

Each human action causes an effect on the world!

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All actions performed by each one of us are the direct consequence of what we think. If our vision of the world is selfish, that is if it doesn't take into account taking care of the neighbour, all our actions will contribute to increase the overall discomfort of the earth.

Diminishing the well-being of man, meant as a common asset to defend, is the origin of the loss of control on an economy for the benefit of all and of a relationship with Nature aimed at acquiring from it the necessary nourishment and to enjoy its beauty without spoiling it, for the sustenance and enjoyment of everybody.

The incapability of any gratuitous act not aimed to obtain material rewards hinders the growth of a person, intended as the possibility of becoming "cultured", because it has been cultivated in the most authentic meaning of the term, and therefore to be itself capable of cultivating and to take care of the creation, which is our "common house". A gratuitous act is beauty at its best, and everybody can enjoy beauty because it is free.

Dealing with politics, economics, environment, biodiversity protection without having acquired the sensitivity of the "farmer", is like confusing the disease with its symptoms, an illness whose cause is unknown and therefore we are not even able to try to cure it.

It's really important to deeply understand the meaning of "cultivating". Cultivating, culture, and cultured derive from the ancient Indo-European root *car[c+ar]* or *kwel**: moving around, looking for, going around to observe, examine, taking care of, walking in circles and, when related with specific experiences, is linked to the meaning of "preparing the land".

To the act of walking in circles, typical of processions, by extension, we can think of the relating activities such as worshipping and venerating, by means of which we intensify the care towards an entity.

Our civilization was born together with the agriculture when nomadic tribes began to cultivate a territory, becoming sedentary and started to build villages and to acquire a sense of community and of the circularity of time and of season cycles.

For the Latins the act of cultivating was "*colere*" *, from which derive cultured, cult, culture, cultivation, and then agriculture.

Culture is the neuter plural future participle of the transitive verb *còlere*. The future participle indicates what is imminent, very close, and of which we foresee the final outcome. The things that we plan to grow, to honor, to worship are culture, very close to

being cultivated and for them we strive to realize the project of the tree and fruits starting from sowing the seeds.



The word culture precedes, temporally, the past participle cult. When in fall we prepare the soil to sow wheat, we choose the best seeds, we entrust them to the land, we propitiate the deads resting underground so that they take care of our seeds and watch over them until spring, that is until when we will be able to take care of the plants by then grown and until the time of reaping the wheat: in all this time span where we work for the harvest, we live the meaning of “culture”.

After the threshing, recalling the various phases, by then past, of the accomplished “culture”, the result obtained, the good fruits ripened thanks to the cures we gave: all this we call “cult”. And at the end of summer, when we begin to think of our new cultivations, we are motivated to start again the cultivation because the preceding one ended well, gave good fruits, has become “cult”.

The culture, all that has been hoped for, wished, announced and that will bring good fruits becomes “cult” when the fruits have been picked up. The cult is both what we aim for and what we see that comes to completion over time, that is the goal of something, and a new origin: it is what gives us the motivation to start again to cultivate.

The use of the car/kwel root and of the verb còlere were extended to all actions that, as agriculture, asked an intense and constant care, such as worshipping the gods, that is the

cult, as cultivating ourselves to grow internally and particularly taking care of the education of the young people.

The fact that the term cult, whose meaning is tied up to material practices, has been, from the beginning, also used to point out something as intangible as the symbolic action to take care of the gods, brings “culture” over an immaterial plan. The symbol, from Greek sym-bolon**, “putting together”, unites the different plans of the existence, it connects what is physical and what is metaphysical, what is tangible and what is intangible.

Culture becomes therefore itself a symbol that drives to make grow, to go upward, over, to know and to understand more deeply the essence of the nature of things, to create connections between the various sciences and disciplines and to educate to build bridges between people and communities. Culture therefore contains and overcomes the ethics because it sees it projected in a project to the future.

Knowing the name and use of all plants, of the diseases they may incur, plants and animals’ response and behavior in a variety of situations, how to disproportionally increase field production doesn’t entail knowing how to properly cultivate the fields. All of this is not sufficient if we do not personally take care of Nature with attention and love, if we do not establish with Nature a relationship based upon collaboration and not on indiscriminate exploitation without keeping in mind the health of the earth.

It is not cultured the person who knows a lot of words, languages, disciplines, dates, notions and holds it for himself or uses it to increase the distance with his neighbour, but those who have lived a lot of experiences, humbly put them to the service of the community trying to build bridges, to create bonds that strengthen mutual collaboration for an improvement of everybody’s life. Culture connects the specific knowledges, transcending, interpreting, reassuming and turning them into a knowledge that makes us able to communicate and to collaborate with all creatures for the construction and the maintenance of life.

All languages, knowledge, artistic expressions created as interpretation of reality by everybody, each one with his own sensitivity, expand the possibility to communicate and act as incentives to create human relationships. In a world shaped by relationships where everything is related to others, exchanging experiences, exchanging “cultures” – that of the fisherman, of the farmer, of the nurse, of the ill one, of the physician, of the musician, of the painter, of the truck driver, of the inmate, of the scientist..., is the only way to reach a less partial and fragmented comprehension of the reality around us.



Completely agreeing with the point of view expressed during the summit fostered by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartolomeo I, organized in Halki, near Istanbul, in September 2015, I believe that politicians, environmentalists, artists, philosophers, all of us, in order to operate and cooperate towards the common interests, each one with his own qualities, talents and abilities, shall first get back to a human, sympathetic understanding of the world.

Giving charity to the poor people thinking to give them only something to eat, without taking into account the profound human relationship that should exist between the giver and the receiver is sterile. Taking care of the conservation of biodiversity without considering it a small part and not certainly the cause of today's human discomfort is as much sterile.

The various activities and disciplines must not act in isolation but interpreting themselves, all of them must contribute to the common cause. In my opinion this is tantamount to feeling ourselves “farmers”, that is to regain a healthy relationship with the time to dedicate to the things we want to take care of continuously because they are really important for our own life and that of the community.

And with renewed wisdom we try to give deep meaning and value to the “culture” that knows how to take care, to elevate, and to contribute to a new perception of a world united by a common empathic participation and collaboration for a “global citizenship”.

*It doesn't matter if the word “to cultivate” comes from the root kwel, from latin, from greek or any other language, the important is that this etymology offers an occasion for an important reflexion.

**The word «symbol» derives from latin symbolum and symbolum comes from greek συμβολον [symbolon] («symbol»): συμ- (sym-, «ensemble») and βολε [bolé], having the approximative meaning of «bringing together» two distinct parts. In ancient greek, the term symbol had the meaning of «recognising card» or «hospitalitas (hospitable) card), according to the custom for which two people, two families or two cities, shared a card, usually from terracotta or a ring, and they preserved each of the two parts at the end of an accord or an alliance. The greek term assumes for extension the meaning of «pact» or «alliance». The perfect match of the two parts of the card proved the agreement existence.



The Experiences at Altaura and Monte Ceva Organic Farms in the province of Padua, in North-East Italy.

The experience in the Farms, begin with the “Good morning” exchange.

Good Morning is not a nonsense formality. When I Say Good Morning, I realize that other people have entered in the Farm spaces, and that, from this moment, I won't be alone and, in my future actions, I'll keep in mind the guests and collaborators' requests and expectations to make their stay very pleasant and interesting. On the other hand, when saying Good Morning, guests and collaborators are aware they have entered into a new reality. From this moment on, the Farm and the guests and collaborators won't be the same anymore.

We will try to evaluate the footprint that our actions produce directly on people with whom we are collaborating and indirectly through the effects that we induce on the earth. For the first ones, we all will always be called to express our opinion, for the seconds the science furnishes us specific explanations that we will frame into a global life vision.

The Altaura and Monte Ceva organic Farms, together with the educational and care farm and farm-house activities, starting from the “rehabilitation” of the cultivation and the care of the land, are trying to give a small contribution to the rebuilding of a world perception focused on a heartfelt production and productivity with enjoyment for the beauty of creation. The goal of the educational program will be to add «the heart» into the notions that we can learn in scientific writings and to the technical experiences of cultivation, in order to build an affective relationship between people and Nature. This will create a desire for a constant appointment with Nature that will induce people to spontaneously adopt more respectful and sustainable actions for the environment because they couldn't lose the object of their affection and well-being.

In the Farms, during the days of practical experience and community life aimed at cultivating plants and breeding animals, a farmer will stimulate « curiosity » and « sensibility » to shorten the distances between Nature and people and helping the in perceiving every signal that Nature will send at that moment. The goal is to indicate a way to awake our sleeping senses and rediscover them as experiences that can satisfy our

desire for well-being. Artists are masters in transforming the feelings they get from Nature into music, painting, photography, poetry, storytelling... So another way to get closer to Nature will be through their works or will let our imagination and talent be free to express ourselves.



I tell some experiences with which I hope the readers will understand how the Farm is trying to shorten the distances between Nature and guests and collaborators. Once educated and «cultured», we will be able to learn, gather and interpret, by ourselves, thousands of new things from the world around us, and to get nourishment and joy from it. Once people try some feelings, they will be able to look independently for other ways to be well and to share it with the others.

-The Altaura and Monte Ceva Organic Farms try to provide a small contribution to the preservation and improvement of Biodiversity characterizing every place, not by using data, statistics or scientific arguments that can be comprehended by few minds, but by means of the emotional impact with the *Spirit or Sense of the Place*. Genius Loci reaches and touches the heart of many, in such a powerful way that may even change their lifestyle. Biodiversity is the background of every place and can be associated and intimately related with the *Spirit of the place* or *Genius Loci*. Our cuisine proposing the cultivated, wild and domesticated vegetable biodiversity of the place, interprets and becomes the messenger of the *Genius Loci*, by connecting places with people living therein.

But what is the Genius Loci? How can we meet him? Accordingly to Servius, “Nullus Locus Sine Genio”: there is no place without its own spirit (Commentary on the Aeneid, 5, 95). Places are like people: they feature a physical, tangible, material side and a spiritual, intimate side. We recognize a place by how it appears to our sight and we love it for the feelings that it gives us, for its *Genius*.

The Spirit of the Place or Genius Loci is difficultly found in books or in classrooms, in conferences, in web sites or via social media, but everyone identifies it and establishes with it a personal emotional relationship, the unique kind of connection that can relate us, by getting close to the place, trying to be discreet while making room inside us, opening ourselves up for listening, to perceive its personality and character.

We are not put into communication with the *Spirit of the Place* by reading or by writing a list of the elements identifying it, but by perceiving the Spirit that harmonizes them and that renders the place unique.

Only by opening ourselves up to shapes, colours, geometries, by smelling scents of flavours, tasting food prepared with the help of new and ancient recipes, experimenting flavours, varieties and textures, savouring wine..., by listening to musical compositions, looking at a vine climbing on an elm tree, a view, a village, a villa, by delving deeply in the environment, we will be able to be amazed and touched, to create a bond with the place, with its Spirit, to grasp its role, its utilization, the purpose of its existence in space and in the community and the manner in which it has been lived by human beings, vegetables and animals.

You too surely have experienced the feeling of Genius Loci, even though you may not be aware it is called in this way. It happened to you when a place struck you deeply in a way you could not easily describe, perhaps a scent, a view, an emotional experience such as having tasted a dish intimately related to the place and the culture of the place itself, by a view of lions drinking water at river at night in Africa, being entranced by a bloom of cyclamen in a Greek island in spring ... and you wouldn't like to lose, not only the physical place itself, but also the emotional, mysterious connections that it brings along, rich in deep feelings of well-being. The famous writer Boris Pasternak used to say that every year he had a rendez-vous with the palaces of Venice; he returned each year to Venice to re-experience the unique feelings that those places were able to relive in him.

Why is Genius Loci so important for biodiversity conservation?

When people feel intimately connected to the Genius Loci of the place they live and work in, where they entertain themselves and derive nourishment, they will dedicate themselves to that place and will possibly spontaneously protect it. They will feel responsible for its future life and will be able to think to plan, with love and affection, changes that would not offend, or worse thwart the Genius Loci, therefore losing the possibility of the link with that place. The bond between people and the spirit of the place where they live, the Genius Loci, which brings us in communication with its Nature, with its works of arts, and its

culture coming from the ancestors is a sort of intangible social capital, perhaps the most meaningful and important so that the community may continue living in peace in a place.

The Genius Loci has been recently considered, by UNESCO, the Council of Europe and European institutions, really important in the matter of protecting territory. In October 2008 the International Council of Monuments and Sites, ICOMOS, organized an international scientific symposium entitled “Finding the Spirit of Place – Between the Tangible and the Intangible” and adopted the Declaration of Quebec, known as “the Preservation of the Spirit of Place”.

One of the subject matters suggested in the 8th WEEC (World Environmental Education Congress), held in June-July 2015 in Gothenburg, was: *Reclaiming sense of place in a digital age*. The spirit of the place is a very precious gift descending to us from the past, filtered by the time and the life of many generations of human beings, animals and vegetables and that is necessary for the life of local communities.

To begin to build a better future, we need to send children, who are our future, to the school of Nature.

Starting from the conviction that Nature is the only teacher and that nobody can desire what he doesn't know, our goal is to shorten the distances among Nature, guests, and collaborators. This to facilitate the knowledge and to promote a way to dialogue with it, not as an exploiter, dominator, but as a user aware of the material and immaterial assets that Nature can give us if respected and treated in a friendly way.

And to learn from Nature, we must have access to a small place of land, close to us, not disturbed, where Nature is free to express itself and teach us everything it has to offer. If in our vegetable garden, garden, country or house's balcony, we don't leave at least a very small part of free Nature, but we continuously intervene, we'll have only the illusion to know it by the answers that we will get from our own stimulations and that have nothing to do with its spontaneous way of being.

On the land of Altaura and Monte Ceva Organic and agroforestral Farms, there are some cultivated and some uncultivated spaces, cultivated and spontaneous plants, a big amount of hedges, integral natural reserves zones, where free animals live in semi-wild and wild state finding here a well hosting environment.

The well-being of the planet is intimately associated to biodiversity preservation, that is the result of an ethical and ecological behavior of world citizens towards Nature. To achieve this result, it is necessary that a big part of citizens, better all, irrespective of their social classes, become active promoters of biodiversity protection for personal believe. This can happen only after people have experienced and realized what would be otherwise missed, from their own well-being, if, even a small part of biodiversity, is lost. Nature, that is the only teacher, teaches scientists and they study and learn and give us results and scientific knowledge and teaches the farmers, who are in direct contact with Nature every day, an emotional knowledge.

Farmers play a very important role in the preservation of biodiversity because, starting from the indications and the results given them by the scientists together with their experience and emotional knowledge, they create the conditions to shorten the distance between Nature and citizens. In this way they can quickly and easily feel an emotional relationship with Nature, the unique connection that deeply relates citizens and Nature so that they can become active promoters of protection of biodiversity for personal belief and interest.

Scientific knowledge, emotional knowledge and experience are needed.

It is our own opinion that food production and its perception must be part of this new arena in organic farming to achieve biodiversity conservation.

The Mediterranean diet, that in November 2012 was declared a world heritage, is one of the most significant examples of a lifestyle respectful of personal well-being and of Nature.

The motivations for this recognition underline the importance of such a link, characteristic of the Mediterranean diet, between nutrition and the sharing of feelings and cultural and economic interchanges as the foundation of reciprocal knowledge.

This is a necessary condition to promote the respect of diversity in culture, in the environment, and of biodiversity itself. The spirit of the Mediterranean diet is a model to put into practice and to extend further the borders of the Mediterranean sea, because it creates bonds among the people, forms a connection between the people and their environment, and it's a great stimulus for the artistic creativity in all of its expressions.

The Mediterranean pyramid with its inclusion of conviviality is an inspirational model that can be adopted beyond the boundaries of the Mediterranean region. It provides ideas for healthy living, creates connections between people and their environment and cultural exchanges.

We neither wish nor are able to change people's minds; there are university professors for this. In our Farm we employ many means to build strong emotional bonds between Nature and people, hoping to reduce the distance between them, for example by creating laboratories for the Educational Farm. Perhaps the most universal method is "at the table", and with this intent, for many years, we have committed ourselves to experiment using both cultivated and spontaneous vegetables in cooking.

Our goal is to offer, to the guests of our farm, an array of "tasty and savory" emotional knowledge. If we are capable to create attraction for a "biodiverse" nutrition, we will have created the desire for a constant appointment with Nature and persuaded people to adopt more respectful and eco-friendlier, spontaneous behaviors. If "eating biodiversity" will be preferred to conventional food, it will arouse interest for Nature also in those people who are not spontaneously attracted by it.

Food is often the only way to stimulate them, to create deep bonds with the environment and to become its active protectors, for personal experience and for interest to continue to savor tastes that would, otherwise, be lost.

Food is also one of the most ancient means of socialization and therefore of building and expanding a network of collective knowledge, useful to disseminate concepts and practices to protect biodiversity.

Starting from my experience in Veneto, North-East of Italy, I propose some seasonal vegetarian dishes, whose ingredients, easily available and/or cultivable in our territory, are hardly known for their use in cooking. I hope, in this way, to enrich tables with many typical ingredients of the Mediterranean diet.

The increment of their utilization fosters their survival and therefore their preservation and the improvement of biodiversity. The disuse of a species causes the loss of all knowledge related to it.



We try to interest our restaurant's guests in food's culture, allowing them to take part in the choices of the main constituents used in the dish preparation, offering them theme evenings in which we serve various types of tomatoes, or of *Brassicaceae* or of beans, or of apples, etc.

Together we taste and discuss them. The conversation with the guests serves to guide our next year's sowing choices and to put in contact cities with the countryside. Before eating, when it is possible, we visit the vegetable garden with our guests.

We don't have available statistics on the appreciation of our dishes but we have been praised many times: our customers, M.G Paoletti with prof Miguel Altieri and Nancy Turner, Lady Vandana Shiva, People to People American groups and children visiting our educational farm, awarded TripAdvisor recognition. They appreciated our dishes and the meaning with which the food is "filled", as a means to contribute to biodiversity preservation, our way to attract people closer to biodiversity by means of the food.

-When we go to the vegetable garden, we bring along two baskets: one for the cultivated vegetables and the other for uncultivated vegetables. Both of them go to the kitchen to be cooked for our dishes. Wild, edible herbs provide most of their produce and properties in spring when the vegetable garden is not yet productive, hence they complement each other perfectly.

- Tasting fruit and vegetables just picked up from the tree: what a privileged experience! In June 2014, I proposed to young Americans, aged from 14 to 18 years, of the group People to People visiting the farm's vegetable garden, to taste raw zucchini picked up with their own hands, at the moment, from the plant. Next to me, there was a 14 boy that begged me to exempt him from that test of life, because zucchini was one of the foods that he mostly hated. I begged him to taste a small piece of it. To be kind to me, he made a great effort and tasted it. With his huge surprise and my great joy, he really liked it.

The taste had nothing in common with what he was used to eat in the United States, purchased at the supermarket, and this really impressed him. Almost one month later, the teacher who collected the students impressions about their various experiences of their travel in Italy, wrote me that the visit of the farm and particularly of the vegetable garden had an impact on «their way of thinking» and that the « zucchini » boy «was so impressed» that he declared, maybe joking a bit, that he was looking forward to finishing his studies to come and work in the Farm.

People to People American groups of students, aged 14-18, visited the farm in their trip to Europe and their teachers wrote:

Linda Veen, June 2015: the kids and I learned so much from you. one of the boys wants to finish school and come back to work with you; he was so impressed by everything he saw, did, and ate! he was the one who said he doesn't like zucchini, yet he said yours was so delicious!

Marlene. Milko, 2014, I returned home from the people to people trip to Europe. I don't know if you recall, but I was one of the leaders of the high school age group from new jersey, usa. started looking through my pictures and wanted to give you some feedback. this was one of the best days for me and a very interesting one from most of the delegates. they experienced the nature that one does not see in their area. that is why they were quite interested in the bees, animals and even innocent games like jump rope. and everyone loved the feast of fresh food/vegetables - i read that in some of their journals as well. thanks again!

- June Filipski New Jersey People to People leader – visit to farm in 2014.

Hello, Maria..as a teacher of foods/cooking, I am always amazed at the lack of knowledge students have about food origins and production, so I found the day to be very educational for both myself and the students.

My new experience was seeing kiwis grow. Guess i thought they are rather than a vine.., but I really think that everyone took something new or thought provoking away with them after the day spent with you and your staff... I thought you would like to know some of the students' thoughts. They are required to keep a journal as we travel on program and the leaders read these periodically.



Most of them wrote on at least one or two presentations of the day as being very interesting and the things they learned. **..I could tell by their writings that their visit to your farm had an impact on their thinking**, which is exactly what I'm sure you hope to do. The lunch was delicious, and I have passed on a photo of my luncheon plate, as well as our website, to several of my friends who also have an interest in sustainable agriculture. The fig jam I purchased has also been a wonderful gift for these people.

-when children coming to visit the farm taste the honey directly from the comb and say that they like it more than candy you buy at the supermarket, we achieved our goal.

- When we are near the mother donkey, I take the opportunity to tell the true tale of her life. The mother-donkey had a baby in June 2012, but after a few days the baby died. She was so sad that she did not eat for days and later became ill. Her bones came out of her skin,

creating many wounds that bled continuously. The doctor came many times and we gave her a lot of medicine, but nothing was able to cure her disease. After a few days the doctor said, "Unfortunately, there is nothing to do for her and she is inevitably going to die very soon." At that point, I made the decision to let her roam completely free in the countryside. With enormous difficulty, she walked around and found a very tiny herb from which we observed her to eat some tiny leaves from. She did not die that day. For every moment of every following day she went on trying to find only that same, specific herb. After a week she seemed to feel a little bit better, while still only eating this single herb. I then took to the Internet and discovered that this specific herb is one that contains a large amount of medicinal properties for people, but the largest amount of benefits for donkeys. I also discovered that the older generations of people here used to eat it boiled at the beginning of winter as a restorative tonic. The name of that herb is **Gramigna**, or spear grass, one of the most hated grasses by farmers because it grows everywhere. The story concludes with the simple point that if we had not let the mother-donkey free she would have surely died, and we would not have learned from NATURE a very useful item for our life and health.

-For years, I had realized that during the period of the corn seeding (not the harvest), there is a peak of deaths of bees, but I didn't tell anybody because I was not able to find an explanation and I feared to be taken as a visionary. One day, casually listening a broadcast program, a listener asked an expert: "Why corn cultivation engraves bees death so strongly? And the expert answered: "It's not during the cultivation that it has this deleterious effect on bees, but during the seeding phase. In the intensive cultivations, the corn's seed, as everybody can see, is usually red because it is wrapped by a red tanning chemical protection." And when, at the end of March, beginning of April, we plant it in the first days of spring heat, the tanning evaporates, and we find ourselves immersed in a toxic cloud that has an evident and direct lethal impact on bees.

-In October 2012, on a part of land that was ready for the corn Spring seeding, a production of *Synapsis Arvensis* appeared, back from a seeding of more than twenty years ago. We picked up quintals of it and then proposed it to our clients of the restaurant, that appreciated it a lot, especially mixed with ricotta as good stuffing for tortelli or simply fried with garlic and oil.

- In the rainy summer of 2014 the fruits (which are really flowers) of fig trees were tasteless and when we tried cooking them with sugar to produce jam, it was impossible to obtain an acceptable result. We then looked at the plant with different eyes and "noticed" the leaves too, which are often an unexpected resource. So, for the first time we have prepared fig leaf syrup that tastes more of fig than the figs themselves! Recipe for fig leaf syrup: Carefully wash the fig leaves, break them into small pieces, boil water, and pour it over the leaves with the juice of two organic lemons. Close the container and leave it to macerate for twenty-four hours. The day after, filter it, add one and a half kg of sugar, and simmer it for twenty minutes over a very mild flame. Sterilize the bottles and fill the bottles while still hot. Our own dishes are not for the rich. One among all is liked, and I too like it very much

for its flavor: fig leaves syrup. Another reason I like it very much is because in the Mediterranean basin everybody can prepare it, even the poorest.

Leave it resting for about twenty days, then use it for summer refreshments, some drops on fruit salads, ice cream, yoghurt, and seasoned cheese. I have made known to a few restaurants on the Greek island of Simi that have immediately included it in their menu paired with Greek cheese. If, until now, we have been using only a part of a plant, now, we have to learn to look at all its parts and we will be surprised, for its gifts and beauty.

In that summer, the Azeroles (*Crataegus azarolus L.*), because of the great quantity of rain, were beautiful and big and we collected them and made great jams and syrups. In the drought's summers, they are reduced «to the bone» and unusable.



-This year, in September 2016, we have produced seeds of alfalfa for next seedings. The amount of the organic harvest was, as the local subcontractor stated, bigger than the intensive. Moreover, the seeds looked really beautiful and indeed, to me, they seemed “alive”. I asked how the harvest of seeds is made in the intensive way and I found that, immediately before the harvest of seeds, to “facilitate it”, is used a defoliant. Well, in my opinion, the defoliant has an impact on the seeds. This is a clear example of why, in organic agriculture, it’s important to start from organic seeds.

-And when the uncultivated plants that grow in the vegetable garden become so exuberant to jeopardize the development of those that we are already cultivating, and when we pull them out with bare hands, without gloves, we will enrich us of new feelings and knowledges. From the effort of our muscles, we will have an idea of the depth of the roots, from the direct contact, we will have the perception of the structure of the leaves and the stem – some are also sharp – and the hands will smell of a marvelous unique perfume of spontaneous herbs.

-If in the vegetable garden, we cultivate chicory, we leave a dwarfish portion of land in which it spontaneously reproduces every year, and we try to understand what its attitudes are, and the same for borage, and fennel... And if a plant of thistle is born out of the space that we had programmed for thistles, we let it live, and try to understand why, from a great number of seeds that every flower of thistle produces, a new plant is growing right there, in that place; it's a planetary grass and the garden is « a moving garden »! It's wonderful!

-And how much wisdom in the country habits that come to us from the oral tradition! I liked a lot the story of Mrs. Serafina, our neighbor, who has lived in the 50ies years the experience: "Share the Pigs!!!!". During the "metamorphosis " of the pigs, from November till the end of January, in each quarter, people agree to kill the pigs not at the same time but in temporal succession, so that, since there were not the refrigerators, all people could eat fresh meat for a long period. What an example of civilization, of sense of the community! What a culture to be recovered and to imitate!

Walking around the farm, we stop to comment what mostly strikes us, that day:

-*Valerianella locusta* (L.) Laterr. Lamb's lettuce. Its genus' name means "small Valeriana", with reference to genus Valeriana. Valeriana derives from the Latin verb *valere* that means "to be strong" because of its many medicinal properties. The term *locusta* refers to the grasshopper and is probably due to the fact that these plants are often eaten by grasshoppers. Both the common name of the species, lamb's lettuce, and the scientific name *Valerianella*, in which the suffix *-ella* transforms Valeriana into its diminutive, probably refers to the unassuming, "humble" appearance of the plant. It is possible to buy it at most supermarkets, cultivate it in the Farm according to the methods of organic farming and find it, spontaneously grown in the fields of the Farm. Together with the three kinds of *Valerianella* we have the opportunity to point out the different sizes of the leaves: from the largest, those bought at the traditional supermarket, to the smallest, the ones which grow spontaneously. Inversely proportional to the leaf's size is the intensity of its color and taste. We envisage that the plant which grows with difficulties, having to fight to survive, would emphasize its own characteristics, which, for use in cooking, is tantamount to concentrating taste as well as nutritional powers. This plant is suitable to season omelets and soups. It has depurative properties.

-*Arctium lappa* L. Burdock. Derives from the Greek term *arctos*, indicating the bear, perhaps referring to the prickly appearance of the plant, while *lappa* could derive from the Greek term *labein*, to hang to, because the fruits of this plant hang to clothes and for this reason are often used by children to play. Velcro was invented by a Swiss scientist who copied the weft of the fruits of these plants. Every year, on the second Friday of August in the royal village of Queensferry in Edinburgh, Scotland, the Burry Man, a man covered by burdock flower-fruits, tours the city knocking at the doors to receive gifts to fulfill a fertility rite. I would like, in the Farm, to dedicate a day to burdock, in which guests are invited to create and present artwork produced with the plants' fruits. Raw leaves are used in salads

when they are small, while roots and stalks are consumed boiled. The plant is commonly used in cosmetics and as a natural remedy against dermatitis.

-*Sambucus nigra* L. Elder tree. The elder tree is a plant present in all the Mediterranean, up to Iran and Northern Europe and is also called "gypsies' grapes" due to the similarity of its fruits to small grape bunches. The Italian term for this plant, sambuco, derives from a Greek word, sambukè, which is a musical instrument. It was well known in Syria and Palestine too. In Lebanon the elder tree is present in the flyers of El Chouf natural park of the Lebanon cedar trees, but not far away from there, in Sidon, it was unheard of and completely unused. When I go to the humanitarian mission in Lebanon, I often bring some bottles of elder flower syrup as gifts. Last time, I went there, we compared our products, because they had begun to make their own syrup. In the past the elder tree wood was used to build a toy, in Veneto known as s-cioparolo. This word is related to the Venetian verb s-ciopare, meaning "to explode", so this word means "something that explodes. This toy is made from an elder stick 4-5 cm in diameter and 20-25 cm long. One must remove the marrow, leaving the stick hollow, and select another stick a bit longer than the first and having the same diameter as the just removed marrow. This second stick is pushed swiftly inside the first, throwing in the process a little ball of hemp, previously inserted inside the first stick.

Now in the Farm we produce the "windpipe". We take a small piece of elder tree trunk between two knots. We open it at one end and drill a small hole near the closed end upon which we place an oak's gall. We hollow inside the branch. We then blow into the open end, causing the gall to bounce up and down in the air over the hole. It is said that both Mozart's magic flute and fairies' magic wands were made from the wood of elder trees. The ancient Germans called it Holunder or Holda tree. Holda, or Hulda, was a fairy of medieval German folklore, who disguised herself as a young maiden with long, golden hair and was believed to live in the elder trees in close proximity to lakes and rivers. It seems that the peasants of the time had so much respect for the Fairy, and consequently for the tree, that if they came across an elder tree on their way, they tipped their hat. They dared to uproot or cut it only when absolutely necessary and then only after asking permission from the Elder Tree Fairy, praying, as follows: "Frau Holda, offer me a branch of your tree and I shall offer you something in my possession". Since it was also useful for curing toothache, a supplicant could approach an elder tree reciting, "Frau Holda, Frau Holda, lend me a sliver and I'll return it ". He could then take the sliver home, and use it to slice his gum, staining the sliver with his blood. Thereupon, he returned to the tree, walking backwards, and reinserted the sliver into the place from which he had taken it. It was believed that the tree absorbed and dispersed the pain. In Tyrol culture it is called "pharmacy of the gods" because of the many medicinal properties that it possesses; the peasants bowed seven times to the Elder tree because seven was the number of gifts received from this plant: flowers, berries, leaves, marrow, bark, wood, and roots.

For the same reason this tree was also considered sacred by the Greeks, who called it actéa, from Sanskrit açnati, nourishment. In almost all North European countries, from

Great Britain to Russia, it was believed that planting elder trees around houses or city walls warded off snakes and, chiefly, evil spells.

Its flowers are used to make syrups treating cough and flu; its black, glossy berries, are also used to prepare excellent syrups, holy wines, and delicious jams. We obtain a neuralgia-soothing herbal tea from its buds. Compresses of leaves cure skin diseases. Additionally, flowers can be used to prepare a depurative tea, while from its berries can be made a syrup curing the respiratory system inflammation. The bark cures glaucoma by positioning it over the eyes, and roots were used against gout. The marrow, mixed with honey and flour, soothes the pain of dislocations.

Common nettle. *Urtica dioica*. L. The name derives from the Latin *urere*, “to burn”, while *dioica* indicates that male and female flowers are distinct and brought from different plants. The nettle is a textile plant. In Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale, Elisa is a princess who lives happily with her eleven brothers. However, one day the king remarries to a wicked stepmother, who places Elisa in the care of peasants’ and casts a spell on her brothers, converting them into wild swans. The fairy Morgana explains to Elisa how she can save her siblings: she must pick nettles with her bare hands, step on them barefoot, and weave them into eleven tunics for her brothers to wear; all the while not uttering a word, lest they die. On account of this strange occupation Elisa is charged with sorcery, taken to court, and sentenced to death by the people. While awaiting her execution, Elisa works feverishly to complete the last tunic; as she approaches the stake, the eleven swans arrive. Elisa casts the tunics over their heads and they find themselves transformed back into princes; they recount the whole story to their father, vindicating her.

Today, what do we eat? Risotto with common nettles, ravioli stuffed with ricotta cheese and common nettles? What do we drink? Water flavored with common nettle leaves? It tastes like melon juice.

Nettle leaves mixed with strawberry leaves, in herbal tea/infusion, are useful in the cases of iron deficiencies, helping the body to hold back great iron quantities. It’s useful against arthritis, rheumatisms, eczemas, and asthma.

-*Vitis vinifera* L. Grapevine. The word *vitis* derives from Latin *vitis* and this from the Indo-European word “*viere*” that means to curve, to weave. In Cattabiani’s *Florario* the grapevine is enumerated among the cosmic trees due to the fact that, since Sumerian time, wine was related to youth and eternal life, so the vine was the plant of life and immortality; for Jewish laws of the Mishnah, it was even the plant of knowledge. Finally, let us not forget that Jesus in the Last Supper affirms: “I am the true vine and my Father is my vinedresser”, while in another parable he compares the creation to the vine of Lord. And what to say of transubstantiation, during which wine converts itself into Christ’s blood, that is to a substance directly related to divinity? One day, strolling in the Euganean Hills among fifteen meter high chestnut trees, I noticed that they were wrapped in old vine shoots that, being no longer domesticated, climbed up to the chestnut tree tops as if to hug to the sky, and they seemed to me even more cosmic! Very often we no longer recognize

the plants' shape, even though they are very well known, when they are left free to express their own nature. In this case, too, I like to emphasize that stuffed vine leaves are used throughout the whole Mediterranean but not in Veneto; yet the Veneto area is a very renowned vine-growing region, so why shouldn't we enrich our kitchen with this easily found ingredient, easy to use, having a nice taste, and increasing our food biodiversity? The vine, and in particular all activities revolving around it, (grape harvest, pruning, wine making) are subjects described and portrayed in all countries of the Mediterranean basin. Today, we eat vine leaves stuffed with rice and cheese.

-*Coriandrum sativum* L., Coriander derives from the Greek name *koris*, "stink bug", with reference to the disgusting smell of the plant's leaves. Either you love them, or you hate them. Throughout the whole Mediterranean, the leaves are used for soups and for seasoning meats and salads but not in Veneto and, as far as I know, very little in Italy. Bringing home from Mediterranean countries coriander seeds I was curious to try sowing them, and with great surprise I realized that it grows and reproduces itself with great ease, as if it were in its original place. It is wonderful, and the bees like it very much. Not long ago, while tidying up some old books, I stumbled upon a 1929 edition of the "Nuova Enciclopedia Agraria Italiana" New Agricultural Encyclopedia" where the coriander is included in the volume dedicated to vegetable cultivation. The coriander seed is indicated as a constituent of a great number of both culinary and liqueur preparations, and it was also the center of an important trade market! I went right away to interview the elderly, to discover whether any of them remembered having cultivated or tasted it, but none of them had ever heard of it. The use of coriander has been completely lost. In the last few years it has become a stable guest of our vegetable garden. In the XVI century during the Carnival festivities coriander fruits were sugar glazed, and it is for this reason that the name remained in the Italian word for multicolored sweets, "coriandoli". They are exquisite wafers. The coriander was among the herbs offered by Egyptian kings in temples, and coriander seeds have been found in Tutankhamun's tomb.

-*Verbascum thapsus* L. Mullein. The word *verbascum* derives from Latin, *barbascum*, "beard" while *thapsus* was the Sicilian town Thapsos, near Siracusa. All kinds of *verbascum* have the same medicinal properties. We can use flowers and leaves but not the seeds which are toxic. Doctor Dioscoride recommended mullein to treat pneumonic diseases, and it has been used, for this purpose, for 1800 years. It contains mucilage, flavonoid, and saponins and has expectorant properties (liquify the mucus favoring deletion) and emollients (reduces irritation of the respiratory tract), for this reason, it is particularly useful in cases of bronchitis, wet cough, dry cough, and sore throat. The stalk of mullein, without leaves and flowers is used, after immersing it in the grease, as a candle, the velvety leaves are wrapped around figs to preserve them, and the infusion of the flowers is good to lighten the hair.

-*Punica granatum* L. Pomegranate. The name *punica* is related to the Punic, the ancient name to indicate Carthaginian people, because this plant was introduced in Italy from Northern Africa, which in the past was populated by this people. While *granatum* means

“with seeds”, with clear reference to the fruit’s structure full of easily recognizable seeds. It is a plant related to the myth of Persephone; who, while in the netherworld, ate pomegranate seeds, forcing her to return to Hades’ realm every autumn but still allowing her to come back to the surface every spring. This plant is therefore linked to the death-and-rebirth cycle, and to the endless regeneration of the universe. The numerous grains of the fruits are also symbols of fertility, particularly among the Romans. In the Middle Ages the pomegranate symbolizes also the Church, that gathers within her, in a single faith, different people. All these symbolisms are summed up in the numerous frescos in which the Madonna, or more often the Infant Jesus, hold in hand an open pomegranate, to indicate the cycle of birth and death ,or better, death and resurrection, the Church’s universality, but also the infinite love of God toward mankind. The plant is rich in tannins, particularly the skin, and is used as a vermicide and astringent. These properties were already known to Ancient Egyptians. Pomegranate. By the time, we have learned not only to drink the fresh juice but also to use the seeds and the peel. We must consider the seeds and peel as infusion that favors digestion. In alternative to pepper we can Pomegranate seeds powder mixed with laurel dried leaves to flavor, beans, peas and lentils soups....

-In September we pick up and taste the purslane that is grown luxuriant and abundant in the vegetable garden.

-*Stellaria media* (L.) Vill. Chickweed. The Latin genus name refers to its star-shaped flowers, while the term *media* means “of average size”. This plant grows every year from the beginning of the cold season until the warm season. Its leaves are extremely delicate like those of a vegetable grown in a greenhouse. It is my belief that it must produce its own kind of natural antifreeze. Additionally, I noticed that, once picked, it rots more quickly than all the other vegetables.

The inhabitants of the desert have coined a lot of words to point out the sand, the esquimesis for the ice and the Persians for the gardens and the trees. For the last ones "Heaven" is such a beautiful garden, whose beauty could even be imaginary, not real. Before planning the house, they put the plants of the garden. The Persians recognized the cut of a tree in their own territory as a clear sign of the beginning of the hostilities by the enemies. At the end of this path in the Farm we hope to have experienced so many emotions, feelings, and amazement of the beauty that spontaneously, inspired by the language of Nature, we will feel the urge to invent a multitude of words to call a leaf, a flower, a tree and to express our sensations, wonder, feelings, and to paint, to write poetries, to compose music and songs,

And how many games are made from what we can pick up during a walk in the Farm!...

Games and toys are an indispensable and magic instrument, a way to approach and to move children (but not only children) closer to NATURE. Even the most difficult children, to whom it is difficult to teach the rules of civilized behavior, more often than not, like to play and follow the rules of a game, because otherwise the game fails. Betting on the desire of the children to play, we propose games and toys to them, made with materials at their disposal which are bound to outdoors life and available in the environment – such as

rocks, pieces of wood, fabric remnants, feathers, etc. It is interesting to note how the world's most elementary games have many similarities and involve children of diverse languages and ethnicities. Many of the following games have been played in various parts of the world by various cultures.



- Astragali also known as Knucklebones, is a game of very ancient origin. It is usually played with five small objects, originally the "knucklebones" (actually the astragalus - a bone in the ankle or hock) of a sheep, which are thrown up and caught in various ways. The winner is the first player to successfully complete a prescribed series of throws, which, while of the same general character, differ widely in detail. The simplest version consists in tossing up one stone (the jack) and picking up one or more from the table while it is in the air. This continues until all five stones have been picked up. Another version consists of tossing up first one stone, then two, then three and so on, and catching them on the back of the hand.

-The game of peacock feathers. One must keep a feather on the tip of their nose without ever letting it fall.

- The game of the torpedo is accomplished by placing one or two chicken feathers at the base of the core of corn cob, which can then be launched as a small airplane.

-The windpipe is constructed with an elderberry branch and an oak's gall, a small "house" for pests that reside in the oak. One must blow through the end of the pipe that is open (the other side is closed), and the air is expelled through a small opening in the top of the

pipe, near the closed end. By putting the small ball/oak gall on top of the hole and blowing consistently, it enables the gall ball to be suspended and balanced on a stream of air.

- MANCALA The word Mancala comes from the Arabic word naqala, literally meaning "moved". No one has the ownership of the seeds but can only move them! Also called sowing play, the aim is to spread around the seeds and collect most of them on your side (as the object of the game is to have more seeds than your opponent, but not to take all their seeds or assets). It is also prohibited to leave your opponent with no seeds and unable to play if the game is still active, making the player with the most seeds give some seeds to the opponent in their immediate next move, thus saving him at the last moment. In many versions of Mancala, this opponent's last-gasp rescue (feed) is required! Reading into this rule, it is not difficult to find traces of a philosophy of solidarity in the agricultural civilization that Mancala originated from.

-A Verbal Test for Children: A blind man is allergic to sour cherries, yet not to regular cherries. He was visiting Altaura Farm where there are a lot of cherry trees and sour cherry trees. How can he distinguish, for sure, a cherry from a sour cherry? Not from the skin of the fruit (drupe), not from the leaves, not from the texture of the skin, but from the tip. This is because in the cherry the seed is inside the fruit (drupe) and in the sour cherry it is linked to the stem. The one whom answers correctly gets some sort of little gift!

- THE OAK WITH THE GOLDEN LEAVES and the magic gift of knowledge

This is a tale I invented to move the children closer to the lives of insects, in an effort to have them become friends to bugs. "One day, in woods like these, there was great excitement. There was a rumor that within a few weeks many trees were going to be cut down to make way for a new football field. The children, who often played under the shade of the great oak, spoke with enthusiasm of this project. They were already thinking of the joyful afternoons that awaited them.

The inhabitants of the woods were, naturally, very worried. The oak, which was the oldest and wisest tree, proposed that all the inhabitants of the woods gather around him to discuss what to do and try to find a solution together. However, none of the ideas seemed very good. They could only complain. "If they cut all the trees, where will we build our nests?" said the bird. "Without your acorns, what will we eat?" said the squirrels. The walnut tree said, "What a pity, without my branches where will the children play hide and seek?" He continued, "They used to have so much fun climbing over my branches!" Then the big oak, all of a sudden, exclaimed "But of course! The children... how did we not think of it earlier? Maybe they could help us, but I do not know how... we would need some magic!" Suddenly the Nature Fairy appeared, "Dear Oak, I think that you are right, and I can make magic... I will leave this magic powder over your leaves and when children pass by, you have to move your branches and the dust will fall over their heads and through this magic, they will acquire the gift of knowledge.

For one day, children will be able to understand all of your words and this way they will become familiar with the life in the forest". The following day, Anna and Andrea, a brother

and sister, were playing under the great oak just like any other day after having finished their homework. "Don't you think it's great that in a few months we will have a real football field?" Andrea exclaimed. "Yes," Anna replied, "but we will not have these beautiful trees to climb and swing on anymore." "So?" Andrea said. "What's the big deal about a few trees? There are so many! And the park will also have swings! Anyway, I will finally be able to throw a ball without having it bounce against a tree!" Anna continued fiddling with a line of ants while Andrea fantasized about future games. At one point, the two heard a soft, little voice, "Go on little ones, we must go make breakfast, you need to eat to grow!" Both children said at once, "What did you say?" "I said nothing, I thought it was you!" they said yet again at the same time. What was happening? If neither of them had spoken whom else could it have been? Around them they could only see... ants! Anna and Andrea layed on the ground and observed the ants. A little bit later, Andrea started to look at two ladybugs (ladybirds) resting on a leaf full of aphids, which represented a delicious morsel. It was almost as if the two ladybugs were arguing... "Move over, I arrived first", said one. "No way", replied the other one. "Let's do this: the one with the most spots on the back wins. I have got 22 and you?" said one. "I only have 7!" said the other one and went away angry. It was wonderful to be able to understand what the animals were saying to one another, who could have thought that there was such liveliness in the woods? Andrea and Anna looked around. They had been there so many times to play with their friends, but they had never noticed the life of the woods. Now, looking at it with renewed eyes, they saw the butterflies, ants, bees and plants anew... They could not allow this beautiful and complex world to be destroyed for a simple football field! And their friends would certainly agree... The two children got up and hurried over to their home to tell everyone what they had discovered. The old oak tree smiled as he watched them go, shaking his golden leaves in a welcoming gesture. The football field was built in another place, where there were no trees to be cut down. The forest is still standing, and the children continue to visit their new friends, and everyone lived happily ever after.

I dream of realizing a project, "moving vegetable gardens-vegetable gardens of hope", aimed at reviving the spirit of the Mediterranean in the territories of the Mediterranean basin, with the twofold goal to promote unifying to face common challenges, respecting biodiversity and pleasant and sustainable cooperation, helping to obtain in the process more secure southern maritime boundaries for the European Union.

To achieve these goals it is of the utmost importance that populations and in particular the young, who are our future, be educated and exposed to a culture and a competence regarding sustainability by encouraging meetings and exchanges that foster mutual acquaintance, which is the basis to establish good relationships.

The project, hopes that people, living in countries of the Mediterranean basin and united by the common interest in learning and practicing sustainable cultivation methods, both through self-commitment and mutual cooperation, will be able to win the battle against ignorance toward Nature.

Mutual knowledge will be followed by relationships based upon trust and collaboration, prevailing over distrust or, worse, enmity between people, communities, nations, and ethnic groups, often caused only by lack of opportunities to know each other, motivated by common interests and goals. “Orti in movimento – Orti di speranza” could, therefore, be defined as a project against ignorance and in favor of knowledge.

It is a widespread belief that today’s global crisis is not only economic but ethical and on account of ignorance. Nature is a part of us, not external but an exterior, that puts all of us into a close relationship. Not respecting and improving the environment around us, it is not sufficient to conserve it! All of us become sick and all our actions towards Nature are reflected not only on us but on all earth’s creatures.

Starting from this viewpoint we believe that understanding and defending Nature, to ensure a better life for all, are motivations common to ethnic groups, religions, nationalities, and age groups, and that loving Nature is a prayer to God for everyone, since all religions recognize their god as the creator of Nature. Many vegetable gardens compose the planetary garden! May it be a path toward global peace! (Clément, 1991).

The project has as a faithful ally, to stimulate a common interest originating from the primary need of nutrition, Nature, in its characteristic function as a source of vegetable sustenance by means of the cultivation of species in the Vegetable garden via environmentally respectful methods and responsible utilization of spontaneous species growing outside the garden. Wild, edible herbs provide the majority of their produce and properties in spring when the vegetable garden is not yet productive, hence they complement each other perfectly.

Essential for achieving our goal is the continuous exchange of information and experiences related to the sustainable solution of the problems that will be encountered during the project realization.

This exchange will put in contact populations of different ethnic groups, deeply motivated to mutual knowledge by the interest for a common project where they will be committed to cooperate to satisfy the primary need for nutrition in a sustainable way, promoting at the same time intercultural dialog.

In this way a network of knowledge will connect not only the people involved in the project but also those living in neighboring rural areas with those living in cities. It is necessary that they begin to collaborate and do not remain separate entities, perhaps thinking that they have conflicting goals. Everyone, with his own capabilities and willingness, will be able to contribute to the growth of the network and therefore to change.

The adoption of these innovative ways will become the basis from which to find a sustainable local administration, promoting cultural dialog, strengthening the endogenous potential of the involved territories and making the southern maritime boundaries of the European Union safer.

The local population will be encouraged to exchange plants and/or seeds believed to be endangered after having realized that the number of specimens has recently diminished and /or is grown only in their own vegetable garden because they have inherited them from their parents.

This will be a motivation directly involving the local population with the project and a special contribution for the preservation of biodiversity and for the creation of a map of Mediterranean biodiversity.

Within the vegetable garden there will be a space where locals, who will cultivate in their own plots and by means of nature-respectful methods, plants typical of the area, will have the opportunity to sell their products.

A friendship point will be recognized that will provide a space in which everyone will be free to pray in his/her own faith, whichever it be! Therefore, nothing static or predefined, but a path to be discovered with a precise goal in mind: recover a good relationship with the surrounding environment in order to interact with it synergistically and be able to involve local communities in collaboration for this project of common interest, regaining good practices of communal life.

A “natural” evolution will be the opening of the botanical vegetable garden as an educational Vegetable Garden for schools. The project “Orti in movimento –Orti di Speranza” will provide local administrators with an original method to improve territorial policies.

Casale di Scodosia, Altaura, November the 4th 2016.

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