



towards a
TERRITORIAL SCHOOL

TOWARDS A TERRITORIAL SCHOOL

A model of diffused primary education in the rural village of Preggio

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“If children don’t grow up
knowing about nature
and appreciating it,
they will not understand it,
and if they don’t understand it,
they won’t protect it.
And if they don’t protect it,
who will?”

David Attenborough

PRINCIPLES

1.1 overview

While more and more children are growing up and accessing education in urban settings, Preggio and many other rural Italian villages are emptying out. When a school in one of these villages fades away, so does the hope for a future generation educated on the connection between humanity and nature.

Raising territorial awareness in younger generations will be crucial for the future of our ecosystems. In an era marked by rapid urbanization and environmental decline, human's technocratic exploitation of lands is critically altering ecological balances both on global and local scales, exposing a major realization: are we teaching future generations that humans are something above the nature of territories? The growth of urban schools surrounded by artificial environments silently supports this option, detaching pupils from the surroundings in the critical stage when core values as future citizens are shaped. To envision a shift, primary education becomes pivotal. If schools and rural territories would find a new connection, pupils could learn from their local landscapes, and develop a broader ecological identity to empower environmental fights of tomorrow.

Following the necessity for innovative programs to foster territorial preservation (Council of Europe Landscape Convention ETS No. 176, 2000), and implementing them in a specific location, the research proposes the model of a Territorial School: a diffused system of primary education where the didactic model and educational resources are anchored in the local territory. Exploring the application of the model in the town of Preggio, located in Italian Central Apennines, allows to imagine alternatives to urban schooling, re-rooting primary education, and simultaneously activating the repopulation of internal areas. This would foster a co-evolutionary development between man and nature. The embedded natural, spatial and cultural qualities of rural villages like Preggio, allows one to look at territories with new eyes, transforming them into a fundamental bibliography for the educational curricula.

May future generations learn within the nature of territories, and teach us something we sensed but never understood: our symbiotic being.



1. Unknown kid, terracotta work representing the territory of Preggio

For an ecological shift of the future, the values that the next generations will fight for tomorrow are something we have to collectively work on today. Greater care in supporting children's growth and imagining new educational pathways to raise awareness of their (and ours) co-evolutionary identity with the environment. This is maybe the only way in which nature will become a human priority again.

Children are our only hope.

1.2 introduction

As cities continue to grow and rural populations migrate to urban areas, education has increasingly become an urban challenge. This required a reevaluation of how school spaces are designed and utilized.

The centralization and zoning of functions within dense metropolitan environments confined education in determined location according to proximity and clustering. When thinking about schools today, a specific image of a building serving as a space for teaching and learning comes to mind. Yet historically, schools, particularly elementary ones, essentially denoted a freer disposition, taking place where vacant spaces were provided. With little differentiation between living and teaching facilities, most children were instructed in informal, unregulated spaces, in closer connection with outside areas and interaction with the open fabrics (Töpfer & Isensee, 2021, p. 383).

Over time, the definition of school buildings has increasingly distanced children from natural environments. With new enclosures for safety and control, and the green surface of playgrounds progressively reduced, school spaces became generally more and more artificial. Arguably, the concentration on urban education corresponded to a shift towards self-sufficient, gated, and clustered school hubs (Hung, 2010, p. 3). Pupils stopped learning within the location of the knowledge, but in the building where it is abstracted. This “deterritorialization” of education suspends responsibility from local knowledge, the pedagogy of nature, and diminishes children’s ability to empathize with it. The consequent alienation from nature, experienced through growing up, becomes a deep-seated crux of the environmental crisis. Established educational practices often pay little attention to the connection with the environment, and some-

times, explicitly or implicitly foster this separation. Even when integrating environmental awareness into curricula, pupils often learn about nature through textbooks rather than concrete contact with the natural world. This didactic and abstract approach often leads to generalization and makes it difficult for children to grasp the scale of problems and their agency in addressing them. As a result, “they know about the importance of environmental conservation because they are told so by parents and teachers, not because they feel the need internally due to situated experiences” (Hung, 2010).

The problems of induced and deterritorialized learning create a premature abstraction (Sobel, 1996), which might alienate students from truly understanding the natural world, even to the point of moralizing or provoking a sense of guilt, climate anxiety and helplessness when learning about environmental disasters.

In order to allow pupils to become actors in the environmental preservation, the scale and relation with the environment needs to be tangible and progressive. Children, especially during their middle childhood, construct their functional cosmology of the universe, which marks their entry into a new relationship with the world (Montessori, 2022). For this reason, it is important to enable them to cultivate immediate and embodied experiences of connection with nature and its territories. Individuals’ experiences in natural environments during childhood have a significantly positive influence on their environmental awareness and actions as adolescents (Bögeholz, 2006). If children could have meaningful experiences of learning about, in, with, and from the nature of territories, it might become an inseparable part of their life histories and education. As a counter-movement to the growing

urbanization, schools need to find a new natural identity.

The potential of alternative education is seeded in the reassessment of all those marginal territories that have been neglected by contemporary centralized society. Focusing on rural areas with direct access to environmental knowledge, while concurrently imagining specific pedagogical programs that promote free discovery and understanding of the context, leads to envisioning a new type of educational structure. The paper intends to establish the concept of a Territorial School: an alternative to urban education that re-roots primary school didactics to the direct place and scale of the surrounding territory. This implies a reassessing of the local, drifting away from the notion of at reach, or closeby, and considering the location according to its geographical, cultural, physical, therefore educational characteristics.



2. London. Urban school as gated learning environment disconnected from the nature of the place



3. Abruzzo, Italy. Rural school during an open laboratory class

Arguing on the relevance of territorial knowledge as an instrument to deconstruct anthropocentric behaviors and logics of capitalist colonialism towards the environment, the “nature” of territories needs to re-appropriate its value as an agent of knowledge production. It has to come back at the center of education.

How can territory-based primary education
re-root pupils environmental identity,
while revitalizing rural areas
as agents of knowledge?

Research question

1.3 methods

The methods adopted in the research aim to analyze the issues of primary education in order to identify a potential model to raise environmental awareness in pupils, while developing renovated territorial value through a school implementation. With a connective and programmatic approach, the research will focus on defining pathways for a more nature-driven pedagogy, and on the re-evaluating of embedded qualities of Italian rural villages in inner areas to avoid their decline.

The first section of the research provides a theoretical framework to define the notions and conditions of a Territorial School: the approach to territories and therefore the approach to didactics. The research combines literature on principles of pedagogy, territorial education and spatial perception to implement the agenda of the European Landscape Convention and the connected Pathways for Landscape Education in School Education (Calcagno Maniglio, 2017), as well as questioning some practical applications. The aim is to produce a direct interpretation and expansion on the existing research and to identify the framework of its applicability through a didactic plan: a strategic framework for achieving territorial education.

In the second section the pedagogical and spatial principles defined by the didactic plan will be adapted and confronted with a specific location: the rural village of Poggio, in the Umbria Apennines. The analysis will be based on historical and geopolitical contextualization of depopulation in Italian inner areas -rural locations remote from major urban centers- and the analytical and perceptive mapping of the site both on the territorial and urban scale. Thanks to its historical, sociopolitical and territorial features, Poggio embodies

both problems and opportunities that characterize Italian rural villages in internal areas. In this sense, the model of reactivation of Poggio directly connects with its siblings diffused in the Apennines, and potentially inspires models for diverse Southern European rural contexts affected by depopulation.

The assessment of the typology of Poggio as a rural village aims to question its specific connection with the natural and artificial elements of the landscape, understand the social patterns and map the pedagogical value that the territory carries. This section will allow to combine the formerly developed didactic plan into a specific didactic program: a structured set of learning experiences, courses, or activities designed to achieve territorial education in the village of Poggio.

The principles of a Territorial School will be extrapolated through the merging of the general plan and the localized program. This approach ensures that the proposed didactic program is both theoretically sound and practically viable. Insights from pedagogy, spatial perception, and territorial education provide a robust foundation, while the detailed case study of Poggio grounds these principles in lived experience and specific socio-territorial conditions. The expected aim is a replicable, yet context-sensitive model of education that aligns learning practices with ecological, cultural, and spatial sustainability, and offers a consistent framework of applicability for local actors and inspire governal plans for the repopulation of critical areas.

How can kids understand the dynamics of environmental pollution through the representation of the globe?

The impossibility to grasp the scale of problems distances pupils from their possibility of action.

To avoid early age alienation from nature, environmental education needs to start from the tangible scale of the visible, physical world.



4. Kids drawing of a polluted globe

TOWARDS A DIDACTICS

the model of a Territorial School

2.1 theoretical position

Territory and school

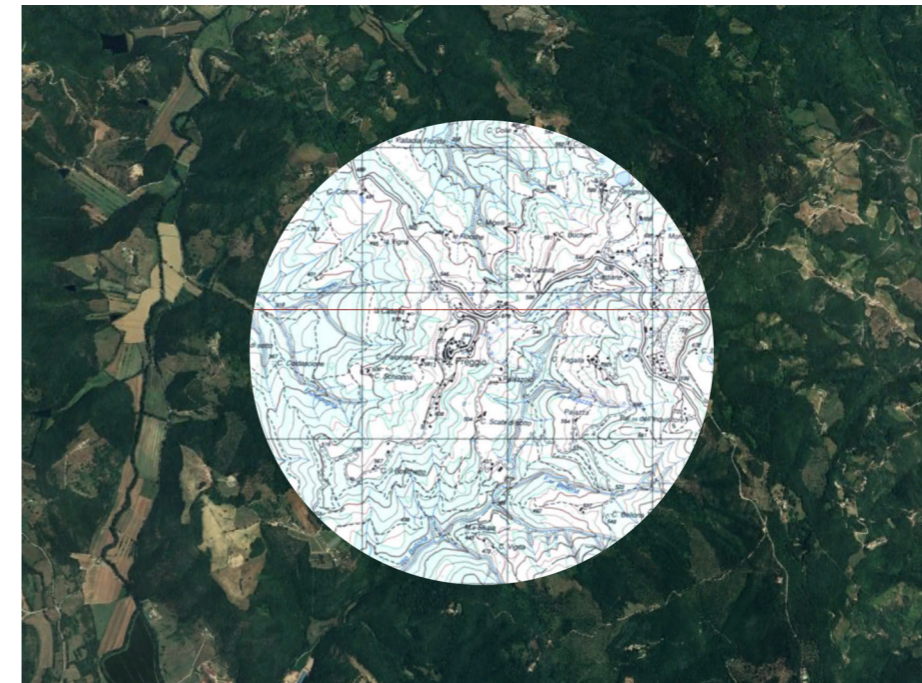
The research towards a Territorial School starts with questioning the relation between the notions of the constituting terms: territory and school. In its original Latin use, territorium referred to the agricultural and grazing land surrounding a human settlement. While becoming a direct synonym of the state with the rise of modern European countries, the territory is often conceptualized as a bounded area, place or region over which a political authority is exercised (Antonisch, n.d.). This general definition prioritizes the political dimension of territories over their cultural and natural aspects, favoring a functionalist understanding rather than a co-evolutionary one. Only in recent times, studies of territorial ecology have introduced a new understanding of the term as a “complex living system” (Magnaghi, 2020, p.20) produced from the relationships between human settlement and the environment. Territories became palimpsests (Corboz, 1983) of different material and immaterial configurations, an overlap and integration of cities, agrarian landscapes, infrastructures, cultures, socio-cultural patterns, and environmental knowledge. As a result of this process, the territory can be now seen as an immense collective, intergenerational, living cultural heritage dense with knowledge.

The notion of the territory as a common good (Magnaghi, 2020, 21) generated new interest in educators and schools. As part of the Global Education 2030 Agenda, a pedagogical program for future sustainable development released by UNESCO, great emphasis has been placed on the importance of connecting pupils with the close-by natural landscape as a way to “understand basic ecolo-

gy with reference to local and global ecosystems” (Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives, 2017, 40).

This territorialist approach (Magnaghi, 2020) could become the catalyst for a radical transformation of the educational system, provoking the rise of new ecological pedagogies, and allowing the shift towards a more eco-responsible future citizenship. Placing the location at the center provokes new understanding of territorial ecosystems, democracy, citizenship, and even territorial governance. Involving new partnerships with local actors and alignments with natural cycles, the territory becomes the structure for a new biopolitical plan as a valid option to prevailing models of urbanization (Viganò, 2023).

In this sense also the notion of schools takes on a renewed meaning. Acquiring a new territorial spatiality, schools are no longer seen as “the physical place where teaching is imparted” (Treccani, n.d.), but more as a learning condition based on the interaction with the physical world. Schooling becomes the unfolding of the location itself, through the active participation and interrelation with its students. Within the field of primary schooling, the Global Education 2030 Agenda encourages reflection on a new relationship between pupils and territories. This perspective moves beyond the dynamics of traditional frontal learning and abstract education confined to buildings in large cities, envisioning an education that adapts to and is shaped by the knowledge of the local environment.



5. Territory of Preggio as a palimpsest of knowledge

“Place + people = politics.”

David Gruenwald

2.2 precedents and principles

Previous experiments

The territorialisation of education has been discussed through time as a practice to fight moral corruptions of urban life and embetter child's healthiness. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his seminal work, *Émile, or On Education* (1762) argued for an educational environment closer to nature, reflecting his broader philosophical belief in the benefits of natural living and learning. His ideas, based on rural localization of schools as the matrix for didactic pedagogies, inspired various movements, including outdoor schools, forest schools, and the nature-immersion philosophies adopted later by educators like Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner.

In recent times, the European Landscape Convention stressed the importance of reintroducing landscape education in schools as a fundamental method to foster environmental stewardship (Council of Europe Landscape Convention ETS No. 176, 2000). This call gave birth to the European Network Let's Care for the Planet, which enacted environmental projects such as a local composting school in the rural town of Epila, Spain (Dhor El Compostador, 2021), or the creation of Biodiversity Observatories for the practical understanding of local ecosystems (CITEGO, 2015).

While setting the bases for a territorial education (Calame, 2015), these initiatives are often treated as extraordinary events, highlighting a significant challenge: their miss-integration into mainstream educational systems and subsequent fading. For these projects to make a lasting impact, more structured connection to local environmental practices into the educational system is needed. Establishing concrete, age-appropriate learning goals tied to personal maturation

during the 5 years cycle could help bridge the gap between innovative initiatives and conventional education, ensuring a holistic, sustained approach to pupils' development.

As a first attempt to harmonize these practices within a structured framework for place-based eco-pedagogy, and interpreting the necessity of future "schools which address the values attaching to landscapes and the issues raised by their protection, management and planning" (European Landscape Convention, 2000), the association CITEGO developed a specific planning for education in natural landscapes. The Pathways for Landscape Education in School Education (Calcagno Maniglio, 2017) highlight the necessity of a didactic continuity, defining targeted learning objectives and practices according to pupils maturation and potential scale of territorial understanding.

The plan introduces the concept of landscape as "part of a territory as perceived by people, the character of which results from the action of natural and/or human factors and their interrelations" (Calcagno Maniglio, 2017). This highlighting the significance of subjective understanding of territories, and the necessity for learning goals that align with children's cognitive and emotional growth. To ensure continuity in the didactic plan, the Pathways will be expanded and further developed based on pedagogies of internalizing complex surroundings.

Territorial didactics

To define a didactic plan for the five years of primary school, it is essential to consider how children interact

with the territory at different stages of their development. From an early age, pupils learn to explore the surrounding world using their senses. This sensory-guided process enables them to create a personal territory—a "mental and emotional construct shaped by how they perceive, assimilate, and store information about their surroundings" (Lynch, 1960). This environment may include urban or natural spaces, which stimulate imagination, foster the absorption of knowledge, and guide behaviors.

Territorial learning, or the acquisition of knowledge about one's place, is therefore based in experiential learning, where the act of education "is not a preparation for life; is life itself" (Dewey, 1966). This requires the deconstruction of educational moments in traditional schools -based of frontal lessons in closed classrooms- into various activities in open space for sensory engagement and active exploration. Only in this way children "develop spatial awareness and a sense of first autonomy and responsibility, then belonging to their environment". (Lodi, Il Paese Sbagliato, 1970).

In order for this process of autonomous territorial learning to happen, the role of educators becomes mainly supportive, and able to provide the necessary skills to engage with the surrounding. In this sense, geographer Gino De Vecchis refers to three objectives: "The first is for children to recognise the existing and active dependencies in their natural environment; the second is for them to be capable, in this context, of orienting themselves in a personal way; the third is to be open to the discovery, internalisation and practical respect for the values of the environment" (De Vecchis & Staluppi, 1997, 105). These objectives—recognizing environmental dependencies, orienting

2.3 the didactic plan

Observation

The first steps (1st year) to introduce pupils to territorial pedagogy is to transform the simple act of looking into an observation. In order to activate processes of research, curiosity, exploration and discovery, pupils need to be exposed to a known, limited territory. Through the activation of the faculty of listening, touching, seeing, recognizing smells, perfumes and sounds, children, who often live in an urban environment, restore a relationship with the place, identifying natural elements (the tree, the hedge, the flowers, the meadow, the small lake, etc...) and objects of human activity (the road, the pavement, the gate, the wall, the school building, the church, etc...). This process allows to observe, therefore recognize a familiar place, leaving enough room for surprise and emotion towards the unexpected and unforeseen (Calcagno Maniglio, 2017).

The active observation happens on the spot, in open air. Spaces must therefore attain a specific level of "safety" to allow kids to move, run and freely engage with the surroundings, away from potential harms (cars, pollution, stranger danger, etc..) and from getting lost. It is also necessary to consider the parameters of the space linked to the child's visual field (i.e. 100 to 150 centimetres of height). Places situated on an elevated position and without intermediate obstacles are preferred, to capture as much information as possible about the observed landscape. Street signalization must be also compliant to the visual limits of pupils.

The observation phase is complemented with the exercise of drawing. This consolidates the open air experience and allows subjective, spontaneous graphic relationship

with the place. Suggesting sensations provoked by the appearance of elements, their forms, colors, aesthetic and functional features, the child starts distinguishing the elements in the foreground and the background.

The external world represented by the children can be seen as an instrument to inform the teacher on the acquisition of perceived things and the way they are recognized. This process must be supported by participatory engagement through the phases and the possibility to exhibit and present personal and collective works.

As part of the learning objectives, the pupils are able to master the organization of spaces, the qualities and distribution of natural elements, objects and people in a known territory. To orientate and place oneself in an experienced landscape. To describe verbally and represent graphically through drawing, sketches. Looking at the landscape, observing it carefully, transposing it through instinctive tools helps pupils to begin to identify and relate the territory to the one to be developed later.

Relation

The second phase (2nd -3rd year) is based on understanding the relation between the identified elements. The pupil explores the landscape with curiosity by identifying, for example, the characteristics of the personal home-school path, the one of other children, the succession of squares and openings, the end of a pavement, the distances and length of urban and natural features, the dead leaves on the pavements, the movements of materials; and their relationships. This

introduces them to the phenomenology of territories, activating the ability to recognize the difference between natural and man-made elements, and the interdependent relationships between them.

Even if based on the direct relation with the natural environment, this phase introduces kids to a more systematic sensorial research. Through short excursions and hikes, they will conduct field surveys supported by predefined tools and objectives. The aim is to understand broader relations between the familiar visual knowledge of the pupils, and the neighborhood they belong to. This process will be supported with practical laboratory activities, where pupils explore through mapping the organization of spaces and their visible correlations, as well as the child's relationship with his or her territory: for example, the route to get home and the route to school, the elements encountered, the progressions, etc... Kids participate in collective lessons, projection and discussion of relevant documentation, writing exercises, photographic exhibitions, and are slowly introduced to different mediums, landscape slides, photographic documentaries, thematic maps, ortho-photo maps.

Pupils learn to understand the phenomena like seasonal changes, or behavioral patterns of humans and their modifications of the environment. By relation, kids compare, understand distances, heights, time-spans and develop basic instrument to assess territories. Furthermore, they will intuitively locate on a simple map their own landscape and the municipal territory where it is located.

Integration

The third phase (4th-5th grade) is characterized by the integration of supportive notions and layers beyond the physical perception. This phase allows kids to understand the stratification of past-present-future actions and modifications on territories, stimulating the ability to assess morphological, geographical, cultural phenomena.

The information previously perceived and acquired in familiar landscapes will be enriched and deepened with the help and contribution of geography, natural sciences, art history, anthropology, landscape archaeology. Adding a layer that is not purely visual but theoretical, allows kids to consolidate their ability to understand and feel connected to a territory.

The success of lectures will be assessed through the ability of kids to recognize notions within the hydrological (rivers, lakes, torrents, etc...), morphological (undulating terrain, terracement, vallive plains), material (brick, wood, etc...), biological (woods, fields etc...), historical (permanences, ruins, signs, etc...) manifestations of the territory. This is also the best way to implement the first interdisciplinary activities in the classroom: to get to know and give names to the elements and objects observed, to understand their uses and meanings in relation to a landscape where the community lives.

Furthermore, small trips will be organized, to confront pupils with areas located outside the usual visual knowledge. These activities inform on broader conditions of natural landscapes (hilly, rural, seaside and lakeside) and the human uses of land (river banks, earthworks built along the slopes, cultivated fields, dikes, terracements, alterations of large ru-

ral areas into commercial or industrial facilities, etc...). Pupils are asked to represent, create maps and formulate proposals for the reorganization of known and experienced landscapes, describe and represent the formulated proposal. Didactic exhibitions are the output of the projects, to be done in a shared way, with the collective help of the children from upper and lower classes (Calcagno Maniglio, 2017).

The learning objectives of this phase are based on the ability to recognize tangible and intangible territorial phenomena, understand the broader notion of location, extension and finiteness, recognize the effects and testimonies of various natural/artificial features and assess the territorial specificities of the location as a system. This process integrates the skills and knowledges acquired in previous phases within a connective aim. The pupil completes the tools to relate their identity within the territory of study. This process not only allows personal localization, but also provides the tools to assess different territories to be confronted in the future, towards a progressive understanding and unfolding of a global perspective.

If education is situated, the context becomes the teacher, it's movements, it's seasons become the lectures. Topics of interest come from kids observations, and teachers become facilitators.

Limits and potential

The outlined didactic plan provides a foundation of imagining an integration of territorial didactics into schools curricula. However, it does not delve into the composition, spatial configuration, or local conditions of the school itself.

Generic plans, while helpful in outlining principles, might fail to capture the unique spatial characteristics, local actors, and landscape dynamics necessary for effective place-based pedagogy. This results in the impossibility to target the educational features of the place, for local schools and administration to support the program, and work towards its implementation.

What these principles emphasize, anyways, is the necessity of moving away from school as a mere buildings, toward the vision of the school as an organism—open and integrated with its surrounding environment. Furthermore, the activities proposed underscore that this program cannot be carried out in anyplace but only in specific territories characterized by natural and cultural diversity. It becomes evident that most artificial and function-driven urban settings would be unable to support this kind of education effectively. The concept of open classrooms requires flexible, spacious, and safe learning environments. These should be spaces where children can move freely, explore, and be guided by intuition without exposure to fundamental risks and, ideally, without constant oversight by teachers. All these conditions are more easily granted by rural locations.

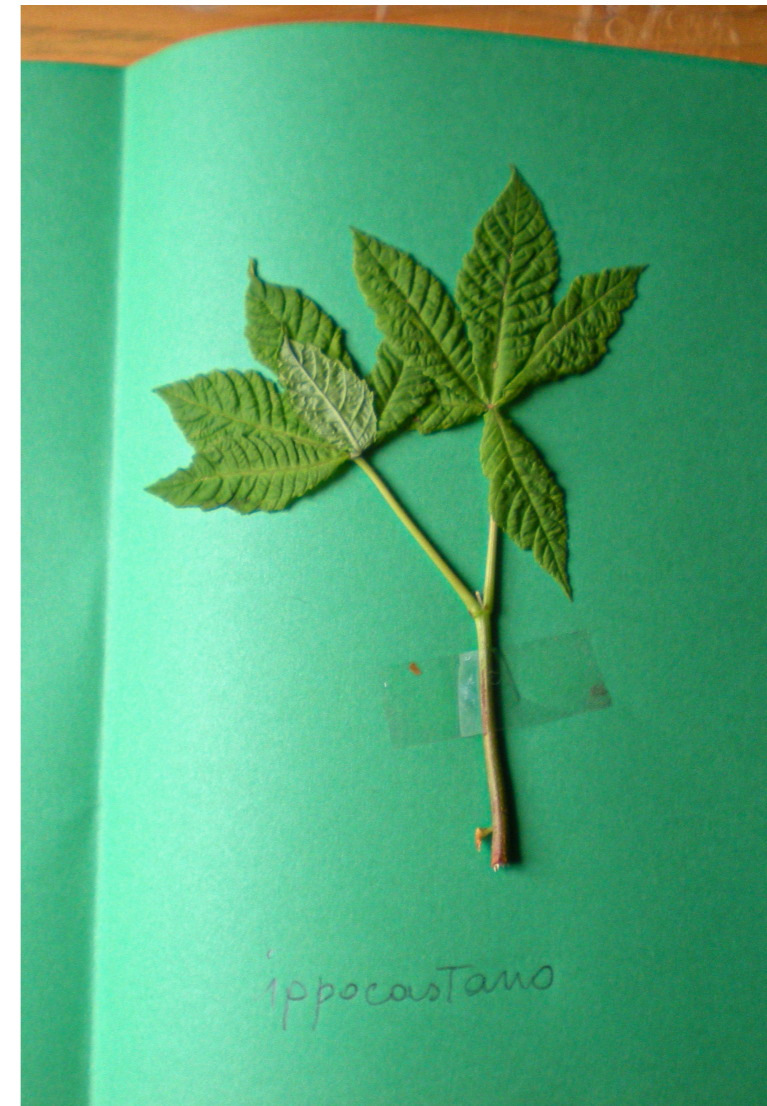
Additionally, education rooted in practical examples and on-site demonstrations requires the connection with these manifestations, and

the presence of school staff with deep knowledge of the local area, capable of narrating its story and context.

Finally, the territorialization of a school program requires more active participation, support, and collaboration from local authorities and administrations. It highlights the necessity of a reciprocal relationship with the place where it is located.

A fertile educational framework must be developed with the local context in mind, turning the territory into both the agent of study and a foundation for a practical, relevant project. To define a model of Territorial School, the didactic plan and its implementation in a location must be systematically intertwined.

Today physical schools provide abstract learning. May the future of education not depend on the presence of schools, but on the persistence of territories?
A new possibility:
physical learning, abstract schools.



6. Workshop on plants recognition, Preggio

TOWARDS A TERRITORY

the case of Preggio

3.1 Italian inner areas

Rural areas and depopulation

The spatial principles derived from the didactic plan bring renewed interest to rural areas. With a different population density, land use, and patterns of economic and social activity, these locations could offer an alternative to centralized urban systems and support the need for educational structures in closer contact with nature.

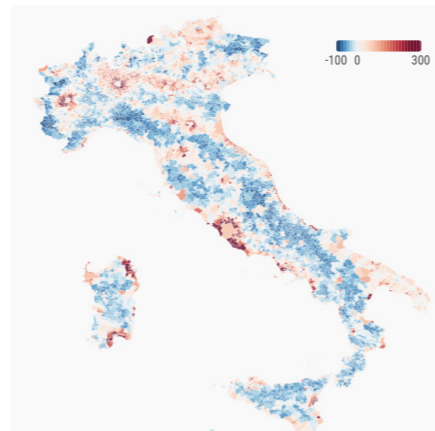
Reflecting on the condition of rurality, one can identify different manifestations across European territories, stemming from the geomorphological context of the land as well as the geopolitical conditions of the area. With the aim of deepening the understanding of the spatial conditions of safety, diversity, naturalness, and specificity expressed in the pedagogical program, the research will focus on studying Italy's inner areas.

In the Italian context, inner areas represent all those territories located in less accessible positions, far from major urban centers. The geomorphological condition of these territories is described with the term *rugosità*: the distinctive alternation of steep terrain and valleys. It can be translated into topographic roughness or coarseness, but it is more precisely defined by the ratio between the ground surface exposed to the open air and the surface projected on a horizontal plane. This characteristic determines the unique development of the region: the continuous alternation of valleys and ridges has, over the years, led to a greater variety of micro-environments with immense natural and environmental diversity. Furthermore, this has favored an economy predominantly local in development, based on traditional activities such as agriculture, craftsmanship, and sustainable tourism. The presence of hill-tops also provides unique conditions

for protection and safety, which, over time, encouraged the establishment of rural villages — a diffuse structure of small settlements scattered across the territory.

On the other hand, the geographical roughness reflects the difficulties in navigating the terrain due to its physical characteristics and, consequently, its isolation. Unsurprisingly, Italy's inner areas are predominantly located near the Alps and Apennines. Today, these areas cover approximately 60% of the country's territory but are home to only about 23% of the national population. Depopulation is the main challenge these areas face today, since the lack of opportunities and development forces migration toward major urban centers. Over the last 50 years, almost 20% of the population has moved from rural areas to larger cities (Openpolis, 2023). As a direct consequence, 5,383 small towns are currently at high risk of abandonment. Of these, 2,381 are in an advanced state of depopulation, while the rest are already completely deserted (Ruffino, 2023).

As populations migrate to larger urban areas, the educational landscape is also altered. Between 2020 and 2030, the population of children living in rural areas is predicted to decrease by 8.32% (Openpolis, 2023). This shift means that education is increasingly concentrated in "urban schools," causing younger generations to slowly lose their connection to these territories, and schools in inner areas to permanently close.



7. Depopulation of Italian inner areas in blue (change in inhabitants per km²)

Within the next 10 years, the population of kids in rural areas will lower by around 9%. This means that almost one more kid out of ten that was previously living in a rural area, will now access education in a urban environment. Rural school become emptier and emptier, until closing forever.

The rural village

The typical settlement of high roughness areas is the rural village. Founded as military settlements, they became then castles or strongholds and subsequently, villages or small towns. Impressively, within different natural, material and climatic conditions, the so-called *paesini* (rural villages) share a common history and identity, preserving the unique condition of urbanity integrated into the natural system.

Considering the geographical roughness as a fundamental asset, the Italian rural villages have been growing by necessity: they were elevated on hills to control the territory; protected by walls, to defend from attacks of enemies; dense and clustered, to enhance communitarian and cooperative living; surrounded by green, as a resource for wood, hunting and cultivation; locally specialized, using the independent craftsmanships as a valuable instrument of exchange. Elevation, protection, density, specialization made these villages flourish, and, -even with consistent fluctuations of population- resist in many critical periods. On the other hand, these same conditions are the ones that are marking their death nowadays. Rural villages became hard to reach by infrastructure, isolated, lacking in spaces for contemporary functions; their naturality attracts romanticizing tourism, but discourages permanent settlement, and their specializations are often out of the market.

Travelling through the Apennines, rural villages appear now as small agglomerates of houses scattered in the landscape. While observing their inherent decadence, these places still perform an irreplaceable work of guarding and caring for the territory. They are bearers of culture,

knowledge and traditions radicated through time (Benedini, n.d.). As a constellation of identities surrounded by nature, they trace an invisible net of relations, unfolding a silent system of environmental variety with priceless contemporary educational value.

For this reason, these same characteristics may acquire new value for the implementation of a contemporary function. The embedded qualities of safety, diversity, naturalness, and specificity, eventually even the great availability of space, could acquire renovated value for the implementation of a new educational function -a Territorial School- which in parallel activates the repopulation of rural villages and gives hope for the future of our ecosystems.

Rural villages represent an opportunity to apply the advocacy developed by the European Landscape Convention and adapt the outlined didactic plan at a local level. Connectedly, the necessity of these places to reinvent themselves is the only possibility of avoid their fading away. In this terms, the addition of a new school facility aims to fundamentally change their destiny.



8. Fontanigorda, GE



10. Migiana, PG



9. Opi, AQ



11. Polino, TR

3.2 Poggio

Poggio, like many of its siblings, doesn't want to be anything more than what it shows. Its modest character has been shaped by necessity. It is elevated on a hill to control the countryside, it is dense enough to be easily protected. Its streets are narrow and houses are made of stone structural walls. These characteristics could acquire renovated value for the implementation of a new educational function. As a localized case study to argue on the relevance of Territorial Schools, Poggio, as a village between villages, will be the case study of the research.

History of Poggio

The rural village of Poggio, located in Umbria Appennines, has always been a settlement connected to the surrounding territory. Eventually, it was first built with that direct intention, as a safe space to observe it. Being protected between woods and hills, together with the possibility of dominating the plains and control the mountain passes, favored the settlement of ancient Italics practicing silvopastoral economy. Being on top of a steep hill allowed the full observation of the surroundings as well as the possibility to defend from enemies' insurgence. On an economical level, being away from valley areas, which were generally flooded, simplified cultivation and the traverse on foot. After a continuous history of transformations along the Roman, Barbarian, Feudal, Communal and Signorial eras, its relationship with the territory evolved, while preserving the interdependent urban-rural identity.

The appearance of Poggio is still extremely connected to its medie-

val history, when the settlement became a stronghold with the name of "castle of Prejo or Praedium", under papal control. The urban structure was defined by a circle of walls, a castle, some connected houses and a watchtower. While having a craftsman and productive vocation inside the walls, the surrounding hills were used for agriculture and livestock herds. In the thirteenth century four hundred and twenty-two families lived in Poggio, being at that time one of the most affluent communities in the contado.

While in barbarian times hordes of brigands, war veterans and stragglers forced Poggio to reduce the circle of walls more and more around its stronghold fortified nuclei, during the Signorial era, the improved living conditions spurred vigorous urban development. This led to the occupation of vertical spaces through tower-houses, arches connecting buildings within the ancient walls, and eventually extending beyond them.

Parts of these transformations are still present, like the consolidation of 3 rings of fortified walls and the remaining ruins of the watchtower (Rocca) on the higher point of Poggio. In the countryside, through the ages, the land-based economy had a visible impact on the rural landscape: specialized crops such as vines and olives became dominant, while agricultural systems were also reshaped. The mezzadria (sharecropping system) became widespread, contributing to the humanization of the landscape, which was shaped into forms still admired today.

In the second half of the 19th century, after the destruction of the walls, Poggio grew in size and population, transforming the inward organization into the one of a rural village. Several families began cultivating silk by breeding silkworms, diversifying the

local economy. A doctor settled permanently in the village, a post office was established, and in 1870, a pharmacy opened. In 1918 the primary school opened, substituting the private one held in the hospital (already existing since 1350). In 1933 the strada nuova connected with the provincial road, and from 1949 a colony to host children in difficult situations was opened in the former church. However, from the 1950s onward, with the industrialization and the rise of modern cities, many residents began leaving the village for bigger centers. This depopulation resulted in a significant decline in working activities for the remaining residents, ultimately leading to the economic downturn of the area.

The village today

Today, Poggio is a hamlet of the municipality of Umbertide, in the province of Perugia. The rural village is located at an elevation of 613 m, about 18 km SW of Umbertide, the bigger nearby city. It lies on an isolated hill surrounded by extensive wooded areas (chestnut and oak) and pastures. In 2001 it was inhabited by 121 residents, but in the last 24 years its population decreased progressively, and now not more than 50 people live there. The school closed in 2012, the restaurants a few years later, and then the only bar in town (2022). Predictably, it will soon join the already long list of Italian and Southern European



12. Vatican museum map showing the territory of Poggio



13. kid biking up the main street in Poggio



15. soccer field behind Poggio



14. view on Poggio from a farmers house



16. Farmers and kid



17. People resting next to the main Preggio square



19. Orchard in front of the former church



18. Agricultural practice



20. Leisure activities

3.3 Poggio as a school

Assets for territorial education

Today Poggio still embodies a territorial presence. Without being affected to major urban expansion, its environment still witnesses the craftsman and agricultural past, while preserving an outstanding natural biodiversity. On top of the general assets of a rural village outlined previously, the unfolding of the history of Poggio highlights local specificities with fundamental value for the implementation of a Territorial School.

On a spatial level Poggio's location on the top of the hill ensures the possibility of 360-degree observation of the context, extremely relevant for the territorial didactic. The urban conformation, still imprinted by the former wall delimitations, has generated a safe space, easy to control, with only two ways in and out to reach the valley. In this sense, kids can move freely and discover the surroundings without harm. The historical process of densification determined a urban structure based on building aggregates. This typology refers to a group of residential, commercial, or mixed-use buildings that are physically connected or located very close to one another. This allows the whole town of Poggio to be simplified into no more than 10 aggregates, allowing easy orientation and recognition of a familiar environment, while creating a series of public spaces and enclosures perfect for kid's play. Apart from the safety, the high hill position surrounded by green also results in a salubrious and unpolluted environment for pupils growth.

On an educational level, the historical, cultural and natural milieu of Poggio, allows the manifestation of manifold insights to be seen and studied on site.

Around the area, remains from Etrus-

can and Roman occupation have been found, while the medieval structure, the building techniques and the local stone walls still characterize most of the urban fabrics. Furthermore, signs of history are present everywhere, like the testimony of the eclipse that happened in the XIII century and is still engraved on the walls of the former church.

The double vocation, agricultural and craft/commercial, allows a double development of local knowledge. On one side, to learn fundamentals of local practices of agriculture, land management, access the act of harvesting, planting; on the other side access the techniques of woodworking, fabrics production, and others local craft. The fondi (groundfloors used as workshops) still preserve the instruments and objects that were produced in the village over the centuries. Additionally, some local traditions, such as the Festa della Sacra Spina (Feast of the Sacred Thorn) are still celebrated today.

The preservation of the identity of the rural village also allows pupils to confront it with the surrounding urban development. Contemporary constructions, new infrastructures, cities and services, are today extremely distant to the rural model that Poggio still adopts.

Furthermore, the geopolitical condition allows kids to connect and understand the problematics of depopulation and centralization on a direct, constituting way, potentially outlining new solutions and opportunities coming from the reevaluation of local practices and knowledge.



21. Poggio today (ph. Andrea Panzironi)

'If you are rooted and cannot move, you must be truly resilient'.

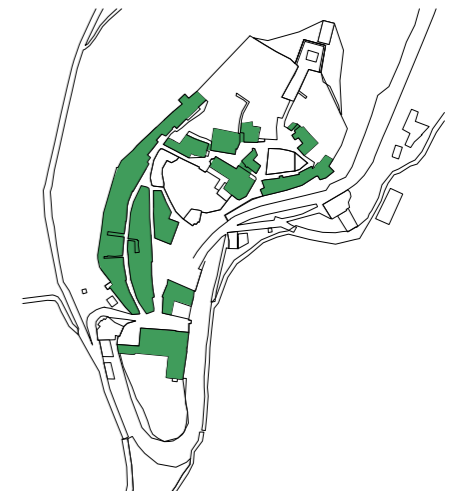
Stefano Mancuso



22. plan of Preggio in Gregorian Land Registry, XIX century



23. former double-layer fortification walls allowing urban safety



24. building aggregates, urban density and simple orientation



25. succession of open areas for public use



26. ramified connection and continuous urban tissue

Preggio educational legacy

Historically, Preggio has been a school of major importance in the territory. While having a diffused system of classrooms, first located in the former hospital, then inside the main square's building, the conversion of the old church into a colony transformed Preggio into a "kid's village". Between 1949 and 1963, more than 150 kids from families in difficulty, or forced to move due to natural disaster (like the Polesine flooding in 1951, which brought more than 80 kids) lived and studied in Preggio. In those years, around one third of the population was under 12 years of age. Kids were freely walking and playing around the town, making use of the location for outdoor classes and walks in the close-by territory.

After the colony closed, the kindergarten and primary school remained active for 50 years. The education was mixed-age, and the surrounding territory was often integrated in the schools education. The two hours per week that the Italian educational system dedicates to laboratorial activities, in Preggio used to be always carried out outside: "the countryside was the laboratory", as stated by the school keeper Luciana. Around the 1980's, due to the settlement of English and German families in the territory, the school of Preggio became one of the first bilingual schools in Italy (Italian-German).

After the closing of the primary school in 2012, the Proloco organized a series of activities to still try to bring kids back to Preggio.

To redeem the works in the traditional fondi (craftsman workshops), the Art Center Preggio, opened a program of educational workshops for 40 school-age children. The goal was to work as a form of play,

through a process of self organization and research. The program was fully taught by specialized craftsman from Preggio, and consisted in two phases. A first phase, represented by the scouting of the territory in search of the raw material (a bark, a stick, a stone), which would then be used in the second phase carried out as workshops, respectively:

- Terracotta whistle workshop (pottery), where the kids learn to shape by hand, fire and decorate little objects and animals from the landscape.
- Carpenter's workshop, where kids reproduce wooden toys made of materials found around the village.
- Dressmaker's workshop, where kids learn to sew with a needle, thread and scissors, transforming few pieces of cloth into dolls and more.

In recent years, through the program Preggio con i giovani per il futuro (Preggio with children for the future), punctual transfers from surrounding urban schools were made to Preggio in order to "deepen the understanding of the life of a tree species, visit to the historical artifacts, observe the astronomy of the sky" (ProLoco Preggio, 2017). Resuming the structure of educational workshops, pupils also produced clay artifacts, graphic-paintings, illustrated books and theater performances. In total, more than 230 children participated.

Even though in the recent years all these activities faded away, the historical didactic activity proves the feasibility and the potential re-integration within a structured educational program. The educational legacy of the school of Preggio allows to imagine the Territorial School as a return of something for which the territory is already prepared for.



27. Primary school class in Preggio, 1963



28. Primary school class visiting Preggio, 2018

"Since the school has been closed due to a lack of school-age children, it feels the need to bring back to Preggio and to the same school, some children. Children by their presence will revitalize these places and from here they will project themselves towards their future."

Alberto Bufali - ProLoco Preggio

Youth repopulation scenarios

Currently, only a few children still live in Poggio. Although the surrounding area and nearby cities could potentially provide a larger pool of pupils, the numbers are not sufficient to open a new school. It is clear that, to implement a Territorial School in Poggio, fluxes of youth repopulation need to be activated. In this sense, as historically testified by the colony, Poggio, used to not only provide primary education to local children but also attracted hundreds of students from distant regions due to its quality of education and the availability of space. While societal needs have evolved, the presence of a Territorial School could still serve as a key attractor for new settlers.

In recent years, Poggio has seen an influx of both Italians and foreigners purchasing homes in the surrounding countryside. This trend reflects a broader desire for more sustainable lifestyles, with people seeking rural living and the flexibility of remote work, as seen with the rise of digital nomads. However, within the current Italian context, young families are often discouraged from moving to rural areas due to the lack of high-quality educational institutions for their children. If Poggio could offer didactic quality on par with urban schools, the movement of families to these areas could be directly linked to the availability of its educational opportunities. This would make the school a central factor in relocation decisions.

This scenario underscores the critical role of education in shaping a more sustainable future. A Territorial School in Poggio could provide not only direct benefits—educating environmentally conscious future generations—but also an induced effect, helping to support young families in

considering alternatives to life in big cities. By offering such opportunities, the school would be instrumental in sparking the repopulation of rural areas, ensuring a revitalization of the community and its surroundings, and counteracting urban densification.

“We are a Finnish family, we moved to Siracusa, but after two months we realized that it was not worth it, since Italian school is not working”

Elin Mattson

The case study highlights the tangible desire of digital nomad families for new rural location to improve their life quality. On the other hand, it expresses the importance of education and primary schools to support this transition.



29. desire of rural life ruined by lack of educative structures

The school as a civic activator

The implementation of a school function in Poggio would not only attract new settlers and spark fluxes of return, but could also have a significant role in the life of current village inhabitants.

As previously outlined, Poggio nowadays does not provide many civic services and activities anymore. The introduction of a school, in this sense, could work as a civic activator.

On one side, the public necessities of a school, such as a canteen, a library, a first aid room, a bar, an event space could reintroduce fundamental civic functions of restoration, education and healthcare for the use of the whole citizenship. This would restore a minimal public structure, stimulating the reopening of formerly present activities. On the other side, the addition of a very young citizenship counterparts the very old one currently inhabiting in Poggio. This could give a new role to the citizens as active teachers, and in some ways expanded grandparents. In this way, the population could find new stimuli from the presence of a school and its pupils.



30. local Poggio inhabitant teaching school kids about the structure of a tree branch

A school system for primary education requires open spaces, mineral areas, light, greenery. Has to be controlled for safety, isolated for kids independence, open for kids healthiness.

Preggio is by it's terms an educative space. It can teach about the flow of time, about the connection with nature, about tangible culture.



31. Preggio top view

PREGGIO TERRITORIAL SCHOOL

Towards a program

In order to trace a didactic program for a Territorial School in Preggio, the general plan needs to merge with the unique educational and geographic characteristics of Preggio. In these terms, Preggio needs to prove its ability to spatially apply the territorial didactics.

To do so, two main didactic necessities need to be site-proofed, respectively:

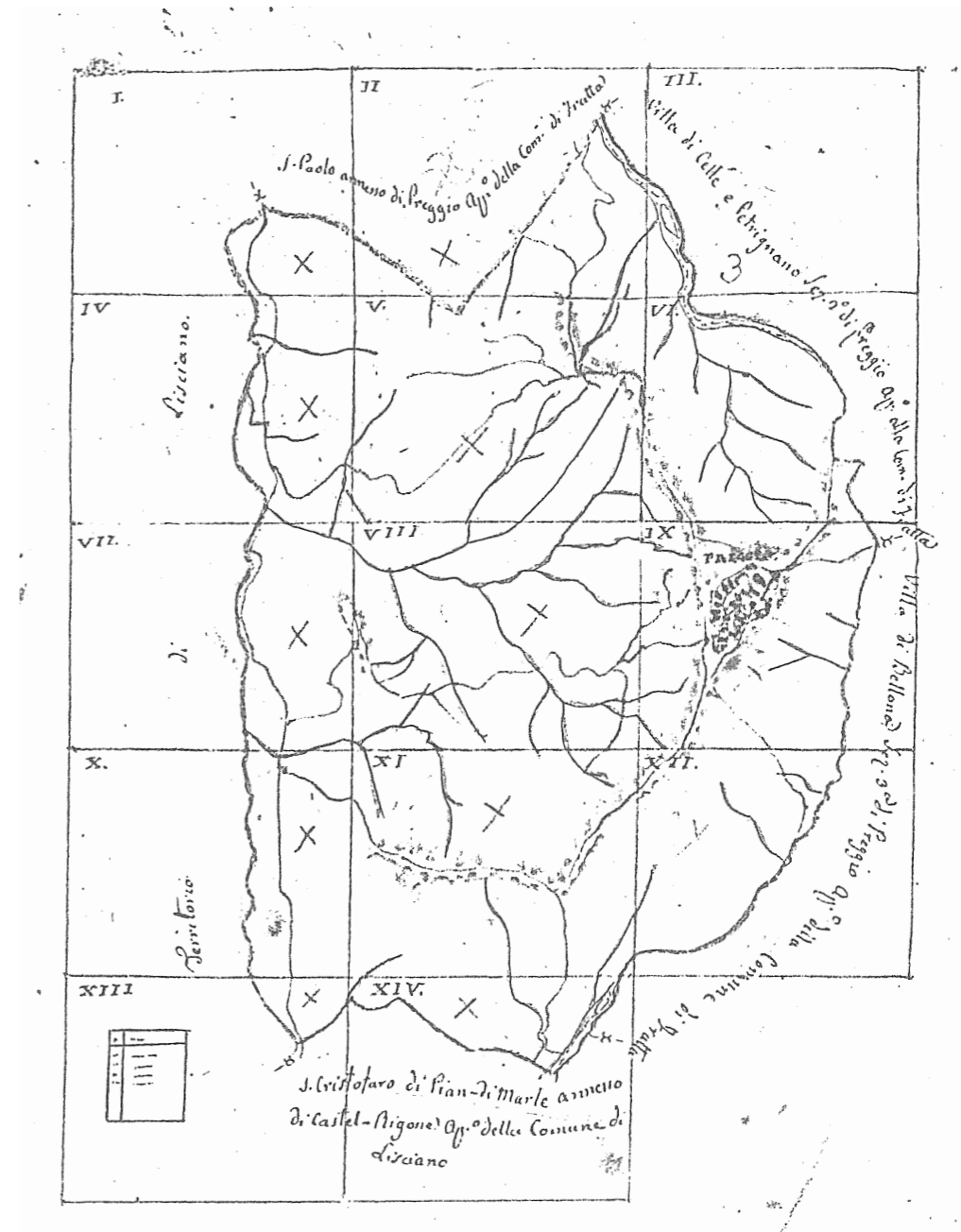
-A learning space that unfolds from the small and familiar to the vast and abstract

-A learning space that has the condition to enact the three didactic stages (Observation, Relation and Integration).

For this reason, the territory of Preggio will be assessed through methods of observation and experiential mapping.

The objective is to understand the territorial identity of Preggio and its spatial implication towards a didactic program.

Preggio remains there, even if no one remembers its beauty, even if no one belongs to it.
But what territory will future kids belong to?



31. Territory of Preggio in the Gregorian Land Registry, XIX century

The village

The process of observation through the progressive exposure of a familiar environment directly connects with the scale of the urban village of Preggio itself. The compactness of it, due to its historical evolution, allows easy orientation due to the system of less than 10 aggregates with continuous facades and connected presence (the school, the bar, the former colony, the ecclesiastical, the mixed-residential, ect...). This conformation shapes a urban environment similar to a open playground: supporting kids orientation, it allows the step by step build up a cosmology of the place.

The former presence of centuring walls somehow still encloses the town through an open fence. Kids can safely walk within an enclosed territory, while old people are there to observe and control that nothing dangerous happens. In this way, urban live and school learning merge in one experience. Each corner in Preggio, if observed properly, allows access to observe direct phenomenas: the stacking of stones, the gutter, the grass, and at the same time their connections on a 1:1 scale, the water that flows through the gutter, the tiles moved by the owl, the hot and cold surfaces, the roughnesses, the smell of trees and of the inhabitants cooking their meals. From the details, pupils start to recognize components of urban life, until grasping the scale of the entire buildings, and then the one of the village in it's entirety. All of this allows to interiorize the village of Preggio as a first personal territory.



image 1



image 2



image 3



image 4



image 5



33. top-view and eye-view of Preggio village scale

The hill

Exiting the village through the provincial road, the surrounding of Preggio reveals a new spatiality, the hill. The naturally open and dispersed condition favors the process of relation with the surroundings.

Around the urban center a few recent constructions appear, new families moved there. A big olive field sits under the west fortification wall, and going down the street until the end, the cemetery of Preggio appears. On the other side, a line of trees brings down to the main road, and a secondary path leads to the former hospital. Through the roads, passages, houses going out of the urban center through the hillside, Preggio unveils a complex morphology connected to slopes and terracements. From these moment on, the asphalt street ends into gravel path biforcations. Preggio's identity merges with the surrounding landscape. The hill slowly unfolds in his historic rurality. Agriculture fields with grapes and other crops, farms and small isolated houses appear as dotted human presences within the woods. The possibility for kids to walk up and down the hill within maximum one/two hours allows to understanding the complexity of a settlement of relation between nature and humans, its articulations, distances, rituals. In this way, Preggio unveils its hill territory.



image 1



image 2



image 3



image 4



image 5



34. top-view and eye-view of Preggio hill scale

The valley

Going downhill reconnects Preggio with the asphalt streets. The valley exposes to a very different territory than the one used to be seen before, favoring the **integration** of broader territories.

The flat lands under Preggio connect Umbria and Tuscany region, and had a very different economic development than the hilly landscape. They are specialized on industrial tobacco and corn cultivations, creating a whole agricultural infrastructure. A river flows gently there and waters the fields, while the historical farmers communities became now small towns, like Lisciano Niccone or Mercatale. All the territory is surrounded by other medieval castles (Castello di Tuoro, Castello di Reschio, etc...), they are all visible also from the hill-top of Preggio. Some are empty now, some became turistic attractions. On the main asphalt street going down from Preggio there are also the main garbage buckets, and a truck comes to empty them regularly, bringing them to an open-air landfill located 8 kilometers away.

The valley territory implements many actors and modifiers in the landscape, slowly unfolding complex human-natural relationships. This understanding complements and expands the vision of Preggio, confronting it with unfamiliar territories, allowing in-depth study for the third learning phase of integration. Preggio unveils its valley territory within its full complexity.



image 1



image 2



image 3



image 4



image 5



35. top-view and eye-view of Preggio valley scale

Territorial didactics in Preggio

The territory of Preggio unfolds downhill as a complex but tangible entity of historical, cultural, natural knowledges. The geographical and spatial conditions of Preggio, allows to progressively unfold it in three spatial levels, the village, the valley, the hill, each of them extremely different in terms of natural structures, human settlements and terrains. This unique possibility expresses the pedagogical potential required by the didactic plan for territorial education. Within Preggio, pupils could learn about a context that unfolds from the small and familiar to the vast and abstract. Furthermore, the three geographical conditions perfectly counterpart the didactic stages, allowing to merge them into: Village-Observation, Hill-Relation, Valley-Integration.

As a fundamental didactic bibliography, the territory of Preggio becomes the agent of knowledge, and the space from which all educational activities and objectives unfold. This tight bond between a location and a didactic plan allows to structure a consistent framework for territorial education, in the form of a specific didactic program.

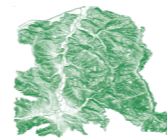
village - observation



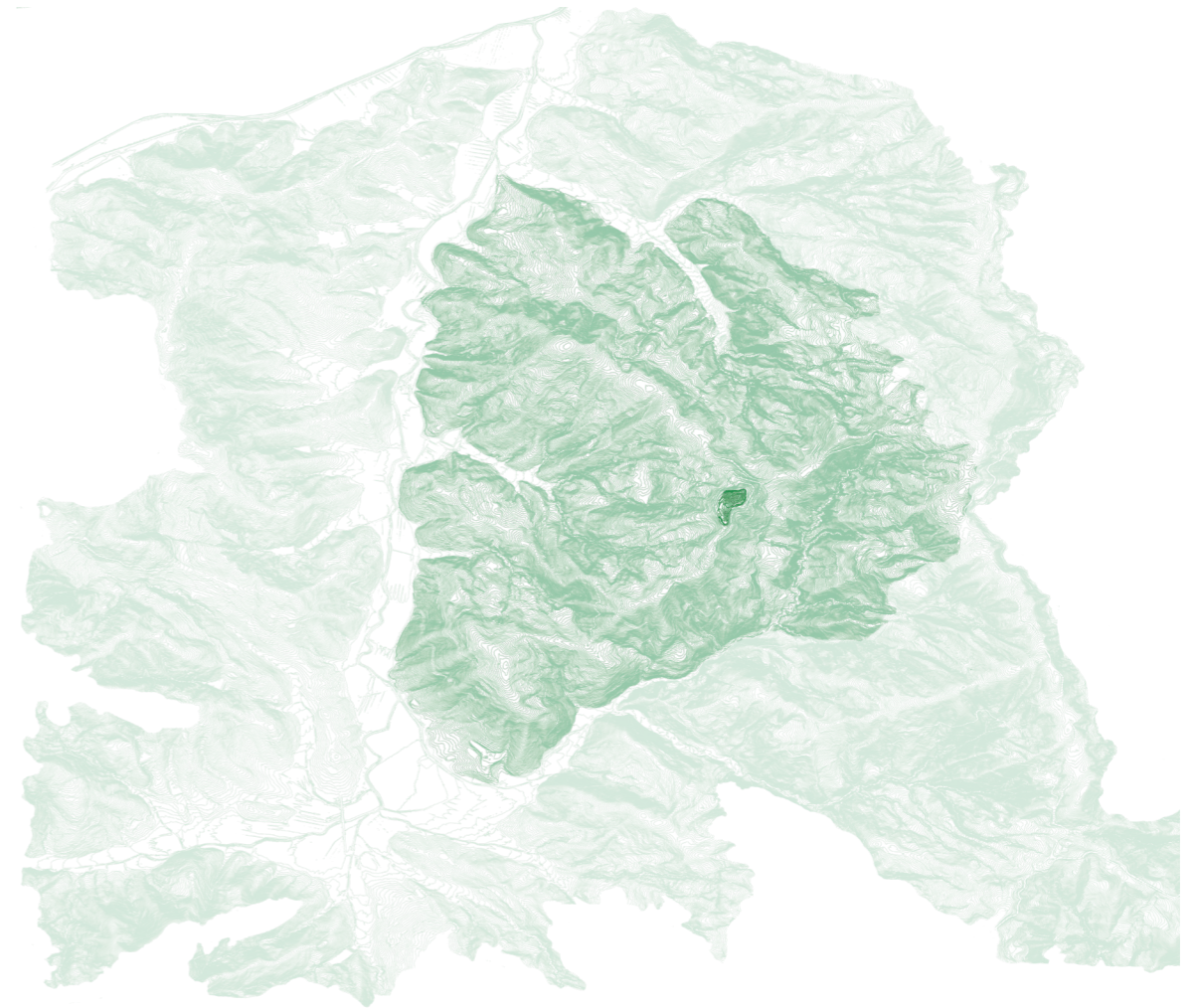
hill - relation



valley - integration



Might Preggio be a teacher, a custodian of identities, a palimpsest of hope for the education of future generations.



36. Preggio educational scales: the village, the hill, the valley

4.2 the didactic program

Objectives

Aligned with the pedagogical principle of from the small and familiar to the vast and abstract, the learning objectives are structured around the progressive understanding of Poggio territorial scales: the village territory (observation), the hill territory (relation), and the valley territory (integration). At the end of each phase, pupils will have interiorised the notions and the developed the skills to navigate themselves in the different scales of relations. The aim is to recognize the territory as a unitary and complex organism composed of elements of natural origin and others introduced by human activity, characterized by reciprocal structural and functional influences. This will allow to foster biophilic values and connect the known territory to their personal identity.

Territorial learning integrates both geographical and personal dimensions, ensuring that the exploration is not limited to physical landscapes but also includes students' identities and roles within their community. This connection extends across all educational activities, encouraging students to engage with their surroundings on a deeper level and fostering a holistic learning experience. A critical component of this approach is the parallel development of territorial understanding at social and geopolitical levels. Students are guided to recognize their active role in shaping the territories they inhabit, understanding their potential to influence both local and broader contexts. By addressing the specific needs of Poggio—such as repopulation, counteracting polarized urbanization, and promoting environmental sustainability—the program bridges the local with the global, preparing students for eco-responsible citizenship.

The Territorial School in Poggio, rooted in this vision, aims to empower children as active participants in their environment. By aligning their education with practical initiatives in territorial preservation and environmental practices, it cultivates a sense of agency and accountability. This approach lays the foundation for a generation that values their local heritage while engaging actively in the broader challenges of contemporary society.

Location and Resources

The morphology and geographic condition of Poggio allows the learning moments of Observation, Relation, Integration to acquire spatial characteristics and different access to local resources. Imagining a school situated on top of a hill, the territory is progressively unfolded. As outlined in the learning objectives, the levels of discovery are therefore defined as: the village territory, high, familiar and protected, ideal to support the 1st year activities; the hill territory, broader and interconnected to support 2nd and 3rd year activities; and the valley territory, diverse and stratified, able to provide a organic understanding of the studied location and its phenomena during 4th and 5th year. These three scales are not seen as hard boundaries, but more as references for the programmed activities. Indeed the progressive permeation connects to the learning objectives of different phases, determining the physical educational spaces of the general didactic plan.

Curriculum

Considering the multiplicity of subjects, learning methods and objectives, Territorial education is not a specific discipline. Involving a set of teachings, it can link together the multiplicity of knowledges that compose the landscape.

Workshops

Within the continuity of the program in three levels, the educational moments are organized on the structure of workshops. These workshops merge the activities outlined in the pathways (mapping and representation), and the ones arising from the knowledge of Poggio (agriculture and craftsmanship). They are therefore divided in three main thematic workshops, with a structure based on reflection and exchange, production and exhibition.

- Mapping Workshop: focused on drawing, representing, communicating the landscape in different scales
- Agriculture Workshop: based on horticultural and agricultural activities in the territory
- Craftsmanship Workshops: merging the activities carried out in the Terracotta, Carpenter's and Dressmaker's workshop.

Open didactic

Open didactic sessions accompany the workshops, offering a complementary space for theoretical exploration and critical analysis. These sessions provide students with the necessary academic tools to reflect on their practical activities while introducing concepts that deepen their understanding of the surrounding environment. Topics may range from the ecological principles underpinning local agriculture to the artistic techniques employed in landscape representation, allowing students to

connect their hands-on experiences with broader historical, scientific, and cultural contexts.

The format of these sessions fosters dynamic interaction, encouraging students to engage in discussions, share observations, and explore complex ideas through collaborative learning. Whether analyzing maps, debating issues like sustainability, or presenting their findings, students develop critical thinking skills and learn to synthesize diverse perspectives. These moments of exploration serve as bridges between the tangible experiences of the workshops and the more abstract intellectual processes that enable students to think critically about their role within their environment and beyond.

Parallel learning

Parallel learning experiences seamlessly integrate everyday activities into the educational framework, demonstrating that learning is not confined to formal settings but deeply rooted in daily life. Tasks such as cooking, composting, and cleaning become avenues for civic education and personal growth, fostering a sense of responsibility and collective care. Students actively participate in these routines, gaining insights into the interconnectedness of ecological systems and the importance of shared efforts in sustaining community spaces. Underscoring the importance of small, intentional acts inspires students to see themselves as custodians of their environment, capable of contributing to both local well-being and broader societal challenges.

Methods

The didactic methods are directly linked with the spatial structure of the school. The urban structure of Poggio lends itself to a decentralized network of educational according to where the knowledge is located.

Indoor activities will be held in the empty buildings present in Poggio, recreating dedicated workshops spaces tailored to specific activities, with accompanying exhibition spaces and space for presentations. Areas for open didactic sessions will also be established, offering flexible spaces for discussions, presentations, and collaborative learning.

Existing civic spaces, such as those used for cooking, composting, or other community utilities, will be reimagined with an educational focus, connecting daily life to the broader learning objectives of the program. Where necessary, these spaces will be adapted or expanded to enhance their functionality and ensure they serve both educational and civic purposes effectively.

The outdoors will function as an open, diffused learning environment, integrating natural and built landscapes into the educational framework. Public squares, gardens, and surrounding natural areas will provide dynamic settings for hands-on exploration, fostering an intimate connection between students and the territory. If required, certain outdoor areas can be outfitted with additional features or facilities to support specific learning activities. This approach ensures that every corner of Poggio become a school itself.

Furthermore, also the learning methods apply this horizontality. The school will integrate formal teachers with the experts of the place, stimulating dialogue relationship with students and

a deeper rooting in the knowledge of the place. Formal learning is substituted with experiential one, therefore teachers need to make sure that the freedom of the pupil is respected and support their personal discovery.

Target audience

The Territorial School in Poggio, due to its educational specificity, aims to attract new actors. The area, suffering from depopulation, requires a flow of migration, not only of return, but especially of new catchment areas. The natural and cultural characteristics of the place, could allow young families of digital nomads to settle in the territory of Poggio. The choice of this place would not be casual, but influenced by the presence of a Territorial School of high educational quality. This process can work both on a local, national, and international scale. For this reason, fitting within a broader and slower biopolitical transition, the Territorial School could first function as an experimental model of a temporary boarding school. In this sense, the school allows children from other elementary schools to join the program and attend the Poggio Territorial School for a limited period, but with a continuity of the same class from the first to the fifth grade. In this way, the effectiveness of the educational program is guaranteed. The school is thus open to different children all year round, promoting variety and spreading awareness of the project throughout the area.

Following a first temporary boarding school mode, the school aims to later take on a permanent feature and be a viable local alternative to elementary school in Europe.

Territory-based education

The educational legacy of Poggio provides a fundamental example of territory-based education, and the possibility to outline a didactic program targeted to the intelligence of the place and the human/natural resources offered. In this sense the school becomes the location where knowledge is embedded. Within Poggio, educational activities take place inside buildings where local craftsman have their tools, in the main square, in the gardens, within the streets, in the woods. The education is diffused following the diffusion and localization of knowledges.

This testimony implements the fundamentals of a Territorial School with notions, ways, and practices of education. With a connective aim, the didactic plan (2.3) and the didactic program (4.2) inform and merge in the definition of a Territorial School in Poggio.

The outcomes highlights a twofold significance. On one side, a Territorial School allows to re-root pupils education and provide a more effective location for environmental education than urban schooling. Within the new didactic framework, education on territorial awareness and future citizenship is reconnected to a tangible scale, supporting pupils understanding of the matter. Allowing application through all schooling activities, the school itself also offers a practical example of biophilic living. In this sense the experimental didactic program in Poggio will expand the necessity for “educational structures to allow landscape preservation” (Council of Europe Landscape Convention ETS No. 176, 2000), hoping to provide possible scenarios to bring forward these projects in the future.

On the other side, the outcome poses

new interest for the revitalization of rural areas as agents of knowledge. In this sense, the project of Territorial Schools is deeply intertwined with the local struggles of forgotten and fragile territories. In the case of Poggio, redeeming the educational value of the place allows to transform the school into a catalyst for broader societal changes. The Territorial School as a civic activator, directly intervenes in the repopulation and new urban-to-rural movements. Bringing in a very young citizenship, new functions and local employment connected to the school logistics, allows to imagine a hopeful alternative to Poggio’s predictable future emptying.

This co-evolutionary relationship outlines a model of education to be fitted in many other locations.

Only within the Italian context, the history and appearance of Poggio is shared by hundreds of other villages located in areas of high roughness, each with their specificity and history. In a broader sense, the whole Mediterranean region faces analogous problems as the Italian inner areas, and its similar geographical and climatic conditions allowed the formation of rural settlements with similar conformations and qualities. In this sense the program of a Territorial School in Poggio connects with the future of abandoned Mediterranean territories. Giving these territories a didactic role can outline a major alternative to the transitory touristic development, and redeem a noble future for inner areas.

Conclusions

The assessment of Poggio allows to further integrate the notions of territory and school. Studying the specific conditions of a location provokes reflections that in more broader terms expand the possibilities of environmental education.

In this sense, when theories of territory-based education find application in a direct location, a specific territory and a specific type of school are assessed. This defines the pathways for a broader model of Territorial Schools for primary education.

The research proposes to see schools and territories in a co-evolutionary relationship, accessing their renovated meaning. The territory becomes a didactic organism, a unitary and complex system of elements of natural origin and human activity, an actor of knowledge (teacher) for the understanding of human identity. The school, adapting to the spreading of the educational milieu, looses a building spatiality, acquiring a diffused geography adapted on the local spatial conditions. The school curricula becomes tangible, a concrete manifest of the phenomena of the place.

The Territorial School also takes notions from the idea of school as a way of thinking, a way of being and reading our surroundings. It becomes a cognitive structure to assess human-environment interactions, to be implemented into any operating system, even to our way of thinking. In this sense, it becomes a school for rhizomatic thinking (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988).

Empowering local knowledge as a matrix of liberation for future generations, the Territorial School grounds kids of today, adults of tomorrow in the perception of a symbiotic society.



37. Unknown kid, terracotta work from workshop in Poggio

“It is the circuit of the children, the one that makes history. All of those that the world, in its blindness, transformed into the last ones. They will one day save all of us”.

Gualtiero Card. Bassetti

Ultimately, the Territorial School is a place that already exists.

As a palimpsest written over time, territories are a manifestation of truth. This gives a sense of hope: we can learn within what is around us.

The only thing we have to do now is to be, intensely, there.



38. first vision of Preggio from a close-by hilltop

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Research Paper

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