

Presentation by Teresa Fiore – Delegation for Agrigento Cultural Capital 2025
(Roma, 2023)

I am from Agrigento but for twenty-eight years, initially to study and then to work, I have lived in the United States. I am just a drop in that great ocean of emigrants that have left and continue to leave Agrigento, in steadily increasing numbers, according to recent data from the Migrants Foundation. I am part of the Agrigento diaspora in the world, and by extension part of an Italian diaspora that remains a structural dynamic of our country. I am part of an Agrigento that exists far beyond the boundaries of the city and the province and that resides on many continents across the world. When I said that I was coming to Rome for this presentation, I was asked (often in Sicilian): "Are you really coming from New York to support Agrigento?" "Yes, and why not?" We are rooted in the original soil of our birthplace, but roots can move in rhizomatic ways, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, creating forms of exchange and enrichment despite distances and differences, across borders. The proposal presented by Agrigento for the candidacy to become Capital of Culture 2025, so focused on the mobility of people and ideas between departures and arrivals, also speaks of and to the communities of Agrigento abroad, adding new cultural meanings and new human implications to the extraordinary natural and artistic beauties of the area.

The Telamon built with the four elements depicted here in the logo of the proposal is, indeed, a traveler who also bears witness to the modes, drives and desires of emigration: the water of the transatlantic journeys of the past; the air of the flights of the flows from the second half of the 1900s to date; the fire of passion that leads one to take risks elsewhere, but also the fire of the conflict that displacement and disorientation create; and finally, the land that you leave for the new one you reach, but also the land you can return to, and not necessarily like Pirandello who in the poem "Return" goes back to his solitary house "disappointed and tired". Indeed, this project defines the conditions for targeted visits, temporary returns, and perhaps even more definitive ones for those who have moved away but plan to return – not disappointed and tired but enthusiastic about the idea of appreciating the beauties of Agrigento, while remaining alert to its unique contradictions. The project certainly constitutes a platform for defining visits by university teachers and students, also in view of more articulated exchanges over time. According to an Open Doors study that collects data on student mobility, year after year, Italy continues to rank near the top of countries chosen by American students for their study abroad. Sicily, which increasingly attracts the attention of American visitors, is not yet a destination for prolonged periods of study: a project like the one presented here, with its emphasis on cultural relations and transformations, would create the conditions for this type of development, encouraging the study of the Italian language that is currently experiencing a period of difficulty. As a person who has been working in the university world for more than two decades as a teacher, researcher, and coordinator of cultural activities, I recognize in this project, so full of concrete activities along with short- and long-term interventions, an opportunity for growth for a territory whose resources are still largely untapped and that is still relatively unknown internationally. A project that has the potential to make Sicily into an active laboratory of human encounters in contact with nature.