

# Time and Tide in Matera, European Capital of Culture 2019: Heterochronic Frictions

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## **Abstract**

*Following recent calls in anthropology to produce ethnographic explorations of temporality, and especially of the future, this article discusses the example of the city of Matera, which has just concluded its tenure as European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2019. It contemplates the heterochronic articulation of temporality in the unfolding of Matera 2019 as a site of ideological tensions or “frictions” (Tsing 2005). Drawing from the work of Bryant and Knight (2019), the author views a Time of Matera 2019 as a form of “vernacular timespace” among the Materani. The discussion begins with a contextualization through a brief summary of past futures in Matera and a description of the more recent transformations of the city under late capitalism, with the rise of touristic commodification and aspirations for a cosmopolitan, hypertechnological future. It then examines how a change that took place in the logo and slogan for Matera 2019, with an ensuing conflict, encapsulates a heterochronic tension existing between Matera 2019 as a mega event and the general population. The analysis also seeks to return anew to the long-standing Italian Southern Question, as it considers the frictions between the unfolding of touristic and high-tech development in the Time of Matera 2019 and the promotion of Matera, but also Southern Italy more broadly, as a celebrated site of “slowness”, following Franco Cassano’s influential notion of pensiero meridiano [Southern thought] (Cassano 1996).*

**Key words:** temporality, future, heterochrony, Matera, European Capital of Culture

## Tempo e marea a Matera, Capitale Europea della Cultura 2019: Frizioni eterocroniche

*Seguendo delle recenti esortazioni in antropologia per la produzione di esplorazioni etnografiche di temporalità, e soprattutto del futuro, questo articolo esamina il caso della città di Matera, che ha appena concluso il suo mandato come Capitale Europea della Cultura 2019. Si riflette sull'articolazione eterocronica della temporalità nel dispiegarsi di Matera 2019 come un sito di tensioni ideologiche o "frizioni" (Tsing 2005). Attingendo al lavoro di Bryant e Knight (2019), l'autrice pone un Tempo di Matera 2019 come una forma di "tempospazio vernacolare" tra i Materani. La discussione inizia con una contestualizzazione, attraverso un riassunto breve dei futuri passati in Matera e una descrizione delle più recenti trasformazioni della città sotto il tardo capitalismo, con il conseguente aumento di mercificazione turistica e aspirazioni per un futuro cosmopolita e ipertecnologico. Prende in esame, poi, come il cambiamento nel logo e nello slogan per Matera 2019, e il conflitto susseguente, incorpori una tensione eterocronica esistente tra Matera 2019 come mega-evento e la popolazione generale. L'analisi tenta inoltre di ritornare sulla storica Questione Meridionale nel considerare le frizioni tra il dispiegamento dello sviluppo turistico e high-tech nel Tempo di Matera 2019, e la promozione di Matera – ma anche del Meridione più ampio – come sito della "lentezza", seguendo la concezione influente di Franco Cassano del pensiero meridiano (Cassano 1996).*

**Parole chiave:** temporalità, futuro, eterocronia, Matera, Capitale Europea della Cultura

The present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds.

José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*

My home in Matera's historic district of the Sassi is two flights of steep stairs up from the street level, very close to the city center, in a small-scale neighborhood (*vicinato*) once known as "U Massaro". Around us live various neighbors: among the older ones, Aldo and Imma, Peppino and his wife Bruna in the summertime, the widower Michele. Aldo and Imma's home includes the expansion they made by adding the small dwelling of an old lady who, when our family moved to the *vicinato* in 1996, still had no running water and used the public fountain where the *vicinato* courtyard and the street intersect. We "younger" neighbors – meaning that we are middle-aged – live on the upper levels: Nunzio just below us,

Giancarlo and his family next to us. Three other dwellings in our *vicinato* have become holiday rentals in recent years. Giorgio does not live in the Sassi, but up to the late 2000s, he kept chickens in a cave a few levels below our street. I would run into him when he came to tend them and visit his father-in-law, who lived in our *vicinato*. After his father-in-law's death, Giorgio gave the apartment to his daughter, who was getting married. She and her husband never lived there, however, so Giorgio ended up investing a great deal of time (well over two years) and money turning it into a B&B, which he finally opened in late 2017. Having observed the progress of the construction site, my husband Antonio and I were speculating about the enormous cost that Giorgio must have borne renovating the apartment and transforming it into accommodations. Even if everything went *really* well for him selling rooms, there would still be significant costs for maintenance and overhead. «Who knows if he'll ever make back the money he spent renovating it?» wondered Antonio, who as a hotelier knows more than a thing or two about making such investments. Giorgio is only one of the many Materani who have jumped on the tourism gravy train.

It is going to be another sweltering summer day, so I go out early to do my grocery shopping and beat the heat. Every time I go into the center, I walk through via San Biagio, which is chock full of new cafés, new souvenir shops and new local fast food places. Rocchino is part of the old guard of via San Biagio, and he fraternizes with some of the other shopkeepers, having a quick coffee before opening his shoe repair shop. Slaloming past the spindly legs of the gigantic simulacrum Dali elephant sculpture where all the tourists are stopping for selfies, I enter into the main square, where a long-standing, old-fashioned barber shop had just disappeared overnight and become another take-away food venue. There are already at least five tour groups stationed in Piazza Vittorio Veneto, each with a guide blathering on about the history of Matera in whatever designated language they are using: the new normal in the city that is European Capital of Culture 2019. As I am coming home, I arrive near the bottom of the first set of stairs, where Imma is working hunched over an old relic of a metal mesh bed frame placed in the direct sun, next to Peppino's flower pots. She is meticulously laying tomato slices out in even rows to have them dry in the summer sun. The tourists continue to stream by just a few meters away from us, but Imma and I are in our little common courtyard of the *vicinato*, exposed to the tourist gazes, but at the same time preserving our own bit of intimacy. She explains almost apologetically that she needs to wait

until the next day to cover the tomatoes with some netting to protect them better. «Are you doing this for the tourists?» I ask her jokingly, thinking that it is truly a fine spectacle for the tourists to see sundried tomatoes in the making. My attempt at humor is lost on Imma, who thinks I mean that she would *sell* the tomatoes to them: «No, they're just for us to eat», she replies plainly.

Imma's painstaking cure of her tomatoes, but also the peppers and figs she also dries every summer, along with the expectation of her family's enjoyment of them in a relatively near future, constitutes a practice that continues to thicken the present based on the thickness of the past (cf. Bryant & Knight 2019: 69). Embedded within the location of Matera in its crucial year of 2019, such practices preserve not only tomatoes, but also slowness and viscosity in a time that is experiencing a dizzying acceleration with the onslaught of mass tourism and grand schemes to move Matera into a hypertechnological future. Imma and I are, in fact, speaking overlooked by the rear of the building that, only a few months earlier, housed a branch of the University of Basilicata, but has now been redesignated to becoming the «San Rocco Digital Hub». Among other things, the Hub will host the «House of Emergent Technologies», announced by the Ministry of Economic Development (MiSE) as a breakthrough project for the Italian South<sup>1</sup>.

As several authors have suggested, anthropology is currently perceiving the need to rethink time – and especially the future – in a productive way (Appadurai 2013; Pels 2015; Bryant & Knight 2019). In this article, I take the ethnographic example of the city of Matera, which has just concluded its tenure as European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2019, together with Plovdiv, Bulgaria. I explore a locally situated temporality by drawing from Bryant and Knight (2019) to suggest that the Materani have been experiencing a «vernacular timespace» of Matera 2019. This is a timespace that is fraught with ideological tensions and «frictions» (Tsing 2005) that arise from the coexistence of different temporalities and futures within the Time of Matera 2019.

The purpose of the analysis is not to make an evaluation of the Matera 2019 mega event per se: such a task would require a separate investigation that would go far beyond the scope of this contribution. Certainly, Matera

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<sup>1</sup> <<https://www.mise.gov.it/index.php/it/per-i-media/notizie/2040587-al-via-la-casa-delle-tecnologie-emergenti-di-matera>>. See also: <<https://hub.comune.matera.it/?lang=en>>

ECoC 2019 is the latest chapter in a longer history of transformations through heritage-making and tourism in the city, phenomena that have both received a great deal of attention in scholarship since the 1980s<sup>2</sup>. Anthropologists and sociologists have described manifold aspects of tourism and problematized its effects, from the pioneering work of MacCannell (1976), Smith (1977) and Graburn (1983) to subsequent classics (Urry 1990; Boissevain 1996; Simonicca 1997), while Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1998) and Simonicca (2015), among others, have connected tourism and heritage explicitly. On the other hand, within broader, interdisciplinary debates, anthropologists have been among the most prominent scholars to problematize heritage and heritage-making (Handler 1988; Herzfeld 1991; Fabre 1997; Clemente 2011; see also the discussions animated by Vincenzo Padiglione in the journal *Antropologia museale*). Among their bountiful publications on the topic of heritage, other scholars have dealt with particular aspects that come into play with supranational actors like UNESCO which, like the European Union, have entered heavily into the heritage arena (Bortolotto 2008; Palumbo 2003, 2010; Broccolini & Padiglione 2017). More generally, among its other key contributions, the body of work on issues of heritage has dealt with temporality primarily in terms of people's relationship to the past. This article adopts a critical perspective that is very much in line with such previous work on heritage and tourism, but rather than addressing Matera's transformations within the existing frameworks proposed in that scholarship, it applies a theoretical lens of temporality with special regard to the future.

As Bear claims (2014: 20), the social framing of time «is a central site for social conflict and a symptom of the inequalities within capitalism». One of the insights of recent anthropological explorations of the future has been the indication of a need to recognize the phenomenon of *heterochrony* (Bear 2014; Pels 2015; Morosanu & Ringel 2016), which is where such social conflict can get played out. Indeed, Guyer (2007: 413) prioritizes the ethnographic question of the «nesting of temporalities and their relative emphasis and mutual entailment [...] for the same population in different affective states». More specifically, I propose that the change in the logo and slogan for Matera 2019, and the ensuing conflict, encapsulates a

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<sup>2</sup> For the subjects of tourism and heritage, it is impossible here to give a thorough overview of this vast literature even within anthropology alone. I signpost only a few of the many works that have been influential for a critical discussions.

heterochronic tension existing between the institutional forces behind Matera 2019 and the general population. I will examine this in greater depth after a brief summary of past futures in the City of the Sassi, as Matera is known. Moreover, this analysis seeks to address anew the long-standing discussions of Italy's Southern Question, as it considers the frictions between the unfolding of touristic and high-tech development under Matera ECoC 2019 and the promotion of Matera, but also Southern Italy more broadly, as a site of «slowness», following Franco Cassano's influential notion of *pensiero meridiano* [Southern thought] (Cassano 1996).

As an anthropologist, I have been active in this area for 30 years, and for 25 of those years I have been a resident in Matera's historic Sassi district. In a previous analysis, I discussed the transformations of Matera and the heritage-making of the Sassi between the end of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century (Zinn 2009). The discussion here is based on ongoing observations and conversations with numerous Materani of different backgrounds, people involved with the promotion and organization of Matera 2019, documents related to the Matera 2019 candidacy and project, and media sources<sup>3</sup>.

## Past futures

I begin this discussion with a brief summary of futures in Matera's recent past, for we cannot refer to the future without considering the past, given their interconnectedness (Kontopodis & Matera 2010: 2). Indeed, Appadurai has noted that «memory is not only or primarily about the past, but is about providing a map for negotiating and shaping new futures» (Appadurai 2013: 288). In providing this concise outline, then, I seek to follow Pels's call for «genealogies and ethnographies of how modern temporal classifications of the future work and for whom» (Pels 2015: 783).

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<sup>3</sup> The EASA MedNet Workshop held in Turin, 24-25 October 2019, stimulated me to systematize various observations and sharpen my focus on Matera ECoC 2019 for a preliminary version of this article. I thank the Editor of *L'Uomo* Alessandro Lupo, Antonino Colajanni, and two anonymous reviewers for their generous feedback on the text, and I appreciate their suggestions for improvement. Any remaining flaws are my own responsibility. I am grateful to the Fondazione Matera-Basilicata 2019 and its director Paolo Verri for granting the use of the logo images, and to Ferdinando Mirizzi and Francesco Marano for providing additional assistance. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Pauline Panetta for lively exchanges over her own unpublished research on Matera ECoC 2019, which moves in a different direction from what I have written here.

Until after the Second World War, the vast majority of Matera's inhabitants lived in the old part of the city, hewn in limestone caves and constructions, known as the Sassi<sup>4</sup>. The publication in 1945 of Carlo Levi's autobiographical novel *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* brought infamy to Matera, when the Sassi become known for the condition of dire poverty and unsanitary dwellings of a sizeable portion of the estimated 16,000 inhabitants. Matera's stigmatization was definitively sealed in 1948, when on a visit to the city, Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi declared it a national disgrace, a reason for shame [*vergogna nazionale*]. From 1952 on, with the implementation of a law originally intended to restore the Sassi, politicians and planners had various futures on the drawing board for Matera, and none of these futures included the Sassi. One vision proposed an atomic bomb to wipe out the Sassi; another thought to eliminate the Sassi in order to lay a highway through the area. Indeed, the idea of paving the way for automobiles was inserted into a wider modernist future, in part embraced by most of the Materani themselves in the same period, which envisioned factories, «development», leaving the toil of agriculture behind, emigrating for a better life elsewhere. On a broader political-institutional level, the problem of the Sassi was imbricated with the period of the «Extraordinary Intervention» for Southern Italy, with agrarian reform to finally distribute land parcels to the peasants and top-down installation of industrial plants, in the hope of jump-starting endogenous development. Between 1952 and 1970, the majority of the inhabitants of the Sassi were transferred to new public housing in peripheral areas far from the Sassi and even from the city center, many of which were designed by avant-garde architects. This visionary work was supported by Italian industrialist Adriano Olivetti's «Comunità» Movement, which also sponsored sociological research into the conditions of the Sassi in 1955 (UNRRA-CASAS 1953; Musatti et al. 1996).

At the same time, there was a co-existing, alternative vision of the future: that of a young group of local intellectuals and artists who were part of the Circolo La Scaletta arts association. In the late 1950s, the La Scaletta group bucked the general consensus about the Sassi, celebrating their aesthetic quality and advocating their restoration. After a decisive conference organized by *Basilicata* magazine in 1967, in which Carlo Levi himself compared the Matera's Sassi to Venice, and argued in favor of their preser-

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<sup>4</sup> See Mirizzi (2009) for a more in-depth treatment of this crucial phase in Matera's history

vation, the deliberate destruction of the Sassi appeared to be precluded, if not their further decay. After several more years passed, between 1974 and 1977 the city promoted a competition of projects for restoring the Sassi. However, this aspiration became an aborted future: no project was awarded first prize; the dominant discourse at that time was simply incapable of projecting the Sassi into any plan for the coming years<sup>5</sup>. Superficially appearing to be a no-man's land in the late 1970s, the Sassi actually did host a few residents. Among these, some older residents became «refuseniks» who would not leave their homes for the new public housing; the Sassi became a way-station for migrants from other parts of the province who aspired to enter the ranklists for public housing in the new quarters; it was a space of traffics of various sorts, wine-making, and the location where young Materani consumed their amorous passions. But it also was a place for visionaries: a group of squatters formed a utopian community in the Le Malve neighborhood, and the Sassi served as inspiration for visiting artists<sup>6</sup> and as a home to some of the members of the intelligentsia who chose to reside there.

For the vast majority of Materani, though, futurism as an epochal timescape (Pels 2015) from the 1950s on aspired to «modernity» while rejecting «tradition», as seen in the loss of dialect, musical traditions, and especially in their negative relationship to the Sassi. The anticipated future of the 1950s and 60s, however, became a form of modernization that was a far cry from satisfying the original hopes, but the former predominantly agricultural economy did morph into a mostly tertiary economy of public jobs and services. In the 1980s and early 1990s, for many

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<sup>5</sup> Despite its inconclusive results, the competition itself launched a new moment for rethinking different, variously creative futures for the Sassi. Out of this process, a common denominator emerged from the evaluated projects that the Sassi would be restored for a predominantly residential use. The effervescence inspired by the competition was, again, limited to restricted segments of the Materan population, and the hegemonic position with regard to the Sassi remained that of disassociation and abandonment.

<sup>6</sup> Among these artists: French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, U.S. poet Cid Corman, and exiled Spanish artist José Ortega. Numerous filmmakers, including Pierpaolo Pasolini, have also used the Sassi as a movie set, and this activity has continued to date with the promotion of a regional Film Commission. However, Raffaele Stifano, a local guide who routinely works with the Commission and film productions in Matera, has said in personal communication that filmmaking will now stop due to the skyrocketing costs in the city.



Materani, a renewed modernist future appeared on the horizon in the form of jobs in the *salottifici* [upholstered furniture factories] that were emerging, and indeed, by the late 1990s this sector alone employed over 10,000 people in the local industrial triangle of Matera-Altamura-Santeramo. National law 771 in 1986 finally established an effective mechanism for restoring and repopulating the Sassi, which were envisioned, at least in official documents and biennial programs, to become «a quarter like any other». The 1993 recognition of the Sassi as a UNESCO World Heritage site was received with little fanfare in local public opinion, but a very slow and gradual process of revalorization of the district began to take hold as people, often non-Materani, utilized the instruments of the 1986 law to renovate properties and move there. The period from 2000 on marked the beginning of touristic development in the Sassi, with the appearance of the first hotels and restaurants<sup>7</sup>. The ensuing increase in nightlife and traffic, especially in attracting Materani from outside the center and people from the surrounding towns to bars and restaurants, began to generate conflicts with the residents, who in many cases had moved there seeking an alternative urban lifestyle (Zinn 2009)<sup>8</sup>. Nonetheless, despite periodic tensions, a certain equilibrium held sway throughout the 2000s. In the meantime, a very gradual process of revitalization of objectivized tradition – dialect, local foods, and music – began to take hold.

Over the last twenty years, this city of 60,000 inhabitants has experienced a vertiginous shift with the era of turbo capitalism and globalization. Tertiary sector services linked to city's status as provincial capital have been hollowed out with the downsizing of the provincial government and many public and semi-public companies that had provincial headquarters there (e.g. the electric company ENEL, Banca d'Italia, Telecom Italia). The once-flourishing manufacture of upholstered furniture has been predominantly offshored, and only the headquarters of the companies remain; the Barilla pasta company closed its Matera plant in the early 2000s, letting go of over 200 employees in one fell swoop. Local retail has been supplanted to a large degree by international chains and online commerce; and the

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<sup>7</sup> The Hotel Sassi opened its doors in 1996, but remained a small, isolated anomaly until other hotels opened later.

<sup>8</sup> This residential choice can be viewed as a form of what Moroşanu and Ringel have termed «time-tricking» (Moroşanu & Ringel 2016).

viability of local agriculture is increasingly threatened by cheap imports. Matera and its surrounding area have a persistently high rate of youth unemployment and emigration.

It was in this context that the local population made a concerted bid, from 2010 on, to secure the designation of European Capital of Culture 2019, and it reacted jubilantly to this success when victory was announced on 17 October 2014.

### **Logos and slogans, old and new**

To borrow the expression of Bryant and Knight (2019), the inhabitants of Matera, Italy, have been living in a new «vernacular timespace» since 2019, which we may call the Time of Matera 2019. Bryant and Knight use the concept of «vernacular timespace» to capture «how, collectively, we express the everyday ways in which temporality temporalizes», especially in its affective dimension (2019: 32). They argue that such vernacular timespaces are the basis for collective social orientations. This Time of Matera 2019 has been made up of three phases: first, by a period from 2010 to mid-October 2014, when the Materani, under the leadership of the Associazione Matera 2019, pushed forward the city's candidacy to become European Capital of Culture 2019; a second phase, from 17 October 2014–2018, beginning with the announcement of the city's victory as designated ECoC 2019; and a third phase, in 2019 itself, with the unfolding of the year in its actualization. During these phases, different collective orientations have emerged, which I suggest have been captured in the creation and deployment of two sets of logos and slogans.

The first phase, that of ECoC candidacy, was characterized by fervor generated by hope and potentiality among the Materani as the movement gathered momentum (Bryant & Knight 2019). Under the guidance of the Comitato Matera 2019, multiple initiatives to promote the candidacy captured and coalesced the positive affect and engagement of the citizenry. As documented in the evaluations of the Commission that awarded Matera this honor, indeed, one of the most compelling elements in Matera's candidacy was the strength of community action in forwarding the city's claim to becoming European Capital of Culture<sup>9</sup>. As Angela Pepe has written:

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<sup>9</sup> <<https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/en/matera-2019/why-matera.html>>. See also the candidacy bid book: <<https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/matera-2019/dossier.html>>

In contrast with other paths that in the last 50 years led to the positive change of the image and trajectory of Matera, the particularity of the path towards the designation of Matera as European Capital of Culture 2019 is in the fact that this candidature was planned also with inhabitants of Matera and Basilicata. In fact, the application report given to MiBACT on the 19th of September 2013 opens with the following statement: «The citizens of Matera and Basilicata, men and women, elderly and children, want the city and the region to take part in the competition because they wish to open up to Europe, link up with other cultural inhabitants and, with them, look forward to a better future for our communities» (Pepe 2018: 284).

Alongside the slogan «INSIEME» [together] that features prominently in the candidacy bid book, a key element in this process of citizen involvement was the deployment of the logo for Matera 2019, adopted in 2011 (Fig. 1), a potent symbol for mobilizing the citizenry.



Fig. 1. The first Matera 2019 logo (Source: Fondazione Matera-Basilicata 2019).

This logo defeated nearly 700 other proposals submitted for the competition, and as the Foundation Matera 2019 site described it in a press release at the time:

It tells the thousands-of-years-old history of the city of the Sassi, its astonishing uniqueness, and at the same time its contemporariness, its being profoundly immersed in modernity, in the history of today, in the European context (Fondazione Matera 2019, 04.08.2011<sup>10</sup>).

Notice the temporalities invoked here: the intertwining of a distant past with present time, and the centuries that lay between them. Through

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<sup>10</sup> <<https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/news/5-abbiamo-un-logo.html>>, [23/09/2019]. Here and elsewhere, translations from Italian are my own.

this logo, the campaign for Matera 2019 referred to a near future of aspiration for a recognition that could give the city a new impetus. This highly localized form of near future was tied directly to the reversal of the shameful history of the recent past<sup>11</sup>. In this fame-to-shame narrative, collective anticipation utilized «the past as a resource for rewriting the future in the present» (Bryant & Knight 2019: 48).

For many Materani, and it was my own immediate reaction when I saw it, the logo represents a stylized version of the *vicinato*, the micro-neighborhood that was the smallest cell in the traditional social body of the Sassi. It distinctly recalls the figure depicting a *vicinato* from Lidia De Rita's sociological study of the Sassi in 1955 (Fig. 2), a well-known interdisciplinary study that was a part of Olivetti's *Comunità* interventions mentioned above (Musatti *et al.* 1996) In fact, in the process of relocating people from the Sassi to the new quarters in the 1950s and 60s, particular care was taken to try to recreate the residents' *vicinato* networks.

Local residents appropriated the logo zealously: it appeared on banners, lapel pins – basically everywhere, and the city rallied a tremendously successful campaign in which schoolchildren decorated white flags adorned with the logo. A large bench in the shape of the logo was placed at the

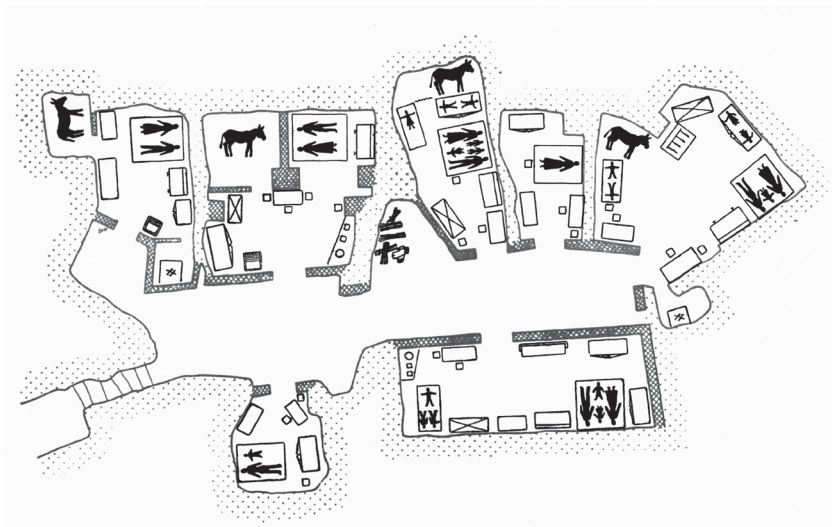


Fig. 2. De Rita's depiction of the *vicinato* (from UNRRA-CASAS 1953: 24)

<sup>11</sup> See the candidacy bid book, *op. cit.*

bus terminal adjacent to the train station, bearing the name of the local basketball team's sponsor.

Yet hardly a year and a half after winning the title of ECoC 2019, in February 2016, to the great surprise of local citizens, the Fondazione Matera 2019 – the guiding institution transformed from the former Comitato Matera 2019 – decided to launch a competition for a new logo. The declared rationale of this move was: «...the aim of finding a new logo in line with the rigid rules of sponsorship and that can be used by the private sector and institutions with clearer procedures<sup>12</sup>». The reaction on the part of the population was decisively negative, and on 20 February 2016, 17 majority members of the city council raised a motion to cancel the competition for the new logo. The motion stated, «The current logo, whether one likes it or not, has become an identifying element of our city, regional and extra-regional community. It has become an integral part of our path for candidacy and nomination<sup>13</sup>». A flash mob in the main square even took place to protest change of the logo, in which the participants lined up in such a way as to compose the form of the logo with their bodies<sup>14</sup>.

The competition for the new logo was halted following the protests, but nonetheless, almost two years later, the Foundation resumed the com-



Fig. 3. The new logo (Source: Fondazione Matera-Basilicata 2019).

<sup>12</sup> <<http://www.materainside.it/matera-2019-avviate-le-procedure-concludere-bando-sul-logo/>>, [10/10/2019]

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> <[https://www.sassiland.com/notizie\\_matera/notizia.asp?id=39545&t=cambio\\_logo\\_matera\\_2019\\_flash\\_mob\\_sotto\\_la\\_webcam\\_di\\_sassiland\\_ma\\_non\\_solo](https://www.sassiland.com/notizie_matera/notizia.asp?id=39545&t=cambio_logo_matera_2019_flash_mob_sotto_la_webcam_di_sassiland_ma_non_solo)>, [10/10/2019]

petition. The Director of the Fondazione Matera 2019 explained that the new logo was needed for third-party users, especially for sponsorship agreements. A second argument was that it was necessary to distinguish the *candidacy* phase of Matera 2019 from that of the actual *project*<sup>15</sup>.

In this way, the old logo became the «candidacy logo», and the winner of the new logo competition in March 2018 became the «project logo», which accompanied the new slogan, «OPEN FUTURE» (Fig. 3).

A member of the commission that judged the competition, Cinzia Ferrara, President of AIAP (Italian Association for the Design of Visual Communication), was quoted as saying that «The chosen logo has profound roots in the territory, but it has the scent of the future, absolutely projected towards the theme ‘Open Future’»<sup>16</sup>.

The wording is now «Matera-Basilicata», as Matera becomes a metonym for the rest of Basilicata and even the South. The new logo and slogan promote a Matera ECoC 2019 within a cosmopolitan future that embraces both «permanent and temporary citizens (i.e. tourists)». Both types of citizens are encouraged to buy the Matera 2019 «passport», a novelty in the ECoC program, in order to attend the key events. Recalling that the trope of *citizenship* was important in the candidacy dossier and in the public drive to promote the city’s bid, and was indeed one of the factors that impressed the ECoC selection commission, we can observe the paradox of clashing temporalities. On the one hand, there is the «candidacy logo» that embodies the revisited past and an aspirational future as ECoC, projecting the transformed Sassi of the shameful past as the key to winning the bid for ECoC in a near future. On the other hand, the new «project logo» erases the evocation of the Sassi. Despite the Fondazione’s claims that the new logo suggests «a typical postcard view of the City of the Sassi’s houses, windows and doors»<sup>17</sup>, it actually fractures the relationship to the past: it eliminates the reference to the past contained in the old logo, and disposes of the need for a «candidate logo», having attained the goal of ECoC.

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<sup>15</sup> <<https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/area-stampa/1167-presentato-il-nuovo-logo-della-fondazione-matera-basilicata-2019.html>>, [12/10/2019]

<sup>16</sup> <<https://www.materalife.it/notizie/matera-2019-la-giuria-giustifica-la-scelta-del-nuovo-logo/>>, [24/08/2019]

<sup>17</sup> <<https://www.wired.it/lifestyle/design/2018/03/01/matera-capitale-europea-cultura-2019-logo/>>, [22/08/2019]

Moreover, the new logo was imposed top-down *against* the general will of the citizenry, despite the declared importance of citizens' participation in the Matera 2019 project. Even the new logo competition itself contradicted the original intention of involving citizen participation: the competition procedure foresaw holding a popular vote for the logo, but out of some 450 projects submitted to the competition, this logo was the only one to get the minimum of 60 points to be admitted to the selection, and therefore no vote was actually held.

The old logo, the one that had so strongly resonated with the people, nonetheless continues to haunt the city landscape in the shadow of the new logo. The old logo-shaped bench at the bus terminal remains, and random appearances of the old logo crop up now at bus stop, now in a supermarket window, now on the sidewalk of a street leading out of the city center. If the need for a new logo was in part justified by the notion of institutional uses, this is belied by the fact that Matera's city government still features the old logo on its letterhead paper and in numerous other official places, such as in the sign of an tourist information booth and even on that of the San Rocco Digital Hub building.

The new logo was the butt of a multitude of jokes and sarcastic imitations and memes online. I spoke with a number of people asking their reaction to the new logo, and none of them spoke favorably on its behalf. A hotelier friend Adele said to me «When I first saw it, it brought to mind L'Oreal shampoo from the supermarket. Or the RAI [national television networks, with their television screen logo]. As you see, it's not present in my hotel [as we speak, she gestures to a sticker on a glass pane bearing the old logo]. I liked the old logo – it said something».

«Why couldn't they just keep the old one?» Francesca mused in another conversation, and Vincenzo replied, «Of course, they just had to have a commission to give someone money». «And there was the Basilicata thing», added Francesca subtly, referring to the remodulation of «Matera 2019» into a pan-regional «Matera-Basilicata 2019».

In this last exchange, we have a very local and politicized reading of the logo affaire, one in which «the usual particularist interests» are seen to be behind the substitution of the old logo. According to this view, the political interests of Matera's archrival city, Potenza, have conspired to profit from Matera's victory as ECoC. Just the way the Potentini stole the RAI public television New Year's broadcast from Matera, many Materani would add. We also see this in the reading by a local left-wing activist, Mi-

chele Saponaro, who published a long *j'accuse* about the new logo, ending with this:

The [new] logo is also a symbol, becomes a symbol, of the unbearable-ness of the world out there: of the «small town politics» of the City Hall and especially of the Regional Assembly, of ravenous, benefitting clientele from Potenza and elsewhere, of conformist and oppressive cultures that recognize us only inasmuch as we are consumers<sup>18</sup>.

Interestingly, alongside a reference taken from long-standing discourses about clientelism, Saponaro's critique refers to the reduction of the much-heralded citizens to *consumers*. And it is in this sense that we find a disjuncture between the hopeful near-future of the Materani's beloved «candidacy logo» and the new, «L'Oreal shampoo»-type logo, as Adele identified it. Indeed, it is no coincidence that, when I asked Adele about the new logo, she said it made her think of L'Oreal shampoo: a commodity that represents globalized homogeneity, consumerism. The single elements of the logo, like capitalist exchange values, can be dismantled and shifted around, and are anonymous like the «empty future» of capitalism (Pels 2015). Despite the best intentions of the Fondazione Matera-Basilicata 2019, the sleek new logo – evidently more suited to *sponsorship* than its predecessor – reverberates with the complicity of ECoC designations in neoliberal development processes (Boland, Murtagh, & Shirlow 2018; Collins 2019)<sup>19</sup>. The open, but empty, technofuture of the new logo – but also that of the Bari Matera 5G project<sup>20</sup> and the new high-tech incubator of the San Rocco Digital Hub – embodies an episteme of postmodern time-space compression (Harvey 1989) that goes hand in hand with neo-

<sup>18</sup> <<https://giornalemio.it/cultura/sul-logo-di-matera-2019-mentono-sapendo-dimentire/>>

<sup>19</sup> From its initial emphasis on showcasing European identity at its inception in 1985, ECoC program policy shifted in the 1990s to serving as a tool for the development of more marginal or post-industrial areas (Hudson, Sandberg & Schmauch 2017; Urbančíková 2018). In more recent years, the ECoC has placed a newer accent on social cohesion and interculturality, but the program is remains a key stake in the globalized competition between cities (Pepe 2018; Collins 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Promoted in an agreement with Telecom Italia Mobile, Fastweb and Huawei, the project foresees Matera and Bari as some of the first 5G cities in Europe: <<http://www.barimatera5g.it/>>. At the end of 2019, the 5G coverage goals were not reached, but the project has attracted attention for the uses of virtual and augmented reality technology for cultural heritage consumption.



liberal transformations in Matera in the present. To sum it up, during the second phase of the Time of Matera 2019, the new logo introduces elements of *uncanniness* – what Bryant and Knight have termed «speculation» (2019: 82-95) – that overlay the orientations of the first phase.

In his discussion of the chronotope as referencing the «intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationship», Bakhtin has pointed to the ideological aspects of chronotope inflections (Bakhtin 1981). We may apply this insight in reflecting on the Time of Matera 2019, where we again reveal the frictions of current transformations in the aspiration to ideologically re-present the Italian South, while simultaneously conveying contradictory ideologies that are associated with late capitalism. Just as it promotes an open future for Matera, Basilicata, and indeed the entire South, the Matera 2019 project also sells the trope of *slowness*, as featured in several places in the bid book. This concept of slowness emerged from sociologist Franco Cassano's famous philosophy of Southern Italian *pensiero meridiano* (Cassano 2005). From the late 1990s on, Cassano's manifesto inspired a number of artists and intellectuals in Matera and throughout Southern Italy to revisit and celebrate local traditions and attempt to advance the South as an exemplar of an alternative way of life in contrast to what Cassano termed the *homo currens* of late capitalism. In the introduction to the second edition of his book, Cassano counters the interpretation of his work as promoting a Southernist fundamentalism, and he reviews how one of his primary aims was instead to rethink a temporal conception of the South as «not-yet» North, a conception grounding Northern symbolic domination (*ivi*: VIII; XIII). Combatting disparaging anti-Southern discourses, he warns that «No development can take place on the basis of contempt for places, their auctioning off, from the industrial rapes of modernity to the touristic ones of postmodernity» (*ivi*: X). What Cassano did not anticipate, however, was the vampirization of his liberation theology for Southerners by the very forces that he sought to ward off: in its new guise in Matera 2019, «slowness» ambivalently also figures as a road map for new marketing in globalized tourism and gastronomic consumption. This would seem to confirm Pels' observation that «...humanist hopes for improvement always face the formal or real subsumption under an empty future of exchange values» (2015: 789).

Over the course of the 1990s, many people embracing the ethos of slowness had chosen to renovate homes in the Sassi, leading to their much-celebrated repopulation, but since the ECoC designation there has

been a newer demographic shift in the Sassi: some inhabitants who feel the encroachment of mass tourism have found their alternative lifestyle betrayed and have relocated elsewhere. Others, exchanging the Sassi's Southern rhythm in favor of commodified time, have put up their residences as tourist accommodations in order to subsidize their living in other areas of the city. All told, in recent years the number of residents in the Sassi has actually declined by some 25% from the levels of the mid-1990s<sup>21</sup>. The change in pace is palpable even in sacred daily rituals of commensality: a number of local restaurants, where relaxed evening meals in the company of friends have been a characteristic of a Southern rhythm transposed from the home, have for the first time implemented a regime of multiple sittings in order to maximize profits with customer turnover. We even see the marketing of the Southern rhythm in the sign on the façade of the new San Rocco Digital Hub, which has ambiguously appropriated the past by calling itself a «digital *vicinato*», while local inhabitants have no connection to it or sense of what is taking place within it.

The consumerist orientation of the Time of Matera 2019, intensified in the second and third phases, has produced a palpable fragmentation in the public space: a span of just a couple of hundred meters of the historic center is brimming over with gelaterias and fast-food operations; in less than six months during 2019, seven Bangladeshi-operated shops opened with Matera souvenirs made in China; rents have skyrocketed, displacing or forcing the closure of historic businesses, making way for more food and beverage operations. The vertiginous transformation of the city also includes the proliferation of bed-and-breakfasts and vacation rentals, which have brought the listed accommodations in Matera from a few dozen in the early 2000s to over 800, with the greatest increase taking place in the period from 2016 on<sup>22</sup>.

All of this reflects a commodification of space in which «places are... co-opted and sanitized with the primary goal being increased consumption» (Collins 2019: 6). In his critical view of ECoC programs, Collins points out how ECoC mega events can readily lead to processes of gentrification and the commodification of space and culture:

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<sup>21</sup> Estimate elaborated from data provided by the Comune di Matera: <<http://dati.comune.matera.it/dataset/residenti-nei-rioni-sassi-dal-1988-ad-oggi>>.

<sup>22</sup> Booking.com lists 836 accommodations [22/12/2019].

This commodification of space is seen as a key driver of local economic development yet it is rarely recognised as the homogenization of spaces bringing to fruition: Horkheimer and Adorno [sic] (2006) contention of the ‘creation of eternal sameness’. With the commodification of space comes the commodification of culture, that is the method by which cities put forward the most consumption friendly aspects of culture (Collins 2019: 5).

A related critique was raised by Luisella as we sat over tea in August 2019 at her home outside the city center, far from the maddening crowd. She is retired friend who had been active in the volunteer and culture sectors, and when conversation turned to Matera 2019, she commented this regarding the ongoing program:

The idea of culture they’re working with is wrong. Culture is getting people to learn, to reflect on a daily basis. It’s not an opera, an exhibit – they’re *means* for culture, but not culture. This is not culture, it’s spectacle.

Moreover, the commodification of the center and Sassi has accentuated anew the historic fracture between these spaces and the new quarters. Several residents of the non-historic areas with whom I spoke said that they no longer go into the center due to the difficulties arising from mass tourism: overcrowding, the impossibility to find parking, soaring prices. The ECoC events themselves took place almost exclusively in the historic zones. As Luisella recounted it, the Matera 2019 events only really involved the non-central areas to the extent that they became part of parade routes to be traversed:

People in the periphery don’t give a damn [about Matera 2019]. The only thing they get is the Bersaglieri, I mean, I like the Bersaglieri, but... Then there were the Confraternities for the Festa della Bruna - they did a big procession. And Gay Pride, that started a bit further down [the road].

In the third phase of the Time of Matera 2019, then, one of the paradoxical effects has been to redraw an older fracture which had never completely healed between the old and new towns, in which most Materani had come to reject the Sassi. The shame-to-fame narrative has offered a balm for the original fracture, and this is reflected in the Matera 2019 logos: the old logo and slogan do this through a direct suggestion of the *vicinato*, a collectively comprehended social unit that was valued in the transition to the new quarters, while the project behind the new logo adds

a probing of futurity as the next step in Matera's redemption. Despite its appeal, however, the shame-to-fame narrative elides an actual affective disconnect with the Sassi for most Materani. As Anne Toxey has observed from her own long-term research in Matera, commenting on the revitalization of the Sassi from 1986 on:

Ironically, those without ties to the Sassi (former Piano residents and newcomers) are the ones who embrace this site today, value it, and invest in its preservation, while those with previous ties to the Sassi have been less enthusiastic about the renovation taking place, many refusing to return there even for a visit. Their middle-class status depends upon this physical and emotional distancing of the Sassi from their lives (Toxey 2016: 313).

The negative affective relationship Toxey describes persists at present, and what we are seeing is that the actors, more and more often non-residents, value and invest in the site without really embracing it. The present-oriented temporality in which they are living aims at cashing in on fame in the short term. The reigning touristic chronotope is a past that refers to Carlo Levi's description of peasant civilization in the early twentieth century, with Materani selling the supposed authenticity of family memories of cave dwelling – whether as a bed-and-breakfast proprietor, a tour guide, or the owner of one of the private museums of cave homes that have sprung up. And while they are at it cashing in on the short term, they will cash in on the rivalry with Potenza, displaying a parochial pride in their city as ECoC while continuing nonetheless to be indifferent or worse about the Sassi. The thinking in the second and third phases of the Time of Matera 2019 has been short term, so much so that with regard to a future beyond the mega event there is fear of a bust when the magical year is over, enunciated in the conjectures of inhabitants, but also in a critical report (CGIL Basilicata-CGIL Matera 2019). In the meantime, a sizeable portion of young Materani have either shrugged their shoulders at the open future, filling the ranks of NEETS, or emigrating with a project of a future elsewhere (Osservatorio Statistico dei Consulenti del Lavoro 2019)<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> The acronym NEETS refers to «not in education, employment or training». Based on elaborations of ISTAT data, the report by Osservatorio Statistico dei Consulenti del Lavoro in September 2019 stated that 2 out of 3 youths in the province of Matera are unemployed, the highest rate in Italy (2019: 22).

So some Materani have been very much living in the present, some seizing the moment, while others are letting it roll over them. In the Time of Matera 2019, my neighbor Imma continues to lay out tomatoes to dry, for a near future in which she and her family can enjoy them. Giovanni complains how, walking home to our *vicinato*, he had to push his way through two different groups of tourists. Everyone is moaning about how prices have gone through the roof in the local restaurants, cafés. Students and young couples cannot find apartments anymore because everything has become an Air BnB rental. Overall it is a vernacular timespace of some disorientation, some malcontent, but also some profiteering.

### **Conclusion: Back to a (Queer) Future**

In this timespace, I have also shared the current uncanny sensation that residents are getting alienated from their own city, and in the midst of the third phase – the year of Matera 2019 itself – I was at least able to take comfort in the company of a few hundred Materani, feeling «community» again for a couple of hours, on a warm summer evening out on the Murgia, outside the city across the ravine from the Sassi. We were attending an outdoor film screening in the annual Parco Murgia Film series at the Jazzo Gattini. Everyone was lying on cushions in the inner courtyard of the rocky Jazzo, as if we were taking refuge in a gigantic living room. Before taking a few minutes to find a comfortable position on the jagged stones for viewing the film, everyone was looking around and chatting with the many familiar faces, breathing in not the «scent of the future», but that of Murgia vegetation dried from the intense summer heat. Momentarily self-exiled from the city, we recreated an oversized *vicinato*.

A feeling of community is still there, despite everything. It was present on 20 July 2019 at the first-ever Gay Pride in Matera, in which a queer futurity with the theme of «Heroes/#Superumani [Superhumans]» finally erupted onto the local scene. An estimated 5000 people paraded, with great participation from students, young adults, and families. Hundreds of Materani who were not directly taking part in the event took chairs and lined the parade route to watch, just as they do with the patron saint's festival that is the apotheosis of Materan *communitas*, the Festa della Bruna.

Using a queer notion of futurity and its spirit of concrete utopia (Muñoz 2009), we find some commonality between the Matera Pride and the first phase of the Time of Matera 2019, that of the push for candidacy.

As Muñoz has written, «Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world». Drawing inspiration from Ernst Bloch, he adds that: «Concrete utopias are relational to historically situated struggles» (Muñoz 2009: 3). In the case of Matera, for the majority of the people, the struggle in the face of neoliberal transformations has been to have access to equal opportunities for a decent life or to hold onto middle-class living gained in the decades of modernization. Perhaps it is no coincidence that poet John Giorno, whose work is cited by Muñoz as embodying queer utopian futurity, was the son of emigrants from Aliano, the town in the province of Matera immortalized by Carlo Levi.

Given the difficult relationship of past and present in Matera, pursuit of the ECoC 2019 designation was in and of itself oriented to a concrete utopia for the Materani, and the victory which had seemed so impossible to many at the beginning tasted unbelievably sweet. This struggle gave rise to a horizon of hope for the near future, but it was an under-formulated, under-articulated future. The queer futurity of Gay Pride suggests an ethos based on historic, collective struggle, an ethos that might be a direction for the future: instead of proposing empty formulations of citizenship, it recuperates the spirit of collectivity and community that reigned during the campaign to become ECoC 2019. Victory inevitably also inaugurated the subsequent phases in the Time of Matera 2019, ones that have turned out to be fraught with frictions that have belied the initial utopian bend. The new vision of an «Open Future», unanchored from the past and near future, appears more suited to the «empty future» of neoliberal transformation. Of course, the Time of Matera 2019 is not over, as we only just now entered into a new, fourth phase following the end of the designated year. It remains to be seen how the Materani will exercise their temporal agency, continuing to construct their future.

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