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TRACING WASTE  
ENVISIONING SUSTAINABILITY  
Reflections on Tourism and Community Practices  
for Collective Futures

edited by  
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foreword  
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## 2. Practices of Cultural Extraction and Notions of Authenticity in Sustainable Tourism: *Rollate* in Sappada and *Saltner* in Merano

*Linda Armano*

### **Abstract:**

The article analyses the figures of Saltner, the guardian of the orchards in Merano, and Rollate, a traditional carnival figure from Sappada, through the lens of cultural extractivism. Since the late 19th century, these two Dolomite locations have taken different paths for the development of tourism. Merano experienced an early and intensive transformation, while Sappada only witnessed significant growth after the Second World War. The study applies the concepts of “high” and “low” cultural extractivism to analyse how authenticity is constructed, based on the degree of local community involvement in the redefinition of traditional figures for tourism. In Merano, there is evidence of high extractivism, visible in how Saltner has been repurposed as an advertising icon by the tourist board, detached from the original context. The low involvement of the local population in this process leads to an idea of authenticity that is mainly characterised by external marketing strategies. Conversely, in Sappada, a low extractivist approach is exemplified by the community’s active role in adapting the Rollate beyond its carnival setting to align with sustainable tourism goals. Here, authenticity remains linked to local values as the community retains control over the meaning and use of its cultural symbols.

**Keywords:** Authenticity; High cultural extractivism; Low cultural extractivism; Saltner of Merano; Rollate of Sappada; Sustainable tourism; Dolomites

## **2.1 Introduction**

The concept of authenticity is central to studies of sustainable tourism, which focus primarily on how tourists associate this concept with the places they visit and their personal emotional experiences (Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Authenticity is seen as the result of complex negotiations between tourists, local communities and institutions to protect cultural and environmental heritage, and is not generally associated with mass tourism or practises that exploit cultural resources for tourism purposes (Canavan and McCamley, 2021). This study critically engages with these assumptions and argues that conceptual and discursive constructs that associate authenticity solely with the preservation of cultural heritage (while addressing the needs of local populations) are potentially limiting, and contribute to the formation of an underlying theoretical bias. This seems to be at least partly due to the prevalence of theoretical studies that are not sufficiently supported by in-depth empirical analyses capable of reconstructing the historical and socio-cultural processes through which certain notions of authenticity are shaped and consolidated in the tourism sector. The Alps represent a particularly relevant area for critical analysis, as it is often associated with experiential and sustainable tourism practises that combine the economic competitiveness of rural mountain areas with respect for the specific culture of local communities (Martini & Buffa, 2016). This study therefore considers the area of the Alps as privileged analytical terrain to reveal the internal contradictions of the various discourses on the concept of authenticity. The Alps have profound regional differences which have influenced institutionalisation processes and tourism development since the mid-19th century. These have evolved in two main ways. Firstly, the early integration of some areas into the emerging tourism circuits, and secondly the persistent marginalisation of certain areas. This has led to heterogeneous tourism promotion, strongly influenced by the

morphology of the land and the degree of infrastructural isolation. This in turn has various effects on visibility, attractiveness, and local economic development. Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate the dynamics - often ambivalent - through which discourses on authenticity (which are historically and culturally contextualised) can be the result of strategies of the cultural extraction and the exploitation of traditions (Smith, 2025). In this case, a cultural extraction can be understood not so much as a use of natural resources, but as a useful analytical lens to observe the processes of appropriation of tangible and intangible elements of local culture, extracted from their original context and subsequently recontextualised in tourism practises and narratives.

This research is based on an ethnographic methodology, consisting of collecting information through in-depth interviews, combined with archival research. This made it possible to carry out a comparative and diachronic study in the geographical context of the eastern Dolomites in the German-speaking area. The analysis reconstructs the historical processes from the mid-19th century, a period in which a growing interest in the development of Alpine areas as tourist and spa destinations emerged within the borders of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The two cases analysed are Merano in South Tyrol and Sappada in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, historically and culturally border areas between Austria and Italy. Despite their common past under Habsburg rule, and albeit at different times and with different methods, the two places have taken different paths in their development of tourism. Specifically, the focus is on two figures of local culture, the Saltner, the guardian of the orchards in South Tyrol, and the Rollate, a ritual character of the carnival in Sappada. Both figures were subject to symbolic and semantic extraction processes, removing them from their original professional and ritual contexts and subsequently reused in tourism initiatives (i.e. the Saltner in the autumn Grape Festival and the Rollate in the summer beer

festival called Plodar Fest). By analysing these two examples comparatively, this study examines how two different extractive tendencies (either 'high' or 'low' as described above), contribute to the construction of two different concepts of authenticity in the sphere of sustainable tourism. The article is organised as follows: In the Methodology and Findings section, the process of data collection and analysis are explained, as well as how the theoretical perspective of cultural extraction has been applied. In the Discussion, after describing the different strategies of tourism development in the contexts studied, the concepts of 'high' and 'low' cultural extraction are applied respectively to the figures of Saltner of Merano and Rollate of Sappada to illustrate two different concepts of authenticity in the field of tourism. Based on the results, the Conclusions finally outline some proposals for the field of sustainable tourism.

## **2.2 Methodology and findings**

In recent years, the concept of extraction has expanded beyond its traditional association with the extractive industry to encompass broader processes of resource appropriation in various economic and social sectors. The 'extractive paradigm' thus highlights the mechanisms and actors that sustain extractive dynamics, understood as forms of exercising power through dispossession, exploitation and marginalisation of local communities that are often obscured by rhetoric of participation and inclusion (Artiga-Purcell 2024). In line with Smith's (2025) proposal, cultural extraction consists of the strategic appropriation of cultural elements inserted into artificially constructed contexts, and centres on "the anticipation of profits obtained through the accumulation of symbolic goods" (p. 654). Smith emphasises that the mobilisation of fragments of traditional culture outside their original context is a crucial indicator of the power dynamics

underlying cultural value enhancement for economic and tourism purposes.

Within the theoretical extractive paradigm, this study introduces the concepts of 'high and 'low' extraction to analyse the nuanced ways in which elements of cultural heritage are re-interpreted in tourism. These conceptual constructs allow us to examine the processes of selection and reintegration of symbolic figures and traditional practises, and shed light on the power dynamics that determine their transformation. High extraction refers to situations where institutions, such as tourism authorities, operate at a distance from the local community and reshape cultural features with minimal or no community participation. This process leads to a form of authenticity that is constructed from the outside and focused on promotional and economic goals. In contrast, low extraction refers to processes in which communities retain agency and interpretation and actively negotiate the symbolic transformation of their own cultural elements. This distinction opens a critical reflection on how tourism influences concepts of authenticity through the appropriation of features of traditional culture by certain actors, and highlights the complexity of the relationship between preservation, transformation and economic exploitation of culture.

This study therefore considers the locations of Sappada and Merano as metaphors and cultural repositories. Through these repositories, the processes by which the figures of Saltner and Rollate are extracted from their original professional and ritual contexts – and subsequently repositioned in tourist events for an external audience – are analysed. In order to investigate this different re-articulation of the two figures, and to understand which concepts of authenticity result from their transfer, ethnographic research based on interviews and participant observation was conducted. The field research phase began in March 2025 and is still ongoing. In particular, the observation was carried out during several editions of the Sappada Carnival and the Plodar

Fest, where it was possible to directly observe the role of Rollate in these events. As for Saltner, who made an appearance at some past editions of the Grape Festival (which takes place every year in October in Merano), the observation was based on secondary sources such as videos and photographic documentation.

In this first phase of the research, the interviewees were selected based on their participation in the festivals and their direct knowledge of how the figures of Rollate and Saltner have been used and modified. In Sappada, the sample included five men who actively dress up as Rollate during the carnival, a representative of the Plodn Association, which promotes the traditional carnival and the local dialect in the municipality, and three people responsible for promoting tourism. In Merano, interviews were carried out with a former Saltner who had practised the profession between 1986 and 1988, an archivist from the Historical Archive of Merano (who helped reconstruct the transformation of Saltner as a professional figure to Saltner as a tourist figure), and two representatives of the *Azienda di Cura, Soggiorno e Turismo di Merano* (the Merano Tourism, Accommodation and Healthcare company), responsible for managing and promoting the city's tourist offer. The ethnographic research was supported by preliminary archival research in the Historical Archives of Merano, where relevant documents dating from the Middle Ages to the 19th century were found. Documents with transcribed testimonies of tourists on verbal and physical encounters with a Saltner during their service in the orchards were also analysed, as well as documents that describe the process of redefining the Saltner figure outside its original context for tourism purposes from the 19th century onwards. Other contemporary materials were analysed, including local newspapers, municipal archives, bulletins and advertising content from tourism agencies. No research was carried out in the municipal archives of Sappada, as the carnival is a predominantly oral tradition - no systematic cataloguing of the archives has yet begun which analyse documents or testimo-

nies that refer to fragments of old editions of the rite. However, sources such as documents on tourism promotion from the 1990s to the present day were also analysed, important for reconstructing the development of Sappada's promotional strategies as a sustainable tourist destination.

In this study, the integration of ethnographic research with a diachronic approach aims to reconstruct the emergence and evolution of the cultural extraction of Rollate and Saltner in the municipalities of Sappada and Merano. This methodological approach allows for the capture the contemporary configurations of these processes, but also helps understand their historical roots. Overall, the sinterviews in both municipalities have shown that citizens not linked to tourism promotion agencies tend to interpret the concept of authenticity as a process directly experienced through the profession of Saltner and in the ritual framework of the Rollate. According to these interviewees, an in-depth sense of authenticity can only be understood by starting from the specific social fabric of symbolic, historical, cultural and economic values, directly linked to the body of knowledge that constitutes the profession of Saltner, or to the cultural meanings of the ritual in which the Rollate plays a particular role. These specific meanings of authenticity are therefore difficult to extract, institutionalise and explain to an external audience without losing their immersive dimension. In contrast, tourism promotion agency staff tend to construct the concept of authenticity through an extractive approach. This involves breaking down the dense network of meanings and practises that make up the socio-cultural fabric, selecting, staging and narrating certain cultural elements in order to make them accessible and attractive to a visiting audience.

### **Discussion**

*Placing different degrees of cultural extraction in context: 'hight' cultural extraction and 'low' cultural extraction*

In the mid-19th century, the spread of tourism in the Eastern Alps, which at the time belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, led to forms of hospitality that were strongly influenced by an idealised vision of rural mountain life. This period saw the emergence of numerous tourist resorts, known in the language of the time as “Bauernbadln” - an ironic but evocative term, used especially in Tyrol and Bavaria to describe places where the tourist experience was associated with a simple and natural life, perceived as pre-modern and an alternative to the accelerated pace of the cities (Leonardi, 2018). The first forms of family-run mountain tourism developed around this idea and were mainly aimed at an aristocratic and urban bourgeois clientele (Balestracci and Causarano 2018). In addition, climatic health resorts and mountain spas emerged, whose appeal was based on the healthy, fresh air and the weather. In South Tyrol in particular, the spread of climatotherapy in the second half of the 19th century contributed to the creation of a tourist offer based on a new naturalist, health-conscious ethos that viewed the mountain world as a privileged therapeutic space. Specialist infrastructure, such as health resorts, sanatoriums and guesthouses were often built in the bottom of the valleys, for example in Merano, which established itself as a spa destination for the European aristocracy. However, the therapeutic component was not the only motivation for a holiday. Visitors were also looking for opportunities to interact with a culture that was considered ‘traditional’, and radically different from urban modernity. This desire was reflected in the development of a hospitality culture that not only received holidaymakers in places like Merano, but also contributed to the transformation of elements of local culture in line with tourists’ expectations (Leonardi, 2018). With this backdrop, while the Saltner continued to perform daily surveillance duties in the orchards according to local regulations and normative customs dating back to the Middle Ages (R.L.P. Tirol und Vorarlberg Nr. 168/1819, §§ 12-13), his image was used by the *Azienda di Cura*,

*Soggiorno e Turismo di Merano*, founded in 1855, for promotional purposes and transformed into a figurative topos intended to epitomise the 'typical' characteristics of the town. His portrayal was reproduced on postcards and souvenirs, and the Saltner was also narrated in operettas (Plant 1908), creating a figure that met the exotic-archaic expectations of visitors. However, this tourist figure stood in stark contrast to the real orchard guard, who, armed with a knife (*runnggel*) and sometimes resorting to aggression, did not hesitate to intervene against tourists entering private property. The traditional profession of Saltner was rooted in the broader socio-economic structure of the Tyrolean farm, a traditional institution consisting of connected plots of land and various farm buildings (Gramm, Hoffmann, and Cattivelli, 2019). This system, still preserved by complex provincial legislation, guaranteed the cohesion of the farm by regulating succession, typically in favour of the male first-born, while the remaining male children traditionally entered the labour market as farm workers or miners (Armano, 2025). Within this socio-economic context, the Saltners were offered in rotation by the various landowners to work in the different municipalities of South Tyrol. During his service, the Saltner was responsible for the maintenance of the roads in the area and supervised the orchards to ensure that no wild or farm animals interfered. His main task, however, was to prevent the theft of fruit by those who entered the property. The ambivalence between the Saltner's actual duties and his tourist representation was the cause of numerous conflicts between orchard guards and tourists, so much so that the press of the time labelled the Saltners as "tourist molesters" (Kofler, Profanter, and Sapelza, 2022). After the Field Protection Act of 1860, which officially recognised the Saltner as a public guard (RGBI, no. 28/1860), this figure's costume, consisting of fox tails (a symbol of cunning), a triangular hat with capercaillie tails (a symbol of vigilance) and peacock tails (a symbol of professional pride), was used almost exclusively in tour-

ist parades, especially from the 1930s onwards, as part of fascist policies aimed at promoting local folkloristic characteristics for creating identity and propaganda.

Over time, the folkloric version of the Saltner has become fully established in public parades (such as the Grape Festival), where the figure appears in spectacular form. In recent editions of the festival, however, its presence has been replaced by depictions of figures of Tyrolean nobility, indicating that the Saltner has also finally disappeared for tourist purposes.

At the same time, other Alpine regions under Austrian rule, such as Sappada, began to develop forms of mountain tourism linked to hiking and mountaineering, promoted by associations and specialised publications (Caria, 2023). In this context, however, the Rollate remained an exclusively ritual figure linked to the ceremonial cycle of the carnival. In line with Sordi's interpretation (1982), the carnival of Sappada fits into a broader European dynamic in which the sequence of traditional festivals alternates pagan and Christian elements. If Christmas represents the celebration of family unity and excludes strangers, the carnival is instead a moment of public openness in which masks invade the collective space of the city. In this sense, the presence of the Rollate solely during the Carnival is largely the result of long-term religious control within the community that has prevented their detachment from their original ceremonial context almost up to the present day. Since the 1950s, thanks to the construction of the state road and the improvement of the road network, the village has become more accessible for and attractive to visiting families. The carnival has also undergone some structural changes, and is only celebrated on three specific Sundays (the Sunday of the Poor, the Sunday of the Peasants and the Sunday of the Lords), each dedicated to a social class that was once represented in the town, taking place in three different squares in Sappada. In addition to the masks, the Rollate, parading in groups of boys in the squares, represent the main character of the carnival ritual. If these public masquer-

ades are intended to present this popular festival to tourists for a few hours, the offertory is still considered a traditional element of the carnival. This consists of mask-wearers being taken to the village houses, where tourists are not admitted. The Rollate tradition in Sappada is an exclusively male masque in which participants must impersonate a tall, imposing figure, typically dressed in distinctive clothing consisting of horizontally striped trousers (*hilhouzn*) traditionally made from cow blankets, a fur coat (*pelz*) made from sheepskins and a tuft of red wool, a wooden mask (*lorve*), a sorghum broom (*pesn*) which serves as a symbolic sceptre, a white or red handkerchief which, depending on the colour, indicates the marital status of the masked person. The Rollate is also characterised by two large spherical bells (*rolln*), from which it takes its name, which are tied around the waist.

Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, Sappada's accommodation was limited to inns and post offices, which mainly welcomed merchants and occasional travellers. Interaction with foreigners was minimal and the facilities represented a basic level of hospitality which didn't help dissipate distrust of the outside world. In the 1970s, the development of winter tourism began with the introduction of ski lifts. As part of this, the promotion and enhancement of the local culture - especially the carnival - became a central element of tourism promotion. While the figure of the Rollate has undergone an aesthetic revaluation in terms of the costumes, it has not been completely decontextualised, as the local community still exerts strong control over its management and representation, as evidenced by the exclusion of tourists from the carnival's ritual offerings in private dwellings. Even when the Rollate is used in summer events such as the Plodar Fest (the beer festival that takes place in Sappada every August) or in other events to promote local culture, the use of the figure remains subject to strong internal control.

A comparison between Merano and Sappada shows how two very different methods of cultural extraction and symbolic

re-contextualisation of these traditional figures are applied. The following table contains some key passages from the interviews conducted in Merano and Sappada, showing the differing perspectives of tourist boards and community members on the concept of authenticity and how these perspectives derive from two different extractive approaches.

**Table 1** – Interpretative comparison of the concept of authenticity in Sappada and in Merano, and how it relates to Rollate and Saltner

Merano		Sappada	
Concept of Authenticity		Concept of Authenticity	
<i>Facilities for the promotion of tourism</i>	<i>Citizens</i>	<i>Facilities for the promotion of tourism</i>	<i>Citizens</i>
<i>Active role of the institutions as Local collective management</i>			
Authenticity is a concept that recalls the local culture and even tourists takes part in the cultural component of Merano as an interested spectator. (Interview with D., member of the staff of the <i>Azienda di Cura, Soggiorno e Turismo</i> )	Authenticity is linked to those who create it and to those who preserve it, therefore it must be conceived within the community (Interview with E.M., archivist at the Historical Archive of Merano)	The task of tourism promotion is to actively shape tourism development that is compatible with the cultural values of the community. This results in an idea of authenticity. (Interview with M. tourism manager, <i>Consorzio Sappada Dolomiti Turismo</i> )	Authenticity is conveyed through daily immersion in the cultural context, and not through institutionalisation. (Interview with C., Plodar Association)
<i>Historical memory as a resource</i>			
Authenticity is linked to the re-presentation of a past that must be preserved. (Interview with D., member of the staff of the <i>Azienda di Cura, Soggiorno e Turismo</i> )	The meaning of authenticity changes over time, but it is always interwoven with the lived history and social changes of our community. (Interview with P., Ex Saltner)	Authenticity is a collective good that needs to be defended, passed on and appropriately ascribed value to by the community. (Interview with M., tourism manager, <i>Consorzio Sappada Dolomiti Turismo</i> )	Authenticity as an everyday, relational, non-codified or formalisable experience that inevitably arises from our connection with the past history that has shaped us. (Interview with C., participant in the carnival as Rollate)

<u>Spectacularisation vs Internal regeneration</u>		
<p>It is also important to utilise authenticity to support economic enhancement and cultural attractiveness. Authenticity must be told, because the tourist must be accompanied into the culture of Merano. (Interview with E., member of the staff of the <i>Azienda di Cura, Soggiorno e Turismo</i>)</p>	<p>The authenticity lies in the oral tradition, in the memory of the family and the community. From this we can understand that it is not always positive, because it can be linked to something difficult from our past. (Interview with E.M., archivist at the Historical Archive of Merano)</p>	<p>The design of authenticity meanings for tourism offers must be constantly coordinated with the municipality and the community. (Interview with local councillor S., <i>Consorzio Sappada Dolomiti Turismo</i>)</p>
<b>Concept of authenticity in connection with the Rollate</b>		
<i>Institutional tourism governance that is not sustained as an embodied practice</i>		
<p>The Saltner is one of the symbols of Merano culture which can be shown to our tourists. (Interview with E., member of the staff of the <i>Azienda di Cura, Soggiorno e Turismo</i>)</p>	<p>The Saltner was the keeper of the orchards, it was a profession and had nothing to do with tourism. (Interview with P., ex-Saltner)</p>	<p>Rollate retains its symbolic importance in the tourism sector if it is also managed by the municipality and community. (Interview with local councillor S., <i>Consorzio Sappada Dolomiti Turismo</i>)</p>
<i>Local community unacknowledged for its role in representing traditional culture in tourism</i>		
<p>Saltner is one of the characters which promotes an authentic tourist experience. (Interview with D., member of the staff of the <i>Azienda di Cura, Soggiorno e Turismo</i>)</p>	<p>Today there is also a tendency to replace the Saltner at tourist events such as the Grape Festival because gentler figures are favoured, such as the depiction of Empress Sissi, to evoke the culture of Merano. (Interview with E.M., archivist at the Historical Archive of Merano)</p>	<p>The deeper meaning is not to organise an event for tourists which the Rollate can be introduced into, but the event takes shape spontaneously because the community itself decides. In this case, Rollate can subsequently be introduced. (Interview with D., participant in the carnival as Rollate)</p>
<i>Adapting tourism to the cultural aspects of the community</i>		

*High cultural extraction in Merano*

Based on the data in Table 1, we can assume that in Merano, tourism promotion fully constructs and manages the definition of authenticity. Therefore, this concept does not correspond to how it is experienced and interpreted by the interviewees in the community. Indeed, at the local level, authenticity is often associated with the concrete and sometimes arduous reality of daily life, especially regarding agricultural labour. The concept of authenticity constructed by the tourism agency is configured as a category that can reproduce stereotypes and power relations that exclude the community, based on a simplified and spectacular narrative of the past and local culture. In this context, the figure of Saltner was gradually reinterpreted for tourists. His behaviour, which was originally brusque, as the historical rules suggested, was softened to better meet the expectations of cultural tourism. The original costume was also transformed into hyperbolic and spectacular forms. In relation to this, the last Saltner in Merano interviewed for this study emphasised a particularly important element about the different ways in which this figure was portrayed. In particular, he highlighted the difference between the Saltner in his historical function as guardian of the orchards, who acted in an everyday agricultural environment, and the Saltner who is reused as a folkloristic figure for tourist 'consumption'. This observation allows us to analyse the different contexts the figure is placed in, and to distinguish between a functional use linked to the work and protection of local cultural resources and a representative use aimed at creating an image intended for tourist consumption:

P: «The Saltner appeared as a guard in the orchards and as a figure for tourists»

«But what did the Saltner do when he had to perform for the tourists? Did he quit his service?»

P. «No, no! The interesting thing is that those who worked as Saltners for tourists were never really Saltners! Because that's only for tourists. Those who did this job as Saltners could not leave the orchards. The Saltner is a historical figure who worked as a guard in the orchards and another who was employed for tourists as if he were a fictional character. The Saltner has nothing to do with tourism, even though he is supposed to welcome tourists. Here, however, he is in disguise» (Interview with P., former Saltner).

In Merano, then, we can recognise a process that can be traced to a form of high cultural extraction based on the idea of a cultural 'deposit'. This is conceived as having a series of features that are exploited and reused for the construction of targeted tourist products. The Saltner is thus one of the many cultural features that can be extracted to be transformed into a cultural representation, having a representative and welcoming function. This high cultural extraction, based on selective re-contextualisation, is accompanied by a re-manipulation of traditional memory. This is then defined as a set of practices through which communities preserve, transmit and reinterpret knowledge, experiences and cultural codes (Ivančič Kutin and Kropelj Telban, 2021). This vision is reflected in the words of those who work at the *Azienda di Cura, Soggiorno e Turismo*:

«D. Every year is a challenge, of course. We have a solid body of work behind us, but we have to listen to the needs of our guests from time to time. And the city always responds well. (...) The Merano Grape Festival is one of the most popular autumn events not only in Merano but also in South Tyrol and is celebrated every year on the third weekend in October. On this occasion, a rich selection of traditions, music and gastronomy is offered. And this attracts numerous visitors, both locals and tourists. (...) The festival consists of parades with decorated floats, performances by bands and traditional costume groups as well as food stalls with local specialities. (...) A few years ago there was also the figure of the Saltner, which was a traditional profession in South Tyrol, even if it no longer exists today.

Tourists expect to see these figures of local tradition to enable them to understand the customs and traditions of the place» (D. member of the staff of the Azienda di Cura, Soggiorno e Turismo).

From the tourist office staff interviews, we can understand how authenticity is understood primarily on an aesthetic level. It is not considered as a 'speaker' of cultural expressions embedded in a social and value-orientated structure, but rather the performative result of a series of adaptations which tend to the needs of an external audience. Another consequence of adapting to tourist desires is that in recent years the figure of the Saltner, who until a decade ago played a key role in the representation of local culture, has been excluded from the Grape Festival. In recent years, he has been replaced by idealised depictions of Tyrolean nobility from the late 19th century, including Empress Sissi. Visitor expectations, fuelled by narratives geared towards tourism consumption, have manifested themselves over a long period of time, developing from early forms of tourism in Merano from the second half of the 19th century.

At the centre of this dynamic is a process of symbolic extraction of traditional cultural traits that are often interpreted as expressions of the archaic, and forms of cultural survival. These elements are categorised as "living fossils" (Ligi, 2011, p. 134), -cultural forms that are perceived as remnants of a distant past and persist in the present. From this perspective, these features acquire an instrumental function within tourist narratives, which tend to simplify, decontextualize, and subordinate them to the logic of economic enhancement derived from tourist consumption. This process is closely linked to an idea of progress that is understood in a linear and unambiguous sense. It contributes to the creation of specific imagery, where some communities that are culturally considered "harsher" or "more backward" are presented as guardians of a still-living past. The tangible and non-tangible culture of those communities has often been shaped by difficult geographical con-

ditions, manifesting in beliefs, habits and customs that are considered exotic or picturesque. As Ligi (2011) points out, the idea of a living fossil is not reduced to the representation of the “primitive”, but evokes an earlier phase of human history, an evolutionary phase that visitors would also have passed through over the centuries. Tourist hospitality thus involves a kind of archaic ‘staging’ in which figures such as Saltner represent a minimum level of civilisation and modernity sufficient to be comprehensible and accessible to a contemporary audience, whilst maintaining archaic external traits that serve to define the difference between him and the visitors. In this example, high cultural extraction is configured as a strategy which appropriates and structures a certain notion of time. This is done by organising tourist encounters which make the link between past and present visible in a unidirectional way. Authenticity thus emerges from the dialectical relationship between the modern ‘self’ of the tourist and the traditional ‘other’ of the community. Where high cultural extraction takes place, where the local community does not participate in the promotion of its own culture in collaboration with tourism promotion agencies, authenticity is therefore linked to the idea of a culture which is ‘frozen in time’, that the tourist is supposed to become familiar with. This temporal construction carries an implicitly paternalistic or intellectualistic tone. This is because recognising the survival of archaic elements in a contemporary culture is tantamount to returning them to a past historical stage. In this sense, the functioning of high cultural extraction is expressed not only as a journey through space, but also as a journey through time, where the past is evoked and consumed without activating critical reflection.

#### *Low cultural extraction in Sappada*

In the case of Sappada, the management of tourist events – and therefore the definition of what is considered authentic in the context of those events – as well as the use of the figure of

the Rollate, remain firmly rooted in the community. This form of collective organisation, whilst secular and contemporary, seems to reproduce the regulation of rituals in a similar way to how the Church traditionally carried out this role in the past. The concept of low cultural extraction highlights a form of mediation between the inside and the outside of the community via tourism practises. In contrast to more invasive forms of cultural extraction, the low extraction process here is characterised by selective and reflexive control by community actors who determine which cultural elements are made accessible, in what form and to which audience. Initiatives promoted by the tourism agency are often perceived as alien by the local community, even though the tourism agency aims to promote and protect the intrinsic and 'unspectacular' character of traditional cultural expressions. This central role of the inhabitants is the reason why the tourist office is largely subordinate to the community organisation, which makes it difficult to independently manage the way in which Rollate is presented to tourists. In fact, the tourist board is almost exclusively limited to a mere channel for publicising events. While the importance of the role of the local community is underlined as an essential condition for welcoming visitors in a truly sustainable tourism dynamic, the control exercised by community members over the management of their cultural expressions has in some cases been met with criticism and objections from tourism stakeholders. The latter complain about the excessive closed-mindedness of the inhabitants of Sappada towards tourism planning, which is perceived as rigidly filtered through them as 'gatekeepers':

«M. This form of closure is perhaps the secret that has preserved the authenticity of the territory and culture for so many years. But is this method a salvation for the territory and for the community itself? The fact that no intrusion has been allowed has meant that Sappada now offers a form of authentic tourism, but this closure is risky! Because things can go well or badly and you can find yourself isolated, without the training to then open up to tourism if one day there is a

need. Unfortunately, they are isolating themselves more and more and are in the process of sinking. (...) So, they were intelligent and lucky to combine their tradition with this form of tourism, but it is undeniable that Sappada today has enormous potential and must grow on a qualitative level. (...) The risk lies above all in the lack of generational change. Young people are happy in Sappada today, but they are not investing in their future. I fear that there will be nothing left for the next generation and the only thing they can improve is tourism, but they don't want to be educated» (Interview with M., tourism manager, Consorzio Sappada Dolomiti Turismo).

However, the Sappada community responds to these objections by stating that the tourism promotion agency is unable to enhance the value of the authentic cultural aspects defined by tradition, and the ritualistic and identity-forming significance of the Rollate. Despite this distrust of forms of external 'spectacle creation', the presence of the iconic mask has gradually spread to other events during the year, such as the Plodar Fest (a beer festival that takes place in August). Such a detachment of the figure from its original context would have been unthinkable until a few decades ago. But even on such occasions, the Rollate is still recognised by the community as a strong symbol of identity. As one interviewee from Sappada explained:

G: «Carnival was the festival of the year. There were no other festivals, so it embodied the spirit of the festival. When people in Sappada think of the festival, they automatically think of the carnival, which in the past was called The Festival. So, when we decide that Rollate is present at other events that are open to tourists, Rollate brings the power of the carnival of our past and projects it into other festivals» (Interview with G., Plodar Association).

However, the use of Rollate outside the carnival oscillates between an approach centred on greater openness to tourists and more conservative instances linked to the protection of local traditions. This oscillation reflects a dynamic balance between enhancing the value of culture and protecting identity:

S: «In recent years, Rollate has been used in various situations. Originally it was associated exclusively with the carnival, then its image was used for tourist advertising purposes. Even all the street lamps in Sappada bear the Rollate logo in wrought iron. However, its presence in the carnival, or even outside the carnival, consists of one step forward and one step back. In terms of the step backwards, it is felt that Rollate should only be present in the carnival, as it is more of a communal and intimate event. (...) It depends a bit on who organises the carnival unofficially. There is always someone who pulls the strings and on whom the use of Rollate partly depends. So, look at the periods when Rollate has been used for tourist purposes, because those who managed the image were also open to tourism. Then there is the period of closure, when the people managing the image didn't want to interact with tourism» (interview with Councillor S., *Consorzio Sappada Dolomiti Turismo*).

Although Rollate remains anchored in a local realm of meaning that guarantees its recognisability and symbolic coherence in the eyes of the community, low cultural extraction functions as a demarcation between inclusion and exclusion, which is implemented in the tourist encounter. However, it is important to emphasise that the resistance of the Sappada community to forms of appropriation by tourist organisations perceived as alien to that same community does not imply total closure or cultural isolation. In fact, interaction with tourism has favoured a creative repositioning of the figure of Rollate and prevented its exclusive confinement to the carnival. Without this process of opening up to tourism, Rollate would probably have suffered a similar fate to the figures of other Alpine carnivals (for example the masks of the Sauris carnival), whose appearance gradually diminished until they finally vanished. Low cultural extraction represents a viable compromise between continuity of tradition, symbolic self-determination and outward development as part of sustainable tourism practises. In Sappada, and particularly in relation to the figure of Rollate, the emerging concept of authenticity is not based on the immutable preservation of an ide-

alised past, but rather on a relational and situational meaning. It unfolds in a constant dialogue between perspectives inside and outside the community and takes shape under specific conditions in which elements of tradition are reinterpreted and adapted to contemporary tourism, remaining in line with local values.

### **2.3 Conclusions**

The comparative analysis of the figures of Saltner, from Merano, and Rollate, from Sappada, shows to what extent the construction of authenticity within sustainable tourism is influenced by the relational and contextual dynamics of representations of time and the involvement of the local community. In Saltner's case, authenticity results from a high cultural extraction model in which this figure is selected and presented as a timeless element of cultural heritage intended for an audience of visitors. This unidirectional approach tends to 'freeze' characteristics of local cultures in stereotypical archaic forms. In this process, the tourism agency assumes the role of exclusive mediator of the cultural narrative, excluding the local community from the processes of defining and creating or protecting the value of its heritage. On the contrary, the Rollate figures from Sappada exemplify low cultural extraction processes, where the local community retains control over the methods of transmission and reinterpretation of its cultural elements. Authenticity in this case is the result of a living, constantly changing reflexive practice that integrates cultural memory and tourism without reducing cultural icons to timeless representations.

Based on these two case studies, we can outline some proposals for sustainable tourism based on a deeper negotiation of notions of authenticity. Firstly, the active participation of local communities in the management of cultural heritage must be

ensured. Secondly, it is necessary to counteract narratives that reduce traditions to mythologised images of a static past. Finally, interpretative tools must be developed that restore the complexity and historic sense of local cultures, and strengthen the communities' capacity to act.

From this perspective, tourism can evolve from a location of symbolic extraction to a space for cultural co-construction, where the dialogue between visitors and local communities creates new practices with shared meaning.

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