



Cultural Commons and Historical Identity: The Experience of the Arbëreshë Community in Southern Italy

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Abstract

This chapter aims to assess whether an ethnic and linguistic minority, such as the Arbëreshë community in Southern Italy, could be considered a specific kind of cultural common. Commons are historically defined as resources connected to natural sphere and enjoyed collectively. The idea that cultures may be analysed under the perspective of commons produces relevant theoretical constructs which are not strictly related to, and therefore not identifiable only with, common-pool resources. With respect to this issue, the chapter offers a systematic analysis of three important dimensions, belonging to a specific community, that can be considered crucial for the definition of a new concept of cultural commons: culture, spatial dimension, and community aspect. Some evidence, drawn from the theoretical analysis and case study method, offers an overview which led to considered Arbëreshë community a unique cultural commons, able to generate shared value from its rich, complex, and lively identity.

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1 Introduction

The chapter aims at investigating the broad concept of cultural commons in order to analyse whether and how this concept may be used to define an ethnic and linguistic minority such as the Arbëreshë community in Southern Italy. Commons are historically defined as resources that are (or could be) enjoyed collectively. These resources may be part of the natural world as forests, oceans, and in broader sense natural resources. But they could also emerge from social realities such as the internet, scientific knowledge, creativity, conventional styles, or social rites. In this chapter, the attention is mainly given to cultural commons that are not strictly connected and therefore not necessarily identifiable with material common-pool resources. Despite the efforts aimed at consistently defining such commons where material and intangible variables coexist, they still prove complex and multi-dimensional, and can be interpreted from various perspectives.

Within such a conceptual framework the chapter focuses on a specific ethnic and linguistic community which seems to retain within its identity three important dimensions that can be considered crucial for the definition of a new concept of cultural commons: culture, spatial dimension, and community. The community is called Arbëreshë: the term comes from Arbëria, which is the denomination of the areas where an Albanian ethnic-linguistic minority live. It is the fifteenth century when Albanians, due to the Ottoman conquer, are forced to emigrate in Italy in Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily regions where they are hosted and then can establish their stable settlements. Since then the Arbëreshë people became part of the regional community, although they were able to keep their historical identity, language, traditions, and rites through the centuries.

Empirical evidence drawn on semi-structured interviews, with some privileged observers of this community, and document analysis offer an overview of the consistency of the concept of cultural commons to the Arbëreshë community. The chapter is organized as follows. Section 2 examines the theoretical framework. In Sect. 3, the Arbëreshë community and its history is briefly described. Section 4 explains the approach adopted. Sections 5 and 6 present and discuss the outcome of the empirical research. Section 7 offers concluding remarks and implications.

2 The Theoretical Framework

2.1 Defining Traditional and Emerging Concepts of Commons

Until twenty years ago only a few works focused on commons. The article of Coman (1911), published in the *American Economic Review*, about irrigation problems, can be considered the first contribution which traces the origins of the debate on commons. More than fifty years later the seminal work by Hardin (1968) focused on commons and collective action introducing the “tragedy of the

commons". Hardin claimed that the only way to avoid the tragedy was to either privatise the resource or transform it in public property. Finally, Ostrom (1990) considers two possible ways to avoid the tragedy: the dilemma privatisation versus nationalisation on one hand, self-government on the other.

According to Ostrom's theory commons are not free to access spaces and resources but they are well-defined and self-managed by a limited group of individuals, based on rules and institutions that the community members know and are able to respect, applying predefined sanctions to those who do not enforce them. For the first time, Ostrom emphasizes the concept of institutional diversity, beside and beyond biological and cultural diversity, but especially she rejects the economic model based on the so-called *homo-oeconomicus* and on proprietary individualism.

There are further kinds of commons, which are not strictly related to, and therefore not identifiable with, common-pool resources. According to Edwards and Escande (2015), there are new categories of commons that include both physical and virtual communities. In the first type, we can include neighborhood commons, such as community parks, libraries, and so on; in the second type instead, we find open access repositories, blogs, virtual communities, internet, public radio and TV, shared music. Considering specific features we can focus upon neighborhood commons, knowledge or information commons, social commons, infrastructure commons, and finally cultural commons.

Within this general framework, commons related to cultural heritage can be identified with two sub-categories: the former is the generic "cultural commons" (cultural experience shared by socially cohesive communities), the latter is "research or education commons", usually supporting academic communities or focused on undergraduate students and school pupils. The former category needs further analysis which is being carried out in the recent years by many scholars.

2.2 The Development of Cultural Commons Theory: Toward a Shared Definition

One of the earliest contributions which refer to the notion of cultural commons was elaborated by Madison et al. (2010). They define the issue such as "environments for developing and distributing cultural and scientific knowledge through institutions that support pooling and sharing that knowledge in a managed way". Research is referred to knowledge, both scientific and cultural, and the paper tries to give it a new perspective, also considering knowledge from the point of view of a common pool focused on cultural production as information goods.

From this perspective, Solum (2010) elaborates his definition of cultural commons excluding "phenomena and processes that might be labeled as 'culture' but that are not usually described as information goods". Actually, he does not consider social norms, language, networks of social relationships among kinship groups, and so forth, but he defines cultural commons as only information production. Clearly, these definitions are still anchored to the discussion about traditional commons as natural resources, since economic debate ignores some important combination and

reciprocal fertilisation among common resources and culture, from both the anthropological and artistic viewpoints.

The pursuit of this increased convention represents the prelude for a new definition of cultural commons, as understood in this chapter. In such a respect an important contribution is the book “Cultural Commons. A New Perspective on the Production and Evolution of Cultures” published in 2012. It argues that the economic issues normally applied to common goods, such as social dilemmas and free riding, should also be applied to the cultural and creative areas, in order for scholars and public decision-makers to elaborate effective guidelines aimed at crafting policy orientations. As Noonan (2014) claims “the book is an attempt to coalesce and influence the research agenda in this emergent area of inquiry”.

In such a respect cultural commons can be seen, according to Bertacchini et al. (2012), as a set of resources expressed and shared by a community defined along three dimensions: culture, space, and community. Similarly, Marrelli and Fiorentino (2016) define cultural commons focusing on their spatial dimension. They also consider elements such as socially cohesive communities and the existence of a governance system based on social ties, over common pooled resource. The aim was to suggest a new orientation within a synergic framework of cultural commons, and to describe the creation and the eventual disappearance of cultural commons within local art market in Naples.

A wider and heterogeneous definition of cultural commons, which seems to be preminent in literature, considers cultural commons such as commons created over social communication flows and composed by both information and attention. Sherman (2016) shares this definition and introduces the discussion on the adoption of a powerful management method for cultural commons, which is represented, according to his conclusions, by collective actions able to offer the spread of democratic options with respect to privatisation.

Other contributions have investigated upon boundaries and shared metrics of cultural commons definition, such as a container that can be filled and crafted within a strategic framework in which institutional goals clearly determine selection criteria and choice mechanisms end up defining cultural commons. Barrère (2018), for example, suggests a sharp breakdown among cultural heritage and cultural commons, in order for local governments to identify adequate management tools; Bruncevic (2017) analyses cultural commons from the legal perspective. With respect to this field of action the concept turns out to be unclear because, despite their permeability to even access, commons may imply limits on property rights and the appropriation of public domain.

3 The Arbëreshë Community in Southern Italy

The Arbëreshë community has moved to Italy since the fourteenth century. They were descendants of Illyrians, who originally lived in a wide area of Eastern Europe that extended from the shores of Danube River to Greece, like contemporary

Albanians. The Arbëreshë probably settled in Italy after the death of their national hero Giorgio Castriota Scanderbeg in 1468, when the progressive increase of the Turkish pressure led Albania to be a vassal state of Byzantine government. Many groups of the Albanian community came to Italy, including soldiers, families, mercenaries, farmers, shepherds, women destined for servitude (Liuzzi 2016). Also, the heavy earthquakes occurring in the same period may have exerted a notable influence on the migration to Italy.

Although the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies accepted these new populations within its borders, it settled them in isolated, neglected, and unproductive areas. Moreover, the socioeconomic dimension of the host territory seemed to be improper for coexistence with local populations, which immediately became hostile toward Albanian populations (Resta 1991). They lived in seven Southern Italy regions: the imaginary Nation of Arbëria composed by Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Basilicata, Puglia, Calabria, and Sicily. See Fig. 1.

Over time, however, the Arbëreshë community has almost completely lost its identity in several regions, while in Calabria the community, counting 58.425 people who live in 33 towns and villages, mostly in the Cosenza province, still preserves its social, religious, and linguistic identity. The Arbëreshë community persists in 19 municipalities: 8 of them (Acquaformosa, Lungro, Firmo, S. Basile, Frascineto, Civita, Plataci, and Castrolibero) are located in the mountain complex of the Pollino (northern part of the Cosenza province) while 11 (Falconara, S. Benedetto, S. Martino, Cerzeto, S. Caterina, S. Sofia, S. Demetrio, S. Cosmo, Vaccarizzo, S. Giorgio, Spezzano Albanese) are scattered east and west of the middle and lower sections of the Crati River (central-southern part of Cosenza province). They represent 46.3 % of the 41 Arbëreshë-speaking municipalities in Italy (Tagarelli et al. 2007).

According to Brunetti (2005), in the area among Calabria and Basilicata lots of Arbëreshë communities are located in mountainous areas away from the main communication routes. This uncomfortable condition of distance, also from other Italian communities, may have been the cause that allowed the Arbëreshë people to preserve their historical identity. This trait, composed mainly by three important aspects such as language, endogamy, and the Greek-Byzantine religious rite consolidated for the Arbëreshë community a strategic position of social differentiation with respect to the Italian community (Resta 1996).

Their language is based on two dialects: *tosk* is spoken in Southern Albania, while *ghego* is diffused in Northern Albania; through the centuries it has been handled orally, and such a practice contributed to contaminate it with the Italian language. In 1999 the act n. 482, enacted by Italian State, recognized the Arbëreshë language and tried to promote the linguistic and cultural enhancement of the community (La Barbera 2019). Also, it established the teaching of their ancient language within schools, and the activation of minority culture courses at university level, while inside public offices the Arbëreshë language can be used for institutional documents. In addition, subsidies are given for publishing and television broadcasters who use this language and finally within all Arbëreshë countries road signs can be written in dual language (Savoia et al. 2008).



Fig. 1 The imaginary nation of Arbëria. *Source* The web

The endogamy practice (marriage among the members of the community) is likely to have contributed to a gradual ethnic isolation process. The rationale of endogamy could be traced in the intention to keep a closed ethnic group, formed only by people from Albania, in order for the Arbëreshë community to consolidate and demonstrate its strength and cohesion (Liuzzi 2016).

From the religious point of view, the Byzantine Catholic Church is under the ecumenical jurisdiction of the Church of Rome, but it maintains and follows Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical rites and disciplines. It was February 13th of the year 1919 when Benedict XV, with the Bull “*Catholici Fideles Graeci Ritus*”, canonically erected the Eparchy¹ of Lungro for Albanian worshippers adopting the Greek-Byzantine religious rite. Today it counts 30 Parishes: 25 in Cosenza province, two

¹The Eparchy is managed by an Eparch nominated by the Pope. He is equated with the Roman Bishops, but before the ordination he can marry. The celebration of the mass is different from the Roman rite although it contains the same essential liturgical moments. For instance, the Eucharist is celebrated with fermented bread and wine while liturgical readings and hymns to Saints vary according to liturgical calendar.

in Potenza province, one in Pescara province, one in Lecce, and one in Bari. The Eparchy of Lungro is a *sui juris* jurisdiction of Greek-Byzantine religious rite which directly depends on the Holy See, like the Eparchy of Piana degli Albanesi in Sicily and the Exarchic Monastery of Grottaferrata in Rome (Vaccaro 2019).

4 The Analysis: Approach and Tools

The exploratory and descriptive research carried out on the cultural commons features in the Arbëreshë community based in Calabria starts from the theoretical analyses elaborated by Eisenhardt (1989), Yin Robert (1994), Sinkovics et al. (2016). The research method is developed along two stages. The first stage explores the economic literature and elaborates the features of appraisal and evaluation of cultural commons through a systematic review (PRISMA) proposed by Moher et al. (2009), as synthesized in Fig. 1, in order for us to adopt a clear selection process.

Scopus database has been used to select the studies. Reference lists of prominent studies and resources were also examined to include contributions that were not identified using a computer database search. After having fixed some limitations, such as the exclusion of contributions before the year 2000 and the exclusion of contributions from subject areas different from social science, arts and humanities, and economics, 140 studies were selected. These have been deemed to comply with inclusion criteria such as the presence of the “cultural commons” search term in article title, abstract, or keywords.

At this point, a single file of identified references was created, and duplicates were removed. The remaining contributions have been screened for eligibility through titles and abstract and 77 contributions were selected for full-text appraisal, but finally only 35 were taken into account. See Fig. 2.

The second stage has been carried out through the case study method (Yin 2002), specifically suitable to investigate the complex and dynamic nature of the cultural sector, and in particular the cultural commons field. Research activity has been carried out between May and December 2019. Data have been collected in two phases: a) information, historical documents, and publications available either on the web or in public libraries of the Arbëreshë community located in Caraffa, a small town of Catanzaro province; b) semi-structured interviews.

According to Gaskell (2000) the use of interview, in qualitative research, allows us to develop a deeper comprehension of a phenomenon. Specifically, semi-structured interviews adopt a common reference framework and allow the analysis to prove consistent. As Corbetta (2014) states, the trace of the interview constitutes the perimeter of the contents to be dealt with. Figure 3 describes the details of the investigation carried out.

The starting point for the elaboration of the content of the interview has been a specific definition of cultural commons provided by Bertacchini et al. (2012) and Marrelli and Fiorentino (2016). The authors similarly define cultural commons and

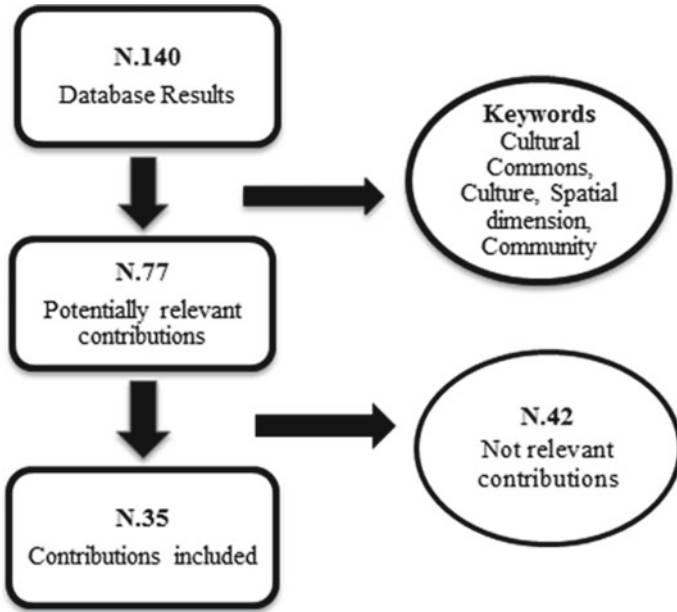


Fig. 2 Literature review. Source Author's elaboration

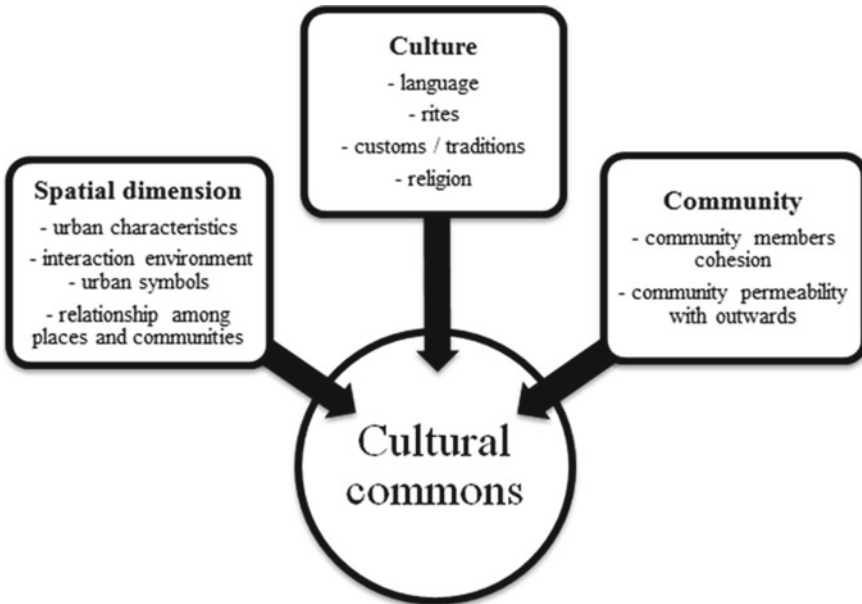


Fig. 3 Interview contents. Source Author's elaboration

used as characteristic elements a set of resources defined along three dimensions: culture, space, and the existence of a system of governance based on the social ties of a socially cohesive community.

Some qualified witnesses have been involved as holders of information about the Arbëreshë community. They are personalities generally involved in the preliminary stages of research (Corbetta 2014), and may be endowed with five features: high status within community, detailed knowledge of the phenomenon, willingness to cooperate, dialectical ability, and impartiality. As qualified witness, we chose three personalities from three different Arbëreshë communities of Calabria region: an elder member of the community as the guardian of collective memory, an historian of the Arbëreshë community, and finally an architect and urban planner, expert and scholar of urban settlements. They, respectively, came from Caraffa (Catanzaro province), San Demetrio Corone, and Santa Sofia di Epiro (both located in Cosenza province).

5 Main Outcomes

The aim of this chapter is to assess whether and how an ethnic and linguistic minority could be considered as cultural commons, focusing on the Arbëreshë community. The results are based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews aimed at verifying how the selected witnesses perceive and contextualise the three dimensions of cultural commons. Secondary data came from research articles, books and documents, and publications available in libraries, the web, and other sources.

5.1 Cultural Variables

Cultural variables were the first dimensions analysed; they consist in language, rites, and customs. Semi-structured interviews had the aim to verify how these aspects had been preserved and dealt with through the generations, and investigate whether these elements were similar or different to those present in contemporary Albania.

The Arbëreshë language, with its several facets, is presently spoken especially among the elderly and adults of the communities; its prevailing oral adoption and diffusion might have contributed to the disappearance of some words and expressions. Experts report that slightly less than half of the Arbëreshë words correspond to the Albanian language, while about 15% of the remaining glossary could have been coined by the Italian-Albanian writers who, in their stories and poems have crafted neologisms that have been later grafted into common language and adopted by the Arbëreshë community.

Finally, a remaining part of the Arbëreshë language derives from contaminations with the Italian language and particularly with many dialects of the areas where the

communities were resident. As for the Italian dialects which may differ from each other even in the same Regional territory, also the Arbëreshë dialects vary quite a lot within communities settled a few kilometers away. Although the Calabria Regional Government has issued an act aimed at preserving traditional language through its teaching in schools, unfortunately it has partially disappeared, mainly due to the attitude of new generations to adopt a sort of homologous jargon.

The most popular rites, preserved and transmitted orally, have religious origins: Epiphany, Cult of the Dead, Holy Week, and Easter. In the Epiphany day, the solemn liturgy in the church is followed by a general gathering of the believers around a fountain in the town center; the Eparca and all the Papas² proceed with the blessing of the waters. This rite recalls, through a song, the descent of the Holy Spirit into the Jordan River during the Baptism of Jesus Christ. The Eparca submerges the cross in the water for three times, holding the candle holder and a sprig of rue in his hands. Finally, a white dove is flown to the fountain in order to reproduce the sacred image of the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus as he left the Jordan.

The cult of the dead, according to the timetable of Byzantine Greek rite, is celebrated at the beginning of spring and is based on the popular belief that for eight days Jesus Christ grants permission to the souls of the dead to leave the underworld and return to the places where they had lived. In some groups boiled wheat is used to commemorate a deceased person, it is blessed by Papas in the home of families who have suffered the loss of someone, and eventually exposed in the Church.

For the Arbëreshë communities, Easter represents the most important religious rite of the year. Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are relived by the believers thanks to the rich Eastern symbolism. The celebrations begin on the last Friday before the Holy Week, when groups of young people headed by the Papas sing to believers waiting for them to give eggs as reward.

During the Sunday before Easter, the Eparchs on the back of a donkey cross the main course of the towns directed to Cathedrals to relive the entrance of Jesus in Jerusalem. Holy Thursday and Holy Friday host the celebrations of Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, while Holy Saturday opens with the prayer for the Resurrection, and at midnight the Papas knock three times on the church door, symbolically blocked by the devil. Then the believers can get in to celebrate the Resurrection. Finally, during the Easter day prayers and songs create a spiritual atmosphere, and traditional costumes can be appreciated when women parade in the streets and squares, distributing red eggs as symbols of the cyclicity of life and immortality.

Within the Arbëreshë communities many traditional customs are still preserved and crafted. They are different from town to town, nevertheless they keep traits of homogeneity. Often communities preserve their traditional customs inside museums, although a few families still keep the original ones with them. Suits are normally being crafted by the same tailors, therefore their specific features can prove mixed and unusually combined with each other also when related to different

²They represent the equivalent of the priests of the Roman rite.

local groups. Furthermore, it seems that until the sixties many Arbëreshë people, both women and men, still used typical costumes daily, but gradually this habit was lost and today they are used only for specific religious and popular events.

Popular culture is mainly formed by songs, dances, and legends. It has always been transmitted orally, and this may have been caused by the widespread illiteracy in the past. Each community used some people as historical memory of the place: they were given the function to preserve and transmit the traditions toward the new generations. As mentioned earlier for the traditional customs, also popular traditions appear to be different among towns and groups. A common popular element is nostalgia for the lost homeland Albania and for the death of Scanderbeg. In fact the most important dance, called Vallje, commemorates Scanderbeg's victory over the Turkish army, which occurred on a Tuesday after Easter. In such a way, the Arbëreshë community remains ideally connected to its epic past. This dance strengthens the cultural identity and the social cohesion.

5.2 Spatial and Urban Variables

In cultural commons, the value chain is strongly influenced by the features of the physical environment where the interactions among the community members occur and develop. The research investigates the urban model of both primitive and contemporary settlements trying to highlight the symbolic places of the Arbëreshë culture. From the urban point of view the most important specific element of identity was, and still is in many communities, the so-called *gjitonia*.

It is a set of houses, usually three or four, which follow curved lines and have no edges; they are shaped in a concentric form with openings facing a small common area, similar to a small square, which is shared by all homes. Finally, within this area there are narrow alleys leading to other *gjitonie*. The families sharing these spaces usually establish deep relationships of fraternity and friendship among them, as well as material and spiritual sharing. For the Arbëreshë community, the *gjitonia* represents an extension of the houses beyond the walls: within it there are stone slabs where people sit to spend their time and do small hand jobs. In fact, the ancient homes had a circular shape, with the oven in the middle of the structure, in order for the residents to cook and to keep their places warm.

On a larger scope, the *rione* is a circular district shaped around a fountain and a small church. Both in *gjitonie* and in *rioni* the circle is the symbolic and functional shape adopted in order for the resident group to share actions and benefits, and at the same time to enjoy the favorable omen related to the reproduction of the celestial sphere. Although these structures could not be built when parts of the community moved to the suburbs, they are still alive in historic centers and hamlets, where most of the houses are still in use, and not only by the elderly but also by young people who preferred to re-populate the places of the ancient Arbëreshë tradition.

5.3 Community Dimensions and Features

The last aspect examined in this section is related to the cohesion degree within the Arbëreshë community itself, and its permeability to the Calabrian people. Attention to ethnic minorities represents a very discussed topic by academics, policymakers, and social groups; its interpretation might combine technical and sentimental views, due to the intensive flows of migrants affecting many coastal areas of the Mediterranean Sea. New perspectives of analysis can be useful from the historical, linguistic, and anthropological perspective, shedding new light upon such a complex and controversial phenomenon.

In the past centuries, the cultural and social condition of the Arbëreshë community in Calabria Region (but, in general, anywhere in Italy) proved quite difficult. At first, the Arbëreshë had been welcomed but very soon cultural differences exploded and they were considered usurpers and, consequently, confined in places located far from the urban centers, in unproductive areas. Then the relationship between the two communities was conflictual. Over time, however, a slow and gradual process of integration has occurred, and despite the many difficulties the Arbëreshë were unanimously acknowledged and accepted as a community, and respected as a nation.

Until a few years ago, the Arbëreshë communities seemed to be not permeable. The reasons may have been manifold: among them the geographical location implying a long distance from other communities hence a high degree of isolation, and the religious identity acting as a glue within each community.

The first eco-system where social relationship developed was the neighborhood, being also considered a powerful educational place and a hub of personal relationships. In fact, daily social relationships with neighbours used to take place within *gjitonia*, the most important dimension of social life after family.

The community lives within these spaces, considered almost as small States, with their own natural laws based on solidarity and mutual respect; neighbours exchange among them both material goods such as food and spiritual goods such as comfort and solidarity. This is emphasised in particular times such as the death of family members. Nowadays the degree of internal cohesion of the Arbëreshë community still remains high, but there is also a high degree of permeability with the Calabrian community, especially among the new generations. The complex relationship between tradition and innovation, typical of each community, has led to flattening the differences and to a wider co-operation, and such a new unity has generated new cultural goods.

6 Discussion and Implications

A definition of cultural commons appears to be quite complex, for a variety of reasons. Certainly, difficulties arise from the need to identify the “culture” galaxy, a delicate combination of different disciplines whose methodological approach and

technical tools contribute to define its features and values. From the anthropological point of view, for instance, culture could refer to the set of social expressions of a defined community, while according to conventional wisdom culture could refer to the practice of the arts in both tangible and intangible forms. From many perspectives culture ends up being identified with the source of a value chain where relationships are quite crucial. According to Donati and Solci (2011), relational goods are produced by relations among individuals or communities, accompanied by defined aspects that may limit their boundaries. Moreover, this particular type of goods postulates the knowledge of other subjects involved in the exchange, and requires an investment of time to build networks, in which monetary investments are not so important.

A relational good is produced in what Bruni and Zamagni (2004) define civil economy, in which the principle of reciprocity appears to be the most specific. At the base of reciprocity there is the action of a subject (*homo reciprocans* or *cooperans*) who carries it out in order for relationships with other subjects to be activated, kept and strengthened, and not merely rewarded (Bruni 2009). Cultural commons could be considered as a set of cultural resources shared by socially cohesive communities, interpreted in the broadest sense: a cultural district, the traditions of an indigenous community, and many other possible examples. The clear and evident aspect is represented by the fact that the resource shared by the community or group increases its value when people adopt it and exchange it; if there were no relational components the cultural commons probably would not exist.

According to De Moor (2013), the theory of commons refers to a different type of approach in which a new view of individuals as members of a community is being shaped. The “rational individuals” who are generally in competition with each other, change their objective-function, generating and getting value (what textbook wisdom would define “utility”) from connections, interactions, collective orientations, and actions.

For *homo cooperans*, the commons represent a new arising phenomenon and source of value, beyond the mere market and state frameworks. The methodological individualism loses strength, in favor of a more collective and shared value hierarchy, and new kinds of goods, services, and actions are crafted. In such a respect, connections among people generate new resources and mutual social solidarity, so we can speak of generating social capital through the enjoyment and exchange of cultural commons. In such a complexity, in which a sharp complication is generated by the quick evolution and transformation of the society and of its dynamics, culture commons can be seen as a relational good produced and enjoyed by the participants in a particular action or in a specific event, or an external reality able to generate value and to satisfy human needs of a relational type (Donati 1994).

7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter aimed at examining the application of cultural commons theoretical features to the identity of a community settled far from its territorial roots and its original network of relationships, and interacting with a different culture. In such a perspective, the evolutionary dynamics affecting this identity are intensively influenced by the many features of cultural commons as a source of shared values both intangible and locally established, within the continuous dilemma between the preservation of cultural identity as it originally was shaped on one hand, and melting some of its features with the local habits, language, values, and beliefs on the other hand. Rather than a struggle, it appears to be an evolving process that we can consider an active cultural commons.

The case of the Arbëreshë community resident in Southern Italy, here examined, can be quite eloquent in offering a living field for analysis, and therefore confirming the complexity of cultural commons as unsteady and dynamic phenomena. The multifold nature of cultural commons, the variety of disciplinary perspectives needed to analyse them, and the multiple layers required for institutional responses to be crafted in order for arising and unpredictable problems and controversies to be effectively faced, make our analysis quite complex. The research carried out cannot reach clear cut conclusions, and further analysis is needed.

The generativity that characterizes the creation of commons can be seen as an opportunity for re-articulation aimed at filling the gaps inadvertently or indifferently opened by a stable and self-reproductive system. Hence what better opportunity, offered by a natural element such as an ethnic and linguistic minority community, can serve as a counterpart to the analysis of cultural commons concepts? The three dimensions of cultural commons allowed this research to achieve interesting results, able to enrich the economic analysis of cultural commons.

Cultural aspects that characterise the Arbëreshë community are related to language, rites, traditional customs, and popular culture. Language, with its several facets, is presently spoken especially among the elderly and adults of the communities, it has been handed down mainly in oral form and the Italian State recognizes and promotes it through a specific act. Rites as Epiphany, Cult of the Dead, Holy Week, and Easter are the expression of a tradition deeply rooted in the community as long as traditions, symbols, aesthetical signs, and styles.

Spatial and urban structures are anchored to two fundamental pillars belonging to the Arbëreshë community *gjitonia* and *rione*, that are not only considered as urban elements but as extensions of the houses beyond the walls where social relationships with neighbours take place, animated by feelings of solidarity and mutual respect. Finally, within communities is present a high degree of internal cohesion, nevertheless external relationships are gradually expanding, proving encouraging signals of integration and cohabitation with other communities, allowing both sides to accumulate an intensive shared social capital through time. The Arbëreshë community, as this research highlights, generates shared value from its rich, complex, and lively identity, that can be considered a unique cultural

commons. In such a respect, this research work should be considered the preliminary step for further research and investigation, within a multi-disciplinary approach.

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