

## ERSA 2024

### (Portogallo, Terceira Island)

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“The role of young people in building up sustainable development practices for inner and rural areas”

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**\*The generational repopulation of depressed community areas among European rules, constitutional principles and sustainable regional anthropization\***

#### Extended Abstract

According to Eurostat, between 2001 and 2020, the population of the EU (at 27) increased from 429 million to 447 million (with a growth of 4%). Seventeen Member States showed an increase in population during this period while the other ten had declines.

Among 1 January 2020 and 1 January 2021, the population of the European Union decreased by 312 thousand people: in absolute values, the most significant drop was observed in Italy.

In 2023, moving attention to the peripheral level of the EU area, Italy became third to last in the European Union for births. Spain and Malta came first with a rate above 1.25 children per woman. France, on the other hand, was the European state with the highest fertility rate, equal to 1.86 children per woman.

In the middle of these asymmetric data in the area of EU countries, some significant facts affect birth and fertility rates, including the economic and environmental quality of life.

Population density, not surprisingly, is the empirical result of these factors although not unique compared to others.

There is the issue of the exploitation of energy resources which has a huge impact and the new generations are faced with two existential perspectives:

- in the present, the actual cost of their livelihood and the family unit they build;
- for the future, the vision of living in ecologically sustainable environments, advanced in terms of efficiency and "beyond generational" (in the sense of their awareness that the world must pollute less and consume as little non-renewable energy as possible).

Against this backdrop of things, the need arises to verify how these new generations can anthropize new spaces or inhabited centers in the presence and depopulation over time (for economic, development, work reasons, etc.)

In fact, the European Union has issued a directive that establishes a common framework of measures to promote energy efficiency in the Union itself in order to guarantee the achievement of community objectives on energy efficiency while allowing, at the same time, to pursue further improvements of energy efficiency.

This is EU directive n. 2023/1791 of 13 September 2023, issued by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, with which states that "member states achieve cumulative energy savings".

Reason why the community dimension has assumed an important and clear position regarding the standards with which it intends to implement the programmatic directions of the 2030 Agenda.

It's a directive, therefore, that combines its self with the fundamental principles underlying the European question in the sense that it wants to deal with two eventualities: the climate crisis and overcoming the energy dependence of states.

The action plan implies that reference is made to the European Convention on Human Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

From this passage derive, in cascade, the national programmatic directions which must be inspired, at the level of public policies, by the internal constitutional principles which, if adhering to the community spirit and compliance with the 2023 directive, can only comply also in terms of development economic to the concept of responsible energy exploitation in order to generate a new type of economy.

This innovation cannot help but deal with an equally new phenomenology of the real life of the new generations: the escape from chaos.

This is a significant psycho-social phenomenon that opens our gaze to an anthropological evolution: the repopulation of depressed areas and villages.

The trend of repopulating internal areas, however, suffers a "wall of no service" effect (i.e. a wall from which there are no sufficient or efficient services).

This is the case of Italy which, for example, has 60% of the internal areas of the country lacking connections, schools and health facilities on a scale equal to large or medium-sized centers.

A fact that makes us understand how these areas risk being the most exposed to the climate crisis because those who settle there have to spend more in out-of-pocket costs.

What is not homogeneous, in terms of public policies for housing resettlement in inland areas and depopulated villages, is a universalistic system of essential services that the European Union states should ensure together with a strong propensity for tax relief or investment direct sources of tax revenue in works that break through the "wall of no service".

The Italian case, from the point of view of the geographical question, is emblematic if we start from the ISTAT 2020 data: the internal areas are mainly mountainous (1,874 Municipalities, equal to 48.9% of the total).

This means that the greater the mountainous extension, the more likely the resettlement is due to climate issues, qualitative-economic conditions (purchasing power first and foremost) and "exit from the chaos".

Furthermore, one of the tools that could be taken into consideration as a consolidation formula for village repopulation is the so-called smart working which during the Covid 19 pandemic phase recorded levels of incidence in the working world and which many companies, in addition to isolated public administrations (at least in Italy), continue to maintain because it is a source of savings and improvements in the performance of company collaborators.

For these reasons, the phenomenon of the re-anthropisation of depopulated regional areas must be taken into serious consideration from the perspective of concrete environmental and work sustainability (with the primary objective of ensuring a quality of life of a level no less intense than large inhabited centers and no more chaotic than the latter; otherwise it would be a failure of public policies).

Creating homogeneity of economic development in the European Union area therefore remains the challenge of challenges. On this level, the new generations have the main role of living in the present to glimpse the future and the repopulation of internal areas with resettlement in small villages can be a useful element for rethinking progress.

In conclusion, a decisive principle will count: the exit from chaos (energy, economic, climate, etc.).