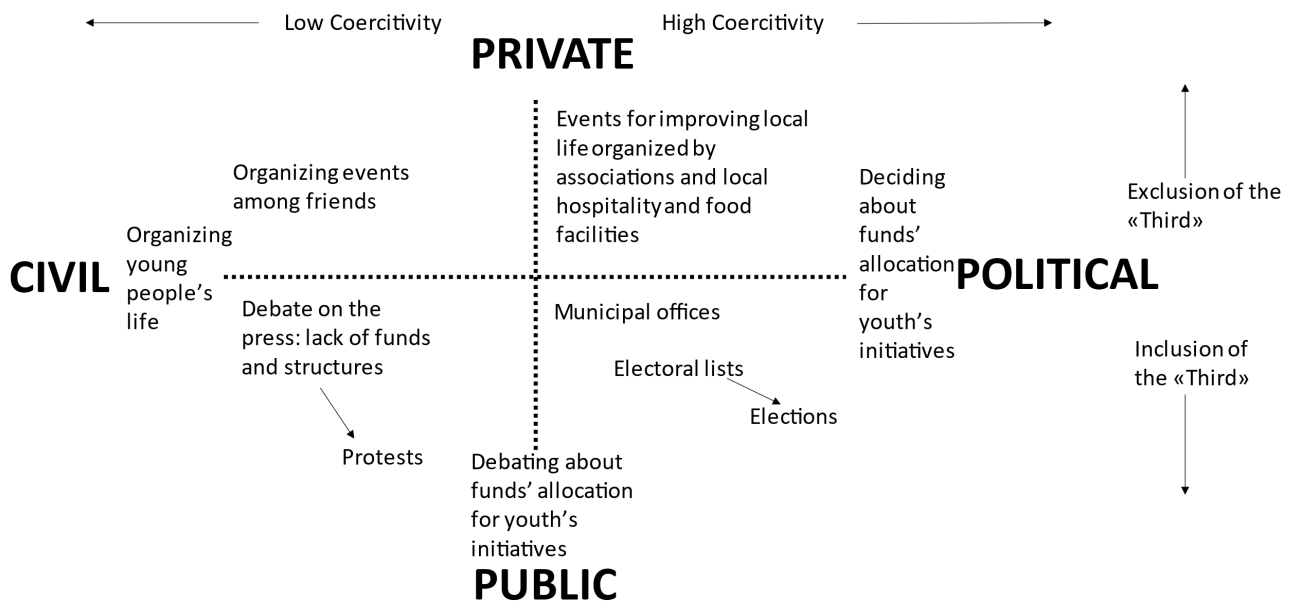


Figure 26.4 The circle of Participation by Pellizzoni adapted to our work

As it is possible to see in the figure above, Pellizzoni's idea is to state that the civil and the private dimensions do not coincide and that there is the possibility for a civil/public dimension, as well as for a political/private one, depending on the inclusion/exclusion of the "third": this is the reason of the presence of the two vertical spheres of "Inclusion of the Third" and "Exclusion of the Third". The notion of the "third" can be controversial, since its identity is not precisely defined: sometimes it consists of a material subject, sometimes it is represented by the ideal asset of a relation among the individuals of a community. The fundamental property that the "third" must have is to represent the principle of accountability. The idea of the "third" – as a turning point for the distinction between the public and the private – derives from the Lockean and Hegelian distinction between the private/familiar domain and the public one, the first being characterized by the absence of the "impartial judge" (the "third") and the second by its presence. But Pellizzoni's scheme also includes the Marxian and Gramscian idea that the element of power is the one determining the difference between the private and the public field⁶⁸: this is the reason why the scheme includes the two horizontal spheres "High Coercitivity" and "Low Coercitivity". In Pellizzoni's diagram, elements from our second case of interest have been put into it instead of the examples that he created for his publication.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

26.3 Findings and Discussion

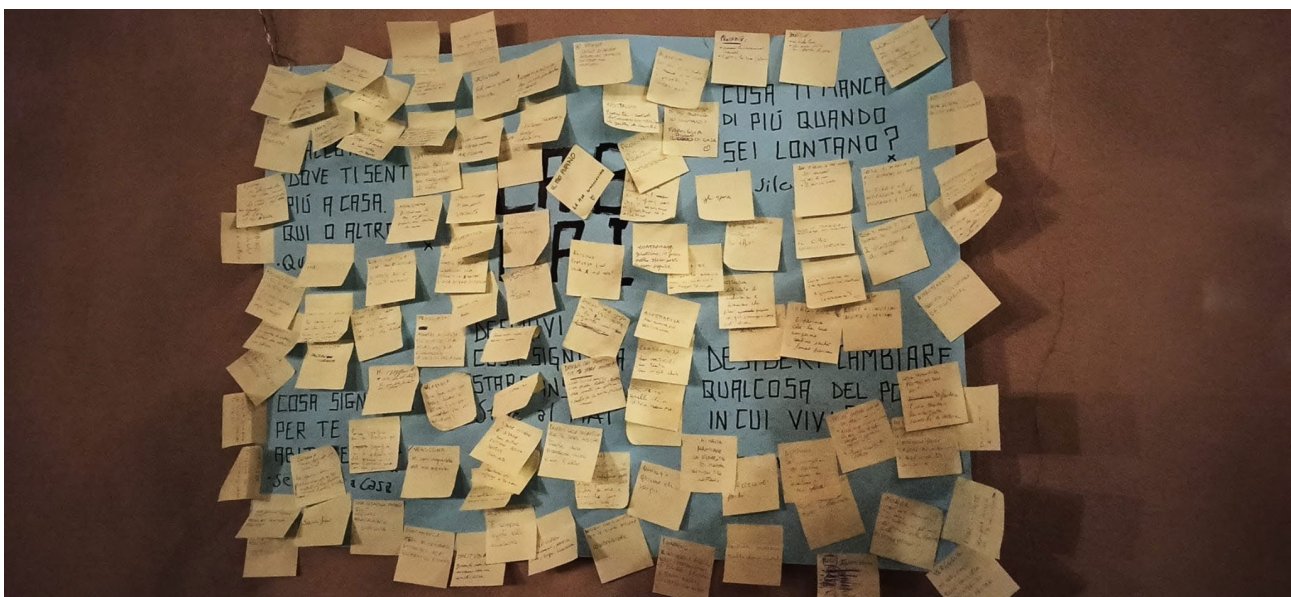
Being the topic of this chapter politically and socially shaped, findings and discussion have been joined in one section, in order to give critical observations together with the outcomes of the research. The first event that has been analysed (following the chronological order) is the MAI (Meeting Aree Interne – Inner Areas Meeting).

The organizers are some local associations: the association “Vojto”, which has also created the festival “VDA Music Potlach” in Valle dell’Angelo; the association Rehub Alburni APS, which is involved in the creation of cultural networks in inner Cilento; the association “Sfavilla” from Villa Littorio; the association “Raccontare Significa Resistere” from Castel San Lorenzo; the association “Dynamicor” from Corleto Monforte; the association “Spazi Attivi” from Trentinara. These associations invited young inhabitants of inner Cilento to participate in the MAI lab and in the MAI event, starting from an initiative of two among them, “Rehub Alburni” and “Vojto”: creating a traveling event which could promote both associations and companies managed by local young people. This intention met the interest of the working group “Presidi Culturali nel Cilento Interno” (“Cultural Hubs in Inner Cilento”), whose intent was to perform research on young generations of inner Cilento.

The event has been analysed as an example of self-organization of local communities about some relevant issues, which can be grouped into the macro-themes of services, environment, economy and culture/social change. The grouping into these macro-themes has been possible only after our participation in the event: indeed, at the beginning, the arguments proposed by the organizers were: “residing, distance, desire, belonging, perspectives, relationships, prejudices and habits”. Then, analysing the questions and the answers that emerged, it is possible to say that the proposed arguments were articulated following the main macro-themes that the research group have listed above.

Figure 26.5 is a picture of a panel that has been built during the laboratory, using all the thoughts and proposals that came out in the course of the discussion. The panel was installed also during the evening event, to present a creative summary of the proposals that had been collected in the afternoon by the participants in the MAI-Lab.

As it is possible to see, the main questions are written in block letters on the blue carton board, while all the little answers are put on them by means of little yellow post-it notes.



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Figure 26.5 The MAI-Lab Panel

The aim of the event has been to formulate proposals and provide realistic data for the policymakers to engage good practices and promote the territory. This is why the ideas on the yellow post-it notes are both about big issues and simple family memories: the attempt was to give value to the problems that young people experience in the inner areas, but also to the cultural heritage that they are still connected to.

Figure 26.6 shows the detail of a single post-it note representing a big problem of the territory: the isolation and the lack of connections among the provincial roads, but also the need for a better cleanup and maintenance of the footpaths on the mountains and country places. Indeed, the note (in Italian) says: "Isolation. Solving the problems of the provincial roads, cleaning up the footpaths and keeping the municipal roads open".

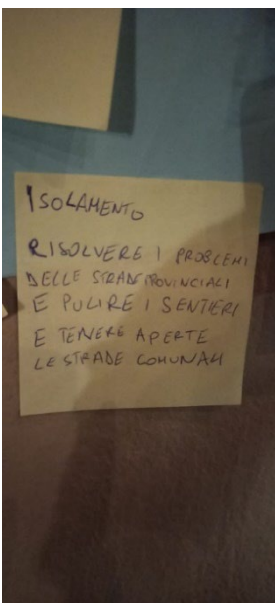


Figure 26.6 Detail of a single post-it note on the MAI-Lab Panel

On the other hand, **Figure 26.7** shows a very "personal" idea put on another post-it note, which confirms the double intention of the laboratory and represents the local cultural values. The note says: "I miss eating mum's *ciambotta* when I'm away" (*ciambotta* is a local traditional dish prepared with vegetables and olive oil).

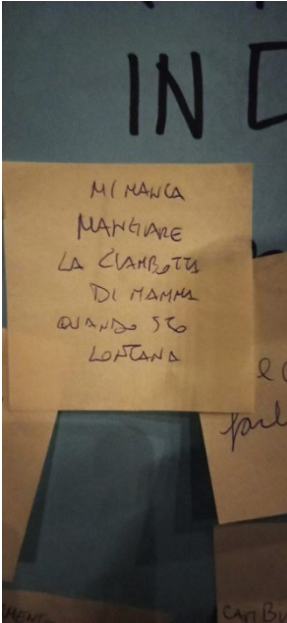


Figure 26.7 Another detail representing a post-it note about family cultural heritage and local food

The methodology that the laboratory has tried to perform is the Action-Research and the approach is declared to be bottom-up. Action-Research is a methodology whose main assumption is the idea that the researcher can understand only the facts that she/he participates to change. This is very different from (but sometimes confused with) the fact that many researchers – especially those belonging to the technical disciplines – also work on the territory, for example in consultancy performances. Action-Research is made of a bi-univocal relationship between the researcher and the territory, which is not the case of consultancy works. Moreover, Action-Research is not even identifiable with participated city/town/regional planning, which consists in a “democratization” process of decision making and in the direct involvement of inhabitants about the planning and projecting of the territories where they live. Action-Research, in conclusion, is a research methodology, which should not be confused with professional practice approaches⁶⁹. Since the organizers of the event have both taken part in the laboratory and collected data for a research study and a document to be created and addressed to local institutions, Action-Research requirements seem to be respected for what concerns their presence in the process.

Following the scheme of Pellizzoni’s “Participation Circle”, we may conclude that the MAI initiative might be interested in becoming a civil/political organization whose final intention aims at performing a public/political action on the territory but is still positioned into the private/political quadrant. This result is evident for two main reasons: 1) ontological: the promoters are not a movement or a political party but a group of local associations and single individuals, together with small local businesses; 2) intentional: the promoters of the initiative are interested in the decisions about the allocations of funds for youth’s policies but they have created an event that has been hosted by a private subject (the agri-food small company), without the creation of an electoral list or program.

⁶⁹ Saija, L., 2016, *La ricerca-azione in pianificazione territoriale e urbanistica*, Publisher: Franco Angeli/Metodi del Territorio.

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Of course, in the next future this situation is likely to be changed, since the goal of the research performed by the organizers is to create a document to be addressed to the local institutions. This means that, as well as in the Pellizzoni's original diagram, there is the possibility to pass from a quadrant to another, thus forming a real "circle". On the other hand, the interview to one of the organizers also outlines the intention to create a branding for MAI in the future: this may divert attention from the public goals and attract energies towards market/profit-oriented horizons, so the challenge is now to understand whether the working group will undertake a collectivistic or an individualistic path.

The other case of interest analysed here is the initiative about agrivoltaic EU funds that has taken place on the 23rd of September 2023 in Roccadaspide, organized by the coordination office and the areal desk of the Municipality. Agrivoltaic projects are realized planting photovoltaic panels in agricultural fields. The important thing to understand is that, from the moment of the installation, the process of agricultural production needs to be changed, according to the presence of these sun-shading panels. For this reason, it is very important that farmers are completely aware of all the consequences of the adoption of these measures.

Using the participation ladder by Arnstein, we may say that the initiative represents a level 3: Information. Indeed, some experts and responsible from the territorial institutions (local and regional) have been invited to give explanations about agrivoltaic projects and some related calls for funding local initiatives. **Figure 26.8** shows the ratio behind the organization of the event and its results, according to the elements that the research group have collected.

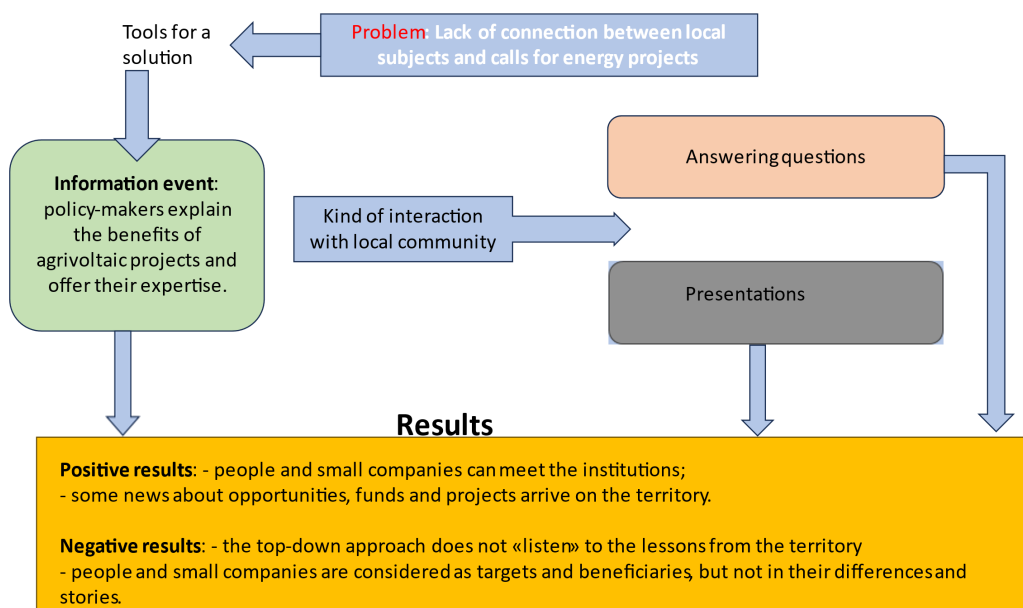


Figure 26.8 Ratio and results of the event about agrivoltaic in Roccadaspide

An important element to be considered is that the deadline for the funding opportunities was very close to the date of the informative event.

Reading the above mentioned "Inner Areas Participation Chart", it is possible to find principles like the one that states that citizens' participation should include all the phases of public policies, starting from the agenda and then going towards the decision, the programming and the implementation. Following this principle, an event that only provides information about funding opportunities in a moment that was very close to the deadline cannot be considered very much participative at all.

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Taking part in the event, some interesting questions and critical speeches from the audience proved that the real needs of the territory are peculiar, that EU projects are often conceived in places that are far from the implementation areas and that people from the territories should be listened more.

It is evident that the level of mere information is not enough, because the local actors are informed about opportunities that are not feasible on that specific territory.

However, it must be said that the areal desk was born only in April 2023 and that its operators, when interviewed, have expressed the interest to widen the range of initiatives to incentivize participation.

Discussing the specificity of the areal desk, it is possible to say that it is managed by a new generation of social facilitators and that they are trying to change trends of participation policies in the territory of inner Cilento. From the interviews, it is evident that they are also trying to involve universities and different actors to create a transformative approach for participation policies. Of course, they will need time to invert the course of policies that did not work in this direction and this can be the reason why the initiative of Roccadaspide was interesting but still followed some old pattern.

Leaving the initiatives to highlight only two last problems detected in the documents, it is possible to focus on the distance between what is declared in the strategic documents and what is really implemented on the field, and the fact that sometimes documents promote the market as a solution. If we read the "Inner Cilento Areal Strategy" mentioned above, we can see that a wide amount of problems are detected about the local health system, the transports and education, but solutions seem to be proposed only creating job opportunities and a market on natural resources and the agri-food dimension. There is even the use of the expression "product/territory" to promote the development of inner areas in a modern declination.

This perspective can create some economic benefits, but it is important to take into account that environmental and social impacts of such an identification of the territory with a product can be significantly negative.

A vision about what is a just way to create job opportunities and well-being should include evaluations on several dimensions that cannot be compressed in the economic one.

Also staying in a merely economic field, it is possible to say that inner territories and the participation processes of local communities can be a pillar in a just transition towards circular economy, because of all the cultural heritage of preservation, reuse, recycle, regeneration, care and life cycle extension that these territories can express. If participation represents only a good word for documents and public speeches, while decisions are taken elsewhere, all this heritage will not even be seen.

26.4 Conclusions

The experience of the MAI teaches that, although the rhetorical elements of participation can be present in many initiatives, their destiny depends on the collectivistic or individualistic purposes that groups from below can chase. More specifically, not all the initiatives that can be defined "from below" are necessarily aimed at achieving collective dimensions or advocacy of political relevance. "From below" we find activists, associations, NGOs, small companies, young entrepreneurs, etc... So, it is important to go beyond the rhetorical aspects about participation in each initiative to understand whether participation is a concrete good practice or just a "spot".

This is true also for what concerns the "top down" initiatives: as the initiative of Roccadaspide can show, there is still need for a real inclusion of the instances and claims of the territories, before organizing such meetings,

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otherwise the risk is that they only represent occasional fake events, created to show to the higher institutions that the local ones are working on the territories.

But the critical perspective is necessary to evaluate the intentions and the actions of all the actors, so we should also focus on the lack of interest about the territorial specificities that sometimes characterizes the higher and centrale institutions, for example EU.

To overcome the problem described above about funds that are available for projects that do not comply with the needs and heritages of some territories, much more needs to be done in the sense of research, consultations, cognitive investigations, etc...

Good policies should take into consideration both the top-down and the bottom-up dimensions to create a more participated life for territories in inner areas and everywhere, but the suggestion that applies to the two dimensions is to overcome the surface and go towards a real knowledge of the local needs. Bottom-up initiatives, as well as top-down ones, may exclude some subjects if the goals are shaped by market-oriented groups or, on the other hand, if solutions are developed by institutions that do not have any knowledge about the local problems.

This can be fundamental in terms of who participates: for example, some municipalities of inner Cilento like Sacco are hosting migrant communities that are not even taken into account in these initiatives, being citizens the main protagonists/target of both the bottom up and the top-down cases.

Hopefully, the current interest for inner areas will create new opportunities to decline projects on the real needs and vocations of such territories.

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Ledizioni Ledipublishing
via A. Boselli 10, 20136 Milan, Italy
www.ledipublishing.com

PDF ISBN: 9791256001446
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10958884

Catalogue and reprints information: www.ledipublishing.com



The JUST2CE project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101003491

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