

*Ynode – Caminu a su Connottu – Exhibition Tierra*

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**Abstract:** In various parts of the world we are witnessing massive ecological impact due to human activity and exploitation of the land perpetuated by economic agents, whose interests are far from the local communities of the territories under attack. The phenomenon of land grabbing is responsible, in certain areas, not only for the compromise of the landscape and the exploitation of the land, but also for the destruction of local economic activities, which increases the impoverishment of communities and the phenomenon of depopulation. The rural communities are often too small to be able to thwart the projects of large corporations or the government decisions that are made many miles away. Furthermore, within the same communities we can witness divisions between those who perhaps accept the new impositions, with the hope of being able to benefit from new income, and those who do not want to give up. The false and illusionary promises of development, promoted by the greed of the economic agents without any knowledge of the story of the place, could be fought with the construction of a new communitarian vision and an alternative dream of development. This may be the only possible way to be independent of external decisions imposed by others. This article aims to propose another vision through the description of a project whose aim was to spread small seeds, by imagining another possible future path, cultivating hope.

**Keywords:** Land Grabbing; Greenwashing; Artivism

## Introduction

On 5 January 2021, the "National Charter of Potentially Suitable Areas"<sup>1</sup> (CNAPI) was published, which identified 67 areas eligible for the construction of the national radioactive waste deposit in Italy<sup>2</sup>. Among these areas there were 22 rural municipalities in Sardinia, although 97% of the island's population had already expressed their opposition to the installation of nuclear power plants and sites for the storage of radioactive waste in the island in a 2011 referendum. The issue aroused the attention of the local community affected by these policies, and involved the actions of some artists that wanted to express in their own creative language their vision toward the use of the territory, which often does not take into account the needs of local populations. During 2021 a series of events and activities was organised by artists, curators, researchers, associations, and local communities. All the actions undertaken aimed to create moments of exchange and reflection on the topic:

January 2021. Conceptualization of a series of projects and actions to be implemented in the territory. During this phase the website **Ynode.org** was created, which provided an alternative view to that of the construction of the radioactive waste repository.

July 2021. The conference "Hub Sardinia - Caminu a Su Connottu" took place in Nurri, which has been part of the *WAC 2021 international encounters/Conference "Walking as a question"*—a biennial conference on the practice of walking. "The Hub Sardinia" aimed to highlight the environmental issue by means of workshops and activities.

October 2021. The site-specific installation *Tierra* was presented at Gallery Espai Souvenir in Barcelona, which intertwined the problematic of the territory of Nurri with the protected area of the Delta del Llobregat protected area in Catalonia, which is threatened by an airport extension project.

## Ynode.org

The Ynode project appears in the form of a manifesto in response to the CNAPI and it was conceived of as a creative-collaborative project that envisions the defence of territory and nature. Ynode took shape with the creation of the website [www.ynode.org](http://www.ynode.org) with the intention to attract individuals, companies, associations, local entities, researchers, artists and everyone who was sensitive to environmental issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Sogin Spa, Deposito Nazionale. Proposta di Carta Nazionale delle Aree Potenzialmente Idonee. In: <https://www.depositonazionale.it/consultazione-pubblica/proposta-di-cnapi/pagine/default.aspx> (Accessed: 30 April 2022)

<sup>2</sup> ISPRA, Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale. National deposit, the SO.G.I.N has published the National Map of the potentially suitable areas (CNAPI) and the preliminary project. In: <https://www.isprambiente.gov.it/en/archive/news-and-other-events/ispra-news/2021/01/national-deposit-the-so-g-i-n-has-published-the-national-map> (Accessed: 30 April 2022)

The term Ynode is formed by the components “Y” and “node”. Y, with a variety of meanings attributable to ancient wisdom traditions; it is a symbol that can be often found in Sardinia in the taurine / uterine protome of the “tomb of the giants<sup>3</sup>” and in singular reliefs dating back to the megalithic period. The graphic form of the Y recalls a crossroads as well, and in this context it invites a conscious choice of respect for life, nature and humanity. The term node means intersection, conjunction, it intends to refer to geographical local entities, and it is also an abbreviation for No Deposit.

The Ynode Manifest underlines the need to safeguard and defend ancient and uncontaminated territories of Sardinia, and it presents itself as a concrete but at the same time poetic vision, which turns its gaze to “*Su Connottu*”, a Sardinia word which means “the known”, referring to a distant past and to a heritage characterised by a closer relationship between the human being and nature. The project defends not only the archaeological, historical landscape and its environmental heritage, but also *relational wisdom*<sup>4</sup>, an anthropological component of the small rural villages of Sardinia, which despite the low population density still preserve this peculiarity.

The Manifesto meant to build and imagine another possible future together. This vision stands in contrast to mere and pure economic interest, based on profit and on the exploitation of the territory, which are often harmful for the local population now and future generations. It aimed to be a stimulus to organise educational, research and investigation projects, through an eco-sustainable use of the territory and their available resources. Our intention was to lay the foundations for a harmonious cohabitation of man and nature.

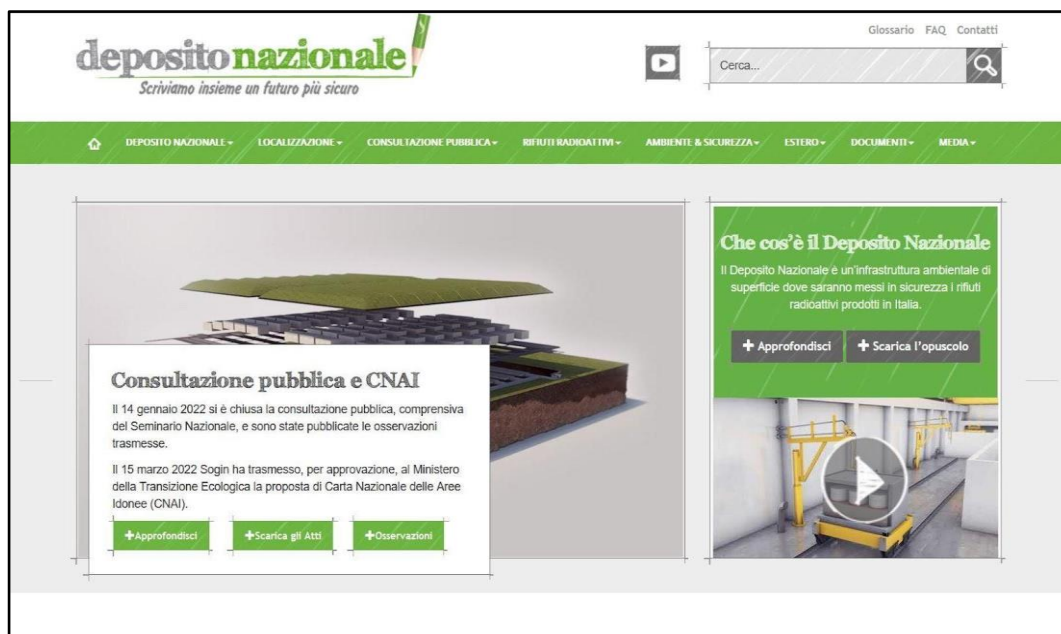


Fig.1 Screenshot Homepage of the website Deposito Nazionale <https://www.depositonazionale.it>

<sup>3</sup> Name given by local people and archaeologists to a type of Sardinian megalithic gallery grave built during the Bronze Age. Its plan has the form a “protome taurina”, a stylized shape of a taurus head.

<sup>4</sup> In the Ynode Manifesto this is referred to as the ability to weave relationships between community members

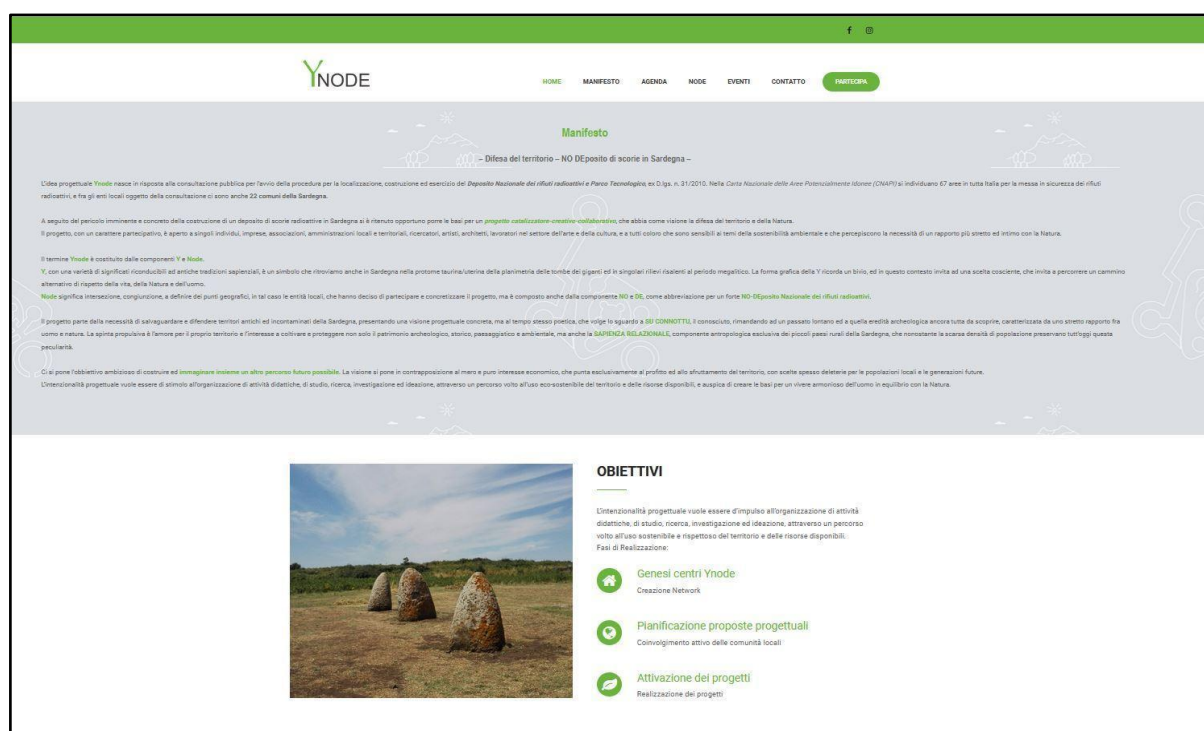


Fig.2 Screenshot Homepage of the website Ynode <https://www.ynode.org>

The Ynode website, conceptualised by Ivana Pinna, appears with a selection of colours similar to those of the Deposito Nazionale, the website where the CNAPI was presented with information about the construction of the radioactive waste deposit. The Deposito Nazionale website was built with different shades of green, a marketing choice clearly meant to hide its non-ecological nature. The Ynode website wanted to be an alternative by showing an artistic utopian vision, by planning numerous initiatives towards an ecological coming out. For this reason a series of project ideas were defined, intended to be carried out later:

- *Artist residence.* Implementation of artist residencies with a relational character, with the aim of involving the local community.
- *Land-art open-air museum.* Creation of ephemeral works, through the involvement of artists and the local population.
- *Nature school.* Eco-sustainability educational centre, set up as a branch of the territorial schools.
- *Rural Paths.* Creation and mapping of rural paths to connect the various nodes in the Sardinian territory.
- *Eco-sustainable Centre.* With experts in biological, scientific, technological subjects for the sharing of knowledge.
- *Archaeology Lab.* Study of the local archaeological finds through didactic or research activities.

The Project presents its agenda as a dynamic action plan in constant evolution, through an experimental method that uses the progress achieved as a starting point for further levels of research. The study and research is focused on rural development, the safeguarding of specific wisdom, cultural knowledge of rural territory, and environmental issues. The goal is also to

apply scientific and technological research for a sustainable ecological transition, respectful of the environment and natural human rhythms. The working method takes inspiration from the principles of the economy of knowledge, eco-sustainability, citizen science and is based on sharing and participational paradigms, as an alternative model to the dominant economic system.

The Ynode Project idea was proposed to artists, organisations and also the local Nurri administration and it was a utopic milestone which helped in the development of other initiatives such as the organisation of the *Hub Sardinia – Caminu a Su Connottu*.

### **Hub Sardinia – Caminu a Su Connottu**

A milestone for the evolution of the Ynode project idea was the activation of the “*Hub Sardinia - Caminu a Su Connottu*”, for the WAC 2021 International Encounters/Conference “Walking as a Question”, organised by the Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the University of Western Macedonia in Greece: “The conference included local walking experiences, performances, conversations and panels that were accessible online for Encounters/Conference participants in other locations. Hub partners could be artistic or curatorial collectives, local networks or organisations or university programs.”<sup>5</sup>

Based on the assumption that walking is an activity that connects the human being with territory and natural landscape, the Hub Sardinia, organised with the help of the association IV Ynode, aimed to investigate how walking could be used to highlight or intervene in political, personal, social, economic and ecological issues. The walking practice and activities had a participatory dimension and they were open not only to artists, curatorial collectives, local networks, organisations etc, but also to the local community and everyone who wanted to join.

As the programme states, the intention was: “Walking among the rural areas that have been indicated by the CNAPI as suitable for the storage of radioactive waste, with the aim to treat a moment of awareness towards environmental problems and the care of the territory. Discovering and reconnecting with the landscape, the territory and the culture of the specific rural areas, finding a link with the past, perceiving the practice of walking as a useful tool for rediscovering the natural / rural space”<sup>6</sup>.

To understand the importance of this process it would be necessary to know that in Sardinia the countryside has always been synonymous for hard work and people used to walk very long distances back and forth from their houses in the village to the fields where they used to work. With the economic boom many left the rural areas and the economy of the villages changed. When cars became synonymous for wealth and well-being, people started to avoid walking. Except for the few shepherds, nowadays not many people walk and the verb “*passaggiare*” (to walk) is even used to go by car and not on foot.

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<sup>5</sup> WAC 2021 International Encounters/Conference “Walking as a Question”, Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the University of Western Macedonia in Greece. In: <https://icowaf.eetf.uowm.gr> (Accessed: 30 April 2022)

<sup>6</sup> Ivynode, Hub Sardinia Caminu a su Connottu. 2021. In: <https://www.ivy.it/hub-sardinia-caminu-a-su-connottu> (Accessed: 30 April 2022)

The Hub Sardinia took place from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of July and had Nurri as a station point, a small village of 2500 inhabitants which has been eligible for the construction of a radioactive waste deposit. The Hub was presented with a large and ambitious programme titled “*Caminu a Su Connottu*”, Sardinian for the “way/walk into knowledge” or simply “knowledge walk”. *Su Connottu*<sup>7</sup> is used in this context poetically and refers to a very ancient and distant past, with a melancholy connotation that expresses a memory that has been lost. The elderly in Sardinia often say “*Ta bellu chi si podiat torrai a Su Connottu*”, “How nice it would be if we could return to Su Connottu”, return us to an idyllic time, far away, linked to the land and the territory<sup>8</sup>. Only the toponymy, whose roots date back to an ancient era which has not undergone linguistic contamination, still binds the local population to that ancient past, which perhaps goes beyond the Nuragic civilization<sup>9</sup>.

“Su Connottu” is in relation with the territorial identity<sup>10</sup>, nature and earth, but it could also have a metaphysical connotation, referring to the original principle of all things. In this context the Hub Sardinia intended to investigate how the practice of walking could help in the perception of “Su Connottu”, through an intimate dialogue between outside and inside, which involves one’s own inner rhythm of walking. The Hub Sardinia was characterised by a series of activities: round tables, events, book presentations, workshops and walk-shops, land art with site-specific installations. Each activity was connected with the territory and with its past in order to highlight the richness and beauty of the landscapes.

Fundamental to the success of the project was the desire to involve the local population, so that they could feel part of the project, thus providing an opportunity to raise outside their borders, the serious threat that loomed over the area.

## **Fragile—People of the Earth—Tierra Exhibition**

During the Hub Sardinia several activities were presented, such as the project *Fragile and People of the Earth*. These two works were presented later in Barcelona in an exhibition called *Tierra*, focusing on the exploitation, the abuse of land and its resources, and the impact of human activities.

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<sup>7</sup> Su Connottu refers to a custom, even juridical, inherited from the ancestors that individuals and communities feel, or have, the duty to respect. It is popular the phrase “*Torramus a su connottu*”, “Let’s go back to the Connottu”, used during the popular revolt against the privatisation of communal lands in Nuoro, which wanted the return to the communitarian system. Sarvadore Serra, Nùgoro 1868, sa rebellia de Su Connottu, in *Limba Sarda* 2.0.

<sup>8</sup> In the Ynode Manifest the expression territory is combined with that of *su connottu* as part of a *territorial identity* with traditions, customs, uses, and rules shared by the Sardinian communities, also toward the use of the land.

<sup>9</sup> The Nuragic civilization is dated to the Middle Bronze Age. The name derives from the *nuraghe*, a characteristic tower-shaped building. There are more than 7000 monuments all over the Sardinian territory but there are no written documents that can help in knowing something about their real function or about the Nuragic civilization. The documents that remain are mainly related to legends or myths.

<sup>10</sup> The territorial identity as defined and analysed by the a. Gen. I. (association of Italian geographers), relating to the local dimension, intertwined with a set of experiences and daily practices that make the local area a place, or a space of collective meaning, effective or potential (Banini, 2013).



For the realisation of the artistic works there we needed to know the land, to get closer to its geography, and we also aimed to respect the place and the culture of the people living there. The works had a character of protection, defence and garrison and also a sacral approach with the quest to rediscover the very identity of those places and to inhabit them, in an attempt to respect the Genius Loci “to maintain a congenial balance between natural elements and cultures, as multiple representations of being”<sup>11</sup>



Fig.3 Walking performance Fragile. Source: Ivynode

## Fragile

In Nurri, Thomas Keis and Ivana Pinna proposed their *walking performance Fragile* by walking the 10kms perimeter of the area identified for the construction of a waste deposit. It counted with the participation of the “SarxSar NoScorie-Sarcidano Committee for Sardinia”, the Nurri Kids Council and a part of the population. On the track 22 signboards were placed with the word Fragile. These visible elements highlighted a moment of awareness towards environmental problems, the care of the territory and the landscape. At the same time, the long walk showed and made the participants more aware of the vastness of the territory threatened. The walk took place on a partly asphalted and partly natural field, which is normally used as a

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<sup>11</sup> In Roman religion, a genius loci was the protective spirit of a place. “The Romans, believ[ed] that each area had its own tutelary deity, and coined the term Genius Loci, [so], every geographical reality was pervaded by its own sacredness” (Manzoni, 2016, p.64)

pasture, and is separated by stone walls and padlocked gates. In the previous days the artists had contacted the owners, asking for permission to walk in those lands. The initiative was also supported by owners, tenants, and shepherds who even opened the gates and moved the flocks in order to make access easier. This interaction and the participation of the population were fundamental for the realisation of the special walk.



Fig. 4. One of the 22 signboards placed during the walking performance *Fragile*. Source: Ivynode

### **People of the Heart – From Clay to Ancestors**

The project *People of the Earth* from the artist Enya Idda started in the small lake of *Cucurru de Omusu*, which in the Sardinian language means “Over the roofs”. This name derives from the fact that up to 60 years ago in that very place many people collected clay and made the tiles for the roofs of their own houses. In fact, a few metres from the lake there is an oven, now almost destroyed, which demonstrates that the place was used by the locals. Nowadays the small lake, not even 2 kilometres from the town, is a forgotten place, rarely visited, except by shepherds who bring their sheep to drink. The human presence during the clay extraction made the site revive, enhanced by the memories of an almost 100-year-old grandfather who told us about the old times there.





Fig 5. Collection of the clay in the small lake of *Cucurru de Omusu*. Source: Ivynode

The extraction of the clay and the cleaning and removal of the impurities were done with the help of some kids from Nurri. It followed on the “People of the Earth” walk to the top of the Mount Pitziogu, the crater of an old volcano, where the work was installed. The People of the Earth represented a small community of people who symbolically watch over the territory of Nurri as primordial presences and ensure, like ancient guardians, that the miracle of creation comes to no harm.

### The “Tierra” Exhibition

The *Tierra Exhibition*, curated by Hermann Bashiron Mendolicchio, combined the work *Fragile* by Ivana Pinna and Thomas Keis, and *People of the Earth* by Enya Idda, and “brought concrete elements to *Espai Souvenir* that tell us the story of two different territories where human intervention is directly threatening the natural ecosystem”<sup>12</sup>. The exhibition established a parallel between the rural areas in Sardinia and the natural park of the Delta del Llobregat in Catalonia, threatened by projected airport expansion. Also in this case, as in the Sardinia, the approach with the territory was important for the realisation of the project itself. In this case,

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<sup>12</sup> Bashiron Mendolicchio. H., “Tierra”. *Espai Souvenir*. 2021. In: <https://espaisouvenir.com/portfolio/tierraivana-pinna-thomas-keis-enya-idda> (Accessed: 30 November 2022)

The artists have engaged in conversation with Cal Met Natrus, part of the Parc Agrari del Baix Llobregat adjacent to the El Prat airport landing strips and situated in the protected natural area and they have asked for collecting land from this territory. Cal Met Natrus had already been indirectly threatened by an airport extension a decade ago” .

A substantial part of the gallery, filled with earth, combined elements that recall the fragility of the territory:

- A golden shelf carrying earth from the Delta del Llobregat on top.
- A golden niche holding the photo with the landscape of Nurri and the Fragile sign with an owl standing on it.
- “People-of-the-earth” figures created with the clay collected in Nurri and the Delta del Llobregat.
- The Fragile sign to symbolise the fragility of the territory.



Fig.7 Part of the exhibition Fragile in the Gallery Espai Souvenir. Source: Ivynode idem.

## Conclusions

The projects Ynode, the organisation of the Sardinia Hub and the Tierra Exhibition highlight the relationship between art and landscape, human intervention, the fragility of rural areas, environmental issues and the importance of increasing people's sensitivity through concrete actions that could be defined as Artivism, a combination of art and activism. Starting from the specific territory of Sardinia, the attention also moved to other realities which are suffering similar problems. All the projects could also be seen as a bridge, finding similar elements of union between communities that are seeking to protect their territory. All the proposed actions and interventions, and the involvement of various subjects, were based on the notion that to achieve a real change and find a solution to a common issue, a collective will is necessary. Joint actions and local common effort combined with an artistic response could help in increasing awareness towards the danger of human intervention in natural ecosystems.

The experience in the field has shown the importance of preview research on the territory and on the local culture. It seems appropriate not to impose any kind of artistic project without knowing the geographical specificity of the territory and above all the people who live there and their approach to the issue at hand; otherwise there is the risk of importing exogenous elements that may not jell with the original purpose of the project or action. The artistic work in this sense is also seen as an attempt to re-establish a dialogue with the surroundings. In this sense it is important to remember the concept of Genius Loci, which has inherent in its meaning the respect for places, and invites an almost phenomenological approach to the territory itself.

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**Ivana Pinna** is a multidisciplinary artist based in Barcelona. Originally from Sardinia. Her artistic practice and research has been influenced by her academic studies in Political Sciences and Social-Cultural Anthropology. In the last years she has been interested in ecological themes and on the care and preservation of the territory and local cultures. She has been organizing art residence projects in her village of origin (Nurri) which has been under attack of land grabbers, leading to the destruction of the landscape by wind farms and the dangerous imposition of a nuclear waste deposit project. She is the founder of the association IVYnode, responsible for the creation, organization of the Artist in Residence program, events and curatorial exhibition projects in rural areas.