

## Summary of the first preparatory seminar of the 2024 Fragile Areas Conference

### *Socialisation and Mobilisation*

### *Capacity of Rewilding*

15 November 2023, h. 3.00-6.00 pm (online)

Let's start with the three speeches (see the programme below), all of which have been very rich in information and suggestions, from which to draw a synthesis that can only be personal. Meredith Root-Bernstein, after a general introduction to rewilding from a socio-ecological point of view, told us about a concrete case of reintroduction of the guanaco in Chile. The geographical context is quite different from that of urbanized Italy or Western Europe, even urbanization does not have those gradients of density of the inhabited area and infrastructures that we have in Italy. Thus, the reintroduction projects are confronted with very strong contrasts between city and country, between rich and poor areas, between people with a high level of education and its opposite. The insistence on the territorial conformation, in which the rewilding takes place, immediately brings out an element: the morphology of the territory and its 'model' of development are essential for the success of the project, because they imply two points that will be useful in the conclusions: the dialogue with the local population, especially if it is made up of farmers and breeders, and the trade-offs or compromises that must be reached. I report this quotation for making clearer the point:

Rewilding thus takes place in the inhabited and thus political landscapes and ecologies of the Anthropocene (...). The ideal rewilding scenario is often presented as one where all the key missing elements, both biotic and abiotic, are restored (...); however, this might not be feasible for a variety of ecological, practical, social, and political reasons. There is then a trade-off between practicality and the rewilding ideal (Jamie Lorimer, Chris Sandom, Paul Jepson, Chris Doughty, Maan Barua, Keith J. Kirby, [Rewilding: Science, Practice, and Politics](#), Annual Review of Environment and Resources 2015 40:1, 39-62).

Davide Pettenella, the second speaker, also mentioned that an appropriate key for rewilding is plural trade-offs, in the sense that there is not only trade-off between developers and ecologists, but there are also those between experts in the various disciplines and those within the primary sector between farmers, shepherds and foresters. Pettenella debuts with a typology of rewilding; the passive one, letting spontaneous processes – such as the growth of the forest in Italy – continue without any intervention. Rewilding as marketing that makes the reintroductions of large charismatic species and certain woodlands an opportunity to fascinate niche visitors, attracted precisely by nostalgia for and healthiness from the wild. And – third type - rewilding as an explicit protection policy. There is not a clear preference for one type or another; they probably coexist in the practice of institutions and operators. Surely, the trade-off mechanism, i.e. the recognition of the kinds and levels of losses/gains for each social category and of any compensations, can ensure the governability of rural systems.

Pietro Piana presents a peri-urban case of rewilding, Genoa, and its 'rural' hinterland, the one towards the mountains to be clear. This is now largely rewilded, a fact that is re-proposing a city-country cleavage, social sciences scholars thought to have been overcome by widespread Italian modernization. The opinion of a sample of respondents from the different areas of Genoa and its 'inland' areas shows a clear demarcation between those who love and want more wild species (urban areas) and those who want their containment even energetically. It is clear that politics can be inserted into such a fracture, with political leaders always ready to grasp distinctive elements.

Whether or not they like wild animals – sometimes introduced surreptitiously like the wild boars of Eastern Europe – reintroduction of species is an excellent marker of distinction.

The title of the seminar was very sociological, while none of the three speakers were sociologists. So it was an opportunity to transfer knowledge between different disciplines, united by an interest in the fate of fragile rural areas. It must also be said that the ideal of building a socio-ecological model has been more enunciated than realized. An integration between the models of low-anthropized ecosystems and the models of complex societies is still a long way off. The main mechanism identified in the seminar – the calculation of trade-offs – has a strong economic footprint and presupposes the possibility of 'quantifying' an interest of ecosystems, which is far from being clarified, given that it is still human organizations that determine what is best for nature.

But let's get straight to the seminar title; we were talking about “Socialisation and Mobilisation Capacity of Rewilding”. The answer to these two very social objectives appears tendentially positive. Socialization, understood as the learning of basic values of a society, in this case of an ideal interface with ecosystems, is increased by rewilding, in at least three aspects: the process of rewilding has allowed the formation of social identities based on ecologism. Ecology provides a starting point for a basic human need: identification with someone else, in this case wilderness. Rewilding is also a formidable opportunity to broaden our horizons of knowledge. Thanks to these policies, there are many more people who wonder how an ecosystem really works. The example of the advancing forest, of the substitute species, of the trophic chain are all opportunities for people to learn more systematically their environment. Finally, the city-country divide previously evoked and exploited by certain political forces becomes a source of new knowledge. In fact, the instrumental use of arguments also generates counter-arguments.

Let's come to the second objective: rewilding as an opportunity for people mobilization. It is not a question of wishing for the agitation of the people but of increasing civicism and commitment to the commons. Here, too, the balance is positive. The reintroductions of animal or vegetal species mobilize many volunteers, who experience gratuitousness, fair organization of a campaign, daily sociability and chances of contact with local populations. This was expressly mentioned in the Chilean case of guanaco, and it is testified by the successfulness of many camps and campaigns having as scope the liberation of wild animals. There is also an intellectual mobilization, typical of Western environmentalism, a kind of reflexive modernization that now has its actualisation in citizen science. Finally, there is an economic mobilization, which is certainly not secondary, given that the projects attract visitors, experts, and multifunctional uses of agro-forestry assets. Obviously, someone demobilizes and this is the great fear of mountain tourist areas where there are bears and wolves. But this will have to be checked. The mobilizations, one above all human migrations, have negative implications, but altogether they are the salt of the earth.

*Giorgio Osti, University of Padua*

*Here the link to the seminar recording and the access code*

[https://unipd.zoom.us/rec/share/c\\_AMh\\_6KAiJUvMT3TIFjqRG4oRoWUfIJ6qVPgY2Zj-hx3OtVdlc7zY0tr7LfJnD1.H6IN3T-GAXk4JdFL?startTime=1700057693000](https://unipd.zoom.us/rec/share/c_AMh_6KAiJUvMT3TIFjqRG4oRoWUfIJ6qVPgY2Zj-hx3OtVdlc7zY0tr7LfJnD1.H6IN3T-GAXk4JdFL?startTime=1700057693000)

Codice d'accesso: \$#.e8j6N



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First preparatory Seminar for the Conference 'Rewilding. Socio-spatial Trends in Fragile Rural Areas'  
(Rovigo, 22-23 March 2024)



## Socialisation and Mobilisation Capacity of Rewilding

**15 November 2023, h. 3.00-6.00 pm** (online,  
zoom platform)

Rewilding is a broad, and not always consensual [concept](#), addressed primarily by nature conservation disciplines and policies. It also has a political and cultural scope. This seminar is designed as a first unravelling of the concept in view of the [final conference](#) in March 2024, whose focus will be rewilding in socially and environmentally fragile rural areas. The seminar involves scholars from different backgrounds and is also aimed at students of the 'Sociology, Places and Cultures of Sustainability' course, Master "Clinical, Social and Intercultural Psychology, Padua University. The cognitive challenge is to see if and how rewilding is a *master frame*, i.e., a factor that mobilizes human and material resources in favour of peripheral areas. A second preparatory seminar (Italian language) will be held at the University of Trieste on 12 December 2024, focused on great mammals return or reintroduction in rural/mountain areas. Details soon.

### Programme

- Pietro Piana, Human Geographer, University of Genua, IT

*Rewilding: a perspective from Geography'*

- Meredith Root-Bernstein, Ecologist, CNRS, Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France

*Working towards socio-ecological rewilding in mediterranean-climate Chile*

- Davide Pettenella, Forest Economist, University of Padua, Italy

*Rewilding vs. land abandonment: an economic perspective*

Chair: Giorgio Osti, Sociologist, University of Padua

The seminar has been organized within the course 'Sociology, Places and Cultures of Sustainability', Master 'Clinical, Social and Intercultural Psychology', University of Padua