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## ARTICLE

# Sketching local development: Graphic methods at the intersection of democratic and representational experimentalism

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## Abstract

Recent debates on 'graphic' geographies and the reinterpretation of the notion of 'democratic experimentalism' in local development suggest the rise of a new 'representational experimentalism' that explores graphic methods for place-based approaches. Graphic methods of research can assist geographers in conducting and presenting the results of place-based research to wider audiences. Graphic products of research function as tools for storytelling and spatial planning. They can also provide intersubjective dialogue between researchers, local communities, and local governments to create more inclusive place-based narratives. In this paper, we present a verbo-visual manifesto and an illustrated fieldwork journal as two empirical examples of possible ways to engage with graphic methods and realise the potential graphic outputs of research. These graphic products are the result of a collaboration between geographers, students in Local Development and Sustainable Territorial Development (at the University of Padua), two professional illustrators, and a group of local stakeholders; they used scribing and observational drawing as place-based graphic methods during a residential seminar at the Po Delta, in north-eastern Italy. This paper contributes to both recent debates on creative methods in local development and the study of the use graphic and visual methods in geography. It proposes graphic methods as a way for embracing place-based approaches to local development in peripheral, fragile, and contested areas, making hidden voices visible.

## KEYWORDS

creative methods, democratic experimentalism, graphic geography, local development, place-based approach, Po delta

## 1 | PRELUDE: SKETCHING LOCAL DEVELOPMENT?

In Figure 1a, students, local stakeholders, illustrators, and geographers are drawn using scribing to sketch a 'manifesto' for the local development of a peripheral area in north-eastern Italy during a seminar in 2017 (Bertocin et al., 2021). In Figure 1b,c, this same manifesto is the chosen cover image of the official document presenting the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI), an example of democratic experimentalism and place-based participatory planning. The decision of the coordinators of the participatory process activated by the SNAI to use the manifesto during their meeting demonstrates the exchange between the

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graphic outputs of geographical research, education, and local development strategies. In this paper, we explore the potentialities of graphic methods for developing geographical research, education, and place-based local planning strategies.

## 2 | INTRODUCTION: GRAPHIC GEOGRAPHY MEETS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

The Po Delta is a territory in north-eastern Italy that is currently developing strategies for dealing with its local development issues, making it a perfect laboratory in which to experiment with graphic place-based methodologies. The region includes seven municipalities and oversees the eastern portion of the Po Plain, a section of the Adriatic coast that is crossed by the



**FIGURE 1** (a) Sketching students while they work in groups on the ‘Manifesto for the Inner Area Strategy in the Po Delta’ during a residential seminar. Illustration by Marina Girardi. (b) Fabrizio Barca holds the manifesto during an official meeting (c) of the coordinators of the National Strategy for inner areas (Italy).

terminal stretches of the Adige and Po rivers. It exists within a fragile, constantly evolving geographical context; the variability of the sediment supply, its distribution due to sea currents, and changes in the wind produce a mobile, unstable geographical context (Figure 2). Anthropogenic activities during the 20th century exacerbated this fragility (Bertoncin, 2004). Starting from a national experimentation in place-based development (SNAI), this paper examines the use of graphic practices as place-based and context-aware methods for conducting research, communicating data, and designing local development strategies. The paper does this via two empirical examples, the aforementioned ‘Manifesto for the Inner Area Strategy in the Po Delta’, and the illustrated fieldwork journal entitled ‘Delta Po. A fieldwork journal’ (Bertoncin et al., 2019).

In the following paragraphs, we aim to show how graphic methods help to: experiment with ‘a new form of seeing the world’ (Kuschnir, 2016, pp. 115–16); contribute to a deeper understanding of spatial contexts, visualising also more abstract spatial aspects (temporality, place-based emotions, social relationships) (p. 121); provide visual data that stimulate the sharing of research results with local communities (pp. 127–8); and promote a deeper conversation between geographical research, pedagogy, and place-based policies (Figure 1).

Within the field of visual geographies, recent works have focused on the possibility of using visual methods to research the ‘ineffable’ (Jacobs, 2016), discuss researchers’ positionality while conducting visual participatory research (Kinson, 2016), and reframe our conceptualisation of place through ‘more-than visual methods’ (Kelly, 2021). Researchers have also discussed the potentialities and limits of some visual methods, such as participatory videos, ‘to disrupt hegemonic gazes and to generate alternative ways of seeing and knowing’ (Kinson, 2016, p. 497). This paper proposes a ‘graphic’ angle to continue geographers’ critical engagements with visual ethnographies (Lobo & Kindo, 2021); their attempts to adapt visual methods to context-based researches (Young & Barrett, 2001); and their experiments to find creative solutions to represent places (Barnes, 2018). It does so by connecting with recent ‘geo/graphic thinking’ and uses the word ‘graphic’ referring with Barnes to a ‘creative utilisation of image and/or text’ (Barnes, 2012, p. 70). This is also in line with an emerging tradition that considers ‘drawing an engaged, situated form of knowing which offers the possibilities of new, maybe renewed, senses of place, world and self’ (Wylie &

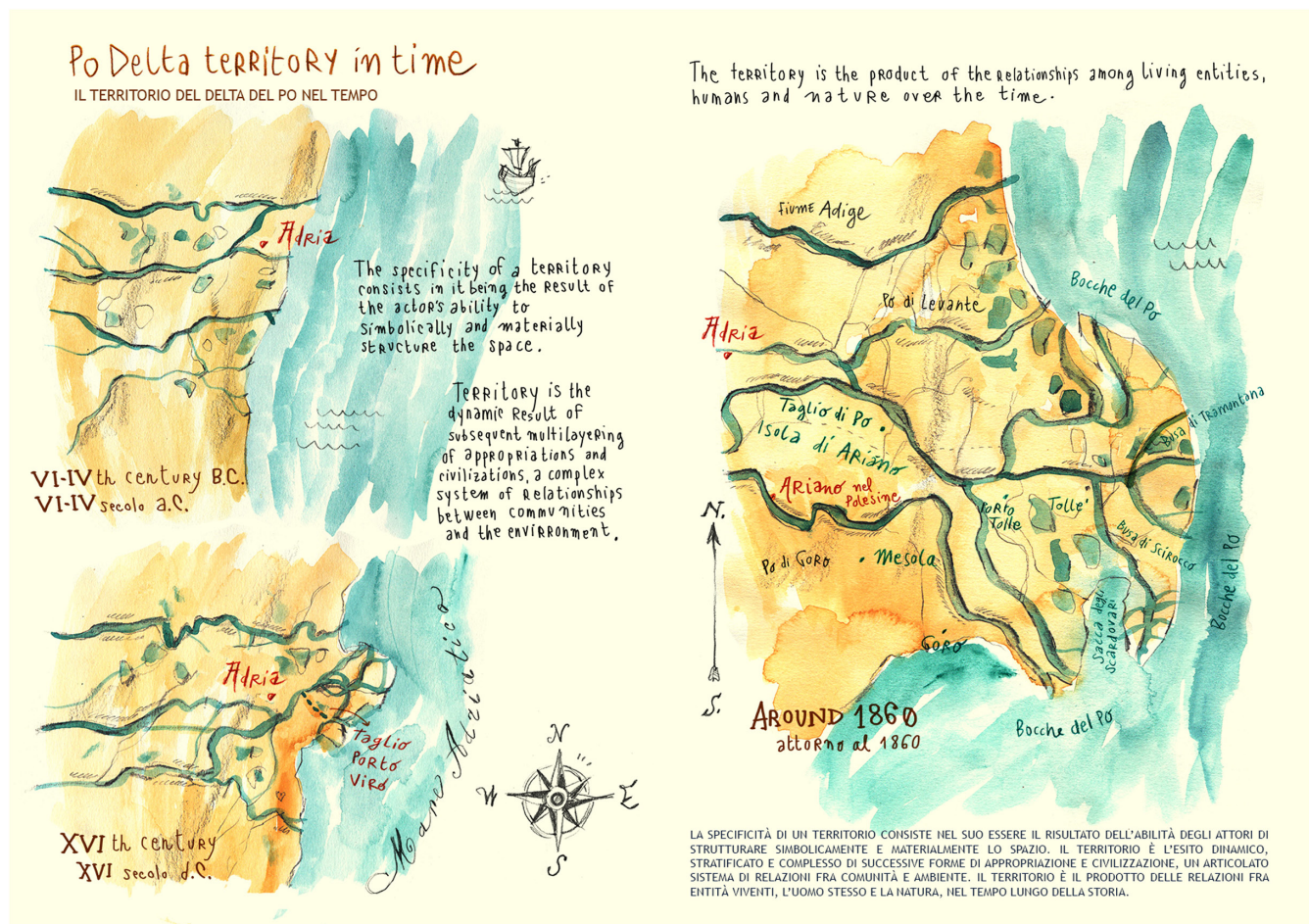


FIGURE 2 The Po Delta territory in time. Illustration: Marina Girardi.

Webster, 2019, p. 33). Studies in ‘graphic anthropology’ by Tim Ingold (2011) and on the benefits of ‘ethnographic drawing’ for anthropological fieldwork (Kuschnir, 2016) connect with recent works by artist-geographers that engage with ‘drawing as a way to take part in the unfolding of the world’ (Brice, 2018) and pave the way for the concept of ‘graphic geography’ (Bertoncin et al., 2021), which combines images and texts to co-produce and disseminate local knowledge (Wylie & Webster, 2019, p. 39).

In terms of research ethics, if participatory approaches try to challenge the tendency of researchers to take from communities without giving back in meaningful ways (Kindon & Elwood, 2009, p. 20), then the products of graphic methods are a means for ‘envisioning a process of shared knowledge production’ (Kindon & Elwood, 2009, p. 20). Graphic methods help enhance communities’ sense of place and political representation by making their knowledge and expertise visible. While traditional representational tools in the Po Delta have generally been produced by institutional actors (the region, the Municipality, the Po Delta Park) through top-down initiatives, graphic representations seem to do a better job for accommodating the voices of local actors through a ‘geoGraphic research process’ (Peterle, 2021).

Like other visual and creative methods, graphic methods have the ability ‘to constitute new and engaged “publics”’ (Hawkins, 2015, p. 248) and to attract institutional attention. In fact, this paper participates in the debate regarding the diverse methods for amplifying research participants’ voices in scholarly work (Stevenson & Holloway, 2017, pp. 90–91). It starts with a focus on democratic experimentalism, which is a place-based, context-sensitive, and deliberative process of government that decentralises power to enable actors to utilise their local knowledge (Dorf & Sabel, 1998). It then proposes the notion of ‘representational experimentalism’ through the empirical example of an experimentation in the Po Delta. Finally, it discusses the efficacy of graphic products through the comments by five local stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>

### 3 | DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENTALISM IN PERIPHERAL, FRAGILE, AND CONTESTED AREAS: A PLACE-BASED STRATEGY FOR THE PO DELTA (ITALY)

#### 3.1 | Defining democratic experimentalism

The place-based approach we propose is deliberative and rooted in what is called democratic experimentalism (Forester, 1999), which has a long tradition in the United States that began with John Dewey’s pragmatism (Sabel, 2012). According to Dorf and Sabel, democratic experimentalism is

A new form of government ... in which power is decentralised to enable citizens and other actors to utilise their local knowledge to fit solutions to their individual circumstances, but in which regional and national coordinating bodies require actors to share their knowledge with others facing similar problems.

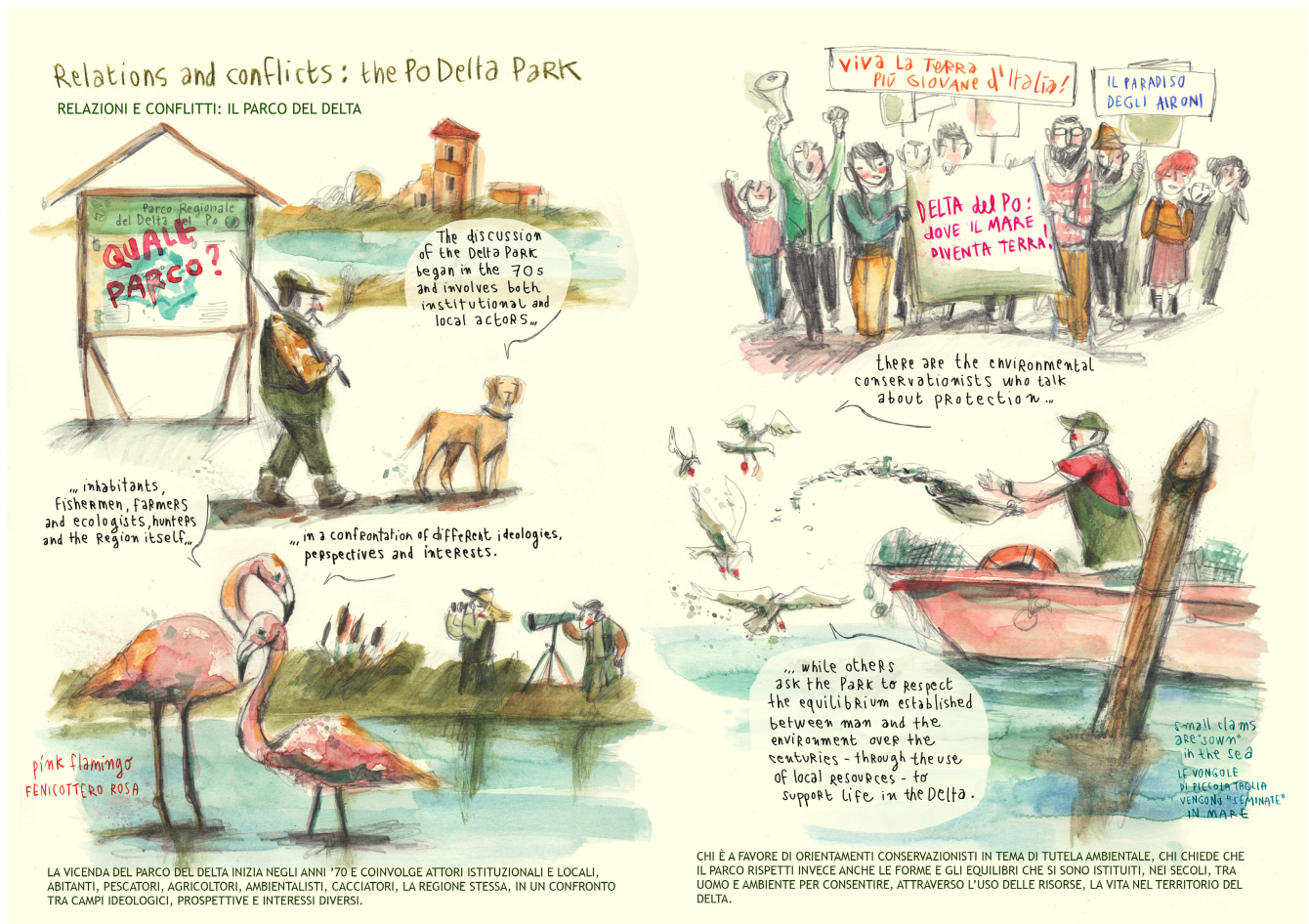
(1998, p. 267)

Today, there is a tendency to interpret democratic experimentalism ‘as a response to specific social conditions of fluidity and diversity’ (Sabel & Simon, 2017, p. 23), emphasising collaboration and deliberation. Democratic experimentalism requires the use of imagination and is always looking for innovative methods to educate young generations, involve weak actors, facilitate the emergence of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966), and share and disseminate local knowledge. If development is done ‘not only through physical intervention but also through imaginaries’ (Hussain, 2021, pp. 127–8), representational experimentalism works through graphic methods on these imaginaries to plan local change.

#### 3.2 | Local development issues in the Po Delta: A fragile region between land and water

Place-based approaches to local development consider both the sense of community and the sense of place as public goods (Barca et al., 2012, p. 147) that stimulate local communities’ awareness of the cultural and social values embedded in the landscape. Indeed, ‘empowering communities to participate and influence decision-making processes that ultimately affect their lives is critical’ (Johnson & Castleden, 2011, p. 354).

This paper uses the Po Delta region as an empirical example because it is one of the pilot areas for the SNAI, a place-based programme created by the Italian government that is devoted to marginalised geographical areas. Here, both local and global processes require the rethinking of regional development in the area (Barca et al., 2012; Pike et al., 2017; Figure 3). For example, the definitive closure of the hydroelectric power plant in Porto Tolle in 2015 requires the reimagining of its footprint



**FIGURE 3** Relations and conflicts: The Po Delta park. *Illustration:* Marina Girardi.

of around 117 hectares and finding a reconversion plan that redraws economic and environmental assets; furthermore, the Po Delta was recognised as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MaB) programme in 2015. The Po Delta Park, which despite being created in 1997 has an executive plan that began only in 2012, requires constant mediation to find a balance between the needs of human and non-human actors (Kuus, 2019). Finally, the effects of global climate change have a local impact: this requires rethinking the development of the area despite (or due to) its environmental, hydrological, and geomorphological fragility. A liminal region like the Po Delta, at the intersection of land and water, 'assumes ever greater significance as a site and object of decision-making in planning and environmental governance' in a time of rapid climate change (Leyshon, 2018, p. 151).

### 3.3 | The place-based approach of the SNAI: New paths for political representation in the Po Delta

First conceptualised in 2012, the SNAI was officially adopted in 2014 as part of the Operational Plans adopted by Italian regions within the framework of the Community Cohesion Policy, particularly of the 2014–2020 programming cycle and the Partnership Agreement for the Use of European Funds signed by Italy (Perelli, 2020). In 2016, 65 project areas were identified. These areas include 981 municipalities, 16% of the national territory, and a combined population of approximately 1.9 million inhabitants (Cotella & Vitale Brovarone, 2020). The Agency for Territorial Cohesion of the Italian Government,<sup>2</sup> which is responsible for promoting the SNAI, defines 'inner areas' as those characterised by particularly strong obstacles in terms of a full inclusion of local communities in national growth paths.

The place-based approach of the SNAI integrates two movements: one from below, which values the role of local communities, their multiple forms of embedded and situated knowledge, and the most proactive actors among them (such as the

Consorzio di Bonifica, i.e., the land reclamation authority in the region), and one from above, through which the state monitors the power dynamics of the local ruling classes, which could interfere with the processes of change. The SNAI offers a method for combining the roles of the endogenous (local) and exogenous (external) competencies to promote local and regional growth (Pike et al., 2017, p. 50).

It is built on five pillars. First is the dialectic between central and local, that is, the previously described relationship between movements (and changes) from above and from below. Second is the orientation toward ordinary and permanent, as opposed to extraordinary, interventions. Third is an inclination toward listening to underrepresented local voices and a strong emphasis on the proactive role of local stakeholders. Fourth is the activation of a participatory process that combines the varied knowledge of both inhabitants and experts in local development strategies. Fifth is a propensity for experimentation. The SNAI considers local communities to be bearers of a place consciousness. However, this local awareness still requires innovative ways of political representation.

## 4 | REPRESENTATIONAL EXPERIMENTALISM: GRAPHIC METHODS FOR PLACE-BASED NARRATIVES

### 4.1 | Graphic representation against political marginalisation: Sketching the Po Delta

Inspired by democratic experimentalism, representational experimentalism is based on a knowledge production that is both horizontal, meaning activated by a dialogue between the human and non-human actors in the region (Latour, 2004), and vertical, meaning stimulated by external voices (in our case, geographers, illustrators, and students from other geographical areas). Representational experimentalism is in line with the place-based approach of the SNAI because it is context-aware and constantly informed by local stakeholders' expertise.

Ever since the Venetian Republic 'invented' the modern Delta with the Taglio di Porto Viro (1599–1604), the need to accurately represent such a mobile territory and the inherent difficulty in doing so, given its alternating waters and lands, has generated a prolific cartographic and graphic representation history in the region. The river diversion implemented by the Venetians in 1604 redirected the main branch of the Po River southward toward the Sacca di Goro, a sea area with shallow waters. Since then, the Delta has advanced 7 km into the sea every 100 years. The cartographers of the Serenissima Republic had to face two great difficulties: the speed of the morphological transformations and the horizontality of the region, where differences of even 30 cm determined whether an area was at risk of flooding. As the huge number of maps and drawings of the Po Delta produced between the 17th and 18th centuries prove, the need for visual control was essential to manage the territory and the enormous mass of spatial information (Bertoncin, 2004).

Recently, graphic artists from the Po Delta have also tried to reconfigure the spatial representations of the area through the combined use of images and words. Comics author Eliana Albertini devoted her graphic novel *Malibù* (2019) to the thematisation of the social, relational, and psychological effects of peripheralisation in the region. As *Malibù* shows, these graphic narratives represent alternative images that make fragile areas and their often-hidden spaces visible (Antona, 2019; Jacobs, 2016, p. 483). If the scale of local development depends 'also on subjective perceptions of local actors' (Garofoli, 2009, p. 226), the use of place-based graphic narratives may help to bring the 'abstract (intangible) or visceral (tangible but invisible) feelings' of local inhabitants to the fore, even imagining the voices of those 'who cannot talk' (Jacobs, 2016, p. 485) like non-human actors (Figure 4).

### 4.2 | Experimenting with place-based graphic methods

Our representational experimentalism in the Po Delta started through a collaboration with two illustrators, who were hired as experts in graphic methods. We will focus on two graphic products of a residential seminar that took place in November 2017, involving a group of geographers, almost 20 local stakeholders, and 60 international students (with an average age of 21 years) studying Local Development and Sustainable Territorial Development. Both of these graphic research products combine images and words to compose a place-based narrative: the first is a verbo-visual manifesto designed in collaboration with Rocco Lombardi and Marina Girardi, and the second is an illustrated fieldwork journal drawn by Marina Girardi and co-written by Marina Bertoncin, Daria Quatrada, Sara Luchetta, and Giada Peterle. The latter was developed to keep a tangible trace of the graphic methods adopted during the seminar, to educate future students on fieldwork for local development,

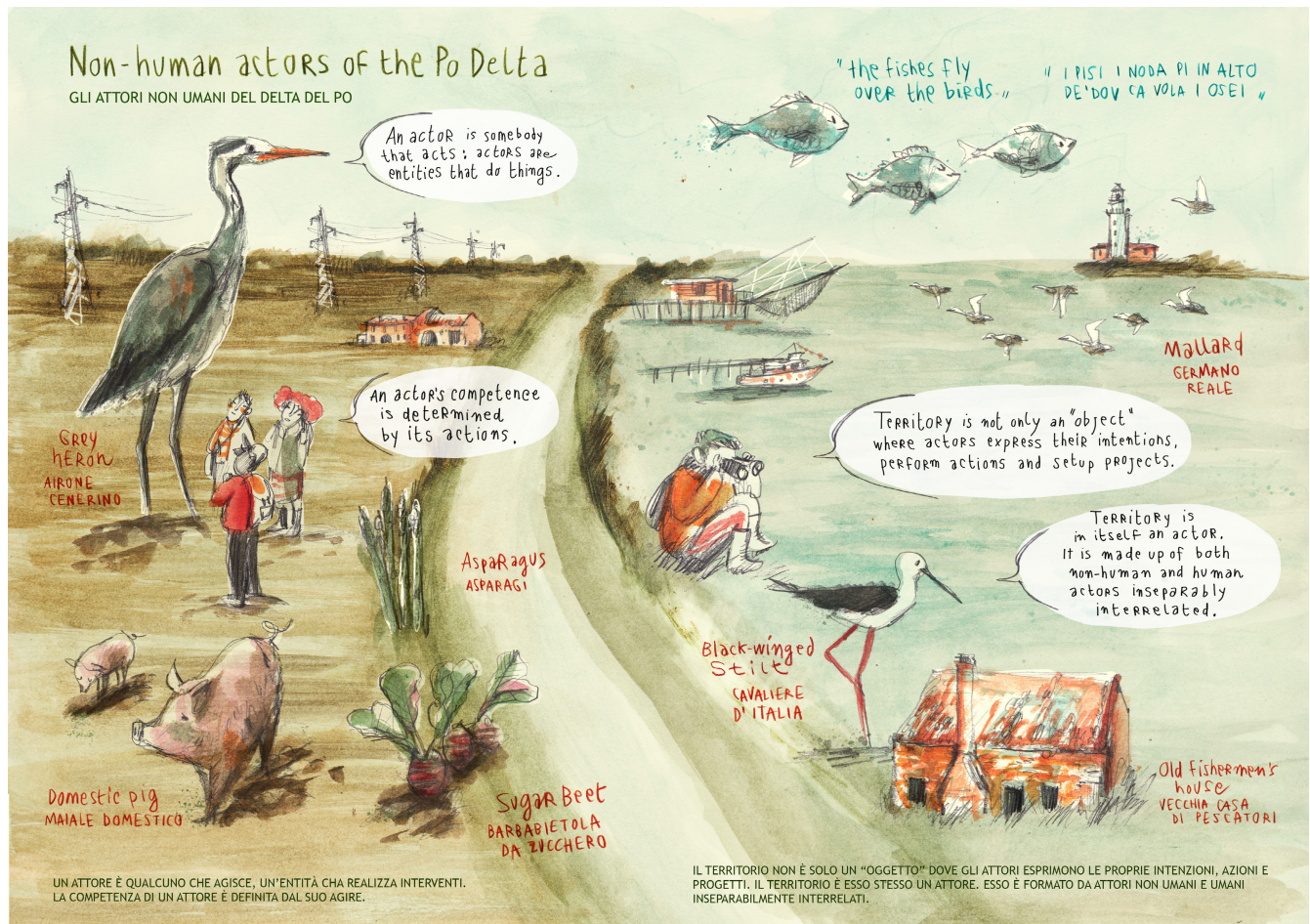


FIGURE 4 Non-human actors of the Po Delta. Illustration: Marina Girardi.

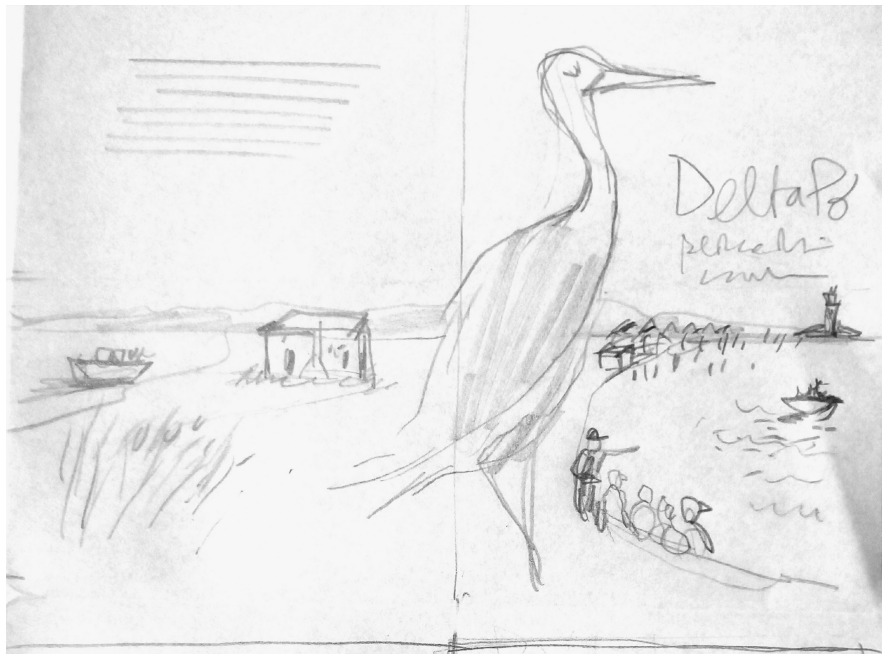
and to disseminate the results of our research. It is called a 'fieldwork journal' because it re-presents many of the sketches, photographs, and written notes that the geographers, students, and illustrators collected in their personal journals during fieldwork. Due to the international backgrounds of the students who participated in the seminar, the manifesto is in English while the illustrated journal is in English and Italian.

### 4.3 | The illustrated fieldwork journal

The illustrated fieldwork journal is the result of a lively dialogue between a group of geographers and an illustrator that began after the residential seminar in 2017 and lasted almost a year. During this time, regular meetings were organised with Girardi in order to reflect on the fieldwork activities, share our visions of the area, and build a draft layout of the journal. We collected visual materials (maps, photographs, and drawings by Girardi) and organised them around keywords that became the titles of the journal's sections; once we had agreed on a layout, Girardi sketched the first verbo-visual illustrations which would be discussed in later meetings.

Throughout the process of sketching the manifesto and the fieldwork journal, illustrators worked as co-producers of knowledge. In fact, there were also moments in which the geographers and illustrators disagreed: as Figure 5 shows, Girardi was keener to emphasise the natural elements of the Po Delta landscape on the book cover while the geographers wanted to highlight the students' observational gazes. The final version, where human and non-human visual elements co-exist, is a mediation between the two visions (Figure 6).

The core section of the illustrated fieldwork journal is a series of 11 double-page watercolour illustrations, with small balloons and captions included to integrate fieldwork notes, excerpts from interviews, key words, and local expressions that



**FIGURE 5** The first draft of the book cover with a heron as a protagonist of the Po Delta's landscape. *Illustration:* Marina Girardi.



**FIGURE 6** The final book cover with a student taking verbo-visual notes on his sketchbook during fieldwork activities at the Po Delta. *Illustration:* Marina Girardi.



were collected during the residential seminar. The illustrations represent both the Po Delta and the place-based approach, graphic methods, and exercises adopted during the seminar. These included observational drawing sessions, where students were scattered throughout the Po Delta landscape to register the interaction between human and non-human actors, through an immersive and embodied perspective; and also collective mapping exercises, aimed at bringing the students' verbo-visual notes together, discussing their different collections of qualitative data and summarising them into a singular verbo-visualisation. In fact, many illustrations in the journal were inspired by fieldwork activities: see the student's sketchbook in Figure 7, the observational drawing exercises in Figures 6 and 8, and the group activities in Figure 1a.

After an illustrated map of the Po Delta, the first double-page spread, 'The Po Delta in Time' (Figure 2), shows the territory as the dynamic result of the relationships between communities and the environment. Then, two illustrations devoted to 'Non-human Actors of the Po Delta' (Figure 4) and 'Human Actors of the Po Delta' present our encounters with representatives of institutions, economic sectors, civil society, and the citizens of the Po Delta (Figure 8).

Four double-page spreads are then devoted to 'Land' and 'Water Spaces'. The illustrations show Ca' Vendramin (an ex-water pump plant now hosting the Regional Museum of Land Reclamation), Ca' Tiepolo (the headquarters of the town hall), the Sacca degli Scardovari and the Fishermen Cooperatives Consortium, which is particularly relevant in a territory where mollusc farming is the main economic activity (Figure 9), and Boccasette (a case study showing the hydraulic evolution of the delta). 'Relations and Conflicts' are illustrated through the examples of the Polesine Camerini thermoelectric power plant and the Po Delta Park. 'Group Collaboration for Sustainable Territorial Development' (Figure 1a) shows students working in groups to draw a common vision with the collected data. Finally, Figure 10 shows the students presenting the results of their fieldwork activities to the local community.

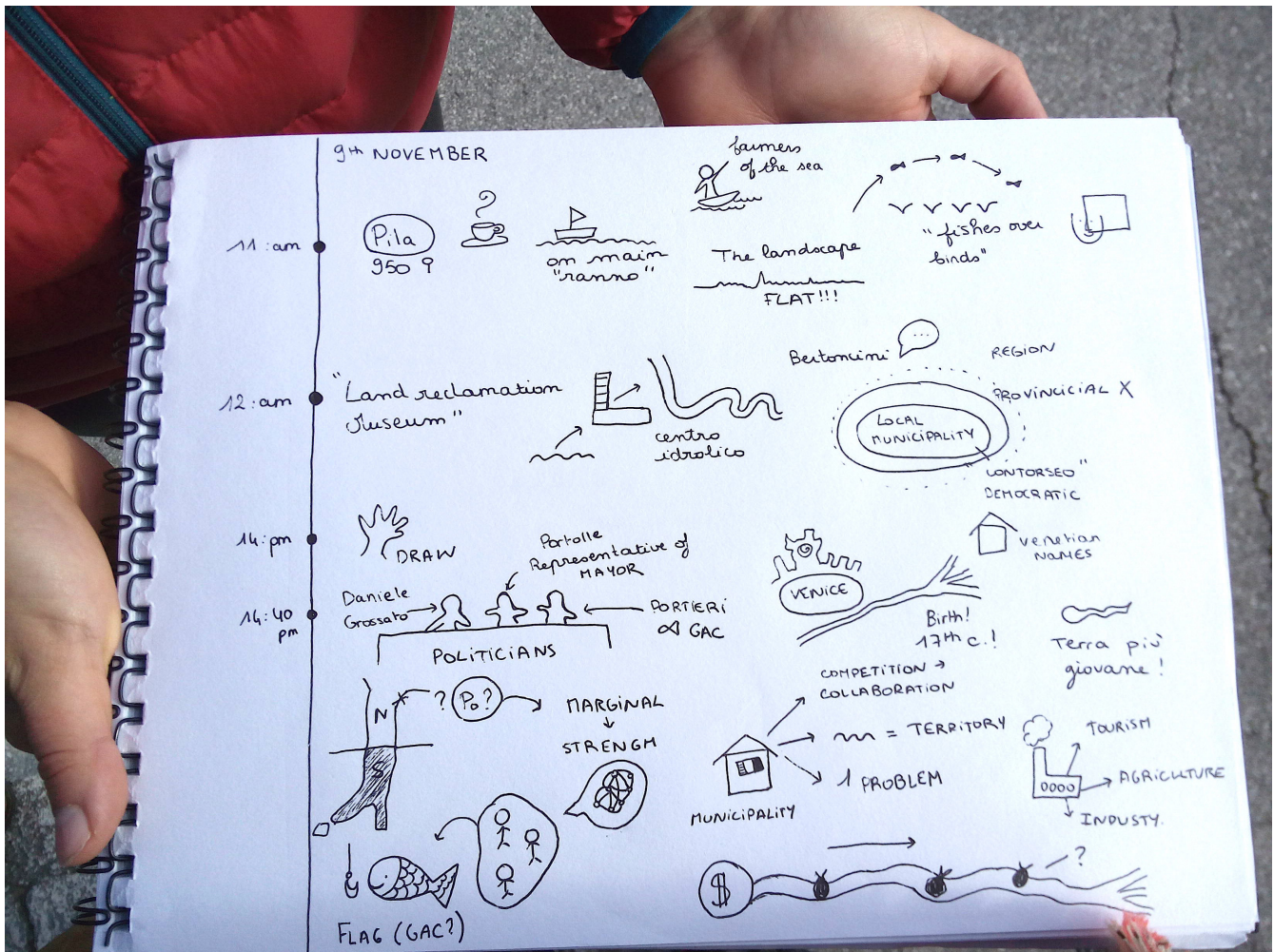


FIGURE 7 A student shows her sketchbook with some graphic fieldwork notes.

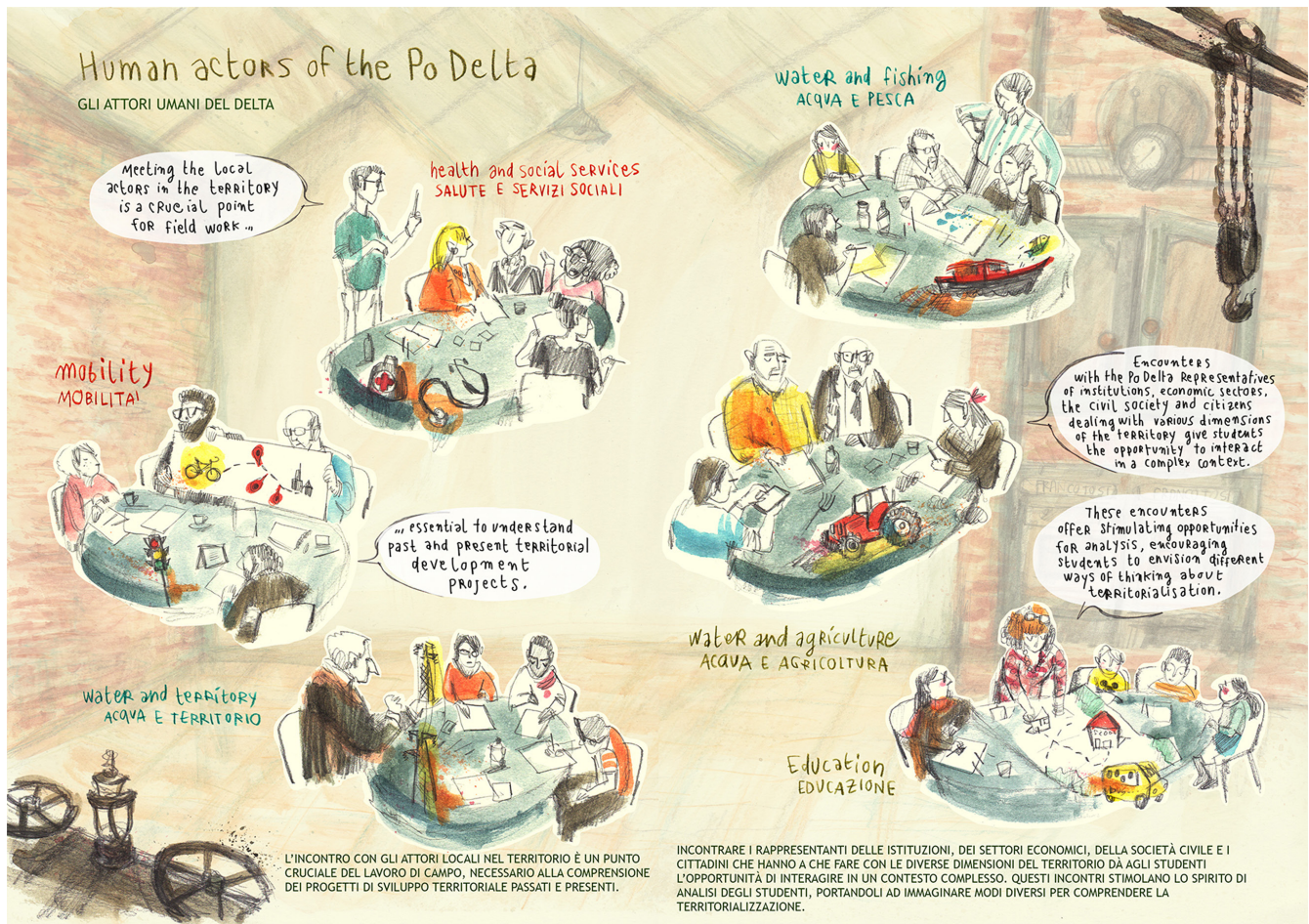


FIGURE 8 Human actors of the Po Delta during the thematic 'listening tables'. Illustration: Marina Girardi.

#### 4.4 | Scribing (for) local development

The manifesto was realised through scribing, a verbo-visual facilitation technique that helps to graphically record discourse as it unfolds through a complex combination of images, words, drawings, and longer texts (Sibbet, 1981). Even if developed outside of academia, scribing represents an opportunity for innovative thinking in 'graphic geography' (Bertoncin et al., 2021), that is, for thinking 'geo/graphically' through a combination of images and texts. Through scribing, the two inform each other, creating new assemblages of meaning while research unfolds (Barnes, 2012). We used scribing as a graphic method to facilitate interpersonal and data communication among audiences of different ages, and linguistic and geographic origins.

The manifesto was drawn up to create a unique vision that brought together the work done by all of the thematic groups. It is organised into six vertical columns that represent the six groups, which were inspired by the thematic 'round tables' hosted by the SNAI: they were called 'listening tables' in Italian to emphasise their role in listening and collecting local stakeholders' voices. These round tables took place in 2016 and were inclusive thematic workshops organised by the SNAI promoters to involve both public and private citizens discussing local development issues, including water and fishing (Round Table 1), water and agriculture (Round Table 2), water and territory (Round Table 3), water defence and adaptability (Round Table 4), and essential services, including education, health, and mobility services (Round Table 5). For our laboratory, the themes were partially reformulated to include three groups on water and agriculture, fishing, and territory and three on mobility, education, and health and social services (Figure 8). The manifesto was realised through a dialogue between representatives of the six working groups and the two illustrators, both Lombardi and Girardi, with the constant mediation of the geographers. It presents testimonies of local stakeholders' voices as collected by students during the round tables: as Figure 8 shows, these were organised with the goal of listening to local voices. Therefore, stakeholders are often illustrated standing, while students are taking verbo-visual notes on their journals. In this case, scribing was used to collect qualitative data.



**FIGURE 9** Water spaces: The Sacca degli Scardovari. *Illustration:* Marina Girardi.

The graphic product of the manifesto represents a mediation between the concerns regarding local development in the area presented by the local stakeholders; the outcomes of students' reflections on the data collected; the aesthetic choices made by the illustrators; and the geographers' goal of combining scientific content and an accessible verbo-visual form. The manifesto unfolded while the activities took place, meaning that it was ready to be presented to local stakeholders on the final day of the seminar. In this case, scribing functioned as a method for both eliciting data and facilitating the dissemination of the students' analyses. As shown in Figure 10, the 20 stakeholders who took part in the round tables were invited to participate in an open event where students discussed the results of the residential seminar using the manifesto as a storytelling device. On that occasion, the manifesto hung next to one realised by primary school children (Figure 11), creating a further connection between the graphic products of the research and local voices. The manifesto stimulated questions and emotional reactions because the local participants could recognise themselves in its graphic representation.

While graphic methods helped students' creative spatial thinking to unfold, the manifesto allowed us to share our reflections with local stakeholders, turning students' analyses into a creative document in the hands of local planners. Graphic outputs further enhanced local stakeholders' individual voices through the combined use of words and illustrations.

## 5 | CIRCULATING GRAPHIC NARRATIVES: SOME FEEDBACK FROM THE PO DELTA

In spring 2020, we sent a short online form to five key actors in the Po Delta to collect feedback on the graphic research outputs from the perspective of local stakeholders. These five were chosen because they actively participated in the residential seminar and are involved in at least one of the five principal areas of the interventions of the SNAI. The respondents were a primary school teacher (R1), a representative of the Consorzio di Bonifica (R2), an environmental hiking guide and counsellor for the Delta Po Park in the Regional Council (R3), a place-based architect (R4), and the Coordinator of the Inner Area Strategy of the



FIGURE 10 A manifesto for sustainable territorial development. Illustration: Marina Girardi.

Po Delta (R5). Our intention was to identify, through a series of questions (Q), the potential strengths and weaknesses of the two graphic outputs as compared to more traditional tools used to communicate local development strategies. We asked:

- how they would define (Q1) and use (Q2) the manifesto;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the process by which it was constructed through a dialogue between students, local stakeholders, illustrators, and geographers (Q3);
- whether they had used other methods of graphic facilitation before and if they foresaw a possible use of scribing during other participatory processes (for example, in the SNAI) (Q4);
- if they could discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this type of publication in comparison with other scientific, specialist, and/or visual ones (Q5);
- if they had any additional comments regarding the manifesto (Q6).

The second part of the form focused on the illustrated fieldwork journal. They were asked:

- to define its usefulness in practice within the SNAI processes (Q7);
- if they would suggest its further circulation and, if so, how (Q8);
- to discuss the potentialities of these kinds of graphic outputs (creative and narrative) as tools to mediate and represent local voices and promote a sense of community (both within and outside the area) (Q9);
- to share their personal impressions and emotions when reading the illustrated journal (Q10);
- to discuss its strengths and weaknesses (Q11); and
- to add any further comment (Q12).



FIGURE 11 The verbo-visual manifesto realised by the students of the primary school Ca' Tiepolo, Rovigo.

In some cases, respondents had already used the manifesto in their working, cultural, educational, or political activities. R1 employed the manifesto to create an educational path that led to the realisation of a verbo-visual map (Figure 11): children at the Ca' Tiepolo Primary School replicated the structure of the residential seminar, by working in three groups – territory, actors, and relations – using a combination of images and words to produce a manifesto. According to R1, graphic methods should be used more extensively in local schools because the process of scribing ‘trains participants’ ability to find solutions to integrate plural voices in a common place-based vision’ (R1).

R2, who already had some experience with scribing, valued graphic methods as ‘particularly useful in participatory processes to stimulate actors creativity’ and considered graphic outputs like the manifesto to be ‘potential tool[s] for dissemination’. According to R2, thanks to the immediacy of its verbo-visual content, the manifesto has a communicative force that makes complex topics more accessible to wider local and national or international audiences: ‘You should distribute the illustrated journal among experts and professionals (as in my case) in order to let them to draw upon ideas from it, develop some of the covered topics as well as use some images to work on specific themes.’

It is worth noting that, while R4 considered the double language to be a strength of the illustrated journal because it could be integrated into an app for international tourists, other respondents asked for an Italian translation of the manifesto and considered it a weakness to use English and Italian when communicating with local communities. Nevertheless, R3 turned what appeared to be a limitation for some into an opportunity to communicate beyond regional borders: when asked by the city administration to find a touristic slogan, ‘unconsciously inspired by the manifesto’ he proposed a translation of the expression ‘*fin cat vò*’ into the English motto, ‘we have a lot!’ In this way, a very unique expression from the territory speaks to a wider transnational audience. Additionally, R5, whose voice is particularly relevant in terms of imagining an integration of graphic products and representational experimentalism into administrative processes to promote participatory strategies for local development, said:

I share the idea of experimenting with new – ‘smarter’ – methods and tools as a support for participatory processes, which could engage the stakeholders more thoroughly [while] also being actions for training and sensitisation as well as for strengthening the local governance.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to recent debates in graphic and visual geographies and local development. Through representational experimentalism hidden places become visible and place-sensitive narratives and disenfranchised actors can start to play a leading role, becoming the irradiation centre of experimental forms of both political and graphic representation. Graphic methods can bring the perspectives of researchers, students, and local stakeholders together and, thus, represent a place-sensitive solution for local development that is ‘informed by theory and empirical evidence but that, at the same time, responds to the structural opportunities, potential, and constraints of each place’ (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018, p. 205). Creative graphic representations facilitate the circulation, sharing, and assimilation of local knowledge and promote a form of representational innovation in peripheral, fragile, and contested areas, becoming tools for local planning and place-based policies.

Graphic methods, especially when they involve a collaboration with local stakeholders, relate to ongoing debates on researchers' positionality. As Wynne-Jones et al. observed, ‘participatory ways of working are now both in vogue and in crisis’ (Wynne-Jones et al., 2015, p. 218), indicating the need for further critical discussion on issues connected to the positionality, ethics, publics, and politics of this way of working. As shown via the manifesto and the journal, graphic representations make researchers', students', and illustrators' exogenous voices (graphically) visible, showing their positionality in the field. Through graphic outputs, geographers' methods, bodies, and practices of research are made visible. When co-existing on the same page, local actors, researchers, students, and illustrators become protagonists in the same place-based narrative and are (re) presented as co-producers of knowledge with different embodied and multiple expertise. In this way, we suggest, representational experimentalism values local actors' expertise, brings local voices to the forefront, and contextualises research efforts within broader networks of collaboration. Finally, this paper is related to recent debates regarding creative geographies. While creative methods are increasingly being used in geography, the discussion on their potentialities and future agenda is still ongoing (Hawkins, 2019, p. 966); the comments of the local stakeholders on the graphic outputs of our geographical research represent another step toward continuing to explore the potentialities of these methods for local development in peripheral, fragile, and contested areas.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and that the full text of the responses to the online form is available upon request.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Their feedback was collected through an online form distributed (via email, due to the pandemic) between May and June 2020.

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.agenziacoazione.gov.it/lagenzia/>.

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