

CALL TO SUPPORT FROM PROFESSORS, RESEARCHERS, SCHOLARS AND FROM CIVIL SOCIETY FOR THE MAINTAINANCE OF THE SELF-MANAGEMENT OF THE COMMON IN MONDEGGI

About three years ago a large number of scholars of various Italian universities and research centers voiced a strong opposition to the selling of the Mondeggi Farm, a publicly owned estate of 200 hectares. During the previous year a large local community (youths, families, retired people, agronomists, professionals, university professors, etc.) had begun to transform the abandoned estate, sinking in debts accumulated in years of bad management by local institutions, into a “common good,” available and open to the local community. Today—once again—we feel the need to raise our voice because, even though the local community who is looking after Mondeggi and exploring organizational and agricultural alternatives there is expanding the public administration continues to attempt to sell the lot, ignoring what is happening on the ground and running away from any engagement which accepts and sustain the grass-root project that is mobilizing so much local energy.

After having tried to sell the farm through an auction, in vain, and having sold some of the land to cover previous expenses and interests on their debts, the Metropolitan City of Florence sold all of the property of the society that used to run the farm and used public funds to repay part of its debt. After this the Metropolitan City has recently decided to put together all the land, the buildings, and even a villa of historical value to attempt once again to sell to a private. They keep referring to the enormous debt that they have accumulated in decades of agro-industrial management and abandonment—one and a half million euro—to continue with the logic of alienation and erase in one brush an alternative form of management that is bearing fruits—both physical and metaphorical. This debt is the result of years of myopic administration that followed a failing agronomic politics with production models that alienated the properties, the competencies and the technics of local farmers and artisans paving the way for a industrial model that causes pollution, unemployment and the abandonment of territories.

It is worth stressing that the public property is supposed to promote the common interest: selling Mondeggi it means negating forever the opportunity of allowing a process of constitutions, recovery, use, and enjoyment of a common good that citizens have activated and self-managed in these years with great success, without any support from institutions and public funds. Since 2014, to resist the selling, in Mondeggi a variegated inclusive community activated itself to oversee, protect, and maintain the buildings and the lands. This community—which organizes itself with assemblies and horizontal decision-making—has shown positive and innovative characteristics and skills that include strictly agricultural aspects as well as social and pedagogical ones such as:

- Collaboration with various departments of Italian and foreign universities (Florence, Reggio Emilia, Rome, Trento, Oxford, Barcelona, etc.) for research projects, theses and training sessions conducted by various university professors;
- Organization of in-depth seminars, technical workshops and conferences on agro-ecological knowledge and agronomic techniques that saw the presence of national and international high profile personalities;

- Establishment of the farm as an interface between the urban and rural world, which has triggered free exchange of knowledge and skills, in particular the Farmer School in which professors, agronomists, experts and peasants hold free lessons and workshops;
- Involvement in the field of education with several classes and elementary and middle school visits to the farm to participate in training courses;
- Central role of the farm in promoting recreational and social relationships that are the indispensable basis for a shared identity and the premise for strengthening mutually supportive and cooperative dynamics that are necessary for the neo-rooting of peasant communities ;
- Experimenting with forms of direct democracy through the adoption of a consensual decision based on principles of openness, inclusiveness and sharing;
- Recovery and revitalization of about 80 hectares of the 180 total farms, with a variety of activities from fruit trees, vegetables, aromatic plants and saffron to management of olive and vineyards, goat and goat breeding, laying hens, beekeeping, herbal productions, brewing that revisit and revive the agro-ecological practices of the traditional agricultural model;
- Realization of self-managed maintenance work for shared management of the housing stock;
- Involvement of more than 300 people in the area involved in the preservation of the farm as a common good, with self-management projects of part of the olive grove and shared gardens (Mo.T.A. project);
- Recovery of local varieties of trees, plants and grains, and organization of seeds exchange;
- Pragmatic search for communication with local institutions that led to the development of a "Declaration of Civic Use of the Common Good" with which the movement became self-contained in the community and envisaged possible forms of legal recognition of the experience of self-management.

During these years of custody, the local community has gathered around the committee's activities and has become aware of itself self. In the wake of the positive experiences of Naples (former Asilo Filangieri) and Palermo (Complesso di Montevergini), which saw the public body recognizing their self-management of a common good, a "Civic Declaration of a Common good " was redacted with which the community of Mondeggi is constituted as a collective subject able to preserve and make Mondeggi live through a series of clear and shared rules.

Nonetheless, the Metropolitan City believes it has to end this "illegal" and "scandalous" creation of a common good that, in other contexts, was not only legally recognized (eg papers on the management of common goods, public spaces, forms of exchange of services, etc.), but it was also supported administratively and economically because it was recognized as a beneficial effect on strengthening a social fabric that is increasingly rarefied and fragmented. Faced with the renewed will of the community of Mondeggi to open a dialogue and see the social utility of its work recognized, the Metropolitan City justifies the intention to alienate the entire property as "... it would be better to allow the Villa complex of Mondeggi and its pertinences to fulfill the mission of 'promotion of multifunctional rurality', as per the urban requirements of the Municipality of Bagno a Ripoli. The 'promotion of multifunctional rurality' is already in place, as well as optimal practices

of sustainable peasant agriculture and a short products chain that have been able to engage the local community and increase the sense of belonging and participation.

If the selling of Mondeggi was to take place it would probably be expected that a successful financial recovery through self-management would be replaced by financial company that would reinforce the phenomenon of gentrification and centralization of land ownership already in place in Italy for decades, with the disappearance of nearly two million small farms only in the last thirty years, with alienating effect on local society.

Mondeggi represents a successful experiment of managing a good according to community logic—against rampant individualism—with solidarity—against the omnipotent competition—and self-governing, instead of the ubiquitous hierarchy. For this reason, Mondeggi's experience is at the same time an important part of the urgent global reflection on the limits of agro-industrial development and a real and working alternative. The intentional activation of a common good allows a practical and responsible answer to sustained ecological crises, unemployment, gradual decline in food quality, and fragmentation of the rural social fabric. We do not ask for support only for those who share our principles but also those who believe in the importance of unexplored roads, nurtured by participation from the bottom as a premise for the dissemination of power, opportunities, cultural models for a sustainable future, and solidarity, which today appears to be utopian in Tuscany while in other contexts has become common practice.

All this considered, we ask the Metropolitan City:

- Not to publish the notice of sale;
- To build a path to recognition and dialogue with the public and social stakeholders interested in consolidating the project, already initiated by the Community of Mondeggi so as to define and formalize the innovative forms of social management and sharing developed in the farm of Mondeggi starting from the " Declaration of civic management of a common good."
- To outline a project of recovery and enhancement within the framework of civic management of Mondeggi as it has already been done in other contexts, such as Naples or Palermo.