"Translocal" narration of environmental issues through graphic novels: two Italian case studies

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Abstract: The prevalence of mainstream media as source of information on environmental issues and their tendency to draw global attention around a few major, dramatic environmental disasters (melting of glaciers in the Arctic, desertification and drought in the African continent, deforestation of the Amazon, oil pollution in the oceans, etc.), is creating in less conative readers/audience a lack of awareness of the damages suffered in the local territorial systems to which they belong and low willingness to collective action. Therefore, crossing and comparing the highest possible number of sources of information, preferring those that can generate a proactive response to events and themes concerning environmental sustainability and highlight deep local/global interconnections, is essential to attain an independent, critical, and responsible narration. After shortly illustrating some theoretical and methodological considerations developed in the areas of popular geopolitics, anti-geopolitics and ecocriticism, this paper reviews two Italian graphic novels providing a bottom-up representation of local environmental issues: the first one deals with the eutrophication of the Orbetello Lagoon (Tuscan Maremma); the second one concerns the collapse of the tailings dams of the Prestavèl fluorite mines located in Val di Stava (Trentino Alto Adige), a disaster that caused the death of 268 people. We will try to point out how the authors, who are totally "embedded" in their works, provide a "translocal" narration, condemning effectively and immediately the environmental damages in the territorial context analysed and, at the same time, highlighting the interconnections between such site-specific events and global sustainability, inviting readers to adopt an holistic view of the nature-culture relationship, beyond the anthropocentric and instrumentalist production model which considers biosphere a mere tool to satisfy the contingent needs of contemporary society.

Key words: popular geopolitics, anti-geopolitics, ecocriticism, graphic novel, Italian environmental issues, Orbetello Lagoon, Val di Stava.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the report "Special Eurobarometer 501 – Attitudes of European Citizens towards the Environment", based on the direct interview of a sample of 27,498 units conducted from 6 to 19 December 2019 in the 28 Member States [1], environmental protection is a major public concern for practically all the EU citizens (94% of respondents). To the question asking them to pick the four environmental issues which they considered the most important, the respondents asked focusing their attention on climate change (53%), the growing amount of waste (46%), air pollution (46%) and marine pollution (40%). Among the ways of tackling environmental problems in the new millennium, Italian respondents (1.020

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units)[2] considered less important both the way we consume (IT: 28%; EU average: 33%) and the way we produce and trade (28%; 31%) compared to the whole European sample. With reference to the behaviours adopted in the last six months (multiple choice question), individual actions, such as separating waste for recycling (IT: 60%; EU average: 66%) or avoiding single-use plastic goods (37%; 45%), clearly prevail compared to proactive cooperation within the local community: in particular, only 1/5th of Italian respondents stated to have spoken to others about environmental issues. Luckily, this attitude is more commonly found at a European level (32%). The unwillingness to "act locally" by joining a demonstration, attending a workshop or taking part in an activity (UE average: 7%; IT: 9%) seems to show that the majority of interviewed citizens perceive environmental issues "around their backyard" as something "not related to themselves" or even ignore them.

Such behaviour is certainly influenced by the narrative power of mainstream media, that represent the main channel to spread news on such themes: actually, television news was the most frequent answer given to the survey question which asked to select up to three sources of information out of a list of eight, accounting 66% of total answers, a percentage still higher (75%) in the Italian sub-group of respondents. On average, one third of EU citizens (38%) keeps informed on the Internet (compared to 1/4th of the Italians); whereas, respondents who get informed through local and regional newspapers account for less than one fifth (EU average: 13%; IT: 15%); equally moderate is the face-to-face information sharing through family friends, neighbours or colleagues (EU average: 16%; IT: 14%) or through social networks (EU average: 20%; IT: 14%).

Unfortunately, in order to capture the audience attention, given the short time available for each headline in the daily news format, the top-down communication of TV news and, in general, of mainstream media, tends to give global visibility to a few major, dramatic "worldwide" environmental disasters (melting of glaciers in the Arctic, desertification and drought in the African continent, deforestation of the Amazon, oil pollution in the oceans, etc.), often described as catastrophes arisen from cruel nature who rages against humans, failing to mention the complex host of underlying anthropic causes. Though mainstream media are periodically concerned with the sub-regions of the "Bel Paese" brought to their knees by unsustainable economic activities (such as steel production in Taranto or illegal landfills of the so called "Land of Fires" in Campania), cameras and microphones are turned off and move quickly away in frantic search of new, unknown environmental horrors to catch the audience attention. Therefore, for less conative readers/audience, flash news on these local issues (eventually occurring in close proximity of one's own lived space!), from time to timeemphatically reported or, on the contrary, intentionally obscured by mainstreammedia, mayend up being classed as a mere humming noise accompanying the repetitive acts of daily life. By passively accepting those contents, we lose the ability to decode them, and to understand the seriousness of the problems "around our backyard", their deep interconnection with global environmental issues and, above all, the need for urgent action on our part as members of the local community.

In the light of the above, it becomes evident that in order to "resist" the systematic biases produced by mainstream media [3] and achieve one's own independent, critical and responsible narration it is advisable to cross and compare the highest possible number of sources, preferring those that can generate a proactive response to events and themes concerning environmental sustainability. This is why geographers are devoting greater attention to the narrative value of popular cultural instruments, including comics, that, rather than a language, are considered a real "ecosystem" - [4](pp. 1–3) - by several artists whose goal is to create *a world, a place* instead of *telling a story,* as highlighted by Horrocks [5]. Through such "world-building" process and, sometimes even placing themselves «within their works, metanarratively or as a character» [6](p. 16), those authors, that can be considered "embedded", are able to take advantage of the whole iconic and textual expressive potential of comics. To explain the "world-building" process, Horrocks makes reference to Magic Boy, a nice character created by Kochalka [7,8] who, waking up after a nightmare on comics epistemology, in a strip explains "the horrible truth about comics" (that is indeed the very title of the comics): «Comics are a way of creating a universe and populating it with characters using a secret code that works in the simplest and most direct way possible to enter the "reader's" brain» [8](p. 133). Here Kochalka uses the word *readers* in quotes - as we will do in this paper - almost trying to highlight the difference between comics and literature: actually, as Tosti observes, too often we are led to believe that the sequential model of "western" writing has to be automatically applied

to comics "reading", «according to the order left-to-right and down that Cohn [9] calls "Z-path"» [10](p. 550). If, on the contrary, we assume that comics create *a world, a place*, then the "reader" has to be considered as an "explorer" and comics, rightly defined by Cristante as an "amphibian" [11](p. 85) art, could be compared to a kind of swamp «in which we get lost and sink ,and, while sinking, we look around in search of any possible escape routes» [10](p. 557). In particular, in the works of "embedded" comics artists it seems that «the physical world fades away as we step into this new reality. We are alive in a living world» [8](p. 131). A powerful synergy is therefore created between the comics artist and the reader, and as McCloud says «every act committed to paper by the comics artist is aided and abetted by a silent accomplice, an equal partner in crime known as the reader» [12](p. 68).

Moreover, on the same wavelength, Sarayeva [13] states that, despite suffering the stigma of being considered an entertainment product, comics are instead conceived with the aim to meet the needs and the sensibilities of diverse audiences; this is in itself a relevant advantage in order to explain and interpret universal topics, and, consequently, help the "reader" in building its own perception. This could, at a superficial reading, suggest a sort of process of indoctrination by the artist towards the reader; actually, it would be rather a pedagogical process, based on the assumption that the perceptual world of the artist differs so profoundly from the one of its "readers", but at the same time comics and graphic novels act as a medium to make clear, processable and assimilable a specific representation of an issue of collective interest. Consequently, the "reader" cannot avoid asking himself/herself questions, putting himself/herself into the game, "committing himself/herself". The strength of comics, compared to other expressive-literary forms, would be in the evocative potential of images. In this regard, Sarayeva always states [13](p. 7)

> «Images in entertainment comics can convey a certain amount of emotion and depth. However, the interpretation of these images may differ due to the different imaginative natures of the readers. These comics stitch together readers' experiences and authors' perception of the real world. Thus, while reading, the reader has to "translate" the narrative and create their own visual image in their minds eye».

In the comics varied universe, of particular interest are graphic novels, that is post-modern comics presenting «a publishing scale allowing them to compete on the book market (thus disengaging them from traditional media, first of all from the European comic-book or magazine)» [14](p. 17) and that apparently connects them to a more thoughtful consumption [15](e-book position 2410). They generally have a powerful plot and span from history/biography to autobiography up to graphic journalism, which, in turn, can take the form of the reportage (mainly/solely resulting from the direct observation of the author) or the investigation (consequence of a broad reading/interpretation of indirect testimonies - interviews, quantitative data, bibliographic sources, maps, etc.), thus showing a clear intention to communicate information, positive judgements and/or critics concerning single spatio-temporal contexts and/or the global scenario as a whole.

After shortly illustrating some theoretical and methodological considerations developed in the areas of popular geopolitics, anti-geopolitics and ecocriticism, this paper reviews twoItaliangraphic novels providing a bottom-up representation of local environmental issues: the first one deals with the eutrophication of the Orbetello Lagoon (Tuscan Maremma)[16]; the second one concerns the collapse of the tailings dams of the Prestavèl fluorite mines located in Val di Stava (Trentino Alto Adige), a disaster that caused the death of 268 people [17]. We will try to point out how the authors, who are totally "embedded" in their works, provide a "translocal" narration, condemning effectively and immediately, the environmental damages in the local environment of reference and, at the same time, highlighting the interconnections between such site-specific events and global sustainability, inviting "readers" to adopt an holistic view of the nature-culture relationship, beyond the anthropocentric and instrumentalist production model which considers biosphere a mere tool to satisfy the contingent needs of contemporary society.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of geographical research, the interest in comics develops within critical geopolitics, whereby each geographic analysis, far from being objective and detached «is the result of a particular point of view, located in a given place, in a precise historical moment, in a certain cultural perspective»

[18](p. 9): geography is not a mere *description,* but a *discursive narration* of the world, «a set of practices producing a meaning that makes the world intelligible to ourselves and the others» [19](p. 322). The meaning of each narration is linked to the reference terminology, the fundamental postulates and, above all, the stereotyped statements that characterise daily life and that, though resulting from a specific reference spatio-temporal context, tend to be considered as an absolute truth, to accept and use without any interpretation [20](p. 739).

Within critical geopolitics, popular geopolitics [21–24] identifies media as a preferred field of creation for such narrations: actually, popular culture, also through "politically correct" forms of expression not expressly aimed at propaganda, conveys with high "im-mediacy" [25] (p. 177) multiple and often conflicting discursive meanings able to become a reference model for the myths, symbols, values, historical events (in short, the identity) of whole "socio-spatial classes" (local, national or supranational) [26]. These forms of expression «apparently harmless» [19](p. 324), such as movies, TV series, advertising images, music, etc., may well include comics and their heroes: this is what the geographer Dittmer made with the comic-books of Captain America [27,28], also compared to those of the Watchmen miniseries [29] and with those of Captain Canuck [30] and Captain Britain [31].

Besides popular geopolitics, "anti-geopolitics" [32](pp. 286–289) deals with the analysis of the depictions conveyed by the instruments of generalist culture and the new media that are able to amplify the "resistance" to hegemonic narrations produced by mainstream media. In this regard, Pepicelli underlines that the graphic novel expressive medium «is particularly appropriate for such purpose, as a narrative instrument able to bring out stories and memories of "other individuals", marginalised by hegemonic narrations» [33](p. 237). In particular, Favaro also states that «the comics technique and its linguistic potential allow it to work as a time machine creating collective historical consciousness», fostering «an ethical and pre-political participation to social issues in the readers' community» [34](pp. 149–151).

The success and the international awards obtained by works as "Palestine" by Joe Sacco [35] and "Persepolis" by Marjane Satrapi [36], which can be considered, without any doubt, as real "world building" graphic novels [5] show that autobiographical/biographical stories, reportages and investigative reports using the framework of comics on "challenging" spatio-temporal contexts (war, social decline, migration, environmental disasters, etc.) are widely appreciated by the public; therefore, it can be said that the graphic novel formula seems to offer the artist and his "silent accomplices" [12] (p. 68) two kinds of approach: a therapeutic approach to overcome the sense of loss «in a quick and restless transition world» [14](p. 21), and a «self-reflective approach to the significant events of recent history» (ibid.). Brancato defines such type of graphic novel as «a sort of passionate historiography» (ibid.), a definition we would combine with that of "sensitive geography" provided by Frémont [37] and that we consider consistent since the authors of such works are unknowingly geographers, exploring the world not only through the sight but the touch, taste, smell and hearing as well, awakening also the senses of their "silent accomplices" that happen to *inhabit* their creative works.

Therefore, in view of the above, graphic novels "world-building" [5] may be considered as a qualified geographic source of data and information on multiple (present and past) spatio-temporal contexts, a real «pivotal element of those complex symbolic systems connected to the relationship between man and environment» [38](p. 10), without forgetting, however, that these are what Bianchi would call "private geographies", i.e. «documents of individuals not officially qualified as scholars of the territory», whose narrations «are therefore filtered by the individual experience they are living and not specifically determined by a scientific code» [39](p. 15). As a result, the information contained in graphic novels should be duly compared with and integrated by field research and the utilization of other indirect quantitative and qualitative observation sources.

In Italy, within the Associazione dei Geografi Italiani (A.Ge.I.), the working group "Media and Geography" (established in 2009 and coordinated by Elena dell'Agnese and later by Fabio Amato) started a fruitful line of research on the relationship between geography and popular cultural instruments [40-43]; further, in 2017 it established the sub-group "Comics and Geography", a specific project on comics; shared documents and reference materials are available for consultation at the link of the "Media and Geography" group on A.Ge.I. website [44], where it is possible to monitor the progress of the ongoing activities of the sub-group that already organised several discussion and in-depth seminars, thanks to

which the interest around the theme is increasing and the first contributions from Italian geographers start to appear [45–51].

3. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

This paper forms an integral part of a line of research started by the authors together with other colleagues of the University of Salento (Fabio Pollice and Marco Sponziello) and of the University of Bari Aldo Moro (Francesca Rinella) within the above-mentioned A.Ge.I. sub-group "Comics and Geography".

It must be said that, in general, the attention paid to comics in Italy is rather recent; proof of this is the fact that, unlike other European countries (first and foremost, France), there are no surveys aimed at delineating the readers' profiles. However, this does not mean that comics in Italy are not experiencing a period of strong expansion.

Firstly, it could be useful to make an overview of the rich and lively kaleidoscope of small and very small independent publishers - for an in-depth analysis refer to the specific discussions of Tosti [10] (pp. 843–913) and Brandigi [6] (pp. 39–44) - some of which, unfortunately, are out of business (PuntoZero, Rasputin Libri, Coniglio editore, etc.), which started to shift comics from newsstands product to book published in specific series at the end of the '90s. Among the publishers that brought comics into new forms of use, we mention in particular Coconino Press [52], that was established at the beginning of the new millennium in Rome and joined the Fandango Group in 2009 [53]. From the very beginning, their goal was the distribution in bookshops and comics book stores through the launch of easily recognisable series, characterised by titles and formal elements that basically remained unchanged over time, though being highly innovative in contents. In 2004 it was the turn of Tunué [54], based in Latina, which ranges from books of essay on comics to multiple proposals on drawn narrative, in particular concerning books for children. In 2010, Bao Publishing [55] was established in Milan. It ranges across national, European, American, and Japanese comics genres. Their leading author is Zerocalcare (aka Michele Rech), who had his artistic training in the underground and social centre circuit, the most famous comics artist among the Italian general public. It should also be stressed that, over the years, many publishers specialised in comics were acquired by publishing giants - e.g. in 2008, the Rizzoli Group acquired Lizard, a publishing company formed in 1993 by Hugo Pratt [56]- that are progressively increasing the space devoted to comics in their series [57–59]. In 2012, the Fandango Group [53] also acquired BeccoGiallo, a publishing house established in Treviso in 2005 (later moved to Padua), specialised in civil commitment graphic journalism, mainly by authors coming from the Italian underground and self-publication landscape. «Its name is a tribute to the brave anti-fascist satirical magazine "Il Becco Giallo", that in the 1920s used the drawing - together with written journalistic investigation - to criticize and press the Authority; its symbol was a blackbird with its beak always open to shout the truth that in those times they wanted to deny» [60]. In 2005, the Roman publishing house Round Robin [61], whose name makes reference to the mariners' custom, mentioned in Björn Larsson's [62] novel, of signing a petition against their higher-ups creating a ring, so as to fully share the responsibility and not to disclose the initiator, was also established. The metaphor of navigation can be found in all of their ten series, four of which ("Libeccio", "Tortuga", "East River", "Bolina") are dedicated to the graphic novel: in particular, "Bolina" makes reference to boats sailing close hauled, a situation in which «it's harder to achieve a result and it's difficult to handle the ship. Twice the journey and thrice the effort. This means sailing close-hauled. Like the organizations working in social contexts that never give up navigating. Knowing that they will always have to fight against dark forces. In waters that are never easy to navigate, even though they are full of beauty» [61]. Such name, in our opinion, fairly represents the resilience of the comic investigation journalism that can be found in the series.

The analysis of a huge number of graphic novels edited by such publishing companies, which was conducted in past researches [48–50] showed that, in fact, works from "embedded" authors represent a real trip within space/time contexts which are real/dystopic, past/ future, near/far. This consideration pushed usdrawing inspiration by the methodology proposed by Scaramellini for the study of travel literature [63,64], so to outline an evaluation grid for the reading/interpretation of graphic novel, taking into consideration a set of "external" and "internal" elements (called "frame" and "picture") (Table 1).

Table 1. Reading grid for graphic novels.

Categories	Mode
"Frame"	
Publisher	Mission, catalogue series, graphic novel publishing series, etc.
Author's biography	Age, place of birth, places of residence, professional background, working experience, political orientation, etc.
Annexes	Presence of: premise, conclusions, events history, bibliographic review, etc.
"Picture"	
Graphic and content style	Realistic or unrealistic nature of the spatio-temporal contexts (iconic/non iconic style)[12](p. 51); graphic technique (use of colour, black and white, etc.; text style, type of balloon; regular/irregular form and size of panels, etc.); terminology, stereotypes, "resistant" messages, etc.
Narration of places	Presence/absence of panels on the narration places; analysis of the symbolic elements mentioned and/or drawn (physical, morphological, hydrographic, vegetal elements, etc.; anthropic components: cultural heritage, economic activities, etc.)

Source: processing by F. Pollice, A. Rinella, F. Rinella, F. Epifani, M. Sponziello.

As far as the "frame" is concerned, we start considering the publisher, gathering the information usually found in the company website, relating to its establishment, mission as well as the title, the purpose and the composition of the series to which the books belong to. Likewise important are the biographical information (generally found on the publisher website or in the blogs of the artists), interviews and reviews of the authors, as well as the pursuit of a direct contact with them, to learn more about their stylistic and content choices. Another "frame" element to analyse is the presence of annexes (premise, final considerations, events history, bibliographical review, etc.) than can also be authored by third parties.

Shifting from the "frame" to the "picture", a stylistic analysis will be carried out, whose aim is not one of critic-artistic nature, but simply to provide basic information, useful for a comparison between the works under analysis and regarding aspects as the use of black and white and/or colour, text style (block, italics, bold, etc.), the type of balloon (shape, outline, presence/absence of tails, etc.) and "closure", the relationship between words and images, the prevalence of realism or, on the contrary, of iconic symbolism.

The content analysis, instead, aims at identifying terminology, stereotypes in each narrative "ecosystem", trying to highlight the sentiments, emotions, feelings, and memories of protagonists. Of course, in our geographic research particularly interesting is the artists' attention on the "setting" (its "where") rather than on the plot, characters and covered themes, that is, the presence of "world-building" process [5].

Usually, graphic novels edited by the publishing companies we already mentioned play the role of real *"rebel" geographies* [48,65] «depicting disadvantaged situations where we can witness the denial of human rights, extreme living conditions, racial and social discrimination (e.g. regarding the elderly and homosexuals), crisis, uprootedness» and, in particular, «environmental crimes, natural disasters» [34](p. 148). For example, in their series we find several "non-fiction" comics concerning Italian environmental issues, such as the Vajont disaster, the chemical pollution of Porto Marghera, the conflicts among steel industry, environment and health in Taranto and between the Val di Susa community and the construction of TAV (high-speed train) [66–69]. There is no shortage of graphic novels dealing with the unsustainability of the contemporary capitalist model [70,71] also dedicated to younger "readers" [72].

In the next paragraph, by using the aforementioned grid, we focus our attention on two graphic novels that can be rightfully considered "embedded" for they possess an important strength: as far as the first novel, on the problem of the eutrophication of Orbetello (Tuscany) arisen in July 2015 [16], both the publishing house Effequ – which inaugurates with this work the first series dedicated to graphic novel - and the author, Stefano Cardoselli, are based in the lagoon location; as for the second one, published by Round Robin and focusing on the collapse of the tailings dams of the Prestavèl fluorite mine occurred on 19 July 1985 [17], the writer Silvia Pallaver and the comics artist Elia Tomaselli both come from Tesero, the small town located in the province of Trento hit by the disaster, where in 2002 the Val di Stava

Foundation, sponsor of the graphic novel and engaged in fostering active memory and environmental education "for" and "with" new generations, was created.

In line with the reflections arising within ecocriticism, a literary research field that gives priority to the analysis of environmental issues [73](p. 27), we also try to answer to the following questions, considered crucial by Buell in the ecocritical analysis of every (not only) literary work [74]: «How does the text represent the interdependence of humans and the environment? Does the text show us a deep environmental context in which humans are limited, constrained, or even marginalised with the deliberate intention of correcting somehow the anthropocentric view? Does the work focus on animal life or depicts humans as a consequence or as victims of the physical world they produced?» (p. 6). Further, does the artist «show a connection with the place or, on the contrary, a migration or diasporic attitude?» (p. 7).

In the conclusions, our research aims to underline if the authors could manage to provide "translocal" narrations, i.e. representations «place-sensitive and, at the same time, aware of the necessarily global nature of the contemporary experience, even when such experience is rooted in a given place» [73](p. 33), succeeded in conveying implicit or explicit "resistant" messages against «the anthropocentric-instrumentalist view according to which the human being (especially in western societies) is the centre of interest and value, while nature and other forms of life are simple means for his wellbeing» [75](p. 19).

4. RESULTS

4.1 The eutrophication of the Orbetello Lagoon through the graphic novel "Persival" by Stefano Cardoselli

The volume entitled "L'ecosistema non è acqua. Di lagune, disastri ambientali e futuro" ("You cannot buy the ecosystem. Lagoons, environmental disasters and the future")(196 pages, size 21 x 14 cm)[16] was published in 2016 by the independent publisher Effequ, established in Orbetello (a town of the Tuscan Maremma) in 1995 by Fernando Quatraro, who chose his initials to designate the new business (now based in Florence) because they were the same of his sons Federico and Francesco; the latter is now managing editor. Effequ logo is an egret - a migratory bird who lives in marshy areas - in the act of taking flight. It represents the publisher determination to promote its territory and, at the same time, to publish more far-reaching works, looking further ahead, «without forgetting the waters where they come from» [76]. The volume deals with eutrophication, frequently found in the Orbetello Lagoon - due to urban wastewater discharge until 2005, pollutant emissions of manufacturing activities, drainage of neighbouring lands, etc. - focusing on the extremely serious dystrophic crisis occurred between 15 July and 16 August 2015, also covered by national media. During that month, a persisting heat dome in the Tyrrhenian Sea caused the macroalgae to proliferate, a severe anoxia and in three cases, the death of thousands of fishes, bringing aquaculture to its knees and seriously damaging the bathing activities and the tourist image of Argentario.

The work, representing the first graphic novel of this publisher, belongs to the "Saggi Pop" series, consisting of texts defined by the publisher as «cross-cutting, hybrid, unconventional but authoritative, with the overbearing idea of reinventing previously known coordinates. Because, as everyone knows, each book is a world itself and, in our opinion, each book does not have necessarily to change the world but it has to try, at least» [77]. The narration chosen is certainly remarkable, and combines a scientific essay of the biologist Mauro Lenzi, head of the Ecology Laboratory of Orbetello Pesca Lagunare - which has the exclusive right of fishing in the lagoon by virtue of an agreement with the Orbetello municipality - with a "sci-fi" graphic novel by Stefano Cardoselli, an artist born in Orbetello and very well-known in the world of the American indie comics, thanks to his twenty-years long relationship with Heavy Metal Magazine.

The essay by Mauro Lenzi (pp. 17–68), that in our analysis we consider one of the elements of the "frame" of the graphic novel (see Table 1) is divided into five chapters. The first two chapters provide general information on the effects of climate change on hydrosphere, as well as on the topic of eutrophication of coastal ponds. The third chapter contains the description of the physical aspects of the Orbetello Lagoon and of the activities of environmental management carried out to protect this fragile and vulnerable ecosystem (pumping of water through draining pumps, seaweed harvesting, water quality monitoring, etc.). The fourth chapter focuses on the dystrophic crisis of 2015 and on the decisions and the technical interventions that directly involved the author, implemented to bring together the interests of

the various economic activities and the protection of the lagoon. The fifth chapter underlines the difficulty/impossibility to find solutions to address "upstream" the issue of eutrophication (e.g. by removing the drains of manufacturing activities), leading Mauro Lenzi to state that «if I have to imagine the future of coastal environment, including lagoons and ponds... I cannot think about it in a positive way» [16] (pp. 66–67), adding a dire prediction:

«We will continue to witness the extinction of many species, we will see the remaining large forests and sea grass beds disappear. We do not tolerate other beings, whether wolves, foxes, bears, pigeons, crows, starlings. Some of them just bother us, soil, cause us economic loss or could hurt us. We are many, we fill all places and there is no space left for the *others.* We will remain surrounded by opportunist species: macroalgae, parietaria, rats, seagulls, cockroaches» (p. 68).

The above statements, only apparently apocalyptic, introduce "Persival" (pp. 75–193), the intense, dystopic graphic novel in black and white by Stefano Cardoselli, set in the Orbetello Lagoon which, 80 years after the dystrophic crisis of 2015, has become a kind of fetid and violent cemetery, «a very hard and dangerous place to live in» (opening panel, p. 71 – Figure 1). The main characters are Ismaele, the warrior, who, for his resemblance to the author could be his alter ego, and his friend/bodyguard Gnè Gnè, the only surviving pink flamingo (Figure 2). Behind the fierce appearance and the foul language, Ismaele hides a noble heart. He deeply and tenderly loves the beautiful Dorotea, daughter of an ugly, ruthless businessman who wants to build a large car park for ten thousand new summer homes, covering the lagoon with super-concrete blasted from futuristic flying cement mixers; further, he has a very strong awareness of his territorial identity, showed for example by the following reflection:

«that's weird, reality is stinky and violent, but sometimes, when I see the sky, the sun mirrored in this pool of green and smelly water moves me, as if there is still a chance» (p. 96).

After shooting two men that were beating up an unarmed man, Ismaele finds out that he is Arturo Cuorveloce, the last biologist of a mission aiming at bringing back to life the lagoon ecosystem through a mechanic device called Persival - hence the title of the graphic novel - to be positioned in the lagoon, near the Ansedonia ridge, where the corporation of Dorotea's father is located. While dying, Arturo entrust the device to Gnè Gnè and Ismaele, thus the two protagonists begin their journey to Ansedonia, in an unfriendly, fetid landscape, inhabited by extremely dangerous and aggressive giant mosquitoes. They manage to defeat a gang of cannibals thanks to Gnè Gnè's frightening voice that has the power to "smash" their enemies' heads. Later, they join a group of separatist warriors that wish to make the Neghelli district independent from the rest of the lagoon territory fighting against the soldiers of the "New State of the Presidi" that in turn, catch Gnè Gnè and Ismaele, imprisoning them in the Gusman powder magazine, sentencing them to be burnt at the stake. Luckily, once again Gnè Gnè screams prevail on enemies. The two characters, reach at last Ansedonia, where meantime Dorotea, disobeying her father, has diverted the flying cement mixers to save the lagoon: the silent panels at page 179 lead the "readers" to imagine that the young woman has not survived the firefight with her father. Finally, the only survivor of the no-holds-barred fight of Ismaele and the separatist warriors against the gang of parking guys pursuing the concreting of the lagoon, is Gnè Gnè, who, laying Persival in water will succeed to bring the ecosystem back to life (closing panel, p. 193 - Figure 1).

Without focusing on the undeniable artistic value of the panels (free of any predefined grid, fully analogic, powerful and highly cinematic, characterised by the clear prevalence of drawing on text - often limited to simple onomatopoeia without balloon), it is worth underlining how the author's abstract and tendentially iconic style is nevertheless able to keep the realistic nature of various symbolic elements of the lagoon and Orbetello (the Spanish mill and the Podestà Palace - Figure 3 -, the Guzman powder magazine, the Leopoldiana dam, the Ansedonia ridge). This, added to the real toponyms used (the Neghelli district, the golf club in Terra Rossa location, the Argentario pinewood, the Tombolo della Feniglia) and to the historic references (such as the Etruscan ruins on the Ansedonia ridge or the State of the Presidi - a Spanish protectorate dating back to the middle of XVI century, of which Orbetello was the capital), allow insider "readers" to identify immediately their "living space", while outsiders, not knowing the local territorial system at all, are nevertheless able to check the truthfulness of the author's drawings, comparing them with the pictures of the lagoon available on the Internet.
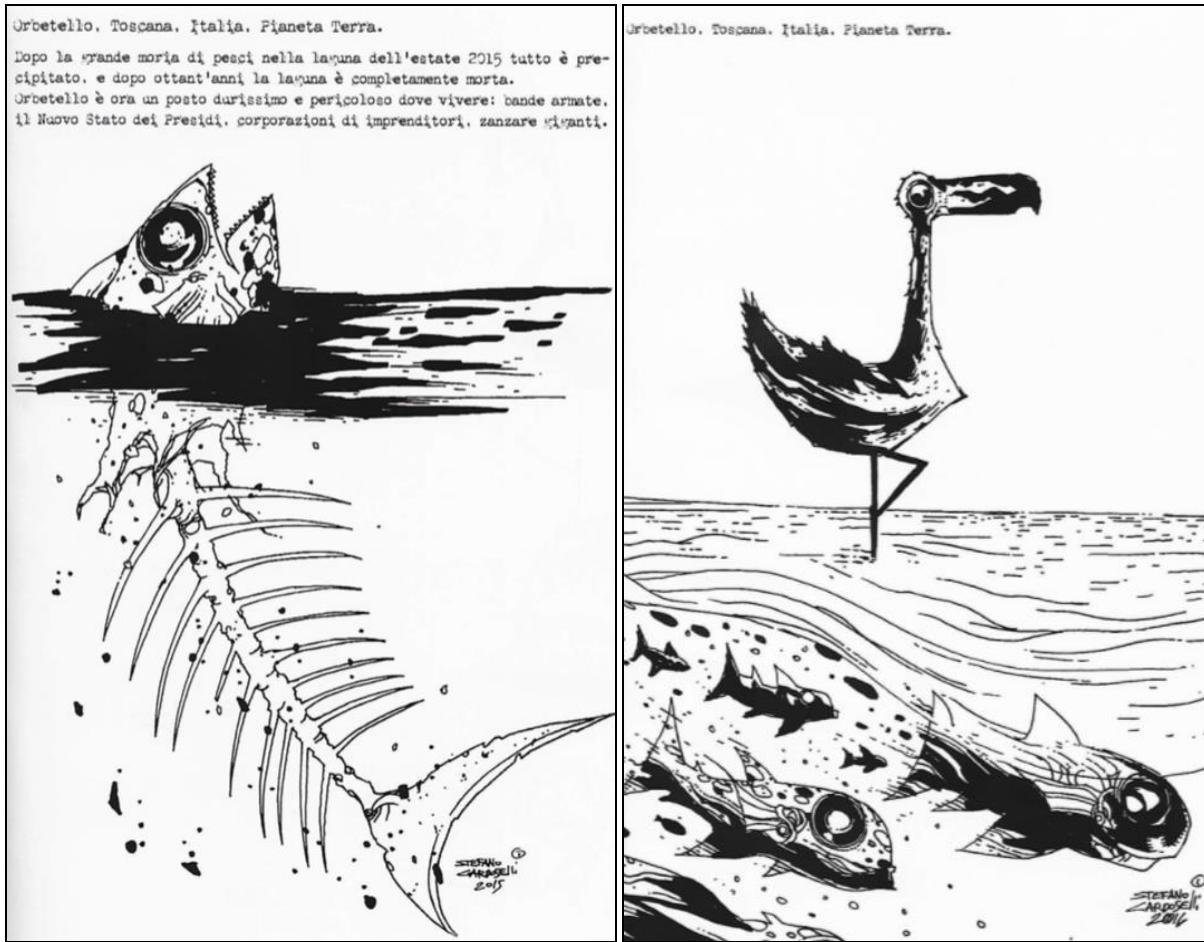
Figure 1. Opening panel [16](p. 71) and closing panel (p. 193) of the graphic novel "Persival" by Stefano Cardoselli.
Source: © 2016 Effequ

Figure 2. The protagonists of the graphic novel "Persival" by Stefano Cardoselli:
Ismaele and Gnè Gnè [16](p. 135).
Source: © 2016 Effequ
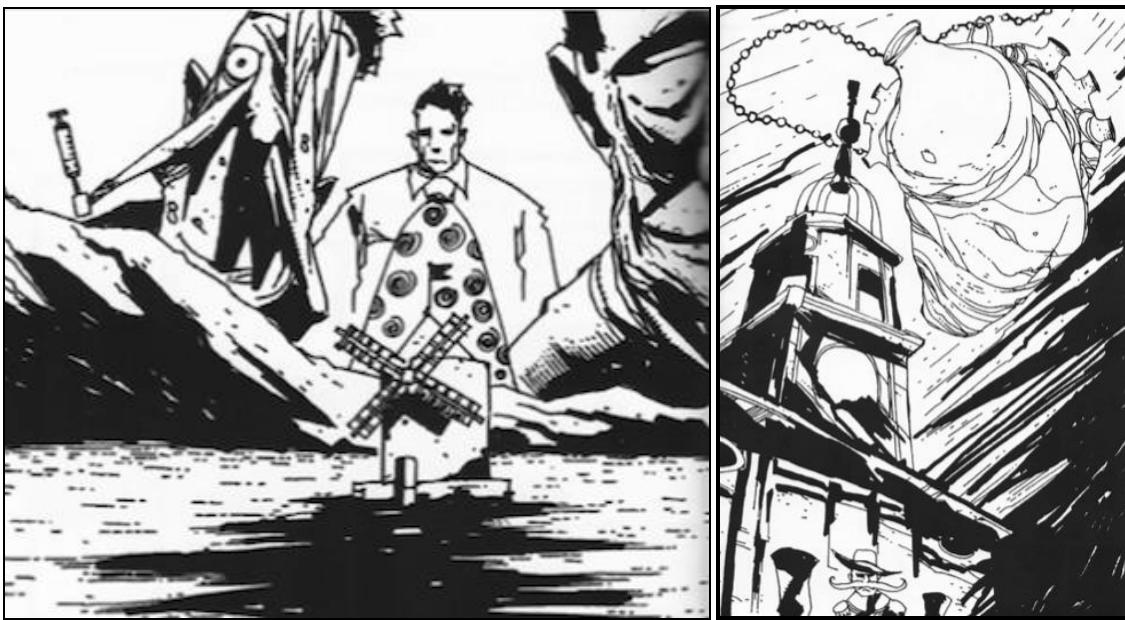
Figure 3. The lagoon landscape elements in the graphic novel "Persival" by Stefano Cardoselli: on the left the Spanish Mill [16](p. 96); on the right the Podestà Palace (p. 141).
Source: © 2016 Effequ

4.2. The disaster of the Prestavèl mines through the graphic novel "L'estate in cui Stava ci venne a cercare" by Silvia Pallaver and Elia Tomaselli

The graphic novel entitled "L'estate in cui Stava ci venne a cercare" [17] ("The summer when Stava came looking for us"), published in 2015 by Round Robin in the "Bolina" series (see § 3), was created by two emerging artists: the writer Silvia Pallaver and the comics artist Elia Tomaselli, respectively born in 1982 and 1983 in Tesero, a location of Val di Stava (Trentino Alto Adige) where, on 19 July 1985, the tailing dams of the Prestavèl fluorite mine collapsed, causing the death of 268 people. The authors belong to a generation that experienced the tragedy through the painful narrations and angry silences of adults that had lived it first-hand. On the thirtieth anniversary of the disaster, thanks to the sponsorship of Val di Stava Foundation, established in 2002 to foster a proactive memory of the disaster as well as a strong path of environmental education "for" and "with" young people, the graphic novel was released. While belonging to fiction, its location, Val di Stava, is absolutely realistic. The graphic novel, all in black and white, having a lean, flat style, mainly iconic for characters and non-iconic for places, opens with a drawing showing a panoramic view of Tesero in 1985 [17] (p. 13 - see Figure 4) and Anna, the main character, a commuting university student, created by Silvia Pallaver and Elia to represent their generation. Anna, while travelling by train from Bologna to Tesero (where she is going to spend her summer holidays with her parents), falls asleep and dreams of herself as a child running near the tailing dams and hearing her mother's voice telling her to stop. After realizing she had missed her stop at Ora, she calls her father asking him to go by car to Bolzano to meet her. During their travel by car from Bolzano to Tesero, passing though Val d'Ega, Anna gets motion sickness on hairpin turns, so they stop in Pozzole, at the foot of the mountain Prestavèl, where the tailing dams were located. The girl feels that her father is uneasy and wishes to hit the road again but cannot understand the reason. In the following days, Anna, who works as a waitress in a hotel to pay her tuition, spends her free time carrying out a real geographic research. She uses direct observation going through the valley with her grandfather (who recounts her the adverse impacts of mining observed in the first half of the 1980s: the fish kill in the Stava river, the traffic of trucks carrying waste material, the harmful dusts on the balconies) and with some friends of her age (all born shortly before 1985, that know little or nothing of the disaster) accompanying her on the Prestavèl, at an altitude of 1,500 meters above sea level, near one of the entrances to the abandoned mines. Afterwards, Anna starts to refer to indirect sources found in the library and, finally, she uses direct interviews stopping to talk with to two old men: Ernesto and Raffaele. The first is a tourist staying at the hotel where Anna works who was in Tesero on 9 July 1985 and to whom she confides, telling him: «I can't

remember anything but the smell. However I don't know if it's autosuggestion. I often think of it in these days, I'd like to ask questions because neither I nor my friends know much» (p. 72). The second one is a townsperson who explains her the fluorite production process, the functioning of the tailing dams and the reasons of their collapse, related to bad management, the lack of effective controls and extreme greed. Anna's research makes her father furious and he asks her in anger:

> «What do you want to talk about, exactly? Tell me! Explain me. Do you want me to talk you about the smell of those days? Of what we saw through our windows? Of all the people taken away by the sludge? [...] What is the difference of knowing the truth? [...] They sold our land and air out, playing with people's lives» (pp. 108–110).

Anna is surprised by such a reaction, apparently irrational, but her grandfather will explain her that her father, a volunteer firefighter, was one of the first rescuers to reach the disaster site (see p. 118 and fig. 4). Anna's mother, instead, agrees to speak with her and tells her daughter that she often took her through the wood in the stroller up to the top of the Prestavèl when she was a child, but always prevented her to go near the dams that she felt were very dangerous (pp. 124–125). At last, Anna's mother words explain the meaning of the dream that opened the graphic novel.

The "frame" of the graphic novel is made of a wide set of annexes that precede (pp. 9–11) and follow (pp. 139–169) it, providing the "reader" many useful information to deepen the knowledge of the origin, the causes and the responsibilities of the disaster. In particular, the appendix containing the photographs coming from the archive of the Val di Stava Foundation allows outsider "readers" to appreciate the highly realistic nature of the landscape elements drawn by Elia Tomaselli, while "insider" users, thanks to the images depicting the places before 1985, immediately after the collapse and nowadays (Figure 4 and Figure 5) as well as the toponyms (Ora, Val d'Ega, Spianez, Pozzole, Passo di Pampeago, Prestavèl, via Molini) may immediately feel "embedded" in the graphic novel.
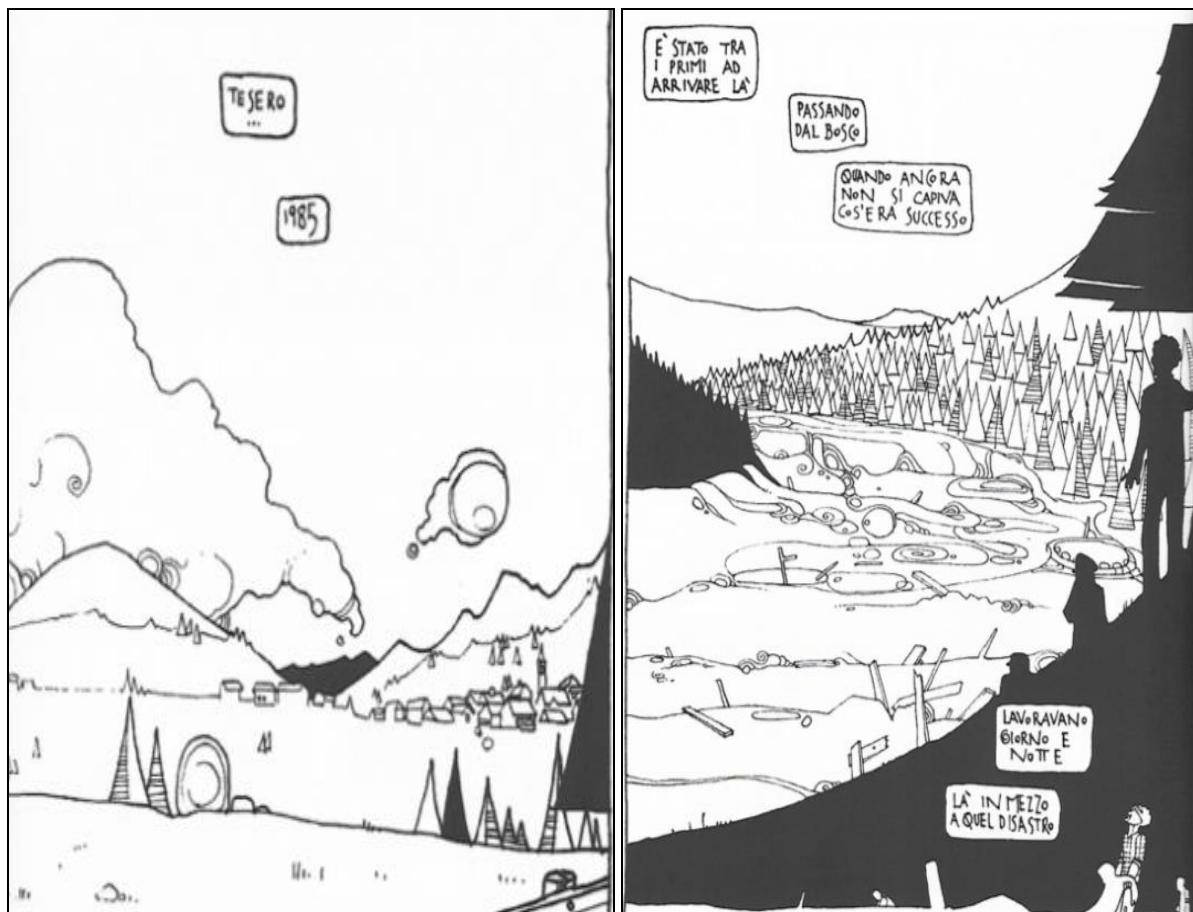
Figure 4. On the left the opening panel of the graphic novel "L'estate che Stava ci venne a cercare" by Silvia Pallaver and Elia Tomaselli [17] (p. 13); on the right an image of Val di Stava immediately after the disaster of 19 July 1985, provided by the authors (p. 118).

Source: © 2015 Round Robin editrice.

Figure 5. An image of Tesero in 2015 provided by the authors [17] (p. 58).
Source: © 2015 Round Robin Editrice.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The first graphic novel has 11 incipit that mention the place where the events happen (Orbetello or a specific site within its territory: see pp. 79,95,119,137,141,152,157,174,177,180,193). These locations are presented as a kind of "little matryoshka" within many other bigger "dolls" (see incipit Figure 1): this is a clear proof of the "translocality" of the graphic novel, that seems to combine the neo-bioregionalist view [78] with the globalist and cosmopolitan one [79]. It is therefore clear that the safety of the lagoon is the result of the combined efforts of humans (Ismaele, Arturo Cuorveloce, Dorotea) and, above all, of different living species, evidenced by the osmotic friendship between Ismaele and Gnè Gnè. The opening and closing panels of the graphic novel plastically juxtapose the negativity of the anthropocentric-instrumentalist view based on dualism and competition, that caused the death of the lagoon, making of it a place for bloody events, weapons of any kind (arquebuses, swords, halberds, spiked batons, blades, AKs, pitchforks, armoured vehicles), to the positive value of the collaborative model based on the horizontality among living species, that allows to restart the natural cycle of the lagoon ecosystem, but not to save the human civilization from its self-destruction.

Actually, as we observed in the first graphic novel, thanks to the effective cooperation of living beings it is possible to save the Orbetello Lagoon; while in the second graphic novel the search for "truth" by the

protagonist can be viewed as a starting point to strengthen the territorial identity and preserve the local system from new attacks. Particularly, the final appendix, condemning and listing 94 tailing dam collapses occurred in mines all over the world between 1961 and 2014 (therefore about two per year), together with a thematic map which highlights their spatial distribution, closes the "frame" under the sign of "translocality", fully in line with the end of the graphic novel [17] (pp. 137–137], showing Anna reading "Das Prinzip Verantwortung" by Hans Jonas [80]. The "translocality" is even more evident in a sort of sequel of "L'estate in cui Stava ci venne a cercare", a short comics released following the collapse of the Brumadinho landfill (Brazil) on 25 January 2019 (Figure 6) .
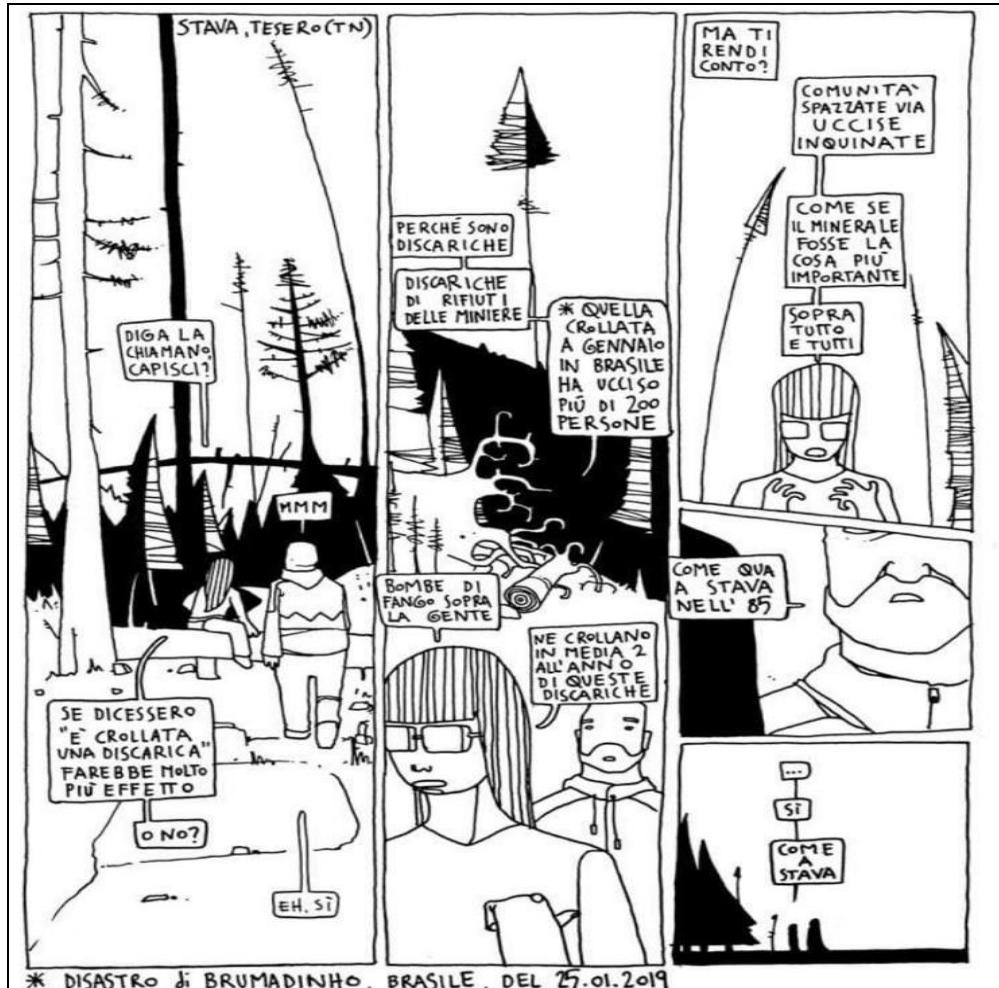

Figure 6. The comics by Silvia Pallaver and Elia Tomaselli on the Brumadinho disaster (Brazil).
Source: Silvia Pallaver, Elia Tomaselli.

In this work Anna, once again the main character chosen by the two authors, "embedded" in the Tesero wood, thinks about this new disaster:

«They call it dam, you see? If they said "a landfill collapsed" it would be more impressive, isn't it? Because they are landfills, mining landfills. The one that collapsed in January in Brazil killed more than 200 people. Mud bombs on people. Every year two of those landfills collapse. Communities blown away, killed, polluted. As if mineral was the most important thing. Above everything and everyone. As in Stava» (Figure 6).

Therefore, we believe we can refer to Stefano Cardoselli, Silvia Pallaver and Elia Tomaselli as "ecological artist", a definition used by Salabè [81]: «an intellectual focused on present emergencies and critical of the hegemony of the market and consumer ethics», who considers reflection and sharing «as preconditions for a real cultural progress, able to meet man's deepest desires». An artist who does not wish to «play the role of foreteller of natural disasters, but, on the contrary, to convey, as suggested by Ernst Bloch [82], a pedagogy of hope» [81] (p. XVI), always keeping a high level of attention on environmental damage of "yesterday" and "today", "near" and "far".

In the light of the above, we can confirm, as Han states [83] (p. 41), that «*like maps, comics simplify a complex three-dimensional reality into a more manageable version*», that is, comics speak the language of *graphicacy* [84]. Therefore, it can be an effective and immediate communication instrument for geographic information also useful, as in the two analysed cases, in promoting a real "environmental literacy" [85,86], a proactive invitation to face the ecological crisis by overcoming the mainstream representation of the relationship between "human" and "non human". Moreover, by delivering alternative narratives (which can be defined as "native", "marginal", "peripheral", "eccentric") [87] expression of a new no more anthropocentric humanism, comics become a precious driver for "divergent thinking" [88] as well as fundamental speaker for an "ecological citizenship" [89] able to develop "a synthesis between bioregional awareness and the needs of a global environmental ethics" [87](e-book position 1098).

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