

The transformation of Sardinia: The forgotten paradise

THE ALIENATION OF HUMAN BEINGS FROM THEIR OWN
NATURE AND A POSSIBLE WAY BACK



**IT IS NOW 41 YEARS SINCE I FIRST
LANDED ON SARDINIA.**

The landing strip was a dust strip, and the terminal was tiny. Direct flights were a scarce commodity, and so was jet propulsion. The luggage either never arrived or got there late. Only the streets of the capital were paved. Outside of the capital, oxcarts and donkey carts - with a sprinkling of 1970's cars - drove over gravel roads. Often you had to stop for quite a while when one of the abundant herds of sheep crossed the street again. More than 3 hours was needed to go a distance that you can travel today in 45 minutes by car.

**THE POPULATION LIVED MOSTLY
FROM LIVESTOCK FARMING AND
AGRICULTURE:**

sheep in particular were much more numerous than people. The shepherds led a nomadic life, spent their evenings in remote pinettas made of stone and juniper wood, and dined on pecorino and pane carasau. The mindfulness and "being in the now" that an ever-growing self-help industry of supposedly spiritual remedies tries to sell you at a high price today glowed in its purest essence in the shiny, jet black eyes of these shepherds, in which you could proverbially see yourself reflected. Time disappeared in them.

THE FORESTS AND BEACHES OF SARDINIA HAD A MYSTICAL PERSONALITY.

When you walked along the pristine beach, the beach was so delicate and unspoiled that your feet made a slight whistling sound. It was as if someone were calling very softly from behind and you would turn around startled only to discover that nobody was there. In the endless silence of Sardinia's landscape and forests you could hear ghosts whisper, shadows and presences strolling, and you could catch a glimpse of the immense depth of your own human existence. It is this subtle and faint boundlessness that can be at the same time a blessing and a curse that human beings always long for in their intrinsic expansionism and their desire to overcome their limits. But man fears nothing more than losing himself in this very boundlessness.

BUILT ON SOLID GRANITE,

Sardinia, an island over 500 million years old with more than 150,000 years of human history, represents for me this magical mysticism that we need to look back upon today more than ever. For the core of human existence is hidden there, and we must discover it again if we are to succeed at redirecting human development toward a path that is not self-destructive, but rather self-sustaining. Even though at that time this island lagged decades behind the rest of Europe in its development, here, too, progress did not stand still.

The coasts were completely developed. Where there had been a single house on a 16 km sandy beach, ten thousand buildings soon cropped up. Wetlands with frogs were drained, the dunes retreated, the composition of the sand changed. You could no longer hear any whistling. Even small dusty roads yielded to paved roads. Traffic increased, streets were built on stilts similar to highways. It seemed as if the woodland fairies had retreated to the heart of the island. Once again, as so often in Sardinia's history, the con-

querors of the island came from the sea. This time in the form of tourists thirsty for the sun, who soon called the island Europe's Caribbean due to its unparalleled beaches. If they only knew how it once was! Who would abandon paradise for the Caribbean? The absurd thing is that even today Sardinia is still considered one of the most unspoiled islands of the Mediterranean and of Europe. It serves here however as an example of a process that humanity has propelled at lighting speed in the last 40 years:

ALIENATION FROM ITS OWN NATURE.

The concept of alienation, interpreted both in a social sense and in the individual psychological sense, can be found as early as Aristotle. In 1955, Erich Fromm put it in the context of modern society in his book "The Sane Society." Originally he focused on industrialization and its consequences. Industrial working conditions led to an unparalleled alienation, which only accelerated later in the service and information society and from there expanded to our entire human existence, and hence also to our leisure. Traveling became vacation, and vacation served to compensate for a highly alienated daily life – regardless of whether it was all-inclusive travel or backpacking.



THE MODEL OF COMPENSATION IN THE SOCIETY WAS CLOSELY LINKED TO A MODEL OF INCREASED CONSUMPTION.

You incorporate everything that you need into yourself. Growth seemed limitless, although we must have known earlier about the limited nature of the world's resources. Paradigms such as "more is better," "unrestricted growth (denial of death)" and the ego-centrism of the economic principle in man were commonly postulated as implicit truths and applied to the configuration of all societal, political, economic and even scientific systems. A financial system almost completely disconnected from the real economy supports this effect.

IN LIGHT OF THE IMMENSE CHALLENGES THAT CONFRONT HUMANITY,

it seems almost laughable today to refer to the change in the sound of the sand, the vanishing of the mystical forest or the changes perceived in the water texture. Today the substantial problems with the environment, with health, with the economy and in politics are so numerous that it is easy to draw up an unending list: environmental disasters, contaminated living conditions, plastic waste in the world's oceans, radioactivity, mobile communications exposure, drought and water shortage, war, refugees, concentrations of capital, globalization, digitalization, artificial intelligence, overpopulation, scarceness of resources, an enormous increase in the diseases of civilization and mental illnesses, collapse of social (family) structures, social media, etc. The list could go on almost forever.

WE CAN VIEW THESE GLOBAL CHALLENGES FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES:

from the perspective of biology, of psychology, of philosophy, of physics, of social sciences, of anthro-



pology, etc. It is the Western world that loves to use cerebrally oriented, supposedly objective analysis and science to approach the challenges of our daily lives. The highest good is reason and its capability for making distinctions. We prefer taking things apart to integrating, objectifying instead of allowing subjectivity as a valid principle. You can see the consequences of this approach in many attempts at political solutions. It often seems that we no longer see the forest for the trees.

TODAY WE HAVE DEVELOPED FURTHER THAN EVER IN TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC RESPECTS.

But what are the foundations on which this soaring high-rise is built? Has reason not become independent a long time ago? Is that not what we see in the increase of mental illnesses due to a digitalized lifestyle? Do we really need a robot's artificial intelligence that says to our face that we are no longer needed in this world? Defeated with our own weapons? Humankind seems to be at the apex of its technological and scientific development, and in spite of this never in the course of human history has there been a greater inner disorientation and insecurity than there is today. Which is combined with the potential danger that each individual could have the power to severely disrupt or even destroy the world at the touch of a button.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE SO-CALLED CHALLENGES FROM AN EXISTENTIAL AND SUBJECTIVE STANDPOINT.

Where are the persons in position of power and leadership who have not, in the best case, learned personal responsibility as a moral postulate, but rather have experienced it? And this based on an own existential experience that comes from life itself and not from any highly developed science: not from economics nor leadership dogmas of social sciences, nor from psychology or (quantum) physics. Where are these people who can respond to the "self" in themselves, because they have faced little death and the big death in order to open themselves up to life. The little death is the thousand deaths that each of us dies when he must relinquish elements of his personality: his house, his car, his boat, his marriage, his money. The big death is the complete dissolution of the individual identity, which can feel completely like a real death. Where are these people who can still smell, taste, feel, see and hear this "self." Who want to maintain their five senses open, transparent and pure through conscientious nutrition, through body, breathing, concentration and meditation exercises because they are in contact with this "self." Not to go down in history as the next yoga and meditation guru, in order to experience a betterment of their "I," but rather because they have discovered the boundlessness and infinity in themselves that links them with everything and that they do not wish to shut themselves from it by stupefaction of their senses.

THE KEY LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN OUR SOCIETY HAVE BECOME UNFATHOMABLY POWERFUL

and nevertheless we have the impression that even these persons cling morbidly and desperately to their "I"-identity, and that this has brought them neither sovereignty over their spirit nor over their emotions nor over their body. It is well-known that the rate of mental illness is especially pronounced in positions

of leadership and power – they are often said to exhibit narcissistic personality structures.

TODAY A MANAGER IS MORE LIKELY TO BE AN ADMINISTRATOR THAN A LEADERSHIP PERSONALITY.

Alienation of man from himself is not a matter of change or of management, let alone a case of change management. How absurd it is to intend to manage life's constant changes! Speaking in terms of physics: at the particle level it is perhaps still possible, but at the field level simply unthinkable. This type of approach leads so often to mistakes because it implicitly denies the existential experience - let's call it the "experience of unity," - by suggesting that you can control life. But it is this very existential experience that is so urgently necessary in order to allow real transformation to take place.

A SYSTEM INTRINSICALLY SEEKS CONTINUALLY TO REPRODUCE ITSELF.

If you modify a component of the system, it adjusts and stabilizes once again. The configuration has changed, but the system remains the same. Conversely, transformation is transcending the system with an urgent necessity of establishing a point of reference outside of the system. As a rule, the personality of a manager-type lacks this existential reference point outside the system of his own personality. For this reason he will not succeed in raising a system to a level more suitable for life nor will he be able to transform it.

ONCE AGAIN WE NEED PEOPLE WHO HAVE COMMITTED TO A SUBJECTIVISTIC SCIENCE

And who have had basic existential experiences before they take on responsibility in the society. In the original clan society it was part of the ritual necessary for survival to send members of the clan into the



solitude of nature as part of the process of youthful maturing in order to be able to set up this reference point as an existential experience of unity outside of their society and clan system. They often spent days and weeks without food in isolation in the wilderness. This process was in the real sense of the words a matter of life and death, both for the maturing young man and also for the clan, whose continuing existence he had to ensure. Modern society however thinks it can manage life and in so doing it continually reproduces in its own pathogenesis.

WE NEED PEOPLE IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS WHO CAN FACE LIFE, AND ALSO DEATH,

who can assume real leadership because they have transcended their own interests and they can dedicate their life to the service of the survival of man or of the society. People who have experienced unity and know their own potential, who can therefore embark on creative journeys to transform systems so that these systems will again serve life and not power or fear.

WHAT DOES ALL OF THIS HAVE TO DO WITH SARDINIA AND THE FORGOTTEN PARADISE?

Each of us is a leader. At the very least we lead ourselves and the better we do at this, the better suited we are to lead other persons, an organization or a group

of individuals. Several years ago I was still working in a business consultancy that advised mainly large corporations. I was confronted every day with individuals and executives who clung closely to their roles and the masks that they wore. The predominant guiding principle of their actions was economic considerations, behind which they were hiding. These considerations were a reality, but they did not serve any deeper truth or life as a whole.

I LOOKED BACK ON MY CHILDHOOD ON SARDINIA,

on my deep mystical experiences back then in this still pristine and unspoiled place. I marveled at myself and my collaboration in these often tone-deaf organizations. I found parallels between my development, these companies, Sardinia's development and that of the society as a whole: man's alienation from himself. At that time, I longed for a place where I would be allowed merely to exist. Where there was no religion, no faith, no gurus and no management consultants. Where nobody wants to impose on other people, often unconsciously, their own inculcated doctrines. I wanted to simply be allowed to be present, perceive and feel. I did not want any media, any self-help seminar, I did not want to learn any martial arts or any possibly manipulative mental technique: I merely wanted the freedom to extend my antennae and switch to receiving mode, redevelop my very own link to what has millions of names.

BACK THEN I HAD THE IDEA TO CREATE A PLACE WHERE THIS IS POSSIBLE. AND RIGHT ON SARDINIA.

Mediation between man and (his) nature should be paramount here so that this journey, almost as an aside, can be completed without a fuss and without teacher, trainer or guru. There had to be a way back! Without wishing to belong to a religion, for me it was a matter of emotional creation of a place that serves anyone who has the courage to let himself step down

from sending to receiving, who dares to hearken to the faint tones of nature in order to have his own existential experience that he alone creates and that is just as faint, mystical and hidden as the secret worth discovering and that makes him, almost as an aside, still less dependent on a society that seems to be racing collectively toward its ruin.

THIS LOCATION SHOULD BE CREATED BASED ON SUSTAINABLE CYCLES CLOSE TO NATURE AND IN PERPETUAL OPERATION.

To this end we used David Holmgreen's twelve principles of permaculture. They are:

1. Observe and interact
2. Catch and store energy
3. Generate a yield
4. Apply self-regulation and learn from feedback
5. Use renewable resources and services
6. Produce no waste
7. Design patterns first and then details
8. Integrate rather than segregate
9. Use small and slow solutions
10. Use and value diversity
11. Use edges and value the marginal
12. Use and respond creatively to changes

APPLYING THESE PRINCIPLES AT A SPECIFIC PLACE IN A LIVING CONTEXT IS THE REAL CHALLENGE.

By long-term observation of the nature of this 25 ha hill at a location steeped in history between a historical cemetery and an old prison from Mussolini's times in Castiadas - roughly one hour east of Cagliari toward the coast, - we will attempt to create solutions that are in the best possible harmony with our lives. On this property right at the foot of the Sette Fratelli National Park, there were traditionally hundreds of olive trees. We made a "Food Forest" out of this with additional, old fruit and vegetable varieties, found



herbs for natural pest control, dug kilometers of trenches at an elevation line to keep the rain water on the property and preserve it from the threat of desertification, built stone terraces, brought solar power to the area to pump water, created micro-environments with organic material and worms to have a continual supply of compost soil. We selected clay as the construction material for the buildings with the objective of using neither construction materials nor human labor located more than 20 km from the construction site. Each of these activities had to be relearned on site specifically for this context. Nature is not the same anywhere. The property is indeed a case of a

SYSTEM CLOSE TO NATURE, BUT SHAPED BY THE HUMAN HAND AND NOT A WILDERNESS.

The logic according to which this place has been built does not allow people to consume their environment, but rather to enter a productive, very respectful and thankful, creative exchange with it. This type of interaction and relationship between the human beings and their natural environment leads to changes in the behavior of the settlers, which is in turn the basis for the existential experience of a dimension of human existence that it is not accessible to reason.

THIS EMOTIONAL PERCEPTION

is difficult to bring to light in daily life in our modern society where the nervous system is subjected to constant bombardment. The continual activation of the sympathetic nervous system leads to the stunning of the reactivity of the parasympathetic nervous system. We subjectively require the self-perceived harmony with our surroundings in order to perceive ourselves through our own means as no longer separated from ourselves.

FOR SOME YEARS NOW I HAVE BEEN WORKING TO CREATE THIS PLACE

in an open process that is always reinventing itself. Although we are normally accustomed to have a clear, unique image when developing this type of projects and implement it in a targeted manner, here the many about-turns that we make when working with a process-oriented method were even quite welcome. We can compare it with IT project methodology: waterfall pattern versus agile development. This process-oriented, agile procedure can be quite stressful for an architect and all involved persons due to frequent redesigning, and it can even be largely incompatible with prevailing bureaucratic circumstances, but it ensures that in the end nothing is created that ignores real needs.

WE ARE NOT OPTING OUT, NOR ARE WE HIPPIES OR TREE-HUGGERS.

We are a group of persons who promote this project on site, who have known each other for some time, live on site and have similar fundamental concerns and values in life. What we all have in common is that we have learned not only one profession in our lives, but rather several, that we are generalists before specialists and that we enjoy variety. The financing of this project has come up to now exclusively from me. The plan is to carry the project over into a foundation if needed. If anyone is interested in participating with

their assets, please write me an email. At the beginning I thought that this project would require several million euros in financing, but one of my realizations derived from the process-oriented method was that the financing required is significantly lower and that if anything too much capital can be counterproductive for this type of projects. On the whole, it is a small, but very delicate project: an area of 25 ha is intended to offer space at the end for roughly 40 persons to be transformed in and by this place.

WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP?

In 2019 we plan to have concluded a large portion of the initial landscaping, ensured water and electricity supply, completed the first two clay buildings and set up a little vegan pop-up restaurant. In 2020, a third clay building is to follow, and in May of that year, the opening of the pop-up restaurant and the new vegetable garden to the public, as well as the inauguration of the Aguahara pool as bio-swimming pond, to mention only one of the special features of this locality as an example. From this moment, the site will be open for guests – from students to managers. Volunteers are already welcome – please ask by email. In the course of the construction process, we will also offer at least 4 workshops in order to make natural construction technologies accessible to a wider public. These will be advertised at an early stage. My task is to make the special features of this place come alive and make them visible, since I would like individual responsibility to be an experience that is accessible to everyone.

But individual responsibility through individual experience can only come about existentially. In the meantime, this process can take minutes or years, and many people go their entire life without experiencing it. Just as planting a tree only brings a yield years later, the experience of individual responsibility is likewise no Internet shopping item. It requires capacity for concentration, sharp senses, a receptive emotional awareness, a strong will, courage and te-

nacity to stick with it. It is a journey that is rewarding in every sense and, in my opinion, indispensable in light of the challenges ahead. It opens the eyes to paradise once again, instead of only seeing the trees in the forest. Even if it sometimes difficult to believe: we have not lost the potential for submerging ourselves in the mysticism of Sardinia's forests and seeing the glow in the Sardinian shepherds' eyes reflected in our own. What I would wish for us is not only to rediscover paradise, both in the interior and in the exterior, but also to strike the delicate balance to be able to sustain it. Please join us!

IN CONCLUSION, I WOULD LIKE TO INVITE YOU TO A LITTLE EXPERIMENT:

What ever you have thought or read in the last few minutes: suppose that this was produced by your eyes and your brain. What would you change about this story, if you were able completely control your thoughts, emotions, conclusions and your body? Become the conscious author of this text and of your life!

Marius Kaup



Marius Kaup has spent almost his whole life asking "Why?" What is wonderful about this question is: it is just as unanswerable as the question of the meaning of life. After studying philosophy and administration in Munich, founding a tourism company with Sardinia as destination, and holding different positions in banking, corporate and startup consultancies, today he is employed as a mediator between the human being and (his) nature. His varied training in organizational development, systematic consulting and naturopathy serve him as a valuable set of tools for his endeavor.

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