

## EXTRA - ORDINARY FOOD: ALONG THE PATHS OF FOOD

*Beatrice Del Monte* \*

From July 13<sup>th</sup> to August 2<sup>nd</sup>, then extended until August 30<sup>th</sup> given its huge success, in various spaces of the Pavilion of the KIP International School in Expo Milan 2015, the exhibition entitled "Extra-Ordinary Food - Along the paths of Food" was held. The exhibition was realized by the association "Obiettivo sul mondo"<sup>1</sup>, in collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a specialized agency of the United Nations based in Rome. The partnership between Obiettivo sul Mondo and IFAD goes back to 2006, when the association was invited to organize a photo exhibit on India's cultural treasures with a particular attention to the richness of its indigenous communities. The underlying theme of the exhibition that took place at the KIP Pavilion in Expo was the food system of various indigenous communities in the world, topic to which IFAD dedicated the global meeting of the Forum of Indigenous Peoples that was held in Rome in February 2015.



*Rural work, Mali – photo credit: Carla Parato Milone*

\* *Beatrice Del Monte*, bursary holder of the 2014-2015 René Cassin Prize, is currently working as Research Fellow with the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty.

Translated from the original Italian version by Mariapaola Pietracci Mirabelli.

<sup>1</sup> [obiettivosulmondo@tiscali.it](mailto:obiettivosulmondo@tiscali.it)

The Cultural Association “Obiettivo sul Mondo” was founded in 1992 to disseminate and preserve the knowledge of different cultures of the earth, through the organization of screenings, photo exhibitions and conferences to discuss the value of this heritage. President and Vice-president of the association are Claudio Tirelli and Roberta Ceolin, who chose to dedicate their lives to understanding the cultures of South Asia and, in particular, of Indian tribes. Carla Parato Milone and Giorgio Milone, instead, have been traveling for over forty years, documenting and exploring areas difficult to reach through conventional travel circuits to understand practices, knowledge and changes put in place by the people who inhabit these territories. From the collaboration of these photographers-travelers the exposition that took place at the KIP International School Pavilion came to life. Before being presented at Expo, the exhibition was on display at the Castle of Abbiategrasso (MI), as an event connected to the International Assembly of Cittaslow, with the support of IFAD and Cittaslow International<sup>2</sup>.



*In a mustard field, Rajasthan, India – photo credit: Claudio Tirelli*

One of the photographers, Claudio Tirelli, in an interview<sup>3</sup> given during their presence at the Universal Exposition in Milan, explained the intentions behind the creation of the exhibition 'Extra-Ordinary Food': "The main idea is that four photographers decided to delve in the archive of 30 years of travels and research looking for photos on the theme of the Expo; that is food, and indigenous peoples and food. The exhibition displays 25 photographs and addresses a

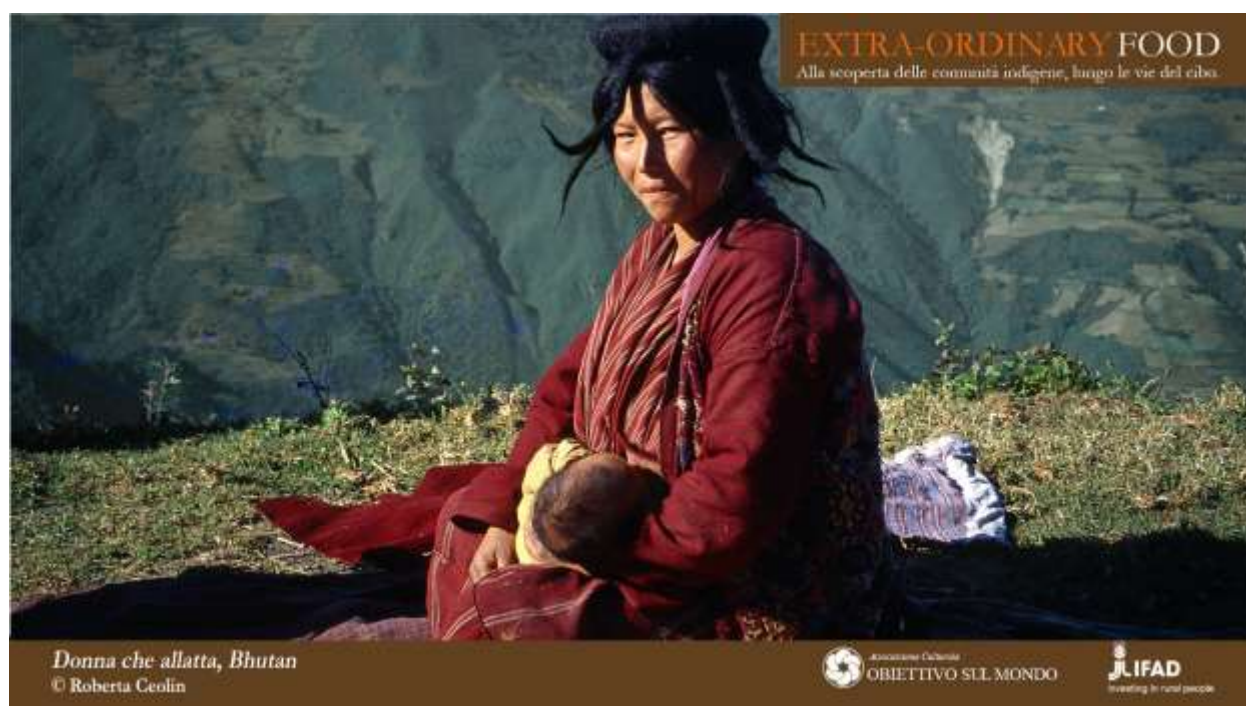
<sup>2</sup> Cittaslow International is a network of cities founded in 1999 to broaden the philosophy of Slow Food to local communities and to government of towns, applying the concepts of eco-gastronomy in everyday life and promoting a different idea of development. <http://www.cittaslow.org>.

<sup>3</sup> Interview at Expo Talk, a show of the RAI, the Italian national public broadcasting company, dedicated to the events and the actors of Expo Milan 2015.



number of topics, (...) how to cook, how to cultivate. Indigenous peoples who try to preserve their identity despite the aggression of the contemporary world."

The photos in the exhibition are a tribute to the lives of rural realities of the globe. In them daily life, rituals, emotions and the pride of farming communities in different continents come to life. The images tell stories of fishermen, farmers working the fields, moments of life in local markets, places of spices and foods inextricably linked with the indigenous cultures. Recurrent among those actors are women, who, in indigenous societies, are often critical to the welfare of the community, not only because of their contribution in economic activities and in the care of families, but also because, with their roles, they contribute to preserving local agro-biodiversity and to passing on the knowledge that indigenous societies carry. Photographer Claudio Tirelli describes, through words, the role of Indian women he encountered during his research trips, represented extraordinarily in the photographs on display: "The image on my left is of a woman in India in a mustard field. It gives the idea of the elegance of Indian women, even in the most difficult and most tiring moments. They are always, in fact, very pleasant, very touching. Hospitable people, people who want to share and tell about their world and their way (...) of life, cooking and agriculture."



*Breastfeeding woman, Bhutan – photo credit: Roberta Ceolin*

The authors of the photographic project on display use a strong anthropological approach in painting their subjects, incessantly combining their empathy with the people represented with a high ethnographic and descriptive value. Their depictions offer glimpses of worlds and real life episodes, captured with honesty and discretion. This approach allows us to perceive and partake in the materiality that we are watching, listening timidly with respect and humility to the lessons that the people photographed have to offer. In their representations, the photographers encourage reflections on the wealth of knowledge tied to land, agriculture and

environment of which the indigenous communities are carriers. The exhibition is thus a celebration of the practices carried out, passed down and transformed through the millennia by these communities, who have developed configurations characterized by a high cultural and spiritual value, and guided by a deep respect for the territories with which they interact. The photos on display placed the emphasis on the voices of indigenous communities, highlighting their role in preserving and promoting social and resilient food systems, through practices and traditions characterized by respect for living things and the community, which are developed in unique conformations in the different territories.



*Mushroom harvest, Vietnam – photo credit: Giorgio Milone*

Through this exhibition, the KIP International School Pavilion decided to raise and spread awareness about the value of the knowledge of indigenous communities. As expressed by Claudio Tirelli, this exhibition focused the attention on the richness of this knowledge, allowing visitors from a highly industrialized world to make a comparison with this diversity, which they would not otherwise come into contact. As he explained “the impressions (of visitors) are interesting because they face a probably unknown world. In this beautiful Expo we see a lot of the future, here we see a lot of the past. (...) (Visitors) know very little about these peoples and it's interesting because they ask a lot of questions and want to learn more from those who, like us, had the fortune to travel and share food with them. ”

The respectful interaction with indigenous communities should be central in the creation of development policies and interventions in local contexts that choose to pay attention to the practices that focus on the uniqueness and individuality of the communities involved. Indigenous peoples have learned over time to interact respectfully with environment, nature and "non-humans" by establishing relations based on social justice and cooperation. In fact, they do not divide the world in portions to be preserved and areas to be exploited freely with

greed, but direct their lives to respect every form of living. The lessons of which they are carriers will be essential to identify new paths, also for highly industrialized societies.

To view the complete photo exhibition, return to the table of contents and click on the video presentation.