

## “Turnà A ‘Ndomà” When Public Service Co-Production Meets Territorial Identity

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### Abstract

*Purpose:* This paper aims to investigate an ongoing process of public service co-production which concerns the involvement of the whole population of Val Brembilla, a small-sized municipality in Northern Italy, in the design and delivery of new avenues for public value co-creation. Beyond the steps of public service co-production, the link between citizens' involvement in public value co-creation and territorial identity is also investigated.

*Methodology:* A mixed approach was used, which consisted of a preliminary qualitative analysis and a quantitative study intended to elicit the outcomes and the implications of citizens' involvement in public value creation. The qualitative analysis was implemented through 7 focus groups, engaging both ordinary citizens living in Val Brembilla and entrepreneurs established in the municipality. The quantitative analysis was conducted on first-hand data collected from 379 semi-structured interviews with citizens involved in the co-production experience.

*Findings:* The purchase of the Kuwait Expo 2015 pavilion represented the trigger of the process of public service co-production and public value co-creation in the Municipality of Val Brembilla. Interestingly, both citizens and entrepreneurs were quite critical of the appropriateness of such an investment, in light of its impact on the municipality's financial balance. However, they thoroughly participated in the co-design of prospective public services to be included in the Kuwait Expo 2015 pavilion. The perceived gap between actual and ideal territorial identity contributed towards explaining citizens' involvement in public value co-creation.

*Practical implications:* Citizens' engagement represents the way forward for sustainable and effective approaches to public value co-creation and public service co-production. However, the barriers to citizens' engagement and involvement in the design and delivery of public services should be carefully identified and addressed to make their participation more feasible.

*Originality/Value:* This is one of the first attempts to merge territorial identity, public value co-creation and public service co-production.

### Keywords

Public service co-production; Public value co-creation; Identity; Expo; Val Brembilla

## 1. Introduction

The need to shift from public service delivery to public service co-production has been stressed to various degrees in scientific literature (Alford, 2009). However, scholars are still debating both the determinants and the distinguishing attributes of public service co-production (Parrado, Van Ryzin, Bovaird, & Löffler, 2013; Carpentier, 2016). Therefore, it is not easy to define what is ultimately meant by public service co-production. In an attempt to systematize the current understanding of this concept, public service co-production could be conceived as the process according to which “...*professionals and citizens (make) better use of each other’s assets, resources and contributions to achieve better outcomes and/or improved efficiency*” (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2013, p. 4). From this point of view, public service co-production seems to rely on the establishment of a co-creating partnership between the users and the providers of public services, which enhances the potential of public value creation (Ciasullo, Palumbo, & Troisi, 2017).

In fact, public service co-production paves the way for some significant advantages, which are likely to reframe the public value chain completely. Firstly, public service co-production may be useful for dealing with the increasing financial constraints faced by public sector organizations, activating the citizens’ dormant assets for the purpose of public value generation (Martin, 2018). Secondly, citizens’ engagement in public value creation enacts a self-nourishing process that raises awareness of the added value of collective action to enhance the well-being of the community (Ostrom, 2000). Thirdly, by encouraging the orientation of public sector entities towards citizens, the latter’s involvement is likely to boost increased quality in the delivery of public services (Cassia & Magno, 2009). Lastly, yet importantly, public service co-production is both a result and a trigger of organizational change, inspiring a deep reconceptualization of the way citizens and providers interact to generate public value (Dunston, Lee, Boud, Brodie, & Chiarella, 2009).

In spite of these considerations, recent studies have emphasized the critical challenges affecting the effective and proper implementation of service co-production in the public realm (Fugini, Bracci, & Sicilia, 2016). Among others, Fledderus (2015) emphasized that public sector co-production may engender a gradual deterioration of the trust perceived by citizens towards public sector entities, since the latter are likely to be considered as unable to produce public value without the citizens’ contribution. Besides, it is possible that citizens bring selfish interests with them when they are engaged in public service co-production, which may determine public value co-destruction, rather than co-creation (Järvi, Kähkönen, & Torvinen, 2018). This may also happen on the side of public service providers, who may not be ready or unwilling to engage users in the co-production of public services, in an attempt to preserve their control over the dynamics of public value creation (Palumbo & Manna, 2017).

From this standpoint, further advancements are needed to shed light on the implementation issues of public service co-production, as well as on its factual ability to contribute towards public value creation. This paper aims to push forward our understanding of public service co-production, discussing the challenges which affect its design and illuminating the perceptions developed by those who are involved in planning citizens’ engagement in the process of public value co-creation. The step-by-step construction of territorial identity alongside the achievement of public service co-production is understood as a fundamental tool for handling the side effects usually generated by citizens’ engagement in co-creating public value. In more detail, this study represents an effort to provide a tentative answer to the following research questions:

- *R.Q. 1*: How could public service co-production be implemented in contexts where citizens are likely to show a strong territorial identity?
- *R.Q. 2*: How does territorial identity affect the engagement of citizens in public value co-creation?
- *R.Q. 3*: And, last but not least, how could territorial identity be exploited in order to achieve enhanced citizens' commitment in public service co-production and public value co-creation?

A mixed case study approach was used to collect first hand evidence to investigate these research questions. The study concerned the co-production experience of Val Brembilla, a small-sized municipality established in Northern Italy, in the Province of Bergamo, which sought to involve citizens in defining the function and appropriate use of the Expo 2015 Kuwait pavilion, which had recently been acquired by the unit of analysis.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: the next section describes the theoretical background which inspired the development of this paper; in particular, it establishes a link between the concepts of public service co-production and public value co-creation and pinpoints the role of territorial identity in fostering the contribution of citizens in the process of value generation. The third section summarizes the research design and strategies, pointing out the mixed approach which was used to collect and analyse relevant data. Findings are included in the fourth section, which stresses the importance of territorial identity in realizing public service co-production. The discussion synthesizes the main conceptual and practical implications of this paper which raise intriguing avenues for further developments, as reported in the sixth and concluding section.

## 2. Conceptual framework

### 2.1 *The conceptual link between public service co-production and public value co-creation*

Although many studies have dealt with the specific and distinguishing attributes of public service co-production and public value co-creation, only in a few cases the link between these two concepts has been taken into consideration. On the one hand, public service co-production may be understood as the process of citizens' involvement – which could be either voluntary or involuntary – in planning, designing, delivering and/or evaluating public services (Osborne, Radnor, & Stokosch, 2016); on the other hand, public value co-creation implies the engagement of citizens in defining what is ultimately meant by public value and in establishing collaborative relationships with public servants to achieve such value (Bryson, Sancino, Benington, & Sørensen, 2017).

In an attempt to emphasize the connection between public service co-production and value co-creation, Osborne *et al.* (2015) recently suggested a public service-dominant approach to reframe the configuration of public sector organizations in a perspective of sustainable public value creation. This approach is established on the assumption that public service co-production alone is not sufficient for improving the ability of public sector entities to meet the evolving needs of the population served or to face the growing challenges raised by the environment. Quite the opposite, public service co-production should be enriched by the propensity of public sector organizations to establish reliable and long-standing relationships with citizens, in order to make them aware of their potential contribution in the generation of public value and to

engage them as co-creating partners in the appropriate and sustainable design and delivery of public services (Osborne, 2018).

However, public sector entities are called to revise their strategies and organizational approaches thoroughly in order to accomplish the transition of citizens from mere value consumers to value co-producers. Scientific literature has suggested various models which could be implemented to encourage citizens to act as service co-producers and value co-creators in the public sector environment. However, conceptual advances are still prevailing as confronted with empirical analysis; as a consequence, little is yet known about the implementation issues characterizing the reconfiguration of the public value chain in a perspective of citizens' involvement.

## *2.2 Engaging citizens as public value co-creators*

Citizens' participation in public service co-production and public value co-creation is a multifaceted issue (Fotaki, 2011), which has been variously discussed in scientific literature. In fact, citizens' engagement may occur at different nodes of the public service value chain (Glynn & Speed, 2012), ranging from the process of public services' provision and distribution (micro level) to the organization of the delivery system (meso level) and overall service governance (macro level).

Among others, Bovaird (2007) endeavoured to synthesize the potential modes of citizens' involvement in public service co-production and public value co-creation in light of their participation in the phases of service planning and service delivery. Obviously, for public service co-production to have a fully-fledged approach, a partnership must be established between public servants and citizens for both the planning and delivery of public services. However, citizens may merely be involved in co-delivering services which are planned solely by public servants. At the same time, citizens may act as co-planners of services delivered by public servants.

Looking at the extent of public service co-production and public value co-creation, Brudney and England (1983) distinguished between individual, group and collective co-production. While individual co-production concerns the one-to-one relationship between public servants and citizens and focuses on the engagement of the latter as co-deliverer of public services (Alford, 2002), group and collective co-production show a wider scope: the former engages groups of people who share similar interests and may contribute towards enhancing public sector organizations' ability to meet the needs of specific clusters of the population (Roberts, Greenhill, Talbot, & Cuzak, 2012); the latter involves the whole population served, which is allowed to participate in the planning, design and delivery of public services (Bovaird, van Ryzin, Loeffler, & Parrado, 2015).

Table 1 provides a graphical summary of these approaches to public service co-production, emphasizing citizens' contribution in public value co-creation.

## *2.3 Back to the future: territorial identity and public service co-production*

Territorial identity is a broad and malleable construct, which refers to the uniqueness and the specificity of a local environment (Roca & Oliveira-Roca, 2007). Since public service co-production and public value co-creation rely on the establishment of a collaborative relationship with public sector organizations – which, institutionally, represent the local environment – they are likely to affect – and to be influenced by – territorial identity. This is especially true as far as group and collective modes of public service co-production are concerned that do not focus

on individual citizens' contribution, but are based on the collective action of people who participate in the co-designing and co-delivering of public services in an attempt to enhance the individual and collective well-being (Jo & Nabatchi, 2018).

*Table 1. The approaches to public service co-production and their implications in terms of value co-creation*

<b>Extent / Degree of citizens' involvement</b>	<i>Individual co-production</i>	<i>Group co-production</i>	<i>Collective co-production</i>
<i>Co-delivery of public services</i>	The individual citizen participates in the provision of services, with a limited degree of value co-creation (e.g. waste collection)	Specific groups of the population are engaged in co-delivering services to improve responsiveness (e.g. self-aid groups)	The whole population is involved in public service provision, in an attempt to enhance service equity and effectiveness (e.g. green area co-management)
<i>Co-planning of public services</i>	The individual citizen participates in planning the design and delivery of public services (e.g. shared user-provider decision-making)	Specific groups of the population have an active role in the planning of existing or new public services (e.g. neighbourhood surveillance)	The whole population is allowed to participate in setting priorities in public service governance and management (e.g. participatory budget)
<i>Fully-fledged co-production (co-design and co-planning of public services)</i>	The individual citizen co-produces public services fully, being involved in both the planning and delivery stages (e.g. patient empowerment and engagement)	Specific groups of the population are targeted to be involved in the co-planning and co-designing of public services (e.g. social services)	The whole population is engaged in a full co-creation partnership with public sector entities (e.g. co-management and co-governance of common goods)

*Authors' elaboration*

From this point of view, a conceptual link between public service co-production and territorial identity could be envisioned. On the one hand, public service co-production concurs in strengthening and deepening territorial identity, since it makes citizens active players in the construction of the local environment's uniqueness and specificity. On the other hand, territorial identity may act as a trigger and a catalyst of citizens' engagement in public value co-creation. However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, evidence of the interdependence between public service co-production and territorial identity is lacking.

### **3. Research Strategy, Design and Methods**

#### *3.1 Research background and context*

The purpose of the research is to define the most appropriate intended use of the pavilion of Kuwait, one of the 145 official participants at Expo 2015 Milan, which was purchased by the municipality of Val Brembilla (BG). Expo, the world event with the theme "feeding the planet, energy for life", was held in Milan (Italy), from May to October 2015 and brought the theme of food and nutrition to the attention of the entire world. The reason why the council of Val Brembilla decided to purchase the Kuwait Pavilion was, "...*To acquire a (polyfunctional) space where new skills can be learnt, to encourage people to gather together, to set up companies*



*that can face challenges, to stimulate ideas aimed at improving the quality of life in Val Brembilla, to enhance the territory and make life in Val Brembilla more enjoyable”.*

Val Brembilla is a municipality in Valle Brembana in the province of Bergamo, located 20 km from the capital of the province. On February, 4<sup>th</sup> 2014, the municipalities of Brembilla and Gerosa (with their 10 relative hamlets) merged to form the new municipality, which covers a total area of over 32 km<sup>2</sup> with 4,300 inhabitants. The municipality is situated at a height of 450 meters above sea level in a mountainous environment that abounds in paths and small villages, but, at the same time, is characterized by an important industrial fabric, which places it amongst the main manufacturing areas on a provincial level, thanks to its recent history of craftsmanship and industry. Small, medium and large-sized companies are located in Val Brembilla and deal particularly in the wood sector (furniture, components and accessories for textile equipment) and metalworking and mechanical engineering firms (lighting technology, mechanical handling equipment, drive belts, etc.). In order to involve the citizens in the decision regarding the intended use of the pavilion, the project which was named “Turnà a ‘ndomà” (meaning “Return to the Future” in the local dialect) – the University of Bergamo was asked to conduct research in order to identify the residents’ opinions and suggestions.

From the outset, the possible macro-areas of attention/objectives linked to the creation of the new space were pinpointed, and are summarized in the following areas of action:

- Increase the job opportunities for young people of the area;
- Create new spaces and reasons for people to gather together;
- Promote manufacturing and assist companies of the territory;
- Gain an economic return on investment (with the relevant timescales);
- Create visibility for the valley;
- Create traffic (increase the number of visitors);
- Promote the territory with an eye to tourism.

These macro-areas of attention were assessed in line with the final aim of creating public value (Benington & Moore, 2010) through co-creation. By becoming more involved, citizens and other key stakeholders (Mainardes, et al., 2011) may make a fundamental contribution towards improving the public sector’s ability for innovation (Bason, 2010).

From an operative point of view, the objectives set include:

1. Listening to citizens’ and entrepreneurs’ suggestions and expectations concerning the “Turnà a ‘ndomà” project
2. Defining the elements of differentiation and value creators of the territory for:
  - Citizens
  - Companies
  - The local council
  - Other stakeholders
  - Tourist operators (and potential tourists)

Before the start of the research activity, the local council had already pinpointed three potential intended uses of the pavilion:

- An outdoor and indoor market, including the sale of traditional produce of the territory (cheese, fruit, corn flour, honey, salami, etc.);
- An area where festivals organized by voluntary associations can be held, with the added benefit of saving money on the hiring of equipment and having fitted kitchens without the need to assemble and disassemble them each time;

- The premises of the LABs, in other words a group of 6 workshops set up for the purpose of creating activities involving the residents in different spheres; in particular, these include:
  1. TANLAB: TAN is the acronym of *Turnà A 'Ndomà*; this lab aims to be the driver of the scheme and at present it is coordinating the various participants and, in the future, it will lead the different activities arising from the association;
  2. ERGLAB: The aim of this workshop is to pinpoint intelligent solutions for the air-conditioning of the space while at the same time identifying the necessary sources of energy;
  3. AGRILAB: A workshop linked to nature, the conservation of the territory and the cultivation of traditional local produce. In more general terms, the workshop will also have to organize the pruning work which is part of the area's conservation activity, to enable public paths to be rediscovered;
  4. FUNLAB: One of the aims of the “machine of the future” is to become a meeting place to encourage social cohesion amongst the community, which already occurs as the result of various village festivals and other similar events;
  5. TECNOLAB: This concerns the workshop linked to the world of business and technology and with the aid of 3D laser cutter printers and machinery it aims to provide training in these new technologies and encourage the setting up of new Start Ups;
  6. 3D SCHOOL: This workshop interacts with schools (middle and secondary schools located in the neighboring municipalities).

In view of the complexity and the multiplicity of stakeholders involved, a two-step research phase was considered appropriate (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Molina-Azorin, 2011): the first involved a qualitative study, which allowed “first-hand” information regarding the target to be gathered by involving the citizens and local companies; the second was a quantitative phase, during which a direct survey was conducted, structured on the basis of the first phase of the work.

### 3.2 *The qualitative study*

The qualitative study was mainly performed by means of focus groups (Marbach, 2000), in other words an investigation technique that is useful for gathering opinions, judgements and points of view concerning a particular topic. This approach is practical for generating hypotheses to be tested in a subsequent analysis of a quantitative type. This technique consists of a group interview led by a moderator<sup>1</sup> who, using a structured outline, seeks to obtain useful information not only from the individual replies given, but also from the interaction of the participants at the focus groups (Trentini, 1995). In our case, we decided to adopt two different focus outlines, one dedicated to businesses, the other to citizens.

For this purpose, seven focus groups were conducted with various categories of opinion leaders. These focus groups were performed by means of meetings held in the room of the VAB (Brembilla Ambulance Volunteers) and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes with groups of opinion leaders consisting of 4 to 10 people. In view of the objectives referred to above, the following list of bullet points describes the key themes examined during the survey:

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<sup>1</sup> In this specific case, Mauro Cavallone and Francesca Magno; while the whole research team participated in the focus groups.

1. Positive and negative aspects of living in Val Brembilla;
2. Intended use of the pavilion;
3. Critical issues concerning the pavilion;
4. Involvement in the management of the pavilion.

The opinion leaders were identified, on the basis of the work they did, their particular duties or their decision-making positions held currently or in the past, as being people capable of providing an objective opinion in order to identify the outcomes expected from the research. The names of these people were provided by the “Pro loco”, the association promoting local culture and tourism, and were contacted at random, as they were unknown to the authors beforehand. In choosing the participants, the key dictates of the method were followed, according to which the members of each focus group must not be too homogenous to enable various points of view to emerge. Following this approach, seven focus groups were conducted, two with businesses and five with citizens, as well as five individual interviews. The participants were involved as they were considered to be opinion leaders of the town. A total of 54 people were interviewed. By using a cross-sectional analysis, the keywords that emerged during the different focus groups were compared, in order to highlight the ones that recurred most often and were most commonly heard amongst the interviewees. In this way, concept maps were drawn up for each of the topics considered to be relevant for the purposes of the research. More specifically, the tabulation is sub-divided into 3 macro-topics which are summarized in the table below (Table 1):

- Positive and negative aspects of living in Val Brembilla;
- Intended use of the pavilion;
- Critical issues concerning the pavilion.

*Table 2. The main topics raised by the focus groups*

<b>Positive aspects Val Brembilla</b>	<b>n. recurrences</b>	<b>Negative aspects Val Brembilla</b>	<b>n. recurrences</b>
Entrepreneurial fabric	5	Little social/night life	6
Peacefulness/ climate / nature	4	Roads and logistics	5
Solidarity/ voluntary work/ “extended family”	3	Lack of infrastructures and services	5
No degradation	2	Envy	4
Link between population – business	2	Town “lacks colour”/drab buildings	4
Qualified people	2	Difficulty of satisfying the job offer and demand	4
Money from the merger	1	Drugs and alcoholism/problems of young people	3
		Little residential activity (distance from the city)	3
		Lack of tourism-hospitality related culture	2
		Poor turnover of volunteers	2
		Generation gap	2
		No interest in culture	2
		Poor consideration of the town	2



<b>End use of the pavilion</b>	<b>n. recurrences</b>	<b>Critical issues concerning the pavilion</b>	<b>n. recurrences</b>
Courses / training	9	Worries about and complexity of the management	7
Festival / events area	7	Vague project	3
Cultural centre	7	No purpose/ other priorities/ waste of resources	3
Cultural events/music/museum	5	Unfair competition	3
Recovery of nature/countryside/territory	5	(to the detriment of shop owners)	
Sports activities	5	Loss of parking space / square	2
Senior citizens' centre	4	Opposition to moving the market	2
Indoor market (agricultural and social)	4	Risk of further isolating the hamlets	2
Place for promoting traditional produce	4		
Library	3		
Bowling alley	3		
Young people's centre	3		
Associations	3		
Internet point	2		
Nursery centre	2		
Support for local businesses	2		

*Source: Authors' elaboration*

### 3.3 The quantitative study

During the quantitative phase of the research, a questionnaire was compiled, based on the evidence that emerged during the previous phase of analysis involving the focus groups. As an investigative tool, the questionnaire enabled data to be collected regarding opinions, attitudes and perceptions. From a methodological point of view, this approach allowed us to validate and strengthen the findings. For this purpose, this phase of the work was performed according to the following steps:

- organization of the work and collection of data;
- tabulation of the questionnaires and subsequent processing;
- formulation of the results.

The interviews took place in February and March 2018<sup>2</sup>. Every effort was made to involve the entire town, from the most popular places to the smallest hamlets, in an attempt to have the broadest representative sample possible of the interlocutors involved in the service co-production activities. To conduct the interviews, a face-to-face approach was adopted, not mediated by information and communication technologies (ICTs), which, on the contrary, facilitated the cataloguing and processing of the evidence gathered. 463 people were contacted altogether: 84 refused quite categorically to answer any questions. Of the remaining 379 interviewees, 303 are inhabitants of Val Brembilla and answered our questionnaire in full, whereas 76 people were found to be non-resident and for this reason they were not taken into

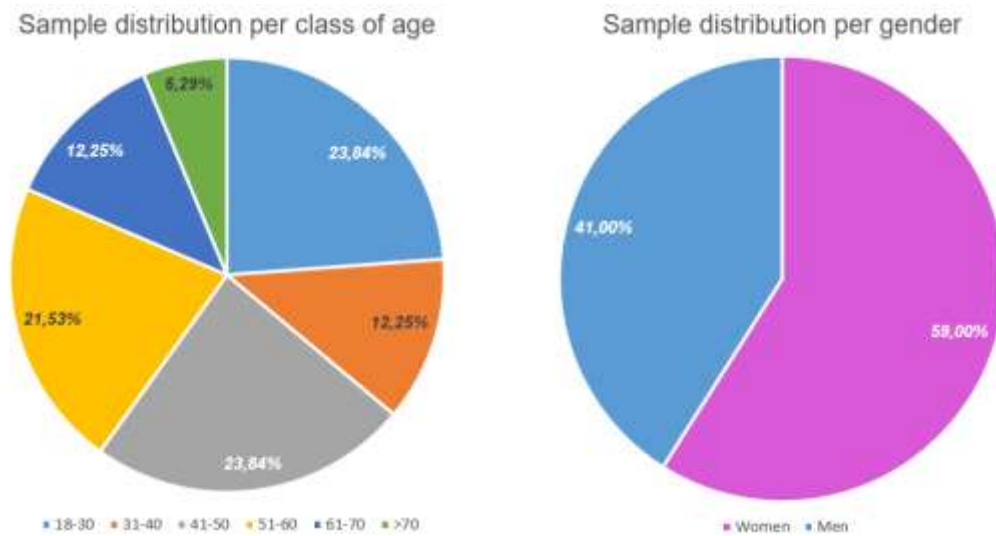
<sup>2</sup> The interviews were conducted on: 8, 16, 18, 20 and 21 February 2018; 13 and 14 March 2018.

consideration. The main reasons for the presence of the latter in the town were participation in sports events and work commitments. Therefore, the final sample is represented by 303 citizens.

### 3.4 The sample attributes

59% (180) of the respondents were women, while 41% (123) were men. The average age of the survey participants was 46 (the youngest being 18 and the oldest 84). Figure 1 summarizes the distribution by age and gender of the population investigated. On average, the interviewees stated that they had lived in Val Brembilla for 38.5 years, with a range varying from a minimum of 3 months to a maximum of 84 years.

Figure 1. The sample distribution per class of age and gender



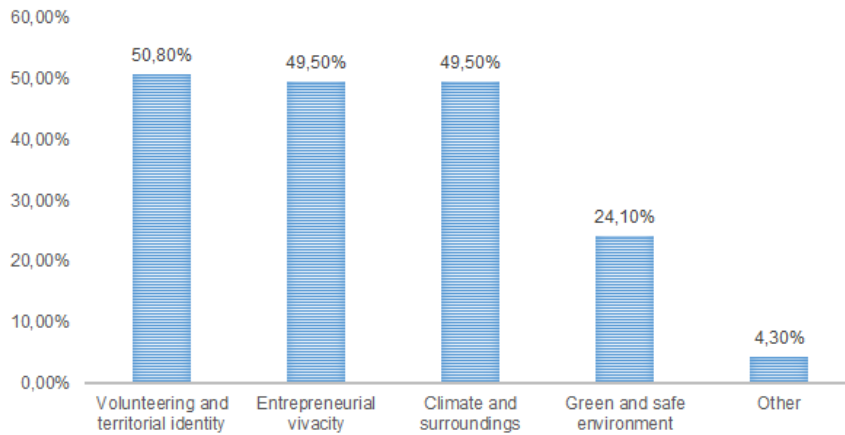
As far as the interviewees' employment situation is concerned, the most widely represented occupations were, in order: workers (24.4%), housewives (14.9%), office workers (14.5%), pensioners (12.12%), entrepreneurs (6.6%), students (6.3%), unemployed (4.29%) and freelancers (4%).

## 4. Findings

The interviewees highlighted various positive aspects of living in Val Brembilla<sup>3</sup>. As summarized in Figure 2, they are, in first place, active volunteering and a strong sense of community (mentioned by more than 50% of the respondents), which always seem to have characterized this community, and are furthermore proven by the numerous operative associations present in the territory. These are followed by an active entrepreneurial fabric and, in general, the link between businesses and the territory (mentioned as a reason by 49.5%); even the aspects linked to nature and the climate appeared to be particularly appreciated by the population (49.5% respondents).

<sup>3</sup> In the interpretation of the data that follows, it must be considered that the respondents were able to indicate a maximum of two of the items that emerged from the analysis of the focus groups.

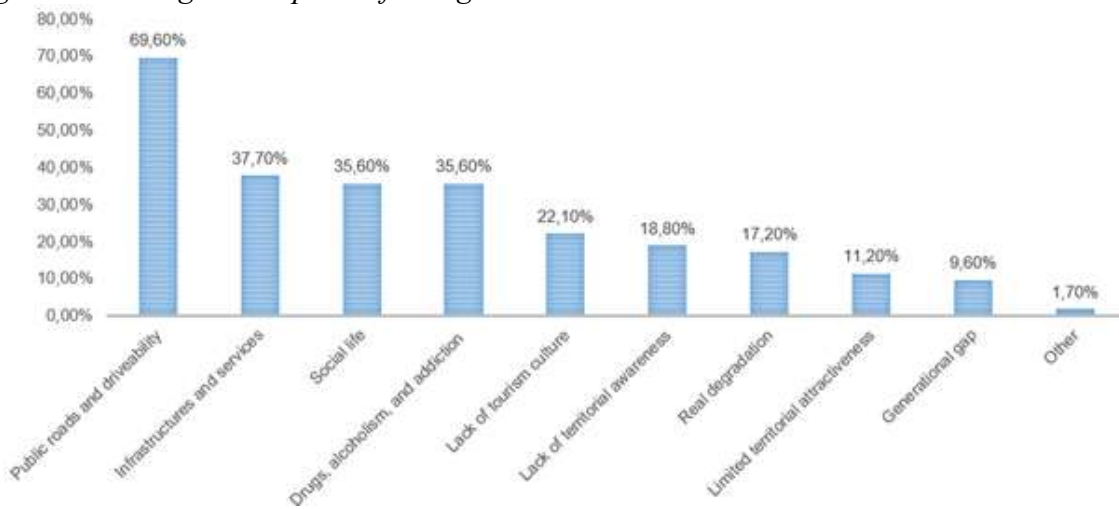
Figure 2. The positive aspects of living in Val Brembilla



Source: Authors' elaboration

On the contrary, the negative aspects (Figure 3) include – for almost 70% of the respondents – the roads<sup>4</sup> and logistics, followed by a lack of infrastructures and services (37.7%), little social life, especially in the evening, (35.6%) and problems of young people (drugs, alcoholism, etc.) which worry 35.6% of the survey participants. Moreover, it should be underlined, as mentioned by 22.1% of the citizens interviewed, that there is a lack of culture linked to tourism and little appreciation of the territory (18.8%).

Figure 3. The negative aspects of living in Val Brembilla



Source: Authors' elaboration

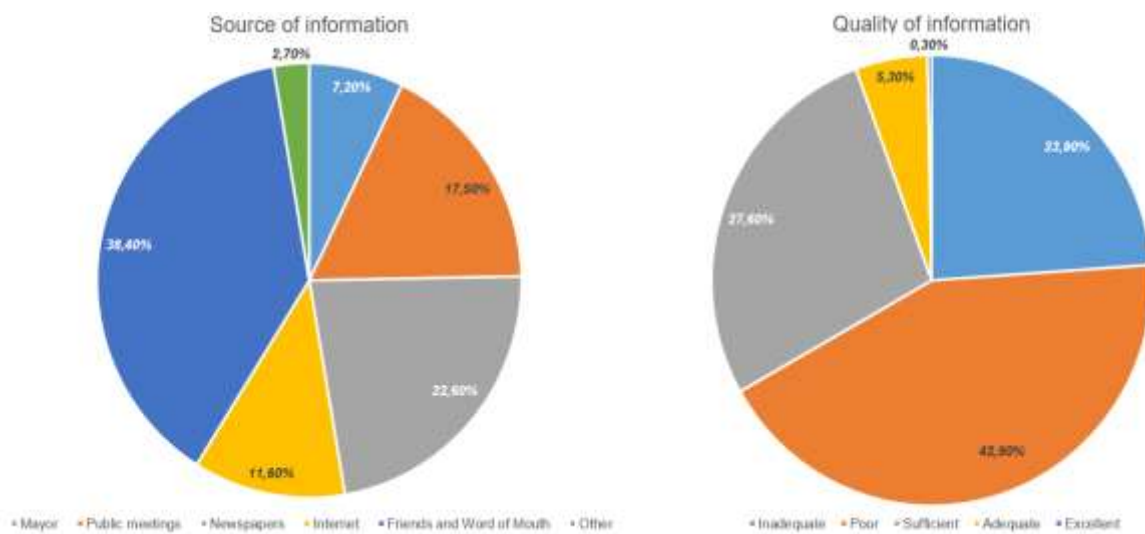
<sup>4</sup> Apart from the very high percentage of people who mentioned the roads as being amongst the negative aspects, the analysis of the comments made by the citizens – as reported below – confirmed this to be an absolute priority.

“...The roads must be dealt with”  
 “...Sort out the roads that are an embarrassment”  
 “...Sort out the roads”  
 “...The roads should have top priority”.

With reference to the roads, it should also be stated that the citizens have scant knowledge of the competencies and responsibilities, including regulatory powers, concerning this topic.

Almost all the respondents 292 (96.40%) had heard about the purchase of the pavilion by the local council; only a very limited number (11, equal to 3.60%) of the respondents had not heard about it. The 292 citizens who were aware of the purchase of the pavilion were asked to specify the source of their information and, in general, to assess the appropriateness of the level of information given about the investment made by the council. Word-of-mouth amongst friends was the most common way in which the news was spread (38.4%), followed by the newspapers (22.6%). The numerous meetings held with the citizens were mentioned as having been a useful source of information by 17.5% of the interviewees. Conversely, as far as the quality of the information is concerned, the citizens' opinion appeared to be decidedly negative (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Source and quality of information about the pavilion

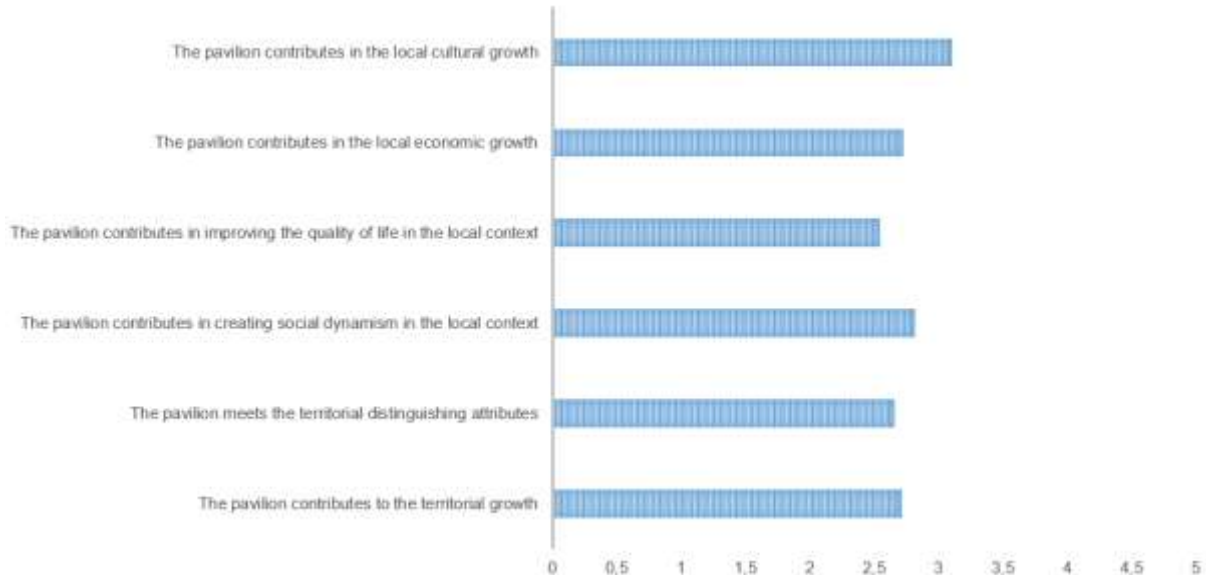


Source: Authors' elaboration

Subsequently, the citizens were asked to express an opinion of the possible benefits that the territory could gain from the pavilion (Figure 5). The opinions were expressed by means of the level of agreement with some statements, measured on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1= totally disagree and 5= totally agree). The citizens tended to appear rather cautious about the benefits that the territory could gain from the pavilion, in fact the values remained in the neutral area. Of all the benefits that emerged from the focus groups, from an analysis of the average values the possibility of the cultural development of the territory stands out (3.11). In addition, of the various options, on one side it emerges that the pavilion might improve the entertainment level in the town (2.82) and this datum recalls the lack of social life which emerged as one of the main problems of the town underlined previously. On the other hand, the contribution that the pavilion can bring to the economic growth of the territory also emerges (2.73). In general, the pavilion is considered to be quite useful (2.72). However, the citizens are more skeptical about whether the pavilion will contribute towards improving the quality of life (2.55). Finally, the

citizens were asked to assess their overall degree of satisfaction with the purchase of the pavilion. The average value proved to be relatively modest (2.55)<sup>5</sup>.

Figure 5. The potential advantages brought by the pavilion



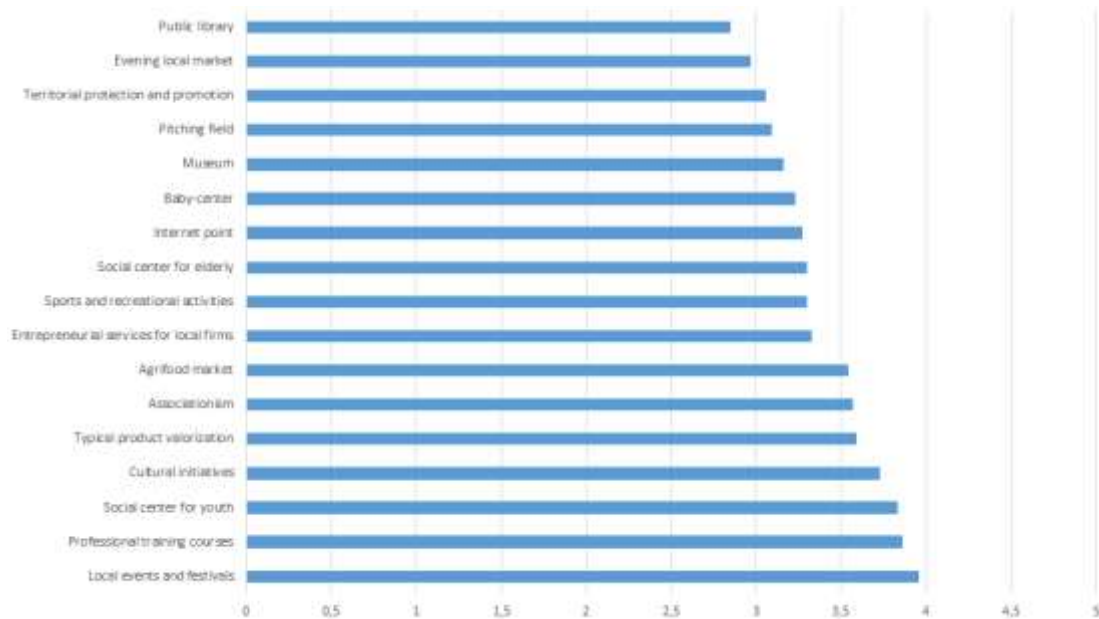
Source: Authors' elaboration

Steps were then taken to ask the citizens to assess the possible intended uses of the pavilion (Figure 6). This assessment was made on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1= not very useful and 5= very useful). The average values proved to be decidedly high, a sign of the citizens' enthusiasm regarding the new initiatives that may involve the town. The highest average value was reported in the events and festivals area (3.96), followed by a place of training where courses can be organized (3.86). This was followed (3.83) by a youth center, a place for cultural events and music. The attachment to the territory and to its traditions emerged strongly, in fact a keenness was shown for the idea that the pavilion could be a place to promote traditional products (3.59), that it could be used as a proper agricultural market (3.54) or that it could, in any case, be a place for the recovery of the countryside, the territory and nature (3.06). Again, the importance of culture for the town re-emerged, having already arisen in the previous questions. In fact, the idea that the pavilion could be used as a museum was met with particular favor (3.16). Of the hypotheses that were greeted with less enthusiasm we find the idea of an evening market (2.97) and a library (2.95).

<sup>5</sup> In general, it should be underlined that the time that has lapsed since the purchase took place, which is more than a year now, may have affected these modest/neutral assessments.



Figure 6. The potential pavilion's destination of use



Source: Authors' elaboration

The possibility of using the pavilion as a place of training was further investigated with a question regarding the types of courses that could be organized there: particular importance was given to professional training, information technology, foreign languages, cooking, dancing and agriculture. In the same way, the interviewees were asked to specify any proposals they had for creating a museum area within the pavilion. The most commonly mentioned themes were: the safeguarding and promotion of the valley, the territory and its traditions; the safeguarding of the historic industrial activities of the town; local art and culture; craftsmanship and traditional handicrafts; photography; a museum for children and adolescents.

To summarize these considerations, Table 3 provides an overview of the possible intended uses of the pavilion divided into age groups.

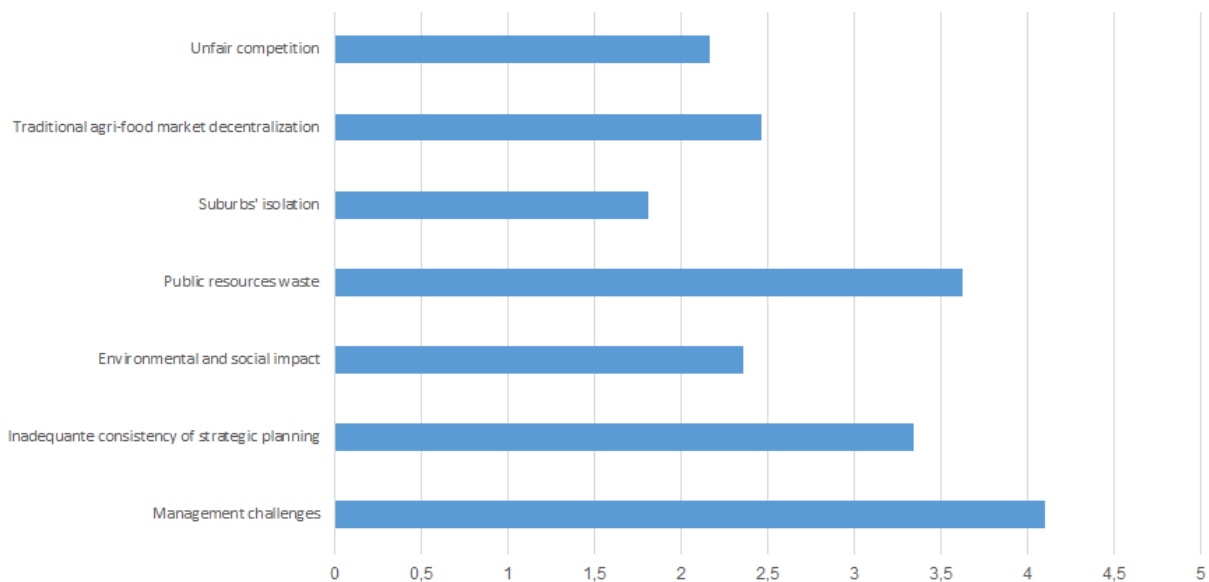
Table 3. The pavilion's destination of use per class of age

Intended uses	18-25	26-40	41-55	>56
Area for events and festivals	3,83	4,08	4,14	3,83
Museum	2,94	3,06	3,31	3,16
Place of training where courses can be held	3,72	4,08	4,09	3,49
Place for the recovery of the countryside, the territory and nature	2,85	3,03	3,12	3,09
A senior citizens' centre	3,15	3,21	3,23	3,49
Possibility of an agricultural market to promote local products	3,57	3,69	3,63	3,29
Possibility of an evening market	2,96	3,21	2,87	2,69
Centre for cultural events and music	3,7	3,82	3,82	3,56
Library	2,66	3,02	3,01	2,9
Bowling alley	2,43	2,92	3,12	3,53
Place for sports activities	3,21	3,32	3,34	3,27
Internet point	3,4	3,34	3,2	3,2
Place for promoting traditional products	3,6	3,63	3,63	3,5
Nursery centre	3,09	3,32	3,25	3,22
Young people's centre	3,74	3,71	3,91	3,83
Offices of the various associations	3,34	3,53	3,71	3,54
Assistance for businesses in the territory	3,15	3,53	3,41	3,2

Source: Authors' elaboration

We now come to the threats that the citizens envisage with reference to the use of the pavilion (Figure 7). The greatest worry concerns the difficulties of managing the entire structure (4.10), followed by concern that the purchase of the pavilion will prove to be a waste of public resources (3.62) and that at the end, as unfortunately often occurs in Italy, the project will not materialize in concrete activities that are useful for the creation of public value (3.34). In these cases, it is also reasonable to consider that the lapse of time since the purchase was made may have contributed towards increasing the citizens' fears. It is interesting to note that the possibility of setting up trading activities (e.g. cafés) inside the pavilion is not considered to be a form of unfair competition against those businesses already present in the territory (2.16). In the same way, the fact that the fulfilment of the project may have a centralizing effect on the town and isolate the other villages as a consequence, is not considered to be a possible threat (1,81).

Figure 7. The threats raised by the pavilion



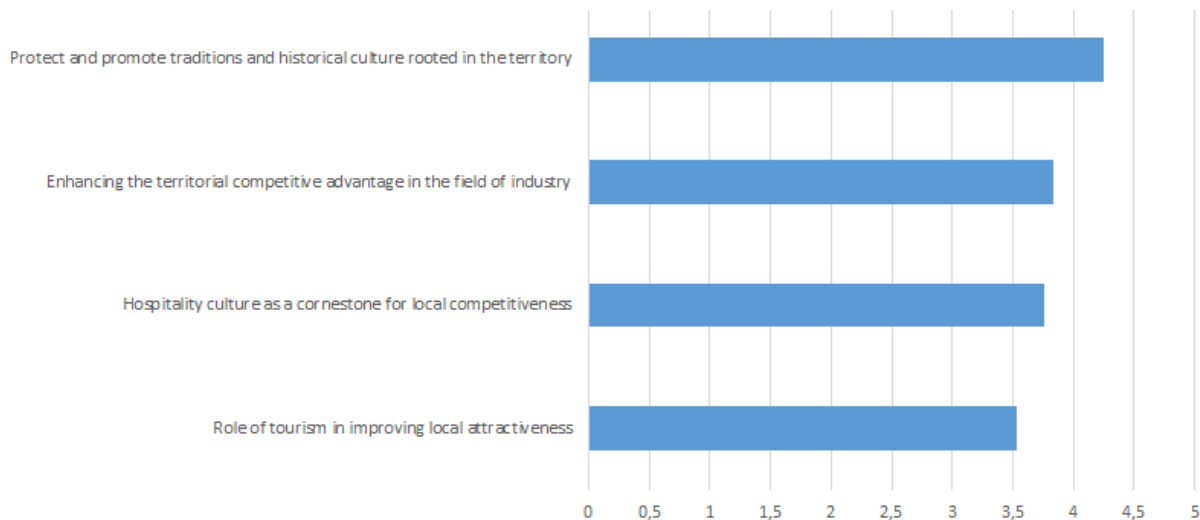
Source: Authors' elaboration

Furthermore, the question was posed as to how important it was for the citizens to be involved in deciding the intended use of the pavilion. The results show how important it is for the citizens to be involved in a choice of this type. In fact, the score for this answer is very nearly the maximum, and more precisely 4.30. In this sense, confirmation is given of what many international organizations and many European programs warmly recommend and that is the importance of the so-called “participatory practices”, which consist in involving the citizens in public choices as a democratic response to the crisis in politics. Continuing from this participatory perspective, the citizens were asked to think about the future and determine which aspect should be emphasized in order to encourage the development of the territory.

“...Live for the present, dream for the future, learn from the past”, were the words of an unknown writer of many years ago and this also seems to be the outlook of the residents of Val Brembilla. In fact, the data highlight a very strong desire to recover the roots and traditions constituting the foundations of the town (4.25). Obviously, industry, which is, undoubtedly, a strong point of the town, is not overlooked (3.83). This is followed by the culture of hospitality (3.76) and the culture of tourism (3.53); basically, the idea that the industrial development has

benefitted the economic well-being of the residents is confirmed, but, paradoxically, this has led to a sort of withdrawal into itself of the town which was once able to welcome people from outside, but today complains of a subtle difficulty in convincing its young people to remain in Brembilla (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Citizens' outlook for maintaining territorial attractiveness



Source: Authors' elaboration

Finally, we decided to add a section dedicated specifically to businesses and we asked the entrepreneurs to think first as citizens and then as active representatives of the economic life of the town. A total of 37 entrepreneurs said they were willing to answer this part of the questionnaire too. Firstly, we asked whether, drawing on their wealth of experience, they considered that there was a viable and distinct possibility of active cooperation amongst the businesses of the town in order to guarantee the success of the project. The entrepreneurs seemed to be mildly cautious with regard to the feasibility of active cooperation for the success of the project, considering their potential contribution to be only marginal (on average 3.46, on a scale of 1= very low to 5=very high). This trend is also confirmed by the subsequent question in which they were asked if they would be willing to take part in the implementation of promotional activities centering around the pavilion. In fact, as many as 61.1% declared that they would not be willing to participate. Analyzing the reasons, they are mostly linked to a lack of time and to an underlying skepticism regarding the project. On the contrary, of the 38.9% of the entrepreneurs who declared that they would be willing to participate, one respondent stands out for stating that not only would he be willing to offer his experience, but that he would also be willing to back the project financially.

According to the main evidence collected during the interviews carried out, thanks to the participation of the citizens and the entrepreneurs, the most prominent aspect is the lack of understanding on the part of those concerned regarding the reasons that led to the purchase of the pavilion. As one of the interviewees stated:

*“...I don't understand the purchase of the pavilion, for how it is structured or for how it is managed...”*

Moreover, fears are expressed over possible threats to the management of the pavilion which, on one hand, requires specific skills and, on the other, wastes resources that could be used for other public purposes. As stated by various interviewees:

- “...There are no fixed human resources to guarantee the continuity of the management...”*
- “...It shouldn’t be done, too expensive, a waste of money (...) [The priority is...] to sort out the roads”*
- “... The money spent on the pavilion should have been spent on something else. (...). There were many other priorities (...). The roads need to be sorted out with guard rails, the holes need to be filled and the manhole covers need to be set flush with the roads (...). It would be better to carry out road maintenance and invest in public parks”*

In addition, many citizens state that they were not sufficiently informed prior to the purchase, underlining that:

- “... [The pavilion...] was purchased without saying anything (...). The population should have been warned before spending such a lot of money. It’s pointless doing surveys when everything has already been done...”*

Finally, there are numerous messages of trust and hope in the investment made. Merely by way of examples, the most significant comments in this sense are reported below:

- “...In view of the fact that it started with Expo, with an eye towards the world and the future, cultural development and innovation (...)”*
- “ (...) I hope that it will be for the future of the young people (...). It is a good initiative for the town, because at the moment it is rather dead”*

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

The results of the research must be read in light of the main limitations characterizing this study. Firstly, the case study proposed for the analysis did not allow the data collected and presented above to be generalized. Nonetheless, the mixed approach adopted enabled us to make our claims more consistent and sound, facilitating the applicability to other contexts of analysis. Secondly, it should be underlined that the experience analyzed concerned a specific example of public service co-production, in other words *collective co-production*, mainly focused on the co-planning - rather than on the co-design – of public value creation activities. As a result, caution is required when drawing theoretical and practical implications from the study. Finally, it should be emphasized that the concept of territorial identity was not operationalized or quantified; rather, it was inferred from the interpretation – from an epistemological viewpoint – of the interviews conducted in the context of analysis. For this reason, it is not possible to pinpoint clearly and objectively the impacts of territorial identity on the dynamics of co-production.

In spite of these limitations, the results presented above provide some attempts to respond to the research questions that inspired this study. Obviously, such answers must be read bearing

in mind the need for further studies for the purpose of shedding light on the distinguishing characteristics of the processes of collective co-production in contexts featuring a strong territorial identity. As far as R.Q 1 is concerned, it seems clear that territorial identity is a factor to be held in serious consideration in the planning of public service co-production activities. In fact, if there is scant knowledge of the features of the territorial identity, there is the risk of creating little commitment in the population and, consequently, discouraging adhesion to the process of public value co-creation. In contrast, the ability to combine public service co-production and territorial identity guarantees the commitment as much as the engagement of the reference population which senses a visceral involvement in the efforts leading to the co-creation of public value.

Moving on to R.Q. 2, serious consideration must be given to territorial identity which, apart from representing a catalyst of public service co-production, may perform – unless handled appropriately – as a restraint on the implementation and maintenance of a long-lasting partnership between citizens and public sector organizations. In fact, the inability of the latter to emphasize and enhance the potential contribution of territorial identity may develop into mistrust on the part of citizens and, consequently, arouse little enthusiasm for public value co-creation. From this perspective – and in line with the contents of R.Q. 3 – the potential of territorial identity must be exploited in order to make the local context a fertile terrain for the grassroots support of co-production activities. This appears to be possible by linking in the clearest possible way – both at a strategic level and in organizational and managerial terms – the experiences of public service co-production with the specific nature of the territorial identity. Indeed, the evidence collected from the quali-quantitative study performed suggested how important it is to safeguard the local identity and enhance the traditions that have taken root in the territorial context over the years.

The set of opinions given as comments to the data emerging from the interviews also provides insights and indications concerning both the intended use of the former Expo pavilion and confirmation of the degree to which the actions of the local council are appreciated. It can be affirmed that the two stages of the data search path not only involved the citizens in expressing their opinion regarding the intended use of the pavilion, in line with the axioms of the “participatory practices”, but they were also a good opportunity for providing information about the project and linking it to the territorial identity. The small posters printed and displayed in places close to where the interviews were held aimed at providing a visual reminder of the project, but also at informing those people who had not previously known about the project. From this viewpoint, it is believed that – like a sort of “knock-on effect” – the research path spread information about the project, leading to a greater awareness of the existence of the initiative and thus initiated co-production. At this point, the citizens of Val Brembilla expect to see the pavilion “up and running”. Obviously, it will not occur “all at once”. Instead, a well-structured and feasible plan of action will have to be devised and implemented; with this aim in mind, it would be advisable to make use of the volunteers of the various “Labs”, in order to maximize the visibility of the project and link it even further to the territorial identity.

In a final analysis, a series of considerations can be made, that may uphold the final choice regarding the intended uses of the pavilion. Firstly, it emerged that there is an objective difficulty for entrepreneurs to collaborate. In this respect, and in the authors’ opinion, any initiatives that provide for the latter active involvement should be set aside (at least temporarily). Conversely, of the positive aspects of living in Val Brembilla, the active volunteering and strong sense of community emerged very clearly. This positive element must be linked, on one hand, with the negative elements which, apart from the roads and logistics



that the local council cannot objectively tackle at this time, include scant social life (especially in the evening) and the problems of young people and, on the other hand, with the intended uses that gained most approval from the community (area for events and festivals, center for cultural events and music and promotion of traditional products). The ability to match these themes will lead to a further effect: that of a greater possibility for promoting and enhancing the territorial identity, which is essential for making the experience of public value co-creation sustainable in the long-term.

The conclusion that can be drawn is that the community demonstrates an incredible urge to stay together and remain attached to its roots: therefore, there is no better opportunity for this – at least not in the short term – than sharing in the project for the pavilion. This opportunity should not be “underestimated” and culture should become the center of the project: a culture that looks at the past from an educational viewpoint, opening up perhaps to forms of industrial tourism, and which, at the same time, reaches out to the world and projects itself into the future (for example, by seeking innovative and environmentally-friendly forms of heating). It is believed that the pavilion should become an open, multi-disciplinary place that combines economic and social purposes linked to the territory’s hard-working roots and, at the same time, embraces the highlighted need for culture. For this reason, it is extremely important not to lose sight of the connection with the Expo pavilion of Kuwait, considered by many to be one of the most beautiful, and to take prompt action before this memory fades completely. Only in this way Val Brembilla can gain a reputation that will enable it to attract the attention it deserves and develop even further.

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