

The “Mud-volcanoes route” (Emilia Apennines, northern Italy)

Paola Coratza and Dorian Castaldini

University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Department of Chemical and Geological Sciences, Italy (paola.coratza@unimore.it)

In the present paper the “Mud-volcanoes route” (MVR), an itinerary unfolds across the districts of Viano, Sassuolo, Fiorano Modenese and Maranello, in which part of the Emilia mud volcanoes fields are located, is presented. The Mud-volcanoes route represents an emotional journey that connects places and excellences through the geological phenomenon of mud volcanoes, known with the local name “Salse”. The Mud Volcanoes are created by the surfacing of salt water and mud mixed with gaseous and liquid hydrocarbons along faults and fractures of the ground. The name “Salsa”- from Latin *salsus* – results from the “salt” content of these muddy waters, ancient heritage of the sea that about a million years ago was occupying the current Po Plain. The “Salse” may take the shape of a cone or a level-pool according to the density of the mud.

The Salse of Nirano, in the district of Fiorano Modenese, is one of the most important in Italy and among the most complex in Europe. Less extensive but equally charming and spectacular, are the “Salse” located in the districts of Maranello (locality Puianello), Sassuolo (locality Montegibbio) and Viano (locality Casola Querciola and Regnano). These fascinating lunar landscapes have always attracted the interest of researchers and tourist. The presence on the MVR territory of ancient settlements, Roman furnaces and mansions, fortification systems and castles, besides historic and rural buildings, proves the lasting bond between this land and its men. In these places, where the culture of good food has become a resource, we can find wine cellars, dairy farms and Balsamic vinegar factories that enable us to appreciate unique worldwide products. This land gave also birth to some personalities who created unique worldwide famous values, such as the myth of the Ferrari, the ceramic industry and the mechatronics.

The MVR is represented in a leaflet containing, short explanation, photos and a map in which are located areas with mud volcanoes, castles, archaeological sites, historic and holy buildings and represent an initiative for the promotion of the environment, art, wellness, tastes, technology and talent of the territory of districts of Viano, Sassuolo, Fiorano Modenese and Maranello.

The MVR presented in this article is an example of how geology can be a starting point and provide continuity for a journey offering close encounters with our region’s science, art, history, culture. This research aimed to transform geomorphological sites into a culturally accessible and shared heritage and therefore into a resource for social and economic development in their own territory. Indeed geological sites are considered as new elements that can catalyse the potentialities of a territory which are often neglected or pass unnoticed. In this way the proposal become an instrument for territorial upgrading, by means of qualified measures on abandoned or secondary areas, thus promoting them to the rank of development models.