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LOCAL CULTURE AND CULTURAL POLICY

When Prof. Helly, European coordinator of the Network on Ancient built Heritage in -Risk Areas, suggested that San Lorenzello should be the subject of a case study as part of the Research Project launched by the European University Centre in Ravello to study local "earthquake cultures", we particularly welcomed that choice and were more than willing to cooperate for two reasons: not only because the bodies in question were so prestigious, but also because the study seminar provided an opportunity of vindicating the cultural policy we had been pursuing up till then.

Our expectation was thus that this initiative would give us valuable ideas as to how we might modify our policy and most effectively protect our environment.

San Lorenzello has always been keen to safeguard the marks of its identity. Youth cultural groups (e.g. the Laurentino history society) and initiatives promoted by the local authority are a means not only of preserving and honouring our traditions, but also of promoting our own development. Development which helps to improve the quality of life without in any way detracting from the value of the past or the wealth of social relations within the community; development which will enable new values to be added to those firmly rooted in our culture, and of which we are proud.

As a local authority we strive to safeguard traditional craft skills, not only commercial ones like the "taralli" and ceramics for which San Lorenzello is famous, but also those of masons, who can repair walls which they know down to the last nook and cranny, or date a doorway from the chisel marks on it. Not to mention all the traditions which still bear witness to the survival of ancient skills today.

Sadly, these traditions have difficulty surviving in our present age because they are replaced by "modern" traditions. But we know that they are still valid, even if they need to be updated.

But there is more to safeguarding local culture than just technical skills. Behaviour patterns are all too often changed by the quest for benefits which subsequently prove non-existent, by the conditioning influence of dominant models and, indeed, by the town and country planners who show far more regard for bricks and mortar than for the needs of

the community which uses those bricks and mortar and first put them together.

After being closely involved in drafting the preparatory material and attending the seminar, we were fully confident that the needs of the community were compatible with the protection of its cultural assets. Indeed, we believe that local culture will only be preserved to advantage if at the same time it benefits the individual and the community. Only where this is the case will the population spontaneously obey any "rules".

The Research Project vindicated our cultural policy. We subsequently set in train a Rehabilitation Plan for valuable rural architecture (suggested at Ravello) and this was followed, after the December 1988 seminar, by a revision of the Rehabilitation Plan for the historic centre.

The guideline laid down for the technical specialists was that they should implement the methodological and scientific conclusions reached by the Research Project. In other words, it was necessary to avoid a situation in which regulations designed to protect the cultural heritage led the various players involved to act in a way which made that difficult; the aim was that the plans should on the contrary encourage them to safeguard their heritage spontaneously.

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