

# Cuadernu

REVISTA INTERNACIONAL DE PATRIMONIO, MUSEOLOGÍA SOCIAL, MEMORIA Y TERRITORIO



**ARTÍCULOS** | HECHOS, VALORES Y PATRIMONIO CULTURAL. REFLEXIONES DESDE LA TEORÍA DE LA VALORACIÓN DE JOHN DEWEY ■ SANADURÍA, CORAZONAR Y TEJER UN PROYECTO MUSEOGRÁFICO PARTICIPATIVO Y COLABORATIVO QUE PLURALIZA LOS SENTIDOS DE PAZ EN COLOMBIA ■ APROXIMACIÓN AL USO DE LA CARTOGRAFÍA SOCIAL EN LA GESTIÓN DEL PATRIMONIO. ALGUNAS REFLEXIONES Y APLICACIONES DESDE VALÈNCIA (ESPAÑA) ■ SAN CIBRAO DO MONTE CALVO (OURENSE). RECRISTIANIZACIÓN DE UN MONTE SAGRADO EN EL SIGLO X ■ MAPEO DE RELACIONES Y AGENTES CLAVES COMO HERRAMIENTA DE DIAGNÓSTICO TERRITORIAL: PRÁCTICAS Y APRENDIZAJES EN LA REGIÓN CENTRO DE ARGENTINA ■ ANÁLISIS DE LA TÉCNICA DE FACTURA DE LOS AMARRES DE CUERO DE LAS CAMPANAS ANTIGUAS DEL CENTRO DE LA CIUDAD DE GUADALAJARA, MÉXICO ■ **NOTAS** | ENCORGADAS. REACTIVACIÓN DO REGADÍO TRADICIONAL DE PENELAS (TEO, GALIZA) ■ THE SHARED ADMINISTRATION OF LIVING HERITAGE IN PARABIAGO ITALIA ■ **VARIA** | EL PATRIMONIO DE LA GUERRA CIVIL COMO HERRAMIENTA PARA LA REAPROPIACIÓN IDENTITARIA Y LA VERTEBRACIÓN TERRITORIAL EN LA COMUNIDAD DE MADRID ■ **ENTREVISTA** | Xosé Lluís García Arias: DE CAMPU, PATRIMONIU Y TRECENDENCIA

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EDITA

LA PONTE-ECOMUSÉU

[www.laponte.org](http://www.laponte.org)

Villanueva de Santu Adrianu s/n CP 33115 (Asturias, España)

Correo electrónico [info@laponte.org](mailto:info@laponte.org)

Tfno.: 985 761 403

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# sumario

## 4 Editorial

## Artículos

- 11** Hechos, valores y patrimonio cultural. Reflexiones desde la teoría de la valoración de John Dewey
- 31** Sanaduría, corazonar y tejer un proyecto museográfico participativo y colaborativo que pluraliza los sentidos de paz en Colombia
- 67** Aproximación al uso de la cartografía social en la gestión del patrimonio. Algunas reflexiones y aplicaciones desde València (España)
- 99** San Cibrao do Monte Calvo (Ourense). Recristianización de un monte sagrado en el siglo X
- 133** Mapeo de Relaciones y Agentes Claves como herramienta de diagnóstico territorial: prácticas y aprendizajes en la Región Centro de Argentina
- 165** Análisis de la técnica de factura de los amarres de cuero de las campanas antiguas del centro de la ciudad de Guadalajara, México

## Notas

- 190** EnCorgadas. Reactivación do regadío tradicional de Penelas (Teo, Galiza)
- 210** The shared administration of living heritage in Parabiago, Italia

## Varia

- 234** El Patrimonio de la Guerra Civil como herramienta para la reapropiación identitaria y la vertebración territorial en la Comunidad de Madrid
- 260** Entrevista a Xosé Lluís García Arias: de campu, patrimoni u y trescendencia

# The shared administration of living heritage in Parabiago, Italy

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*Raul Dal Santo, Silvia Dossena and Lucia Vignati*

(Parabiago ecomuseum).

agenda21@comune.parabiago.mi.it

## *Abstract*

This paper examines the shared administration of common goods through co-creation and subsidiarity approaches. The Parabiago ecomuseum (Italy) is highlighted as a case study. This ecomuseum aims to engage citizens and local stakeholders in co-creative processes for planning and implementing long-term action plans that utilise local heritage resources, knowledge, and skills to carry out planned actions. The participatory and co-creative processes are as important as the outcomes as they help foster a sense of community and place while maximising impact. Between 2017-2023, the ecomuseum facilitated 48 cooperation agreements and pacts with citizens, organisations, and the Parabiago municipality for the care, management, and regeneration of cultural and landscape heritage. Data on these agreements is analysed in comparison to national trends in Italy. While some issues have been highlighted, the experience shows how such participatory governance builds community resilience by empowering citizens to care for common goods. The integrated conceptual framework and practical models applied in Parabiago provide lessons for addressing complex problems through co-creative planning and collaborative local action aligned with the subsidiarity principle.

## *Keywords*

Ecomuseums, subsidiarity, heritage administration, active citizenship, cooperation agreements, co-creative processes.

## Resumen

Este artículo examina la administración compartida de bienes comunes a través de enfoques de co-creación y subsidiariedad. El ecomuseo de Parabiago (Italia) se destaca como un estudio de caso. Este ecomuseo tiene como objetivo involucrar a los ciudadanos y las partes interesadas locales en procesos co-creativos para planificar e implementar planes de acción a largo plazo que utilicen recursos, conocimientos y habilidades patrimoniales locales para llevar a cabo las acciones planificadas. Los procesos participativos y co-creativos son tan importantes como los resultados, ya que ayudan a fomentar un sentido de comunidad y lugar mientras maximizan el impacto. Entre 2017-2023, el ecomuseo facilitó 48 acuerdos y pactos de cooperación con ciudadanos, organizaciones y el municipio de Parabiago para el cuidado, gestión y regeneración del patrimonio cultural y paisajístico. Los datos sobre estos acuerdos se analizan en comparación con las tendencias nacionales en Italia. Si bien se han destacado algunos problemas, la experiencia muestra cómo esta gobernanza participativa construye resiliencia comunitaria al empoderar a los ciudadanos para cuidar los bienes comunes. El marco conceptual integrado y los modelos prácticos aplicados en Parabiago proporcionan lecciones para abordar problemas complejos a través de la planificación co-creativa y la acción local colaborativa alineada con el principio de subsidiariedad.

## Palabras clave

Ecomuseos, subsidiariedad, gestión del patrimonio, ciudadanía activa, acuerdos de cooperación, procesos co-creativos.

## Introduction

### The shared administration of common goods

The recent and ongoing environmental, health and socio-economic crises have highlighted the need to reactivate a community and identity dimension of places, albeit with a global vision. In this issue, cultural institutions such as ecomuseums can play an important role in creating resilient communities,

able to renew themselves in response to crises (Riva, 2022).

Moreover, due to the drastic reduction of private and public assets, recognising and using common goods for the social, environmental and economic development of local communities is needed. However, on the one hand, the community often does not recognise the commons as community assets; on the

other hand, the obsolete model of governance, based on the logic of administration that opposes the administrators to the administered, does not allow the community to activate its own resources to solve problems and crises. Finally, these problems and crises, given their complexity, often cannot be solved by the institutions alone (Arena, 2006).

This is, in summary, the reasons why co-creation, subsidiarity and common goods are three key concepts for understanding and addressing contemporary crises.

These concepts refer to ways of organising and managing resources, services and relationships between different stakeholders in society, in order to promote the common good, democratic participation and sustainable development.

In this article, we aim to explore the meaning, implications and potential of these concepts, with particular attention to the Italian reality and a case study at the Parabiago eco-museum.

### **Co-Creation: Active Involvement of Citizens**

By co-creation, we mean the collaborative process through which citizens, public institutions, civil society organisations and the

private sector engage together in defining and solving public problems, producing goods and services of general interest, and creating social and economic value. Co-creation involves sharing knowledge, resources, responsibilities and benefits among the different subjects involved, based on principles of trust, transparency and reciprocity. Co-creation can take different forms and levels of intensity, depending on the objectives, contexts and modes of interaction among participants.

### **Subsidiarity**

The concept of subsidiarity refers to the principle that public decisions and actions should be taken at the level closest to citizens, provided that this level is able to effectively achieve the set goals. The principle of subsidiarity is enshrined in the Treaty on European Union and regulates the exercise of non-exclusive competences of the Union. It aims to ensure a degree of autonomy and responsibility for local communities, while respecting the unity and solidarity among Member States. The principle of subsidiarity also has a horizontal dimension, which concerns cooperation between different levels of government (local, regional, national, and European) and between different actors in society (public, private, and civil).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union, TITLE I - COMMON PROVISIONS, Article 5

## **Common Goods: Participatory Management for the Public Good**

The notion of common goods refers to material or immaterial resources that are shared by a community of users and require collective management to ensure their preservation and fair access. Common goods can be natural (such as air, water, biodiversity) or cultural (such as knowledge, cultural heritage, data). Participatory management of common goods is essential to ensure their preservation and sustainable use. This concept emphasises the need to involve communities in defining policies and management practices, so that common goods are preserved for future generations.

Co-creation, subsidiarity, and common goods are interconnected concepts that influence each other and can contribute to generating social innovations and the integral development of local communities. Co-creation can be seen as a means to achieve a more active form of subsidiarity, as it involves local communities in the decision-making and design process. At the same time, subsidiarity promotes co-creation by allowing communities to have greater control over issues that directly concern them. Common goods, managed through participatory processes, are often the result of collaborative co-creation efforts and their management reflects the concrete application of the principle of subsidiarity.

## ***The Italian context***

As in Europe, also in Italy often people are unable to perceive the value of places and to recognize in the territory not only the space available for building, producing and moving, but also the heritage to be conserved and valued. This incapacity is widespread particularly in the larger central urban agglomerations of Italy. This has created deep wounds in the landscape such as the loss of biological and cultural diversity; the imbalance and physical separation between human habitat and natural habitat; the serious dysfunction of the landscape apparatus (Turri, 2001).

The shared administration of the commons in Italy is a topic of growing interest and relevance also for these reasons. Today the idea of the commons in Italy refers to natural and cultural resources that belong to everyone and must be managed in a fair and sustainable way to ensure the well-being of present and future generations (Arena, 2020).

## **The concept of common goods in Italy**

The concept of common goods has deep roots in Italian history and culture. Already in the Middle Ages, local communities had developed systems of collective management of common resources, such as agricultural land, pastures and forests. However, over the centuries, these shared management systems were progressively eroded by processes



of privatisation and centralisation of power (Dani, 2014).

In Italy, the revival of interest in the commons is largely due to the work of the jurist and political scientist Stefano Rodotà; he activated the debate on this issue between the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Rodotà emphasised the importance of recognising the commons as a fundamental component of collective heritage and promoting their participatory management as a tool for democracy and social justice.

### **The Italian regulatory framework**

The shared administration of common goods in Italy received a significant boost in 2001 with the reform of the civil code, which introduced the legal figure of 'common goods'. In particular, Article 822 of the Civil Code defines common goods as assets that belong to several subjects and are intended for common use.

The concept has been recalled by subsequent legislation, but in Italy the process of recognising common goods and their shared administration is still ongoing and presents several challenges: the definition of clear and consistent criteria to identify common goods and establish the modalities of their shared management; the implementation of effective policies for the conservation and enhancement of common goods, which requires significant administrative and financial capacity, which is often lacking at the local level.

### **Labsus and the Regulation for the Shared Administration of Common Goods in Italy**

In 2014, the Italian association Labsus (Laboratory for Subsidiarity), proposed a draft Regulations for the Shared Administration of Common Goods, to which public institutions can refer in order to foster forms of participatory democracy and implement the principle of horizontal subsidiarity present in the Italian Constitution (Article 118 last paragraph). The text regulates forms of collaboration between citizens and public institutions for the shared care and management of common goods, through collaboration pacts.

These pacts are administrative acts through which one or more active citizens and a public entity define through a co-creation process the terms of collaboration for the care of common goods. The pact identifies the common good, the objectives such as the general interest to be protected, the skills, competences and resources of the signatories, the duration of the collaboration and the responsibilities.

This instrument is distinguished from other more common tools used by public administrations, such as fostering, concessions and adoptions, by the high level of informality that characterises it. Indeed, the pact often involves informal groups, committees or inhabitants of a neighbourhood united by

a common interest in promoting the care of a specific commons. This characteristic makes this instrument particularly advantageous.

Through pacts, active citizens can carry out activities of general interest on an equal footing with the public administration. The Regulation has been adopted by more than 270 municipalities and other public institutions, demonstrating its ability to adapt to different contexts<sup>2</sup>.

### **Ecomuseums and cultural heritage management in Italy**

Italy stands out as the only nation worldwide where the proliferation of ecomuseums has occurred over the last two decades, and they have received legal recognition in fifteen regions or provinces out of the total of 21 in the country. A recent survey reveals the presence of 263 Institutions that self-identify as ecomuseums, with 135 receiving official recognition from Regions or Provinces (Dal Santo, 2023)<sup>3</sup>. Both a national network and various regional networks have been established to foster collaboration, solidarity among ecomuseums, and help new ecomuseums. In 2016, Italian ecomuseums collectively formulated a comprehensive document known

as “Manifesto”, which not only encapsulates the wisdom acquired through the national network but also defines ecomuseums as *«participatory processes that recognise, manage and protect the local heritage in order to facilitate social, environmental and economic sustainable development. Ecomuseums develop creative and inclusive practices aimed at the cultural growth of local communities, based on the active participation of people and on the cooperation of such stakeholders as institutions and associations. The ecomuseums primary objective is to reestablish correspondences between techniques, cultures, productions and resources of a homogeneous landscape and the local cultural heritage. Moreover, ecomuseums cooperate with museums, associations, cultural institutions, as well as with other actors in heritage protection at the regional and national level. It brings its own specific experience and expertise in managing heritage and landscape to the public (Dal Santo et al. 2017).*

The Manifesto is a permanent and evolutionary document that, through the 2019 amendment, underlined the commitment of Italian ecomuseums *«to further promote the objectives of safeguarding, care, valorisation and access to landscape and natural and cul-*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.labsus.org/cose-il-regolamento-per-lamministrazione-condivisa-dei-beni-comuni/>

<sup>3</sup> Updated informations are available at <https://sites.google.com/view/ecomuseiitaliani/chi-siamo>

*tural heritage, both tangible and intangible, and their role in the environmental, social and economic development of communities, the achievement of the goals of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and climate justice»<sup>4</sup>.*

Italian ecomuseums employ a specialised «toolkit» to effectively and sustainably use the living heritage, employing a holistic approach (Dal Santo *et al.*, 2017b). Several of these tools, such as parish maps and short supply chains of local agricultural products, have been extensively utilised within various Italian ecomuseums over an extended period. For instance, the community map, a participatory cartography employed for inventorying cultural heritage, has been employed by over 50 ecomuseums. While relatively new, other tools such as circular economy, cooperation agreements, and rivers, lakes, and seas pacts are noteworthy due to their potential for significant impact.

Among these tools, subsidiary cooperation pacts with active citizens have been developed in some ecomuseums with the goals of preserving and revitalising cultural heritage as a common good and reinforcing a sense of community and place.

## **The Parabiago Ecomuseum case study**

### **Parabiago and its ecomuseum**

Located amidst the Olona River valley and the high plain of the metropolitan city of Milan, Parabiago is a town with around 30,000 residents. The Parabiago Ecomuseum, managed by the Municipality of Parabiago, is a cultural institution that was officially recognized by the Lombardy Region in 2008. Its purpose is to promote local development through the sustainable utilisation of the region's living heritage.

The goal of the Parabiago ecomuseum is to provide inhabitants and visitors with a comprehensive and intelligible understanding of the landscape. The ecomuseum considers the act of learning to perceive and comprehend the landscape as an essential skill in empowering citizens to take responsibility for its preservation and enhancement.

As an active citizenship initiative, the Parabiago ecomuseum operates based on the principle of subsidiarity (Article 118, last paragraph, of the Italian Constitution). It is aimed at the care of the landscape and heritage, the protection of the environment, bio-

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<sup>4</sup> <https://sites.google.com/view/ecomuseiitaliani/manifesto>

diversity and ecosystems, also in the interest of future generations (art. 9) for the material and spiritual progress of society (art. 4) and the full development of the person (art. 3, second paragraph).

Through an ongoing participatory and co-creation process, the Parabiago ecomuseum has evolved into a collective agreement, in which the community has pledged to collaborate towards the care of the territory.

### **The common good shared administration in Parabiago**

The Parabiago ecomuseum was conceived and is functioning in a manner that deviates from the conventional approach of museums, which typically design and execute initiatives 'for' the community, often removing people from the decision-making, design, and implementation stages. The objective, methodology, design, and execution of this ecomuseum are all structured in collaboration 'with' the community, in accordance with the principles of participatory planning, co-creation, subsidiarity, and active citizenship.

A public participation forum was first established in 2007, and such forums continue to be organised to address issues and the future of the community. Land and heritage owners, municipalities, museums, parishes, water treatment companies, associations, farmers, traders and artisans, public and private educational institutions, as well as individual ci-

tizens are invited to participate. The aim is to involve citizens and local organisations in the issues that affect their community.

The public meetings are designed to ensure that participants are informed, that they are aware about the issues and trends affecting Parabiago and finally that they are empowered to act in a coordinated way to respond to the problems and shape the future of Parabiago. The ecomuseum works to ensure that citizens and local stakeholders: participate in co-creative processes of planning and implementation of long-term action plans; activate and utilise resources, knowledge and skills to care for local heritage; implement planned actions in a coordinated way; strengthen the sense of community.

For the Parabiago ecomuseum, co-creative and participatory processes are at least as important as the results and outcomes of planned actions. The interaction of local actors is essential to create a sense of place and community while maximising impacts (Dal Santo y Worts, 2022).

The co-creation of a parish map was the first step in the planning phase of the ecomuseum. The parish map is a participatory process and a permanent archive of the tangible and intangible heritage of a territory (Clifford, Maggi y Murtas, 2006). This map documents the present and past of Parabiago, and helps the community to improve and enhance it. The parish map of Parabiago, one of the first

in Lombardy Region, was started in 2007 by a working group within the forum of citizens. A questionnaire was submitted to about 400 citizens to indicate the heritage elements characterising Parabiago's landscape. The map was printed in 2008 and distributed to all families of Parabiago, with 16,000 copies printed. A multimedia map was later created and published on the ecomuseum website to update its contents. The ecomuseum also used participatory mapping to co-create parish maps of the "Mulini" Park (2011), the routes map of the Olona river valley (2017) and the Parabiago students parish map (2018) with local partners.

These maps constitute an inventory of the heritage that the community intends to study, protect and use responsibly for local and global sustainable development. The long-term planning co-created with the community (2008 Parabiago ecomuseum Plan, 2013 "Mulini" Park Plan, 2019 Integrated Culture Plan, 2022 Strategic Program for the Olona, Bozzente, Lura and Southern Lambro rivers sub-basin) and the short-term program based on a three-year period that is updated annually by the ecomuseum, identify the objectives, timing, resources and methods with which the ecomuseum and its partners intend to promote the sustainable use of community heritage.

### **Cooperation agreements**

The goal encompasses not only the implementation of participatory planning activities, but

also the establishment of cooperative agreements with citizens, aimed at safeguarding, administering, and revitalising the cultural heritage and landscapes as common goods, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle according to the the Italian Constitution. Thus, the ecomuseum assumes the role of an enabler, empowering people to apply their creative and physical energies while sharing resources within the community itself, all for the collective benefit and nurturing, producing, and advancing the commons. These agreements, forged throughout the years, have taken various forms, both formal and informal.

An example of an informal agreement is the study, planning and realisation of the reopening of an irrigation ditch of mediaeval origin, the Riale of Parabiago, which took place between 2009 and 2011 thanks to the involvement of numerous associations, agricultural entrepreneurs and students. This was followed by an act formalised in 2014 with farmers and the River Olona consortium for the maintenance of the irrigation ditch and its use as a wetland for amphibian reproduction.

An example of a formal agreement is the pact for the Olona river, promoted in 2013 by the "Mulini" Park (a local natural park) to which the ecomuseum adhered together with numerous public and private subjects from the Milanese Olona river valley where the ecomuseum is located. Ten years after it was signed, the pact is still active and constitutes an

example of shared management of a peri-urban river landscape (Fanzini, 2019). Periodic monitoring shows the results obtained<sup>5</sup>.

In 2016, the Municipality of Parabiago approved the regulation entitled 'Municipal regulation for active community participation, for the promotion of resilience processes for the care, regeneration of urban spaces, social cohesion and safety'. The regulation, based on the scheme proposed by Labsus, allows the municipality and the ecomuseum to use a set of collaborative and co-creative processes to define projects and foster their implementation through active community participation (FIGURE 1).

The Regulation distinguishes Pacts from cooperation agreements on the basis of the duration of the projects.

Interventions of an occasional nature (less than one year) require the signing of a cooperation agreement which can be activated by simply filling in a form. Interventions of a longer duration are formalised through a cooperation pact, under a more complex scheme.

For both pacts and cooperation agreements, active citizens present an idea to the ecomuseum, which examines it and:

1. evaluates the general interest of the idea and the coordination with other activated project

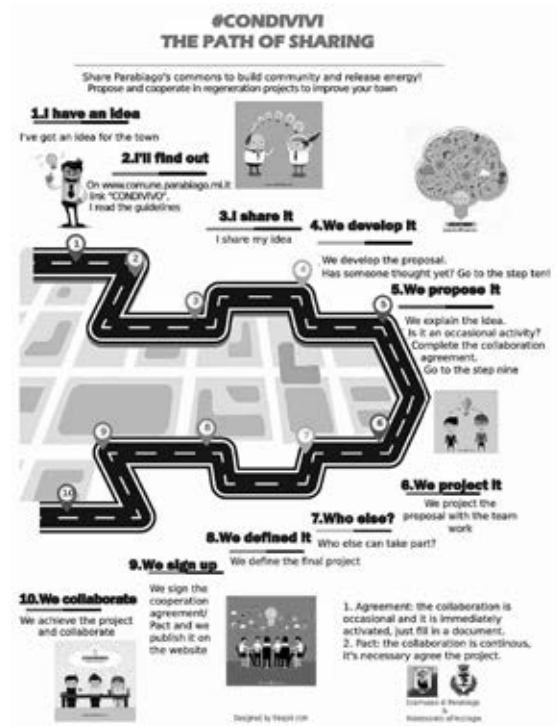


FIGURE 1 The workflow for the shared administration of commons. (Parabiago ecomuseum)

<sup>5</sup> Periodic monitoring is reported on <https://sites.google.com/view/parcodeimulini/il-parco/pianificazione/pat-to-per-lolona>

2. Identify relevant trends that need to be either supported or redirected
3. Identify stakeholders and the living heritage who need to be involved in the project
4. defines the way that projects might be funded, the ways of facilitating, empowering and training of the active citizens,
5. Identifies and defines the monitoring programme of desired impacts on, and within, the community (identifying what kinds of change are being sought).

When the idea becomes an achievable project, in the case of agreements it is immediately signed. In the case of pacts the city council expresses an opinion. Afterwards, the ecomuseum and the citizens sign the pact and start working together in full autonomy. In this way, the Parabiago ecomuseum has climbed the ‘staircase of participation’ to inspire relevant changes in the community and maximise cultural impacts through citizen intervention (Dal Santo, 2019; FIGURE 2).

### Analysis of cooperation agreements

Cooperation agreements have been thoroughly analysed within the context of the Parabiago ecomuseum. Since the approval of municipal regulations, spanning from 2017 to 2023, the ecomuseum has played a pivotal role in facilitating the establishment and execution of nine long-term cooperation pacts and thirty-six short-term agreements with

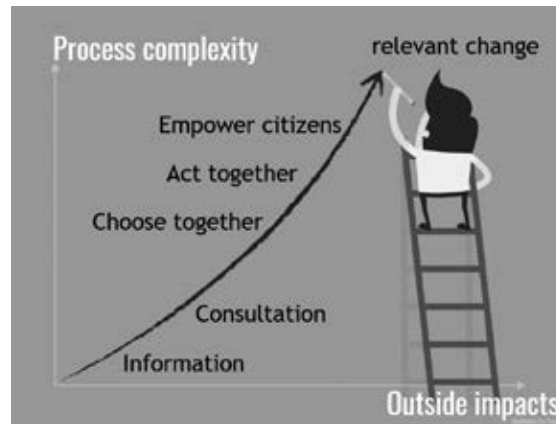


FIGURE 2 The staircase of participation. (Parabiago ecomuseum).

community groups. These collaborations aim to realise projects proposed by the community in alignment with the ecomuseum’s multi-year program.

In addition to these formal cooperation pacts, various spontaneous initiatives have emerged over time, which are not bound by formalisation. Examples include tree planting activities during ‘Tree Days,’ involving students, teachers, and family members, as well as the cleaning and installation of signs for a new cultural route within the ecomuseum. The progress of all formal collaboration agreements is carefully monitored, with certain projects being renewed over time. Furthermore, new projects have emerged through continuous dialogue with stakeholders within the community.

## 1. Subjects involved

A different range of local actors are engaged in collaborations with the Parabiago ecomuseum. The majority of signatories are individual citizens, constituting approximately 46% of participants. Informal groups follow suit, accounting for around 21%. Associations make up approximately 13% of the subjects involved, while farmers represent 10%. The involvement of schools, businesses, and nonprofit companies is comparatively lower, with subscriptions from these entities amounting to 4% and 2% respectively (FIGURE 3).

## 2. Commons involved

The signed pacts and cooperation agreements in Parabiago predominantly focus on actions related to environmental stewardship. These initiatives encompass tasks such as street cleaning to remove waste, the care of flower boxes, pruning of grass and trees, along roadsides as well as the care, restoration, and maintenance of green areas either owned by or available to the municipality. Notably, approximately 11% of the established covenants involve the upkeep of street furniture, such as partial maintenance of playgrounds and the repainting of benches.

Conversely, activities centred around cultural, educational, and social cohesion are relatively minor in comparison. Examples include the beautification and maintenance efforts undertaken at two primary schools,

### Agreements/Pacts for subjects

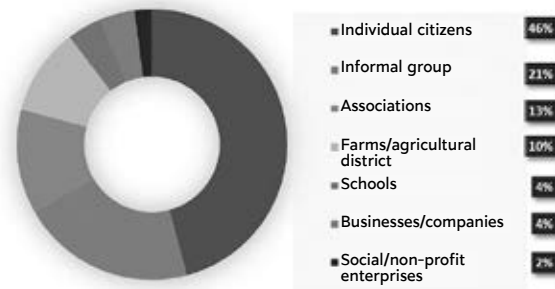


FIGURE 3 «Agreements/pacts by subjects» Municipality in Parabiago. (Parabiago Ecomuseum).

### Agreements/Pacts by areas of intervention

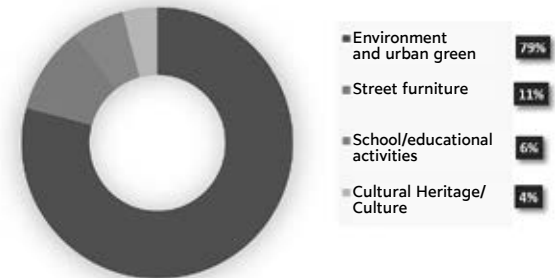


FIGURE 4 «Agreements/covenants by areas of intervention» Municipality in Parabiago. (Parabiago ecomuseum).

as well as an awareness-raising campaign regarding water wastage by students from the Liceo Cavalleri in Parabiago (FIGURE 4).



### 3. Type of goods

A significant majority of the signed pacts (83%) primarily focus on the care and maintenance of tangible goods, while a smaller proportion of pacts (6%) specifically address the preservation of intangible assets. Additionally, there are pacts (11%) that encompass the care and stewardship of both tangible and intangible goods (FIGURE 5).

No doubt, delineating the typology of a pact is frequently a challenging task. The reason behind this complexity lies in the inherent connection between collaborative efforts to preserve a tangible asset and the nurturing of intangible aspects, such as the relationships fortified by the pact within the associated community. Within this examination, pacts encompassing the safeguarding of intangible assets can be classified into two categories: cultural undertakings (e.g., cultural initiatives) and educational activities aimed at promoting awareness on specific topics, such as plastic usage and water conservation. These initiatives are developed by schools, associations, or individual citizens.

In the field of tangible and intangible common goods, Parabiago embraces the promotion of initiatives focused on environmental preservation and urban green spaces. Notably, the «Orto Cistercense» garden project exemplifies this commitment by encompassing the nurturing of an educational and therapeutic garden, which serves as an integral part of the revered national monu-

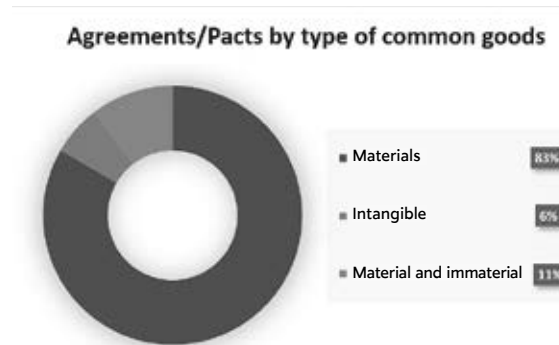


FIGURE 5 Agreements/covenants by type of goods in Municipality in Parabiago. (Parabiago ecomuseum).

ment, the Church of Sant’Ambrogio della Vittoria. Spearheaded by an association, this initiative aims to cultivate and sustain this garden. Another example is the conservation efforts in the ‘Cinin’ wetland, where three citizens realised the wetland and are actively engaged in the maintenance and ecological monitoring of its diverse fauna and flora, accompanied by the meticulous photographic documentation of biodiversity in the area.

Within the field of street furniture, two collaborative agreements were established. The first agreement involved a social cooperative responsible for the maintenance of select benches throughout the city. The second agreement was forged between an association and a citizen entrusted with social services, who undertook the upkeep of specific areas managed by the municipality of Parabiago as part of

their public utility activity. In these instances, active citizens not only attend to the physical upkeep of a tangible asset but also provide a service that fulfils crucial needs for both personal and communal development. These services encompass fostering relationships with the psychosocial centre and its patients, monitoring wildlife, promoting the integration of unaccompanied foreign minors, and facilitating social rehabilitation. In doing so, these agreements contribute to the overall well-being of both the individuals involved and the community at large.

#### 4. Places involved

When considering the various locations of these interventions, the foremost focus lies on the nurturing of gardens, flowerbeds, and parks. Following closely behind is the maintenance and upkeep of squares and streets. Additionally, under the category labelled as 'other,' attention is dedicated to the care of benches and fountains. (FIGURE 6).

The Parabiago ecomuseum website features a dedicated page that serves as a valuable resource on cooperation pacts<sup>6</sup>. This page provides comprehensive information on how to engage and actively participate in these ini-

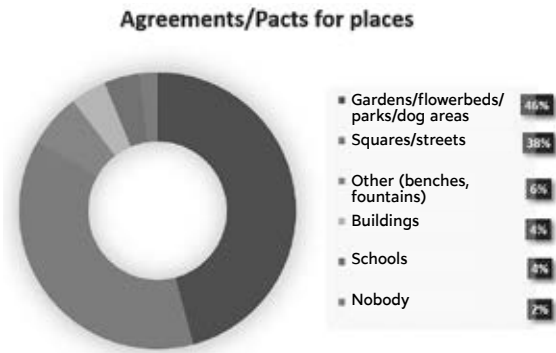


FIGURE 6 'Agreements/covenants for places' Municipality in Parabiago. (Parabiago ecomuseum).

tiatives, while also presenting a detailed list of the signed pacts. Notably, an interactive map (FIGURE 7) showcases the locations where these interventions have taken place<sup>7</sup>. Each pact is meticulously catalogued based on the specific type of intervention it entails. Furthermore, a tab accompanying each pact offers a wealth of details, including its name, description, year of signing, classification as a pact or agreement, and duration.

#### 5. Duration

The analysis reveals a significant proportion of annual agreements (48%) and occasional

<sup>6</sup> <http://ecomuseo.comune.parabiago.mi.it/ecomuseo/partecipa.html>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1cwE2gJOnctBJnNd2mln7WdSY\\_xU&ll=45.55422831249542%2C8.942736999999976&z=14](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1cwE2gJOnctBJnNd2mln7WdSY_xU&ll=45.55422831249542%2C8.942736999999976&z=14)



FIGURE 7 The interactive map of signed cooperation pacts. (Parabiago ecomuseum).

agreements (25%) that encompass interventions of short or very short duration, typically lasting less than a month or occurring over a few days throughout the year. Pacts with a duration of 1 to 3 years account for 17%, while those extending beyond 3 years represent a mere 2%. It is important to note that each pact presents the possibility of renewal. Thus far, the majority of renewal instances have involved pacts initially signed for a duration of two

or three years, with only one case of renewal observed for an originally one-year agreement. Renewal decisions are primarily influenced by the willingness of active citizens to continue the activity, particularly in areas such as public area cleaning, care of natural spaces, and utilisation of communal assets.

Regrettably, three pacts were concluded due to the passing of the active citizen responsible for them. However, in two cases, other citizens assumed the responsibility and continued the initiatives. On the other hand, the 'Acqua azzurra, acqua chiara' (Blue water, clear water) project focused around the Parabiago Town Hall fountain was not carried forward by other citizens. This particular fountain, previously dilapidated and a breeding ground for mosquitoes, underwent a remarkable transformation into a water garden with aesthetic and ecological objectives through the mentioned pact. Following the passing of the citizen who had been caring for it, the ecomuseum took over the responsibility of maintaining the fountain.

## **Examples of agreements**

### **The church of Madonna di Dio'1 sa**

Due to the decreasing number of priests, several churches in the area have regrettably ceased to be accessible for worship, including the nationally recognized sanctuary 'Madonna di Dio'1 sa' located in Parabiago.

However, in 2021, an informal group of active citizens proposed to the ecomuseum a cooperation pact aptly named ‘Let’s open the sanctuary.’ The objective of this pact is to periodically reopen the “Church of Madonna di Dio’l sa”, organising events and guided tours in collaboration with the Maria Madre della Chiesa parish in Nerviano. Furthermore, the citizens took the initiative to create an informative brochure for visitors and undertook the revitalization and upkeep of the cemetery, formerly a leper hospital (an isolation hospital for people with infectious diseases), which was adorned with various plants. This lazaretto holds historical significance as it forms part of the ‘memory’ route that connects the locations where leper hospitals once stood during times of plague in the five municipalities of ‘Mulini’ Park<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, it’s worth noting that the church itself is one of the sanctuaries along the Saint Augustine’s Way, a recognized path recognized by the Lombardy Region<sup>9</sup>.

The pact was signed in 2021 with a two-year duration and provides the mentioned activities carried out by active citizens with the support of the ecomuseum. The key provisions of the pact include:

- Access to and temporary utilisation of municipal spaces, namely the former leper hospital and its adjacent park.
- Coordination with the Parish, which owns the sanctuary ‘Madonna di Dio’l sa’.
- Guidance and assistance from ecomuseum staff in planning and executing activities.
- Design and printing of informative materials about the church.
- Promotion of the initiative, with a particular emphasis on utilising social networks.
- Comprehensive insurance coverage, facilitated by the Municipality of Parabiago, for the active citizens and collaborators involved.

During the initial phase, the ecomuseum disseminated information about the pact on its website, inviting interested individuals to join in the collaboration. Subsequently, a young woman was welcomed into the original group of volunteers, which consisted mainly of retirees.

In 2023, the pact was successfully renewed for an additional two-year term. The guided tours attracted the participation of hundreds of people, marking the widespread interest and engagement within the community.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://sites.google.com/view/parcodeimulini/il-parco/storia-e-cultura/luoghi-della-memoria>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.camminidilombardia.it/cammino-di-sant-agostino>

## The Oasis of Peace and Beauty

The story of the Oasis of Peace and Beauty begins in the 2013/2014 school year when the 5th D students of Liceo Scientifico Cavalleri high school in Parabiago approached the ecomuseum with a request for an area to improve that they could work on themselves. The ecomuseum suggested an abandoned green space near the Olona river, which was once a garden and test site for gardening equipment and outboard motors produced by the neighbouring MEP Marazzini company.

Through training and co-creative design, with the ecomuseum's contribution, the students formulated a project named «Oasis of Peace and Beauty» with the goal of revitalising the area and making it accessible to young people. With the financial resources from the national competition prize «Meet no Neet» and through collaboration with public and private entities, the students successfully redeveloped the area. The owners of the land generously granted free use of it to the municipality of Parabiago. Until 2021, the Legambiente association of Parabiago informally collaborated with the municipality to maintain and oversee the area.

In 2022, the Legambiente association and an engaged citizen (who responded to the proposal published on the Parabiago ecomuseum and municipal websites, seeking further participation) signed a cooperation pact

for the care, cleaning, and enhancement of the Oasis of Peace and Beauty. This collaboration includes activities such as sowing and planting native herbaceous and shrub species, as well as organising educational visits to the area for both young and adults.

The three-year pact encompasses the mentioned activities carried out by active citizens and outlines the support provided by the ecomuseum, including:

- access to and temporary use of the spaces,
- cooperation from ecomuseum staff in activity planning,
- appropriate insurance coverage provided by the Municipality of Parabiago for the active citizens and collaborators involved.

## Diagnosis and comparison with the Italian reality

The report on Shared Administration of Common Goods in Italy, edited by Labsus, allows a comparison between the Parabiago ecomuseum and the broader Italian context. The report examines 1001 collaborative pacts implemented across a sample of 62 municipalities (including Parabiago) that had adopted the Regulation for Shared Administration by 2021.

When comparing the findings of the Labsus report with the data on cooperation pacts signed in Parabiago, several notable differences emerge.

Actors involved	Parabiago (percentage figure)	Italy (percentage figure)
Individual citizens	46	21
Informal group	21	13
Associations	13	40
Farms/agricultural district	10	0
Schools	4	7
Companies/companies	4	6
Social/non-profit enterprises	2	4
Other, Church bodies, Foundations, Other public institutions, Professionals, Universities	0	9

**TABLE 1** Comparison between the Parabiago ecomuseum and the broader Italian context. Actors involved. (Data: Parabiago ecomuseum and Labsus).

### 1. Actors involved

One significant difference pertains to the actors involved in these pacts. In Parabiago, approximately 67% of the cooperation pacts involve individual citizens or informal groups. In contrast, at the national level, this figure stands at only about 34%.

### 2. Assets involved

The predominant field of intervention, both in Parabiago and across the country, revolves around the environment and urban greenery.

However, this aspect holds even greater significance in Parabiago compared to the national context. It is worth noting that, unlike the broader national context, there are no projects in Parabiago related to areas such as sports, territorial animation, or employment initiatives (such as coworking spaces or tourist reception facilities).

### 3. Type of goods

In both Parabiago and the national context, the majority of signed pacts revolve around

the care of tangible goods. However, a notable distinction arises when considering the classification of goods as tangible or intangible. In Parabiago, only three pacts fall into the intangible category, unlike the national context where a quarter of the surveyed pacts do.

#### 4. Involved places

The examination of the locations engaged in the cooperative agreements reveals a significant alignment between the data from Parabiago and those presented in the Labsus report. At the forefront, we have the main-

Assets involved	Parabiago (percentage figure)	Italy (percentage figure)
Environment and urban greenery	79	48
Street furniture	11	19
School/educational activities	6	7
Cultural Heritage/Culture	4	7
Social inclusion, co-design, sports, intangible commons not listed, animation, coworking, tourist reception, other	0	19

TABLE 2 Comparison between the Parabiago ecomuseum and the broader Italian context. Assets involved. (Data: Parabiago ecomuseum and Labsus).

Furthermore, unlike the national context, no pacts in Parabiago have been signed specifically focusing on digital commons.

Regarding assets categorised as both tangible and intangible, Parabiago mainly sees the development of activities in the field of environment and urban greenery, whereas the national context displays a more diverse range of classifications.

tenance of gardens, flowerbeds, and parks, followed by maintenance of squares and streets, even if there is a substantial difference in terms of percentages.

The category labelled as ‘other,’ which in Parabiago refers to the care of benches and fountains, is frequently associated ‘is often indicated in co-participation with activities of a sporting nature (15 times) or for areas

Type of goods	Parabiago (percentage figure)	Italy (percentage figure)
Materials	83	63
Intangibles	6	7
Material and immaterial	11	25
Digital	0	1
Not detectable	0	4

**TABLE 3** Comparison between the Parabiago ecomuseum and the broader Italian context. Type of goods. (Data: Parabiago ecomuseum and Labsus).

of intervention falling under social inclusion, intangible assets or cultural activities'. These broader efforts often prioritise the maintenance of sports facilities such as gardens (Labsus, 2022)

In contrast to the national scenario, no agreements have been established in Parabiago regarding the maintenance of wall surfaces (on streets), cultural spaces, libraries, former industrial areas, or buildings and barracks.

## 5. Duration

In Parabiago, the dominant trend revolves around annual and sporadic agreements, whereas at the national level, there is a prevalence of pacts spanning 1 to 3 years. Compared to the national survey conducted in 2019, there is a growing inclination towards

an increased number of pacts falling within the 1 to 3-year duration range, as well as those surpassing the 3-year mark, although the latter remain a minority in Parabiago. It should be noted that the Labsus report also considers pacts categorised as annual, those that, despite their initial 1-year duration, have been renewed and consequently have been active for multiple years.

## 6. Forms of support

Unlike in Parabiago, where support is consistently provided in a combined manner, at the national level, it becomes apparent that support predominantly revolves around a single measure of support, such as the supply of materials, followed by the promotion of initiatives and advertising. Furthermore, at the national level, tax benefits for participants in



Places	Parabiago (percentage figure)	Italy (percentage figure)
Gardens/beds/parks	46	43
Squares/routes	38	18
More	6	16
Buildings	4	9
Schools	4	6
None	2	2
Wall surfaces (of streets), cultural spaces (cinemas, theatres), libraries, industrial areas or buildings, barracks	0	6

**TABLE 4** Comparison between the Parabiago ecomuseum and the broader Italian context. Involved places.  
(Data: Parabiago ecomuseum and Labsus).

Duration	Parabiago (percentage figure)	Italy (percentage figure)
Occasional interventions/undefined duration	25	4
Less than 1 year	8	9
1 year	48	32
1 to 3 years	17	41
More than 3 years	2	14

**TABLE 5** Comparison between the Parabiago ecomuseum and the broader Italian context. Assets involved.  
(Data: Parabiago ecomuseum and Labsus).

the pact and technical assistance also hold significant importance.

## **Conclusions**

The practice of shared administration of common goods through co-creation processes in Italy is a crucial mechanism for ensuring the care and management of the territory, while fostering a sense of community and resilience amidst multifaceted local and global crises. Co-creation, subsidiarity, and common goods represent key concepts in the European context that reflect the need to actively involve citizens, promote the responsibility of local communities, and ensure the sustainable management of shared resources. These concepts intersect and reinforce each other, providing a conceptual framework for addressing complex challenges in a collaborative and effective way. Within the Italian reality, these concepts play a crucial role in the Italian Constitution and Local regulations governing the care of commons through co-creation and subsidiarity have become increasingly prevalent across the country. Numerous Italian municipalities, as well as certain ecomuseums managed by public institutions have adopted this tool. Among them, the Parabiago ecomuseum stands out, having facilitated 48 cooperation pacts for the care of common goods between 2017 and 2023.

The approach employed by the Parabiago ecomuseum centres around the shared ma-

nagement of cultural landscape and heritage as common goods, promoting the responsible utilisation of local resources and fostering a stronger sense of community. This system of governance, characterised by the active involvement of local stakeholders, plays a vital role in creating a sense of place and community, ultimately generating significant cultural impacts (Dal Santo, Worts, 2022). Through this approach, the ecomuseum is a facilitator that enables people to contribute their creative and physical energies, sharing community resources for the collective benefit and the production and development of common goods and well-being. The results achieved can be valued in relation to the transformative changes that have been initiated within the community. These include methodological changes in working practices, cultural changes with a focus on social and relational dimensions, as well as physical changes such as heritage and landscape quality improvement and ecosystem health and safety.

In Parabiago, more so than at the national level, the pacts primarily revolved around the care and revitalization of green and natural areas, meeting the needs of individual citizens and informal groups who are not affiliated with associations but wish to dedicate their efforts to the management of common goods.

However, several critical points have been identified in Parabiago. The signed agreements often have short durations. For this reason, to ensure continuity of projects and processes is a

challenging task and significant efforts are needed on the part of the ecomuseum to coordinate and support the numerous active citizens, as well as to sustain discontinued projects.

The flow chart presented in Figure 1 for activating an agreement should be rethought in a circular manner. Monitoring each concluded agreement would provide essential feedback for better designing new agreements. Due to the high number of activated agreements, limited emphasis is placed on monitoring results and impacts, which are often assessed in an informal and non-analytical manner.

Insurance coverage is an important benefit for volunteers, but it has become increasingly costly for the municipality. Developing insurance policies that account for the actual time dedicated to active citizenship activities would be more appropriate.

Despite these challenges, the Parabiago experience demonstrates that cooperation agreements are a valuable tool to achieve constitutional principles such as subsidiarity and landscape preservation, while contributing to significant shifts in societal culture towards more cohesive and resilient communities.

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1. Las propuestas enviadas deberán ser originales e inéditas (que no hayan sido publicados previamente, impresa o digitalmente, en otro medio u otro idioma).
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  - Artículos: su extensión no debe exceder las 10.000 palabras. Son sometidos a revisión por pares ciegos.
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3. Las lenguas principales son el castellano y el asturiano, aunque puntualmente podrán publicarse trabajos escritos en otras lenguas.
4. No se admitirán en el texto términos o construcciones literarias que hagan referencia a cualquier tipo de discriminación u ofensa.
5. Las propuestas se presentarán en formato docx y constarán de las siguientes partes:
  - Título, autor/a y filiación.
  - Resumen: tendrá un máximo de 200 palabras y resumirá de manera clara y concisa el contenido. – Palabras clave: un máximo de cinco palabras descriptivas del contenido.
  - A continuación, deben seguir el orden habitual de las publicaciones científicas, con una introducción, cuerpo central descriptivo y analítico, conclusiones y bibliografía.Tanto título, resumen como palabras clave deberán presentarse también en inglés a continuación de la versión en el idioma original.
6. Figuras: se puede incluir un máximo de 10 imágenes, tablas e ilustraciones por propuesta. Las imágenes deben estar formato JPG y tener una reso-

lución mínima de 300 ppp. Se enviarán separadas del texto y denominadas con la abreviatura “Fig.” más el número que corresponda al orden de situación en el texto. Dentro del texto se señalará la posición de cada imagen todo ello entre paréntesis, Ej.: (FIGURA 6). En archivo word aparte, incluya un listado con la leyenda de cada figura. Debe señalarse la referencia y/o autoría de las figuras en caso que no correspondan al(los/as) autor(es/as) o si están tomadas de otra fuente.

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