



HISTORY OF TWINNING AND CAMEROONIAN HOUSE OF CULTURE

Vasanello is a small town in the province of Viterbo, in Lazio, Central Italy. A rural reality closely linked to its traditions where time, marked in every stone by the slow progression of the seasons of past history, seems suspended in a distant dimension. But not for this reason insensitive to a future which, like a powerful ebb wave, slowly brings man back towards his distant land of origin.

We are about to tell you about when the heart and the head, often so distant, manage almost by magic to meet, mixing in an osmosis of extraordinary power. Able to even move mountains. In this case the *Plateau Bamiléké*, thousands of kilometers from the Viterbo area. Down, deep in Black Africa.

Cameroon, a place that in Italy evokes, for many, only football memories linked to the fantastic world title brought home by Bearzot's squadron in 1982, but which a series of circumstances which we will go into in depth shortly have determined, in Vasanello, from 2002, a twinning with the city of **Dschang** with enormously profitable implications from a cultural point of view and beyond.



Leading the municipal administration of the small Cimino town, thanks to funding from the Lazio Region, to even create a **House of Cameroonian culture** in the land of Tuscia.

Cameroon is one of the 54 countries that make up the African continent. Here nature still preserves identical manifestations and rhythms for thousands of years. Even with regards to man, despite the overwhelming pace of technological progress. Lush tropical jungles, renowned wildlife parks, *makossa*, grilled chicken and *poissonerie* on street corners: this in a nutshell is Cameroon, the country that more than any other can boast of representing the whole of Africa from a natural point of view, ethnographic and cultural.

Italy is one and a half times larger and has less than 20 million inhabitants. Far from the modern cities in unbridled expansion, such as Yaoundé, the administrative capital, or Douala, the economic capital, the rainforests extend in the northern part starting from the Atlantic Ocean, while further north the climate favors the presence of savannahs and semi-desert areas. In the natural parks, among the most pristine in Africa, it is possible to observe all the fauna of the continent.



But the real treasure of Cameroon is represented above all by its people, divided into three large anthropological groups, Bantu, semi-Bantu and Nilotic which make up 240 ethnic groups. Therefore, dozens of languages are spoken, even if the official one is French, with a small Anglophone enclave in the North West.

Lepri e conigli vivono in cunicoli artificiali mentre le galline razzolano all'aperto

Allevamenti per sfamare il terzo mondo

Un progetto pilota convenzionato con l'università

VASANELLO - Insegnare l'allevamente integrato delle piccole specie ad uso ali-mentare. E' questo il grandioso e innovativo progetto che si prefigge Giorgio Mariani con il suo allevamento ecologico unico nel suo genere, di lepri e conigni. Da questo allevamento è nato coordinato da Alessandro Finzi (una vera autorità nel settore zootecnico e responsabile del centro sperimentale allevamenti cunicoli alternativi), il progetto scaturito da un'idea delle "donne dell'Onu". Obiettivo principale del progetto del singolare allevamento (convenzionato con l'università della Tuscia) è quello di tentare di ridurre l'enorme problema alimentare dei paesi in via di sviluppo. Finzi, che nei giorni scorsi ha accompagnato a visitare l'allevamento una nutrita delegazione dell'Africa occi-dentale, spiega che il progetto è supportato principalmente della Fao, ma anche dalla Tavola Valdese e della chiesa luterana di Roma. "In parole povere - sinte-



Allevamento alternativo la visita di un gruppo internazionale

tizza l'esperto - ci prefiggiamo, attraverso questo progetto pilota - l'insegnamento dell'allevamento integrato delle piccole specie a uso alimentare. Troviamo infatti del tutto inutile pretendere lo sviluppo culturale e tecnologico delle popolazioni il cui maggior problema è rappresentato dalla fame. Cerchiamo perciò di risolverlo alla radice, tutto il resto è conseguenza". L'allevamento di Vasanello è nato nel 1992 con la collaborazione del centro diretto da Alessandro Finzi, e tra i principali successi c'è sicuramente l'aver dato vita a una nuova razza di coniglio: il leprino di Viterbo. Altro successo e innovazione è rappresentato dal sistema di produzione a "celle interrate" che, attraverso cunicoli artificiali simula molto realisticamente quelle che sono le tane in natura. Abolite dunque le gabbie in favore di un ritorno ai sistemi naturali. Un fatto che riduce praticamente a zero l'impatto ambientale, oltre che indurre nelle cinquanta fattrici un reale stato di benessere. Altro grosso pregio di questo sistema innovativo di allevamento è il basso costo degli impianti, cosa logica se si considera che il progetto è volto allo sviluppo dei paesi più poveri che certamente non hanno grandi risorse economiche. Inoltre quest'incredibile struttura, completamente a cielo aperto, dove ogni animale gode del giusto spa-

zio, è una risposta forte agli allevamenti intensivi che profilerano un po' ovun-que. Oltre a lepri e conigli, Giorgio Mariani alleva tacchini, oche, anatre e galline rigorosamente libere di razzolare, nulla a che dire con il deprimente spettacolo di animali ingrassati con il mangime in ambienti squallidi e gabbie troppo strette. Sul registro dei visitatori non mancano le firme di persone prove-nienti da ogni parte del mondo, senza esclusione di russi, arabi e cinesi. Tra i visitarori anche Kaba Moris, emissario della Giunea Konakri e figlio di un rap-presentante della Fao che dice: "Con la pancia vuota si ragiona male. Gli aiuti internazionali, per quanto provvidenziali, ci mancherebbe, rappresentato un palliativo. Ecco allora che attraverso soluzioni alternative speriamo di sviluppare una nuova formula per il terzo mil lennio, vere innovazioni zootecniche che possano permettere ai nostri paesi di autosostenersi".

Ardelio Loppi

Farms to feed the third world - Corriere di Viterbo 20-05-2001

The partnership between the Municipalities of Vasanello and Dschang began to take hold in 2002 thanks to a curious circumstance to say the least: a rabbit farm. Founded in Vasanello in 1992 thanks to an intuition of Professor Alessandro Finzi, head of the Experimental Center for Alternative Cunili Breeding of the University of Tuscia, the structure, directed by Giorgio Mariani, aimed to teach the integrated breeding of small species for family use in developing countries. Therefore, the delegations that came here from all over the world to seek a solution to the chronic problem represented by hunger were nourished.

Thus it was that the municipal administration, chaired by mayor **Primo Paolocci**, began to seriously consider the idea of twinning with one of these entities. The choice fell on Cameroon above all thanks to **Martin Sanou Sobzé**, president of Sinergia Cameroon, a regular visitor to the farm, originally from Dschang.

The ancient capital of Bamiléké, the city of Dschang is today the capital of Menoua, one of the eight districts into which the West of Cameroon is divided. The first Westerner to set foot here was the German Eugen Zintgraft in 1895, during the expedition of



Alessandro



Giorgio Mariani



Primo Paolocci



Martin Sanou Sobzé

conquest which, after the defeat suffered by Bismarck's troops at the foot of Mount Cameroon in 1891, led Germany to control the entire country in 1902 The oldest part of the urban nucleus was therefore built between 1903 and 1907.



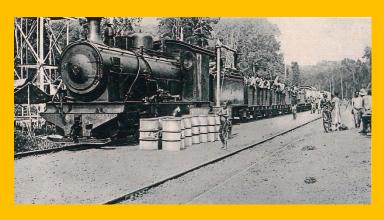


With the outbreak of the Great War, which was at least as bloody in the colonies as in Old Europe, the city was wrested from the Germans by British troops in 1915. Until 1919 it was administered in substantial condominium by the English and the French.



With the Treaty of Versailles, from 1920 Dschang became part of the 4/5ths of the country annexed to France - the other fifth, in the North West, became British - and would remain so until 1 January 1960, the date on which through a referendum announced by the UN, Cameroon obtains independence. As in most of the country, a strong French socio-political-cultural imprint can still be felt in Dschang. Also because, unlike the Germans, who were never accepted by the population especially for their bloody methods, the French managed to practice a particularly effective policy of assimilation. They initially committed themselves to systematically erasing every trace of German domination, receiving that substantial sympathy which helped them significantly in making the natives accept the ban on the teaching of native languages.

France also committed itself to the creation of the first infrastructures, such as the Douala-Yaunde railway and the road network, also increasing the exploitation of the large cocoa, banana, coffee, oil palm, tobacco and



rubber plantations. The legacy of French colonial architecture can be found in the buildings of the main institutions of Dschang: the hospital, the courthouse, the prefecture, the administrative district, the prison and the famous *Center Climatique*, which thanks to the quality of the services offered and the truly enchanting setting in which its bungalows are set, it is considered one of the best tourist residences not only in Cameroon.

The first institutional step for the twinning took place in May 2003, with the official visit of the Dschang authorities to Vasanello. At the time the Cameroonian city was divided into two distinct municipal areas, one rural and the other urban: the twinning was established with the rural municipality, of which **Momo Kenfàck** was mayor. The situation then changed in 2007 with the merger into a single municipality, and with the consequent ratification of the twinning signed on 16 December 2009.





May 2003 Above, ratification of the twinning with the signature of the mayor Primo Paolocci and the mayor of the rural municipality of Dschang Momo Kenfack.

To the side and below are moments of the ceremony, which was attended by hundreds of people

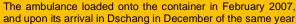


The first official visit of the municipal administration of Vasanello to Dschang arrived in March 2004: it included the deputy mayor **Antonio Porri**, the councilor for culture **Alberto Mastromichele**, the councilor for sport and tourism **Lorenzo Petrarca**, and the majority group leader **Sandro Filosa**.

Such an engaging and powerful experience awaits them, especially regarding the immense daily problems of the population, that it convinces them to set up a cooperation project which, in a few years, will involve bodies and associations at the highest levels: starting from the precious contribution offered by the Italian ambassador to Cameroon, **Antonio Bellavia**, one of the most convinced supporters of the initiatives of the small Cimino centre.

And then the Embassy of Cameroon in Rome, FAO, UNESCO, Unicef, Italian and Cameroonian Red Cross, Anlaids, Caritas, Lazio Region, Province and Municipality of Viterbo, Policlinico Umberto I of Rome, University of Rome 1, 2, Upter and the Tuscia, Viterbo Chamber of Commerce, Paola Pesci Foundation, Mingha Africa Onlus, Ceramica Galassia, Edil Fazioli, Det Gode Liv Italia, as well as ordinary citizens. Thanks to these synergies, since 2003, containers of basic necessities and development goods, an ambulance have landed in Cameroon and several water collection wells have been built.

Pipàd becomes a determining trait-d'union with Dschang, acronym for Integrated project for the promotion of self-development, a local association created by Martin Sanou Sobzé, thanks to the convinced support of Fotó chef **Momo I**. Inside the Pipàd are carried out programs that revolve around hygiene and development: therefore the construction of wells, latrines and training to stem the incidence of infectious diseases.









Antonio Porri



Alberto Mastromichele



Lorenzo Petrarca



Sandro Filosa



Antonio Bellavia



Momo I

Among Pipàd's projects, particularly important is that of the Department of Infectious and Tropical Diseases of the Umberto I hospital in Rome, present for years with the Minga project, "my child" in *Yemba* dialect, which, coordinated by Doctor Gianluca Russo, deals with providing assistance to pregnant women affected by HIV while trying, at the same time, to prevent contagion to the child.

In Cameroon, healthcare is fully paid for and furthermore, given the lack of medical personnel, one for every 12,500 inhabitants, who, moreover, tends to be concentrated in hospital facilities in urban settlements, healthcare in the rest of the territory is provided only by nurses who manage the Centers de Santé with great difficulty, dilapidated structures invariably lacking medical equipment and chronically lacking in medicines. The healthcare context is therefore particularly difficult and the statistics are consequence of this: infant mortality is 154 per 1,000 live births, with an average life expectancy of 48 years and with a seroprevalence for HIV infection close to 6%.





From the meeting between the Vasanella delegation visiting Dschang in 2004, **Gianluca Russo** and **Fiore Traditi**, also from the Umberto I Department of Infectious and Tropical Diseases, the idea of focusing particular attention on health problems arose.

It is the Red Cross, as we have seen, upon returning to Italy, which makes this desire possible by providing a freelander ambulance to be sent to the tormented African country. Thus, on 12 February 2007, on the container leaving for Cameroon with basic necessities and development items, there was also the first ambulance ever to arrive in the Dschang area.



Gianluca Russo



Fiore Traditi

The twinning was proving to be increasingly profitable and full of satisfactions, yet the municipal council of Vasanello looked further, well aware that without a real cultural exchange, without an objective that linked the two realities to a project of mutual knowledge, the relationship, substantially one-way, it would never have gone beyond the heading "humanitarian aid".

And here's the idea. Taking advantage of the regional announcement no. 749 of 5 October 2007 called **Let's give legs to the ideas of small municipalities**, a school interculture project is developed aimed at the creation of a **Cameroonian House of Culture**, to be set up in rooms overlooking the municipal library.

At first this might have seemed like a somewhat crazy bet, given the sidereal cultural distance between such different realities. Yet on 21 July 2008 the Lazio Regional Council expressed itself favorably by allocating 68 thousand euros for the realization of the project. **The administration had won its bet**.

Thus it was that at the beginning of December 2009 **Antonio Porri, Marcello Arduini**, the anthropologist appointed as head of the project, and the journalist **Ardelio Loppi** took off from Fiumicino to Douala. The objective was scientific research and the acquisition of the material that would give life to the Cameroonian House of Culture: the first in the world outside the African country. In any case, an important opportunity for both realities, since on the one hand the possibility of making itself better known, especially by school groups, will allow Cameroon to increase its development possibilities, Vasanello will instead be able to take advantage of the flow of visitors to enhance its artistic and archaeological heritage.

Three takeoffs and three landings - via Tripoli and Cotonou - and after a dozen hours here is the runway of Douala international airport. Cameroon is located just above the equator and in December, thanks to a humidity level that reaches 90% in the coastal areas, the heat is suffocating. When you step out of the plane, the first breath of air therefore has the effect of a punch in the stomach.



Antonio Porri



Marcello Arduini



Ardelio Loppi

From Douala to Dschang it is still a four hour drive up $Rue\ nationale\ n^\circ\ 5\ du\ Cameroon$. A hoot, if you consider that for long stretches the roadway - not yet finished at the time - is riddled with potholes where, often, the taxi's wheels sink halfway down.

Dschang is located at 1,400 meters above sea level, and this makes it a much more livable place than the caldera below. It is from here that the journey begins with the many *chefferie*, as the villages are called, where Martin Sanou Sobzé and the African art expert **Giuliana Quartullo** have already carried out the precious preparatory work in choosing the materials.



Giuliana Quartullo

In Dschang there is a completely fortuitous meeting with Fiore Traditi and Gianluca Russo. They are in these parts to participate in an international conference on the fight against HIV organized by the local university on 14-15 December. With its approximately 16 thousand students, the University of Dschang is among the most important not only in Cameroon but on the entire continent. Furthermore, the faculty of agriculture is the only one in Central Africa. It is quite logical that, in 2005, again as part of the Vasanella project, the university twinned with that of Tuscia. The faculty of foreign language and literature even boasts a very popular Italian section, to which the Municipality of Vasanello has donated an entire teaching section.

An important institutional moment was held on 16 December: a new act which ratified the twinning with Dschang which, as mentioned, has changed its structure since 2003 by grouping together the two previous municipal entities, one rural and the other urban - with two distinct firsts citizens - in a single and more practical municipality in 2009 governed by **Bernard Momo**.



The "only" mayor of Dschang Bernard Momo and Antonio Porri







They were very intense days, up and down some of the most important chefferie, from which, after complicated and mysterious rites. artefacts propitiatory extraordinary artistic and cultural value obtained. The work "convincing" often proved to exhausting, since many of the finds heirlooms were real considered immovable for generations, but the quality of the project ended up convincing even the most rebellious.

Between one acquisition and another, a way was found to also intervene in important cultural events, highlighted Cameroon's great determination in wanting to selfdevelop through the valorization of its enormous anthropological heritage. The S.a.c.o. In 2009, for example, the first exhibition of the 40 municipalities of the West, which took place from 7 11 December in Bandjoun, represented one of the most significant events from this perspective. In addition to the numerous exhibition pavilions, set up with the best artisan products of this area, numerous groups performed with music and dances typical of the Bamiléké culture.

Even more impressive was the inauguration of the Bamendjinda Slavery Museum on 12 December. Focused on the slave practices which, starting from the 18th century, snatched millions of human beings









here as in all of West Africa, destined above all for the plantations of the New World. On the sidelines of the event, as usual, a large party was held during which famous Cameroonian artists performed, amid general rejoicing.

The always suggestive parade of secret societies could not be missing, usually in harmony and complementary to the political power of each Bamiléké chefférié but which, in theory, could also undermine it.

The universe of chefferie deserves to be explored further. These are also very large tribal groups at the top of which is the chef, the leader. The latter, custodian of ancestral customs and a sacred figure with divine power, watches over his people, administering their fate. Respect for the chef represents the foundation of the Bamiléké tradition and is normally expressed through a series of distinctive signs and behaviors that regulate the relationship between him and his subordinates. For example, all lower-ranking individuals must uncover their boss in front of him, they cannot touch him, turn their backs on him and do not have the right to sit on his chair.

At the same time, there is also a form of limitation to what might seem like unlimited power. This occurs through the support of the chef by a council of 9 notables, who are in turn immovable as they are elected by succession and therefore in a position to negotiate and sometimes counteract the chef himself, as he cannot remove them from their position.

In addition to the council of 9, there is also a multitude of secret societies that are also able to counterbalance the power of the chef. These societies are divided into political-administrative, including the council of 9 itself,







warrior, magical-religious and totemic. In essence, the notables and secret societies control the chef and actually have the power of life and death over him, being able to elect him as well as "eliminate" him. The most important chefferies in the Dschang area are those of Fotó and Bafou, but in total there are as many as 15. Another particularly important aspect of the Bamiléké tradition is represented by funerals. The ceremony can be organized either a few days after passing away or even after several years. The one witnessed, in the chefférié of Fotó, was celebrated to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of his death. These are festive events characterized by music, songs, ritual dances and gargantuan eating.

There was also no shortage of visits to structures, mostly schools, where the support of Vasanella citizens has been massive over the years. In Fotó, for example, thanks above all to the proceeds collected by the Paola Foundation, Pesci an equipped classroom was created which frequented by many children. And at the Ecole publique du Plateau, an institution where the conditions of extreme difficulty facing education in Cameroon appear in all its disarming evidence. Yet the smiles and displays of jubilation that all children in the world have in common are not spared. Large, bright eyes, very white teeth framed by open and joyful smiles that well reflect the nature of an entire people. Of people who have little, and don't expect too much from life, but who perhaps for this very reason live every single experience to the fullest









and most intensely. The biggest problem for these children is certainly not getting the latest model of PlayStation as a gift, but rather getting up every morning at dawn and, on foot, with books, trotting for 10 or more kilometers to sit on the school desks. When they return home, then, under the scorching sun, you happen to meet them in long lines with large jars of water collected from the rare public fountains on their heads.



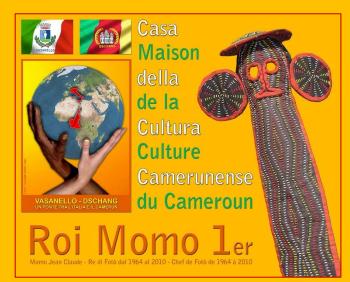
In the limited time available, the foundations of the audiovisual materials have been laid which will integrate the Center's documentary material with thematic interviews. Of course, the time available for this important aspect of the project was not much, and we will have to return, but the material collected was nevertheless very satisfactory.

On December 21st, kisses, hugs and off we go again along *Rue nationale n° 5 du Cameroon*, destination Douala airport to return home. As always happens at the end of every trip, on the one hand you can't wait to have a nice "real" coffee at the first bar in Fiumicino that comes along, yet the sense of melancholy you feel is such that you would gladly less.

extent of The true the accomplished was felt during the last two days, spent packing and shipping the artefacts, when it was understood that these were not simple objects, but the very essence of the beating heart of Africa. The heart of a tortured and wounded continent that will now also beat in Vasanello, a small town of just over 4 thousand souls determined not to look the other way. And now, thanks to this far-sighted initiative supported by the Lazio Region, it has broadened its horizons by diving into the 21st century with open eyes.



























A sinistra un momento di divulgazione dell'iniziativa nella scuola media di Vasanello



It starts at 4pm at the Albertone cinema with the screening of the documentary "Citizens of the world"

House of culture, Polverini arrives

The entire diplomatic corps of Cameroon in Italy and ten traditional kings were present



Il suggestivo ingresso della Casa della cultura camerunense A destra il sindaco di Vasanello Antonio Porri, al centro il direttore scientifico Marcello Arduini, a sinistra il regista del documentario Ardelio Loppi

VASANELLO - La quattro giorni delle "Giornate della cultura camerunense" avrà questo pomeriggio alle 16 a Vasanello il suo momento clou con l'inaugurazione della "Casa della Cultura Camerunense". Questa struttura, l'unica al mondo fuori dal paese africano, è stata realizzata grazie al bando

regionale n° 749 del 5 ot-tobre 2007 - " Diamo gambe alle idee dei pic-coli comuni" - e sviluppata come progetto di Intercultura Scolastica. Si tratta di un momento molto sentito in quanto va a chiudere un cerchio, quello del decen-nale gemellaggio tra Vasanello e Dschang, che ha visto coinvolti enti ed associazioni ai più alti livelli: amba-sciate d'Italia e Camerun, Fao, Unesco, Uni-cef, Croce Rossa Italiana e Camerunense, Regio-ne Lazio, Provincia e Comune di Viterbo, Poli-clinico Umberto I di Roma. Università Roma 1. 2, Upter e della Tuscia, oltre ad associazioni e privati cittadini. Que-ste sinergie hanno permesso che in questi an-ni sbarcassero in Camerun container di beni di prima necessità e svi-

luppo, un'ambulanza e fossero realizzati svariati pozzi a captazione idri-

La giornata odierna, che inizierà come detto alle 16 (al cinema "Albertone Nazionale"), si aprirà con la proiezione del documentario "Cittadini del Mondo" (soggetto, sceneggiatura e regia di Ardelio Loppi; montaggio e audio Angelo Munzi), realizzato per spiegare nel miglior modo questi dieci anni di cooperazione e come si è giunti alla realizzazione della "Casa della Cultura". A seguire gli interventi. Aprirà il primo cittadino di Vasanello



Antonio Porri, quindi quello di Dschang Bernard Momo e a seguire: Stefania Pinci, Ministero degli Affari Esteri; Antonella Scolamiero, prefetto di Viterbo; Naseri Paul Bea, prefetto di Dschang; Dominique Awono Essama, ambasciatore del Camerun a Roma; Guy Bertrand Momo Soffack, re di Fotò; Anaclete Fomethe, rettore dell'Università di Dschang; Marcello Arduini, responsabile scientifico della "Casa della Cultura Camerunense"; Marcello Meroi, presidente della Provincia di Viterbo; Renata Polverini, presidente della Regione Lazio.

La "Casa della Cultura Camerunense"

La "Casa della Cultura Camerunense" è un progetto molto ambizioso che, se da un lato darà al Camerun la possibilità di farsi conoscere meglio, soprattutto da scolaresche, potenziando le proprie possibilità di sviluppo, permetterà a Vasanello di approfittare del flusso di visitatori per valorizzare anche il proprio patrimonio artistico e archeologico. Ma non solo. Infatti grazie alla stretta sinergia tra l'Università di Dschang (la più importante del Centro Africa), e quelle della Tuscia, di Camerino, di Urbino, La Sapienza, Tor Vergata, Roma tre, e alla collaborazione con l'ospedale Umberto I di Roma, ormai si può ben sostenere che la "Casa della Cultura Camerunense" di Vasanello sarà il fultor culturale, il trait d'union intorno al quale queste realtà troveranno un fisiologico punto d'incontro. E' in proposito allo studio un portale interattivo, dotato di una ponderosa banca dati, che renderà estremamente semplice a chiunque lo studio e il confronto tra tutte le realtà

coinvolte

La "Casa" è soprattutto un Centro di intercultura scolastica. Per questo il documentario che sarà presentato oggi, correlato da dvd di approfondimento, sarà inviato, con l'invito a visitare la "Ca-sa", a tutte le Direzioni Didattiche del Lazio e non solo. Le scuole potranno qui "incon-trare" una realtà africana altrimenti difficile da conoscere, e questo permetterà senz'altro quello scambio culturale che il Vecchio Continente. sempre più popolato da etnie africane, non può più permettersi di rimandare. L'augurio è che, attraverso la conoscenza, si possa aiutare davvero il processo di integrazione. Vasanello è paesino di poco più di 4mila ani-

me determinato a non voltarsi dall'altra parte. Una piccola realtà che ora, grazie a questa iniziativa, generosamente appoggiata dalla Regione Lazio, si sente pronta ad ampliare i propri orizzonti tuffandosi, ad occhi aperti. nel ziesimo secolo.



Alcune immagini della casa



