

How an art project empowered a Sardinian village

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This research was conducted by **Claudia Sardu and three other people** at the **University of Cagliari, Italy**.

Summary

This paper tells the story of how a community arts project in 1979 galvanised the inhabitants of a village in Sardinia, leaving them empowered to develop together as a coherent unit, rather than as an assembly of individuals. The paper identified a variety of outcomes resulting from the arts project, all of which indicate how the community was strengthened through their encounter with it.

The mountain village of Ulassai in Sardinia is home to 1,600 people

The Italian artist Maria Lai devised a performance that involved the whole village tying their houses together with ribbon in order to tell the story of a local legend. The idea of the performance aroused a lot of suspicion and opposition from local leaders and some villagers. Despite this, a small group of local people were enthusiastic, and acted as advocates and leaders for the project. It eventually succeeded thanks to the way the artist and community worked together.

‘Even today, its effect is pronounced in the lives of community members’

There was a range of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes from the performance. For the project to work Maria Lai needed people to co-operate with their neighbours, which connected them together. The years following the art performance saw a revival in a traditional textiles co-operative, the

restoration of a building into a community space, and co-ordinated protests about outside religious instructions placed on the village. The longer-term outcomes of the project (and its subsequent mobilising of the community) led to the development of a regional park and a wind farm.

‘This community experience illustrates the positive role arts can play in community development’

The paper looked at how the art performance might help with health promotion, which frequently relies on community empowerment and citizen participation to function effectively. The dynamics of this project (instigated but not dictated by an external presence, community-led etc.) are seen to exemplify a potentially fruitful approach for health promotion.

Keywords

performance Italy community health

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