

ANCIENT ROADS IN SOUTHERN ITALY: AN HYPOTHESIS OF REQUALIFICATION FOR THE VALORIZATION OF THE RURAL TOURISM

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1. Abstract

The current rural heritage in a specific area represents the form that the man has been able to give to his surroundings. Over the centuries, in many European rural areas, the roads have lost their traditional design motivation. Their requalification in the framework of a sustainable development of the rural areas can be an important way for a sustainable development of rural tourism. It could pass through the valorization of route-based itineraries designed on some ancient roads, as those built in Europe by the Romans or during the middle-age for religious pilgrimages. The "Francigena Way" is a combination of arterial roads dating back to the roman epoch; the "Herculia Way" is a part of the "Francigena Way" that was built in Southern Italy.

In this paper the possible requalification of a part of the Herculia Way has been hypotized. Some ancient paths, known as "tratturi" (sheep-tracks) and small royal tratturi, partly still existing, have been detected and located on historical maps, for a possible structural and functional restore, with the creation of a route that could be run along by walking, by bicycle or on horseback.

This redevelopment could contribute to the protection and enhancement of the rural landscape elements examined, to the sustainable management of the environment and the enhancement of rural history and, more generally, to the promotion of rural tourism through the creation of new alternative activities compatible with the particular nature of the environment.

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2. Introduction

The role that rural buildings have historically played, is closely connected with the surrounding environment [12]. The architectural artifacts are the products of the human activity and as such it carries in itself the memory of the project or purpose which it has generated [4]. Types of rural buildings have significant impacts on the environment and natural resources, leading to a sustainable environmental development [16]. The history of an area can be inferred through a careful observation of the natural elements and architectural features that are found in it. Extra-urban areas have always been environments in which important forms of natural landscape taking origin in the old coexistence of the natural environment with the human presence can be found. Over the centuries, the Agriculture is becoming highly mechanized and therefore requires less manual labour. This is causing economic pressure on some villages, leading to an exodus of young people to urban areas. In many rural areas, roads and buildings have lost their original motivation at the base of the traditional design under the influence of major changes occurred in the local countryside. The gradual state of neglect and deterioration of the landscape leads, over time, to the inexorable loss of valuable local cultural identities linked to the nature of the territory. The neglected rural heritage is destined to disappear. The conservation of this precious natural resource aims to protect the local rural landscape.

There is, however, a segment of urban population that is interested to visit the rural areas and understand their perspective. This segment has been rapidly growing in the past decade in Europe, and has led to rural tourism becoming a good business prospect. Rural tourism focuses on participating in a rural lifestyle. Any village can be a tourist attraction, and many villagers are very hospitable.

It can be a variant of ecotourism, a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial (mass) tourism. Its purpose may be to educate the traveller, to provide funds for ecological conservation, to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, or to foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. Since the 1980s ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavour by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention. Several university programs use this description as the working definition of ecotourism. Generally, ecotourism deals with living parts of the natural environments. Ecotourism focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth, and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Ecotourism is intended to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment, and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats.

Rural tourism exists in developed nations in the form of providing accommodation in a scenic location ideal for rest and relaxation. The relevant programs include

those that minimize the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, an integral part of ecotourism is the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and creation of economic opportunities for local communities. For these reasons, ecotourism often appeals to advocate environmental and social responsibility.

Currently, rural tourism presents itself as an enterprise closely linked to traditional agricultural activities. It generates additional income and fosters greater sensitivity to the environment and land conservation. These activities often deal with minimisation of the overall environmental impact of these developments [11].

Rural developments, therefore, need to be considered both in terms of sustainable environment integrity [10].

The added income from rural tourism can contribute to the revival of lost folk art and handicrafts. It is an ideal and natural method of rural and urban economic exchange. The employment implications are notable, particularly in the southern regions. Tourism is sustainable when it defines its development retains the activities connected with it for an unlimited time, without altering the natural balance, social and artistic, and does not stop or inhibit the growth of other productive activities, economic and social area . Principals human disseminated locally are evidence of the close relationship between man and environment.

Tourism has long been identified as an economical factor stimulating the growth of a local territory [7].

Many buildings, constructed by man have been introduced in rural areas and its recreational potential is growing and makes human movements for rural areas, which is coincident with the urban expansion in the last 20th century [8].

In a modern rural economy decision-making processes are designed to ensure harmonious relations between environmental integrity and preservation of historic rural buildings, constructed by integrating within its landscape. It seems therefore necessary to ensure the conservation of the rural heritage abandoned and destined to disappear, through its conversion to new uses in order to protect the local rural landscape, with its traditions and its culture [9].

The possibility to re-use by new activities, abandoned rural architectural elements, is a good practice that can guarantee, in the long term, sustainable conservation of natural resources, as it provides an utility for owners, ensures the proper maintenance of buildings and helps to protect the sense of place of rural landscapes [5].

Optimizing and upkeeping the environment through the prolonging the life of an artifact is a method to reach a balance between tradition and innovation [4]. In the second half of the twentieth century, an increase in the demand for goods and services in rural areas, such as recreation, contemplation of the landscape, commercialization of traditional tourism and cultural heritage, took place. The use and economic promotion of these resources offer a real opportunity for diversification and improvement of local economies [15]. The promotion of the

territories through tourism has long been considered a powerful tool for development, capable of stimulating economic growth, to increase investment and local jobs [7]. It has been shown that, in some cases, tourism has led to greater protection and conservation of the environment [13]. Experts agree on the proper integration and environmental position in mind to balance harmoniously rural buildings related to tourism within their landscape environment [14, 1].

The present work aims to identify the characteristic elements of the rural landscape investigated with the aim of suggest a possible environmental and functional intervention by analyzing a portion of route of the HerculiaWay, in the Basilicata Region, in order to initiate a process of launching a rural tourism that can protect the identity of the local landscape for the future.

3. Requalification of Ancient Roads for the valorization of the rural tourism

3.1 Ancient Roads in Southern Italy: the "Herculia Way"

The Herculia Way is an ancient road artery connecting the north to the south of the Basilicata Region (Fig. 1).

Figure n. 1: The regions of Southern Italy in the "Descriptio Augustea"



It was built during the Roman period, at the time of the emperors Diocletian and Maximian Herculius, from which it takes its name, in order to connect the Grumento City with the Appian Way in the north, the Popilia Way and the Ionian Coast eastward.

The stretch of the Herculia Way eastbound assumes historical significance for religious pilgrims, in consequence of the passage of Saint Mark the Evangelist and the Apostle Peter and his followers, travelling to Rome, in the Bishopric of

Anglona, an apostolic foundation sited in the territory of the Tursi municipality, located along the Herculia Way in the Basilicata Region. [3].

It was subsequently used by commercial traffic crossing the region. In the middle Ages, the main axis of road network of Basilicata Region reproduced the ancient Roman paths, linking, as far as possible, all the territory of the old region. These were the Appian Way, the Capua-Reggio Way and the Herculia Way.

This latter represented the ancient arterial road, the most active, which crossed the territory of the region. It facilitated the transit of goods and armies towards the Ionian Coast and the transit of pilgrims among the various dioceses. During the middle Ages, the Herculia Way continued to assume more importance. At this time beside the main roads, appeared the sign of a minor road. It is a simple little extensive road network. This network of internal roads and side streets is perceived by "Procopio" as a whole in two levels of roads: the first level, the most important, was the one of the "*publicae*" roads run by public authorities, which was normally frequented by armies, merchants and pilgrims.

The second level was constituted by paths, harsh and tough, little more than mule tracks, with winding paths along the ridge or crest, maintenance-free and generally known only to premises [6]. The articulation of this minor road network was mainly based onto economic reasons as well as the emergence of new settlements of people. In this way the roman concept of linear road was left, moving to a new conception of the road now understood as medieval road network (*strata, via, iter, itinerarium*) [2], mostly articulated in the territory and intended to serve different purposes. The Herculia Way was built with strategic military targets. Then its trajectory has been used by tourist flows. Therefore, it is a set of macro paths, connected to micro routes, built and developed to meet the needs of local residents. From the City of Grumentum it continues toward the ancient Greek City of Heraclea, crossing south the Agri Valley and linking the cities of Spinoso, San Martino d'Agri, Roccanova, Sant'Arcangelo and Tursi. An intermediate station should probably fall in the area of Sant'Arcangelo. This road runs along the route of the Herculia Way [2].

By consultation of bibliographic and cartographic material currently available, some points of historical interest have been chosen with the purpose to start an investigation on the stretch of Herculia Way into the Basilicata Region. In particular, the locations of Grumentum, Roccanova, Sant'Arcangelo and Anglona (the old City of Pandosia) in Tursi were chosen. Targeted inspections were conducted with the aim of researching the significant elements of local rural architecture, capable of interpreting the history of the landscape and, therefore, the characteristic elements of rural heritage. To intercept the rural buildings, falling within the ancient road layout branched on the territory, the endowment of historical cartographic material revealed very useful. The rural buildings, identified along the road stretch investigated, were the subject of a photographic survey along with a survey of their geographical coordinates, in order to be able to assign the exact geographic position on georeferenced cartographic material.

3.2 Results and discussion

The field survey that was conducted has allowed the identification of rural buildings and, generally, elements of the agricultural landscape, different in type and use.

In particular, it emerged the presence on the territory of distinguished rural constructions, both building and minor road layout, characterized by a high architectural, environmental and historical value (Fig. 3).

Figure n. 3: Rural religious building in Anglona and a particular roads thereby.



The inspections, localized at points of greatest historical importance and representing the main stages of the ancient route, have allowed to conduct a targeted investigation.

Especially near the center of the City of Grumentum, buildings have been identified dating mainly from the religious Roman era.

In the stretch of road between the City of Roccanova and the City of Sant'Arcangelo, proceeding from west to east, in the direction of the ancient Monastery of Orsoleo, paths thoroughly natural and ancient fountains, predominantly privately owned, were identified.

In the way from the ancient center of the City of Anglona (Pandosia) to the City of Sant'Arcangelo, from east to west, a road layout belonging to an agricultural farmer has been identified; at present it is abandoned.

Many wells and water troughs have been identified along the route. With the exception of the great religious building, observed in City of Anglona, along this stretch other small religious structures were encountered.

The current deterioration of this road has brought to light original flooring built in local stone (Fig. 4).

Generally, in the three paths identified, constructions of small and medium-size (Fig. 4) have been observed; currently they suffer of low maintenance or they are completely abandoned.

Figure n. 4: Particular of sheep track in original flooring built in local stone and constructions of small size.



On the contrary, in some limited cases, medium and large buildings were well preserved. It is a type of construction, especially of a religious nature, such as churches and rural sanctuaries that testify the great importance that these territories have had in the past for religious pilgrimages.

A second type of construction, observed in a smaller number of cases, identifies buildings of smaller size. They are related to small shelters, located in the area of internal roads, once used by local farmers, as auxiliaries for local agricultural activities carried out in the fields, or as a refuge for animals raised for family consumption. In some cases, in the vicinity of these structures, fountains can be found, which were used in the past for local agricultural use or for the needs of travellers, traders and soldiers.

In all cases, the observed structures are made of poor materials locally available, such as stones, clays and wood, wisely used. In a few cases, especially along the third section investigated, rural buildings for agricultural and husbandry of a larger size were observed. It was also important the presence of useful structures, used for the storage or the processing of agricultural products, such as small mills. A link between the identified structures has been observed, sheep-tracks, mainly private, identifiable in the natural landscape. The construction works and sheep tracks observed were analyzed by taking their photographs and GPS coordinates. From the positioning of these pictures and the georeferenced cartographic material, a concentration of buildings along rural roads related to roads of higher relevance was observed. In this way, it was possible to identify the traits of sheep tracks which belong to the Herculia Way, confirming, within a small margin of error, its role in the middle Ages as one of the most important link of Southern Italy.

Currently, a growing interest in rediscovering places of cultural and natural interest and the possibility of a recovery of the old rural routes, linked to local cultural traditions, is essential to raise awareness of landscape resources poorly understood. The hypothesis of a structural restoration of the observed paths can be

useful for new forms of alternative economic activities compatible with the nature of the place, as the provision of accessible paths on foot or horseback. These activities could use the old abandoned rural structures, observed for the visit of pilgrims and horses, on the way along ancient paths roads. Similarly, the presence of fountains along the roads could be useful. In this way, the natural equilibrium of the environment would remain unchanged and especially the natural resources would be preserved and respected. The preservation of the landscape and the sense of place in the long term could be achieved by increasing the competitiveness and environmental sustainability, in accordance with the international lines of economic and environmental development.

4. Conclusions

The analysis on the rural elements observed along the tracts afferent to the Herculia Way, reveals an interesting cultural heritage which is connected to the history of places, worthy of attention landscape-architectural interest, both at national and international level.

The current state of abandonment, which has been observed, can lead to a loss of important cultural heritage linked to the history of the local territory. The functional and structural restoration of the identified pathways and structures may be an effective opportunity to begin a process of regeneration of the local rural environment, especially regarding the potential natural environment. Protecting and making accessible these resources for the future generation is an essential process in the integrated conservation of the rural landscape, where the resources are included and in which they are an integral and essential part. In addition, the creation of new complementary activities could be a real opportunity to be seized in accordance with the sustainable development of the territory to promote the development of sustainable rural tourism linked to the history of the territory.

New investigations are needed in order to complete the path of reunification of the traits roads identified in order to deepen their knowledge and initiate a study on the promotion of the ancient road network.

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