

## ***Small Places, Great Ideas: Placemaking in Remote Communities***

**Public lectures in English on Monday April 17 2023 at 16:30, followed by a social gathering**

Introductory lecture by Nina Goršič, UIRS, moderated by dr. Matej Nikšič, UIRS



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*dr. Giulio Verdini, University of Westminster*

### **The Oasis of the future: climate adaptation as a strategy in rural Morocco**

The Oasis town of Figuig is located in the Oriental Region of Morocco, near the border with Algeria. People's livelihood depends on a sophisticated water system that crosses the historic cores of the town, alimenting a still productive palm grove. However, the impact of climate change, in terms of overheating and reduced precipitation, is threatening the survival of its main agricultural resource, and therefore of the entire Oasis. The municipality is putting forward a strategy of climate adaptation and transition towards sustainability, as an opportunity to rethink both the transformation of the built environment, and the future economic alternatives to sustain resilient local development processes. The presentation will reflect on these challenges highlighting the results of a preliminary scenario workshop conducted in June 2022, where local stakeholders and civil society associations were consulted regarding their future. The public discussion had the merit to open up a reflection on how global challenges such as climate change are triggering a new imagination for the future, particularly in fragile rural areas, but also on the evident problems on the ground. The specific local context of rural Morocco, with lack of municipal resources, brain drain and migration, and the institutional weaknesses typical of a middle-income country, can inevitably harness potential pathways towards sustainability.

*dr. Urška Sešek, coordinator of the project Village garden*

### **The village garden of Smlednik**

A community project initiated in 2016 in Smlednik, a village in the municipality of Medvode, by the local Society for Oral History. The idea was to bring back to life the historical community garden by the river Sava, where villagers once used the favourable microclimatic conditions to grow seedlings of important vegetable crops. The garden called 'flančnik' was unique in Slovenia, but was flooded after the damming of the Sava river in Medvode after World War 2. In 2018, when Smlednik celebrated its 900th anniversary, the Society for Oral History coordinated the construction of a modern version of 'flančnik' near the original location, in the historical village center of Smlednik. Over 60 volunteers supported by the local organizations (municipality, local primary school, local businesses etc.) created a permacultural garden on about 120 m<sup>2</sup> of land provided for free by the parish.

The garden is now in its fifth year and has been increasingly popular and recognized despite the setbacks of the Covid years. It brings together about 50 villagers annually who socialize and exchange plants, experiences and ideas. The Society for Oral History as the coordinator hopes that the project will inspire the younger generations to maintain our valuable natural and cultural heritage: plants and knowledge of gardening techniques but also the traditions of shared work, grassroots education and mutual support. Of course, the Village Garden is also a place of interest and learning for non-members. Between April and November it attracts individuals, school groups, families and tourists who admire the array of over 100 different plants (herbs, grains, fruits, vegetables and flowers), including traditional and rare species.

*mag. Valerija Pučko, manager of Mythical park*

### **The Mythical park**

The Mythical park (Mitski Park) in Rodik contains a wealth of intangible cultural heritage materialized in the landscape. Rodik is a small village where the karst and flysch mountains meet. The starting points for the establishment of the park were formed within the Living Landscape project (Interreg ITA – SLO). At that time, the originators of the idea presented the project to the locals, who immediately adopted it and actively started looking for financing options. The municipality took over the leading partnership, it recognized the park as a tourist spot that utilizes the rich intangible cultural heritage for the development of sustainable tourism.

More than 20 years ago, local woman Jasna Majda Peršolja wrote down the local stories in the book *Rodiške pravce in zgodbe*. These stories, with which people used to make sense of their place and role in the world, were the basis for the research of ethnologists. They gave a mythical, religious and scientific view of them, UNESCO artist for peace, and Marko Pogačnik added an artistic view of the mythical landscape where the stories are presented. As a result two hiking trails were designed, connecting twelve mythical and folklore spots. At each of them, the story is represented by artistic stone markers and sculptures.

Mitski Park is an example of cooperation between the profession and the local community - the later was of central importance within the research itself when the oral tradition about the area was collected, local people also participated in the installation of the sculptures themselves, they gave their land for free of charge, and today they also actively participate in the maintenance of the park.



Giulio Verdini is Reader in Urban Planning at School of Architecture and Cities of University of Westminster, and Visiting Professor at Mohammed VI Polytechnic University in Morocco. His research explores ways to enable sustainable, climate-resilient and inclusive transition of places, particularly in rural areas. He works primarily in China and North Africa. He regularly serves as expert for international organisations such as UNESCO, WHITRAP, UN-HABITAT and UfM - Union for the Mediterranean. Some of his main publications are 'Culture and Rural-Urban Revitalization in South Africa' (2021, with Sirayi & Kanyane), and 'Management Planning for Cultural Heritage' (2022, with Taylor).

Urška Sešek is an educator by profession (22 years as university teacher, academic researcher and teacher trainer in the field of languages, now self-employed as coach for students with learning difficulties). She has pursued a variety of other interests and activities over the years, and is a gardening and heritage enthusiast. She joined the Society for Oral History in 2016 upon realizing that community is being increasingly eroded in the city (workplaces, residential areas), and that her only chance of being a part of a community is to turn back to the village where she grew up and contribute to projects there. The idea of the Village Garden was sparked during her attendance of the international Permaculture Design Course.

Valerija Pučko has a master's degree in transport sciences, but after 17 years of working in logistics she switched to organizing events and working in tourism. In Rodik project she participated as a local from the very beginning by co-creating the project, connecting the local community with the scientific team and municipal authorities. After the end of the project, she took over the management of the park and, together with her colleagues, makes sure that the mythical tradition is not trivialized. She tries to follow the philosophy that the tradition of the place is passed on to the visitors through storytelling.



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