

LOST AND FOUND

Processes of abandonment of the architectural and urban heritage
in inner areas. Causes, effects, and narratives (Italy, Albania, Romania)

Edited by Annunziata Maria Oteri

ArchistoR
EXTRA

Lost and Found. Approcci *history-based* nelle strategie per la conservazione del patrimonio abbandonato

Annunziata Maria Oteri (Politecnico di Milano)

Il saggio introduce gli esiti della ricerca Lost and Found. Processes of abandonment of the architectural and urban heritage in inner areas: Causes, effects, and narratives (Italy, Albania, Romania), che studia come i fattori di abbandono e i loro effetti possano aver influenzato i processi di costruzione di memoria e identità nel corso del XX secolo e come tali processi potrebbero condizionare l'attuale percezione e interazione con questi luoghi da parte delle comunità, dunque le potenziali strategie di ripopolamento e riuso o di abbandono consapevole. In particolare, poi, il saggio riflette sulle potenzialità dell'approccio history-based, che ha ispirato la ricerca, in quei casi in cui l'abbandono è causato oltre che da fattori socio-economici, anche da significativi fattori di rischio fisico (idrogeologico, sismico, ecc.). Per approccio history-based si intende qui un metodo che inquadra in una dimensione storica le ragioni profonde dell'abbandono e le conseguenti ripercussioni su territori e insediamenti nell'idea che le interpretazioni che ne derivano possano aiutare a valutare le potenzialità per il rilancio di questi territori o, al contrario, l'impossibilità di un "ritorno in vita". Inoltre, il saggio spiega come questo approccio si sia rivelato utile nella verifica dei processi di costruzione della memoria che hanno condizionato la percezione delle aree in esame (la Calabria meridionale, la regione di Argeş in Romania e la valle del Drino in Albania) la cui storia è in vario modo segnata da catastrofi naturali.

LOST AND FOUND

Processi di abbandono del patrimonio architettonico e urbano nelle
aree interne. Cause, effetti, narrazioni (Italia, Albania Romania)

www.archistor.unirc.it

ArchistoR EXTRA 13 (2024)

ISSN 2384-8898

Supplemento di ArchistoR 19/2023

ISSN 978-88-85479-11-1

DOI: 10.14633/AHR398



Lost and Found. History-based Approaches in the Strategies for the Preservation of Abandoned Heritage

Annunziata Maria Oteri

«Caring for small towns means understanding them in depth»¹. This brief quotation summarizes the sense of the study *Lost and Found. Processes of abandonment of the architectural and urban heritage in inner areas: Causes, effects, and narratives (Italy, Albania, Romania)*.

The study investigates how a history-based approach for the study of marginal regions affected by depopulation can help in addressing possible strategies for “mitigating” the phenomenon and its consequences in terms of cultural heritage abandonment. The history-based approach is here intended as a methodology that places the deep-rooted reasons for abandonment, as well as its repercussions on territories and settlements, within a historical context. Such an approach should help assess the potentiality of the relaunch or, conversely, the end of a specific site, as strategies do not necessarily have to or can coincide with the repopulation of these territories and the reuse of abandoned architectural and urban heritage.

The history-based approach also helps us understand how abandonment factors and their effects influenced the construction processes of memory and identity over the 20th century and to further grasp how these processes can condition contemporary perception and interaction with depopulated areas and abandoned heritage by different user groups. The results are important to evaluate the potentiality of repopulation and reuse of the abandoned built environment.

1. RIZZO 2022, p. 31 (translation by the author).

Although the study mainly deals with processes and effects of depopulation in southern Calabria, a comparison with similar cases in Europe, particularly Romania, and Albania is proposed. The idea is to relate three areas that are different from many perspectives but are connected by the same shrinkage phenomenon. Furthermore, the cases from Albania and Romania offer interesting experiments with new strategies for repopulation.

The study draws inspiration from the approach outlined by historians (modern and contemporary history, economics, architecture, and urban planning, etc.), geographers, sociologists, archaeologists, and landscape ecologists who examine the processes of transforming the territory. They focus not so much on the physical structure or its representation – which is the outcome of these transformations and not even the last one, as architects often tend to forget – but rather on the layering of long-term processes that define the current structure (both physical and non-physical) of the territories. In particular, the research focuses on regions where depopulation is not solely due to economic reasons but also to adverse events that have accelerated or forced these processes in some cases: earthquakes and floods in Calabria, for example, fires and further floods in Romania; places where depopulation has often been intentional, decreed by laws and regulations, therefore politically driven, and sometimes accompanied by repopulation elsewhere with all the associated issues related to new forms of settlement.

Guiding the reader. The Lost and Found research framework

The historical dimension of abandonment is here investigated with the dual aim of verifying the dynamics that have led to depopulation, often controversial, unfavourable and not always clearly justified, and the effect of these processes on the studied areas also including the perception of their safety and liveability. Effects and narration of the abandonment are the main focuses of the study, with the idea that every possible recovery of small settlements in marginal areas cannot ignore the facts and how they have been narrated over time. For this reason, as will be seen in the following pages, the volume deals with abandonment and its results on sites and communities looking at it from three different perspectives: the processes, the effects, and the narrative.

Although the phenomenon of depopulation is not exclusive to the modern age, and indeed, population shifts and resettlements have characterized Europe since the Middle Age, the research particularly focuses on contemporary time. In the case of Calabria, Decree n. 445 issued in 1908²

2. The appendix to Royal Decree No. 445/1908 defines many settlements to be abandoned or relocated elsewhere. For



Figure 1. The Calabrian case studies (elaboration by N. Sulfaro)

has been taken as a starting point. As specified in the following pages³, with the decree, the Italian government established the relocation of a significant number of small towns and villages at risk in Calabria and Basilicata due to seismic or hydrogeological factors. The research then focuses on what happened around the 1950s when significant natural disasters, especially floods (1951 and 1953), accelerated the processes of abandonment and relocation to other sites.

The so-called Grecanica and Locride areas are the focus of the Italian research group with some specific attention to the small towns of Africo, Bruzzano, Canolo, and Ferruzzano in the province of Reggio Calabria (fig. 1). Situated on the ridge of the Aspromonte mountains, these historical villages are today partly or entirely depopulated due to a complex interplay of natural (earthquakes and floods), anthropogenic (depopulation, war), economic, and political phenomena that led to a slow and, in some cases, definitive abandonment and the emergence of a "dual" settlement on the coast around the 1950s, except Canolo, whose new settlement was built close to

Calabria alone, the initial list, later updated, included 62 small communities and 27 villages.

3. See Sulfaro in this volume, pp. 202-227.

the historical settlement in the mountain; a circumstance that allowed for interesting comparisons on the outcomes of this unusual choice. The Grecanica and Locride areas are of particular interest for the investigation because the abandonment, closely linked to seismic and hydrogeological risks, primarily since the early 20th century, has strongly shaped the socio-economic destiny of these lands which exhibit many physical and socio-economic vulnerabilities⁴. Since the early 20th century, the significant historical phenomena of depopulation have merged with a severe crisis in the agricultural sector, with economic, social, cultural, and even geographical consequences that are still being faced today. Some of these villages have been abandoned, others resettled on the coast, in other cases, only part of the population has been moved to new centres, and in some cases, the abandonment has generated a true diaspora of the inhabitants. On the other hand, paradoxically, abandonment is the main reason this area is rich in territorial assets, often untouched (natural landscapes, urban and architectural heritage, traditions, etc.). At the same time, depopulation – often implying the end of a settlement – has almost always coincided with the beginning of another (the village and its double). This has entailed significant disruptions in terms of identity dislocation, as well as aspects related to urban planning in the new centres. The processes of relocating entire settlements have not had positive outcomes for the communities that have endured them, leading to significant consequences in terms of loss of identity, without relevant benefits for a potential socio-economic revival, and lastly, because the relocation has triggered processes of urban redesign on the one hand and the abandonment of traditional heritage on the other, which have not been thoroughly investigated. Indeed, part of the area falls within the scope of the Italian National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI), for the socio-economic and cultural relaunch of marginal areas at risk of abandonment (fig. 2).

The abandonment of rural settlements in the 20th century, mainly due to a combination of physical and social risks with significant implications for the perception and construction of new identity processes, is also the focus of the other two case studies dealing with Romania and Albania which are presented in the second part of the volume. Primarily, processes and results after the collapse of communism in Albania and from the socialist collectivisation and "systematisation" of rural areas in Romania are analysed. Both cases propose some examples of governmental strategies for triggering repopulation through new uses of the abandoned heritage.

The modes of depopulation in Calabria, particularly the mass exodus that was renewed after the Second World War, seem to have a strong connection with what is happening to rural villages

4. *Ibidem*.

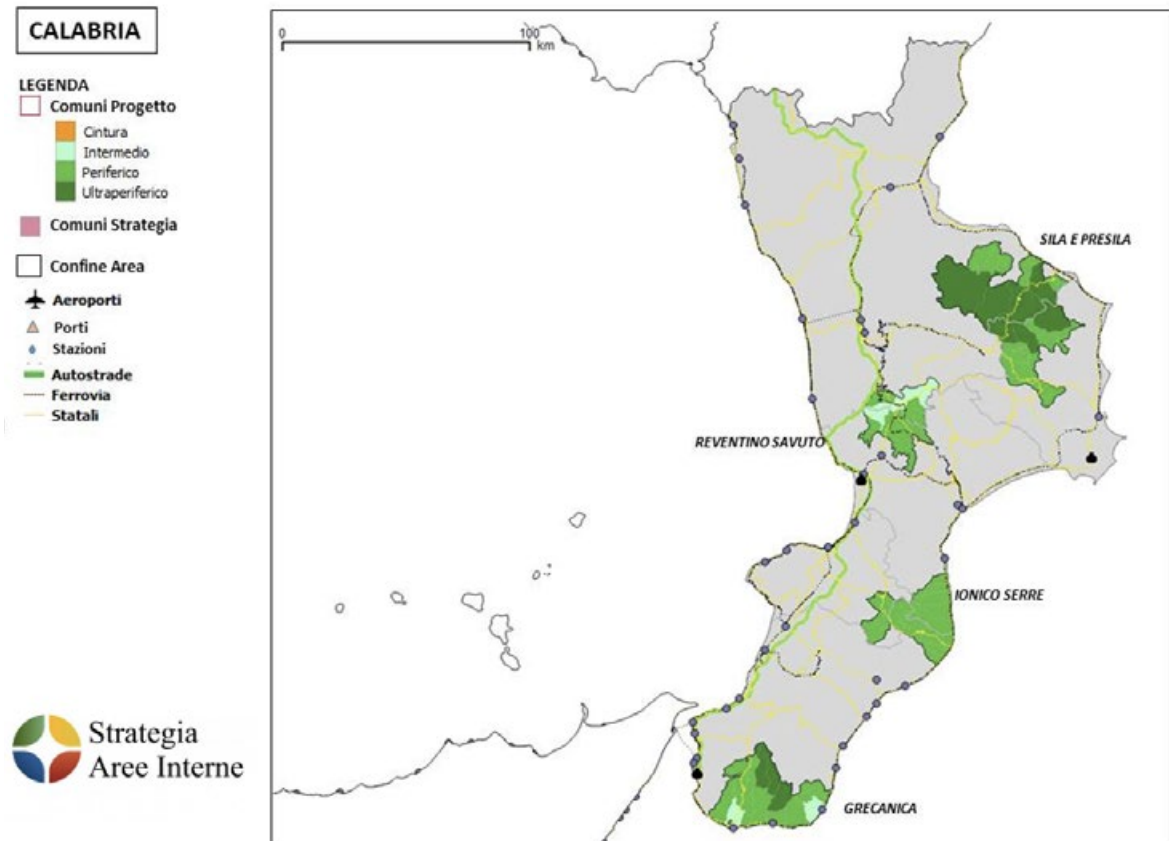


Figure 2. Map of the areas of the Calabria included in the SNAI; <https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/strategia-nazionale-aree-interne/regione-calabria-aree-interne/> (accessed 15 December 2023).

in the Drino Valley, Albania after the fall of communism, especially regarding the socio-economic consequences. Since the 1990s, there has been a significant reform of the rural system to dismantle the organization wanted by the socialist government and characterized by state-controlled agricultural cooperatives. Despite attempts to reassign ownership, a competitive revival of agriculture has not occurred, and the massive wave of emigration that affected Albania after the fall of communism has mainly hit rural areas with an enormous exodus of inhabitants towards large urban centres or, in many cases, abroad⁵. Diasporas, natural disasters, and processes of marginalization and depopulation also concern rural villages in Romania. Also, in this case, the social, political, and economic dimensions intertwine, determining significant processes of marginalization that condition a negative narrative and, therefore, the prospects for repopulation and reuse⁶. This aspect is not irrelevant since both the Albanian and Romanian cases are currently interested by "territory-based" projects or strategies for repopulation, primarily aimed at promoting tourism.

While the research focuses primarily on Calabria, comparing Albanian and Romanian cases is helpful as it allows for analysing the outcomes of depopulation in marginal and predominantly rural areas in contexts that vary significantly in geographical, economic, cultural, and even political conditions.

As mentioned earlier, the study is grounded on three main themes – processes, effects, and narratives – which also suggest the structure of the volume. The first part of the volume deals with the causes of abandonment and the policies implemented by the central government to manage depopulation. In the case of Calabria, but this applies generally to other cases as well, abandonment marks the territory – a "territory of abandonment", precisely – which emerges from a superimposition of historical maps⁷. The historical documentation analysed has also defined a framework of often inconsistent policies, activated by the central government to address the emergency caused by the ruthless intertwining of socio-economic reasons and natural disasters. Regulatory tools were specifically designed to relocate local communities and establish new settlements, as evidenced by the essays by Nino Sulfaro and Marco Mareggi. In some cases, these are "experiments" which certainly impact inhabitants and territories, as documented by Renato Sansa in the case of Africo. The second part of the volume focuses on the effects of depopulation on architectural and environmental heritage. The data collected here, partly from archival research and partly from meticulous fieldwork,

5. See ISLAMI, VEIZAJ in this volume, pp. 450-477.

6. See MINHEA *et al.* in this volume, pp. 398-449.

7. See MAREGGI, ROMBOLÀ in this volume, pp. 126-149.

provide a precise picture – albeit relative to specific case studies – of the effect of abandonment on architecture and landscapes. To quote some examples from the volume, the work on cartography by Rosa Maria Rombolà and Marco Mareggi, who superimposed the historical maps, shows that some intrinsic characteristics of the territory (the *fiumare*, for instance, that conditioned the historical and current mobility in Calabria) along with the different land uses over time influenced the depopulation processes. Looking at these maps in more depth, a sort of diagram of accessibility and inaccessibility of these areas also emerges that cannot be ignored in the perspective of envisioning new uses.

The research then aimed to map the disused built heritage, highlighting the potential and possible uses of digital cartography and drone mapping in understanding small historical centres⁸. The digital map presented here by Morena Scaglia and Caterina Valiante aims to define possible methods of analysing the specific problems of small historic centres at risk of abandonment, experimenting with this approach through a case study, the ancient settlement of Ferruzzano Superiore (Reggio Calabria) (fig. 3). A digital database collected data relating to the urban and architectural characteristics of the built heritage and the current conditions of the structures and materials, highlighting their critical issues and residual potential for possible reuse. The application of this methodology shows how such an approach – albeit characterized by rapid survey – can provide an essential knowledge base to support decision-making processes involving the reuse and enhancement of the architectural heritage of small historical centres. A reflection in this regard, attempting to direct the outcomes of history-based research towards possible methods of evaluating the reuse potential of these historical settlements, can be found in the essay by Sonia Pistidda.

Strategies for repopulation and new perspectives for the future of small villages at risk of depopulation are also explored in the case of rural villages in the Drino Valley, Albania and in Romania with specific reference to the Argeş County. The narrative, namely how processes and effects of abandonment have been officially vehiculated over time, is an essential focus of the Albanian and Romanian investigation. The topic is also the focus of the third part of the volume, which deals with the narrative on abandonment. This factor intensely conditions communities' perception of new and old sites, hence their potential for a possible relaunch. The imagery of the abandoned villages is central in the essay by Agostino Petrillo, who traces “fragments” of a sociology of the abandonment, starting from the bias which has affected sociologists since recent times about the rural world as a fragment of “yesterday’s world”⁹. Memories and narratives of abandonment – not only the physical

8. See BARAZZETTI in this volume, pp. 262-279.

9. See PETRILLO in this volume, pp. 354-373.



Figure 3. Ferruzzano superiore, Reggio Calabria. A view of the abandoned village (photo A.M. Oteri, 2023).

abandonment, the depopulation but also a «kind of termination of the affective bond with a place»¹⁰ – are still central in the essay by Monica Musolino. In the context of the *Lost and Found* research, the combination of history-based knowledge and narrative of the events is crucial in the idea that a review of the historical dynamics of abandonment, its effects on the territory and communities, and finally, on the modes of narration proves particularly useful for guiding choices in a more conscious and targeted manner.

A structured historical framework against the rhetoric of inner areas

The destiny of abandoned heritage in marginal regions is a recurrent topic among scholars, politicians and experts. However, even if often quoted in European programmes and agendas, rarely is its recovery central to planning strategies for a given territory¹¹. Although cultural heritage in inner areas is considered an indispensable capital for territorial development, its relaunch is often seen as a means to reach purposes that are defined at a different, mainly socio-economic scale. This approach is understandable, as revitalising at-risk abandoned areas must first and foremost set their economic and social recovery as its goal. However, the cultural heritage that these places preserve is often perceived as a fundamental attraction to activate external economies (bold financiers or investors, tourists, etc.), images more than tangible goods rich in history, memories, and indispensable knowledge. Very often, as demonstrated by some of the measures introduced in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan launched by the European government for post-pandemic recovery, it becomes a bait to sacrifice: a process of inventing an image or stereotype (often imported from other sites or models) that is not very attentive to the values and specific characteristics that such heritage preserves. Due to the level of abstraction guiding it, this approach fails to trigger any process of care and re-recognition, which, on the contrary, is fundamental to encouraging place-based programs¹².

Most of the “rhetoric” on inner areas, which increased after the pandemic, is grounded on a kind of description (mainly a physical description) of these areas rather than on the interpretation and narration of the historical phenomena that have characterised them over time and have defined the current features¹³.

10. See MUSOLINO in this volume, pp. 374-395.

11. ROSSITTI 2023.

12. See MUSOLINO in this volume, pp. 374-395.

13. BERARDI, COPERTINO, SANTORO 2021, s.p.

It is quite a paradox that the more the inner areas are in the spotlight, the more invisible and depopulated they become:

«Those approaching the analysis of these contexts today encounter many difficulties in obtaining a comprehensive view. One of the difficulties [...] is the evident lack of scientific studies on what the inner areas are today. Territories in distress, suffocated by tourism plans, bound to market needs that determine the local excellence and push towards a uniform standard of efficiency for everyone. A narrative that has reduced inner Italy to invisibility»¹⁴.

Authenticity, identity, and traditions are trapped in a rhetoric which tends to increase municipalisation and isolation of marginal territories and communities rather than relaunch them as repositories of essential resources. Even the programmes and strategies for contrasting depopulation are mostly addressed to the patrimonialization of any physical traces (e.g. built heritage and landscapes) as they would be empty spaces to be filled in for the needs of unreal users¹⁵.

SNAI¹⁶, a significant example in the European context of a policy aiming at contrasting depopulation in marginal territories affected by shrinkage and social inequalities, looks at cultural heritage as one of the key resources to foster territorial development. Despite the central role assigned to cultural heritage, in the innovatory structure of SNAI¹⁷, it has been mainly considered as a means to attract tourism and boost economies. The risk of such an approach is to impoverish the complexity and richness of these cultural capitals. Nonetheless, the history of territorial transformations and the study of what remains in marginal areas in terms of physical traces of the past, but also of economic, social, cultural, and memorial values, is vital for planning the future of these areas.

14. RIZZO 2022, p. 32.

15. See the interesting contributions in BARBERA, CERSOSIMO, DE ROSSI 2022.

16. SNAI has been designed and studied since 2009 by the then National Agency for Territorial Cohesion within the European programme and adopted in 2014. It is the most important recent policy in Italy, designed to hinder inequalities in inner areas and contrast depopulation and abandonment in the last twenty years. While acknowledging the limitations and rigidities of SNAI, the concept of the inner area it proposes, from a perspective we could define as “territorialist” (place-based), partially aligns with the premises of the *Lost and Found* research. It is also worth remembering that the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion was abolished in 2023 by the PNRR Ter decree, which transfers its functions (as well as instrumental, financial, and human resources) to the Cohesion Policies Department (Dipartimento per le Politiche di Coesione), within the President of the Council of Ministers (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri). This passage appears to have contributed to the loss of effectiveness of SNAI, hindering the regionalization process that various parties have called for, due to institutional tensions and discontinuities in administrative organization (BUSSONE 2024).

17. SNAI proposes an important change from the urban-centred model of continuous growth to a participatory practice which implies the involvement of the communities in the relaunch of marginal territories through the reissue of agriculture, the care of agroforestry and hydrogeologic heritage, and the protection of the natural and cultural diversities (see MARCHETTI, PANUNZI, PAZZAGLI 2017 and PARISI 2020, p. 438).

For this reason, the results presented here mainly deal with data collection, interpretation and organisation. However, it is worth saying that such a detailed exploration of the processes and outcomes of abandonment had never been conducted in the Grecanica and Locride areas before.

The research mainly focused on collecting and analysing data at various scales, starting from statistical data related to the settlements studied in the Province of Reggio Calabria¹⁸ (fig. 4). The cartographic and statistical data were then cross-referenced with the findings from archival research and other sources. Investigations into unexplored archives, particularly at the State Archives of Reggio Calabria were extremely helpful¹⁹ (fig. 5). Another direction involved retrieving topographic maps compiled by the British War Office in 1943 at various scales, depicting the territorial situation of the study areas before the floods and post-war natural disasters. To reconstruct the chronicle of natural events, their impact on communities, emergency management in the short and medium term, the political implications of refugee management, and the debate on how to intervene to settle the territories, as well as the processes of relocating settlements with subsequent territorial, economic, and social problems, consulting the periodic, mainstream, and political press all proved immensely valuable²⁰ (fig. 6). Finally, studying and analysing parliamentary acts and minutes from 1947 to the late 1950s helped reconstruct the political debate at the central level regarding the situation of the territories before the natural events and during the years of government intervention and reconstruction. From the discussions within the committees – the first primarily established to solve the problems of the 1951 Polesine flood and the second and third constituted by Calabrian parliamentarians specifically to discuss and approve the special laws for Calabria in 1953 and 1955²¹ – a political debate emerged on the opportunity to relocate those centres considered at risk; a discussion that ended with the approval of special laws sanctioning the relocation of inhabited centres and the hydro-geological and forestry arrangement of the territories.

18. As documented in the appendix to the volume, ISTAT data (analysis period 1861-2011) were collected and organized along with information from other sources (DataWare online; data for the municipalities examined in the following online repositories: ANCI, Atlas of Small Municipalities (2019); Department for Cohesion Policies, Update on SNAI Areas (2022).

19. Particularly, the archival *Fondo Prefettura di Reggio Calabria, Ufficio provinciale di assistenza post-bellica; Ufficio del Genio civile di Reggio Calabria*, the municipal archives in Canolo and Bruzzano and the National Archive in Rome concerning the measures for the 1951 flood and the resettlement of Africo between 1953 and 1956.

20. In particular national and international journals such as «La Stampa», «The Evening Star» and «Il Giornale di Calabria» have been examined, along with political journals such as «Il Popolo», «Avanti» and «L'Unità» and the periodical «Rinascita».

21. See SULFARO in this volume, pp. 202-227.

RIDA_Casi studio - Attributi elemento

Localizzazione

Comune Africo

Classificazione aree interne C - Cintura

Area progetto Sias -

Dati demografici

Dinamiche demografiche Esodo

Popolazione 1971 3481

Popolazione 2011 3210

Popolazione 2020 2791

Tasso di crescita 1971-2020 -19,8%

Tasso di crescita 2011-2020 -13,1%

Dati archivistici

Archivio_Collocazione ASRC, Prefettura RC, Ufficio Provinciale Assistenze Post-Belliche. ASRC, Genio Civile.

Archivio_Codice cartella Prefettura: B.19-F.114, B.24-F.129. Genio Civile: Serie 1.3.26_174, 1.3.26_34, 1.3.26_32, 1.3.26_13.

Riferimento bibliografico

Bibliografia

Brancoforti 1987; Besozzi 1992; Cortese, 2013; Gambi 1961; Modafferi, 2018; Modafferi, Squillac 2021; Musolino 1968; Oteri, Suffro 2019; Palamara 2003; Santagata 1999; Stajano, 2015; Teti 2004; Teti 2008; Zanotti Bianco 1954.

OK Annulla

Figure 4. Example of a data sheet referred to Africo. Localization and classification of the small town, demographical data, archival references, bibliographical references (elaboration by C. Valiante and F. Vigotti).

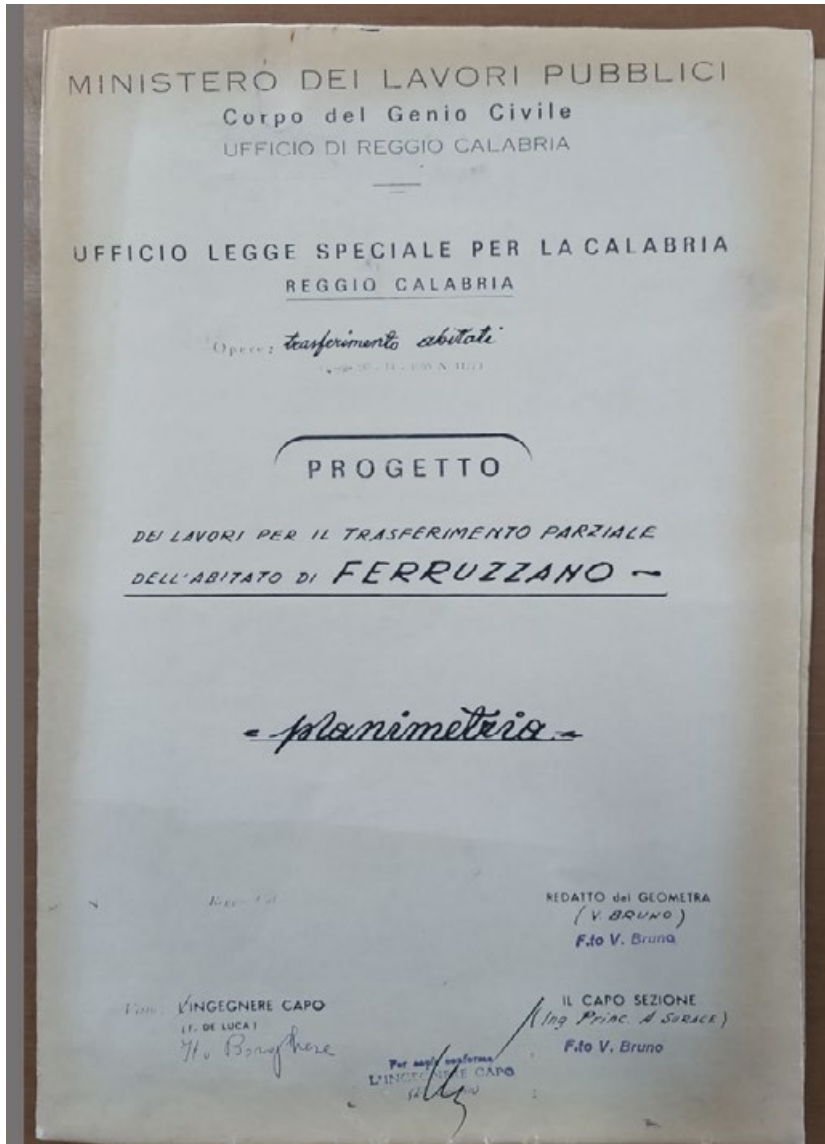


Figure 5. Relocation of Ferruzzano and damage estimate after the flood of 1969 (Ufficio del Genio Civile di Reggio Calabria, State Archive, Reggio Calabria).

Visits to the study areas complemented the on-desk phase. Between May and June 2022, site visits were conducted to acquire field data, produce orthophotos of the sites using drones²², and visit abandoned and pretty inaccessible sites such as Africo Vecchio (fig. 7). These visits also provided an opportunity to engage with local administrators and some associations particularly concerned about the fate of these areas, facilitating a valuable exchange for research purposes. In April 2023, a detailed mapping of the Ferruzzano settlement began²³, which, as mentioned earlier, was chosen as a case study to assess the potential for reactivation of the built heritage.

Statistical, cartographic, regulatory and management data regarding the various emergencies – from the early 1900s – that have influenced the events and outcomes of these places, urban planning tools used to manage emergencies, and the design aspects that emerged (especially regarding new settlements), the narrative of events and their perception by communities through a re-reading of national and local chronicles from those years, parliamentary debate within numerous committees specially appointed by the government to discuss the issue, and so on, were collected and analysed. Reasoning based on data is at the heart of the *Lost and Found* research, with the idea, as mentioned earlier, of helping to build possible strategies to counter abandonment. This task was difficult as the data are fragmented and often contradictory, and the management of these territories by those who administered them at both central and local levels since 1908 has been as non-linear as the data themselves. In this sense, the research highlighted the possible limits of a history-based approach, as it is essential, but, at the same time, it prolongs the timeline of research²⁴. This aspect is not irrelevant if the final purpose of such an investigation is to guide local administrations in planning new strategies for hindering depopulation. As is commonly known, the agendas of politicians and local administrators, who frequently must face emergencies and respect the rigid deadlines for accessing national and international funds, do not fit with research timelines²⁵.

22. See BARAZZETTI in this volume, pp. 262-279.

23. See SCAGLIA, VALIANTE in this volume, pp. 280-323.

24. Furthermore, the multidisciplinary of the history-based approach also extends the time of the research as it implies, as we will see in the conclusions, to find and share a common ground for debating data and results.

25. This aspect is one of the questions opened by the research. See OTERI in this volume, pp. 480-505.



Figure 6. Journal collection from the 1950's (elaboration by N. Sulfaro).



Figure 7. Trip to Africo Vecchio from the Italian research group. The scheme shows the difficulties in reaching the site (elaboration by N. Sulfaro).

The idea of “inner area” as a premise for history-based approaches

Grounded on the historical framework, the research then analyses if and why a history-based approach can have a role in defining the strategies for relaunching inner areas rich in cultural heritage²⁶. It is important to specify that for a history-based approach, a methodology that focuses not only on the physical effects of the events on territories and settlements but also on communities and their economies, traditions, and cultural habits is intended. In short, it is an approach that looks simultaneously at tangible and intangible effects of a given event over time.

The first problem in focusing on the matter is the idea of inner area in itself or, to be clearer, the idea of “categorizing” inner areas. The definition of what one may define “inner area” is an open question, and scholars and experts who study territories are perfectly aware of the unfeasibility in finding a shared, comprehensive meaning. Since the post-war period, inner areas had been connected to hills and mountains (that in Italy nearly correspond to 60% of the national territory) and have above all been strongly associated to a negative idea of marginality and isolation. However, awareness of the indefinability of “inner areas”, and the risks implied in using unreal categories have arisen since the last century. As Manlio Rossi Doria writes in the introduction to the Special project for the inner South (1981)²⁷ «the idea of “internal area” is a necessary abstraction that operationally lacks meaning»²⁸. Even within mountainous or hilly territories, some areas are far from fragile or marginal, possessing high productive values or, conversely, were once prosperous but have now become impoverished and depopulated. «In practical terms, what matters is the individual zone, realistically delimited, not very extensive, with its specific features, its problems, its population, and its past events»²⁹. The difficulty in defining what an "inner" area is already emerged in the post-war debate when there was reflection on the idea of describing as "inner" everything that was not coastal

26. In an interesting essay on the application of a historical perspective for small towns and inner areas, Roberto Parisi asks himself, «In what measure can historical research and historiographical debate on the destiny of smaller towns affect the correct application of the territorial model adopted by SNAI?» (PARISI 2020, p. 437, translation by the author).

27. The *Special Project for the Inner South* was considered revolutionary for its time and aimed at strengthening local economies and intellectual forces, both present and traditional. It envisioned, at least in theory, a focus on small widespread interventions, methods of active participation, and processes that today we would define as sustainable (CESARINI 1981, p. 17), a kind of *ante litteram* place-based program. In practice, however, these areas have been often viewed as underdeveloped and, therefore, in need of revitalisation through the economic exploitation of their resources, mainly for tourism purposes.

28. ROSSI DORIA 1981, p. 1 (translation by the author).

29. *Ibidem* (translation by the author).

(a rigid definition quickly abandoned)³⁰ or, regardless of the relationship with the coast, everything that has remained closed to progress³¹.

Indeed, even at that time, scholars and experts, at least those more attentive to the dynamics of territorial transformations, were aware of the need to break away from the stereotype that associated socio-economic and cultural marginality with physical marginalisation³². However, they were equally conscious of the impossibility of defining the meaning of “inner area” only grounding it on historical and cultural criteria. This would have implied the need to confront the immense diversities of the territories and, therefore, the impossibility of defining a single category. Moreover, a definition of this kind would undoubtedly be impossible. It is not by chance that after fifty years and despite the innovative approach of SNAI, the classification in peri-urban, intermediate, peripheral, and ultra-peripheral areas proposed for settlements other than urban poles is not conceived as a historiographical category³³. On the contrary, it is a technical (and political) distinction grounded on the distance, in terms of space and time, of these areas from the urban poles³⁴.

However, as a relevant sign of change, in the view of SNAI, the inclusion among inner areas does not necessarily mean that the specific site is fragile. By overturning the common belief which has significantly influenced national policies since the post-war period, “inner” and “fragile” are not synonymous in the conception of SNAI. On the contrary, «in some areas, some particular capabilities of the stakeholders along with some policy actions, since the 1980s have transformed marginality into

30. FORMICA 1981, p. 43.

31. «Without underestimating the operational opportunity for a more precise delineation, [...] it seems to me that by “inner areas”, we should understand those regions that, regardless of their morphological characteristics and their position relative to the sea, have remained closed to progress and the influences of modern urban-industrial civilization. Essentially based on a subsistence economy, these areas have undergone profound social and territorial alterations in recent decades due to the disruption of old balances that, although founded on poverty, had allowed the survival of their population», *Ibidem* (translation by the author).

32. Such a stereotype is still to overcome today. In a recent article on the «Il Sole 24 ore» the idea that inner areas do not necessarily match with remote and unknown places far from the seaside or that suffer economic discomfort is reiterated. In Italy places like Matera, Termoli and Cernobbio are included among inner areas due to their distance to fundamental services (health, education and mobility), MARRONI 2024.

33. PARISI 2020, p. 437.

34. It is a model based on the distance from the urban pole intended as a centre of services, particularly the three considered vital: health, education and mobility. *Le aree interne. Di quali territori parliamo? Nota esplicativa sul metodo di classificazione delle aree*; https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Nota_metodologica_Aree_interne-2-1.pdf (accessed 3 November 2023) (translation by the author).

an asset to enhance, by activating interesting processes of development through the involvement of local communities, being able to hinder depopulation»³⁵.

Local, Regional, and universal history. Which narrative in the history-based approach?

The issue is of utmost importance for the reflections that follow. Even though it may not be possible to define the category of "internal area" based on historical-cultural or, worse still, identity parameters, it is true that any viable strategy or program aimed at internal areas cannot ignore the study of the specific, historical characteristics of that given area, even before considering the physical ones.

For this reason and given the importance of cultural heritage in fostering development in inner areas, another crucial question is the role of a history-based approach in defining appropriate policies and strategies.

In the case of Italy, SNAI is built on a place-based approach that does not explicitly refer to a history-based process of knowledge of the involved areas³⁶. In SNAI – which is not the focus of the following reflections but only a pretext for verifying the importance of the historical dimension in defining proper approaches for the destiny of small towns in marginal areas – the socio-economic and demographical structure of the specific area are the leading indicators to assess the potentiality for the development of a given area, along with its potential in attracting tourism. But these indicators are not sufficient, as well as the nonspecific presence of cultural heritage, to evaluate the potentiality of small and very small towns to be repopulated or definitively abandoned³⁷.

Since the 1970s, many studies from historians, economists and geographers have tended to demonstrate that the vitality of a place mainly depends on the awareness of the communities regarding their values and identity; awareness that only a historical reconstruction and reconnections of facts and events can provide. In an interesting study published in 1973, the geographer Massimo Quaini reflected on the uselessness of studies on abandoned small towns if not framed in their natural (and historical) context. He suggested shifting the focus from studying the abandonment of a particular settlement to that of its population: «In reality, the issue of abandoned sites – Quaini writes – does

35. *Ibidem*.

36. There is no intentional idea of excluding the historical perspective from the main phases of SNAI. However, as many times affirmed by the creators of the Strategy, it offers a method: knowledge of the territories where the method needs to be verified must be envisioned and applied by the local communities.

37. ROSSITTI 2023, particularly pp. 5-21.

not have much significance when isolated from its natural context: population, agricultural structures, urban-rural relationships. The very disciplines called upon to study it – archaeology, toponymics, even historical geography – are often more capable of providing information about the birth and life of a settlement than its death»³⁸. Furthermore, the Italian scholar emphasises that studies on the history of settlements also do not make sense if approached from a monodisciplinary perspective: «in the case of vanished centres, the conception is reductionist, both in its tendency to emphasise geographic-physical factors (landslides, earthquakes, etc.) and in its limitation in capturing factors related to the chronology of events (wars, etc.) or periods in demographic history (plagues)»³⁹. In short, Quaini recognised that «history, much more than geography, can connect abandonments to the transformations that the territorial structure undergoes due to changes in land use, urban-rural relationships, and so on»⁴⁰. Studies on abandonment only produce «inventories of abandoned sites» if not related to the history of the settlement. In the case of Calabria, for example, it is useless to study the history of depopulation without understanding the opposite phenomenon of population settlement⁴¹. In the case of Calabria, for example, it is useless to study the history of depopulation without understanding the opposite phenomenon of population settlement⁴².

The history of population and depopulation is not the aim of this paper, nor the research presented here. However, whatever the reasons for the abandonment, in Italy, efforts to counter depopulation in inner areas have been spoiled by short-sighted or incomplete visions since the post-war period. Political decisions, particularly for southern regions, have suffered from a shortage of specific knowledge, resulting in policies that failed to grasp the complexities of the situation. Following the war, the prevailing belief was that abandonment was inevitable due to migration towards urban centres driven by the industrialization process.

At best, certain specific and small areas saw encouragement for touristic and handcraft activities. However, the formulation of strategies and proposals, which were strictly centre based,

38. QUAINI 1973, p. 714 (translation by the author).

39. *Ibidem*.

40. *Ivi*, p. 717. See also SANSA 2020.

41. «It is relevant – as Quaini writes referring to the Middle Age – that the study of dying villages cannot be separated from the study of centres that emerged spontaneously or through municipal, lordship, or royal initiatives during the same period and in the same region. This study has so far taken shape as an autonomous theme concerning population history, and at least in Italy, it has predominantly captured the interest of historians (particularly historians of architecture and law historians), rather than geographers», *Ibidem*.

42. GAMBI 1972, p. 109.

overlooked the historical transformations of the affected areas. Mindful analysis of the inefficacy of post-war national policies for hindering depopulation can be found in the presentation of the already quoted *Special Project for the Inner South*, where two primary and opposing tendencies are described: one tendency viewed abandonment processes as unavoidable. At the same time, the other held an unrealistic (and unaware) vision of the territories and their evolution over time. Consequently, these approaches suffered from a lack of knowledge and awareness regarding the areas affected by depopulation⁴³. Conversely, the *Special Project* was grounded on the idea that a balanced economic relaunch of these areas would have been possible only by recognizing local communities' right to «organise and develop in their native environment, in their values and cultural identities»⁴⁴. Although innovative and forward-thinking, the idea failed for many political and cultural reasons, but also due to an excess of faith, understandable at that time, in an economy based on industrial development, albeit in a controlled and targeted manner, even for traditionally agriculturally oriented inland areas⁴⁵.

Indeed, the *Special Project* highlighted the importance of investing in local knowledge and culture to strengthen local economies.

The central role of local communities (whether native or new communities) in hindering depopulation – which is also the base of SNAI – implies the knowledge and consciousness of a given place. Indeed, even if quite ineffective in results – at least in terms of increasing the awareness for inner areas and settlements as productive, cultural and civic systems – SNAI is based on a “territorialistic”⁴⁶ vision, which is (or should be) place-based, hence grounded on the collective management and care of local resources. In this view, policies and strategies should also be history-based, as “territory” is not an idea but the product of history. Like historical buildings and settlements, the more multi-layered the territories, the more they produce cultural and social values⁴⁷.

43. ROSSI DORIA 1981, p. 11.

44. CESARINI 1981, p. 17 (translation by the author).

45. PARISI 2020, p. 441.

46. The term refers to a specific vision born in Italy around the 1970s by scholars from different disciplines who share the idea of territory as a common good in its historical, social, cultural, environmental, and productive complexity. For this reason, they propose a humanistic approach to a place-based knowledge of territories as an alternative to the levelling tendencies of globalization; http://www.societadeiterritorialisti.it/wpcontent/uploads/2013/05/110221_manifesto.societ.territorialista.pdf (accessed 15 December 2023).

47. TETI 2018, p. 192.

Once the importance of history-based approaches in preserving heritage at risk of abandonment in inner areas is assessed, another crucial question concerns the main “features” of a possible historical process.

Historians tell us that the recent history of our country, mainly the post-unification period, is characterized by continuous attempts at standardization of the diverse peripheral areas by the "centre," as demonstrated by the economic policies of the last century alone. The "peripheries", which cling to their localities, often resist these attempts; "small homelands" react by reaffirming roots and traditions (sometimes invented) in response to generalizations and flattening⁴⁸. This ambiguity risks confusing the heritage of collective memories, which are diverse and constantly evolving, with rigid identity claims and significant resistance to change. Regardless of whether one looks at the problem from the perspective of the centre or the periphery, the risk of falling into the "rhetoric of tradition"⁴⁹ is always present, with undeniable repercussions on the processes of memory construction and, consequently, on the methods of caring for the tangible and intangible heritage that is claimed to be uncontaminated.

In this regard, it is helpful to consider the suggestion coming from other fields, such as history and geography, to replace words like "identity" and "collective memory" – concepts that are difficult to define – with others like "production" and "construction of locality"⁵⁰. These concepts encourage a dynamic and conscious examination of the past of these places, relying not so much on transmitted history but on the "real" history, that is to say, on the practices of activating resources that have characterized events, people and sites over the centuries, as well as the knowledge connected to them⁵¹. Indeed, if such an approach is valid for understanding the historical changes in a territory, for example, from forest to pasture, and the social implications these transformations have had and could still have for the involved communities, why not extend it to the rich, widespread architectural heritage that characterizes our inner areas?

From a methodological perspective, it would be necessary to base knowledge processes on local history, which inevitably involves comparative history⁵². It teaches us to highlight peculiarities and differences (the "localities," precisely) rather than common traits. Therefore, it is not a matter of

48. ZANNI ROSIELLO 2017, p. 69.

49. VAROTTO 2021, p. 201.

50. APPADURAJ 1996; see also on the matter TORRE 2011.

51. MORENO 1990, p. 12.

52. ALLEGRETTI 2017, p. 28.

deploying a "topography of sources," but rather a "topography of phenomena"⁵³. As historians tell us, it is an analytical approach that reassesses the specificities and discontinuities of local space to be placed at the base of processes of care and revitalization. It is impossible and even improper to define the boundaries between "locality" and "universality" with such an approach.

In the introduction to the third edition of the volume *Economia e società nella Calabria del Cinquecento*⁵⁴, Roberto Galasso reflects on the impossibility of defining a border between local and non-local dealing with the history of rural areas, but not only. Variety and continuity are two aspects that hinder human attraction to simplification and generalization of events and processes, softening the border between what is local history and what is or can become universal history. The locality or universality of a given historical event does not depend on the place where it happens (a small village or an urban centre). On the contrary, it depends on the qualitative dimensions of the event «that can make the history of a village or a suburb as interesting as that of a metropolis, as they may reveal significant elements of an era, a structure, a world, an experience, a logic or, in short of a historical event»⁵⁵. In the case of Calabria, particularly the studied area, the abandonment of small and very small villages after the 1950s hydro-geological events can be considered paradigmatic for the consequences on local communities (the trauma of leaving their native sites and the loss of confidence and identity in the new ones), economy (the end of the rural world), territory and heritage (the abandonment of land and urban fabric)⁵⁶. The historical dimension of the event, and the long-term effects on the socio-economic and cultural structure of the region and southern Italy goes beyond the locality and becomes global. On the other hand, historians demonstrate that transformations are not uniform in periods of slower growth or economic downturns, even within the same regional context. On the contrary, even during crises, certain regional vocations and traditions consolidate, ensuring opportunities and potentialities for the future⁵⁷. From this perspective, a history-based approach also has this ambition: without generalizations or simplifications, it attempts to grasp connections or influences, moving beyond "localism" and contemplating strategies that, if not universal, at least lay claim to a broader foresight. Interesting studies demonstrate how in given conditions, for example after

53. TORRE 2011, p. 13.

54. GALASSO 1992³ (translation by the author).

55. *Ivi*, p.12.

56. See SANSA, pp. 90-105, MAREGGI, pp. 152-201, and SULFARO, pp. 44-89, in this volume.

57. GALASSO 1992³ (translation by the author).

an earthquake, inhabitants' reactions are similar (e.g. resistance or resignation) even in different territories⁵⁸; namely, a local event can become paradigmatic. Most of the contributions in this volume demonstrate the exemplarity of the local events, both those that analyse the phenomena from a historical and sociological perspective and those that look at them through the lens of planning and architectural preservation⁵⁹.

History-based approaches and “vitality indicators”. Some reflections on the potentiality of architectural heritage in inner areas

The research has ultimately another goal: showing that even if there are specific reasons for abandonment and, eventually, resettlement – whether in Calabria, Romania or Albania – a history-based analysis of the territorial, social, cultural, and economic effects, including the narrative generated further, is essential to address a possible future repopulation prospective and reuse or, conversely, a definitive abandonment.

An interesting study on the Central Italian Apennines, after the earthquakes that repeatedly hit that area between 2016 and 2017, demonstrates how important a conscious knowledge is to plan the relaunch of territories and communities ripped asunder by negative events⁶⁰. The *Cantieri mobili di storia. Nei paesi del doposisma: un Progetto itinerante tra passato e presente*⁶¹ is a project which deals with the idea of placing the enhancement of cultural heritage at the core of local communities to hinder depopulation and abandonment. The initiative has been conducted in the form of «a long journey back in time, in an attempt to recover the foundational features of the Apennine civilization in Central Italy, from which economic forms, social balances, and the very vitality⁶² that allows it to

58. CIUFFETTI 2019.

59. See SANSÀ, pp. 90-105, MAREGGI, pp. 152-201, SULFARO, pp. 44-89, and MUSOLINO, pp. 374-395, in this volume.

60. CIUFFETTI 2019, p. 22.

61. The *Cantieri mobili di storia* were conceived within the project *New Development Path for the Marche Apennines after the Earthquake* from a collaboration between the Macerata Institute of History and the RESpro - Rete di storici per i paesaggi della produzione (Network of Historians of Productive Landscapes). The project goals were to discuss possible strategies for the relaunch of damaged sites with the local communities, which had not been involved in the political decisions for the reconstruction and, at the same time, to place an up-to-date interpretation of historical processes as the focus for the rebirth, *Ivi*, p. 13.

62. For the “vitality” of a given place, the complex set of productive activities, traditions, and civic awareness of a given community, still present or latent in a given territory, is here intended.

resist despite phases of crisis and decline, extend well beyond the boundaries of the 19th century»⁶³. The reflection can be extended to marginal areas in general and implies that the historical approach to studying local territorial systems cannot be the same, not only in Italy, as that adopted in the 20th century, which primarily focused on big towns and their essential role in the economic and cultural development of the country. Conversely, this kind of study should enhance the vitality and productivity of inner areas in the pre-industrialized era and highlight the complex relationship between the general economic growth of a given area or country and the local resources, including their evolution over time, a process that primarily implies a new historical interpretation of what a resource is⁶⁴.

In the case of Calabria, perhaps it is helpful to start from a consideration by Galasso, who describes it today as in the past, «a land with challenging geography, but not without a strong historical characterization»⁶⁵, and emphasizes that «the lack of any economic boost in the 16th century was to weigh heavily on its future, but it did not clip the wings of this vitality, to which, for better or for worse, its fate is still entrusted»⁶⁶.

Although the research presented here focuses on events from the mid-20th century onwards, when economic crisis and depopulation seemed to reach a point of no return, the historical investigation underlying the research effectively confirms, at least in the studied areas, that perhaps the vitality mentioned by Galasso is not lost but rather forgotten. Before Galasso, Lucio Gambi reflected on the inner vitality of the people from Calabria: «The human nature of Calabria, in its common and stronger traits, is [...] a picture of poverty. However, its spirit is today animated – in certain places – by firmness and impetus that indeed do not easily show themselves [...] as they are not coordinated, nor coherent, nor brought together up to now, and are sometimes still enmeshed in paltry rivalries»⁶⁷. He recognised a "fecund energy" in Calabria because «in recent decades a stronger dynamism of

63. CIUFFETTI 2019, p. 22 (translation by the author).

64. CALAFATI, SORI 2004, p. 8.

65. GALASSO 1992³, p. 30.

66. «Il mancato “decollo” del secolo XVI avrebbe pesato gravemente sul suo futuro, ma non avrebbe tarpato la spinta di questa vitalità, alla quale, nel bene e nel male sono pur sempre rimesse le sue sorti». *Ibidem* (translation by the author).

67. «Il volto umano della Calabria, nei suoi segni più forti o più comuni, è [...] immagine di povertà. Ma il suo spirito è animato oggi – per lo meno in diverse zone – da vigore e iniziativa, che però non si manifestano facilmente [...] poiché rimasero fino a noi poco coordinati, non coerenti e non fusi, e a volte impigliati in meschine rivalità»; GAMBÌ 1972, p. 529.

displacement has been revealed in its population: a dynamism at first somewhat fatalistic and not autonomous»⁶⁸.

The vitality of a given area, as emerges from historical studies, is the premise to envision possible futures.

From our point of view, mountains, pastures, rivers, but also settlements and cultural heritage are the resources which, taking advantage of the suggestions from economic historians, characterize a given territory, intended here as «one of the most effective means for preserving and transmitting material and immaterial factors for development over time»⁶⁹. Therefore, looking at the territory as an agent factor, an input⁷⁰, the research studies the productive background of the studied area, the reasons for its crisis, the impact of abandonment on people and settlements (including new settlements)⁷¹, territorial transformations after earthquakes and floods, and analyses of what remains in terms of production, traditions, and communities' awareness. It also looks at the physical remains which include analyses of the urban fabric and its main feature⁷², but also – at a territorial scale – the complex system of roads, paths and mule tracks that ensured connections between inner and “external” areas⁷³. What the research tried to highlight, although being aware that the results here presented are only the first step of a longer journey still to be undertaken, is the very nature of what we are talking about. Through a specific focus, the research intends to bestow a name on objects and places: not “landscape” nor “nature”, not even (or not only) the aseptic sum of the studied settlement's characteristics. The historical perspective of research embraces the idea that territory is not the sum of individual, sometimes abstract, factors (identity, *genius loci*, etc.), but rather the result of a sedimentation of long-term economic, productive, and cultural processes that include social practices⁷⁴.

68. *Ivi*, p. 527.

69. SORI 2002, p. 173 (translation by the author).

70. *Ivi*, p. 165.

71. See MAREGGI in this volume, pp. 152-201.

72. See the analyses conducted on the small settlements of Ferruzzano Superiore, whose results are described and interpreted in Scaglia, Valiante in this volume, pp. 280-323.

73. See MAREGGI, ROMBOLÀ in this volume, pp. 126-149.

74. BORTOLOTTI 2009, pp. 7-8; see also OTERI 2019, particularly p. 175.

Giving a name to things that «one can indicate with a finger»⁷⁵ has been the main task of the research, trying to assess the relationships which still exist among them, those that do not exist anymore, those that one could recover, and those that are irreversibly lost: «People who come from the town call it nature – says a young mountain man to a friend from town in *Le otto montagne* by Paolo Cognetti – It is so unreal in your mind that also the name is unreal. In the mountain, we call it wood, pasture, river, rock. They are things that one can indicate with a finger. Things that one can use. We don't even give them a name if one cannot use them, as they are useless»⁷⁶.

The awareness of such a problematic framework is indispensable so as to demonstrate that the feasibility of a possible relaunch which starts from territory (as an input) cannot only be based on vague aesthetical or historical values nor, as some local strategies sometimes seem to suggest, a generic ecological perspective (the attraction for uncontaminated and authentic places) or on the viewpoint of sustainable and responsible tourism that find an appealing reference to the “wilderness” of a given area⁷⁷. The relaunch of a given territory depends mainly on the potential of those values (historical, aesthetical, ecological, economic, cultural, and anthropological values and features) of being updated⁷⁸.

Economic historians currently debate whether the dynamicity of a given local economic system is reversible, that is, if «a territory that went through a period of significant development can regress to an underdeveloped area»⁷⁹. In this case, the reference is to the industrial and proto-industrial economies, and of course, the topic is not the focus of this paper. However, these theories are quoted here as they present the idea, undoubtedly shareable, that to assess the potentiality of a given area, also regarding the possibility of transforming and renovating its productive potentiality, it is necessary to verify the latent vitalities, namely if something of the original productive and cultural substratum remained. Another premise to the following reflections is the idea, unanimously shared among scholars⁸⁰, that cultural heritage and its historical and environmental context are inseparable.

75. COGNETTI 2018, p. 140.

76. «Siete voi di città che la chiamate natura. È così astratta nella vostra testa che è astratto pure il nome. Noi qui diciamo bosco, pascolo, torrente, roccia. Cose che si possono indicare con un dito. Cose che si possono usare. Se non si possono usare un nome non glielo diamo perché non serve a niente», COGNETTI 2018, p.140 (translation by the author).

77. In this sense, the idea expressed by Ciuffetti on the Central Apennine is shared here, and it can be extended to the studied area; see CIUFFETTI 2019, p. 22.

78. BONFANTINI 2016, p. 9.

79. SORI 2002, p. 173.

80. MIONI, PEDRAZZINI 2005, p. 9.

The two assumptions are of the utmost importance in dealing with built heritage as, after many unfortunate experiences in the field of architectural preservation, maybe the still prevailing idea should be changed that recovering a historical settlement, whether abandoned or not, is merely a physical and functional matter. On the contrary, the technical and practical aspects are strictly related to broader socio-economic and cultural strategies, and the success of such operations is not measurable only in terms of technique (a high-quality restoration design). Improvement of the quality of life, even a small improvement, connected to the specific intervention in that area is the unit to measure the achievement of planned actions⁸¹.

The history-based approach has been, at the very least, helpful in understanding that the "vitality indicator" of a centre, whether medium, small or very small, is not exclusively tied to the presence of historical-monumental heritage. Therefore, it will not be resolved solely by the physical-functional revival of such goods, the number of inhabitants, the location of the settlement (hill, plain, coast), or proximity to more important centres – all individually important factors but not sufficient on their own. In some way, recovery works if it intercepts a latent vitality, which we might define as "historical" or traditional. It functions if the ultimate goal is not just the rebirth of "monuments" and/or "minor" architecture (simple restoration), perhaps to attract passing tourists: these recoveries should not only be "physical" but also have a "civil" impact (not only technical-functional restoration but also the management of the use of such heritage for civil purposes). Essentially, these recoveries, rebirths, or whatever they may be called, need to become forms of territorial governance in the broadest sense⁸². The *Lost and Found* research does not propose the measurement of such a "vitality indicator" in the studied area. It highlights, and it is not an irrelevant result, that the relaunch of a given territory is possible if the traditional and cultural features that emerged from the history-based analyses match with the local communities' capability to rethink their past under a symbolic but also political and cultural aspect. In commenting on the contents of the book *Riabitare l'Italia*⁸³, Alessandra Broccolini⁸⁴ reflects on the fact that architects and urban planners often see small centres in rural areas as «empty places that need to be filled, where innovation and development must be brought in with the perspective that one must find solutions. The prevailing idea is that these areas represent an opportunity not because something local makes them such but because they are places

81. *Ivi*, particularly p. 14.

82. *Ivi*, p. 17.

83. DE ROSSI 2018.

84. BROCCOLINI 2019, s.p.

where one can experiment freely, where the 'void' can be filled [...]. However, little is said about the fullness that historically existed or still exists, or what has locally been transformed from what was there»⁸⁵.

Looking at the "fullness," among other things, would help overcome stereotypes (depopulated centres as the «immobile paradise of tradition»⁸⁶) and instrumental uses of these places and their traditions, removing them from history and confining them to a timeless dimension⁸⁷. In short, other perspectives suggest that a history-based approach would help find a third way between place-blind reuses and complete abandonment. The new strategy should be grounded on the assumption that the opportunity for these places comes from what they guard, from their "locality"⁸⁸, rather than considering them empty spaces for experimenting with new and unfeasible designs.

As particularly evidenced in Sonia Pistidda's essay, although the research does not go as far as defining the measure of the "vitality indicator", it nonetheless attempts to explain which factors could help determine a unit of measurement for the potential for reuse. After all, the digital map of Ferruzzano is constructed precisely with the idea of correlating physical data related to the settlement and its preservation with other information (statistical, cartographic, archival, as well as economic and productive, etc.) that could assess its propensity for potential reuse. Indeed, the case was chosen because, among the small centres analysed, it is the one that, on paper (accessibility, state of preservation of the settlement, proximity to the coast, presence of some human activities, etc.), shows the most significant potential for actual repopulation.

Finally, the research does not aim to prove at all costs that revitalization of these abandoned places in Calabria is possible. On the contrary, excluding the case mentioned above of Ferruzzano, the research seems to lean towards an impossibility of reuse, thus contrary to the rhetoric of return that pervades much of the narrative about marginal areas. Indeed, a proper interpretation of historical processes sometimes demonstrates that the end of a given productive, cultural and civic system matches that specific site's end, and any attempt to relaunch it risks failing⁸⁹.

85. *Ibidem* (translation by the author).

86. *Ibidem*.

87. OLMO 2022.

88. TORRE 2011.

89. TETI 2020.



Figure 8. Despite the complete abandonment and the state of ruin in which the small village lies, it is a place that seems ready to welcome anyone who wanders through its deserted alleys (photo F. Vigotti, 2023).

If we look at abandonment from an anthropological perspective, the solution to the problem is not necessarily repopulation. As Mauro Varotto suggests⁹⁰ and with an optimistic perspective, an abandoned town is open to everyone (fig. 8); abandonment is not the very end of everything, and abandoned places themselves can suggest new forms of use, new modes of dialogue if appropriately interrogated, even focused on maintenance and care. In essence, it is a response to those who advocate innovation at any cost but also to those convinced followers of "abandonology" (a science, but perhaps it would be more appropriate to say an ideology) who profess physical renunciation of the reuse of abandoned villages in favour of the ideal (or idealistic) recovery of ancestral experiences. Whatever the perspective – abandonment or reuse – the method presented here is grounded on the idea that a place does not belong to those who founded it, own or inhabit it. It belongs to those who take care of it⁹¹.

90. «Abandonment is, by definition, an open space [...] (from the French *à ban donner*). Therefore, abandoning does not mean merely or solely multiplying "no man's lands" but "making available to all"», VAROTTO 2020, p. 64.

91. The quotation by Daniela Poli is in MUSOLINO in this volume, pp. 374-395.

Bibliography

ALLEGRETTI 2017 - G. ALLEGRETTI, *Topografia, globalità, comparazione. Pratiche di storia dei territori locali*, in R.P. UGUCCIONI (ed.), *Piccole patrie. Riflessioni sulla storia locale*, Società pesarese di studi storici, Ancona 2017, pp. 20-33.

APPADURAJ 1996 - A. APPADURAJ, *Modernity at large. Cultural dimensions of globalization*, University of Minnesota press, Minneapolis 1996.

BARBERA, CERSOSIMO, DE ROSSI 2022 - F. BARBERA, D. CERSOSIMO, A. DE ROSSI, *L'invenzione delle aree interne. Produzioni discorsive, retoriche e forme di auto ed etero rappresentazione*, in «Dialoghi Mediterranei», 2021, 52, s.p., <https://www.istitutoeuroarabo.it/DM/linvenzione-delle-aree-interne-produzioni-discorsive-retoriche-e-forme-di-auto-ed-etero-rappresentazione/> (accessed 23 November 2023).

BONFANTINI 2016 - G.B. BONFANTINI, *Integrazione informativa e strategie di innesco territoriale nel palinsesto insediativo storico*, in ID. (ed.), *Attivare risorse latenti. Metodi sperimentali per l'analisi, la mappatura e la gestione integrata delle trasformazioni di territori e manufatti del patrimonio culturale diffuso*, Planum Publisher, Roma-Milano 2016, pp. 7-19.

BORTOLOTTI 2009 - L. BORTOLOTTI, *Storia e identità dei luoghi: qualche riflessione*, in «Storia urbana», XXXI (2009), 122, pp. 5-25.

BROCCOLINI 2019 - A. BROCCOLINI, *Ripensare l'osso e la polpa. Uno sguardo antropologico su "Riabitare l'Italia"*, in «Dialoghi Mediterranei», 2019, s.p., <http://www.istitutoeuroarabo.it/DM/ripensare-loosso-e-la-polpa-uno-sguardo-antropologico-su-riabitare-litalia/> (accessed 23 November 2023).

BUSSONE 2024 - M. BUSSONE, *Lettera al direttore de «Il Sole 24 ore»*, 17 March 2024, https://admin28.antherica.com/newsletter//sys_templates/viewinhtml.html?titleid=1&action=allpreview&heading=preview_template&sys_folder=newsletter&sys_database=newsletter_uncem_nazionale&msg_id=3765&cid=407&t=1&ui=73180&userid=73180&expid=3675 (accessed 20 March 2024).

CALAFATI, SORI 2004 - A.G. CALAFATI, E. SORI (eds.), *Economie nel tempo. Persistenze e cambiamenti negli Appennini in età moderna*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2004.

BARBERA, CERSOSIMO, DE ROSSI 2022 - F. BARBERA, D. CERSOSIMO, A. DE ROSSI (eds.), *Contro i borghi. Il Belpaese che dimentica i paesi*, Donzelli, Roma 2022.

CESARINI 1981 - G. CESARINI, *Obiettivi del progetto speciale per il Mezzogiorno interno*, in *Progetto speciale per il Mezzogiorno interno*, «Quaderni della Cassa per il Mezzogiorno», 1981, 3, pp. 15-18.

CIUFFETTI 2019 - A. CIUFFETTI, *Appennino. Economie, culture, spazi sociali dal medioevo all'età contemporanea*, Carocci editore, Roma 2019.

COGNETTI 2018 - P. COGNETTI, *Le otto montagne*, Einaudi, Torino 2018.

DE ROSSI 2018 - A. DE ROSSI (ed.), *Riabitare l'Italia. Le aree interne tra abbandoni e riconquiste*, Donzelli, Roma 2018.

FORMICA 1981 - G. FORMICA, *La morfologia geoeconomica delle zone interne*, in *Progetto speciale per il Mezzogiorno interno*, in «Quaderni della Cassa per il Mezzogiorno», 1981, 3, pp. 43-59.

GALASSO 1992³ - R. GALASSO, *Economia e società nella Calabria del Cinquecento*, Guida editori, Napoli 1992³.

GAMBI 1972 - L. GAMBI, *Le regioni d'Italia. Calabria*, Unione tipografica editrice torinese, Torino 1972.

MARCHETTI, PANUNZI, PAZZAGLI 2017 - M. MARCHETTI, S. PANUNZI, R. PAZZAGLI (eds.), *Aree interne. Per una rinascita dei territori rurali e montani*, Rubettino, Catanzaro 2017.

- MARRONI 2024 - C. MARRONI, *L'Italia spopolata: più anziani, meno abitanti*, in «Il Sole ventiquattr'ore», 17 March 2024, pp. 4-5.
- MIONI, PEDRAZZINI 2005 - A. MIONI, L. PEDRAZZINI (eds.), *Valorizzazione dei centri storici. Criteri e indirizzi per i piccoli e medi comuni lombardi*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2005.
- MORENO 1990 - D. MORENO, *Dal documento al terreno. Storia e archeologia dei sistemi agro-silvo-pastorali*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1990.
- OLMO 2002 - C. OLMO, *Il borgo e l'uso politico della storia*, in F. BARBERA, D. CERSOSIMO, A. DE ROSSI 2022, pp. 81-86.
- OTERI 2019 - A.M. OTERI, *Architetture in territori fragili. Criticità e nuove prospettive per la cura del patrimonio costruito*, in «ArcHistoR», VI (2019), 11, pp. 169-205, DOI: 10.14633/AHR118.
- PARISI 2020 - R. PARISI, *Sui borghi dell'“osso”. Centri minori e aree interne in una prospettiva storica*, in F. CAPANO, M. VISIONE (eds.), *La città palinsesto. Tracce, sguardi e narrazioni sulla complessità dei complessi urbani storici*, Tomo I *Memorie, storie*, immagini, Federico II University press, Napoli 2020, pp. 437-446.
- QUAINI 1973 - M. QUAINI, *Geografia storica o storia sociale del popolamento rurale?*, in «Quaderni storici», 24, 1973, pp. 691-744.
- RIZZO 2022 - A. RIZZO, *I paesi invisibili. Manifesto sentimentale e politico per salvare I borghi d'Italia*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2022.
- ROSSI DORIA 1981 - M. ROSSI DORIA, *Prefazione*, in *Progetto speciale per il Mezzogiorno interno*, in «Quaderni della Cassa per il Mezzogiorno», 1981, 3, pp. 9-13.
- ROSSITTI 2023 - M. ROSSITTI, *A strategic social value-based approach to support built heritage conservation in inner areas: The case of Tammaro-Tiverno*, PhD thesis in Preservation of the Architectural Heritage, Politecnico di Milano, XXXV Cycle, supervisor A.M. Oteri, co-supervisor F. Torrieri, Milano 2023.
- SANSA 2020 - R. SANSA, *Salvare gli insediamenti dallo spopolamento attraverso i progetti. Una possibile prospettiva storica*, in A.M. OTERI, G. SCAMARDÌ (eds.), *Un paese ci vuole. Studi e prospettive per i centri abbandonati e in via di spopolamento*, «ArcHistoR Extra», 2020, 7, pp. 1323-1331.
- SORI 2002 - E. SORI, *Territorio e sviluppo economico: una prospettiva storica*, in «Proposte e ricerche», 2002, 49, pp. 164-181.
- TETI 2008 - V. TETI, *Il sentimento dei luoghi tra nostalgia e futuro*, in DE ROSSI 2018, pp. 191-203.
- TETI 2020 - V. TETI, *Un paese ci vuole: dal villaggio della memoria a una nuova comunità del futuro*, in A.M. OTERI, G. SCAMARDÌ (eds.), *Un paese ci vuole. Studi e prospettive per i centri abbandonati e in via di spopolamento*, «ArcHistoR extra», 2020, 7, pp. 69-95.
- TORRE 2011 - A. TORRE, *Luoghi. La produzione di località in età moderna e contemporanea*, Donzelli, Roma 2011.
- VAROTTO 2020 - M. VAROTTO, *Montagne di mezzo. Una nuova geografia*, Einaudi, Torino 2020.
- VAROTTO 2021 - M. VAROTTO, *Oltre gli immaginari dicotomici: spazi di relazione e inversione dello sguardo*, in F. BARBERA, A. DE ROSSI (eds.), *Metromontagna. Un progetto per riabitare l'Italia*, Donzelli, Roma 2021, pp. 201-218.
- ZANNI ROSIELLO 2017 - I. ZANNI ROSIELLO, *A proposito di memoria collettiva*, in R.P. UGUCCIONI (ed.), *Piccole patrie. Riflessioni sulla storia locale*, Società pesarese di studi storici, Ancona 2017, pp. 66-77.
- ZILLI 2017 - I. ZILLI, *Dal passato al futuro. Il contributo degli studi storici alla rinascita delle aree interne*, in M. MARCHETTI, S. PANUNZI, R. PAZZAGLI (eds.) 2017, pp. 39-48.