

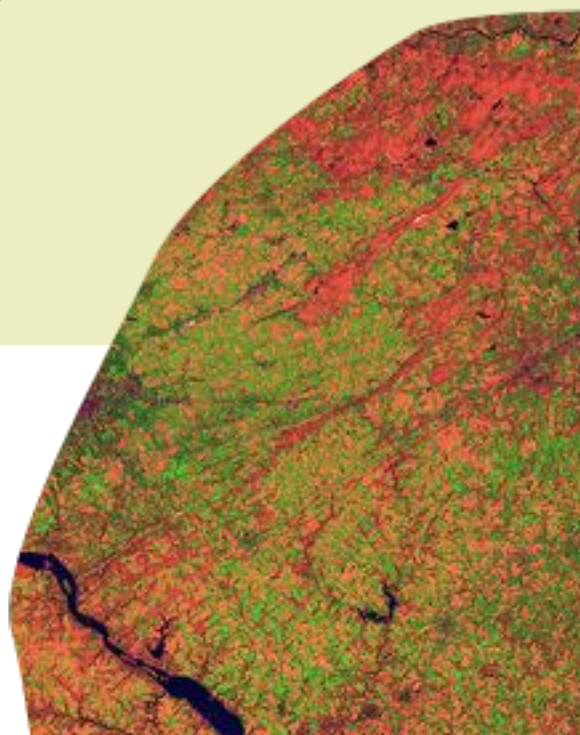
Title:

Author:

**Occupy Climate
Change (OCC!)**
*Grassroots initiatives
entry*



FORMAS



La Foresta Che Cammina, The Case Of Satriano Di Lucania, Italy

Angela Pietrafesa

Where is this grassroots initiative implemented? Who are the promoters? Who are the beneficiaries?

In the small city of Satriano di Lucania (PZ), Basilicata, Southern Italy, every year a celebration renews: it is the ritual *Carnevale di Satriano* (Carnival of Satriano), an ancient tradition that was transformed in recent years by the spontaneous initiative of Rocco Perrone, municipal councillor, activist and keeper of the tradition, and a group of young citizens. The annual celebration reiterates an ancestral ritual that has gained now a new meaning, thanks to the will of the organisers to bring a different reading to a local tradition, of which the whole community is extremely fond of. What makes this *Carnevale* unique is the presence of one of the most ancient traditional masks in Southern Italy. The name of this character is *Rumita*, a word that can be translated as hermit, a silent and quiet man whose identity is completely concealed by a mask made of ivy leaves. Every year, a parade of *Rumita* and other traditional masks march through the streets of Satriano, surrounded by a joyful crowd of locals and tourists. The *Carnevale di Satriano* has gained more and more international recognition over the years and has become one of the most important traditional festivals in Italy. Part of its magic, it should be noted, is due to the strong ecological message it delivers, linked to the coexistence of humans and non-humans, and the effective sustainable practices put in place during each edition. The message behind the tradition of the *Rumita* has always been that of a reconnection with nature, as anthropologists have observed (Spera 1982), but it was only with the reinvention of the rite that it has gained a deeper environmental awareness.

How does this initiative engage with climate? Does it tackle mitigation, adaptation, both or other dimensions of climate change?

Since the initial idea of redefining the traditional *Carnevale*, the initiative has become a full-fledged narrative of the everlasting relationship between human and non-human nature. This kind of connection between humans and the lands they inhabit, is one that still exists in Basilicata's rural areas and is, in fact, incarnated by the hybrid being of the *Rumita*. With the recovery of the *Carnevale* and the traditional mask, the citizens of Satriano were able to revive the original spirit of

the ritual. Traditionally, in fact, the *Rumita* was the hybrid of human and nature that at the end of winter would ask for food and small offers of money to the people of Satriano. Through the gifts to the *Rumita*, the village would pay back its debt towards nature (Spera 1982). The grassroots initiative for the recovery of the Carnevale has thus restored the ideal connection that interlinks the community of Satriano with the land it inhabits and has allowed the creation of a storytelling that merges past and present. The promoters of the new *Carnevale*, by always keeping in mind the ancient symbolic meaning of the *Rumita*, have created a new form of storytelling, that adds the sensibility of younger generations towards climate change and environment. It must be highlighted as well that climate change also has an impact on local communities and their culture and identity: it is crucial, therefore, to take concrete action towards the defence of lands as well as the nature and humans that inhabit them. However, the initiative has a more practical side, in which locals and tourists are directly involved: anyone can be involved in the parade, through workshops in which those willing to take part in the parade are invited to build their own *Rumita* costume and become one of the protagonists of *La foresta che cammina*. Moreover, the main promoters of the initiative are working to build a concrete environmental sensibility in their town: they have planted a large number of trees to compensate for the CO₂ emissions of the event and, more importantly, to raise awareness among the students of local schools, who took part in the project. Being mainly an artistic and cultural initiative, the Carnevale shows that a connection between folklore, traditions and art is a way to spread awareness about climate change and the ways it can affect lands and identities.

What are the main objectives? What are the main values?

The *Carnevale di Satriano* as we know it today is a grassroots initiative that came from the innate sensibility of Rocco Perrone and the first organisers towards ecology and environmental sustainability. As stated by Perrone, one of the main goals for the promoters, while recovering an important historic tradition, is that of keeping the anthropic impact under control, as well as reflecting constantly on the role that the festival itself might have on the community and local environment. According to him, it is crucial to always remember the ancestral bond between pre-industrial nature and human beings, of which the *Rumita* is a metaphor. In addition, Perrone reiterated that every decision and step taken in the making of the *Carnevale* is spontaneous, and only dictated by a shared environmental consciousness that makes it possible for the rite to become an emblem for the importance of communities in becoming the true actors for a change. In short, the Carnevale exists for two main reasons: on one hand, it represents the symbolic hybridization of

culture and nature, and, on the other, it provides new means and ideas for the local community to tackle rising concerns about the environment.

What is the timeline? Are there already visible effects?

The initiative began in 2012, when the *Carnevale* already existed but was very different from now. Perrone and a group of citizens were upset by the decision of the local administration of removing the parade floats from the program of the *Carnevale*. After this event, they decided to take action and ask for the permission to organise the future editions of the festival. It must be noted that while the traditional masks, including the *Rumita*, never truly disappeared from the festival, it was only after 2012 and the encounter with the film director Michelangelo Frammartino that the *Carnevale* and the *Rumita* started taking its present shape and meaning. After Frammartino's video installation *Alberi* (ital. trees 2013) and its presentation at MoMa in New York, in fact, the tradition was changed and the *Rumita*, that once was a lonely hermit, now moves in groups. In the film, in fact, the director follows a group of *Rumita* in their annual visit to the town. Since 2014, the organisers of the *Carnevale* have taken inspiration from Frammartino's vision and the *Rumita* are now 131, one for each town in Basilicata, organised in a parade called *La foresta che cammina* (The Walking Forest) (Perrone, interview 2023). After almost ten years, *La foresta che cammina* has become a moment for local population and outsiders to meet and form a diverse and rich community. The main result that the promoters have achieved is that of recreating every year a gathering of people connected by the respect for nature, that often lacks in modern society, and the creation of a sustainable model for the protection of historic rituals. Also, the rite has been opened to visitors and tourists, who, for the first time, are allowed to actively participate in the parade, by building their own mask and marching alongside with locals. This way the tradition has become universal, as universal is the message of returning to a healthy and wholesome relation with nature. As stated before, the goal of the promoters is that of having a sustainable celebration, open and accessible to all, that counts on many concrete initiatives, such as implementing the use of biodegradable and reusable items for the distribution of locally sourced food and drinks. This approach has created a virtuous circle of cooperation between the organisation of *Carnevale* and local producers and workers, as well as becoming a model for sustainable forms of tourism. Moreover, until now, the *Carnevale* has been included in the Aarhus Sustainability Model in 2018 as a case of good practice for the message it delivers as well as the implementation of sustainable actions throughout the celebration. The *Rumita* have also walked from Satriano to Matera to support the candidacy of the city as capital of culture for the year 2019, as well as taking part, in 2017, in the Aarhus

Sustainability Festival, for which a group of *Rumita* have travelled on e-bike all the way to Denmark from Matera, always proposing itself as the guardian of an environmentalist message.

Who are the actors involved? What are their backgrounds?

During the years, *La foresta che cammina* and the *Carnevale di Satriano* have seen growing support from local institutions, inhabitants of Satriano, scholars, and reporters, as well as filmmakers. Besides Frammartino, in fact, Maria Giménez Cavallo in 2020 made the documentary *La foresta che cammina*, that follows the ritual stages of the building of the *Rumita*'s mask. The main stakeholders, however, are local organisations and associations: Associazione Al Parco, in particular, has been organising the celebration every year since 2013, and many other are involved in the synergy that brings the *Carnevale* alive, one of which is Forum dei Giovani di Satriano that directly takes care of the preparation and construction of the costumes for the *Rumita*.

Which limits does it encounter?

The idea of expanding the message of the *Rumita* and *Carnevale* has led to a growth in the number of people that come to Satriano every year from all around the world. While it is good for the rite to receive international recognition, Satriano is a small village that has a limited capacity. This is the biggest obstacle that Perrone has identified: the larger the number of tourists and visitors, the more the very existence of the festival is at risk. The consequence would be the loss of *Carnevale* because it could become virtually impossible to host in a small village such as Satriano a number of visitors that grows exponentially from year to year. It is also getting more and more complex to guarantee the sustainability of the project, because more visitors mean more cars, more pollution, and more waste, and also less control over the use of resources and the interaction with the local environment.

Are any shortcomings or critical points visible? What other problematic issues can arise from its implementation?

Since this is a grassroot initiative, each aspect of the organisation is managed by volunteers, who cooperate to guarantee the success of the *Carnevale*. However, as the celebration gets bigger and bigger every year, it becomes dangerously easy to lose control over it. It is possible that, in future, it will be harder to follow the good practices that Rocco Perrone and the other volunteers have put in place until now (such as the monitoring of separate collection of waste, the promotion of carsharing

and carpooling, the limited number of entries). From my personal perspective, in addition, the problem with an excessive number of tourists is also connected to a problematic gaze upon locals and their culture. In fact, when the local tradition of a small community is discovered by the general public, the first and most immediate critical aspect is the loss of unicity and peculiarity of the tradition. There is a concrete risk that the tradition could become more and more gentrified, to accommodate to the tastes of the average visitor, and that the symbolism and the conscious stance of Satrianesi might end up caught in a North-centred perspective, that flattens and manipulates the specificity of Southern regions that have often been only depicted by others (Cassano 2005).

How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?

While the mask of the *Rumita* is specific of Satriano and would be impossible to export it elsewhere, the model of the *Carnevale di Satriano*, potentially, can become a precedent for the creation of other local-driven narratives to promote a strong ecologist message and the specific characteristics and traditions of small communities. The measures adopted to guarantee the sustainability of the celebration prove that a grassroots initiative, lead only by the enthusiasm and willingness of local promoters, can really become the motor for a concrete action towards the reappropriation of marginal identities and the rediscovery of one's own ancestral roots. The initiative, of course, still has its limitations, some of them highlighted above, but I believe it can lead the way towards a more aware conception of tourism.

Is this initiative conducive to broader changes ?

The organisation of the *Carnevale* is constantly working towards the building of a concrete environmental consciousness inside the community of Satriano: Perrone reported that the main associations involved in the making of the *Carnevale* have worked with schoolkids to build trees in order to compensate for the CO2 produced during the celebration and, also, to educate them to the respect of nature and environment. It is now necessary for the community and the town to avoid the collapse of the *Carnevale*: to do so, Perrone and those involved in the organisation, are actively trying to build a balance between the openness of the celebration and the town to the outside world and a constant attention for the land and town of Satriano. It was taken into consideration to extend the period of the *Carnevale* (that now is of two days), as well as opening to an active dialogue with

local institutions and population to create a deep understanding of the dynamics that act between human and non-human nature and their intrinsic fragilities.

References

Carnevale di Satriano <https://www.carnevaledisatriano.it>.

Cassano, F. (2005). *Il pensiero meridiano*. Laterza.

Perrone, R. (2023). Interview.

Spera, E., (1982). *Il Romita, l'orso e la vedova bianca*, in *Quaderni*. Edizioni La scena territoriale.